Romance by the book: A morphological analysis of the popular romance

Susie Zachik-Smith

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ROMANCE BY THE BOOK:
A MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POPULAR ROMANCE

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Susie Zachik-Smith
September 1993
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Abstract

In this thesis I employ the morphological methodology of Vladimir Propp (1928) to the analysis of popular romance novels. I examine 13 such novels and create a morphology of my own. In so doing, I find that the functions of the popular romance novel are "constant and predictable." Despite compulsory romantic roadblocks, the words "I love you . . . Will you marry me" invariably appear before the advertising copy on the inside back jacket.

While the results of this analysis illustrate the predictability of the functions and roles of popular romance novels, they also raise interesting social questions. Given the narrative redundancy of these books, why do millions of women read them? Moreover, why do female readers repeatedly read stories that depict women as submissive and secondary to heroes, marriages, and children? Drawing on insights from treatments of fairytales, I demonstrate that the formulaic elements of the popular romance text hook women in by appealing to basic psychological needs. Once hooked, however, I find that the reader is subject to a formulaic narrative that perpetuates a patriarchal agenda that inhibits the fulfillment of these same basic needs. The analysis of popular romance novels, therefore, gains us important insight into a unique textual form as well as a powerful textual ideology.
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Introduction

'I love you, Jo.' There was a tender warmth in the eyes that traced every rise and hollow of her delicate features, and her heart filled with a joy so intense that it brought a lump to her throat. 'I love you,' he said again . . . (Whittal 187)

. . . leaning his palms on the wall on either side of her head, he kissed her. Although her lips were chilled from the evening air, by the time he raised his head they were soft and moist and yielding. . . . 'I've been waiting for this for weeks,' he said, 'Years, it sometimes seems. Marry me, Marya?' (Field 185)

'Allison,' he stated . . . 'I'm sorry for being such a jerk. It took me almost losing you to realize how much I love you. Can you ever forgive me? And if you can forgive me, will you marry me?' (Clark 247)

'I said I love you. I love you. I love the way you talk and the way you laugh and the way it feels when you wrap your arms around me. I love you in your purple dress and in jeans and in nothing. I love you because of the way you care about your work and the way you are with your family and the honest straightforward way you have of twisting everything—including me—to your way of thinking. I loved you six weeks ago and I love you now.' (Coughlin 251)

With few exceptions, the popular (*pulp, *dimestore, *bodice-ripping) romance novel will conclude with a profession of love and commitment. The hero undoubtedly will make this profession to the heroine, but only after hero, heroine, and reader have endured 200 to 250 pages of misunderstandings and exterior obstacles that have heretofore separated the intended. The 199 pages of misunderstandings fall to the wayside as easily as clothes to the floor in a love scene so that the narrative might
end with the couple in the happy clinch foreshadowed by the cover graphics.

The basics of the narrative rarely change. Despite romantic roadblocks—the differences of class, economics, power, and experience; the consistent failures to communicate; the painful wrongdoings—the words "I love you . . . Will you marry me" invariably appear before the advertising copy on the inside back jacket. Yet despite the narrative redundancy of these books, millions of women read them.

The most pressing question is "Why?" Why would a reader read a story of which she already knows the outcome? Why, in other words, would she read the same story again and again?

To answer, I look to the structure of the story. A logical approach to the analysis of a story structure lies in the work of Vladimir Propp. In 1928, Propp examined 115 Russian folktales, looking for recurring elements or features and random or unpredictable ones. He concluded "that while the characters or personages of the tales might superficially be quite variable, . . . their functions in the tales . . . were relatively constant and predictable" (Toolan 14). Propp went on to identify 31 key functions, or constants, in the folktale narratives. I believe that the functions of the popular romance novel are "constant and predictable" and that it
is largely this constancy that attracts readers.

Therefore, in the present work, I borrow from Propp's technique in order to establish the key functions of the popular romance fantasy narrative and the constancy of those functions. The task of analyzing the popular romance structure is significant, for as Tania Modleski states, "It is crucial to understand [popular feminine texts]: to let their very omissions and distortions speak, informing us of the contradictions they are meant to conceal and, equally importantly, of the fears that lie behind them" (113).

I have divided the task into four chapters. First, I present a brief history of the popular romance narrative. In that history I discuss how popular romance fits into and derives from the traditional genre of romance, specifically, how it has evolved from such canonical romances as Samuel Richardson's Pamela, Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, and Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre. In addition to bearing a relationship to traditional romance, popular romance also shares many of the thematic and narrative qualities of the traditional fairy tale. Thus, in chapter one I also review structural studies of the fairy tale. This work is closely aligned with the work of Propp himself, who based his morphology on Russian oral fairy tales.
In the second chapter, I describe the methodology needed to establish my morphology; specifically that borrowed from Vladimir Propp, from linguist Michael J. Toolan—who expands upon and explicates Proppian technique—and from narratologist Gerald Prince, who examines written as well as oral narrative.

In the third chapter I apply the methodology to create a morphology of popular fantasy romance. With a morphology in hand, I then compare the structure of the popular romance with that of the traditional romance and the traditional fairy tale outlined in chapter one. The comparison reveals the functions of the popular romance narrative to be uniquely different from yet still grounded in the elements of its traditional forbears.

Finally, in chapter four, I discuss the cultural and social-psychological reasons that these "constant and predictable" romance texts appeal to specifically female audiences. This discussion centers on the work of such feminist critics as Rosalind Coward, Tania Modleski, Janice Radway, and Kay Mussell.

The establishment of a morphology enables the unique impact of the narrative to become clearer. The morphology becomes a tool to understanding why a very large, very female reading audience accepts, expects, even demands the "very omissions and distortions" of the popular romance novel.
CHAPTER ONE: WHAT IS "PULP ROMANCE"?

1.1 The History and Characteristics of the Popular Romance, Its Economic Success, and Its Readers

The popular romance novel is about love, the kind of love found in a sexual, monogamous, committed relationship that is tinged with domestic expectations—the kind of love found in a marriage. In the popular romance novel the heroine must not just find love in the hero's arms, she must, in all but a few instances, marry him. "The story of a romantic novel begins with an assumption, unquestioned and unexamined except in a few books, that the necessary, preordained, and basic goal of any woman is to achieve a satisfying, mature, and all-fulfilling marriage" (Mussell, Gothic xii). Despite the feminist surges of our time, in this fictional world traditional conservative values prevail. "The essential assumptions of romance formulas--belief in the primacy of love in a woman's life, female passivity in romantic relationships, support for monogamy in marriage, reinforcement of domestic values--have not faded or significantly altered" (Mussell, Fantasy xii). And this "romantic" love (not any exchange of telephone numbers on the back of business cards, but the I-want-to-have-children-with-this-man-he's-my-soulmate kind of love is big business.
Publishing analysts for decades have said more women read than men. Moreover, "50 per cent of all women reading at any given moment are likely to be reading romance" writes Jean Radford (14). This is a significantly large audience. Writer and researcher Linda Christian-Smith cites romance sales of more than two hundred million dollars annually and a readership of over twenty million in at least twenty countries. She writes, "... romance fiction represents the most lucrative segment of paperback publishing today" (12). Popular romance novels make up 25 percent of all mass market paperbacks (Salmans P13). Approximately 400 paperback titles are released each month; one hundred or so of these are romance. Almost all of the largest paperback houses--Bantam, Avon, New American Library, Jove, Simon and Schuster, Fawcett--include a proportion of romance fiction. The leading publishers of romance are Harlequin and Silhouette. Each releases about twenty titles a month at an average 500,000-per-book press run (Christian-Smith 12). Silhouette is big; Harlequin is the biggest.

Harlequin Enterprises is a subsidiary of the $550 million Canadian communications giant Torstar (Christian-Smith 12). Over 2,300 Harlequin Romance titles have appeared since the first was published in 1958. Harlequin dominates at least 10 percent of the paperback market in North America, selling 100 million books on this
continent alone, and 50 million more in countries like Israel, Germany, and Holland. While the United States is the chief market for Harlequins, the novels are translated into 16 languages (Modleski 35). Its name, Harlequin, is today synonymous with popular romance fiction.

The economic success of Harlequin and other popular romance publishers is not attributable so much to the narrative quality, characterization, or prose style of the texts, but rather to marketing and distribution. Romance publishers directly target their audience—women—and go after them where they feel sure they'll find them: in the supermarket, in the drugstore, in front of the television at noon watching All My Children. Harlequin TV ads urging women to slip away for a few private romantic moments have run during game shows, soap operas, and during showings of Gone with the Wind, and in 1981 the ads ran heavily during the coverage of the royal wedding (Mussell, Fantasy 12). Romance publishers utilize the magazine distribution network. This network has proven successful in putting the books in the hands of their audience, for "it [makes] available for book distribution two outlets almost always visited on a regular basis by women, the local drugstore and the food supermarket" (Radway 32). Feminist critic Janice Radway writes, "The early success of the gothic genre is a function of the de facto but nonetheless effective concentration of women brought about by social
constraints on their placement within society. . . . [A]s a potential book-buying public, American women were remarkably easy to reach" (32). Harlequin today, in fact, claims that it reaches "one out of every ten women in America and that 40 percent of those reached can usually be converted into Harlequin readers" (Radway 44).

In addition to their overwhelming distribution success, romance publishers succeed by means of an unconventional book marketing strategy: they market the brand name rather than the individual book. When Harlequin advertises, it pushes the Harlequin Romance series, not single titles, thus spreading the cost over the whole series. "As a result of this method of advertising, the company can sell its books more cheaply than other paperback companies [approximately $3.00 per book] and achieve a very low return factor" (Modleski 35). In effect, every novel becomes a best seller.

As early as the 1950s, romance publishers found it advantageous to provide invariant text that would enthrall a large and consistent reading audience rather than put forth the time and money to seek out new audiences. "The principal activity of these publishers changed significantly," writes Janice Radway, "from that of locating or even creating an audience for an existing manuscript to that of locating or creating a manuscript for an already-constituted reading public" (43). Audience
demands began to dictate form, as did revised production techniques. The combination of rotary presses with improved binding and synthetic glues "made possible the production of huge quantities of books at a very low cost per unit and contributed to the acceleration and regularization of the acquisition and editorial processes" (Radway 28). By the late 50s, books were being produced and set on shelves in less time than ever before. In addition, because of their cheap, disposable format, few individual novels survived over time—30 days was the average shelf life of a paperback novel (Business Week 48B). Paperback publishers needed copy; they needed it quickly; and they needed copy that didn't require major editing before it met the demands of their ready-made audience. Thus, they began "to look with favor on category books that could be written to a fairly rigid formula" (Radway 28). Through a formulaic narrative "mass-market houses saved the time and expense of editing unique books that had as yet not demonstrated their ability to attract large numbers of readers" (Radway 28).

History of the Modern Romance Format

It was at this time that the paperback publishing industry met with a slump. The industry was heavily laden with mystery novels, and suddenly the mystery formula
wasn’t selling. Publishers sought an alternative narrative. An editor at Ace Books took notice of the consistent reprint success of Daphne de Maurier’s *Rebecca*. *Rebecca* had been filling bookstore shelves since its original publication in 1938. The editor gambled that the popular book struck a chord in female readers, sought out similar previously published titles, and in 1960 published the first novel in Ace’s "gothic" line (Radway 31).

Simultaneously, competing editors at other houses began collecting *Rebecca* look-alike narratives. One editor stated in an interview, "this [1955] was a time when mysteries were not selling well. . . . Women didn’t want to read Mickey Spillane. . . . they wanted to read emotional stories about a woman in peril" (qtd. in Radway 31). When English writer Victoria Holt’s *Mistress of Mellyn* developed into a bestseller in the same year as Ace’s first release, "the boom in gothic sales began" (Radway 31). By the 1970’s the gothic audience had grown to such proportions that the works of "top gothic authors outsold the works of equivalent writers in all other categories of paperback fiction, including mysteries, science fiction, and Westerns" (Radway 32). The gothic formula set down by Victoria Holt and others was, of course, not new. It succeeded in publishers’ eyes because of its similarities to the widely accepted *Rebecca* and the nineteenth century romance novel *Jane Eyre*. The industry
gambled that popular romance was a sure avenue to financial success. What Holt and others were doing was simply restructuring and validating the formula for a new generation of readers (Mussell 10).

Characteristics of the Modern Romance Format

The rejuvenated formula boasts some striking and consistent characteristics. Always the story is told in the third person from the heroine's point of view. The story ends happily and within approximately 200 pages. The prose is "dominated by cliche', simple vocabulary, standard syntax" (Radway 189). And without fail, "the love story is the central action and the most significant motivating force" (Mussell, Fantasy 11). Harlequin Enterprises issues these binding guidelines to potential writers,

Harlequins are well-plotted, strong romances with a happy ending. They are told from the heroine's point of view and in the third person. There may be elements of mystery or adventure but these must be subordinate to the romance. The books are contemporary and settings can by anywhere in the world as long as they are authentic. (qtd. in Modleski 35-6)

Each story told is a romance with happy ending. Although each new popular romance novel is peopled with unfamiliar characters, filled with uncompleted events, and is rich with strange exotic settings, "they all retell a single
tale whose final outcome their readers always already know" (Radway 198).

The Audience

Who are the readers sitting through happy ending after happy ending, and contributing to the wealth of paperback publishing houses? They are women. As Kay Mussell observes, "romances are with few exceptions written by women, read by women, and published for women" (Fantasy 3). The predominantly female readers are of all ages, of all socioeconomic classes, of varying education levels, and are both employed women and housewives (Mussell, Fantasy 13). Janice Radway's study on a specific group of readers indicates a correlation between romance reading and motherhood, specifically those mothers caring for children other than infants and toddlers (57). Overall, the romance reading audience constitutes a large cross-section. Kay Mussell cites evidence that suggests romance readers do not fulfill the role stereotyped for them—"teenaged girls, bored housewives, . . . frustrated spinsters," but are rather "well-adjusted, literate, and normal women" (Fantasy 12). Mussell concludes, "The sheer number of readers tends to refute easy assumptions that only unrealistic or frustrated women read them" (Fantasy 13).
Popular romance exists as a genre with its own distinct characteristics and loyal audience. But its connotations within the larger society are negative; its literary merits are scoffed at; its motivations and effects are held suspect. It is mass art at its most formulaic. Tania Modleski comments on the distinction between mass and high art.

... the argument runs, only two types of art exist: mass art, which is used by its producers to manipulate the people and to 'colonize' their leisure time—in short, to keep them contented with the 'status quo'—and high art, which is the last preserve of an autonomous, critical spirit. (26)

The possibility that romance exists to "manipulate" makes it a potentially powerful force worthy of serious inspection. The next section examines how pulp romance fits into and derives from the traditional genre of romance.
1.2 The High Art of Romance in Popular Romance

Today's writer who chooses to weave a tale of love and passion, knowingly or unknowingly, builds the tale upon established traditions. Northrop Frye contends that such a writer "may seem to be making up his [sic] stories out of his own head, but this never happens in literature... His material comes from traditions behind him; which may have no recognized or understood social status, and may not be consciously known to the writer or to his public" (Scripture 10). Frye is concerned with the establishment of textual archetypes--recurring images or symbols which connect one text with another. The popular romance genre demonstrates such intertextuality. Each paperback novel contains the requisite elements that connect all pulp romance texts--the archetypal hero, heroine, and concluding passionate embrace. Furthermore, such archetypes serve to connect popular romance to the larger, traditional genre of literary romance.

The High Art of Romance

Romance, popular and traditional, is about love. "The central element of romance," writes Frye, "is a love story, and the exciting adventures are normally a foreplay leading up to a sexual union" (Scripture 23-4). If in chapter one of a romance, hero and heroine meet, fall in
love, unite sexually or marry, then we have no love story, or we have a very short love story. For a romance novel to hold reader attention the romance must include the "foreplay" of exciting adventures, or, at the least, it must throw up obstacles that keep the lovers apart and keep the audience asking "when will they unite?"

The obstacles or adventures that necessarily appear in romance appear seemingly at random. "In realism ... the problem is normally: 'given these characters, what will happen?'" (Frye, Scripture 47). Romance, on the other hand, "moves from one discontinuous episode to another, describing things that happen to characters, for the most part, externally" (Frye, Scripture 47). If realism is a "hence" narrative, romance is an "and then" narrative form (Frye, Scripture 47). The episodes of romance, traditional and popular, function more as a string of unrelated spontaneous surprises, than as a logical or realistic stream of events.

The underlying structural unity of romance is for Frye a type of "Utopian fantasy" (Jameson 110). He defines romance as "the literature of wish-fulfillment": romance represents "the intrusion of the 'it might have been' into the 'it was'" (Radford 8). It "does not involve the substitution of some more ideal realm for ordinary reality . . . but rather a process of transforming ordinary reality" (Jameson 110). The popular appeal of romance,
concludes Frye, "is that it dissolves the boundaries between the actual and the potential, offering a vision of 'the possible or future or ideal'" (Radford 9).

According to Frye, before the wish can be fulfilled in the romance narrative, there is a whole journey of descent and ascent to be made. The romance hero or heroine begins in an idyllic world surrounded by flowers and sunshine. This is a world associated with "happiness, security, and peace," and one often affiliated with "childhood" or "an innocent . . . pregenital period of youth" (Frye, Scripture 53). Romance begins in "a state of existence in which there is nothing to write about," a happy state, but an uneventful one (54). "It is," writes Frye, "existence before 'once upon a time,' and subsequent to 'and they lived happily ever after'" (Scripture 54). It is only upon leaving this happy, uneventful state that the story's conflict begins. The hero or heroine leaves the idyllic world and descends into a darker world of excitement, adventure, and obstacles. This world Frye calls "the demonic or night world" (Scripture 53). It is often a world of "separation, loneliness, humiliation, pain, and the threat of more pain" (Scripture 53). The story concludes when the hero or heroine returns once again to the idyllic world. The return to the dull happy place, one usually marked by some symbol like marriage, is a release from the "tyranny" and obstacles of the night.
world (Frye, Scripture 54). This "polarization of ideal and abhorrent worlds" is a structural principle central to romance (Scripture 80).

The dark demonic world of romantic descent is a jarring shift from the warm light world of the heroine's or hero's original identity. It is a lonely world of increasing alienation. "The hero," writes Frye, "is not only separated from the heroine or his friends, but is often further isolated by being falsely accused of major crimes" (Scripture 115). Shakespeare's Kate is dragged away from her Padua home to Petruchio's country house where she is deprived of food and sleep. Joseph from the Bible in his descent into Egypt is not only separated from his homeland and kin, but is accused falsely of raping his Egyptian master's wife. Even Alice of Alice in Wonderland is alienated in her descent, and at the conclusion of her journey she is left to stand trial before all the characters who have turned on her.

The dark world is not only lonely and painful, but often holds the hero or--especially--the heroine motionless as if under a charm or spell (Frye, Scripture 129). This charm or spell is often erotic in nature, and functions in the romance to allow the pursued heroine to be caught by the pursuing hero. There are hunting motifs in the dark world of romance. Frye writes, "We are often reminded of this type of descent by the imagery of the
hunt. . . . The hunt is normally an image of the masculine erotic, a movement of pursuit and linear thrust, in which there are sexual overtones to the object being hunted" (Scripture 104).

As the romance concludes, we see the heroine or hero leave the dark world--its obstacles, its fiendishly exciting adventures--and ascend to safety, to the world of sunshine and flowers, and very often, to marriage. This descent followed by ascent, according to Frye, is a very old and established narrative movement. "The heroine who is saved from rape or sacrifice, even if she merely avoids Mr. Wrong and marries Mr. Right, is reenacting the ancient ritual which in Greek religion is called the anabasis of Kore, the rising of a maiden, Psyche or Cinderella or Richardson's Pamela or Aristophanes' Peace, from a lower to a higher world" (Scripture 163).

In defense of the sentimental ending Northrop Frye writes, "The conventional happy ending of romance may seem to us faked, manipulated, or thrown in as a contemptuous concession to a weak-minded reader. . . . But if the conception is genuinely romantic and comic, the traditional happy ending is usually the one that fits" (Scripture 134).

Popular Romance
The conventions of high art romance resurface as more conventional, more formulaic, more stridently archetypal in popular romance. In popular romance texts lovers continue to meet, separate, and reunite blissfully. Jameson writes,

The older generic categories do not . . . die out, but persist in the half-life of the subliterary genres of mass culture, transformed into the drugstore and airport paperback lines of gothics, mysteries, romances, bestsellers, and popular biographies. (110)

Victoria Holt, the author credited for bringing contemporary romance formulas to prominence in the 1960s, did not in her novel *Mistress of Mellyn* invent a new romance formula, but rather she restructured and validated the form found both in *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* (Mussell, *Fantasy 10*). In *Mistress of Mellyn* the heroine is the penniless gentlewoman Martha who works as a governess for the owner of an estate in Cornwall, the hero Connan TreMellyn. Like Jane Eyre, Martha is rather plain. But while she is not beautiful, not wealthy, and without any home of her own, Connan TreMellyn falls in love with Martha. For in the midst of fighting off a crazed murdereress, Martha manages to appear a lady at a ball, handle two difficult children, and create a family where one did not exist. Connan rewards Martha's domestic femininity with marriage. This narrative is as old as the novel itself. Tania Modleski connects this form to the
"putative origin of fiction"—Samuel Richardson's Pamela, which is about a socially and economically deprived servant girl who marries her master.

Like traditional romance, popular romance features fantasy, wish fulfillment, obstacles that keep lovers apart, idyllic states, dark erotic states, journeys of descent and ascent into these states, enchantment, hunting motifs, and, above all, happy endings.

Popular romance follows the same random discontinuous "and then" narrative form as does traditional romance. Popular romance is filled with chance meetings; spontaneous travel; whimsical jaunts for two (by boat, on horseback, on foot in moonlight); new acquaintances; and the unexpected return of old acquaintances. The modern-day romance is filled with external obstacles and manoeuvrings that serve simultaneously to pull together and push apart the hero and heroine until the happy resolving clinch at the end.

Popular romance falls well within Frye's definition of "wish-fulfillment" literature. Popular romance takes place in "ordinary reality." Pulp romance heroines waken, shower, and go to work. They run after departing buses. They ride elevators in skyscrapers. Their cars break down. They break nails. They argue with their fathers. They mull over homework. Yet intruding upon their "ordinary reality" is a hero--tall, dark, unconventionally handsome. And with
this hero come passionate embraces, soulful gazes, and the promise of someone to care and nurture and ease the anxieties of "ordinary reality."

The popular romance audience first comes upon the heroine in her "pre-genital" or idyllic state. She enters the story as one safely surrounded by family, one young and inexperienced, one often just coming to grips with a developing body and the desires that accompany that development.

... she was wearing ... that loathsome school uniform--the shapeless royal blue gyslip, the blue and white gingham blouse, the prissy blue tie, the straw boater, to be worn level over the forehead, and best of all [she had] ... two fat blonde pigtailed which hung down her back.

She was perfectly safe ... (King 24)

When the popular romance conflict begins, the heroine leaves this safe world of familial love and descends into a darker, more dangerous, more erotic world.

Frye says this descent in romance "is the individual loss or confusion or break in the continuity of identity, and this has analogies to falling asleep and entering a dream world. ... a world of increased erotic intensity" (Scripture 104). The above excerpt of the girl in school uniform I took from a novel entitled Dark Guardian. In the story the virginal heroine at 17 is caught naked and trespassing by hero Brand Carradine. The moment overwhelms the two, and they make love. This actions signifies the
heroine's descent. Later, she reflects back on the action and determines it was indeed a departure from all she had known; it was "that cataclysmic encounter . . . when harsh reality had so brutally broken through her flimsy fantasy world" (King 21).

In popular romance, the heroine often takes on the characteristics of the high art romantic hero in descent. It is she, usually, who is faced with loneliness, pain, and accusation.

Strong fingers snaked about her arm, biting painfully into her soft flesh above her elbow, and Rafe's expression was dark and ominous as he spun her round to face him. 'Chris was flirting with you this evening, and I didn't see you make an effort to discourage him.' (Whittal 91)

Yet it is also the popular romance heroine who is held motionless, enchanted, caught within the spell of her attraction.

. . . briefly she was aware of the heavy beat of his heart, the strength of his arms and the dig of fingers into her back, before these isolated feelings were lost in an overwhelming surge of primitive desire. It was like an ambush, taking her completely by surprise, annihilating her normal control. (Field 30).

In the popular romance text, the hero is the hunter and the heroine the disconcerted hunted.

The popular romance narrative too reenacts the ritual of ascent. The maiden eventually rises from the dark world
of confusion and despair and receives not only satisfying
sex, but the promise of love and care.

'No, I'm not going away. . . . That's what you
want, isn't it—that we'll be together for always?'
Capri felt her heart soar, felt as if she was
floating heavenward as joy exploded inside her.
'Oh, yes, Taggart, that's what I want!'
The smile he bestowed on her was like no other
smile she had ever seen. It was as tender, and as
imbued with promise, as the first day of spring.
(Green 184)
The final closing scene in the popular romance text where
the hero takes the heroine in his arms and promises to
love and care for her and get her with lots of babies is
both achingly inevitable and the focus of much derision.
But it is the requisite romantic happy ending. As Frye
said, "if the conception is genuinely romantic and comic,
the traditional happy ending is usually the one that fits"
(Scripture 134).

From beginning to end, descent to ascent, popular
romance borrows from and thrives upon the conventions and
archetypes of the traditional genre of romance. To further
illustrate this notion, let us look to the archetypes of
specific traditional romantic texts and draw their
parallels to popular romance.
1.3 Narrative and Characteristic Parallels Between Traditional Canonical Romance Texts and Popular Romance Texts

The form of popular romance, resplendent in its stultifying repetitiveness, is a logical outgrowth of the romance forms that have gone before. As Rosalind Jones writes, "lovers have met, separated and been blissfully reunited since Alexandrian Greece" (197). The drama of clinching and unclinchning has been enacted in Longus' Daphnis and Chloe, in Roman comic theater, in Arthurian cycles, in Italian pastoral, and in the canonized psychological/realist novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Jones 198). The form and characteristics inherent in popular romance texts are found between the impressive bindings of texts in the literary canon. My scholarly and critical sources acknowledge as the forebears of the popular romance such novels as Pamela, Mansfield Park, Clarissa, North and South, Shirley, Northanger Abbey, The Mysteries of Udolpho, The Monk, Wuthering Heights, Jane Eyre, Turn of the Screw, and Rebecca. They cite the Brontes, Samuel Richardson, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Edith Wharton, Gustave Flaubert, and Leo Tolstoy as among the predecessors of the popular romance formula we know today. The high art
romance text that gets most mention is Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

There must be thousands of women who subscribe to the opinion that Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* has never been equalled as a romantic novel. Even now, centuries later, heterosexual and lesbian women alike secretly admit that the novel exemplifies all the necessary elements of a good romance. (Coward 189)

*Pride and Prejudice* contains the necessary romantic elements of heroine (Elizabeth Bennet), hero (Mr. Darcy), the happy union at the end, and the intriguing descent into the dark world of adventure and obstacle. "No less than in . . . pulp romances, *Pride and Prejudice* progresses through obstacles, preconceptions, misconceptions, and embarrassments," writes Rosalind Coward (190). Mr. Darcy is of a different socioeconomic class than Elizabeth Bennet and is, therefore, "above" marriage to the heroine. Nevertheless, motivated by his desire for her, he makes a shameful proposition. The proposition offends Elizabeth Bennet and further reinforces her perception of Mr. Darcy as "arrogant, presumptuous and cruel" (Coward 190). The story only resolves when the obstacles and misconceptions have been removed, "when Mr. Darcy, in the throes of his overwhelming love for Elizabeth Bennet, has proved his worth and his power can be safely harnessed to hers in marriage" (Coward 190).
"Gothic and romantic fiction have always been influenced and replenished by works of serious fiction," writes Kay Mussell; "... there was a whole series of novels that drew from and gave back to the more formulaic gothic and romantic modes" (Gothic 51). Samuel Richardson's Pamela (1740), as mentioned above, was one. Pamela features a requisite heroine, the serving girl Pamela, who works for and is pursued by a powerful, worldly hero. The story of Pamela is a seduction story, a cautionary tale. The young heroine of this tale manages to resist the "blandishments of a rake" (Mussell, Fantasy 8). In the end the hero yields to her superior virtue, rewarding her with love and an offer of marriage. In other seduction stories, such as Richardson's Clarissa (1747), when the heroine capitulates prematurely to her seducer (before the wedding ring) she dies an "ignominious" death (Mussell, Fantasy 8). But in either case, the vicissitudes and trials of the hero's pursuit and the heroine's resistance are central to the plot, just as obstacles and doubts and virtues and misunderstood desires are central to today's popular romance.

Narratives such as Pamela, Clarissa, and Pride and Prejudice—located in bookstores under "Classics"—are not so remarkably different from the narratives found on the rack stenciled "Harlequin Presents." For example, in the Harlequin novel The Land of Maybe, the narrative tells of
the beautiful heroine Marya from a poor village in the Faroe Isles, and the hero Craig Huntingdon, a rich corporate head of a Canadian forestry company. She, once scorned by a rich man, hates them all. He, fawned over by dozens of calculating "gold-diggers," trusts no woman. Yet Craig's desire for Marya moves him to make several propositions, none of which contain marriage. While Craig attracts Marya, his proposals repel and anger her. Not until the offending proposals and insinuations are dropped, not until the two conclude that money doesn't really matter, do they embrace and make plans for their wedding. Both the traditional narrative and the popular narrative thus contain the lonely accusations and erotic fumblings of the romantic descent; both ascend and resolve with the rising maiden joining the hero in marriage.

That which draws romance characters irresistibly together, the charmlike spell over motion and control discussed in the previous section, is also an archetype of both traditional and popular romance narrative. The charmed state has evolved over time throughout classical text and subliterary genre, writes Jean Radford. What used to be magic in romance tales is now in popular text the power of sexual desire. "'Magic' which in earlier romances rescues the hero from false Grails becomes in Jane Eyre a supernatural voice which unites her with her 'true' destiny; . . . that magic/supernatural/Providential force
is in today's romance represented as coming from within; as the magic and omnipotent power of sexual desire" (Radford 10).

The characteristic personalities of the popular romance heroine and hero also have models in canonical romance. "In the classic formula," writes Modleski, "the heroine, who is often of lower social status than the hero, holds out against his attacks on her 'virtue' until he sees no other recourse than to marry her" (17). In popular romance the heroine is also invariably of a lower socioeconomic class than the hero. Jo is a nurse, Rafe a wealthy rancher. Marya is a poor villager, Craig a company CEO. Fliss is a 17-year-old schoolgirl, Brand a 30-year-old movie magnate (Whittall, Field, King). And while today's popular romantic heroine is no longer strictly-speaking virginal (she occasionally gives in to "attacks on her 'virtue'"), she is monogamous. Responds Fliss Naughton to a bedazzled Brand Carradine, "Oh, yes, . . . I've loved you too, ever since Sombra--and, like you, there's never been anyone else for me" (King 187).

Regarding the characteristics of the classic heroine, Modleski continues, "Of course, . . . he [the hero] wants to marry her, having become smitten with her sheer 'goodness'" (17). Popular romance heroines, a century and subgenre away, are still "good." Joceline braves a violent storm so she might deliver a baby in trouble; Marya mends
a three-year rift with her stubborn father with a hug and a warm "You're forgiven"; Fliss dotes lovingly on her aging, ailing grandfather (Whittal, Field, King). Rosalind Coward observes that not only are classic heroines (specifically those of the 19th century) good, but "they naturally perceive and uphold what is truly valuable"--representing "the soft and understanding aspects of humanity" (177). 20th century pulp heroines also perceive what is conventionally and intuitively valuable. They extend reassuring hands to their maniacal but somehow vulnerable mother-in-laws; they fail to yield to senseless peer pressure; they dream of babies; they have loyal dogs; they appreciate sunsets; and always they let heart rule over head. It was vital in the classical formula that the heroine represent the "understanding aspect of humanity," continues Coward, for then "the domestic sphere could . . . be represented as the realm of pure feeling--borne by the woman--where men's true identity could be expressed" (178). Without the softening acceptance of the classical heroine, the classic hero may never have found the appropriate arena to express his vulnerability, his anxieties, and his love. The scenario remains unchanged in today's popular romance.

He softly caressed her cheek in a farewell gesture that made her heart ache, then held his hand out to her.
'Goodbye, Fliss.'
'No!' Thrusting it aside, she put her arms around him. His body was as taut as a strung bow, but as she laid her face against the rough cloth she sensed him very slightly begin to tremble. (King 187)

Yet while the romantic hero, in both canonical and popular texts, expresses his touching vulnerability in the resolution, he does not let his tough veneer slip previous to this encounter. Rosalind Coward speaks to the characteristics and influence of such romantic heroes as Mr. Darcy.

... Admittedly, Pride and Prejudice, being Literature with a capital L, has a rather rarefied appeal. But the ever-popular Mills and Boon novels are really not that dissimilar. The heroes of such novels are often endowed with Mr. Darcy-like qualities: they are powerful in social position, scathing in conversation, distant in emotions and satanic in appearance. (189)

In the romance it's acceptable for the hero to appear tough, even "satanic," for we, the reading audience, know his true feelings beneath the scowl. We know this because we know the form of romance. We appreciate the scathing conversation as a necessary obstacle, a necessary precursor to the inevitable union.

The reading experience in a romance, especially in the more conventional popular form, is unique in that "the knowledge of the reader seems to surpass the knowledge of the speaker" (Belsey 78). For a romance to be a romance we know the lovers must descend into a world of obstacles, misunderstandings, and misconceptions, and we know they
must ascend and join. We, the readers, know this; the speaker, however, does not. This phenomenon of reader knowledge surpassing speaker knowledge has precedent in traditional literature. "Jane Eyre as a child often has less understanding of the implications of her experience than the reader does," writes Catherine Belsey (78). And despite the inconsistent and limited perceptions of Lockwood or Nellie Dean of Wuthering Heights, the reader still manages to understand the nature of the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff (Belsey 78).

Even the simple phenomenon of the popular romance speaker has precedent in traditional literature. Previously, I quoted Harlequin editors as saying, "[Harlequins] are told from the heroine's point of view and in the third person." Kay Mussell cites the same perspective in Henry James' Turn of the Screw. She writes that James "used a romance convention by having his protagonist tell her own story, which begins as if it would be one more of those classic tales of an insignificant governess who wins the love of her powerful employer" (Fantasy 7).

The parallels abound; popular romance draws heavily from the conventions of canonical romance. Of course, the conventions evolve over time, yet the core of the romance narrative remains substantially unchanged. Kay Mussell concludes that the fictional world of romance has
developed "in a long and almost unbroken line of stories that center on—whatever the other ingredients of the plot—the course and culmination of one woman's love story" (Fantasy 4). Before analyzing the structure underlying the course of that one woman's love story, I will examine another influence in popular romance tradition—an influence rich in archetypes and conventions, and one that may make the archetypes and conventions of the popular romance more apparent. The following section is an examination of the fairy tale.
1.4 The Fairy Tale in Romance

Many have noted that the fairy tale and the popular romance share an unrealistic blend of plot-action and characterization. But the most striking and easily demonstrable similarity the two forms share is a stereotypical and repetitive structure. According to Bruno Bettelheim, a leading expert on the structure of fairy tales, the fairy tale is a strictly constrained form that adheres to set patterns. He writes, "[T]he fairy tale has a consistent structure with a definite beginning and a plot that moves toward a satisfying solution which is reached at the end" (57). This structure conforms to the narrative format of romance described by Northrop Frye. The fairy tale narrative begins in a state of comfortable status quo, descends into tumultuous adventure, and ascends to end happily--often in betrothal. The descent begins with the hero or heroine leaving home. "Only by going out in the world can the fairy-tale hero . . . find himself [sic] there," writes Bettelheim (11). Snow White must leave her castle, Cinderella her hearth, and Little Red Riding Hood must go out into the woods. Only outside the home, concludes Bettelheim, can the hero or heroine find identity, self-realization, or love: "... being pushed out of the home stands for having to become oneself" (79). And as the hero leaves home, adds Bettelheim, "he [sic] will also find
the other with whom he will be able to live happily ever after" (11).

Dr. Marie von Franz also writes of the descent in fairy tales. In the fairy story, she notes, a long journey has to be taken. This journey into a dark world of danger occurs when characters "lose their oneness with themselves" (115). This loss disturbs the status quo, for the unhappiness and discomfort which ensue force the hero or heroine "to go in search of the soul again" (115). The journey "is generally a long process of seeking, and of giving up the worldly advantages one had at first in order to find the inner wholeness again" (von Franz 115). In the fairy tale, wholeness is often regained through love. In the popular romance, it will be noted, love is its only vehicle.

An old Grimm's tale cited by von Franz exemplifies well the journey of descent that must precede redemption. The tale is entitled "The Singing, Soaring Lark." In this fairy story a young girl grows attached to a lion that magically sheds its skin at night to become a beautiful prince, only to return to its feline skin by day. The lion warns the girl that light must not fall on him. The girl subsequently fails him; a dark room she shuts the lion up in contains a crack. When light filters through the crack and falls upon the lion he turns into a dove. The dove tells the girl that he must now fly among other doves for seven years, but that if she wants to follow him she can—he will leave drops of blood
and feathers for her. Notes von Fränz, "The girl then has to go on a long and painful quest to find him at the end of the world beyond the Red Sea and a terrible wood and there redeem him" (111). In this narrative the girl loses her beloved, thus slipping from her state of comfortable existence, and she must then journey far to reinstate that existence.

Many fairy tales employ a quest that is followed by redemption. The blinded prince must wander for many years before he comes upon his lost Rapunzel in a desolate land. Reunited, they embrace. Rapunzel's tears of joy fall upon the prince's eyes and they clear. The prince brings Rapunzel out of the desolate land back to the kingdom where they live happily ever after. Hansel and Gretel, lost in a dark and unknown forest, must face a miserable stepmother and a wicked hungry witch. But in the end, the witch is dead and Hansel and Gretel possess her jewels. Brother and sister return home, find the stepmother also dead, reunite joyfully with their father, share their newfound wealth, and live happily thereafter. The Little Tailor goes out into the world and its surrounding forests to kill two giants, capture a unicorn, and trap a wild boar. At the end of his quest, he reigns as king. In parallel with Frye's model, the fairy tale quest is a descent into a dark world of complications and adventure; the redemption is an ascension into loving reunion and acceptance of identity.
Despite the dark dimensions of the fairy tale descent, the hero or heroine is rarely alone. According to Bettelheim, "... the hero is often forced to depend on friendly helpers: creatures of the underworld like the dwarfs in 'Snow White,' or magic animals like the birds in 'Cinderella'" (127). Part of the lesson of the fairy tale, observes Bettelheim, is delivered by way of these helpers. Not only must one leave home to find one's kingdom, not only must one realize that the kingdom cannot be gained immediately, that risks must be taken and trials submitted to; one must realize "that it cannot be done all by oneself, but that one needs helpers; and that to secure their aid, one must meet some of their demands" (133). The popular romance heroine, as we shall see, also has such helpers and lessons to learn.

Aided by helpers, the fairy tale hero or heroine eventually culminates their journey and ascends out of darkness. The ascent is marked by an end to threat and conflict: the dragon is slain, the witch burned in her own oven, the golden goose found, and the frog transformed into a prince. "In the traditional fairy tale," writes Bettelheim, "the hero is rewarded and the evil person meets his [sic] well-deserved fate" (144). Then comes the happy ending, a necessary component of every complete fairy tale, according to J.R.R. Tolkien (Bettelheim 143). According to Tolkein, four components make up a good fairy tale: fantasy,
recovery, escape, and consolation—"recovery from deep despair, escape from some great danger, but, most of all, consolation" (qtd. in Bettelheim 143). In the end the hero is reunited with his beloved and achieves his, or her, "true selfhood" (Bettelheim 127).

At this point, all is happy and well. The fairy tale takes us up to the happy ending, the joyful reunion, but, alas, no further. "It is characteristic of such stories," writes Bettelheim, "that once the dragon is slain—or whatever deed that frees the beautiful princess from her captivity is accomplished—and the hero is united with his beloved, we are given no details about their later life, beyond being told that they lived "happily ever after" (112). We have no hint as to how Snow White handles her royal domesticity, if Cinderella resents the Prince's night out with the boys, or if the Frog King lends a hand changing diapers. "These stories," worries Bettelheim, "while they take the heroine up to the threshold of true love, do not tell what personal growth is required for union with the beloved other" (278). This omission, as we shall see later, is a striking characteristic of the popular romance as well.

Other aspects of the fairy tale that have correlates in the popular romance involve point of view and characterization. "The fairy tale," writes Bettelheim, "views the world and what happens in it not objectively, but from the perspective of the hero [sic]" (203). We, the
readers, identify with Snow White for we see all events through her eyes, and not through those of the queen. Often the hero or heroine is unnamed. The hero of "The Brave Little Tailor" is called the little tailor. The hero of "Beauty and the Beast" is simply the beast. And the chief character of "The Poor Man and the Rich Man" is the rich man. If names are given they are usually common generic terms denoting virtues or attributes. She who wears a red cap is simply Little Red Cap; she who sits by the cinders is Cinderella; and she who is very fair is Snow white. Nor are the other characters who populate the fairy tale often afforded names. They are the parents, the coachman, the evil stepmother, the king, the queen, the giant, the godmother. Their roles are important, but not their identities. All this namelessness, writes Bettelheim, facilitates "projections and identifications" (40). The reader most clearly identifies with that character through whom the story is told. Once we identify with the heroine, then all the magic that befalls her can, in turn, touch us. "The fairy-tale hero has a body which can perform miraculous deeds," notes Bettelheim. "By identifying with him [sic], any child can compensate in fantasy . . . for all the inadequacies, real or imagined, of his own body. He can fantasize that he too, like the hero, can . . . become the most powerful or the most beautiful person" (57). The popular romance narrative is told from the vantage of the
protagonist as well—in this case, the heroine. Identification, thus, is with the heroine. And when she is told she is beautiful, we as readers feel beautiful too.

Not only is the popular romance, as we shall see, similar to the fairy tale in terms of point of view and hero identification, it shares certain fairy tale character traits. Bettelheim notes that fairy tale heroes are often cast in the role of hunters. This is psychologically suitable, for "[i]n the unconscious the hunter is seen as the symbol of protection" (205). The hero has a paternal quality. "In 'Snow White,' as in 'Little Red Riding Hood,'" writes Bettelheim, "a male who can be viewed as an unconscious representation of the father appears"; for example, in "Snow White" there appears the hunter who is ordered to kill Snow White, but instead saves her life (204). The popular romance hero, who is typically ten to fifteen years older than the heroine, who is richer, more experienced, and more socially adept, is reminiscent of this fairy tale hunter-father-protector figure. Yet, the popular romance hero is a bit wolfish too. A parallel can also be seen in this respect with the fairy tale.

Many tales feature that huffing, puffing, chop-licking, furry character the big bad wolf; "Little Red Riding Hood," "The Three Little Pigs," "The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids" come quickly to mind. The wolf is popular and well ingrained in the fairy tale tradition. Bettelheim
conjectures, "If there were not something in us that likes the big bad wolf, he would have no power over us" (172). The wolf represents, states Bettelheim, "the selfish, asocial, violent, potentially destructive tendencies of the id" (172). Since we all exhibit these tendencies from time to time, we may feel a kinship with the wolf. At the same time, we cheer to see these destructive tendencies defeated, as they are time and again in our literature. It is interesting, therefore, to note the wolfish characteristics of the popular romance hero. He is as seductive, persistent, and surly as the wolf after Red Riding Hood or the three little pigs. He is to the heroine, and hence to the avid romance reader, irresistible. We are attracted to him not on an intellectual level, but on a feeling level, instinctively. Perhaps in his strength and wiles and unstoppable fortitude we recognize a survivor. And while the wolf may possess us entirely, he could, if he so chose, protect us from all else. But the romance, as the fairy tale, does not leave the wolf the victor. In the fairy tale, the wolf is defeated. In popular romance, the wolf must soften, become vulnerable, sensitive before the heroine will have him. The asocial, violent tendencies must give way to more humane characteristics. And that is the romance heroine's role—to tame the wolf and allow the man his true identity.
While the popular romance hero shares the tendencies of the wolf, he also shares significant characteristics of the good, unselfish, social, thoughtful fairy tale hero. Both the fairy tale and popular romance hero act. They take overt action to unite with their beloved. Bettelheim writes of fairy tale heroes that they must "become active and prove that they are worthy of the woman they love" (277).

In 'Snow White' the prince declares he cannot live without Snow White . . . . In penetrating the wall of thorns to reach Sleeping Beauty, her suitor risks his life. The prince in 'Cinderella' devises an ingenious scheme to trap her, and when he catches not her but only her slipper, he searches for her far and wide. (Bettelheim 278)

All this action leads up to the moment when the beautiful princess turns in perfect grace and acceptance and affords the hero the opportunity to speak his tender sentiments. But the hero in fairy tales (and, as we shall see, in popular romance), is, despite all his plot-advancing action, only a supporting actor in the emotional drama. His function is to take us up to the reunion and not beyond. Bettelheim writes, "... since the male rescuers in these stories have only supporting roles, nothing more specific can be learned from their behavior about what developments are involved in loving somebody, what the nature of the commitment 'being in love' entails" (278).

We learn more about what it takes to love somebody from the fairy tale (and popular romance) heroine. But
Unlike the hero, she is not active. "Passive acceptance" is the term Bettelheim applies to the fairy tale heroine. She does not actively pursue love, but is pulled into it. Rapunzel is frightened by the prince who has tricked her and climbed up her hair, but is persuaded by him to accept his courtship. Snow White simply awakens to her prince's kiss. And the youngest princess in "The Frog King" cries in despair at the thought of having to sleep and eat and live with her frog prince.

While fairy tale heroines most often do not actively pursue, their acceptance of the hero is very important to the tale. "It is the female partner who finally brings out the humanity in the male" (Bettelheim 282). It is the heroine who brings about love and sacrifice, fear and triumph in the fairy tale hero. Bettelheim cites "A Tale About the Boy Who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was" as one featuring a humanizing female. In the story a young man does not know the fear that all men feel, but seeks to discover it. He goes through many trials to feel fear or "the creeps," but feels nothing. He gains instead a castle, a treasure, and a princess. It is not until the princess pours cold stream water with shivering minnows over his sleeping body that the boy cries "I've got the creeps!" (Grimm 12-20). Neither dead bodies nor possessed cats nor the gallows afforded the hero the fear all humans feel, but his newly-wedded wife did. In "Beauty and the Beast" it is
Beauty who metamorphosizes Beast into human form and feeling, and in "The Frog King" the littlest princess gives the frog prince back his humanity. It is also, as we shall see, the female protagonist in the popular romance who brings about a humanizing triumph of ego over id in the popular romance hero.

Not only does the popular romance echo fairy tale elements of narrative, point of view, and characterization, but the popular genre shares in the psychological elements that make the fairy tale pleasing and satisfying to an audience. The fairy tale is significant, according to Bettelheim, because it addresses some very basic emotional needs and anxieties: "the need to be loved and the fear that one is thought worthless; the love of life, and the fear of death" (10). It is in addressing the need to be loved that the fairy tale is, of course, most akin to the popular romance novel. The fairy tale often sets up a lonely, despairing character (i.e. Cinderella, Rapunzel, or Snow White) and subsequently saves this character from forlornness through the love of another character (i.e. the prince). The fairy tale, writes Bettelheim, "does indicate that which alone can take the sting out of the narrow limits of our time on this earth: forming a truly satisfying bond to another. The tales teach that when one has done this, one has reached the ultimate in emotional security of existence" (10).
The fairy tale is very careful, according to Bettelheim, to define "a truly satisfying bond" as one that occurs with an appropriate mate. The fairy tale actually moves to resolve "oedipal difficulties" (Bettelheim 194). In several of the many variations of "Cinderella," the heroine nearly enters into marriage with her father. Bettelheim says this "could be interpreted as conforming to and expressing universal childish fantasies in which a girl wishes her father would marry her" (246). And of "Little Red Riding Hood" or "Little Red Cap," Bettelheim states that at least on one level it "deals with the daughter's unconscious wish to be seduced by her father (the wolf)" (175). Yet the fairy tale goes beyond this bond in favor of another. Cinderella ends up married to the prince, not her father. And Red Riding Hood is not overcome by the wolf, but is rescued by the hunter. Bettelheim concludes that the child reader's movement along with the heroine from an "unsatisfying bond" to a more "satisfying" one is psychologically beneficial. By following along with, for example, Cinderella's predicament and resolution, a child reader identifies with one who disentangles herself from an oedipal crisis and thus the child is afforded the confidence to do so as well.

In contrast, many critics of the popular romance say the romance heroine is stuck in an unsatisfying bond. Her love-interest demonstrates many characteristics of a father
figure. He is considerably older, more knowledgeable, and more experienced. Moreover, he treats the heroine as one who is to be coddled and protected. The romance heroine's bond is one rich in oedipal entanglements, and she does little to place herself on the level of a more adult and equal partnership. In this sense, the potential psychological benefits to readers of fairy tales and popular romances differ.

The psychological effects of fairy tales—the cathartic doing away with evil, the validation of "good" actions, the working out of adolescent and childhood conflicts, the satisfying of the need to be loved—will become relevant in a later discussion of the psychological effects of popular romance. There are many similarities between the elements of the fairy tale and the popular romance narrative: dark adventurous quests; indispensable helper characters; they-lived-happily-ever-after endings that give none of the specifics as to how hero and heroine live happily ever after; and clearly-identified heroes and heroines. The two narrative meet many of the same psychological needs and produce many of the same psychological effects. But to the extent that the fairy tale is clearly set in a world far far away and the popular romance narrative is steeped in the trappings of realism, that mate selection is psychologically appropriate in the fairy tale and slightly incestuous in the popular romance,
and that most fairy tales depict heroes and heroines who reach fulfilling selfhood while the popular romance puts forth one submissively dependent heroine after another, the two narratives do contain some striking dissimilarities as well. Do these lead to dissimilar effects, i.e. one is healthy, the other insidious--? One can speculate . . .
Productions of the imagination, writes Frye, are "rigidly conventionalized" (Scripture 36). Reveries, daydreams, conscious sexual fantasies are formulaic (36). Improvised drama, "from commedia dell'arte to guerrilla theater," contains a minimum of variables (36). And folktales, their plot-themes and motifs, "are predictable enough to be counted and indexed" (Frye 36). Frye was referring most probably to the work of the pioneering Russian analyst of the folktale, Vladimir Propp. Propp was the first to demonstrate systematically the formal and structural properties of the folktale. Propp's aim was to describe the folktale, according to its component parts and the relationships of these components to each other and to the whole. Although he makes no overt reference, Frye, in this chapter, connects a minimum of variables (36). And improvised drama, "from commedia dell'arte to guerrilla theater," conventionalizes sexual fantasies are formulatic (36). "Rigidity conventionalized" (Scripture 36). Reverses, productions of the imagination, writes Frye, are
Propp focused on a very limited, but very rich, narrative corpus. His 1928 study was based on 115 Russian folktales, specifically those from the Afanas'ev folktale collection (Propp xxi). He sifted through the material, "discarding all but the most basic patterns" (Toolan 14), then took those basic patterns and defined them "in terms of their function, that is, in terms of what the dramatis personae do" (Svatava Pirkova-Jakobson, in Propp xxi). He looked for constant functions and variable functions, and concluded that while characters of the tales might be variable, their functions were "constant and predictable" (Toolan 14). Propp numbered the functions "obligatory for the fairy tale" and classified them "according to their significance and position in the course of the narrative" (Svatava Pirkova-Jakobson in Propp xxi). He identified 31 key functions in the tales that (while not always appearing in every tale) always appeared in the same order. Propp's account, writes Gerald Prince, "is often considered to mark the birth of modern narratology and structural analysis of narrative and it has constituted a starting point for many influential models of narrative structure" (37-8).

Propp's morphology serves as a "starting point" for my study of the narrative structure of the popular romance. I contend that the popular romance narrative is, to borrow Frye's term, "rigidly conventionalized"—moreso even than most products of the imagination. In order to determine what
effect this very formulaic romance narrative has on its audience, it is necessary to study its form closely. Propp defended his close study of form with the following analogy: "Is it possible to speak about the life of a language without knowing anything about the parts of speech?" (15). So, I begin, as did Propp, with the "parts of speech."

Michael Toolan provides a minimalist definition of narrative: "All narratives involve the report of some state and some change or changes to that state" (14). The "state" Toolan speaks of echoes nicely the state Northrop Frye attributed to the beginning of the romance story, that "state of existence in which there is nothing to write about" (54). So, the tale begins with Little Red Cap happy and comfortable at home. Her mother then says to her, "Come, Little Red Cap, take this piece of cake and bottle of wine and bring them to your grandmother" (Grimm 101). In the tale "Little Red Cap" a change has been made, or is about to be made, to the original state. Propp's focus was on the changes to that state. Each change, each move away from that original state, he termed a function.

"Functions bring sequential changes to a specified initial situation," writes Toolan (15). Through mother asking Little Red Cap to deliver the cake and wine, Little Red Cap is up and out of the house and into the woods. A change has been made to the initial situation and the narrative action has begun. "The essence of a function,"
says Barthes, "'is the seed that it sows in the narrative, planting an element that will come to fruition later'" (as qtd. in Toolan 21). By taking Little Red Cap out of the house and into the woods, the above function brings Little Red Cap in direct line with the wolf, a meeting which leads inevitably to the tale's conflict. The function, writes Toolan, is "that by which the narrative is driven" (21). The function is the something that happens, the "something that can be summed up by a verb or a name of action" (Rimmon-Kenan 2). For example, "The hero is pursued" is a function.

It is important to note that Propp defined "function" as "an act of character" (21), and to note that while he observed characters changing from story to story, most often he observed that their functions or actions did not. Frye also connects characterization with function. He writes that characterization depends on function; "what a character is follows from what he has to do in the play" (Anatomy 171). Propp observed that the functions of characters serve as "stable, constant elements" in the tale, "independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled" (qtd. in Toolan 15). It is essential to the tale "Little Red Cap" that Red Cap be sent out on her errand and given a warning that inevitably she will fail to observe; it is not essential that that act come from her mother. Propp discovered in the Russian fairy tale that there is almost without fail a character issuing a
warning, a character performing villainous acts, and a character acted upon (a princess-type sought-after figure). But from tale to tale it is not the same character issuing the warning or performing the villainous acts. "One character in a tale is easily replaced by another," wrote Propp (87).

It is possible to index recurrent character types according to the actions characters perform. Propp noted seven basic character types that kept reappearing in the tales performing the same essential functions:

1. the villain  
2. the dispatcher  
3. the donor/provider  
4. the helper  
5. the hero  
6. the princess (+ father)  
7. the false hero. (Toolan 16)

The villain's "sphere of action" is to fight, struggle with, and pursue the hero (Propp 79). The dispatcher functions to send the hero off on his or her adventures (Prince 22). The donor provides the hero with a magical agent (Propp 79). The helper functions to transfer the hero from one place to another, to help liquidate the misfortune or lack, to help rescue the hero or heroine from pursuit, or in general, to help solve difficult tasks (Propp 79). The hero searches for something that is lacking, weds the heroine, suffers from the actions of the villain, suffers from the lack, and liquidates his or another character's
misfortune (Propp 80, Prince 40). The princess and her father assign difficult tasks and eventually reward the hero with marriage when the tasks are completed (Propp 79). The false hero "pretends to have accomplished what, in fact, the hero accomplished" (Prince 30).

These character types appear, for example, in "Little Red Cap." The mother functions as the dispatcher, Red Cap as the sought-after princess-victim, the wolf as the villain, and the huntsman as the hero. In "Cinderella," Cinderella is the princess figure, the prince her hero, her stepmother a villain, the birds and mice function as helpers, and the stepsisters take their turn as false hero(ine)s. The events these characters enact constitute the fundamental components of the story.

Propp counted 31 functions or events in the Russian folktales he examined. The 31 functions identified were, according to Michael Toolan, "[t]he only functions necessary to specify the essential action structure of the stories in [Propp's] corpus" (20). Propp arranged these 31 functions into a sequence that reflected the logical order of their appearance in the fairy tale. "The sequence of events has its own laws. The short story too has similar laws, as do organic formations. Theft cannot take place before the door is forced. Insofar as the tale is concerned, it has its own entirely particular and specific laws" wrote Propp (22). The
following constitute the governing laws, or **functions**, of the fairy tale as Propp saw them.

I. **ONE OF THE MEMBERS OF A FAMILY ABSENTS HIMSELF FROM HOME.**
   II. **AN INTERDICTION IS ADDRESSED TO THE HERO.**
   III. **THE INTERDICTION IS VIOLATED.**
   IV. **THE VILLAIN MAKES AN ATTEMPT AT RECONNAISSANCE.**
   V. **THE VILLAIN RECEIVES INFORMATION ABOUT HIS VICTIM.**
   VI. **THE VILLAIN ATTEMPTS TO DECEIVE HIS VICTIM IN ORDER TO TAKE POSSESSION OF HIM OR OF HIS BELONGINGS.**
   VII. **THE VICTIM SUBMITS TO DECEPTION AND THEREBY UNWITTINGLY HELPS HIS ENEMY.**
   VIII. **THE VILLAIN CAUSES HARM OR INJURY TO A MEMBER OF A FAMILY.**
   IX. **ONE MEMBER OF A FAMILY EITHER LACKS SOMETHING OR DESIRES TO HAVE SOMETHING.**
   X. **MISFORTUNE OR LACK IS MADE KNOWN; THE HERO IS APPROACHED WITH A REQUEST OR COMMAND; HE IS ALLOWED TO GO OR HE IS DISPATCHED.**
   XI. **THE SEEKER AGREES TO OR DECIDES UPON COUNTERACTION.**
   XII. **THE HERO LEAVES HOME.**
   XIII. **THE HERO IS TESTED, INTERROGATED, ATTACKED, ETC., WHICH PREPARES THE WAY FOR HIS RECEIVING EITHER A MAGICAL AGENT OR HELPER.**
   XIV. **THE HERO REACTS TO THE ACTIONS OF THE FUTURE DONOR.**
   XV. **THE HERO ACQUIRES THE USE OF A MAGICAL AGENT.**
   XVI. **THE HERO IS TRANSFERRED, DELIVERED, OR LED TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF AN OBJECT OF SEARCH.**
   XVII. **THE HERO AND THE VILLAIN JOIN IN DIRECT COMBAT.**
   XVIII. **THE HERO IS BRANDED.**
   XIX. **THE VILLAIN IS DEFEATED.**
   XX. **THE INITIAL MISFORTUNE OR LACK IS LIQUIDATED.**
   XXI. **THE HERO RETURNS.**
   XXII. **RESCUE OF THE HERO FROM PURSUIT.**
   XXIII. **THE HERO, UNRECOGNIZED, ARRIVES HOME OR IN ANOTHER COUNTRY.**
   XXIV. **A FALSE HERO PRESENTS UNFOUNDED CLAIMS.**
   XXV. **A DIFFICULT TASK IS PROPOSED TO THE HERO.**
   XXVI. **THE TASK IS RESOLVED.**
   XXVII. **THE HERO IS RECOGNIZED.**
   XXVIII. **THE FALSE HERO OR VILLAIN IS EXPOSED.**
XXIX. THE HERO IS GIVEN A NEW APPEARANCE.
XXX. THE VILLAIN IS PUNISHED.
XXXI. THE HERO IS MARRIED AND ASCENDS THE THRONE.

(26-63)

With the functions indexed, Propp then notes patterns within the sequence of the narrative. Certain functions appear as pairs: prohibition (function II) invites violation (III); struggle (XVI) results in victory (XVIII); and pursuit (XXI) meets with deliverance (XXII) (Toolan 16). Other clusters of functions serve some general purpose in the narrative. Functions 1-7 make up the preparation for the story. Functions 8-10 present the complications. And the later clusters of functions constitute transference of hero or heroine, struggle between hero and villain, return of the hero and his or her final recognition (Toolan 16).

Propp, near the conclusion of his monograph, provides a sample analysis of a tale. I draw from that sample to illustrate the application of Propp's methodology. The tale is "The Swan-Geese."

There lived an old man and an old woman: they had a daughter and a little son.

1. Initial situation.
'Daughter, daughter,' said the mother, 'we are going out to work and we will bring you back a little bun, sew you a little dress and buy you a little kerchief. Be wise, take care of your little brother, and do not leave the courtyard.'

2. Interdiction.

The elders went away,

3. Departure of the elders.
and the daughter forgot what they had ordered her to do. She placed her little brother on the grass under a window and ran out into the street and became absorbed in playing and having fun.

4. Violation of the interdiction.

The swan-geese flew down, seized the little boy and carried him away on their wings.

5. Villainy.

Of course, the story continues. The sister-hero leaves home in a quest to follow her brother. She happens upon helpers, the villain, and finally her brother. She seizes him, returns home pursued by the villain, and eventually is delivered from that pursuit back into safety. But the excerpt above is enough to show the application of numbered functions to the narrative. We see the development of the patterns noted by Propp. We see the presentation of an initial situation and the changes to that situation. We see prohibition and violation. We see the beginnings of struggle and the inevitable conflict.

In the next chapter, I decompose the popular romance narrative into its functional components, following the steps Propp set out. I am encouraged to follow Propp's methodology for as Michael Toolan writes, "... certain fictions rather remote from the Russian fairytale do seem to lend themselves to Proppian analysis without too much strain" (17).

The popular romance tale is one such fictional type. A narrative, as defined by Propp, begins with a reported
state. The given state of the popular romance novel is "woman without a man." Further, some change must occur to that state. The romance novel inevitably evolves from "woman without a man" to "woman with a man." More specifically, Propp deems a tale a tale when it proceeds from a "lack." Romance heroines such as Joceline Harris, Capri Jones, and Marya Hansen all begin their tales lacking a love interest. Finally, in snug coincidence, Propp concludes that a tale proceeds from a "lack" to a "marriage" or to "an escape from pursuit." Quite literally, the romance novel culminates in marriage or promise of marriage. The hero's pursuit of the heroine ultimately ends in weak-kneed swooning obtainment.
Propp applied his morphological methodology to 115 Russian folktales, a relatively small number considering that his conclusions have been extended to all Russian folktales, and ultimately to the tale in general. But Propp defended his sample study on the grounds that "if repetition is great, then one may take a limited amount of material" (24). A repeated pattern between the narrative components became evident in the 115 tales Propp examined. To examine more material, reasoned Propp, would have been redundant.

My morphology of the popular romance is based on what I have found in the close study of 12 series romance novels, and is supplemented by the observations of literary and feminist critics. I draw from Propp's methodology and the morphological groundwork lain by Janice Radway, who in 1984 determined that 13 general functions appear in the romance. I find that many of the functions Propp deemed applicable to the fairy tale also apply to the popular romance. Radway has omitted many of these, for she concerned herself with the very general workings of romance, rather than focusing on the specifics of the popular series romance.

The series romance is one of a romance line (e.g. Harlequin Romances, Candlelight Romances, Silhouette Romances) which is published monthly, appears in bookstores
and supermarkets under the same banner, and is mailed in packets to subscribers. Rarely is one series author distinguished from another, and rarely does one cover illustration deviate from another. I chose the series romance, for as Kay Mussell notes, "Series romances provide a baseline against which all other formulas of women's romance can be measured and differentiated, for they are the purest and simplest romance type" (Fantasy 30).

The series romance among women's fantasy romances provides, in Mussell's words, a "stripped-down" fantasy (Fantasy 37): heroine meets hero; problems of their own making keep them apart; they recognize their mutual love and reunite by the last page. I begin with a dozen series romances (see Primary Texts Used For Analysis, page 152). The majority of the series novels are Harlequin Presents, a line which Mussell defines as straightforward love stories that experiment with somewhat sophisticated contemporary situations—i.e. professional women in social relationships, single parenting, AIDS. Two of the novels (Good Morning, Miss Greene and Her Brother's Keeper) are Harlequin American Romance and Silhouette Special Edition. These are longer and, according to Mussell, "more titillating" (Fantasy 35). Not only are they slightly more explicit sexually, but social issues play a greater role. Both heroines are dedicated to their careers and—-they make this clear—-will
remain so after marriage; one hero is raising a daughter singly, and the other hero is an ex-convict.
3.1 The Roles of the Dramatis Personae in the Popular Romance

Before I string together the narrative actions of the popular romance, allow me first to introduce the actors and their roles. The following is a list of typical romance novel characters compiled from my own reading of the romance and from the critical work of Ann Rosalind Jones, Tania Modleski, Kay Mussell, Rosalind Coward, and Janice Radway. Six character types appear frequently:

1. The Heroine
2. The Hero
3. The False Heroine
4. The Male Rival
5. The Helper
6. The Aged Nurturer

Each will be discussed in turn below.

The Heroine

I begin with the heroine for she is the character with whom the romance reader most closely identifies. It is largely through her point of view that we come to know the story. The romance heroine correlates best to the Proppian role of hero. It is the romance heroine, like the Proppian hero, who suffers most noticeably from a lack. Consistently, what she lacks is love. Propp names two categories of heroes: the seeker-hero and the victim-hero. The seeker-hero 1) departs on a search, 2) reacts to demands, and 3) weds
(Propp 80). The victim-hero does only the last two. The romance heroine is a victim-hero, not one who actively searches for what she lacks, but instead one who reacts primarily to the demands of others.

In 1984, Janice Radway conducted a survey of romance readers. She found an enthusiastic group in the central midwestern community of Smithton, its state's second largest city (Radway takes pains not to name the state). Radway queried the Smithton readers as to the attributes of a good heroine. They replied that a good heroine has intelligence, a sense of humor, independence, and a fiery disposition (77, 123). The romance heroine has her submissive moments, but she goes on record slapping, biting, retorting, and insulting. While this is undoubtedly aggressive behavior, it is in almost all romance instances a response to the demands of another—notably the hero. In responding to the movements of the hero rather than instigating her own, the romance heroine consistently enacts the role of the victim-hero.

When provoked, she is aggressive and fiery, but when another lies prone or helpless before her the romance heroine displays the strongly feminine emotion of compassion. Writes Radway, "[The heroine] is always portrayed as unusually compassionate, kind, and understanding" (127).

'It's Stan, madam, . . . He says Klara has gone into labour, and the midwife is sick in bed with
bronchitis. Stan isn't sure if there's still enough
time to get Klara to the hospital, and he wants to
know if you could come and help.'

Jo placed her untouched cup of tea on the tray
and said calmly, 'Tell Stan I'll be at his house
... .' (Whittal 142)

The heroine's is a compassion and kindness mixed with
capability. According to Radway, the romantic heroine must
demonstrate that she can "transmute the sick into the
healthy" (127). She must reassure the reader (and the hero)
that she is indeed a "true" woman, "one who possesses all
the nurturing skills associated by patriarchal culture with
the feminine character" (127). Radway explains that in
popular romance it takes a "true" woman's combination of
"womanly sensuality and mothering capacities" to awaken and
intoxicate a man such as the hero (127).

Of course, the romantic heroine's physical beauty helps
to intoxicate the hero as well. According to Radway's
Smithton readers, ideal heroines "always have 'glorious
tresses' and 'sparkling' or 'smoldering' eyes, inevitably
'fringed by sooty lashes'" (126). Without fail, aspects
beyond the heroine's eyes and hair are noted as well.

Their eyes were caught by the fascinating jiggle
of her full breasts, which turned her man's cotton
shirt into an incredibly provocative garment. Their
heads swivelled as she passed by, drawn inexorably to
appreciated the way her stretch denim jeans moulded
the trim, taut, cheeky femininity of her bottom.
... . Keira, however, was blithely unaware of these
cursory appraisals. (Darcy 13)
While beautiful, say Radway's readers, romance heroines are "unaware of their beauty and its effect on others. As a consequence, they are never vain, nor do they preen in an effort to attract a man" (126). The heroine must not appear a conniving "adventuress," writes Tania Modleski (48). The romance novels are "careful to show that the girl never set out to get [the hero] and his goods" (Modleski 48). "This," adds Modleski, "is . . . a simple reflection of the double bind imposed upon women in real life: their most important achievement is supposed to be finding a husband; their greatest fault is attempting to do so" (48).

This double bind manifests in heroines as a sort of self-delusion. The romance heroine loves the hero but refuses for the longest time to acknowledge or accept that love, refuses to believe the hero loves her even though she longs for that love desperately, refuses to believe herself worthy of that love. This self-delusion protects the romance heroine from appearing an "adventuress." Modleski writes, "If a woman is chiefly deceiving herself about the nature of her feelings, she can't be accused of wilfully deceiving others, and, due to the uncertain state of her emotions, she can act inconsistently, thus presenting herself to the man as a charming enigma, without being suspected of deliberately trying to stir up his interest" (51). The romance heroine is beautiful without putting that beauty to scheming construction. She must possess an unself-conscious
beauty for the romance narrative to work. To achieve the
satisfying union at the end, the hero must give in to his
desire, thus the heroine must be an object of desire.

The heroine, it is important to note, is young, usually
between the ages of 18 and 29. Her immaturity often
contributes to her self-delusion; that, and the fact that
she is sexually inexperienced.

... it was perhaps not the stigma it had once been
to be a woman of over twenty-one with so limited a
sexual history that she was still actually a virgin,
but it was still something she preferred to keep to
herself; a vulnerable Achilles' heel, ... (Jordon,
Second Time 6)

The romance heroine may be a capable 29 year old running a
successful company, but she is still, very often, a virgin.
And if not a virgin, she has been celibate for a long time,
and unfulfilled even longer. The obvious message here is
that good girls, even grown-up career women who make mature
decisions daily, do not choose promiscuity. In romance, it
is only the conniving false heroines who freely welcome and
enjoy sex, and they are rarely rewarded with love or
marriage or any sense of fulfillment. Only in the present
romance under the spell of "true love" is the heroine
finally allowed her sexual awakening.

Initially, the romance heroine is, according to Ann
Rosalind Jones, in a state of "social limbo": "her family is
dead or invisible, her friends are few or none, her
occupational milieu is only vaguely filled in" (198). Like
the Proppian hero, the romance heroine has left home physically or emotionally--free from ties of support--and she suffers from a loss of identity. It is the romance hero who takes her home and restores her identity. There is little self-actualization for the heroine. For example, many heroines work, but rarely does the heroine's professional life mark her identity. Rarely is work enough.

... why did she still feel this need, this urge to change her life so completely? Was it because she was afraid that if she didn't, eventually there might come a time when her work was ALL that her life held? She gave a tiny shiver, not liking the pictures her mind was drawing for her. (Jordon, Second Time 172)

The priorities set down for the romance heroine, and in turn communicated to an audience who identifies with her, are man and family first, career second. These are values projected in novel after novel, and they carry the weight of indoctrination.

Ironically, the romance heroine's career (usually a professional role much sought after by men as well as women), rather than fulfilling the heroine, hangs on her like a prop. In romance, careers function as cosmetic glamor (Jones 207). Out of the dozen series romances before me, three heroines preside over companies, one is an oil company executive, another an efficiency troubleshooter, one an actress, one a nurse, one a student of music, one a teacher, one a parole officer, and one a dress designer. Yet rarely do their careers--most very demanding careers--impinge upon
their burgeoning love affairs. "Job duties in a specific workplace seem to be disposable ingredients," writes Jones (206). "Heroes or other men advancing their interests manipulate the heroine's employment without her knowledge and with incredible ease: agents are bribed, posts are found abroad, . . . leaves of absence are immediately available when the heroine needs time to track the hero down, or, more often, to wait for him to find her in a lyrical setting and to propose" (Jones 207). For the love relationship to develop fully the heroine's job must always be of secondary importance.

In short, the romance heroine is young, fiery, delusional, compassionate, beautiful, glamorously employed yet unencumbered with the demands of work, family, friends, or community. Most importantly, she faces a void in her life that calls into question the significance of her whole existence. The stage is set for a confrontational and passionate match-up. All that is needed for the story to begin is a hero who catches the heroine's eye. She may hate him at first, but the hero always catches her eye.

**The Hero**

Power, was her first impression, then arrogance. In his mid-thirties, his face very tanned, hard, his eyes curiously light . . . (Richmond 7)

The series romance has two essential characters upon which it focuses--the heroine and the hero. With the
emergence of the hero, the story and the romance begin. He's older than the heroine, usually by seven to ten years (Jones 198). He appears at first as a "rake" or a "mystery"—quiet, brooding, saturnine, uncommunicative (Jones 198). Yet, Radway's Smithton readers cite the qualities of humor and intelligence as necessary to a good hero as well (82). The citing of intelligence is puzzling. The hero is always blazingly successful in his professional life, so intelligence presumably plays a perceived role there. But he is never brainy or exceedingly verbal. Rarely does he quote great literature, philosophy, or Einstein's theory of relativity. Rarely does he demonstrate his knowledge of architecture, the stock market, or economics. Rather, such showy demonstrations are characteristics of a false hero. Radway herself found the Smithton readers' preference for an intelligent hero to be something of a mystery. In follow-up interviews the readers were vague as to the manifestations of intelligence. However, Radway notes that the high ranking of intelligence is "both consistent with the high value [the readers] place on books, learning, and education and their own upward mobility as well as a way of reaffirming male excellence and agentivity" (82). Too, there is some evidence that the Smithton women may recognize intelligence in the hero's ability to perceive, to understand uncannily the thoughts and motives of the woman before him.
Those cat's eyes of his seemed to stare into her soul and see the truth. (Richmond 27)

The hero is keyed in to the heroine. According to heroine Angelica from *Second Time Loving*, the hero seems to understand her need "almost by instinct" (Jordon 148). Repeatedly, deftly, the hero recognizes the heroine's need and answers it.

The Smithton readers define the hero as "The man who the writer gets you to like and wants the heroine to have" (Radway 132). However, aside from the moments when the hero is surprisingly perceptive of the heroine, when he performs brief tendermesses toward her, and when we slip momentarily into his point of view so as to witness his adoration of her, the hero is not very likable. He takes on more the attributes of a Proppian villain than hero. It is his "sphere of action" to taunt, fight, struggle with, and pursue the heroine.

He is very successful in the public world. He is, writes Jones, at the "top of unquestioned class and political hierarchies" (208). This economic and hierarchal security afford the romance hero the luxury, writes Modleski, of "bow[ing] to no man" (49). And he doesn't bow, not until the end of the romance novel, and then it is only to one woman—the heroine. He is diagnosed by critics and heroines alike as domineering and arrogant.
Staring at him, at this complete stranger, ... who had casually invited himself inside, into her cottage, who stared at her with insolent eyes, behaved with such casual arrogance, Sam lost control. (Richmond 8)

Beyond simply controlling and dominating, adds Radway, the romance hero hurts the heroine emotionally. His "power to wound [the heroine] emotionally by toying with her affections is demonstrated in vignette after vignette" (Radway 129).

'I'll provide Danny with the financial assistance he needs if you'll agree to marry me again and provide me with an heir. ...'

Jo had a curious sensation that the breath was being squeezed from her lungs, and she paled visibly. 'If this is intended as a joke, then it's in poor taste!' (Whittal 18)

The qualities of the romance hero, the qualities romance heroines knowingly or unknowingly desire, writes Rosalind Coward, are "age, power, detachment, the control of other people's welfare" (192). Yet these qualities—"power (the desire to dominate others); privilege (the exploitation of others); emotional distance (the inability to communicate); and singular love for the heroine (the inability to relate to anyone other than the sexual partner)—are, writes Coward, the very qualities feminists have chosen to ridicule (192). Questions and concerns abound regarding this masculine ideal. How can it be healthy to desire—as romance heroines and (presumably) readers do—involved with a man who is controlling, exploitative, uncommunicative, and
possessive? A concern is that women reading the romance will learn to reconcile themselves to, if not seek, this type of relationship. That is not a step beyond the confines of patriarchy, but a retreat into them.

Nevertheless, romance readers such as the Smithton group like the hero. They like this brusque, boorish man because, I believe, of the formulaic nature of the narrative. Since *Pamela* the same general events have been occurring. According to the formula, the hero's boorish acts are revealed in the end to be the result of his tormented love for the heroine. Knowing that this will be revealed in the end (and only the audience knows this, not the heroine), the romance audience forgives him and cheers him on his boorish way. In the above quoted sample, the hero tricks the heroine into a marriage for money. In the end he explains it was the only way he knew to get the heroine back. Little of his previously manipulative and inappropriate behavior is questioned, for the happy clinch at the end somehow justifies the questionable means. All of which communicates a double standard to the reader: men can behave abominably and be forgiven; women must be saints or no reward will be forthcoming.

All the power and domination in the hero act like a magnet on the heroine; that and the fact that the hero is, in Janice Radway's words, "physically pleasing" (105).
For a brief moment they were locked together, . . . She was frighteningly aware of the strength of the arms encompassing her, the solid wall of his chest upon the softness of her breasts, and his hipbone hard against her thigh. (Leigh 48)

He is physically pleasing, but never pretty. He is chiseled rather than soft. His face is made up of planes and angles and more often likened to granite than to a baby's bottom.

He wasn't good-looking in the fair-haired, smooth way which Giles had been. He was too rugged, too roughly hewn, too powerfully male to have that kind of appeal. (Jordon, Second Time 37)

The hero is, in the words of romance heroine Selina Anne Martin, "all man" (Richmond 33).

Sexual prowess, in the romance novel, is an attribute of a true man. The hero is often promiscuous, and if not flagrantly so, certainly more expert sexually than the innocent heroine. Heroes very often are "the objects of intense sexual interest, and have active sexual lives but refuse to settle down" (Coward 193). It is only the hero's intense and "overwhelming desire" for the heroine that leads him to marriage (193). Neither the heroine nor apparently the romance audience finds the hero's early promiscuity callous toward or disrespectful of women. Rather, in accordance with what Janice Radway found from the Smithton readers, the hero's promiscuity is attributed to "his [very male] virility and his fear of emotional involvement with calculating women" (130). These are attributions, it should be noted, which place little blame upon the male.
However, the successful romance hero is not too uncompromisingly male, too callous, nor too aggressive. There is in every ideal hero a chink in the armor. In the ideal romantic hero, explains Radway, "the terrorizing effect of his exemplary masculinity is always tempered by the presence of a small feature that introduces an important element of softness into the overall picture" (128). Throughout large portions of the romance novel the hero is gruff, demanding, and domineering, but he breaks down often enough (enough for the reader to "like" him) into tender utterances for the heroine to recognize his underlying gentleness. The Smithton readers describe their ideal hero in paired terms: "strong but gentle," "masculine but caring," "a he-man but a lover-boy, too" (129). Radway attributes this disjointed pairing to the hero's contradictory combination of "self-protective aggressiveness" and "underlying gentleness" (130). Actually, for the hero to obtain the heroine, that abrupt aggressive masculine behavior must be revealed as false, or as a "defensive facade," concludes Radway (168). In good romances, she writes, the hero's true personality is revealed to be kind and tender (168). "In bad romances [as evaluated by her readers], the hero's masculine behavior is never transformed totally" (Radway 168).

Thus the popular romance hero is a good, capable, tender man who because of challenging life experiences,
calculating women, and his own overflowing virility is relegated to hide behind a facade of gruff arrogance and unfulfilling promiscuity. It is, as stated earlier, the hero's function to rescue the heroine from her loss of identity, but, in turn, it is also her role to rescue him. Her compassion, sensuality, and nurturance allow the romance hero to recognize his truer gentler self, safe in the soft embrace of the heroine's arms.

Before the hero and heroine can unite and find their "true" selves, however, there are obstacles to overcome.

Male and Female Foils, Helpers, and Aged Nurturers

Obstacles in the romance narrative often take the form of male and female foils. In the series romance, however, rather than being a true obstacle or a true rival for the hero or heroine's affection, the foil is usually only a perceived obstacle. The other woman never really has a chance with the hero, but the heroine perceives her as a formidable obstruction. And while the male rival is barely afforded a second glance from the heroine, the hero inevitably fabricates a torrid affair between the two. Despite the problems they create, the love rivals in the series romance make only brief appearances. In the ideal romance, confirms Janice Radway, character foils are peripheral and are used only for "purpose of contrast" (172).
In contrast to the heroine's "sexual innocence, unself-conscious beauty, and desire for love," the female foil is typically in hot "self-interested pursuit of a comfortable social position" (Radway 131). When the false heroine makes an appearance, it is she who appears the "real scheming adventuress" (Modleski 51). According to Radway's Smithton readers, the Other Woman stands in sharp contrast to all the heroine is and should be: the heroine is sexually inexperienced, the female foil experienced; the heroine desires love, the foil does not; the foil desires wealth and position, the heroine does not; the heroine is not selfconscious, the foil vain; the heroine is nurturant, the foil demanding; and the heroine fears men where the foil toys with them (132). As the false heroine fails in the end (she always does), she becomes for readers a moral lesson as to what not to be.

The false heroine is, of course, beautiful like the heroine. In the popular romance she must be beautiful to constitute a real threat. While she shares beauty with the heroine, the false heroine shares background or lifestyle experience with the hero, and appears to be a more probable match than the heroine for the hero. But the false heroine, while young and beautiful and polished enough to pose a threat, is too old and familiar to possess the refreshing innocence ultimately necessary to attract the hero. The poorer, more fiery, less worldly heroine usually comes from
outside the hero's pool of love interests, and therefore is a woman like no other. The Other Woman in the popular romance is thus most akin to Propp's role of false hero, for it is she—with scarlet nails clinging possessively to the hero's arm—who pretends to accomplish what, in fact, the heroine accomplishes.

Male rivals too make attempts to accomplish what the hero accomplishes, although their attempts are vain, bungling, and uninspired. "Male rivals," writes Radway, "are very shadowy figures in the ideal romance. While they do appear, they are described rather sparingly and almost never prove even momentarily attractive to the heroine" (131).

... she'd had the most overwhelming desire to lean against him, slide her arms around him, be held, kissed. And that was the craziest thing of all—because she was still in love with Paul. Yet she couldn't even conjure up his face. Only Devlin's... (Richmond 67)

It's difficult to remember these love interests' names, let alone their faces, for they get little description and hold little interest for the reader or for the heroine. They therefore pose no real threat to the forthcoming conquest of the hero.

On the path to overcoming the obstacles—be they love rivals, miscommunications, or pride—the hero and heroine are provided with helpers. As Kay Mussell noted, the series romance rarely complicates its plot with characters other than the hero and heroine, but helpers do appear.
occasionally to ease the conflict. Popular romance helpers function much as do Propp's: they help to transfer the heroine or hero from one place to another; they help liquidate the all-important lack; they help to solve difficult miscellaneous tasks. In the popular romance, helpers appear as best friends who arrange chance and unsuspected meetings between the hero and heroine (Law of Possession), as co-workers who provide the hero with the secret location of the runaway heroine (Second Time Loving), as brothers who aid the hero in the scheme to win back the heroine (Valley of the Devil), and as sisters who tactfully slip from the room providing the hero and heroine a moment alone (The Land of Maybe).

There is one character role that appears repeatedly in the series romance but receives little mention from critics and has only slim correlation with Propp's character roles—the aged nurturer. The aged nurturer is academic mentor, grandfather, mother, father, adopted father, aunt—a figure who in the heroine's or hero's past provided nurturance, but because of death or distance or age or circumstance no longer can. Such characters function, I believe to demonstrate that the hero and heroine are capable of a fruitful relationship. In addition, the inevitable absence of the aged nurturer helps create the void that the growing love relationship must fill. If anything, this role correlates with Propp's donor/provider role. In Russian
folktales, the donor provides the hero with the magical agent necessary to succeed in his task. The aged nurturer, in comparison, provides the romance heroine/hero with the early nurturance that enables them to love later.
3.2 Defense and Support for the Construction of a Popular Romance Morphology

In the following section, I follow Propp's lead and enumerate the functions of the dramatis personae in the order dictated by the popular romance narrative. The play action of the popular romance novel is often synopsized by romance readers and critics, as follows.

... the formula rarely varies: a young, inexperienced, poor to moderately well-to-do woman encounters and becomes involved with a handsome, strong, experienced, wealthy man, older than herself by ten to fifteen years. The heroine is confused by the hero's behavior since, though he is obviously interested in her, he is mocking, cynical, contemptuous, often hostile, and even somewhat brutal. By the end, however, all misunderstandings are cleared away, and the hero reveals his love for the heroine, who reciprocates. (Modleski 36)

The elements necessary to the popular romance narrative include a "decent" heroine who is sometimes "misled" or deluded, "a powerful hero," their mutual attraction, and "a number of difficult circumstances to be overcome before the happy resolution of the affair" (Coward 189). I have expounded already on the attributes of the heroine and hero. They are attractive, successful, magnetic characters. But if they meet and marry within the first chapter there is no story. What drives the popular romance is the conflict, the obstacles that keep the fated lovers apart. While occasionally the conflict is a result of something material
(e.g. different class backgrounds), according to Kay Mussell, it usually "derives from an adversarial relationship between male and female characters" (Fantasy 8). The two misjudge, misperceive, misunderstand, distrust, and, to a degree, fear each other. "For a really good romance," concurs Rosalind Coward, "there must be either some misjudgment by one or both of the protagonists, ... as when a basically good heroine or hero is misperceived by the other as bad, calculating or promiscuous" (189). Hero, heroine, attraction, obstacles of misperception, clarifying confrontation, then finally reunion: according to critics, these are the basic elements of the popular romance.

It is my goal, however, to uncover the specific functions of the popular romance and see how the narrative components work together to achieve their end. To do so I reduce a 200-odd page novel to twenty three functions. When Propp did this, many raised the question of reductionism. In Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction, Michael Toolan asks whether it is defensible for Propp to claim that 31 and only 31 functions are necessary to specify the essential action of the folktale narrative (20). He states that Propp relies on "intuitionism," and questions the defensibility of this methodology. In the end, however, Toolan finds legitimacy in the fact that whole groups, whole communities, stand in substantial (albeit intuitive)
agreement as to what is necessary to a specific genre or corpus. Toolan writes,

... we do readily find groups of readers (even whole communities) disclosing substantial agreement over what is essential and non-essential in plot, characterization and so on--disclosing, in short, a common grasp of structure. This generality of agreement and commonality of grasp are the essential justification for the inductive speculations of Propp, Barthes, and others. (20)

There are large groups which agree ultimately as to what is typical and atypical of the popular romance. In defense of my particular brand of reductivism I call upon the specific community Radway found in Smithton.

Radway's readers demonstrate "a common grasp of structure" which supports the structural findings of such popular romance critics as Modleski, Coward, and Mussell. In Smithton they agree that essential to the popular romance are two people "who come together for one reason or another, grow to love each other and work together solving problems along the way" (Radway 65). Indeed, for the Smithton readers, the most striking characteristic of the ideal romance is "its resolute focus on a single, developing relationship between heroine and hero" (Radway 122). Radway then moved beyond the generalities of the romantic relationship and probed specifics. She wanted to know of these readers the key ingredients to a romantic story. They replied, 1) "a happy ending," 2) "a slowly but consistently developing love between hero and heroine," and 3) "some
detail about heroine and hero after they've gotten together" (67). What doesn't belong in a romance are 1) rape, 2) a sad ending, and 3) explicit sex, physical torture of the heroine or hero, or bed-hopping (Radway 73). A happy ending, especially, is essential to the Smithton readers. Nearly all believe that "an unhappy ending excludes a novel that is otherwise a romantic love story from the romance category" (Radway 99).

Radway went so far as to reinforce this community's agreement over what is essential to popular romance structure by plugging it into a Proppian-like morphology. She found that when "Propp's method for determining the essential narrative structure of folktales is applied to these particular novels, it becomes clear that ... these stories are all built upon a shared narrative structure" (Radway 133). Radway posited a sequence of thirteen narrative functions that recurred in the Smithton's readers' favorite books.

1. The heroine's social identity is destroyed.
2. The heroine reacts antagonistically to an aristocratic male.
3. The aristocratic male responds ambiguously to the heroine.
4. The heroine interprets the hero's behavior as evidence of a purely sexual interest in her.
5. The heroine responds to the hero's behavior with anger or coldness.
6. The hero retaliates by punishing the heroine.
7. The heroine and hero are physically and/or emotionally separated.
8. The hero treats the heroine tenderly.
9. The heroine responds warmly to the hero's act of tenderness.
10. The heroine reinterprets the hero's ambiguous behavior as the product of previous hurt.
11. The hero proposes/openly declares his love for/demonstrates his unwavering commitment to the heroine with a supreme act of tenderness.
12. The heroine responds sexually and emotionally.
13. The heroine's identity is restored. (Radway 134)

Radway's morphology reflects well the narrative action of the dozen paperbacks before me, but in its generality falls short of including some essential functions that appear repeatedly in the texts. Thus for my morphology, I build upon Radway's and elaborate further with my own findings and the critical findings of my secondary sources. Like Propp, I provide a brief summary of the essence of each function, then follow with examples. As did Propp, I find "the examples far from exhaust [the] material. They are given only as samples. . . . [and] only illustrate and show the presence of the function" (Propp 25).
3.3 A Morphology for the Popular Romance Narrative

What follows is my morphology for the series romance.

I. THE HEROINE MEETS AND REACTS ANTAGONISTICALLY TO THE HERO.
II. A THREAT IS ADDRESSED TO THE HEROINE.
III. THE THREAT IS RIDICULED.
IV. HEROINE ACKNOWLEDGES ATTRACTION FOR HERO.
V. CIRCUMSTANCES FORCE THE HEROINE AND HERO TOGETHER.
VI. THE HERO RESPONDS AMBIGUOUSLY TO THE HEROINE.
VII. THE HEROINE PERCEIVES THE HERO'S ATTENTIVE BEHAVIOR TO BE MOTIVATED SOLELY BY SEXUAL INTEREST.
VIII. THE HEROINE RESPONDS TO THE HERO'S BEHAVIOR WITH ANGER.
IX. THE HERO RETALIATES BY PUNISHING THE HEROINE.
X. THE HERO ATTEMPTS TO TAKE POSSESSION OF THE HEROINE.
XI. THE HEROINE SUBmits BRIEFLY TO THE POSSESSION.
XII. THE HEROINE AND HERO ARE SEPARATED.
XIII. THE HEROINE AND HERO ARE TRANSFERRED AND DELIVERED TEMPORARILY.
XIV. THE HEROINE EXHIBITS NURTURANCE.
XV. THE HERO TREATS THE HEROINE TENDERLY.
XVI. THE HEROINE RESPONDS WARMLY TO THE HERO'S ACT OF TENDERNESS.
XVII. THE HEROINE SECRETLY ACKNOWLEDGES LOVE FOR HERO.
XVIII. THE HEROINE GROWS DESPONDENT AT THE HERO'S APPARENT LACK OF RECIPROCAL LOVE.
XIX. THE HEROINE RETREATS OR FLEES.
XX. THE HERO PURSUES THE HEROINE.
XXI. THE HERO OPENLY DECLARES HIS LOVE FOR THE HEROINE.
XXII. THE CONFLICT IS RESOLVED.
XXIII. THE HEROINE'S IDENTITY IS RESTORED.

Discussion

As does every tale, the popular romance begins with an initial situation. The heroine is introduced by name and status. We find her, as noted before in a state of
"social limbo" (Jones 198). "The mood of the romance's opening pages," explains Radway, "is nearly always set by the heroine's emotional isolation and her profound sense of loss" (135). Rather than characterize this displaced state of lost identity—as did Radway—as the first function, I consider it indicative of the initial situation. In the romance narrative we are not privy to the actions that create the "social limbo" state; instead it is relayed as a present and ongoing situation—the result of past actions or an intrinsic nature.

The initial "limbo" situation of the romance heroine maintains some of the particularities of Propp's Function I, absentation (see Propp's morphology, page 53). The absentation of Propp's Function I often manifests in "the death of parents" or in the departure of "members of the younger generation" (Propp 26). The romance heroine, similarly, is removed from "a familiar, comfortable realm usually associated with her childhood and family" (Radway 134). For example, her grandfather has died, forcing her to quit her job and lifestyle in order to take over and run his company (An Unequal Partnership); or, because of attending to her sister's illness instead of her own affairs, her business has gone under, forcing her to work in a foreign place (One Girl At A Time); or she has abandoned her career, bland
fiance', and home to care for a deceased friend's child (Law of Possession). We meet the romance heroine in a state when her sense of identity is soundly shaken, for in addition to being displaced and isolated, she also demonstrates or admits to a profound lack of feminine fulfillment.

... she ... felt this emptiness, this yearning, this need to be fulfilled as a woman. (Jordan, Second Time 33)

In typical storytelling fashion, when a lack is demonstrated there is impetus to fill that lack. The romance story begins with the introduction of the hero.

I. THE HEROINE MEETS AND REACTS ANTAGONISTICALLY TO THE HERO.

Nina threw back her head, defiance in every line of her trembling frame. ... 'I hate you, Anton Lakitos! she spat at him. 'I despise the very sight of you!' (Reid 23)

In the popular romance the heroine must distinguish herself from the scheming adventuress types. Her instant animosity for the hero serves to do this. Writes Modleski, "The woman's determination to hate the hero at once absolves her of mercenary motives" (49). Once established as fiery but innocent of schemes, the heroine is in a position to vie for the hero's love and fortune.
II. A THREAT IS ADDRESSED TO THE HEROINE.

'Don't thank me yet, Nina Lovell. You have no idea what my terms for helping you are going to be.'

. . . 'Th—that sounded very much like a threat to me,' she whispered shakily as the bedroom door closed quietly behind them.

Anton Lakitos turned her in his arms, forcing her with the superior power of his will to look at him. . . . 'It was much more than a threat, my beautiful nymph,' he murmured huskily, his arms folding her hard against him. 'It was a vow . . .' (Reid 45-6)

Typically, in the folktale narrative Propp found that a threat or warning was addressed to the hero (Function II, interdiction). In romance the threat is addressed to the heroine—the threat of being possessed by the hero.

III. THE THREAT IS RIDICULED.

Involvement with Taggart Smith . . . or any other man . . . was the very last thing she wanted! (Green 41)

The threat of possession is presented, and immediately the heroine scoffs at it. She hates the man, or has rejected the idea of romance. Certainly, she would not allow herself to become enmeshed in a relationship. In the tales Propp analyzed, the villain usually enters at the violation of the interdiction or warning. At this point it is the villain's "role . . . to disturb the peace of a happy family" (Propp 27). In the popular romance, the hero enters bringing with him
the threatening prospect that causes the heroine's reactionary ridicule or dismissal. As stated earlier, the romance hero often takes on characteristics Propp attributed to the villain. As it was the Proppian villain's role to disturb, so too does the romance hero disturb--and he specifically disturbs the heroine by threatening her lackluster status quo. It should be noted (for the avid romance reader who knows the formula knows this) that the threat may be scoffed at, but it is no empty threat--the hero will possess the heroine. Her brave but meaningless dismissal of the threat of entanglement only serves to further separate her from mercenary types and make her more attractive to hero and reader.

IV. HEROINE ACKNOWLEDGES ATTRACTION FOR HERO.

The physical contact between them was minimal, but Mike was appalled to discover that her pulse-rate seemed to have doubled. (Gibson 64)

Here begins the sexual awakening of the heroine. In many cases she is virginal without any prior sexual experience. In other instances, the romance heroine has had previous relationships but feels resoundingly platonic about them: "Even when she had been engaged, sexual desire had never strongly motivated her" (Jordan, Rival 39-40). It takes the hero to arouse her and send her pulses rocketing, to awaken within her "a latent
sensuality she had never dreamed she possessed" (Jordan, Rival 149).

V. CIRCUMSTANCES FORCE THE HEROINE AND HERO TOGETHER.

'You must understand that your grandfather was very concerned about you, Fliss. . . . He was anxious if anything should happen to him, that you should be taken care of—at least until you officially come of age. And so--'
'So?' she demanded impatiently.
'And so, until you are twenty-one, he has appointed Brandon Carradine to be your legal guardian.' (King 72)

In the popular romance, some circumstance serves to bring together a couple whose animosity would probably keep them apart (despite their strong mutual attraction). In the series books before me, hero and heroine are snowbound (Good Morning, Miss Greene); she is foster parent to his allegedly illegitimate child (Law of Possession); they are equal yet unwilling partners in the running of a business (An Unequal Partnership); he is her legal guardian (Dark Guardian); he is her boss (One Girl At A Time); they share a duplex (Second Time Loving); she is his landlord, he her tenant (Rival Attractions); his brother is marrying her sister (The Land of Maybe); and, of course, there is the marriage of convenience (No Way to Begin and Valley of the Devil) where in exchange for money or protection the heroine weds the hero.
VI. THE HERO RESPONDS AMBIGUOUSLY TO THE HEROINE.

She simply couldn't fathom out this baffling man. An arrogant, ruthless, cynical man who was nevertheless capable of playing the piano with such feeling that it could almost reduce her to tears; a man who, judging by his single status and reputation as a playboy, was incapable of committing himself to any one woman. And yet he was now looking at her as if her welfare was of the utmost importance to him...as if she genuinely mattered to him... (Gibson 91-2)

The heroine, whether due to her own misperceptions or to the hero's baffling actions, is confused by the hero. She simply can't figure him out, and his motives escape her. One moment he appears arrogant and ruthless, the next compassionate and caring. It is a convention of the popular romance for the hero to be granite-hard masculine with a small tender break in the facade. Repeatedly, the dual nature of the hero's character leads the heroine to misjudge him.

VII. THE HEROINE PERCEIVES THE HERO'S ATTENTIVE BEHAVIOR TO BE MOTIVATED SOLELY BY SEXUAL INTEREST.

The tenderness in that warm, seductive mouth was a sheer hypocrisy. Luke was simply amusing himself with her. (Gibson 90)

The only thing the heroine is sure of is the hero's desire for her. It is, after all, demonstrated in one bone-crunching embrace after another. So, faced with the ambiguity of his personality, the heroine surmises that
the hero is only attempting to seduce her and that love plays no part in his machinations.

VIII. THE HEROINE RESPONDS TO THE HERO'S BEHAVIOR WITH ANGER.

Mike flung his hand away. '... it's your cue to say goodnight and go home!' Her mouth curled disdainfully. Did he think that she was trying to flirt with him? That she welcomed his casual, meaningless caresses? (Gibson 90-1)

Casual sex is not for the popular romance heroine. And empty seductions anger her almost as much as her own desires billowing out beyond her control. So she responds coldly to the hero, managing to avert a number of his advances.

IX. THE HERO RETALIATES BY PUNISHING THE HEROINE.

... she glanced down at her left wrist and saw the ring of faint shadows from where she had been 'assisted' out of his penthouse and into the cab. ... (King 79)

While the proximity of the romance hero's body and the touch of his caresses do much to disturb the heroine, so too does his biting cynicism and powerful, sometimes angry, control. Mostly in response to the heroine (for in the end we find the hero is as frustratedly enamored as the heroine) the hero acts in a punishing manner—testing, interrogating, verbally attacking the heroine, and roughly handling her. In some
instances he is responding to the heroine's coldness, to his perception that she put herself unnecessarily in danger, or to the sight of her dispensing her favors elsewhere when he so achingly wants them for himself. In other instances, the punishment is more cruel and less clearly motivated. Often the hero mocks the heroine's professional capabilities, questions her ethics, or deprives her of her freedoms. Again, when held up to the Proppian model, the romance hero seems most closely aligned with the role of villain. In Propp's Function VIII (villainy) it is the villain, like the romance hero, who torments at night and declares war by day (Propp 34).

X. THE HERO ATTEMPTS TO TAKE POSSESSION OF THE HEROINE.

'You belong to me now!' Before she could do more than gasp out a protest, she was in his arms, and the kiss was hard and punishing, but staking claim all over again. (Reid 60)

The romance hero attempts again and again to possess the heroine. At their most obvious, these possession attempts are sexual. Episodes of near or actual sexual possession occur repeatedly throughout the romance novel, and tend to increase in length and intensity as the novel progresses. In subtle moments, the hero is slowly coming to possess (through brief tendernesses) the heroine's heart as well. But rarely
does he know of this possession or believe it possible: thus in frustration, he attempts possession in an arena where little ambiguity exists between the couple—in lovemaking.

XI. THE HEROINE SUBMITS BRIEFLY TO THE POSSESSION.

For the space of a long, breathless second, she hesitated . . . and then—whether bewitched by the moonlight and the musky closeness of his body or driven by the mindless urgings of her own hormones—. . . she fell in with his step. (Green 92)

The heroine is overwhelmed by her physical desires and growing love for the hero, and when he advances she inevitably submits. As stated above, the episodes of possession occur repeatedly throughout the novel and tend to increase in intensity. What begins as a feather-light kiss may end in an act of consummation.

In fairy tales, Propp notes that "the hero mechanically reacts to the employment of magical or other means" (30). Jean Radford has observed that the magic which subdued forces in early romance "is in today's romance represented . . . as the magic and omnipotent power of sexual desire" (10). Echoing older conventions, the popular romance heroine submits, almost powerless against the spell of her own desire. The villain casts the spell in
Propp's function VIII (villainy). Here, it is the hero who holds the heroine spellbound.

In some instances of the series romance, the heroine, at this point in the narrative, does submit completely in a physical sense. But even then the possession is not absolute. Neither the heroine nor the hero has professed love. The heroine may give of her body, but she does not give of her whole heart without obtaining that particular commitment.

But then, as she lifted her face to offer those fateful words which would commit her to him forever, she saw that the dark gleam was back in his eyes, and, on a lusty growl, he picked her up and took her back to bed. And any thought of using words of love to him died at that moment. His own feelings were all too clear. Physical, nothing more, nothing less. (Reid 136)

Still, in many other novels of romance, the physical act of lovemaking is not consummated until "those fateful words" are uttered. The heroine often submits to the advances of the hero, then regains enough composure to rebuff him. Circumstances may also interrupt heated moments that neither heroine nor hero would likely end--workmen downstairs, the unexpected arrival of the other woman or the other man, telephone calls, storms, etc. And surprisingly often, the hero's decorum puts a stop to moments of near-possession:
'I want you, Angelica,' he told her huskily. 'Right now there's nothing I want more than to take you to bed and make love to you, but I can't...' (Jordan, Second Time 80)

So, while the heroine may submit physically at this point in the narrative, she does not yield everything. The crack in her resolve, though, is enough to spur on the hero and the hopes of the audience.

XII. THE HEROINE AND HERO ARE SEPARATED.

She found that entangled with her growing physical awareness of Daniel was a knotted thread of suspicion. (Jordan, Second Time 53)

Here, the rift that has been building since hero and heroine first laid eyes on each other culminates and forces the two to separate physically or emotionally. The conflict, the obstacle, the misunderstanding overshadows the growing attraction and causes tentative feelings of love to turn to bitterness.

The conflict manifests in various obstacles. The hero is caught with the other woman. The hero assumes the heroine is involved with another. A "spoiled brat" heroine refuses to grow up (Mussell, Fantasy 35). The heroine's career ambitions clash with the hero's (Mussell, Fantasy 35). The heroine refuses to be with a hero who apparently lusts after her but doesn't love her. Class distinctions keep the two apart. Even
remnants of the heroine or hero's paternal relationship can haunt the development of the current relationship:

'I didn't dare hope that you might love me. You see, all my life my father let me know how unsatisfactory he found me as a daughter... as a woman--' (Jordan, Rival 185)

Whatever wedge separates the two lovers, it is their own weaknesses, insecurities, poor communication skills, and doubts that take them an almost insurmountable distance apart. Mussell writes, "Lovers rarely attempt to correct false impressions because they do not wish to appear vulnerable by admitting their love prematurely. Characters go to great lengths to resist their feelings" (Fantasy 35).

He wished he had had the courage to tell her how he felt as they made love, but he had been terrified that if he did she would withdraw from him... (Jordan, Rival 166)

In the midst of the conflict rarely does one character step forward and say "Let me explain." And in the rare moment when one attempts to do so, the other is not listening.

XIII. THE HEROINE AND HERO ARE TRANSFERRED AND DELIVERED TEMPORARILY.

Nina and Anton were supposed to spend a fortnight on the island, but stayed a month, and during that time found a certain kind of peace with each other that Nina instinctively knew would not survive the return to reality. (Reid 135)
In the fairy tale, Propp noted that at some point the hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of search (Function XV, spatial transference between two kingdoms, guidance) (Propp 50). The popular romance retains this convention in its temporary transference of the hero and heroine to a place free from conflict, to a place where they find the object of their search—each other. This break in the conflict is a pastoral interlude of sorts. In this place of transference—a deserted island, an overgrown and secluded orchard, an empty windswept beach, a two-seater jeep driven deep into the backcountry—the heroine can see the hero and the hero can see the heroine in a truer light. The two reveal more of what they feel, and, in this place, the text allows the reader to see how idyllic the two would be with differences resolved.

XIV. THE HEROINE EXHIBITS NURTURANCE.

All she knew was that everything else inside her had given way to make room for a mammoth yearning to take care of Alex the way no one else had ever bothered to. . . . She wanted to put his needs first, before everything else . . . . (Coughlin 156)

In the fairy tale Propp noted a point in the narrative where the hero reacted to some test. In Function XIII (the hero's reaction), the hero either withstood or did not withstand a test (Propp 42).
Likewise, the romance heroine is tested, and always she passes. Some crucial circumstance arises in the romance narrative where either the heroine can respond with care and nurturance, or she can walk away. The romance heroine, without fail, responds compassionately. She soothes the small boy who misses his deceased mother (Law of Possession). She sits endless nights at the bedside of her sick father (No Way to Begin). She delivers babies (Valley of the Devil), pleads for the benefit of her employees (An Unequal Partnership), and directs business to the local, industrious, and hungry craftsmen (One Girl At A Time). And, of course, when necessary she bathes the wounds of the vulnerable hero. The reader must see the heroine in a nurturant, compassionate light, for, to paraphrase Radway, only the virtues of a "true" woman can break down the barriers surrounding the hero and ultimately domesticate him (127).

XV. THE HERO TREATS THE HEROINE TENDERLY.

Any doubts that had accompanied Daisy through the door vanished, obliterated by the concern in his eyes. It seemed bottomless, as though it went straight through to his soul. (Coughlin 176)

Tender moments can begin quite early, as in Chapter One of Second Time Loving where the hero tends to the sick heroine. But they usually increase in frequency and
intensity as the book progresses. When the conflict between the two appears most insurmountable, the hero often performs an act of tenderness significant enough to cause the heroine to question her dismissal of him as arrogant and cynical.

XVI. THE HEROINE RESPONDS WARMLY TO THE HERO’S ACT OF TENDERNESS.

She had been determined to dislike Luke from the beginning, determined to think the worst of him. To discover, as she had this afternoon, that he was capable of tolerance, even of kindness, disturbed her for some inexplicable reason. She didn't want to admit that he might have any redeeming qualities, didn't want to find her attitude towards him changing. (Gibson 63)

In taking a second look at the many aspects and idiosyncrasies of the hero's character, the heroine is warmed by what she sees. Here, after all, she surmises, may be a humane, caring man. And, on that thought, her cold defenses thaw.

Note that the heroine can only see the hero as "all bad" or "all good." When he shows any redeeming features at all, his past boorishness is quickly forgiven. Feminist critics ask, "Why should inappropriate behavior be forgiven?" What could possibly excuse snide remarks, unwelcome advances, or rough handling? Romance readers respond, "Because he loves her secretly and intensely."

XVII. THE HEROINE SECRETLY ACKNOWLEDGES LOVE FOR HERO.
I love him! she acknowledged despairingly. (Leigh 106)

The heroine, eventually, can no longer hold off the haunting interdiction. She loves the hero. At this point she acknowledges that love to herself and to the reader, but not to the hero. Kay Mussell observes that the hero very often has "a reputation as a lover of beautiful women." By the heroine refusing "to become one of his harem, and by holding out for marriage and monogamy" she actually "tames the stud" (Fantasy 36). While "taming the stud" may fulfill feminine readers' fantasies, I do not attribute conscious intentions of this sort to the heroine. She believes that the hero does not return her love. Rather than risk humiliation and denigration, she says nothing of her feelings.

XVIII. THE HEROINE GROWS DESPONDENT AT THE HERO'S APPARENT LACK OF RECIPROCAL LOVE.

... she had to know the truth. 'You're with Ella because you want to be. What you said to me about letting her down lightly was just talk, wasn't it? You had no intention of leaving her for me!'

Impassively Vin regarded her, then with a lift of his shoulders he went to the door... The door opened and closed, and Tansy sank on to her chair and buried her head in her hands, mourning for a man who had never existed, and a happiness that could never be hers. (Leigh 167)

The heroine is in love with the hero but does not reveal the extent of that love to him. Yet, she is still
in close contact with him, often seeing him on a daily basis. And the closeness of unrequited love is torment for her.

XIX. THE HEROINE RETREATS OR FLEES.

Hurriedly she stuffed her belongings into her cases, her fingers as urgent and frantic as her thoughts. She must not be here when Daniel woke up in the morning. (Jordan, Second Time 159)

The heroine runs from the hero. In her eyes, she is running from a relationship that offers nothing but limited kindness, from a union that is nothing but sex and childbearing, nothing but the convenience of security and protection. The heroine believes that the hero, knowing of her love, will do anything but fold her in his arms and whisper the words, "I love you too." So, she retreats within herself, packs up, leaves town, and refuses his calls.

XX. THE HERO PURSUES THE HEROINE.

'Daniel.' Her hand went to her chest and her heart started to pound. 'What ...? How did you ...?' (Jordan, Second Time 179)

In the fairy tale, Propp noted that the hero is pursued (Function XXI, pursuit, chase). In popular romance, the heroine is pursued, and the hero is her pursuer. Often it's simply a case of him catching up to her. In other instances he steps in and averts some
danger the heroine has stumbled upon—meetings with
crazed real estate clients (Rival Attractions), a
drug-smuggling scam (One Girl At A Time), or a vengeful
suitor (No Way to Begin).

XXI. THE HERO OPENLY DECLARES HIS LOVE FOR THE HEROINE.

'Will you marry me, my darling?' (Jordan, Rival 186)

When the hero catches up with the heroine he
demonstrates and professes his own suffering obsession.
He pours out to the heroine the full force of his desire
and love. The hero, in this function, is tamed and
domesticated. At this point, writes Modleski, he "is
brought to acknowledge the preeminence of love and the
attractions of domesticity at which he has, as a rule,
previously scoffed" (17). In turn, the heroine submits
completely, responding sexually and emotionally.

Here, the popular romance morphology resonates of
Propp's Function XVIII (victory) and Function XXII
(rescue). For it is at this point that the villainy is
defeated. The arrogant cruelty of the hero ends. The
hero's baser demands (those of the id in Freudian terms)
succumb to gentler passions (those of the ego). And the
heroine, by finally submitting to being "caught," is
freed from pursuit, for that which she feared was
pursuing her was, in actuality, what she hoped for.
Propp found that "[a] great many tales end on the note of rescue from pursuit" (Propp 58). For the popular romance, the end is close in sight. But first, there are misunderstandings to clear up.

XXII. THE CONFLICT IS RESOLVED.

'We are good together, you and I, Nina. You know we are. Don't throw it all away on a few crazy misunderstandings.' (Reid 182)

Usually, at this point the hero and heroine are blissfully in each other's arms, but in some instances they are shouting accusations and explanations still. In either case, each has the other's complete attention, and the two manage eventually to communicate. In doing so, the misunderstandings are cleared away. Both are prompted to reinterpret the other's previous ambiguous behavior. Further, the misdoings (usually those of the hero)—the testing, the attacking, the romps with the rival—are forgiven. All that is false—the false hero, the false villainy of the real hero (for he either did not intend to treat the heroine intolerably or she misunderstood his unacceptable behavior), the hero's supposed attraction to the other woman—is exposed (much as in Propp's Function XXVIII, exposure) (62).

XXIII. THE HEROINE'S IDENTITY IS RESTORED.
'This is when we make our vows to one another,' Charlotte told him huskily. 'This is when we make the promises that we'll never break. Make love to me, Oliver.'

'All the days of my life,' he promised huskily. 'All the days of my life.' (Jordan, Rival 187)

The lack is liquidated. No longer in a state of social limbo, but in position beside the man she loves, the heroine is fulfilled. Her identity is defined clearly by her own and the hero's love and desire. This is made apparent in little more than a page and a half at the conclusion of the romance novel. Each popular series romance includes some happy detail after the union of the hero and heroine so as to insure restored identity and harmony. Intentions are clear—the two go on to become engaged, marry, conceive, and the like.
3.4 Unique Characteristics of the Popular Romance Narrative

The morphology presented above lays bare the unique patterns or groupings of functions in the narrative. Propp identified function pairs—noting how one function necessitates another, and how several functions work together towards a common narrative goal. Radway too noted the narrative logic of her morphology, identifying several function pairs in the popular romance narrative. Where the story begins with the heroine in a state of lost identity (Radway's function 1), it ends with the heroine's identity restored (function 13). One of the romance's chief movements is from the heroine's antagonistic response toward the hero (function 2) to her warm sexual and emotional response (function 12). Likewise, the hero evolves from one exhibiting an ambiguous response (function 3) to one of unwavering commitment (function 11). Where the heroine misinterprets the hero's behavior (function 4) she is bound to reinterpret it correctly (function 10). Where she is cold (function 5) she becomes warm (function 9). Where the hero is punishing (function 6) he grows tender (function 8) (Radway 150).

In my expanded romance morphology, additional pairs and groupings of functions are evident. Functions II,
III, and XXI (threat, ridicule of threat, threat made good) are one such grouping. If a character says to the heroine, "The hero will possess you," invariably she will respond, "No, he won't." And assuredly the hero will possess the heroine before the novel's culmination.

Likewise, functions X, XI, and XXI (attempt possession, rebuff possession, submission to possession or threat of) form an inevitable sequence. The hero attempts to take the heroine on his terms; she refuses; yet when he comes around to her way of thinking (as he always does) she submits. Functions XII and XXII (conflicts separate, conflicts resolved) are also linked. Whatever it is that drives the hero and heroine apart is resolved and put to rest so that the two may be blissfully joined. Functions XV and XVI (hero tender, heroine responds to tenderness) are also a pair. Any tender action is met with a tender reaction. Function XVII (heroine acknowledges love) rarely appears without functions XVIII and XXI (lacks reciprocal love, receives love). No heroine acknowledges love for the hero without pining away for lack of reciprocal love, until, of course, the hero crushes her to him with the words "I love you." And finally, it would throw the popular romance completely off balance to have the heroine flee (function XIX) and the hero not pursue (function XX). The result of these function pairs and groups, where one function appears early in the
narrative to be met and answered by another later, is that they reinforce the predictability of the popular romance. The reader learns quickly that if one shoe drops, so eventually must the other.

In addition to function pairs and small groups, clusters of functions appear in the popular romance to further some general purpose of the narrative. Functions I through V serve as EXPOSITION, preparing and setting up the story for the inevitable fiery coming together of the hero and heroine. The COMPLICATION begins when the heroine stops musing about the hero and the two start interacting—usually beginning about function VI (ambiguous response of hero). The COMPLICATION extends through misinterpretations, through angry punishing exchanges, through embraces, past terminated embraces, past episodes of brief nurturing and hesitant tendernesses, and along through pursuits. The CLIMAX of the romance occurs not when the heroine acknowledges her love—for that is only half the way there—but when the hero declares his (function XXI). The narrative is then RESOLVED as misunderstandings are cleared away (function XXII) and identities are restored (function XXIII).

Not only is the structure of events unique to the popular romance narrative, so too is its point of view. As stated earlier, the romance usually is narrated from the third person point of view of the heroine. An
The idiosyncracy of the text occurs after encounters between the lovers, for then follow "passages in which the heroine thinks about the meaning of what has happened and almost always misinterprets it" (Mussell, Fantasy 37).

What had happened to her must have been some sort of physical backlash to Giles's rejection of her. That and the overheated atmosphere of intimacy forced on her by her illness was what had led to her astoundingly stupid behavior.

The wine hadn't helped, of course. Alcohol was notorious for relaxing one's inhibitions. (Jordan, Second Time 84-5)

There is much free indirect discourse representing character thoughts and utterances in the popular romance; notably, most of it is the heroine coming to terms reluctantly with her own desire and love. But occasionally the narrative shifts subtly from the heroine's point of view to the hero's.

As she slipped into sleep Oliver studied her wryly. Things had got dangerously out of hand. All he had intended had been a little light lovemaking, a breaking down of the boundaries between them as a prelude to the relationship he wanted to have with her—a slow, gentle courtship. (Jordan, Rival 164)

The rare shifts into the hero's perception serve to reassure the audience that the hero is not a cad; rather, his intentions (those the heroine keeps misinterpreting) are indeed honorable and decent and true.
The popular romance narrative has another idiosyncracy—its fashion commentary. We see repeatedly in the popular romance what Janice Radway calls the "fashion vignette." "The plot is momentarily, often awkwardly, delayed as the narrator accidentally notices seemingly superfluous details for the reader" (Radway 193).

.. . she surreptitiously checked out every other woman within eye range. What she saw was a lot of little black dresses, a few sleek whites, here and there a soft rose. They were understated dresses that whispered class. (Coughlin 194)

Radway hypothesizes that these details are really not superfluous at all. They are, instead, "part of an essential shorthand that establishes that, like ordinary readers, fictional heroines are 'naturally' preoccupied with fashion" (Radway 193).

Did Elizabeth Bennett run down the fashion detail of a ball? No, she had too broad a perception and too fiery a tongue. Rather in Pride and Prejudice when a character begins a fashion vignette--

'I never in my life saw anything more elegant than their dresses. I dare say the lace upon Mrs. Hurst's gown--'

Here she was interrupted again. (Austen 8-9)

--she is often interrupted, with the implication that the talk is frivolous.
The popular romance exists as a genre of its own. The narrative function pairings and groupings do not appear at so predictable a rate in classical romances. Juliet, Elizabeth Bennet, and Clarissa do not begin their stories suffering a loss of identity. Not always is a threat of possession addressed to the heroine so that she may respond in violation. Conflicts are not always resolved—Catherine and Heathcliff certainly do not end up blissfully in each other's arms. And the hero, failing to pursue (both Heathcliff and Rochester staunchly refuse to chase), sometimes lets the heroine go.

Another characteristic also sets the popular romance apart. According to Modleski, popular romance novels are female-oriented, while just about everything else—from detective fiction to classical narrative—is male-oriented. To explain, she cites Roland Barthes' view that most popular or classic narratives reenact the male oedipal crisis. The hero perceives a lack or flaw in the once all-powerful mother and then identifies with the superior male, the father. Male texts often disable the female figure, thus asserting masculine superiority. "At the end of a majority of . . . narratives the woman is disfigured, dead, or at the very least, domesticated" (Modleski 12). In contrast, the popular romance novel reenacts more the female electra crisis. In romance
fantasy narrative it is not the heroine domesticated, but the hero. No woman is disfigured or killed, but rather the heroine is fulfilled as never before and allowed to reach her "true" identity. While seeing males domesticated and females go without disfigurement is heartening, there remains, however, a problem with this underlying message. The popular romance holds up a single avenue of fulfillment to women—that of domesticating female--, and in so doing, implicitly discourages other choices.

Yet, despite differences of male vs. female orientation, fashion sense, and predictability, the popular romance still remains derivative of its classic counterpart. Both the classical and popular narrative identify clearly and early the hero and the heroine, drawing the audience in close proximity and empathy to the heroine. Complications—of class, money, careers, misperceptions—arise that separate the two lovers, be they Elizabeth Bennett and her Mr. Darcy, or Nina Lovell and Anton Lakitos. And both the classic and popular romances climax when the heroine and hero profess and perceive correctly the affection of the other.

Had Elizabeth been able to encounter his eye, she might have seen how well the expression of heart-felt delight, diffused over his face, became him; but though she could not look, she could listen, and he told her of feelings, which, in proving of what importance she was to him made
his affection every moment more valuable. (Austen 274-5)

In resolution, the classic as well as the popular romance clears all misunderstandings away and joins the two lovers physically, emotionally, and/or spiritually (Heathcliff and Catherine appear as a ghostly pair).

Further, the saturnine qualities of Mr. Darcy and the satanic ones of Heathcliff are recalled in the socially powerful Oliver Tennant (Rival Attractions), the distant Brand Carradine (Dark Guardian), the scathing Rafe Anderson (Valley of the Devil), and the darkly passionate Anton Lakitos (No Way to Begin). Likewise, the fiery wit and delusional tendencies of Elizabeth Bennett reemerge in Marya Hansen (The Land of Maybe), as does the youthful playfulness and innocence of a Clarissa or Juliet in Fliss Naughton (Dark Guardian), and the compassion of a Jane Eyre in Miss Allison Greene (Good Morning, Miss Greene). While an entity unto itself, the popular romance retains deep ties to its romantic predecessors.

It is tied as well to its fairy tale predecessors. There are some content carry-overs from the folk/fairy tale narrative to the romance narrative. What is most significant, however, are the structural similarities. Both Northrop Frye and Alan Dundes acknowledge the link between folklore and literature. Dundes writes in his
introduction to Propp's morphology, "In understanding the interrelationship between folklore and literature, . . . the emphasis has hitherto been principally upon content. Propp's morphology suggests that there can be structural borrowings as well as content borrowings" (Propp xiv-xv). My structural analysis reveals that, in the broadest sense, both the popular romance narrative and the folktale narrative as detailed by Propp contain the same general elements—both begin with a lack, move through obstacles, and resolve in a marriage.

Propp's functions I through VI—which involve the absention of the hero, the address of an interdiction to the hero, his violation of that interdiction, the reconnaissance by the villain of the hero or victim, the gathering of information, the attempt to deceive the victim, and the submission of the victim—are realizations of the preparation or exposition (Toolan 16). The popular romance parallels these functions of preparation. The romance heroine is absented from home; she is issued a threat which materializes; and she is as well the object of reconnaissance and deception.

Propp's functions VIII and X—in which the villain causes harm, a lack is made known, and a seeker seeks—constitute the complication (Toolan 16). In the romance novel the hero/villain imposes himself on the heroine/victim; the heroine experiences a certain
red-blooded lack or desire of which she may not be consciously aware, but her mother and roommate certainly are; and while the heroine may not actively seek, she certainly yearns for the hero. Again, a correlation can be drawn between Propp's folklore narrative and the romance.

To the Proppian function clusters of struggle and recognition, the romance structure again correlates nicely. The hero and heroine joust throughout the romance novel until each recognizes the other for who they truly are.

Others have noted the lasting effect the fairy tale has had on literature, especially on romance. Kay Mussell writes, "Many women writers, from the most serious to the most derivative, write within or against the fairy-tale model" (Fantasy 183). She voices concern however that in the fairy tale, in serious literature, and in "derivative" literature the issues of the future beyond marriage are left unexamined. For example, she finds that "[n]owhere in Jane Austen [with the exceptions of the Crofts and the Gardiners] do we find models for a marriage to which a woman might aspire" (Fantasy 183). Similarly, we know nothing of Snow White's, Cinderella's, or Sleeping Beauty's marriages. The popular romance ends within a page and a half of the hero proposing. Mussell's disheartening conclusion:
"Only in the exquisite torture of mate selection and courtship do some heroines appear to come alive, face real choices, and act as fully human characters with a meaningful role to play" (Mussell, Fantasy 183).

The ending for the popular romance, like the fairy tale, is happy, blissful, and free from complication. We are witness to no more strife, and certainly not to the demands of marriage. The guaranteed happy ending, and its effect on readers, surely constitutes a striking similarity between the popular romance and the fairy tale. On the effects of the fairy tale ending, Bettelheim writes, "[S]ince the fairy tale guarantees a happy outcome, the child need not fear permitting his [sic] unconscious to come to the fore in line with the story's content, because he knows that, whatever he may find out, he'll live happily ever after" (32). This peculiar effect is one that occurs in the popular romance as well. The pulp romance will end happily; that particular element is so consistent that critics and readers claim that an unhappy ending is enough to exclude a story from the genre. Given the guaranteed happy clinch at the conclusion, the romance reader too "need not fear permitting [her] unconscious to come to the fore in line with the story's content." She may identify fully with the romance heroine, because whatever she, the reader, may find out along the way,
she knows that she, the heroine, will live happily ever after.

However, like classical romance, the popular romance is clearly distinguishable from the fairy tale. For example, the fairy tale places its characters in "timeless, mythical space" while the romance makes clear that its "fictional time operates as time does in the real world" (Radway 204). It is Bettelheim's argument that the spinning of a fairy tale is helpful and healthful. The implication follows, therefore, that where the popular romance deviates from a "healthy" form to which it is so closely aligned, the effect may be unhealthful. The next chapter examines the effect of the popular romance upon its reader.
CHAPTER FOUR: WHY WOMEN READ THE ROMANCE AND WHAT THAT READING SIGNIFIES

4.1 Cultural and Social-Psychological Reasons for the Popularity of Popular Romance

Why the Appeal?

Why do these 200-odd-page paperbacks that spin the same formulaic narrative issue after issue appeal to such a broad and overwhelmingly female audience? Why, when women know the outcome at the outset, do they pick up these books again and again? The answers from the genre's critics and readers run the gamut from excitement, control, and vengeance, to indulgence, the rewards of nurturance and recognition, escape from disillusionment, and a renewal of hope.

The romance audience, as characterized in the first chapter of this thesis, is made up of a broad cross section of women from all socioeconomic classes with varying levels of education. The readers are housewives, mothers, grandmothers, working mothers, single mothers, single career women, teens, and preteens. For these women, real life is hectic, full up with myriad demands. Real life is a world of the busy mundane: clothes washing, dish washing, memos, dry cleaning, vacuuming,
errands, bed making, potty training, faxing, inputting data, paying bills. The fantasy world of romance, on the other hand, represents excitement.

Women willingly enter this world because here the men are always handsome, intriguing, and attentive; the pursuit is thrilling; and the rewards are valuable. The settings too--Australia, Thailand, the Faroe Isles, the Karoo of Africa--are exotic. These novels, writes Kay Mussell, are "a vicarious travelogue for women who have never experienced the excitement of more romantic locations than their own" (Fantasy 86).

Moreover, sex in the world of the romance is always heart-poundingingly good, albeit euphemistically so. The heroine's "center of desire" gets "stroked," and the hero's "heat" "pour[s]" (Clark 194, 195). Romance readers don't get many sexual specifics, and actually the sex act is not always culminated, but the tension, the fire, the focus of the sensuous moment is there for the reader to enjoy vicariously. For those women unsatisfied with the sexual happenings of their real life, or for those "facing the impact of the sexual revolution but unable--for whatever reason--to participate in it, . . . the euphemistic eroticism of women's romances might bring a vicarious pleasure" (Mussell, Fantasy 142).
In short, in a real world that offers working women, housewives, and mothers "little room for guiltless, self-interested pursuit of individual pleasure" (Radway 96), popular romance is a self-indulgence and an escape. Said one reader of romances, "They always seem an escape and they usually turn out the way you wish life really was" (qtd. in Radway 88).

Some readers and critics also see the genre as inspiring hope. "In a society in which romantic love is stressed at an early age," says Peter Mann, the actual fruition of a relationship or marriage often falls far from its "rose-colored dream" (as qtd. in Mussell, Gothic 112). It is thus not unusual for disillusionment to set in. According to Mussell, a woman's dissatisfaction with her chosen mate is a "natural consequence" of society's "overvaluation of virginity and marriage" (Fantasy 160). One role of the popular romance is to assuage this disillusionment. Fantasy provides relief. "[W]ithout fantasies to give us hope," writes Bruno Bettelheim, "we do not have the strength to meet the adversities of life" (121). Traditional fairy tales provided that hopeful escape to the "happily ever after." The modern-day fairy tale romance too ameliorates the anxiety of dissatisfaction by offering "a temporary and soothing escape" without challenging
social myths or requiring any painful life decisions (Mussell, *Fantasy* 160). No one need be divorced or left behind; no familial or societal structure need be questioned. The status quo is safely reinforced. All that is necessary for a renewed "sense of emotional well-being and visceral contentment" is a three-dollar paperback (Radway 70).

Popular romance emotionally strokes the reader because the reader is the vicarious recipient of the rewards obtained by the heroine of the romance fantasy.

... in offering his care and attention to the woman with whom [the reader] identifies, the hero implicitly regards that woman and, by implication, the reader, as worthy of his concern. This fictional character thus teaches both his narrative counterpart and the reader to recognize the value they doubted they possessed. (Radway 113)

These novels portray women as valued, as worthy of devotion and adoration. It is the woman who is the center of attention and desire. For those who have donned the role of caretaker in society, it is pleasing to turn things about and be taken care of.

For women whose primary daytime role (in the family or in the workplace) may well be to nurture others, this romance convention [where the heroine is the centre of the expert care and attention of the hero] can thus represent a utopian aspiration. (Radford 15)

The desire to be nurtured reflects significant psychological needs, say feminist critics. Rosalind
Coward argues that this turnabout of man nurturing woman appeals to "feminine Oedipal fantasies of winning one's father as lover" (Jones 200). Janice Radway, on the other hand, sees the appeal of gentle nurturance as reflective of the desire to be mothered again (Jones 200).

In addition to the reward of being taken in arms and told that all will be taken care of (whether paternally or maternally motivated), the romance heroine typically is rewarded with a kind of control, a kind of validation, a kind of power. Romance heroines, and readers vicariously, are told they matter. As far back as Mr. B. in Pamela, Lovelace in Clarissa, and Mr. D'Arcy in Pride and Prejudice romance heroes have been spending their full time "plotting the seductions" of the heroines (Modleski 18). Consequently, romance heroes and romances can be seen to enhance the importance of women. Women are at the center of things. In romance their concerns, their hopes, their opinions, their fears matter. Also, at the end, the heroes provide significant means by which women can, in Tania Modleski's words, "localize their diffuse and general sense of powerlessness" (18). At the end romance heroines marry. At the end they enter into a partnership with a powerful man, a powerful man over whom they have significant control and influence. Attached to a powerful man who
has influence in society, the woman thus has influence as well—although it is a power secondary in importance to that of the man.

The idea that woman is most happy and fulfilled in a secondary position strikes a discordant note in a time of feminist awareness. However, this is a time, writes Mussell, where traditional limits on women's lives are being loosened, and "many women face options and choices that seem frightening and debilitating" (Fantasy 87). The popular romance, Mussell hypothesizes, may reassure women, for it shows "that even in the most extreme conditions, woman's sphere can be both significant and triumphant" (Fantasy 87).

Tania Modleski finds revenge too to be an appealing part of the fantasy. Where women have traditionally ached in heart and body, men too ache. From this vantage, the woman is empowered again, but not because she has lashed herself to the power of a man. Rather, she brings him to his knees. Modleski writes, "A great deal of our satisfaction in reading these novels comes . . . from our conviction that the woman is bringing the man to his knees and that all the while he is being so hateful, he is internally grovelling, grovelling, grovelling" (45).

Finally, women choose the popular romance narrative because it assures them the comfort of predictability.
In entering into a romance fantasy the romance reader is confident that "the author will not change the rules in midstream" (Mussell, Fantasy 8). Things in the romance world always work out well and as expected, which is an assurance few get in real life. This process of fantasy with all its assurance and escape is a temporary one. Yet when a reader needs further reassurance or vicarious excitement there is always Harlequin, Silhouette, et al. to provide an endless stream of formulaic romance. The romance fantasy is a repeatable and readily available experience. And since it is one that offers not solutions, but escape, it easily becomes the source of a quick fix for those who continue to be disillusioned among its female audience. Concludes Kay Mussell, "Relief is only temporary, because the reality of women's experience in society is so massive that only repeated reading can assuage the felt discontinuities" (Fantasy 164). Thus, according to Mussell, it is "the reality" of women's "experience is society" that compels them to read the romance. Given this claim, an examination of "the reality of woman's experience in society" is relevant here.

Cultural Conditions Conducive to the Success of Popular Romance
Many contemptuously sneer at the wooden action and purple prose of the popular romance genre. But, as Northrop Frye notes, a critique of the prose alone misses the point.

Popular romance . . . is often an expression of a frivolous or silly social mythology, and a value judgment of the social mythology is likely to be more relevant to criticism than a value judgment on the literary merit. (167)

"The form," writes Alan Dundes in his introduction to Propp, "must ultimately be related to the culture or cultures in which it is found" (xiii). In a time where a female in a senatorial seat still makes news and a woman makes it to the White House only if she is married to the man who makes it to the White House, women are still tangential, removed from the center of things. Those who feel peripheral to that which matters rarely feel recognized, validated, or cared for enough. What drives women to repeated encounters with romance fiction, writes Janice Radway, is "an intensely felt but insufficiently met need for emotional nurturance" (119). Radway argues that the romance reader is depleted, that the environment in which she functions piles upon her "responsibilities that are acutely felt and occasionally . . . too onerous to bear" (93). She concludes, "it is the constant impulse and duty to mother others that is responsible for the sense of depletion that apparently
sends some women to romance fiction" (85). Vicariously, it is the romance narrative that gives back, that nurtures, that fortifies these women. Radway writes, "By immersing themselves in the romantic fantasy, women vicariously fulfill their needs for nurturance by identifying with a heroine whose principal accomplishment . . . is her success at drawing the hero's attention to herself, at establishing herself as the object of his concern and the recipient of his care" (84). In experiencing the romance, women escape the myriad duties of their roles and enter into a world where such needs as theirs are adequately met.

The idea that the popular romance narrative vicariously fulfills women's unmet needs is further carried out in the novels' portrayal of sex. Time and again the hero and heroine embrace passionately then are separated.

She wrapped her arms around him, holding on when her knees threatened to buckle beneath her. But by leaning on him she could feel the full extent of his stimulation, pressing hard and hot against her. . . .

'Coffee. I think we'd better get that coffee.' (Clark 153-4)

The constant interruption of the sex act in romance novels, writes Ann Jones, "may well correspond to many women's experience of sex as better in anticipation than in action" (200). The implication is that many readers
in action" (200). The implication is that many readers of the romance, many women, find sex unfulfilling. Alison Light as quoted by Jones pushes past implication; "The reader is left in a permanent state of foreplay, but I would guess that for many women this is the best heterosexual sex they ever get" (200).

The above-mentioned reasons for reading the romance portray a female audience that is unhappy, insecure, tangential, unfulfilled, and depleted—and generally so because of cultural causes. These are thus readers who select "stories that . . . reinforce their feelings of self-worth and supply the replenishment they need" (Radway 184). It becomes the role of the romance then to "counter the force of a system that functions generally by making enormous demands upon women for which it refuses to pay" (184).

Popular romance is compensatory literature. Women are essentially unhappy. Patriarchal culture has failed them. The paperback romances, in turn, offer some form of sustenance. "[A]ll popular romantic fiction originates in the failure of patriarchal culture to satisfy its female members," writes Radway (151). Adds Mussell, "Romances are less failed narratives than narratives of failure, and the failure belongs less to writers and readers than to patriarchy's denial of women's right to explicate their own lives" (Fantasy
185). From this perspective, romance fantasy is a resource for survival.

Romance writers and readers seem to be saying to each other: 'If we may not participate in the wider world, we will construct a drama of our own. We need not threaten patriarchy, for that in turn threatens us. We may acquiesce—or seem to—in definitions of self that fail to fulfill. But, at least, we can make something of the one story that is left for us to tell.' (Mussell, Fantasy 186)
4.2 The Effect of Popular Romance

In the previous section, I proposed that millions of women read the romance because the narrative compensates for something that women lack. That lack—lack of nurturance, lack of replenishment, lack of excitement, lack of romance—can be attributed to the failed ideals of patriarchal culture, which exhausts and bores women with innumerable and menial tasks, and offers little sustenance or recognition in return. Popular romance, in contrast, offers vicarious sustenance and therefore attracts women readers. Women return again and again for the escape and validation popular romance temporarily and repeatedly provides. In a sense, reading the romance functions much like an addiction. It is an opiate taken to temporarily relieve anxiety and provide an escape from problems.

Yet, the repeated reading of the romance creates a double bind for women. While they turn to the romance for compensation of needs unmet by a patriarchal society, romance perpetuates and helps reconcile readers to a patriarchal agenda. The messages inherent in popular romance are those of female selflessness, subordination, validation through men, and safety through dependence. In effect, the narrative constantly holds up as model that which the romance reader may be
trying to escape. The "addict" or "user" thus must constantly increase "the dosage of the drug"—or repeatedly read the romance—in order to alleviate or escape those problems aggravated or reinforced by "the drug itself" (Modleski qtd. in Radford 17). And, of course, nothing of the original problem is solved.

Romance doesn't help women break free of an unsatisfactory environment; rather it effects and induces unrealistic life expectations, practices of hypocrisy and pretense, and the presentiment of "hysterical" behavior— all of which are behaviors that have stereotyped women for centuries. The models women find repeatedly in the romance display regressive behavior, mirroring, writes Kay Mussell, the "infantilism of women in a patriarchal culture" (184). Ultimately, by force of repetition, romance indoctrinates readers to the roles and expectations of patriarchal culture.

The popular romance offers fantasy to its reader. These fantasies "admit a belief that everything would be all right between the sexes were it not for a series of foolish misperceptions and misunderstandings" (Coward 193). Obstacles do exist in the development of the relationship between hero and heroine, but they are of external circumstance, and in the end they are
conveniently and methodically removed. In actuality no single life experience could be so simple.

A problem exists in the popular romance's distinction between fantasy and actuality. The fairy tale fantasy, considered a psychologically healthy narrative by Bettelheim, stresses that the events of its story occurred "once upon a time, in a far-distant land, and makes clear that it offers food for hope, not realistic accounts of what the world is like here and now" (Bettelheim 73). The popular romance narrative, on the other hand, uses cues of time and place that indicate the very present, very real here and now: dated technology, fashion, concerns, music.

Music was supplied by quadraphonic speakers set around the patio. A track of Michael Jackson's Thriller was being played. The strong hand holding Keira's pulled her closer as the man to whom it belonged turned to face her. (Darcy 29)

While the traditional fairy tale offers an extravagantly happy ending, it's clear that that ending happens only in a place our imaginations can reach. Bettelheim writes that the fairy tale happy ending "would . . . lead to disenchantment with the child's real life if it were part of a realistic story, or projected as something that will happen where the real child lives" (133). Since the popular romance narrative has the trappings of a realistic story, it sets readers up in the belief that
its fairy tale ending could happen here and now, and the effect of that implication likely results in disenchantment with the here and now.

Far from modeling behavior that may alleviate disenchantment, the romance heroine, as noted above, displays regressive tendencies. She evolves very little, if at all, as a character. She rarely takes the situation in hand, but rather sits passively waiting for the hero to act. For example, she is not responsible for sex. The hero finds her irresistible, and he cannot help but act on his impulses. Therefore, the heroine avoids the difficulty of choosing whether to act on her desires or not, and "need not take any responsibility for her own sexual feelings" (Radway 76). Further, she takes no active role in the upkeep of the romantic relationship. Radway points out that when the "ideal male" finally recognizes "the intrinsic worth" of the heroine she is thereafter "required to do nothing more than exist as the center of this paragon's attention" (97). The means to the happy ending in popular romance is one of passive regressiveness, one of waiting for an other to control actions and desires. The message to readers is to wait passively as well. React; don't act.

"As stories of coming of age," writes Mussell, "romances are sadly deficient, for their heroines rarely even aspire to autonomy or genuine maturity" (Fantasy
In the popular romance the hero is successful, authoritative, capable of protecting and providing. He is mature and experienced. The heroine, on the other hand, is young, innocent, often in need of care, and in complete adoration of the hero. Coward suggests that "in the adoration of the powerful male, we have the adoration of the father by the small child" (191). As older female rivals are abolished and young heroines safely ensconced at heroes' sides, it is hard to miss the oedipal (or electra) implications of the narrative. In one of the novels before me, No Way to Begin, the heroine, desperate to talk of important matters with the hero, waits unbeknownst to him in his bedroom. When he enters finally, drunk and stripped naked for bed, the room is dark and the heroine asleep. Startled by his entrance and disoriented by the place, the heroine awakens.

'Daddy?' she whispered shakily, groping anxiously for the bed. Knowing she had got something wrong, but unable to work out what. (Reid 17)

The oedipal fantasy is that of a child's, depicting an infantile desire for nurturance and recognition. Janice Radway suggests "that the heroine's often expressed desire to be the hero's formally recognized wife in fact camouflages an equally insistent wish to be his child" (145).
Not only does the popular romance novel hold up delusions and regressive behavior, it exemplifies in its heroine and produces in its readers a rift—a tension derived from the reading experience. When Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer diagnosed female hysterics they made note of a kind of "double conscience" (Modleski 32). One such hysterical (Anna O., a case study of Breuer's) felt compelled to tell stories about herself in the third person and expressed a sense that even at her most "insane" "a clear-sighted and calm observer sat ... in a corner of her brain and looked on at all the mad business" (Modleski 32). This kind of duality exists, writes Modleski, "at the very core of romances, particularly in the relation between an 'informed' reader and a necessarily innocent heroine" (32).

The reader knows the romance formula; therefore, she knows the outcome of the narrative before her. Yet at the same time, the reader is identifying with the heroine who knows nothing of what is to come. So the reader is caught in the duplicity of cheering the heroine on toward her intended goal, and experiencing each narrative moment anew in ignorant bliss. Harlequin the series forces upon its readers the modus operandi of Harlequin the character, who was known to divide himself into two people and hold dialogues with himself (Frye, Scripture 111). The convention creates the dual roles of
"dreamer and the self he is dreaming about" (Frye, Scripture 111). The duplicity inherent in popular romance narratives gives rise to various painful psychological dilemmas.

Through the actions of the heroine, through her constant refusal to primp for the hero, to move consciously toward the hero, romance readers are told to be "unconscious of themselves if they are not to incur the charge of narcissism" (Modleski 112). Yet the reader is terribly conscious of the self (the identifiable heroine) about whom she is reading or dreaming. In acute contradiction, readers are "forced to look at themselves being looked at" (Modleski 112). And if a romance reader tries to carry the messages of romance into real life, the resultant behavior is hypocritical. While the romance reader is shown that it is "socially, economically, and aesthetically imperative for a woman to get a husband and his money," she is also shown that women, good women, "achieve these goals partly by NOT WANTING them" (Modleski 50). In order to achieve such ends with such means in real life, writes Modleski, "pretense and hypocrisy must be practiced" (50).

Not only does the reader experience the schism of being conscious of the self where it is unseemly to be selfconscious, she must invalidate and disavow the emotions of this second self. Modleski explains,
Since we know the heroine must wind up with the rich, lordly man, we feel pleasure in those episodes which further the desired and expected ending. We tend to doubt from the beginning the heroine's avowed dislike of the hero, and, moreover, we are pleased whenever her expressions of this aversion have effects contrary to what she intends—that is, whenever they excite the hero rather than alienate him. (50)

In other words, we, the readers, consider the heroine's emotions—those with which we identify so closely—as important only insofar as they "subvert themselves" (Modleski 51). Concludes Modleski, "the whole process can feel like deception and hypocrisy" (51). And the tension, the hypocrisy of experiencing the narrative from two opposing perspectives, is never resolved. The plot ends. The reader stops reading. But the "resolution" does not bridge the gap between the fiction (the romance) and the reader's life. The reader who so readily identifies with the heroine wants to experience life as does the heroine, but she cannot. She is too self-conscious of the role she must play to function as a successful nonhypocritical heroine. Therefore, to experience the ignorant rush of a love relationship that carries her completely away, the reader must find a new heroine with whom to identify. She must find a new novel and begin the narrative again.

The behavior the role model of popular romance models is passive and infantile. In identifying with the heroine the romance reader internalizes hypocritical,
hysterical, and unrealistic behavior and expectation. The result of repeated readings of the romance, of repeatedly watching the heroine make the same lifestyle choices, and act in the same essential manner is inevitably reconciliation, indoctrination, and inoculation to a lifestyle that privileges female subservience, selflessness, and dependence. In a complex double bind, the popular romance narrative privileges the very lifestyle that leaves women lacking in validation and sustenance and seeking it in such temporary forms as the popular romance itself.

"True indoctrination is the real social function of literature," writes Northrop Frye (Scripture 19). Popular arts, writes Kay Mussell, play a special role in the process, "for they assert, support, and demonstrate the rightness of the underlying belief structure of a culture" (Fantasy 146). What popular romance does, in particular, is not challenge the status quo, but repeatedly affirm it.

The status quo is patriarchy. In the world of popular romance, the institutions of marriage and family, the myth of male superiority are never questioned. Rather it is the goal of every romance to see the heroine submit entirely to the passions of the hero, to marry heroine to hero, and to end with the promise of babies to come.
There is no challenge to the underlying belief structure; rather "patriarchal myths and institutions are ... whole-heartedly embraced" (Modleski 113). This is a belief structure that privileges the male gender and relegates the desires and insights of the female to a subordinate position. It is the underlying message of popular romance fiction "that a woman derives her fullest identity through a man," that the hero is "the only character with the authority to validate her life" (Mussell, Fantasy 114). It is a man, according to this narrative, who will create the whole of a woman's "ecstasy" (Mussell, Fantasy 131).

Not only does the content of romance reconcile readers to their place in a patriarchal society, so too does the form of romance and the experience of reading that form. By reading the romance as if it were a realistic novel about an individual's unique life, "the reader can ignore the fact that each story prescribes the same fate for its heroine and can therefore unconsciously reassure herself that her adoption of the conventional role, like the heroine's, was the product
of chance and choice, not of social coercion" (Radway 17).

Too, this pasting on of a mythical happy ending to the story of an individual woman with individual choices tends to lump all women together. It sends readers the message that women are important solely for their ability to produce children and nurture others.

When the mythic ending of the romance undercuts the realism of its novelistic rendering of an individual woman's story, this literary form reaffirms its founding culture's belief that women are valuable not for their unique personal qualities but for their biological sameness and their ability to perform that essential role of maintaining and reconstituting others. (Radway 208)

Popular romance, both in form and content, teaches women to exist in a world with which they may not be wholly satisfied. For instance, the romance reader repeatedly witnesses the romance hero behaving offensively toward the heroine. Rather than see the heroine's anger at the behavior justified, however, we see it nullified. The romance narrative explains away the offensive behavior by implying that it was prompted by "the heroine's inability to read a man properly" (Radway 215). If only she had recognized the hero's love for her and been content by his side, he would not have twisted her ruthlessly to him, forced a marriage of convenience upon her, or uttered such unkind words. The
reader, on the other hand, knows how to read the hero's behavior. She knows the formula. She knows the hero has fallen for the heroine and is hurt whenever she turns from him. This process teaches the reader "that she knows how to read male behavior correctly" (Radway 216). It teaches her that her anger toward her spouse may be unnecessary or unjustified, for she is reading him incorrectly. An adjusted reading of the spouse paints him to be like the hero, one who actually loves deeply, though is unable to express it. Thus, his behavior becomes acceptable.

Romance teaches that a woman should be selfless. Take care of your man, put him, put the children first, and in turn you will be taken care of. Unlike traditional fairy tales where "the essential steps in growing up and achieving an independent existence" are depicted through imagery and symbolism (Bettelheim 73), the popular romance fantasy models actions that lead regressively to a dependent existence. Woman achieves power and safety and validity through a man. Even "after long or repeated passages representing the heroine's capacities and ambitions outside marriage, the ending almost inevitably assigns her a future defined by the needs of the hero," writes Ann Jones (204). The romance novel is a documentation of the heroine's growing readiness to function at the hero's side. When the
heroine faces personal problems, they are related to her ability to perform in a marriage. A career-minded heroine must learn that she can combine career and marriage. All heroines— aspiring to the role of good woman, good wife, good mother—must demonstrate an aptitude for domestic tasks. "The personal development of a heroine requires that she prepare herself not for autonomous adulthood but for a lifelong commitment to the hero," concludes Mussell (Fantasy 95). "Romances," as Mussell says eloquently, "reflect the circularity and hopelessness of women's attempts to find their identity in humanity rather than in men" (Fantasy 185).

Popular romance further indoctrinates by glorifying a culture in which men are appraisers and women objects of appraisal. Romance novels reaffirm female objectification and the male privilege that goes with it.

Dark eyes met hers across the room with a familiar stabbing precision that pinned her helplessly to her chair. (Whittal 13)

In romance, women are looked at, and men do the looking. Power lies with he who looks, while power drains from she being looked at. The men of romance novels, in Modleski's words, "assert their masculine superiority in the same ways men do in real life": they threat women as jokes and appraise them as objects (40).
His voice was full of lazy amusement. 'This is my pool, my water, and you are my own personal water nymph. I caught you, so I can kiss you whenever I want to!' (Reid 77)

But not only is it romantic heroes who through the power of appraisal reinforce a position of submissiveness for women, it is also the heroines. "Heroines stare into mirrors," writes Ann Jones, "in long auto-erotic scenes of dressing and making-up that reinforce the pragmatic narcissism in which women are trained as objects of desire" (214).

Dressed in her silky undergarments, she moved about the room with a natural, fluid grace. Her tall, slender figure was trapped every now and then in the full-length mirror against the wardrobe door . . . . (Whittal 23)

Even in the casual glance, romance novels objectify women.

Finally, and most frighteningly, by modeling how "good women" should act, romances inoculate readers to male violence. Popular romance novels repeatedly confuse the boundaries between sexuality and violence.

Next moment, a hand seized her roughly by the arm. 'Dive for it.' The man's voice was harsh with anger.

'No, please. I'm sorry--' she began, then too late clutched at the pool edge as he pushed her and she felt herself fall helplessly backwards.

She surfaced coughing and choking for air . . . . The man, a darkly threatening shadow, was towering over her. (King 15-6)
Popular romance takes the rapist mentality and all its intention to dominate and humiliate and degrade, writes Modleski, and turns it into its opposite—"sexual desire disguised as the intention to dominate and hurt" (42). The trick as discussed previously is that the reader is caught up in what Modleski calls "advance retrospection." The reader, well-versed in the formula of romance, knows that when the hero behaves horribly he is really acting out of a distressed, desperate kind of love. The effect is that "male brutality comes to be seen as a manifestation not of contempt, but of love" (Modleski 41). In essence, the popular romance novel teaches the reader to reinterpret violence.

When a romance presents the story of a woman who is misunderstood by the hero, mistreated and manhandled as a consequence of his misreading, and then suddenly loved, protected, and cared for by him because he recognizes that he mistook the meaning of her behavior, the novel is informing its readers that the minor acts of violence they must contend with in their own lives can be similarly reinterpreted as the result of misunderstandings or of jealousy born of 'true love.' (Radway 75)

Popular romance teaches readers to reinterpret even the act of rape.

... Rafe's hands seemed to be everywhere, disrobing her and ripping off her flimsy nightdress. ... Jo heard her own scream of terror ... as he flung her on to the fourposter bed and imprisoned her there with the weight of his heated, aroused body. (Whittal 58)
The romance manages to evoke the reader's fear of rape, for the reader is identifying with the heroine flung upon the bed and imprisoned beneath the hero. But as this brute forcing himself upon the heroine is the same man who in the end will pledge his undying devotion and love, and the reader knows this, the romance also manages to convince the reader "that rape is either an illusion or something that she can control easily" (Radway 214), or as something really secretly desirable.

If such violent acts are reinterpreted so as to appear palatable, even illusory, then there is little motivation to eradicate such behavior. "In learning how to read male behavior from the romance," writes Radway, "a woman insulates herself from the need to demand that such behavior change" (151). This reconciliation is frightening, for this is behavior that women, all women, would be better off changing.

In conclusion, popular romance novels are more than laughable predictability and purple prose. They both mirror and perpetuate in their consistently repetitive structure the ills women endure in a male-dominated culture. I agree with Kay Mussell that "The romance fantasy may be both trivial and insignificant in the world of art, but it is genuinely tragic in the real world where women must live" (Fantasy 186). What is doubly and ironically tragic is that these ills--the
stereotypes, the cliches', the constant portrayal of and applause for a few narrow options for women--are in demand by women. Women seek out this rigid narrative structure that in novel after novel perpetuates dependence and subordination.

It is vitally important, therefore, to look upon the popular romance narrative as more than innocent escapism and entertainment. It is important to see it as a social indicator. Tania Modleski casts popular romance as the bearer of bad news. An understanding of these novels, she writes, "should lead one less to condemn the novels than the conditions which have made them necessary" (57). It is important to ask how popular romance functions, why it appeals, and what are its effects. According to Northrop Frye, "Unconsciously acquired social mythology, the mythology of prejudice and conditioning, is clearly also something to be outgrown: it is therapeutic to recognize and reject it" (170). Let us all, the readers and critics of popular romance, examine consciously the social mythology of romance and then therapeutically recognize and reject it.
Works Cited

Primary Texts Used For Analysis


Secondary Sources Consulted


