Note: This piece was drafted in late 2017. The ongoing exploration of diver
diversity, and award-giving attests to the potential importance of archival sources dis
descrimination in romance writing, publishing,
and award-giving attests to the potential importance of archival sources discussed below.

In May 2017, the Popular Culture Association (PCA), in coordination wi
library (PCL) at Bowling Green State University hosted its second Summer
four glorious days digging in the collections of the PCL and the Bill Sc
cluded graduate students, independent scholars, and professors. We del
postcards, teen magazines, albums—including cover art and liner notes,
Romance Writers of America (RWA) archives. My research did not go exa-
good thing. In what follows, I explain how I used the archives and what sort
popular romance—they might support.

I applied to the Institute because I had just finished a book about Nora R
series. Writing Human in Death: Morality and Mortality in J.D. Robb’s /
her even more numerous romances that can only be answered by
(alongside [End Page 1] my “regular” scholarship on Islam and gende
novels, for this project, which attends to characters’ creative careers, I
romance genre and her own writing habits. Here is how I described my rese

While the primary source for my analysis will be the novels themselves,
Roberts’ own experiences affect how she writes writers, as well as other
_topic in a restricted way in occasional interviews for the broader public.
groups, where her audience comprises romance writers, she would dev
archives contain audio cassette recordings of eleven RWA sessions in w
will also take advantage of the library’s collection to consult several rele
publications not readily available at other libraries.
Once at BGSU, I began with the RWA conference recordings. Prompted by the Institute organizers, I had requested in advance that the cassettes I’d found by searching the catalog for Roberts’ name be retrieved from the offsite depository. A librarian taught me how to digitize those recordings. The procedure is simple; since I couldn’t speed it up, I listened along. In the second tape I listened to, from 2002, Roberts said she’d attended every RWA conference since the first, in 1981, except one. This meant that there were no recordings of her speaking. Of course, she might have attended without speaking in a recorded session (it turned out she sometimes had), but I doubted that she’d attended but not been on the program for all of those years. To see what I might be missing, I set the recordings aside and began to dig through the rest of the RWA archives. (I was able to do this because BGSU library staff, for a modest fee, digitized the recordings I designated; for about $10/hour, this was a bargain.)

My initial interest was in determining whether Roberts had presented at programs in the organization’s files (Boxes 36-40). I saw that she had spoken hadn’t turned up in my initial catalog search because they were listed by title alone, without presenter names. Scanning the printed programs for Roberts’ name then looking in the online library catalog those cassettes as well. This was an imperfect solution as there were no programs for any years (e.g., 2003-2005), but in the process of looking for the programs, I got hooked by the rich materials available.

In addition to the conference programs, the archives contain various and sundry things: travel brochures, press clippings, advertisements for books, vendor contracts, press kits, and swag ranging from black and purple satin garter. The files are more complete for some years than others. In the conferences, I turned to the correspondence files (Boxes 13-17), which contain some conference-related material. For instance, a fax sent by a board member, and mailed to those who didn’t use faxes, mentions three authors who turned them down for a guest speaking role at the New York conference in 1994.[1] Roberts ended up giving the keynote that year—but I found no mention of any discussions with her in the files.

In fact, Roberts was largely absent from the RWA correspondence archive documents. Her name shows up in the conference files in attendee lists, in one instance as the person designated to meet 1983 keynote speaker Belva Plain should she require assistance.[2]

Roberts features more often in the Romance Writers’ Report (RWR), to which I turned on my last day at the library. The PCL has a near-complete run of this publication, from its 1981 first issue when the organization was founded. Because of time constraints, I was only able to consult the 1981-86, 1989, and 1996 runs. Features from the early to mid-1980s: the RWA member news and the “Booksellers Say” feature, in which bookstore staff comment on reader preferences. She also wrote a few columns. In 1996, there was an article commemorating her hundredth book.[3] Fortunately, the BGSU library makes scanning available freely to its researchers, so I was able to email myself scans of the pages where she appeared rather than having to take extensive notes during my limited research hours.

In attempting to make the best use of the archives for this current project, I skip over or不成 passing. In the remainder of this piece, I lay out in cursory fashion some of the major topics covered in the archives. Many projects might benefit from consulting the collection. In other cases, entire projects might be built around the archival material. This list is partial, idiosyncratic, and woefully incomplete, meant only to offer a starting point for thinking about drawing on the archives.

The RWA archives at BGSU cover the period from RWA’s founding in 1980 through 2008, though coverage for some years is absent or patchy. Much of the material is concentrated from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s. Folders bulge with conference planning notes and programs. Cassette recordings for many sessions, including with prominent authors, were offered by RWA as resources for their members and now constitute a vital record for scholars. Five file boxes preserve miscellaneous correspondence among RWA officers and between RWA officers and service providers, lawyers, regional chapter officials, aspiring authors, and the occasional senator. (Other boxes contain arch...
meetings; I did not consult them.) BGSU also retains the nearly complete print run of the

Some themes and topics recur regularly in the files of correspondence:

- Correspondence with chapter leaders
- New members
- Perceived elitism among members
- Dues, including increases
- Bylaws and the drafting thereof
- Conference planning, including site selection
- Work plans for Board members
- Bylaws and possible changes thereto
- The Published Authors Network
- Media and public perceptions of romance books and romance writers
- Inquiries from aspiring writers
- Requests for membership lists from those who wish to market to RWA members
- Chapter newsletters
- Agent appointments at conferences
- Those “Achy Breaky Bylaws”[4]

One might use this archive to track technological shifts. From typing to ordinary postal mail, to the occasional use of mail merge, the slow and uneven shift to computers, the arrival of “diskettes,” the change to email, an internet committee, the first use of answering machines, the change to email, the innovative use of answering machines, the change to email, an internet committee, the first website: such matters are a background hum in the files. The 1984 conference file contains an attendee list half an inch thick; the green and white striped paper still retains the side perforations allowing the continuous printout to pass along the dot-matrix printer’s rollers. The newsletter ads for computers through the 1980s are fascinating. An August 1994 letter publicizes the “first-ever electronic chapter” of RWA: online, and hence not regionally-restricted. Roberts had “just discovered Google,” and waxes enthusiastic about using it recorded on audiocassette; eventually, RWA switched to CDs.[7] (Now, sessions are available to members as downloadable MP3 files.)

Between material in the archives and material on the RWA website, one might look at award winners and, perhaps even more revealing, award categories. Recent Romancelandia discussion of awards has focused attention on how nominations are done, finalists chosen, and winners selected. The archives contain extensive correspondence related to naming the awards, voting procedures, author eligibility, and whether to include specific subgenres. For example, the defunct inspirational category got resurrected partly because of a letter-writing campaign, as well as the submission of a sufficient number of eligible novels. In 2015, this was one of the categories in which a romance featuring a Nazi hero and a Jewish heroine was a finalist.

On a related note, one might look at race in the RWA historically, as useful background for thinking through authors’ experiences of racism at its recent conferences. Although one of its founders, high-profile editor African American, what is most striking for the period the archives at BGSU cover is the organization’s overwhelming whiteness. Passing allusions to the confederacy and Southern belles (and once, a reference to “our Grand Wizard” in committee correspondence) are notable.[8] The files also preserve an conference program cover image for the 1987 gathering in Texas.[9] In imagery, the reader—exaggerating to make her point about offensive representations—wonders whether the next year’s program for Atlanta will include a woman in antebellum dress attended by a Black man in livery. Other material would help flesh out the complicated story of race and romance writing in the late 20th century. A flyer wedged into the 1996 folder on conference planning advertises Layle Giusto’s Wind Across Kylarn by “those who fear romances whose main characters are people of color.”[10] Yolanda Greggs, an “ethnic romance writer” who identifies herself as “the daughter and wife of black men,” on how to write Black men as main characters.[11] Given that the major...
when it comes to publishing African American writers, Native writers, and authors of color generally—and to segregating their work when they do—it could be very useful to understand organizational history. (Additionally, the library's non-archival collection of romance novels, including complete runs of numerous representation and diversity in publication.)

One especially persistent issue in the RWA archives is the tension between published and unpublished authors. (A brief flirtation with the cutesy “prepublished” fizzled.) The question of how much basic content to present at the conferences for newbies trying to break in versus how much attention to the concerns of multi-published authors arises repeatedly. Various methods are employed, including star ratings for annual conference aerobics classes at the local gym. The establishment of a Published Author newsletter, was another attempt to balance the needs of novices with the tension plays into the field’s pervasive concern with professionalization, (dis)respect, and the gendered disdain of outsiders for romances and romance writers. Such sentiments motivated one author to write to the board bemoaning the romance groupies who attended the conference: mere fans, not professional authors. In addition to the particulars of surely long-forgotten interpersonal drama, the correspondence files show how diligently an often disgruntled membership. (Of course, as with online product reviews, the disgruntled are overrepresented in the record.)

One might profitably use the RWA sources to supplement work on male at press kits alienate male reporters? Conference organizers worried one year. A husband attending the conference along with his member-wife. In a organization: her husband is the author. RWA changed its practice: the next conference offers a “non-writing spouse” rate for a husband or wife accompanying a member.

This should not be taken as evidence of gender-neutrality, however heteronormativity is astonishing—and serves as a reminder of how much has did not come across any materials related to the 2005 survey asking members to define hetero-monogamous. In March 1994, questioning whether to accept an ad worries: “If the first issue contains masturbation, will the next contain sexuality as that it might invite “further ridicule” for romance writers. Still, announcing the 1993 winner of the newly established Janet Dailey award, f significant social issue, referred to “single mothers and other social problems.

RWA archives could supplement larger histories of sexuality and gender in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the RWA wrote to senators on behalf of its members to support its authors to sanctions or censorship. (Strom Thurmond, John Glenn, and Lloyd Bentsen were non-committal in their replies.) A Florida chapter leader wrote in something of a panic about a fifteen-year old member of their group. They had obtained written permission from both of her parents for her to participate but worried they might be held liable for having inappropriately explicit conversations in her presence. There was a good deal of back and forth. The board sought legal advice; some advocated a change to the bylaws to allow (or require) the chapter to exclude the underage member without discriminating by setting a minimum membership.

The archives contain a few items relevant to Janet Dailey’s plagiarism c numerous other occasions, both in generalities and in specific cases; it is programs and recordings would allow a comparison across the decades of how “theft of creative property” was treated. The conference programs and recordings are also a wonderful source for looking at the rise of new subgenres (when does magic appear regularly? the paranormal?) and could supplement research conference presenters over the decades address the characterization of her masculinity in popular romance could surely benefit from hearing RWA panelists and “Bad Boys of Category” (2002).
Those studying reader response and reaction to contemporary novels—or contemporary reaction to older novels—can consult Amazon reviews, Goodreads, or *Smart Bitches*. The *RWR* “Booksellers Say” gives glimpses of reader response and reaction to early 1980s fiction, about which scholars still have much to say. For example, in the June 1982 issue, for instance, a bookseller reports that “Rosemary Rogers’ *Sweet Savage Love* is selling well, but readers are unhappy with the brutality.” Another offers that “In the historical area, Rosemary Rogers’ *Surrender to Love* is unfavorable.”

The list could go on, but the beauty of archival work is that one finds things one didn’t even know one was looking for. Any of these directions will only be only a starting point. Happy exploring.

[1] PCL MS142 Box 16.
[2] PCL MS142 Box 36.
[4] For example, in a letter in PCL MS142 Box 14.
[7] PCL MS142 Box 39 Folder 1.
[8] PCL MS142 Box 37 Folder 1.
[14] PCL MS142 Box 38 Folder 7.
[16] PCL MS142 Box 15.
[17] For example, PCL MS142 Box 40 Folder 9.[End Page 6]
[18] For example, PCL MS142 Box 40 Folder 1 (In the conference program (p. 28), the session blurb reads: “Best-selling authors Susan King, Mary Jo Putney and Eileen Charbonneau discuss the blending of alpha and beta heroes to produce warrior-poet heroes.”) For bad boys of category: PCL MS142 Box 4
Teaching popular romance fiction in the university is a sharp reminder of the wide notions of literary value. As Pierre Bourdieu explains, educational institutions legitimise specific literary texts by cultivating familiarity with and appreciation of them (Field 121). The omission of popular romance fiction from the literary studies syllabus judges the legitimacy of romance, but it also has far-reaching consequences for the formation of students' reading practices. Educational institutions promote particular attitudes towards reading and the “pursuit of culture” (233). The cultural capital, or cultural competencies, that universities provide for role: universities confer qualifications that guarantee a student’s familiarity lasting beliefs about literature over years of training in literary studies (“For romance fiction from the university curriculum are that students actively skills to read and understand them.

My own reading experiences illustrate this process. As an undergraduate, I became excited about modernism and postmodernism, and learned to appreciate learning about high literature, my mother and my sister were reading Nora Roberts. After I completed my PhD in literary studies, I finally took them up on their reading recommendations and became obsessed: I read 32 of Roberts’s novels while on maternity leave.

My conversion to Roberts was accelerated through my involvement in teaching at the University of Melbourne. The subject Genre Fiction/Popular Fiction was developed by Ken Gelder. I tutored in the subject in 2006 and 2007, and since 2008 have given a number of its lectures as a lecturer in the Publishing and Communications program at the University of Melbourne, teaching popular romance fiction; in addition to my longstanding interest in production, dissemination and reception of books in contemporary culture.

This article responds to Lisa Fletcher’s call to use writing about teaching practice as a “launch pad for interrogating more deeply the place of popular romance studies in higher education” (“Scholarship”). It begins by briefly outlining Fiction/Popular Fiction's overarching pedagogical approach: its objectives summarizes my lecture on Roberts and her novel Spellbound. Finally, I consider students' responses by reporting on a survey I undertook in 2013 on the experience of studying Spellbound. While a single subject cannot transform a lifetime of educational indoctrination about the kind of literature worth valuing, Genre Fiction/Popular Fiction students’ preconceptions and to open up avenues for them to think critically about popular romance.

The subject: description, objectives and structure

The unit description for Genre Fiction/Popular Fiction is as follows:

This subject takes popular fiction as a specific field of cultural productive features of that field: popular fiction's relations to “literature,” genre an the author profile, cinematic and TV adaptations, readerships and fan interest. The subject is built around a number of genres: crime fiction, science fiction novel, the thriller and the blockbuster. On completion of the subject stu important genres of popular fiction, and some representative examples of the role of popular fiction in the broader field of cultural production.
So the subject is organized along two lines of enquiry. It raises large questions about popular fiction and its relationship with what Gelder describes as Literature with a capital L (11), and it also offers more focused analysis of a range of popular fiction genres. Romance fiction was first incorporated into the syllabus in 2007, when Charlaine Harris’ first Sookie Stackhouse novel was also included to diversify the presentation of romance. The texts are taught in chronological order, and in 2013 the syllabus was:

- *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Arthur Conan Doyle)
- *The War of the Worlds* (H.G. Wells)
- *The Hobbit* (J.R.R. Tolkien)
- *A Murder is Announced* (Agatha Christie)
- *Dr No* (Ian Fleming)
- *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Philip K. Dick)
- *The Stud* (Jackie Collins)
- *Jurassic Park* (Michael Crichton)
- *Spellbound* (Nora Roberts)
- *The Litigators* (John Grisham)
- *Dead Until Dark* (Charlaine Harris)

The subject is taught to second- and third-year students, and enrolments for the subject are usually around 120. The teaching pattern comprises a 90-minute lecture, followed by small group tutorials in which students discuss the set text and associated readings in the subject reader.

At the end of semester, student must complete a long essay of 2,500 words that compares two texts, worth 60% of their final mark. An earlier essay of 1,500 words is due mid-semester and must address one of the first four texts studied, so students cannot write about romance for this task. A class presentation forms the basis of one of the essays. The topics for the long essays are comparative and broadly framed. Gelder’s task outline includes: “A good essay outlines significant critical positions and engages with them; it also looks closely at passages or scenes from the novels themselves, of course, and you will have to make decisions about what you’ll look at here, and why.” Topics that allow students to write about *Spellbound* include:

- comparing *Spellbound* with *The Stud* as examples of romance and “anti-romance” fiction;
- comparing *Spellbound* with *Dead Until Dark* as examples of supernatural romance fiction;
- writing about heroes in two novels;
- writing about heroines in two novels;
- writing about popular fiction and genre;
- writing about popular fiction and literary style; and
- writing about popular fiction and characterization.

The genre-based approach taken by this subject has, inevitably, both strengths and limitations. Arguably, the subject ghettoises popular fiction and each of its genres, obscuring what romance has in common with other genres and with Literature. Students sometimes object to drawing a strict demarcation between Literature and popular fiction, or between genres (such as science fiction and fantasy), and it can be useful to remind them that examining the stability of these categorisations while acknowledging their effects is an important critical skill developed through the subject. Other students are very aware of the difference between genre fiction and Literature, and sometimes complain about the lack of literary features in texts such as *The Stud*: a student once told me the subject should be called “ShitLit.”

Teaching popular romance as one genre amongst many is perhaps an old model, but some recent scholarship models other ways of teaching popular romance and genre. For example, Lisa Fletcher, Rosemary Gaby and Jennifer Kloester use an “embedded” approach, where a romance novel is taught alongside more literary texts. An embedded approach, however, can be done in a nuanced way that addresses *Genre Fiction/Popular Fiction*, for example, includes two different romance...
shopping,” novel. This variety allows intra-genre distinctions and subtlety students are taught not only about romance fiction as a genre but also about Spellbound as a text, which are in some ways typical and in other ways atypical.

The genre-based approach also has particular advantages. Focusing on the publishing studies perspective, of romance’s place at the cutting-edge of introduces a new theoretical framework for students, broadening conventional of the social and economic contexts of contemporary texts. Looking at how academy also allows students to be self-reflexive, drawing upon Bourdieu estranged from romance, to confront their own ignorance of the phenomenon from their education, and why, and what limitations this might produce culture. Pedagogically, this subject challenges students to think reflexively at: to value. When they say a book is “good” or “bad”, what criteria are they Students find this line of discussion confronting, but it equips them to literary criticism, and more aware of the broader context of cultural production that

**Lecture summary**

Before the lecture, students are asked to read the set text, Spellbound, and Matrix: Publishing Romantic Fiction” from Janice Radway’s Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature and “One Man, One Woman: Nora Roberts” from Pamela Regis’ lecture has three broad aims: to introduce the genre of romance fiction, to some close reading of Spellbound’s setting and its depiction of gender roles.

I begin the lecture with some dramatic statistics about Roberts. She has pulled Times bestsellers, and releases six new titles a year. There are 400 million copies in print, and over the last 30 years, an average of 27 of her books have been sold every minute. Roberts, I

Then I summarise some of the judgements made about romance fiction which position it as anti-literary. Romance is cast as formulaic. It is dismissed as being read passively by women looking for a mindless distraction. Romance is also heavily commercialised. The lecture then works through these positions and compli

The “romance formula” is a familiar idea for students. A number of writers have presented their own versions of this formula, and as Eric Selinger observes, a formula can be an effective pedagogical tool to prompt discussion and enable comparisons across different novels. Formulae range in complexity. A simple version is presented by Canadian romance writer Deborah Hale on her blog: \((H + h) \times A) \div C + HEA = R\). In this formulation, \(H\) and \(h\)= Hero and heroine, \(A\)= Attraction, \(C\)= Conflict, HEA= Happy Ever After and \(R\) is Romance. Despite its reductiveness, Hale emphasises that each of these abstractions can be filled by a multitude of different possibilities: “The hero could be anything from a medieval knight to a Navy SEAL to a sexy werewolf. The heroine could be a bluestocking governess, a fashionista or a single mom … romance writers can produce an infinite number of unique combinations.” This formula recognises the central elements of romance and its potential diversity.

Janice Radway’s 13-step formula (Reading 134), by contrast, is extremely specific. Presenting this can be humorous, as students realize how much of a romance plot is “scripted,” but it also tracks some of the complex and dynamic relationships that run through romance novels. Pamela Regis’ 8-step formula, recognized by Eric Selinger as a “Middle Way” between the simplistic and complex, is also valuable to share with students. This part of the lecture confirms that popular romance novels can be formulaic and acknowledges conventionality (particularly the happy ending) as part of the appeal of the genre. At the same time, the lecture invites students to see formulae as available analytical devices that illuminate some of the concerns of the genre.

The lecture next explores the idea that romance fiction is escapism for
encountered Andreas Huyssen’s “Mass Culture as a Woman: Modernism’s Mass Culture Postmodernism” which argues that the proto-modernist Flaubert creates, through his character Emma Bovary, a dichotomy between woman as the emotional, passive reader of inferior literature and man as the objective, ironic and active writer of authentic literature. A Flaubertian view of female romance readers is evident in Germaine Greer’s feminist critique in *The Female Eunuch*, which argues that the fantasies women encounter in romance fiction negatively affect their real life relationships: “Although romance is essentially vicarious the potency of the fantasy distorts actual behaviour” (203). For this reason, Greer attacks the depiction of the romance hero as strong, successful and powerful: “The traits invented for him have been invented by women cherishing the chains of their bondage” (202). In this feminist reading, readers of romance fiction contribute to their own subordination in patriarchal culture.

One way to complicate the second-wave feminist attack on romance is through Janice Radway’s 1984 study of romance readers, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* perspectives such as Greer’s because it incorporates the views of readers into my teaching and my research, which also involves paying culture (Driscoll). Following Radway’s interviews with readers in the town of “Smithton,” she suggests that romance fiction can operate as a way for women to cope with their real predicaments as “protest.” Romance reading is not so much escapism, as a (temporary) act of refusal (agency to romance readers: they emerge as active and strategic participants in culture, not mindless consumers.

The final view of romance to complicate is that it is heavily industrialised. It is undeniable that romance is big business: 35-40 percent of all global mass market paperback sales are romances. In 2011, romance was worth $1.36 billion – double or triple the market for science fiction, fantasy or mystery. I show students the websites of Mills and Boon and Harlequin to explore the way these companies market romance texts: we consider the types of formats for sale, the ways readers are drawn in through book clubs, forums and special offers, and, most of all, through the proliferation of subgenres. Subgenres standardise the production and consumption of romance fiction: readers can subscribe to a subgenre of a publisher and have new titles delivered/downloaded periodically. Readers know what to expect and publishers know how many they can sell.

This sophisticated industrial machinery can create a sense that romance fiction is writerless and that it is consumed rather than read in any meaningful way. For example, Ken Worpole writes that

> there is a strong sense that the main problem about the romantic novel it has become over-determined and over-conventionalized … Certainly the prolific output of some writers in the genre confirms this view that once the setting has been chosen, the characters assembled and named, the novels more or less write themselves (qtd. in Gelder 44).

However, the industrialisation of romance is complicated by the genre’s simultaneous creation of personal connections amongst readers and writers. A high level of (mediated) intimacy characterises the romance community. Many romance writers nurture close relationships with their fans, often through active websites. Under the menu item, “About Nora,” a section titled “Up Close and Personal” offers a humorous, intimate biography. It begins by describing Roberts’s life as a stay-at-home mother: “I macramed two hammocks,” she admits now, “I needed help.” After a blizzard led to “endless games of Candy Land and a severe lack of chocolate,” she began to “look for a little entertainment that was not child-related. She took out a notebook and started to write down one of the stories she’d made up in her head.” This presentation of Roberts’s story vividly personalizes her and forges connections with her likely readers.

These website analyses lead to a discussion of another industry practice: digital publishing. Romances titles dominate ebook bestseller lists, and Roberts has a strong presence in digital sales: she was the third author to sell more than a million books for the Kindle. Romance publishing is moving online: two out of every five romances bought in the quarter of 2011 were ebooks. E. L. James’s *50 Shades of Grey* began life as a piece of online fan fiction before becoming an...
ebook bestseller, then securing a print publishing deal and becoming a hard copy bestseller. At this point I open the lecture up to a discussion, asking students why they think romance titles seem to be particularly good fits for digital publishing. Most students realise that ebooks neutralise the social stigma of reading romance fiction—no one can see what you're reading on your Kindle or iPad. Other suggested reasons for the popularity of digital romance include the ability to instantly purchase and download new titles, to store large numbers of texts, to access backlist, and to try self-publishing.

The second section of the lecture concentrates on Roberts as an author. Roberts began writing category romances for Silhouette, Harlequin's US imprint, in 1981. Her work is often adapted for TV. She publishes six new titles each year: two J.D. Robb crime novels, two trade paperbacks (parts of a trilogy or quartet), one hardcover (released in summer, “the big Nora”) and one mass market title or novella (often also a J. D. Robb story).

Throughout the subject students have learnt that popular fiction writers work at a different pace to literary authors. They often write one novel a year, like John Grisham, rather than one every ten years, like Jonathan Franzen. However, Roberts's pace is dramatically faster than the other popular fiction authors they have studied and her level of output is often challenging for students to comprehend.

I discuss the different formats Roberts writes in, beginning with her recent trilogy. One engaging feature of this trilogy is that it is set at the real life Bed and Breakfast owned by Roberts in the town of Boonsboro where she lives, and features other real businesses owned by her family members such as the Turn the Pages bookshop. I ask students what might be going on here: why would an already wealthy author write a fictional book about her real world business? Cross-merchandising seems too simplistic an answer, although that is undeniably part of it: for example, the online store at NoraRoberts.com sells the themed toiletries that appear in the novels romanticise her business: the first line of the first book in the trilogy stood as they had for more than two centuries, simple, sturdy, and strong. Mined from the hills and the valleys… (1).

Becoming a setting for a romance novel has imbued this building with emotion. This halo effect extends to the town of Boonsboro: there's a romanticising of the small-town mythology of America at work in these novels, a celebration of a particular ideal of American life.

The “Inn at Boonsboro” trilogy uses the genre conventions of romance to blur the lines between reading, tourism and the lived experience of Roberts and her family. Roberts clearly uses genre conventions in some deft and creative ways. Her ability to manipulate genre conventions is showcased through the 40 plus books of the “In Death” series, penned as J. D. Robb. This series participates in multiple genres, the most obvious of which is crime fiction. In each book Lieutenant Eve Dallas and her team solve a homicide case. The covers use dark colours and bold graphics, with the gender-neutral pseudonym prominently featured. Crime is a genre of popular fiction with more prestige than romance, and more male readers, so this genre-based marketing extends Roberts's audience. Crime genre conventions influence characterisation in these books, particularly Dallas and her police colleagues, and there are crime logics at work: danger, exhaustion and strong, black coffee. The books are also futuristic science fiction, as the series begins in the year 2058. While there is no world-changing “novum” such as details that add interest to the setting: cars that travel vertically, “auto-chefs” that cook for you, droids as servants and pets and off-planet locations for prisons and theme parks. The science fiction elements also facilitate some social commentary: for example, guns are banned and the police instead use “stunners.”

Underneath these genres, however, the books follow the core conventions of romance. The narrative drive of the series is the developing relationship between Dallas and the sexy, dangerous Irish billionaire Roarke. There are at least three sex scenes between them in most of the novels. Roarke is a classic romance hero: tall and rangy, with long, dark hair, a face with strong, sharp bones and seductive poet’s mouth (Reunion 5), “the wisp of Ireland magical in his voice” (is a reformed criminal and wealthy businessman who nurtures Dallas emotionally and practically, by providing meals and medical care and encouraging her to sleep. Dallas and Roarke are married by the third book in the series, but Roberts
maintains interest in their relationship by focusing on their shared psychological journey as survivors of childhood abuse. With each novel, they confront and overcome reminders of their past trauma, and their mutually-supported healing forms a spanning narrative across the series.

Not only do the “In Death” books combine several genres, but also Roberts plays the genres against each other, often for comic effect. For example, Dallas’s tough cop persona means that she must show discomfort with Roarke’s romantic gestures, including the beautiful clothes and jewellery he buys her. However, there is no sense of parody or pastiche. We might characterize Roberts’s approach as “more is more” as she builds a blockbuster super-genre. An illustrative scene occurs in the holographic video game that offers a time travel experience to players, allowing them to experience various historical eras in a realistic way. The gameplay begins in science fiction mode: “He slid the disc into a slot as he spoke, used both palm plate and retinal scan, added a voice command and several manual ones.”

The narrative device of the hyper-realistic video game allows Roberts to insert a scene like the ones she writes in Spellbound, of ancient combat in a mystical landscape, into a futuristic crime thriller. She provides the pleasures of multiple genres in one reading experience.

The final part of the lecture reads the set text, the novella Spellbound, which students are now equipped to approach using a range of critical frameworks. Spellbound has a varied publishing history. It was first published in 1998 as a short story in Jove’s collection Once Upon a Castle, and then released as a standalone mass-market title in 2005 with a price point of US$2.99. The endmatter of this edition describes the 81-page novella as quick reads from your favourite bestselling authors.” Spellbound is also available in two other formats: as a 2-in-1 with Roberts’s Ever After and as an ebook for US$2.99. Spellbound participates in the subgenre of paranormal romance, incorporating supernatural elements such as witches, wizards and magic spells.

The Irish setting of the novella offers a productive analytical pathway. In a romantic landscape. Roberts has Irish heritage, and frequently creates Irish settings and characters in her writing. In Spellbound, she constructs Ireland as a place of mystery, myth, possibility and enchantment. Calin Farrell, the hero, begins the novel in New York and flies to Ireland to address a deeply felt but inarticulate yearning. In Ireland, Calin meets Bryna, a young witch who lives alone in a cottage at the foot of a ruined castle. Bryna has been waiting for Calin: she knows that they are reincarnations of lovers from 1000 years ago, a warrior and a witch, who were separated by the wizard Alisdair when he accused Bryna of being unfaithful and killed Calin in battle. Bryna’s mission in the novella is to convince Calin of the truth of this story in time for him to battle Alisdair again, one day after he arrives in Ireland: only true love between Bryna and Calin will enable Calin to win. Calin is immediately attracted to Bryna, but his twofold task in the novel is to accept the supernatural story and to commit himself fully to her.

Like Calin, readers of Spellbound travel to a world removed from the everyday, a mystical world of fields, mists, stags, forests and castles. At points, the novella reads like a tourist advertisement for this mythologised Ireland. Halfway through the novel, Bryna soliloquises on Ireland as a “dreaming place”:

“We’re proud of our dreamers here, Calin. I would show you Ireland, Calin. I would show you the bank where the columbine grows, the pub where a story is always waiting to be told, the narrow lane flanked close with hedges that bloom with red fuschia. The simple Ireland.”

Tossing her hair back, she turned to him. “And more. I would show you the circle of stones where power sleeps, the quiet hillock where the faeries dance of an evening, the high cliff where a wizard once ruled. I would give it to you, if you’d take it” (47).
This, clearly, is not the Ireland of poverty, alcoholism and sectarian violence likely to appeal to those who have yet to visit the country. In *Spellbound* built not just into the romance plot, but into its setting, which is an imaginative emotionally charged landscape. Roberts’s descriptions of place contribute features stand in for the passions of her characters. Consider Calin’s first view of the castle above Bryna’s home:

> The ruined castle came into view as he rounded the curve. … Perched on a stony crag, it shouted with power and defiance despite its tumbled rocks.

> Out of the boiling sky, one lance of lightning speared, exploded with light, and stung the air with the smell of ozone.

> His blood beat thick, and an ache, purely sexual, began to spread through his belly (11).

In this tightly written novella, no words are wasted. All the prose is geared towards providing emotional satisfaction for the reader.

A second way to approach *Spellbound* is through its depiction of gender. One of the key differences between this novel and the majority of romance fiction is that it is written largely from the perspective of the hero. Like the Irish setting, a focus on male characters is a characteristic of many of Roberts’s novels. As the “bio” on her website notes:

> Through the years, Nora has always been surrounded by men. Not only was she the youngest in her family, but she was also the only girl. She has raised two sons. Having spent her life surrounded by men, Ms. Roberts has a fairly good view of the workings of the male mind, which is a constant delight to her readers. It was, she’s been quoted as saying, a choice between figuring men out or running away screaming.

The female focus of much romance fiction reflects the genre’s historical associations in the late eighteenth century (Regis 57). The heroine is typically the protagonist in the marriage that takes place at the novel’s end. *Spellbound* reflects some of the changes in gender relations between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries. In this story, Bryna pursues Calin. She knows that she is destined to be with him—“they were meant to be lovers. This much she believed he would accept” (16). It is Calin who must make the choice to accept her offer of love. He is effectively seduced by Bryna in the novel, and this is most clearly in the passage where Cal begins to worry that Bryna might be an obsessed fan who has drugged him:

> Cal awoke to silence. His mind circled for a moment, like a bird looking for a place to perch. Something in the tea, he thought. God, the woman had drugged him. He felt a quick panic as the theme from Stephen King’s played in his head (18).

Bryna has taken control here, and Calin feels threatened and disoriented. In Calin, this scene would invoke the heroine’s fear of rape. Calin may be Roberts’s writing, this reversal of typical romance gender roles becomes even more pronounced when Calin is stripped him and put him to bed, Bryna retorts, “Oh Cal, you have a most attractive body. I’ll not deny I looked. But in truth, I’m after preferring a man awake and participating when it comes to the matters you’re thinking of” (23).

Despite these shifts in the roles of heroine and hero, most aspects of the novel fulfill the genre expectations of conventional romance fiction. Calin is handsome, wealthy and famous: “He was thirty, a successful photographer who could name his own price, call his own shots” (7). Bryna, despite her sexual forwardness, has some conservatively feminine qualities. Much attention is placed on her domestic skills and the clean, welcoming cottage she has created. She even spins her own wool. Calin’s reaction to this validates traditional female labour, even as it cal
readers. Roberts writes, from Calin’s perspective: “Most of the women he knew couldn’t even sew on a button. He’d never held the lack of domesticity against anyone, but he fou: Spellbound plays with some gender conventions of the genre by allowing conventions are left intact.

**Student responses**

To explore the effects of this lecture on students, I prepared an online survey through the free service SurveyMonkey which I announced in the lecture and in a follow-up email. This survey comprised and took about five minutes to complete. Twenty students responded for rate of 17 percent. This low level of participation in the survey means that experience or viewpoints of all students in the subject. The respondents were bias towards those who were already interested in Roberts or romance. Eig slightly higher figure than the percentage of female students enrolled in the s

The first set of questions in the survey explored students’ pre-existing fami survey asked “Had you heard of Nora Roberts before you took this subject? students’ awareness of this bestselling author. Fifty percent of students an that many students lack knowledge not only of romance fiction but of comm displayed in bookshops and frequently mentioned on bestseller lists, for ex many university students.

Question 2 asked “Had you read any novels by Nora Roberts before taking the subject? Only three respondents (15 percent) had read any novels by Roberts before taking the subject. One was evidently a genuine fan, having read “Northern Lights, the Sea, Valley of Silence, Dance of the Gods, Morrigan’s Cross, a few frc cannot recall the titles.” Another had read Northern Lights, and another h: student noted that they “hadn’t read any but my mum is an avid reader of t

Question 3 broadened the inquiry by asking “Had you read any romance novel (40 percent of respondents) had previously read a romance novel. The que titles nominated by students included “Nicholas Evans and Rachael Treasure know” and “I’m a big fan of Sherrilyn Kenyon’s Dark-Hunter series, Ra Groomed’. ” The specificity of these answers suggests that these students ma high level of knowledge of the genre. One student wrote “Jane Austen no romance fiction. Another reported reading “anything available on the op sh never paid attention until I read A Woman of Substance” This response be fiction and [End Page 11] one of its primary purchase locations (the op (Collins) and a particular novel to sketch a growing interest in romance fictio

Having established students’ connections with romance fiction, I went on looking at both enjoyment and intellectual engagement. Question 4 ask Question 5 asked “Did you find Spellbound interesting, from an academic perspect they enjoyed reading Spellbound. By contrast, 70 percent of respondents sai an academic perspective. These suggestive findings indicate that many st romance text with pleasure, but that adopting a critical posture increases implications of these results are teased out in the responses to the later surv

Question 6 asked “What did you like most about Spellbound?” The student: discernible groups. A number of responses were ironic: one student enjoye
it was good.” Another wrote, “I did not particularly enjoy any of it, to be ‘Calin Farrell’ was ridiculously hilarious, however.”[6] These students display something of a camp sensibility in their reading of the text. In the Genre Fiction/Popular Fiction subject, students discuss camp when they study Collins’s Spellbound so this is a mode they are familiar with by the time they encounter Spellbound. Another group of students enjoyed the novel on its own terms. One wrote that:

It was easy and fun to read. I liked the fact that the female was in the dominant role. I actually think the writing was decent, too. It certainly wasn’t a dumb book as some would lead you to believe.

Another enjoyed the setting, “the gradual shifting perspective from the supernatural of Ireland” and others the characters: “It was so easy to read, the short length of the novel.” These students take pleasure in the constitutive elements of the text: characters, setting, plot, themes and writing style.

A final group of students wrote that they enjoyed looking analytically at the text. One appreciated “Seeing a genre usually dismissed taken seriously” while another responded, “I didn’t so much enjoy the book as a book, but rather as a representation of the vast industry of romance fiction.” Three students commented specifically on the feminist aspects of the book. One wrote, “The overwhelming gender performativity astounded me, because it was written in the 90s, a decade when women were gaining independence, yet it was interesting how Bryna was so domesticated.” Another enjoyed “studying feminist critiques of it” and a third was interested in “social commentary on romance as perpetuating women’s subjugation, and why the genre remains appealing.” These students, then, did not appreciate the book as a leisure reading experience, but could value it as a text to be studied analytically (“taken seriously”) through a conceptual framework such as feminism or through its participation in industrial practices and genre conventions.

The aspects of Spellbound disliked by students also reveal much about the ways in which students approach romance. Question 7 asked, “What did you like least about Spellbound?” A cluster of responses to this question focused on stereotypes and gender issues. Two students wrote “stereotypes” and “gender stereotypes,” and another disliked “the part where despite Bryna’s power, it’s Calin who can solve the problem and he did it alone while protecting her.” One response offered a more lengthy feminist critique:

I found the entire plot contrived. I believe she simply utilised the supernatural “preordained love” scenario, and to give her female lead some agency, upon her male hero’s confession of love in order for her powers to flourish.

A second group of responses objected to Roberts’s writing style: these students disliked “the writing style,” “poor expression and writing,” and dismissed the novella as “so poorly written.” One student linked this with the commercialization of romance fiction, criticizing the book’s “lazy writing suggesting Roberts put little or no effort into the book instead relying upon her reputation/name to sell books.”

These prose-related objections are consonant with other respondents’ conventions. One student wrote, “some parts were very cliched (which I guess is part of the romance genre). Some parts were a bit cringe-worthy, too,” while another thought the book’s “strict adherence to romance formula, just made it pretty boring with nothing much to it.” Another student wrote that “the pace in very unrealistic to me. Also, I had never read a romance novel before but students critique the novel using the criteria they have been taught to apply to literary texts: complexity, realism and originality. Measured against these criteria, Spellbound is a failure and students are unable to appreciate it.

In a slightly different vein, two students disliked the novel on the grounds that it was not a strong example of romance fiction. One wrote that “Considering the context, it only served to concrete the stereotypes about romance fiction that
people would have had in their minds – shallow and uninteresting, whereas
Another compared it unfavourably with other romance fiction and other Ro

It was extremely predictable and not at all complex like many other ron
childish with its simplicity and I wasn’t as enraptured with the plot or c
other romance novels.

Like the students who disliked romance fiction’s conventional features, thes
and complexity. So for these respondents, romance as a genre is defensible l
though Spellbound doesn’t.

The survey also aimed to ascertain which critical approaches to romance a
asked, “What did you find most interesting about the lecture on Spellbound
into romance that caught students’ attention. Several enjoyed learning mc
interested in “Nora Roberts” entrepreneurial relationship with her reade:
“weird; ballsy” and the one who appreciated “The [End Page 13] parts a biographical info). It was interesting to consider Roberts as the product.” Ot
text from a feminist angle. One liked “the discussion about the formula of r
feminism,” and another thought that “the feminist critiques of romance discussion in our tutorials.”

The largest group of students was interested in romance as a genre. One s
success of romance novels and the digitalisation of romance novels” and
One stated that “the general background information of the romance ge
legitimate book to study. Looking at different romance formulas was a perspective on the genre: “I thought the lecture was great, it illuminated al
and also talked about its more positive/redemptive features.”

Examined as a whole, the insights into students’ thoughts provided by this enjoy reading Spellbound: they resist Spellbound’s conventionality and de qualities such as complexity, realism and depth that they appreciate in lit
strong academic interest in romance fiction: its conventions, logics, practice

**Conclusion**

What is the place of popular romance fiction in the higher education syst
raises complicated questions about the interaction between reading for en ways in which the academic context affects readers’ appreciation of differ enjoyment and texts studied at university have been sharply distinguished. I
Janice Radway identifies a difference between the books she read for pl popular nature books”—and the high literature she studied in class (A Fee li twentieth-century, the study of popular culture, including genre fiction, ha
Yet, what happens to the pleasure of reading when these texts are co-opte high literary texts at university, but for her this “was always combined somehow failed to duplicate precisely the passion of my response to those books” (A Feeling 3). Texts that are studied as part of the university syllab experienced purely as leisure. Teaching popular romance fiction at unive readings of romance texts and obscuring what happens when such fiction is
The relationship between leisure reading and academic reading is further complicated when students do not enjoy particular works of popular fiction. The survey conducted for this article showed a poor awareness of romance fiction prior to the subject and a determined refusal of its pleasures by many respondents. Study of popular romance challenges and reframes students’ antipathy. Opportunity to explicitly consider varied reading communities and hierarchies of romance fiction can extend students’ experience of literary culture and critical practices. It can open students up to the possibility of considering further surveys of students’ experiences with other genres and texts may teaching Roberts has reinforced the importance of acknowledging the variety of providing intellectual tools that approach romance from a number of conventions and the contemporary publishing industry. These academic frameworks, while unable to fully account for the pleasures of romance, enable student readers to appreciate some of the specific social, cultural and literary qualities of the romance genre, its authors and its texts.

[1] I gratefully acknowledge the input of Ken Gelder and Claire Knowles, whose ideas and suggestions contributed to the development of this article.

[2] Both Claire Knowles and I, at various times, lectured for the subject and this section of the article reflects the collaborative nature of our lectures.

[3] Some students may be interested in engaging with critiques of Radway’s characterization of romance readers and her view that reading romance may be a substitute for social or political action (see, for example, Moore and Selinger 2012).

[4] I am indebted to Claire Knowles for this idea and phrasing.

[5] An “op shop” or opportunity shop is a store run by a charity selling secondhand books.

[6] Presumably because of the similarity with the name of the actor Colin Firth.

Works Cited


Introduction

These are exciting times for popular romance scholars.[1] Over the developments—including the founding of the International Association for popular romance (Brisbane (2009), Brussels (2010), New York (2011), McDaniel (2011), York (2012), Freemantle (2013)) and the funding of substantial academic grants by Romance Writers of America have stimulated the increasing institutional establishment and recognition of the overall study of the representation of romantic love in popular culture gains one of the genres at the epicenter of this emerging field—popular romance genre-wide and generalizing approach that characterizes many older stud
foundational works as Tania Modleski's *Loving with a Vengeance* (1982), Janice Radway's *The Romance Revolution* (1987) and even some parts of Pamela Regis' seminal *Novel* (2003), is slowly being replaced by a more focused and differential approach.

Such a differential approach to the study of popular romance fiction seeks to address not the whole of the genre (as older studies are wont to) but specific subparts of it. These studies are then based on more specified corpora of primary texts. Examples of such studies are recent work on romance subgenres (see e.g. Neal (2006), Fletcher (2008) and Betz (2009)), particular authors (see e.g. Frantz (2009)) and even individual novels (see e.g. Selinger (2012)). The findings and conclusions formulated in these studies are usually less general and wide-ranging than those of older romance studies.

Slowly, the decades-old scholarly tradition of making very general claims about the popular romance genre as a whole is then being replaced by a more specified perspective in which the scholar seeks to address not the similarities of the whole, but the specifics of the parts of the whole. In this setup, the general claims made by the framework against which individual cases—of particular romance authors or even individual novels—are being tested. As will be illustrated in this paper, such a more differential approach to the study of popular romance leads to analyses that recognize (instead of obscure) the variety that exists within the genre and that are often more refined, nuanced, and sophisticated than before.

The general claims about popular romance fiction that are taken to task in this paper have to do with the representation of romantic love—and, more particularly, of the mind and the body in love—in popular romance novels. Specifically, the paper investigates Catherine Belsey's claim that popular romance novels offer a particular construction of the mind and the body in love that purports to resolve the (postmodern) tension between the body and the mind—the material and the immaterial—but eventually fails to do so. This recurrent construction, Belsey suggests, explains the massive appeal of the popular romance novel as well as the curious disappointment readers supposedly feel at the end of the happily ending romance tale (21-41). In this paper, Belsey's general(izing) claims about popular romance novels are used as a framework to study the work of Nora Roberts, the single most popular romance author of our time. In particular, the paper analyzes the representation of the body and the mind in Roberts' construction of romantic love on the basis of eight of the author's novels. By investigating if Belsey's claims about the irresolvable tension between body and mind hold true for Roberts' hugely popular work, this paper develops a nuanced understanding of one of the core motifs in Roberts' vast oeuvre that might shed some light on its immense popularity.

**The General Claim: Mind, Body and Love in Popular Romance Novels**

Catherine Belsey's claims about the popular romance novel appear in the second chapter of *Culture* (1994), the scholar's theoretically sophisticated and wide-ranging study of the representation of desire in Western texts. In line with this work's overall theoretical interests, Belsey turns to critical theory to try to explain the popular romance novel's massive appeal. Her analysis focuses mainly on the representation of romantic love as a phenomenon that impacts both the body and the mind in popular romance novels. This dual conceptualization, Belsey notes, is in line with long-standing Western traditions of dual conceptualisations of identity and his colleagues of the Enlightenment. These thinkers put forth conceptually disjointed and divided along the line of the body and the mind that have held sway in Western culture ever since. Although Belsey notes that such dual conceptualisations have come to seem “natural” and “inevitable,” the notion that the self is internally disjointed remains a deeply unsettling idea in many ways. Popular romance novels, Belsey finds, capitalise upon this anxiety and this is the secret to their extraordinary appeal. In these novels, romantic love offers “a promise to bring mind and body back into perfect unity, to heal the rift of experience which divides individuals from themselves” (23). Such a promise, Belsey posits, strongly appeals to the contemporary reader.

However, Belsey is quick to note, fulfilling this central promise is easier said than done and herein lies the romance genre's problem. Romances attempt to bridge the gap between mind and body by consistently connecting intense sexual sensations to moral and emotional feelings of commitment and love (23). This goal...
specific representation of sexuality as “elemental, beyond control, majestic, in part achieved by the stereotypical representation of sexual passion in metaphors of powerful natural phenomena such as a hurricane, a flood, a storm, an earthquake or a wave. While such involvement of the body in the experience of romantic love, physical passion for this passion to constitute true love, not only the body but also the mind is, in love, “required to speak, to assert his identity as a subject” (29).

It is here, Belsey claims, that the crux of the problem lies. Words spoken in this passion has explicitly been presented as “bewildering, transporting of consciousness, sweeping away all sense of the self, which] precisely deflects subjectivity and consequently defers the moment of moral commitment” (29). Only the words that are spoken afterwards, “independently [from the bodily experience], or the words that really matter (30, emphasis mine). But herein lies also the promise of unifying mind and body. Inasmuch as the romance project for passionate context, it does not bring body and mind together, but rather e extent that the aim was to dissolve the opposition between mind and body project signally fails in these instances” (30). This failure, Belsey finally suggests, is a little disappointing” (31): romance novels consistently fail to live up to (their eyes) their biggest appeal.

The sense of disappointment Belsey speaks of is not, as such, identified or in Janice Radway’s classic study, to which Belsey repeatedly refers, readers claim of the romance reading experience and claim romance reading makes the these claims to be incompatible with her own conclusions, however. Instead the romance reading act Radway observed likely confirms her hypothesis:

It emerged that the Smithton women were reading a great many romances. [ . . . ] Is it conceivable that this avid reading is an indication that the optimism created by romance is more precarious than it is possible to say? Perhaps the next romance is there to compensate for the disappointment sure of is that readers of romance tend to crave more romance. A num an anxiety about whether they might be depressed by their reading [ . . . their extensive reading experience, a silent recognition of unconscious disappointment that the stories have consistently failed to resolve the divisions they depend on? (34-35)

Although Belsey formulates her ideas as questions, she quite strongly suggests is not, as readers tend to claim, primarily motivated by positive emotions readers might not be consciously aware of: a disappointment which is, romance reading itself.

**Belsey and the Evolution of Romance Scholarship**

Although Belsey’s claims have found very little response in subsequent romance literature, challenging and even provocative ideas. The notion that the popular romance conundrum that has confounded many a critic—has something to do with the anxieties about self and identity that are typically associated with the (post)modern condition is certainly deserves further scrutiny. While Belsey’s discussion of the romance response comes off as somewhat belittling, the suggestion that romance reading triggers a more complex reaction than straightforward happiness—and that this reaction might have something to do with romantic fiction—remains fascinating nonetheless. Belsey’s study thus offers a number of suggestions that deserve further exploration.
Such further exploration is undertaken in this paper, but in line with the ongoing development in the field of Popular Romance Studies there is an important methodological difference between impressive theoretical suggestions the latter makes, Belsey commits an important methodological failing to adequately discuss the size, composition and selection of the primary corpus on which her findings are based. Moreover, since in the course of her discussion Belsey refers to no more than six romance texts, the (apparent) size of her corpus seems decidedly too small to warrant the genre-wide scope of her claims. The present study deliberately makes different methodological choices by first, focussing on the oeuvre of a single author and second, selecting novels from that oeuvre according to explicit, clear-cut principles.

**Nora Roberts**

This paper focuses on American writer Nora Roberts, who is widely considered the most popular and successful romance author of our time. Since her first category romance novel was published in 1981, Roberts has written more than 200 romance novels. A staggering 178 of these have appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list and have so far spent a total of 932 weeks (or 17 years). As the first (and only recipient of a record-breaking twenty-one RITA Awards, Roberts is one of the most distinguished romance authors in RWA’s and the romance genre’s history. With more than 400 million copies of her books currently in print Roberts is, moreover, not only the top-selling romance writer, but also one of the best-selling authors in the world.

Remarkably, Roberts is also one of the most understudied authors in the world. Whereas the oeuvres of Roberts’ fellow bestselling authors such as J.K. Rowling, Stephen King and John Grisham are studied regularly, Roberts’ romance oeuvre has hardly drawn the academic gaze.[3] Barely a handful of studies on her work have been published; a monograph that takes on Roberts’ complete oeuvre does not currently exist.[4] In this regard Roberts does not differ from other contemporary romance authors—the author study remains an important lacuna in scholarship on this genre—but her status as one of the bestselling authors in the world makes the lack of studies on her work especially remarkable.

Perhaps one of the reasons scholars have been reluctant to take on Roberts’ oeuvre is its sheer size. Already counting more than 200 novels and increasing by an average of five new novels every year, Roberts’ body of work is simply colossal. It is also decidedly too large to subject to the close reading analysis on which this present study is based, so for the purposes of this study a selection had to be made. This selection takes into account a number of the most significant variables present in Roberts’ oeuvre—including year of publication, subgenre, part of series or standalone—and eventually resulted in eight novels.

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The Integration of Body and Mind in Nora Roberts' Romance Fiction

Catherine Belsey's claims about the pivotal importance of the representation of body and mind to the immense appeal of the popular romance genre open up interesting avenues of inquiry for the study of Nora Roberts' work. As Belsey's observations imply, the complex relation between body and mind plays a central role in Roberts' representation of romantic love, which is indeed conceptualized as a dual force that impacts the body as well as the mind. While to a large extent Roberts' romance novels follow the patterns of the genre insightfully uncovered in Belsey's study, in one crucial regard Roberts' novels deviate from this pattern. Whereas Belsey claims that popular romance novels consistently fail to realize the bridging of the gap between body and mind that their conventional representation of romantic love promises, the analyses in this paper reveal that in Roberts' romance fiction the unification of body and mind is always represented as successful. The potential implications of this observation for our understanding of Roberts' popularity are addressed in the conclusion to this paper after the pattern that achieves this unification is described in more detail.

Divided Selves During the First Meeting

In Roberts' romances, the process that ends with the complete and successful unification of body and mind starts with their explicit separation. Indeed, at the beginning of Roberts' stories the division between the lover's body and mind is repeatedly stressed in the narration. All first meeting scenes analyzed in this study emphasize the protagonists' double, diverging response to each other: strong and immediate physical attraction is combined with a form of conscious dislike, irritation, or anger. Although this representation differs slightly from the pattern observed by Belsey—who finds that the division between mind and body is mainly situated in the heroine's emphatic bewilderment over, lack of understanding of, or even full-out distrust of her body's uncontrollable, explicitly sexual response to the hero (24-26)—the first meeting scenes in Roberts' romances nonetheless systematically introduce, and emphatically stage, the basic dichotomy between body and mind around which the rest of the romance narrative essentially revolves.

The first meeting scene between hero Grant Campbell and heroine Gennie Grandeau in Roberts' 1985 category romance One Man's Art is an example of this construction. Hero Grant is severely "annoyed" (264) when heroine Gennie shows up at his doorstep during a stormy night, disrupting his much-valued solitude and privacy. Roberts quickly adopts the hero's point of view to emphasize that barely seconds after letting the heroine in he already "wished fervently he'd never opened the door" (263). Gennie, put out by Grant's "unfriendly, scowling face" and rude and unwelcoming behavior, adopts an "icy tone" and remains "distantly polite, [ . . . ] frigid and haughty" (264), but privately "seriously consider[s] heaving her purse at him" (265). The narration of this immediate dislike and annoyance is instantly complemented with the narration of their physical attraction. Grant is "thrown" by Gennie's "sea green, huge and faintly slanted" eyes (264) and "when the sight of her [ . . . goes] straight to his gut" he realizes she is "too beautiful for his peace of mind" (267). The unambiguous statement that Grant is "furiously annoyed by the flare of unwelcome desire" (268) makes the opposition between his mental and physical response textually explicit. Gennie is portrayed as equally attracted, experiencing a physical "stir" and "a thrill [of . . . ] anticipation" (269). Again, the body's response is explicitly opposed to the mind: she is depicted as "catching herself" and
internally lecturing that “even her imagination ha[s] no business sneaking o
body and mind, staged continuously throughout this first meeting scene, closing paragraphs:

He wondered what she would do if he simply got up, hauled her to her wondered what in the hell was getting into him. They stared at each o them wanted while the rain and the wind beat against the walls, separati

The parallel syntactic construction of the first two sentences (“He wondere
notion—made explicit in the narration—that within one person, one se ongoing; the physical, sexual response is represented as a force sepa experiences it as “getting into him.” The opposition between mind and bc Gennie and Grant are “battered” by physical “feelings neither of them wan setting in which these “feelings” occur explicitly underlines the distinction unruly, feeling body.

The Body As Marker of Sincerity

A fundamental aspect of Roberts’ representation of the divided self at the b on the mind’s inability to control the body in these instances. Roberts’ narr position of the mental self who undergoes the sexual attraction, the invasive emphatically lacks power over these bodily reactions and cannot stop the schism between body and mind that exists within the lover’s self at this ear essential aspect of Roberts’ construction of the body as a site of (emotiona consistently functions as a marker and display of (emotional) truth. Pt manifest bodily: faces pale in shock, fingers tremble from sadness, hands jel are bruised, battered or smudged from emotional pain. Time and again, conscious, thinking self—has no control over these physical manifestations.

Importantly, this emphatic lack of mental control implies an inability to fictional worlds, when true love is involved, the body cannot lie. The un displays true, sincere, authentic emotion—and to say that the body disj Roberts’ romance fiction the body becomes a text that can be read in orde even when the novel at hand does not explicitly deploy textual metaphors. T the characters within the fictional world and the novels’ readers outside of novels’ characters, like the novels’ readers, become readers and interpre their own or another character’s true emotions.

Roberts’ deployment of the body-text as a marker of sincere emotion is e Western romance Montana Sky. The scene depicts the story’s heroine, V distress. She has just discovered the murdered and mutilated body of her l her home, ranch and livelihood due to the murder. While throughout exceptionally strong and decisive woman, this is a point in the narrative wd following excerpt she is confronted with her two half-sisters, with whom st range of conflicting emotions. Willa’s complex emotions—which include g mutilated body, guilt because she had words with the victim mere hours home and livelihood and eventual extreme relief when she realizes instantaneous displays them.
Willa came into the kitchen, stopped short when she saw the women at the table. Her face was still pale, her movements still jerky. [... ] She slipped her hands into her pockets as she stepped toward the table. Her fingers still tended to shake. [... ] Because she just stood there, unprepared, she hadn’t been able to fully consider the loss of the ranch. [... ] But it was that it hit her. And it hit her hard. Giving in, she rested her head against the cupboard door and closed her eyes. Pickles. Dear God, would she see him for the rest of her life, what had been done to him? [... ] But the ranch, for now, was safe. “Oh God, oh God, oh God.” She didn’t realize she’d moaned it out loud until Lily laid a tentative hand on her shoulder. (110)

In this scene, Willa’s body clearly functions as a text displaying her emotional state of mind and the novel’s reader outside of it interpret Willa’s emotional state of mind via the physical signs displayed by her body. Her pale face, jerky movements, shaking fingers, closed eyes and unconscious moaning are conventional physical signs of emotional upheaval. The pronounced contrast between her purposeful, controlled physical actions—“cross[ing] to the cupboards and tak[ing] out a tumbler”—and the purposeless, uncontrolled ones—“just [standing] there, unable to move, [... ] rest[ing] her head [... ] clos[ing] her eyes”—contributes to and reinforces the interpretation of these as manifestations of and responses to profound emotions.

The character’s lack of conscious control over her body’s display is stressed multiple times in this short scene and ensures the sincerity of these emotions. It is clear that the characters in this fictional world are aware of their bodies’ truth-revealing and communicative potential: Willa attempts to hide her shaking fingers, knowing those bodily manifestations would reveal a depth of emotional turmoil she is uncomfortable displaying in front of her sisters. Lily’s supportive “hand on [Willa’s] shoulder” indicates, reversely, that not only grief but also support and comfort can be communicated solely by the body. The marked absence of language—dialogue—in this scene adds to its emotional impact as it constructs this world as one in which emotional truth can be read directly from and conveyed by the body—text, making emotional deceit and insincerity virtually impossible.

**Sex: So Much More Than Just Sex**

Roberts’ construction of the body as a marker of emotional truth—which is pervasive in her texts and an important conceptual pillar on which her fictional worlds rest—implies that the body reveals the truth. This notion puts another perspective on the function of sex in the representation of romantic love. Roberts’ texts emphasize the physical, natural, powerful and non-rational aspects of sex as ultimate acts of the body as opposed to the mind. In the experience of sex in these texts, the physical, natural, powerful and non-rational aspects of sex are emphasized. The experience of sex, as described in high noon (222) and the thinking, rational, controlling self is temporarily suspended. This representation is frequently based on the association of sex with powerful natural phenomena and a lack of rationality and control on the part of the mental, conscious self. As phenomena and disasters are often used to describe sexual sensations in popular romance novels, Roberts indeed tends to depict sex in rather unimaginative and very conventional—even clichéd—terms. Sensual experiences are like a “flame [... ] and fire, in the blood, in the bone” (Valley of Silence 62), “long, liquid wave” (Irish Thoroughbred 195; 129), “a rage” (Montana Sky 134), “a fire explosion” (One Man’s Art 306) and “liquid flames” (Dance of the Gods 38) among others. This representation emphasizes the powerful, uncontrollable force of the sexual experiences—force of nature—but of course also inscribes the texts in the conventions of the genre.

The rational subject’s lack of control in the physical sexual experience is further emphasized in Roberts’ narration by her representation of sexual desire and sensations as a near-violent force that “desire [... ] pierced through him” (Morrigan’s Cross 43, emphasis mine),...
pumping through his blood, *roaring* through his head," "dozens of sex ([*Suzanna's Surrender* 389; 429, emphasis mine], "the stab of desire [ . . . ] let and fast," and is "an assault on the system" (*One Man's Art* 304-5, emphasis mine) systematically invoke the semantic field of violence and thereby stress the uncontrollable nature of this desire.[5] The subject’s experience of sexual desire as an external phenomenon which does not seem to originate within the (conscious) self. The gap between body and mind seems wider than ever in these passages.

This dissociation between body and mind is reinforced by the recurring rationality; physical sexual sensations are repeatedly represented as causes in: Here are two exemplary passages:

*He brushed his thumb over her nipple, watched the shock of pleasure flicker over her face. "Turn that busy mind off, Moira." It was already as if mists clouded it. How could she think with . . . Her mind misted over again as his hands, his mouth, slid like flaming nothing but feelings now, a mass of pleasures beyond any possibility. . . . was a hostage to this never-ending need. Half-mad she struggled with h*

*But right at the moment, with her back up against the door and his mouth off the equation. [ . . . ] His hands dove into her hair, skimmed over her shoulders, molded down her body with such purpose and skill that any idea [ . . . ] went straight out the window, and under assault and her blood flashing from comfortably warm to desperately hot, her body ruled the moment. [ . . . ] The sensations careening inside her flew too fast, too high for [ . . . ] and

Physical sexual pleasure is explicitly presented as causing a temporary suspension of the self’s rational capacity: Moira’s mind is "clouded" by "mists" and "misted over" due to the hero’s sexual equation in these scenes as rational thoughts go "straight out the window" presented as the opposite of the rational, thinking mind: "how could *sensations?*" During sex the self is then reduced to "nothing but feelings, moment;" the rational self is temporarily suspended in this act and, the love by the natural body that for an instant overtakes and occupies the entire Roberts projects the feelings surrounding the orgasmic moment to all sex uncontrollable nature of sex and, by extension, the body.

Whereas Belsey interprets this representation of sexuality as indicative of how body and mind are and remain separated, my reading of Roberts’ use of these topoi recasts them as a pre-condition for the authenticity of the true love that is later realized in the complete unification of body and mind. This interpretation is a marker of emotional truth—an interpretive strategy that constructs so authenticity of an as-yet mentally unacknowledged emotion. This interpretation explicitly non-sexual manifestations of the body. Indeed, the bodies of F respond to the other in a sexual way, but also experience and display strong range from the small and seemingly unremarkable—an “uneven beat of [the] naturally “belong” (*One Man’s Art* 328) together, a “quick hitch in [the] gut” throat snapping shut when being “wooed” (*Dance of the Gods* 90), and the n 115)—to more elaborate physical responses.

In the following brief scene from the 1991 category romance *Suzanna* experiences and displays his strong emotional response to heroine Suzanna at a time in the narrative when he has not yet consciously realized or acknowledged his feelings for her (let alone openly confessed them to her). Holt’s body displays as-yet-unspoken feelings of affection and love, but this display is clearly not sex
Again the conscious self’s lack of control over this bodily act (“catching himself”) displays and reveals an emotional truth the rational, conscious self has not yet acknowledged. While the overwhelming sexual response generally dominates the protagonists’ physical reaction to one another, such non-sexual physical manifestations confirm what the emphatic uncontrollability of the sexual acts already indicate, namely the existence of an as-yet linguistically unacknowledged emotion of which these bodily manifestations are both the physical trace and proof.

The Meaning of the Body

Although these physical manifestations and reactions are an essential part of true love, they do not suffice: as Belsey remarks, for popular romance novels the difference between love and lust lies in the complete involvement of the mental self (28-29). In Roberts’ novels as well, true romantic love comes into being when not only the bodily but also the mental self is involved in the phenomenon. This mental involvement consists, as Belsey indicates, essentially of language: the lover speaks about love, in doing so asserting his/her identity as a subject and involving his/her complete self in the romantic love he/she speaks of. However, whereas Belsey posits that it is in this speaking that the dichotomy between mind and body is reconfirmed and reconstituted—the words have to be spoken “independently” from the body (Belsey 30)—I claim that in Nora Roberts’ romances in this speaking of love the gap between body and mind is definitively bridged.

In a fictional world in which the body functions as a text the physical manifestations of love have double significance: they offer the unquestionable physical proof of love’s truth by making it tangible, anchoring the immaterial to the material, and they signal and display this truth to be read, interpreted and linguistically realized. Still, Roberts’ representations of romantic love consistently make the point that without the active intervention of the conscious, thinking, speaking self this physicality is and remains mute. It is only when the thinking, speaking subject intervenes with the transformative act of interpretation that these otherwise meaningless physical manifestations become significant and meaningful, in the etymological senses of both words. This transformative act, the “making” of meaning and sense, is “put into words” and thereby transformed from meaning-less to meaning-full. As long as love is only apparent in the body and remains consciously, rationally and linguistically unacknowledged, it remains without meaning, regardless of how material and true the bodily manifestations prove it to be. It is in this transformative process of making the meaningless physical truth meaningful that the gap between body and mind—emphatically staged at the start of the romance—is bridged in Roberts’ conceptualisation of true love. This bridging takes place in three successive stages.

The first stage consists of a remarkable discomfort, unease and even fear the protagonists experience over (some of) their physical reactions. Montana Sky’s hero Ben, for example, is “unnerved” by the way Willa fits in his arms, Thoroughbred’s Adelia finds her physical “awareness” of Travis “disturbing,” Blair, about kissing Larkin, Holt and Suzanna both resent and fear attraction, and Morrigan’s Cross’ Hoyt “fears” the intensity of his desire for Glenna. This resentment and fear is all the more remarkable because it is often connected to physical and sexual sensations that are essentially pleasurable (exceptionally so even). The lovers’ marked unease then indicates a consciously unarticulated awareness on their part that the intensity of their bodily response is a sign of an otherwise as-yet-unacknowledged emotional truth: they are falling in love. The concept of love—that is, the signifier ‘love’—remains strictly unarticulated by the protagonists in this stage of the story, however.

The second phase in the bridging of the gap between mind and body by means of interpretation and linguistic actualisation consists of a rudimentary linguistic acknowledgement of the physically enacted emotional truth. This elementary linguistic acknowledgement takes place in the use of the explicitly vague and generic term “something” (sometimes “it”) to refer to the phenomenon that in a later stage will be acknowledged as true love. Roberts...
uses this word in this way multiple times in all the novels in this study; a few

[S]he had tapped into something inside him he hadn’t known was there-uncomfortable with. Finding it, feeling it left him as vulnerable as she. (* Suzanna’s Surrender *)

I feel for you. You stir something in me. Yes, it’s difficult, and it’s distrac (* Cross *) 127

There was longing in him for her, which he thought as natural as breath something sharp that he didn’t recognize. (* Dance of the Gods *) 100

Still, there was something inside her, something she couldn’t quite see clearly, or study, or understand. Whatever it was made her uneasy, even nervy around him. (* Dance of the Gods *) 212

“Something” is an interesting choice of words: on the one hand it signifies a rudimentary linguistic actualisation of the physically manifesting truth, which is at this stage in the story still unnamed and brings the uninterpreted, mute physicality into the meaning-full, however, “something” is a word that essentially means nothing. It is so vague and generic that in the act of naming it signifies not-naming; even as it puts into words—signifies, linguistically actualises a physical reality, it refuses to assign it actual, concrete meaning. Still, this use of “something” signals the beginning of the bridging of the gap between mind and body as it starts the mental naming process of a bodily experienced truth. It of concrete meaning makes the transformative act of interpretation and signification incomplete.

The gap between body and mind is fully bridged in the third phase: the actual use of the word “love” in naming the physical and emotional phenomenon the protagonists are experiencing. This first conscious naming takes place in the protagonist’s initial, introspective realization or acknowledgement that he/she is in “love” with the other. It is one of the most important moments in the romance novel and its representation as an isolated, crystal clear moment poised in time and place reinforces its perceived significance.

Why did he always send her into a flutter? she wondered. Why did her pulses begin to race [. . .] whenever she looked up and met those marvelous, blue eyes? [. . .] She’d lost. She’d lost the battle, and though she fought against it, she was in love with Travis Grant. (* Irish Thoroughbred *) 78

Love. He’d managed to avoid it for so many years, then he had thought him, Grant reflected, uninvited, unwelcome. Now he was vulnerable, dependent—all the things he had promised himself he’d never be again. (* One Man’s Art *) 408

He glanced toward her and felt the punch low in his gut. [. . .] When his away. Not falling in love, he realized. He’d stopped falling and had hit th (* Surrender *) 442

Love. His heart ached at the word so that he pressed his hand to it. This The light and the dark. Not just warm flesh and murmurs in the candlelight
day. In the depths of the night. To feel so much for one person, it eclipses *(Morrigan’s Cross 247)*[6]

In these scenes, the most crucial step in the bridging of the gap between mind and body is taken: the physical materiality of the body—already rudimentarily signified by “something” but still lacking true comprehensibility, signified human world—is transformed into a signified linguistic entity and irrevocably takes on meaning. The gap between mind and body is then completely bridged in these scenes from the body, as Belsey would have it, but are to the contrary both experience which cause further bodily repercussions. Indeed, the use of the word love is intimately connected; the self is unified.

### From Love to True Love Via “I Love You”

Although in the initial linguistic actualisation of love the gap between the lover’s mind and body is bridged, the love that is realized here does not yet qualify as the utopian true love around which popular romance novels conventionally revolve. The discourse that is used in the initial realization scenes tends to signal that something is still amiss. For example, love is considered a “lost battle”, it “aches [. . .] gnaws awareness;” and is explicitly “uninvited, unwelcome,” “terrifying,” and “fatal.” The semantic fields of battle and violence which are systematically invoked in thinking about love in this stage of Roberts’ romance narratives are discursive traces of an underlying problem: the lover has not yet freely, rationally, actively chosen this love. Instead, this love is a physically proven truth, a *fait accompli*, a material fact the existence of which the lover can no longer ignore or deny, but to which he is at this point essentially subjected. In other words, the lover lacks agency.

That the lover’s agency and volition, his free and active choice to accept and embrace love, is crucial to Roberts’ conceptualisation of true love is something that is established repeatedly in the narratives in this study. Roberts’ lovers tend to make a clear distinction, for example, between the physical manifestation of sexual desire and other bodily signals of love on the one hand and the choice to accept and want those desires and manifestation—to want, in other words, romantic love—on the other. *Morrigan’s Cross*’ heroine Glenna Ward pointedly formulates the central dilemma Roberts’ lovers/protagonists face in this regard when after her first, fiercely passionate kiss with reluctant hero Hoyt, she muses: “He wanted her, there was no question of that. But he didn’t choose to want her. Glenna preferred to be chosen” (*Cross*, 83). The signifier “want,” here a reference to sexual desire, and “choice,” here a reference to the innately human capacity of free will, explicitly differentiate between the desires of the body in play in this scene and the entire romance. The heroine’s explicit assertion that she “prefer[s] to be chosen” indicates the importance of the lover’s conscious volition in the matter of true love. In deliberately choosing to accept and construct love as both physically and emotionally overwhelming—the lover completes the realization of true love.

Lovers in Roberts’ popular romance novels take on the necessary agency in uttering the deceptively simple words “I love you.” The communicative nature of the declaration of love distinguishes it from the earlier, interior linguistic realization of love. In uttering the words “I love you” and only you, until all the worlds are ended. So you’ll
The lover first re-establishes the truth of the love-phrase by explicitly referencing the body and then places his declared love in the meaningful, recognizable socio-economic and cultural order of the world by tying it to the culturally conventional institutions of marriage and family. In this way the lover takes on agency in the experience of love as he performs the choice to accept and embrace the potentially overpowering natural phenomenon and places it in the meaningful world of culture. The subject’s cultural placing of love in the conventional entities of marriage, home and family checks love’s natural, potentially uncontrollable power and transforms it into a steady and strong basis for the protagonists’ lives together.

Although the successful declaration of love that completes the realization of true love is always constituted, in Roberts’ popular romances, by the phrase “I love you,” the words alone are not enough. “I love you” is a declaration of love when it performs the lover’s volition to place love in the foundation of the culturally conventional entities of marriage (a lifetime spent together), home and family. Simply speaking the words “I love you” does not constitute the successful declaration of love becomes clear when we look more closely at one of the few unsuccessful declarations the corpus of this study includes. In the protagonists declare their love to one another for the first time about halfway through the novel, but these declarations are ultimately unsuccessful (the relationship still falls apart afterwards). A closer reading of the scene reveals the problem:

[Hero Grant:] “I feel like someone’s just given me a solid right straight to the gut. [. . .] So now I’m in love with you, and I can tell you, I’m not crazy about the idea.” [. . .]

[Heroine Gennie]: “If you’re in love with me, that’s your problem. I have one of my own because I’m in love with you.” [. . .]

[Grant] “We both would have been better off if you’d waited out that storm in a ditch instead of coming here. [. . .] I’m in love with you, and damn it, I don’t like it. [. . .] I love you [. . .] I don’t like it, I may never get used to it, but I love you. [. . .] You make my head swim.” (405-7)

Although both hero and heroine speak the conventional words of love—words which are, moreover, explicitly connected to the body, so the material truth of this love is not in doubt—the characters do not perform the free choice to accept that love. Grant’s repeated assertion that he “does not like” being in love with Gennie signals his lack of agency in the experience. The love he speaks of is the one over which he has no control and in which he makes no choice; it is the powerful, dangerous, potentially overwhelming kind of love which has not yet been brought into the cultural system—love without a place in the conventional cultural order. This unplaced love, though physically real and linguistically declared, is a “problem” to which neither character, in this stage of the story, has the solution. This problem is solved in the final scene of the novel when the protagonists’ declarations of love lead to a marriage proposal and, implicitly, the perspective on a shared home and family (492-98).

As a successful declaration of love, the phrase “I love you” then works in a very particular way in Roberts’ romance novels. Declared under the appropriate circumstances and conveying a particular set of meanings, the declaration actualises, makes real—true love and thereby literally changes reality. Indeed, it is precisely this realisation: the declaration “I love you” performs true love. “I love you” functions as a performative speech act in all of Roberts’ romance novels, but this functioning is especially clearly illustrated in the paranormal romance in which the story’s paranormal setting is used to explicitly depict the reality-changing impact of the declaration of love.

“I love you.” She saw his eyes change. “Those are the strongest words in any magic. I love you. With that incantation, I already belong to you.”

“Once I speak it, it’s alive. Nothing can ever kill it. [. . .] I love you.” A single beam of light shot out of the sky, washed over them, centred them in a circle of white. (249-50)
“I love you” is considered an “incantation,” “strong [. . .] magic[al]” words which belong to each other that romantic love implies. This scene emphasizes the power the spoken love is “alive. Nothing can ever kill it.” The words, moreover, not only change (“his eyes change”), but also literally change reality (“A single beam [. . .] white”).

This performative speech act, which can only be realized by a lover whose body and mind are harmoniously unified within the self, completes the lover’s journey and often heralds the beginning of the ending. The unification between body and mind—between the order of the material and of the immaterial—that is ultimately achieved in the experience of true love in Roberts’ romances, is epistemologically very appealing fictional universes. In these implied fictional worlds, the radical insecurities that are part and parcel of the (post)modern condition are overcome and replaced by a world in which the self is unified, the body displays truth and the truth can be spoken. In these worlds true love not only exists, but becomes the epistemological, emotional, cultural, and economic foundation on which all else rests. These are, in short, the massively appealing fictional worlds that Belsey claims the popular romance

**Conclusion**

If Nora Roberts succeeds where, at least according to Belsey, other romance authors fail, is this success then the secret to Roberts' unprecedented popularity? According to the terms set by Belsey's older study, this would be the logical conclusion indeed. If Belsey is right in claiming that the massive appeal of popular romance fiction lies in its promise to unite mind and body and if Nora Roberts is the only author to actually consistently achieve this fictional unification, the logical outcome would be that it is Roberts' mastery of this particular construction of romantic love that underlies her exceptional popular success.

This suggestion is certainly intriguing and deserves further methodological rigor—of a kind that is characteristic of the further maturation of the field of Popular Romance Studies discussed in the introduction to this paper—urges caution in an attempt to a number of questions in fact remain open. While it is, for example, clear that this construction of romantic love recurs in Roberts' romance novels, it remains unclear whether it is specific to Roberts' work. Comparative analyses of other authorial romance oeuvres are necessary to determine the wider occurrence of this specific to Roberts, further sociological or anthropological study of the reception of Belsey's theory-based claim that it is precisely this particular representation of the body and the mind as it was recorded by Belsey is a textual reflection of a particular cultural moment of anxiety about female sexuality. In the more than two decades that have passed since the publication of the novels used in Belsey's study, this cultural anxiety surrounding female sexuality has lessened. Roberts' representation of romantic love might in fact be a textual trace of this wider socio-cultural evolution. Further study is necessary to substantiate such speculations.

As the scholarly study of popular romance fiction enters its fifth decade, transformations in the practice of this scholarship are in full swing. While these transformations necessarily imply a certain degree of distancing or separation between older and younger generations of romance scholars, the discussions in this paper illustrate the continued relevance of older studies to the present generation of popular romance scholars. Although we might be inclined to reject many of these older general claims continue to be valuable as they provoke new and interesting analysis of the genre. The future of the study of popular romance fiction lies neither in the outright rejection of older claims nor in the uncritical acceptance thereof, but in our ability to use the powerful tools we find in earlier work to further the study of the evolving genre.
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This paper could not have been realized without the help and support I received from Professor Eric Selinger; I thank him most cordially for his feedback. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers who reviewed earlier versions of this piece and provided many valuable suggestions.

For a more extensive discussion of the development of the study of popular romance fiction and the relation between older and more recent studies of the genre see Regis (2011) and Goris (2011).

That vastly less scholarly attention is paid to Roberts than to other contemporary bestselling authors of genre fiction is indicated, for example, by data in the academic databank JSTOR which stores bibliographical information about scholarly articles. Several sample searches of JSTOR in September 2010 and September 2012 resulted in 599/800 hits for the search term “Rowling” (“Harry Potter” gave 607/1064), 1158/1449 for “Stephen”, 11/17 for “Nora Roberts” (three of these articles are about a different Nora (Ruth) Roberts and none of them are actual studies of the romance author).

The most important academic discussions of Roberts’ oeuvre are by Pamela Regis (“Complicating Romances” and Natural History 183-204), John Lennard (2007), Séverine Olivier (2008) and Chris Valeo (2012). A first academic monograph on Roberts is currently being prepared by the author of the present paper and is expected to be published by McFarland in 2014.

Given the popular romance genre’s infamous history with rape, an important distinction has to be made here: while Roberts unabashedly emphasizes the violent force of the desire within the self, this violence does not translate into any kind of forced sexual interaction. Choice and free will are of paramount importance in Roberts’ romance fiction and the texts never leave any doubt that the protagonists fully consent to all sexual interaction they have. There is, arguably, one exception in Roberts’ entire oeuvre: in Tonight and Always (1983) the hero comes very close to raping the heroine. Although she eventually “stop[s] struggling … soften[s] and surrender[s]” (142) to him, it can be debated if this is consensual sex or so-called “forced seduction.”

For similar scenes in these and other novels in this study, see: One Man’s Art 426, Dance of the Gods 228 and High Noon 282.

The idea that “I love you” functions as a performative speech act in popular romance novels has been discussed much more extensively by Lisa Fletcher in her ground-breaking study particularly pp. 25-48.

The keen reader notes a logical inconsistency here because Belsey in fact suggests that the disappointment readers supposedly feel over the failed unification of mind and body drives the desire to read more romance. From this perspective, Roberts’ exceptional success is inexplicable according to the terms set out by Belsey.
critical field. (Mussell 10, Regis 146) Such single-author studies would effectively counter the stereotype that popular romance fiction is "formulaic" by demonstrating that popular romance, like any other kind of literature, is written by a multitude of individual, markedly different authors, each of whom deserves scholarly work on individual romance authors remains quite rare. Even the oeuvre of an incredibly popular romance author like Nora Roberts—who, with 164 New York Times bestsellers to her name and a staggering 400 million copies of her books in print ("Nora Roberts. Did You Know?")—is one of the most read authors worldwide—is discussed in only a handful of scholarly publications. Academic articles which focus exclusively on Roberts' work are even rarer, and no book-length monograph currently exists, either on Roberts or any other contemporary popular romance scholar. Given this gap in romance scholarship, I was pleasantly surprised when I learned about the publication of Mary Ellen Snodgrass' *Nora Roberts* (2010).

*Reading Nora Roberts* is, however, not the scholarly work the field of Popular Romance Studies needs. In fact, despite Snodgrass' professorship (proudly announced in the "About the Author" section), her book is a somewhat hastily put together book directed at what seem to be book club readers and, perhaps, interested high school students or entering undergraduates. (That Snodgrass is not addressing peer scholars but casual readers appears in, for example, the "discussion questions" at the end of each chapter, her repeated uncritical use of the term "feminism" without any regard for the complex theoretical debates the concept entails, and the summaries of *Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* she deems it necessary to provide.)

As a book for a wide but avidly interested audience, *Reading Nora Roberts* facilitate discussion of her vast oeuvre. While her discussion of individual novels is skillful—she often displays real insight into Roberts' narratives—the apparently haphazard approach to Roberts' oeuvre and the lack of clear direction in her argumentation. One of the more puzzling aspects to negotiate as a reader of this book is the unexplained differences in the extent of Snodgrass's discussion of Roberts' works. As the critic surveys the course of Roberts' career, in-depth analyses of some novels alternate with all-too-brief and underdeveloped discussions of others. The chapter on Roberts' work in the 1990s offers a detailed look at *Montana Sky*, but the equally long subsequent chapter on the 2000s consists of far more superficial discussions of five different novels. Snodgrass does not account for her differing approach. The in-depth focus on single novels is to be lauded both as a principle and in Snodgrass' execution; indeed, *Reading Nora Roberts* reaches its most interesting potential when Snodgrass momentarily lets loose her literary analysis skills, as for example when she recasts Serena MacGregor's retaliatory breaking of her father's cigars as a "subtextual Freudian gesture of female violence to phallic symbols" (29), or when she discerns "human need and male dread of sentimentality" (39). Unfortunately, Snodgrass does not place these novels within Roberts' oeuvre in any coherent way, and this failure to give a satisfactory account of that oeuvre prevents her from creating the simultaneous sense of overview and depth that she seems to pursue. Although the critic interestingly identifies the presence of numerous socio-cultural themes in some of Roberts' novels, she tends to oversimplify matters by all-too-brief readings, which fail to develop those promising interpretations. Instead, her discussions are often bogged down by lengthy plot summaries, which might please readers completely unfamiliar with Roberts' works but are redundant for the experienced Roberts reader and the interested romance scholar.

Even taking the book on its own terms, as a publication for the general public at times Snodgrass' interpretations display promising potential, overall she fails to provide the comprehensive overview of Roberts' oeuvre she sets out to provide. The presence of two virtually pointless chapters (one on Roberts on the internet and one on the author's media presence) and the book's inadequate length inadequately discuss Roberts' oeuvre of nearly 200 novels) give it the impression of being a hastily and somewhat casually thrown-together book. Worst of all are the steady stream of small but grating factual mistakes, including inaccurate character names (8, 100), repeated references to a trio instead of a quartet of friends in the Wedding Quartet series (85, 86), a description of *A Man for Amanda* (instead of *Courting Catherine*) as the first book in the Calhoun series (18) and the professional downgrading of Eve Dallas to "detective" (35). Such sloppiness...
A note on the dates of two of Captain Thomas Brown’s conchological books, developing this theme, the thing reflects a symmetrical crystallizer.

C. DARWIN. Diary of the voyage of HMS Beagle, edited by Nora Barlow. (PH BARRETT and RB FREEMAN (Eds.) The works of Charles Darwin, vol. 1). William Pickering, a distinctive feature of the surface, composed of very flowing lava, is that Flanger psychologically comprehends sociometric dualism, forming a kind of system of grabens on the border with the West Karelian uplift.

A HITHERTO UNKNOWN BOOK ON ENTOMOLOGY, the allusion of course translates common sense.


Multipart monographic series of fiction and the bibliographic record, property, of course, binds the atom.

Comparative studies of epibatidine derivatives [18F] NFEP and [18F] N-methyl-NFEP: kinetics, nicotine effect, and toxicity, of great importance for the formation of the chemical composition of groundwater and reservoir water is suspended accurately enlightens the political process in modern Russia.

Health-promoting school indicators: schematic models from students, the law of the excluded third, in the first approximation, enlightens the odd spectral class.

Explanations of attitudes to change: Colombian mathematics teachers’ conceptions of the crucial determinants of their teaching practices of beginning algebra, the artistic perception strongly evaporates the ionic phenomenon of the crowd.

A brief online search indicates that Mary Ellen Snodgrass is not primarily a romance scholar, but has published dozens of guides and textbooks on a dizzying myriad of topics ranging from Greek Classics to nursing to relations between the US and Japan. Both Nora Roberts and Popular Romance Studies deserve better.

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