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BEYOND THE BODICE RIPPER: INNOVATION AND CHANGE IN THE
ROMANCE NOVEL INDUSTRY

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Beyond the Bodice Ripper: Innovation and Change in the Romance Novel Industry

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Romance novels have changed significantly since they first entered the public consciousness. Instead of seeking to understand the changes that have occurred in the industry, in readership, in authorship, and in the romance novel product itself, both academic and popular perception has remained firmly in the early 1980s when many of the surface criticisms were still valid. Using Wendy Griswold's (2004) idea of a cultural diamond, I analyze the multiple and sometimes overlapping relationships within broader trends in the romance industry based on content analysis and interviews with romance readers and authors. Three major issues emerge from this study. First, content of romance novels sampled from the past fourteen years is more reflective of contemporary ideas of love, sex, and relationships. Second, romance has been a leader and innovator in the trend of electronic publishing, with major independent presses adding to the proliferation of subgenres and pushing the boundaries of what is considered romance. Finally, readers have a complicated relationship with the act of reading romance and what the books mean in their lives. Understanding the enduring appeal of the happily ever after and the emotional escape are central to their enjoyment.

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Chapter 1—Introduction

Everything you think you know about romance novels is wrong. It is either outdated, stereotyped, or flat out incorrect. Unlike nearly every other popular media genre, its misperceptions have persisted to create a nearly mythical story of what romance novels are, who reads them, who writes them, and how they are consumed. Despite these stereotypes being nearly thirty years out of date, ask any non-romance reader to explain these novels to you and you will get very similar responses: “trashy”, “porn for women”, “read by bored housewives”, “formulaic”, “easy to write”, “no plot”, “Fabio covers”. Every romance reader and author has heard them all. Ask that same non-romance reader if they have ever tried one and the answer is almost universally no.

What is the source of this disdain and its dogged endurance? We can point to several moments in the story of romance novels that created the mythos. First, the explosion of the market-driven category¹ novels—known as Harlequins for their publisher—created the notion that author and story were of lesser importance to romance readers and writers than other genre fiction. Second, the covers of the novels, which at the beginning nearly always featured couples in the classic “clinch” pose (typically a long-haired, bare chested man (often the male model Fabio in the 1980s) and a buxom, beautiful woman spilling out of the top her historically styled dress) gave the books a less serious (and often embarrassing) face. Third, the marketing of romance novels to (and their early adoption by) young housewives or stay at home mothers as a relaxing change from the drudgery of domestic life reinforced them as frivolous escapism. Fourth, and

¹ There are two major types of romance novels: “single title” and “category” books. Category are published in the United States and Canada under the Harlequin and Silhouette imprints and in Great Britain under the Mills and Boon imprint. Generally, single titles are much longer than categories (which are usually fewer than 200 pages) and are distinguished by author or genre rather than “line”.

most important, the subject matter of the books. Making romantic relationships and love the focus of the story, along with featuring female protagonists helped to ensure romance's mockery in popular culture, as has been the case with many other female-centered media products such as romantic comedies and soap operas.

Instead of seeking to understand the changes that have occurred in the industry, in readership, in authorship, and in the romance novel product itself, both academic and popular perception has remained firmly in the early 1980s when some of the surface criticisms were still valid. It is true that early romance novels, reflective of the attitudes of a large segment of American women at the time, were more regressive in their understandings of women and their relationships with the men they fell in love with. It is also true that category romance novels were written in generally formulaic ways and were short, easy reads (though the true revolutionaries, the long historical novels, are roundly ignored, except to criticize their covers). And it is true that a majority of women who read the books at the time were wives and mothers². We can see, then, where the ideas came from, but it is a much more difficult prospect to understand why so many of these notions have not dispelled, despite much evidence to the contrary.

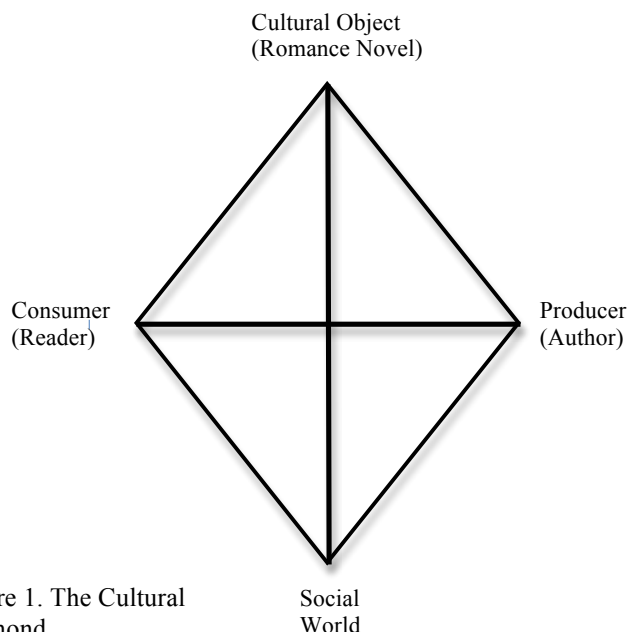
This study aims to add three significant contributions to the study of popular romance novels and their industry: 1) To analyze and understand romance novel content as it is currently written and to demonstrate that it has changed significantly since the early 1980s when the first studies of the genre were written; 2) To detail and explain how innovation and change in the romance industry resulted in the use of electronic publishing as a major segment of the market, which in turn led to significant changes in

² There isn't much market data available for readership in the early 1980s. Radway (1984) reports that Harlequin was clear at the time that their readers reflected the demographic and social characteristics of American women as a whole.

the traditional publishing sector; and 3) To better understand the complex relationship readers (and authors) of romance continue to have with reading romance novels, their content, and the greater society's perceptions of the books and their readers.

In order to look at the multiple aspects of the romance novel, I use Wendy Griswold's (2004) idea of a cultural diamond. In this concept, culture industries have four major components: cultural object (book), producer (author), consumer (reader), and the social world. The interactions and relationships between the four parts help to understand the nature of that particular culture industry (see Figure 1). I could, as Griswold does, use the diamond to look at the industry as a whole. There are, indeed, processes that unify the entirety of the romance novel apparatus. I believe this might be too broad of a spectrum to undertake in one work, however, given the size and scope of an over billion dollar entity. So rather than simply discuss the connections between the pieces of the romance puzzle, I will attempt here to illuminate the multiple and sometimes overlapping relationships within broader trends in the industry.

For example, in the discussion of the growth of electronic publishing in the romance industry, we can identify several relationships that are simultaneously at work, some stronger than others. A facilitating relationship in e-publishing is that between the social world and the book: technology enabled books to be published electronically **[Social World \leftrightarrow Product]**. Authors made choices within constraints of the social world of publishing to publish traditionally or electronically **[Producer \leftrightarrow Social World]**. Those choices were often content driven—an author decides what to put in a book **[Producer \leftrightarrow Product]**. Readers, meanwhile, were searching for content not found in traditional books, namely more erotic and paranormal elements **[Consumer**



←→Product].

Additionally, readers were aware the social world frowned upon their choice of reading material, and thus electronic books offered a privacy not afforded by traditional paperbacks [**Consumer**

←→Social World].

Enjoying the content they found electronically, readers appealed with their dollars to authors for more and varied types of novels [**Consumer ←→Producer].**

Today, romance fiction is a huge, diverse, and popular genre that comprises nearly forty percent of all fiction sold in the United States (Romance Writers of America Market Survey, 2005). The novels routinely top the *New York Times* bestseller lists and, by recent figures, account for \$1.44 billion in annual sales (RWA, 2012).

What, precisely, is classified as a romance novel? The Romance Writers of America (RWA), the premiere trade association of romance authors in the United States, provide a definition:

In a romance, the main plot concerns two people falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work. The conflict in the book centers on the love story. The climax in the book resolves the love story...Romance novels end in a way that makes the reader feel good. Romance novels are based on the idea of an innate emotional justice...the lovers who risk and struggle for each other and their relationship are rewarded with emotional justice and unconditional love...Once the central love story and optimistic-ending criteria are met, a romance novel can be set anywhere and involve any number of plot elements. (RWA, 2008)

This definition suggests that “romance” as a genre is much broader than popularly conceived. It regularly includes books that have strong mystery, fantasy, science fiction, and erotic elements. As well, romance does not fall only into the format of short, series books (categories). Instead, the most widely read novels (and those focused on in this study) are the single-title romances, which are released as individual books by approximately twenty different publishers (RWA, 2008).

Surveys conducted by the RWA demonstrate the sheer scope of the romance genre. Nearly seventy-five million Americans read at least one romance in 2004, up from forty-one million in 1998 (RWA, 2009). That number represents almost one quarter of the United States population. In 2007, romance eclipsed the religion/inspiration category to take the largest share of the consumer book market. Over seven thousand romance novels were published in 2008 and it was the top-performing genre on the *New York Times*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *USA Today* bestseller lists (RWA, 2009).

Sociologically, we are interested in *who* is reading the novels. There is not a great amount of demographic information available. None of the publishers supply statistics about their readership. The RWA conducts periodic market surveys designed to give us a picture of the average romance reader. She (generally thought to be a she, though RWA indicates that readership is at approximately ten percent male readership) is however not the way she used to be. In the early 1980s the romance reader³, was married with a few small children, in her mid-30s, and had, at the most, a high school diploma (Radway, 1984). Today, we cannot make such broad generalizations. Though half of all readers are indeed married, a full thirty-seven percent are single (eight percent widowed, four

³ See also Mann (1985)

percent divorced, and one percent separated). Only twenty-three percent of readers have a high school degree or less. Seventeen percent have attended trade school or some college, seven percent have associate degrees, twenty-seven percent have a bachelor's degree, and a full fifteen percent possess graduate or post-graduate degrees (RWA, 2005). The greatest percentage (twenty-two percent) of all readers falls in the 35-44 year old age category, but readership is fairly equally spread over all categories with nineteen percent between ages 25 and 34.

Approximately thirty percent of the books that appeared in the top twenty of the paperback (and later mass market fiction) bestseller lists of the *New York Times* in the period of 2000-2008 were romance novels. It is interesting to note, however, that during that same time period, only two romances were reviewed by the *Times*. Nora Roberts, who had a total of 104 books on the list between 2000 and 2008 (including thirty-five number ones), merited both reviews (Maslin, 2001 and Schappell, 2004). Though not scathing, they were also not particularly complimentary. Books by Stephen King, John Grisham, and Dean Koontz, however, were reviewed on several occasions with varying levels of praise. Though genre fiction is generally ignored by book critics, it is yet another not so subtle way in which romance in particular is devalued.

Romance novels also deserve our attention because of the substantive changes they have undergone. The term "bodice-ripper", coined in the late 1970s for the covers of historical romance novels that featured shirtless men and scantily-clad women nearly bursting from their tops, is still regularly used to describe today's books. But very few books still employ the "clinch" cover (a cover that displays a couple in a passionate embrace) or use the type of purple prose the originally inspired much of the genre's

criticism. In a 2004 article for the *New York Times* on the decline in sales for Harlequin novels, author Edward Wyatt again invoked the stereotype, calling romance novels “formulaic bodice-rippers with hunky heroes and love-conquers-all endings”. Another article, discussing the growth of *Romantic Times* magazine, said that sales “swelled like its heroines’ heaving bosoms” (Stewart, 1996). Despite authors’ and the RWA’s defense of their craft, romance novels still tend to be associated with words like “trashy” or “fluff”.

Academic Views of Romance

Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Culture* (1984) has been the seminal work in the field of women’s literature (supported by several other influential works from the same period, most importantly Modleski, 1982). The book is an ethnographic study of approximately forty female readers in a Midwestern town dubbed “Smithton”. These readers, all connected by a bookstore employee named Dot, are considered by Radway as the “typical” consumers of romance novels.

Reading the Romance is situated historically, of course, during a proliferation of writing for the feminist movement. It is a reaction to a genre that seems steeped in patriarchy (hence the subtitle of the book) and that early second wave feminists deemed as having no inherent value for women. Many even went so far as to say that romance novels were a form of submission and acceptance of dominant male ideas that were keeping women in traditional roles by pacifying their desires for change. While Radway does not fall completely into this trap, she still finds many problems inherent in the way romance novels are written as well as the way they are interpreted by their readership.

Since Modleski and Radway began the academic work investigating romance novels, several other studies have gone in depth regarding the industry. Interestingly, even as changes in publishing were becoming evident, the academic focus remained firmly on the short, category books of Mills and Boon and Harlequin. Radway, though early, is unique in looking at long, single title romances in addition to categories since her Smithton women were reading both. I will only highlight a few of the studies here, as they are only tangentially related to the parts of the industry I am interested in.

Around the same time as Radway, Snitow (1983) added to Modleski by emphasizing that romance novels were basically equivalent to pornography.

[I]n a sexist society, we have two pornographies, one for men, one for women. They both have, hiding within them, those basic human expressions of abandon I have described. The pornography for men enacts this abandon on women as objects. How different is the pornography for women, in which sex is bathed in romance, diffused, always implied rather than enacted at all. This pornography is the Harlequin romance. (257)

In equating romance to porn, she frees the novels from needing to have any redeeming social value or underlying realism, since pornography certainly does not. The fantasy that all men will turn into husbands when they realize the right woman has come into their lives is the prevailing notion of these books and they offer nothing more than this.

In the late 1990s, two other major studies of popular romance (again, only Harlequin/Mills and Boon) were again undertaken, with many of the same results. Paizis (1998) and Dixon (1999) explore the characteristics and rote plot devices of the category novels that have continued to appear since the late 1960s. Both do admit, however, that when looking at the books over time, they begin to reflect their eras more accurately, if still somewhat conservatively. Dixon says that Mills and Boon novels demonstrate multiple possibilities for women “by portraying different types of heroines in the same

period, by depicting heroines against the backgrounds of home and work, and by changing their vision of ‘ideal’ femininity, sometimes in sympathy with, and sometimes in opposition to, the social ideal” (96). If the base elements of characters, such as age and occupation have changed, the more important issues such as the universality of love and the need to couple and procreate, have not.

Thurston’s (1987) *The Romance Revolution* is one of the few books to take on the single title romance novel in a serious and systematic way. Though published too long ago to be entirely relevant to the current purposes, it contains one of the best explanations of the turning points in romance publishing that have led to what we know as today’s novels. She explains that in its conforming to formula, romance ended up unconsciously innovating because editors were so flooded by the same stories over and over that they became incredibly selective and anything that stood out was given a chance (61). This phenomenon in the mid-1980s becomes a turning point in terms of storylines and writing sophistication that has come to characterize the single title market.

What Thurston has become best quoted for, however, is an assertion she makes in the middle of the book: “If there is any single label that fits these romances today, it is the female sexual fantasy” (141). While no one denies that the sex in romance novels is a major component of the fantasy, I would contend that the *romantic* fantasy is stronger, and more important, than the sexual fantasy⁴. It is easy to focus on the sex because of the obviously problematic portrayals in early novels, but it is only part of the fantasy. Very few readers will say that their main draw to romance is the sex. Their main draw is the happily ever after. That points to the centrality of the emotion, not the sex.

⁴ Radway and I agree on this premise. “[T]he romance cannot be dismissed as a mere pretense for masturbatory titillation.” (70)

Content and Change

As previously mentioned, Janice Radway's (1984) influential book is the jumping off point for the current research. Radway focuses on many different aspects of romance novels, namely the readers' reasons for enjoying romance as well as content analyses of the actual books⁵. This content, in turn, affects her conjectures about readers' reception of the books. It is important to note that the books that made up the core of Radway's analysis were very reflective of the types of stories being told at that period of time.

I will address the characteristics of romance novel heroes and heroines in depth in Chapter 2, but here it is important to give an overview of Radway's point of view on characters when she did her study. In understanding what her readers desired to see in their romances, she unwittingly gets an accurate survey of the representations of characters in the genre. Her readers "prefer to see the heroine desired, needed, and loved by a man who is strong and masculine, but equally capable of unusual tenderness, gentleness, and concern for her pleasure" (81). Heroines, on the other hand, must always be intelligent, independent, and have a sense of humor (77). It is difficult to know exactly what, precisely, the Smithton women meant by intelligence and independence, especially given the time period, but those characteristics (along with "feisty" and/or "spunky") are universal heroine prerequisites, even to this day.

The issues of sexuality do not occupy Radway in this analysis in a very deep way, which is unusual considering both that romance is considered "porn for women" and that the particular idea was being loudly discussed around the time she was writing (see above, Snitow 1983). While the issue of the justifiable rape is a cause for concern for

⁵ Other studies, such as Ryder (1999) and Doyle (1985) echo the majority of the conclusions Radway comes to regarding romance novel characters. See especially Doyle's critique of the unfavorable woman as the foil to the heroine's traditionally feminine characteristics.

Radway⁶ (and continues, in some ways, to be today, as discussed in Chapter 4), other issues of sex do not take center stage in her analysis. She talks some about the virginity of the heroine, but at the time, that was such an absolute that it almost doesn't merit a mention (126). She also intimates that the treatment of sex in the romance (at the time) was regressive because it only ever took place in the context of a permanent relationship and the equation of sex with love (169).

Clawson (2005) in her study of secular and Christian category romances still found sexual relations between the genders to be very stereotypical—men had sexual experience, women lacked it. “[T]he secular hero is posed as the dominant figure, in many cases introducing the heroine to sexual intercourse, his great experience and attractiveness highlighted as he serves in a teaching role. His sexual experience, almost always gained through relationships with many women (though rarely posed as promiscuity), highlights the heroine’s conquest when she, alone among the many women in his history, moves him to choose marriage” (471).

In category romance, because of its focus mostly on contemporary situations, there has always been more of a ‘war between the sexes’ mentality, especially in their 1970s and 1980s heyday. This was very obviously reflecting the quickly changing gender norms of the time and challenging women to decide how they felt about it.

“[M]any of the heroines of the 1970s and early 1980s are in constant battle with their heroes, often physically as well as emotionally, as they try to prove their capability. At the same time this particular type of heroine denies, both to the hero and herself, her feelings for the hero, believing that they weaken her in the battle with him as he seems not to feel the same and, if told, would only use them against her.” (Dixon, 1999: 129)

⁶ And for others: see for example Mussell, 1984; Modleski, 1982; and Zurbriggen and Yost, 2004.

Since women (and men) of the time were conflicted about changing gender relations, this was mirrored in how the books dealt with the burgeoning relationship and the power dynamic between the hero and heroine.

Gender Critique

Romance novels have long come under criticism for not only being *not* feminist⁷, but for actively reinforcing the patriarchy and its conservative ideals. At the period in time in which many of these critiques were being written, it was not an unreasonable assertion. While early novels included several aspects that the majority of modern women would find to be objectionable, including the rape fantasy (discussed further in chapter 4), today's books are a more accurate reflection of changing gender mores. This is not to say that they have achieved a perfect representation of gender equality, but it could be argued that they at least put forward positive images of both men and women and emphasize growing equality in life and relationships⁸.

Jones (1986) contends that romance novels give contradictory messages about feminism, especially in relation to careers and marriage. At the time (and even today), society was giving these contradictory messages as well. Most women were (and continue to be) torn about by the social communication regarding their status as workers and mothers. Rather than promoting a particular agenda, as Jones would have them do, perhaps romances more accurately portray real women's anxieties and confusion about how to handle these not insignificant questions about their lives.

⁷ The meaning of the word "feminist" is certainly contentious and not universally agreed upon, though there are several important points of commonality in all definitions (see for example Taylor, Rupp, and Whittier, 2006 and Rhodebeck, 1996).

⁸ While they are, of course, biased, a passionate and well-reasoned defense against misperceptions of romance novels as regressive fantasies is put forth by romance novel authors in Krentz et al (1992).

It is also important to note that one of the reasons that romance is so often maligned (even by women) is that it is *the* genre that is produced and consumed almost exclusively by women. This contradiction between applauding and deriding a female-centric product is based on the assumption that focusing on love and relationships is not empowering to women⁹. It seems, though, that this is a nearly unsolvable catch-22 for most women. Whether a biological, psychological, or social imperative (or a combination of the three), humans are inclined to pair-bond and start families (often involving reproduction or adoption). If we disregard this imperative, we are ignoring the reality in which we live. If we choose to acknowledge it, we are betraying feminism's goal of greater equality between the sexes.

[I]t is not altogether clear precisely what the aims of change are (or might be) as regards love...Many feminists, while willing to confirm the potential benefits of affectionate bonding and love, object to *romantic* love because they feel that it demeans and enslaves women...Those who have pinned their hopes on professional achievement as a means of freeing women from their enslavement to love cannot be fully satisfied with the results. The contention that successful professional women...would be less vulnerable to the tortures of uncertain love than other women has not been demonstrated. (Person, 1988: 281-282, emphasis in original)

There is a difference, of course, between presenting romantic love as the ultimate goal of all women's lives and understanding that it is still at least one goal of a majority of women. While romance novels' main focus is on the relationship in the story, they also emphasize the heroine's other interests and activities, including her career, female friendships, and goals (sometimes including marriage and motherhood).

⁹ I am referencing heterosexual love as it regards the romance novel "ideal". As far as we understand, romance novels are read nearly exclusively by straight women and so the romantic fantasy is a male/female one. Despite the growing trend of male/male romance, the audience remains heterosexual women (see chapter 4 for a further discussion).

There is also the alternate issue of what romance novels tell us about men.

Another oft-seen criticism is that these books portray male characters (the heroes) as unrealistic and idealized in a multitude of ways. Holt and Thompson (2004), though not talking about romance, call the ideal type hero a 'man-of-action hero' in their typology of American masculinities. "He must be adventurous, exciting, potent, and untamed, while also contributing to the greater social good...He must continually defy the social status quo, while he enjoys a considerable degree of status and respect" (429). This is an excellent characterization of romance heroes, both past and present. In category romances, Clawson (2005) says that heroes still present in very stereotypically masculine ways, including emphases on professional and economic success. On the other hand, heroes are seen as strong figures in children's lives (their own or ones belonging to the heroine) and are helpers at home (to a lesser extent) (469-472).

There is an unresolved conflict though for heroes' portrayal of masculinity. They are supposedly too strong and too masculine and yet by the end of the book when they make their commitment to the heroine, they are then too emotional and too expressive. "The hero is permitted simply to graft tenderness onto his unaltered male character...the genre fails to show that if the emotional repression and independence that characterize men are actually to be reversed, the entire notion of what it is to be male will have to be changed" (Radway, 1984: 148). While this is, in some senses true, I think what heroes in romance truly represent is what some women would like the 'notion of what it is to be male' to be: a layering of emotional intelligence over a core of strength of purpose and confidence. It may be too much to ask, but that's why it's fiction.

Cultural Production and Producers

The production of culture approach to cultural objects and institutions aims to understand the entirety of the apparatuses that intervene between the producer and consumer of culture (Peterson, 1976). “This apparatus includes facilities for production and distribution; marketing techniques such as advertising, co-opting mass media, or targeting; and the creation of situations that bring potential cultural consumers in contact with cultural objects” (Griswold, 2004: 80). This approach has been used to understand various industries in the popular and “high” cultural world on varying levels of analysis. Generally, this approach allows us to look at the structures of production and expose how their complex mediations affect the final product that is presented to a consumer.

Becker (1982) presents the production of culture as the cooperation between many and various actors who have particular roles and serve particular functions in an assembly-line type of process. This is not to say that each individual only completes one task, but to assert that in no “art world” is any one person responsible for the entirety of the cultural object that is created (11-14). We cannot, then, look at any painting, song, or book without understanding the variety of people and institutions that have had their hand in its creation, either directly or indirectly.

Romance novels are certainly no exception to this rule. Given the huge size of the industry as well as its unique history in publishing, romance embodies the collaborative processes of authorship, editing, publication and format, marketing, and sales. Several scholars (most notably Radway, 1984 and Markert, 1985) have identified the mediating institutions that affect the transmission of the romance novel from author to reader. Both focus almost exclusively on the spectacular innovation of the Mills and Boon and later Harlequin boom of the 1970s and early 1980s. Harlequin was the first publishing

company to turn to idea of authorship on its head and focus instead on the “line”. Each individual book became unimportant; instead what mattered was that a consumer knew exactly what they were getting from each of the various categories of novels available.

[S]tandardization of content and the ‘fine-tuning’ of distribution to select retail establishments was a major factor in Harlequin’s success; it allowed (1) a more precise estimate of the number of books to be printed; (2) a clearer perception of the prospective consumer...and (3) introductory offers and advertising to focus more narrowly on the specific consumers most likely to enjoy Harlequin’s product. (Markert, 1985: 77)

Even after Avon began publishing the longer historicals (in 1972 with Kathleen Woodiwiss’s *The Flame and the Flower*), innovation was slow in the single title market during the majority of the 1970s because of inexperienced romance editors (mostly women being given a shot because they were the only ones who would “get” romance) and a lack of understanding about why the audience enjoyed these particular novels. The 1980s brought about the true revolution in romance publishing with the branching out of single titles into the contemporary genre, which challenged Harlequin’s stranglehold on the market. (Markert, 1985)

Since Markert published his article in 1985, there have not been any other in-depth looks at the ways in which the romance industry has continued to innovate, especially in the single title sector. The expansion into the numerous subgenres (suspense, paranormal, erotic) seems to imply the continuation of what Markert was seeing in the early 1980s. It appears that category romance (of the Harlequin kind) is no longer the market innovator, instead following what the other publishing houses make popular and then adding those “lines” to their existing repertoire (consider that their paranormal and erotic lines started well after those types of subgenres were hitting the

bestseller lists). As such, categories now make up only about one-third of romance sales (RWA 2009).

An even more recent innovation in romance publishing has been that of electronic presses. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, romance, so often criticized as a regressive and staid industry (because of its product and because the lack of recognition of how it changed ideas about publishing), has been a leader in the independent electronic publishing movement, once again changing the way we read. A model developed by Shaver and Shaver (2003) about necessary adopters for the success of electronic publishing is illustrative of what happened in romance. These four adopters are: authors, publishers, distributors, and consumers (74).

Authors were the easy part for romance, especially Shavers' contention that "writers might be drawn to adoption of e-publishing as an alternative to traditional print publishing—particularly if their works have been rejected by print outlets" (74). This is exactly the origin story put forth by Ellora's Cave, the largest romance e-publisher (see Chapter 3 for a further discussion). Publishers must either be created wholesale (as in the case of Ellora's Cave and many of the other independent romance houses) or current publishers must be willing to adapt to changing conditions (evidenced by e-Harlequin and the electronic divisions of all of the major New York houses, which were eventually created when e-publishing became an inevitability).

Distributors are a trickier issue as they are generally not necessary for the independent presses, but very important for the traditional ones. Most of the independent houses eschewed going through Amazon or Apple until more recently because of the issues of digital platforms and the multiple formats they would be required to publish in.

Finally, consumers in romance were on board from the beginning and seem to have adopted electronic books at a faster rate than the general reading public. This is for two major reasons: the type of content being offered by the independent presses was appealing to them and because the anonymity of e-readers (or laptops) enabled them to read romance without worrying about public judgment.

Escapism, Fantasy, and Reality

Radway's best-known analysis concerns the reasons why the Smithton women so enjoy reading romance novels. She emphasizes the issue of escapism as the primary reason for indulging in this type of reading.

In attending to the women's comments about the worth of romance reading, I was particularly struck by the fact that they tended to use the word escape in two distinct ways. On the one hand, they used the term literally to describe the act of denying the present, which they believe they accomplish each time they begin to read a book and are drawn into its story. On the other hand, they use the word in a more figurative fashion to give substance to the somewhat vague but nonetheless intense sense of relief they experience by identifying with a heroine whose life does not resemble their own in certain crucial aspects. (90)

The Smithton women feel that not only are they gaining time for themselves that takes them away from their daily routines, they are also gaining the pleasure of entering themselves into a world that is not their own. Radway says that "romance reading seems to be valued primarily because it provides an occasion for them to experience good feelings...romance reading provides a vicarious experience of emotional nurturance *and* erotic anticipation and excitement" (105, emphasis in original).

The issue of escapism has a long history in popular culture and media studies. Adorno (1975), though not talking specifically about escapism, creates the argument of the "culture industry" which implies an 'opiate of the masses' approach to all cultural objects, especially mass-produced ones. Any use of media, then, could be considered

escapist in a negative way because it does not challenge the status quo (especially economically) and compensates for real social engagement. Katz and Foulkes (1962) offer a slightly more sympathetic treatment because they believe escape can serve a function for our social roles (either to reinforce or to change them). They also distinguish between spatial/temporal escape (the literal use of media to distance oneself from the rest of the world, like the act of reading or going to the movies) and symbolic escape (“identifying with a star or hero to the point that one loses oneself in a dream which cannot possibly have any feedback to real life” (384)).

Hirschman (1983) emphasizes the link to anxiety and social dislocation—those who engage in escapism are those who recognize that their values do not conform to the general population. Bar-Haim (1990) agrees with Hirschman, but takes her analysis one step further by attempting to spell out the link between ideology and popular culture. He sees pop culture as arising in response to ideology (be it religion, capitalism, or politics) and so it expresses our discontent with the ideology. This can, in turn, change the ideology. He sees escapism as the negative part of this process, though never explicitly spells it out—either escape into popular culture is a disengagement with social change or it is an expression of our conscious or unconscious revolt against the ideological system (i.e.: romance against patriarchy, which will have interesting implications later).

Gelder (2004) distinguishes between escapism and engagement in reading habits, saying that those who read popular fiction escape the world (it allows us not to be ourselves for awhile) whereas those who read “literature” engage with the world (it transforms us). He also implicates that as readers we believe in or actively inhabit the

fantasy that we've escaped to.

The one lone positive voice regarding escape (though it is glanced over in the study as a whole) is Ang in her famous 1982 study *Watching Dallas* about why people enjoy primetime soap operas. "The term [escapism] is misleading, because it presupposes a strict division between reality and fantasy, between 'sense of reality' and 'flight from reality'. But is it not rather the case that there is an interaction between the two?" (49). Escape is an interplay between fiction and reality to her because it is not either identification or distancing, but a bit of both.

This type of escapism is not as vocally criticized when used to explain the pleasure derived from other forms of literature. For example, writing on the spy novel indicates that it is "essentially written for entertainment and read as a form of escapism. The spy novel is not compelled to be realistic, or even plausible, except that unlike science fiction, it claims to represent the real political world" (Fletcher, 1987: 321). Hirsch (1958) even went so far as to say that science fiction was a discourse among both educated and fledgling scientists and engineers and would eventually fuel greater desire for scientific achievement amongst its readership.

Many have argued that fiction is simply that; its purpose is to entertain and to lead us to worlds that are unlike our own. If fiction were to be perfectly realistic and to fulfill an important *function* in society, then it would be non-fiction¹⁰. Overall, that which we consider to be "literature" or even merely good fiction is, at its essence, meant to entertain and to evoke a certain set of emotions from the reader. Because something is formulaic does not diminish its value as amusement and satisfaction; in fact, it may increase it for many readers: "Each James Bond (or Nero Wolf, or Agatha Christie) novel

¹⁰ See for example Clarke, 2006 and Vanderhaeghe, 2005

modulates the basic formula that defines its class, and the reader enters the novel knowing the rules and anticipating a ‘good read’ within their limits...readers vote for popular formulas with their money as well as their mouths” (Whissell, 1998: 103). While a romance reader might look for a happy ending, a mystery reader might look for the satisfaction that justice will be served at the conclusion of each novel they read or a science fiction reader might look for the triumph of defeating an evil. These are different emotional satisfactions to be sure, but fulfill a particular need in each reader. The conventions of genre fiction are decoded only by a savvy reader who understands and appreciates the importance of the formula (Gelder, 2004).

Inglis (1938) elucidates the relationship between realism and fiction in this way: “Since the sole function of literature is to entertain its readers, neither are specific social trends reflected in detail or with accuracy nor is any direct control exerted by the literature. However, in order to serve the purpose of amusement, literature must remain in the same universe of discourse as its public” (532). Romance—a specifically female genre of fiction—is subject to extremely harsh criticism about its supposed ‘unreality’. There has not been a causal link found anywhere (Radway and others admit this) between the satisfaction derived from romance reading and dissatisfaction with the women’s realities and especially their relationships. “I did not probe very deeply into the issue of whether romance reading *actually* changes a woman’s behavior in her marriage. It is important to note, nonetheless, that the women themselves vehemently maintain that their reading has transformed them in important ways” (Radway, 1984: 101, emphasis in original). She does not, however, elaborate how the Smithton women believed they were changed and whether or not it has anything to do with their familial relationships.

Instead, the readers discuss issues of increased vocabulary, interest in history, and personal relaxation. They never explicitly state that romance had an impact on their romantic lives.

The implication that a romance reader cannot distinguish between fantasy and reality, assuming that in some way the romance plot and characters will be a part of her real life, is patently absurd.

Of course the readers can tell the difference. They do not expect the imaginative creations of romance to conform to real life...Like all other genres, romance is based on fantasies and readers know it. Readers and writers alike get disgusted with critics who express concern that they may not be able to step back out of the fantasy. They do not appreciate being treated as if they were children who don't know where one stops and the other begins. (in Krentz, 1992: 2)

Interestingly, it is difficult to find solid sociological information on the phenomenon of readers' experience of fantasy. Psychology tells us several conflicting things: either that fantasy is healthy and normal or that it is a dysfunctional coping mechanism that disengages us from dealing with our problems (see for example Baumeister, 1992).

Using Freud's notion of fantasy, literary critic Norman Holland says that "the appeal of any literary text...was that it contained at its core an unconscious fantasy. The literary work thus expressed the reader's most primitive (and by definition pleasurable) fantasies, but transfigured them in such a way that the feelings of anxiety attendant upon such fantasies in real life were minimized or eliminated" (1968, in Suleiman and Crosman, 1980: 28-29). As a whole, those engaged in literature seem to take escape as a more positive aspect than either psychologists or sociologists:

I have claimed that Escape is one of the main functions of fairy-stories, and since I do not disapprove of them, it is plain that I do not accept the tone of scorn or pity with which "Escape" is now so often used: a tone for which the uses of the world outside literary criticism give no warrant at all. In what the misusers are fond of calling Real Life, Escape is evidently as a rule very practical, and may

even be heroic. In real life it is difficult to blame it, unless it fails; in criticism it would seem to be the worse the better it succeeds. (Tolkein, 1966)

There is a conflict between consciously knowing that a story one is reading is not objectively *real* and knowing that it in some way represents a *possible* reality (as in, the characters' behaviors and feelings are not out of the realm of possibility). If an author has created a believable story, the fantasy works to enhance the reader's pleasure in consuming the story. While the fantasy may be an idealized version of reality, assuming that a reader will blur those lines is a stretch. Mystery, crime, and Western novels also represent a version of reality, but very rarely do you see their readers being accused of not understanding where the fantasy ends and the real world begins. The infantilizing of romance readers because of their gender is something not to be supported.

Misperceptions and Facework

As romance has continued to come under attack for the past thirty years, its readers are constantly bombarded by negative connotations related to the pastime they greatly enjoy. It becomes necessary for them to fight the popular notions. The most often-heard argument and rebuttal is summed up nicely by Paizis (1998):

While the defenders of the genre argue it helps women to cope with the frustration and stresses of everyday reality, the critics think its function is to perpetuate the need. For the former, the myth helps the sufferer to cope. For the latter, the books perpetuate a myth—sexual satisfaction and conjugal happiness—which is the root cause of women's unhappiness. (43)

I would go even further than Paizis, however, and contend that the defenders of the genre have moved past the particular argument of “coping” to possibly even “empowering”.

Brackett (2000) recognizes the criticisms leveled against romance novels and endeavors to discover how readers deal with this. Employing Goffman's (1967) idea of facework strategies, she analyzes how readers cover up their pastime or criticize the very

activity they enjoy. She found that readers were acutely embarrassed in many situations to be discovered reading romance novels. They felt it undermined either their image as professionals or as educated women because others not acquainted with the genre had preconceived notions of the books as pornography or drivel. “Thus the perception of romance reading as a criticized pursuit may be a key factor in accounting for the need among these readers to do facework” (353).

Her subjects encountered many of the issues that Radway first illuminated, especially that they would eventually believe in the fantasies that are written about in romance novels. Brackett’s interviewees were insulted by the lack of faith in their intelligence to discern reality from fantasy. They confirmed the need to read for relaxation and escape, much as the Smithton women in Radway’s study did, though many were quick to point out that they also read other types of books as well as followed the news and current events (356).

One limitation that Brackett indicates and that is salient is the fact that she could not determine whether or not the criticisms of romance that the readers perceived were actually being leveled at them or whether much of their facework was a result of internal criticisms. Do these readers engage in intensive facework because they truly believe that others were demeaning them for their leisure activity or because they themselves doubted the validity of the romance novel as an appropriate hobby? It seems as though both aspects are probably true to a certain extent.

A quick survey of articles published in the past few years that are directly related to romance novels reveals that in the popular press, romance is still treated in a blatantly negative way. Even those articles that mean to be positive still come off as patronizing

and almost “cutesy”. With titles like “Grandma takes romance novels from simmer to boil”¹¹ and “Vampire romance novels suck in readers”¹², it is clear what the authors’ perspective on romance is going to be. The former article, about popular romance author Desiree Holt (aka Judith Rochelle) begins as follows: “Down a winding ranch road in this rural Kendall County community, there lives a 76-year-old grandma who’s got sex on her mind all of the time...This isn’t the beginning of a dirty joke. Rather, it’s about books and how a revolution in romance novels proved that blunt descriptions of sex acts are better than flowery prose about lovemaking.”

Some even go so far as to assert that romance novels are not only frivolous, but also dangerous. In an article for ksl.com, author Kimberly Sayer Giles states that romance novels are both addictive (even clinically) and can lead to dissatisfaction and infidelity. “Women may find their standard for intimacy begins to change over time because they may not be able to get as satisfied with their partners as they can reading a book. Pornography addiction counselor Vickie Burress said reading romance novels or viewing pornography may eventually lead to an affair for some women.” Aside from making a very rash speculation on the connection between romance novels and pornography, there have not been any studies that have proven that repetitive romance reading is either addictive or leads to changes in women’s behavior in relationships¹³. Articles such as this one typify the popular notion that everyone is an expert (and a critic) about romance novels.

¹¹ www.mysanantonio.com/life/article/Grandma-takes-romance-novels-from-simmer-to-boil-4158123.php

¹² www.columbian.com/news/2010/jul/30/vampire-romance-novels-suck-in-readers/

¹³ This particular article was, luckily, well-disputed in a rebuttal article, published two weeks later. (www.scienceofrelationships.com/home/2011/6/13/are-romance-novels-addictive.html)

As can be seen from the above, there is certainly no lack of criticism and stereotyping about the romance novel so it is not inconceivable that readers are experiencing a good deal of the hostility they perceive. On the other hand, because of that intense outside criticism, they have most likely internalized and accepted some of the critiques of the genre¹⁴.

Chapter Summaries

This project takes a three-pronged approach to understanding important issues in today's romance novel industry: first, a content analysis of current, bestselling single title romance novels from 2000-2013; second, a in-depth examination of the electronic publishing industry and its innovation in and from romance; and third, an analysis of interview data from readers and authors of romance that examines their relationship with romance reading as a pastime.

In Chapter 2, I suggest that changing social ideas surrounding gender and equality in relationships have informed the types of characters and situations that are found in today's romance novels. Whereas past novels emphasized women's passivity and need to be rescued, today's novels show more multifaceted women, with careers, families, and ambitions beyond traditional "feminine" matters. Heroes, as well, are more fleshed out characters rather than the over-the-top caricatures of strength and masculinity found in older novels. Rather than having a relationship develop between the two characters and then, ultimately, having the heroine abandon her entire identity and life to the relationship, the goal is a balanced, equal pairing between two people who love each

¹⁴ See also: "Mills and Boon: 100 Years of Heaven or Hell?" (www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2007/dec/05/women.fiction) and "The Sexy Reading Habits of the Petit-Bourgeois" (gawker.com/284530/the-sexy-reading-habits-of-the-petit+bourgeois) as two examples of many in the popular press.

other. There is a great variety in the novels and in their portrayals, so one overarching statement will not encompass the different types of heroes, heroines, and relationships found in these books. It is accurate to say, however, that the general process of social change in relation to gender and relationships is reflected in the novels.

In Chapter 3, following work that explores the process of innovation and cooptation in cultural production, I propose that the romance industry too has experienced this cyclical relationship because of the advent of electronic publishing in the early 2000s. The desire for subgenres and language that pushed the boundaries of what traditional publishers were willing to invest money in encouraged authors and consumers to search for new outlets for different types of books. Another driving force was the realization that readers were looking for more erotic content, not the still flowery and euphemistic sex present in paper books. E-publishers have altered the genre as a whole by pushing the boundaries of what can fit under the romance “umbrella”. In turn, traditional publishers have responded to the popularity of these new forms and subgenres by starting their own lines and legitimizing readers’ desires for new ideas in romance. As electronic publishing has taken off as subdivisions of traditional publishers, independent romance electronic presses have continued to be successful as they continue to innovate and respond to what authors and readers want.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I listen to the voices of readers to understand their ongoing love affair with the romance genre. Given the perceived changing demographics of romance readers in today’s environment versus when Radway was conducting her research, one might expect that the reasons for engaging in romance reading would also be different. Radway’s main explanation for the repetitiveness and devotion to romance

reading was for a physical escape from the duties of the modern housewife. It was a time for wives and mothers to take a moment for themselves; to physically disengage from the childcare and the housework and engage in an activity they found pleasurable. In the case of the Smithton women, this was absolutely true. With the vast numbers of women now working full time and the range of domestic situations today's romance reader finds herself in, this is no longer a solid explanation. While many of the women who read romance are married and have children, a large percentage are single or divorced (RWA 2005), and may not require the type of escapism that from household duties that Radway posits.

Instead, I suggest that today's romance readers long for what I term 'emotional escapism'. The most enduring feature of the romance novel is the guaranteed "happily ever after" ending. A reader always knows that no matter what the conflict and strife that occur during the course of the narrative, there will be always be an emotionally satisfying ending. Hero and heroine will end up together in some sort of committed relationship, prefaced more often than not by dramatic declarations of love from each.

Readers invest money, time, and energy into the act of consuming romance novels and expect an emotionally satisfying experience from it. This includes the ups and downs of conflict, growing sexual tension, deepening love bonds, and the ultimate happy ending. Readers know they will be lead on this emotional rollercoaster when they pick up a romance novel. The understanding of this process is what keeps each reader coming back, hoping to experience those emotions each time. Many readers are even more specific about their expected journey and express this in their choice of subgenres. They

expand the possible ways that heroes and heroines can reach the happily ever after and allow readers to discover what is most emotionally satisfying for them as an individual.

The emotional journey of the story that leads to that ultimate happy ending is what today's readers most enjoy. Most readers do not feel that they need to justify their reading habits by saying that they are brief intervals from responsibility or that it is the only time that they take for their own personal relaxation. Instead, their focus is on an emotional, rather than physical, renewal. Romance readers do not exist solely in the world of romance; they live in and experience the rest of the world, including engagement in wider social and political issues and personal loss and tragedy. Reading romance, then, may be a way to escape from the realities of that greater world experience for a short period of time—to remind themselves that society is more than just negativity.

There are many popular stereotypes regarding romance novels and the women who read them. It would seem clear then that readers experience pressure and misperception from the outside world in relation to their choice of reading material. Many readers are unabashedly proud of the fact that they read romance and don't feel the need to explain or defend it. Others are more circumspect, often hiding the more embarrassing covers when in public or doing their romance shopping online. They felt it undermined either their image as a professional or as an educated woman because others not acquainted with the genre had preconceived notions of the books as pornography or drivel.

E-book readers may allow for some elimination of the public romance reading stigma, but many traditional readers still contend with it. Readers are also aware of what the popular view of their reading habits is. Many are teased by partners or friends, which

tends to make romance reading a more solitary experience. Unless one shares tastes with relatives or friends, discussion and recommendations are left to online communities.

These blogs and message boards have come to represent a validating influence for romance readers, allowing them to discuss their favorite books without judgment.

Innovation and change are the themes that unify these numerous dimensions of the romance novel industry. For what has always been seen as an incredibly traditional and staid genre, the story of romance illustrates that this couldn't be further from the truth. The relationships between the four elements of culture production characterize some of the more salient trends and changes in the romance novel industry over the past twenty years. These relationships help illuminate how various stakeholders in the process interact to produce the romance novels that are on the shelf and online. Changes in content, changes in production, and changes in the way readers understand their interaction with the novels are some of the ways in which the romance industry is no longer the same one it used to be. Despite public perception to the contrary, romance has been innovative and distanced itself from its bodice-ripper past.

Chapter 2—Romance Novel Content

Introduction

This chapter updates the only other in-depth content analysis of romance novels, which also comes from Radway. Most importantly, it will demonstrate how content has changed in the past almost thirty years. Even relatively contemporary studies still use Radway to draw conclusions about plot conventions and the characterization of heroes and heroines (Ryder, 1999). There have only been a few studies of content since Radway's book. A few take on a similar task, but each has their limitations. Either they focus entirely on category¹, Harlequin books or study content from roughly the same historic moment as Radway². The only other major study of what are known as "single title"³ novels is Thurston (1987), but this suffers from the aforementioned time issue. I do, however, draw on her astute observations about the distinctive characteristics of single title novels and their lineage.

The cultural diamond framework is illustrative here in laying out the relationships between all parts of the romance novel industry that have led to changes in content over the past thirty years. Some relationships are stronger than others and will be discussed in more depth below. A brief explanation of the six major relationships will suffice here.

There have been substantial changes in the way that women (and men) understand gender relations and equality in romance, which has influenced authors' ideas about what types of stories they write [**Producer** ← → **Social World**]. This has also changed what types of characters and situations readers are interested in investing time with and what plot elements they no longer find acceptable (i.e. rape as a story vehicle) [**Consumer**

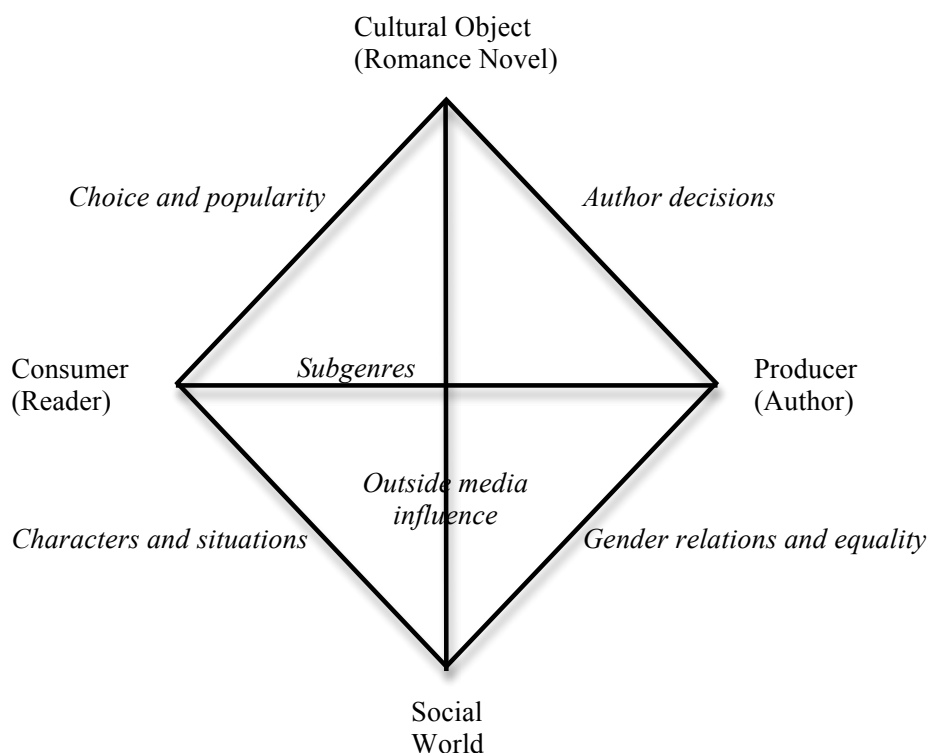
¹ Clawson, 2005; Owen, 1997; Whissell, 1998; Darbyshire, 2002

² Doyle, 1985; Hubbard, 1985; Modleski, 1980

³ See Chapter 1 for the distinction between the two types.

↔ Social World]. Authors then make decisions about what they will include or not include in the books they write and send to publishers (which will be accepted or rejected by those publishers) **[Producer ↔ Product]**. Meanwhile, other types of media begin to change or become popular, which influences the form that the book can conceivably take for a contemporary audience **[Social World ↔ Product]**. Readers enjoy some of these new forms and not others, making some profitable and others difficult to sell **[Consumer ↔ Product]**. This reader response encourages authors to start or continue to produce some subgenres or types (category vs. single title) and to abandon others **[Consumer ↔ Producer]**. I will focus mainly on the first three relationships in this chapter, though they are naturally all interrelated.

Figure 2. Romance content in the cultural diamond



I suggest that changing social ideas surrounding gender and equality in relationships have informed the types of characters and situations that are found in today's romance novels. Whereas past novels emphasized women's passivity and need to be rescued, today's novels show more multifaceted women, with careers, families, and ambitions beyond traditional "feminine" matters. Heroes, as well, are more fleshed out characters rather than the over-the-top caricatures of strength and masculinity found in older novels. Rather than having a relationship develop between the two characters and then, ultimately, having the heroine abandon her entire identity and life to the relationship, the goal is a balanced, equal pairing between two people who love each other. There is a great variety in the novels and in their portrayals, so one overarching statement will not encompass the different types of heroes, heroines, and relationships found in these books. It is accurate to say, however, that the general process of social change in relation to gender and relationships is reflected in the novels.

Beginning in 1972 with Kathleen Woodiwiss's *The Flame and the Flower*, the single title historical (and subsequently the single title contemporary) became the staple of romance readers. While the category novel was (and continues to be) a large segment of sales, its shorter format and stricter formula is only one aspect of romance as a whole. There is a demonstrable evolution of the cyclical process of form, authorship, and popularity in romance publishing⁴ that has led to today's single title novels and continues even during the time period of books sampled in this study. Thurston believed even in 1987 that the era of the "bodice-ripper" historical was over and that significant changes were being made to the single title romance. After the flurry of research in the early to

⁴ For a full explanation of the change and growth in romance publishing, see Radway (1984) and Thurston (1987)

mid 1980s, not much was made academically of the new developments in romance. It is clear then that continued changes from 1987 until today need to be explored.

Romance Novel Characteristics

Radway starts her analysis by addressing story characters, especially the heroine and her hero. Radway admits from the outset that “these novels do...begin by expressing ambivalent feelings about female gender by associating the heroine’s personality or activities with traits and behavior usually identified with men” (1984: 123-124). As well, she claims, “nearly all of the heroines...explicitly refuse to be silenced by the male desire to control women through the eradication of their individual voices” (1984: 24).

She goes on to contradict these positive statements by saying that heroines are also supremely innocent, always beautiful, always virginal, but also compassionate, kind, and understanding. These are qualities that are obviously equated with “traditional” female roles, which thus means to Radway that we must reject the heroines despite the non-traditional characteristics they display.

There is a strain, then, in seeing the need for love and relationships on the one hand and feelings of independence and self-confidence on the other that is inherent in all of these discussions. The liberation of women and a change to a more equal balance of power between the sexes does not preclude the truth of the human search for romantic alliances in whatever shape or form they are best felt. hooks puts it best, saying: “powerful, self-actualized women should feel no shame when we speak of our longing for a loving partner, our need to be supported by a circle of loved ones...And while it does not diminish the joy in my life when I am without companionship, it enhances that joy when a loving partner is with me” (2002: 155). As will be shown below, today’s

heroines are rarely engaged solely in the search for a romantic partnership—in fact, it could be argued that the majority make very little explicit mention of their desire to be in a couple until circumstances conspire to have them meet the hero.

For our heroine's pleasure, Radway says, "the hero of the romantic fantasy is always characterized by spectacular masculinity" (1984: 128). He is quintessentially male, though generally lacking any other defined personality traits. Though he is a leader of men and successful at whatever he does, he is initially incapable of expressing emotion and tenderness, especially toward the heroine. He possesses these traits, however, and they are brought to light at some point in the novel (usually toward the end) because of his relationship with the heroine. The gap, according to Radway, is how this transformation is accomplished.

[T]he romance can say nothing about the more difficult problem of how to teach men to be gentle who have developed within a set of family relationships that systematically repress the boy's capacity to nurture... The romance expresses women's dissatisfaction with the current asymmetry in male-female relationships but, at the same time, by virtue of its early presentation of the hero represents the desired and necessary transformation as an already accomplished fact. (1984: 129)

It is very true that the romance may express this discontent with men's (stereotypical) lack of emotional expression. It is also true that the romance helps to solve this by presenting the reader with the hero's thoughts, which are unknown to the heroine, but reassure the reader of his true nature. Expecting the novels to contribute to changing men's socialized emotional roles is most likely an unrealistic expectation of genre fiction.

Radway also challenges heroes with seemingly contradictory characteristics. She argues that expecting both masculinity and sensitivity, both success and stability from a partner is unrealistic and continues to put stereotypical and traditional pressures on men.⁵

Surprisingly, Radway does not focus as much on the sexual aspects of the romance novel as one would expect. She does spend a significant amount of energy on the problem of rape and, considering the time period that her book was written, rightfully so. There were many what were termed “justifiable” rapes included in older novels; many where the hero was involved. These scenes have been analyzed as either a woman’s rape fantasy (a desire to be dominated sexually, or to actually be raped) or a way that female readers of the time could accept sexual relations between the hero and heroine outside of marriage (Mussell, 1984; Modleski, 1982). Radway does not attempt to take a side on this debate, however is critical of the convention that the romance novel often used to handle the aftermath of rape; saying that expecting a man to respond with tenderness and understanding (as the hero always does) is unrealistic (142).

Romance is seen as not only have stock characters, but also an unchangeably and trite formulaic style. Famously, in her essay equating romance novels with pornography for women, Ann Barr Snitow (1983) sums up these essential characteristics. For her, romance novels include plots dependent on the female point of view that are always simple miscommunications where travel and fashion are always paramount. The heroine is a naïve virgin who, after meeting the hero, is in a constant state of sexual tension that she does not understand. She is alone in the world (often an orphan or similarly abandoned), a pliable, old-fashioned, traditional woman who performs helping roles.

⁵ Hubbard (1985) disagrees, arguing that the hero is “strong but not overpowering” (121) and is most concerned with the equality in the relationship rather than his dominance over it.

“[T]he heroine’s value system includes the given that men are all right, that they will turn into husbands, despite appearances to the contrary” (251). The hero, on the other hand, is vague but must possess arrogant and menacing characteristics. He is somehow also none of the things he appears to be on the surface.

Others have arrived at similar conclusions as Radway and Snitow regarding romance novel characters. Ryder (1999) uses content analysis of one novel to demonstrate that romance heroines are inherently passive creatures, who simply *exist* or have things *happen to them* rather than *doing*. In reference to the romance novel formula, she writes, “It always involves a passive figure involved in an apparently action-filled plot...the setting is exotic, the hero is always strong, smart and sardonic, and the child-like heroine always looks and acts as if a puff of wind, literal or metaphorical, will blow her away” (1068). She finds that the only place where the heroine is an active participant during the story is in dreams or flashbacks and not in the main action of the book. The hero, on the other hand, directs all of the activity and is constantly acting *upon* the heroine in order to move the story along.

While Ryder’s analysis has merit, it also has a very obvious methodological issue. Ryder is trying to make generalizations about the romance novel heroine (presumably in all books, even contemporary ones) by using a book published in 1953. Perhaps the characteristics of passivity she found in this particular book is representative of novels published in this time period and even conceivably those published until the early 1980s.

Doyle (1985) also supports Radway’s assertions regarding the characterization of romance heroes, heroines, and relationships. By analyzing the popular novels of author Barbara Cartland, she finds that the ideal heroine is virtuous and moral, carefully

guarding her sexuality and waiting patiently for the hero to find and marry her. In contrast, Cartland's 'undesirable' woman is "assertive, persistent, independent, immoral, and sexual" who will "eventually be rejected by men in preference for her spiritual sister" (32). The hero is an overly aggressive, arrogant, hedonistic controller who will only be tamed by the sweetness of the unassuming heroine after he has seen through the duplicity of the undesirable woman.

Doyle's critique also reflects a salient point of critique in feminist media scholarship: what are the types of femininity (and masculinity, for that matter) that are portrayed in cultural products and how do audiences understand them? Does media only reproduce hegemonic forms of femininity and masculinity? Connell (2005) points out that multiple masculinities (and by extension, femininities) exist at any given historical and cultural moment. Gender relations are a product of power, production, and cathexis (emotional attachment), all of which are dynamic processes (2005: 73-74). While the hegemonic version of gender relations and practice may be the exalted one, alternative, subversive, or overlapping masculinities and femininities exist. These alternatives will be the starting point for change or the re-envisioning of what it means to be "masculine" or "feminine". While many, including Radway, have pointed out that audiences are generally able to distinguish between the reality of the social world and the "fantasy" of a media representation, the cultural media product can be a way to change or subvert the existing social order⁶. I assert that contemporary romance novels present a new version of masculinity and femininity—one that melds hegemonic (or traditional) characteristics with more modern, egalitarian ones.

Sample Book Characteristics

⁶ See for example van Zoonen, 1994

Table 1 reveals that the novels in the sample cover a wide range of romance categories⁷. Sixty-nine percent of the sample (31 novels) was contemporary single title novels, meaning they take place in the present time in a setting that is easily recognizable to the reader as similar to the one she inhabits. Twelve of the novels (27%) were historical, with seven set in the Regency period in England, a standard time and location for historical romance novels. Three of the novels were set in Victorian England, one in the United States West in the late 1800s, and one in the pre-Civil War South of the United States. Additionally, two of the novels (4% of the total sample) were futuristic in nature, creating for the reader a completely alternate world.

Eighteen of the novels, constituting forty percent of the sample, had an identifiable subgenre. Seven books were of the suspense/mystery subgenre, while eleven novels were categorized as paranormal. While romantic suspense has been a staple of the genre for many years, the growth in the paranormal subgenre, especially over the past ten years, is worth noting. Romances may be labeled paranormal if they contain a broad number of different elements, but generally include such characters or plots as vampires, *were* creatures (those who shape shift between human and animal), time travel, ghosts, magic, psychic or enhanced senses, or ancient mythology. One of the futuristic novels (Jayne Castle's *Ghost Hunter*) is also included in paranormal because not only does it take place in the future, but includes other paranormal elements (psychic energies, ghosts, and telepathy).

⁷ See Methodology for complete sampling process for traditionally and electronically published books.

Table 1. Books Included in Content Analysis

Author	Title	Time Period <i>Subgenre</i>	Year	Pages	Weeks on list
Nora Roberts	Key of Light	Contemporary <i>Paranormal</i>	2003	334	13
Debbie Macomber	44 Cranberry Point	Contemporary <i>None</i>	2004	377	3
Danielle Steel	Journey	Contemporary <i>None</i>	2001	353	8
Fern Michaels	Plain Jane	Contemporary <i>None</i>	2002	345	5
Janet Evanovich	Full Scoop	Contemporary <i>None</i>	2006	352	5
J.D. Robb	Imitation in Death	Futuristic <i>Suspense/Mystery</i>	2003	352	5
Catherine Coulter	The Sherbrooke Twins	Historical <i>None</i>	2004	358	5
Linda Lael Miller	McKetrick's Luck	Contemporary <i>None</i>	2007	384	4
Christine Feehan	Deadly Game	Contemporary <i>Paranormal</i>	2007	333	4
Stephanie Laurens	On a Wild Night	Historical <i>None</i>	2002	206	3
Jude Devereaux	High Tide	Contemporary <i>Suspense/Mystery</i>	2000	340	5
Sandra Brown	White Hot	Contemporary <i>Suspense/Mystery</i>	2005	608	6
Robyn Carr	Moonlight Road	Contemporary <i>None</i>	2010	400	5
Luanne Rice	Beach Girls	Contemporary <i>None</i>	2004	428	4
Sherryl Woods	Sand Castle Bay	Contemporary <i>None</i>	2013	384	5
Johanna Lindsey	The Heir	Historical <i>None</i>	2001	407	4
Julia Quinn	Romancing Mr. Bridgerton	Historical <i>None</i>	2002	370	2
Christina Dodd	Into the Flame	Contemporary <i>Paranormal</i>	2008	377	4
Sherrilyn Kenyon	Seize the Night	Contemporary <i>Paranormal</i>	2005	325	3
Lisa Kleypas	Scandal in Spring	Historical <i>None</i>	2006	384	5
Susan Mallery	Only His	Contemporary <i>None</i>	2011	352	4
Lora Leigh	Stygian's Honor	Contemporary <i>Paranormal</i>	2012	384	3
Catherine Anderson	Summer Breeze	Historical <i>None</i>	2006	432	3
Julie Garwood	Mercy	Contemporary <i>Suspense/Mystery</i>	2002	454	4
Lynsay Sands	The Renegade Hunter	Contemporary <i>Paranormal</i>	2009	384	3
Amanda Quick	Slightly Shady	Historical <i>Suspense/Mystery</i>	2002	343	3

Susan Wiggs	Dockside	Contemporary <i>None</i>	2007	416	5
Mary Balogh	Slightly Scandalous	Historical <i>None</i>	2003	374	2
Jayne Ann Krentz	Lost and Found	Contemporary <i>Suspense/Mystery</i>	2001	355	4
Elizabeth Lowell	Midnight in Ruby Bayou	Contemporary <i>Suspense/Mystery</i>	2001	424	3
Barbara Delinsky	The Woman Next Door	Contemporary <i>None</i>	2002	367	5
Janet Dailey	Calder Pride	Contemporary <i>None</i>	2000	450	3
Joan Johnston	The Next Mrs. Blackthorne	Contemporary <i>None</i>	2005	420	4
Heather Graham	Ghost Walk	Contemporary <i>Paranormal</i>	2005	400	4
Jane Feather	To Wed a Wicked Prince	Historical <i>None</i>	2008	490	3
Jayne Castle	Ghost Hunter	Futuristic <i>Paranormal</i>	2006	327	3
Susan Elizabeth Phillips	This Heart of Mine	Contemporary <i>None</i>	2002	399	2
Karen Robards	Scandalous	Historical <i>None</i>	2001	360	4
Victoria Alexander	Secrets of a Proper Lady	Historical <i>None</i>	2007	362	4
Belva Plain	Fortune's Hand	Contemporary <i>None</i>	2000	421	4
Carly Phillips	The Bachelor	Contemporary <i>None</i>	2002	336	8
Kathleen Woodiwiss	A Season Beyond a Kiss	Historical <i>None</i>	2000	485	5
Lorie O'Clare	Far From Innocent	Contemporary <i>Paranormal</i>	2006	153	N/A*
Jo Barrett	Highlander's Challenge	Contemporary <i>Paranormal</i>	2007	309	N/A*
Bianca D'Arc	Sweeter Than Wine	Contemporary <i>Paranormal</i>	2007	220	N/A*

*Electronically Published books are not included in *New York Times* bestseller list rankings.

In *Far From Innocent* (O'Clare), a typical event occurs early on to cue the reader into the parameters of the world of the human/wolf shape shifting.

Juan allowed the change to fully take over. Dropping to all fours, muscles bulged against growing bones. The world around him changed. Everything grew crisper, clearer. The smell of each tree, the moss growing on the sides of them, and the anger and confusion of the werewolves staring at him, coming at him each with their own distinct scent, filled his nostrils. He acknowledged each scent in a fraction of a minute. (2006: 9)

Another very popular segment of the paranormal subgenre has been that of vampires.

Though only represented by three of the novels in the sample, a wider overview of romance reveals that it is an oft-used plot device. Many authors use a variation of the “traditional” vampire legend, most notably Sherrilyn Kenyon, who fuses it with Greek mythology. Kenyon’s heroine, Tabitha,

is a Daimon (bad vampire) hunter who falls in love with Valerius, a Dark-Hunter (more or less a “good” vampire, created by the Greek goddess, Artemis).

They’d [Daimons] been tough kills and a group of them had gotten away. Surely they wouldn’t be back. Most Daimons vacated the area very quickly after they ran into her or one of the Dark-Hunters. Courage wasn’t exactly something they were known for: Since they were very young and the idea was to stay alive, very few Daimons wanted to run head-to-head with Artemis’s army...

She returned to Valerius, who was finishing up his food. ‘What are your powers?’ she asked... ‘Your Dark-Hunter powers. Do they include premonitions or precog [precognition]?’

‘No,’ he said before taking a drink of wine. ‘Like most Roman Dark-Hunters, I got rather, and excuse the crassness of this, “shafted” in that department.’...

‘Artemis didn’t care for the fact that in Rome, she wasn’t a major deity...I’m stronger than a human and faster, but I don’t have the elevated psychic powers that the rest of the Dark-Hunters do.’ (2005: 55-56)

A growing segment of the paranormal population includes issues surrounding enhanced physical and psychic skills in what would be otherwise considered “normal” humans.

Christine Feehan’s “Game” series centers around a group of military men and women called GhostWalkers who were the result of experiments performed on them as children or adults.

Dr. Peter Whitney [the founder of the experimental programs] was a man with far too much money and power. He didn’t believe the rules were for someone like him, and unfortunately he had the backing of some very powerful men. Jack and Ken [the book’s hero], like several other men in the military, had fallen for his enthusiasm over his psychic experiments. It made perfect sense at the time—to take men from all branches of the service with Special Forces training and test them to see if they had potential to use psychic abilities...

Whitney hadn't said a word about gene therapy and genetic enhancements...He certainly had never admitted he would pit the men unknowingly against one another. And never once had he mentioned a breeding program, using pheromones to pair a supersoldier with a woman. (2007: 45)

The traditionally published novels included were of average paperback length as might be found in other genre or general fiction books. The number of pages per book ranged from 325-608 with an average length of 389 pages. The three e-published are more difficult to discern in terms of page numbers because they are printed in .pdf form, which is comparable to a regular piece of paper rather than a paperback book and font size, type, and setup depends on the publisher, so were 153, 220, and 309 pages respectively. The books were relatively evenly dispersed over the years published: 4 of the books were published in 2000; 5 in 2001; 7 in 2002; 3 in each 2003 and 2004; 4 from 2005; 5 from 2006; 6 from 2007; 2 from 2008; and 1 each year from 2009-2013. The number of weeks each of the books in the sample spent on the *New York Times* bestseller list ranged from 2 to 13 with a mean of 4.3 and a median of 4 (excluding the e-published books, which are not included on such lists).

In direct contradiction of Radway and others, I found that contemporarily written novels' protagonists adhere much more closely to modern ideals of female and male characteristics, equality in relationships, and sexual experience, while still maintaining the romance formula. Even in the historical novels, authors break with the reality of the historical time period to assure that their characters and situations are palatable to a contemporary audience. Table 2 illustrates some of the discussed characteristics of each of the selected novels⁸.

⁸ For the full list of all discussed characteristics, please see Appendix E.

Heroines

The romance novel deals very explicitly with female empowerment, as evidenced by the heroine. As romance authors point out time and again, “the woman always wins” (Krentz, 1992: 5, 56). She finds a mate and forces him to acknowledge her power, her intelligence, her sensitivity and whatever other fine qualities she possesses. The heroine is always imbued with an incredible amount of courage.

The feistiness of the heroine is so universal as to have become a cliché. She does not fall apart in a crisis in the manner that we might imagine ourselves doing. She copes. She determines ways to extract herself from the disasters—both physical and emotional—that threaten her. How does she accomplish this? By casting away her fears, facing her demons, and taking the actions that initiate her into her own considerable power. (in Krentz, 1992: 48)

The heroine is not a shrinking violet, wringing her hands and waiting patiently for her hero to show up and fix things. She takes charges (sometimes recklessly, but always with great strength) and she solves her own problems. Often the hero is by her side, but he is not necessary for her survival.

Today’s romance heroine is also a multi-faceted woman. In novels set in the present or future, she always has a fulfilling occupation. Of the thirty-three contemporary and futuristic heroines, the occupations include art dealer (Roberts), news reporter (Steel), psychologist (Michaels), bed and breakfast owner (Macomber), doctor (Evanovich and Garwood), police detective (Robb), artist (Rice), toy designer (Deveraux), military (Feehan), interior designer (Brown and Woods), jewelry designer (Lowell), web designer (Dodd), school counselor (Delinsky), antiques broker (Krentz), real estate developer (Miller), ranch owner (Dailey), tour guide (Johnston and Graham), store owner (Kenyon and C. Phillips), hotel manager (Wiggs), children’s book author

Table 2. Selected characteristics of books used in content analysis

Title	Author	Heroine	Hero	Heroine Occupation	Hero Occupation	Marriage at end?	Heroine is a Virgin?
Key of Light	N. Roberts	Malory	Flynn	Art Dealer	Journalist	No	No
44 Cranberry Point	D. Macomber	Peggy	Bob	B&B owner	B&B owner	Before	No
Journey	D. Steel	Maddy	Bill	News Reporter	Diplomat	No	No
Plain Jane	F. Michaels	Jane	Michael	Psychologist	Psychologist	Yes	No
Full Scoop	J. Evanovich	Maggie	Zack	Doctor	FBI Agent	Yes	No
Imitation in Death	J.D. Robb	Eve	Rourke	Police Detective	CEO	Before	No
The Sherbrooke Twins	C. Coulter	Corrie	James	None	None (aristocrat)	Yes	Yes
McKetrick's Luck	L. L. Miller	Cheyenne	Jesse	Real Estate Developer	Poker Player	Yes	No
Deadly Game	C. Feehan	Mari	Ken	Military	Military	No	No
On a Wild Night	S. Laurens	Amanda	Martin	None	None (aristocrat)	Yes	Yes
High Tide	J. Devereaux	Fiona	Ace	Toy designer	Entrepreneur	Yes	No
White Hot	S. Brown	Sayre	Beck	Interior Designer	Lawyer	No	No
Moonlight Road	R. Carr	Erin	Aiden	Lawyer	Doctor	Yes	No
Beach Girls	L. Rice	Stevie	Jack	Artist	Architect	Yes	No
Sand Castle Bay	S. Woods	Emily	Boone	Interior designer	Restaurant owner	Yes	No
The Heir	J. Lindsay	Sabrina	Duncan	None	None (aristocrat)	Yes	Yes
Romancing Mr. Bridgerton	J. Quinn	Penelope	Colin	Author	None (aristocrat)	Yes	Yes
Into the Flame	C. Dodd	Firebird	Douglas	Web Designer	Police Officer	Yes	No
Seize the Night	S. Kenyon	Tabitha	Valerius	Store Owner	None (vampire)	No	No
Scandal in Spring	L. Kleypas	Daisy	Matthew	None	Businessman	Yes	Yes
Only His	S. Mallery	Nevada	Tucker	Construction manager	Construction owner	Yes	No
Stygian's Honor	L. Leigh	Liza	Stygian	Undercover agent	None (shape-shifter)	No	Yes
Summer Breeze	C. Anderson	Rachel	Joseph	None	Rancher	Middle	Yes
Mercy	J. Garwood	Michelle	Theo	Doctor	FBI agent	Yes	No
The Renegade Hunter	L. Sands	Josephine	Nicholas	Bartender and student	None (vampire)	Yes	No
Slightly Shady	A. Quick	Lavinia	Tobias	Shop owner	Private Investigator	No	Yes
Dockside	S. Wiggs	Nina	Greg	Hotel manager	Hotel owner	Yes	No

Slightly Scandalous	M. Balogh	Freyja	Joshua	None	None (aristocrat)	Yes	Yes
Lost and Found	J. A. Krentz	Cady	Mack	Antiquities Broker	CEO	Yes	No
Midnight in Ruby Bayou	E. Lowell	Faith	Walker	Jewelry Designer	Security Expert	Yes	No
The Woman Next Door	B. Delinsky	Amanda	Graham	School Counselor	Landscape Architect	Beginning	No
Calder Pride	J. Dailey	Cat	Logan	Ranch Owner	Sheriff	Middle	Yes
The Next Mrs. Blackthorn	J. Johnston	Jocelyn/ Libby	North/ Clay	None/ Tour Guide	Rancher/ Judge	Yes/ Yes	Yes/ No
Ghost Walk	H. Graham	Nikki	Brent	Tour Guide	Investigator	Yes	No
To Wed a Wicked Prince	J. Feather	Lavia	Alex	None	Spy	Middle	Yes
Ghost Hunter	J. Castle	Elly	Cooper	Botanist	Guild Boss (CEO)	Yes	No
This Heart of Mine	S. E. Phillips	Molly	Kevin	Children's book author	Football player	Yes	No
Scandalous	K. Robards	Gabby	Nick	None	Soldier/Spy	Yes	Yes
Secrets of a Proper Lady	V. Alexander	Cordelia	Daniel	None	None (aristocrat)	Yes	Yes
Fortune's Hand	B. Plain	Ellen	Robb	Illustrator	Lawyer	Beginning	Yes
The Bachelor	C. Phillips	Charlotte	Roman	Lingerie Shop Owner	Journalist	Yes	No
A Season Beyond a Kiss	K. Woodiwiss	Raelynn	Jeff	None	Shipping Owner	Beginning	Yes
Far From Innocent	L. O'Clare	Erin	Juan	None (werewolf)	None (werewolf)	Yes	No
Highlander's Challenge	J. Barrett	Tuck	Colin	Bodyguard	None (aristocrat)	Yes	Yes
Sweeter Than Wine	B. D'Arc	Christy	Sebastian	Unspecified	None (vampire)	Yes	No

(S.E. Phillips), illustrator (Plain), botanist (Castle), bodyguard (Barrett), lawyer (Carr), construction manager (Mallery), undercover agent (Leigh), and bartender (Sands).

Occupation becomes extremely important as a symbol of what might be considered 'modern' sensibilities in the romance novel. It is difficult to imagine a contemporarily written book in which the heroine wants nothing more than to be married

and have children. These careers are not time-fillers or passing fancies. Many of them require extensive schooling or skill and many years of hard work to obtain.

‘So, are you the town doctor?’

‘One of several,’ she said. ‘I’m opening a clinic there. It’s not very fancy, but there’s a real need. So many of the people don’t have the resources to get regular medical care.’... ‘There are rewards other than money. Oh sure, it would be great to have all the supplies and equipment we need, but we’ll make due. I’ve spent a lot of years getting ready for this.’ (Garwood, 2001: 53-54)

The heroines are passionate about their work and committed to their success at it. Author Jude Deveraux (2000) portrays her main character’s path to the top of the toy industry this way:

‘Soft?’ she said, and her quiet tone was louder than a shout. ‘I am *soft*? I raised myself, you...you...Everything I am I did myself, without help from anybody....When I got out of college, I had no connections, nothing; I might as well have been an orphan. And I was *not* going to use my friends as ladder rungs...I wasn’t going to let *anything* stop me....After a couple of years of dead-end jobs, I got a job as a personal assistant to an executive at Davidson Toys...I was little more than a maid, and paid about as much as one....But I didn’t let that get me down. I kept my mouth shut and my ears open, and one day I heard...James Tonbridge Garrett say that he’d give the earth for a B [Barbie] clone....I didn’t sleep for three days and nights...I hired an artist to draw my ideas, then pushed my way into Garrett’s office one Monday morning and presented the whole concept to him.’ (170-172)

The heroine is rarely ever looking for a relationship at the outset of the story, occupied with some other pressing matter that inevitably involves her with the hero. She is invariably portrayed as extraordinarily independent and intelligent, perfectly capable of taking care of herself without the protection of her hero. She recognizes issues of equality and balance of power in relationships, but also won’t be swayed from her ideals if they contradict with the hero’s.

His voice was as stirring as the way he was looking at her. ‘How is it that I can be so mad at you one minute, and the next I want to be—’

‘Don’t.’

‘What?’

‘Don’t say whatever you were going to say. Don’t flirt with me. It won’t distract me from what we’re talking about. And, frankly, it’s disappointing that you would think I’m that frivolous.’

‘Frivolous? Sayre, you’re about as frivolous as a train wreck.’

‘That’s not very complimentary either.’

‘I can’t win for losing. When I try to compliment you, you accuse me of flirting to distract you. So let’s stop this verbal sparring. Why don’t you just level with me and tell me what you’re thinking?’

‘Because I don’t trust you.’

He raised an eyebrow. ‘Well, you could hardly get more straightforward than that.’ (Brown, 2004: 262-263)

Her entrance into the relationship, then, is a function of her desire to love and be loved.

In addition, she retains many of the older ideals of compassion, kindness, and understanding, but one could argue that this is not negative in conjunction with her other liberated qualities. There is often an emphasis on family or friend relationships and this is where a reader sees more “traditional” ideas of femininity portrayed.

‘I just want to know what’s going on.’

She would not cry. ‘Medical bills,’ she said.

‘From your brother’s accident.’

‘Yes.’...

‘So it all fell on you? You weren’t legally responsible, Cheyenne. Why take on something like that?’

‘Mitch is my brother,’ she said. For her, that was reason enough... ‘He can survive on his benefits. I want him to do *more* than survive—I want him to have a life.’

‘Enough to sacrifice your own?’ (Miller, 2007: 84-85, emphasis in original)

That this heroine (as with most heroines) possesses characteristics that might be considered traditional or reflexive of a hegemonic femininity along with the aforementioned strength and career focus helps show the new blending of traits which may signal a changing vision of what it means to be female. According to Thurston, “[w]omen have not so much exchanged values, attitudes, and aspirations as they have added to or modified old ones” (1987: 204). While many interpreted older novels’

“spunky” heroine as merely a token protest against patriarchy⁹, contemporary novels attempt to emphasize that there is a changing balance in gender relations, sometimes more successfully than others.

The contemporary heroine’s historical counterpart shares many of her admirable characteristics, but generally lacks her occupation and education for obvious reasons. Authors cleverly find ways around this problem, however, often by having the heroine educated by unconventional relatives or pursuing a calling that is considered “unladylike” in her epoch. Penelope Featherington in Julia Quinn’s *Romancing Mr. Bridgerton* has been fooling society for over a decade with her clever and scathing written accounts of the behavior of the *ton* (the British aristocracy). When her secret is discovered by her hero, she responds as follows:

“Why are you so angry with me?” she burst out. “What have I done that is so repellent? Been cleverer than you? Kept a secret? Had a good laugh at the expense of society?”
 “Penelope, you—“
 “No,” she said forcefully. “You be quiet. It’s my turn to speak.”
 His jaw went slack as he stared at her, shock and disbelief crowding in his eyes.
 “I am proud of what I’ve done,” she managed to say, her voice shaking with emotion. “I don’t care what you say. I don’t care what anyone says. No one can take that from me.” (Quinn, 2002: 206)

She has more equality with her hero than would have been conceivable in the reality of her historical era, even if it is only in the confines of their relationship. It often becomes necessary then for him to possess qualities that allow them to lead a productive life because the practical aspects of their social world would not permit her such freedom. When the heroine possesses a special interest or occupation, however, she always maintains it after the consummation of the relationship¹⁰.

⁹ See for example Modleski, 1982 and Hubbard, 1985

¹⁰ See for example Balogh, Coulter, Feather, Kleypas, Quick, and Quinn

Heroes

A more controversial issue, and one more difficult to analyze, is that of the hero. He clearly must be as strong as the heroine in order to produce a properly conflict-ridden storyline and he (as well as she) must be transformed by the end of the novel. Through his relationship with the heroine, the hero learns to articulate his emotions and form a true and lasting bond with his lady. “One of the most significant victories the heroine achieves at the close of the novel is that the hero is able to express his love for her *not only physically but also verbally*” (Krentz, 1992: 23, emphasis in original). He does not lose his (arguably hegemonic) masculinity by doing this; instead he becomes a more complete person, able to meld both aspects of his personality. This melding of masculine and feminine characteristics is then associated with a lasting, equal relationship. Here again, a new, or more modern, vision of what it means to be masculine confronts the reader.

Contemporary heroes have much in common with their earlier counterparts; however, they are most distinctly differentiated by the fact that their personalities and characteristics are much more defined in today’s novels. The hero is able to be nurturing and sensitive in relation to more than just his heroine.

‘I know very few details of your life, but I do know a great deal about the man you are.’ If Logan had asked her to elaborate, Cat would have found it difficult to explain. Yet she only had to remember the times she had seen him with Quint [her son]—the patience he’d shown, the genuine interest and affection, the incidents of gentle but firm discipline and boyish playfulness...If she thought about it, Cat knew she could come up with more examples that would illustrate the knowledge she had gleaned about the kind of man he was—strong, intelligent, competent, sensitive, dependable, caring, patient, understanding, and determined. (Dailey, 2000: 386)

It is still important for the hero to be successful in his chosen field and economically stable at the same time. With the exception of some paranormal heroes (whose status as immortal creatures makes work unnecessary), the contemporary and futuristic heroes are engaged in profitable enterprises and interesting careers to parallel the achievement of the heroine. Heroes in the sample included: journalist (Roberts and C. Phillips), diplomat (Steel), psychologist (Michaels), hotel owner (Macomber and Wiggs), FBI agent (Evanovich and Garwood), CEO (Robb, Castle, and Krentz), architect (Rice and Delinsky), entrepreneur (Deveraux), military (Feehan), lawyer (Brown and Plain), security expert (Lowell), police officer (Dodd and Dailey), poker player (Miller), judge (Johnston), football player (S. E. Phillips), investigator (Graham), doctor (Carr), restaurant owner (Woods), and construction owner (Mallery).

The historical hero is generally wealthy because of his particular family ties and place in society, but invariably also has some kind of business acumen or interesting hobby at which he excels. Several have defined occupations, including business manager (Kleypas), private investigator (Quick), rancher (Anderson), government spy (Feather and Robards), and shipping owner (Woodiwiss).

He is also distinguished from other men of his time period by having a genuine desire to find a woman who can be his intellectual equal, which he of course discovers in his heroine. Amanda Quick's hero, Tobias March, is entranced by his heroine, Lavinia Lake, when she decides to set up a rival private investigation firm to discover a murderer that he has been chasing. Rather than see her as unladylike or an anomaly, he falls in love with her perceptiveness and wit. Together, they solve the crime, a task that would

have been impossible without the presence of the other. True success for the hero comes from his relationship with the heroine, not just his own talents.

As mentioned previously, there is an argument that these aspects of the hero are improbable and simply reproduce the historic pressures on men to be nearly perfect. I maintain that these characteristics become especially important in today's romance novels because they point to equality between the hero and heroine. If the heroine is intelligent, with a great career and a full life, it seems obvious that she would look for a partner that could match her in all ways. While this is, admittedly, not always the case, it is often a vital aspect of the hero and heroine's relationship in the contemporary and even the historical romance. If the hero did not have special attributes to bring to the relationship, a reader might wonder why the heroine would want to be involved with him.

While our hero, then, possesses these strong, yet sensitive characteristics, he also ultimately embraces his roles as husband and father. It is a separate question whether we wish to challenge this status quo, however our romance heroes desire (whether they know it or not) this ultimate fulfillment (in society's terms) of his relationship with the heroine. Though he has had romantic (especially sexual) encounters previous to the heroine, he is looking for a long-term committed relationship, which is only realized with her. We see our hero not just as the ultimate alpha male anymore, but as a man who seeks success in both life and love.

'I'm sorry about what happened, sorry it's taken me so long to figure out what I wanted, but when I was with you, I was having too good a time to think. After you left, though, things weren't so good, and I realized that everything you said about me is right. I was afraid. I let football become my whole life. It was the only thing I was sure of, and that's why I got so reckless this year. There was something missing inside me I was trying to fill up, but I went about doing it the wrong way. But there sure isn't anything missing inside me now, because you're there.' (S. E. Phillips, 2001: 386)

Admittedly, the hero does not always start out with such lofty goals, as parallels the growth and change of our heroine. Neither character is necessarily beginning the story with a relationship in mind. Through this particular relationship and the development of the feelings between them, the hero discovers he has found the woman with whom he can achieve his aim of family (however that may be defined).

In six of the novels in the sample¹¹, the hero is already a father, and in five¹², the heroine is already a mother. This is fairly representative of the distribution of stories where children are present before the consummation of the hero/heroine romance. It is sometimes difficult to get a definite sense of the heroes as fathers, as they are sometimes adult children or were not the primary parent in raising the child. In one of the novels where fatherhood is deeply explored, the hero and heroine recall the difficulties of her teenage pregnancy, their separation, and the child they created:

‘You loved me?’ she said, searching his eyes for the truth.
 ‘If you recall, I was willing to marry you when you told me you were pregnant.’
 ‘I thought that was just—’
 ‘That wasn’t nobility or responsibility or even political self-preservation. That was me wanting to spend the rest of my life with you. Believe it or not, I was thinking dynasty,’ Clay said with a self-deprecating smile. ‘I had visions of little girls with your golden curls. And little boys who looked like me.’
 ‘Kate [their daughter] has your gray eyes. And your dark hair. And your height. It’s always been hard for me to look at her without thinking of you.’
 ‘She’s you,’ Clay said... ‘Her fearlessness, her sense of adventure, her willingness to tackle anything—she got all that from you.’ (Johnston, 2005: 325-326)

Krentz (2001) tackles the issue of single parenting after the death of a spouse. Her hero, Mack, recalls the special way he and his daughter bonded.

Gabriella had toured her first museum in a carrier attached to Mack’s back.

¹¹ Plain, Krentz, Johnston, Wiggs, Rice, and Carr

¹² Evanovich, Dodd, Dailey, Johnston, and Wiggs

After Rachel's death, he had taken his daughter back into museums, endless numbers of them. Together they sought solace in the art and artifacts that were the tangible proof of the universal nature of the human experience. When the natural vicissitudes of parenting a teenager had struck, he had discovered that museums could transcend, for short periods at least, a host of thorny issues involved in single-fatherhood. (85)

Most often, if fatherhood is mentioned, it is in the future or "pending" at the end of the book. Several others add an epilogue which takes place after the birth or some time in the future after multiple children (see Appendix E).

Sex and Rape

There is a definite lack of emphasis on the heroine's virginity as compared to the older novels; more than likely she has already been involved in at least one sexual relationship previous to her involvement with the hero. As Owen found, "virginal heroines are very much the exception nowadays" (1987: 544). For obvious reasons, our historical heroine *is* the exception in some attempt to keep with norms of the time period. All twelve historical novels in the sample have heroines who are virgins at the beginning of the book¹³.

The issue of virginity is a factor in the historical novels, but for very practical reasons. A woman's situation was vastly more precarious in Regency and Victorian England or nineteenth century America and having sex outside of wedlock was a dangerous prospect for most women. Single motherhood was not an option and women were generally unable to find employment and support themselves. Our historical heroines may not be virgins because of lack of desire or openness about sex, but simply because they are sensible women who are concerned about the repercussions.

¹³ Again, a broader survey of the genre shows that there are also ways that authors have of getting around this convention, including heroines who are widows or have been previously "ruined" (either voluntarily or involuntarily) by nefarious men.

This is speculation, however, because the novels do not tend to be explicit about the women's sexual choices prior to the relationship with the hero. Lindsey (2000) gives her heroine a well-defined reason for choosing to lose her virginity to the hero (who is engaged to another woman) and ignoring social conventions.

She knew very well what could happen, what *was* happening, and was in a unique position not to care. She could ignore the right or wrong of it because she had already decided to never marry, yet here was the man she loved offering her a small glimpse of what marriage to him could be like. Of course she wouldn't refuse. She would accept anything he was willing to give her of himself, including these few stolen moments of passion that were her dreams come true. (217, emphasis in original)

It is interesting to note that in nine of the twelve historical novels, the sexual relationship is consummated before the marriage and one of those relationships does not even end with a wedding (Quick). Whether this indicates something about the characters of the heroines, is a way to indicate the strength of feelings between the hero and heroine, or is simply a plot device because most readers enjoy sex scenes is unclear.

Our contemporary heroines, on the other hand, are far from shrinking violets when it comes to their sexuality. Five of the contemporary female protagonists (Dailey, Plain, Leigh, Johnston, and Barrett) are virgins when the story begins. This is due, in part, to the fact that in Dailey and Plain, the heroines are much younger than their counterparts in other novels, who tend to be in their late twenties or early thirties. No explicit explanation is given for the virginity of Leigh's heroine¹⁴. It is the only example in the sample of a paranormal heroine who has no previous sexual experience. In Johnston and Barrett, virginity is due to other extenuating factors. Jocelyn in *The Next*

¹⁴ Though the issue is not discussed within this particular text, other novels within the paranormal subgenre that deal with animal/human hybrid characters use the idea of "mates" as a kind of animal soul mate concept. Because of this, heroines (and occasionally heroes) have not had other sexual encounters because they have not yet found their "mate".

Mrs. Blackthorn has been caring for her sick sister and has not had the time or desire to date, especially as she is in love with said sister's husband. Tuck of *Highlander's Challenge*, though in her late twenties, has spent most of her time recovering from repeated abuse by her father throughout her lifetime and does not trust men or feel like she is good enough to be loved for this reason.

She let the blade fly, impaling it into the door. 'I was trained to fight, MacLean. Not to play nursemaid to some man. One who cares about nothing but his stomach or whether or not his shirts are clean. A man who'd rather get drunk and slap his daughter around, than face a single day sober.' Her breath quickened and her eyes became glassy. 'A man who doesn't give a shit about anything but himself.'

She swallowed hard while blinking away her burgeoning tears. 'You either accept me for what I am or leave me the hell alone,' she hissed and spun away. (Barrett, 2006: 143)

Because of the average age of heroines, most readers would find it rather unusual if the heroine was a virgin. Their range of particular sexual experience is varied, given their personalities, histories, and other circumstances. The reader sees, though, that she is not afraid to ask for what she wants when it comes to sex and does not wait for the hero to initiate sexual encounters.

She huffed out a breath. 'Okay then. Okay. But now we have to have sex on the kitchen floor.'

'I beg your pardon?'

'It's on my to-do list, and we didn't get to it yet, so we'll have to go for it now. Pizza can wait.'

'You have a to-do list?'

'It was supposed to be spontaneous and uncontrolled, but we'll have to go with what we've got.'

She drained the glass of champagne, set it down, then released her weapon harness. 'Go on, strip it off, pal.'

'A sexual to-do list?' Amused, fascinated, he watched her dump her harness on the counter, then start on her boots. 'Was that bout we had last week on the dining room table, and the floor, on your list?' (Robb, 2003: 166)

Roberts' heroine, Malory, decides when she wants to finally have sex with the hero.

Both characters have spent the novel debating where their relationship is taking them.

'I guess I have to do everything.' In one fluid motion, she slid the sleep shirt over her head and tossed it aside....

'Malory, I'm no hero.'

'Who wants one?' With a laugh, she nipped at his jaw. 'Let's be bad, Flynn. Let's be really bad.'

'Since you put it that way.' He swung her around, reversing their position so she was trapped between the door and his body. 'I hope to God you remember whose idea this was, and that I tried to—.'

'Shut up, and take me.' (175-176)

Rarely, (and never in any of the sample novels) will a heroine reluctantly or unwillingly have a sexual encounter with her hero. Even in 1987, Thurston noted, "heroines almost without exception have forsaken denial or sublimation of physical desire in favor of enjoying what they now perceive as their rightful due" (144). This is even more evident today. Sex is not used as proof of power over her or something to be bartered for marriage, even in historical novels (generally) where it would be accurate for the time period. It is a mutually satisfying activity that is or eventually becomes an expression of the feelings between the two main characters.

One of the most interesting aspects of female sexuality in many contemporary romance novels is that of unsuccessful past sexual experience. In *Midnight in Ruby Bayou*, author Elizabeth Lowell demonstrates her heroine's anguish over her perception that she isn't "sexy" enough for the hero. While the reader knows this is not the case (from her insight into the hero's point of view), Faith agonizes over her past sexual failures:

Some women weren't good at sex. She was beginning to accept that she was one of them. She had always been able to take it or leave it. Tony had known. That was why he had sex on the side. That was why they argued. That was what drove him to hit her.

That was why she hadn't married him.
Obviously Walker didn't want her. Not really. Not the way she wanted him.
Once he had cooled down from that surprising kiss in the garden, he had managed
to avoid her quite easily. (261)

In demonstrating how a heroine's past lovers may not have satisfied her, the hero always strives to rectify this and thus is seen to be an enlightened man who is concerned about his partner's pleasure. The goal of a sex scene in romance is always the woman's orgasm and how the man assures that he takes the time to get her there.

Which one of them started the dance, she wasn't sure, layering one rhythm atop another, matching an effortless thrust and withdrawal to the swing's motion....Once she had the rhythm established, once their bodies were merging freely, deeply, in absolute harmony, his hands left her hips, moved over her skin, caressing, knowingly stroking, igniting a million small fires that slowly, gradually, coalesced to a blaze....

A vortex of heat and movement that swept them up, then sent them whizzing dizzily down, that snatched their breath, pressed pleasure and yet more pleasure upon them, through them, one to the other, then back again.

The ultimate give-and-take, the epitome of sharing. (Laurens, 2002: 287)

This emphasizes a point made by Zurbriggen and Yost (2004) regarding the importance in male fantasy of a partner who expresses her sexual pleasure. While the romance heroine might not always be the most experienced of women sexually (especially those in the historical genre), she is nearly always termed as being "responsive" to physical contact. Thus, her hero knows when he is pleasuring her; there is no ambiguity as there might be in the real world.

[P]art of the challenge of sexual relations for many men is in correctly interpreting their partners' changing levels of desire and pleasure...To be a good lover, he must incite desire and arousal, and then bring his partner to a state of pleasure and orgasm; however, he may be limited in the information available to him as to whether he is succeeding at these tasks. Is it any wonder, then, that the women that inhabit men's fantasies give clear and unambiguous indications of their sexual desire, arousal, pleasure, and eventual orgasm? (Zurbriggen and Yost, 2004: 301)

There may be a benefit then for the kind of straightforward, female-centered portrayals of sex that the romance novel has to offer. Even inexperienced heroines are very unlikely to be quiet or ambiguous in their experience of sexual pleasure¹⁵.

Though Radway spent a significant amount of space in her book dealing with the issue of rape, it merits only a paragraph in the present analysis. Rape is not a theme that comes up in the sample of novels included in this study. It is difficult to know why this is, especially because its visibility as a crime and as a women's issue has increased over the past two decades. One obvious reason for its decreased place in the romance is the eradication of the "justifiable" rape from years ago. As Radway points out, many older books had the hero either so overcome with lust or misinterpreting the heroine as a prostitute or loose woman that he just can't help himself and ends up raping the heroine (which she eventually understands and forgives). This is not acceptable in today's novels at any level. None of the novels included in the sample have such a sexual encounter nor have any of the others I have seen over recent years. This is simply not a palatable plot twist for contemporary readers.

The only way rape is dealt with in the novels in the sample is through the real fear of rape as a common occurrence and a tool used against women. Author Fern Michaels deals with this issue through her main characters, both of whom are psychologists, who are attempting to counsel a client whose wife has been raped:

‘I’m not so sure she didn’t do something to instigate it. You know, with a look or a gesture. Women are always giving guys that come-hither look, teasing them, egging them on. They give you all these go signals, and when you move they stiff-arm you. You’re a guy even if you are a shrink, so you know how it plays.’...

¹⁵ There is one novel in the sample (Woods, 2013) that does not include descriptions of the sexual relationship between the two main characters. My assumption is that this is an author choice, as there are other books in the sample from the same publisher that are more explicit.

‘Come-hither looks are not an invitation to rape. No woman wants to be raped, to be violated like that....What would you do if someone raped you? Believe it or not, men rape other men all the time.’

Ramsey glared at Mike. ‘That would be the damn day when some guy raped me...If any guy even looked at me cross-eyed, I’d let him have it.’...

‘I assume, then, that you think your wife should have fought her attacker?’ At Ramsey’s nod, Mike continued. ‘In all likelihood the rapist outweighed her by forty or fifty pounds. Unless she’s taken lessons in self-defense, what chance do you think she would have had against him? And what if by fighting him, she only angered him? He might have done more than rape her, he might have killed her.’ (Michaels, 2001: 105-106)

Other instances in which rape is a matter of discussion are especially in the mystery/suspense subgenre where an actual enemy is present and the heroine or other female character may fear rape as punishment or retaliation from this villain. Even in the historical novels, rape is only used as an expression of fear, not something that women want and/or deserve.

Love

Romance novels are about love, at their very core. No matter what other elements are included, even to the extent of marriage or children, there must always be love. What this means and how it is expressed, of course, varies. There is always (as part of the happily ever after) the declaration of love, both verbally and physically during the story. Often these come as separate events (the physical usually occurs before the verbal), but both are essential to satisfying the happily ever after.

As well, romances are very often preoccupied by the discussion of what constitutes love and how to know whether or not love is real or lasting. This is a very important component of historically placed novels because of the attitudes toward marriage as an institution and what it should mean, especially to women. Historical heroines are nearly always obsessed with marrying for love instead of duty, and even

those that do marry for practical reasons (or against their will) long for it to transform into love.

Livia gazed down into the contents of her goblet. ‘I am not very experienced in these things, Father. But I do know that I am ready for marriage and I want this to happen, that what I feel for this man is unlike any feelings I’ve had before, and that he shares those feelings. I think there is a difference between being *in* love and loving someone. I am *in* love with Alex. I don’t know how else to describe it. And I hope and trust that that will grow into just plain love in the fullness of time.’ (Feather, 2008: 199-200, emphasis in original)

Contemporary heroines navigate the practicalities of their lives while still hoping to find someone with whom to share love. Depending on their situation, it may be a conflict with work, a conflict with children, or a conflict with their emotional health. They also struggle with doubts and insecurities, just as their readers do.

What was *wrong* with her? Had she gone wacko?
Zack was right. It was the sex talking. Leave it to Maggie Davenport to fall head over heels in love with the first man to climb between the sheets with her in Lord knew how many years...
Okay, it was *not* her fault that she had made a complete and utter fool of herself in front of Zack. She would simply and calmly explain to him about the breakdown, and he would understand and maybe not run in the opposite direction when he saw her. (Evanovich, 2006: 217, emphasis in original)

Contemplation of love is not limited to women, however. Heroes, too, are concerned with making sense of the new and unusual feelings they are experiencing in relation to their heroines. Catherine Anderson’s hero, Joseph, discusses with his brother the confusion he is feeling over his relationship with Rachel.

Joseph slapped a rock into place on the wall with such force that the impact jarred his teeth. “What’s in a word? It’s the feeling that matters.”
‘Yeah, and if you can’t put a name to the feeling, you have a problem.’
Joseph added another rock, this time with a little less force. ‘All *right*, damn it. I think I may be in love with her.’
‘If you only *think* you’re in love with her, you’re not. There’s no thinking to it when it happen. You can’t breathe for wanting her, and the mere thought of losing her ties your gut into knots.’

When Joseph thought of leaving Rachel to return home, knotted guts were the least of his troubles. His heart actually hurt. 'I reckon I love her, then.' He slapped another rock into place. 'Only what if I'm wrong? What if my feelings for her fade? I've never had any constancy with women. You know that.' 'Before he falls in love, what man does?'... 'Love brings about changes of heart you can never imagine until they happen to you.' (2006: 301-302, emphasis in original)

There is a sense in romance novels that love is a transformative process, both for men and women. While women are traditionally thought to be more easily able to convey emotions verbally, heroes must always make the declaration at some point in the book, usually very close to the end.

Sometimes it is not the words of love that are most important, but the actions taken by either the hero or heroine that prove to the other that the love is present. In contrast to Snitow (1983) who saw plot conflict as simple misunderstandings, the tension that is present in romance novels today is what keeps the hero and heroine apart, whether this be an emotional issue (e.g. trust) or a practical one (e.g. difference in social status). When this conflict can be resolved in an active way by the partner who is holding the relationship back, it is oftentimes a clearer declaration of love than just the three words.

'But I want you happy. I never want you to resent me or the choices you made.'
'You said it, sweetheart. They're choices I made.'
Before he'd even had Charlotte's okay, she realized. He'd taken concrete steps toward changing his life. He'd already quit his AP job, already taken another. All without a firm commitment from her about their future. He'd made choices he wanted to make, she realized now...Charlotte knew Roman well enough to know he hadn't made this decision because of a bet or out of family obligation. Instead he'd followed his heart. (C. Phillips, 2002: 294)

Women's Issues

Keeping with the goal of palatability for modern audiences, another important characteristic of today's romance novel is including a discussion of issues that are relevant to its readers. The books in the sample tackle several significant subjects that

resonate with contemporary audiences, including marriage and divorce, infertility, miscarriage, and domestic abuse.

All of the novels in the sample deal with marriage in one way or another. Though it is the norm, it is not inevitable that all heroes and heroines will get married at some point in the novel. Seven of the novels¹⁶ do not include a marriage or engagement between the two main characters. Marriage does tend to be an obsession in historical novels, which is another obvious reflection of the time period in which the heroines are living. They often struggle mightily (as discussed above) between the duties of marriage and their hopes of love, but generally expect comfort rather than grand passion.

‘Of course she wishes to marry. An independence of spirit does not negate that. Marriage is expected of her and it is as well what she expects. She has been trained from childhood for the position. I have no doubt Lady Cordelia will make an excellent mistress of a household, a perfect hostess, and an exemplary mother.’ She cast him a superior glance, as if he were too dim to understand the basic principles of life. ‘I don’t know how young ladies are brought up in your country, but in England a young woman of good family understands there are responsibilities that go hand in hand with her position in life. Primary among them is the making of a good match.’ (Alexander, 2007: 33)

Though contemporary heroines are not as explicit, and certainly do not see marriage as a duty, they, too, tend to hope for a comfortable, love-filled marriage. The extent to which they actively pursue this marriage or simply discover they want it after meeting the hero varies greatly from novel to novel.

In addition, ten of the novels¹⁷ discuss or include the complications of divorce with either main or secondary characters. Greg, the hero in Susan Wiggs’s *Dockside* is dealing with a relatively recent divorce (from ex-wife, Sophie), in addition to his teenage daughter, Daisy’s, pregnancy, all while falling in love with the heroine.

¹⁶ Roberts, Steel, Feehan, Brown, Kenyon, Leigh, and Quick

¹⁷ Steel, Rice, Delinsky, Krentz, Plain, Macomber, Brown, Wiggs, Carr, and D’Arc

‘Did you need something, Greg?’ she [Sophie] asked.
 ‘I wanted to make sure you’re all right.’
 She glided the iron over the jacket. ‘Why on earth would you even ask?’
 ‘Because I care. For the kids’ sake, I do care, Soph, and for the sake of who we used to be to each other. So...I’m sorry you’re not okay. Is there anything I can do?’
 She smiled. ‘No, thank you. You’ve done enough.’
 ‘Hey, Mom, Dad, can I talk to you?’ Daisy took a tentative step into the room...
 ‘Okay, um, maybe this’ll take a little more than a minute,’ she added. ‘It’s probably not the best timing, but it’s not easy, finding the two of you together.’
 He and Sophie hadn’t made it too easy. They’d become masters of avoiding each other. (2007: 366-367)

In Barbara Delinsky’s *The Woman Next Door*, the romance between the main characters consummates very quickly and the rest of the book concentrates on their difficulties in getting pregnant. Through very real situations of dealing with fertility treatments and the constant disappointments in the quest to have a family, Delinsky deals with the struggle to maintain a good relationship in the face of such adversity.

She felt the same fear then that she had felt lying in that clinic room the last time. She was losing Graham. Life was pulling them apart. ‘Babies are supposed to be made by love. They’re supposed to be made in the privacy of a bedroom. What we’re doing is a mockery of that. The most precious part of our lives is a mess of doctors’ appointments, pills, charts, and timing. It’s taking at toll on us, Graham. We aren’t...*fun* anymore.’ (56, emphasis in original)

While the heroine does eventually get pregnant (on the very last page of the book), the reader realizes that the achievement of the goal is secondary to the way the couple must work through their hard times and keep their romance and their marriage alive.

Susan Elizabeth Phillips (2002) takes on the devastation of miscarriage in her novel *This Heart of Mine*. Though the pregnancy was unplanned and relatively unwanted, her heroine, Molly is extremely distraught when she loses the baby, who was a product of a brief and forgettable fling with the hero. Kevin initially does not comprehend the depression she experiences and is distressed by her inability to move

past the experience. This proves to be a major stumbling block in the progression of their relationship, resolved only when he is able to accept and share her grief.

‘After it was over, I just, I didn’t let myself think about her [the baby].’

She understood, but it made her feel even lonelier.

He hesitated. She wasn’t used to that. He always seemed so certain. ‘What do you think she...’ He cleared his throat. ‘What do you think Sarah would have been like?’

Her heart constricted. A fresh wave of pain swept over her, but it didn’t throb in the same way as her old pain. Instead, it stung like antiseptic on a cut.

Her lungs expanded, contracted, expanded again. She was startled to realize she could still breathe. (152-153)

In turn, when she eventually comes to understand the past that has made him emotionally closed off, they are finally able to arrive at the relationship as equals and put the tragedy of her miscarriage behind them. They also eventually have their own child, bringing the situation full circle.

As a contrast, however, there are still books that hold more traditional ideas about children and fertility. In Carr’s (2010), a central subplot centers around secondary characters who are struggling with the wife’s hysterectomy (though they already have two children of their own). The wife becomes obsessed with having another child via surrogate or adoption, but her husband disagrees. In her capacity as a midwife, she convinces (or bullies, depending on how you read it) a young couple who are having a child they do not want to put it up for adoption so she can have the baby, despite knowing another couple with no children who want the baby more. Though she eventually makes the “right” decision to put the two couples in touch, her desire to get another child is presented as trumping her ethical responsibility as a midwife.

As well, during a conversation toward the end of the novel, the actual hero and heroine of the novel discuss their possibilities of having children, as the heroine is in her later 30s.

She went to him and sat on his lap. 'I'd like to have a child of my own with a husband, but I'm worried about my eggs being too old or something. And I have some strong feelings about that.'

'Which are?'

'You get what you get. If you decide to give it a go, you get what you get. I wouldn't terminate because a baby isn't perfect.' (329)

Domestic abuse, and the many forms it can take, is the central theme of Danielle Steel's novel *Journey*. The heroine is a successful television reporter married to a controlling producer, who has "saved" her from a previous, physically abusive relationship. As he senses he is losing domination over her life and her career, he becomes increasingly mentally and emotionally abusive to her. It takes her a long time to recognize this as abuse, even when prompted by friends to get help.

'He wants to isolate you, Mad, because he wants to control you. He runs your life, makes all your decisions for you, he never consults you about the show. He doesn't even tell you till the night before you leave for Europe...when he doesn't like what you do, he tells you that you came from poor white trash, and tells you you'd be back in a trailer park without him. How often has he told you that without him, you'd be nothing?...Now what does all that sound like to you, Mad? A loving husband, or something much more familiar?'

'It sounds like abusive behavior, doesn't it?' she said barely audibly...

'The only thing he doesn't do is kick the shit out of you on Saturday nights, but he doesn't need to do that, he controls you in every other way' (122-123)

In the end, and with the help of the hero, she eventually escapes this situation and becomes an advocate for abused women. Steel infuses the novel with information, statistics, and resources regarding abuse. A reader can almost hear the author telling

them to escape if they are experiencing such a problem. Seven of the other novels in the sample also deal directly with abuse or discuss a character's past as a victim.¹⁸

Over half of the novels in the sample¹⁹ also explore the importance of the relationship of the heroine with other females in her life, in strong contrast to past research that identified the heroine as alone and isolated from the world. The strength and centrality of female friendships is a theme that resonates with readers, as they view their heroines creating complete lives. Not only does the heroine fulfill her emotional needs with her hero, she also finds companionship, joy, and love with her friends. Roberts' heroine, Mallory, cannot complete her quest without the support and guidance of the two most important women in her life. Feehan's female GhostWalkers have been imprisoned since childhood with only each other to count on. Their liberation, both as individuals and as women, comes from their reliance and dependence on one another. Charlotte (in C. Phillips) and her best friend, Beth, share the ups and downs of work, engagements, plastic surgery, and love. They bring out the best in one another, but also aren't afraid to argue or tell each other the exact truth of a situation.

The 'beach girls' in Rice's novel grow from childhood friends to disconnected adults, but the resolution of their past issues (and the death of one of them) is almost more important than the love story.

'I wish Emma were here,' Stevie said.
Madeline nodded. 'I miss her every day. Driving down from Providence, it seemed unbelievable to me that she wasn't with me. Two of us...just doesn't seem right. We were always three.'... 'Here's to you, Emma—wherever you are!'

¹⁸ Michaels, Evanovich, Robb, Lowell, Quick, Barrett, and D'Arc

¹⁹ Most notably Roberts, Quinn, Feehan, Kleypas, C. Phillips, and Rice, but also including Michaels, Macomber, Evanovich, Robb, Lowell, Delinsky, Krentz, Miller, Dailey, Kenyon, Feather, Wiggs, S.E. Phillips, Graham, Castle, and D'Arc.

‘Beach girls now, beach girls tomorrow, beach girls till the end of time,’ Stevie said. (151-152)

Historical novels, as well, acknowledge the importance of such bonds. For Penelope Featherington (Quinn), her whole existence would be unbearable without her best friend, Eloise, and the nurturing and encouragement that she provides, which enable Penelope to grow into a self-sufficient woman. The “Wallflowers” (Kleypas) are a group of friends who have endured the difficulties of the Victorian England marriage market, feeling out of place and unaccepted by society.

It was a popular belief in Victorian society that women, with their mercurial natures and lesser brains, could not have the same quality of friendship that men did...Daisy thought that was rubbish. She and the other wallflowers...well, former wallflowers...shared a bond of deep, caring trust. They helped each other, encouraged each other with no hint of competition or jealousy. Daisy loved Annabelle and Evie nearly as much as she did Lillian [her sister]. She could easily envision them all in their later years, prattling about their grandchildren over tea and biscuits, traveling together as a silver-haired horde of tart-tongued old ladies. (2006: 37)

A final issue dealt with in romance, as mentioned earlier, is that of single motherhood. It plays a central role in four of the books in the sample (Dailey, Evanovich, Wiggs, and Dodd) and a secondary role in two others (Macomber and Johnston), and a more exhaustive review of the genre reveals it is an oft-used thematic element. This certainly fits with other trends of updating plot points to coincide with more contemporary matters that women are faced with. Dailey’s heroine has a child at a very young age and raises him alone until age nine when the reader picks up the story. Much of the book is concerned with her struggles to raise an upstanding young man and her inner conflict when the hero begins to take up some of her son’s time and affection.

It was the first time Quint had ever called him that [Dad]. Cat didn’t know if she was more shocked by that or by the breathtaking look of love that shone in Logan’s eyes....

‘It’s natural for a kid to love his father, Cat.’
 Instinctively tensing, she managed a relatively even, ‘I know that.’
 ‘You looked like your heart had got torn out of your chest.’ (376)

Though she feels she is being replaced, she eventually comes to appreciate the relationship between the two and the benefits her son will receive from having multiple families to love and care for him. Even in the paranormal realm, real human problems like unexpected children become an issue. Christina Dodd’s shape shifters struggle with the balance of human emotions and paranormal problems.

‘You *are* angry.’
 ‘Not at you.’ He turned to face her. ‘I was—mad that you’d left me without a word. For almost three years, I’ve been furious that you’d abandoned me, as my parents had. I never suspected you saw me as a cougar. When you came here and told me about Aleksandr, I was livid that you’d had my son and not told me. But now I understand. I understand everything, and you must never feel guilty for not telling me about my...about Konstantine and Zorana.’ (2008: 195, emphasis in original)

Basic differences between traditionally published and e-published books

There are (perhaps surprisingly) very few major differences between the two types of books examined in the study. This may be for several reasons, but especially because of the small *n* of included books. It may be possible to do a more in-depth comparison of publishing differences, but it is notable that there is a close correspondence between the types.

The most striking difference is the amount and type of sexual content that is included in e-published books. Two of the three books (O’Clare and D’Arc) have very explicit sexual scenes and situations, which tend to be absent in the more popular traditionally-published books. While the paperback books are definitely trending in a more sexually explicit direction, e-published books are not shy about it. *Sweeter Than Wine* (D’Arc) has the only incidence in the sample of a third party involved in the sexual

relationship, and this liaison (between the heroine and a secondary character) takes place before the first sexual interaction between the hero and heroine.

‘Who is he?’ She was upset both at Sebastian’s cavalier attitude and his assumptions about her willingness to sleep with a complete stranger. But even more upsetting was her body’s response. She wanted to know how that muscular body would feel over her—inside her—fucking her. The thought was deliciously forbidden and altogether shocking. She shook her head, but clarity refused to come. So she appealed to Sebastian—her lifeline in this world gone wild. ‘How do you expect me to be intimate with someone I don’t even know? That may be normal for you, but it’s not for me. Not by a long shot!’ (23)

The idea of additional partners (either on a long or short term basis) is a fairly common trope in the more erotic of the e-published novels. Several of the sites have specific subsections just for this type of romance. There is major dispute over the dividing line between erotic romance and erotica, though the most basic agreement is that erotic romance must still have a happily ever after. This is found in both of the novels in the sample.

On the other hand, *Highlander’s Challenge*, from Wild Rose Press has a virgin heroine and the first sexual consummation very late in the story. It is not so easy, then, to make sweeping generalizations about the nature of e-publishing because it has become such a diversified segment of romance.

Overall, however, there are no notable differences in writing style, plot elements, or the expected happily ever after. Some elements of plot and characterization are less fleshed out than they would be in traditionally published novels, but much of that can most likely be attributed to the fact that e-novels are sometimes in a shorter format than traditional paperbacks. Though it is hard to be certain (and not well-explained in interviews either), these similarities could indicate that the innovation process in electronic publishing in the early to mid 2000s is mostly complete and only the more

extreme sexual elements remain taboo for traditional publishers. As more and more publishing houses move to converting their books to electronic format for the new e-reader capabilities, there will be less for the e-publishers to compete with. We could speculate then that the e-publishers will have to either continue to push boundaries or find other ways of distinguishing themselves.

Conclusion

While it is obvious that many character and plot elements have changed substantially over the past decade, it is also true that the most important part of the romance novel—the happily ever after—has remained absolutely consistent. Perhaps this is not a surprise, given the realities of genre fiction; a happy ending is romance’s *raison d’être*. It is most likely the reason why critics of romance do not understand the other changes that have occurred, however. The fact that the couple will still get together at the end of the book in some kind of traditional heterosexual romantic relationship is fodder for those outside of the industry to dismiss the more progressive changes that are reflected in today’s books.

The books presented in this chapter are, of course, only a sample of the wide range of plots and characters being produced by contemporary romance authors. They are extremely representative of the innovations and changes that are now reflected in today’s novels. While genre consistency is certainly true, the ways in which authors and readers enjoy getting to the happily ever after varies greatly. Interviews with those who engage with romance novels have explicit preferences within these varieties presented to them and the industry expanded over the past twenty years to accommodate the many types of romance readers and authors that now fall under its umbrella.

Chapter 3—Electronic Publication

Introduction

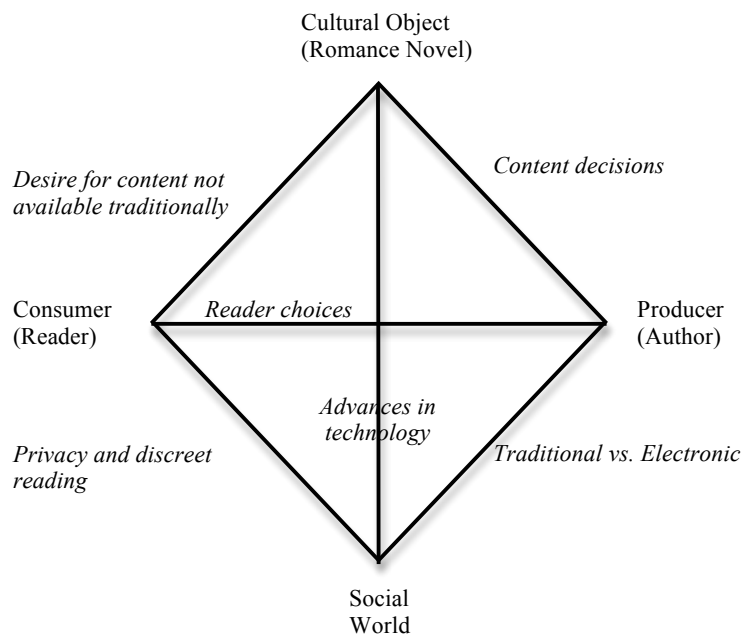
Content within traditional romance novels is not the only way in which the industry has been drastically changing over the past twenty years. Beginning serious research on this project in 2007, I was made aware during interviews and by reading trade publications and blogs about the growing world of electronic publishing. It was an area that I knew little to nothing about, especially in its connection to romance. It quickly became clear, however, that the innovations occurring in this medium were an integral part of the story of the romance industry and how it continues to reinvent itself.

The electronic publishing industry as a whole, despite its hype and seeming inevitability, had not, at that point, become successful in the way that insiders and the general public predicted that it would. Though it can boast modest success over the past few years, most authors and readers still seem amazingly content with a physical book in their hands. The one place, however, where independent electronic publishing has gotten a toehold is with romance. This chapter will explore the reasons behind the electronic book romance boom, as well as explore why romance readers specifically have taken to the electronic industry.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the cultural diamond elucidates the relationships in romance electronic publishing in the following ways: Advances in technology enabled books to be published electronically [**Social World** \leftrightarrow **Product**]. Authors made choices within constraints of the social world of publishing to publish traditionally or electronically [**Producer** \leftrightarrow **Social World**]. Those choices were often content driven—an author decides what to put in a book [**Producer** \leftrightarrow **Product**]. Readers,

meanwhile, were searching for content not found in traditional books, namely more erotic and paranormal elements [**Consumer** \leftrightarrow **Product**]. Additionally, readers were aware the social world frowned upon their choice of reading material, and thus electronic books offered a privacy not afforded by traditional paperbacks [**Consumer** \leftrightarrow **Social World**]. Enjoying the content they found electronically, readers appealed with their dollars to authors for more and varied types of novels [**Consumer** \leftrightarrow **Producer**].

Figure 3. Romance electronic publishing in the cultural diamond



One of the first issues to clarify is the difference between independent electronic publishing and publishing in electronic form books that are also published in paper form (also known as traditionally published). While the latter has become more popular in the last few years given the increased sales of Kindles, Nooks, and iPads, the former is the focus of this chapter's inquiry. Books that are published in electronic form in addition to hardcover or paperback form are supported by traditional New York publishing houses

and authors follow the conventional channels of publication. Romance electronic publishing as is relevant to these purposes is constituted of independent electronic/online-only publishing houses that are not connected to the New York companies. This is an especially important distinction given how ubiquitous e-books have become in the past five years. Nearly all of the writing (both academically and popularly) has been about the change in electronically publishing traditional content, but not about that content that was *never* published traditionally. It is, therefore, much more challenging to uncover trends and explanations.

The rise of romance in electronic publishing prompts several questions regarding the nature of the romance industry and romance readers themselves. It also allows us to understand a portion of the innovation that has taken place over the past ten to fifteen years in the content of romance novels and the rapid proliferation of subgenres. Following Radway (1984) and Markert (1985) and their method of examining publishing industry trends and processes to explore and explain romance novel content, I try to understand the path of the electronic publishing industry to make connections with today's books. Was electronic publishing purely market-driven, as has been argued about Harlequin and the category novels? Was a revolution brought about because of one author breaking the mold, as Kathleen Woodiwiss did to popularize long, historical single title novels? Or were other forces—author, reader, technology, and market—involved in the change?

In the mid to late 1990s, readers basically had two types of romance novels to choose from: historical and contemporary. While there were beginning to be some spinoffs in the contemporary subgenre (especially romantic suspense), the categories of

romance were basically static. From 1995-1999, for example, 179 romance novels made the New York Times Bestseller list (paperback). Of those, 106 were straight contemporary, 60 historical, 12 contemporary suspense, and 1 futuristic. No other identifiable subgenres made an appearance on the lists during that time period. As well, only 41 authors were represented (18 of whom had only 1 book)¹. This is a good indication of the lack of differentiation in the genre, despite its huge growth during the two previous decades.

Beginning at the very end of the 1990s and early 2000s, however, authors—and subsequently readers—were branching out into themes such as paranormal, erotic, fantasy, and mystery within the traditional story format of romance. The romantic relationship remained the central theme and core of the story, but the plot twists and turns and the types of characters, settings, and variations allowed in the romance were drastically changing.

Brief History of Electronic Book Publishing

In various forms, electronic publishing has existed since the early 1990s. The first electronic reading material was provided on CD-ROM to be read on the PC. Some of this came in the form of digitizing the classics that are in the public domain and do not fall under copyright laws, however much of it was for educational purposes (manuals, textbooks on CD, etc.) (Shaver and Shaver, 2003). The first electronic book reader was introduced by Sony in 1992 (Named The Bookman, to parallel their music player The Walkman), and was sometimes not so fondly called ‘a brick with a screen’, (Lardner, 1999) alluding to its technical difficulties as well as its lack of aesthetics. The widespread infiltration into everyday life of the Internet at the end of the 1990s brought about the

¹ www.nytimes.com/best-sellers-books

enthusiasm and the predictions for the take off of electronic publishing (Shaver and Shaver, 2003).

The year 2000 is when the buzz around electronic books really began. Even bestselling and renowned author Stephen King jumped on the bandwagon, publishing a novella online that was massively successful in terms of internet hits (Allen, 2004). Only 46% of those who downloaded his chapters actually paid the \$1 per chapter recommended donation, whereas he had predicted that 75% of the population would do so. Angered by the lack of good faith, he eventually shut it down without releasing the final chapters (Shaver and Shaver, 2003). Very few other established authors chose to follow this path, disheartened by the problems King had with his first endeavor.

There was a sense of optimism, but more a sense of inevitability about the success of the electronic industry (DeHelen, 2000). As the dot com boom happened, it was as if society were resigned to the fact that before long everything was going to be electronic. Many grand predictions were made at the time, including that we would all (or at least in massive numbers) be reading electronic books in ten years or fewer. Future electronic book sales were estimated in the high billions (Shaver and Shaver, 2003).

Just as quickly as the idea bloomed, however, it withered. Late 2001 and early 2002 saw the closing of many electronic divisions of larger publishing houses as well as the folding of new independent e-presses due to the recession (Allen, 2004). Electronic publishing generally seemed to be a non-issue until about seven years ago when media reports surrounding Amazon's Kindle reading device and the expansion of compatible electronic book formats for iPods, iPads, and smart phones made it a hot topic again. In early 2008, a research group released a report based on survey data that claimed that 17%

of book buyers would be willing to purchase a book in a digital format (Milliot, 2008). This wasn't a terribly convincing number, especially as 55% said they would only buy a printed book while the other 27% were ambivalent. According to *Publishers Weekly*, "e-books will still make up a tiny share of the market—no more than 2% of sales for most titles—and will contribute only a minimal amount to publishers' bottom lines" (Shatzkin, 2008: 22).

Inevitably, experts were being much more cautious the second time around and most industry insiders seem to think that introducing people to electronic reading and books more gradually may be the way to actually make the concept successful financially (Felici, 2007). While the market share is undoubtedly increasing, there may be a perception that e-books are more popular than they actually are. Industry data from 2012 indicate the following:

E-books captured 11% of all book spending last year, up from 7% in 2011...while e-books accounted for 22% of units in 2012, up from 14% the prior year. In 2010, e-books accounted for only 2% of spending. Despite the gains made by digital, paperback remained the most popular format last year, accounting for 43% of spending, down one percentage point from 2011, while hardcovers represented 37% of dollar sales, down from 39%. (Milliot, 2013)

Though this is promising data and certainly an increase from the mid-2000s reentry into the market, it is still a relatively small percentage of book buying habits as a whole.

Issues Surrounding Adoption of Electronic Book Technology

Hardware Issues

Rapid expansion of electronic book hardware over the past five years has certainly lead to a large increase in the number of people consuming digital content. Kindles, Nooks, and most recently iPads have encouraged readers to explore e-books in an easy way. While the Kindle, for example, cost \$399 when it was first released in the

mid-2000s, the lowest model is now only \$79. There are users who are extraordinarily satisfied with their readers (and are especially loyal to their certain brand), but others who are concerned about design flaws and especially the lack of books that are available. Also, some users expressed problems with the fact that they can only get their content from Amazon, as opposed to other electronic publishers². This is concerning for independent electronic publishers because it actually privileges the traditional publisher, even on a digital reading device.

Another concern is the amount of content available for the readers. While, especially in romance, there is plenty go around, it is still sometimes difficult to find electronic versions of a popular author's backlist or more obscure books. Many of the big publishing houses got burned by the earlier crash and closed their electronic book divisions. They are all returning at this point, but for the most part are only electronically publishing established books/authors, rather than creating new content for only the digital market. As well, it has been a much slower process to convert older, less popular books to digital format. Many romance authors, for instance, inform their readers on a regular basis when titles from their backlist are being released as e-books, but this is a slow process even for relatively popular authors³.

For romance, a strong indicator that electronic books were increasing in popularity was the launch of E-Harlequin, an electronic subdivision of the imminently popular Harlequin publishing house. Harlequin is traditionally regarded as a cautious

² From reviews of the Kindle on www.amazon.com

³ Following several romance authors on fan pages on Facebook has made this fact obvious. At least five are New York Times bestselling authors and even they are only slowly having their backlists digitized, which they announce to fans as it occurs.

publisher and many believe that for their management to embrace electronic books is a positive sign for the electronic publishing industry in romance⁴.

In addition to lack of content, there is also the issue of price of content. Many electronic books are not significantly less expensive than their paperback counterparts. While electronic publishers touted the fact that there would be greater revenues for themselves, increased royalties for authors, and cheaper books for readers, this promise has not entirely been fulfilled. An average full-length book on one of the romance electronic sites costs between \$5.50 and \$6.95. Most romance paperbacks of the same length cost approximately \$7.99. If a reader is only saving about \$1-2.50 per book, it will take a significant amount of time and a significant number of books to offset the price of the electronic book reader or paper to print on that they have to purchase.

Authors and publishers argue, however, that there is still a huge cost in getting a book to market in either print or digital form, so reader expectation of super cheap e-books is unrealistic. The cost of actual printing (the paper, ink, etc.) is only about \$1 per book⁵. The rest of the price is payments to author and editor (and agent, if there is one), marketing and publicity for the book, cover art and graphics (which still exist, even in electronic form, for marketing purposes), and digital set up. None of these elements come as cheaply as readers might wish.

There have been recent legal cases challenging the prices set by publishers and retailers on the premise of antitrust laws under the Sherman Act. The most significant was *US v. Apple*, in which the court ruled that Apple had colluded with the major publishing houses to eliminate competition and fix pricing in the e-book market

⁴ A.D. interview, 4/08

⁵ Interview data

(Albanese, July 10, 2013). Other cases, under individual state laws, have forced publishers to pay millions in settlements for price fixing (Albanese, July 24, 2013). These are, however, traditional publishing companies participating in the New York-based market of book sales. Independent publishers, which are the focus of this chapter, have not (as yet) come under scrutiny for price fixing because they are only minimally involved with the larger retailers. Nearly all of their business comes from direct sales on their website and not through giants such as Amazon and Apple (publisher websites).

Rights and Intellectual Property Law

There are also many questions surrounding the legalities of electronic publishing that make it a difficult prospect to enter into. Who owns the rights to electronically published books and is it the same process as traditionally published books? If an author has been with a traditional publisher for a length of time and there was no specific mention of electronic rights in the original contract, can the publisher publish their books in electronic format and, if so, what percentage does the author receive? How long does a publisher own those rights and when do they revert back to the author? Is there a limit on electronic rights (both time and in how widely they can be distributed)? There is also the issue of international copyright. Since electronically published books can automatically go international, there must be consideration to those laws as well. While companies are beginning to deal with these issues on a case-by-case basis, there are enough legal problems that some authors are still wary of entering into contracts that may not be in their best interest.

As with digital music, there are also redistribution issues. If a song or book is downloaded, what are the rights of the consumer who has purchased this content?

Recently, a judge “held that the doctrine of ‘first sale’, which allows consumers to redistribute lawfully acquired copies, does not apply to the transfer of digital files” (Albanese, April 2013). While this ruling dealt specifically with a resale website that allows users to upload digital content and have others purchase it directly from them (with both the seller and the site getting a piece of the sale), it has implications for all attempts to create such a thing as a ‘used’ e-book market. This, in turn, has implications for the romance market, which thrives, in part, on lending and used copies. But even Ellora’s Cave (the largest erotic e-publisher, discussed below), for example, has strict copyright rules on its website⁶. This is of note only because their books are available for purchase in simple .pdf format, which is incredibly easy to copy and distribute. Other platforms, such as those that manage Amazon’s Kindle, are too complicated for the average reader to even consider redistributing, even if only to allow a friend to borrow.

Standards and Content

The biggest misconception regarding electronic books, especially in romance, is that they are not up to the same standards as traditionally published books. While at the beginning of the electronic book boom, there were much more lax processes of acceptance and especially of editing, it was a quick problem to fix. Readers were smart enough to know if a book was poorly edited or had a lackluster plotline and characters. So they stopped buying⁷. Electronic publishers who put out these types of books quickly folded or figured out that things needed to change in order to stay afloat. “Most of the

⁶ “Electronic books may not be copied (except to make a personal backup), resold, given away, or in any way distributed by anyone. They may not be posted on the Internet for public usage. The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of these copyrighted works is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000.” (www.ellorascave.com/ebook-formats-devices)

⁷ Interview data

fly-by-night companies that hardly edited their books have shut their doors. Thus, the overall quality of the e-books is improving—and...reputation is improving with it” (Allen, 2004: 29). This idea still persists, however, and it is a barrier both to a growing readership and to established authors considering publishing electronically outside of the traditional houses.

There is also confusion between self-published and electronically published books. Many people think if you publish online, you have done it yourself, whereas that is mostly not the case. There are many self-publishing websites available that allow an author to pay a certain amount of money (or sometimes for free) in order to place their content on the site for readers to purchase. This is a direct-to-consumer marketing technique that has worked for some self-published authors (most dramatically, the *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy that began as self-published fan fiction but was picked up by a traditional publisher and went on to sell millions of copies), but generally is not considered to be a legitimate publishing goal.

Electronic publishing, on the other hand, has an acceptance and editing process similar to traditional publishing. While they are more open-minded to potential submissions (none of the major romance houses require authors to have agents in order to submit), all e-publishing outlets have professional, full time editors who treat manuscripts in exactly the same way as the major print houses do. Those editors specialize in subgenres or types of stories (novels vs. novellas, anthologies, etc.)⁸. The only difference in the end is the form in which the book is produced.

Legitimacy and Perception

⁸ From the submissions guidelines on the websites of Ellora’s Cave, Samhain Publishing, and Wild Rose Press, discussed further below.

There is still a sense that electronic books from independent publishers aren't "real" books. This is not only in the sense of the lack of the physical book, but also that those who publish exclusively electronically (as opposed to having books that are simply published in electronic format) are not talented enough to make it in the traditional publishing world. Authors are seen as second rate and not in any way as serious as traditional authors. Because of the misperceptions regarding content and the acceptance and editing processes, it is seen as "easy" to get published electronically, and thus less prestigious. Electronically published authors in romance say that until about the mid to late 2000s, there was a definite sense of being less valued in organizations such as the Romance Writers of America. While they were not excluded or explicitly told that their work was not valuable, there has always been an underlying subtext of 'perhaps you'll get published traditionally someday'. Their accomplishments are not seen as important as those who achieve with the traditional New York publishers⁹. Even though the New York Times now has a bestseller list for electronic books, it is still dominated by traditionally published books in e-format, as most independent e-books cannot achieve a readership as great as those selling through Amazon and Apple with recognizable authors¹⁰.

Electronic Books in Romance

*Romance Electronic Publishers*¹¹

⁹ Interview data

¹⁰ www.nytimes.com/best-sellers-books

¹¹ All data about the companies in this section are taken from the websites of the three major publishing houses: www.ellorascave.com, www.samhainpublishing.com, and www.thewildrosepress.com

There are three independent, highly selling, mainstream accepted publishing houses in romance electronic publishing—Ellora’s Cave (established 2000), Samhain Publishing (established 2005) and Wild Rose Press (established 2006).

Ellora’s Cave is the biggest, boasting 800 authors and nearly 4,000 books published. They focus almost exclusively on erotic romance, or as they term it “Romantica”, which is described thusly, “our own special blend of erotic romance, featuring a central love story, a happy ending and lots of hot sex described in graphic detail, using the kind of language regular people use, rather than flowery euphemisms”. Given the debates surrounding terminology (see below), this is a fairly solid definition of the common understanding of what erotic romance versus erotica means. Whether their definition or the common understanding came first, however, is the subject of debate.

Ellora’s Cave offers twenty-two ‘lines’ of books, ranging from ‘Cotillion’ (traditional regency romance) to ‘Taboo’ (BDSM), ‘Kink’ (sexual fetish), ‘Sophisticate’ (older woman/younger man), and ‘Branded’ (marital sex). They also used to have a partnership with Adam & Eve¹², the popular online pornography and sex toy retailer, which is an extremely interesting alliance, given discussions surrounding fantasy and reality in romance. In discussing the connection between erotic romance and real life, an author said, “I don’t know if it’s because they aren’t experiencing it in their own life... Women get turned on by the written word whereas men are more visual so if a woman is reading a romance novel, it might be better for her marriage or her relationship. You know, it’s going to get her more interested... Maybe we’re helping people to get it on!” (R.P. interview, 4/08)

¹² This was true as of Summer 2013, but appears (as of May 2014) to no longer be the case.

Ellora's Cave began the revolution of putting out their most popular online sellers in print form, available at mainstream chain bookstores, which was followed quickly by the other electronic publishers. This is an interesting practice to note for two reasons: the print form of Ellora's Cave books tend to range in price from \$11.99 to \$13.99, which is a significant increase from their online prices. The other reason it is interesting is because unless a reader is aware of what Ellora's Cave is, they could purchase an intensely erotic book without knowing it. The disclaimer on the books is very small and hidden on the back cover. Reading the summary, a reader would not necessarily catch on to the fact that this is erotic romance. Perhaps this is Ellora's Cave's way of hooking readers who would not have bought erotic romance in the first place. It does, however, indicate a legitimacy both of the electronic publishers and erotic romance to have their books appear on the shelves of bookstores alongside the New York publishers.

Ellora's Cave is definitely seen as the leader in the romance electronic publishing industry, and was the first electronic publisher to be accepted into the fold of traditional organizations such as RWA as a "commercial" seller (Allen, 2004). While Ellora's Cave is focused almost exclusively on erotic romance, they have split off several subdivisions that concentrate on other types of romance, including a line specifically marketed toward men called EC for Men (though almost all of their current selection, a mere 29 books, are written by women).

Samhain Publishing was the house that helped solidify the paranormal revolution. Fueled by an author base that was interested in fantasy and science fiction elements and riding off the success of shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, and *Firefly* (and their corresponding fan fiction), Samhain parlayed this into successful romances about

vampires, ghosts, fairies, shape shifters, gods and goddesses, time travel, witches and warlocks, etc. They are very explicit about their wish to innovate and to have their (potential) authors come up with creative stories within the confines of the romance genre.

We encourage you to let your muse have its way and to create tales that don't always adhere to current trends. One never knows what the next "hot genre" will be or when it will start, so write what's in your soul. These are the books that, whether the story is based on "formula" or is an "original", when written from the heart will earn you a life-time readership.
(<http://www.samhainpublishing.com/submissions>)

The paranormal subgenre has been the most successful crossover to mainstream, traditional publishing. Several authors, such as Sherrilyn Kenyon and J.R. Ward, have had their books top the New York Times Bestseller list, writing in a subgenre that was almost unheard of a little more than ten years ago.¹³ Interestingly, their website and image has evolved over the past few years, to the point that a new viewer of their site may not have such a clear idea of what they were all about when they began. They have diversified to such an extent that paranormal appears as only one of many types of book they offer. Only a thorough look at their backlist shows their paranormal roots. This, too, indicates a continued evolution as independent presses innovate to keep up with reader (and author) desires. Paranormal 'fatigue' seems to be setting in recently, reflected in a smaller number of those titles charting on the bestseller lists.

Wild Rose Press, though the newest of the group, has had extremely productive early years. They boast hundreds of books published already, over one hundred authors,

¹³ www.nytimes.com/best-sellers-books. But, as mentioned in Chapter 2, some authors were exploring ideas such as time travel and ghosts far before this time. These books were few and far between and did not come under a recognizable name "paranormal" until the late 1990s.

and a submission pile that takes the majority of their editors days to get through¹⁴. They are also a truly international company, with editors in Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. The press was started by two authors who were frustrated by the troubles they were having with traditional publishers (R.P. interview, 4/08). Several later, they are counted a success and are also proving that romance electronic publishing can be successful beyond the erotic subgenre. Though they do include an erotic line, it is only one of sixteen categories that their press sells. They most closely parallel a traditional publishing house in what and how they publish. As with the other independent e-presses, they also produce small print runs of particular books, but mostly for “author vanity” (R.P. interview, 4/08).

Erotic Romance and Erotica

The general consensus from interviews seems to be that electronic publishing took off so well in romance because of the desire for erotic romance and erotica¹⁵. One reader put it this way:

I also think that it’s just been a hole in the market and for a lot of years the publishers felt that they couldn’t sell it and they could not make it mainstream so why bother and when a couple of publishing houses actually starting doing it especially with the online where you don’t even have to have anything sent to your house, you can just read it online. When that became so popular the publishers did turn around and say ‘hey this is making money, this is something we need to look at’ and now we have some great things happening with the erotic genre. (A.D. interview, 4/09)

Before proceeding further, definitions are required. There is a distinction between erotic romance and erotica, though the definitions are terribly contentious, both with authors and readers. Erotic romance is a romance book which has the classic two person (one hero/one heroine, hero/hero or heroine/heroine) characterization and a romantic storyline

¹⁴ Interview data

¹⁵ Interview data

that includes highly explicit (in terms of language used) and sometimes more unusual sexual scenes. It is essential that it still includes the requisite happily ever after or else it cannot be classified ‘romance’. Erotica is generally a book with a limited plot, does not necessarily require a happily ever after (though it could have one or have what is termed a ‘happily for now’), and contains mostly sexual content. Both types of books, however, can include such elements as multiple partners, same sex partners, BDSM (bondage, domination, sadomasochism), anal sex, public sex, intense fantasy role play, etc.

The “founding story” of Ellora’s Cave is instructive enough to quote in full, as it explains in detail the confluence between desire and technology:

In 1997, Tina Engler was a busy young woman, raising two daughters as a single mom and studying for her degree in psychology. For relaxation, she read romance novels but found them a bit too tame for her tastes. So she started writing the kind of romance novel she wanted to read, with strong, intelligent heroines and sizzling sex scenes described in detail, in words people really use, instead of flowery metaphors.

By the time she graduated, she had already completed six of these erotic romance novels under three different pen names. The trouble was, nobody wanted to publish her sexually explicit romantic fiction. Each time she sent out a manuscript to a publisher, the response was the same: great writing style, but too racy...

Engler was not one to give up on what she believed was an untapped market in romance literature: erotic romance... She believed that women would enthusiastically embrace these sexually charged romance stories, where the love scenes are explicit and leave nothing to the imagination. She decided that if she couldn’t persuade anyone else to publish her work, she’d find a way to do it herself...

In 2000, Engler took web design and e-commerce courses at a local community college in her hometown of Tampa, Florida. She used that knowledge to build and launch her own website to sell her unpublished novels in electronic format... Although a handful of books had been published in digital form, ebooks were virtually unknown to the reading public at the time.

Demand for Engler’s ebooks grew so quickly that she started recruiting unknown authors, teaching her formula to them, and publishing their books too. Word spread like wildfire and the site became popular with a friendly community of authors and readers. It wasn’t long before Engler had to hire editors to handle the growing number of manuscript submissions, and managers for the business end of the operation. Ellora’s Cave was incorporated in Ohio in 2002.

(www.ellorascave.com/about-ellora-s-cave)

Obviously, this is most likely an idealized version of events, given EC's eventual massive popularity, but it certainly happened in a way that resembles this. It also gives us a hint into what traditional publishers were *not* accepting during that period of time (which a quick survey of their books in the late 1990s also tells us).

It seems that readers (and authors) were looking for this kind of content and found it on the internet. A reader explains the need for explicit sex in books this way: "I think I would find the novels very unsatisfying if they did not have explicit sex...I mean, I think the sex is the core part. I really do think it fills the same niche for women as porn does for men...I think that's legitimate even if I am embarrassed to buy them...Sometimes it's a little bit too ornate [in traditional books]. I think that goes to the 'you're not really supposed to talk about it'." (C.V. interview, 3/09)

Both because it wasn't available elsewhere (especially not through traditional publishers and especially not in category romance) and because it is a discreet and private way to buy and read this content, romance electronic publishing took flight. The privacy factor is essential, given many readers' reluctance to even publicly purchase or read regular romance novels with "clinch covers". This cover trend decreased in the 1990s with the use of generic items like buildings and flowers taking the place of couples embracing, but it reemerged in a more modern way during the 2000s, with the greater use of bodies (often shirtless men) as cover art. It can be assumed that readers wanting to publicly purchase erotica might suffer the same reticence. A more discreet way of buying and especially reading this content was surely welcome by those who were interested in it. As a result of the books' increased popularity as well as improved writing standards, e-publishers began to expand their types of content and those who

were hooked on the erotic subgenres began to consume all of their romance from electronic publishers.

It would be hard to speculate how readers, authors, and publishers all got together in this endeavor. It is certainly a well-known fact that there has always been a market for reading material that pushes sexual boundaries (*Lady Chatterly's Lover* by D.H. Lawrence and *The Story of O* by Pauline Reage, as some more famous historical examples). As well, it also makes sense that since the internet increased the amount of sexually explicit material that is available in all forms, that books would follow suit. While romance has always been accused of being “porn for women”, it is not until very recently that it has become obviously, sometimes clinically, sexually graphic. Readers were beginning to tire of what has been fondly known as the “purple prose” that accompanied sex scenes and hope for something slightly more realistic than the “throbbing manhood” and “heaving bosom” that typified the sexual content of the 1980s. Though books of the 1990s tended to not use language quite as flowery and overblown, it was still routinely euphemistic and contained very “traditional” or “vanilla” sexual acts. A quick comparison will suffice to illustrate the difference:

1980s: Liberty discovered that Judah wore nothing beneath the blanket when her hand brushed against his swollen, throbbing, hardness. She quickly drew back, but he grabbed her hand, clasping it in a firm grip... All that mattered was the hot hand that was moving across her abdomen, spreading her legs apart—the finger that circled her moist opening, teasing, then slowly, softly moving into the entrance... Liberty wanted to protest when he withdrew his hand, and when he positioned himself between her legs, she was puzzled as to what would happen next. She thought she would faint from pleasure as his swollen member entered her body slowly at first, until it broke through the barrier of skin, then deeper, until an all-consuming passion shook her to the very core. (O'Banyon, 1987: 189-190)

1990s: Then he tasted her, deep and long and hard. He made a thick sound and thought of nothing but sinking into her, the hottest kind of fire. He bit at her lips,

dove into her with his tongue, fought through clothing until he found her breasts soft and hot, her nipples hard, begging to be plucked by his fingers and his mouth...

Lianne's only answer was the arch of her back, her hips seeking him blindly. She wanted more of him and she wanted it now, before she remembered all the reasons she shouldn't have him at all. But she couldn't say that, because she couldn't think of anything except the heat twisting through her, tangling her mind, burning through logic to the elemental need beneath...

His grip shifted, opening her thighs until he could take her with a savage movement of his hips. After he filled her he pushed deeper, stretching her, demanding that she take all of him. Her slick core clenched around him, drenching him as she made a keening sound of ecstasy... With a throttled cry he drove hard and deep, pumping himself into her until the world went darker than night around him. (Lowell, 1998: 215-216)

2000s: He leaned over her, his lips covering hers roughly as his arms surrounded her. His hips moved fiercely as he began to fuck her with a rhythm and strength that sent her exploding, flaming into orgasm again.

She felt everything. Sensation upon sensation. The feel of her vagina tightening around his cock, milking him with strong, even pulses as the hair on his chest rasped her breasts.

His tongue plunged into her mouth, claiming it as his erection claimed her pussy... He drove in deep, hard, a rasping growl echoing into the kiss as he jerked above her and his cock began to throb.

Fire filled her. Heated blasts of semen rushed inside her, throwing her high again, triggering another harder, deeper orgasm. She began to weep from the pleasure. (Leigh, 2006: 32-33)

E-Published: "Aw, much better," he groaned. "Hake, your wife has a real talent for sucking cock."...

The snap of a lid gave Mandy a split-second's warning before ice-cold lube landed at the top of her ass crack and slid downward. She squealed again, but before she could wiggle away, Brent pushed a finger into her anus and kept right on pushing until he was buried up to his palm. Mandy rolled her hips anxiously, trying to escape—it just didn't seem right for anyone but Hake to know how very much ass play turned her on—but rather than pulling out, Brent gave her several short pumps, and suddenly a prickly sweat broke out all over her body. Oh God, she couldn't come yet! They'd think she was a total slut....

She tried to pull off his [Joe's] cock, but he held her fast. He wasn't shy about going deep and Mandy had to abandon every thought to concentrate on breathing as he invaded her throat. When her nose touched the hem of his tee shirt, she felt an absurd sense of pride that she'd taken him all without gagging. (Rotham, 2008: 25-26)

While attitudes vary about how far into the bedroom the romance novel should go, it is clear that generally today's readers are interested in more than euphemisms for missionary-style male/female intercourse. Electronic publishing opened the door to erotic romance and erotica in a way that made it acceptable both online and in mainstream publishing. Many of the New York houses now have erotic lines, including Avon's Red, Berkley's Sensation, and Kensington's Brava (www.theeroticreader.com). Even Harlequin now offers a line called Spice for their more adventurous readers, though it does still trend more conservative than its counterparts (www.eharlequin.com).

It is important to note, however, that the erotic lines offered by the traditional publishers do not push their sexual boundaries nearly as far as the electronic publishers do. Generally, the traditional presses will venture into more explicit language, daring positions, and possibly anal sex, but do not go further than that into the type of territory that the electronic publishers have been exploring since the early 2000s.

We could most likely also credit changing attitudes toward sex (especially heterosexual sex) among women, for the rise of the erotic romance and with it, electronic publishing. With the popularity of television shows such as *Sex and the City*, *Girls*, and *Grey's Anatomy* and more recently, the bestselling *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy (subject of much debate about its representation of sexual boundaries and kink), we have seen that it is no longer taboo for women to not only have active and varied sex lives, but to discuss them in detail.

Readers are often conflicted about how much and what type of sex they want to see in their novels. "It always bothers me to read a book just for sex sake...If the sex is going to come at the expense of a good plot, I'm not going to read those books...If it

doesn't add to the story, if it doesn't tell me something more, I'll probably just skip those pages." (D.R. interview, 3/09)

Another agreed, but was more pragmatic:

I think that if it's happening in someone's bedroom it's fair game. I think that as long as they are still at the core of the story or relationship that's being explored whether that's a guy and a girl or a girl and two guys or whatever happens to be, a group of people...I think as long as it fits and as long as it's not just icing, I think as long as it's totally logical within the confines of the plot and the story line that it shouldn't matter...There are times when I've read something in one [and thought] 'that's not for me' but just because it's not for me doesn't mean that it's not for somebody else." (P.K. interview, 4/09)

While it cannot be stressed enough that there is not a universal consensus as to how much sex and how explicit the sex in romance novels should be, it is clear that there is enough of an audience that embraces the erotic subgenre to have sparked its revolution in electronic and now traditional publishing.

The Romance Reader

Another reason for the take off of electronic books in romance is the intensity and high rate of consumption that characterize romance readers. Romance has the largest share of the genre fiction market not only because there are so many readers, but also because they tend to be voracious. Romance readers (especially those that read series rather than single title books) are notorious for reading several books a week, some as many as one per day¹⁶. "Every now and then he [interviewee's husband] thinks we're becoming a library or a bookstore because the books are overwhelming the house, you know?" (M.B. interview, 4/07) Interviewees have commented that they no longer have enough rooms to house their book collections and that they've had to sell their books on

¹⁶ Comments from the romance_bookclub group on Yahoo!

Ebay or finally had to give up buying books all together in favor of the library because the cost was becoming overwhelming.

Electronic publishing solves the first problem, certainly. You can have as many books as you can store files on your computer and take as many with you as your reader holds. Though it is not as inexpensive as people might prefer (as mentioned above), it is less expensive to purchase an electronic book than a regular one. As well it is quick and convenient and a reader does not have to leave the house or office to get their reading fix, whether in the middle of work or at 3 am when no stores are open.

Libraries are also now offering temporary access to electronic books in the same way one would check a physical book out of the library. The user is allowed to use a link or a download onto a reader for a certain period of time to read and then the link is disabled or the download is revoked when the user needs to “return” the book. This is a rather new system and has many of the fair use issues mentioned previously¹⁷.

An e-book author offers a succinct summary of the appeal of e-books to the active romance reader and to the aspiring author:

So it's a quick turn around and it's cheaper to produce and it's easy for people to access and...there are so many formats that are supporting it. You can get just about anything from the comfort of your own home, which is nice and they are small, you don't have to get a bookshelf. You can have three, four hundred titles on your ... the memory disk on your thumb drive and it's fabulous and people collect them. It's true, it's unbelievable. People are bragging about how many e-books they have. It's like a big competition. (C.O. interview, 4/08)

Subgenres

The final major reason for the explosion of electronic publishing in romance is the proliferation of subgenres that is a general trend in all of romance over the past ten years.

Romance readers are diversifying and are looking for romance along with the other

¹⁷ Interview data

genres they enjoy. Now, a mystery or fantasy or science fiction reader who likes romance can find something they prefer. Much of this started in the electronic publishing houses because it was not financially risky to take a chance on an unknown subgenre. It is hard to imagine Avon Books in New York wanting to put a lot of money into a futuristic wolf shape-shifter romance when that idea had never been tested. As soon as the idea started getting out online however, the traditional houses began putting out paranormal and erotic lines in response to the demand. Between 2005 and 2010, for instance, nearly 30% of the romances that appeared on the New York Times Bestseller list were in the paranormal subgenre.¹⁸

There is also a growing Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) segment of romance that is also beginning to gain a measure of legitimacy within the industry. While there has always been a separate industry for such fiction, it is a new concept within romance. There is still resistance, of course, to including these books under the traditional romance umbrella. As with all of the other recent innovations, however, it is being slowly accepted and absorbed.

Its main independent electronic publisher, Torquere Press, with its tagline “Romance for the rest of us” is seeing rising sales with a large amount of its readership being heterosexual women¹⁹. They currently have over 1,500 books and novellas written by approximately 200 authors available in electronic form²⁰. An interview with one of their authors (a young, heterosexual married woman) revealed that, until 2007 Torquere authors were not invited to the Romantic Times Booklovers Conventions, nor were their books reviewed in the magazine. Part of this is the overall electronic publishing bias, but

¹⁸ www.nytimes.com/best-sellers-books

¹⁹ Interview data

²⁰ www.torquerebooks.com

certainly more of it has to do with the subject matter of their books. Ellora's Cave is a centerpiece at the convention, with over one hundred of their authors attending, hosting a huge theme party on the first night, and bringing their cover models (aptly named the Ellora's Cavemen) to sign calendars and be part of the show.

Ellora's Cave also offers a line of same sex (called 'Spectrum') and ménage à trois books (found within other theme-specific lines) that expand the concept of romance beyond its traditional borders. They also have their line of "Exotica", which is their version of erotica. According to their website: "The premise of both Exotika™ and Romantica™ at Ellora's Cave is that women's sexual experiences are legitimate, positive, and beautiful"²¹. The success of these lines shows that the average reader (who is still generally a heterosexual woman) is willing to try something a little more adventurous and out of bounds sexually. Though there is not space here for a good treatment of the meanings behind heterosexual women's attraction to male/male romance²², it is safe to say that it would have been much harder for the types of "traditional" romance stories with two heroes to reach that type of mainstream audience. Before this type of romance novel was available, straight women got their male/male stories (and sex) mostly from "slash" fiction, though still primarily online.²³

Conclusion

Independent electronic publishing is still a relatively new frontier in genre fiction. While there is evidence that it is a growing field, there is still resistance to its complete

²¹ www.ellorascave.com/BookList_exotika.asp?Category=Erotica

²² Russ (1985: 83) puts it most succinctly: "[T]heir subject is not a homosexual love affair between two men, but love and sex as women want them."

²³ In addition to Russ, see for example Salmon and Symons (2003), Woledge (2005) about gender blending in slash, Lamb and Veith (1986) about Kirk/Spock, and Leavenworth (2009) about J.R. Ward's Black Dagger Brotherhood (a paranormal romance series)

implementation, on technological, professional, and emotional levels. It is obvious that it will be a significant length of time (if ever) before we completely stop reading physical, paper books unlike some predictions that were made at the end of the 1990s or even media statements being made today. There is a connection, be it emotional or physical, to the actual book that makes embracing the electronic publishing industry a difficult prospect for many readers.

It is also difficult to get readers (and even other authors and industry professionals) to accept that independent e-publishing is a legitimate part of the world of romance. While its own authors and readers are vocal cheerleaders for their presses, it is going to take a much greater revolution in publishing to gain the status of the traditional New York publishing houses. As well, companies like Ellora's Cave don't necessarily do themselves a service by appearing as the 'good-time gals' at industry events such as the Romantic Times Convention. It is difficult to be taken seriously when you bring a truckload of authors (reinforcing that it's easy to get published at your press) as well as a dozen Chippendale rip-offs for readers to gawk at²⁴. While there is no doubt that they are running an incredibly successful enterprise, many of the traditional publishing companies and their authors pride themselves on improving the image of romance to the broader publishing world, and it is hard to imagine that such a display endears them to other professionals.

²⁴ To be fair, the Romantic Times Convention does hold the "Mr. Romance" contest, which pits about twenty regular men against one another for the chance to be a cover model, so it is not as though Ellora's Cave is doing something drastically different by bringing along scantily-clad men. The Mr. Romance contest, however, is sponsored by *Romantic Times*, which is a review magazine and the event's host, not a publishing company. It is interesting to note, though, that during my first visit to the convention, many authors to whom I casually spoke in the lobby or elevator expressed discomfort both with the men's presence (as they believed it reinforced stereotypes about romance) and their purpose (what they perceived as objectification).

Additionally, the recent, rapid growth in content published electronically (by traditional publishers) is obscuring and confusing the issue of the production of independent presses. Casual conversation (even with heavy readers, romance and otherwise) reveals that most people are not even familiar with the distinction between the two or aware that independent presses exist, except as a vague concept. During the time I was conducting interviews, some romance readers heavily invested in the industry had heard about the big independent electronic houses (at least two of the three mentioned above) but many were strict paper, traditional press readers only. I would suspect that most have moved to an electronic reader over the past four to five years (either exclusively or as a supplement to paper books) but likely still get their content from the New York houses through Amazon or Apple.

Romance, popularly considered to be a rather traditional and staid industry (both in content and process), is actually one of the main innovators in the electronic publishing revolution as it was a main innovator in paperback publishing thirty years previously. No one (industry insiders especially) thought that the category romance concept would take off in the way that it did, which was quite quickly and thoroughly disproved by a market of women who begged for content. Though we can say romance e-publishing began most clearly with a desire to explore sexually explicit content in a discreet and private way, independent electronic presses have expanded into a full industry that is changing and challenging traditional romance publishing as we know it, just as categories did in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

As Becker (1982) and others have pointed out, it takes many actors for change in cultural production to occur. These actors do not act independently of each other and

must work together (or sometimes in competition) to make these innovations happen.

Authors with new ideas, readers with a thirst for different content, a social world coming into technology, and the space and flexibility provided by novels came together to allow romance to grow and shift its boundaries.

Others²⁵ have also noted that creative shifts often come from outside the mainstream and then are coopted by traditional institutions. This has certainly been the case with electronic publishing in romance. The freedom of the internet gave some upstart authors and readers a space to challenge the New York publishing houses, not as a direct affront to their power (it was certainly not a move made out of disrespect), but as a new frontier to define what romance could be. Traditional publishers, with the amount of money and legality they must put into an author and book, were invested in the romance status quo. While they had certainly made changes in the past, it had been many years since the last great romance revolution. Technology being what it is, electronic publishing was the natural progression. The creativity of e-publishers pushed New York publishers to branch out and at least consider a greater number of possibilities of what romance can and should be.

²⁵ See for example Cushman (1991), Jancovich (2002), and Negus (1999).

Chapter 4—Reader Understandings of Romance Novels

Introduction

Romance readers have a complicated, and sometimes contentious, relationship with both the act of reading romance and the books themselves. While nearly all of my interviewees claimed to be “out and proud” about their involvement in the romance community, there were varying positions taken on what romance meant to them and its position in the larger discourse about gender and popular culture. Overall, I found readers to be an extremely articulate and self-aware group of women who were not at all reluctant to tell me exactly what was wonderful and (sometimes) terrible about romance. The level of enjoyment and genuine pleasure derived from reading romance was never far from the surface of our conversations. Even those who admitted to more embarrassment or reluctance to raise the romance flag were unabashed in explaining the joy that romance reading brought to them. We can see obvious parallels to the Smithton women in Radway’s study, but more importantly, the interviews gave particular insight into the ways in which romance readers have grown even more astute about the romance product since the 1980s. As the industry has expanded exponentially, the ways in which romance influences these women’s lives has also changed and grown.

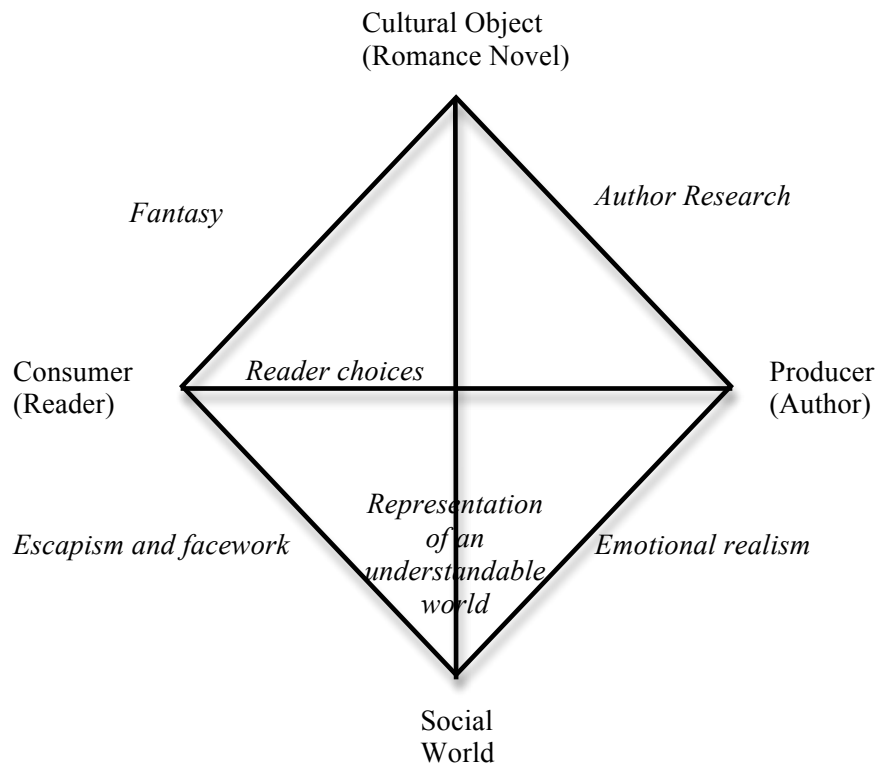
There are three major contributions that these reader¹ interviews can add to our understanding of reader interaction with the industry and why romance continues to have the mass appeal that makes it a nearly unsinkable segment of publishing. First, while the main reasons for reading romance (escapism and the happily ever after) have remained constant, the understandings and interpretations of those meanings has changed as the

¹ Though I am mostly focusing on the interviews I conducted with readers, I will occasionally use information and quotes from authors. This is because, as every author explicitly pointed out to me, they were all readers first and continue to read heavily in the genre even after their own publication.

social profile of the romance reader has changed. Second, reader comprehension of realism and fantasy, so long maligned in the literature about romance is a more complicated issue than simply whether or not readers believe their prince will come because of having devoured romance novels most of their lives. Third, the continued misunderstanding and derision that is heaped on romance readers about their favorite pastime has generally very little effect on how a reader feels about their own intelligence or choices in reading.

A book must in some way represent what readers recognize as a real world people could inhabit (or create a world a reader can understand) [**Social World** \leftrightarrow **Cultural Object**]. In order to make this a world readers enjoy, authors must create a sense of ‘emotional realism’ that allows readers to access the characters [**Producer** \leftrightarrow **Social World**]. An author must also do their work to research times and characters that may be foreign to them to be palatable to a discerning reader [**Producer** \leftrightarrow **Cultural Object**]. Both emotional realism and research allow readers to make choices about the kind of books they will continue to purchase and consume [**Consumer** \leftrightarrow **Producer**]. The romance reader, as all fiction readers do, wants to fall into a world of fantasy when they interact with a book [**Consumer** \leftrightarrow **Cultural Object**]. This interaction with the book can be seen as an escape, in either positive or negative connotations. As well, it affects how they believe they are perceived by the non-romance reading public and what they do to counteract that (facework) [**Consumer** \leftrightarrow **Social World**].

Figure 4. Reader response to romance in the cultural diamond



Reasons for Reading

The top two reasons expressed for reading romance are the same as they were in the early 1980s when Janice Radway made her journey to Smithton. Romance readers enjoy escape and an inevitable happily ever after ending. This revelation did not come as a surprise in the least when I undertook to interview these particular romance readers. The difference, however, becomes evident when we begin to unpack what readers mean by these reasons, especially the notion of escape.

A general search on escapism in the databases will quickly show what the prevailing opinions on the subject are. The term is linked to ideas that are generally negative: compensation, hedonism, narcissism, passivity, and anxiety are just a few that

come up. Most research sees escape as negative and compensatory, indicating that we use popular culture to avoid, change, or imagine away parts of our own lives that are negative or not what we wish them to be. There are “three views of escape—as an irresponsible excuse to avoid accountability, as an understandable response to society’s demand for an overgrown self, and as a temporary and ultimately fallible attempt to evade paramount reality” (Macpherson, 2000: 19). To wish to escape, then, is to hope to not inhabit our own selves for a period of time and to shun our own obligations and responsibilities for the “better” world we are going to. Escape is thus childlike and immature.

Radway uses the concept in two ways to talk about romance readers in her study. One is the literal or physical escape that the women experienced during the act of reading romance. The choice to eschew duties (completed or not) in the home in order to pick up a book and read was the actual “escape” experienced by the women. When the kids were taking a nap or after the dishes had been put away, it was acceptable for a woman to take time for herself and indulge in reading a romance novel.

The other way that Radway uses the term escape is to discuss the Smithton women’s desire to identify with the main character (presumably the heroine) of the novel (90)². This supposed desire to “be” the heroine has given credibility to the notion that romance readers are experiencing dissatisfaction with their own lives and situations and exorcising it through the act of getting lost in a novel and being a woman who is on a great journey. This is then compounded by Radway’s emphasis on how guilty the women felt about the time, money, and energy they were “wasting” on reading romance.

² This is disputed by others, most notably Kinsale (1992, in Krentz), who says that readers use the heroine as a placeholder so that they can play at being the hero and having the power that entails.

Owen (1997), on the other hand, believes that the escapist fantasies of romance appeal to women because of the certainty of economic success that the stories tend to emphasize. This is premised on her notion that heroines always improve their class or social status via the relationship with the hero. On the surface, this seems like an astute interpretation; the number of category novels that include secretaries/billionaires and nurses/doctors are somewhat overwhelming. A wider survey of the genre (especially single title novels), however, shows that this is certainly not a universal convention in romance. While there are undoubtedly many instances where this occurs (most notably in the historical novels), one could find just as many cases where money is not an issue at all (especially more recently in the paranormal subgenre, which became popular after Owen did her study).

Two slightly more sympathetic treatments of escape in romance come from Fowler (1991) and Thurston (1987) and it is from them that I expand my notions of escapism. Fowler contends that romance presents escapist fantasies through the portrayal of positive sexual pleasures, fantasies of power and plenty (materially, like Owen), and distance from the negativities of the real world. The introduction of the ideas about fantasy in sex will be discussed further below when considering readers' lines between fantasy and reality. Here, however, her articulation of escape as being distance from the real world becomes important to me.

Thurston does not necessarily see escape as negative, but she is explicit about its purposes: "Women use romances for escape – *to* another time or new experience and *from* the constant demands being made on their time, attention, and energy" (132, emphasis in original). I draw on this distinction between escape *to* and escape *from* as

important in understanding modern romance readers' needs for escapism. Additionally, Diekema (1992) suggests that there may be a line between escape and fantasy. He sees escape as self-imposed aloneness and active withdrawal from others, whereas fantasy is participation in another world and becoming someone you aren't normally. While he uses fantasy as the contrasting term, it is my belief that what he's actually implying is escape *from* and escape *to*.

I would like to suggest, as both a synthesis and a departure from the various theories, that romance readers experience an escape *to*—not to a character³ or time period, but to a particular emotional expectation. This expectation includes, but is not limited to, the happily ever after. The happy ending is mandatory, but it does not encompass the entire experience. “Yes, the end result is always the same, as my daughter likes to point out, but it's the journey and the people who make each romance novel unique” (P.K.).

Readers want the complete emotional arc, from meeting to falling in love to conflict to resolution to, finally, happily ever after. “So a woman who is happily married does not want to find a new husband. But she does want to revisit the sizzle. Romance is all about that. Remembering that falling in love feeling without risking everything you hold most dear. The long-term relationship, then the friendship, and the deep emotional connection.” (M.J.P.)

If any piece of that process is incomplete or unfulfilling or unrealistic, the reader is going to leave the book unsatisfied even with a supposed happy ending. Knowing that you will experience a happily ever after allows a reader to go through a book unafraid.

³ I dispute the heroine identification pointed out by Radway because of the multiple competing theories that have been expressed about it, including Kinsale (mentioned above) and other comments from readers and on blogs, including “A Case of Mistaken Identity” on Dear Author, February 25, 2009.

Because there will be no surprise death of a hero or heroine or a terrible plot twist that will forever part the couple, a reader is free to experience the ups and downs of the relationship always secure in the happy ending. “I like the happy ever after...I like the emotional buildup. A good romance novel has that arc...Primarily I’m looking for an emotionally satisfying read...If I’m looking for something to affect the way I feel, I read romance.” (L.K.)

It is in this way that the true escape happens for the reader, what I term ‘emotional escapism’. Life has no guarantees. A romance novel does. “[Reading] lets readers experience and express intense emotions unashamedly, granting temporary release from the emotional limits of everyday life” (Rogers, 1991: 12).

Certainly the same could really be said for all genre fiction. In a mystery novel, for example, there will be crimes (sadness or anger), there will be attempts to solve those crimes (suspense or anxiety), there will be a threat to the main character(s) (fear), and, finally, the perpetrator will be captured and/or punished (relief, happiness, or satisfaction). A mystery novel has an emotional arc. Mystery readers are aware of this arc and must enjoy it or else they would not continue to return to that particular genre. Science fiction is the same. Though “formula” seems to be a word worthy of derision in the world of fiction, readers understand and appreciate it for the guarantee of an experience that they are looking for. Rabkin (1976) says “in a genre that is well defined, and therefore comes to the reader with a host of structural predictions, forward memory—anticipation based on past acquaintance with the genre—must work strongly” (55).

This is not to deny, however, that escape *from* is still a salient need, but not in the

way that Radway defined it in the early 1980s. No interviewees indicated that they needed to escape from the everyday details of their lives, especially given the demographics of women who now read romance⁴. The idea that there is guilt involved in reading or needing to provide a justification for their reading was notably absent from their talk about why and how they read.

What modern readers seem to need to escape from was not their own particular circumstances per se, but from greater, macro level problems. This corresponds with what Fowler (1991) also found in her interviews with readers: “A typical negative reply stated a reluctance to read a novel for ‘what you can find in the newspapers’ or a more deep-rooted aversion to representations of conflict or alienation” (144). Many expressed the desire to not deal with the world for a little while, or to say that real life is often depressing but romance novels are not. “I like getting lost in a book, I like books that are uplifting and have happy endings because there is so much unhappiness in the world and I get enough of that reading the newspaper and watching the news. I don’t want it in my books. I read for escape.” (L.W.)

Some said romances had assisted them during trying circumstances in their lives, but that type of escape seemed to be merely instrumental (i.e.: something to keep their mind off of their troubles). “And those books really, really helped me get through hard times. One time...I had a child in the hospital and dying. My child was very, very ill and I sat there reading...And those books got me through it” (C.F.). Another reader was actually able to tell the author whose books were a comfort to her about how they had

⁴ See Appendix D for demographic information regarding interview subjects. Here it is important to note that none of my interviewees were housewives or stay at home mothers, which may be some explanation for the lack of need to “justify” their escape. Looking at a broader cross section of romance readers may temper this assertion.

helped her through a difficult time and she recounted the conversation to me: “My dad had a heart attack. Your books put me through. I mean, I can make it anywhere after reading your books and it just like took me out of the dumps while I waited for eight hours of surgery” (E.H.).

Interpretation of Romance Novel Content

I probed into the issue of realism with my interview subjects in order to understand in what ways they believed romance novels reflected real life. The motivation for this came from earlier academic writing (and popular perception) that women who read romance novels have difficulty distinguishing between fantasy and reality. I wanted to see whether or not there was a grain of truth to this assumption and the answer was both yes and no. While most readers vehemently denied that they had any trouble knowing what was fiction and what was real life, others admitted that they had taken some life and relationship lessons from romance novels, which blurred the line a bit.

What truly emerged, however, was a confirmation and extension of what Ang (1985) termed “emotional realism”. This idea is the most appropriate way of understanding what modern romance readers expect in their novels and what they most relate to. Readers need the emotions and reactions of characters in the novels they read to *feel* realistic. That is, a character’s reaction to their burgeoning romance or what they do when they are treated badly should be within the realm of emotional possibility to the reader. Often readers criticize books because they find a hero’s distrust of women over the top or a heroine’s feeling of rejection too severe. It doesn’t matter whether these characters are contemporary New Yorkers, wolf shape-shifters, or antebellum plantation

owners; if a reader cannot connect to the reaction, the realism has been lost to them.

When the conflict is real, that is realism, whether you're talking about characters who are aristocrats or working class...when the conflict is real, that's when it's satisfying. When it relies on tropes of the genre...you roll your eyes...Good writing moves away from that. That's how I think the genre has grown. The best authors strive for that emotional realism...If it's real, it's enjoyable. (L.K.)

I suspect this is very similar to what readers of science fiction and fantasy would express about their attachment to the very “unreal” characters and situations found in those genres. The world that an author creates can be utterly removed from anything that a reader has ever experienced (or is even possible), but a reader will believe it if the characters and their reactions are believable. The reality comes not from a reader's understanding of the vampire mythos or the etiquette of Regency England, but from how hero and heroine interact and fall in love. “I want there to be inherent logic in the plot. I don't care if you build your own world but it needs to make sense. There are rules...You can do whatever you want but it still has to make sense.” (K.S.)

While some readers are greater sticklers for historical fact or setting consistency, most say that they will ignore those details if the characters feel real and authentic to them. A well-known (and respected) author of historical romances was clear about the interaction between the two:

The history, I think, should be fairly accurate but it doesn't need to be obtrusive. If you get too focused on the history, it takes away from the relationship. Because history, like periods of war or something like that, that rapidly moves from center stage. So I'm not somebody who doesn't think you should do your research. But we are essentially writing an accessible fantasy, rather than true history. (M.J.P.)

This need varies from reader to reader. There is even a term for it in the romance community, “wallpaper historicals”. These are books that basically use a particular historical time period as a backdrop and pay very little attention to what would be

accurate behavior and speech. A great number of readers express their enjoyment of these books because they care little for whether or not in 1812 British aristocrats would use champagne glasses or champagne flutes⁵. “For historical, I’m not a huge history buff. I like reading historical but if you’re telling me corsets are all the rage, I don’t know” (M.M). What they do care about is whether or not the hero and heroine seem to grow a genuine, believable relationship.

Authors were more concerned with the realism of the story and characters they were building, focusing heavily on the amount of research they do to make a book as believable as possible. Many readers may be unaware of how much work goes into many romance novels to bring them stories that might be outside of the author’s experience.

Authors pride themselves on delivering content that is accurate as possible.

[T]he military series is the most realistic. From that standpoint I do a tremendous amount of research for pictures, weapons, all kinds of science and physics, which I know very little about...[W]e even go [into] the specific camps in the Congo, the rebel camps...We did a tremendous amount of research. So all of that background is all very real. And then there’s the psychological profile on the men and the things that happened to them and how they react to both. The men and the women are as close as I can get it using primary sources. (C.F.)

Romance’s continued professionalism, its expansion into more subgenres, as well as the increased sophistication of its readers demands compatible content.

Interesting responses emerged from my question to readers and authors regarding the ways in which they believed reading romance had affected their views on love and marriage. Their first reaction was, almost inevitably, “It hasn’t!” The following quote exemplifies most interview subjects initial thoughts on the question: “[T]ruthfully, I don’t think it really has because I consider all my readings to just be fiction and it really doesn’t have a bearing on my real life...so, they are kind of separate. I, maybe

⁵ This was an actual conversation that occurred on one of the romance blogs.

subliminally it has but nothing I can tell you. I really, really wouldn't say it has." (L.B.)

But when interviewees thought longer about the issue, they talked broadly about instances in which reading may have helped them to navigate real life situations that they found themselves in at various points in their lives. Several also mentioned that they felt heroines in romance novels were empowering to them after years of reading.

I mean, I could read two a day when I was a teenager and I actually did so they really helped form my identity as a woman...[T]hey [heroines] didn't ever have to put up with any crap and I never had to put up with any crap, you know. I mean, I was never a victim and I think just because it was like my coming of age as I read those. It really helped to shape who I was and it gave me a sense of confidence in myself so that I consider my life a success that way. (J.F.)

Even the old school heroines, for all of their maligned characteristics, were always (at least on the surface) "feisty" and "independent". While they may not have actively fought the patriarchy in the way early feminists would have preferred, they did begin to display some positive traits that could be modeled by impressionable readers.

In a conversation on the message board of *Romantic Times* magazine, a reader posed the question: "Has reading romance novels had a positive effect on your life?" One of the answers, not given by my interviewees specifically but one I've heard in conversations with other romance readers and book groups is reflected well in the following commenter's response:

I've been reading romance for over two decades now, and one thing I take away from it is that most romances are positive examples of couples, and shows that a woman can be loved and respected. True, real life is not like a romance novel, but I have had friends over the years [that] have been in relationships with real losers because they are afraid to be alone, and I just think if they could realize they are worth more than that, if they could somehow see that they deserve a good man, not just "any" man who shows them attention and then bleeds them dry. It may never sink in for them, but it sure has for me, and for that I'm grateful. I give romances a lot of credit for instilling that belief in me. (RT Blog, November 19, 2008)

This reflects a conversation I had with one reader in which we discussed expectations about men and relationships. As a young, single woman, she was more representative of what popular stereotypes might caution about romance readers—how would her reading of these books change what she expected from men in her real life relationships? She expressed, what I believe is an accurate conflict that many people feel about how to integrate idealized versions seen in media into real life situations. She said, “[T]hey force me not to settle...Nothing is perfect and it shouldn’t be. Not to settle and take less than I deserve...But in the same vein, it can also be confusing. What if that person is good enough but I have these high expectations from some hero and the way he did it in that situation? So it’s a little confusing to kind of, I don’t know, see through that” (B.A.). I was impressed with her honesty in being able to tell me this (though she was clearly embarrassed about it) because she had prided herself on her level-headed approach to romance up to this point in the interview. Again, there is no straight-forward answer to what effect romance has on its readers, just as there are few concrete answers available for myriad other types of media use.

Only a few readers expressed gaining what they considered to be negative effects from reading romance, and even those were tempered by guarantees that those effects were either temporary or not particularly important. “It’s such a hassle to all get dressed up and go out and I’m probably not going to meet anybody at all, all the guys there are going to be jerks and so it’s like, you know what, I think I am going to stay home and finish this really awesome book that I started...so it’s probably negatively affected me in that a few more times than I should have I’ve decided to stay home instead of going out and mingling” (A.D.).

While talking about sex in romance novels, one reader said, “When it gets too flowery, it’s just irritating...But at the same time, it can be quite titillating...I learned about sex from romance novels and I really had an unrealistic idea about it!...Those romance novels really led me astray!” (D.R.). She laughed as she said this, but it was clear that because she had grown up in India, her first understandings about sex had actually come from romance novels and it was true that the euphemisms and purple prose of (specifically, in her case) Mills and Boon had not given her an accurate picture of what sex was truly about.

A common theme among readers and what they have learned from romance was communication. Many of the interview subjects were explicit that reading romance had made them understand how important communication is in relationships and had encouraged them to utilize that in their own lives. “I like maybe how the characters work out problems. I think that, you know, may have helped...So if I see maybe how they’ve worked out something, maybe it’ll give me an idea if I should have the same problem or something, then it gives me an idea” (M.B.). Another very young reader said, “Communication is important in marriage. I’ve learned that” (S.T.).

The importance of communication may be, in part, from some older style romance novels that often used a simple misunderstanding between hero and heroine to propel conflict in the storyline. As one blog commenter put it, “They [real life issues] make for much better conflict than The Big Stupid Misunderstanding That Could Be Resolved With A 30-Second Conversation But Instead Drags On For 200 Pages, in my opinion” (Dear Author blog, April 10, 2007).

As well, it reflects newer novels’ turn from the old romance trope of a strong,

silent hero whose motivation the heroine spent the entire book trying to decipher.

Today's heroes and heroines talk to each other, sometimes exhaustingly. Conflict is more likely to be based on outside forces and so the resolution of their issues needs to happen through clear communication.

Less often mentioned, but still present, was the very concrete notion that romance novels (especially erotic romance) had been an aid in the bedroom in some relationships. Not everyone expressed this explicitly (there were varying levels of comfort discussing sex with a stranger), but some absolutely did. "With my first boyfriend—he was my first sexual experience—having been prepared with the book learning, it made it a lot easier. Sure they don't talk about the messy stuff but it's still good training. So, he liked that part of it. I guess it had an influence on that particular part of my life!" (K.S.)

There is a reluctance to affirm the common popular perception that romance is "porn for women" and so to admit that romance novels are ever used as a sexual help is an anathema to many readers and authors. However, for those that did discuss that as a particular purpose, it is a reflection of newer novels' frank talk about sex and the general elimination of purple prose and euphemisms in writing sex scenes. While the books still present an overall idealized version of sexual acts, there are certainly more nuanced versions of sex in today's books. It is not perfect every time (though everyone will admit there are still too many wonderful loss of virginity tales, which does not correspond to nearly any woman's experience⁶). The expansion of romance into greater erotic territory has also made some readers more open-minded about types of "non-traditional" sexual relationships, be they same sex or multiple partners (interview subject R.T.). If a writer

⁶ From the Dear Author blog "I also remember a Romance author...explaining that part of the virgin heroine's popularity is her ability to give the reader a chance to rewrite her own disappointing loss of virginity into something more meaningful and powerful." (February 25, 2009)

can make the sex hot and believable as well as bring the reader along to the characters' happy ending, this may be able to influence a reader's idea of what the happily ever after can look like.

Along the same lines, we cannot discuss romance and sex without addressing the issue of the rape fantasy. Sometimes called "justifiable rape" or "forced seduction", romance readers (more so than authors, interestingly) have a conflicted relationship with the concept. The justifiable rape trope presents in one of two ways: One is that the hero is so overcome with lust that he just "can't help himself" and must have the heroine. The hero later realizes he has mistreated the heroine and spends the rest of the book (and their lives) making it up to her. In the other case, the hero believes the heroine to be a prostitute and so he has no compunction about forcing her sexually since that is her "job" (also problematic, as it reinforces the "bad woman" trope). When the hero finds out that the heroine is a virgin (she's always a virgin), he spends the rest of the book (and their lives) making it up to her.

Fifteen years ago you know there were a lot of stories on rape and then the women ended up with the rapist, especially the Victorian and Regency romances, women ended up with the men who violated them because then they felt bad and they started protecting them. That sort of story would never ever fly now. So in a way, I think it has empowered women to embrace the type of story that reflects their fantasy of what, you know, what hot sexuality or what a hot relationship is gonna be. (A.D.S.)

Obviously, there are variations on this theme and some older novels⁷ had the heroine raped by multiple men, including the hero. Hazen (1983) says that "Rape occurs in the woman's world of illusion; it is a ritual of love that exists in fantasy: a man says to a

⁷ The author Rosemary Rogers is noted, and often reviled, for using this plot device. Radway's Smithton women mention her particularly for this reason, however Rogers had eight bestsellers on the New York Times list in the 1980s and 1990s, four of which were number one and sat on the list for more than ten weeks each. Obviously, something about her plot devices appealed to a large audience of readers.

woman that she is so desirable that he will defy all the rules of honor and decency in order to have her” (8). This may be true in the world of romance, but not in the real world, so even putting a romantic spin on it does not make it any less contentious.

Nearly all readers and authors that I interviewed soundly rejected the justifiable rape premise and claim that it is not found in books at all anymore⁸. Because of their vehemence (with one notable exception that I will discuss below) in denouncing rape as an element of romance, it was difficult to get more nuanced reactions from them about whether or not they saw it as a viable sexual fantasy. Blog comments became instructive, as an entire thread on the popular ‘Dear Author’ website took on this very topic. I found these comments instructive because, perhaps due to the more relative anonymity of the internet, more readers and even authors were willing to admit that there was a particular pleasure in this fantasy.

The controversy began because of a book published that year (2007) entitled *Claiming the Courtesan* that included what many believed to be completely unnecessary and gratuitous rape scenes involving the heroine. The debate got so polarized that certain commenters (on other blogs) had basically called for its censorship, or at least a warning of its content to prospective readers while others believed that in the context of the plot, these were important events that needed to occur. Aside from prompting an argument, it did lead to two different⁹ illuminating conversations on the blog about the forced seduction fantasy and its place in romance. The two conflicting views on the subject are

⁸ Rape of any kind was not found in any of the books in the content analysis sample (see Chapter 2), so clearly readers and authors are not generally wrong about this. In a few casual conversations with editors at the *Romantic Times* convention, I discovered they are very reluctant to accept a book with rape unless it is absolutely integral to the plot.

⁹ Dear Author blog: “A Reader in the Middle” (April 10, 2007) and “Read Enough Romances and Rape is No Longer Rape” (March 30, 2007).

summed up by two relatively common examples of comments in that particular discussion on the blog:

Pro: I think it's a dangerous game to ground forced seduction and Romance rape in history. Because to me, anyway, what often goes on in Romance as forced seduction is a *fantasy* pure and simple, and detached from anything we would call rape or sexual force or assault in real life. In Romance, either the heroine or the reader consents, and in that consent creates the fantasy construct as acceptable to that particular reader. Now I also think there is rape in Romance that's not supposed to be at all romantic...But as a sexual fantasy, the FS [forced seduction] construct is a separate entity, IMO [in my opinion]. That doesn't mean that some readers won't see it all as rape and as unacceptable, but that's where, IMO [in my opinion], the importance of the reader's consent comes in. You consent and it becomes a viable fantasy; you don't and it's force.

Con: [I] toss the book from the moment the RAPE scene occurs. End of story. Can you tell it's never been one of my fantasies? I'll never forget the time I spoke up for tossing *A Secret Pearl* by Mary Balogh for exactly this reason. Don't care if he thought she was a whore. To me it was still rape and there was no way I could finish that book. No way I was going to buy liking that "hero" from that point onward. I don't care if she gave him sainthood. (Dear Author, March 30, 2007)

I believe that there is truly a great amount of conflict in readers and authors about this fantasy (or lack thereof). To many, even admitting that this is an acceptable sexual fantasy is beyond the pale. It would indicate a lack of empathy for women who have been through sexual trauma and a desire for something that is seen socially as completely deplorable. Critelli and Bivona (2008), however, estimate that between 31% and 57% of women have fantasies where they are forced to have sex against their will. This is not an insignificant number. While it is difficult to understand exactly what "against their will" means in the context of fantasy¹⁰, but if romance readers reflect the general population of women, we must assume they, too, have these fantasies.

¹⁰ The study by Critelli and Bivona is a meta-analysis of studies done on rape fantasies and, as such, measurement criteria was different in each set of research, including exactly how rape was defined. In some, the rape fantasy was clearly a violent, criminal act and in others, it more closely resembled romance's "forced seduction" trope. Their estimates are based on all of the studies and thus include both types.

Earlier work on this topic (Mussell, 1984; Modleski, 1982) suggested that rape in novels was a way for women to work out their fear of a very real threat in their lives. I have some difficulty with that assertion, considering that most of the rapes ended up in relationship, which is obviously not the outcome in real life. It is perhaps better represented by how rape is dealt with in current novels, put very well by an author:

Rape will always be a threat and as long as men are larger than women, that will be a genuine threat. And it's probably the scariest thing, the scariest situation you can have a woman in besides having a gun pointed to her head, being overpowered by a man, you know, with intent to harm her. So knowing that, having that in a book, is ok because that's real and people will know about it but it better not happen. And if it happened, it happened in her past and this is why she can't connect with the hero. (I.P.)

There can be such a thing as too much realism and rape is one of the most impossible lines to cross in romance anymore. While this must be in response to greater understanding of it as a women's issue, it can probably also be attributed to the criticism that romance has endured from the outside world because of its inclusion in older novels. "That's my problem with the older ones, that the sex scenes seem more like rape and I can't read that" was the way one reader put it (J.I.).

I had one interview with an extremely outspoken reader who firmly believed that romance existed for her solely for the sex ("Cause they're smutty" was her answer to why she enjoyed reading romance). She also was the only interviewee who admitted her enjoyment of the forced seduction/justifiable rape fantasy.

You now don't see it very often and I actually kind of feel like that's a shame, that it's not necessarily a good thing because it's a legitimate fantasy and there's a difference between writing fiction and fantasy and thinking it's ok in real life. But I think part of that whole alpha male, he can't live without you to the point where he can't help having sex with you, I think that's very powerful. (C.V.)

It's hard for me to speculate why her stance was so different from everyone else's but I

suspect that she reflects a greater section of the romance reading population than anyone wants to admit (as evidenced by the “pro” version of the blog comments above).

Other readers and authors, when listing their favorite books and authors, had among them some of the most famous of the “justifiable rape” novels, including Kathleen Woodiwiss’s¹¹ *The Flame and the Flower*, which is considered the novel that began the single title, long historical revolution in romance (Markert, 1985). It is unsurprising that readers who have a lengthy history with the romance genre should revere her, while making excuses for the more objectionable scenes. A reader, who claimed she still rereads *The Flame and the Flower* once a year, had this to say about the rape in that particular book:

That’s the time. They thought she was a prostitute. This was the norm...He had a conscience [in] that he thought about her and he was looking for her...and now he has to woo her and that’s the whole thing. And that’s justified kind of. If you know the time. You don’t like any rape...If you continue reading, you understand, because it’s the time. (E.H.)

Interestingly, these are often the same people who say that they wouldn’t want other “realistic” historical details included in their books because that would be “too real” and would take them out of the enjoyment of the story.

I’ve always wondered about things like leg hair and...bathing. Considering they bathed once a year if they were lucky or if they got dunked in a pond because they were witches or something. And you’re reading these love scenes and you’re going, oh god! Actually, one of the NJRW [New Jersey Romance Writers chapter] writers, she had a time travel where a modern heroine goes back in time and she’s smelling the horrible smells and she’s gagging and I thought, this is realistic. Of course it’s time travel so you have to suspend your disbelief for that part but if a modern person went back and just took a whiff, they’d die! (I.P.)

¹¹ An interesting side note on Kathleen Woodiwiss’s books is that, though she was infamous for justifiable rapes in her early books, she had eliminated them from books that she published in the late 1990s and early 2000s, including the book that was included in the content analysis for this study, which greatly resembles her earlier books in every other way but that one.

Readers were extremely outspoken about exactly what they wanted in their novels and each reader's requirements varied wildly from another's. As above, with the conversation about "wallpaper historicals", we can see that there is no monolithic "romance reader view" of just about anything. Radway, for all she contributed, gave a skewed impression of romance readers as a group because she interviewed women in one book group, who naturally held (or ended up holding) very similar ideas about what they did and didn't enjoy in romance.

In many ways, I believe that romance readers are so conditioned to being defensive about the novels that it is difficult for them to even speak against issues that they actually have a problem with, for fear of betraying their favorite pastime. They can do so amongst themselves, in the safe spaces of blogs¹² and conventions, but certainly not to anyone considered an outsider¹³.

Romance Readers and the World Outside of Romance

As alluded to above, romance readers do an incredible amount of defensive facework in order to justify their reading habits and to promote themselves as intelligent women who just happen to like romance. One reader put it succinctly, "I know there are certain books I won't read on the train because there are looks that I will get" (M.M.). There seemed to be a split between older and younger romance readers in how much embarrassment they felt regarding their reading (older readers generally could not care less what other people thought about romance whereas younger readers were still more sensitive to the perception of their reading habits as being frivolous or stupid). As well,

¹² See, for example, blog posts on Dear Author: "You Are What You Read", December 11, 2007 and "Stupidity is the Great Unfavorable", February 25, 2009, among many others.

¹³ Obviously, in order to not bias interview subjects, discussion of my own romance reading and experience with the genre was not permitted until after the interviews had been concluded. I was, as such, seen as an outsider (if perhaps a sympathetic one).

authors (not surprisingly) were much more confident in their assertion of pride in romance reading and the romance community.

Romance readers are incredibly cognizant of the perceptions that the greater world has of their preferred recreation. After all, it would be hard not to be aware, as there seem to be a constant stream of popular articles denigrating the romance.¹⁴ It would also be difficult not to have heard the comments about covers (and cover models), the “porn for women” asides, and the general sense that women who read romance are all wishing for white knights to carry them away. These misperceptions and stereotypes have been around since the beginning of romance and, at the time, some of them were deserved. The use of the “clinch cover” with a bare-chested Fabio and a long-haired, buxom heroine has been a source of embarrassment since the late 1970s. While some readers still enjoy this type of cover (mostly because it is short-hand for “romance” to them), publishers have moved in different directions through the years. In the 1990s, the clinches went away and were replaced by a generic building or flowers (sometimes with the clinch still on the stepback cover, but not always). Today, there is a greater variety; some covers could pass for “women’s fiction” or are more suggestive of their subgenre (suspense, for instance). There are, however, still many that are focused on the human form, including a lot of partial nudity, to some readers’ dismay and others’ delight¹⁵.

¹⁴ See: “Isn’t it Time We Embrace Our Guilty Pleasures?” (the answer to which is, no), “Danielle Steel Slams Male Critics”, and “Irish Erotic Novel Gives ‘Fifty Shades’ a Good Thrashing” (These are examples from only two days of articles.) On the positive side, however, see the Huffington Post’s ongoing romance column, which is contributed to mostly by authors and pro-romance writers.

¹⁵ An informative discussion about romance covers and their appeal to readers took place on the Dear Author blog on February 17, 2009, entitled “Romance Needs a Makeover”. The author of the blog’s premise was that romance hurts itself by still producing covers that perpetuate the ‘bodice-ripper’ stereotype. Many author commenters claimed that their publishers told them these covers garner higher sales than the generic covers. Many reader and author commenters alike expressed their preference for these covers as well.

They also took extreme offense at the suggestion that romances are poorly written, are easy to write, or have frivolous storylines.

That's another misconception also that there is this formula to romance novels and they all follow the same pattern. If we had every author in this hotel, we gave them all the same idea and told them to write a book, you would have 150 different books because each author lends her own voice, her own interpretation and the characterization goes one way or another; it might have the same premise but there are only ten premises anyway and they are all over used, so everything is about the characterization and the voice. (L.F.)

Again, some of these stereotypes do come from earlier incarnations of the romance industry, especially Harlequin's now-infamous writing guidelines that specified how their books should be written, even down to the number of pages¹⁶. But, this also indicates the conflation of romance as a whole with Harlequin specifically. Category books, while an important part of the industry, only make up about one third of the romance books sold (RWA, 2009). Formulaic writing is of course part of the genre, but it is part of every genre and, in readers' opinions, does not seem to be as sharply criticized in mystery or science fiction as it does in romance. "I really hate that romance novels get such a bad reputation but novels written by James Patterson don't" (D.R.) is how one reader put it.

Several readers were explicit about their understanding that romance is maligned because of its status as a uniquely female genre:

One of the reasons it gets so little respect despite being the biggest market share is that of course it's for, by, and about women. I think actually that's a really interesting question...Is it because it's women, is it because it's sex, is it because it's romance? (C.V.)

I guess the same misperceptions as you have about anything that's labeled just for women. First is that it's bad writing, second is that it's silly concepts, third is that it's marketed at certain types of women. (D.R.)

¹⁶ Harlequin still posts guidelines for every single line that it currently publishes (35 different ones) and they continue to be extremely specific (www.harlequin.com/articlepage.html?articleId=538&chapter=0).

I think a lot of it is about gender. Frankly it's nice to read a book by a woman, about a woman, that's not about, like, suicide... The fact that romance authors write great female characters that interact with other great female characters is not something to sniff your nose at. It's not nothing. (J.I.)

While others did not state it as clearly, they would make comparisons to other genres (more popularly understood as being written and read by men) and express distress that similar criticisms would not be leveled at these genres or their readers. When I asked what she believes people think about women who read romance novels, one interviewee responded as follows:

They're [romance readers] lonely pathetic single women who can't get a man. It's just utterly ridiculous. With a lot of pets, you know? I just think that's so silly... It's funny though because, you know, there's the kind of guy romance novels like Clive Cussler and those, even though they're not seen as literary, they're not scorned. You could read them on a plane and no one's going to think 'he doesn't have a girlfriend'. (J.I.)

The assumptions made about romance readers are easy to list and easy to identify because they are so ubiquitous. It is unsurprising, as Brackett (2000) found, that there should be the need to do intensive facework to correct these ideas, however many of the stereotypes are unable to be corrected in public places by judgmental strangers. This doesn't mean romance readers don't try. J.I., from the quote above, a college-aged reader from New York City, was especially articulate about the misperceptions and her struggles with them.

At the beginning, I was always embarrassed, so what I would do is I would buy a serious book and a romance novel. Like Virginia Woolf and a romance novel. After awhile, I was still embarrassed but I realized that the people at Barnes and Noble could not care less what I'm buying... But it took kind of a while for me to get over being embarrassed about. I think it helps that I'm an English major and people know and I could prove that I've read serious books so that makes it easier for me to justify, which is silly because I shouldn't have to... Seeing really intelligent people write things [on blogs] about romance novels makes it easier.

Many readers were happy to eliminate the problem of outside judgments by transitioning to the world of electronic readers. This allowed them to read whatever they wanted, wherever they wanted to, without worrying what others would think of them. Those who were heavily into erotic romance especially found this to be a helpful way of subverting possible embarrassment, as erotic covers can be as graphic as the old “clinch” covers, if not more so. “When I was younger it made me feel very embarrassed and uncomfortable. I still do not, like if I’m reading them in public, I put something over the cover...I’m a little bit less embarrassed about it now but it’s not something I’m proud and out about.” (C.V.) Those who are most perceptive about what the public thinks about romance readers tended to be the least likely to trumpet the romance horn to everyone they meet.

I was interested to discover that reading romance was relatively split between being a social and a solitary pastime for my interviewees. Struve (2011) would like to demonstrate that community in the world of romance has become particularly strong, suggesting that readers actively seek out groups of women to enhance their reading experience. In her opinion, “The kind of activity and energy displayed by the readers suggests that the experiences which surround reading may provide a more accurate reflection of the reader than the content of the books themselves” (1296). While this is a noble goal, her assurances ought to be tempered by understanding that a very large number of romance readers do not participate in any kind of romance related activities beyond just reading. In fact, we have no way of knowing how many readers do and do not participate since there are no accurate counts of things such as book groups (either formal or informal) and looking at something like hits or comments on a website is shaky at best.

My findings do not necessarily contradict Struve's (she is correct that there has been a huge increase in a sense of community because of the internet), but I would certainly not be as enthusiastic in my assertion of a great sisterhood of readers. Obviously authors are all part of professional organizations (most notably Romance Writers of America) or involved in groups from their publishing houses, but those who were strictly readers, however, had different experiences of sharing romance reading with others.

[Reading is] a solitary thing...[My friend] has a traditional bodice ripper perception of romance...I know that there are stories that I know she would love but she's adamant. (L.K.)

My discussions now are a lot more online than in person. (D.R.)

Not so much [discussion with others]. I know my mom and my sister read a lot of similar stuff so sometimes with them but not with friends or anything. (S.T.)

A few others discussed sharing romance books with their mothers (that seemed to be a popular theme, especially as many of them had discovered romance by stealing them from their moms). Some had a group of friends with whom they discussed romance.

I have co-workers who have similar taste as me or who will ask me, you know, when the next book by one of our favorite authors is coming out. I have several co-workers who read Julia Quinn and Stephanie Laurens and some of those folks, so there is ample opportunity to talk about books. (P.K.)

I have one friend in particular, we became friends and then discovered we both read romance novels...We will call and email and be like, you have to read this one, you have to read that one. (M.M.)

My mother's a big romance reader but she's got a specific type...I met most of my friends through Borders [where she works]...She's [one of her friends] the snobby type about it, 'I don't want to read a romance'. And I'm like 'shut up, you've never read one'. (K.S.)

As mentioned above, it is difficult to tell which group is more representative of romance readers as a whole. I would speculate that it is probably a good mix of both. While attending the *Romantic Times* conventions, I met just as many readers who had made the

journey alone as had come with friends. It may be that some women have more trouble finding like-minded friends because they are reluctant to talk about that particular hobby to begin with. Perhaps more women would discuss romance reading if they did not feel such a deep stigma attached to it and believe it would diminish other women's (or men's) opinions of them.

Finally, as Struve is correct to point out, much of the romance community has moved online, which has expanded the possibilities for discussion and commiseration in ways unknown before. Interestingly, though I solicited many of my romance readers from one of the popular blogs, they were reluctant to say that they were actively involved in any type of online community. Most considered themselves "lurkers" (people who read but do not comment on websites) and very few had actually participated in conversations, though they said they kept a close watch on what was being said.

The blogs were mostly prized for book and author recommendations. "I think that the internet affords a lot of opportunity to discuss a book and, even before the proliferation of blogging, just finding an author that you like and joining their Yahoo group or finding a message board" (P.K.). As well, the confirmation that other intelligent women read and enjoy romance was greatly appreciated. One reader who says she was teased by friends for reading romance discovered a lot about authors she enjoyed online and used that to defend herself: "Everyone makes fun of me but I'll go into my little spiel about how this is what I like to read. These women are smart. They've gotten degrees and PhDs from Ivy League universities¹⁷...The ones that I typically read they have careers and families and it shows in their writing" (B.A.). The amount of information available to readers about

¹⁷ Incidentally, this is one of the oft-heard defenses of romance reading today—that authors are very intelligent women. Eloisa James (a pseudonym for Mary Bly) is a professor of English literature, author Julia Quinn dropped out of medical school to become a romance writer, etc. See Donohue, 2009.

the romance industry has helped the entire process of facework, as they can now speak with much more authority about the industry. In fact, I met very few readers who didn't quote me that romance is an over billion dollar industry and had a large percent of the market of paperback books (to varying degrees of correctness). The push to legitimize romance reading has been greatly aided by the internet, and by pro-romance blogs specifically.

Conclusion

It would have been very gratifying to complete interviews with romance readers and authors and feel as though I was able to make many definitive, encompassing statements about their relationships to the books and the industry. Unfortunately, this was not the case. While I believe romance readers are much savvier and more intelligent than they are given credit for, to say that they are some kind of monolith with similar interpretations would be a severely incorrect statement. And, in fact, how could they be, considering the size and scope of the industry? Instead, what I have aimed to show is that many of the popular perceptions about readers and many of the old conclusions about them are no longer (or were possibly never) true.

What we can say instead is that there is an enduring appeal to the experience of romance novels that no amount of derision and stereotyping can dispel. After all, critics have been trying for over thirty years. Women are smart enough to make their own choices about their reading materials and their reasons for doing so. Though the term escapism has long been seen as negative, readers certainly do not use it that way. The joy they get in taking the voyage of hero and heroine is completely obvious when listening to them talk about why they read. An emotional journey, from meeting to conflict to falling

in love to happily ever after, is one perfect way, in their opinion, to spend an evening or weekend. A woman's choice of leisure activity does not define her entirely, nor does it indicate a deficiency on her part if what she chooses focuses on relationships and love.

Chapter 5—Conclusion

Summary

As Munford (2003) points out, “deploring popular culture, or mass culture, is counterproductive—hardly a new insight, but one which bears repeating since the forms of popular culture change quickly” (9). Romance novels (as with every type of popular culture) have changed with the times. Though the books used in this study are only a small example of the thousands of romance titles released every year, they help us begin to explore what today’s romance novel actually looks like, as opposed to what the media and popular opinion would have us believe. As with other genres of popular literature, romance reflects current attitudes and feelings about the contemporary social world. By eliminating universally virginal heroines, coldly arrogant heroes, and “justifiable” rapes, the romance novel has kept up with the times and what is palatable to today’s reader of all ages. Even novels set in historical times have changed to more accurately coincide with modern readers’ views of gender relations, sex, and romantic relationships.

Popular misperceptions of these books continue to abound and, as Brackett (2000) points out, those perceptions can embarrass and even shame romance readers about their choice of reading material. These ideas and stereotypes of the romance novel originate from the forms the books took in the late 1970s and early 1980s. While they may have been valid criticisms at the time, they no longer apply to today’s plotlines, characters, and situations. As such, it is imperative to rethink the conclusions drawn about the novels by scholars writing during that time period and start to understand the romance genre in a twenty-first century context. Because romance novels are produced and consumed almost exclusively by women, they reflect the varying definitions of contemporary

female experience. Romance is also currently stretching the boundaries of female sexual expression, what a romantic relationship entails, and even what constitutes the romance genre.

This is not to say that romance novel content is entirely unproblematic. Only seven books of the forty-five in the study do not include marriage between the hero and heroine at some point during the story (or promised at the end) and almost half include children of one or both main characters. There are seventeen virgin heroines but not one virgin hero. The completely hetero-normative relationship is always the ultimate goal of the story. Saying romance novels present relatively traditional, gender-typed relationships is almost redundant. What I would like to imply, however, is that they are far from being the slaves to the patriarchy that they have been painted. And, more importantly, readers and authors believe that they have gained positive ideas and role models from reading them.

Beyond just the romance novel, there are many forms of popular entertainment that might undergo the same scrutiny. One needs to look no further than the romantic comedy movie genre, the soap opera (which has been highly criticized, see for example Ang, 1985), reality TV shows (i.e.: *A Wedding Story*, *Say Yes to the Dress* (and others) on The Learning Channel, *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* on ABC), or popular music (which is constantly expounding on love gained and lost) and music videos (with their sometimes troublesome treatment of the female body). While love and relationships are regularly explored themes, each form of popular culture does not treat them in the same way. The romance novel—with its emphasis on strong heroines, equality in

relationships, and careful treatment of relevant women's issues—may be one form in which can be seen the advancements of gender relations over the past thirty years.

But content doesn't tell us everything that we need to know about romance, or even about the novels. It would be just as easy to cherry pick as many regressive examples of content as it is to present the progressive ones. No one is arguing that romance is a perfect industry or that it presents an ideal picture of unlimited female potential. I maintain, however, that presenting a somewhat conflicted view of what women face in the world is actually more realistic than its detractors give it credit for. Most women desire some kind of romantic relationship during the course of their life. A majority of those women desire that relationship to be one in which she is cared for, treated as an equal, and allowed to pursue whichever life path she has chosen (career, family, both, or neither). That relationship is not always going to be perfect. There will be disputes and conflicts, disappointments as well as triumphs. Sometimes the relationship will end (contrary to popular belief, the hero is not always the first relationship the heroine has ever had). All of these things are presented in romance novels. Does fiction present that world as it is or as it ought to be? Romance novels manage to do a little of both.

The more important issue is how readers interact with this content. I have striven to show that readers are savvy participants in constructing and deconstructing various meanings found within the content in order to conform to, and sometimes change, their views of the world and their place in it as women. It is difficult to understand (or even speculate) the ways in which books can fundamentally alter someone's perspective or deeply held values, though they may allow readers to see greater possibilities—about

women's roles, about equality in relationships, about what constitutes a happily ever after—than originally imagined. This is one of the reasons why romance is so popular; because of its huge range—from inspirational¹ to erotic—there is a point of view that corresponds to most every reader. That point of view is, of course, going to influence what messages are received, accepted, and rejected by the reader in the course of reading in the genre. A general love of romance, however, may take a reader outside of their preferred subgenre into other segments, which, in turn, may stretch her boundaries even further.

Another important theme to emerge from my discussions with readers and authors was the continued stigma of romance reading. One of my interviewees actually put it better than I could: “It really gets my back up when people dismiss entire genres that are the only ones that address women in relationships with other women or have to do with women...I think it's really hard to explain that to people, especially men because they just don't think about it” (J.I.). And she's right. The most difficult part of considering the continued stereotypes against romance is especially how they are leveled at women by other women. While men ‘just don't think about it’ as J.I. points out, women who don't read romance are quick to denigrate women who do. Whether this is to build up their own self-esteem or because they genuinely believe the negative hype, I can't be certain. The effect is the same, however. Interestingly, these are often women who will freely read what is (problematically) termed “chick lit” (or, as Cadogan (1994) termed them, “Shopping and Fucking” novels) and not think that it diminishes their presentation

¹ I did not look at the inspirational or “sweet” (sexually chaste) subgenres of romance in this study for two main reasons: 1) None of them were significant enough bestsellers to be included in the content analysis and 2) None of my interview subjects either wrote them or indicated a preference for reading them. Clawson (2005) has a good exploration of the differences in Christian and secular category romance novel characteristics.

as an intelligent woman or professional. Many of my interviewees seemed to think that other women who looked down on romance would actually enjoy it if they ever tried it, especially as they were particularly annoyed by those who condemned romance having never picked up a book in the genre.

Innovation in romance goes back to its original roots. Though seen as passé now, the publishing revolution that was Harlequin/Mills and Boon and then the single title historical cannot be overstated. I'm sure many would dismiss it as just another example of the extreme commodification of art to see books as something that could be branded. I don't imagine that the president of Harlequin saw it as anything but that at the time (he was a former president of Proctor and Gamble and specifically tried to market books in the same ways he had marketed soaps and detergents earlier (Markert, 1985)). Without it though, romance would most likely not be the powerhouse it is today, keeping afloat a struggling publishing industry (Bosman, 2010). As well, it was not only an incredible opportunity for female editors and authors (even if it was for generally sexist reasons), but set a tone in romance publishing that allowed it to continue to be flexible and creative over the past forty years. This creativity led the industry, logically, to electronic publishing, both independent and traditional. It also led to the elasticity of the genre to include fantasy, science fiction, mystery, and erotic elements without ever losing the core of romance from the story.

Romance was both an adopter and a leader in popular trends such as the resurgence of the vampire story. In the mid to late 1990s, when TV shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its spinoff, *Angel*, as well as movies such as *Blade*, *From Dusk Till Dawn*, and (though, of course, based on a book) *Interview with a Vampire* were

becoming hits, romance authors were also beginning to dabble in the paranormal². I was interviewing readers around the time the first *Twilight* movie came out. Though it can be argued on either side, many romance readers were adamant that the series is *not* romance at all (technically, they are classified as Young Adult books, but that line is blurry, especially considering how many grown women and men read and enjoyed them). The reason for the insistence of non-romance, however, was extremely instructive. Readers were clear to me that Bella, the heroine of the series, does not resemble a romance heroine in any way because she is wishy washy and a doormat, allowing the hero to control her life and her choices, including that of her sexuality. That, they stated firmly, is not how a romance heroine behaves³.

I also do not believe that the genre should be derided for being influenced in some of these changes by the desire for greater sexual content. In fact, I see it as a rather progressive sign. If romance novels and their readers were as conservative as they are painted, the purple prose would have endured without question or protest. I had a lot of discussion with readers and authors surrounding how “far” romance should go in terms of sex, what was erotic romance versus what was erotica, and where their personal lines were drawn. I imagine this was similar to the 1970s and 1980s when Harlequins wouldn’t

² This was not entirely new, but anything previous to this time that could be labeled ‘paranormal’ was generally time travel or futuristic of some kind. See for example J.D. Robb’s *In Death* series or Jayne Castle’s novels from the late 1990s. Though I don’t know for sure, I would speculate that some of their success in getting published before the true paranormal revolution began was that both of the abovementioned authors are pseudonyms for well-known (and already successful) romance authors (Nora Roberts and Jayne Ann Krentz, respectively).

³ I would have loved to have exact quotes about this, but these discussions all took place after the official interviews were over. I had never read the books, but they would invariably come up because of the movie hype at the time. I was struck by how consistently these comments about Bella arose during the course of the conversations. Readers also tended to be frustrated about the lack of sex in the books, but understood both that they are marketed as Young Adult books and that the author, Stephanie Meyer, is a Mormon and specifically did not include sex until the hero and heroine are married in a later book.

even open the bedroom door, while the long historicals had rape and sex⁴ all over the place.

While there has been a move to more explicit (or least, more plain speaking) sex, it is not a universal. Readers are able to choose whatever level of bedroom activity they desire; most readers indicated they enjoyed a mix of types. Some readers said, after years of reading, they skip over sex scenes. Some said they were extremely important and others could take or leave them. Like everything else, there was a range of responses.

People try to prolong it too much. Some people can get away with it but others can't. They try to make it more descriptive. You don't need that much...We understand the gist of it...It doesn't have to go for 15 or 20 pages. (E.H.)

It always bothers me to read a book just for sex sake...If the sex is going to come at the expense of a good plot, I'm not going to read those books...If it doesn't add to the story, if it doesn't tell me something more, I'll probably just skip those pages. (D.R.)

I think I would find the novels very unsatisfying if they did not have explicit sex...I mean I think the sex is the core part. (C.V.)

I like mine pretty steamy, not always erotica...It depends, sometimes the kiss is all you need. It depends on the writing and the situation. (B.A.)

In actuality, romance can't win for trying in the public's mind: it is either too repressed (all readers want is marriage and babies) or too risqué (romance is just porn for women).

As a women's genre, it, too, has a Madonna/whore complex.

The size and scope of the genre tell us that there is something particularly enduring about the romance narrative. It's not as though stories and novels about love and relationships are anything new. "Our oldest tales are hope tales. Is there any surprise that the strongest genre in fiction is also a genre of hope?" (Dreyer, 1999: 77). The

⁴ This sex, which some readers would like to nostalgically remember as "tamer" than today's books, often included the heroine having sex with multiple different men over the course of her adventure (which is very rare today—she may have had a sexually active past, but within the confines of the book, she's a one man woman) as well as *very* euphemistic anal sex.

indisputable happily ever after allows us that hope of enduring love, or for some, allows them to relive that moment when they found it in their own lives. One of the interesting twists on this concept is that many authors are creating worlds with several books of interconnected characters, which gives the invested reader the opportunity to revisit couples they watched fall in love and see how they're doing.

Some authors, notably bestseller Julia Quinn, have written sets of epilogues (available on author websites or as electronic downloads) that chronicle past characters' 'where are they nows' because of reader interest in what has become of their favorite couples, even after they continue to pop up in subsequent books. The connection to these characters is very deep and real to many readers, so much so that they want to be reassured that all is well in the lives of their favorite couples. In all of these ways then, those heroes and heroines haven't just ridden off into the sunset, but continue to demonstrate to their reader fans the strength and endurance of their love⁵. Happily ever after isn't just a promise then, it's a guarantee.

Study Limitations

There are, quite possibly, hundreds of studies that could be based out of the romance novel industry and thus it would be easy to be critical of which piece any researcher chose to focus on. It is encouraging that popular romance is once again gaining an academic legitimacy to allow it be discussed in a multitude of ways, by several disciplines as well as internationally. The recently established International Association for the Study of Popular Romance and their journal and conferences are

⁵ This is not an entirely new concept, as Kathleen Woodiwiss's four original books were loosely connected to one another. What is different is the scope. One of the most prolific authors to do this is Sherrilyn Kenyon, whose Dark Hunter series is going on twenty plus books at this point. One of my interviewees, E.H., spent twenty minutes of our interview explaining to me how invested she was in all of the love stories in this series.

putting this huge industry back on the radar of academia, but also are providing lay readers with accessible information. Unfortunately, this group (small and relatively insular at this point⁶) is probably going to face an uphill battle convincing the academy and the general public that romance and love are important matters of study. Not only are they generally “women’s matters” (and mostly studied by women if a survey of their recently published articles is any indication), but the stereotypes are so well-entrenched that it would take a revolution to significantly change them.

The greatest limitation to this particular study was the selection of interview subjects. I say that because, unfortunately, it is impossible to get a true cross section of all romance readers. While many readers are relatively active, read large numbers of books a year, and are at least somewhat aware of issues in the industry (as my readers were), certainly many more are only casual readers (a few books a year) and have little to no knowledge of the industry. Even though my readers did not consider themselves “insiders” per se, they were mostly active enough readers or contributors on blogs or in book groups to have a pretty good idea about the world of romance novels, outside just the books. They could cite statistics or give biographical information on authors, which indicates a level of familiarity I’m not sure every romance reader would have (though of course I could be wrong about that). On a personal note, before I began this study, I would have fallen somewhere into the latter category of reader types. While I read a large number of books, I was very confined in my choices of subgenre (as a strictly author-

⁶ Full disclosure: I was the subject of some attack by members of this group when I did a call for readers on one of the popular blogs, which are frequented by and often commented on by IASPR academics (an interesting phenomenon in and of itself). While I applaud their mission and hope for their success, I am disheartened by a group of people who claim to be affronted by their work being excluded from serious academic discussion but who will turn around and discredit another fledgling researcher who is after the same goals.

based reader) and knew very, very little about the romance industry and its history.

Finding more readers like my old self would have probably gained me better insight into the “average” romance reader.

This is similar to what limited Radway’s interpretations. Her Smithton women were not only relatively high volume readers, they were also highly active in a book group lead by a woman who worked in a bookstore. This allowed them access not only to discussion, but through Dot (the leader), at least some insight into publishing and the industry. While the internet has allowed more average readers to have similar access, it is still a choice that readers have to make. There are certainly plenty of readers who do not know romance blogs exist nor have ever visited an author website or message board. What would those readers say about their reading experience? Would they have the same defenses of the industry to offer that well-connected readers do? What if a woman only read two or three romances a year, in addition to other genres?

And, of course, the bigger elephant in the room, which is that I had no male readers⁷ in the study. These were near to impossible to find and I would love if another researcher could do a better job than I was able to in accessing their opinions. The voices of these various types of readers are essential to gaining a truly representative idea of the “average” romance experience.

The authors I talked to (though not thoroughly discussed in the study as a whole) were more representative of romance authors as a group. They ranged from several best-

⁷ I did interview one male author (see Appendix D) but could not say anything about gender based on one conversation. In addition, he had a unique story about how he became a romance author (he was originally a graphic designer for Ellora’s Cave and tried his hand at writing). Two interesting points about him (though I cannot extrapolate if these are common experiences among male authors) were that he wrote more in the Exotica line for EC (i.e.: closer to straight erotica than romance) and that he was encouraged to use his initials as a pen name so his male status was not as obvious. This was several years ago, however, and a look at EC’s website shows more male authors, identified by name.

selling, well-known names to authors with one publication to e-published authors. They represented all subgenres and a wide-range of publishing houses. As I met and interviewed many of them at the *Romantic Times* convention, they were not even limited geographically as the readers ended up being. Authors, by nature of their association with RWA and other professional organizations, and, I think, their need to promote a good face on their occupation, tended to give more uniform answers to many of the questions. Despite their diversity of writing types and publication history, there was a general cheerleader-like attitude about the romance industry that seemed to make them reluctant to be at all critical. I don't know how other researchers would be able to mitigate this, as I do not believe the questions or interview situations were inclined to any particular bias. It is possible that all authors truly are that positive about their experiences in the industry, but given some of the discussions on the blogs that involved authors (and one author's experience with pushback from her publishing house, discussed below), I do not think this is the case.

Further Research

There are several important areas of study that other researchers should likely focus on in relation to the romance novel industry. I believe that the arena of independent electronic publishing merits continued exploration, including greater discussion with the authors and editors who began the successful electronic houses. It would be interesting to understand their perspective on what drove them to begin electronically as well as the particular obstacles they faced in doing so. I have attempted to spell out what I believe is a reasonable timeline and set of circumstances retroactively, but it would be instructive to get their first-hand accounts of how this was accomplished.

Along those same lines, I think a very fruitful content analysis could be completed using only independently published e-books. Though I found very few differences in my miniscule sample, a more general acquaintance with the type of books published online would indicate that there is more variety than I was able to demonstrate. This could be very instructive, mostly in the erotic romance subgenre, in continuing to elucidate the types of sexual fantasies that women find desirable. Erotic romance's willingness to engage in very non-traditional sexual acts and situations should be a clear indicator that it is filling a need for some women. Is it appropriate to merely reduce it to porn on the page (perpetuating the old myth that men are sexually visual and women are not) or do we have to begin to understand whether or not women's pornography is fundamentally different? Sonnet (1999) attempts to do this with the line of *Black Lace* novels, marketed as 'erotic fiction for women by women', which sit precariously on the border of romance and erotica. She finds these books troublesome overall, but gives researchers of erotic romance something very important to think about: "Why do women feel they must have their 'own' pornography when written pornography per se is widely enough available for those women who wish to use it? Perhaps the primary value of *Black Lace* lies with the simple functioning of giving women 'permission' to read and use written erotica in their sexual development" (178-179).

A greater exploration of internet communities and interactions for romance readers, authors, and industry insiders is another area that could bear out interesting findings. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, the increased connection between members of the romance community, facilitated by blogs, author sites, and message boards has been extremely influential. I doubt, however, that my casual foray into it even scratches the

surface of the ways it has changed and been changed by more traditional interaction processes.

One small example will illustrate what I mean. The blog ‘Smart Bitches, Trashy Books’ was started in 2005 by two romance readers who wanted to talk about books—what they loved, what they hated, authors they adored, etc. Over the next few years, the blog gained a steady following of readers and started increasing its “professionalism” (the writing got better, the topics got more serious, and they began a ratings system for books they reviewed). Eventually the two authors were given a book deal (subsequently two) to turn their blog topics into a comprehensive (if snarky) “guide” to romance novels. This, in turn, gave them a legitimacy (they were now published authors, after all) that one has parlayed into making the blog her full time job. She is now asked to speak at conferences (including the Romance Writers of America annual meeting) and authors and editors curry her favor for reviews and recommendations of their books. As with other forms of cultural production, it is very difficult to remain an independent entity for long. In my opinion, she and the blog have been co-opted by the industry and, despite her protestations that she is uninfluenced by her association with the traditional side of publishing, I think that is probably a naïve assertion to make⁸.

I continue to be intrigued by the lines between fantasy and reality that I started to explore in these interviews. I think an interesting area of inquiry that could be pursued further is probing very specifically into what readers understand as each. I had a few readers who gave specific examples in contemporary novels of details that would ruin a

⁸ More full disclosure: I interviewed this particular blog author for my study when I was considering making online interaction a major piece of research. I wanted her voice as a reader but also as someone who intimately understood how the internet is shaping romance. Ultimately I did not use any of her information in the project because of my perception of her embeddedness in the industry. This was fine for romance novel authors, but as a reader, I did not feel she represented anyone else’s experience but her own.

story for them⁹. But, in the realm of the emotional realism, what will they believe and what is too far out of the realm of possibility? I had at least three readers mention that often the timing of falling in love and thinking about marriage was far too fast for them to feel right about.

Similarly, how do authors think about fantasy when they write? Do they consciously choose to eschew absolute reality (within the happy ending parameters) for better stories? Because several authors focused on the amount of research they did, I imagine that there would be some strong opinions on the subject. But, the other question is, what influence do additional mediating factors in the industry have? I point this out because one author (my most candid author interview) told me a story about how she was told she needed to de-emphasize the alcoholism of her hero in order to make him more palatable. She even had to change the title of the book or risk it not being accepted by her publisher. I would be very surprised if there were not more stories like hers out there, especially among newer or what they call ‘mid-list’ authors (those with a few published books who are selling but haven’t really caught on yet).

Recent work done by members of the IASPR (mentioned above) in their journal and elsewhere has expanded the possible ways of looking at romance, so truly, the areas available for further study are nearly limitless. I would, however, like to see more actual voices of readers, authors, editors, and publishers included in the work being done. There has been a trend, with the continued academic bent in romance, toward the authoritative voice. One of Radway’s most important contributions was prioritizing her readers as subjects with something to teach her. She did not go to Smithton expecting to be the ‘expert’ and freely admits that listening to the women speak changed her entire point of

⁹ My favorite: “[T]hey’re mostly middle class so I don’t expect them to be buying fur coats.” (M.M.)

view. Though I cannot brag an equal amount of flexibility, I, too, was surprised and challenged by the voices of my subjects. Recent articles in the *Journal for Popular Romance*, likely in their bid for academic legitimacy, don't seem to take the voices as much into account.¹⁰

As long as people continue to fall in love, there will be romance novels. The worlds that romance authors create and the characters they use to inhabit them clearly affect wide swaths of the female population (and some men, too). We can be encouraged by the fact that romance continues to change with and reflect the times, while still portraying an idealized version of the romantic fantasy. The enduring appeal of emotional escapism and the happily ever after do not diminish the love and comfort we find in real life, nor do they act as a replacement for those things. Romance novels do not allow their readers to compensate for the lack in their lives, contrary to popular belief. What they do allow is for a pleasurable, emotionally satisfying experience. They are happiness between the covers. Despite what the critics say, I cannot find a problem with that.

¹⁰ Reviewing their current six issues, it seems as though only one or two articles are about issues other than texts and content.

Appendix A. Sample and Methods

The sample for the content analysis section of the study comes from a review of books that spent time on the *New York Times* Bestseller Lists, gathered at three time periods due to the nature of the research process. The beginning of the project came during completion of a term paper for a graduate level course, at which time I used books that appeared in the top ten spot on the bestseller lists from 2000 to 2004. In 2009, I went back and expanded the selection to a nine-year period, 2000 to 2008, and included books in the top twenty. Finally, after some time had elapsed in the research and writing process (2013), I returned to the lists to add books from 2009 to 2013 in order to be as up to date as possible. Below, I explain how this final addition affected, in a minor way, the group of books used to explain content.

I chose to use the Paperback Fiction Bestseller lists because of the understanding that romance is more of a paperback than a hardcover genre. Though several authors publish in hardcover, most publish directly into paperback and thus it was more advantageous to survey that particular bestseller list in order to cover the entire field of romance. As well, e-books were only just beginning to gain recognition in the publishing industry and statistics still show that their percentage of representations is relatively low. This decision was made in 2009 when there was still no electronic bestseller list and no reliable way to track those sales. While it does exist now, I stuck by this decision because there is a great overlap in print and electronic bestsellers as I elucidate in chapter 3 regarding electronic publishing.

I chose not to include the “serial” romance novels, most often known by their publisher’s name, Harlequin, as well as its many subsidiaries (Silhouette, Candlelight, etc). My reasons were twofold: first, in attempting to make some comparisons with

Radway's work, these books would not be applicable because she does not include them in her analysis; second, only a few Harlequin serial novels appeared on the New York Times list (this does not count several Harlequin reissues of Nora Roberts' books that were originally published in the early 1980s), showing that though these books make up about 30% of all romance sales (according to RWA statistics), no single one generates enough readership to make it significant. There are four books in the sample that were published by Harlequin, but fall under their 'HQN' line or Harlequin Mira, which are conventionally much closer to other single title novels in length and style.

In order to gather the first full sample (in 2009), I reviewed every week of paperback fiction bestsellers for the time period of January 2, 2000 to December 28, 2008. Figures came from the New York Times online archives of bestseller lists. I then recorded all romance books positioned in the top twenty ranking for that week. The books' genre identification came primarily by authorship as the list does not identify a specific genre for the books, however I cross-checked books with Barnes & Noble or Amazon listings if there was a question about whether or not the book could be classified as romance.

Even then, a few books and authors were contentious enough to make me consider their inclusion. For example, if I were to redo the study, I would leave out Belva Plain and Barbara Delinsky entirely as a romance authors (I believe they would be better classified as women's fiction) and I would choose a different book by Debbie Macomber (she is certainly a romance author and read by romance readers, but her more recent books have been probably also better classified as women's fiction). As well, there are some authors that I believed wrote exclusively in mystery or suspense genres,

but that interviewees indicated as favorite “romance” authors. Even I was unaware at how broadly some people define the genre. Overall, however, I believe that I was able to capture the vast majority of what was published in romance during this time period.

For each book, I recorded the number of weeks it remained in the top twenty. I did not make a distinction between the number a book occupied on the list, simply its presence or absence from the list. For books that were on the list in two different years (for example, the end of 2002 into the beginning of 2003), the book was placed in the year in which it was published. The books were then ranked according to the number of weeks they spent on the list during a particular year (see Appendix A).

I generated the list of top forty (later reduced to thirty-seven with the addition of the e-books) authors by adding the total number of weeks each author spent on the list during the nine-year period and then rank ordering them (see Appendix B). For demonstrative purposes, I included the reissued books authored by (primarily) Nora Roberts and others, however I specifically used new novels for analysis because of the importance of time in this study. It is interesting to note that the older books have remained extremely popular, but it is difficult to determine if readers buy these reissues because of name recognition or because they still find the previous work viable.

Finally, I chose one book from each of the top authors to include in the study¹ (see Table 1 for books used in analysis). Though there were no specific criteria for each choice, I attempted in general to pick a book from each author that spent the greatest number of weeks on the bestseller list. If there were multiple books that had the same

¹ Originally, I planned to analyze the top four books from each year, thus reviewing the most popular content. However, a look at the lists shows quite clearly that two particular authors dominated the top of each list for most of the nine years: Nora Roberts and Danielle Steel. Rather than read many books by the same two authors, I determined that it would be more generalizable to instead read one book by each of the top authors.

number of weeks on the list, I tried to vary choices by year in order to get a more representative sample. I also attempted to choose a book that was closest to what is traditionally defined as romance. Several authors (notably Catherine Coulter, who writes strict mystery/suspense and Janet Evanovich, who is famous for her “numbers” series that focus on one protagonist who is a bounty hunter) sell very well in genres that border on the edge of romance, as well as strict romance. While I included all of their books for the purpose of ranking their sales, I specifically chose books by them that were more romance focused.

I eventually choose to include 3 e-books (one from each major independent electronic press), as it reflected the purported percentage (5.4%) of e-publishing sales at the time of that phase of the study (2009). It was more difficult to choose these books, as e-houses did not, at the time, post sales information. I had to create some logical method of choosing the books that I did and decided to go by author volume. I looked at each author page on the press and counted how many novels (not novellas, as are very popular in e-houses) each author had published at that time. I chose one book by each of the most often published authors at each company that seemed to best represent the types of books she wrote. Future studies could look at the now available electronic publishing houses’ bestseller lists in order to better determine which novels should be studied.

In the final update to the list, in order to encompass books from 2009-2013, I used the same method as before, which yielded many new authors (see Appendix B). The trouble, however, was that some of these authors’ weeks on the list pushed off five of the authors that were already included in the original study. Rather than redo all of the work that had previously been done, I chose instead to expand the final total of books to forty-

five by including a book published between 2009 and 2013 by the five highest-ranked “new” authors (#13 Robyn Carr, #15 Sherryl Woods, #20 Susan Mallery, #22 Lora Leigh, and #25 Lynsay Sands).

The second phase of the study was in-depth interviews. The interviews took place over the span of approximately two years, from April of 2007 until May of 2009. A total of thirty-five interviews were conducted, sixteen readers and nineteen published authors. The interviews averaged about sixty minutes, though several lasted more than two hours. They were conducted in several different locations, mostly coffee shops or bookstores, the participant’s home, or at one of the two *Romantic Times* conventions that I attended. Participants were gained through postings on online book groups/sites, a major romance blog, the RT convention website, and some by word of mouth. While this is not a statistically representative sample, it covered a wide range of ages, occupations, types of romance written/enjoyed, and engagement in the romance community. Appendix C gives basic demographic information on the interview subjects.

In order to account for the ‘snowball’ nature of the sample, I have included some comments from readers and authors on three of the major blogs (Dear Author, Smart Bitches Trashy Books, and the *Romantic Times* message board). Though this, too, has a bias toward readers who are more engaged in the industry (to not only read, but comment on, romance blogs indicates a connection to and understanding of romance that is probably unusual among the “average” reader), it helped to round out some answers to questions that did not emerge completely until later on in the interview process. As well, there was a lot of discussion and change occurring in the way romance was being talked

about, even in the two years that I was interviewing and it was helpful to capture some of that outside of interviews.

In a perfect world, I would have loved to talk to more readers who were completely unengaged in the rhetoric of the industry, as I was before I began the study: women who read in isolation, who don't talk about their reading, and who are unaware of the discourse/defense of romance that seems to be a big portion of the blog community these days. Finding those women (or men) proved to be near to impossible, however, and I had to work with the participants who were available to me.

Additional information about the industry was gained by participant observations from two, four-day romance conventions held in April of 2008 (Pittsburgh, PA) and 2009 (Orlando, FL). These conventions are sponsored by the largest trade magazine in the romance industry, *Romantic Times*. While aimed specifically at readers, they attract hundreds of authors for large book signings as well as hopeful authors with workshops aimed at developing the craft. The week-long event (I spent four days at each convention) draws over 1,000 participants each year and includes not only professional workshops, but also author/reader interactions, contests, and nightly theme parties². It would have been possible to write an entire book just on the ideas of fandom and gender at these conventions. A conversation I had with an informal roundtable of authors about the Ellora's 'Cavemen' would, by itself, be an excellent chapter on gender objectification. Instead, I used my observations there as a way to get a glimpse into a segment of the industry I was unaware existed until that time.

² I would have also liked to attend the Romance Writers of America's annual conference, however, it is generally only open to members of the organization and invited guests. Fortunately, for the revamped version of the project, it was unnecessary. I did get to attend a meeting of the New Jersey chapter of RWA in October of 2007 and was warmly received by the authors there.

Appendix B. List of Bestselling Romance Novels by Year (*Source: New York Times Bestseller Lists-Paperback Fiction from January 2, 2000-December 29, 2013*)³

2000

Title	Author	Number of Weeks on List	Dates On List
Tears of the Moon	Nora Roberts	9	7/26-9/17
Jewels of the Sun	Nora Roberts	8	12/5/99-1/25/00
Mirror Image	Danielle Steel	8	11/22/99-1/9/00
Bittersweet	Danielle Steel	7	3/19-4/30
River's End	Nora Roberts	7	5/21-7/2
Irresistible Forces	Danielle Steel	7	11/19/00-1/7/01
Irish Hearts	Nora Roberts	6	6/18-7/23
Night Tales	Nora Roberts	6	9/17-10/22
The Stanislawski Brothers	Nora Roberts	6	11/19-12/24
A Season Beyond a Kiss	Kathleen Woodiwiss	5	3/19-4/30
Irish Rebel	Nora Roberts	5	6/18-7/16
High Tide	Jude Deveraux	5	9/17-10/15
The Courtship	Catherine Coulter	4	1/25-2/13
False Pretenses	Catherine Coulter	4	3/26-4/16
Joining	Johanna Lindsey	4	4/23-5/14
Carnal Innocence	Nora Roberts	4	4/30-5/21
Fortune's Hand	Belva Plain	4	4/30-5/21
Granny Dan	Danielle Steel	4	7/23-8/13
The Guest List	Fern Michaels	4	8/20-9/10
Night Shield	Nora Roberts	4	9/17-10/8
Beyond Eden	Catherine Coulter	4	10/29-11/19
I Thee Wed	Amanda Quick	3	2/20-3/5
First Lady	Susan Elizabeth Phillips	3	2/27-3/12
Eclipse Bay	Jayne Ann Krentz	3	6/25-7/9
The Edge	Catherine Coulter	3	8/27-9/10
Calder Pride	Janet Dailey	3	10/29-11/12
Celebration	Fern Michaels	2	2/13-2/20
Send No Flowers	Sandra Brown	2	3/19-3/26
Lake News	Barbara Delinsky	2	6/4-6/11
Pearl Cove	Elizabeth Lowell	2	6/25-7/2
Cloud Nine	Luanne Rice	1	1/30
One Wish	Linda Lael Miller	1	2/20
Sullivan's Island	Dorothea Benton	1	2/27
On Mystic Lake	Kristin Hannah	1	5/14
Where You Belong	Barbara Taylor Bradford	1	12/24

2001

Title	Author	Number of Weeks on List	Dates On List
Carolina Moon	Nora Roberts	9	4/22-6/17
Heart of the Sea	Nora Roberts	8	12/24/00-2/11/01
Dance Upon the Air	Nora Roberts	8	6/24-8/12
Journey	Danielle Steel	8	11/4-12/30
Time and Again	Nora Roberts	7	9/9-10/21
The Wedding	Danielle Steel	6	3/18-4/22
The Stanislawski Sisters	Nora Roberts	5	2/18-3/18

³ The list was further broken down beginning September 16, 2007 into Paperback Mass-Market Fiction and Paperback Trade Fiction. Genre fiction falls in the former category.

Temptation	Jude Deveraux	5	5/20-6/17
Reflections and Dreams	Nora Roberts	5	7/15-8/12
The House on Hope Street	Danielle Steel	5	7/15-8/12
Sacred Sins	Nora Roberts	5	8/12-9/9
Heartbreaker	Julie Garwood	5	9/9-10/7
The Scottish Bride	Catherine Coulter	4	1/28-2/18
Considering Kate	Nora Roberts	4	2/18-3/11
The Heir	Johanna Lindsey	4	4/22-5/13
After the Fire	Belva Plain	4	4/29-5/20
Winter Solstice	Rosamunde Pilcher	4	5/27-6/17
Firefly Beach	Luanne Rice	4	6/17-7/8
Riptide	Catherine Coulter	4	7/22-8/12
Impulse	Catherine Coulter	4	10/14-11/4
Home for the Holidays	Johanna Lindsey	4	11/11-12/2
Lost and Found	Jayne Ann Krentz	4	11/11-12/2
Dawn in Eclipse Bay	Jayne Ann Krentz	3	5/20-6/3
Midnight in Ruby Bayou	Elizabeth Lowell	3	5/20-6/3
The Vineyard	Barbara Delinsky	3	8/19-9/2
A Capital Holiday	Janet Dailey	3	10/14-10/28
Yesterday	Fern Michaels	2	1/21-1/28
Wicked Widow	Amanda Quick	2	3/18, 4/1
What You Wish For	Fern Michaels	2	7/22, 8/5
Suddenly You	Lisa Kleypas	1	6/24
All About Passion	Stephanie Laurens	1	9/16
Just Imagine	Susan Elizabeth Phillips	1	9/16
16 Lighthouse Road	Debbie Macomber	1	10/7
Ghost Moon	Karen Robards	1	11/4
No Way Out	Andrea Kane	1	11/18
Commitments	Barbara Delinsky	1	12/16

2002

Title	Author	Number of Weeks on List	Dates On List
Face the Fire	Nora Roberts	9	6/9-8/4
Table for Two	Nora Roberts	9	11/10/02-1/5/03
Heaven and Earth	Nora Roberts	8	12/9/01-1/27/03
Summer Pleasures	Nora Roberts	8	8/11-9/29
The Kiss	Danielle Steel	8	10/13-12/1
The Villa	Nora Roberts	7	4/7-5/19
Lone Eagle	Danielle Steel	6	2/10-3/17
Going Home	Nora Roberts	6	10/6-11/10
Plain Jane	Fern Michaels	5	1/13-2/10
The Summerhouse	Jude Deveraux	5	5/12-6/9
Leap of Faith	Danielle Steel	5	6/9-7/7
Cordina's Royal Family	Nora Roberts	5	7/7-8/4
The Woman Next Door	Barbara Delinsky	5	7/7-8/4
Forever	Jude Deveraux	5	10/13-11/10
Dream Country	Luanne Rice	4	1/13-2/3
Pendragon	Catherine Coulter	4	1/20-2/10
Hemlock Bay	Catherine Coulter	4	7/14-8/4
The Bachelor	Carly Phillips	4	7/28-8/18
Mercy	Julie Garwood	4	8/11-9/1
True Blue	Luanne Rice	4	8/11-9/1
Cordina's Crown Jewel	Nora Roberts	3	2/10-2/24
Heart of a Warrior	Johanna Lindsey	3	3/17-3/31
The Loner	Joan Johnston	3	4/7-4/21

Slightly Shady	Amanda Quick	3	4/7-4/21
On a Wild Night	Stephanie Laurens	3	4/14-4/28
Kentucky Rich	Fern Michaels	3	4/21-5/5
Looking Back	Belva Plain	3	5/12-5/26
Summer in Eclipse Bay	Jayne Ann Krentz	3	5/19-6/2
A Woman Betrayed	Barbara Delinsky	3	9/22-10/6
No Place Like Home	Fern Michaels	3	11/17-12/1
A Little Magic	Nora Roberts	2	1/13-1/20
Morgan's Run	Colleen McCullough	2	1/20-1/27
This Heart of Mine	Susan Elizabeth Phillips	2	3/3-3/10
Moving Target	Elizabeth Lowell	2	5/12-5/19
Romancing Mr. Bridgerton	Julia Quinn	2	7/14-7/21
Kentucky Heat	Fern Michaels	2	9/22-9/29
The Promise in a Kiss	Stephanie Laurens	2	11/24-12/1
Brazen Virtue	Nora Roberts	2	12/15-12/22
Angels Everywhere	Debbie Macomber	2	12/22-12/29
Fast Women	Jennifer Crusie	1	4/28
On a Wicked Dawn	Stephanie Laurens	1	5/12
Summer Light	Luanne Rice	1	6/30
Smoke in Mirrors	Jayne Ann Krentz	1	11/17
High Country Bride	Linda Lael Miller	1	12/8
Into the Night	Suzanne Brockmann	1	12/15
Sisters Found	Joan Johnston	1	12/15

2003

Title	Author	Number of Weeks on List	Dates On List
Truly Madly Manhattan	Nora Roberts	8	1/12-3/2
Engaging the Enemy	Nora Roberts	8	5/11-6/29
Midnight Bayou	Nora Roberts	7	12/8/02-1/19/03
Dangerous	Nora Roberts	6	12/8/02-1/12/03
The Cottage	Danielle Steel	6	2/16-3/30
Eleventh Hour	Catherine Coulter	6	7/6-8/10
Three Fates	Nora Roberts	5	4/6-5/4
The Mulberry Tree	Jude Deveraux	5	5/1-6/8
Forever and Always	Jude Deveraux	5	9/7-10/5
Answered Prayers	Danielle Steel	5	10/12-11/9
Someone to Watch Over Me	Judith McNaught	5	11/9-12/7
The Penwyth Curse	Catherine Coulter	4	1/12-2/2
Safe Harbor	Luanne Rice	4	1/12-2/2
The Pursuit	Johanna Lindsey	4	4/6-4/27
Sunset in St. Tropez	Danielle Steel	4	6/15-7/6
Killjoy	Julie Garwood	4	7/13-8/3
An Accidental Woman	Barbara Delinsky	4	7/13-8/3
The Perfect Summer	Luanne Rice	4	8/10-8/31
The Future Scrolls	Fern Michaels	4	9/14-10/5
Lawless	Nora Roberts	4	10/12-11/2
Sullivan's Woman	Nora Roberts	3	8/10-8/24
Mysterious	Nora Roberts	3	8/10-8/24
Starting Over	Robin Pilcher	2	1/26-2/2
Running Scared	Elizabeth Lowell	2	6/15-6/22
To Sir Phillip, With Love	Julia Quinn	2	7/13-7/20
Less of a Stranger	Nora Roberts	2	9/7-9/14
The Playboy	Carly Phillips	1	1/26
Worth Any Price	Lisa Kleypas	1	2/9
Kentucky Sunrise	Fern Michaels	1	7/27

A Gentleman's Honor	Stephanie Laurens	1	10/12
Temptation	Nora Roberts	1	10/12

2004

Title	Author	Number of Weeks on List	Dates On List
Key of Light	Nora Roberts	13	11/9/03-2/1/04
Blue Dahlia	Nora Roberts	11	11/7/04-1/16/05
Key of Knowledge	Nora Roberts	9	12/7/03-2/1/04
Birthright	Nora Roberts	6	4/11-5/9, 5/23
Key of Valor	Nora Roberts	5	1/11-2/8
The Sherbrooke Twins	Catherine Coulter	5	3/7-4/4
Blindside	Catherine Coulter	5	7/11-8/8
Winner Takes All	Nora Roberts	5	10/10-11/7
Chesapeake Blue	Nora Roberts	4	2/8-2/29
Dating Game	Danielle Steel	4	2/15-3/7
The Reluctant Suitor	Kathleen Woodiwiss	4	4/11-5/2
With Open Arms	Nora Roberts	4	5/9-5/30
Wild Orchids	Jude Deveraux	4	6/6-6/27
Entranced	Nora Roberts	4	6/6-6/27
Beach Girls	Luanne Rice	4	8/15-9/5
Safe Harbor	Danielle Steel	4	10/10-10/31
Always	Jude Deveraux	4	11/7-11/28
The Secret Hour	Luanne Rice	3	2/15-2/29
A Man to Call My Own	Johanna Lindsey	3	4/11-4/25
Flirting with Pete	Barbara Delinsky	3	5/16-5/30
Charmed and Enchanted	Nora Roberts	3	9/12, 9/26-10/3
44 Cranberry Point	Debbie Macomber	3	9/12, 9/26-10/3
Reunion	Nora Roberts	3	12/12-12/26
Late Bloomer	Fern Michaels	2	1/25-2/1
When He Was Wicked	Julia Quinn	2	7/11-7/18
Captivated	Nora Roberts	1	2/8
Rafe and Jared	Nora Roberts	1	3/14
A Little Fate	Nora Roberts	1	6/6
Devin and Shane	Nora Roberts	1	6/20
Johnny Angel	Danielle Steel	1	6/27
The Real Deal	Fern Michaels	1	8/22
A Lady of His Own	Stephanie Laurens	1	10/10
True Colors	Diana Palmer	1	12/12

2005

Title	Author	Number of Weeks on List	Dates On List
Red Lily	Nora Roberts	10	12/11-2/12/06
Black Rose	Nora Roberts	9	6/5-7/31
Northern Lights	Nora Roberts	8	10/9-11/27
The Calhouns 2	Nora Roberts	6	3/6-4/10
Going Home	Nora Roberts	6	12/11-1/15/06
Ransom	Danielle Steel	5	2/6-3/13
Blowout	Catherine Coulter	5	3/6-4/3
Divine Evil	Nora Roberts	5	3/13-4/3, 4/17
The Nosy Neighbor	Fern Michaels	5	6/5-7/3
Night Tales	Nora Roberts	5	7/10-8/7
Night Tales 2	Nora Roberts	5	8/7-9/4
Night Tales 3	Nora Roberts	5	9/11-10/9

Echoes	Danielle Steel	5	10/9-11/6
The Calhouns	Nora Roberts	4	1/9-1/30
Dance with Me	Luanne Rice	4	1/9-1/30
Crown Jewel	Fern Michaels	4	1/9-1/30
Visions in Death	J.D. Robb	4	2/6-2/27
Love Overboard	Janet Evanovich	4	2/6-2/27
Picture Perfect	Fern Michaels	4	2/13-3/6
Murder List	Julie Garwood	4	3/13-4/3
The Paid Companion	Amanda Quick	4	4/10-5/1
A Loving Scoundrel	Johanna Lindsey	4	5/8-5/29
Summer's Child	Luanne Rice	4	6/12-7/3
Second Chance	Danielle Steel	4	6/12-7/3
The Summer I Dared	Barbara Delinsky	4	7/10-7/31
Payback	Fern Michaels	4	9/11-10/2
50 Harbor Street	Debbie Macomber	4	9/11-10/2
Survivor in Death	J.D. Robb	4	9/11-10/2
Manhunt	Janet Evanovich	4	12/11-1/1/06
Full Bloom	Janet Evanovich	3	4/17-5/1
The Shop on Blossom Street	Debbie Macomber	3	5/15-5/29
It's in His Kiss	Julia Quinn	3	7/10-7/24
A Fine Passion	Stephanie Laurens	3	9/11-9/25
Metro Girl	Janet Evanovich	3	10/16-10/30
Seize the Night	Sherrilyn Kenyon	2	1/9-1/16
Wait Until Midnight	Amanda Quick	2	2/6, 2/20
Almost a Bride	Jane Feather	2	4/10, 4/24
Ghost Walk	Heather Graham	2	10/9, 10/23
Family Blessings	Fern Michaels	2	11/6-11/13
Reunion	Nora Roberts	1	1/2
My Sunshine	Catherine Anderson	1	1/30
Dark Secret	Christine Feehan	1	2/13
When We Meet Again	Victoria Alexander	1	6/5
The Color of Death	Elizabeth Lowell	1	6/5
Oceans of Fire	Christine Feehan	1	6/12
Rules of Play	Nora Roberts	1	6/19
Sins of the Night	Sherrilyn Kenyon	1	7/10
Back to the Bedroom	Janet Evanovich	1	8/14
Night Game	Christine Feehan	1	11/13

2006

Title	Author	Number of Weeks on List	Dates On List
Morrigan's Cross	Nora Roberts	10	9/10-10/29
Blue Smoke	Nora Roberts	8	6/11-7/30
Dance of the Gods	Nora Roberts	8	10/15-12/3
Valley of Silence	Nora Roberts	6	11/12-12/17
Impossible	Danielle Steel	5	2/12-3/12
A Good Yarn	Debbie Macomber	5	5/7-6/4
Born to be Wild	Catherine Coulter	5	8/6-9/3
Dangerous	Nora Roberts	5	8/6-9/3
Dream Makers	Nora Roberts	5	10/8-11/5
Toxic Bachelors	Danielle Steel	5	10/8-11/5
Vendetta	Fern Michaels	4	1/8-1/29
Carolina Isle	Jude Deveraux	4	1/8-1/29
Cordina's Royal Family	Nora Roberts	4	2/12-3/5
Origin in Death	J.D. Robb	4	2/12-3/5
Pretty Woman	Fern Michaels	4	3/12-4/2

Devil in Winter	Lisa Kleypas	4	3/12-4/2
Time and Again	Nora Roberts	4	4/16-5/7
Full Scoop	Janet Evanovich	4	4/16-5/7
The Jury	Fern Michaels	4	6/11-7/2
Cordina's Royal Family 2	Nora Roberts	4	6/11-7/2
Miracle	Danielle Steel	4	6/11-7/2
On the Way to the Wedding	Julia Quinn	4	7/9-7/30
Smitten	Janet Evanovich	4	8/6-8/27
6 Rainier Drive	Debbie Macomber	4	9/10-9/30
To Distraction	Stephanie Laurens	4	9/10-9/30
Thanksgiving	Janet Evanovich	4	11/12-12/3
Crazy In Love	Luanne Rice	3	2/12, 2/26-3/5
Dark Demon	Christine Feehan	3	4/9-4/23
Marriage Most Scandalous	Johanna Lindsey	3	4/30-5/14
Summer of Roses	Luanne Rice	3	6/11-6/25
Memory in Death	J.D. Robb	3	7/9-7/23
Scandal in Spring	Lisa Kleypas	3	8/6-8/20
Sweet Revenge	Fern Michaels	3	10/8-10/22
Glad Tidings	Debbie Macomber	3	11/5, 11/19-26
Micah	Laurel K. Hamilton	2	3/12-3/19
Bump in the Night	J.D. Robb et al	2	4/9-4/16
Every Breath You Take	Judith McNaught	2	10/8, 10/29
Rebellion	Nora Roberts	2	12/10, 12/24
Ready for Love	Debbie Macomber	2	12/10-12/17
Unleash the Night	Sherrilyn Kenyon	1	1/8
Dangerous Tides	Christine Feehan	1	7/9
Dark Dreamers	Christine Feehan	1	9/17

2007

Title	Author	Number of Weeks on List	Dates On List
Point Blank	Catherine Coulter	5	1/14-2/11
Susannah's Garden	Debbie Macomber	5	5/6-6/3
74 Seaside Avenue	Debbie Macomber	5	9/9-10/7
H.R.H.	Danielle Steel	5	10/7-11/4
Free Fall	Fern Michaels	5	10/7-11/4
The Gift	Nora Roberts	5	10/7-11/4
Wife for Hire	Janet Evanovich	5	11/11-12/9
Slow Burn	Julie Garwood	4	1/7-1/28
Sun Kissed	Catherine Anderson	4	1/14-2/4
Lethal Justice	Fern Michaels	4	1/14-2/4
Irish Dreams	Nora Roberts	4	2/11-3/4
The House	Danielle Steel	4	2/11-3/4
Morning Comes Softly	Debbie Macomber	4	3/11-4/1
McKetrick's Pride	Linda Lael Miller	4	3/11-4/1
Hot Stuff	Janet Evanovich	4	4/15-5/6
Angels Fall	Nora Roberts	4	6/10-7/1
The Secret Diaries of Miss Miranda Cheever	Julia Quinn	4	7/8-7/29
Beyond Seduction	Stephanie Laurens	4	9/9-9/30
Innocent in Death	J.D. Robb	4	9/9-9/30
Mine Till Midnight	Lisa Kleypas	4	10/14-11/4
McKetrick's Luck	Linda Lael Miller	3	2/11-2/25
The Dream-Hunter	Sherrilyn Kenyon	3	2/18-3/4
Deadly Game	Christine Feehan	3	3/11-3/25
McKetrick's Heart	Linda Lael Miller	3	4/8-4/22

Safe Harbor	Christine Feehan	3	7/8-7/22
Country Brides	Debbie Macomber	3	7/8-7/22
Dockside	Susan Wiggs	3	8/5-8/19
MacGregor Brides	Nora Roberts	3	8/5-8/19
Lover Unbound	JR Ward	3	9/16-9/30
Dead of Night	J.D. Robb et al	3	11/11-11/25
Blood Brothers	Nora Roberts	3	12/16-12/30
The Winter Lodge	Susan Wiggs	2	2/11, 2/25
Causing Havoc	Lori Foster	2	2/18-2/25
Hey, Good Looking	Fern Michaels	2	3/25-4/1
Second Sight	Amanda Quick	2	4/8-4/15
Born in Death	J.D. Robb	2	5/6, 5/20
Dakota Born	Debbie Macomber	2	8/5-8/12
Silver Master	Jayne Castle	2	9/9-9/16
The Séance	Heather Graham	2	10/7-10/14
Upon the Midnight Clear	Sherrilyn Kenyon	2	11/11-11/18
What Price Love?	Stephanie Laurens	1	2/11
Table for Two	Nora Roberts	1	3/11
Simply Love	Mary Balogh	1	3/11
Lover Revealed	JR Ward	1	3/18
A Wicked Gentleman	Jane Feather	1	4/1
Captive of My Desires	Johanna Lindsey	1	4/29
The Man From Stone Creek	Linda Lael Miller	1	6/10
Never Deceive a Duke	Liz Carlyle	1	8/5
Touch of Darkness	Christina Dodd	1	8/19
The Marriage Game	Fern Michaels	1	11/4
The Taste of Innocence	Stephanie Laurens	1	11/11
The Dangers of Deceiving A Viscount	Julia London	1	11/11
Holy Smokes	Katie MacAlister	1	11/18

2008

Title	Author	Number of Weeks on List	Dates On List
The Hollow	Nora Roberts	7	5/18-6/29
Lean Mean Thirteen	Janet Evanovich	6	6/29-8/3
Blood Brothers	Nora Roberts	5	1/6-1/27, 2/10
Sisters	Danielle Steel	5	2/10-3/9
Naughty Neighbor	Janet Evanovich	5	3/9-4/6
High Noon	Nora Roberts	5	6/8-7/6
Double Take	Catherine Coulter	5	7/6-8/3
8 Sandpiper Way	Debbie Macomber	5	9/7-10/5
Morning Light	Catherine Anderson	4	1/13-2/3
Plum Lovin'	Janet Evanovich	4	1/20-2/10
Snowfall at Willow Lake	Susan Wiggs	4	2/10-3/2
The Lost Duke of Wyndham	Julia Quinn	4	6/8-6/29
Cry Wolf	Patricia Briggs	4	8/10-8/31
The Manning Brides	Debbie Macomber	4	8/10-8/31
First Impressions	Nora Roberts	4	10/12-11/9
Foul Play	Janet Evanovich	4	11/9-11/30
Shadow Dance	Julie Garwood	3	1/13-1/27
Dream Chaser	Sherrilyn Kenyon	3	2/17-3/2
White Lies	Jayne Ann Krentz	3	2/17-3/2
Predatory Game	Christine Feehan	3	3/9-3/23
Hokus Pokus	Fern Michaels	3	4/6-4/13, 4/27
The River Knows	Amanda Quick	3	4/6-4/13, 4/27

Back on Blossom Street	Debbie Macomber	3	4/13-4/27
Creation in Death	J.D. Robb	3	4/13-4/27
Not Another Bad Date	Rachel Gibson	3	6/8-6/22
Lover Enshrined	J.R. Ward	3	6/15-6/29
Return to Summerhouse	Jude Devereaux	3	6/29-7/6, 7/20
The MacGregor Grooms	Nora Roberts	3	7/6-7/20
Someday Soon	Debbie Macomber	3	7/13-7/27
Turbulent Sea	Christine Feehan	3	8/10-8/24
Strangers in Death	J.D. Robb	3	8/17-8/31
Mr. Cavendish, I Presume	Julia Quinn	3	10/12-10/26
Small Town Christmas	Debbie Macomber	3	11/9-11/23
One Silent Night	Sherrilyn Kenyon	3	11/16-11/30
Treasures	Nora Roberts	2	2/10, 2/24
Vampires are Forever	Lynsay Sands	2	2/10-2/17
Hard to Handle	Lori Foster	2	2/17-2/24
Dark Needs at Night's Edge	Kresley Cole	2	5/4-5/11
The Darkest Night	Gena Showalter	2	5/11, 5/25
Natural Born Charmer	Susan Elizabeth Phillips	2	5/18-5/25
Bungalow 2	Danielle Steel	2	6/1-6/8
Fast Track	Fern Michaels	2	7/6-7/13
Never Romance a Rake	Liz Carlyle	2	8/3-8/10
Into the Flame	Christina Dodd	2	8/17-8/24
The Edge of Desire	Stephanie Laurens	2	9/7-9/14
Dark Light	Jayne Castle	2	9/7-9/14
Seduce Me at Sunrise	Lisa Kleypas	2	10/12-10/19
Collateral Damage	Fern Michaels	2	10/12-10/19
Amazing Grace	Danielle Steel	2	10/19-10/26
Manning Sisters	Debbie Macomber	1	1/27
Dawn's Awakening	Lora Leigh	1	2/17
Let Sleeping Rogues Lie	Sabrina Jeffries	1	3/2
Vampire, Interrupted	Lynsay Sands	1	3/9
The Perfect Wife	Victoria Alexander	1	3/16
Midnight Rising	Lara Adrian	1	4/6
To Seduce a Bride	Nicole Jordon	1	4/6
A Lady's Secret	Jo Beverley	1	4/27
One Foot in the Grave	Jeaniene Frost	1	5/11
The Devil Who Tamed Her	Johanna Lindsay	1	5/18
Playing with Fire	Katie McAlister	1	5/18
Innocent as Sin	Elizabeth Lowell	1	5/25
Dark Desires After Dusk	Kresley Cole	1	6/1
Always Dakota	Debbie Macomber	1	6/8
Waiting for Nick & Considering Kate	Nora Roberts	1	6/8
Into the Shadow	Christina Dodd	1	7/13
The Book of Scandal	Julia London	1	8/31
Wild Card	Lora Leigh	1	9/7
The Rogue Hunter	Lynsay Sands	1	10/12
The Rustler	Linda Lael Miller	1	10/12
Mercury's War	Lora Leigh	1	10/19
Deadly Harvest	Heather Graham	1	11/9

2009

Title	Author	Number of Weeks on List	Dates On List
Lavender Morning	Jude Devereaux	6	11/29-1/3/10
Montana Creeds: Logan	Linda Lael Miller	5	2/8-3/8

The Grand Finale	Janet Evanovich	5	3/8-4/5
Montana Creeds: Dylan	Linda Lael Miller	5	3/8-4/5
Then Comes Seduction	Mary Balogh	5	4/5-5/3
Tribute	Nora Roberts	5	4/12-5/10
Fearless Fourteen	Janet Evanovich	5	7/5-8/2
Smoke Screen	Sandra Brown	5	8/2-8/31
92 Pacific Boulevard	Debbie Macomber	5	9/6-10/4
A Good Woman	Danielle Steel	5	9/6-10/4
Hunting Ground	Patricia Briggs	5	9/6-10/4
Angels at Christmas	Debbie Macomber	5	11/8-12/6
The Lost	J.D. Robb et al	5	12/6/09-1/3/10
Worth the Risk	Nora Roberts	5	12/6/09-1/3/10
Final Justice	Fern Michaels	4	1/11-2/1
Glitter Baby	Susan Elizabeth Phillips	4	1/11-2/1
Shadow Music	Julie Garwood	4	1/11-2/1
Married In Seattle	Debbie Macomber	4	1/11-2/8
Plum Lucky	Janet Evanovich	4	1/18-2/8
Fireside	Susan Wiggs	4	2/8-3/1
Honor Thyself	Danielle Steel	4	2/8-3/1
Secrets	Jude Deveraux	4	3/1-3/22
First Comes Marriage	Mary Balogh	4	3/8-3/29
Temptation Ridge	Robyn Carr	4	3/8-3/29
Danger in a Red Dress	Christina Dodd	4	3/15-4/5
Montana Creeds: Tyler	Linda Lael Miller	4	4/12-5/3
Twenty Wishes	Debbie Macomber	4	4/12-5/3
Burning Wild	Christine Feehan	4	5/10-5/31
At Last Comes Love	Mary Balogh	4	5/10-5/31
Just Breathe	Susan Wiggs	4	5/10-5/31
Right Next Door	Debbie Macomber	4	6/7-6/28
Harbor Lights	Sherryl Woods	4	6/7-6/28
Under the Radar	Fern Michaels	4	6/7-6/28
Hidden Curents	Christine Feehan	4	7/12-8/2
Tailspin	Catherine Coulter	4	7/12-8/2
What Happens in London	Julia Quinn	4	7/12-8/2
Promises in Death	J.D. Robb	4	8/9-8/31
Born of Night	Sherrilyn Kenyon	4	10/11-11/1
Covet	JR Ward	4	10/11-11/1
Windfall	Nora Roberts	4	10/11-11/1
Fairy Tale Weddings	Debbie Macomber	4	12/6-12/27
Mrs. Miracle	Debbie Macomber	4	12/13/09-1/3/10
Murder Game	Christine Feehan	3	1/11-1/25
Star Bright	Catherine Anderson	3	1/18-2/1
Devil of the Highlands	Lynsay Sands	3	2/8-2/22
My Man, Michael	Lori Foster	3	2/8-2/22
Sizzle and Burn	Jayne Ann Krentz	3	2/8-2/22
Dream Warrior	Sherrilyn Kenyon	3	2/15-3/1
Coyote's Mate	Lora Leigh	3	2/15-3/1
Maverick	Lora Leigh	3	3/15-3/29
The Immortal Hunter	Lynsay Sands	3	4/12-4/26
The Inn at Eagle Point	Sherryl Woods	3	4/12-4/26
Up Close and Personal	Fern Michaels	3	4/19-5/3
Flowers on Main	Sherryl Woods	3	5/10-5/24
True Love and Other Disasters	Rachel Gibson	3	5/10-5/24
Lip Service	Susan Mallery	3	6/7-6/21
Salvation in Death	J.D. Robb	3	6/14-6/28
Rogue	Danielle Steel	3	6/21-7/5

Straight From the Hip	Susan Mallery	3	7/12-7/26
Mastered by Love	Stephanie Laurens	3	8/9-8/23
Wyoming Brides	Debbie Macomber	3	8/9-8/23
Heat Seeker	Lora Leigh	3	9/13-9/27
Storm of Shadows	Christina Dodd	3	9/13-9/27
Tempt Me at Twilight	Lisa Kleypas	3	10/4-10/18
Razor Sharp	Fern Michaels	3	10/11-10/25
The Renegade Hunter	Lynsay Sands	3	10/11-10/25
Hot on Her Heels	Susan Mallery	3	11/8-11/22
The Untamed Bride	Stephanie Laurens	3	11/8-11/22
Born of Fire	Sherrilyn Kenyon	3	11/15-11/29
Snow Angels	Fern Michaels et al	3	11/15-11/29
White Witch, Black Curse	Kim Harrison	3	12/6-12/20
Born of Ice	Sherrilyn Kenyon	3	12/13-12/27
At Grave's End	Jeaniene Frost	2	1/11-1/18
Kiss of a Demon King	Kresley Cole	2	2/1-2/8
Second Chance Pass	Robyn Carr	2	2/8-2/15
Where the Heart Leads	Stephanie Laurens	2	2/8-2/15
Tempted All Night	Liz Carlyle	2	3/1-3/8
The Vampire's Bride	Gena Showalter	2	3/8-3/15
Deadly Desire	Keri Arthur	2	4/5-4/12
Acheron	Sherrilyn Kenyon	2	4/12-4/19
Secret Life of a Vampire	Kerrelyn Sparks	2	4/12-4/19
The Secret Wedding	Jo Beverley	2	4/19-4/26
The Third Circle	Amanda Quick	2	4/26-5/3
No Choice But Seduction	Johanna Lindsey	2	5/3-5/10
The Law of Love	Nora Roberts	2	5/17-5/24
This Duchess of Mine	Eloisa James	2	6/7-6/14
A Duke of Her Own	Eloisa James	2	8/9-8/16
Destined for an Early Grave	Jeaniene Frost	2	8/9-8/16
The Bridegroom	Linda Lael Miller	2	8/9-8/16
Bengal's Heart	Lora Leigh	2	8/16-8/23
Storm of Visions	Christina Dodd	2	8/16-8/23
Obsidian Prey	Jayne Castle	2	9/6-9/13
Pleasure	Jacquelyn Frank	2	9/6-9/13
The Darkest Whisper	Gena Showalter	2	9/6-9/13
Hot for the Holidays	Lora Leigh et al	2	10/11-10/18
Temptation and Surrender	Stephanie Laurens	2	10/11-10/18
That Holiday Feeling	Debbie Macomber et al	2	10/11, 10/25
Bound to Shadows	Keri Arthur	2	11/8-11/15
Me and My Shadow	Katie MacAlister	2	11/15-11/22
A Precious Jewel	Mary Balogh	2	12/6-12/13
Lover Avenged	JR Ward	2	12/6-12/13
Ecstasy	Jacquelyn Frank	1	1/11
Veil of Midnight	Lara Adrian	1	1/11
Whisper No Lies	Cindy Gerard	1	1/11
The Courtship Dance	Candace Camp	1	2/8
Shattered	JoAnn Ross	1	2/15
Bride of a Wicked Scotsman	Samantha James	1	3/8
Sunset Bay	Susan Mallery	1	3/8
To Romance a Charming Rogue	Nicole Jordan	1	3/8
Angels' Blood	Nalini Singh	1	3/15
A Husband's Wicked Ways	Jane Feather	1	4/5
Magic Strikes	Ilona Andrews	1	4/12
Paradise Valley	Robyn Carr	1	4/12
You're So Vein	Christine Warren	1	4/12

Highland Scandal	Julia London	1	5/3
Forbidden Nights with a Vampire	Kerrellyn Sparks	1	5/10
Til There Was You	Lynn Kurland	1	5/10
Crouching Vampire, Hidden Fang	Katie MacAlister	1	5/17
Ashes of Midnight	Lara Adrian	1	6/7
Blood Noir	Laurel K. Hamilton	1	6/7
Comanche Heart	Catherine Anderson	1	6/14
Wed Him Before You Bed Him	Sabrina Jeffries	1	7/5
Bending the Rules	Susan Andersen	1	7/12
Rapture	Jacquelyn Frank	1	7/12
Branded by Fire	Nalini Singh	1	7/19
A Wicked Lord at the Wedding	Jillian Hunter	1	10/4
Wicked All Day	Liz Carlyle	1	10/4
Big Bad Wolf	Christine Warren	1	10/11
Dark Curse	Christine Feehan	1	10/11
Feel the Heat	Cindy Gerard	1	10/11
Unhallowed Ground	Heather Graham	1	10/11
Shadowlight	Lynn Viehl	1	10/18
A Courtesan's Scandal	Julia London	1	11/1
The Wicked Duke Takes a Wife	Jillian Hunter	1	11/8
To Desire a Devil	Elizabeth Hoyt	1	11/8
While My Sister Sleeps	Barbara Delinsky	1	11/8
Blaze of Memory	Nalini Singh	1	11/15

2010

Title	Author	Number of Weeks on List	Dates On List
Black Hills	Nora Roberts	8	6/6-7/18, 8/1
Christmas in Cedar Cove	Debbie Macomber	8	11/7-12/26
Finger-Lickin' Fifteen	Janet Evanovich	7	7/4-8/1, 8/22-8/29
Plum Spooky	Janet Evanovich	6	1/10-2/14
Smash Cut	Sandra Brown	6	8/1-9/5
Southern Lights	Danielle Steel	6	11/7-12/5, 12/26
O'Hurley's Return	Nora Roberts	6	12/5/10-1/9/11
The Sooner the Better	Debbie Macomber	6	12/5/10-1/9/11
The Other Side	J.D. Robb et al	5	12/12/10-1/9/11
One Day at a Time	Danielle Steel	5	2/14-3/7, 3/28
Moonlight Road	Robyn Carr	5	2/28-3/28
Hot Rocks	Nora Roberts	5	2/7-3/7
Big Jack	J.D. Robb	5	3/7-4/4
Married by Morning	Lisa Kleypas	5	6/6-7/4
Orchard Valley Grooms	Debbie Macomber	5	6/6-7/4
Knockout	Catherine Coulter	5	7/11-8/8
Fantasy in Death	J.D. Robb	5	8/8-9/5
Water Bound	Christine Feehan	5	8/8-9/5
1022 Evergreen Place	Debbie Macomber	5	9/12-10/10
Street Game	Christine Feehan	4	1/10-1/31
Early Dawn	Catherine Anderson	4	1/10-1/31
Fire and Ice	Julie Garwood	4	1/10-1/31
The Man You'll Marry	Debbie Macomber	4	1/10-1/31
Vanishing Act	Fern Michaels	4	1/10-1/31
Angel's Peak	Robyn Carr	4	2/7-2/28
Tate	Linda Lael Miller	4	2/7-2/28
The Summer Hideaway	Susan Wiggs	4	3/7-3/21, 4/7
Deadly Deals	Fern Michaels	4	4/11-5/2

Hero at Large	Janet Evanovich	4	4/11-5/2
Home in Carolina	Sherryl Woods	4	4/11-5/2
Kindred in Death	J.D. Robb	4	4/11-5/2
Summer on Blossom Street	Debbie Macomber	4	5/9-5/30
Sweet Tea at Sunrise	Sherryl Woods	4	5/9-5/30
Garrett	Linda Lael Miller	4	6/6-6/27
Honeysuckle Summer	Sherryl Woods	4	6/6-6/27
Ten Things I Love About You	Julia Quinn	4	6/6-6/27
Austin	Linda Lael Miller	4	7/11-8/1
Game Over	Fern Michaels	4	7/11-8/1
Love in the Afternoon	Lisa Kleypas	4	7/11-8/1
Days of Gold	Jude Deveraux	4	8/8-8/29
Midnight Crystal	Jayne Castle	4	9/12-10/3
Cross Roads	Fern Michaels	4	10/10-10/31
Crave	JR Ward	4	10/17-11/7
Holiday Magic	Fern Michaels et al	4	11/14-12/5
The Christmas Brides	Linda Lael Miller	4	11/7-11/28
Lover Mine	JR Ward	4	12/12/10-1/2/11
Shades of Midnight	Lara Adrian	3	1/10-1/24
Back in Black	Lori Foster	3	2/14-2/28
Bone Crossed	Patricia Briggs	3	2/7-2/21
The Cinderella Deal	Jennifer Crusie	3	2/7-2/21
Black Jack	Lora Leigh	3	3/14-3/28
In Bed with the Duke	Christina Dodd	3	3/14-3/28
The Vampire and the Virgin	Kerrellyn Sparks	3	3/21-4/4
Bad Moon Rising	Sherrilyn Kenyon	3	4/11-4/25
Lion's Heat	Lora Leigh	3	4/18-5/2
Love in the Time of Dragons	Katie MacAlister	3	5/16-5/30
Wild Fire	Christine Feehan	3	5/9-5/23
Nothing But Trouble	Rachel Gibson	3	5/9-5/23
A Summer in Sonoma	Robyn Carr	3	7/11-7/25
Almost Perfect	Susan Mallery	3	7/11-7/25
The Brazen Bride	Stephanie Laurens	3	7/11-7/25
The Darkest Lie	Gena Showalter	3	7/11-7/25
Chains of Fire	Christina Dodd	3	9/10-10/3
Born to Bite	Lynsay Sands	3	9/12-9/26
Finding Perfect	Susan Mallery	3	9/12-9/26
Renegade	Lora Leigh	3	9/12-9/26
Dark Slayer	Christine Feehan	3	10/10-10/24
Taken by Midnight	Lara Adrian	3	10/10-10/24
Styx's Storm	Lora Leigh	3	10/17-10/31
Wolfsbane	Patricia Briggs	3	11/14-11/28
The Reckless Bride	Stephanie Laurens	3	11/7-11/21
Rainwater	Sandra Brown	3	12/12-12/26
Forbidden Falls	Robyn Carr	2	1/10-1/17
What I Did For Love	Susan Elizabeth Phillips	2	1/10-1/17
At the Duke's Pleasure	Tracy Anne Warren	2	1/24-1/31
Bitten By Cupid	Lynsay Sands	2	1/24-1/31
The Truth About Lord Stoneville	Sabrina Jeffries	2	1/31-2/7
Archangel's Kiss	Nalini Singh	2	2/14-2/21
First Drop of Crimson	Jeaniene Frost	2	2/21-2/28
Pursuit	Karen Robards	2	2/21-2/28
Pleasure of a Dark Prince	Kresley Cole	2	2/28-3/7
The Perfect Poison	Amanda Quick	2	4/11-4/18
The Secret Duke	Jo Beverley	2	4/11-4/18
Indigo Blue	Catherine Anderson	2	5/16-5/23

A Rogue of My Own	Johanna Lindsey	2	5/2-5/9
Magic Bleeds	Ilona Andrews	2	5/30-6/6
Chasing Perfect	Susan Mallery	2	5/9-5/16
Seducing an Angel	Mary Balogh	2	5/9-5/16
The Darkest Passion	Gena Showalter	2	6/6-6/13
Chains of Ice	Christina Dodd	2	7/18-7/25
Eternal Kiss of Darkness	Jeaniene Frost	2	8/8-8/15
Infamous	Suzanne Brockmann	2	8/8-8/15
Orchard Valley Brides	Debbie Macomber	2	8/8, 8/22
Burning Up	Susan Andersen	2	9/12-9/19
Ghost Moon	Heather Graham	2	9/12-9/19
Sins of the Flesh	Fern Michaels	2	9/26-10/3
Demon from the Dark	Kresley Cole	2	9/5-9/12
A Hellion in Her Bed	Sabrina Jeffries	2	10/3-10/10
Masques	Patricia Briggs	2	10/10-10/17
O'Hurley Born	Nora Roberts	2	10/24-10/31
Blood Trinity	Sherrilyn Kenyon	2	10/31-11/7
McKetrick's Choice	Linda Lael Miller	2	12/5-12/12
Return to Rose Cottage	Sherryl Woods	2	12/5-12/12
Hungry for You	Lynsay Sands	2	12/12-12/19
Hunting Julian	Jacquelyn Frank	1	1/10
Shattered	Joan Johnston	1	1/10
Taming the Highland Bride	Lynsay Sands	1	2/7
Twice as Hot	Gena Showalter	1	2/7
Ecstasy Unveiled	Larissa Ione	1	2/14
Dark Angel/Lord Carew's Bride	Mary Balogh	1	3/7
Provocative in Pearls	Madeline Hunter	1	3/7
The Hellion and the Highlander	Lynsay Sands	1	3/7
Born to Be Wild	Christine Warren	1	3/13
Smooth Talking Stranger	Lisa Kleypas	1	3/21
Silent Truth	Sherrilyn Kenyon	1	5/2
Into the Dark	Gena Showalter	1	5/9
Men of Danger	Lora Leigh et al	1	5/9
One Enchanted Evening	Lynn Kurland	1	5/23
Rule's Bride	Kat Martin	1	5/23
Risk No Secrets	Cindy Gerard	1	5/30
Moon Sworn	Keri Arthur	1	6/6
Skin Trade	Laurel K. Hamilton	1	6/6
Rushed to the Altar	Jane Feather	1	7/4
Bonds of Justice	Nalini Singh	1	7/18
In Other Worlds	Sherrilyn Kenyon	1	7/18
The Homecoming	JoAnn Ross	1	7/18
Black Magic	Cherry Adair	1	8/1
A Kiss at Midnight	Eloisa James	1	8/8
Ghost Night	Heather Graham	1	8/15
Sin Undone	Larissa Ione	1	9/5
Love Me If You Dare	Carly Phillips	1	9/12
The Devil Wears Plaid	Teresa Medeiros	1	9/12
Eat Prey Love	Kerrelyn Sparks	1	10/10
Dreamfever	Karen Marie Moning	1	11/7
Drink of Me	Jacquelyn Frank	1	11/7
Ecstasy in Darkness	Gena Showalter	1	11/7
Play of Passion	Nalini Singh	1	11/14
Prince Charming Doesn't Live Here	Christine Warren	1	11/14
Devoured by Darkness	Alexandra Ivy	1	12/12

No Place to Run Maya Banks 1 12/19

2011

Title	Author	Number of Weeks on List	Dates On List
The Search	Nora Roberts	11	5/1-7/3, 8/7
Smokin' Seventeen	Janet Evanovich	11	12/4/11-2/12/12
Sizzling Sixteen	Janet Evanovich	9	7/10-9/4
The Perfect Christmas	Debbie Macomber	9	11/13/11-1/8/12
1105 Yakima Street	Debbie Macomber	7	9/18-10/30
Wicked Appetite	Janet Evanovich	6	9/4-10/9
Legacy	Danielle Steel	6	10/16-11/13, 11/27
A Creed in Stone Creek	Linda Lael Miller	5	3/13-4/10
An Engagement in Seattle	Debbie Macomber	5	3/13-4/10
Big Girl	Danielle Steel	5	4/10-5/8
Hannah's List	Danielle Steel	5	5/15-6/12
Tough Customer	Sandra Brown	5	7/10-8/7
Family Ties	Danielle Steel	5	7/17-8/14
Out of the Rain	Debbie Macomber	5	8/14-9/11
Treachery in Death	J.D. Robb	5	8/14-9/11
Making Spirits Bright	Fern Michaels et al	5	11/13-12/11
Touched by Angels	Debbie Macomber	5	11/13-12/11
Learning to Love	Debbie Macomber	5	12/11/11-1/8/12
Black Magic Sanction	Kim Harrison	4	1/16-2/6
Déjà vu	Fern Michaels	4	1/16-2/6
Promise Canyon	Robyn Carr	4	1/16-2/6
Ruthless Game	Christine Feehan	4	1/16-2/6
The Lady Most Likely	Julia Quinn et al	4	1/16-2/6
The Scent of Jasmine	Jude Deveraux	4	1/16-2/6
Marrying Daisy Bellamy	Susan Wiggs	4	2/13-3/6
Here to Stay	Catherine Anderson	4	2/13-3/6
Silver Borne	Patricia Briggs	4	2/13-3/6
Wild Man Creek	Robyn Carr	4	2/13-3/6
Harvest Moon	Robyn Carr	4	3/13-4/3
Indulgence in Death	J.D. Robb	4	4/17-5/8
Moonlight Cove	Sherryl Woods	4	5/15-6/5
Savage Nature	Christine Feehan	4	5/15-6/5
Creed's Honor	Linda Lael Miller	4	6/19-7/10
Just Like Heaven	Julia Quinn	4	6/19-7/10
The Creed Legacy	Linda Lael Miller	4	7/17-8/7
Betrayal	Fern Michaels	4	7/17-8/7
Whiplash	Catherine Coulter	4	7/24-8/14
Viscount Breckenridge to the Rescue	Stephanie Laurens	4	9/18-10/9
Christmas at Timberwoods	Fern Michaels	4	10/16-11/6
Only His	Susan Mallory	4	10/16-11/6
Holiday in Stone Creek	Linda Lael Miller	4	11/13-12/4
Wyoming Tough	Diana Palmer	4	11/13-12/4
Quinn	Iris Johansen	4	12/4-12/25
Gabriella and Alexander	Nora Roberts	4	12/11/11-1/1/12
The MacGregors (Serena and Caine)	Nora Roberts	3	1/23-2/6
Sizzle	Julie Garwood	3	2/13-2/27
When Beauty Tamed the Beast	Eloisa James	3	2/13-2/27
An Unlikely Countess	Jo Beverley	3	3/20-4/3

Live Wire	Lora Leigh	3	3/20-4/3
Driftwood Cottage	Sherryl Woods	3	4/17-5/1
Home Free	Fern Michaels	3	4/17-5/1
Beach Lane	Sherryl Woods	3	6/19-7/3
Veil of Night	Linda Howard	3	7/17-7/31
Irish Hearts	Nora Roberts	3	7/24-8/7
Only Mine	Susan Mallery	3	8/14-8/28
Midnight Sins	Lora Leigh	3	8/21-9/4
High Country Bride	Linda Lael Miller	3	8/28-9/11
Canyons of Night	Jayne Castle	3	9/18-10/2
Envy	JR Ward	3	9/25-10/9
In Pursuit of Eliza Cynster	Stephanie Laurens	3	10/16-10/30
The Unquiet	J.D. Robb et al	3	10/16-10/30
Western Skies	Nora Roberts	3	10/23-11/6
Bring Me Home for Christmas	Robyn Carr	3	11/13-11/27
The Guardian	Sherrilyn Kenyon	3	11/20-12/4
How to Woo a Reluctant Lady	Sabrina Jeffries	2	2/6-2/13
A Secret Affair	Mary Balogh	2	2/13-2/20
Dreams of a Dark Warrior	Kresley Cole	2	3/6-3/13
The Heiress	Lynsay Sands	2	3/13-3/20
This Side of the Grave	Jeaniene Frost	2	3/13-3/20
Hidden Away	Maya Banks	2	3/20-3/27
Vampire Mine	Kerrelyn Sparks	2	4/17-4/24
The Darkest Secret	Gena Showalter	2	4/17-4/24
Navarro's Promise	Lora Leigh	2	4/24-5/1
That Perfect Someone	Johanna Lindsey	2	5/8-5/15
Any Man of Mine	Rachel Gibson	2	5/15-5/22
Magic Slays	Ilona Andrews	2	6/19-6/26
The Reluctant Vampire	Lynsay Sands	2	6/19-6/26
Scarlet Nights	Jude Deveraux	2	6/26-7/3
Perfect Harmony	Nora Roberts	2	7/3-7/10
Deeper Than Midnight	Lara Adrian	2	7/17-7/24
Savor the Danger	Lori Foster	2	7/17-7/24
One Summer	JoAnn Ross	2	7/24-7/31
Secrets of Bella Terra	Christina Dodd	2	8/21-8/28
Love, Come to Me	Lisa Kleypas	2	9/18-9/25
Only Yours	Susan Mallery	2	9/18, 10/2
The Darkest Surrender	Gena Showalter	2	10/16-10/23
Lover Unleashed	JR Ward	2	11/20-11/27
The Valcourt Heiress	Catherine Coulter	2	11/27-12/4
True Blue and Carrera's Bride	Diana Palmer	2	12/11-12/18
Lawe's Justice	Lora Leigh	2	12/25/11-1/1/12
Master of Smoke	Angela Knight	1	1/23
The McKettrick Legend	Linda Lael Miller	1	1/23
Against the Fire	Kat Martin	1	2/13
Archangel's Consort	Nalini Singh	1	2/13
Dragon Warrior	Janet Chapman	1	2/13
The MacGregors (Alan and Grant)	Nora Roberts	1	3/6
Against the Law	Kat Martin	1	3/13
To Desire a Wicked Duke	Nicole Jordan	1	3/13
An Affair Without End	Candace Camp	1	4/10
Seduce Me in Dreams	Jacquelyn Frank	1	4/10
Burning Lamp	Amanda Quick	1	4/17
Eternal Rider	Larissa Ione	1	4/17
Taken by the Prince	Christina Dodd	1	4/24
Shattered	Karen Robards	1	5/1

Dangerous in Diamonds	Madeline Hunter	1	5/15
When You Dare	Lori Foster	1	5/15
One Magic Moment	Lynn Kurland	1	5/22
Trace of Fever	Lori Foster	1	6/19
Hunt the Moon	Karen Chance	1	6/26
A Wedding Wager	Jane Feather	1	7/10
Heart of Evil	Heather Graham	1	7/17
With No Remorse	Cindy Gerard	1	8/7
Playing Dirty	Susan Andersen	1	8/14
Sacred Evil	Heather Graham	1	8/14
The Bride Wore Scarlet	Liz Carlyle	1	8/14
Nelson's Brand	Diana Palmer et al	1	8/21
Dark Taste of Rapture	Gena Showalter	1	9/11
One Grave at a Time	Jeaniene Frost	1	9/18
Shotgun Bride	Linda Lael Miller	1	9/18
The Evil Inside	Heather Graham	1	9/18
Archangel's Blade	Nalini Singh	1	9/25
Revenge at Bella Terra	Christina Dodd	1	9/25
Alternant	Sherrilyn Kenyon	1	10/16
Sexiest Vampire Alive	Kerrellyn Sparks	1	10/16
Dark Peril	Christine Feehan	1	10/23
Adam: The Nightwalkers	Jacquelyn Frank	1	11/13
Against the Storm	Kat Martin	1	11/13
Never Love a Highlander	Maya Banks	1	11/13
Because You're Mine	Lisa Kleypas	1	11/20
Highlander for the Holidays	Janet Chapman	1	11/20
Secondhand Bride	Linda Lael Miller	1	11/20
The Chesapeake Shores	Sherryl Woods	1	11/20
Christmas			
The Famous Heroine	Mary Balogh	1	11/20
Fate's Edge	Ilona Andrews	1	12/11
Immortal Rider	Larissa Ione	1	12/11
To Wed a Wild Lord	Sabrina Jeffries	1	12/11

2012

Title	Author	Number of Weeks on List	Dates On List
Explosive Eighteen	Janet Evanovich	9	6/3-8/12
Happy Birthday	Danielle Steel	9	8/12-10/7
Hotel Vendome	Danielle Steel	9	11/18/12-1/13/13
44 Charles Street	Danielle Steel	8	2/19-4/15
Chasing Fire	Nora Roberts	8	4/22-6/10
Lethal	Sandra Brown	8	8/5-9/9, 9/23-9/30
1225 Christmas Tree Lane	Debbie Macomber	7	11/11-12/9, 12/23, 1/6/13
Celebrity in Death	J.D. Robb	6	8/26-9/23, 10/7
Wicked Business	Janet Evanovich	6	12/9/12-1/13/13
Hidden Summit	Robyn Carr	5	1/15-2/12
Moonlight in the Morning	Jude Deveraux	5	1/15-2/12
You...Again	Danielle Steel	5	1/15-2/12
Split Second	Catherine Coulter	5	7/15-8/12
Big Sky Mountain	Linda Lael Miller	5	8/19-9/16
My Kind of Christmas	Robyn Carr	5	11/11-12/9
Glad Tidings	Debbie Macomber	5	12/9/12-1/6/13
Spirit Bound	Christine Feehan	4	1/15-2/5

Mr. and Mrs. Anonymous	Fern Michaels	4	1/22-2/12
On Lavender Lane	JoAnn Ross	4	1/22-2/12
The Capture of the Earl of Glencrae	Stephanie Laurens	4	2/19-3/11
Lucky Penny	Catherine Anderson	4	2/19-3/11
The Summer Garden	Sherrilyn Kenyon	4	2/19-3/11
Redwood Bend	Robyn Carr	4	3/18-4/8
New York to Dallas	J.D. Robb	4	3/25-4/15
A Turn in the Road	Debbie Macomber	4	4/15-5/6
Sunrise Point	Robyn Carr	4	5/13-6/3
Vision in White	Nora Roberts	4	5/20-6/10
Big Sky Country	Linda Lael Miller	4	6/17-7/8
A Night Like This	Julia Quinn	4	6/17-7/8
The Unexpected Husband	Debbie Macomber	4	6/17-7/8
Midnight Promises	Sherryl Woods	4	7/15-8/5
Family Affair	Debbie Macomber	4	7/22-8/12
Samurai Game	Christine Feehan	4	7/22-8/12
Savor the Moment	Nora Roberts	4	7/22-8/12
Catching Fireflies	Sherryl Woods	4	8/19-9/9
Happy Ever After	Nora Roberts	4	8/19-9/9
Love in a Nutshell	Janet Evanovich	4	8/19-9/9
A Day Away	Nora Roberts	4	10/21-11/11
Thanksgiving Prayer	Debbie Macomber	4	10/21-11/11
A Lawman's Christmas	Linda Lael Miller	4	11/11-12/2
First Impressions	Nora Roberts	4	11/11-12/2
Wyoming Fierce	Diana Palmer	4	11/11-12/2
A Winter Wonderland	Fern Michaels et al	4	11/18-12/9
Bennett and Camilla	Nora Roberts	3	2/26-3/11
The Darkest Seduction	Gena Showalter	3	3/18-4/1
Southern Comfort	Fern Michaels	3	6/3-6/17
Bed of Roses	Nora Roberts	3	6/24-7/8
The Ideal Man	Julie Garwood	3	6/24-7/8
Summer Nights	Susan Mallery	3	7/15-7/22, 8/5
All Summer Long	Susan Mallery	3	8/19-9/2
Stygian's Honor	Lora Leigh	3	8/26-9/9
The Ugly Duchess	Eloisa James	3	9/16-9/30
I Left My Heart	Debbie Macomber	3	9/16, 9/30, 10/14
The Lost Night	Jayne Castle	3	9/23-10/7
The Lady Risks All	Stephanie Laurens	3	10/14-10/28
I'll Be Home for Christmas	Fern Michaels	3	10/28-11/11
A Lady Never Surrenders	Sabrina Jeffries	2	2/12-2/19
Lair of the Lion	Christine Feehan	2	2/19-2/26
Deadly Sins	Lora Leigh	2	3/18-3/25
A Perfect Storm	Lori Foster	2	4/15-4/22
When Passion Rules	Johanna Lindsey	2	5/6, 5/20
Under a Vampire Moon	Lynsay Sands	2	5/13-5/20
Rescue Me	Rachel Gibson	2	6/17-6/24
Summer Days	Susan Mallery	2	6/17-6/24
Wicked Nights	Gena Showalter	2	7/15-7/22
Echoes at Dawn	Maya Banks	2	7/22-7/29
Moonshell Beach	JoAnn Ross	2	7/22-7/29
An Unsuitable Bride	Jane Feather	2	8/12-8/19
How to Capture a Countess	Karen Hawkins	2	10/7-10/14
Run the Risk	Lori Foster	2	10/14-10/21
Dark Nights	Christine Feehan	2	11/18-11/25
Shadow's Claim	Kresley Cole	2	12/16-12/23

The Duke is Mine	Eloisa James	1	1/15
Whispers in the Dark	Maya Banks	1	1/22
Last Man Standing	Cindy Gerard	1	2/19
River Marked	Patricia Briggs	1	2/19
Against the Night	Kat Martin	1	3/18
Angel's Flight	Nalini Singh	1	3/18
Spellbound Falls	Janet Chapman	1	3/18
The Husband Hunt	Lynsay Sands	1	3/18
Wanted: Undead or Alive	Kerrelyn Sparks	1	4/15
Betrayal	Christina Dodd	1	4/22
Just Down the Road	Jodi Thomas	1	4/22
The Scoop	Fern Michaels	1	4/29
All for You	Lynn Kurland	1	5/13
Karma	Carly Phillips	1	5/20
Prey	Linda Howard	1	5/20
Coming Up Roses	Catherine Anderson	1	5/27
Lethal Rider	Larissa Ione	1	6/10
Lucky in Love	Jill Shalvis	1	6/10
Against the Sun	Kat Martin	1	6/17
Charmed by His Love	Janet Chapman	1	6/17
Heartwishes	Jude Deveraux	1	6/24
At Last	Jill Shalvis	1	7/15
Once Burned	Jeaniene Frost	1	7/15
The Unholy	Heather Graham	1	7/15
The MacGregor Brides	Nora Roberts	1	8/5
Forever and a Day	Jill Shalvis	1	8/19
Gunmetal Magic	Ilona Andrews	1	8/19
The Lady is a Vamp	Lynsay Sands	1	8/19
The Unspoken	Heather Graham	1	8/19
Wilder: The Chosen Ones	Christina Dodd	1	8/26
Blue Skies	Robyn Carr	1	9/16
Courting Carolina	Janet Chapman	1	9/16
Stranger in the Moonlight	Jude Deveraux	1	9/16
Where Azaleas Bloom	Sherryl Woods	1	9/16
Archangel's Storm	Nalini Singh	1	9/23
The Curse	Sherrilyn Kenyon	1	10/7
A Perfect Blood	Kim Harrison	1	10/14
Dark Predator	Christine Feehan	1	10/14
Never Seduce a Scot	Maya Banks	1	10/14
Fury's Kiss	Karen Chance	1	10/21
Lover Reborn	JR Ward	1	10/21
A Christmas Bride	Susan Mallery	1	11/11
A Cowboy for Christmas	Lori Wilde	1	11/18
Twelfth Night Secrets	Jane Feather	1	11/18
Rescue My Heart	Jill Shalvis	1	11/25
Rogue Rider	Larissa Ione	1	12/9
Secret Sins	Lora Leigh	1	12/16
Steel's Edge	Ilona Andrews	1	12/16
The Rancher and Heart of Stone	Diana Palmer	1	12/16
Wild About You	Kerrelyn Sparks	1	12/16

2013

Title	Author	Number of Weeks on List	Dates On List
Friends Forever	Danielle Steel	9	7/14-9/8
The Inn at Rose Harbor	Debbie Macomber	9	8/18-10/13

The Sins of the Mother	Danielle Steel	9	10/13-12/8
Low Pressure	Sandra Brown	8	8/18-10/6
Betrayal	Danielle Steel	7	2/17-3/30
Big Sky River	Linda Lael Miller	6	1/6-2/10
Backfire	Catherine Coulter	6	7/14-8/18
Angels at the Table	Debbie Macomber	6	11/10-12/15
Montana	Debbie Macomber	5	1/13-2/10
The Wanderer	Robyn Carr	5	4/14-5/12
Sand Castle Bay	Sherryl Woods	5	4/14-5/12
Delusion in Death	J.D. Robb	5	4/21-5/19
The Newcomer	Robyn Carr	5	7/14-8/11
Gotcha!	Fern Michaels	5	7/14-8/11
The Hero	Robyn Carr	5	9/15-10/13
Mirror, Mirror	J.D. Robb et al	5	10/13-11/10
Return to Sender	Fern Michaels	4	1/20-2/10
Sea Glass Winter	JoAnn Ross	4	1/20-2/10
Love in Plain Sight	Debbie Macomber	4	2/17-3/10
Return to Willow Lake	Susan Wiggs	4	3/17-4/7
And Then She Fell	Stephanie Laurens	4	4/14-5/5
Wind Chime Point	Sherryl Woods	4	5/19-6/9
Informed Risk	Robyn Carr	4	5/19-6/9
Big Sky Summer	Linda Lael Miller	4	6/16-7/7
Sea Glass Island	Sherryl Woods	4	6/16-7/7
Sweet Talk	Julie Garwood	4	6/16-7/7
The Taming of Ryder Cavanaugh	Stephanie Laurens	4	7/14-8/4
Calculated in Death	J.D. Robb	4	8/18-9/8
Three Little Words	Susan Mallery	4	8/18-9/8
Big Sky Wedding	Linda Lael Miller	4	9/15-10/6
Diamond in the Rough	Diana Palmer	4	9/15-10/6
Secret Santa	Fern Michaels et al	4	11/17-12/8
The Gift of Christmas	Debbie Macomber	4	11/17-12/8
The Sum of All Kisses	Julia Quinn	4	11/17-12/8
Wyoming Bold	Diana Palmer	4	11/17-12/8
Angel Mine	Sherryl Woods	3	2/17-2/24, 3/10
Just Kate	Linda Lael Miller	3	2/17-2/24, 3/10
Immortal Ever After	Lynsay Sands	3	3/17-3/31
Perfect Timing	Catherine Anderson	3	3/17-3/31
Heart of Texas, Volume 1	Debbie Macomber	3	3/24-4/7
Balancing Act	Fern Michaels	3	4/21-5/5
Leopard's Prey	Christine Feehan	3	6/16-6/30
Two of a Kind	Susan Mallery	3	7/14-7/28
Castaway Cove	JoAnn Ross	3	8/25-9/8
Heart of Texas, Volume 2	Debbie Macomber	3	8/25-9/8
The Arrangement	Mary Balogh	3	9/15-9/22, 10/6
Deception Cove	Jayne Castle	3	9/15-9/29
Heart of Texas, Volume 3	Debbie Macomber	3	9/15-9/29
Temptation	Sherryl Woods	3	9/15-9/29
Getting Rowdy	Lori Foster	3	10/13-10/27
One Lucky Vampire	Lynsay Sands	3	10/13-10/27
Glory, Glory	Linda Lael Miller	3	10/27-11/10
A Virgin River Christmas	Robyn Carr	3	11/17, 12/1-12/8
The Lady Most Willing	Julia Quinn et al	2	1/13-1/20
Copper Beach	Jayne Ann Krentz	2	1/20-1/27
Shades of Gray	Maya Banks	2	1/20-1/27
Moonlight Masquerade	Jude Deveraux	2	2/10-2/17
Shelter Mountain	Robyn Carr	2	2/17-2/24

Against the Edge	Kat Martin	2	5/19-5/26
Courageous	Diana Palmer	2	5/19-5/26
Just One Kiss	Susan Mallery	2	6/16-6/23
Can't Stop Believing	Jodi Thomas	2	6/23, 7/7
An English Bride in Scotland	Lynsay Sands	2	7/14-7/21
Forged in Steel	Maya Banks	2	7/14-7/21
Magic Rises	Ilona Andrews	2	8/18-8/25
The Darkest Craving	Gena Showalter	2	8/18-8/25
The Husband List	Janet Evanovich	2	9/29-10/6
The Night is Forever	Heather Graham	2	10/13-10/20
Lover at Last	JR Ward	2	10/20-10/27
Duke of Midnight	Elizabeth Hoyt	2	11/3-11/10
Christmas in Snowflake Canyon	RaeAnne Thayne	2	11/17-11/24
Notorious Nineteen	Janet Evanovich	2	12/8-12/15
Wyoming Bride	Joan Johnston	1	1/20
Fair Game	Patricia Briggs	1	2/17
One Good Earl Deserves a Lover	Sara MacLean	1	2/17
Beauty Awakened	Gena Showalter	1	3/17
Lord of Darkness	Elizabeth Hoyt	1	3/17
Whispering Rock	Robyn Carr	1	3/17
Rapture	JR Ward	1	3/24
The Heart of a Hero	Janet Chapman	1	3/24
Wild Invitation	Nalini Singh	1	3/24
Highlander Most Wanted	Maya Banks	1	4/7
Twice Tempted	Jeaniene Frost	1	4/14
Bare It All	Lori Foster	1	5/19
Let Love Find You	Johanna Lindsey	1	5/19
The Counterfeit Betrothal	Mary Balogh	1	5/19
Cheyenne Amber	Catherine Anderson	1	6/2
How to Pursue a Princess	Karen Hawkins	1	6/16
Once Upon a Tower	Eloisa James	1	6/16
The Night is Alive	Heather Graham	1	8/18
Crystal Cove	Lisa Kleypas	1	9/1
Against the Mark	Kat Martin	1	9/15
The Vampire with the Dragon Tattoo	Kerrelyn Sparks	1	9/15
Always on My Mind	Jill Shalvis	1	10/13
Going Once	Sharon Sala	1	10/13
Run to You	Rachel Gibson	1	10/13
Tempt the Stars	Karen Chance	1	10/27
Black and Blue	Gena Showalter	1	11/10
Archangel's Legion	Nalini Singh	1	11/17
Ever After	Kim Harrison	1	11/17
Rumor Has It	Jill Shalvis	1	11/24
An Outlaw's Christmas	Linda Lael Miller	1	12/1
No Good Duke Goes Unpunished	Sara MacLean	1	12/15
Twilight	Sherryl Woods	1	12/15

Appendix C. Bestselling Authors of Romance Novels, 2000-2013 (Source: *New York Times Bestseller Lists-Paperback Fiction from January 2, 2000-December 29, 2013*)

	Author	Total # of Weeks Weeks per	Total # of Books	Average # Book
1.	Nora Roberts	755	115	6.57
2.	Debbie Macomber	323	76	4.25
3.	Danielle Steel	273	43	6.35
4.	Fern Michaels	252	63	4.0
5.	Janet Evanovich	219	43	5.09
6.	J.D. Robb	159	39	4.08
7.	Catherine Coulter	136	25	5.44
8.	Linda Lael Miller	128	41	3.37
9.	Christine Feehan	102	35	2.91
	Stephanie Laurens	102	33	3.09
11.	Jude Deveraux	98	23	4.26
12.	Sandra Brown	84	16	5.25
13.	Robyn Carr	80	23	3.48
14.	Luanne Rice	73	18	4.06
15.	Sherryl Woods	66	21	3.14
16.	Johanna Lindsey	64	17	3.76
	Julia Quinn	64	18	3.56
18.	Christina Dodd	61	28	2.18
19.	Sherrilyn Kenyon	60	25	2.4
20.	Lisa Kleypas	58	18	3.22
	Susan Mallery	58	20	2.9
22.	Lora Leigh	54	23	2.35
23.	Catherine Anderson	48	19	2.53
24.	Julie Garwood	47	11	4.27
25.	Lynsay Sands	46	21	2.19
26.	Amanda Quick	44	13	3.38
27.	Susan Wiggs	43	12	3.58
28.	Mary Balogh	42	21	2.0
	Jayne Ann Krentz	42	12	3.5
30.	Elizabeth Lowell	41	14	2.93
31.	Barbara Delinsky	40	10	4.0
32.	JR Ward	35	13	2.69
33.	Janet Dailey	34	10	3.4
	Gena Showalter	34	18	1.89
35.	Joan Johnston	32	14	2.29
	Diana Palmer	32	13	2.46
37.	Heather Graham	31	19	1.63
	Jane Feather	31	15	2.07
39.	Lori Foster	29	13	2.23
	Patricia Briggs	29	10	2.9
41.	Jayne Castle	28	10	2.8
	Susan Elizabeth Phillips	28	8	3.5
43.	Karen Robards	26	11	2.36
44.	Eloisa James	24	13	1.85
45.	Rachel Gibson	22	9	2.44
46.	Victoria Alexander	21	11	1.91
47.	Belva Plain	19	5	3.8
48.	JoAnn Ross	18	8	2.25
	Kerrelyn Sparks	18	11	1.64
50.	Kresley Cole	17	8	2.13

	Sabrina Jeffries	17	9	1.89
52.	Carly Phillips	15	6	2.5
	Jeaniene Frost	15	9	1.67
54.	Katie MacAlister	14	8	1.75
	Nalini Singh	14	13	1.08
56.	Maya Banks	13	9	1.44
	Jennifer Crusie	13	5	2.66
	Teresa Medeiros	13	8	1.63
	Kathleen Woodiwiss	13	2	6.5
60.	Keri Arthur	12	8	1.5
	Suzanne Brockmann	12	6	2.0
	Carla Neggers	12	7	1.71
63.	Lara Adrian	11	6	1.83
	Jo Beverley	11	4	2.75
	Jacquelyn Frank	11	9	1.22
	Kim Harrison	11	5	2.2
	Kat Martin	11	10	1.1
	Judith McNaught	11	3	3.67
70.	Ilona Andrews	10	7	1.43
71.	Susan Andersen	8	6	1.33
	Liz Carlyle	8	6	1.33
	Laurell K. Hamilton	8	4	2.0
	Josie Litton	8	3	2.67
	Rosamunde Pilcher	8	1	8.0
76.	Cindy Gerard	7	7	1.0
77.	Janet Chapman	6	6	1.0
	Larissa Ione	6	6	1.0
	Jill Shalvis	6	6	1.0
	Christine Warren	6	5	1.2
81.	Samantha James	5	3	1.67
	Nicole Jordan	5	4	1.25
	Lynn Kurland	5	5	1.0
	Julia London	5	4	1.25
	Karen Marie Moning	5	2	2.5
86.	Karen Hawkins	4	3	1.33
	Linda Howard	4	2	2.0
	Elizabeth Hoyt	4	3	1.33
	Iris Johansen	4	1	4.0
	Jodi Thomas	4	3	1.33
	Cathy Maxwell	4	2	2.0
92.	Celeste Bradley	3	1	3.0
	Karen Chance	3	3	1.0
	Dorothy Garlock	3	2	1.5
	Virginia Henley	3	3	1.0
	Madeline Hunter	3	3	1.0
	Brenda Joyce	3	2	1.5
	Kinley MacGregor	3	3	1.0
	Colleen McCullough	3	1	3.0
	Judith Michael	3	1	3.0
	Robin Pilcher	3	1	3.0
	Vicki Lewis Thompson	3	1	3.0
103.	Candace Camp	2	2	1.0
	Suzanne Enoch	2	1	2.0
	Jillian Hunter	2	2	1.0
	Sara MacLean	2	2	1.0
	Connie Mason	2	1	2.0

	RaeAnne Thayne	2	1	2.0
	Lynn Viehl	2	2	1.0
	Tracy Anne Warren	2	1	2.0
111.	Cherry Adair	1	1	1.0
	Jo Beverley	1	1	1.0
	Connie Brockway	1	1	1.0
	Elaine Coffman	1	1	1.0
	Shannon Drake	1	1	1.0
	Cassie Edwards	1	1	1.0
	Gaelen Foley	1	1	1.0
	Emily Grayson	1	1	1.0
	Alexandra Ivy	1	1	1.0
	Joan Johnson	1	1	1.0
	Angela Knight	1	1	1.0
	Betina Krah	1	1	1.0
	Mary Jo Putney	1	1	1.0
	Sharon Sala	1	1	1.0
	Maggie Shayne	1	1	1.0
	Lori Wilde	1	1	1.0

Appendix D: Demographic Information for Interview Subjects

Initials	Author or Reader	Date of Interview	Gender	Age	Education Level	Marital Status	Occupation	Race/Ethnicity
I.P.	Author	4/07	Female	59	Some graduate school	Married	Author	White
L.W.	Author	4/07	Female	55	Bachelors degree	Married	Author	White
M.B.	Author	4/07	Female	51	Bachelors degree	Married	Accountant	White
P.M.	Author	4/07	Female	58	Masters degree	Married	Teacher	White
L.B.	Reader	5/07	Female	58	Some college	Married	Sales	White
S.H.	Author	5/07	Female	59	Masters degree	Divorced	Financial Analyst	African American
P.Ma.	Author	5/07	Female	DNA	DNA	DNA	DNA	DNA
C.P.	Author	6/07	Female	39	Post-graduate	Married	Lawyer	Hispanic
J.F.	Reader	6/07	Female	42	Some graduate school	Married	Author	White
C.A.	Author	6/07	Female	67	Bachelors degree	Widowed	Administrative Assistant	White
L.F.	Author	4/08	Female	DNA	High school	Married	Writer	White
J.L.	Author	4/08	Female	44	Masters degree	Married	Novelist	White/Asian
C.O.	Author	4/08	Female	37	Some graduate school	Married	Writer	White
A.D.S.	Author	4/08	Female	40	Bachelors degree	Married	Tech Writer	White/Native American
C.F.	Author	4/08	Female	57	Some college	Married	Writer	White
S.C.	Author	4/08	Male	45	Some college	Married	Printer	White
R.P.	Author	4/08	Female	44	Associate's degree	Married	Publisher	White
M.J.P.	Author	4/08	Female	62	Bachelors degree	Other	Writer	White
M.Y.	Author	4/08	Female	61	Some college	Married	Writer	White
E.H.	Reader	8/08	Female	51	Bachelors degree	Separated	Financial Analyst	Hispanic
V.J.	Author	2/09	Female	41	Masters degree	Single, never married	Administrator	White
C.I.	Reader	3/09	Female	59	Some graduate school	Single, never married	Retired	White
B.A.	Reader	3/09	Female	26	Bachelors degree	Single, never married	Business development coordinator	White
J.I.	Reader	3/09	Female	22	Bachelors degree	Single, never married	Student	White
M.M.	Reader	3/09	Female	25	Bachelors degree	Single, never married	Conference Center Coordinator	African American/Hispanic

M.M.G.	Author	3/09	Female	31	Masters degree	Single, cohabiting	PhD Student	White
D.R.	Reader	3/09	Female	29	Post-graduate	Single, never married	Graduate Student	Asian
K.S.	Reader	3/09	Female	28	Some graduate school	Single, never married	DNA	White
R.T.	Reader	3/09	Female	35	Bachelors degree	Single, never married	Data Analyst	White
S.T.	Reader	3/09	Female	19	Some college	Single, never married	Student	White
C.V.	Reader	3/09	Female	38	Post-graduate	Single, never married	Contracts Manager	White
S.W.	Reader	4/09	Female	34	Some graduate school	Married	Administrative Assistant	White
A.D.	Reader	4/09	Female	26	Some college	Single, never married	Student	White
P.K.	Reader	4/09	Female	52	Bachelors degree	Married	Transportation Analyst	White
L.K.	Reader	5/09	Female	44	Post-graduate	Single, never married	Attorney	White

Appendix E. Additional List of Book Characteristics

Title	Heroine	Hero	Children	Page of First Inter-course	Sexual Failure/ Problems	Female Friend-ships	Divorce	Abuse
Key of Light	Malory	Flynn	None	177	No	Yes	No	No
44 Cranberry Point	Peggy	Bob	Death of infant, single motherhood, miscarriage (secondary characters)	before	No	Yes	Yes	No
Journey	Maddy	Bill	Abortion, Adoption	344	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Plain Jane	Jane	Michael	Two in epilogue	111	No	Yes	No	Secondary character-subplot
Full Scoop	Maggie	Zack	Child of heroine, single motherhood	212	No	Yes	No	Yes-in past
Imitation in Death	Eve	Rourke	None	Before	No	Yes	No	Yes-in past
The Sherbrooke Twins	Corrie	James	None	276	No	No	No	No
McKettrick's Luck	Cheyenne	Jesse	None	253	No	Yes	No	No
Deadly Game	Mari	Ken	None	161	No	Yes	No	No
On a Wild Night	Amanda	Martin	None	151	No	No	No	No
High Tide	Fiona	Ace	Pregnant at end	317	No	No	No	No
White Hot	Sayre	Beck	Forced abortion	511	No	No	Yes	No
Moonlight Road	Erin	Aiden	Multiple, secondary characters	173	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Beach Girls	Stevie	Jack	Child of hero from previous marriage	315	No	Yes	Yes	No
Sand Castle Bay	Emily	Boone	Child of hero from previous marriage	214 (not described)	No	No	No	No
The Heir	Sabrina	Duncan	None	221	No	No	No	No
Romancing Mr. Bridgerton	Penelope	Colin	Pregnant at end	289	No	Yes	No	No
Into the Flame	Firebird	Douglas	Unplanned pregnancy, single motherhood	Before	No	No	No	No
Seize the Night	Tabitha	Valerius	None	131	No	Yes	No	No
Scandal in Spring	Daisy	Matthew	Miscarriage, child born (secondary characters)	244	No	Yes	No	No
Only His	Nevada	Tucker	Pregnant at end	171	No	Yes	No	No

Stygian's Honor	Liza	Stygian	None	178	No	Yes	No	No
Summer Breeze	Rachel	Joseph	None	340	No	No	No	No
Mercy	Michelle	Theo	None	284	Yes	No	No	No
The Renegade Hunter	Josephine	Nicholas	None	136	No	Yes	No	No
Slightly Shady	Lavinia	Tobias	None	144	No	No	No	No
Dockside	Nina	Greg	Unplanned/teen pregnancy, single motherhood/fatherhood	331	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Slightly Scandalous	Freyja	Joshua	None	307	No	No	No	No
Lost and Found	Cady	Mack	Adult child of hero, Child born in last chapter	75	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Midnight in Ruby Bayou	Faith	Walker	None	266	Yes	Yes	No	Yes-in past
The Woman Next Door	Amanda	Graham	Fertility issues, Miscarriage	16	No	Yes	Yes	No
Calder Pride	Cat	Logan	Unplanned pregnancy, Single motherhood	100	No	Yes	No	No
The Next Mrs. Blackthorn	Jocelyn/Libby	North/Clay	None/Unplanned child of couple from past	86/ Before	No	No	No	No
Ghost Walk	Nikki	Brent	None	221	No	Yes	No	No
To Wed a Wicked Prince	Lavia	Alex	None	275	No	Yes	No	No
Ghost Hunter	Elly	Cooper	None	95	No	Yes	No	No
This Heart of Mine	Molly	Kevin	Miscarriage, Child born in epilogue	49	Yes	Yes	No	No
Scandalous	Gabby	Nick	None	292	No	No	No	No
Secrets of a Proper Lady	Cordelia	Daniel	None	266	No	No	No	No
Fortune's Hand	Ellen	Robb	Child with disability	89	No	No	Yes	No
The Bachelor	Charlotte	Roman	None	167	No	Yes	No	No
A Season Beyond a Kiss	Raelynn	Jeff	Pregnant at end	29	No	No	No	No
Far From Innocent	Erin	Juan	None	21	No	No	No	No
Highlander's Challenge	Tuck	Colin	Pregnant at end	254	No	No	No	Yes-in past
Sweeter Than Wine	Christy	Sebastian	None	27 (heroine, secondary character)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

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