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Watching *The Big Read* with Pierre Bourdieu: Forms of heteronomy in the contemporary literary field

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Abstract

This paper offers an analysis of *The Big Read,* a television and internet based search for the nation's favourite book broadcast in 2003, in the light of Bourdieusian accounts of the literary field. *The Big Read* initiative involved an interactive television programme and poll based around a list of the most popular 100 works of fiction as proposed and voted for by BBC viewers, listeners and readers. The stories about books and reading that emerge from the programmes and their associated organisations are considered in the light of Bourdieu's model of the 'literary field'. Notions of autonomous and heteronomous forms of cultural production and their relation to cultural hierarchies are considered in the context of the inclusive take on questions of literary and popular reading evident throughout *The Big Read* initiative. Whilst discussions of autonomy and heteronomy in research on cultural production tends towards a concentration on the pernicious influence of the economic field upon the apparently autonomous field of the cultural, this paper instead identifies and reflects on two related sources of heteronomy necessary for understanding the contemporary literary field revealed by *The Big Read*. Firstly it draws on insights provided by Bourdieu's later work to trace the media's role as mediating or 'meta-capital' in organising the position and make-up of the literary field in social space. Secondly it uses material drawn from those governmental and quasi-governmental organisations involved in *The Big Read* to examine the relationship between the literary field and the field of policy. The paper argues that the consideration of the heteronomous influence of both media and policy narratives might offer an important extension of what Bourdieu can contribute to the analysis of the contemporary cultural field.

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Introduction

This paper uses the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu to examine a specific empirical context, a television poll of contemporary British literary tastes. It draws on insights provided by Bourdieu's work on the field of cultural production and work inspired by Bourdieu on the media and TV to reflect on the various forces at work in shaping production and consumption in the contemporary literary field. It also proposes that the relatively under-theorised 'field' of policy can be a useful tool for considering contemporary forms of cultural production.

The Big Read project was a BBC initiative which combined a multi-media, multi-platform, interactive poll of the nation's reading tastes with a series of television programmes broadcast in prime-time on Saturday nights on BBC2 from March to September 2003. It combined the skills of marketing and promotion experts from the nation's leading publishers and book-retailers with the literary expertise of the BBC arts department and others. It also involved a number of partners from charitable, policy-oriented governmental and quasi-governmental organisations concerned with, on the one hand, the promotion of the book industry and, on the other, questions of literacy and education and their relation to a number of social problems. It was, according to Janet Root, commissioner of Arts programmes for the BBC in 2003, a combination of a search for the 'nation's favourite book' combined with an explicit celebration of 'the joy and magic of reading literature.' (Holman, 2003)

The initiative began with a call for nominations of the favourite novels of viewers and listeners of BBC TV and radio, and readers of the BBC's web-site. This resulted, following two weeks of open-nominations, in some 140,000 initial votes around some 6,400 initially nominated novels. The one-hundred most voted for books were then selected and presented in a launch programme, presented by the comedian, lawyer and chat-show host, Clive Anderson together with a panel of experts assembled to discuss a count-down of books from 100 to 22. This was followed by a series of seven programmes over the following seven weeks in which the top 21 books were show-cased in a series of half-hour films presented by an expert celebrity proponent of the novel (a 'book champion'). Here the books' relative literary virtues, their themes, their relevance to life in the modern UK and their particular impacts on the lives of the 'book champion' in question were outlined and dramatised. During each of these programmes viewers were encouraged to register further votes, by telephone, SMS text message or via the internet. A running countdown of the relative standings of the final 21 was presented throughout the programmes alongside the coverage of a number of *Big Read*-related events, held in libraries, parks or town-centres across the country. These included live readings in a Liverpool park and a community in Scotland who used a *Big Read* related reading group to fill a gap in their village life created by the recent closure of the local branch of the post-office.

After all these processes a 'top-five' was identified and, during a live grand final held with the recognisable pomp and ceremony of a major film and television awards show, further voting was encouraged. The book champions, accompanied by other celebrity proponents and a panel of literary experts of various kinds further made the case for and against these five. Finally, with what was recognised by some protagonists at a relatively early stage of this process as an air of inevitability, *The Lord of the Rings* by JRR Tolkien, championed by the television presenter and survival expert Ray Mears, was named the nation's favourite book. It had been the front-runner from the start (and indeed had won an earlier search for the nation's favourite book conducted in 1997 by the retailer Waterstone's) and had polled 174,000 votes in total. Tolkien's grandson accepted the award of nation's favourite book on behalf of the

author and declared his pride at the place of this popular novel in the cultural life of the nation so long after it was written.[1]

Figure 1 The Top 21 'nation's favourite' books

1. **The Lord of the Rings**, JRR Tolkien
2. **Pride and Prejudice**, Jane Austen
3. **His Dark Materials**, Philip Pullman
4. **The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy**, Douglas Adams
5. **Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire**, JK Rowling
6. **To Kill a Mockingbird**, Harper Lee
7. **Winnie the Pooh**, AA Milne
8. **Nineteen Eighty-Four**, George Orwell
9. **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**, CS Lewis
10. **Jane Eyre**, Charlotte Brontë
11. **Catch-22**, Joseph Heller
12. **Wuthering Heights**, Emily Brontë
13. **Birdsong**, Sebastian Faulks
14. **Rebecca**, Daphne du Maurier
15. **The Catcher in the Rye**, JD Salinger
16. **The Wind in the Willows**, Kenneth Grahame
17. **Great Expectations**, Charles Dickens
18. **Little Women**, Louisa May Alcott
19. **Captain Corelli's Mandolin**, Louis de Bernieres
20. **War and Peace**, Leo Tolstoy
21. **Gone with the Wind**, Margaret Mitchell

This paper proposes *The Big Read* is ripe for sociological analysis for two particular reasons. Firstly it demonstrates neatly an emerging tend in the contemporary literary industry towards engagement with the mass media, not, as might have been the interpretation in the recent past, as the polar opposite 'popular' culture to the book industry's 'high culture'. Such distinctions have always been as much imagined as real, as a number of social histories of the trade have demonstrated, notably Coser et. al (1982) and Miller (2006). In the contemporary context, though, the mass media is far more of an active partner than an antagonist. Mass mediated publicity for books, via such broadcasting initiatives as *Oprah's Bookclub* in the US and *Richard and Judy's Bookclub* in the UK, is celebrated within the book industry for precisely 'spreading the word about books'. Voices of opposition to such initiatives are rare, though their persistence and how they are characterised in discourses surrounding the book industry are themselves revealing of the shifting grounds of cultural production. Moreover these forms of 'mass-mediated reading' have made fiction and new fiction in particular a booming business in the contemporary UK.

Secondly, but linked to this, is an emergence of 'mass-reading' initiatives explicitly linked with policy imperatives. Emanating from proposals from the Washington Centre for the Book in 1998, One Book One Community projects have expanded to over 130 state and city-wide mass-reading initiatives across the United States. One Book One Chicago, in which book shops and libraries throughout the city engage, twice a year in the communal promotion of a particular title has become a model for the organisation of such events that has crossed the Atlantic (Fuller and Rehberg-Sedo, 2005). In the UK Liverpool, Bristol, Stevenage, Swansea and Edinburgh have all engaged in similar processes, the latter organised around Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped* and explicitly linked to the successful campaign for the city's recognition as the UNESCO city of literature in 2006/7. Such programmes, with their assemblages and linkages across numerous institutions that are active within the book industry (individual publishers, publisher's associations, retailers and trade associations,

policy interests in libraries and schools, authors and readers) are emblematic of a particular orientation to the production of culture from policy-makers, a belief that 'culture' can do civic work and contribute to social goods.

In the light of these twin contexts this paper examines *The Big Read* as an example of cultural production in the contemporary literary field using insights drawn from the theoretical models of Pierre Bourdieu. The next section will outline the relevance and limits of Bourdieu's models of literary production to this initiative. The paper will then draw on some analysis of *The Big Read* programmes in the light of Bourdieusian perspectives on the role of the media in mediating between fields of cultural production. It will go on to consider the forms of partnership and alliance between institutional actors in *The Big Read* as a means of exploring the role of policy discourses in the making of this initiative. The paper concludes with a consideration of what these twin(ned) influences of the media and policy makers might suggest for notions of autonomy and heteronomy in contemporary conceptions of the literary.

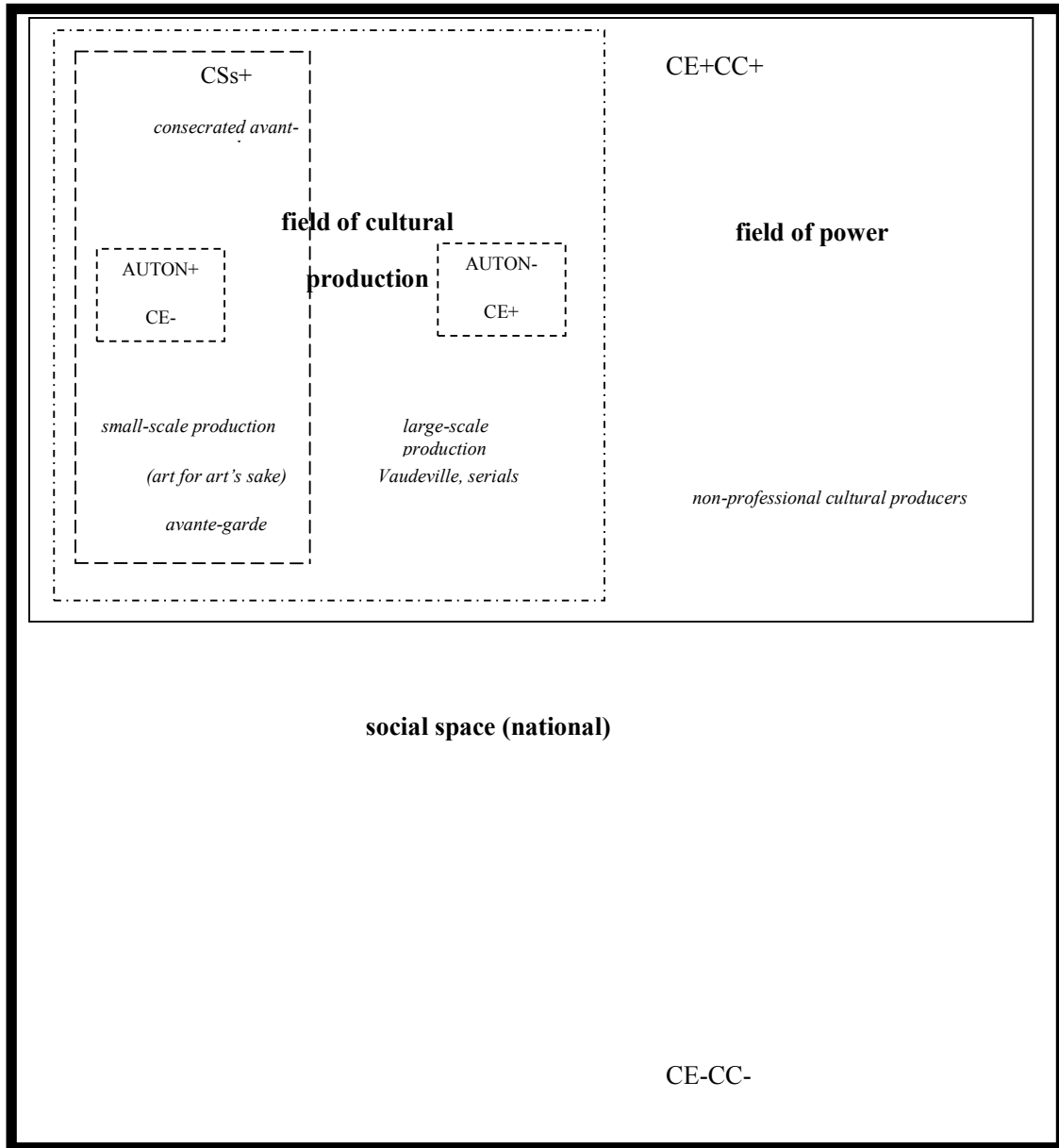## Why watch *The Big Read* with Pierre Bourdieu?

If then *The Big Read* existed within these two contexts of, on the one hand, a transformed relation between the book industry and the mass media and, on the other, a transformed policy imagination of the role of the 'cultural', the work of Pierre Bourdieu offers a particularly well-shaped theoretical lens through which to analyse it. Developed as part of his broader theoretical concerns with developing explanatory tools for examining the ways in which human action is structured, enabled and constrained (Bourdieu, 1977), Bourdieu provides a model of literary production that gives a clear topology of the pressures at work in shaping the processes of artistic creation and cultural production. At the same time, in his major empirical contribution to processes of cultural *consumption*, *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu provides some key insights into the shape of cultural taste in general and literary taste in particular and their relation, through the operation of the concepts of cultural capital, habitus and field, to the organisation of social life.

Taking the 'myth' of the individual artist as a starting point, Bourdieu dissects, ostensibly in two substantive contributions to his oeuvre (1993; 1996) the complex relations between artists and cultural producers, the processes by which artists emerge, the structures which might support them in different social and historical contexts and the ways in which they are received and appreciated by their audience. The literary field has a particularly prominent place in Bourdieu's schema, providing, in *The Rules of Art*, the basis for the structure of the field of cultural production that Bourdieu subsequently uses to exemplify artistic production of all kinds. Based upon a detailed reading of Gustave Flaubert's novel *Sentimental Education*, Bourdieu sketches a map of the literary field in nineteenth century France through analysis of the trajectories of the novel's prominent characters, most notably the Art dealer Malraux and the aspirant artist and writer Frederic. For Bourdieu, 'the structure of the social space in which the adventures of Frederic unfold proves to be, at the same time, the structure of the social space in which the author himself was situated.' (Bourdieu, 1996: 3) The key to this position in the social space is the fleeting autonomy of writers such as Flaubert in the French literary field of the nineteenth century. This autonomy is, firstly, from the pressures of the market, which would subsequently transform the notion of artistic production in general and 'the literary' in particular and secondly from the pressures of the state, ostensibly through the kinds of tribute and sponsorship from the powerful and wealthy courts of the aristocracy. Instead the 'literary field' in nineteenth century France can be understood as a world apart, governed by its own rules. This vision of the complex processes and tensions inherent in cultural production, particularly between autonomy and heteronomy, is the starting point of this analysis of *The Big Read*.

The key structuring elements for this vision of the place of cultural production in social space is the particular relationship between economic capital (CE) and cultural capital (CC), with the additional influence, within the field of cultural production itself of symbolic capital (CS), displayed on Figure 2 below. The volume of cultural capital is traced on a vertical axis, whilst its composition is traced on a horizontal axis, with economic capital increasing from left to right and cultural capital increasing from right to left. With the characteristics of the social space so determined, Bourdieu identifies the 'field of power', a space within the social space, characterised by higher levels of volume of both economic and cultural capital. For Bourdieu, the field of power can be defined as 'the space of relations of force between agents or between institutions having in common the possession of the capital necessary to occupy the dominant positions in different fields…It is the site of struggle between holders of different powers.' (Bourdieu, 1996: 215)

Whilst the volume of both capitals is high here, the field is still internally structured by the distribution of economic capital, with the right hand side of the field of power being dominated by greater economic capital than cultural, and vice versa for the left.

Figure 2. Bourdieu's field of cultural production, 'in the field of power and in social space', a simplified and modified reproduction from The Rules of Art (1996:124)

CSs+

consecrated avant-

field of cultural

production

CE+CC+

field of power

AUTON+

CE-

AUTON-

CE+

small-scale production

(art for art's sake)

avante-garde

large-scale production
Vaudeville, serials

non-professional cultural producers

CE-

CC+

CE+

CC-

social space (national)

CE-CC-

The field of cultural production is located on the left hand-side of the space, within the field of power. This location is itself an important rhetorical device for Bourdieu, positioning cultural producers as *amongst* the powerful within the social space, albeit as a 'dominated fraction' of this dominant class. Writers, artists and intellectuals might share some structural characteristics with the poor or dispossessed (a lack of economic capital, for example) and indeed might wish to associate themselves more readily with such groups in society. This is less significant in the structure and distribution of power as their role in the 'symbolic economy', heavily implicated by Bourdieu in processes of legitimation and consecration of the cultural, which ultimately acts to legitimise their position in the field of power. In this way Bourdieu punctures the 'myth' of the artist. In a recent review of the place of the literary in Bourdieu's thought, Boschetti suggests that it was this attempt to bring to light the role of the symbolic in the legitimation of the social order (alongside the revelation of the social production of aesthetic beliefs enabled by *Distinction*) that partly accounts for the hostile reaction to Bourdieu's work in some circles. Boschetti explains, 'the cult of culture is such a deeply entrenched and shared belief that there was very little likelihood that a critical analysis would be well received or appreciated by either culture people, who profit by the prestige of culture, or those excluded, who in spite of the exclusion adhere to this cult.' (Boschetti, 2006: 139) The effect of the charismatic belief in culture that Bourdieu lays bare, though, is its persistent preservation for those in the cultural know.

Finally Bourdieu's model does not just theorise the place of cultural production within the social space and within the field of power. It also suggests the way the field itself is shaped as a result of its own internal struggles between economic and cultural capital. The left hand-side, restricted pole of the field of production here is characterised by small scale forms of production which, in the short-term at least, generate little in the way of financial reward but, over time, generate symbolic profits for the producers procured through the long-term accumulation of cultural capital. This is the realm of the 'bohemian' writer, artist or producer, producing 'art for art's sake', uninterested in financial reward or in fame outside of the relatively small circle of fellow strugglers. In time these types of producer might move up the left hand-side to become established, consecrated, avant-garde artists, with ample cultural and economic capital. The right hand-side is characterised by forms of large-scale production, where short-term economic profits are more valued and success is driven by such criteria as the length of a print run or the number of sales of a particular artefact. For Bourdieu the key distinction between these two 'sides' of the field of cultural production is their relative autonomy within the field of power. Producers working on the left hand-side, where concerns with cultural capital accumulation and symbolic profits are greatest, are more able to work free from the constraints of the market, due to the presence of a ready and keen audience for this work – 'celebrants and believers' in the 'illusio' of art according to Bourdieu - to sustain their relatively small-scale endeavours. Producers on the right hand-side though need economic capital to secure their position within the field of power. As a result concerns here are more likely to be with those forms of cultural production which are more likely to gain the largest audience, rather than appealing to the concerns of the cultured specialist few. In the specific case of the literary field, Bourdieu describes how its progress towards autonomy in the nineteenth century is characterised by an inversion of economic logic. Those products that emerge from the left of the space are valorised precisely because they lack a popular audience and those on the right are dismissed because they have one. On the left are such writers as Mallarmé, Zola and Verlaine, whilst on the right are the popular 'théâtre de boulevard', vaudeville, novels of manners or cabaret.

Such distinctions between popular or commercial culture or refined and consecrated culture are familiar in the contemporary literary field. Moreover overcoming such divisions is, arguably, one inspiration for initiatives such as the *The Big Read* where a rhetoric of inclusion or flattening of hierarchies of culture was at the heart of attempts to generate interest in the 'literary' to a broad and diverse audience. The positioning of genres and authors in literary space in twentieth century Britain might be very different from that in nineteenth century

France, given both the vast changes in the processes and technologies of cultural production and circulation and the conceptual challenges to cultural hierarchies wrought by post-modernism and the rise of a critical appreciation of popular culture enabled by Cultural Studies. Despite this, the remainder of this paper will argue for the utility of Bourdieu's model as a starting point for thinking about the literary field in the UK. Autonomy and heteronomy are particularly useful tools for explaining the emergence of 'mass-reading' initiatives such as *The Big Read* and the enduring struggles between economic capital and cultural capital involved in this event. The next section will, using *The Big Read* as its central focus, demonstrate the extent to which the 'field of the media' acts to shape and influence questions of autonomy and heteronomy. The paper then goes on to explain further how the political context of the UK, the field of policy, can be similarly implicated in *The Big Read* and its operation.

The field of the media

The Big Read was clearly a media event as much as a literary event, in as much as we can distinguish meaningfully between the two. As such it immediately troubles the shape of the field of literary production imagined by Bourdieu, where, based as it is upon the emergence of a particular division of cultural production in the mid-nineteenth century, the 'mass media' as we might know it today was of a vastly different order of magnitude and influence. The media is present in Bourdieu's model of cultural production in the form of 'journalism' which he identifies as straddling the left 'autonomous' area of production and the right 'heteronomous' (see *The Rules of Art*: 122) in a manner which suggests a role for the media in making an audience for art and literature – translating or 'mediating' the difficult, disinterested works from the left of the space to those lacking in the cultural capital to appreciate them fully. The mass media, specifically television, is similarly lacking as a significant element from Bourdieu's opus on questions of cultural taste and consumption, *Distinction*, which contains just one question on television watching (Bennett, 2006). Later work, though critically received by media scholars, provides a framework through which to understand the place of the media in transforming, or at least mediating relationships between fields which is particularly useful in examining *The Big Read* and other mass media literary events. In *On Television and Journalism*, Bourdieu implies a role for the media in shaping social reality in a manner which suggests the media itself constitutes a 'field'. The media, along with philosophy, art and the social sciences becomes part of a group of fields that compete to create and define the social world. Moreover, according to Benson's subsequent development of Bourdieu's assertions on television and journalism, 'the media's mediating role – its unique mandate to enter into and explore other fields and then publicly share its findings –allows it to actively influence the relations of power throughout contemporary societies.' (Benson, 1998: 466) Benson, drawing on the work of Bourdieu's colleagues, including Champagne (1991) and Lenoir (1994), demonstrates the influence of the media on the fields of the academy, the judiciary and medical research. In each case, the apparently increasingly commercial, or heteronomous, drives of media institutions necessarily tend towards the transformation of the fields upon which they operate. The news media, in particular 'are undermining the autonomy of other spheres of cultural production, and thus the optimal social conditions for the production of scientific knowledge and artistic innovation.' (Benson, 1998: 463) In the realm of the academy this generates 'media-friendly' academics, and research findings suited to news agendas. In the realm of medical research it generates and magnifies scandals and controversies, and in the realm of the judiciary it alters the nature of relationships between separate arms of the state.

One of the criticisms of this part of Bourdieu's work[2] is that it fails to engage with or grasp insights from media-studies about the ways audiences are active in their take-up or rejection of media messages. It also smacks of rather simplistic assertions about the media's role in 'dumbing-down' various forms of public discourse which similarly denies the possibility of

sophisticated critical engagement with forms of popular cultural production. What the interventions of the media in particular fields might also provide, as Pinto asserts in his discussion of the field of philosophy, is a means of opening up 'closed' fields in which the media becomes a weapon within 'the internal battles with the guardians of orthodoxy.' (Pinto quoted in Benson, 1998: 472) In the case of the literary field, the example of the literary prize illustrates this transformation quite neatly. Street (2005) and English (2002) describe the 'cultural politics' of the contemporary arts prize in terms which precisely reflect the tensions between autonomy and heteronomy in cultural production. Thus prizes are decried by both radical and conservative critics from the autonomous pole as an abdication of critical responsibility and/or extensions of public relations and marketing. At the same time they are promoted within the book industry as a means of providing credible market information to consumers, signs of 'quality' in a vastly diversified market. Street identifies the dilemma amongst the organisers of literary prizes between choosing judges with credibility in the literary world and those who would have some recognition within the media world to translate their opinion into a highly visible opportunity to promote sales. Prizes inevitably become both judgements of quality and opportunities to promote and generate sales – an ambivalence summarised by English who points out the critical view of prizes as indicative of 'a society that can conceive of artistic achievement only in terms of stardom and success, and that is fast replacing a rich and varied cultural world with a shallow and homogenous McCulture based on a model of network TV.' (English, 2002: 3)

Collins (1995; 2002) similarly suggests a role for the media in creating a mass market for forms of 'high culture', something of a contradiction in terms in Bourdieu's model of production where popularity is subsumed into economic 'interestedness'. 'High-pop', represents the appropriation of 'culture', the preserve of the left-hand side producers, for the right hand heteronomous pole of mass entertainment. Thus, the 'high-pop' of such contemporary phenomena as the 'block-buster museum show', the popular Shakespeare film adaptation or indeed the TV book-club represent a new quickened form of the circulation of value and a dispersal of value and authority away from disinterested producers and their sustaining audience of believers. But, as Collins argues, 'this dispersal of cultural authority is not simply a matter of taste-cultures in conflict but rather the splitting of other relationships that once held art, critical evaluation, education and the technology of reproduction together through mutual confirmation.' (Collins, 1995: 28) The concentrated attention on the media wrought by such phenomena as *Oprah's Book Club* in the US, or *Richard and Judy's Book Club* in the UK can be seen to alter the shape and direction of struggles within the field. Disinterestedness or art for arts sake, the criteria for literary merit in Bourdieu's schema, become distinctly less forceful in a context in which recognition by the media demonstrated by the selection of writers or books for consideration by such initiatives, become driving, organising pressures within the field of literary production itself.

The point here is that the media does not 'challenge' orthodoxy in any simplistic way, though this might be part of the interpretations given to media interventions in these historically charismatic forms of the production of literary value. Rather than shining a light on murky processes of cultural production in a way which might re-allocate cultural and symbolic capital within the social space in an egalitarian way, the media become powerful actors within the field. Whereas historically symbolic and cultural capitals were allocated according to the criteria of academic or literary experts, in the contemporary contexts, the media become additional arbiters of worth. 'Media-capital', or as English describes it 'journalistic capital', those characteristics which might make a product attractive for providing the kinds of narrative ripe for mediated analysis, becomes an important source of value in the literary field.

Between this 'dumbing down' and 'opening up', Couldry proposes the notion of the media operating as a form of 'meta-capital', able to assist in the circulation of the forms of knowledge of other more specialist fields. 'The media', he argues, 'are both a production

process with specific internal characteristic (possibly a field of such processes) and a source of taken-for-granted frameworks for understanding the reality that they represent (an influence, potentially on action in all fields.' (Couldry, 2004: 165) For good or ill, the concentrated media attention on a particular field alters 'the internal workings of that sub-field and increase the ambit of the media's meta-capital across the social terrain.' (Couldry 2004: 181) Couldry uses an example from the literary field, the emergence of the TV gardener Alan Titchmarsh as a romantic novelist, to illustrate the extent to which 'media-based symbolic capital developed in one field can, under certain conditions be directly exchanged for symbolic capital in another.' (Couldry 2004: 181)

In *The Big Read,* this meta-capital role for the media is played out in three main ways. Firstly in the process of book selection and event promotion. Here the notion of television interactivity, enabled by various digital technologies had created within the UK an emergent genre of popularly created lists. Channel 4's '100 Greatest' series, begun in the late nineties, had, for example, drawn on web-based and telephone voting to create lists of popular tastes in films , television, music and sport. A list of one hundred nominated items were posted on the channel's web-site in the weeks preceding the programme and visitors were invited to vote for their favourites, as well as to join internet forums to discuss the relative merits. The finished programmes, with lists ordered as per the votes cast, were subsequently broadcast over the evenings of a weekend. The success of these programmes in the context of contemporary television production can be understood through their economic viability (requiring merely the right to clips to various films or television programmes and the involvement of a recognisable band of television celebrities and talking-heads) and their provision of a simple narrative drama and invented controversy as the countdown nears the winner. The BBC raised the sophistication of the popular interactive poll with its *Great Britons* series in 2002. This allowed viewers themselves to nominate individuals they felt had made significant contributions to British history. The one hundred most popular were then voted upon to create a list of one hundred 'great Britons', controversial due to the lack of black Britons in this final list. A series of prime-time broadcasts then accompanied a further vote on the top 10 nominees in which viewers were persuaded by the arguments of a 'champion' to vote for a particular great Briton. The eventual winner, Winston Churchill, was championed by the former Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam. The programme produced predictable controversy, identifiable along the lines of Bourdieu's model, with commentators attached to the autonomous pole of the production of history expressing dismay at the number of pop-stars, footballers and television stars presented (see Born, 2002) whilst others praised the initiative for encouraging interest in history amongst a wide audience. The important thing here to note is that *The Big Read* emerged in the context of an established and successful television format. Moreover its 'multi-platform' approaches position the initiative as akin to an exercise in brand-building familiar to the launches of new high-profile products. These approaches took in a variety of media across the BBC's output including TV, radio – both national and local, the internet but also billboard posters and leafleting campaigns and branded promotions in bookshops and libraries. If *The Big Read* was about 'spreading the word' about reading, then it drew on the established, media management techniques honed by professionals rich in the symbolic capital of the marketing and promotion field far more than those of the academic or literary field per se.

This contested position of 'traditional' sources of literary capital is evident in the second major way in which the media's 'mediating' role in the distribution of capital in the literary field is revealed - *The Big Read's* choice, and treatment of, expertise. There is a sense in which the process of book selection for *The Big Read* promotion, drawing as it did on a rhetorically open call for nominations and voting, inevitably side-steps the kinds of processes of selection and evaluation that historically distribute books and authors across the field of cultural production. In the course of the programmes, in order to fit with the need for narrative and the conventions of the TV list 'genre' outlined above, it was necessary to include a degree of discussion and debate of the list in general and of selected titles in particular. This took two

major forms. Firstly in the programme which introduced the list, and in the programme in which the winner was announced, two panels of protagonists were gathered together in order to discuss, firstly, the make-up of the list from one hundred to twenty-two and secondly, the relative merits of the final five books. The first panel included the chair Clive Anderson alongside Armando Ianucci, a comedian and television producer/writer of *I'm Alan Partridge*; Linda Smith a comedian and regular panellist on TV and radio game-shows; Andrew Davies, a TV writer responsible for the adaptation of several classic novels into successful TV series; Tim Lott, a novelist and regular reviewer on the BBC's *Newsnight Review* arts discussion programme; Daisy Goodwin, a TV producer of 'life-style programmes' including *How Clean is Your House* and editor of popular collections of contemporary poetry; Professor Robert Winston, a fertility expert and geneticist who has presented of a series of science-based documentaries on UK TV including *Child of our Time*, a long term investigation into the development of children born at the dawn of the third millennium. The panel of experts in the final was made-up of Professor John Carey, another prominent TV and media critic; Bonnie Greer, a playwright and another regular *Newsnight Review* critic; Michael Rosen, poet, children's author and radio presenter. All of these pundits, then, have trajectories which traverse the media and literary fields.

The second form of 'expertise' is in the selection of the book champions, outlined below. Enthusiasm for the title in question, rather than expertise itself was important here, but, as figure 3 shows, expert media performers of various kinds are to the fore, with traditional forms of expertise actually belittled or diminished as potential barriers to the forms of inclusive participation which the programmes rhetorically sought to encourage. The historian and presenter Simon Schama, for example describes how readers may be put off engaging with *War and Peace* because 'it has the whiff of the lecture theatre about it.' It's a mistake, he argues, as the book is a 'good read' with contemporary themes.

Figure 3. The Big Read book champions and their media profiles.

Book	Champion	Media profile
Lord of the Rings, JRR Tolkien	Ray Mears	TV presenter; wildlife expert
Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen	Meera Syall	Comedian, actor, writer
His Dark Materials, Philip Pullman	Benedict Allen	TV presenter, Explorer
The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Douglas Adams	Sanjeev Bhaskar	Comedian, actor
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, JK Rowling	Fay Ripley	Actress
To Kill a Mockingbird, Harper Lee	John Humphreys,	Radio-presenter , Journalist
Winnie the Pooh, AA Milne	Phil Jupitus	Comedian
Nineteen Eighty-Four, George Orwell	Jo Brand	Comedian
The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, CS Lewis	Ronni Ancona	Actress, comedian
Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë	Lorraine Kelly	TV presenter
Catch-22, Joseph Heller	John Sargeant	TV journalist
Wuthering Heights, Emily Brontë	Alistair Macgowan	Actor, Comedian
Birdsong, Sebastian Faulks	William Hague	MP
Rebecca, Daphne du Maurier	Alan Titchmarsh	TV presenter, gardener, novelist
The Catcher in the Rye, JD Salinger	Ruby Wax	Comedian, actor
The Wind in the Willows, Kenneth Grahame	Bill Oddie,	Comedian, TV wildlife presenter
Great Expectations, Charles Dickens	David Dimbleby	TV journalist
Little Women, Louisa May Alcott	Sandi Toksvig	Comedian, actor
Captain Corelli's Mandolin, Louis de Bernieres	Claire Short	MP
War and Peace, Leo Tolstoy	Simon Schama	Historian, TV prsenter
Gone with the Wind, Margaret Mitchell	Arabella Weir	Comedian, actress, writer

Comedians, actors, television personalities of various kinds and politicians (themselves recognisable and regular media performers) dominate the process of championing and interpretations of the books. The writers (Lott, Rosen, Greer) and academics (Carey, Winston, Schama) involved in this process as experts are also recognised media personalities, frequently addressed for their views on the arts and culture. Bourdieu, rather polemically referred to such figures, that exist in the media, as writers or academics as 'collaborators', 'Trojan horses', who introduce the heteronomous forces of the media (driven by commercial imperatives or the need to secure extensive popular audiences) into the 'autonomous' worlds of literary or academic production. The symbolic capital they accrue through involvement in the media replaces the need for the long-term accrual of symbolic capital necessary for sustained success within a specific field of academic or literary production. Media producers are attracted to such academics, Bourdieu argues, because they are ready to accept what is required of them in the production of media narratives, and to therefore sacrifice notions of autonomy for the purposes of media production.

The final mediating role of the media is evident in the relationship between the books on the list and film and television adaptations of them. Of the books in the top 21, only *Birdsong*, *The Catcher in the Rye* and *His Dark Materials* had not been adapted for film or TV.[3] The film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, for example, was cited as a driving force behind the overwhelming popularity of the title within the programmes. This interestingly reveals tensions between autonomy, heteronomy and literary expertise and re-asserts distinctions between 'book culture' as somehow disinterested non-commercial and the film industry, particularly in its 'Hollywood blockbuster' incarnation as emblematic of a diminished mass culture. Such distinctions of course deny the large-scale commercial operations of the contemporary publishing industry and its own promotional and marketing activities, of which *The Big Read* was arguably a substantial example. They also deny the increasingly intense relationships between the fields of literary production and the fields of film and television production, both at the level of organisation (as media companies and publishing companies merge) and at the level of text, as the 'adaptation industry' shifts stories from novel or book to film or vice versa (Murray, 2007; Gelder, 2004). A text in one field becomes a promotional device for another. Such translations can be interpreted precisely as a result of struggles between autonomous and heteronomous poles of literary production.

There is some ambivalence here about the place of the mass media in allocating symbolic capital within the literary field. Whilst the example of *The Lord of the Rings* is cited within the programmes as evidence of a commercial mass media polluting the 'correct' taste for books in the context of an inclusive popular vote, the appearance on the list of various titles and the media coverage that accompanies it is similarly credited with increasing sales and visibility of particular titles. *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, for example, appeared in the vote and subsequently made its first appearance in the UK bestseller lists. The exposure wrought by appearance on the list is credited with rescuing some titles from publishing oblivion, notably Anya Seton's *Catherine*, which, as Clive Anderson describes, 'before it was voted onto the list, most people had forgotten about it'. Actors within the media field become the arbiters in the distribution of symbolic capital and economic capital, allowing the media to act as both saviour of and threat to the field of literary production. *The Big Read* demonstrates the influence of the media field in the production, presentation and 'narrativisation' of the contemporary literary field in ways which demonstrate and reveal tensions between autonomy and heteronomy. The next section will look at the place of policy narratives in the construction and reception of *The Big Read* initiative, to suggest a place for the field of policy in similarly shaping and mediating action in the literary field.

The field of policy

Whilst *The Big Read* was not a government initiative in a strict interpretation of that term, it clearly relied on and fed from the kinds of narratives that underlie the working of the contemporary state. In the UK in particular the emergence of New Labour and its concerns with re-working and re-shaping the organisation and form of public expenditure with an emphasis on value, return and impact has had far-reaching effects on the tenets of policy-makers across a range of institutions. In the area of cultural policy it has generated a twin conceptualisation of cultural policies as, on the one hand, concerned with 'excellence' in the light of the centrality of processes of cultural production to producing economic returns (creating jobs and contributing to exports) and, on the other, concerned with the measurable impact of the cultural sector. This pressure is most notable in the museums and art galleries sector and their associated 'outreach' work, nominally organised around building community cohesion and tackling social exclusion (DCMS, 1997, 1999; Jowell, 2004). Thus, whilst in Bourdieu's model of cultural production 'heteronomy' is another term for the influence of the market, in the contemporary context of cultural production, the influence of the state and the field of policy are also pertinent.

The state's primary role in Bourdieu's schema of cultural production is in the consecration, via the education system, of legitimate forms of art and culture, tastes for which can be 'cashed in' as cultural capital (Guillory, 1993). The effect on the literary field is primarily felt in the creation of a canon of notable works, which constitute 'the literary'. Later work which develops a Bourdieusian framework to examine the literary field (notably Sapiro, 2003a, 2003b) also stresses the importance of autonomy from the state, i.e. from the field of politics as well as from the market. Under totalitarian regimes, for example, claims to autonomy rest upon the literary field's ability to resist the pressures from the state in relation to censorship; under market conditions claims to autonomy are dependent, in part, on securing from the state the means of allowing autonomy from the market, through, for example, legislation on price protection. Sapiro identifies forms of *politicisation* of the French literary field, ostensibly through the identification of different forms of political engagement of French writers from the emergence of the autonomous literary field identified by Bourdieu and throughout the twentieth century. As the professional expertise of writers as definers and interpreters of the social world was challenged by the institutionalisation of other forms of professional expertise, notably, the role of the journalist but also of the politician, so the political role of the literary field changed. Overtly political literary activity, at the autonomous pole, took the form of claims to truth and defences of freedom of expression exemplified by the Dreyfuss affair, a model for the emergence of the writer as a political figure. With the shape of the literary field changing through the industrialisation of literary production, the institutionalisation of notions of freedom of expression and the emergence of new publics enabled by mass literacy, the political engagement of writers took different forms, notably what Sapiro terms political prophetism. This is characterised less by claims to professional expertise and more by an aptitude for 'emotional preaching' – a discourse which had a political dimension in its coterminous relationship with the process of the cultural creation of national identities – being, Sapiro argues, 'perfectly adapted to the demand of the new political entrepreneurs in the upcoming democratic system for political legitimacy.' (Sapiro, 2003a: 638) Literary production then, can be conceptualised as having an ambivalent relationship to the state, consistent with its position within the field of power. In any case, 'the effects of the different political and economic configurations on the literary activity should be taken into account at both the national and international levels.' (Sapiro, 2003b: 442).

The Big Read provides a highly visible example of the way the field of policy operates, alongside the mediating role of the media, in relation to the contemporary literary field. If, as Sapiro argues, forms of political and economic organisation affect literary activity at the level of the nation it is useful to reflect on those publicly funded organisations involved in *The Big Read* and their particular priorities. Miller and Rose's characterisation of the way political

power operates in the contemporary state, exercised, 'through a multitude of agencies and techniques, some of which are only loosely associated with the executives and bureaucracies of the formal organs of state' (Miller and Rose, 1990:1) is relevant here. A list of 'agencies' involved in *The Big Read* would include the BBC; The Open University (who co-produced the programmes and had links in accompanying promotional material to courses in English literature); the Public Library Service (under the remit of the Department of Media Culture and Sport); The Reading Agency (a registered company but one that draws funding from the Arts Council and the Museum and Libaries Archive Council); The Book Trust, (a national independent charity, though one with links to the Arts Council, and via its initiative Bookstart, a campaign to encourage parents to read to children, links to the government's Sure Start scheme for parents and young children - for *The Big Read*, The Book Trust provided advice to participants on the best way to form and organise a book group); the National Literacy Trust (another independent charity, but one with links to the Arts Council, the Museum Libraries and Archives council, the Department for Education and Skills amongst other industry groups, including book retailers and publishers.)

Each of these governmental and quasi-governmental agencies share a particular vision of reading as a social, as well as a personal good in ways which collate 'literacy', a concern with the technical skills of reading and writing and their benefit to educational but also workplace careers, with 'the literary', a particular orientation to written material centred around book-culture. This collation allows the literary field, via an initiative such as *The Big Read* to be co-opted and mobilised as part of more general policy drives. This co-option though involves the translation of literary activity, and the world upon which it is presumed to act, in a manner redolent of Miller and Rose's interpretation of the operation of contemporary government, where,

> The events and phenomena to which government is to be applied must be rendered into information – written reports, drawings, pictures, numbers, charts, graphs, statistics…This form enables the pertinent features of the domain to literally be re-presented in the place where decisions are to be made about them.

> (Miller and Rose, 1990:7)

In the context of *The Big Read* these processes are revealed by the collation and calculation of the 'impacts' that the initiative and the increased engagement with the literary that was assumed to follow from it had, as they were understood by the Public Library Service and The Reading Agency.

The co-option of cultural production into social and economic policies is not new, but it has gained particular momentum, as George Yudice points out, in recent decades when,

> it is nearly impossible to find public statements that do not recruit instrumentalized art and culture, whether to better social conditions, as in the creation of multi-cultural tolerance and civic participation thorough UNESCO-like advocacy for cultural citizenship and cultural rights, or to spur economic growth through urban cultural development projects and concomitant proliferation of museums for cultural tourism

> (Yudice, 2003: 11).

In Bourdieu's model of cultural production tension existed between those connected to the autonomous pole of art for its own-sake and more economically interested agents in the field. In the contemporary policy context, art for its own sake has been replaced, Yudice argues, for all actors within the cultural field and therefore appeals to culture are no longer made on the grounds that it is transcendent. Moreover he identifies a system in which the myriad of managers and administrators within the various agencies involved in a project such as *The Big Read* mediate between artists, funding bodies and communities. He suggests, 'like their

counterparts in the university and the business world, they must produce and distribute the producers of art and culture, who in turn deliver communities or consumers' (Yudice, 2003:12)

This emphasis in cultural policy, for all its apparent novelty, can be interpreted as a continuation of rather persistent nineteenth century visions of culture and its role in shaping individuals (Bennett, 1998). The public library service itself was founded upon such a desire to 'create' citizens (Joyce, 2003). Hand points out the place of techniques of self-improvement embedded in library service provision in Britain, and their explicit role in 'stabilizing civic consciousness' (Hand, 2005: 70; see also Black, 2000) in the period immediately following the First World War. Newman (2007) and Hand both point out shifts in the nature of discourse defining the public library service in its contemporary incarnation, away from libraries representing a repository of knowledge to which citizens have access to an active agent engaged in the creation of publics and communities. DCMS' *Framework for the future* (2003) document concerning library development in the contemporary UK, for example, contains a number of conceptions of the value of reading. Amongst the presumed social benefits are enabling active citizenship, generating an 'informed consumerism' and stimulating the imagination. Such ideas are informed by policy discourses about the importance of measurement and impact of the cultural sector (see Matarasso, 1997). Library initiatives of reader development, are demonstrated here to contribute to personal development, social cohesion, community empowerment, local image and identity, imagination and creativity and health and well-being. (Matarasso, 1998: iii-v).

Public libraries were a primary focus of activity for *The Big Read*, with the concerted media attention being built on through numerous *Big Read*-branded events throughout the country. In partnership with The Reading Agency, the scale and scope of these events were measured as a means of interpreting the success of the project, and reports were subsequently published outlining these findings (TRA, 2004, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c). Objectives of the partnership included maximizing 'opportunities for people to encounter *Big Read*-linked content, events and activities in places local to them' and to encourage reading but also 'instil more confidence to talk about books'.(TRA, 2004) The relative success of these objectives was measured using a combination of a national survey of library users in a sample of library authorities (conducted by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy), telephone interviews with a sample of 20 librarians conducted by interviewers from the BBC, a survey of reader development librarians in seventy-five per cent of library authorities and analysis of loans data for the top 100 books in the list from 30 sample authorities for the period of the initiative (identified as July to December 2003), compared to the similar period of the previous year. Thus, of the seventy-five per cent library authorities surveyed, three quarters had some kind of *Big Read* display; a third of authorities had planned to run some form of *Big Read*-related event (local forms of poll, book discussions and book groups, outreach work in local precincts or cafes, for example) numbering some 900 events in 1143 libraries. Ninety seven per cent of all library authorities agreed that *The Big Read* had been successful in stimulating debates about books in libraries; 77% of users reported discussing *The Big Read* with family or friends and 47% said they felt more confident to talk about books as a result; 83% of library authorities 'thought *The Big Read* had encouraged reading wider reading to some degree' (TRA, 2004).

The analysis of impact on loans reveals a 'steep upward trend' in levels of borrowing with a remarkable 56% increase in loans in November 2003 compared to November 2002. Broken down into the individual titles, claims for the initiative's ability to increase participation can be supported by reported increases of over 125% for twenty-one of the titles. Of these there was an 807% increase in loans of *I Capture The Castle* (though this is attributed to the release of a film adaptation of the book), a 597% increase in numbers of loans of Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* and 125% increase in loans of the *Catcher in the Rye*. There were also decreases (though these are not commented on in the report) in loans for all the *Harry Potter*

titles on the list (including a 31% decrease in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*). There were also decreases in loans for Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding and several titles by the then 'children's laureate' Jacqueline Wilson. In addition to these 'quantified' measures of impact, 'case studies' of the work in specific library authorities revealed the ways in which the initiative was conceptualized by local library authorities. Norfolk County Council reported that the profile of *The Big Read* made it a useful vehicle for the implementation of strategic priorities, including 'making sure library activities activate social inclusion'. To this end the library service had forged partnerships with adult education workers and trade unions and set up a *Big Read* reading group in a local prison (TRA, 2003a). In Walsall *The Big Read* was used as a 'hook to promote related activities already taking place' as well as inspiring reflection on 'new and exciting ways to promote reader development' which are interpreted as part of a *Big Read* 'legacy' (TRA, 2003b). Finally in Derbyshire *The Big Read* was used as a tool for staff-training 'because its appeal is inclusive and it doesn't alienate staff as some Reader Development activity can. It is democratic in that it is about people's favourite books and not books that you're supposed to say are good.' (TRA, 2003c)

It is in these ways that the influence of the field of policy, as one element of the field of power, assembled through the interactions between a whole series of different agencies with interests in the literary are seen to shape *The Big Read*. In terms of questions of autonomy and heternonomy in the policy context, cultural production can be seen to be co-opted into doing the work of government. Much as with role of the media discussed above, wide dissemination becomes a goal of policy narratives and the measurement of its achievement becomes a marker of the value of cultural activity. Impact and outreach become, like the print-run or best-seller list in Bourdieu's model, important weapons in struggles between autonomy and heteronomy in the field of cultural production.

Conclusion

This paper has used the example of *The Big Read*, a contemporary form of organised literary production, to reflect on the notions of autonomy and heteronomy as they emerge from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. The specificities of the project and its aims differ significantly from the contexts of literary activity with which Bourdieu was concerned when he positioned literary production as the exemplar of all forms of cultural production in the *Rules of Art.* Despite this, the paper has demonstrated the robustness of this model in providing conceptual tools for the understanding of contemporary cultural production in the literary 'field'. Bourdieu's more general theoretical concerns with revealing the hidden, with pulling back the curtain, with puncturing or dismissing myths in relation to culture are particularly useful here in relation to the workings of the media field and the field of policy and their relations within the field of power.

The notion of field is a helpful tool for thinking about the ways in which initiatives such as *The Big Read* (and other contemporary forms of mass-mediated or policy-driven literary activity) are positioned in relation to a variety of institutions and agencies operating in a variety of inter-locking and over-lapping areas. Analytically the notion of field helps side-step perennial debates about high or low culture or 'dumbing-down' by avoiding the conceptual pitfalls associated with positioning literary activity in a hierarchy of cultural production. The 'mediating', meta-capital of the media, for example, can be seen, through the lens of the field as a way of allocating symbolic capital within the media field in a way that is not directly transferable to symbolic capital in the literary field itself. The reaction of the novelist Jeanette Winterson, who described *The Big Read* as exemplifying 'the Posh and Becks approach to culture – big names and small talk' (Winterson, 2003), demonstrates the persistence of notions of autonomy and their relation to the kind of 'orthodoxies' of good and bad forms of cultural participation which *The Big Read*, via the media field, helped 'open-up'.

At the same time heteronomy which, in Bourdieu's model itself and in later work on the media in particular is synonymous with the economic pressures on producers (with, in *On Television and Journalism*, the media, being almost a substitute for the market) is provided in the example of *The Big Read*, not just by the market, or by the media per se but by collusion between the fields of economy and policy. The media and policy fields act in this initiative as arbiters for the allocation of symbolic capital. The example of *The Big Read* shows the co-option of the book industry into doing the work of policy in a manner redolent of Yudice's notion of expedient culture, with echoes of historical connections between culture and person-formation. The characteristics of the contemporary state imply changed processes of politicisation of the literary field which *The Big Read* reveals. It also shows policy-makers co-opted into doing the work of the book industry via the provision of marketing platforms, some publicly funded, for their products. The tracing of these links and the forms of heteronomy that they reveal are indicative of what Bourdieu's model might still offer the study of contemporary forms of cultural production.

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[1] See www.bbc.co.uk/arts/thebigread and BBC (2003) for further details. Wright (2007) offers some further analysis of these processes.

[2] See Neveu (2005) for a consideration of Bourdieu's theoretical position on the media in relation to the Frankfurt School and Cultural Studies perspectives.

[3] *His Dark Materials* was adapted for radio in 2003 and for theatre in 2004. A film of the first novel in the sequence, *The Golden Compass*, was released in 2007. J.D. Sallinger, in a move that can be interpreted as demonstrating some commitment to the 'autonomous pole' of literary production, has consistently refused to allow any adaptations of his work for film or television – a position that had the potential to cause some embarrassment to the BBC in the light of the adaptation produced as part of *The Big Read* programme (McCallister, 2003)

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