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Posts Tagged 'Nora Roberts'

Romance Fiction in the Archives by Kecia Ali

May 19th, 2018 |

Note: This piece was drafted in late 2017. The ongoing exploration of diverse and award-giving attests to the potential importance of archival sources disc

In May 2017, the **Popular Culture Association** (PCA), in coordination with the **Library** (PCL) at Bowling Green State University hosted its second **Summer** four glorious days digging in the collections of the PCL and the **Bill Se** included 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 l* 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 (specifically, 1987, 1990-1993, 1996-1999, 2002). While my primary intere 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 in advance that the cassettes I'd found by searching the catalog for Roberts' name, a librarian taught me how to digitize those recordings. The procedure is simple and original; since I couldn't speed it up, I listened along. In the second tape I listened to 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 (and it turned out she sometimes had), but I doubted that she'd attended but not been recorded (what I might be missing, I set the recordings aside and began to dig through the archives. This is because BGSU library staff, for a modest fee, digitized the recordings as a bargain.)

My initial interest was in determining whether Roberts had presented at any of the programs in the organization's files (Boxes 36-40), I saw that she had spoken at several programs that hadn't turned up in my initial catalog search because they were listed by title rather than by printed programs for Roberts' name then looking in the online library catalog for those cassettes as well. This was an imperfect solution as there were no programs listed 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 items such as advertisements for books, vendor contracts, press kits, and swag ranging from t-shirts to 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 in 1994 mentions [End Page 2] three authors who turned them down for a keynote in 1994.[1] Roberts ended up giving the keynote that year—but I found no mention of her name in the files.

In fact, Roberts was largely absent from the RWA correspondence archive files. Her name shows up in the conference files in attendee lists, in one instance as the person designated to meet 1983 keynote speaker Belva Pla. I'm not sure what she should she require assistance.[2]

Roberts features more often in the *Romance Writers' Report* (RWR), to which I have access. I have a near-complete run of this publication, from its 1981 first issue when she was a member. Due to space constraints, I was only able to consult the 1981-86, 1989, and 1996 runs. I found several features from the early to mid-1980s: the RWA member news and the "Board of Directors" comment on reader preferences. She also wrote a few columns. In 1985 she wrote the hundredth book.[3] Fortunately, the BGSU library makes scanning available. I did my own scans of the pages where she appeared rather than having to take extensive notes.

In attempting to make the best use of the archives for this current project, I have identified several leads and materials. In the remainder of this piece, I lay out in cursory fashion some of the archives. Many projects might benefit from consulting the collection. In other words, I'm not the archival material. This list is partial, idiosyncratic, and woefully incomplete. I'm still thinking about drawing on the archives.

The RWA archives at BGSU cover the period from RWA's founding in 1980 to the present. Some are absent or patchy. Much of the material is concentrated from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, including planning notes and programs. Cassette recordings for many sessions, including those from the RWA as resources for their members and now constitute a vital record for the organization's history, correspondence among RWA officers and between RWA officers and service members, aspiring authors, and the occasional senator. (Other boxes contain archival materials.)

meetings; I did not consult them.) BGSU also retains the nearly complete pri

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 writer
- Inquiries from aspiring writers
- Requests for membership lists from those who wish to market to RW
- Chapter newsletters
- Agent appointments at conferences
- Those “Achy Breaky Bylaws” [4]

One might use this archive to track technological shifts. From typing to org merge, the slow and uneven shift to computers, the arrival of “diskettes,” th of answering machines, the change to email, an internet committee, the first the files. The 1984 conference file contains an attendee list half an inch thic the side perforations allowing the continuous printout to pass along the do —and writer references to—computers through the 1980s are fascinating. 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, sess MP3 files.)

Between material in the archives and material on the RWA website, one r more revealing, award categories. Recent Romancelandia discussion of (**awards** has focused attention on how nominations are done, finalists cho extensive correspondence related to naming the awards, voting procedu specific subgenres. For example, the defunct inspirational category got campaign, as well as the submission of a sufficient number of eligible novels **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 us experiences of **racism at its recent conferences**. Although one of its four African American, what is most striking for the period the archives at B whiteness. Passing allusions to the confederacy and Southern belles (and committee correspondence) are notable.[8] The files also preserve an ar conference program cover image for the 1987 gathering in Texas.[9] In imagery, the reader—exaggerating to make her point about offensive rep program for Atlanta will include a woman in antebellum dress attended by : flesh out the complicated story of race and romance writing in the late t folder on conference planning advertises Layle Giusto’s *Wind Across Kylarn* by “those who fear romances whose main characters are people of color.” Yolanda Greggs, an “ethnic romance writer” who identifies herself as “the c 4] how to write Black men as main characters.[11] **Given that the major r**

when it comes to publishing African American writers, Native writers, and their work when they do—it could be very useful to understand organizational 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 flirtation with the cutesy “prepublished” fizzled.) [12] The question of how much for newbies trying to break in versus how much attention to the concerns. Various methods are employed, including star ratings for annual conferences, aerobics classes at the local gym. The establishment of a Published Authors newsletter, was another attempt to balance the needs of novices with those. This tension plays into the field’s pervasive concern with professionalization, (discomfort for romances and romance writers. Such sentiments motivated one author groupies who attended the conference: mere fans, not professional authors. Forgotten interpersonal drama, the correspondence files show how diligently an often disgruntled membership. (Of course, as with online product review record.)

One might profitably use the RWA sources to supplement work on male authors. Do 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 for a husband or wife accompanying a member. [13]

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 hetero-monogamous.**) In March 1994, questioning whether to accept an advertisement worries: “If the first issue contains masturbation, will the next contain le morality as that it might invite “further ridicule” for romance writers. Still, announcing the 1993 winner of the newly established Janet Dailey award, for 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 subject its authors to sanctions or censorship. [16] (Strom Thurmond, John in their replies.) A Florida chapter leader wrote in something of a panic about. They had obtained written permission from both of her parents for her to proceed for having [End Page 5] inappropriately explicit conversations in her presence. The board sought legal advice; some advocated a change to the bylaws to underage member without discriminating by setting a minimum membership

The archives contain a few items relevant to Janet Dailey’s plagiarism controversy on numerous other occasions, both in generalities and in specific cases; it is programs and recordings would allow a comparison across the decades of her

The conference programs and recordings are also a wonderful source for exploring magic appear regularly? the paranormal?) and could supplement research in conference presenters over the decades address the characterization of her masculinity in popular romance could surely benefit from hearing RWA panel and “Bad Boys of Category” (2002). [19]

Those studying reader response and reaction to contemporary novels—consult Amazon reviews, Goodreads, or *Smart Bitches*. The *RWR* “Bookseller reaction to early 1980s fiction, about which scholars still have much to say. reports that “Rosemary Rogers’ *Sweet Savage Love* is selling well, but readers offers that “In the historical area, Rosemary Rogers’ *Surrender to unfavorable.” [20]*

The list could go on, but the beauty of archival work is that one finds things of these directions will only be only a starting point. Happy exploring.

[1] PCL MS142 Box 16.

[2] PCL MS142 Box 36.

[3] Sharon Ihle, “100 Titles! Celebrating Nora Roberts!” *Romance Writers’ Report*

[4] For example, in a letter in PCL MS142 Box 14.

[5] PCL MS142 Box 17.

[7] PCL MS142 Box 40 Folder 9.

[8] PCL MS142 Box 39 Folder 1.

[9] PCL MS142 Box 37 Folder 1.

[10] PCL MS142 Box 29 Folder 13.

[11] Yolanda Gregg, “How to Pen the Black Man” *Romance Writers’ Report*,

[12] PCL MS142 Box 15.

[13] “Conference Report.” *Romance Writers Report*, April-May 1984, v. 4 no. 1.

[14] PCL MS142 Box 17.

[15] PCL MS142 Box 38 Folder 7.

[16] PCL MS142 Box 14.

[17] PCL MS142 Box 15.

[18] For example, PCL MS142 Box 40 Folder 9. **[End Page 6]**

[19] For warrior-poets: PCL MS142 Box 40 Folder 1 (In the conference producing selling authors Susan King, Mary Jo Putney and Eileen Charbonneau discuss produce warrior-poet heroes.”) For bad boys of category: PCL MS142 Box 40 Folder 13.

[20] “Booksellers Say,” *Romance Writers Report*, v. 2, no. 4, June 1982, pp. 1-2.



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Genre, Author, Text, Reader: Teaching Nora Roberts

Introduction[1]

Teaching popular romance fiction in the university is a sharp reminder of the wide notions of literary value. As Pierre Bourdieu explains, educational institutions are cultivating familiarity with and appreciation of them (*Field* 121). The omission of romance from the literary studies syllabus judges the legitimacy of romance, but it also has far-reaching implications for reading practices. Educational institutions promote particular attitudes towards reading (233). The cultural capital, or cultural competencies, that universities provide play a key role: universities confer qualifications that guarantee a student's familiarity with and lasting beliefs about literature over years of training in literary studies ("For example, the attitudes towards romance fiction from the university curriculum are that students actively seek out and use the skills to read and understand them.

My own reading experiences illustrate this process. As an undergraduate, I was initially excited about modernism and postmodernism, and learned to appreciate high literature. However, when learning about high literature, my mother and my sister were reading Northanger Abbey. In my literary studies, I finally took them up on their reading recommendations and became a fan of the novel on maternity leave.

My conversion to Roberts was accelerated through my involvement in teaching the subject *Genre Fiction/Popular Fiction* at the University of Melbourne. The subject *Genre Fiction/Popular Fiction* was a 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. I am teaching popular romance fiction; in addition to my longstanding interest in the production, dissemination and reception of books in contemporary culture.

This article responds to Lisa Fletcher's call to use writing about teaching popular romance fiction to "explore deeply the place of popular romance studies in higher education" ("Scholarship on *Genre Fiction/Popular Fiction's* overarching pedagogical approach: its objectives and outcomes summarized in my lecture on Roberts and her novel *Spellbound*. Finally, I conducted a survey I undertook in 2013 on the experience of studying *Spellbound*. While the article addresses 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 the role of popular fiction in the broader field of cultural production.

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 production and explores the features of that field: popular fiction's relations to "literature," genre and the author profile, cinematic and TV adaptations, readerships and fan culture. The subject is built around a number of genres: crime fiction, science fiction, the novel, the thriller and the blockbuster. On completion of the subject students will be able to identify 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 what Gelder describes as Literature with a capital L (11), and it also offers a range of fiction genres. Romance fiction was first incorporated into the syllabus in 2008. Charlaine Harris' first Sookie Stackhouse novel was also included to diversify the syllabus. 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 enrolment is limited to 20 students. The teaching pattern comprises a 90-minute lecture, followed by small group tutorials and associated readings in the subject reader.

At the end of semester, student must complete a long essay of 2,500 words to receive a mark. An earlier essay of 1,500 words is due mid-semester and must address a specific topic. Students cannot write about romance for this task. A class presentation forms the basis of the final essays. Essays are comparative and broadly framed. Gelder's task outline includes: identifying critical positions and engages with them; it also looks closely at passages of interest. and you will have to make decisions about what you'll look at here, and what you'll read. *Spellbound* include:

- comparing *Spellbound* with *The Stud* as examples of romance and "a study of the female hero"
- comparing *Spellbound* with *Dead Until Dark* as examples of supernatural 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 strengthened and ghettoised popular fiction and each of its genres, obscuring what romance has to offer as Literature. Students [End Page 3] sometimes object to drawing a strict demarcation between genres (such as science fiction and fantasy), and it can be useful to challenge these categorisations while acknowledging their effects is an important critical task. Students are very aware of the difference between genre fiction and Literature. The subject's literary features in texts such as *The Stud*: a student once told me the subject is not just about

Teaching popular romance as one genre amongst many is perhaps an old tradition. Some recent scholarship models other ways of teaching popular romance texts. Jennifer Kloester use an "embedded" approach, where a romance novel is taught in the context of Gothic literature. Goris argues for a "focused and differential approach," that draws out the differences between genres, however, can be done in a nuanced way that addresses the complexities of *Genre Fiction/Popular Fiction*, for example, includes two different romance

shopping,” novel. This variety allows intra-genre distinctions and subtleties. 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 the field introduces a new theoretical framework for students, broadening conventional understandings of the social and economic contexts of contemporary texts. Looking at how the academy also allows students to be self-reflexive, drawing upon Bourdieu's concept of being estranged from romance, to confront their own ignorance of the phenomenon from their education, and why, and what limitations this might produce in the culture. Pedagogically, this subject challenges students to think reflexively about the value of the genre. When they say a book is “good” or “bad”, what criteria are they using? Students find this line of discussion confronting, but it equips them to be more critical, and more aware of the broader context of cultural production than they might otherwise be.

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 Woman* and “One Man, One Woman: Nora Roberts” from Pamela Regis's *The Romance Novel*. The lecture has three broad aims: to introduce the genre of romance fiction, to provide some close reading of *Spellbound*'s setting and its depiction of gender roles, and to explore the idea of the romance formula.

I begin the lecture with some dramatic statistics about Roberts. She has published 100 *Times* bestsellers, and releases six new titles a year. There are 400 million copies of her books in print, and every 27 seconds, an average of 27 of her books have been sold every minute. Roberts, I argue, is the most successful female author in the world.

Then I summarise some of the judgements made about romance fiction which are often formulaic. It is dismissed as being read passively by women looking for escapism and is seen as commercialised. The lecture then works through these positions and complicates them.

The “romance formula” is a familiar idea for students. A number of writers have developed their own formula, and as Eric Selinger observes, a formula can be an effective pedagogical tool for making comparisons across different novels. Formulae range in complexity. A simple one is from writer Deborah Hale on her blog: $((H + h) \times A) \div C + HEA = R$. In this formula, H = Hero, h = heroine, A = Attraction, C = Conflict, HEA = Happy Ever After and R is Romance. Despite its simplicity, it emphasises that each of these abstractions can be filled by a multitude of different characters and settings, from a medieval knight to a Navy SEAL to a sexy werewolf. The heroine could be a single mom ... romance writers can produce an infinite number of unique stories by combining these central elements of romance and its potential diversity.

Janice Radway's 13-step formula (*Reading* 134), by contrast, is extremely detailed. It shows students realize how much of a romance plot is “scripted,” but it also highlights the importance of the relationships that run through romance novels. Pamela Regis' 8-step formula (“The Way” between the simplistic and complex, is also valuable to share with students). The lecture shows how popular romance novels can be formulaic and acknowledges conventionalized structures and the appeal of the genre. At the same time, the lecture invites students to see how these formulas can 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 (C) *Mass Culture Postmodernism*) which argues that the proto-modernist Flaubertian *Bovary*, a dichotomy between woman as the emotional, passive reader of in and active writer of authentic literature. A Flaubertian view of female romance and feminist critique in *The Female Eunuch*, which argues that the fantasies of romance affect their real life relationships: "Although romance is essentially vicarious behaviour" (203). For this reason, Greer attacks the depiction of the romantic traits invented for him have been invented by women cherishing the chains of readers of romance fiction contribute to their own subordination in patriarchal

One way to complicate the second-wave feminist attack on romance is through the perspectives of readers, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy* [End Page 5] and *Pop Culture* perspectives such as Greer's because it incorporates the views of readers through the nexus between my teaching and my research, which also involves paying attention to popular culture (Driscoll). Following Radway's interviews with readers in the town of Okaloosa, Florida can operate as a way for women to cope with their real predicaments and as a form of "protest." Romance reading is not so much escapism, as a (temporary) act of cultural agency to romance readers: they emerge as active and strategic participants in the

The final view of romance to complicate is that it is heavily industrialised. It is estimated that 15 percent of all global mass market paperback sales are romances. In 2011, romance was the largest market for science fiction, fantasy or mystery. I show students the websites of publishers the way these companies market romance texts: we consider the types of marketing through book clubs, forums and special offers, and, most of all, through social media. Publishers standardise the production and consumption of romance fiction: readers receive new titles delivered/downloaded periodically. Readers know what to expect to sell.

This sophisticated industrial machinery can create a sense that romance fiction is more 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 is that it has become over-determined and over-conventionalized ... Certainly the genre confirms this view that once the setting has been chosen, the characters more or less write themselves (qtd. in Gelder 44).

However, the industrialisation of romance is complicated by the genre's relationship amongst readers and writers. A high level of (mediated) intimacy characterises the way writers nurture close relationships with their fans, often through active websites. For example, Nora Roberts's website, noraroberts.com, which also functions as an introductory text. "About Nora," a section titled "Up Close and Personal" offers a humorous look at Roberts's life as a stay-at-home mother: "I macramed two hammocks," she writes, which led to "endless games of Candy Land and a severe lack of chocolate," she writes, which is not child-related. She took out a notebook and started to write down one of the details of her presentation of Roberts's story vividly personalizes her and forges connections between

These website analyses lead to a discussion of another industry practice: digital marketing. Best-seller lists, and Roberts has a strong presence in digital sales: she was the first author for the Kindle. Romance publishing is moving online: two out of every five titles in the first quarter of 2011 were ebooks. E. L. James's *50 Shades of Grey* began life as a

ebook bestseller, then securing a print publishing deal and becoming a hardcover bestseller. This leads to a discussion, asking students why they think romance titles seem to be so popular. Most students realise that ebooks neutralise the social stigma of reading on your Kindle or iPad. Other suggested reasons for the popularity of ebooks are: to purchase and download new titles, to store large numbers of texts, to access

The second section of the lecture concentrates on Roberts as an author. She published her first novel, *Silhouette*, Harlequin's US imprint, in 1981. Her work is often adapted for television. She publishes six new titles each year: two J.D. Robb crime novels, two trade paperback novels, one hardcover (released in summer, "the big Nora") and one mass market paperback. Throughout the subject students have learnt that popular fiction writers write one novel a year, like John Grisham, rather than one every ten years. The pace is dramatically faster than the other popular fiction authors they have read. This is a challenging task for students to comprehend.

I discuss the different formats Roberts writes in, beginning with her recent 'Inn at Boonsboro' trilogy. One feature of this trilogy is that it is set at the real life Bed and Breakfast owned by Roberts where she lives, and features other real businesses owned by her family members. I ask students what might be going on here: why would an already wealthy author own a business? Cross-merchandising seems too simplistic an answer, although the online store at NoraRoberts.com sells the themed toiletries that appear in the novels. Roberts romanticises her business: the first line of the first book in the trilogy is "The Inn at Boonsboro stood as they had for more than two centuries, simple, sturdy, and strong." Becoming a setting for a romance novel has imbued this building with an aura. Boonsboro: there's a romanticising of the small-town mythology of America. It's a particular ideal of American life.

The "Inn at Boonsboro" trilogy uses the genre conventions of romance to create a lived experience of Roberts and her family. Roberts clearly uses genre to manipulate genre conventions is showcased through the 40 plus books of the series. Dallas participates in multiple genres, the most obvious of which is crime fiction. In the first book, the team solve a homicide case. The covers use dark colours and bold fonts. Crime is prominently featured. Crime is a genre of popular fiction with more prestige than romance. Genre-based marketing extends Roberts's audience. Crime genre conventions are particularly Dallas and her police colleagues, and there are crime logics a part of the work, danger, exhaustion and strong, black coffee. The books are also futuristic. The year 2058. While there is no world-changing "novum" such as **[End Page 7]**, the details that add interest to the setting: cars that travel vertically, "auto-chefs" and off-planet locations for prisons and theme parks. The science fiction elements are used into crime scene investigation methods or forensic science is necessary when the plot is so but intriguing way. Science fiction tropes sometimes provide plots: *Creation* and *Death* involves murder by hologram video game. The science fiction elements are used as an example, guns are banned and the police instead use "stunners."

Underneath these genres, however, the books follow the core conventions of romance: the developing relationship between Dallas and the sexy, dangerous Irish man. The scenes between them in most of the novels. Roarke is a classic romance hero: "strong, sharp bones and seductive poet's mouth" (*Reunion* 5), "the wisp of hair" is a reformed criminal and wealthy businessman who nurtures Dallas emotionally and provides medical care and encouraging her to sleep. Dallas and Roarke are married

maintains interest in their relationship by focusing on their shared psychol
With each novel, they confront and overcome reminders of their past traur
a spanning narrative across the series.

Not only do the “In Death” books combine several genres, but also Robert
comic effect. For example, Dallas’s tough cop persona means that she r
gestures, including the beautiful clothes and jewellery he buys her. How
postmodern. It’s unironic: there is no sense of parody or pastiche. We mig
more” as she builds a blockbuster super-genre. An illustrative scene occur
test a holographic video game that offers a time travel experience to playe
eras in a realistic way. The game play begins in science fiction mode: “He
palm plate and retinal scan, added a voice command and several manual
game begins: “With barely a shimmer this time, she stood on a green hill, h
did, some sort of leather top that hit mid-thigh and snug pants that slid into
era” (107): “She turned back to him and didn’t he look amazing with all the
leather and with a bright sword in his hand. ‘I won’t be calling time-out.’ S
The narrative device of the hyper-realistic video game allows Roberts
Spellbound, of ancient combat in a mystical landscape, into a futuristic crim
genres in one reading experience.

The final part of the lecture reads the set text, the novella *Spellbound*, which
range of critical frameworks. *Spellbound* has a varied publishing history. I
Jove’s collection *Once Upon a Castle*, and then released as a standalone
US\$2.99. The endmatter of this edition describes the 81-page novella [Enc
quick reads from your favourite bestselling authors.” *Spellbound* is also a
Roberts’s *Ever After* and as an ebook for US\$2.99. *Spellbound* participa
incorporating supernatural elements such as witches, wizards and magic spe

The Irish setting of the novella offers a productive analytical pathway. S
romantic landscape. Roberts has Irish heritage, and frequently creates I
Spellbound, she constructs Ireland as a place of mystery, myth, possibility a
the novel in New York and flies to Ireland to address a deeply felt but inarti
young witch who lives alone in a cottage at the foot of a ruined castle. Bryna
are reincarnations of lovers from 1000 years ago, a warrior and a witch, who
accused Bryna of being unfaithful and killed Calin in battle. Bryna’s mission
this story in time for him to battle Alisdair again, one day after he arrives in
will enable Calin to win. Calin is immediately attracted to Bryna, but h
supernatural story and to commit himself fully to her.

Like Calin, readers of *Spellbound* travel to a world removed from the ev
forests and castles. At points, the novella reads like a tourist advertisement
the novel, Bryna soliloquises on Ireland as a “dreaming place”:

“We’re proud of our dreamers here. I would show you Ireland, Calin. Th
pub where a story is always waiting to be told, the narrow lane flanked c
fuschia. The simple Ireland.”

Tossing her hair back, she turned to him. “And more. I would show you
sleeps, the quiet hillock where the faeries dance of an evening, the high
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.[4] 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

The ruined castle came into view as he rounded the curve. ... Perched c defiance despite its tumbled rocks.

Out of the boiling sky, one lance of lightning speared, exploded with light ozone.

His blood beat thick, and an ache, purely sexual, began to spread through

In this tightly written novella, no words are wasted. All the prose is geared to the reader.

A second way to approach *Spellbound* is through its depiction of gender. One of the majority of romance fiction is that it is written largely from the perspective of male characters is a characteristic of many of Roberts's novels. As the "bio"

Through the years, Nora has always been surrounded by men. Not only was she also the only girl. She has raised two sons. Having spent her life surrounded by a good view of the workings of the male mind, which is a constant delight as saying, a choice between figuring men out or running away screaming

The female focus of much romance fiction reflects the genre's historical association with the late eighteenth century (Regis 57). The heroine is typically the pursuer of marriage that takes place at the novel's end. *Spellbound* reflects some of the late eighteenth and twenty-first centuries. In this story, Bryna pursues Calin. She says "they were meant to be lovers. This much she believed he would accept" and he does accept her offer of love. He is effectively seduced by Bryna in the novel, and this most clearly in the passage where Cal begins to worry that Bryna might be

Cal awoke to silence. His mind circled for a moment, like a bird looking for a nest he thought. God, the woman had drugged him. He felt a quick panic as he was played in his head (18).

Bryna has taken control here, and Calin feels threatened and disoriented. In the novel, Calin, this scene would invoke the heroine's fear of rape. Calin may be surprised. In Roberts's writing, this reversal of typical romance gender roles becomes even more pronounced when he stripped him and put him to bed, Bryna retorts, "Oh Cal, you have a most interesting truth, I'm after preferring a man awake and participating when it comes to the

Despite these shifts in the roles of heroine and hero, most aspects of the novel remain true to romance fiction. Calin is handsome, wealthy and famous: "He was thirty, and he would pay his own price, call his own shots" (7). Bryna, despite her sexual forwardness, has her attention placed on her domestic skills and the clean, welcoming cottage she has built. Calin's reaction to this validates traditional female labour, even as it ca

readers. Roberts writes, from Calin's perspective: "Most of the women hit the button. He'd never held the lack of domesticity against anyone, but he found *Spellbound* plays with some gender conventions of the genre by allowing some conventions are left intact.

Student responses

To explore the effects of this lecture on students, I prepared an online survey I announced in the lecture and in a follow-up email. This survey comprised 10 questions and took about five minutes to complete. Twenty students responded from a total of 117, a response rate of 17 percent. This low level of participation in the survey means that the survey does not represent the experience or viewpoints of all students in the subject. The respondents were likely to be biased towards those who were already interested in Roberts or romance. Eighty percent of respondents were female, a slightly higher figure than the percentage of female students enrolled in the subject.

The first set of questions in the survey explored students' pre-existing familiarity with the subject. The first question asked "Had you heard of Nora Roberts before you took this subject?" Fifty percent of students answered "yes," indicating that many students lack knowledge not only of romance fiction but of contemporary fiction more broadly, including titles displayed in bookshops and frequently mentioned on bestseller lists, for example, by Nora Roberts. Many university students.

Question 2 asked "Had you read any novels by Nora Roberts before taking this subject?" Sixty percent of students were prompted to identify which ones. Only three respondents (15 percent) identified specific titles. One was evidently a genuine fan, having read "Northern Lights, the Sea, Valley of Silence, Dance of the Gods, Morigans Cross, a few from the series, but I cannot recall the titles." Another had read *Northern Lights*, and another had read "Northern Lights." A student noted that they "hadn't read any but my mum is an avid reader of her books."

Question 3 broadened the inquiry by asking "Had you read any romance novels before taking this subject?" (40 percent of respondents) had previously read a romance novel. The questions asked "What titles did you read?" Titles nominated by students included "Nicholas Evans and Rachael Treasler's 'The Girl on the Train' and 'I'm a big fan of Sherrilyn Kenyon's Dark-Hunter series, Ravenheart, and 'Groomed'." The specificity of these answers suggests that these students may have a high level of knowledge of the genre. One student wrote "Jane Austen novels are not romance fiction. Another reported reading "anything available on the open shelves." One student never paid attention until I read *A Woman of Substance!*" This response became a point of discussion in the lecture and [End Page 11] one of its primary purchase locations (the open shelves at the library (Collins) and a particular novel to sketch a growing interest in romance fiction.

Having established students' connections with romance fiction, I went on to explore their attitudes towards the genre, looking at both enjoyment and intellectual engagement. Question 4 asked "Did you enjoy reading *Spellbound*?" Question 5 asked "Did you find *Spellbound* interesting, from an academic perspective?" Sixty percent of students said they enjoyed reading *Spellbound*. By contrast, 70 percent of respondents said they found it interesting from an academic perspective. These suggestive findings indicate that many students enjoy reading romance text with pleasure, but that adopting a critical posture increases their interest. The implications of these results are teased out in the responses to the later survey questions.

Question 6 asked "What did you like most about *Spellbound*?" The student responses fell into several discernible groups. A number of responses were ironic: one student enjoyed

it was good.” Another wrote, “I did not particularly enjoy any of it, to be ‘Calin Farrell’ was ridiculously hilarious, however.” [6] These students did not enjoy the reading of the text. In the *Genre Fiction/Popular Fiction* subject, students do 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 the

It was easy and fun to read. I liked the fact that the female was in the dominant position, decent, too. It certainly wasn't a dumb book as some would lead you to

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 themes and writing style.

A final group of students wrote that they enjoyed looking analytically at the dismissed taken seriously” while another responded, “I didn't so much representation of the vast industry of romance fiction.” Three students commented on the book. One wrote, “The overwhelming gender performativity astounded when women were gaining independence, yet it was interesting how B “studying feminist critiques of it” and a third was interested in “social control, subjugation, and why the genre remains appealing.” These students, then, could not experience, but could value it as a text to be studied analytically (“taken seriously” feminism or through its participation in industrial practices and genre conventions).

The aspects of *Spellbound* disliked by students also reveal much about their attitudes. Question 7 asked, “What did you like least about *Spellbound*?” A cluster of responses focused on stereotypes and gender [End Page 12] issues. Two students wrote “stereotypical” and “disliked “the part where despite Bryna's power, it's Calin who can solve the problem for her.” One response offered a more lengthy feminist critique:

I found the entire plot contrived. I believe she simply utilised the superpower “preordained love” scenario, and to give her female lead some agency, she had to rely 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 style and writing,” and dismissed the novella as “so poorly written.” One student wrote “this is romance fiction, criticizing the book's “lazy writing suggesting Roberts put her name upon her reputation/name to sell books.”

These prose-related objections are consonant with other respondents' criticisms of genre conventions. One student wrote, “some parts were very cliched (which I guess were a bit cringe-worthy, too,” while another thought the book's “strict adherence to genre conventions boring with nothing much to it.” Another student wrote that “the pace in the novel was very unrealistic to me. Also, I had never read a romance novel before but these students critique the novel using the criteria they have been taught to evaluate originality. Measured against these criteria, *Spellbound* is a failure and students

In a slightly different vein, two students disliked the novel on the grounds of its genre. One wrote that “Considering the context, it only served to concretize the

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 ch other romance novels.

Like the students who disliked romance fiction's conventional features, the 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 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 reader "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 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 d 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 ple popular nature books"—and the high literature she studied in class (*A Feeli* 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 explored through particular works of popular fiction. The survey conducted for this article shows a general interest in the subject and a determined refusal of its pleasures by many respondents. This study of popular romance challenges and reframes students' antipathy. It provides an opportunity to explicitly consider varied reading communities and hierarchies. The study of romance fiction can extend students' experience of literary culture and critical practices. It can open students up to the possibility of considering romance as a site of further surveys of students' experiences with other genres and texts may lead to new teaching. Roberts has reinforced the importance of acknowledging the varied pleasures and of providing intellectual tools that approach romance from a number of angles, including conventions and the contemporary publishing industry. These academic frameworks, which explore pleasures of romance, enable student readers to appreciate some of the specific pleasures of the romance genre, its authors and its texts.

[1] I gratefully acknowledge the input of Ken Gelder and Claire Knowles, who assisted in the development of this article.

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

[3] Some students may be interested in engaging with critiques of Radway's view that reading romance may be a substitute for social or political action (1984, 100).

[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 second-hand books.

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

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“Mind, Body, Love: Nora Roberts and the Evolution of Romance Studies” by An Goris

October 15th, 2012 |

Introduction

These are exciting times for popular romance scholars.[1] Over the past decade, a number of developments—including the founding of the International Association for the Study of Popular Culture and of the peer-reviewed *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* in 2010, the publication of *The Heroine as Reader, the Reader as Heroine: The Temptation* (Brisbane (2009), Brussels (2010), New York (2011), McDeane (2012)), and the funding of substantial academic grants by Romance Writers of America—have stimulated the increasing institutional establishment and recognition of the field. The overall study of the representation of romantic love in popular culture gains momentum as one of the genres at the epicenter of this emerging field—popular romance—receives a genre-wide and generalizing approach that characterizes many older stud-

foundational works as Tania Modleski's *Loving with a Vengeance* (1982), Jani Thurston's *The Romance Revolution* (1987) and even some parts of Pamela I *Novel* (2003), is slowly being replaced by a more focused and differential app

Such a differential approach to the study of popular romance fiction seeks studies are wont to) but specific subparts of it. These studies are then bas Examples of such studies are recent work on romance subgenres (see e.g particular authors (see e.g. Frantz (2009)) and even individual novels (see e. formulated in these studies are usually less general and wide-ranging than tl Slowly, the decades-old scholarly tradition of making very general claims a then being replaced by a more specified perspective in which the scholar se but the specifics of the parts of the whole. In this setup, the general claim framework against which individual cases—of particular romance authors c be illustrated in this paper, such a more differential approach to the stu recognize (instead of obscure) the variety that exists within the genre a sophisticated than before.[2]

The general claims about popular romance fiction that are taken to task in romantic love—and, more particularly, of the mind and the body in love paper investigates Catherine Belsey's claim that popular romance novels off body in love that purports to resolve the (postmodern) tension between immaterial—but eventually fails to do so. This recurrent construction, Bels popular romance novel as well as the curious disappointment readers su romance tale (21-41). In this paper, Belsey's general(izing) claims about pop study the work of Nora Roberts, the single most popular romance author c representation of the body and the mind in Roberts' construction of rom novels. By investigating if Belsey's claims about the irresolvable tension b hugely popular work, this paper develops a nuanced understanding of one might shed some light on its immense popularity.

The General Claim: Mind, Body and Love in Popular Ro

Catherine Belsey's claims about the popular romance novel appear in the *Culture* (1994), the scholar's theoretically sophisticated and wide-ranging s texts. In line with this work's overall theoretical interests, Belsey turns t romance novel's massive appeal. Her analysis focuses mainly on the repre impacts both the body and the mind in popular romance novels. This dual c with long-standing Western traditions of dual conceptualisations of identity and his colleagues of the Enlightenment. These thinkers put forth concep disjointed and divided along the line of the body and the mind that have he Belsey notes that such dual conceptualisations have come to seem "natura internally disjointed remains a deeply unsettling idea in many ways. Popula this anxiety and this is the secret to their extraordinary appeal. In these n mind and body back into perfect unity, to heal the rift of experience which c promise, Belsey posits, strongly appeals to the contemporary reader.

However, Belsey is quick to note, fulfilling this central promise is easier saic problem. Romances attempt to bridge the gap between mind and body by c 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 metaphorical terms: a hurricane, a flood, a storm, an earthquake or a wave. While such elemental 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 involved. The subject, 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 the context of this passion has explicitly been presented as “bewildering, transporting of consciousness [which] precisely deflects subjectivity and consequently defers the moment of truth that are spoken afterwards, “*independently* [from the bodily experience], or the words that really matter (30, emphasis mine). But herein lies also the failure of the promise of unifying mind and body. Inasmuch as the romance project in a passionate context, it does not bring body and mind together, but rather to the extent that the aim was to dissolve the opposition between mind and body, the romance 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 the expectations (in the eyes) their biggest appeal.

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

It emerged that the Smithton women were reading a great many romance novels. This reading is an indication that the optimism created by romance is more than a temporary relief. Perhaps the next romance is there to compensate for the disappointment. The measure of it is that readers of romance tend to crave more romance. A number of them express an anxiety about whether they might be depressed by their reading [. . .] In their extensive reading experience, a silent recognition of unconscious desires that they consistently failed to resolve the divisions they depend on? (34-35)

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

Belsey and the Evolution of Romance Scholarship

Although Belsey’s claims have found very little response in subsequent romance scholarship, her challenging and even provocative ideas. The notion that the popular romance novel is a conundrum that has confounded many a critic—has something to do with the fragmentation of self and identity that are typically associated with the (post)modern condition is certainly deserves further scrutiny. While Belsey’s discussion of the romance novel’s response comes off as somewhat belittling, the suggestion that romance novels offer a straightforward happiness—and that this reaction might have something to do with the fascinating nonetheless. Belsey’s study thus offers a number of suggestions to

Such further exploration is undertaken in this paper, but in line with the Romance Studies there is an important methodological difference between the impressive theoretical suggestions the latter makes, Belsey commits an important failing to adequately discuss the size, composition and selection of the primary corpus. Moreover, since in the course of her discussion Belsey refers to no more than a small corpus seems decidedly too small to warrant the genre-wide scope of her different methodological choices by first, focussing on the oeuvre of a single author and then, selecting an oeuvre according to explicit, clear-cut principles.

Nora Roberts

This paper focuses on American writer Nora Roberts, who is widely considered the most successful author of our time. Since her first category romance novel was published in 1981, she has written over 200 romance novels. A staggering 178 of these have appeared on the *New York Times* Bestselling list and she has 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 successful authors in RWA's and the romance genre's history. With more than 400 million copies sold, she is 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. While bestselling authors such as J.K. Rowling, Stephen King and John Grisham are regularly drawn into the academic gaze,^[3] barely a handful of studies on her work exist. A complete study of Roberts' complete oeuvre does not currently exist.^[4] In this regard Roberts is not alone—among romance authors—the author study remains an important lacuna in scholarship. The fact that she is one of the best-selling authors in the world makes the lack of studies on her work especially noteworthy.

Perhaps one of the reasons scholars have been reluctant to take on Roberts is that her oeuvre is vast, with more than 200 novels and increasing by an average of five new novels every year. This is also decidedly too large to subject to the close reading analysis on which this study is based. In this study a selection had to be made. This selection takes into account a number of factors: the genre of Roberts' oeuvre—including year of publication, subgenre, part of series or stand alone—ultimately resulted in eight novels.

	Publication	Subgenre	Series / stand alone	Original format
<i>Irish Thoroughbred</i>	1981	Contemporary	Irish Hearts series	Category
<i>One Man's Art</i>	1985	Contemporary	MacGregor series	Category
<i>Suzanna's Surrender</i>	1991	Contemporary/ Suspense	Calhoun series	Category
<i>Montana Sky</i>	1996	Western/ Suspense	Stand alone	Single (hardcover)
<i>Morrigan's Cross</i>	2006	Paranormal	Circle Trilogy (1)	Single (paperback)
<i>Dance of the Gods</i>	2006	Paranormal	Circle Trilogy (2)	Single (paperback)

<i>Valley of Silence</i>	2006	Paranormal	Circle Trilogy (3)	Sing (pa)
<i>High Noon</i>	2007	Suspense	Stand alone	Sing (har

Although this collection of eight novels does not represent the full range of [missing and the decade between 1996 and 2006 is underrepresented, to ne corpus is nonetheless fairly well-balanced and compatible with the practical

The Integration of Body and Mind in Nora Roberts' Ron

Catherine Belsey's claims about the pivotal importance of the representat appeal of the popular romance genre open up interesting avenues of in Belsey's observations imply, the complex relation between body and mind p romantic love, which is indeed conceptualized as a dual force that impact extent Roberts' romance novels follow the patterns of the genre insightfu regard Roberts' novels deviate from this pattern. Whereas Belsey claims th realize the bridging of the gap between body and mind their conventional analyses in this paper reveal that in Roberts' romance fiction the unificati successful. The potential implications of this observation for our understand conclusion to this paper after the pattern that achieves this unification is des

Divided Selves During the First Meeting

In Roberts' romances, the process that ends with the complete and succes mind starts with their explicit separation. Indeed, at the beginning of Rober and mind is repeatedly stressed in the narration. All first meeting scenes an double, diverging response to each other: strong and immediate physical dislike, irritation, or anger. Although this representation differs slightly from the division between mind and body is mainly situated in the heroine's emp of, or even full-out distrust of her body's uncontrollable, explicitly sexual scenes in Roberts' romances nonetheless systematically introduce, and en body and mind around which the rest of the romance narrative essentially r

The first meeting scene between hero Grant Campbell and heroine Gennie *One Man's Art* is an example of this construction. Hero Grant is severely "ar his doorstep during a stormy night, disrupting his much-valued solitude : point of view to emphasize that barely seconds after letting the heroine in] the door" (263). Gennie, put out by Grant's "unfriendly, scowling face" and tone" and remains "distantly polite, [. . .] frigid and haughty" (264), but priv him" (265). The narration of this immediate dislike and annoyance is insta physical attraction. Grant is "thrown" by Gennie's "sea green, huge and fa her [. . . goes] straight to his gut" he realizes she is "too beautiful for his pe: that Grant is "furiously annoyed by the flare of unwelcome desire" (268) physical response textually explicit. Gennie is portrayed as equally attracted, .] anticipation" (269). Again, the body's response is explicitly opposed to the

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 oth
them wanted while the rain and the wind beat against the walls, separat

The parallel syntactic construction of the first two sentences (“He wonder 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 distinctio 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 (emotional consistently functions as a marker and display of (emotional) truth. Pi manifest bodily: faces pale in shock, fingers tremble from sadness, hands je 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 c novels’ characters, like the novels’ readers, become readers and interprete 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 w following excerpt she is confronted with her two half-sisters, with whom sk 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 instantaneously displays them.

Willa came into the kitchen, stopped short when she saw the women at movements still jerky. [. . .] She slipped her hands into her pockets as still tended to shake. [Her sister confirms the ranch is safe. . . .] Because to the cupboards and took out a tumbler. Then she just stood there, un 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 Pickles. Dear God, would she see him for the rest of her life, what had b him? [. . .] But the ranch, for now, was safe. "Oh God, oh God, oh God 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 world and the novel's reader outside of it interpret Willa's emotional state body. Her pale face, jerky movements, shaking fingers, closed eyes and u signs of emotional upheaval. The pronounced contrast between her purpos the cupboards and tak[ing] out a tumbler"—and the purposeless, uncon move, [. . .] rest[ing] her head [. . .] clos[ing] her eyes"—constructs a manifestations of and responses to profound emotions.

The character's lack of conscious control over her body's display is stressed the sincerity of these emotions. It is clear that the characters in this fictional and communicative potential: Willa attempts to hide her shaking fingers, kn a depth of emotional turmoil she is uncomfortable displaying in front of shoulder" indicates, reversely, that not only grief but also support and con The marked absence of language—dialogue—in this scene adds to its emoti which emotional truth can be read directly from and conveyed by the bod virtually impossible.

Sex: So Much More Than Just Sex

Roberts' construction of the body as a marker of emotional truth—whi conceptual pillar on which her fictional worlds rest—implies that the bod truth. This notion puts another perspective on the function of sex in the emphasize the physical, natural, powerful and non-rational aspects of se ultimate acts of the body as opposed to the mind. In the experience of se (*High Noon* 222) and the thinking, rational, controlling self is temporarily sus over. This representation is frequently based on the association of sex w rationality and control on the part of the mental, conscious self. As phenomena and disasters are often used to describe sexual sensations in po] to depict sex in rather unimaginative and very conventional—even clichéd— . . . 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 f explosion" (*One Man's Art* 306) and "liquid flames" (*Dance of the God emphasizes the powerful, uncontrollable force of the sexual experiences— force of nature—but of course also inscribes the texts in the conventions of*

The rational subject's lack of control in the physical sexual experience is fi 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 sensations (Suzanna’s *Surrender* 389; 429, emphasis mine), “the *stab* of desire [. . .] left me hot and fast,” and is “an *assault* on the system” (*One Man’s Art* 304-5, emphasis mine). These passages 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 originate in the 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 motif of the loss of rationality; physical sexual sensations are repeatedly represented as causing a temporary suspension of the self. Here are two exemplary passages:

He brushed his thumb over her nipple, watched the shock of pleasure flash off, Moira.” It was already as if mists clouded it. How could she think with her mind . . . H]er mind misted over again as his hands, his mouth, slid like flames over her, leaving nothing but feelings now, a mass of pleasures beyond any possibility. [. . .] She was a hostage to this never-ending need. Half-mad she struggled with him.

But right at the moment, with her back up against the door and his mouth on her neck, the equation. [. . .] His hands dove into her hair, skimmed over her shoulder, and he knew the purpose and skill that any idea [. . .] went straight out of the window, and she was under assault and her blood flashing from comfortably warm to desperate. [. . .] The sensations careening inside her flew too fast, too high for [. . .] and she was

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

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

In the following brief scene from the 1991 category romance *Suzanna’s Surrender*, the hero consciously realized or acknowledged his feelings for her (let alone openly expressed his yet-unspoken feelings of affection and love, but this display is clearly not sexual).

[Holt] rubbed a thumb over the line between [Suzanna's] brows in a gesture of catching himself, he dropped his hand again. (*Suzanna's Surrender* 421)

Again the conscious self's lack of control over this bodily act ("catching himself" from these acts from the mind, displays and reveals an emotional truth the rational While the overwhelming sexual response then generally dominates the prototypical non-sexual physical manifestations confirm what the emphatic uncontrollable the existence of an as-yet *linguistically* unacknowledged emotion of which physical trace and proof.

The Meaning of the Body

Although these physical manifestations and reactions are an essential part of the remarks, for popular romance novels the difference between love and lust is self (28-29). In Roberts' novels as well, true romantic love comes into being and is involved in the phenomenon. This mental involvement consists, as Belsey says, lover speaks about love, in doing so asserts his/her identity as a subject and of love he/she speaks of. However, whereas Belsey posits that it is in this speaking is reconfirmed and reconstituted—the words have to be spoken "independently" Nora Roberts' romances in this speaking of love the gap between body and mind

In a fictional world in which the body functions as a text the physical manifestations offer the unquestionable physical proof of love's truth by making it tangible and they signal and display this truth to be read, interpreted and linguistically read. Love consistently make the point that without the active intervention of the mind is and remains mute. It is only when the thinking, speaking subject intervenes that these otherwise meaningless physical manifestations become significant in both words. This transformative act, the "making" of meaning and sense, takes place is "put into words" and thereby transformed from meaning-less to meaningful. The body and remains consciously, rationally and linguistically unacknowledged. Materially real and true the bodily manifestations prove it to be. It is only when meaningless physical truth meaningful that the gap between body and mind in romance—is bridged in Roberts' conceptualisation of true love. This bridging

The first stage consists of a remarkable discomfort, unease and even fear that is physical reactions. *Montana Sky* hero Ben, for example, is "unnerved" by *Thoroughbred's* Adelia finds her physical "awareness" of Travis "disturbing" (48) about kissing Larkin, Holt and Suzanna both "resent and fear" (*Suzanna's* attraction, and *Morrigan's Cross'* Hoyt "fears" (82) the intensity of his desire is more remarkable because it is often connected to physical and sexual response (exceptionally so even). The lovers' marked unease then indicates a conscious of the intensity of their bodily response is a sign of an otherwise as-yet-unacknowledged love. The concept of love—that is, the signifier 'love'—remains strictly unacknowledged in 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 emotional truth. This elementary linguistic acknowledgement takes place in the "something" (sometimes "it") to refer to the phenomenon that in a later stage

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 the body—already rudimentarily signified by “something” but still lacking the full, comprehensible, signified human world—is transformed into a signified line. The gap between mind and body is then completely bridged in these scenes. The desires from the body, as Belsey would have it, but are to the contrary both fulfilled and the experience which cause further bodily repercussions. Indeed, the use of these scenes are 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 and the beloved realized here does not yet qualify as the utopian true love around which popular romance is constructed. The discourse that is used in the initial realization scenes tends to signal this gap. The above, for instance, love is considered a “lost battle”, it “aches [. . .] gnaws at the heart,” “awareness;” and is explicitly “uninvited, unwelcome,” “terrifying,” and “frightening,” which are systematically invoked in thinking about love in this stage of Roberts’ novels. An underlying problem: the lover has not yet freely, rationally, actively chosen. It is a proven truth, a *fait accompli*, a material fact the existence of which the lover is at this point essentially subjected. In other words, the lover lacks *agency* in the realization of true love.

That the lover’s agency and volition, his free and active choice to accept or reject, in the conceptualisation of true love is something that is established repeatedly in the popular romance to make a clear distinction, for example, between the physical manifestation of love on the one hand and the choice to accept and want those desires and manifestations—on the other. *Morrigan's Cross*’ heroine Glenna Ward pointedly notes that her lovers/protagonists face in this regard when after her first, fiercely passionate lover wanted her, there was no question of that. But he didn’t choose to want her (Roberts, *Cross*, 83). The signifier “want,” here a reference to sexual desire, and “choose” the capacity of free will, explicitly differentiate between the desires of the body and the choice of the mind in romance. The heroine’s explicit assertion that she “prefer[s] to be chosen” is a clear assertion of volition in the matter of true love. In deliberately choosing to accept and reject, the lover is constructed as both physically and emotionally overwhelming—the lover is chosen and completes the realization of true love.

Lovers in Roberts’ popular romance novels take on the necessary agency in the realization of true love by uttering the deceptively simple words “I love you.” The communicative act is a step away from the earlier, interior linguistic realization of love. In uttering the words “I love you” to the other and transforms the status of his love from private to public. As the lover and the beloved, it also becomes part of the world outside the self and the interior exterior world. The successful declaration of love signals the lover’s free will and completely accept the potentially overwhelming experience and give it a name. This is an example of a successful declaration scene:

I love you. [. . .] You’re my breath, and my pulse, my heart, my voice. [. . .] I’ll stop. I’ll love you, and only you, until all the worlds are ended. So you’ll

and fight beside you. We'll live together, and love together, and make a

The lover first re-establishes the truth of the love-phrase by explicitly referen in the meaningful, recognizable socio-economic and cultural order of the institutions of marriage and family. In this way the lover takes on agency in t to accept and embrace the potentially overpowering natural phenomenon ; The subject's cultural placing of love in the conventional entities of mar potentially uncontrollable power and transforms it into a steady and strong

Although the successful declaration of love that completes the realization popular romances, by the phrase "I love you," the words alone are no declaration of love when it performs the lover's volition to place love in the the foundation of the culturally conventional entities of marriage (a lifeti simply speaking the words "I love you" does not constitute the successful c more closely at one of the few unsuccessful declarations the corpus of this the protagonists declare their love to one another for the first time about h are ultimately unsuccessful (the relationship still falls apart afterwards). A cl

[Hero Grant:] "I feel like someone's just given me a solid right straight t 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 hav you." [. . .]

[Grant] "We both would have been better off if you'd waited out that st] I'm in love with you, and damn it, I don't like it. [. . .] I love you [. . .] I love you. [. . .] You make my head swim." (405-7)

Although both hero and heroine speak the conventional words of love—woi the body, so the material truth of this love is not in doubt—the characters love. Grant's repeated assertion that he "does not like" being in love with Ge The love he speaks of is the one over which he has no control and in dangerous, potentially overwhelming kind of love which has not yet been b place in the conventional cultural order. This unplaced love, though p "problem" to which neither character, in this stage of the story, has the solu the novel when the protagonists' declarations of love lead to a marriage proj home and family (492-98).

As a successful declaration of love, the phrase "I love you" then works in a Declared under the appropriate circumstances and conveying a partic —actualises, makes real—true love and thereby literally changes reality. Inc love is realised: the declaration "I love you" performs true love. "I love you" Roberts' romance novels, but this functioning is especially clearly illustrated in which the story's paranormal setting is used to explicitly depict the reality

"I love you." She saw his eyes change. "Those are the strongest words in incantation, I already belong to you."

"Once I speak it, it's alive. Nothing can ever kill it. [. . .] I love you." A si washed over them, centred them in a circle of white. (249-50)

“I love you” is considered an “incantation,” “strong [. . .] magic[al]” words romantic love implies. This scene emphasizes the power the spoken love spoken, it is “alive. Nothing can ever kill it.” The words, moreover, not only change”), but also literally change reality (“A single beam [. . .] white”).

This performative speech act, which can only be realized by a lover whose 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 ultimately achieved in the experience of true love in Roberts’ romance epistemologically very appealing fictional universes. In these implied fiction and parcel of the (post)modern condition are overcome and replaced by which the self is unified, the body displays truth and the truth can be spoken becomes the epistemological, emotional, cultural, and economic foundation massively appealing fictional worlds that Belsey claims the popular romance

Conclusion

If Nora Roberts succeeds where, at least according to Belsey, other romance Roberts’ unprecedented popularity? According to the terms set by Belsey’s indeed. If Belsey is right in claiming that the massive appeal of popular romance body and if Nora Roberts is the only author to actually consistently achieve would be that it is Roberts’ mastery of this particular construction of romance success.[8] This suggestion is certainly intriguing and deserves further methodological rigor—of a kind that is characteristic of the further mature discussed in the introduction to this paper—urges caution in an attempt to a

A number of questions in fact remain open. While it is, for example, clear that Roberts’ romance novels, it remains unclear whether it is *specific* to Roberts’ romance oeuvres are necessary to determine the wider occurrence of the specific to Roberts, further sociological or anthropological study of the reception Belsey’s theory-based claim that it is precisely this particular representation appeal of Roberts’ oeuvre. If the construction is not specific to Roberts’ oeuvre an important wider historical shift in the romance genre. It is imaginable, for and the mind as it was recorded by Belsey is a textual reflection of a particular sexuality. In the more than two decades that have passed since the public cultural anxiety surrounding female sexuality has lessened. Roberts’ reproduction textual trace of this wider socio-cultural evolution. Further study is necessary

As the scholarly study of popular romance fiction enters its fifth decade, transformations are in full swing. While these transformations necessarily imply a certain displacement and younger generations of romance scholars, the discussions in this paper studies to the present generation of popular romance scholars. Although we have studies because of their (over)generalizing approach to the genre (see e.g. S general claims continue to be valuable as they provoke new and interesting popular romance fiction lies neither in the outright rejection of older claims nor our ability to use the powerful tools we find in earlier work to further our evolving genre.

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[1] This paper could not have been realized without the help and support him most cordially for his feedback. I am also grateful to the anonymous piece and provided many valuable suggestions.

[2] For a more extensive discussion of the development of the study of po older and more recent studies of the genre see Regis (2011) and Goris (2011)

[3] That vastly less scholarly attention is paid to Roberts than to other con indicated, for example, by data in the academic databank JSTOR which sto articles. Several sample searches of JSTOR in September 2010 and Septem term “Rowling” (“Harry Potter” gave 607/1064), 1158/1449 for “Stephen 11/17 for “Nora Roberts” (three of these articles are about a different No studies of the romance author).

[4] The most important academic discussions of Roberts’ oeuvre are by *Natural History* 183-204), John Lennard (2007), Séverine Olivier (2008) and on Roberts is currently being prepared by the author of the present paper a 2014.

[5] Given the popular romance genre’s infamous history with rape, an im while Roberts unabashedly emphasizes the violent force of the desire with any kind of forced sexual interaction. Choice and free will are of paramount texts never leave any doubt that the protagonists fully consent to all sexu exception in Roberts’ entire oeuvre: in *Tonight and Always* (1983) the hero c she eventually “stop[s] struggling ... soften[s] and surrender[s]” (142) to hi so-called “forced seduction.”

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

[7] The idea that “I love you” functions as a performative speech act in pc discussed much more extensively by Lisa Fletcher in her ground-brea particular pp. 25-48.

[8] The keen reader notes a logical inconsistency here because Belsey in supposedly feel over the failed unification of mind and body drives the desir Roberts’ exceptional success is inexplicable according to the terms set out by



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Review: Reading Nora Roberts, by Mary Ellen S

August 4th, 2010 |

In the landmark 1997 *Paradoxa* special issue on popular romance, Pamela I of individual romance authors was needed for the further development and

critical field. (Mussell 10, Regis 146) Such single-author studies would e
romance fiction is “formulaic” by demonstrating that popular romance, I
multitude of individual, markedly different authors, each of whom deserve
alas, scholarly work on individual romance authors remains quite rare. Eve
author like Nora Roberts—who, with 164 *New York Times* bestsellers to her
books in print (“Nora Roberts. Did You Know?”), is one of the most read au
of scholarly publications. Academic articles which focus exclusively on Ro
monograph currently exists, either on Roberts or any other contempora
romance scholarship, I was pleasantly surprised when I learned about the
Nora Roberts (2010).

Reading Nora Roberts is, however, not the scholarly work the field of Pc
Snodgrass’ professorship (proudly announced in the “About the Author” se
study at all. Instead, it is a somewhat hastily put together book directed at w
interested high school students or entering undergraduates. (That Snodg
readers appears in, for example, the “discussion questions” at the end of e
term “feminism” without any regard for the complex theoretical debates
Eyre and *Wuthering Heights* she deems it necessary to provide.)

As a book for a wide but avidly interested audience, *Reading Nora Robe*
facilitate discussion of her vast oeuvre. While her discussion of individual no
scholar—she often displays real insight into Roberts’ narratives—the b
apparently haphazard approach to Roberts’ oeuvre and the lack of clear dire

One of the more puzzling aspects to negotiate as a reader of this book
Snodgrass’s discussion of Roberts’ works. As the critic surveys the course
novels alternate with all-too-brief and underdeveloped discussions of others
chapter on Roberts’ work in the 1990s offers a detailed look at *Montana Sky*.
2000s consists of far more superficial discussions of five different novels.
approach. The in-depth focus on single novels is to be lauded both as a
Reading Nora Roberts reaches its most interesting potential when Snodgr
skills, as for example when she recasts Serena MacGregor’s retaliatory b
Freudian gesture of female violence to phallic symbols” (29), or when she
“human need and male dread of sentimentality” (39). Unfortunately, Snodg
oeuvre in any coherent way, and this failure to give a satisfactory account
simultaneous sense of overview and depth that she seems to pursue. Althou
of numerous socio-cultural themes in some of Roberts’ novels, she tends to
which fail to develop those promising interpretations. Instead, her discu
summaries, which might please readers completely unfamiliar with Robert
Roberts reader and the interested romance scholar.

Even taking the book on its own terms, as a publication for the general publi
at times Snodgrass’ interpretations display promising potential, overall she
Roberts’ oeuvre she sets out to provide. The presence of two virtually poi
and one on the author’s media presence) and the book’s inadequate length
adequately discuss Roberts’ oeuvre of nearly 200 novels) give it the impre
thrown-together book. Worst of all are the steady stream of small but
character names (8, 100), repeated references to a trio instead of a quartet (c
a description of *A Man for Amanda* (instead of *Courting Catherine*) as the
professional downgrading of Eve Dallas to “detective” (35). Such sloppiness

shows a curious lack of respect for Roberts, her readers, and the project of t

A brief online search indicates that Mary Ellen Snodgrass is not primarily a guides and textbooks on a dizzying myriad of topics ranging from Greek Cla Japan. Both Nora Roberts and Popular Romance Studies deserve better.

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