General editor's introduction

Bestselling books and hit films have much to tell us about the preoccupations, values and preferred role models of society in any given period. In this thoughtful and detailed study, Christine Grandy explores bestselling novels and cinematic hits, both British and American, to assess the extent of their engagement with contemporary concerns about the economy, gender and the nation in inter-war Britain in the aftermath of the traumatic upheaval of World War I.

Rightly rejecting the idea that such popular works are purely escapist, she argues powerfully that the main thrust of the culture was to endorse the worth of a capitalist democratic society with defined traditional heterosexual male and female gender roles. She focuses on the depiction of heroes and heroines (whom she significantly dubs 'the love-interest'), villains and villainesses. In books and films like *Sorrell and Son*, she sees the culture working to re-establish pre-war masculine role models as patriotic soldier, breadwinner and *pater familias*. The male villain is the polar opposite of this value set and among the ranks of inter-war villains in for instance the *Bulldog Drummond* books and films are regularly to be found figures concerned with profit and the undermining of the national economy and social well-being – profiteering businessmen, arms dealers – the so-called 'merchants of death', sinister foreigners (Oriental masterminds, rebel Indian princes, Russian Bolsheviks) and renegade Establishment figures.

For women, who had achieved a degree of emancipation by gaining the vote and experiencing wartime employment and wage-earning, popular culture prescribed a feminine preoccupation with love and finding and serving Mr Right, so films show women giving up their careers for love, as in *A Star Is Born*, and forsaking wealth and power for love, as in *Queen Christina*. Villainesses by contrast seek wealth, status and power at all costs.

Grandy also examines the role of the censors in underpinning the value systems enshrined in popular culture, particularly the Home Office with its bans on novels promoting deviant sexuality and the British Board of Film Censors seeking to eliminate from films anything likely to upset the status quo political, social and moral. Grandy's book, with its focus on the national picture, can usefully be read alongside Robert James's *Popular Culture and Working-Class Taste in Britain, 1930–39* (2010), which establishes a comparative local study of Portsmouth, Derby and South Wales. Together they enrich our understanding of the nature and operation of popular culture in the inter-war period.

Jeffrey Richards