# Literature Reloaded:
## using databases to explore literary trends

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# Researching genre literature

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- Existing research on genre perception relies on stereotypes and 'common knowledge'

- Reports on genre popularity rely almost exclusively on sales data

- **No clear definitions**: genres are fuzzy sets, easy to recognise at the centre but vague near the edge

- **No standard labelling**: publishers use broad categories

# Speculative fiction

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"Works presenting modes of being that contrast with their audiences' understanding of reality, [with] key emphasis on speculative representation of what would happen had the actual chain of events or the matrix of reality-conditions been replaced with other conditions."

 - Gill 2013

# Cambridge English Corpus

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- A multi-billion word collection of written, spoken and learner texts compiled by Cambridge University Press.

- Primarily used in-house to inform English Language Teaching department and publications.

- Access is restricted to researchers working for Cambridge University Press and Cambridge English Language Assessment.

# Cambridge English Corpus

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Tools:

- **Word sketch difference** (how words differ in their context and behaviour)

- **'Thesaurus'** (words used in similar context)

- **Word sketch** (important co-occurring words)

# Cambridge English Corpus

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Problems:

- Number of entries falls sharply after 2008

- Small sample size

# Nielsen BookScan

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- A commercial service aimed at publishing houses that gathers weekly sales figures from various UK booksellers

- Their statistics capture over 90% of British print book market

- Access is restricted to institutions who are Nielsen BookScan subscribers

# Nielsen BookScan

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Problems:

- Only rudimentary ebook and self-published market tracking

- Tracking by ISBN - bestseller charts do not always reflect actual bestselling titles

- Broad genre categories

# Goodreads

goodreads

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- The world's largest site for readers and book recommendations

- Over 30 million members

- Over 900 million books

- Users can categorise books with no pre-set labels or category names

# Goodreads

goodreads

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- Tracking popularity without having to rely exclusively on book sales data

- Tracking perception of genre through user-created labels

- Combined with Nielsen data: an insight into popularity of genres and discrepancies in use of genre labels

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# Thank you!