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Popular Romance Novels: Seeking out the 'Sisterhood'

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
Interdisciplinary MA in Popular Culture
Brock University

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November 2005

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Some Thoughts on Popular Romance

Virginia Woolf, writing in the nineteenth century, states that most women were unable to write because they lacked “a room of [their] own” (Woolf 58). Today female popular Romance writers usually have a room to write in, yet they are now criticised for writing on topics entirely feminine. Popular Romance fiction is written almost exclusively for women by women, and female and male critics alike largely choose to trivialize popular Romance as mere trash. So the discussion begins: to love or not to love Romance.

Popular Romance narrative itself is trans-historical; it transcends both time and place. In fact, women have been enjoying themes of Romance since Ancient Greece (1300 B.C.-450 B.C.). Stories of lovers were sung in songs and written in poetry. It would seem that most people are familiar with courtly love, an often debated concept that was born around the eleventh century (Coghlan 8). In the past, the concept of courtly love encompassed much more than love itself, and it became synonymous with suffering, pleasure, attraction and passion— incidentally, all the emotions that are experienced in popular Romance today. The legends of the famous love triangle of King Arthur, Sir Lancelot, and Guinevere filled stories and poems, and at the very heart of each narrative is love, passion, pleasure and suffering. Of course, Romance did not stop with Arthurian legend, and poets and writers of all centuries have indulged in stories focusing on themes of love and Romance.

According to Kate Ramsdell, Romance “as part of the human experience has existed from the first time a pair of lovers gazed at each other with love- blinded eyes and saw the world around them not as it was, but as what they wanted it to be. The world has

never been the same since” (Ramsdell 3). Ramsdell defines Romance simply in an “all-encompassing” fashion: as a story in which the central focus is love between two main characters accompanied by a satisfactory resolution in which the reader is provided with “some degree of vicarious emotional participation in the courtship process” (Ramsdell 5). In the twenty-first century, Ramsdell’s “all- encompassing” definition holds true and Popular Romance continues to dominate mainstream popular culture.

Today Romance is mass consumed, and it manifests itself in film, television shows, and books. Romance is central to everything from Hollywood ‘chick flicks’ to soap operas and reality television shows such as *The Bachelor* to Harlequin Romances and their imitators. Unfortunately, the consumer of popular Romance has been stigmatized by critics as superficial and small-minded; more specifically, the consumer of popular Romance has been labeled as feminine.

The question that arises is -- why did Romance themes become cause for demeaning commentaries? Popular Romance fiction today is subject to degrading criticisms from both male and female critics alike. Popular Romance’s poor reception is not surprising because all popular fiction is regarded by most literary critics as inferior. However, this popular genre written exclusively for women seems to invite even more debasing comments. Romance writer Jayne Ann Krentz, at a Conference on Romance at Bowling Green State University (2000), states that “the prejudice against Romance fiction, while strong and virulent for generations and arguably exacerbated by the fact that the books are traditionally written by women for women ... is actually nothing more than a particularly sharp extension of our culture’s overall prejudice against the whole of

popular fiction” (Krentz 2). Romance has an even more challenging task than most popular fiction to gain respectability because of its association with the feminine.

Whether Popular Romance fiction is respectable or not has certainly not hindered the 51 billion readers who consume Romance yearly in North America (Romance Writers of America). Romance’s popularity alone suggests that it is important to re-evaluate this mass- consumed medium and, rather than condemn it, attempt to understand it. This is not to say that we should argue that all popular Romance narrative is created equally. More specifically, it is not the contention of this thesis to regard popular Romance as high literature that should be studied as the classics are, or to suggest that popular Romance should be heightened to some grand level of literature, but rather, to provide a less prejudiced outlook on popular Romance fiction. I believe this is essential because popular Romance is the genre that billions of women are reading across North America everyday: in 2002, there were 51.1 billion Romance readers in North America. Overall, Romance fiction sales in North America in 2002 reached \$1.63 billion dollars, and in the same year, 53.3% of all paperbacks purchased were Romance. (Romance Writers of America)

Romance’s enormous popularity is fostered because Romance writers understand the Romance market and the Romance reader very well. These female writers write purely with their female audience in mind, hoping to provide what will entertain and please them. This is an essential factor, and most Romance readers truly believe that the author has their best interests at heart. Diane Palmer writes in “Let Me Tell You About My Reader”

that it is not the critics who are important to her, but rather her readers. Palmer describes her readers as ‘everywomen’; they are laborers, housewives, teachers and executives. More specifically, these readers know love because “they live it every day. They sacrifice for their families, they worry, they fuss, but most of them would do it all over again” (Palmer 156). Palmer concedes that Romance allows these women the fantasy to be whoever they want to be, and “as long as men and women fall in love, Romance will continue to thrive ... in spite of criticism and ridicule, mockery and disdain” (Palmer 156). Regardless of criticism, female authors want to please their readers. So from the author’s profound hope to please every reader, and to keep them interested, a plethora of Romance subcategories have been created to entertain all women’s interests.

In order to demonstrate the size of the Romance genre, I would like to provide an outline of the subcategories, as they have been defined by Kristen Ramsdell in *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*. Popular Romance fiction is a diversified genre that contains a subcategory for most Romance reader’s interests. The subcategories include Contemporary, Romantic Mysteries, Historical Romance, Inspirational Romance, Alternative Reality Romance, Regency Period Romance, Sagas, Gay and Lesbian Romance, and Ethnic/Multicultural Romance. Although all categories will be briefly outlined in the course of this thesis, only three of the most popular Romance subcategories will be discussed in depth: Contemporary, Romantic Mysteries, and Alternative Reality Romance.

The first category under discussion is the Contemporary Romance. The purpose of the Contemporary Romance is to reflect Romance of the current period. So, Contemporary Romance would reflect the social values and morals of the seventies,

eighties or nineties depending on when the work was written. The Contemporary category is quite large and appeals to a large following of readers. Today, the focus of the Contemporary Romance is women finding success both “professionally and romantically” (Ramsdell 43). In the resolution of the story, the heroine finds both true love and success in her job, as well as a way to live with both in a harmonious fashion. The Contemporary heroine is assertive and she “often displays a high degree of independence, intelligence, initiative, and determination, relying more on herself to solve her problems than on the hero” (Ramsdell 45). The Contemporary heroine is always a professional and the hero’s equal in the workforce, and she is often the aggressor in moving the sexual aspect of the relationship forward.

It is important to note that stories categorized as Contemporary reflect changing social morals and values over time. They reflect the period in which they are written. For instance, Contemporary Harlequins of the sixties and seventies do not have the hero and heroine engaging in sexual intercourse, as they do today. The most prominent type of Contemporary Romance today is ‘Chick lit’ and this category will be examined exclusively in Chapter Four.

The Contemporary Romance itself encompasses many sub-categories of works and tends to cross with other categories. For instance, the Romantic Mystery often has a contemporary setting; however, mystery and Romance plots remain central to the story. The Romantic Mystery combines Romance, mystery and adventure. Janet Evanovich has contributed to this category’s success with her series revolving around bounty hunter Stephanie Plum. Evanovich’s Plum stories are in demand by readers; there are currently ten mysteries. Stephanie, the heroine, seems to get herself involved in hilarious

conundrums while seeking out criminals, and at the heart of every story is the love triangle between Stephanie and two other men in the same profession: police detective, Joe Morelli and bounty hunter Ranger. The love and mystery/detective plots intertwined are indicative of Romantic Mystery. These two plots converge eventually and they often maintain a connection through the heroine. The conclusion of both plots takes place at the resolution of the story. Ramsdell regards the Romantic Mystery as linked to Romantic Suspense and the Gothic Romance. The differences between the categories are mostly related to the setting. The Romantic suspense takes place in a contemporary setting whereas the Gothic takes place in remote mansions or castles. Similar to the Gothic of the past, the Contemporary Gothic is often accompanied by mysterious or unexplained events. (Ramsdell 82)

According to Ramsdell, Romantic Mysteries “have their particular historical origins in the late eighteenth century [and were] inspired by Warpole’s original Gothic novel, the chilling, supernatural *The Castle of Otranto*, [and] Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* [both authors] tempered the terror and horror with elements of Romance and sensibility” (Ramsdell 84). The Gothic Romance remains a popular choice for female readers today despite its highly fictionalized setting and plot.

The Gothic Romance is similar to the Historical Romance, and both maintain a focus on unique settings. The difference remains in the author’s use of history. The Historical Romance attempts to create an accurate representation of setting, and authors may study and publish exclusively on certain time periods and places in order to establish an authentic setting. The countries and time periods vary, but they often take place in Scotland, Ireland, or England. The Historical Romance can be further divided

into the Period Romance. This type of Romance is “essentially a generic love story in a historical setting” (Ramsdell 113). It contains accurate historical information; hence, it attempts to be reflective of a certain time period. As a result, these stories are often highly descriptive of the setting, clothing, manners, and customs of the time period they reflect (Ramsdell 113). In addition, accurate attention is paid to language in the Period Romance, and characters speak in levels of language indicative of their time period and social class. The Regency Period Romance is set during the 1800s. It is a period novel, and it is highly concerned with manners and social customs. The story almost always takes place in London England and revolves around the trials and tribulations of the aristocracy (Ramsdell 187). Also in the family of the Period Romance, the Sensual Historical is a subcategory of the Historical Romance; it is notoriously connected to “action; adventure; and sensuous, explicit, occasionally brutal, sex” (Ramsden 114). In the past, these stories have often been labeled “Bodice Rippers.”

In contrast to the highly sexual Sensual Historical is the Inspirational Romance. These are Romances that contain spiritual themes; they are often linked to Christianity and traditional family values. This type of story is often focused on religion, and the characters “need to resolve things with God before their love relationship can work out” (Ramsdell 273). The settings for the Inspiration Romance can vary from Historical to Contemporary, and the focus on religion is nondenominational; the influence is on a sense of deep spirituality intertwined with Romance (Ramsdell 274).

Differing greatly from the above categories is the Alternative Reality Romance. This is a large category in Romance publishing today, and it is directed at the science fiction and fantasy reader. It focuses on "other-worldly" elements such as magic,

mystical characters, or fantasy and science fiction motifs. Ramsdell groups Alternative Reality Romance into four subgroups: fantasy, futuristic, paranormal, and time travel. The fantasy subgroup relies on myth, legend and fairy tales; the futuristic deals with science fiction- type settings, space travel or alien cultures; and the paranormal focuses on unexplained phenomenon, for example, ghosts, psychics, witches, werewolves, spirits or vampires. The last subgroup is the Time Travel Romance. These Romances are set in two different time periods with characters "time-traveling" between the contemporary and historical world (Ramsdell 216– 231). Diana Gabaldon is one author who contributes significantly to the Time Travel subgroup. Gabaldon is a retired University Professor and Field Ecologist who left her job at Arizona State University when writing the *Outlander* series became too time consuming and demanding. Her highly-researched Time Travel Romance series is based on a love story between “Jamie Fraser, an eighteenth century Scotsman, and Claire, his 20th century wife” (Gabaldon Homepage). Gabaldon’s stories are read all over the world, and her fan base is quite diversified. Her stories have attracted millions of readers, and she continues to extend the *Outlander* series. Gabaldon’s female fan base is committed and loyal to her series. (Gabaldon Homepage <<http://www.cco.caltech.edu/~gatti/gabaldon/gabaldon.html>>)

Gabaldon’s series could also be regarded as a Saga. The Romantic Saga is defined as a “multigenerational narrative, usually centering around the activities of one, or possibly two, particular families” (Ramsdell 237). These stories appear in multivolume formats and they chronicle the lives of the families involved. The *Outlander* series revolves around the trials and tribulations of lovers Jamie Fraser and Claire, and their Scottish and English descendants. Characteristic of the Saga, is its

similarity to the soap opera. Ramsdell regards the Saga as popular in the same way as soap operas are, so the focus of their popularity seems to be on their continuous nature. (Ramsdell 237)

Similar to most Romances that are focused on plots of love, Gay and Lesbian Romance and Multicultural Romance differ only in that they deal strictly with homosexuality and ethnicity. The Gay and Lesbian Romance is a category that may be combined with any of the previously mentioned categories. The Romance plot is central to the story; however, before the lovers can unite they must resolve the issues that challenge their love. These obstacles are often related to their sexuality; for instance, difficulty of accepting one's sexuality or outside prejudices affecting the relationship (Ramsell 261). In Multicultural Romance, the protagonists are often African American, Latino, or Asian, and the narrative has an "authentic flavour" (Ramsdell 289). For example, these stories would represent different cultural groups ; the setting and character would differ in that they would be uniquely Latino or Asian, and specific cultural customs would be highlighted.

Judge Me for the Joy I Bring

Romance, as we have seen above, is diverse and varied. In fact, Romance writers cater to women by providing them with fiction that suits their reader's preferences. But, I believe what remains most important about the Romance category is what it represents for women. Romance novels are often a dialogue on what women love, fear, hate and admire. In fact, Romance is a periscope into the daily concerns of most women. Even though they are fantastical stories, Romance broaches topics that interest women whether critics like it or not. More specifically, Romance speaks to women about issues

that affect their daily lives; beneath the fantasy, Romance is somehow able to speak to women about life and love. In addition, Romance is appealing because female readers have control over a consistent resolution of love, a love they may be seeking in their own life.

This thesis sets out to re-evaluate women's popular Romance and challenge the critical stereotypes attached to it. In some way, Romance is speaking to women today just as it has spoken to women in the past. This is the most crucial and essential factor in popular women's fiction. Outside the walls of academia, women are consuming Romance writing in much greater quantities than they are reading feminist theory. In fact, Romance throughout time has provided readers with heroines who have always in some way defied regressive social and moral values. These heroines are not weak 'damsels in distress,' but instead women who attempt to be catalysts in societies that confine them. From Samuel Richardson's Pamela to Helen Fielding's Bridget Jones, heroines have been redefining women's positions in society. In order to understand the general population of women, perhaps we should learn to better understand popular Romance fiction.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not start at the beginning: Chapter One of this thesis provides a framework of literary criticism beginning with the critics who have embraced canonical literature and rejected popular narrative, moving towards those who have defended popular narrative. Chapter One will also present the voices of various female critics: those who defend popular Romance and those who choose to condemn it.

Following the chapter dedicated to literary criticism, Chapter Two focuses on examples of popular Romance fiction of the past. Women readers were recognized as an

important market centuries before the birth of Harlequin. Popular Romance was read widely by middle class women of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Chapter Two will examine the Sentimental, the Domestic and The Sensation. More specifically, the heroines of Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel *Pamela*, E.D.E.N Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*, and Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynne* will be examined in this chapter in regards to woman's concerns of the time, and woman's representation of the female heroine as a quasi-powerful figure.

The heroine will be addressed once again in Chapter Three, in which the main categories of Harlequin Romance will be discussed. Harlequin heroines speak to the women who read them, and Harlequin's ongoing popularity suggests that women readers are listening. Since Harlequin's inception, sales have not faltered but have instead grown stronger. In a world of feminism, is there room for Harlequin? Harlequin authors and readers seem to think so. Contemporary Harlequin Romance depicts strong heroines; they are passionate, aggressive and successful. Harlequin is a mirror of the wants and dreams of today's women and their popularity indicates this.

Lastly, Chapter Four will provide a look at the most Contemporary heroine with whom women are reckoning: Bridget Jones. Bridget Jones has become an iconic figure as she represents postfeminism and the angst of thirty- something females. *Bridget Jones's Diary* suggests that Romance in the twentieth century is still speaking to women, but it is questionable whether feminist critics like what Bridget is trying to say.

Endnotes

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Chapter One

The Course of True Love Never Did Run Smooth

Chapter One presents a broad analytical framework of popular fiction criticism, and then move towards a more focused examination of popular Romance critics. More specifically, the critics who have embraced canonical literature and have rejected popular fiction will be introduced and those who choose to defend it will follow. The focus then moves towards a more detailed approach to popular Romance, and examines the female critics who have studied popular Romance. The opinions of female critics regarding Romance fiction and popular Romance differ significantly. This creates an eclectic dialogue of women's voices as they criticize, justify and defend a type of narrative that has been written almost exclusively for them. In this chapter, I show that the acceptance of popular Romance has been doomed since its inception. I go on to argue that the fragmented female voices which both condemn and defend Romance need to find a common platform of respect on which to discuss Romance seriously because it is a genre with such a powerful appeal to so many women.

The stigmas attached to Romance narrative are essentially rooted in the past. Gillian Beer writes in *The Romance* that "any history of the romance will in one sense be a record of decadence. The works now popularly called 'romances' are usually sub-literature, magazines like *True Romances* or lightweight commercial fiction deliberately written to flatter daydreams: such 'romances' batten on the emotionally impoverished" (Beer 1). This approach to the Romance creates precisely the negative attitude that defenders of Romance fiction have been struggling to overcome for years. Romance has been regarded as an inferior form of fiction devoid of any real literary value. This thesis sets out to challenge these inherent notions which seem to be imbedded in the very

foundation of our society. This is not to say that the reputation of popular Romance fiction should be elevated to that of Shakespearean literature, but rather, that it should not be simply dismissed, but should be taken seriously for its importance to women, and its role in speaking to them about the society in which they live.

Popular narrative, which includes popular Romance, has been regarded by some literary critics as valueless and morally bankrupt. Early critics such as F. R Leavis, Q. D Leavis and Mathew Arnold, who embraced canonical literature and rejected popular narrative, provide rigid definitions as to what qualifies as worthy reading. F.R Leavis in *The Great Tradition* insists that not all novelists are great. Instead he chooses to point out those major novelists whom he believed “not only change[d] the possibilities of the art for practitioners and readers,” but also promoted human awareness: “awareness of the possibilities of life” (Leavis, F. R. 10). Those novelists who depicted social realities of the day became worthy of reading. Hence, for Leavis, great literature represented an accurate depiction of life. Those novelists who chose to traverse this path were regarded as “great,” and all others who failed in depicting life’s realities accurately were judged as inferior. Hence, George Eliot’s *Adam Bede* would be elevated, not because of its plot of Romance, but because of its accurate and detailed representation of daily life. For example, in the following passage, Eliot depicts a funeral and the emotions felt by the family that has recently lost a loved one:

... the two sons lifted the sad burthen in heartstricken silence. The wide-open glazed eyes were grey, like Seth’s, and had once looked with mild pride on the boys before whom Thias had lived to hang his head in shame. Seth’s chief feeling was awe and distress at this sudden snatching of his father’s soul... When death, the great Reconciler, has come, it is never our tenderness that we repent, but our severity (Eliot 97).

Death is an occurrence everyone must confront. It is a realistic daily occurrence. *Adam Bede* is a narrative composed of the details of daily life: work, family, hardships and turmoil. For Leavis, the accurate depiction of life was a necessary element in great writing. And the authors who fit this rigid definition of greatness, according to Leavis, were as follows: Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad. This narrow-mindedness is evident as he highlights only five authors of English literature as great, and states that “the great tradition of the English novel is there” (Leavis, F.R. 37).

In an elitist and exclusionary fashion, Leavis defends his principles as to why he believes certain authors obtain the status of greatness. He disregards Samuel Richardson as “vulgar” but does claim that Richardson’s importance is rooted in his connectedness to the path of Jane Austen’s greatness. Leavis states that Richardson, as an author, is a contributing factor “in the background of Jane Austen” and for that we must regard him as important (Leavis, F.R. 13). Leavis regards Austen highly and considers her important in the line of English literary history: “she exemplifies beautifully the relations of ‘the individual talent’ to tradition” (13). However, Leavis’ most profound praise of Austen lies in her attachment to moral perfection. Leavis appreciates Austen for her moral preoccupations “that characterize the novelist’s particular interest in life” (Leavis, F.R. 17). It is this combined with the “truth of life” that creates Austen’s “perfection of form” (17). Leavis believes that novelists who set out to include this seriousness in their works would work to protect society from “a mechanized society of trashy romances, alienated labour, banal advertisements and vulgariz[ed] mass media” (Eagleton 29).

In agreement with her husband, Q.D Leavis, in *Fiction and the Reading Public* chooses to harshly categorize authors of literature into two groups: those who are great

and those to be disregarded. In reference to popular narrative, Q.D regards the bestseller as an “almost entirely derogatory epithet among the cultivated” (Leavis, Q.D. 34). She argues that a novel provides the reader with an intellectual experience, whereas a bestseller is morally corrupting: “the novel can deepen, extend and refine experience by allowing the reader to live at the expense of an unusually intelligent and sensitive mind, by giving him access to a finer code than his own”(Leavis, Q.D. 74). Q.D contends that the authors of popular fiction instruct us that life should be fun and devoid of standards, and this persuasiveness on the part of the author can only lead to a society lacking in culture. In addition, she says that the reading of popular fiction causes individuals to fall out of “touch with the best literature” of both the past and present (Leavis, Q.D. 235). Q.D’s contention is obviously elitist as she argues that the popular is connected to the masses whereas the literary is connected to the intelligent individuals in society. Hence, according to Q.D’s standards, Harlequin would be regarded as a corruptor of society’s morals and values. She argues that popular fiction functions only to spoil society’s notions of what is cultivated. In reality, as we will see in Chapter Three, popular Romance fiction actually reflects society’s morals and values. For example, a Contemporary Harlequin Romance written in the seventies excludes sexual activity and highlights virginity; however, today in Harlequin’s Contemporary Romance series, sexual relations are not condemned, suggesting that society’s sexual values have changed. I would suggest that popular fiction is reflective of society and meant to entertain rather than to corrupt. In addition, admiring popular fiction also teaches us to respect literature; each form is unique and should be judged by its own merits.

Writing prior to the Leavises, yet expressing a similar view, Matthew Arnold in

"Culture and Anarchy" claims that popular fiction is by nature corrupt. For Arnold, popular narrative fails to represent the world realistically. Instead, it infects the masses negatively by encouraging them to live a substandard lifestyle. Popular narrative sets out to destroy "the pursuit of perfection" which is embodied in the notion of culture. Arnold states that "plenty of people will try to give the masses [...] an intellectual food prepared and adapted [...] for the actual condition of the masses. [...] Ordinary popular literature is an example of this way of working on the masses" (Arnold 426). Arnold believes that the presence of popular fiction corrupts the search for the perseverance of perfection in society by depicting false ideas and providing an unrealistic portrayal of beauty. However, popular fiction does not aim to capture beauty, but instead to entertain the reader and allow an escape from the mundane details of everyday life. It does not presume to be didactic or offer poetic landscapes to ponder; however, beneath the text of most popular fiction are themes charged with human life and human relationships: love, death, technology, crime, and fear.

While Terry Eagleton, writing in a more contemporary vein, notes the conservative approach of the Leavises and Matthew Arnold, Eagleton does not condemn their rigid approach to defining literature. Instead, in *Literary Theory*, Eagleton states that in evaluating literature and popular fiction, "a different kind of approach is needed altogether" (Eagleton 2). He states that "perhaps literature is definable not according to whether it is fictional or imaginative, but because it uses language in peculiar ways...literature transforms and intensifies ordinary language, deviates systematically from everyday speech " (Eagleton 2). Everyday speech is not reflective of what one hears in poetry; poetry is discerned by a more intense use of language. Therefore, popular

fiction does not concentrate on a heightened level of language, but rather, aims to perpetuate the everyday. More specifically, popular fiction exemplifies the diction used and recognized by society as a whole in order to communicate to that same society.

Eagleton points out that defining literature is often problematic because it suggests that literature is inherently meaningful. He states: “some texts are born literary, some achieve literariness, and some have literariness thrust upon them” (Eagleton 7). Eagleton believes that by definition texts are often labeled at once. So, in determining that a book is of literary stature is to create a distinction. There are those books that are born literary because the author has been classified as such; others achieve literary status because their books have been recognized in academia as literary. In short, it is how one’s text is categorized in society: “if they (academics) decide that you are literature then it seems that you are, irrespective of what you thought you were” (Eagleton 8). Therefore, it would seem that the very ideas of what constitute literature are created within the walls of academia.

Eagleton, with hopes of dispelling high-brow definitions of literature, states that what is important is not what the novel is labeled, but instead, how the author is read and perceived by the audience. In fact, literature for Eagleton is an empty impractical term; he says that “people term literature writing which they think is good” (Eagleton 9). Eagleton believes that when labeling literature in this way, ‘value judgements’ overcome the work itself. He states that “there is no such thing as a literary work or tradition which is valuable in itself, regardless of what anyone might have said about it. Value is a transitive term: it means whatever is valued by certain people in specific situations, according to particular criteria and in the light of given purposes” (Eagleton 10). If this is

true, then the definition of literature is reflective of the social ideologies of the time. And because social values are closely related to value judgements, “they refer in the end not simply to taste” but to the power that certain social groups exert over the rest of society (Eagleton 14).

Eagleton provides us with an overview of literary history, and he concludes by stating that “[his] book is less an introduction than an obituary, and that we have ended by burying the object we sought to unearth” (Eagleton 178). Eagleton concedes that literature is “a name which people give from time to time for different reasons to certain kinds of writing” (178). His definition of literature becomes the lack thereof as he comes full circle and concludes without a precise definition for literature. Instead, Eagleton provides us with a new approach by examining popular narrative that allows for open speculation. He highlights the notion of criticism as fluid and ever-changing.

Terry Eagleton’s more open approach to defining literature contrasts with those early critics who condemn popular fiction. Literature has been regarded as that which is elevated and deemed worthy of reading whereas the response to popular fiction has been fraught with value judgments and taboos. However, there are also critics who choose to examine popular narrative and redeem it of its debasing stigmas. Leslie Fiedler in *What Was Literature? Mass Culture and Mass Society* and Harriet Hawkins in *Classics and Trash* defend the value of popular narrative.

Leslie Fiedler examines ‘High literature’ and ‘Low literature’. He questions whether academics have helped to “perpetuate an unfortunate distinction” (Fiedler 13) and encouraged a separation between that which is regarded as literature and that which is regarded as popular fiction. He states that literature should be classified as ‘minority’

and 'majority' literature because of the large audiences who read popular narrative, or perhaps as 'optional' and 'compulsory' because of the school curriculum that forces classics and rejects the popular. It would seem that labeling of works occurs at the onset of one's education. Hence, children are taught to regard literary classics with high esteem, and are discouraged from reading popular genre fiction.

In agreement that education predetermines an early distinction between the classics and popular narrative, Harriet Hawkins argues that "the surest way to destroy the popular status of any given work might well be to put it on the syllabus and thus create an instant hostility to it on the part of unwilling students" (Hawkins 109). This contributes to the large gap that exists between the way the two types of narrative are regarded. Hawkins disagrees with the labeling of literature as 'good' and popular narrative as 'bad', and she argues that even the plays of William Shakespeare could be regarded as 'good' or 'bad'. Hawkins discusses the distinction between *King Lear* and *King Kong* and questions why *King Kong* should or should not be included or excluded from the syllabus. She argues that the decision to include or exclude any work is based solely on "value judgments" (Hawkins 107). Popular fiction is often judged in this manner, and value judgements tend to be unfair criticisms." Rather than comparing popular fiction to literature and labeling the popular as 'bad', I think what needs to be distinguished is the criteria used in order to evaluate literature and popular fiction.

In order to eliminate unhelpful value judgments, Hawkins defends popular narrative and questions the actual difference between *King Lear* and *King Kong*. She concludes that we have the same emotional response. Therefore, popular narrative should not be classified as either high and low art, and in agreement with Fiedler,

Hawkins states that it is not “the artistic tradition , but the academic tradition that has erected barriers between ‘high art’ and popular genres, even as it has erected barricades between art and life” (Hawkins 113). Fiedler concedes, stating that the dissension existing between ‘high art’ and ‘low art’ is linked to cultural warfare. Fiedler argues that bestsellers were “turned out by other, more naïve, less pretentious authors (largely female), whose taste and fantasy coincided with those of the popular audience, itself largely female” (Fiedler 28). A struggle resulted between those who wrote for literary acclaim and those who wrote popular fiction. As a result, a “battle of the sexes” ensued, suggesting that women were associated with popular genres whereas men were associated with literature. He states that the stereotypes ingrained in our society portray the “serious’ writer as an alienated male, condemned to neglect and poverty by a culture simultaneously commercialized and feminized” (Fielder 29). Although this idea is somewhat dated, there is still truth to it today. Female Romance writers are often associated with Harlequin Enterprises, and in turn, commercialization. These female authors contribute to a million dollar industry and their books sometimes appear on the New York Times bestseller list, yet society views them as shallow and unintelligent. Whereas, a male author for example, Tom Clancy, does not receive the same sneering criticism. Consequently, there is a serious prejudice against Romance writers, and I do not believe the same bias exists towards the predominantly male popular genres.

In the first section of this chapter, I set out to provide a framework of criticism that began with conservative canonical criticism and moved towards an open approach to popular fiction. The conservative canonical critics provide us with the view that literature is elevated and popular fiction is debased. In fact, the dichotomy that separates

criticism of popular fiction as ‘bad’ and literature as ‘good’ began as early as literary criticism, and is instilled in the very framework of criticism and embedded in the very walls of academic institutions. Popular narrative critics such as Eagleton, Fiedler and Hawkins challenge this traditional, established ideology, and thus “the bones of the dinosaur are being rattled from within as post-modern teachers and critics explore the place of high literature and popular narrative genres...in order to, as Harriet Hawkins shows in *Classics and Trash*, enhance and understand our appreciation of both” (Irons XIV).

In the following section, the focus will move from popular fiction criticism to the women who have written exclusively about popular Romance. The following section introduces female critics who have chosen to condemn popular Romance for its placing of women in positions of powerlessness. In contrast, the women who defend Romance will also be presented; they wholeheartedly embrace a narrative that is largely written by women for women, and these women will be regarded as the true defenders of Romance.

If popular fiction generally was subjected to predictable debasing reviews from critics, narratives written by women for women were certainly destined to an even more dreadful reception. For years, the battle to defend Romance has raged. Some female critics have fought relentlessly to defend Romance writing whereas others have set out to destroy it. Consequently, a varied dialogue of women’s critical voices has emerged from the desire to understand women’s admiration of popular Romance fiction.

For some female critics, popular Romance is regarded as an inferior category that degrades women. These female critics believe that Romance subverts realistic notions of love relationships and advocates unrealistic ideas about gender relationships while

reinforcing patriarchy. For these critics, Romance is a corrupted form of narrative where the female heroine is powerlessly subjected to a domineering man. For example, Ann Douglas, Ann Snitow and Jan Cohn absolutely and crudely condemn a genre that provides millions of female readers the enjoyment of briefly entering into a fantastical, happy world where love conquers all.

Ann Douglas, in *“Soft Porn Culture,”* states that “Harlequins are porn softened to fit the needs of female emotionality [and] they are located inside the female consciousness” (Douglas 10). Douglas condemns the eager behavior of the heroine in contrast to the demanding actions of the hero and declares that “Harlequins are dramas of dependency” (Douglas 25). The notion that popular Romance is soft pornography is a relatively widespread idea adhered to by many female critics who deem Romance demeaning. For example, the sexually focused scenes, synonymous with the Contemporary Harlequin Blaze category, are labeled as pornographic rather than regarded as indicative of a love relationship between a man and woman who mutually consent to a sexual act.

Ann Snitow, in the same vein as Ann Douglas, in *“Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different,”* states that popular Romance fiction resembles pornography in that it exploits and encourages misogyny and helplessness. Snitow does not condemn pornography itself, but instead condemns pornography “in a sexist society” (Snitow 256). She believes that in a less oppressive society, pornography could be fun and expressive. However, in a patriarchal society, soft pornography and popular Romance are exploitive of women and regressive. Jan Cohn agrees, suggesting that the issue is not whether Romances are erotic or pornographic, but whether the woman’s

sexuality is exploited in Romance and whether women submit to male force (Cohn 16).

The notion of sexual exploitation is a central factor in Snitow's and Cohn's attack on Romance. Romance sexually exploits the heroine, and this puts the hero in a position of power. For Snitow, the more problematic issue connected to sexual exploitation is gender inequality. She states that Popular Romance disrupt gender relations, thus leaving the hero in control. This becomes apparent in Romance and soft pornography, she states, where the heroine is always displayed in submissive roles, and has an undeveloped personality. Heroines in both Romance and soft pornography "have no particular qualities" nor do they have a past: "they live in the eternal present of sexual feeling" (Snitow 257). Snitow states that "Harlequins are benign if banal sex books" (Snitow 257). In addition to the pornographic nature of popular Romance, Snitow says that this type of fiction creates tensions between the genders while distorting relationships and creating a fantastical notion of love between the genders (Snitow 259).

Jan Cohn, in agreement with Ann Snitow, argues in *Romance and the Erotics of Property* that at the core of Romance narrative lies the distortion of power relations between the genders: "Power and gender relations, however, are clearly addressed in the subtext of romance fictions, where the matters are resolved again in fantasy, in favour of the weaker gender; power is acquired by the powerless" (Cohn 7). The heroine is often placed in a powerless situation where "the acquisition of the hero" is her entry into society and her reward for the struggles she has endured (Cohn 5). Cohn argues that using marriage as the resolution of the plot is an affirmation of the "status of the patriarchal family" (5). So although Romance is on the surface, power lies within the subtext. And, at the heart of Romance is the intermingling of both desire and authority,

and “what is desired is authority itself” (5). In short, Cohn believes that love and marriage motifs overshadow the more frightening question of gender power that exists beneath the Romance.

At the heart of Cohn’s discontent with popular Romance is the figure of the heroine. Ann Snitow describes the heroine as morally void and lacking in character. Cohn describes the heroine to be a passive female who anxiously awaits for the hero’s acceptance. She says of the heroine that “defined by her apparent passivity and lack of interest, she is a negation of the purposeful, self-interested, mercenary woman” (Cohn 127). The heroine’s success is marked by the status she gains through marrying the hero.

If Cohn’s heroine of popular Romance is a characterless waif, the hero is subjected to a much harsher criticism. She argues that Romance heroes are “sometimes violent and brutal, nearly always arrogant, occasionally tender and empathetic” (Cohn 24). The heroine throughout the story must always run from the “sexual potency” of the hero (Cohn 27). Cohn’s hero doesn’t actually feel love; he is willing to acquire the heroine only if the reward of sex is offered. She argues that the hero is always the dominant figure in Romance, and he represents “the satisfaction of all those desires that our culture both fosters and disappoints for women” (41).

Although Snitow, Douglas and Cohn demean popular Romance, not all female critics find it necessary to scorn the genre of Romance. Instead, some female critics explore it and understand it. When investigating Romance, it is important not to overlook the works of Mariam Darce Frenier and Kay Mussel. Both women examine the relative importance of Romance in relation to women readers. Frenier and Mussel survey the ideas of other female critics writing on Romance and defend the genre, while adding their

own beliefs and social commentary.

In defense of Romance fiction, Mariam Darce Frenier, in *Good- Bye Heathcliff*, provides a more accurate and fair representation of the figure of the hero and heroine in Romance fiction, than do Snitow and Cohn. Frenier, in her explanation of the Harlequin, argues that despite Romance's association with the traditional roles of women, contemporary popular Romance portrays women in positive ways. She states that women are often placed in powerful professional roles, such as bankers, doctors and pilots. Frenier believes that the heroines are often in control of the love relationship (Frenier 105).

Kay Mussel, in *Fantasy and Reconciliation, Contemporary Formulas of Women's Romance Fiction*, agrees that the Romance formulas adhere to "belief in the primacy of love in a woman's life, female passivity in romantic relationships, support for monogamy in marriage, [and the] reinforcement of domestic values" (Mussel p xii). She states that not all Romances should be treated equally, and that some writers of popular Romance are far superior to others.

At the outset, Mussel defines herself as a feminist with strong beliefs. She states with confidence that she cannot "condemn Romances as enemies of women" because she believes that Romances address imperative issues and "espouse real values for many women" (Mussel XV). Mussel's analysis counters current disparaging critical commentary on Romance, although she agrees that "today, romances are shunned and attacked as unrealistic and subversive. Disdaining to read them, critics and reviewers have instead been satisfied to relegate them to the garbage heap of fiction" (Mussel 16).

Mussel declares that Romances have been misunderstood and devalued

throughout history. She outlines the three main arguments against popular Romance as established by critics and academics. The first argument rejects Romance narrative as insignificant and not worthy of attention. This argument she believes does not deserve any attention because it simply reinforces the assumption that what is considered exclusively for women is trivial. She states that this supposition “mirrors the cultural attitude held by many men and women toward the woman’s sphere and the female experience” (Mussel 17).

The second argument, which is most often put forth by feminist critics, states that, “romances are subversive to women’s lives, for they encourage readers to succumb to stereotypical patterns that pacify and obscure women’s legitimate frustrations in the performance of traditional roles”(Mussel 17). Although Mussel believes that this notion has validity, she argues that men’s adventure formulas are “no less limiting and unrealistic than those prescribed for women” (17). She draws upon Ian Fleming’s James Bond as an example. Bond overcomes a villain, acquires a beautiful woman as a secondary conquest and afterwards enjoys sexual intercourse with her. In short, men’s fiction is no more legitimate than women’s fiction. She asks why Ian Fleming is not attacked as often as Romance writers are. Mussel goes on to attack those academics and critics who claim they are in tune with a popular genre when they have not examined more than one or two books. She suggests that understanding any popular genre requires learning it in its entirety, and she believes that most critics read one or two examples and make large assumptions about the genre as a whole. (Mussel 17)

The third argument Mussel addresses is the one most associated with Ann Snitow, discussed earlier in this chapter. Snitow claims that Romance narrative objectifies women

sexually and constitutes a type of soft pornography for women. Mussel argues that defining the heroine's sexual encounter in this way strips it of its metaphorical significance. The sexual act in Romance narrative is profoundly attached to the heroine's identity and self-realization. Through the sexual act, she comes to terms with the hero who values her as an individual, and she is able to confront her true identity. This same revelation occurs with the hero, and it is through this sexual act that the hero is awakened to his own inner identity. (Mussel 23)

Using this same argument, but with more conviction, Tania Modleski and Janice Radway set out to rediscover Romance. When discussing Romance, it is virtually impossible to overlook the revolutionary works of Tania Modleski and Janice Radway. In hopes of defending Romance as an inferior genre and eradicating the stigmas attached to women and the reading of Romance, Modleski and Radway provide an open-minded approach to women reading popular Romance.

In *Loving with a Vengeance*, Modleski examines "Mass-produced fantasies for women" and uses a psychoanalytical approach to defend popular Romance and the women who read it. Modleski refers to escapism for women as "disappearing" (Modleski 36). In fact, she believes that women disappear in order to escape mundane roles within the household. Modleski concedes that this is healthy in a "mass culture that has turned women into commodities" (Modleski p 37). Modleski blames "the double critical standard" for the negativity that surrounds Romance narrative. Agreeing with Mussel, she states that critics are inherently biased when evaluating Romance fiction, and this same bias operates in popular culture studies. She argues that popular male genres have "aggrandized titles," and we see this in fiction, such as the western: "inflated claims for

(...) say, the detective novel fill the pages of the *Journal of Popular Culture*" (Modleski 11). Female characters and Romance narrative do not claim the status "male heroes and male texts often claim" and at the root is the "masculine mode" (Modleski 12). The masculine mode "works to insist implicitly on their [men's] difference from the feminine" (Modleski 12). Modleski argues that the mode originates with the Oedipal conflict: "the male gains access to culture and the symbolic first by perceiving the lack" of the mother and identifying with the father (12). Furthermore, Romance has often been criticized in this masculine mode, and Modleski disagrees with the notion of studying Romance by placing it into categories generally used in the studies of male popular culture, categories which have been "borrowed from high culture criticism in an effort to gain respectability" (Modleski 11). She classifies women's criticism of popular Romance into three categories: "dismissiveness; hostility;...or, most frequently a flippant kind of mockery" (Modleski 14). Male criticism of Romance narrative is defined as "pervasive scorn for all things feminine" that has forced women writers to constantly operate on the defensive (Modleski 13). Rather, she argues that the importance of Romance is that it speaks "to very real problems and tensions in women's lives" (Modleski 14).

Romance fiction from its origin has addressed the fears and anxieties that women confront in daily life, but its popularity is rooted in the relationship of the hero and the heroine. According to Modleski, the hero is a "brutal" lover, yet "male brutality comes to be seen as a manifestation not of contempt, but of love" (Modleski 41). The function of the heroine is to ignite this manifestation which often results in a sexual encounter. However, women readers maintain a certain distance from the hero and heroine. Modleski argues that this detachment is rooted in the reader knowing the formula, and

being placed in a role superior to the heroine. As a result, the reader has a close “emotional identification with the heroine because she is intellectually distanced from the heroine and does not have to suffer the heroine’s confusion” (Modleski 41). She goes on to say that because women readers are accustomed to the reformation of the hero from a flawed character to a sympathetic lover by the end of the story, “serious doubts women have about men can be confronted and dispelled” (41). Modleski points out that women’s enjoyment is focused on the elements of revenge fantasy, “from our conviction that the woman is bringing the man to his knees and that all the while he is being so hateful, he is internally groveling” (Modleski 45). Modleski will be frequently revisited throughout this thesis, as her criticism forms a framework to it.

Similar to that of Modleski, Janice Radway defends women reading Romance. In an ethnographic study titled *Reading the Romance* (1984), Radway examined a group of women readers and their responses to popular Romance fiction. She determined that women read Romance to escape “the directed social role prescribed for them by their position within the institution of marriage” (Radway 211). The group, referred to as the Smithton women, outlined some essential ingredients in creating the perfect Romance: happy ending, historical setting, love scenes (Radway 67). However, they could not formally identify all characteristics in the narrative that constituted the perfect Romance; instead it was agreed that the interaction between the hero and the heroine remained central to their pleasure. The ideal Romance constituted “a focus on a single, developing relationship between heroine and hero” (Radway 122). The group believed that besides providing pleasure and therapeutic value, reading Romance gave them insight into other countries and different historical periods (Radway 119). They believed that the heroes of

Romance should be tender even if they do not start out that way, and that the heroines should bring out this quality in them by the resolution (Radway 129).

Radway concluded that reading Romance meets the needs of women are extremely unfulfilled in marriage which she believes is most women. Radway argues that women use Romance to escape from the patriarchal society that confines and represses them (Radway 9). In reading, these women perform an act “for their own private pleasure” (9). Radway studies Harlequins in relation to the emotional response evoked by the female reading audience, and while she concludes that Romance does affect women emotionally, this response “does not alter a woman’s social situation” (Radway 212). Radway regards escapism or “leisure-time withdrawal” as a positive exercise; she believes the need for this “withdrawal” is rooted in women’s unhappiness with their current social situation, and in society’s “failure to satisfy the emotional needs of women” (Radway 213). Radway defines Romance reading as a ritual in which women together express their common angst regarding unhappy situations. Although reading is a solitary act, Romance readers often unite, either through reading groups as in Radway’s study or, more popular today, web based interactive reading groups. Women may together “attempt to imagine a more perfect state where all the needs they so intensely feel and accept as given would be adequately addressed” (Radway 212).

Both Modleski and Radway introduced ground-breaking initiatives concerning popular Romance narratives, and their works continue to treat popular Romance and its readers with respect and seriousness. Some contemporary female critics have taken a different stance, and gone one step further. Kathleen Gilles Siedel and Catharine Asaro have endeavored to defend Romance as a narrative genre that liberates women as

heroines of social change. Both Siedel and Asaro are popular Romance writers, and they are also academics employed by universities in the United States.

Kathleen Gilles Seidel, in "Judge Me by the Joy I bring", addresses popular Romance from the position of being both an academic and a best-selling romance novelist. She sets out to debunk the myth that all Romance narrative is the same formulaic story. She argues that Romance celebrates women's power in a genre that is strictly their own (Siedel 158). Seidel begins by addressing the notion of fantasy. She states that all popular fiction in some way is linked to fantasy, and it is for these reasons that individuals read popular genres. Fantasy is linked to longing, wishing and desiring to walk "in the imagination--- in some other pair of shoes" (Seidel 159). Popular fiction is successful when the reader achieves that desire, and "fantasy is not the shock of recognition one feels when one's own life or feeling is paralleled by a book" (Seidel 160). Fantasy is associated not only with popular fiction, but with all kinds of literature. Romance narrative invites fantasy into the work, and this is best exemplified by the happy ending. The heroine of Romance can undergo any threatening life situation without repercussion, and she will always survive. When a woman picks up a Romance, this is exactly what she expects: fantasy without real life's darkest possibilities (Seidel 161). According to Seidel, the relationship between the hero and the heroine are the most important aspects of fantasy. The hero "may seem cold and self-contained, he may be mysterious and ruthlessly independent," but by the end, the hero is so deeply in love that the heroine is the only thing he can think of (Seidel 161). And that is the heroine's constant power over the hero.

According to Seidel, the next most important aspect of the Romance in relation to

fantasy is its setting. The setting of the Romance novel “is to be Other, to transport the reader to somewhere else” (Seidel 165). Seidel states that particular settings become associated with particular fantasies and, because individual readers have preferences, they will choose the Romance and fantasy that best fits their needs. The Romance reader demands a certain type of experience where escapism is foremost (Seidel 169).

Seidel argues that Romance has progressed in that it has been “responsive to the social issues raised by mainstream feminism” (Seidel 170). In fact, Romance authors “have changed the notion of what heroines can be and what they can do” (170). Heroines are older, sexually experienced, and mothers. Their jobs vary from building bridges to riding out in battle; heroines have been given solid professions and they are often sexually aggressive. Seidel concedes that feminists “fault romances for not promoting” change, and she comments on Radway’s conclusion that women ought to in some way reorganize their lives. Seidel shuns Radway’s condescension to women readers who may not believe that their lives need reorganizing (Seidel 171). Seidel argues that feminists talk about sisterhood, but she wonders how deeply they feel it. In fact, she says, some feminist critics maintain a moral superiority when they assert that they “know what is right for other women” (Seidel 172). The readers of Romance are not all women escaping from an unhappy situation. Romance readers are “every woman” and they come from all classes and walks of life. In addressing feminist concerns, Seidel admits that as an author she is not “helping readers to change their lives” and that popular Romances are not self- help books.

Instead, Seidel defines popular Romance as fantasy, entertainment, and pleasure. She believes that Romance novels should be judged by the joy they bring: “I am tired of

the assumption that reading romances proves that there is something wrong with a woman's life [.]. She ought to change her life, the thinking goes, so that whatever needs are met by her books will be met by her life. But books are a part of life. They are a source of splendid pleasure" (Seidel 177). Seidel's arguments do not defend Romance narrative for not meeting some contemporary feminist standards; she concludes that woman read not to seek advice but to escape into a world of fantasy, where in the end, love is victorious.

Catherine Asaro, a writer of Romance and a physicist with a Ph.D. in atomic and molecular theory, reinforces Seidel's theory on the heroine in Romance as sexual libertine. She regards the heroine as the driving force of the story where she is rewarded for what she values by achieving her goals and winning the hero. The heroine is "every woman" and "she may be of noble birth, or have other qualities we don't associate with everyday lives, but she doesn't have to be a male-identified heroine to be considered interesting or worthwhile as a character" (Asaro 2).

Asaro argues that Romance has not *become* feminist, but that it has always *been* feminist. She states that it has always been "on the edge of what mainstream culture accepted, and the changes we've seen reflect how that edge has moved" (Asaro 2). She believes that the emphasis on Romance now revolves around equality and consensual sex, and this reflects the progress made concerning the roles of men and women. However, the hero is still benefiting from "the heroine's strength and wisdom" which is a consistent characteristic of Romance narrative (Asaro 3). In Romance narrative, the heroine is often [the woman] in charge. Therefore, we need to refocus our expectations regarding popular Romance, and concentrate on how heroines are represented in

contemporary Romance narrative. These concerns will be further addressed in Chapter Three, *Harlequins: Still Winning the Hearts of Women Everywhere*.

Romance writers and critics like Siedel and Asaro, set out to destroy the preconceived notions that have surrounded a genre of writing dedicated to women. They insist that the contemporary Romance heroine is a changed women, even though they do not ever necessarily brand the heroines of the past as weak. Siedel agrees that the purpose of Romance is fantasy and escapism, but not escapism from the sphere that Janice Radway depicts. This is not an unhealthy female sphere, but instead, a place where reading Romance is an act of enjoyment. And if women do read to escape life's obstacles, these obstacles may not be related to the patriarchy or female oppression that Radway concentrates on. Although Radway respects the importance of Romance because of its strong association with women, she assumes an uncomfortable pessimism regarding male/female relationships. For Radway, women are escaping a negative, male-dominated reality. Today this is untrue, and many critics defend Romance praising its positive aspects. For instance, Tania Modleski provides a path for other critics to follow. Her most important statement suggests that women's narrative speaks to women: this can not be overlooked.

Romance narrative has been speaking to women since its inception. Romance narrative has also been producing heroines from the very beginning, and even though women's characteristics and professions have altered, there have been many strong heroines beginning with Richardson's *Pamela*. Romance narrative has always, and does still, mirror the lives of women, and not just their exterior lives, but also their inner emotions, their needs and their desires. These notions will be addressed in Chapter Two,

Herstory of Romance: An Overview of Romance as Reinvented.

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Chapter Two

Herstory of Romance: an Overview of Romance Fiction. A Journey from the Sentimental Romance to the Domestic Romance and the Sensation Romance.

In Chapter Two, the history of Romance fiction will be traced from Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel *Pamela* to E.D.E.N Southworth's *The Hidden Hand*, and Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynne*. These novels provide examples of popular Romance fiction read widely by middle class women of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. For the purpose of this chapter, I will focus on three forms of popular Romance: the Sentimental, the Domestic and the Sensation. These categories of popular Romance will be discussed in this chapter in regards to the periscope effect into the lives of women: women's concerns of the time, and women's representation of the female heroine as a quasi-powerful figure.

The plot is similar in all three popular forms of popular Romance: the Sentimental, the Domestic and the Sensation. More specifically, in regards to this paper, Romance is connected to these essential components: ritual courtship, attraction, suffering, passion and love. Although the Romance formula is timeless, as are its components, the interaction of genders in relation to ritual courtship, attraction, suffering and love has nonetheless evolved over time.

John Steven in *Medieval Romance* states that Romance "as a genre, [or as] a series of related genres, is characterized by conventions, motifs, [and] archetypes, which have been created in order to express the experience in its essential nature" (Stevens 16). As a matter of fact, these conventions of Romance are continuously being reinvented.

Stevens describes courtly love as a fixed code which every lover was expected to obey (Stevens 16). He states that these patterns of emotions or codes of behaviour— more specifically, Romance conventions— originated because they were needed “to order experience” (Stevens 30). Romance motifs of ritual courtship, attraction and love, and the related human experiences that were connected to them, were born in Arthurian legend, and “it is through one’s reading of medieval Romance that we know the experience of courtly love” (Stevens 33).

Romantic love thrives on frustration, not only sexual frustration, but from the outset Romantic love is fraught with difficulty and obstacles. In Romance fiction, before one can love one must suffer. However, the resolution of love is marriage, and from the Sentimental to Contemporary Romance, love and marriage are often the conclusion of the narrative.

Pamela: An Early Romance

In fact, Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, the story of a poor servant sought after by her wealthy owner, revolves around the three conventions of Romance as outlined above: ritual courtship, attraction and love. Mr. B, through what seems to Pamela as attempts on her virtue, realizes that he must court and marry her before she will yield to his desires. As his attraction grows for her, he in turn becomes her servant of love, and his actions change from those of the intolerable rake to that of a concerned lover. Mr. B states passionately to Pamela, “Oh my dear obliging good girl, on my knees, as you on yours, I vow to you everlasting truth and fidelity” (Richardson 289). At this moment, Pamela returns his love, and she is rewarded by marriage “for all the sufferings” she has endured earlier on in the narrative which were the result of Mr. B’s attacks on her virtue

(Richardson 289). In the Sentimental novel, ritual courtship, attraction and love are still central, however, marriage enters the Romance domain. Pamela and Mr. B's love must be legitimized through the ceremony of marriage.

In *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Fiedler argues that courtly love ends where sentimental love in the novel begins. He states that "the lover may kneel still before his mistress, but he kneels not to pledge himself to humility and secrecy, but to ask her hand" (Fiedler 60). Although the details of courtly love have been altered, the motifs are still undeniably present in Romance narrative. Fiedler regards the movement from courtly love to the sentimental of the eighteenth century as a movement from the adulterous love of Lancelot and Guinevere to a newer concept represented by marriage and the happy ending (60). Fiedler sees this history of Romance as a sentimental revolution: "a revolution carried out in modest silence by the literary form that in the meantime dethroned poetry --- the modern or bourgeois novel" (Fiedler 60).

Fiedler also notes that the eighteenth century novel sets out to mock chivalry rather than to celebrate it (Fiedler 39). He suggests that the novel form created by Samuel Richardson was "to deal with the truth of daily existence," and he refers to the Richardsonian novel as "fictional history" (Fiedler 39). Fiedler states that the novel was considered "sub literature" by eighteenth century critics; however, the distinction between serious fiction and trash was not yet considered relevant (Fiedler 41). The novel gained great popularity in the eighteenth century, and its success is rooted in "a new group of readers, to whose cultural aspirations and spiritual needs it responded with peculiar aptness" (Fiedler 41). This large growing audience was the middle class. Fiedler

defines this audience as “middle class, Protestant, and urban” more specifically, the first “mass public” (41).

This reading public “grew steadily on into the nineteenth century until it had established publishing as the first mass production industry in the world” (Fiedler 41). In fact, the reading public had changed: “the masculine wit of the eighteenth century verse and essay seemed more at home in the coffee house than in the boudoir, where the middle class tended to believe books were to be consumed” (Fielder 42). According to Fiedler, this is a crucial moment in the history of the novel as a profound division occurs. The male and the female social spheres are clearly separated; more caught up in social discourse and the interests of business, the male member of the household is unwilling to pay attention to trivialities, such as art, and this was left to the female members of the family (Fiedler 42). Fiedler comments that “the moment at which the novel took hold coincides with the moment of the sexual division of labour which left business to the male and the arts to the female” (42). He states that the natural movement of the novel towards themes of love and marriage is a result of the predominant female audience (42). Hence, the novel, as a narrative form, abandons the poetic stuffiness of more traditional works, and is “intended to seem closer to the chronicles and news accounts which its readers trusted than to poetry which they feared” (Fielder 44).

So, rather than read Alexander Pope, women of the eighteenth century read the story of *Pamela*. In fact, this non-poetic narrative interwoven with the theme of love was favoured by women readers who preferred reality, more specifically, *real* fictional heroines confronting what they believed to be *real* issues. At the time Richardson published *Pamela*, middle class women were recognized as part of the reading public,

and the Sentimental novel was born. More women had access to books and were able to read them, and the ability of this novel to speak to women was astounding. Furthermore, in *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt states that *Pamela's* success “was largely due to its appeal to the interests of women readers” (Watt 151). In fact, women constituted a large portion of the reading public, and Richardson was able to take advantage of this broadly based female readership. Watt explains that women of the middle-class were more apt to read *Pamela* because “their lower educational standards made classical and learned literature out of the question for the great majority, and that they therefore tended to devote much of their leisure to whatever lighter reading was available” (Watt 151). Watt also attributes the combination of both “fictional and of devotional literature” in *Pamela* as an important factor in its success (Watt 152). Women could read it without guilt, and believe that it somehow strengthened their moral standing which was so readily imposed on society by the institution of the Christian church. Fiedler states that the novel represented “entertainment pretending to be a sermon” (Fiedler 45). As a result, the novel became a book of conduct “for the daughters of the bourgeois” (45). Fiedler comments that in addition to teaching Christianity and virtue, the novel embodied “the Sentimental Love Religion” and strong overtones of “Christian piety” (45).

Pamela epitomizes Christian piety as she protects her virtue; hence, it is clear that Richardson understood the female reading public. He is able accurately to describe the daily lives of women to them with a unique “closeness to the feminine point of view” in which we find a “wealth of minutely described domestic detail” (Watt 153). In fact, “the taste for domestic detail on the part of Richardson’s feminine audience probably made an

appreciable contribution to the narrative's air of everyday reality," for example, Richardson is able to carefully describe "a suitable travelling wardrobe" (153). Fiedler states that Richardson's "insights into the complexities of the female mind has become terrifyingly acute" (Fiedler 60).

Watt believes that Richardson was able to depict in his novel the trivialities of everyday life. He believes that, in *Pamela*, the relationship of the lovers has the qualities of Romantic love, "and yet it can realistically be made to involve many of the basic problems of everyday life" (Watt 138). This represents another aspect of Richardson's connectedness to the reality of women's lives. Furthermore, Watt states that the concept of courtly love itself "could not be combined with [that of] marriage until marriage was primarily the result of a free choice by the individuals concerned" (138). Courtly love had also further divided the genders, associating women with purity and men with sinfulness, and "the feminine role in courtship made it immoral as well as impolitic for a girl to allow herself to feel love for a suitor until he had actually asked for her hand in marriage" (Watt 167). This explains Pamela's reluctance to receive Mr. B until he has claimed his everlasting love for her. It is when Pamela leaves for her parents' home that a romantic association becomes more apparent. At this point, the reader realizes that Mr. B has become more than passionately attracted to Pamela, and that Pamela herself is somewhat saddened at leaving him. His love for her has transformed his rakish actions into gentlemanly behaviour. Mr. B declares his love for Pamela and seeks her forgiveness for his ghastly behaviour: "But spare me my dearest girl...for I find I cannot live a day without you...let me see if you can forgive the man who loves you more than himself" (Richardson 263).

Pamela's ability to reform Mr. B is essential to the plot for the eighteenth century female reader. Women could read *Pamela* and be offered the hope that they might not be destined to the status they were born into. Watt states that "the legal position of women in the eighteenth century was very largely governed by the patriarchal concepts of Roman law" (Watt 140). Hence, Pamela is the property of Mr. B, and her refusal to have a sexual relationship with him is a brave act when we consider that she was virtually physically owned by him. With an understanding of the historical context, one begins to understand the dire circumstances that Pamela challenged and her victorious resolution. In fact, it could be stated that Pamela is a heroine of her time.

As stated above, women of the eighteenth century were the property of men as were the children conceived in marriage (Watt 141). A husband was permitted to beat his wife, and could sue for a separation, while she was not awarded that luxury. It was extremely difficult for women to gain economic independence, and the wage for women was "about a quarter of the average wage for men" (Watt 142). In addition, the necessity of the dowry was an important factor in the eighteenth century where "marriage became a much more commercial matter" than it had been previously. A servant girl, such as Pamela, would not have access to a dowry, and a woman without a dowry had great difficulty finding a husband. Even more horrible was the poverty of women, and indigent women were subjected to being sold "at prices ranging from sixpence to three and a half guineas" (Watt 143).

In some cases, women were purchased and used as servants; and "they were usually bound to stay with their employees either until they were twenty-one, or until they married; many employers forbade their servants to marry under any circumstances"

(Watt 144). The lives of the lower middle class women of the eighteenth century were filled with hopelessness and desolation. In the midst of their despair, Richardson gives them Pamela, and although most critics do not recognize Pamela as a liberated heroine, for women of her time she is a glimmer of hope in a pool of despair, and the model of an escape from the poverty and hardships that filled their lives.

According to Watt, Pamela's matrimony would have represented a triumph to middle class servant girls (Watt 148). He states that "Richardson's heroine symbolized the aspirations of all the women in the reading public who were subject to ...difficulties" (148). *Pamela* as a narrative is revolutionary as she marks "a very notable epiphany in the history of our culture: the emergence of a new, fully developed and immensely influential stereotype of the feminine role" (Watt 161). Hence, Pamela is a heroine for her middle class audience, and also innovative as she helps to reform a culture of popular romance narrative in the eighteenth century by providing women with hope. The story of Pamela suggests for women that there is hope in their life to change their dismal situation as Pamela changed her circumstances from misfortune to success.

It should not be overlooked that Richardson imbued his female protagonist with heroic qualities. Pamela was the victorious maiden who overcame all obstacles and in the end was rewarded with love and wealth. However, it seems rather intentional on the part of Richardson that his heroine should procure such a position of power considering her social class. This is not to say that all female readers believed that they could change their place in the class structure of England, but it provided them with a role-model who achieved success by overcoming insurmountable odds. By the end of the novel, Pamela is a wealthy landowner and has achieved this by maintaining her virginity.

In *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong highlights Pamela's ability to artfully negotiate a contract with Mr. B. In fact, Pamela manages to get a contract that would have normally been off limits to a servant: Richardson "In allowing [Pamela] the grounds of negotiating such a contract, ... modifies the presupposition of all previous contracts, namely that the male defined and valorized the female as a form of currency in an exchange among men" (Armstrong 112). Although Armstrong agrees that Pamela is used as property in exchange for the marriage and land she attains, it is important to point out that Pamela, as a servant, has acquired this in addition to the man whom she loves. So, she has gone from servant to wealthy landowner, and has negotiated a contract in which she is a beneficiary. In the end, Pamela receives exactly what any servant would dream of and has changed her life and class. In the contract negotiation, Pamela represents an astute business woman rather than a repressed housewife.

In the end, Richardson's Pamela is not the weak maiden that her letters often portray her. She is strong and unwilling to succumb to Mr. B without a commitment from him. Pamela is able to secure herself comfort and wealth in a society dominated by aristocracy. She does not concede to Mr. B's advances despite the fact she may be fired for denying him. Although her outer actions represent the expectations of society, or the way a virtuous maiden was to act in the eighteenth century, her inner actions are often intuitive and audacious. Pamela plays the weak feminine role as society expected of her, fainting and becoming physically ill at Mr. B's advances. However, she still does not fall prey to him and she will not give herself to him without a marriage contract. On several occasions she trusts her intuition. For example, Pamela is not easily convinced of Mr. B's love for her, and she recognizes that his love for her may not be sincere. She is

perceptive and remains suspicious of Mr. B's intentions of marriage:

Things that we wish, are apt to gain a too ready credence with us. This sham-marriage is not yet cleared up: Mrs. Jewkes, the vile Mrs. Jewkes! May yet instigate the mind of this master: His pride of heart, and pride of condition, may again take place. And a man that could in so little a space, first love me, then hate, then banish me this house, and send me away disgracefully; and now send for me again, in such affectionate terms, may still waver, may still deceive [me] (Richardson 263).

Although she feigns weakness, Pamela is a powerful heroine and her motives become clearer as the narrative progresses.

Armstrong states that Pamela's maintenance of her virtue is an exertion in itself of power. She does not succumb to Mr. B's advances, and when he persists and appears in her bedroom, she continues to fight for her virtue: "he kissed me with frightful vengeance; and then his voice broke upon me like a clap of thunder. Now, Pamela, said he, is the dreadful time of reckoning come, that I have threatened--- I screamed out in such a manner, as never anybody heard the like" (Richardson 212). Armstrong argues that Mr. B's failure to seduce Pamela "on so many occasions tells us that this woman possesses some kind of power other than that inhering in either the body of a servant or in that of a prominent family" (Armstrong 113). Richardson has imbued his serving girl with control, and the Sentimental narrative form is an instrument in relating Pamela's victory to the female reading public. More specifically, Richardson uses the form to present a heroine who in the end achieves what would have been regarded as virtually impossible in an elitist, patriarchal English society. Pamela, and the power of the Sentimental Romance provide an example of a woman overcoming her fears and achieving her desires; the result was to provide the reading audience with comfort and hope.

The Gothic as Interlude to Domestic

In Sentimental Romance, Pamela is exemplary as she connects women of the time to their hopes and dreams, while providing women with an insight into the minds of men. In fact, real women's concerns with love, sex and marriage are mirrored in Pamela's struggles with Mr. B. The Gothic takes this one step further: women's fears of men are manifested in the narrative itself.

The Gothic story, although clouded with melancholy and darkness, still makes use of romantic themes. It most often revolves around a heroine, in a gloomy setting, with a mysterious man who is coloured by a dark past. The heroine fears for her life, and is trapped in an unforgiving world devoid of physical and spiritual safety. Emily St. Aubert, the heroine of Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, is the archetypal gothic heroine. Emily is an orphan living with her aunt. She is fearful of her home because she believes it is haunted, and she is terrified of her aunt's husband, the Count Montoni. The following passage is an example of how Emily responds to her situation:

She now retired to her bed, leaving the lamp burning on the table; but its gloomy light, instead of dispelling her fear, assisted it; for, by its uncertain rays, she almost fancied she saw shapes flit past her curtains and glide into the remote obscurity of her chamber.—The castle clock struck one before she closed her eyes to sleep. (Radcliffe 241)

The Count is a villainous character who has married Emily's aunt for money. When Mme Montoni dies, Emily suspects that the Count has killed her. Women's fears of men are manifested in the Gothic narrative.

In addition to the heroine's perpetual state of fear, Modleski states that an essential element of the female Gothic is that it is "set in a remote place, in a faraway

time” (Modleski 20). She goes on to say that “the female Gothic as created by Ann Radcliffe in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* expresses women’s most intimate fears, or more precisely their fears about intimacy” (20). The implication is that women of the eighteenth century are often sheltered in patriarchal homes and misunderstand what is expected of them on an intimate level when they marry. As Watt points out, in an arranged marriage that takes place for financial reasons, a woman may not even know her husband prior to the wedding (Watt 158). So the home becomes a frightening place for women, and it is in the house where women are generally confined; in the Gothic, this “becomes the locus of evil in an entirely make-believe sixteenth-century Italian mountain setting” (Modleski 20). Modleski suggests that the remote Italian mountain setting in the Gothic is symbolic of the fear and imprisonment women may feel in the domestic sphere.

More specifically, the Gothic Romance speaks to women about their feelings of fear and imprisonment. According to Modleski, “Gothics provide an outlet for women’s fear about fathers and husbands, fears which are much more pronounced than the sentimental heroine’s” (Modleski 20). Modleski regards Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho* as the archetypal Gothic Romance that was later imitated by many Gothic authors. In Radcliffe’s novel, after the villainous Montoni marries Emily’s aunt for her riches, he brings Emily and her aunt to an isolated castle “in the mountains where he imprisons the aunt and persecutes the niece in order to gain control of her fortune” (Modleski 20). Modleski argues that this plot was popular at a time when the nuclear family was controlled by a dominant husband: the Gothic “spoke powerfully to [a] young girl struggling to achieve psychological autonomy in a home where the remote, but

all powerful father ruled over an utterly dependent wife” (20). Furthermore, Modleski believes that the Gothic probed “the deepest layers of the female unconscious, providing a way for women to work through profound psychic conflicts, especially ambivalence towards the significant people in their lives---mothers, fathers, lovers” (Modleski 83).

As discussed above, the Gothic is a platform for women’s concerns and fears. The Domestic Romance that follows the Gothic continues in the same vein. Modleski states that “Gothics are domestic novels too, concerned with the (often displaced) relationships among family members and while driving home to women the importance of coping with enforced confinement ...although nineteenth century readers soon dropped the Gothic novels in favour of the Domestic novels, it could be argued that the latter novels are somewhat continuous with the earlier ones” (Modleski 20).

The Domestic Romance Introduced

Similar to the Gothic, the Domestic Romance concerns itself with women’s unhappiness in marriage and the Domestic sphere. However, the Domestic seems to go one step further as it does not use fictional settings to disguise women’s fears. The female writers in the nineteenth century were “middle class women ... writing both within the domestic sphere and about it” (Armstrong 119). However, the middle class female writer did not have the luxuries of a writing room, nor did she have privacy. Instead, the female writer was “the middle class wife and mother” who was expected to “sublimate all of her needs and desires” for the well-being of her family” (119). This lack of privacy and freedom, combined with the monotony of domestic chores, provided women with a muse, and their angst and frustrations were woven into a narrative form: the Domestic Romance.

Modleski suggests that the Domestic Romance is a grievance “against marriage, fathers, and husbands” (Modleski 22). The domestic sphere is not a place of contentedness, but rather a place clouded with misery and filled with monotonous tasks (Modleski 23). Modleski believes that in Domestic fiction “men are culprits responsible for the intense suffering of wives and daughters” (Modleski 23). Hence, a typical plot of Domestic Romance writer E.D.E.N Southworth concerns itself with a heroine “who is forced to fend for herself because a guardian, father, or husband persecutes or neglects her, and she manages splendidly until at the end she gets a mate worthy of her, or alternatively, the mate she has, finally comes to appreciate her virtues and abilities, and is transformed into a model husband” (Modleski 23). The Domestic Romance becomes the pulpit from which women could declare their unhappiness with their marital relationships and their station in life, a station in the domestic sphere that patriarchal society had dictated to women.

E.D.E.N Southworth, writing in the 1800s, hoped that she could implement change in what she believed to be a patriarchal society. Her own life was one filled with trials and tribulations; Southworth’s husband had abandoned her and left her virtually penniless. Amy Hudock in “*Challenging the definition of heroism in E.D.E.N Southworth's The Hidden Hand*” states that “the sheer number of Southworth's books suggests that she wrote for money, and that she did it well, [but] a closer look at the life and work of this productive writer reveals other motivations than financial gain behind her seemingly tireless pen” (Hudock 1). Despite the monetary rewards, Southworth also believed herself to be a moral writer, and “she desired above all to instruct through entertainment, and her most important message for her largely feminine readership was

also the most significant lesson of her own life: be not afraid” (Hudock 1). In addition, Southworth used her narrative form to speak out against “slavery, capital punishment, class oppression, alcohol consumption, and...mistreatment of women” (1). She was concerned with the abuse of and injustice perpetrated on women. Another important contributing factor to Southworth’s accomplishment is how she was represented by society at the time. Southworth defines herself “in the public eye by disclosing her life history--the story of a woman who triumphs over incredible odds” (Hudock 1). By creating this persona as an author, Southworth gained respectability, and this was consistent with the “images of heroic women presented in her fiction” (1). Women admired her success because, despite her husband’s abandonment, she created her own social stability and financial gains.

Domestic Romance: The Hidden Hand— Capitola Black as Heroine.

E.D.E.N Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand* presents us with a Domestic Romance in which the heroine overcomes all odds. Capitola Black is a homeless orphan whose heroic qualities cause her to defy the domesticity women of the time were synonymous with. She is forced to dress up as a boy in order to protect herself from the harsh streets that are her home. Capitola is determined, strong willed, and courageous. She recognizes the injustice that was associated with being a woman:

when I couldn't get a job or work for love nor money, when my last penny was spent for my last roll--and my last roll was eaten up--and I was dreading hunger by day, and the horrid perils of the night [rapists and thieves], I thought to myself if I were only a boy, I might carry packages, and shovel in coal, and do lots of jobs by day, and sleep without terror by night! And then I felt bitter against fate for not making me a boy. (Southworth XXV)

Capitola's past of hardship forces her to be a strong independent woman devoid of sentimentality and deep emotion. These qualities are quite contrary to what women were supposed to represent. According to Ellen Micheletti, "we often think of the nineteenth century woman as an oppressed creature imprisoned in layers of skirts. Capitola broke all the conventions of proper feminine behaviour and ranged as free as any man. She had adventures, she spoke her mind, she did what she wanted to do and she was rewarded for her audacity" (Micheletti 1).

Capitola is a survivor, and rather than faint at the sight of trouble, she is able to construe plans and defend herself. Even when she is faced with a robbery, she does not panic: "The deadly inclination to swoon returned upon her, but with a heroic effort she controlled her fears and forced herself to look. Yes, there they were! It was no dream, no illusion, no nightmare-there they were, three powerful desperadoes armed with bowie knives" (Southworth XXVI).

Capitola is a heroine to whom the female reading public could look up. In fact, Hudock states that Capitola is at the heart of the novel's popularity and that she entered "into the national consciousness" (Hudock 6). Capitola is a "defender of the weak, champion of justice, and inventor of numerous practical jokes. Southworth's madcap protagonist, who best describes herself as a 'damsel-errant in quest of adventures,' won the hearts of millions (Hudock 6). Capitola was a heroine that women readers could reckon with. Women could understand Capitola's anguish and her inability to find her place in a patriarchal society. Southworth derived her fiction from real life, and the origins for Capitola appeared in a New York newspaper "in which it was stated that a little nine-year-old girl, dressed in boy's clothes and selling newspapers, had been

arrested. She was homeless and friendless, and was sent to some asylum in Westchester county. That was the origin of Capitola. The newspaper item was a seed which had stopped in my mind and germinated there” (Hudock 6).

Southworth places Capitola in the position of hero rather than that of heroine. Capitola’s heroic undertakings are similar to any great heroes in literary history: “she battles with the notorious bandit Black Donald and his gang, fights a mock duel, and rescues an imprisoned maiden” (Baym 1). Capitola is the target of villainy because she is an heiress to a fortune, yet she herself has no knowledge of this. Southworth’s Capitola Black is a revolutionary heroine. Southworth creates a woman “who transcends gender roles, a protagonist who effectively battles the forces of evil, and a hero who conquers the past on her own terms, thus forging a place for herself in society... Through Capitola, Southworth teaches a morality which claims goals can be reached and heroic deeds performed without separation, death, and destruction” (Hudock 6).

As always happens in the conventions of Romance, at the end of the story Capitola falls in love and weds. However, Hudock believes that the happy ending and marriage was a forced action on Southworth’s part: “Capitola’s marriage is discussed only in the last two pages of the novel, a brevity which suggests Southworth was in a hurry to conclude on conventional lines but was not much interested in this plot development” (Hudock 14).

Southworth ends her story of Capitola Black with the following words:

I wish I could say they all lived happily ever after. But the truth is I have reason to suppose that even Clara had sometimes occasion to administer to Doctor Rocke dignified curtain lectures, which no doubt did him good. And I know for a positive fact that our Cap sometimes gives her “dear darling sweet Herbert,” the benefit of the sharp edge of her tongue, which, he, of course, deserves. But

notwithstanding all of this, I am happy to say that all enjoy a fair amount of human felicity. (Southworth LXI)

The conclusion suggests that Southworth did not see marriage as the culmination of a woman's life. *The Hidden Hand* presents readers "with a recognizable plot pattern--the young girl makes good in the world by finally marrying--through which she challenges the underlying social assumptions that prescribe women's roles in society" (Hudock 6). Southworth instinctively mirrors the distress of her readers. Southworth's novel reflects the "hopes and fantasies" of the female reading public who yearn for a heroine to look up to. The author creates a heroine who "triumphs to show her readers that they too can risk, strive and succeed" (Hudock 6).

If the Domestic Romance novel concerns itself with women's unhappiness in the domestic sphere, the Sensation Romance goes one step further, to show women who escape the constraints of the prison-like homes. Lady Isabel Vane, the heroine of Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynne* (1861), runs away from her husband and children: "marriage itself creates Isabel's misery. Even though Archibald Carlyle is the best of all possible husbands, utter dependence makes Isabel timid. She is afraid to ask questions. Her requests are ignored. She is protected, cherished, and prevented from taking adult responsibilities" (Mitchell XVI). As a matter of fact, the Sensation dealt with this very issue: women's unhappiness in the home. In addition to this theme, divorce, sexuality, repression and revenge were all intertwined; they were recognized as ingredients for a successful Sensation novel. This Romance form used elements such as secrets, surprises and suspense to engage the reader (Mitchell XII). In fact, the Sensation entered the realm

of woman as sexual being, and this notion was neglected by Domestic Romance writers. Anne Dalke in “*The Shameless Woman is the Worst of Men: Sexual Aggression in Nineteenth Century Sensation Novels*” defines the separation between the Domestic and the Sensation as connected to the depiction of female sexuality in the narrative. She states that women become sensual beings in the Sensation, and we begin to see women as adulteresses, another common theme in Sensation fiction. We see this theme in *East Lynne*. Lady Isabel seems to have everything her heart desires; she has a loving husband, money at her disposal, nannies for her children, and a grand home, but she seeks something deeper that she can not recognize. This is, in fact, rooted in her need to fulfill her sexual desires.

I would be remiss in not mentioning the root of the above themes in relation to the Sensation novel. According to Diane Wallace, the Sensation began as a short story that appeared in female-centred magazines; in fact, the magazines gained their popularity through these stories. Wallace states that the Sensation attracted female “readers because its representations of crimes and secrets disrupting genteel domestic life closely mirrored some of the most pressing contemporaneous anxieties: about criminality, shifting class identities, financial instability, failed and illegal marriages, sexuality, and mental debilitation” (Wallace 196).

Unfortunately, unlike Pamela and Capitola, the genteel heroine of *East Lynne*, Lady Isabel Vane, is not rewarded at the end of the story for her actions. Lady Isabel, as mentioned above, runs away from her husband and children to be with the villainous Francis Levinson, who is convicted of murder by the end of the story. However, upon her return home to East Lynne, she discovers that her child is sick and dying. In order to

be with her son, William, she disguises herself as a governess and begins working at East Lynne. By the time she returns from her affair, her husband has forgotten his love for her, and he is already remarried and besotted with his new love, Barbara Hare. At the beginning of Lady Isabel's marriage to Archibald Carlyle, she had been jealous of Barbara Hare who was in love with Archibald. Near the end of the novel, as William is dying, Lady Isabel comes down with an unknown sickness:

She began to sink with alarming rapidity. There appeared to be no ostensible disease, but she was wasting away day by day, as her mother had done. Her fading was observed by none; and she still discharged her duties as Lucy's governess...was she conscious of her own decay? Partially so: and, had anybody inquired what her malady was, would have answered, A broken heart. (Wood 472)

Lady Isabel becomes a physical manifestation of remorse that consumes her entire being. Although Isabel is courageous in her escape of the domestic sphere, in the end, Mrs. Henry Wood punishes her for her actions. But even so, Wood must make amends to her reading public for her heroine's outlandish behaviour.

Lady Isabel, as a heroine, is unlike Pamela or Capitola. Isabel is part of the aristocracy and she is supposed to conform to society's rules; instead she defies them by running away and committing adultery. Isabel creates her own misfortunes, just as Pamela and Capitola create their own fortunes. Therefore, Isabel must suffer for her actions of wrong doing in order that Mrs. Henry Wood reckon with her Christian reading public. However, Isabel's strength as a heroine lies in her defiance. Isabel has the courage to run away and escape a lifestyle where she feels empty and useless.

It is important to point out that the author uses her husband's name rather than her own. Critics have seen this as a deliberate choice by the author to create respectability;

for example, Davies claims that “to declare oneself as ‘Mrs. Wood’ is to say to the reading world that one is a safe, harmless, respectable, God-fearing, middle-class English woman....it is to advertise one’s novel as safe moral reading for the family circle” (Davies 1).

As well as defining herself as safe to the female reading public, Mrs. Henry Wood is able to combine pedagogy with fiction. The didactic nature of Mrs. Henry Wood’s fiction is present in the voice of the authoritative narrator of *East Lynne* who often interrupts the story to add an insightful comment to influence the reader’s response:

When Lady Isabel was Mr. Carlyle’s wife, she had never wholly loved him. The very utmost homage that esteem, admiration, affection, could give, was his; but that mysterious passion called by the name of love (and which, as I truly and heartily believe, cannot in its refined etherealism be known to many of us) had not been given to him. It was now. I told you some chapters back, that the world goes round by the rules of contrary. (Southworth 496)

The author of *East Lynne* is not subtle; in fact, she wants the reader to be wary. She is warning the reader “if you are a woman, and want to remain safely within orthodox society[,] your nature is assimilated with your wifehood, and the duties of a wife are universal” (Davies 2). Wood reminds the reading public that at the heart of her book is the theme of love and marriage. However, Wood hopes to share with her readers a story that will teach them: “she urges the female reader to profit by the horrific fate of the gentle and aristocratic Lady Isabel by...avoiding jealousy, which, rather than lust, seems to be defined as woman’s original sin” (Davies 2). Isabel must suffer for her actions in order for Mrs. Henry Wood’s moral lessons to be heeded. Mrs. Henry Wood uses the popular Romance form of the time to impart her dire message to women.

East Lynne, as a Sensation, similar to both the Sentimental and Domestic, speaks to women's concerns and desires of the time. But the author in this case seems to be warning her readers to behave correctly rather than encouraging them to challenge conformity as Southworth's heroine, Capitola Black, did. Pamela, Capitola, and Isabel are all different types of heroines. They all speak to different issues; however, what they have in common is that they hold at the centre of their universe the wants and desires of women. Today, in Harlequin Romance, the wants and desires of women still remain the focus. The Harlequin will be discussed at length in Chapter Three where it will be suggested that popular Romance fiction is still speaking to women, and that the heroines of Romance have evolved into 'mighty' females.

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Chapter Three

Harlequins: Still Winning the Hearts of Women

Confessions of a Harlequin Reader

Gradually, I began to read more and more Harlequins, until one day when I found myself about to buy one, I began to suspect I was hooked. I reasoned that anyone who paid 95 cents or \$1.75 (or whatever it was back then) for a few poorly written pages had to be hooked. So I vowed I would never sink that kind of money into any habit, hoping in that way to limit myself to the occasional read. No sooner had I made my decision, that I discovered a second-hand store two blocks away from my place that sold ten Harlequins for a dollar! My resolve weakened, I became a customer and had to admit that I was a 'Harlequin reader' (Miles 2)

Harlequin Romance has been capturing the interest of female readers for decades. In fact, in the twenty-first century, despite the progressive movements in feminism, Harlequin is still capturing the interest of millions of female readers worldwide as statistics below will provide. Harlequin as a corporation has grown immensely; there is a multitude of subcategories to cater to everyone, as varied as their likes and dislikes may be. More specifically, for every female's personal taste there is a Harlequin.

This chapter will focus on the heroines of Harlequin; as well, the different categories of Harlequins will be examined, including Harlequin Intrigue, Harlequin Temptation, Harlequin Presents, Superromance, and Harlequin Blaze. Chapter Two presented us with strong heroines of the past, for example, Pamela, Capitola, and Lady Isabel; Harlequin heroines carry on where their predecessors left off and similarly speak to an era. Comparable to the heroines of the past, Harlequin heroines reflect the social ideology of the time period; for example, issues such as single motherhood, miscarriage, abortion, unplanned pregnancy, and birth control often appear in Harlequin. In addition,

women in the work place and women and sexuality play a large role in the narrative.

Women's fears, desires, and goals are all represented in Harlequin. Although fictional, these heroines speak to the women who read them, and Harlequin's steadfast popularity suggests that women readers are listening.

Harlequins- The Industry

To begin with, it is imperative to begin a Chapter on Harlequin by profiling the media giant that dominates popular Romance. This giant is known as Harlequin Enterprise Limited. It is the "world's leading publisher of Romance fiction and women's fiction" (Harlequin Enterprises). Since its inception in the early sixties, the popularity of Harlequin has not waned, but only strengthened, suggesting that the stories are still popular for women today (Jensen 33). Harlequin Enterprise is based in Toronto and publishes about 110 titles a month in 27 languages. This covers five international markets on six continents. There are over 1300 authors around the world, and each author contributes to one or more of the diverse categories of Harlequin Romance. Harlequin is clearly the dominate player in the Romance industry: "with 144 million books sold in 2003-half overseas and a tremendous 96% outside Canada-it is both the country's most successful publisher and one of its most international businesses" (Harlequin Enterprises Ltd.). In addition to Toronto, Harlequin has offices in the following cities: New York, London, Tokyo, Milan, Sydney, Paris, Madrid, Stockholm, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Athens, Budapest, and Warsaw.

There is a Harlequin to suit the many different tastes of women all over the world. Harlequin boasts of bestselling authors and skyrocketing sales: "since its inception, Harlequin has shipped approximately 4.95 billion books" (Harlequin Enterprises Ltd.).

The publishing giant believes that it is the captivating experiences they create for women that place them at the “forefront of women’s fiction” (Harlequin Enterprises Ltd.). To date, Harlequin Enterprises owns the following trademarks: Harlequin, Harlequin American Romance, Harlequin Duets, Harlequin Flipside, Harlequin Historical, Harlequin Presents, Harlequin Romance, Harlequin Superromance, HQN, Temptation, Harlequin Intrigue, Blaze, Bianca, Deseo, Silhouette Romance, Silhouette Bombshell, Silhouette Desire, Silhouette Intimate Moments, Silhouette Special Edition, Silhouette Shadows, Dreamscapes, MIRA, Red Dress Ink, Steeple Hill, Love Inspired, and eHarlequin.com. (Harlequin Enterprises Ltd.)

It is because of these diverse categories that women are able to choose the Harlequin that best suits their needs and desires. In essence, their choice of Harlequin is based on the category of Romance which they favour and which they believe best fits their lifestyle. As with the heroines represented in Chapter Two— Pamela, Capitola Black, and Lady Isabel— female readers are able to reckon with and admire the Harlequin heroine. However, the contemporary Harlequin heroine is unlike our heroines of the past; in fact, she is a ‘new woman’.

Harlequin Heroine – A ‘New Woman’

Margaret Ann Jensen, in *Love’s Sweet Return: The Harlequin Story*, composed a study on Harlequins in the early seventies. Even at this time, Jensen defined the contemporary Harlequin heroine as a ‘new woman’. Contrary to critics who condemn the heroine as a patriarchal pawn, Jensen argued that the Harlequin heroine “gets everything she wants – economic security, a loving husband, an exciting sex life and a choice of whether or not to pursue a career. This “new woman is able to augment traditional

attitudes with emerging feminist values” (Jensen 25). The heroine’s characteristics often vary from passionate, fiery, and serene to strong-willed and aggressive (Jensen 85). As we will see in the examples of Harlequin discussed in this chapter, heroines are not depicted as weak and passive women. In fact, they represent strong characters who must overcome serious obstacles to achieve personal and professional goals in life. Attached to these goals is the heroine’s desire for love and intimacy. By the end of the story, the heroine achieves her goals and the story culminates in marriage. The Harlequin heroine as a ‘new woman’ is strong and focused. Her hopes of love are intertwined with those of achieving success in the work place.

In addition to the representation of the strong heroine, the Harlequin Romance also portrays women as professionals. In Harlequin, heroines are FBI agents, doctors, lawyers, scientists and farmers, among thousands of other professions. A good indication that Harlequin reflects the time period is that “heroines in earlier Harlequins had traditionally feminine sex-typed occupations [such as] nurses, predominating in the 1950s and early 1960s, ...secretaries in the 1970s and the secretaries have, in turn, been supplanted by a more diverse group of heroines in the 1980s.” This alteration of professions continues as we will see in this chapter (Jensen 87). Contemporary heroines are also “capable of living alone, taking care of [themselves] and making good decisions... whether [the heroine has] inherited everything she has or painstakingly worked her way up through the trenches of corporate America, she needs to be strong, resourceful and ready to handle the responsibilities of a sensuous adult relationship (Hamlett 34). Another important aspect of the progressive contemporary Harlequin heroine is her sexual freedom. Importance is not placed on a female’s virginity as it was,

for example, in Richardson's *Pamela*.

In contemporary Harlequins, such as, those being examined in this Chapter, women are sexually liberal and are often sexual initiators: "Once upon a time, heroines had to be virgins. In fact, they were still virgins by [the] book's end, although the symbolism of a discreetly closed bedroom door on the honeymoon reassured us that condition would blissfully change. Today, a romance novel's lead character can be 'experienced'" (Hamlett 34). Also, the marital status and sexual experience of heroines has changed. Heroines can be separated, divorced, or widowed and sexual intercourse is not restricted to marriage (Jensen 86). This is progressive in that women are not judged by their virginal status, and instead are free to be sexually active.

In addition to the heroine's sexual liberty, the contemporary Harlequin heroine's clearly live in the real world. Kay Mussel, in *Fantasy and Reconciliation*, states that "heroines face dilemmas in fiction that all women confront consciously or unconsciously, in daily life" (Mussel VX). For example, in Porter's *In Dante's Debt*, Daisy faces pre-marital pregnancy alone and looks to raising her child without a father: "she was determined to raise the baby here, on the farm, among people she loved" (Porter 170). In addition, Daisy must look after her father who is ill with Alzheimer's: "it would kill Zoe to watch their Dad wither away, and it would happen before their eyes. His memory would go. His control would go. His mind..." (Porter 51). In Caroline Anderson's *Assignment: Single Father*, the hero, Dr. Xavier Giraud, has a disabled child, and the heroine, Fran Williams, is compassionate towards Giraud's circumstances. Giraud states: "nobody wants to take on a disabled kid" (Anderson 13). With issues such as pre-marital pregnancy, disabled children, and Alzheimer's, there is certainly an element of reality in

Harlequin.

Not only do Harlequins include realistic issues, but also the Harlequin heroine is someone with whom female readers can reckon. She is attractive in her own right, but often in some way flawed, and she must overcome a character flaw in order for her to gain happiness. As well, her beauty is inextricably linked to her inner persona: “the Harlequin heroine’s kind of beauty is not just skin deep; it radiates from within, for the heroine’s personality matches her appearance. The most outstanding character traits of the heroine are her warmth, compassion and generosity” (Jensen 84). Fran Williams, in Anderson’s *Assignment: Single Father*, gives all her kindness and warmth to Xavier Giraud and his family; he tells her “you’re my rock, Fran, my anchor” (Anderson 181).

Most important in Romance fiction is the heroine’s profound ability to transform the hero, with his character flaws, into the true knight she longs to have. For example, *In Dante’s Debt*, Daisy transforms Dante. His arrogance and chauvinism are transformed as he will do anything for her because of his love for her, and that includes changing his inherent ideas of marriage. Dante believes that he must marry within his culture and class. By the end of the story, these ideas change, and it is Daisy who enables this transformation to occur. Daisy’s love teaches him to overcome his arrogance and his archaic values, and Dante asks marriage of Daisy at the end of the story.

Tania Modleski refers to this transformation as a “revenge fantasy” since the female reader receives satisfaction at witnessing the heroine “bringing the man to his knees” (Modleski 45). Modleski regards the heroine’s ability to change the hero as central to the appeal of Harlequins. This is essentially the heroine’s power: her ability to transform the hero.

Agreeing with Modleski's interpretation of the heroine's power, Miriam Frenier in *Good Bye Heathcliff*, points out that the heroine of Romance fiction is a powerful figure even though she may not know it: "on the surface, the heroes had more power than the heroines. But underneath, the heroines had lots of unauthorized, indirect power. And that power was portrayed as being more potent than the heroes' legitimate power because it transformed brutes into husbands" (Frenier 58). This is important because it supports the notion that the power in the Harlequin essentially lies in the heroine. Frenier argues that it is the heroine's power that attracts the reader; it is "the basic appeal" of Romance narrative (Frenier 106). In addition, it is the heroine's power that is central to Romance narrative, and her supreme power is her sexual attraction (Frenier 36).

Through her power, just as Pamela transforms Mr. B, so does the Harlequin heroine transform the hero. The hero's flaw is corrected, as the heroine helps the hero to overcome his imperfections. Whether he is aware of it or not, the "hero possesses an 'acceptable minor flaw'—a physical or emotional scar that heretofore has prohibited him from fully relinquishing the hold on his heartstrings... [the] heroine possesses the patience to heal [and] the confidence to believe" (Hamlett 34). It may be a physical, emotional, or mental obstacle, but the hero's surmounting it is essential before the true union can occur. The hero's revelation is fundamentally attached to the Romance formula. He must physically, emotionally, and mentally see the light before the heroine will give her true love to him.

It is only the heroine who can aid the hero on this journey to selfhood. She is the only one who can truly transform the hero. The hero is often "emotionally, and/or physically damaged and, like an injured lion...he may lash out at those around him...yet

only [the heroine], with her love, compassion and female strength, can save him from his demons” (Putney 101). In fact, a woman who can heal a tormented man “has great power,” and this is an essential quality the contemporary Harlequin heroine embodies.

A Harlequin for Everyone

In this section of Chapter Three, examples of the heroine as a “new woman” still speaking to women readers will be discussed- by examining heroines from the following Harlequin subcategories: Harlequin Intrigue, Harlequin Temptation, Harlequin Presents, Superromance, Harlequin and Harlequin Blaze. The heroines presented in this section are goal-oriented achievers who have solid professions and sexual freedom. These heroines are ordinary woman who possess the power to transform their lovers into the perfect hero.

The first example of the heroine will be taken from Harlequin Superromance. This subcategory was created as a “longer romance novel featuring realistic, believable characters in a wide range of emotionally involving stories” (Harlequin Enterprises). So, for women who enjoy a longer read and a story tinged with realism, the Superromance is the most fitting of the Harlequin series. Lynnette Kent’s *The Last Honest Man* provides us with a sensible working heroine and a strong hero. The heroine, Phoebe Moss, is a successful speech therapist, and although she has been hurt by a lover in the past, this does not alter her disposition; she is confident and aggressive. The hero, Adam Devries, is a successful business man who is looking to enter the realm of politics. However, the hero has a physical weakness, a speech impediment, which he relies on Phoebe to help him overcome. Adam’s speech problem represents a physical manifestation of his inner weakness and insecurity, and also marks his dependence on the heroine.

Phoebe seems at once smitten with Adam, and although he is attracted to her, he is fearful that Phoebe will not be interested in him. Phoebe is forward with Adam, eventually they begin seeing one another, and it is Phoebe who aggressively begins to further the relationship by suggesting that they move the relationship one step further:

“Adam.” Her whisper was the wind rustling the leaves of the trees, mysterious irresistible. “Don’t leave me tonight. Stay and make love to me”. An invitation to paradise. Who else but Phoebe could offer him heaven with such simple generosity? And what could he offer her? His body aching to the bone, Adam drew back. Away. “I...” God this was hard to say. “I think I better leave”...She had offered herself without reservation. And he’d turned her down without explanation. (Kent 192)

Phoebe as the sexual initiator is an integral factor in the narrative. But more importantly, is the hero’s refusal of her sexual advances. As the story progresses, we also find out that the hero is a virgin, and he is embarrassed to share this with Phoebe who is obviously sexually experienced. This adds a new dimension to the narrative, where Phoebe is placed in a dominant role, suggesting that the strength of ‘the new woman’ can often supersede that of the hero, to the point where she becomes the ‘hero’. Often in Harlequin we see exactly this: the woman plays a life-saving role where she physically and mentally transforms the hero. Phoebe helps Adam to build his self-confidence by helping to correct his speech. Phoebe is self-assured and intelligent, and she helps Adam in the only way she knows how: by teaching him to be confident and self-assured. An interesting twist in this story is the hero’s lack of sexual experience, and it is Phoebe who must lead him through his first sexual experience.

By the end of the narrative, Adam’s speech impediment and his insecurity are both corrected by Phoebe’s therapy. Phoebe’s distrust of men is also overcome as she

trusts Adam as wholeheartedly as he trusts her. The lovers unite and Phoebe proclaims her love to Adam, saying “you trusted me in a way you haven’t trusted another woman. That’s the most wonderful thing that’s ever happened to me.” (Kent 226). The hero has overcome his weaknesses with the help of the heroine, and therefore, the couple may happily continue their relationship.

Another type of Harlequin Romance is Harlequin Blaze. This category provides the female reader with a more passionate version of the Harlequin heroine. Blaze is regarded as a more sexualized Romance, and it is advertised as “Harlequin’s sexiest series yet! Red-hot reads that you will want to get your hands on” (Harlequin Enterprises). In Karen Anders’ *The Diva Diaries*, the heroine is a professional violinist who ends up at a Texan ranch. Jenna Sinclair is looking for her deceased grandmother’s diary and the jewellery that her grandmother hid before she passed away. Jenna has been left letters that indicate this provocative diary exists. She travels to the home of Texan farmer Sam Winchester on the pretence of offering a free concert to help one of Sam’s charities. Jenna stays as a guest at Sam’s ranch. Unwittingly, Sam helps her to find closure regarding her grandmother’s death, and also leads her to the items she is so desperately seeking.

As soon as Sam and Jenna meet at the airport, they are instantly attracted to one another. They begin at once to flirt with one another, and the sexual tension between the two of them pervades the narrative:

The thrilling sensation of his hands on her body and her breast against his hard pectoral muscle moved through her blood, and along her flesh in sharp waves. Right at that moment, lust, too deep and strong for her to deny, and more overwhelming than she’d ever experienced, made her want to lean in and taste his full mouth to see if it was as delicious as it looked. (Anders 24)

The Blaze series has at its root the human emotion of lust. But, the narrative still revolves around a strong independent heroine who must transform a flawed hero. Sam is weary of love. His wife left him because she could not adapt to his rustic lifestyle, and he is afraid of falling in love and getting hurt once again. Jenna, like the hero, is hardened to love, and she does not want to commit to a relationship, but only wants to share passion. Sam and Jenna's relationship begins solely on the premise of sex. However, their relationship soon flourishes as passion turns to love, but both Sam and Jenna must overcome their barriers before they can unite.

It is the hero who first realizes his love for the heroine:

He'd never loved anyone more, never craved anyone more, couldn't ever see himself with anyone but Jenna..."I love you Jenna." "No don't say that. Don't" "I have to. I want you to stay here. We can work it out. I know it" ... "I'm so sorry I hurt you. I wanted to protect you. I'd have to choose and I can't. I love my music too much. I can't give it up, not even for you... You need a woman who will be a true rancher's wife and stand by you." (Anders 234)

Jenna is unable to give up her music for the love and passion she feels for Sam. Her past hurt leads her to believe that love is not a safe emotion, whereas music has always been her reliable, safe haven. However, when she leaves Texas and travels back to New York, she realizes that she loves Sam and can not live without him. Both the hero and the heroine overcome their pasts in order to be together. They both learn that passion is meaningless unless it is accompanied by love. So the Blaze series ends consistently, as the other Harlequins do, where the reformed hero and heroine live happily ever after.

Unlike the overt, steamy passion of Harlequin Blaze, American Romance is an "Upbeat, lively romance about the pursuit of love in the backyards, big cities, and wide-

open spaces of America” (Harlequin Enterprises). In Sharon Swan’s *Millionaire Montana, Four-Karat Fiancée*, the hero and heroine begin as bitter enemies. Amanda Bradley and Dev Devlin are feuding business owners, and from the beginning, the author sets the hero and heroine up as equals. Both are successful, strong willed, and unwillingly to compromise. However, when Amanda finds out that she has four orphaned younger step-siblings, she at once tries to claim them. Unfortunately, the court is concerned with her single status. Once Dev hears of her dilemma, he instantly wants to help her and the children. Dev knows about the hardships of growing up without parents because his parents abandoned him and his brother, so he suggests they get married. Amanda hesitates but she knows this is the only way to save the orphans, and they get married at once. When the newly-wed couple returns to present their case to the court, the social worker, Louise Pearson, is suspicious and she interrogates them. Eventually, the court awards temporary custody of the four children to Amanda and Dev, but Louise promises she will visit them soon to make certain they are adjusting to the new situation before considering the status of permanent custody.

When Amanda and the four children move into Dev’s lavish home, their relationship begins to change. Dev’s kindness in helping her warms her heart and she begins to become attracted to him, and Dev feels the same attraction for her. As in the Harlequins previously discussed, the hero and heroine are not able to unite because of a past clouded with disappointment. Amanda’s father had run off with another woman abandoning her and her ill mother, and Dev’s father had deserted him and his younger brother when they were toddlers, leaving them with a less than suitable parental figure, an uncle who abused alcohol. As an adolescent, Dev was often in trouble. Later, he became

a successful business owner, attempting to escape his family's shady past.

Amanda and Dev's insecurities are linked to their past familial rejection, and this makes it difficult for them to trust their injured hearts with one another. In fact, it is not until they admit their traumas to one another that they truly begin to overcome their barriers. Amanda feels relief once she shares with Dev that her father had died in prison while serving a sentence for embezzlement: it "was different...they'd opened up to each other and shared some confidences tonight—confidence of the most private and personal kind...it hadn't been easy to reveal those facts about her father. Still, she had no regrets" (Swan 219). In return, Dev shares with her the embarrassing status of his criminal brother who is "in jail in Nevada after being convicted on several counts of burglary last year. A sneak thief, that's how Jed Jr. wound up. Just what more than a few folks in this town would once have expected of a no-account Devlin" (Swan 210). This common ground with their families' shaded pasts helps the hero and heroine to overcome their barriers to romantic intimacy. Once the hero and heroine have admitted their weaknesses to one another, they sexually consummate the relationship, and the narrative ends in an official marriage celebration:

People of all ages danced to their hearts content as afternoon drifted into evening, and no one seemed more content to put their feet to good use than the bride and groom. With their attention centered on each other, they seldom spared a glance around them to see how frequently heads came together as some late breaking news began to circulate among the crowd. (Swan 250)

In true Harlequin fashion, in the end, the hero and heroine have come to terms with their weaknesses allowing them to love and live happily ever after.

While the American Romance has at its roots small town America, the Harlequin series Intrigue contains stories of narrative suspense. Harlequin defines Intrigue as

“Electrifying romance and heart-stopping suspense” (Harlequin Enterprises). In Mallory Kane’s *Heir to Secret Memories*, the hero, Johnny Yarbrough, has amnesia after his stepmother, Serena Yarbrough, has attempted to kill him because he is heir to her late husband’s fortune. Serena and society at large believe Johnny to be dead. Although Johnny has no idea of this at the onset of the narrative, and he does not know who he is, his past love Paige Reynolds recognizes his art at an art show and realizes that the lover she presumed dead is alive. Paige had believed that Johnny deserted her, and she has borne his child, Katie, on her own. When Serena finds out that Johnny has an heir, she at once begins to plan the mother and child’s demise. Serena kidnaps Katie and the narrative begins to unfold. Johnny and Paige meet, and he does not remember who she is; however, after she probes his memory he does slowly begin to remember and vows to help Paige find Katie.

Paige, the heroine, had been abandoned by her father as a child. Her mother’s sadness and the lack of parenting creates a feeling of loneliness and isolation in Paige. Now Paige herself is a successful single mother, and the author sets up the heroine’s successes and hardships at once: “she was a well-respected social worker. The road had been hard, the hours of studying and working and taking care of her daughter brutal, but she had done what her mother had never been able to do. She’d put her heartbreak behind her and concentrated all her love and energy on her career and on Katie, her beloved child” (Kane 16). Paige is a strong female who overcame obstacles to gain her success, and now she must save her daughter. In addition, Paige must help Johnny discover his past and remember who he is.

At the point in the narrative where Johnny discovers who he is, the couple reunites. Johnny shares with Paige his last evening before his step-mother's attempted murder, and he explains that he did not desert Paige, but simply was lost to her. Johnny confesses: "I don't know what happened to keep me from coming back for you. I can't even tell you what kind of person I was...Right now, I can't think of anything important enough or strong enough to keep me from you" (Kane 174). This is important to Paige who has been abandoned by her own father, and then is presumably abandoned by Johnny. At the end of the story, the couple finds Katie; Serena's actions are exposed and she is charged for her crimes. Johnny and Amanda bestow their love to one another, and yet another Harlequin ends happily ever after.

Differing from the Harlequin Intrigue's focus on suspense is the series Harlequin Temptation, a Romance narrative series that focuses on young lovers and passion. Harlequin Ltd. says this about Temptation: "Sexy, sassy and just a little bit naughty, these romances reflect what it's like to be young and looking for Mr. Right in today's society" (Harlequin Enterprises). In Vicki Lewis Thompson's *Old Enough to Know Better*, the heroine Kasey Braddock is dared by her colleagues to ask out the company's new landscaper, Sam Ashton. Kasey is a young Public Relations Executive who is looking to gain the attention of Sam while impressing all her colleagues. However, after they meet and the relationship progresses, Kasey realizes that her harmless flirtation has turned into something much bigger than she had imagined. Sam is feeling emotionally attached to Kasey, and despite her resistance, she is falling in love with him. However, Kasey fails to tell Sam that she is twenty, ten years his junior, and the younger sister of a friend he knew from high school. When Sam finds out Kasey's age and who she is, he

instantly breaks up the relationship, and Kasey is left heartbroken. Sam is also heartbroken, but he feels deceived because she did not tell him her age when they began dating. In the end, Kasey, through a careful crafted plan, wins his affection back.

Most significant about the Harlequin Temptation narrative is the heroine's aggressive nature. She is successful and determined to get what she wants which, of course, is the man. Kasey relentlessly pursues Sam, but at first she is interested in no more than a harmless fling: "she had no illusions about holding on to Sam and zero interest in lasting relationships...no way she would tie herself down until she was really old, as old as her brother. As old as Sam. With tons of sexual experience" (Thompson 28). However, her feelings change and Kasey realizes that she is not in control of the emotion of love which she is feeling. At the end of the story, the couple reunites— after they overcome the age issue— and realize that everything else is insignificant except their feelings toward one another.

In the last example I will deal with here , the narrative takes a shift, and the hero and heroine must overcome cultural odds before they can come together. It is this cultural difference that causes the couple's tribulations. Harlequin Ltd. describes the series Harlequin Presents as: "sophisticated men of the world and captivating women in glamorous, international settings" (Harlequin Enterprises). In Jane Porter's *In Dante's Debt*, the American heroine, Daisy Collingsworth is indebted to the Argentinean hero, Count Dante Galvan. Dante saves Daisy's horse farm which is in debt because of the deal that Dante's late father had made with Daisy's father. Daisy has recently taken on the management of the farm because her father is suffering from Alzheimer's. As the story commences, Dante and Daisy are attempting to negotiate a large debt that Daisy's

family owes to Dante's family. Dante and Daisy are attracted to one another, but Daisy dislikes his arrogance. Daisy is stubborn and strong-willed and refuses to give up her farm, and Dante concedes to Daisy's stipulations as they finally agree on a contract.

Dante pays off all the debts on the farm at once, but as part of the contract, Daisy must travel to Dante's Argentinean horse farm to learn from his Stable master. When Daisy is staying in Dante's home, the relationship begins to move from attraction to intimacy. After they have sexually consummated the relationship, his treatment of her worsens. And when he is angry at himself for not using protection, he takes it out on Daisy, "It's not personal, Daisy, so don't take this the wrong way, but I've no desire to get married and no desire to start a family. If I wanted a family I would have had one by now" (Porter 141).

The evening worsens and Dante's sister runs away with a 'gaucho,' a term that refers to a lower class Argentinean. This prompts a heated discussion between Daisy and Dante, and Daisy questions why social class matters if love is present. Daisy comments that her family is not as economically stable as the wealthy Galvan family. His reply is the ultimate insult: "'there are different kinds of women. Lovers and wives.' Of course he made her his lover" (Porter 147). Daisy is devastated at the realization: "so he would make love to her but not marry her. He'd take her body but not keep her" (Porter 147). Her love for him keeps her in Argentina until she no longer can live with the idea of being only his lover at his convenience. Daisy questions him: "Is there a law against marrying someone like me?" and Dante replies "Not a written law, no, just your culture and your class" (Porter 158). At this point in the narrative, Daisy leaves Argentina and travels back to her home in Kentucky.

After Daisy leaves, Dante is heartbroken and he realizes that he does love Daisy. When he finally calls Daisy's home, he discovers by mistake that she is pregnant. At once, Dante travels to Kentucky to reconcile with Daisy, but she refuses him. Before the lovers unite, Dante must change, and his transformation occurs near the end of the narrative. Throughout the story, we learn of all the disappointments Dante has had with failed familial relationships, and how this has contributed to his insensitivity concerning love. Before Dante and Daisy reconcile, Dante addresses his fears: "Disappointing her. The answer drifted up like a guilty conscience. He was afraid he'd disappointed her the same way his father had disappointed those around who loved him...maybe it was time he faced all the skeletons in the closet. Maybe it was time to confront all the shoulds and woulds that drove him to act, or not act, as it happened in Daisy's case" (Porter 171). Dante's realization about his horrible treatment of Daisy and his reconciling with his past prompts him to want to work things out with Daisy.

Dante and Daisy continue their lengthy discussions about reconciling, but after an in depth discussion about their relationship, Daisy miscarries the baby. Daisy allows Dante the opportunity to leave and end the relationship: "the only reason Dante had come back for her was because she was pregnant, and now the baby was gone, there was nothing keeping them together, no reason for them to continue together" (Porter 180). However, Dante refuses to end the relationship. He pleads with Daisy: "Daisy, I'm sorry, and perhaps I've handled this badly, but now is the time we need to fight to make this work...I love you, Daisy. We can make this work... Marry me, Daisy" (Porter 183). So, despite all Daisy's resistance, the lovers end up together in the end, and the hero has changed under the heroine's power. Dante's love for Daisy has caused him to overcome

social and class constructions that are inherent in the Argentinean society depicted.

Harlequin Speaking to Women About Contemporary Issues

Although Harlequin provides a variety of Romantic popular narratives, each book is based on a powerful contemporary heroine. As the above Harlequin examples indicate, the heroine is a new woman. The Harlequin heroine has changed to reflect our time period. She is no longer the virgin, but instead she is sexually mature and sexually aware. Her strong, assertive nature causes her to challenge the hero and to fight for her proper place in society. The heroine is a professional who has worked hard to achieve her position in the workplace.

In addition, the heroine is also a woman who speaks to societal issues of the time; especially to issues of concern to women. In the above Harlequin examples, single motherhood, unplanned pregnancy and birth control were dealt with. The stories do not teach that promiscuous sex is rewarded, but rather that passion and sex are important contributors to a healthy, love-based relationship. In this section, I would like to provide some examples from the above texts that reinforce the notion that Harlequin speaks to contemporary societal issues.

In Kane's *Heir to Secret Memories*, Paige Reynolds is a single mother who has no family support. When she finds out she is pregnant, she is forced to live with a disapproving aunt because her mother is deceased and she does not know her father. Once she is able to support herself, Paige moves out on her own with her new baby and works her way through college. Single motherhood is a fear of many young women today, and it is actually experienced by a significant number. These women must suffer through hardships, and raise their children on their own. In Ontario in the nineties,

Demographic statistics show that increasing numbers of families in Canada are no longer two-parent led... roughly 20% of all families with children were single-parent families (954,700), and 82% of these families were headed by women. Where lone mother-led families constituted around 8% of all Canadian families with children in 1961, that percentage had climbed to around 18% in 1991. (Statistics Canada, 1992:9)

The Harlequin storyline suggests that women, despite single motherhood, should follow their goals regardless of how difficult their situation is. In addition, on several occasions Harlequin presents the female reader with a non-traditional family where mothers and fathers are absent or deceased. This suggests that the contemporary family has been redefined, and Harlequin is reflecting a more encompassing definition of the nuclear family.

In the narrative, *Dante's Debt*, Porter introduces the issue of unplanned pregnancy. Dante regrets not using birth control and is angry at his lack of control. Daisy reassures him that if she does become pregnant she is fully willing to take care of the baby on her own, and she states: "if I was pregnant, I wouldn't need your help, I don't want your help either" (Porter 141). This incident is significant for two reasons: firstly, it indicates that women can raise children without men, as Daisy so vehemently declares, and secondly, it addresses the importance of practicing safe sex. Similarly, in Swan's *Four- Karat Fiancée*, the importance of safe sex appears again. Dev reaches for the birth control, and Amanda is thankful that he has remembered this crucial factor in intimacy:

He crouched down to ruffle through one of the suitcases stacked against a wall. More of his belongings went flying before he found what he sought and strode back to the bed with a small bunch of foil packets in hand. Amanda had to be grateful, as well, watching as he tossed the protection on the nightstand. (Swan 176)

The fact that Swan interrupts the flow of the narrative to include the hero's struggle to get

condoms is an important progression in the Harlequin. There is an overt understanding in the book that this is an important part of sexual intercourse and must be heeded in order to avoid pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

A New Look at Harlequin

My intention in this chapter is not to suggest that Harlequins should be regarded as literature and compared to Shakespearean literature in English 101, but instead to draw attention to the positive aspects Harlequin is representation of the heroine. I also wish to suggest that there needs to be another paradigm by which we judge popular Romance narrative. Instead, we need to judge Romance for the enjoyment it brings to female readers, and that means accepting it as a form of entertainment rather than degrading it as useless rubbish.

Some female authors have created new parameters in order to understand the appeal of Harlequin Romance. The desire of Jensen, for example, is to “explain the appeal of Harlequin Romances from the perspective of millions of readers who read them” (Jensen 159). She argues that it is essential to listen to female readers and to work outside the preconceived standards and judgements usually applied to popular Romance. Perhaps, listening to the reader is the first step in reconstructing a system for valuing Romance narrative.

According to Ann Maxwell and Jayne Anne Krentz in “The Wellsprings of Romance,” women read Romance because it “focuses on the most fundamental, the most emotionally charged of the legends, the legends of male-female bonding. In doing so, Romance clearly reigns supreme among the genres because it has at its heart all the most

powerful human emotions and drives. Love, hate, jealousy, compassion, vengeance, the spirit of self sacrifice...all spring straight from the Romance genre" (349).

These emotions are all intertwined in Romance fiction, and for Maxwell and Krentz, it is precisely these emotions that are essential to Romance fiction's appeal.

In "Moments of Power", Stella Cameron believes that the appeal of Romance is that it celebrates women's strengths. She states that "Romances exist and continue to exist because they are a joyous celebration of the strengths women value most within themselves ... In Romance novels love is portrayed as an adventure embarked upon by free, bold women who know that their true power lies in their own heroic qualities" (Cameron 144). In Harlequin, the heroines are strong, and they are often powerful. The Harlequin heroine is socially progressive as she strives for success and happiness. The idea that the Harlequin heroine has always been portrayed as chasing the hero is a criticism used to attack the Harlequin as regressive. But the idea of a man and a woman falling in love has always been at the very foundation of our society, and Harlequins thrive on this idea. It would seem that there is an underlying assumption that love strengthens a man and weakens a woman. However, in reality, the Harlequin heroine is modern because she chooses her profession based on her own aspirations, and she chooses love and sex based on her lifestyle, whether or not the hero approves.

While many female critics continue to regard Harlequin as patriarchal and degrading to women, as was noted in Chapter One, sales at Harlequin Enterprises continue to soar. It is undoubtedly true that the formulaic marriage ending which we find in many Harlequins is suggestive of patriarchy, and an argument against this is futile. However, marriage is still a normal social institution in our society today, and Harlequin

reflects this. While I do agree that the ubiquitous marriage at the end of the Harlequin novel is not a realistic representation of modern society, I also believe that the positive aspects represented outweigh the instances of patriarchy. The contemporary Harlequin heroine is a new woman, and the stories often deal with contemporary issues. The patriarchy that seeps into the narrative needs to be corrected at the core of society itself; it is not the role of Harlequin to implement changes in the sociological structure of society. Harlequin's focus is to cater to the needs and desires of their female audience in current society. Although the story addresses women's concerns, the author's purpose is not to scold the reader or question the reader's morals or objectives. Seidel concedes, as an academic and as a Romance writer, that it is not the writer's role to teach readers how to live their lives: "if romance reading has encouraged some women to improve their lives, if it has made them more independent, if it has increased their sense of value, that is grand. But such real-life change is not, I think, the standard by which we judge our work" (Seidel 173). In essence, it is time for us to reconsider the value of popular romance and judge them "for the joy they bring" (Seidel 159).

An important idea regarding Romance is its capacity to function on a trans-historical level; Romance, despite the time period, is able to communicate to the female reading public of the time. It is reflective of the society that it is being written for. Romance today is still clearly speaking to women. A new brand of Romance, originating from Helen Fieldings' *Bridget Jones's Diary*, has emerged. 'Chick lit' has attracted millions of female readers, and frequently appears on bestseller lists. It speaks to a new generation of women in their thirties who are trapped between love, marriage, work and

feminism. Chapter Four will discuss *Bridget Jones's Diary* and the new popular Romance category that Romance writers call 'Chick lit'.

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Chapter Four

Bridget Jones Diary, Postfeminism & the Inception of Chick Lit

The most recent form of popular Romance is a narrative that pokes humour at the trials and tribulations in women's lives. If contemporary Harlequins provide a glimpse into the desires of women in the twentieth century, Chick lit, a witty modern type of Romance focused on a new heroine, goes one step further and provides a dialogue for women twenty-something and thirty-something caught between dreams of love and the teachings of feminism. Although humorous in plot, tone and style, a more troubling voice lingers beneath the hilarious conundrums of the heroine. In Chapter Four, Helen Fielding's first novel in the Bridget Jones series, *Bridget Jones's Diary* will be discussed exclusively as an example of evolutionary Chick lit. More specifically, Fielding's popular work will be presented as a template which other authors all over North America and Britain are following. Chapter Four explores Fielding's book as a prototype in the market that has been labelled 'Chick lit'. Lastly, *Bridget Jones's Diary* will be examined in relation to postfeminism.

Chick Lit and Postfeminism

Chapter Four begins with a definition of Chick lit as a new category of popular Romance. Although Chick lit is a relatively new term, compared with standard Harlequins and popular works of renowned Romance authors, there are several websites that focus on chick lit. The following information has been gathered from various websites.

Chick lit originated with Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, and many women writers followed suit; for example, Sophie Kinsella, Isabel Wolf, and Carly

Philips. Sophie Kinsella is loved by her readers: “alongside single-girl sensations like *Bridget Jones’s Diary* ... Sophie Kinsella's SHOPAHOLIC trilogy holds a place of honor in the Chick lit canon (Chick lit). This form of popular Romance fiction appears in bookstores everywhere, and often writers must continue to write sagas at their reader’s demand. Chick lit book titles are often short and catchy, and covers do not show couples and characters, but focus on physical items such as purses, shoes, computers. Also, book covers do not show Fabio- like characters, images that have become synonymous with Harlequins, and instead use feminine colours, catchy fonts and contemporary graphics. Chick lit set out to defy the popular conventions of Romance and, in doing so, many followed Fielding’s novel *Bridget Jones’s Diary* to the number one place on bestseller lists across North America and Britain (What is Chick lit). In short, Chick lit had Bridget Jones to thank for its acceptance into popular culture:

The success of the book, “Bridget Jones’s Diary” launched a new genre of writing called Chick lit. Chick lit refers to modern literature for women - that is written about late twenty and thirty something singles (aka singletons) as they search for the perfect partner... Chick lit is very different from the standard romance novels that were made famous by writers like Barbara Cartland. These books, for the most part ... reflect the lives of everyday working young women & men. Chick lit or Chic Fic... gives fresh insight into relationships and a humorous account into the way women deal with them... these books [are] funny, witty, entertaining & relaxing. ((What is Chick lit)

The settings of Chick lit are not the mysterious or flamboyant locations we so often see in Harlequin. Instead, the narrative takes place in modest accommodations based in New York apartments or London flats. The central setting is that of an everyday home. Chick lit tends to lack the glamour so apparent in some Romance fiction. Writers such as Danielle Steele and Barbara Cartland create rich and abundant mansions for their heroines. Chick lit differs in that most heroines are often placed in very normal

surroundings. In addition, the heroine is different from the typical Romance. She is a woman with attitude, and she “can be rude, shallow, overly compulsive, neurotic, insecure, bold, ambitious, witty... [or] all of the above” (What is Chick lit). As well, the hero is not necessarily a wealthy land owner or an heir to an oil dynasty, but instead he is usually a working man with convictions and beliefs. These heroes are happy to fight for what they believe to be just. In fact, wealth is not something these characters strive for; what remains focal is their achieving happiness at life. Chick lit focuses on obliterating “boyfriend angst” and achieving a successful male and female relationship in the midst of trying to attain or maintain a successful career.

According to Rian Montgomery, creator and operator of www.chicklitbooks.com, Chick lit is defined as uniquely women’s fiction because of the personal tone of the narrator, among other characteristics. Montgomery states that

Chick lit is told in a more confiding, personal tone. It’s like having a best friend tell you about her life. Or watching various characters go through things that you have gone through yourself, or witnessed others going through. Humor is a strong point in chick lit, too. Nearly every chick lit book I have read has had some type of humor in it. THAT is what really separates chick lit from regular women’s fiction. Chick lit is also a truly fascinating character study. That is one major factor that keeps me so interested in the genre. A chick lit author takes a character and puts them through a series of mostly realistic ordeals - many that many women can relate to. (Montgomery)

It is interesting that Montgomery points out the notion of humor because, in essence, Chick lit provides a touchstone at which women everywhere can laugh at their own plights or idiosyncrasies.

Diane Goodman, an associate professor at Allegheny College, connects Chick lit to the notion of postfeminism. She defines Chick lit as: “hip, stylish, confident and sharp - it's also honest and very brave. It battles and conquers the term *Chick*; it explores, explains, sometimes gives into and sometimes blows away the notion of a chicklet, trapped by birth to imprint its parents; it is sexual and sensual in dear or savage or shocking ways. And it proves itself structurally, lyrically, and formally as lit-erature” (Goodman). Equally important, Goodman discusses the confusion women today have with the notion of feminism. Goodman suggests that the tension between women and feminism has become encapsulated in Chick lit:

Chick- Lit is **Postfeminist Fiction**. Whew. But then you wonder, what does *that* mean? There is no hyphen: this fiction is not just feminist, it's postfeminist. Unfortunately (or not, as we may determine later), the prefix *post* has several meanings: *after, subsequent, subsequent to, behind, posterior, posterior to, later than*. ... a bigger dilemma exists in exploring the second part of the work: feminist. Is anyone sure what that really means? I know I'm not: the term has changed so much over the years that I find elements of it which I identify with intensely and elements of it which I reject with equal passion. (Goodman)

Clarifying the notion of postfeminism becomes integral to any discussion of Chick lit. Postfeminism is not a specific, universally agreed upon term. In an attempt to help reduce some of the fear and tension surrounding the term postfeminism, the following section will briefly outline some definitions regarding the term, and its relationship to Chick lit.

Susan Faludi states that “the media declared ... feminism as the flavour of the seventies and that ‘post-feminism’ was the new story --- complete with a younger generation who supposedly reviled the women’s movement” (Brooks 3). Faludi equates

“postfeminism with the popular ‘backlash model’” (Brooks 3). The backlash model, a term made popular by Susan Faludi, relegates feminism to expecting too much of women, and it implies that a woman has to be a ‘superwoman’ in order to achieve success in the eyes of feminism.

In essence, postfeminism offers an escape from the perfection that feminism demanded. The concept of postfeminism suggests that feminism has done its job, and that women and men have reached equality; as a result, feminism becomes a rejected model to women of younger generations. Women who have not lived through sexism and gender discrimination have difficulty understanding what feminism set out to accomplish. The problem with feminism, for young women, is their perception of feminists as a political group. Unfortunately, feminists have been negatively portrayed by the media. Young women are embarrassed with media depictions of feminists as angry and anti-male. Hence, young women tend to reject all teachings of feminism. They misunderstand the crucial concepts, and instead equate feminism with lack of femininity manifested in such outward badges as, for example, shaved heads, hairy legs and strident voices. Chick lit internalizes women’s confusion and camouflages it under the guise of humour. However, the fear and uncertainty does not disappear, and the seriousness is always lurking beneath the text. Chick lit is the twenty-something and thirty-something woman’s confusion with the expectations of feminism, and instead of rejoicing in feminism, readers are rejecting it.

According to Ann Brooks in *Postfeminisms, Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*, postfeminism sets out to challenge hegemonic feminism that has

infiltrated society through the media. Postfeminism is defined as expressing “the intersection of feminism with postmodernism, poststructuralism and post-colonialism, and as such represents a dynamic movement capable of challenging modernist, patriarchal and imperialist frameworks” (Brooks 4). Suzanna Danuta Walters, in *Material Girls*, regards the above definition as coming primarily from academia. For Walters, the mainstream version of postfeminism relates solely to what Faludi regards as ‘the backlash’ (Walters 117). Walters places popularist postfeminism, as opposed to academic postfeminism, within the framework of antifeminism. She concedes that the backlash has dominated the nineties:

in the beginning...our newly awakened anger and astonishment at the realities of our own oppression caused us to take positions that were extreme. We went too far, either becoming ‘like men’ in our quest for acceptance or finding ourselves doing double duty at home and work...But as the popular historians would have it now, we have emerged from the dark, angry nights of early women’s liberation into the dawn of a postfeminist era. (Walters 120)

Walters argues that the eighties destroyed much of what feminism sought to achieve, and she cites examples of films as providing a twisted depiction of feminism. While housewives are put on a pedestal, single women are represented as sinister. As an illustration, she draws on the film *Fatal Attraction* as a “dialogue of female angst” (Walters 123). In the film, “the bad woman is the childless, single, professional woman who seduces the innocent family man...the good woman is, like in old times, the good mother, who significantly is a sophisticated house wife” (Walters 123). More specifically, Walters goes on to provide examples of films, concluding that “strong women of the 1980s and 1990s films are shown as legitimately strong through their

maternal identification” (Walters 132). Walter argues that this is all a part of the backlash, and that postfeminism disassociates women from the sisterhood acquired in the 1960s, and instead emphasizes a connection with a “hip but overwrought generation of late capitalist yuppies” (Walters 136).

Walters speaks of sisterhood, but the question remains: where is it? In the case of feminism, women are most often presented as a disjointed and fragmented set of voices in which many women disagree with one another. And as noted in Chapter One, Kathleen Gilles Seidel questions the value of the sisterhood as some feminists seem to constantly preach of it while they continue to bash and belittle the very women who may not agree with the teachings of their so called ‘sisterhood’. In the midst of the dissension and discussion of backlash feminism, we have the creation of Chick lit, a narrative that provides a touchstone for women who do not understand exactly what this multitudinous voice of their grandmothers, mothers, teachers, and professors is telling them to be. Society still expects women to procreate, and feminism teaches women to succeed and achieve; this requires a very delicate balancing act as women struggle to come to terms with a society that both accepts and rejects them. Chick lit represents the fear inherent in women regarding feminism itself, and the fear in disappointing the grandmothers and mothers who endlessly fought against sexism, and who lived the “double day”—everyday.

Contrary to the curt tone of Walters, Angela McRobbie in *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* provides an alternate view of postfeminism in the twentieth century. She concedes that feminists need a way of “constructing a kind of feminist postmodernism in sociology and cultural studies which refuses the lure of believing that

if we try hard enough we can reproduce our feminist selves and our feminist theory in our daughters and with our students. Postfeminism and postmodernism in the social sciences must mean being able to see the deep problem in this kind of thinking. We have to respect difference and that includes the experience of young people for whom feminism, as we know, is not necessarily the political space they choose” (McRobbie 9). McRobbie suggests that young women need to be allowed to form their own decisions about being a woman (McRobbie 9). Most important, is her realization that feminism is failing to communicate with young women today: “What space away from feminism do young women need in order to disconnect from the historical experience of their others or their teachers and find their own way towards feminism, redefining it in the process for themselves? These questions of how feminism continues and seeks to extend itself while recognizing different histories, experiences and identities are therefore crucial. Can it continue, can it still call itself feminism? What must it do to be able to legitimately address women?” (McRobbie 69). These are essentially the questions that postfeminism hopes to come to terms with, and the issue of defining oneself as feminine or feminist is focal to the heroine in Chick lit. This is where young women today are finding a sisterhood: within the community of readers who share their interests, and with a heroine who shares their fears and foibles. To see this, one need only to visit the countless web sites dedicated to Romance fiction and Chick lit where female readers are encouraged to communicate with other female readers, and share favourite authors, interesting stories and life-time goals. This is a sisterhood where women do not criticize one another for their likes and dislikes, but rather seek information from one another at a time in their life when they may need the support and friendship of a sisterhood.

Women sought a sisterhood and found the answer in Bridget Jones. Finally, an imperfect heroine was created, and Chick lit was born. If popular Romance is concerned with seeking out perfection, Chick lit is concerned with revealing imperfections. Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* did exactly this. This section of Chapter Four examines three main ideas: *Bridget Jones's Diary* as postfeminist, the narrative's popularity, and the value of the story as a predecessor to an evolutionary category of Romance: Chick lit

Bridget Jones's Diary as Postfeminist

Chick lit maintains at its very foundation a true-to-life narrative combined with self-deprecating humor, and *Bridget Jones Diary* encompasses exactly this. The characters and the story line create a feminist dialogue. Dr. Douglas Mann, in a lecture at the University of Western Ontario, conceded that by studying the characters in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, the reader is confronted with different notions of feminism. However, Mann does highlight Bridget as a postfeminist, and he states that Bridget "works in a publishing office, lives on her own, and wants some control over her life. Yet she also spends much of the book agonizing over her love life, searching for romance, not to mention fretting about her weight and clothes, and her frustrations with the 'smug marrieds' (Mann 2005). The other characters in the story also come to represent different feminist approaches.

Bridget has a collection of close friends on whom she relies for advice and comfort. Tom, a homosexual man, who at one time was a famous musician, seems to provide Bridget with the most sound advice regarding her love life. Bridget is dating her boss Daniel Cleaver, depicted in the story as a handsome rogue. Bridget appreciates

Tom's advice: "Tom, who has taken, unflatteringly, to calling himself a fag-hag, has been sweetly supportive about the Daniel crises. Tom has a theory that homosexuals and single women in their thirties have natural bonding: both being accustomed to disappointing their parents and being treated as freaks by society" (Fielding 27).

As a contrast to Tom, Bridget's friend Jude is a weak and somewhat pathetic character. She is, in fact, a weaker version of Bridget. She is constantly fighting with her boyfriend, Vile Richard, and if they are not fighting, she is fretting about him. Jude is a postfeminist who can not separate herself from a commitment-phobic boyfriend. Ironically, Jude has an executive position with a financial institute, and though she can handle her job without fail, her love life causes her great anguish. In sharp contrast to Jude and Bridget is Sharon. Sharon represents the radical feminist. In the novel, she is famous for tirades and words of harsh reality (Mann 2005). Sharon always advises Bridget to assert herself, and she makes negative statements about the male gender: "Sharon maintains men—present company (i.e. Tom) expected, obviously – are so catastrophically unevolved that soon they will just be kept by women as pets for sex, therefore presumably these will not count as shared households as the men will be kept outside in kennels. Anyway, feeling v. empowered. Tremendous. Think I might read bit of Susan Faludi's *Backlash*" (Fielding 77). Bridget hopes to read Faludi's book; however, she never does in the story. Perhaps, this suggests Bridget's own confusion with feminism. Although she strives to be closer to a radical feminist as every good woman is taught, everyday life, Romance, and obsessions with her appearance constantly lure her from this path of righteousness.

A different feminist viewpoint is presented in Bridget's mother. She had started off as a traditional woman, in a traditional marriage. However, she and her husband split up and she has become a "born again liberal feminist, waking up to the feeling that she's wasted her life as a wife, mother and homemaker. Her father spends most of the book confused, unable to understand his wife's sudden self-assertion" (Mann 2005). Bridget is uncomfortable with her mother's new outlook and her new sexual liberation, and it seems quite disturbing to her to think of her mother's sexual prowess. Bridget's mother, despite her new thinking, does continue to hassle Bridget regarding marriage.

In the case of marriage, Chick lit often avoids the popular ending of Romance fiction. The happy marriage ending so often found in Harlequin is left out in Chick lit. Marriage itself is depicted as a frightening endeavor that must be regarded with great caution. As examples of the representation of marriage as a problem in Chick lit, it is also important to point out Bridget's "smug," married friends, Jeremy and Magda, who are not necessarily important to the plot of the story but significant nonetheless as they make Bridget feel guilty about her single status (Mann 2005). In Jeremy and Magda, society's fixation on marriage is encapsulated: "All the Smug Marrieds keep inviting me on Saturday nights, now I am alone again, seating me opposite an increasingly horrifying selection of single men. It is very kind of them...but it only seems to highlight my emotional failure and isolation" (Fielding 212). The pressure for women to be marry and also to succeed in a career is predominant in society; however, the fear of adultery is also prevalent. Women are faced with a society that preaches marriage and warns of adultery and divorce. Bridget represents this confusion. Her mother and her relatives urge her to find a husband and get married, and her married friend warns her to relish her

‘singledom’: “Magda says I should remember that being single is better than having an adulterous, sexually incontinent husband” (Fielding 212).

It is in the midst of these eclectic feminist voices that Bridget emerges. Bridget is exposed to feminist ideology, and yet she still fears being single and alone and half eaten by dogs (Fielding 125). Bridget is similar to many young woman of the twentieth century wanting to live a feminist lifestyle for the foremothers of feminism, but instead falling into the path of postfeminism. When Mark Darcy asks Bridget what she is reading, she wants to present herself as an intelligent strong feminist: “I racked my brain frantically to think when I last read a proper book...I’m halfway through *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, which Jude lent me, but I didn’t think Mark Darcy, though clearly odd, was ready to accept himself as a martian quite yet. Then I had a brainwave. *Backlash*, actually, by Susan Faludi, I said triumphantly” (Fielding 14). This is a significant passage, not only because it occurs at the onset of the story, setting up the issue of feminism, but more so because it introduces Bridget as a postfeminist. As an educated working woman, Bridget sees more glory in the reading of *Backlash*, a book of radical feminism that represents female strength, rather than the reading of a self-help book which indicates weakness. However, in actuality Bridget is more concerned with achieving a harmonious relationship than learning of radical feminism. This begins a series of ironic statements made by Bridget to indicate her position as a postfeminist. In reality, Bridget rejects radical feminism and instead relishes postfeminism, even though she would prefer Mark Darcy, and in essence society, to regard her as a true feminist at heart. Bridget fails miserably at this task of playing feminist, and she is emblematic of the confusion and misinformation that surrounds the notion of feminism. And although

she declares independence from men, her actions always suggest the opposite. As she waits for Daniel Cleaver to call her, after hours of preparing herself, Bridget states ironically: “one must not live one’s life through men but must be complete in oneself as a woman of substance” (Fielding 31). Although Bridget alludes to independence, all of her actions and thoughts suggest the opposite. Perhaps this is how popular feminism is beginning to define itself by twenty-something and thirty-something women in the late twentieth century. Laura Durnell so poignantly describes Bridget as a self-proclaimed feminist: “just one of those feminists of the nineties who maintains her independence while waiting for her man to call as he promised...[Bridget’s] sharp tongue and persistence bring to mind that feminist anthem of long ago—I am woman, hear me roar” (Durnell 1, 4).

Despite all discussion and speculation, Bridget Jones is still a heroine to millions of female readers, regardless of her ironic stature. Bridget allows us a glimpse of the late twentieth century woman’s desire to have it all. However, regarding feminism, Bridget is not “quite the daughter feminists were hoping for back in the seventies when they marched on Washington and burned their bras. And that’s why Bridget Jones’s Diary may prove to be one of the most stinging indictments of feminism to come along in awhile” (Vincent 2). Nora Vincent regards Bridget as a spoof of the modern liberated woman, and Bridget’s unsuccessful attempt at reading *Backlash* is essentially her failed attempt at feminism. Interestingly, Vincent refers to Bridget as the true daughter of feminism, a “legacy of the gender wars” (Vincent 2). Vincent concedes that Bridget’s relationship to feminist foremothers— Susan B. Anthony, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinam—has a great deal in common with a mother-daughter relationship (Vincent 2).

This relationship is often clouded with dissension and arguments, and in the novel Bridget's relationship with her mother is also far from perfection; in fact, they do not get along with one another. Bridget tends to be closer to her father. Vincent concedes that "embarrassing as it might be to most feminists, Bridget Jones is living out exactly the farce for which her precursors set the stage. After all, is it any wonder Bridget is a spoiled princess when she grew up on the feminist belief that women should and must have it all? Is it surprising that feminists who condemned housebound motherhood were paving the way for a chronically single, childless woman like Bridget?...Bridget Jones's life is not a spontaneous anomaly" (Vincent 3).

Despite all conflicting voices regarding Bridget's representation as a feminist, the most consistent and agreed upon fact about *Bridget Jones's Diary* is the book's popularity. This suggests that, above all, women are reading Bridget's story. The author of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Helen Fielding, began her career as a journalist writing a weekly column "Bridget Jones's Diary" in a British daily newspaper called *The Independent* in 1995. Fielding's column was astoundingly well received, so much so that she turned her column into a book: "Bridget Jones became an international success with over 4 million copies sold worldwide. The character she had invented seems to be one with which a lot of women can (partly) identify - the single female in her 30s" (http://www.cosmopolis.ch/english/cosmo18/bridget_jones_diary.htm).

A most significant feature of Fielding's success is her attaching *Bridget Jones's Diary* to Jane Austen's classic Romance, *Pride & Prejudice*: as one critic aptly put it, "it is a truth universally acknowledged, that borrowing the plot of a great classic and loosely

applying it in a different context will inevitable result in comparisons being made between the two” (Dick 1). At this time, I will briefly discuss the significance of the connection between Fielding and Austen’s narratives. This is not to argue that *Pride and Prejudice* is a version of eighteenth century Chick lit, but rather to draw attention to the heroines, Elizabeth Bennett and Bridget Jones, who both seek love in a heterosexual based society. In an unflattering tone, Penny Dick chastises *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, and ignores the narrative’s humour; on the contrary, Dick feels seriously that Bridget Jones portrays a regression for women; she says that “In 1813, Elizabeth Bennett and her sisters could only gain a legitimate place in society through being part of a heterosexual couple. Bridget Jones tells us that not much has changed” (Dick 3).

Penny Dick concedes that both Elizabeth Bennett and Bridget Jones both seek the same goal of acquiring a mate. This is undoubtedly true, despite the fact that the heroines are situated in very different time periods. Interestingly enough, each one is unique and similar in the society they represent. Elizabeth Bennett’s eighteenth century world is filled with rules of decorum and socializing; she must find a husband in order to maintain her status in society and obtain wealth. However, it is also important for Elizabeth Bennett to find happiness and Romance, and these notions of love are trans-historical. On the other hand, Bridget maintains independence but struggles between the fear of love and the fear of dying lonely. Both heroines push the limits of society by challenging society’s standards. Elizabeth Bennett does this by verbally rejecting Mr. Darcy, and Bridget illustrates this notion by always saying exactly what she feels, and by displaying her own sexual liberty. According to Cynthia Fuchus, in a review in Popmatters.com,

The women in *Bridget Jones's Diary* reveal a slightly more complex and thought-provoking dependence to their predecessor. Bridget's mother certainly corresponds to the flighty Mrs. Bennett, but she's also part Lydia Bennett, the rebellious daughter in *P&P* who runs off with Wickham and (gasp!) lives with him before they get married. Mrs. Jones is more a response to Austen than a reflection, as she abandons her roles as wife and mother, and runs off with the host of a home shopping cable television show...And then there's Bridget. She, like Elizabeth, is opinionated, strong-willed, impulsive, passionate, and embarrassed by her mother. Sure, we could never imagine Elizabeth (who despite the above qualities is ultimately constrained by propriety) smoking, drinking, or referring to herself as a "wanton sex goddess" (Lydia, maybe), but we stop short of congratulating Bridget Jones with a hearty "you've come a long way, baby" (Fuchus).

Contrary to both Fuchus and Dick, I would argue that, as a heroine, Bridget has acquired a great deal since the days of Elizabeth Bennett. Bridget is independent, has career opportunities, and is sexually liberated; this is quite a progression from Austen's time when women were not allowed to be alone with men for fear their reputation might be slandered. In the end, both Elizabeth Bennett and Bridget Jones are strong heroines who acquire love. Also, they are both strong and intelligent heroines who speak their minds even though they are always conscious of what society expects of them. And, in both cases, Elizabeth and Bridget are fictional creations of authors who are able to communicate with women of their time period.

In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Romance is still about women speaking to women. In the case of Bridget, satire plays a large role. And, as with most cases of satire, a much more serious issue looms in the narrative. Bridget becomes emblematic of other women, young postfeminists of the twenty-first century trying to create their own place by achieving solid careers as well as successful relationships. Mann refers to the narrative as an "extended commentary on how the postfeminist or third-wave feminist woman

deals with romance. The secondary characters represent various other positions on feminism: Daniel is the old-fashioned but charming male chauvinist, Bridget's mother a born-again liberal feminist, Sharon a radical feminist, and Tom a sort of neutral party, the sexual equivalent of Switzerland" (Mann 2005). In addition, the book indicates that "the post-feminist woman *can* have it all - career, romance, and friendship" (Mann 2005).

Bridget Jones's Diary paved the way for other Chick lit authors to follow.

Bridget abandons an adulterous lover to end up finally with the man she loves: Mark Darcy. However, this journey to love is filled with rejection and catastrophe. Bridget rejects Mark as she misunderstands his dislike for her previous boyfriend, Daniel, but realizes in the end who her true knight in shining armour is. The story ends with the understanding that Bridget and Mark's journey of trials and tribulations is only just beginning because *the course of true love never does run smooth*. This is a clear subversion of the Romance genre that always seeks to end with perfection. There is never a hint of a grey clouds surrounding the couple. Chick lit provides for the reader the presumption that Romance is never perfect, a comforting thought to those who seek it and can never find it. This ending is more realistic for women today.

New Woman Defined Through Chick lit

Chick lit is a revolutionary form of popular Romance fiction and there are many refreshing characteristics; for example, maternal men, non-maternal females, and non-traditional family structures. Chick lit presents non-traditional families where marriage is not always the resolution. However, if Chick lit has performed any great task, it has enabled us a glimpse of feminism in the late twentieth century or, more importantly, women's confusion with feminism. Young women hope to be feminists and follow the

teachings of their strong foremothers, but instead they succumb to media-created hopes of love and Romance, and they fall into postfeminism, believing that equality has been achieved. Although all women aim to live, in Bridget's words, "not through men but [in being] complete in oneself as a woman of substance," they are led astray, and believe that Romance and love help provide this completeness (Fielding 31). In short, it seems as though twenty-something and thirty-something women have misunderstood what feminism set out to accomplish. Young women's confusion is based in the mixed desire not to disappoint the foremothers of feminism, and a yearning to abandon the anger, fragmentation and sense of hopelessness that they are told accompanies feminism.

In Chick lit, women have repositioned themselves and allied themselves with postfeminism. Heroes in Chick lit are kind and compassionate; heroines are seeking an understanding, compassionate man. Wealth is not a motivator. Both the hero and the heroine are in search of happiness and harmony, love and job success. Chick lit does not present marriage as the only resolution to Romance, but provides alternate endings; for example, the couple may decide to begin dating or move in together. These narratives do not end with marriage and a baby. This is quite significant as a more true reflection of present time. Today, women do not rush into marriage, and women often have babies later in life.

Therefore, it would seem that Chick lit gives a fair representation of women today. Most importantly, Chick lit brings women's fears to public view; for example, Bridget's fear of being alone and her confusion regarding feminism. In essence, Chick lit sets out to define a 'new woman', the daughter of feminism: or maybe, the woman who can have both love and success while still obsessing over her femininity. These

narratives do not end in marital bliss, but rather with the implication that love and Romance are imperfect, and harmony can only be attained by confronting this. They do not rely on fantastical dreams of Prince Charming, but instead present men who are ordinary and flawed. In fact, the heroine herself is often depicted as flawed. These are imperfect people striving for love, happiness and success, and this is a feasible goal, a goal that twenty-something and thirty-something women struggle with today. Chick lit provides women with an outlet of understanding. Women are caught between the maternal role that society still expects of them and their desire to succeed in the work force. This angst is central to Chick lit as women strive to find the perfect balance. Chick lit attempts to show us that a harmonious balance can be found.

Perhaps the lingering question is ---what is Chick lit teaching women today? I think the answer is obvious: it teaches women twenty-something and thirty-something that they are not alone in their confusion with feminism. Readers can feel a sisterhood that is rooted in the idea that perhaps women should not be made to feel guilty because they are concerned with their appearance, and that they hope for love and Romance. The readers of Chick lit are women who have never been subjected to the sexism that their foremothers helped to diminish, and although they are not ungrateful---they want to read their Romance fiction guilt-free.

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Secret of Happiness

I have met many Bridgets ...I have friends who are Bridget Jones. I am from a Bridget generation who is searching for "the secret of happiness" (Fielding 307). And, although this all seems reminiscent of a confession at an AA meeting, I somehow feel the same piercing guilt as Bridget feels. I am not alone. A female student in one of my classes writes in her journal, "Feminists would not agree with me. I read (girlie) magazines for women and I enjoy them. I can admit it, and I am not ashamed". Following this journal reflection, I asked a Short Fiction class, composed of an equal number of males and females, how they defined feminism. The faces were astonished; the faces were frightened. Perhaps, they said more what they thought I wanted to hear rather than what they honestly felt. One male, with great intrepidity, replied, "I believe it's about equality". As the class discussed feminism further, both males and females in the class seemed to share the same amount of anxiety regarding the topic.

Modern young women and men fear feminism. The fear that surrounds this issue is embodied in Bridget Jones who pretends to be reading Susan Faludi's *Backlash* but is really reading John Grey's *Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus*. Young women are striving, eager to succeed in school and in a career, but, at the same time, hoping for the perfect man and the perfect marriage. In its most poignant form, Romance fiction is speaking to women; women do not want to let their foremothers down on the feminist front, yet they still want Romance despite its connections with patriarchy.

In addition, female readers want to revel in the entertainment or escapism that popular Romance fiction provides. So why can't women have it all?

Popular Romance fiction, although fantastical, provides a platform for realistic issues: women in the workforce, birth control, violence against women, infidelity, money issues and marriage fears. However, it sometimes paints a picture of a heroine who has it all—and this is something many women are desperately seeking: “the secret of happiness” (Fielding 307). In short, popular Romance fiction speaks to women and has been speaking to women through the centuries. Today, the heroine in popular contemporary Romance is often strong, educated, and in control of her life. The hero must work to gain her respect. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this scenario, although many may argue against it. The truth is that regardless of critic's labeling popular Romance as patriarchal and banal, millions of women are still reading it. In fact, Harlequin and popular Romance represent the everyday voices of women. In the midst of a fantasy is the discussion of contraception, fears of marriage, fears of men, and fears of motherhood. The world of popular Romance fiction, as you will see if you visit any Romance fiction focused websites on the internet, is a true sisterhood. Authors promote one another and recommend each other's books. Readers often praise authors and show great loyalty to their books. As a matter of fact, all of these women are bound by their loyalty to the Romance genre. They together must defend their genre, and that they do. Diane Palmer states “For all ...women I write books. They are my family, my fans, my friends. I know many of them by name. They write to me and I write back. I never forget that it is because of them that I am privileged to be a successful writer. I

owe my career, my livelihood, and my loyalty to them. I write books for my readers. As long as they continue to read my novels I really don't mind if the world at large ridicules my work or dismisses it as 'trash'" (Krentz 2000 157). Women readers of Romance read passionately, and they do so despite what others think of them. Jayne Anne Krentz argues that women readers have "guts", and readers are "impervious to critics, feminist lectures on the evils of patriarchal societies and the scorn of the media" (Krentz 2000 2).

Many feminist critics harshly criticize Romance fiction, and I strongly disagree with this position. I do not want to appear as anti-feminist nor do I want to disregard the work of our foremothers who worked against inequality. In fact, I do believe that "feminist action" is necessary, and I am truly thankful of our foremothers' struggles. However, I can not ignore the grave misconceptions that exist surrounding discussions of popular Romance in contemporary society. Popular Romance continues to represent women's fears and this is exemplified in Bridget. Bridget is fearful of marriage yet also afraid of being alone. Bridget wants to be accepted by society. Many young women desperately cling to the role models they see in the media, as they search for an identity that will be acceptable within the society in which they live. Feminist critics who want to dictate what women should be reading and consuming contradict the free will that feminism embodies, more importantly it has caused women to reject feminist teachings. Bridget is not alone in rejecting the readings of Susan Faludi, and like Bridget, many women in my own age group have the Bridget guilt: should I be fighting for women's rights instead of obsessing over this ten pounds of winter weight? So, in all honesty, feminists' condemnation of popular Romance which many women enjoy has backed young women into a corner. And that corner is filled with other women who reject

feminist teaching. This sisterhood feminists speak of—where is it? There are divergent voices everywhere, and in a genre where women are central, the ‘feminist’ sisterhood falters as the feminists condescend to their so-called “sisters” for enjoying a certain type of book or for gaining entertainment from reading Romance (Krentz 19). Rather than condemning, I believe women need a new method of communicating to young women about the issues of feminism. This will not happen by disapproving of the “popular” items they choose to consume. Popular Romance fiction is ‘herstory,’ and members of a true sisterhood defend one another. In that case women should be understanding one another so we together can find “the secret of happiness” (Fielding 307).

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