

Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep

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I dedicate this thesis to my husband Greg for his support, his advice and his unfailing good humour.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	v
Abstract	vi
Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep	1
Critical Exegesis	182
Introduction	183
Chapter One: The Heart Has Its Reasons	196
Chapter Two: Narrative Strategies of Romance and Realism	219
Works Cited	249

Abstract

The creative work – *Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep* – is a Harlequin Mills & Boon Sweet Romance. It details Jaz Harper's return to her hometown of Clara Falls in the Blue Mountains after eight years away. Her return means confronting her past – in the shape of her high school sweetheart, Connor Reed, who broke her heart and who is the reason she left Clara Falls all those years ago. Connor is convinced that eight years ago Jaz cheated on him, dashing all their plans for the future. In the time since she left he has become a single father. The story details the development of their relationship from antipathy to empathy, and then from friendship to love.

The accompanying exegesis discusses the conventions and constraints of the popular romance genre. It explores the challenges presented to a writer in creating and maintaining emotional intensity in a popular genre romance and the need to provide a satisfying and credible ending to that romance. Five well-known romance novels – *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, *Rebecca*, *The Grand Sophy*, and *The Republic of Love* – are analysed for the manner in which they portray romantic love and for the narrative strategies that may be of use to the writer of category romance. Finally, the exegesis discusses how the conventions of the popular romance genre and the narrative strategies employed have combined to shape the creative work.

Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep

by Therese Dryden

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as *Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep* by

Michelle Douglas

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EXEGESIS

INTRODUCTION

All writing, whether fiction or non-fiction, is bound by constraints arising from its aims and objectives and the effects it wishes to create. Popular genre fiction, however, is the fiction most easily identified by the conventions and constraints that define it. Ken Gelder identifies eight primary genres of popular fiction: romance, crime fiction, science fiction, fantasy, horror, western, historical and adventure. He states: “with popular fiction, generic identities are *always* visible. . . . Popular fiction announces those identities loudly and unambiguously” (42). In *Bestsellers* Clive Bloom calls these popular genre conventions artistic restraints (14), and in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* Pamela Regis calls them essential narrative elements (27), but regardless of what one calls them, these essential defining criteria must be met if reader expectations are to be satisfied. Indeed, if these essential defining characteristics are not met, the work falls outside of its popular fiction genre parameters and becomes something else.

For the popular romance genre, though, the conventions have been scorned and ridiculed, more so than for any other genre. Gelder notes that “some genres of popular fiction are . . . seen as more conservative—more convention-bound—than others. Romance is notoriously accounted for in this way, as much more tied to formula and convention than, say, science fiction” (43). As a result of this perception Bloom observes: “Popular genres do not . . . have equal status. Some are considered more serious than others (which often means less ‘female’ or ‘juvenile’). This becomes obvious when one compares the two leading genres that account for the vast majority of annual fiction output: detective fiction and women’s romance. Detective fiction always had cachet” (14). The inference here is that “women’s romance” has not. This has led to the widely held belief that romance fiction is more formulaic than any other type of popular genre fiction, with the connotations of formula in this context decidedly negative. Of formula Regis says: “the term implies hackwork, subliterate and imagination reduced to a mechanism for creating ‘product’ ”

(23). In his groundbreaking study of formula literature—*Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*—John Cawelti acknowledges that because formula literature’s “dominant influence” is “the goals of escape and entertainment” it has come to be viewed negatively as lowbrow and subliterate. He states: “The trouble with this sort of approach is that it tends to make us perceive and evaluate formula literature simply as an inferior or perverted form of something better, instead of seeing its ‘escapist’ characteristics as aspects of an artistic type with its own purposes and justification” (13). Cawelti claims that formula literature is “a kind of literary art . . . [that] can be evaluated like any other literature” (8).

Regis defends the romance genre along similar lines and claims:

The genre is not silly and empty-headed, as mainstream literary culture would have it. Quite the contrary—the romance novel contains serious ideas. The genre is not about women’s bondage, as the literary critics would have it. The romance novel is, to the contrary, about women’s freedom. The genre is popular because it conveys the pain, uplift, and joy that freedom brings (xiii).

Popular opinion chimes in on this issue too. To reveal the absurdity of judging an entire genre or class of fiction by its conventions, *All About Romance*—a website that reviews and discusses romance fiction, and is very popular with readers of romance—published a piece titled “Guidelines for Writing Literary Fiction” where Robin Uncapher identifies what she claims are the popular conventions of literary fiction. This piece, while very much tongue-in-cheek, highlights that while all fiction is bound by conventions, it is unreasonable to criticize a work based solely on its form. Jennifer Crusie reinforces this in her essay, “So, Bill, I Hear You Write Those Little Poems: A Plea for Category Romance.” She asserts: “you can’t critique a fiction by its form any more than you can by its subject matter; that is, saying ‘Category romance is a lesser form of fiction,’ makes as much sense as saying ‘Romance is a lesser form of fiction in general’ ” (42).

The purpose of this exegesis, however, is not to provide a defence of the popular romance genre. Lucid and convincing counterarguments in its support have already been made.¹ This exegesis is concerned with identifying the essential constraints attendant on the short category romance novels of Harlequin Mills & Boon, and to explore how these, as well as non-essential constraints and/or conventions, are implemented to meet reader expectations and to provide reader satisfaction. This exegesis is interested in probing the challenges that these constraints pose for writers of category romance novels, and to explore how these challenges are tackled and overcome. This links directly to the creative work which accompanies this exegesis. Entitled *Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep*, the creative work is a Harlequin Mills & Boon Romance for the Sweet line.²

Sarah Wendell and Candy Tan, authors of *Beyond Heaving Bosoms: The Smart Bitches' Guide to Romance Novels*, and administrators of *Smart Bitches, Trashy Books*—a website that focuses on the popular romance genre—ask: “why [is it that] romance’s genre constraints are met with such derision when other genres have similar defining constructs?” In an attempt to answer the question, Tan points out that many people “confuse popular (but nonessential) genre elements with actual constraints.” She claims there are only: “two constraints to genre romances: 1. The central plot concerns the romantic/sexual relationship between a central unit of people. . . . 2. The romantic couple are together by the end of the story, and there’s a reasonable assurance that they’re a) in love and b) happy about that state of affairs, even if the other parts of their lives aren’t perfect” (*Smart Bitches, Trashy Books*). This echoes the definition of romance given by Romance Writers of America—the association for and advocate of more than ten thousand romance writers worldwide: “Two basic elements comprise every romance novel: a central love story and an emotionally-satisfying and optimistic ending” (*Romance Writers of America*).

¹ For example, Pamela Regis provides a compelling defence in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, as do the essays in Krentz's *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*, and Kaler and Johnson-Kurek's *Romantic Conventions*. See also Jennifer Crusie's essays and articles.

² The Sweet line is called the Romance line in North America and Cherish in the UK.

Thus, emerging from the literature discussing the popular romance genre two important defining criteria become apparent:

1. The focus of the story must be centred on the developing relationship between the two central characters, and
2. The story must end happily.

Regis further refines this definition. A romance novel, she argues, is “a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines” (19). In addition, she identifies eight essential narrative elements of the romance novel: society defined, the meeting, the barrier, the attraction, the declaration, point of ritual death, the recognition, and the betrothal. In effect, these elements taken together are the naming of parts that ensure the romance novel’s focus on the developing relationship between heroine and hero. Further, it is clear that several of these elements are necessary for most novels and not exclusive to genre romance novels. For example, conflict, or what Regis calls “the barrier,” is an essential narrative element for nearly all works of fiction.

Terminology, as is often the case in literary theory, can prove problematic. David Duff in *Modern Genre Theory* points out that the term genre is “often used, sometimes pejoratively, to denote types of popular fiction in which a high degree of standardisation is apparent: for instance, detective stories, historical romances, spy thrillers and science fiction. These are collectively known as ‘genre fiction’ as distinct from more ‘serious’, highbrow fiction” (xiii). This is the manner in which the term has been used in this exegesis so far. However, the term genre is generally acknowledged to be much broader than this rather narrow definition. Genre as defined by Duff is more akin to the term “formula.” Both Cawelti and Regis acknowledge that “genre” and “formula” are often mistakenly used interchangeably. Regis attempts to rectify the misunderstanding: “Formula denotes a subset of genre. It is narrower than a genre” (23). John Frow defines genre as a “specific organisation of texts with thematic, rhetorical and formal dimensions” and subgenre as

“the further specification of genre by a particular thematic content” (67).³ Hence, it could be argued that the novel itself is a genre and that the popular romance novel is a subgenre of the novel, and also a literary formula as Cawelti defines it: “a structure of narrative or dramatic conventions employed in great numbers of individual works” (5). A further division, however, is created when one turns to the short category romances of Harlequin Mills & Boon.

Harlequin Mills & Boon category romances are examples of popular genre fiction and as such are formulaic. As Regis has said of formula as a subset of a genre: “The elements of the genre are all present in the formula, but their range of possible embodiment has been restricted” (23). This restriction of range can be traced first to the constraints and conventions that govern the novel, then to the further two essential criteria that define the popular genre romance, through to the added constraints and conventions of a Harlequin Mills & Boon category romance. It is these additional constraints and conventions that provide Harlequin Mills & Boon novels with their particular flavour and meet particularly specific reader expectations. The Harlequin Mills & Boon constraints can be explicit or implicit and fall into three different categories:

1. Formal elements
2. Narrative elements
3. External influences

Formal and narrative constraints, whether they are explicit or implicit, deal with structural and thematic elements of the novels. External constraints are factors outside of the novel (and not always within an author’s control) that have an impact on it and how it is perceived.

An examination of the guidelines published by Harlequin Mills & Boon for the Sweet line will illustrate these divisions more fully:

These might be short romances at 50-55000 words, but they’re not short on story—
just highly focused on the central relationship! The reader experiences that amazing

³ For a more comprehensive discussion of this topic see Duff’s *Modern Genre Theory* (2000) and Frow’s chapter on literary genre theory in *Genre* (2005).

“rush” via the heroine—the reader lives through the romance through the heroine. Therefore, the heroine is vital—she must be warm, easy to like and engage with. Of course, the hero takes centre stage with the heroine—and hero point of view is welcomed to give his character depth and credibility. He’s always strong and charismatic, successful in his own way and aspirational—a man you’d want to be with! He can be an alpha male, but like the heroine, his character is always highly developed, three dimensional and convincing for 21st Century readers (*eHarlequin*).

The first sentence of the guidelines makes explicit two of the essential elements of the line—the word count (formal element) and the focus of the story on the central relationship (narrative element). What is implicit and unspoken here, but what a study of a range of novels from the line would reveal, is that chapter lengths rarely go beyond twenty pages each (a formal element) and that the hero and heroine should meet within the first few pages of the book (narrative element). While there are exceptions to both these conventions, there would need to be good reasons for flouting them. Reading further, the guidelines make it clear that the heroine’s viewpoint is necessary and that the hero’s is welcome. Implicit, however, is the fact that the heroine’s viewpoint can comprise as much as one hundred percent of the book and is rarely less than sixty percent. Additionally the guidelines say:

Every story in this series must deliver on emotional depth, driven by strong, character-driven emotional conflicts. These conflicts stem from the real-life challenges and emotional issues that are relevant to women all over the world today. There is scope for a wide-range of storylines and themes—from deeply emotional “weepies,” relationship dramas, urban romances, Westerns—and even contemporary romantic fantasies such as Sheikhs and royalty so long as the emotions are convincing and the scenarios firmly rooted in reality. High sensual tension between the protagonists is vital, but our readers are primarily interested in

the romance—no explicit detail, so in this series, we close the bedroom door
(*eHarlequin*).

This paragraph lists the kinds of popular plot situations offered by the line, but more importantly it indicates the tone of the line. In three sentences the word emotion or emotional is mentioned five times, strongly indicative of what mood this line is aiming for. The Harlequin Mills & Boon Sweet line provides stories that are moving and poignant. That is their signature, so to speak. The different lines offered by Harlequin—Sweet, Sexy, Medical, Historical, Suspense etc—each have their own particular flavour or tone (be that intense, glamorous, humorous etc) that must be achieved to meet reader expectations and provide reader satisfaction.

The kind of language a Harlequin novel incorporates is another implicit narrative element, but it is one that has been essential to their success. As Jay Dixon affirms: “These books are not post-modern game-playing; they are straightforward stories, which aim to engage the emotions, not the intellect” (5). These books do not play with language the way a piece of literary fiction attempts to—story is paramount, not experimentation. In many ways the language itself needs to be almost invisible to allow the reader a total absorption in the story: “Mills & Boon books are stories; they come out of the oral storytelling tradition rather than the tradition of the written word. As a result their style is very different from that of classical literature. They use language to involve the emotions and imagination to such an extent that the world they create completely envelops the reader” (Dixon 4). Dixon further adds that “literary style is irrelevant” and that “the emotional involvement of the reader . . . is all that matters” (4). In their essay “Beneath The Surface,” Linda Barlow and Jayne Ann Krentz claim that “the conventional diction of romances” is reviled and misunderstood by literary critics, but that it is this language “that, for romance novels, *works*” (21). They add: “In our genre (and in others, we believe), stock phrases and literary figures are regularly used to evoke emotion” and:

Romance readers have a keyed-in response to certain words and phrases. . . . Readers associate certain emotions—anger, fear, passion, sorrow—with such language and expect to

feel the same responses each time they come upon such phrases. . . . Encountering the familiar language, the reader responds emotionally to the characters, settings, and events (21).

This immersion in the fictional world is a feature that Gillian Beer identifies as one of the “properties” of romance. Romance, she says: “creates a coherent illusion; it creates an absorbing imaginative world composed of particulars seen with an intensity which suggests the ideal; it is sustained by the subjective imagination of the writer” (47). In fact, this complete immersion in an imaginative world became one of the reasons the Victorians mistrusted romance: “The romances allowed their readers—who were mainly women—to immerse themselves without responsibility in a hectic world which made real life pale by comparison” (Beer 53). This distrust and censure can be traced back to the Renaissance. Barbara Fuchs in her study *Romance* details how the sixteenth-century humanist moralist Luis Vives in his manual *The Education of Christian Women* “denounces the romances’ imaginative force” (81). The romance has a long history, but one of the “properties” (Beer) or “strategies” (Fuchs) that the romance novels of Mills & Boon have inherited from this tradition and continue to employ is this privileging of readerly pleasure by complete immersion in the imaginative world of the story.

If the language that a Mills & Boon romance typically employs is a narrative convention, the titles of these romances are an example of an external convention. Marketing departments are responsible for the titles, not authors. If market research proves that titles with hooks like “Bride,” “Baby,” “Tycoon” and “Mistress” sell well, those hooks will be used in varying combinations over and over again. The manner in which Harlequin market their romance novels is another external factor. In his essay “Mills & Boon: Guilt without Sex,” David Margolies says:

Unlike the traditional image of publishing which assumes the unique value of each book, Mills & Boon romance is presented as a commodity like tea or soap powder. Whereas literary publishers may advertise a new novel stressing the qualities that distinguish it from others, Mills & Boon advertise a general product, ‘the rose of

romance.’ The product is sold in an easily recognizable package assuring the purchaser of standard quantity . . . and consistent quality (qtd. in Watson 75).

This marketing strategy is perhaps one of the primary reasons these romances are viewed with disdain by certain sections of the population. As Rosemary Auchmuty states in her foreword to Dixon’s history of Mills & Boon: “as pioneers of brand-name publishing, whose readers are attracted by a logo rather than an author’s name, they have come to stand for all that is worst in formulaic writing and cynical mass marketing” (ix).

There has been much debate surrounding genre fiction in relation to the conflict between social and cultural agendas and economic imperatives. Torstar (the parent company of Harlequin Mills & Boon) is driven solely by economics. Torstar is in the business of selling books, regardless of what those books have to say on social or political issues (within normal societal bounds). As Dixon states, Torstar is a capitalist organization whose “financial and political ideology follows from that—and can be simply defined as profit-making” (179). She further asserts that Mills & Boon romances are books whose

target audience of readers is women and their marketing strategies, such as they are, are aimed specifically at women. They rely on women for both the initial production (authors) and the secondary presentation (editors) . . . they cannot be called a feminist publishing firm in the way that Virago and The Women’s Press in Britain can. The reason for this is that feminism is a political group with political aims. Mills & Boon, Harlequin and Torstar do not have a stated feminist agenda (182).

She adds: “However, it does not necessarily follow from this that individual *books*, produced by individual women, cannot have a feminist content” (182-3). Dixon’s study of Mills & Boon novels from 1909 to the 1990s “shows how romance writers have adapted certain creeds of both the First and Second Waves of feminism to fit the dominant beliefs which their own writings exemplify” (194). Obviously, writers do not live in vacuums and it is to be expected that the dominant

ideologies of their day will have some impact on them. It is inevitable that a writer's personal belief system will imbue their writing, both consciously and unconsciously.

The impact of editorial attempts to make romance novels more "politically correct" is discussed in the critical anthology *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*. In Jayne Ann Krentz's essay "Trying To Tame The Romance" she outlines four targets for reform—the alpha male, the aggressive seduction of the heroine by the hero, the convention of the heroine's virginity, and the genre's frequent use of certain core stories. Her essay makes clear why all of these conventions work and concludes:

The efforts to make romance novels respectable has been a resounding failure. The books that exemplify the "new breed" of politically correct romances, the ones featuring sensitive, unaggressive heroes and sexually experienced, right-thinking heroines in "modern" stories dealing with trendy issues, have never become the most popular books in the genre (113).

Daphne Clair has a slightly different take on the issue in her essay "Sweet Subversions." She claims this change to a more politically correct hero with editors "insisting on sensitivity, humour, understanding, and patience in the romantic man" (70) indicates the biggest subversion of all—that not content with equality with men, women now demand "that men should be more like women—the ultimate subversion" (70). In her essay "Judge Me By The Joy I Bring," Kathleen Gilles Seidel states: "In the last eight to ten years, romance novels have been extremely responsive to the social issues raised by mainstream feminism. We have changed the notion of what heroines can be and what they can do" (170). She adds: "In the mid-1980s there was considerable editorial pressure on writers to conform to at least the appearance of a more feminist fantasy" (170) While she says her own problems with this were minor, there were some authors who "felt an alien sensibility was being forced on their work, that they weren't being allowed to speak to their readers in their own voices" (171).

This is a representative rather than exhaustive list of the constraints and conventions of the popular romance genre. Undoubtedly there are many factors impacting on and shaping the category romances of Harlequin Mills & Boon, some quantifiable, others not. The level of emotional intensity that needs to be generated quickly and maintained over the course of the story, and the credibility of the happy ending are two elements I find most difficult and challenging in my own practice. This is in part due to the page constraints, which necessarily curtail the space a writer can dedicate to the development of characters and their concerns. It is also due to the tension that exists between the fantasy and wish fulfilment element, which is present in all popular genre fiction, with the elements of realism demanded by Harlequin's guidelines as well as the realism demanded by the form of the novel itself. Of course, the primary concern of the popular romance genre is with the theme of romantic love and this is the key to addressing and resolving these difficulties. To achieve the required emotional intensity and credibility, an author needs to portray romantic love in a manner that resonates with readers. While there is a great body of critical literature surrounding the subject of romantic love and how it has been depicted in the novel, the idea or aspect that most interests me and seems to most promise an answer to my own difficulties is the conflict romantic love seems to trigger between intellect and emotion. As Blaise Pascal declares: "the heart has its reasons whereof Reason knows nothing" (qtd. in Lewis, Amini, and Lannon 4). The internal discord this can engender in a heroine and/or hero can generate tension quickly within a story and help amplify the narrative elements of internal and external conflict while heightening the emotional tone of the story. Furthermore, the resolution to enable the happy ending must in effect be earned by the conflicted character(s)—some kind of change or character growth must occur. If the heroine and/or hero resolve the conflict between reason and emotion within themselves in a convincing and plausible way, then it follows that the happy ending—that is, the triumphant union of the heroine and the hero—will be credible.

Chapter One of this exegesis explores how five well-known romance novels have dealt with the theme of romantic love, paying particular attention to the clash between reason and emotion.

The five chosen novels are Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca*, Georgette Heyer's *The Grand Sophy*, and *The Republic of Love* by Carol Shields. The first four of these novels were chosen for the influence they have had on the romance novels that followed. Of *Pride and Prejudice* Regis asserts: "It is probably the best-known canonical romance" (27-8). As such it has been the pattern for many romance novels since and, therefore, an automatic inclusion for study. In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë created a new kind of heroine who embodied passion and rebelliousness, and whose story readers still find compelling and disturbing today. Daphne Du Maurier and Georgette Heyer were to the popular Gothic romance and the popular historical romance respectively "a standard and a reference" (Clive Bloom 152). The popularity of Du Maurier's novels gave birth to a revival of the popular Gothic romance while Heyer's novels initiated a resurgence in popular historical romance. Their popularity indicates a universal appeal that fascinated and resonated with both the readers of their day and the authors who came after. Carol Shields' *The Republic Of Love* is an example of a romance novel written within the last twenty years that has received some critical attention. *The Republic Of Love* uses many of the conventions of the romance novel while asking whether it is even possible to have a romance in the twentieth century. The modern world it depicts is very different from the worlds portrayed in the other four novels where marriage has a greater impact on a woman's livelihood and her standing in the world. It is the similarities, however, that are illuminating—the desire for romantic love infuses all of these novels. *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Grand Sophy* all recreate the romantic myth and idealize romantic love. *Rebecca* and *The Republic of Love*, however, push conventional boundaries to challenge the romantic fantasy. It must be pointed out, of course, that each of these five novels deals with subjects and concerns beyond the theme of romantic love and, as has already been pointed out, there are many different ways of viewing and depicting romantic love. This study does not mean to imply that the conflict between reason and emotion is the only way in which these five novels consider the theme of romantic love. The conflict between reason and emotion is simply the lens that may help to illuminate a way through the challenges in

my own work. These five novels span a period of nearly one hundred and eighty years and, of course, the roles of women and the popular and sociological perceptions of romantic love have changed during that time. The constraints these five authors were operating under are different from those of today's authors of popular genre romance. However, a study of the approaches these authors take in their individual works can prove instructive to the writer of popular genre romances today.

Chapter Two of the exegesis explores how the constraints of the popular romance genre have shaped the creative work. It discusses the narrative strategies used to generate and maintain emotional intensity in the creative work with reference to the five novels discussed in Chapter One. The tension that exists between the fantasy and wish fulfilment of romance with elements of realism are also explored with particular reference to the credibility of the "happy" ending that is such a mainstay of popular genre romances today.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE HEART HAS ITS REASONS

“In vain have I struggled”⁴: Recreating the Romantic Myth—Pride and Prejudice, Jane Eyre and The Grand Sophy

Charlotte Brontë, on being recommended Jane Austen’s novels, famously rejected Austen’s work for being elegant and confined: “a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers” (qtd. in Showalter 102). Brontë contended that Austen’s business was with the head, not the heart “and that the Passions are perfectly unknown to her” (qtd. in McMaster 7). Juliet McMaster disagrees with this assessment. She believes that Jane Austen’s novels can move readers deeply: “Jane Austen . . . is far from deficient in feeling. . . . She is acutely awake to sex, and quite able to convey sexual feeling even though she may not take us into bedrooms. . . . Her subject was love, and she knew her subject” (7). She adds: “[Darcy’s] ‘In vain have I struggled’ speech is as well calculated to stir romantic feelings as Mr Rochester’s ‘God pardon me! . . . and man meddle not with me: I will have her, and will hold her’ ” (68). In her introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, Vivien Jones does not find the novel lacking in passion either: “From that first meeting, Elizabeth and Darcy’s fraught fascination with each other generates a tantalising sexual energy, an energy which, like Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre and Rochester later in the century, finds expression in a series of highly articulate confrontations” (xiii).

As “the best-known canonical romance” (Regis 27), *Pride and Prejudice* has provided a model and a guide for many of the romance novels that followed: “*Pride and Prejudice* is centrally concerned with personal happiness and the grounds on which it might be achieved, and Elizabeth’s marriage to Darcy—tall, handsome and rich—is the stuff of wish fulfilment” (Jones xi). This romantic fantasy is still a powerful cultural myth for readers today. Darcy might well be tall,

⁴ *Pride and Prejudice*, 185.

handsome and rich, but as any reader of romantic fiction knows it is his arrogance that casts him as the ideal romantic hero, and in large part it is the romantic hero's transformation—his confrontation with his own deficiencies and his efforts to counter them and improve himself—that drives the story. It is, however, the transformation of both the heroine and the hero in *Pride and Prejudice*—Lizzy and Darcy's individual attempts to reconcile passion with reason—that is the narrative focus of the novel and provides much of the suspense surrounding the question of whether Lizzy and Darcy will come to see each other (and themselves) truly enough to earn their happy union, and in effect ensure that the hoped-for ending is credible within the world of the story.

There is little doubt that romantic love triggers conflict in Darcy. He struggles with his growing feelings of love for Lizzy convinced that, as his social inferior, she is unsuitable to be his wife. How is this struggle delineated in Darcy? The answer is manifested in his changing attitudes towards Lizzy. He progresses from a state of not finding her “handsome enough” (13) to tempt him to dance, to admiring her “fine eyes” (27), to then warning himself not to become captivated by her (57). When he does propose to her it is as much a shock for the reader as it is for Lizzy. However, these two sides of his nature—passion and reason—are still palpably in opposition in the first proposal scene, the conflict they manifest in him evident in almost his every word: “In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you” (185). *In vain have I struggled?* Mr Darcy is obviously operating under the effects of romantic love—of his attraction and infatuation with Lizzy—but it has not wrapped him so firmly in its grip that he cannot recognise the unsuitability of the match. This becomes evident as he goes on to detail “His sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which judgement had always opposed to inclination” (185), and he finishes by “representing to her the strength of that attachment which, in spite of all his endeavours, he had found impossible to conquer” (185). Passion, he freely admits, has overruled his reason because a rational man would not fall in love and offer marriage to a woman “whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own” (188).

Lizzy's tart refusal and the ensuing confrontation is the catalyst for Darcy's transformation. He is able to subdue his pride and the pain of Lizzy's rejection to acknowledge the justice of her accusations. He confronts his failings and then sets about reforming his faults, and the results of this transformation are evident in his second proposal. Once Lizzy has thanked him on behalf of her family for the service he has performed for her sister Lydia, he says: " 'If you *will* thank me,' he replied, 'let it be for yourself alone. That the wish of giving happiness to you, might add force to the other inducements which led me on, I shall not attempt to deny. But your *family* owe me nothing. Much as I respect them, I believe, I only thought of *you*' " (346). There is not an ounce of pride or recognition of what is due to his consequence in this speech. Nor, when he tells her that his "affections and wishes are unchanged" (346), is there that old security and assurance that his offer will be accepted. His apprehension and anxiety are evident. This scene simmers with fear, hope, excitement, and a "tantalizing sexual energy" (Jones xiii). Absent from the scene is Darcy's former resentment that his judgement and sense have betrayed him or that in marrying Lizzy he is going against his own best interests. He is a rational man who is making a rational choice in pursuing the object of his heart and begging her to marry him, because that marriage will significantly add to his happiness.

Both of the proposal scenes are moments of high drama in the novel and Austen manages to invest the scenes with the necessary emotion and tension primarily due to the fact that Elizabeth Bennet is such an engaging heroine. Lizzy's intelligence and liveliness ensure reader support for her. As readers, we care what happens to her. As Austen herself described her, Lizzy is "as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print" (qtd. in Jones xii), and it is Lizzy's transformation as much as Darcy's that drives the novel. Lizzy's views of marriage have been made clear to the reader by the time Darcy issues his first marriage proposal and her rejection of his offer illustrates the sincerity of her sentiments. Her process of transformation does not begin until after she reads Darcy's letter detailing his connection with Mr Wickham: "She grew absolutely ashamed of herself. —Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial,

prejudiced and absurd. . . . Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. . . . I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away ” (201-2).

Like Darcy, Elizabeth must learn to temper her prejudices, and the passions that arise because of them, with the cool hand of reason in a process of self-improvement. Lizzy’s honesty with herself secures a reader’s trust. Hence, when Lizzy changes her mind about Darcy, the reader does too. What adds credibility to Lizzy’s change of heart is that her feelings for Mr Darcy do not immediately turn from dislike to love upon learning that she has misjudged him. She admits her error, but she does not regret turning down his offer of marriage. It is only as the novel progresses and Darcy makes an effort to conquer his pride that Lizzy, making an effort to view him honestly and without prejudice, comes to see and appreciate his worth and realise he is a man who could make her happy. Robert M. Polhemus notes that where Darcy “falls in love” Lizzy does not. Lizzy comes to love Darcy by slow degrees. Indeed, Lizzy acknowledges as much. When Jane asks her how long she has loved him, she answers: “It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began” (353), and again in reply to her father’s protests: “by explaining the gradual change which her estimation of him had undergone, relating her absolute certainty that his affection was not the work of a day . . . she did conquer her father’s incredulity” (356). It is in part this illustration of the different and individual ways romantic love can affect a person that adds such force and plausibility to the novel.

Lizzy’s and Darcy’s potential union is contrasted with the marriages made by Charlotte Lucas and Lydia Bennet: “Charlotte is all head, Lydia all hormones” (Polhemus 42). Lizzy and Darcy’s ability to negotiate these two extremes with honesty and intelligence is rewarded in the end by their achievement of the ideal marriage. In effect they have earned their happy ending. Polhemus claims: “Knowledge of being loved deepens [Elizabeth’s] moral sense, and actively loving changes [Darcy]” (47). Stuart M. Tave believes that Lizzy and Darcy’s “happiness is deserved by a process of mortification begun early and ended late” (qtd. in Harold Bloom 55). Harold Bloom, however, favours “the judgement that Elizabeth and Darcy scarcely change, and learn rather that they

complement each other's not wholly illegitimate pride" (55). All of these views, different as they are, signal that Lizzy and Darcy earn (via mortification or through knowledge) their happy union. They have learned, in some instances painfully, to balance their emotions with reason. This has allowed Darcy to acknowledge the justice of Lizzy's criticisms of his first proposal and to moderate his behaviour to win her love. In Lizzy's instance it has allowed her to view Darcy without blinkers and realise he is a man who would suit her, who would make her happy. As a result the ending of the novel is both gratifying and fulfilling. This ending, the sense of rightness in the union of the heroine and hero, is the aim of all popular genre romances. McMaster recognises the significance of this ending: "This is not mere compatibility, but a full and mutual engagement and deployment of minds and hearts. Such too is the consummation achieved by *Jane Eyre*" (80).

Jane Eyre made popular the story in which the innocent, orphaned heroine meets the dark, brooding hero and lives happily ever after. However, romantic love was never Jane's goal. Jane's quest is made explicit early in the novel—to no longer be "less than a servant" (18). She burns to escape the thrall of dependence and its subsequent oppression. She achieves the personal and financial freedom she craves, but during the course of that journey she also learns to balance the opposing poles of her nature—explicitly labelled as passion and reason. Reader support and sympathy for Jane is created via the injustices and hardships that she is forced to endure and through her passion and rebelliousness in the face of them. The conflict between passion and reason that Jane must resolve in her own nature is not merely as a result of romantic love. However, it is how she deals with the confusion and chaos of romantic love with all its risks and responsibilities, with the temptations and limitations that it poses, that is most revealing of her character growth.

The crisis point for Jane in the novel, and the moment of highest emotional intensity, is when Rochester urges her to become his mistress. This follows the most sensational moment of the novel when Bertha Mason and her true connection to Rochester are exposed. It is at this crisis point that the mature Jane is in most danger of allowing her passions to take precedence over reason. In fact she says:

my very conscience and reason turned traitors against me, and charged me with crime in resisting him. They spoke almost as loud as Feeling: and that clamoured wildly. ‘Oh comply!’ it said. ‘Think of his misery; think of his danger; look at his state when left alone; remember his headlong nature: consider the recklessness following on despair—soothe him; save him; love him; tell him you love him and will be his’ (416).

However, the lesson Jane learned from Helen Burns while at Lowood School—to temper her yearning for love—comes to her aid here. Jane had declared to Helen: “if others don’t love me, I would rather die than live—I cannot bear to be solitary and hated, Helen. Look here; to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest” (93). Pauline Nestor points out that “the potential for masochism and self-destruction is clear. Such a slavish desire for love represents a particularly dangerous trap for women who are taught to define themselves in terms of their love relationships” (57). Helen answers with “Hush, Jane! You think too much of the love of human beings; you are too impulsive, too vehement” (93). In calming Jane she reinforces her assertion: “If all the world hated you, and believed you wicked, while your own conscience approved you, and absolved you from guilt, you would not be without friends” (92). Jane almost paraphrases this sentiment when she answers her own question: “Who in the world cares for *you*? or who will be injured by what you do?” with “I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now” (416). She refuses to be swayed by Rochester’s vehemence or her own passions. Though it is hard-won, Jane is fighting for that balance “between the potentially destructive extremes of her own character—between the poles of Reason and Feeling. . . . She is asserting the right to value her own well-being above the demands made by others” (Nestor 50-1).

While Charlotte Brontë is undeniably innovative in asserting that women had sexual feelings and depicting them in her heroine, *Jane Eyre* bases a true and equal love on a balance between sexual passion and reason. The key word here is equal. If Jane had become Rochester's mistress he would always have had the advantage. The personal freedom that was so important to her would have been lost. Feelings unchecked by conscience, although exaggerated, are embodied in Bertha Mason's madness. If Jane is to attain her own emotional and personal independence she needs to mediate a balance between Helen Burn's doctrine of total self-abnegation and Bertha's passionate excess. To become a fully self-possessed and self-actualizing individual she needs to find a balance for her impulses that are not merely a form of repression, but allow her to remain true to herself. Although Rochester claims to have accepted Jane as his equal, Jane is aware that his conception of equality is only partial. She certainly does not feel secure in his idea of equality as is evident in their courtship when she likens him to a sultan and when she is vexed with his attempts to lavish on her jewels and gifts. However, Rochester denies Jane equality in a more fundamental way, by not telling her the truth about Bertha. He pays lip service to the idea of equality yet he refuses to relinquish control—even to his chosen partner in equality.

When Jane refuses to become Rochester's mistress, she is refusing to allow herself to be wholly dictated to by her passion. Elaine Showalter states: "Jane Eyre suffers in running away from Rochester, but she acts out of the instinct of self-preservation . . . For Jane Eyre action is a step towards independence" (124). Conversely, when Jane turns down St John's proposal, she is refusing the relentless dictates of reason. She will not betray herself sexually: "Such a martyrdom would be monstrous" (530). In rejecting St John who "takes her seriously—far more seriously than Rochester does—as a fellow human being," Patricia Meyer Spacks claims that Jane "chooses passion over action" (65). With her return to Thornfield and Ferndean as an independent woman, and her discovery of the events that have occurred in her absence, Jane is free to choose her own path. As Jane says: 'Reader, I married him' (587) and not 'Reader, he married me.' Many critics have noted the importance of this distinction—most notably Patricia Beer in *Reader, I Married Him* (1974).

Regis explains that “in returning to, courting and marrying Rochester, [Jane] acts from the base of [her achieved] independence, and extends it to her life with her new husband” (91). However, many critics have found the ending of *Jane Eyre* disturbing and have accused Brontë of harbouring a punitive impulse towards her hero. Spacks claims that “female anger has been satisfied, the balance righted, by Rochester’s maiming,” (65) and that this maiming is his punishment for having tried to control Jane. Harold Bloom disagrees: “I do not think that we are to apply the Freudian reduction that Rochester has been somehow castrated, even symbolically, nor need we think of him as a sacrificed Samson figure. . . . But certainly he has been rendered dependent upon Jane, and he has been tamed into domestic virtue and pious sentiment” (127). However, Showalter maintains: “When they finally marry, they have become equals, not only because Rochester, in losing his hand and his sight, has learned how it feels to be helpless and how to accept help, but also because Jane, in destroying the dark passion of her own psyche, has become truly her ‘own mistress’ ” (122). In many ways the ending of the novel mirrors the pattern of Jane and Rochester’s relationship. Jane is the true hero of the novel—it is she who constantly comes to her beloved’s rescue. It occurs in their first meeting when Rochester sprains his ankle and is physically dependent on her, she saves his life by dousing the fire in his bedchamber, and at the end of the novel she manages their courtship. Like Jane, Rochester has had to learn to balance the two sides of his nature. Being physically dependent on others has taught him to relinquish control, and the “physical dependence he experiences as a result of his injuries provides Rochester with the opportunity for new understanding” (Spacks 66). When Jane and Rochester do finally marry, Jane has maintained her self-respect and Rochester has learned self-restraint. Their love has transcended the fleetingness of infatuation to a deeper communion of the mind. Their achieved “oneness” is very much part of traditional romantic love—an aspect that romantic love celebrates—and as such has an undeniable mythic quality. While the ending of *Jane Eyre* is certainly contrived, because of Jane and Rochester’s sufferings and exertions it is also welcome and deserved.

Pride and Prejudice and *Jane Eyre* reveal in their different ways the manner in which a heroine and hero's character growth can lead to their satisfying happy union. *The Grand Sophy* demonstrates how a heroine can earn her happy union by exerting herself and, in many ways, is a celebration of the heroine. Georgette Heyer was a historical novelist who chose as her period setting the Regency. Her influence on the historical novels that followed has been considerable. Regis states: "[Heyer's] influence is felt in every historical romance novel written since 1921, particularly in the Regency romance novel" (125). Clive Bloom calls her work "a standard and a reference" (152). Regis observes that "Heyer may set her novels in an historically accurate Regency world of glittering surfaces, but the characters she puts there, particularly the heroines, are not the historical norm" (127). Sophy Stanton-Lacy may not be the "historical norm," but, like Lizzy Bennet, she is intelligent and lively. However, because she has a modern sensibility she acts in ways Lizzy would never consider. Also unlike Lizzy or Jane, romantic love does not trigger any kind of conflict between Sophy's passion and her reason.

The reader is disposed to like Sophy from before she makes her entrance on the page when learning of her unconventional childhood. This support is cemented when she does make her appearance, in part due to the monkey and parrot that she brings as gifts to the utter delight of the Rivenhall children, and then through her description: "Sophy stood five feet nine inches in her stockinged feet, and was built on generous lines, a long-legged, deep-bosomed creature, with a merry face, and a quantity of glossy brown ringlets under one of the most dashing hats her cousins had ever seen" (40). As the scene unfolds, the adjectives used here—generous, deep-bosomed, merry, dashing—become attributes of Sophy's personality as well. Sophy arrives in a chaotic whirlwind of activity, but she manages to bring warmth, a sense of fun and affectionate delight to her cousins and her aunt before she even enters the house. Heyer's heroine wins her readers over as easily as she does her relatives.

Unlike either Lizzy Bennet or Jane Eyre, however, Sophy does not change much over the course of the novel. She is confident, capable and, due to the provisions her father has made for her,

financially independent from her relatives. Perhaps most important of all, however, she is less constrained than any other woman in the novel by the conventions and codes of conduct of the day. She recognises the hypocrisy of these codes and chooses to fight for what she believes is right rather than submit to the dictates of form or to the strictures surrounding a woman's conduct. When another character in the novel bemoans a less than ideal situation and then claims that there is nothing to be done, Sophy's reply reverberates throughout the rest of the novel: " 'That,' said Sophy severely, 'is what people always say when they are too lazy, or perhaps too timorous to make a push to be helpful! I have a great many faults, but I am not lazy and I am not timorous' " (109). Romantic love does not trigger a conflict in Sophy. She is not torn between her passion and her reason. However, while Sophy herself doesn't change or grow much over the course of the novel, she is the agent of change.

The primary object of that change is the hero, Charles Rivenhall, and it is through him that the conflict between reason and passion is seen most clearly. Charles, like Mr Darcy, is arrogant and convinced of his own superiority. He is a man with an uncertain temper who is used to being obeyed. As a consequence, he has become something of a domestic tyrant. Although he is engaged to another woman—the prim and moralistic Eugenia Wraxton—the experienced romance reader recognises Charles as the romantic hero even before he makes an appearance on the page when a secondary character exclaims: "So it is Charles who calls the tune!" (9). This impression is further deepened by the physical description of Charles as "harsh featured" and "with a manner that combined assurance with a good deal of reserve," and the telling detail that his "notion of making himself agreeable in company was to treat with cold civility anyone for whom he felt no particular liking; and his graces—far from winning—included a trick of staring out of countenance those whose pretensions he deprecated, and of uttering blighting comments, which put an abrupt end to social intercourse" (15-6). Conditioned by *Pride and Prejudice* and its predecessors, the romance reader anticipates the taming of Charles' arrogance.

Due to his father's profligacy Charles has been forced to assume financial responsibility for his family. As a result of his worry and anxiety, any appearance of good humour in him has vanished. This has made his family afraid of him. Sophy recognises the truth early. She alters her opinion from "Charles sounds a most disagreeable creature" (49) and "a tyrant" (51), to "she was inclined to think he could not be as black as he had been painted" (62). The repression in Charles of anything resembling a carefree nature and his prevailing sense of responsibility and rationality is best exemplified in his betrothal to Miss Wraxton. Charles values Miss Wraxton's sense of propriety and what he views as her good sense. She, unlike his father, would never bring shame or dishonour to his family. Miss Wraxton, it is made clear early in the novel, does not love Charles and wants only to avoid the ignominy of being left on the shelf. Their lack of passion and physical desire for each other is evident. Sophy, confident in her own selfhood and with her own means of financial support, cheerfully refuses to bend to Charles' will or to be intimidated by his temper. In doing so she knowingly holds up a mirror to him whereby he can view the results of his domineering behaviour on his family. What he sees appals him and during the course of the novel the reader is treated to his recognition of his faults and his attempts to mend them. His efforts at reform win for him a better understanding with his family.

Sophy is the agent of change in another perhaps more significant way and it is one of which she has little control—the inevitable contrasts that Charles starts to make between her and his fiancée. Sophy's sense of honour is contrasted against Eugenia's sense of propriety. Sophy's warmth and generosity eclipses Eugenia's reserve and moralising. Charles slowly comes to realise that Eugenia's sense of propriety is empty of any real feeling for him, and that his idea of respectability and his yearning for order and control have misled him. He cannot cry off from his engagement—it would be dishonourable and despicable—but the change in his outlook is revealed when he promises to no longer stand in the way of his sister's engagement: "God forbid I should have any hand in parting you from one whom you sincerely love, or in promoting your marriage to

a man you cannot care for. . . . I have come to see that nothing but misery could result from such a union. You at least shall not be subjected to a lifetime of regret” (284).

When his words are reported to Sophy, the reader has become well enough acquainted with her to realise she will not sit idly by and watch her cousins make unsuitable marriages that will result in their misery and “a lifetime of regret” (284). By this stage in the novel Sophy has recognised that Charles has feelings for her that this prior commitment prevents him from acting upon. Sophy never speaks about or refers to this knowledge, however, and this reveals that in at least one area Sophy is as proper and decorous as other heroines before her. In *The Grand Sophy*, the reader is never made privy to Sophy’s reflections about her own feelings (which find expression chiefly through tormenting Charles). However, her clever machinations result in freeing Charles from his engagement, and it is worth noting the generosity of these machinations—nobody is hurt. Eugenia, though insufferable, is not wicked and the narrative makes it clear that she will soon form an alliance with the equally insufferable Lord Bromford. Freed from his engagement, Charles proposes to Sophy in a typically humorous fashion in keeping with the tone of the rest of the novel. Charles’ success at tempering both his arrogance and domination, his recognition of the difference between the facade of morality and true integrity, combined with Sophy’s exertions to ensure others’ happiness in concert with the liveliness, warmth and commonsense that she brings into his family, instils a sense of confidence that Sophy and Charles, like Elizabeth and Darcy before them, will have a successful, and no doubt passionate, marriage.

Lizzy Bennet, Jane Eyre and Sophy Stanton-Lacy, while each very different, garner reader support in their efforts to act as independent individuals. While Lizzy Bennet is constrained by the conventions of her time and the limited choices available to women, Harold Bloom argues: “Austen’s ultimate irony is that Elizabeth Bennet is inwardly so free that convention performs for her the ideal function it cannot perform for us: it liberates her will without tending to stifle her high individuality” (55). When Darcy falls in love with Lizzy for her uniqueness, for the “liveliness of her mind,” it is cause for celebration—her marriage does not diminish her. In contrast to Lizzy, Jane

represents a new kind of heroine. Showalter observes: “The influence of *Jane Eyre* on Victorian heroines was felt to have been revolutionary” (122). Gilbert and Gubar claim that it wasn’t the passion and sexuality of *Jane Eyre* that shocked Victorian reviewers, but “its ‘anti-Christian’ refusal to accept the forms, customs, and standards of society—in short, its rebellious feminism” (qtd. in Harold Bloom 128). Harold Bloom states that “Jane Eyre cannot countenance a sense of being in any way inferior to anyone whatsoever” (127). When Jane returns to Rochester and directs their courtship and betrothal she is acting from this sense of equality, and Rochester accepts and loves her for it. What is made clear in both these two novels is how serious a business love and marriage is for a woman in the times these two authors were writing. Polhemus puts it succinctly: “the contrasting figures of Charlotte Lucas and Lydia Bennet, between whom [Austen] places her heroine, show how dubious and difficult the subject of romantic love could be for women in the author’s milieu. . . . Love . . . is dangerous for a woman” (42-3). By the time Heyer published *The Grand Sophy* in 1950, however, the situation for women had changed substantially, and this is reflected in the heroine of Heyer’s novel. Regis claims that “three broad social trends meet and clash on the pages of the romance novel: the rise of affective individualism, the importance of companionate marriage, and English law as it applied to married women” (55-6). Sophy acts as a fully affective individual in ways that Lizzy Bennet and Jane Eyre cannot. This may in part explain the more light-hearted tone and style of *The Grand Sophy* when compared to *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre*: where marriage is concerned, the stakes are no longer so high for a woman.

Within the framework of their story worlds the ending of each of these novels in happy triumphant union is, if not always a hundred percent credible, always earned and welcome. This process of earning one’s happy union can be seen quite clearly in the painful process of change and transformation each of the heroes is forced to undergo. This transformation is necessary before he can be considered worthy of his heroine and can, therefore, earn his union with her. The reformation of the hero and his verbalization of it “is romance’s literary device to show men changing to ‘fit’ women, both emotionally and sexually” (Dixon 170). This idea has been seized by

modern category romances: “In these books, marriage is for life, but *only* if the husband accepts his integration into the female world . . . it is the man who has to work at the marriage, not the woman” (Dixon 170). As Jane Miller says of Austen’s romances: “The good marriage . . . must start with a man’s concessions, his acknowledgement of his own dependence and brotherly admission of equality” (81).

Jane Austen employs elements of both romance and realism in *Pride and Prejudice* to construct a realistic depiction of modern manners. She employs an ironic tone while illustrating the danger romantic love may pose for a woman. She depicts the impact social institutions have on romantic love, marriage and personal happiness while at the same time ensuring her lovers overcome all such difficulties. Conversely, *Jane Eyre* is infused with the romantic. Elements of realism are secondary to the Gothic sensibility Charlotte Brontë creates. Spacks claims it is a novel that “makes few overt claims to realism” which suggests “the author here shapes a world closer to her heart’s desire” (66). However, the heroine of the novel is not infused with the romantic. Rather, she steadfastly resists it. For all of its Gothic unreality, the novel raises big questions about personal freedom and male and female equality. *The Grand Sophy* follows most closely in style and narrative structure to that of *Pride and Prejudice*, but with a heroine who has the freedom that Jane Eyre imagined. The concerns of the story world that *The Grand Sophy* depicts, however, are much narrower than those of the other two novels.

While *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Grand Sophy* differ from each other in many ways, they are each infused with the idea that romantic love, and the marriage that logically ensues, will significantly enhance the happiness of their heroine and hero. This is still a powerful cultural myth today, which in part accounts for the extraordinary popularity of category romances. As Jones says: “We still respond with pleasure to the rags-to-riches love story, to the happy ending which combines sexual and emotional attraction with ten thousand a year and the prospect of becoming mistress of Pemberley, a resolution which makes romantic love both the guarantee and the excuse for economic and social success” (xii). It is the pleasure readers have found in this kind of story that

has ensured genre romance's continuing popularity today, and has led to the particularly specialized form of the Harlequin Mills & Boon category romance.

“Is it possible to have an intelligent love affair?”⁵: Love in the Modern World—Rebecca and The Republic of Love

In *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Grand Sophy* the force of the overarching romantic ideal provides much of the structure and momentum of the narrative and ensures that the resolution of each novel ends with the heroine and hero's happy union. In *Rebecca* and *The Republic of Love*, however, elements of realism clash with this romantic ideal, creating a different kind of story.

Many commentators on Daphne Du Maurier's bestselling Gothic romance, *Rebecca*, have noted the undeniable echoes of *Jane Eyre* that sound throughout it.⁶ Present in both novels are the young and innocent first-person narrator, the mad first wife, the mysterious house, brooding descriptions of the landscape, and a spectacular fire. Richard Kelly identifies *Rebecca* as “the first major gothic romance in the twentieth century and perhaps the finest written to this day. It contains most of the trappings of the typical gothic romance . . . however, [it] is much more than a simple thriller or mystery. It is a profound and fascinating study of an obsessive personality, of sexual dominance, of human identity, and of the liberation of the hidden self” (54). While Charlotte Brontë subverts elements of Gothic romance in *Jane Eyre* to challenge reader expectations, Daphne Du Maurier uses these same conventions to explore the themes of love and identity. In doing so, however, she challenges romantic fiction's convention of the traditional happy ending.

Rebecca relates the story of a young, innocent girl—a paid companion—who meets a mysterious, aristocratic older man who marries her and whisks her off to his country house,

⁵ *The Republic of Love*, 250.

⁶ See for example, Daphne Watson's *Their Own Worst Enemies*, Richard Kelly's *Daphne Du Maurier* and Horner and Zlosnik's *Daphne Du Maurier: Writing, Identity and the Gothic Imagination*.

Manderley. Once at Manderley the far-from-confident heroine-narrator is overwhelmed by the grandeur and mystery of the house, and overshadowed by the spectre of her husband's first wife, Rebecca. Kelly comments: "In many fairy tales and in most romances, marriage is the essential ingredient that rewards the heroine and provides the all-important climax to the story. In *Rebecca*, the marriage comes early in the story and is merely the prelude to the fierce competition the heroine faces in winning the love of her husband" (57). Before she can attain her triumphant ending with her husband, the heroine must vanquish the memory of the dead Rebecca.

Du Maurier creates a sense of nail-biting suspense throughout the pages of her novel, and she achieves this in three main ways. First, the heroine of *Rebecca* is not the usual romantic heroine. She is described as devastatingly plain and awkward—the antithesis of Rebecca (but reminiscent of Jane Eyre). Heroines of Gothic romance typically “preserve that incandescent virtue and beauty which invites villainy to attempt their destruction” (Beer 57). Although the second Mrs De Winter does not have beauty she is painfully naïve and innocent and it is this sense of “persecuted innocence” (Richetti, qtd. in Fuchs 119) that creates much of the narrative tension in *Rebecca*. Du Maurier's heroine suffers enormous personal angst, fuelled in part by the machinations of the sinister Mrs Danvers, convinced that she can never live up to Rebecca's perfections and as such gains reader sympathy and identification. This “persecuted innocence” of the heroine gains added momentum as the questions that surround the dead Rebecca become more urgent. When these two elements are combined with Du Maurier's brooding physical descriptions of Manderley, descriptions that evoke a growing sense of foreboding, they coalesce to build a level of fever-pitch emotion in the novel. In *The Rebecca Notebook* Du Maurier, attempting to explain the genesis of the novel, said she knew “something terrible would have to happen, I did not know what . . . I paced up and down the living room in Alexandria, notebook in hand, nibbling first my nails then my pencil” (11). The reader likewise senses that “something terrible” is looming.

Of course, the reward for such nail-biting tension is revelation—for both the heroine and the reader. Maxim, however, only reveals the truth to his second wife when it appears that his crime

will be exposed (and it is only now that he makes his first declaration of love to her). As soon as she discovers that he never loved his first wife, the heroine is freed from the spectre of Rebecca. The unravelling of the mystery surrounding his first wife renders the second Mrs De Winter less dependent on her husband. However, as the threat that he could be charged with Rebecca's murder looms, Maxim becomes increasingly dependent on the heroine. This vanquishing of Rebecca as a rival for Maxim's affection correlates in an increase in the heroine's confidence, which in effect makes her not only Rebecca's superior, but also Maxim's equal. Logically it is at this point in the novel that a reader should be able to believe that the second Mrs De Winter has become a fully realised, self-actualizing individual and that she is free to love fully and without fear, and to believe that she is loved in return, but this conclusion never rings quite true. While it could be argued that the burning of Manderley at the end of *Rebecca* provides the hero and heroine with a release—leaving them free to enjoy their newfound conjugal harmony—it could be just as easily asserted that Manderley's burning condemns them to “barren and lonely continental wandering” (Clive Bloom 94).

Herein lies *Rebecca's* challenge to popular genre romance's convention of the happy ending. *Rebecca* traces the process of being in thrall to love, but it is far less certain whether this love deepens into that “full and mutual engagement” that Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy, and Jane Eyre and Mr Rochester attain. Daphne Watson states: “There is no sense that post-Manderley the De Winter marriage ever attains that idealistic quality expressed in Bronte's novel . . . there is no transcendence and blissful union in the love and marriage of the De Winters. Maxim, unlike Rochester, would not appear to have fallen in love with the heroine” (21). It could be argued that there is no meeting of souls in *Rebecca* as there is in *Jane Eyre*, no full and mutual engagement, because there is in effect no romantic love to speak of in the novel. The heroine of *Rebecca* is obsessed with gaining her husband's love, and her obsession is never tempered with reason. She seems to need Maxim's love as a means of shoring up her inferiority complex, while he seems to need her to exorcise the memories of his first wife. Sally Beaman, in her afterword to the Virago

edition of *Rebecca*, describes the heroine-narrator as “a masochistic woman who is desperate for the validation provided by a man’s love—a woman seeking an authoritarian father surrogate” (437).

Rebecca illustrates the dangers that exist for women who define themselves solely through their love relationships. None of the other heroines so far considered choose marriage at the expense of all else—especially not their identity. Lizzy initially refuses to marry Darcy, for all his wealth, because she is convinced he is the last man who could make her happy—respect and esteem for her marriage partner are more important to her than money. Jane refuses to bind herself to Rochester when such a step would limit and threaten her personal freedom and independence. Sophy tests Charles and then, when he has passed these tests, she masterminds their match in a clear-sighted manner. All three of these heroines have (or come to have) a strongly defined sense of self. It is their fight to attain and maintain this sense of self that earns for them their happy union of oneness with their hero. The heroine of *Rebecca* never achieves this sense of self. She reveals little character growth and while discovering the truth about Rebecca means she grows in confidence, it does not seem to bring her wisdom or insight. Unlike Jane Eyre, she does not consult her conscience to decide an ethical and principled course of action—reason never imposes its will upon desire. Her instant and unthinking resolve to lie, perjure and swear to save her husband does not indicate an emotional maturity. There is no questioning of Maxim’s motives for the murder, no suspicion that he has coloured the truth, no assessment or weighing of the situation. There does not even seem to be any true pity for him. She takes what he says as the absolute truth, revelling all the while in his claims that he never loved Rebecca. It is her relief and joy at this revelation that are predominant, and they are also striking and chilling. Her actions claim that nothing is more important than possessing Maxim’s love.

Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik claim that “the Female Gothic resists unhappy or ambiguous closure.” However, while “this formula may be appropriate when applied to eighteenth-century Gothic novels by women or to what are often rather loosely described as ‘popular Gothic novels’ . . . it does not work when applied to . . . du Maurier’s *Rebecca*” (28-9). What is striking is that “du

Maurier's works which employ the Gothic mode never completely exorcise the sinister: Rebecca continues to function as a haunting presence for both characters and readers despite the burning down of Manderley" (25). Beauman states that Du Maurier herself "feared her novel was 'too gloomy' to be popular, and . . . the ending 'too grim' to appeal to readers" (431). *Rebecca* delves into the dark territory of obsessive love and the dangers inherent to a woman who loses her very identity to it, and as such the novel provides a critique of some of the assumptions that underlie the happy endings and blissful oneness that romance novels work towards. It may be for this reason that Regis claims *Rebecca* does not actually fit into her definition of a romance novel "as a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines" (19). She claims that "*Rebecca* depicts the courtship and betrothal, but does not focus upon them. They are preconditions for the story that follows rather than being, themselves, the story" (49).

Hence, while *Rebecca* was labelled as a Gothic romance, the novel rebels against the constraints of that genre, refusing to fulfil the expectations raised. In *Rebecca* Du Maurier is not attempting to depict a world in which romantic love overcomes all obstacles. As a result, she is not interested in ending her novel with the jubilant union of her heroine and hero. Beauman evidently agrees with this assessment claiming: "*Rebecca* is a deeply subversive work, one that undermines the very genre to which critics consigned it. Far from being an 'exquisite' love story, *Rebecca* raises questions about women's acquiescence to male values" (441). As Watson observes: "[Du Maurier] offers glimpses of the complexities of human nature and the peculiar power struggles and structures redolent of actual human relationships" (26), and that in denying the reader the "triumphalist happy ending" of *Jane Eyre*, this allows the reader "freedom from closure, freedom to speculate" (26). Cawelti makes it clear that formula fictions present an ideal world. The world Du Maurier depicts in *Rebecca* may not be any more realistic (or, in Cawelti's words, mimetic) than that of popular romance, but it does break with the conventional happy ending to explore concerns that move beyond those dealt with by popular romance (concerns that popular romance must either ignore or

resolve in a much more optimistic way if it is to maintain its commitment to the presentation of that ideal world).

Where *Rebecca* challenges the convention of the happy ending in genre romance fiction, *The Republic of Love*, while using many of its narrative structures, resists much of the idealization that is popular romance's mainstay. Carol Shields' novel, in its exploration of whether it is even possible to have a love affair—a romance—in the twentieth century, resists idealizing the romantic hero and the setting and, in the process, resists idealizing romantic love itself. Harlequin Mills & Boon category romances take the existence of love, sexual attraction and grand passion as a given; Carol Shields' novel does not. While a Harlequin novel never attempts to justify itself, *The Republic of Love* does. Faye Hammill in "The Republic of Love and Popular Romance" outlines Shields' uses of the structures and conventions of popular romance—in a knowing homage, perhaps—as a way to situate the reader, but also as a means to disorientate and defy expectations. The specific structures that Shields borrows include the alternating narratives between the two lonely protagonists that immediately set up a reader expectation that these two will meet, fall in love and live happily ever after according to the conventional pattern: falling in love at first sight; the heroine and hero encountering problems that threaten their union; and the novel ending with their marriage and a brief glimpse into their optimistic future. Hammill adds: "This satisfying, if predictable pattern is continuously disrupted . . . by the less traditional elements of the plot, characterization, and narrative structure" (62).

It becomes clear from the first page of the novel that Tom is not the typical romance hero. He is not a rich and arrogant alpha hero, like Darcy or Rivenhall, nor is he brooding and tortured, like Rochester and De Winter (though it could be argued that Tom has more in common with the Mills & Boon Sweet hero than the Mills & Boon Sweet hero has with Darcy and Rochester). Tom is the typical boy next door. He is nice-looking rather than extraordinarily handsome and/or physically intimidating. He is gentle and never attempts to assert his will over the heroine, and his greatest flaw may just be his optimistic belief in romantic love (demonstrated by his three previous

marriages). This is not a flaw that heroes of romantic genre fiction share. Krentz says of the alpha hero: “These males are the tough, hard-edged, tormented heroes that are at the heart of the vast majority of bestselling romance novels. These are the heroes that made Harlequin famous” (107-8). These alpha heroes are men who need to be tamed and gentled, and Tom does not fit this image at all. Of course, in real life there are more Toms than there are Darcys and Rochesters. However, the strong, powerful hero is part of the fantasy of formula romance and in departing from it Shields signals her refusal to be limited by popular romance’s conventions, indicating that her work falls somewhere outside of genre romance’s parameters.

Just as there is no alpha hero in *The Republic of Love* there is also no Pemberley, Thornfield Hall or Manderley, and no Regency England, to add glamour, to foreshadow disaster or to invoke mood. There is just present-day (or near present-day) Winnipeg with its neat suburban streets, its bus-stops and grey snow, its frozen winters and its first month of summer when canker worms drop from the trees and defile the streets. It is what accompanies this setting, however, that challenges the way romantic love is presented in popular genre fiction: the social networks that surround Fay and Tom. Fay and Tom do not operate within the isolation that is normally attendant on a romantic couple in popular genre romance. They are surrounded by their families and their friends and Shields also explores in some detail their interactions within their workplaces. As Fay herself notes:

The problem with stories of romance is that lovers are always shown in isolation: two individuals made suddenly mythic by the size of their ardour . . . She wonders why it is that lovers in books are cast adrift . . . where they are free to stew in their unnatural seclusion, removed from human interference or even human needs. Their families, their friends, even their work and separate histories pale beside their rapture (333).

Fay and Tom’s social networks reveal the wider frame of their lives and it is through these networks that they are given much well-meaning advice about love and relationships, and the many varying opinions on what love is that they need to negotiate before they can find their own answer to the question—what is love and does it exist?

For genre romance novels—particularly the category romances published by Harlequin Mills & Boon—the focus on the developing relationship between heroine and hero is one of the genre’s governing constraints. In exploring Fay and Tom’s family relationships, network of friends and roles in the workplace, Shields diffuses this focus, which adds a sense of realism to her novel that is not usually present in a popular romance. This diffused focus is significant. Unlike a writer of formula romance fiction, Shields’ primary goal is not to explore Fay and Tom’s developing relationship. Hammill has identified that it is Faye’s “movement from irony to wonder, rather than the story of her falling in love, which forms the central narrative of *The Republic of Love*” (63). Cawelti claims that “formulaic works necessarily stress intense and immediate kinds of excitement and gratification as opposed to the more complex and ambiguous analyses of character and motivation that characterize mimetic fiction” (14). In terms of the romantic fantasy promised by genre romance novels, excitement and gratification are not immediate in *The Republic of Love*—Fay and Tom do not meet until halfway through the novel. *The Republic of Love* is more interested in detailing Fay’s motivation and struggles with the concept of romantic love than in recreating the romantic myth. Shields’ work is mimetic rather than formulaic.

To earn her happy ending, Fay must learn to balance her desire for love with her belief that love does not actually exist. She yearns for the myth of love to be real while despairing of its very existence. Fay moves from a state of disbelief in love’s existence to a hopeful and exuberant belief. That swiftly changes to disillusionment when love does not live up to its mythic proportions. Ultimately, however, Fay’s disappointment in not finding the dizzy, giddy heights of love, with its accompanying excitement and promise, gives way to something quieter and more prosaic, something less dramatic but none the less real for that. While *The Republic of Love* ends in a manner that a reader of romance would hope and expect—with Fay and Tom’s happy union—the novel’s ending is more qualified and less exuberant than most Harlequin category romances. There is less fanfare and fewer fireworks. Fay, while arriving at a concept of love that she can believe in, seems somehow diminished by her disappointment and this is perhaps a critique of the expectations

and romantic fantasies formula romance novels invoke with their depictions of blissful unions. As Fay says: “Love restored is not precisely love redeemed” (364). This sentiment reflects Shields’ resistance to the relentless idealizing impulse of romance. Of course, it can be argued that the romantic ending is also muted because the romantic relationship itself has not been the main focus of the novel. The real resolution to *The Republic of Love* is Fay’s acceptance of romantic love’s limitations as well as its possibilities.

Of formula fiction Cawelti says: “Each formula has its own set of limits that determine what kind of new and unique elements are possible without straining the formula to breaking point” (10). *Rebecca* and *The Republic of Love*, while both dealing with the theme of romantic love, have moved beyond the limits of genre romance fiction to become something different—Female Gothic, perhaps, and a more mimetic kind of romantic fiction respectively. Cawelti points out that “many works fail rather badly because they develop characters and situations that are too complex for the formulaic structure they are part of, without becoming sufficiently individualized to support a nonformulaic structure of their own” (12). *Rebecca* and *The Republic of Love* do not fail. They demonstrate the limitations of the romantic fantasy and explore whether that fantasy is more dangerous or destructive than life-enhancing. They transcend the limits of the romantic fantasy to become something akin but different.

CHAPTER TWO:

NARRATIVE STRATEGIES OF ROMANCE AND REALISM

Genre fictions are created for the purposes of enjoyment and pleasure. Cawelti states: “Much of the artistry of formulaic literature involves the creator’s ability to plunge us into a believable kind of excitement while, at the same time, confirming our confidence that in the formulaic world things always work out as we want them to” (16). The key term here is “believable.” Romance has always had a problem with credibility. When the word credibility (or believable) is used in relation to romance another term is immediately suggested—realism. Realism, it seems, is a term even more loaded and difficult to pin down than romance. Damian Grant claims that “the word is in fact delinquent, and writers have indicated their mistrust of its behaviour either by sending it out under escort [with a qualifying word or words] or by letting it loose only when safely handcuffed by inverted commas” (2).

This delinquency, however, has not deterred writers and critics from attempting to formulate clear and categorical definitions. In *The Realistic Imagination* George Levine cites David Lodge’s definition of realism as “the representation of experience in a manner which approximates closely to description of similar experience in non-literary texts of the same culture” (13). While Levine claims that there are problems with this definition, he builds on it with his acknowledgement that realism “attempts to represent life sincerely” (7), that it purports to “speak the truth” (5), and that it “defines itself against the excesses, both stylistic and narrative, of various kinds of romantic, exotic, or sensational literature” (5). Levine notes “realism’s effort to make the ordinary significant” (13) and how “much nineteenth-century realism defined itself against romance because that form implied wish fulfillment rather than reality” (9).

Philosophically, romance and realism are at odds. If one of realism’s goals is to make the ordinary significant, romance’s focus (particularly that of category romance) is on the extraordinary

moment(s) or event(s) in an ordinary person's life (that is, falling in love). In crudely black and white terms, if realism's priority is to attempt an objective portrayal of the world, romance's priority is to provide pleasure. If realism's goal is truth, romance's goal is entertainment. Realism attempts to show the world as it is. Romance attempts to show the world as we would like it to be. However, while realistic narratives and romances have different agendas, their practices often overlap. If romance is, as Fuchs asserts, "a cluster of narrative strategies" (130)—that include "delay and deferral, the pleasure of the reader, a fascination with female vulnerability, an emphasis on the marvellous over the quotidian, a focus on the travails of the individual, a nostalgia for other times and places" (130)—then perhaps the same can be said of realism. Levine, while noting that the idea of treating realism as a set of conventions contradicts its philosophy, identifies several strategies that realistic narratives have in common: "The primary conventions of realism are its deflation of ambition and passion, its antiheroism, its tendency to see all people and things within large containing social organizations and, hence, its apparently digressive preoccupation with surfaces, things, particularities, social manners" (15).

The five novels chosen for study in Chapter One demonstrate this overlap between the narrative strategies of romance and realism as, to some extent, does the creative work. While the early novel was defined in opposition to romance, the distinction between the two narrative modes has always been difficult to sustain. Attempting to create a division between works that are romantic or realistic is clearly problematic, as many authors have embraced the narrative strategies of both in their works. As Thomas Hardy acknowledges: "The real, if unavowed, purpose of fiction is to give pleasure by gratifying the love of the uncommon in human experience. . . . The writer's problem is, how to strike the balance between the uncommon and the ordinary so as on the one hand to give interest, on the other to give reality" (qtd. in Allott 58). It may be more useful to view romance and realism as a continuum, with individual works falling anywhere along that continuum (including at the two poles).

Each of the novels in this study negotiates the differing demands of romance and realism in striking ways. Of particular interest are the compromises, sacrifices, and compensations the novels make in using the conventions of romance “to give pleasure by gratifying the love of the uncommon.” As a Harlequin Mills & Boon Sweet Romance, the creative work, like all romance, depicts an idealized vision of the world, but it too needs to negotiate the differing demands of romance and realism to provide a satisfying story that meets reader expectations.

A Believable Kind of Excitement

The techniques for generating the “believable kind of excitement” that Cawelti identifies as providing “much of the artistry of formulaic literature” (16) are not solely the province of genre fiction writers and it can be illuminating to compare how these techniques operate in works that are not bound by the constraints of a “category.” The five novels discussed in Chapter One are not category romances. They are novels that deal with issues beyond those of formulaic fiction. However, while the narrative strategies of romance operate in a less concentrated form, they provide similar satisfactions within the wider world of these novels.

For genre romance novels, particularly category romance, Cawelti’s “excitement” is the emotional intensity that exists between the heroine and hero—usually present in their first meeting—and that continues to build during the course of the novel. This emotional intensity is made up of two key elements that have long been the staple of the romance plot. The first element is the physical attraction that exists between the heroine and hero, and which they view as being in opposition to their goals and a direct threat to the achievement of those goals: if Jane becomes Rochester’s mistress she loses her independence and her freedom; if Darcy allows his attraction to Lizzy to overcome him, he will be connecting himself to a woman and a family who are socially inferior to him; if Charles Rivenhall gives in to his attraction for Sophy while he is engaged to another woman that would make him dishonourable. The second element is the heroine and hero’s deep-seated belief that they cannot find love and lasting happiness with each other (even if there is

an indication that they could find physical delight and harmony with each other). Lizzy's inherent belief in Darcy's arrogance, conceit and his disregard for the feelings of others has her turning down his first offer of marriage. Jane's belief that Rochester will never consider her his equal if she is his mistress has her fleeing from the life he offers, convinced that their brief delight will descend into discontent and bitterness. Fay ends her relationship with Tom because she thinks romantic love a sham that will let them down.

In a category romance, the first step to generating emotional intensity lies in creating a high level of identification for the heroine, as the Mills & Boon guidelines make clear: "The reader experiences that amazing 'rush' via the heroine—the reader lives through the romance through the heroine. Therefore, the heroine is vital—she must be warm, easy to like and engage with" (*eHarlequin*). While affirming the importance of identification, Cawelti also acknowledges: "All stories involve some kind of identification, for, unless we are able to relate our feelings and experiences to those of the characters in fiction, much of the emotional effect will be lost" (18). The level of identification for a category romance is not necessarily different than it is for any other story, but due to the page constraints it does need to be achieved very quickly. Category romance does not have the same luxury as, for instance, *Jane Eyre* does in developing the heroine and her situation. In detailing Jane's circumstances and the oppression she suffers as a child, and then allowing the reader to follow Jane's progress and development to adulthood, a great deal of reader sympathy can be generated for Jane even if there are elements of her character the reader finds irritating or frustrating. Likewise, in detailing and revealing Fay's dealings within her wider world in *The Republic of Love*, a comprehensive and sympathetic picture of Fay can be built. Both of these methods, however, fall outside the parameters of those used in a category romance. Due to its constraints, category romance does not possess this same latitude or scope to build reader sympathy and identification. However, identification can be achieved quickly for a character and *Pride and Prejudice* provides a potent example: Reader sympathy is achieved swiftly for Lizzy Bennet—she is witty, intelligent and, while her mother wants to marry her and her sisters to eligible men as soon

as she can manage it, Lizzy is unmoved by a potential suitor's wealth if she finds his personality unpleasant. These are facts the reader learns about Lizzy early in the novel. In a similar fashion, as soon as Sophy is introduced in *The Grand Sophy* she is shown to be good-natured, good with children and good-humoured, traits that endear her to the majority of the Rivenhall family (and the reader) and have them warming to her immediately.

Likewise, it was important to gain identification quickly for the heroine of the creative work. In an early draft of *Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep*, the heroine first returns to Clara Falls roaring up the main street on her Harley Davidson motorcycle wearing black leathers, with purple-spiked hair and sporting a nose ring. In this version of the story, the heroine is the archetypal rebel who is still bitter and angry about things that happened in the past. Hence, initially she appeared prickly, cocky and not immediately likable. To explain why she felt and acted as she did and, therefore, to make her "warm, easy to like and engage with" would have taken valuable page space. Hence, a decision was made to reshape her personality. As a result, the heroine-rebel was transformed into a capable businesswoman with a mature outlook who is confident that she can stand on her own two feet, while her rebelliousness becomes an aspect of her past. This reveals her growth in the eight years since she left Clara Falls and shows her as a fully realised adult. It was easier to create immediate identification and sympathy for this version of the heroine than to spend page space explaining her immaturity in an attempt to garner sympathy for her.

In a category romance emotional intensity is maintained by the conflict that simmers and builds between the heroine and hero. If the reader is privy to both the heroine's and hero's points of view, and is sympathetic to both perspectives, the emotional intensity increases. This may be why the hero's viewpoint is encouraged in the Mills & Boon Sweet guidelines too: "the hero point of view is welcomed to give his character depth and credibility" (*eharlequin*). Hence, identification needs to be created for the hero of a category romance as well as the heroine. Sympathy to varying degrees was created for each of the heroes in the five novels discussed in the first chapter. How could a reader not start to warm to Darcy once he comes to see and acknowledge Lizzy's many

excellent qualities? In *The Grand Sophy*, although he is autocratic it is made clear that Charles Rivenhall is honourable and doing his best for the family he loves. Although it leads him into error, the intensity of Rochester's passion for Jane arouses sympathy in the reader. An attempt is made to secure reader support in the creative work during the hero's first meeting with the heroine. Like Charles Rivenhall, Connor is shown to be honourable—he will do what is right (as opposed to what he might prefer to do)—while still believing the worst about the heroine and, like Darcy, it takes some time before he recognises the heroine's excellent qualities.

To maintain emotional intensity in a category romance the plot needs to focus almost completely on what occurs between the heroine and hero. Jan Cohn observes:

Unlike the love story in the comic tradition, romance shows no interest in imposing social constraints on young love. No problems of family opposition or of real or imagined class difference prevent the hero and heroine from loving and marrying at the outset. . . . rather than a story of love's victory over socially imposed obstacles, the sexual plot in popular romance tells a story of discovery, of the uncovering of a powerful secret, of the triumphant acquisition of love as a hermetic truth. The question popular romance poses is not "Will the lovers win?" but "Will the lovers know?" (20).

Cohn identifies here one of the elements that make category romance romantic rather than realistic.

That is, category romance tends to downplay the power of social institutions to frustrate or quash desire. *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* acknowledge the power of social institutions, even though that power proves irrelevant, or at least not the real issue, in each of the novels.

However, as Cohn notes, it is the ongoing encounters between the heroine and hero that provide the primary focus or narrative thrust of a category romance. Furthermore, she nominates three main stages to this focus: "an initial meeting between the hero and heroine, which incurs the heroine's hostility to the hero; a long period of armed truce during which the hero and heroine work towards some mutually accepted goal; and a final episode of danger, rescue, and exile leading to the declaration of love" (20).

As Cohn rightly identifies, the initial meeting between the heroine and hero is crucial. It establishes the conflict that the characters must overcome before they can earn their happy union, and, as befits such an important scene, is a moment of high emotional drama. Lizzy and Darcy first meet at Meryton's assembly where Darcy's dismissal of her and refusal to dance with her convinces Lizzy of his pride and arrogance. The Gothic overtones of *Jane Eyre* come to full-bodied life as Rochester emerges through the dusk on his horse at a gallop and then suffers a "clattering tumble" (149). At Sophy and Charles' first meeting, they overtly size each other up—"[Charles] discovered that he was being looked at in a manner quite as critically as his own" (54)—hinting at the adversarial turn their relationship will take. While Fay and Tom fall in love at first sight and their initial meeting is almost a series of still photographs with the mounting details emphasizing the weight of the moment and capturing their emotion and awe, they both have very different views of the world—Tom has an optimistic belief in love, Fay does not—leading to a conflict every bit as difficult to resolve as personal animosity.

A similar intensity is sought for the initial meeting between the heroine and hero in a category romance. In the creative work, this is in part achieved by making the heroine's return to her hometown as difficult and fraught (and, therefore, as emotional) for her as possible. *Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep* is a reunion story. The heroine and hero have a shared history. As a result, the story opens with strong reasons why they would want to avoid contact and resist any romantic entanglement with each other. An encounter with the hero on her first day that leaves her feeling cast at a disadvantage ensures the heroine's return is both trying and confronting. When the viewpoint switches to the hero, the reader discovers that he does not feel any more in control of the situation than she does. Furthermore, he discovers that his efforts at proving himself have unknowingly made him look petty and vengeful, which he resents. Both characters are disturbed by the physical attraction they feel for the other. Hence, the characters' good intentions are frustrated and undermined in this opening scene. In a category romance, the intensity that is created in this initial meeting should not be allowed to wane for long before it is increased and built upon. Unlike

Carol Shields in *The Republic of Love*, the writer of category romance cannot afford to explore the wider aspects of their heroine and hero's lives or, as in *Pride and Prejudice*, people their stories with a large cast of secondary characters. To do so would remove the focus from the heroine and hero, diffusing the tension building between them. This close focus on the interactions that take place between the heroine and hero allows an author to portray their characters' motivations at the same time as they depict those characters' struggles to fight their growing physical attraction to each other. This detailed exploration of a character's motivation allows a reader's identification to grow, while the development of the physical attraction increases the character's internal conflict. In this way the emotional intensity, or Cawelti's "excitement," is enhanced.

Readers want good things to happen to good people, and the heroine and hero of category romance, while not perfect, are good people. If reader identification is gained for both the heroine and the hero and they are in conflict with each other and in danger of not achieving their goals, the reader becomes anxious for them. This is an element of the suspense that Cawelti identifies as one of the devices most commonly used by formulaic writers. He verifies that suspense "is essentially the writer's ability to evoke in us a temporary sense of fear and uncertainty about the fate of a character we care about" (17). Scott McCracken claims that readers read popular fiction because it is fun—"We read it for pleasure" (154)—while William F. Brewer points out in his essay on suspense: "Why would anyone read suspense stories for entertainment? Clearly, most people do not want to subject themselves to situations that lead to negative affective states such as apprehension or anxiety" (107). It must be noted, however, that the suspense that is engendered in a reader via a work of fiction is not the same as the reader would experience in real life if they were undergoing the same trials and tribulations as the heroine and hero of that fiction. The reader is always at liberty to stop reading, skip a section or flick to the final pages to discover how the book ends. This sense of control may help to explain how suspense is made pleasurable or contributes to pleasure in fiction.

There is much theory and debate surrounding the issues of the pleasure of a text and the emotions that fiction may engender in a reader. Suspense in fiction is neither simple nor unproblematic. Dolf Zillmann acknowledges:

Recipes for the creation of acute experiences of suspense tell us little. . . about the enjoyment of suspense. On the premise that the experience of suspense, per se, is noxious, the basis for enjoyment must lie outside the suspense experience proper. Seemingly paradoxically, it is on the termination of the suspense experience, not during its acute manifestation, that enjoyment is determined: Satisfying resolutions will liberate joyful reactions and dissatisfying resolutions will prevent them, fostering disappointment instead (209).

Hence, according to Zillman's argument, pleasure in suspense is in effect due to an ensuing "satisfying resolution" that ensures the safety and happiness of the sympathetic main character(s). In these terms, it is therefore the uncertainty of the outcome that is creating the suspense, and the suspense is only enjoyed if the story is resolved satisfyingly (that is, happily). If it is true that a reader derives pleasure from the suspense engendered by a text and often seeks out the same kind of text again and again (as is the case with category romances and mystery novels), the question becomes: how is it possible to create a sense of suspense when the outcome of that text is already assured? After all, category romances *always* end with the triumphant union of heroine and hero.

Acknowledging that suspense is a complex issue, Cawelti argues that suspense for formulaic fictions is "different from the kind of uncertainty characteristic of mimetic literature" (17). Challenging a reader's assumptions and expectations about the world is a convention of mimetic fiction. Therefore, Cawelti argues, a reader's level of suspense while reading mimetic fiction is not so intense because the reader is expecting ambiguity and uncertainty. He claims that the reverse is true for formulaic fictions: "If we are encouraged to perceive the story world in terms of a well-known formula, the suspense effects will be more emotionally powerful because we are so sure that it must work out" (17). According to Cawelti then, in formulaic fictions the level of

suspense is heightened and intensified when a reader starts to worry that in this particular instance the story will not conform to its conventions. This, however, has to be an element that is virtually non-existent for the category romances of Mills & Boon with their entrenched convention of the happy ending. Reader interest for a category romance may well lie in the process that Suzanne Simmons Guntrum outlines in “Happily Ever After: The Ending as Beginning”: not in the question whether the lovers will overcome, but in how the lovers will overcome. While this latter question creates uncertainty (an element of suspense) it does not create the anxiety of the former question.

Lothar Mikos argues: “Pleasurable flirtation with fear is at the centre of the experience of exciting stories. A prerequisite for this pleasurable experience of fear is surety regarding the story’s outcome” (37). Like Cawelti before him, Mikos believes the reader’s pleasure in the suspense comes from the generic expectation that all will turn out well in the end. But how is it possible to create this fear when a reader already knows how a story will end? This is the question Noël Carroll asks, and it is what he calls “the paradox of suspense” (71). He claims that there are many instances

where the consumers of fiction find themselves in the enjoyable hold of suspense while responding to stories, read, heard, or seen previously, whose outcomes they remember with perfect clarity; in fact, quite frequently, these audiences have sought out these already familiar fictions with the express expectation that they will re-experience the pleasurable surge of consternation and thrill that they associate with suspense once again (73).

He then asks: “But how can they rationally expect to re-experience suspense if they know—and know that they know—the outcome of the fictional events that give rise to suspense?” (73). He answers this by claiming: “even though we know otherwise, we may entertain (as unasserted) the proposition that a certain morally good outcome is uncertain or improbable” (87). He claims that “emotions may be generated on the basis of thoughts” (87), and as such the very idea of an unhappy outcome is enough to generate fear and anxiety. So, if a reader recognises the unlikelihood of the heroine and hero’s joyous union in a category romance, this thought itself is enough to excite fear.

That is, the reader has “recognised a situation in which the good is unlikely, and it is always appropriate or intelligible to undergo consternation in reaction to even the thought of such a prospect” (87). Hence, it is not a belief in the uncertainty of the ending, but the thought that a morally unjust ending is possible that creates the consternation and suspense. This may in fact be one of the reasons why genre fiction is so popular—it gives the reader the opportunity to revisit the same experience again and again, to experience the same fears and to have those fears comfortingly laid to rest.

Surprising plot twists and smaller story questions are narrative devices that can also create suspense and maintain reader interest. Interesting examples of these abound in the five chosen novels. One of the most powerful and intense occurs in *Jane Eyre*—the revelation that Rochester is already married to Bertha Mason, the mad woman in the attic. This is so shocking and unexpected (although believable in the story world Brontë creates) that a reader feels compelled to read on to discover what will happen next. A similar effect is created in *Rebecca* when Maxim reveals to the heroine that he murdered his first wife. Lydia’s elopement with Wickham is another example, raising such questions as to whether Lydia will be found or ruined? Will she ruin her sisters’ prospects too? How will this elopement impact on Lizzy and Darcy’s courtship? On a smaller scale, this is the effect desired for *Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep* when it is discovered that Mr Sears (the villain) was formerly the lover of the heroine’s mother.

Story questions in concert with a sympathetic character’s discomfort can also create tension. If during a scene a character is uncomfortable, ill at ease or tense—or senses the same in another character—that sense of discomfort may be translated to the reader, creating tension. The heroine of *Rebecca* experiences this on first meeting Mrs Danvers. Lizzy Bennet experiences it at the Netherfield ball when Darcy asks her to dance and, although she has sworn never to dance with him, she cannot think of a reason to refuse. It occurs in *Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep* when the hero challenges the heroine to attend the town’s harvest ball. In each of the above instances a question is raised—how will the heroine deal with this situation? As long as both the story

questions and the characters are compelling enough, a reader should continue to care and, therefore, read on. In *Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep* the heroine and hero's goal to avoid emotional involvement with each other is in tension not only with their physical desire for each other but also with their desire to do what they believe is right. To maintain emotional intensity this tension needs to increase as the story progresses. The more a character's opposing desires come into conflict the greater the suspense and emotional intensity. Cohn details the absolute centrality to category romance of what she calls the sexual plot: "Sexuality is the *res gestae* of romance, the stuff of which the story is made. . . . the initial meeting forces on the heroine a new sexual self consciousness, which accounts for her hostility toward the hero. The period of uneasy truce and of proximity between the hero and heroine is marked by encounters of increasingly intense sexuality" (20-1). It is this intense sexuality the heroine and hero of *Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep* attempt to deny and ignore at the same time as they find themselves working more and more closely together. This is, in essence, the sexual plot of the novel and it takes its entire duration to resolve.

The development of the sexual plot is constantly interrupted and delayed by the characters' external goals (that is, Jaz's attempts to save the bookshop from financial ruin and Connor's attempts to mend his relationship with his daughter). This kind of delay and deferral has been a strategy since Homer's *Odyssey*. Fuchs claims that romance is "composed of the tension between two movements: the quest, and the constant delays or detours from that quest. The narrative thrust of romance is constantly undone by narrative suspension, yet the latter sustains the story even as it postpones resolution" (19). In effect, this delay actually generates narrative. It can also add to a reader's pleasure, not just by generating suspense but also through delaying gratification. Knowing that the heroine and hero will eventually overcome the obstacles to their romantic (and sexual) union and will realise bliss, the reader can enjoy a sense of anticipation.

Guntrum believes readers read romances for "the process, not the conclusion" (153). Knowing how the story will end, the reader can "sit back and enjoy the ride" (153). In *Plot*, the novelist Ansell Dibbell states: "Waiting to find out builds suspense, drama" (89). She is referring

here to the technique of delaying the answers to story questions that have been raised. In *Pride and Prejudice*, we do not find out immediately how Lydia's elopement affects Lizzy and Darcy's courtship—there is a delay before that story question is resolved. Although we know Sophy means to manage the affairs of her cousins in *The Grand Sophy*, there is a delay before the reader discovers exactly how she means to do so and in finding out how successful her machinations will be. Likewise, in *Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep* the reader is forced to wait before finding out about Frieda and Mr Sears's past relationship. Raising story questions and then delaying their answers is one way to create suspense and, as a result, maintain reader interest.

As already mentioned, the page constraints of a category romance can prove challenging. Ensuring that scenes are multi-functional, that they have more than one objective, is one way to overcome this particular challenge. If a scene can intensify conflict between the main characters, and at the same time deepen characterization and propel the plot forward, then the narrative pace will be accelerated and taut, and suspense and emotion will be heightened. Although the novels discussed in Chapter One are not constrained by the word count of a category romance, there are many instances of multi-functional scenes. Austen creates a multi-layered, multi-functional scene in *Pride and Prejudice* at the point just after Lizzy has read Jane's letters detailing Lydia's elopement. Here the plot has taken a startling and dangerous turn (and, in hindsight, a pleasingly foreseeable one too), Lizzy reveals to Darcy the complete turnaround her feelings have taken about Wickham, and at the end of the scene she comes to realise that he is the man who would most suit her and that he is now further out of reach than he has ever been. Additionally, Darcy's sympathy and concern for Lizzy in her distress, along with his tact, reinforces the transformation that his manners have undergone. This scene moves the plot forward in a suspenseful way—what will become of Lydia, and what does this mean for Lizzy and Darcy?—while furthering the character development. Lizzy also finally recognises her true feelings for Darcy—that he is a man she could love. Hence the stakes are raised for Lizzy at exactly the same time the conflict is strengthened too. The likelihood of Darcy attaching himself to her family now seems more remote than ever. Similar objectives are

accomplished—the plot moved forward, characterisation of the main characters deepened, and conflict increased—in *Jane Eyre*, in the scene at the church when Mason reveals that Rochester is already married. These scenes are powerful because they are turning points in these novels. The pace of these scenes is fast. They promote anxiety in the main characters and also in the reader.

These scenes (and others like them) provide examples and a template of how to achieve a multi-functional scene for *Bachelor Dad On Her Doorstep*. One such example of a multi-functional scene in the novel occurs when Connor confronts Jaz with why his daughter has been spending her afternoons at the bookshop rather than with her babysitter. In this scene Connor's characterization is developed and his character growth revealed, and as a result he is rewarded when Jaz provides him with a solution to his major problem, which moves the story forward. Their physical attraction for each other simmers, making the scene more fraught and tense, intensifying the sexual plot. The conflict between them is also deepened for, while they overcome this initial misunderstanding, Connor makes it clear that he wants Jaz to stay out of his daughter's life. The scene opens with high emotional intensity that gradually eases as the hero's temper abates and then ratchets up even more at the end of the scene. Connor is forced to acknowledge to himself that physically he desires Jaz more than ever. However, at this point in the story his distrust of her is stronger than his desire. Cohn notes: "The problem for contemporary popular romance, on the level of the sexual plot, is to manage and contain the sexuality the heroine discovers and to turn that sexuality into an instrument in the service of love. This is a difficult task precisely because sexuality blossoms within the heroine; it is no longer an aspect only of the threatening other but a new part of her own being" (27). In modern category romance—particularly in the home and hearth lines—this is also an aspect or problem the hero must deal with and resolve as well.

Along with creating and maintaining a "believable kind of excitement" in a "plot [that] centers around two individuals falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work," a category romance must also provide "an emotionally-satisfying and optimistic ending" (*Romance Writers of America*). Hence, for a category romance to meet reader expectations (for it to be

actually considered a category romance) regardless of the sources of conflict, the hero and heroine must eventually overcome these difficulties to their relationship and make some kind of commitment to each other. Given the constraints of category romance, how can an author build to a climax in their novel that ends so predictably with the heroine and hero's joyous union, yet in a manner that is believable for a reader? As the study of the five novels from Chapter One indicates, one way in which the heroine and hero can "earn" their happy union is by demonstrating character growth or, as in the case of Sophy, by exerting themselves and fighting for what they believe in. At the same time, however, the corresponding development of the heroine and hero's love for each other—Cohn's sexual plot—also needs to be convincing for a reader. To achieve this a writer of category romance novels needs to describe and portray the germination and growth of a romantic love relationship in a manner that resonates with a reader and persuades the reader that this love is true, lasting and genuine. A long-standing solution to this problem is the idea of the conflict romantic love can trigger between intellect and emotion, which in turn can be helpful in depicting character growth that leads to a resolution of a character's conflict and, as a result, add authenticity to the happy union.

Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini and Richard Lannon in *A General Theory Of Love* state: "The cleavage between reason and passion is an ancient theme but no anachronism; it has endured because it speaks to the deep human experience of the divided mind" (31). They acknowledge that this "divided mind" is not a new idea and assert that in the human brain "the neural systems responsible for emotion and intellect are separate, creating the chasm between them in human minds and lives" (4). As a result they add that

a person cannot direct his emotional life in the way he bids his motor system to reach for a cup. He cannot will himself to *want* the right thing, or to *love* the right person, or to be happy after a disappointment, or even to *be* happy in happy times. People lack this capacity not through a deficiency of discipline but because jurisdiction of

will is limited to the latest brain [the neocortex] and to those functions within its purview (33).

As Cohn has detailed, this is essentially the dilemma that provides the narrative thrust of popular romance. Of the heroine of popular romance she states that “her own new erotic response enters combat with her intellect” (26) and that “the heroine’s own body betrays her, becomes itself the enemy” (25). In more modern romances (Cohn studied category romances of the 1980s), and especially in the home and hearth lines (Sweet, Medical, SuperRomance, Special Edition), this is a dilemma that both the heroine *and* the hero experience. It is certainly a dilemma that confronts both Jaz and Connor in *Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep*. However, even here it is Connor who, after attempting to ignore and fight his attraction for Jaz, attempts to initiate and re-establish a sexual relationship with her. She is tempted, but resists. Connor may not be looking beyond tomorrow, but Jaz refuses to resume a sexual relationship with him when there is every chance that their past mistakes will be repeated in the present. She becomes angry with herself for being tempted under such circumstances. It is not until the conflict between them is resolved (and Connor has declared his love for her) that she feels free to resume a sexual relationship with him. Cohn’s observation that “male sexuality, at first seen as entirely dissociated from love, is transmuted and domesticated into a new, love-evidencing sexuality” (28) is indeed the outcome of the sexual plot, the resolution of the divide that romantic love (and sexual attraction) triggers between the intellect and emotion.

As discussed in Chapter One, this conflict between intellect and emotion is revealed quite early in *Pride and Prejudice* in Darcy. He immediately recognises the unsuitability of the Bennet sisters as potential wives for a man of his (and Bingley’s) station. However, as he comes to recognise Lizzy’s worth and falls in love with her, his attraction for her overcomes his previous objections. This process, however, is achieved in stages. First comes his declaration that she is not handsome enough to tempt him to dance, followed soon after by an acknowledgment of her fine eyes, and then the realisation when she is staying at Netherfield that his growing fascination with her could prove dangerous. This all culminates in his partly repressed, partly passionate first

proposal to her. It could be argued that this scene shows emotion in the ascendant but with reason not very effectively suppressed. During the course of the rest of the novel, Darcy learns to reconcile these two extremes. As a result his second proposal sounds far more natural. He sounds like a man who loves a woman rather than a man operating under the stress of an attraction he cannot control. In the first proposal he is thinking only of his own happiness. In the second proposal he is thinking predominantly of Lizzy's happiness. Just as Darcy must come to see Lizzy's worth (and she his), Connor and Jaz must make a similar journey.

In *Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep*, Jaz and Connor both start the story with strong reasons for not wanting to get involved with each other. To counter this antipathy, however, over the course of the novel they need to learn to appreciate each other again. Hence, while Jaz and Connor have strong reasons for remaining aloof, they also need more compelling reasons for falling in love with each other again. To overcome their internal conflicts, the knowledge they slowly acquire about each other (and themselves) needs to be recognised and finally acted upon. If character growth does not occur, as it does not in *Rebecca*, then the "emotionally-satisfying and optimistic ending" is not attained.⁷

Connor overcomes his conflict with Jaz in a similar fashion to the way in which Darcy overcomes his objections to Lizzy—that is, in stages. Connor believes Jaz cheated on him in the past and as a result he refuses to risk his heart to her again. Although he is immediately physically attracted to her, he refuses to give this any weight, dismissing it as sign of the irrationality and ephemerality of desire rather than anything lasting and substantial. However, coming into such close proximity with her on an almost daily basis, he cannot help but become reacquainted with Jaz. As a result, and while still combating his attraction to her, he finds he likes her and a tentative friendship is formed. It is not until she states her decision to give her mother's love letters back to

⁷ This is a simplified reading as it can certainly be argued that *Rebecca* is as much a critique of romance as it is of its heroine's deficiencies. In terms of the lessons it can provide for the writer of category romance, however, the heroine of *Rebecca* provides an example that is the antithesis of the category romance heroine.

Mr Sears, however, that he realises that the kind of woman Jaz is—the kind of person she has always been—would never have cheated on him all those years ago. It wasn't Jaz's betrayal that ruined their relationship but his habit of jumping to hasty conclusions. With this realisation comes the knowledge that it was not love that led him into a series of mistakes, but his own flawed judgement. No longer able to blame Jaz for his previous heartbreak and the ensuing mistakes he had made, Connor's internal conflict is resolved—love is not bad, jumping to conclusions is. In this way he learns to balance both emotion and reason.

Jaz believes that the death of her and Connor's relationship eight years ago has turned her into a different person—a bitter, angry, resentful person who would not listen to her mother's pleas to return home. She is determined never to become that unfeeling monster again. As far as she can see, the only way to avoid that is to banish romantic love from her life forever. However, Connor challenges this view and this forces Jaz to confront the choices she has made and the path she has been determined to follow. When this is coupled with Mr Sears's revelations about his and Frieda's past, Jaz gains a new perspective and finally recognises the mistakes she is in danger of perpetuating. She realises then that she has learned from her past mistakes. This realisation frees her from her fear of romantic love, and she is able to admit to Connor and to herself that she loves him and wants to make a life with him.

Of course, like the five novels discussed in Chapter One, the journey of the heroine and hero's transformations take the entire book; their changing attitudes about love and themselves is an evolving process, not a lightning bolt, and this is one element that should help to make their happy ending believable. Their relationship moves from antipathy to empathy and then to friendship, trust and finally love. It is only when they gain that element of trust, when they can see each other truly and without distortion, that the physical element of their relationship is free to blossom. They have both found a way to bridge the gulf between passion and reason.

A Believable Kind of World

Although category romances are bound by strong generic constraints, the element of fantasy and wish fulfilment that lies at the heart of all genre fiction still needs to be balanced with an appearance of reality. Verisimilitude engages the reader. Category romances may depict an idealized vision of the world, but that does not mean that they dispense with realism altogether. To varying degrees the five novels discussed in Chapter One display a certain idealization too, but they are also grounded by elements of realism. As such they provide an example of how a category romance can position itself in a recognisable and believable world.

While *Pride and Prejudice* is peppered with characters of a decidedly unromantic bent—not the least Lizzy Bennet with her pragmatic and not very hopeful view of marriage and her future—it is nevertheless a rags-to-riches love story. In her introduction to the novel, Jones calls it a “romantic fantasy” (xii) and “the stuff of wish fulfilment” (xi). Notwithstanding the realistic elements of the novel, the narrative arc of a romantic fantasy like *Pride And Prejudice* demands a happy ending, whether that is a realistic outcome or not. Similarly, there is “deflation of ambition” in *Jane Eyre*, most glaringly when Jane herself ruthlessly cuts her own ambitions down to size as she prepares to leave Lowood School:

I desired liberty; for liberty I gasped; for liberty I uttered a prayer; it seemed scattered on the wind then faintly blowing. I abandoned it and framed a humbler supplication. For change, stimulus. That petition, too, seemed swept off into vague space. ‘Then,’ I cried, half-desperate, ‘grant me at least a new servitude!’ (114).

Jane does not dare to dream big dreams. However, the Gothic elements of *Jane Eyre* counter this realism. Jane triumphs over not only physical cruelty and financial deprivation, but also a mad wife in the attic and one lover who would make of her a bigamist and another who would make her a martyr. In the end she wins all that her heart desires—financial independence, a family and marriage to the man she loves—against the odds. In contrast to Jane, the heroine of *Rebecca* is a romantic and is swept away by the romance of Manderley and Maxim’s past, but finds the reality of

it decidedly unromantic. *The Grand Sophy* is in some ways like the sixteenth and seventeenth century romances like Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* or Robert Greene's *Pandosto*: it relies on recreating a bygone era in which readers can be persuaded such things were possible. It abounds with historical detail to lend it veracity. Sophy's machinations involving Charles and his family, while certainly amusing and entertaining, are extravagant and far-fetched, but the form of the romantic fantasy, as in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre* before it, demands a happy ending, even when that ending rests on extraordinary luck rather than a realistic resolution. Even *The Republic Of Love*—perhaps the most realistic of the five novels—in its use of the conventions of romance and its mermaid mythology creates a sense of unreality and otherworldliness. While the novel is imbued with a sense of Fay and Tom's wider lives, the focus is still on their developing romance and the narrative momentum focuses on bringing that romance to a satisfying conclusion.

While in romance love always triumphs, this is certainly not the case for realistic narratives. In *Rebecca*, even with its Gothic overtones, the realistic elements overshadow the romantic ones by the novel's end, providing an example of how realism resists or disguises the wish fulfilment of romance. Levine states: "in realistic fiction experience brings knowledge and disenchantment . . . a recognition of ones' own limits, of the injustice pervasive in society, and of the power of society over one's own ambitions . . . the characteristic realistic protagonist ends in some sort of compromise" (31). This is perhaps one of the reasons why the ending to *The Republic of Love* is more muted and less celebratory than in a more conventional romance story too. As *The Republic of Love* draws to a close, the realistic and romantic elements are in tension with one another. After coming to believe in the power of romantic love, Fay feels betrayed by it when her parents' marriage breaks down. She is forced to confront love's limitations. While Fay does choose romantic love—that is, marriage with Tom—at the end of *The Republic of Love*, one cannot help feeling that she has been diminished by the journey she has undertaken. She achieves contentment, but not that state of joy and delight that is normally associated with romance.

Like Fay, the hero and/or heroine of a category romance often start the story disenchanted with the ideal of romantic love. During the course of the novel they progress from disenchantment to a belief in the existence and power of romantic love, and the story ends in their rapturous union. There is no conception that this ending is a compromise or concession for either character. This ending diminishes neither the hero nor the heroine. On the contrary, they are enhanced by the experience. There is little doubt, however, that in many instances the endings are contrived or prove lucky. This, however, is not only the case for category romance. In *Jane Eyre* there is a great deal of luck involved in finally ensuring Jane and Rochester's union—Bertha Mason must die, Rochester must learn what it is like to be dependent as Jane was dependent, and Jane must credit her psychic episode when Rochester calls out for her. In terms of the probability of them actually happening, these incidents may indeed seem contrived, but in terms of emotional justice they are not. Jane's exertions throughout the novel have won for her the independence she has yearned for. These exertions demand the happy coincidences that will allow her marriage with the man she loves. In this light the ending is satisfying and fulfilling. Likewise in *The Grand Sophy*, although her machinations are complicated and do not go precisely to plan, Sophy's exertions and good intentions ensure that all works out right in the end.

Where realistic narratives generally portray characters who are anti-heroic, romance novels, as well as category romances, are concerned with, and more likely to depict, idealized characters. Heroes and heroines of romances are more likely to be richer (Darcy), livelier (Elizabeth Bennet), more passionate (Jane Eyre), more brooding (Rochester), more handsome (Maxim De Winter), more innocent (heroine of *Rebecca*), more capable (Sophy), and more arrogant (Charles Rivenhall) than the average person. Much of the pleasure derived from reading a romance is the chance to vicariously walk in the shoes of characters who are better and more daring than we are. These are characters readers could aspire to emulate. This idealization of characters can, however, stretch romance's credibility beyond the realm of the probable or even the possible. In *The Grand Sophy*, for example, Sophy deliberately shoots one of the secondary characters in the arm in order to bring

about a love match. While Sophy demonstrates remarkable steadfastness of purpose (not to mention a steady hand) in this particular scene, it has to be admitted that the likelihood of anyone outside of the pages of a romance committing such an act is exceedingly slim. Hence, to counter this idealization, characters must also be shown to have flaws. However, a heroine's flaws cannot be ones a reader would find unforgivable. Lizzy places her confidence in first impressions and prides herself on her own judgement, Jane is discontented and restless, the heroine of *Rebecca* lacks the courage to assert herself, Sophy is spoiled and wilful, and Fay has a fear of commitment. These are not flaws of malice, spite or vengeance. They are generally flaws a reader can relate to, understand (perhaps have shared during the course of the story) and may even condone. If an author depicts a heroine's (or hero's) motivation sympathetically and garners empathy for their character, readers will root for the character even if they do not wholly approve of the way that character attempts to achieve their goals. What happens, however, when a character oversteps the bounds of this sympathy? *Rebecca's* heroine provides a chilling example. Throughout the novel the reader cheers the heroine on, hoping she will unravel the mystery and learn the truth, but when that truth is discovered and she willingly becomes an accessory after the fact to Rebecca's murder, the reader's support and approval are withdrawn. This explains in part why the ending of *Rebecca* is not romantically satisfying—the heroine has not earned her happy ending. In fact, although she and Maxim are together, their exile and “barren and lonely continental wandering” is a far cry from the triumphant delight of a true romantic ending and the fact that she is partly responsible for her fate only makes it that much bleaker and colder.

Category romance, in depicting characters that progress from a state of disenchantment to one of enfranchisement, satisfaction and delight, also creates an idealization of the world that realistic narratives eschew. However, at the same time as it provides stories about idealized characters with simplified motivations, category romance also needs to find ways to engage with readers' real lives. So how does category romance attempt to gain a sense of credibility, or perhaps a better word to use in this instance would be verisimilitude, within the pages of its individual

stories? Verisimilitude is achieved in a similar way for romance as it is for realistic narratives: through particularity and via the perspective or viewpoint through which the story is told.

Austen's fiction provides an exemplary example of this technique of particularity. Harold Bloom in fact likens Austen's art of representation to Shakespeare's because of her precision and accuracy (51). Jones states: "Austen works out her romance plots in terms of the everyday, material details of realist fiction" and her novels have an "economical attention to the lived texture of a social environment" (xvi). The reader's introduction to Lady Catherine De Bourgh is one example of Austen's art. In the two pages in which Lady Catherine is introduced, the reader learns not only that she "was a tall, large woman, with strongly marked features," but that her "air was not conciliating" and that she did not allow "her visitors to forget their inferior rank" (159). During dinner, which "was exceedingly handsome, and there were all the servants, and all the articles of plate," she was "gratified by [Mr Collins and Sir Williams'] excessive admiration" (159-160), and when they returned to the drawing room "there was little to be done but to hear Lady Catherine talk" (160). Through all these details Austen builds a picture of Lady Catherine's pretentiousness, her snobbery and her boorishness. The picture that Austen provides has more believability than if she had simply stated that Lady Catherine was a pretentious snob with no thought for the feelings of others, because in witnessing the scene the reader recognises behavioural traits that are not confined to fiction. Brontë uses similar means to depict Blanche Ingram in *Jane Eyre*. Through Jane's eyes the reader is told that, like her mother, Blanche is proud and haughty. Blanche's meanness and her sense of superiority are then revealed during her discussion about botany with "the gentle Mrs Dent" (228) as her purpose to expose the other woman's ignorance and make it an object of sport unfolds as part of the action of the scene.

In *Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep*, Mr Sears's personality and attitude are revealed primarily through his gestures and behavioural traits. In his first meeting with Jaz, he refuses to shake her hand. In their next confrontation these are the details that describe him (as he doesn't utter a word in this short scene, his gestures are the only means a reader has of interpreting his mood and

attitude): “Mr Sears jerked around from the far end of the shop and his eyes darkened”; “lines bracketed his mouth, distorting it”; “his glare grew even more ferocious”; “he looked as if he’d like to throw the loaf at her head”; “he slammed her change on the counter” (66-7). These details leave us in little doubt of Mr Sears’s anger and resentment, but there are two additional details in this piece too, that hint at his better nature: “he very carefully placed a piece of carrot cake inside [the bag] . . . He’d always treated his baked goods as if they were fine porcelain” and “his fingers lingered on the bag, as if in apology” (66-67). These details help the reader to build a picture of the complex character of Mr Sears, while hinting that he may yet be redeemed.

Accretion of detail can help build up and create the texture of the real social world too. Jane’s love for Mr Rochester becomes more and more convincing as the second volume of the novel progresses through the sheer amount of detail she notices and records about him. Shields also employs this technique in Fay and Tom’s walk home from the party after their initial meeting. The precision of this detail, recorded from Tom’s point of view, contrasted with the things he can’t quite recall (which have their own exactness), builds a vivid picture. Puddles, the trees, street names, the way the child who is with them runs, Tom’s wonderings if he’d shortened his stride to match Fay’s or if she lengthened her stride to match his, all build to create a vivid picture of the scene, and also convey Tom’s state of mind: “He couldn’t remember afterwards what he and she had talked about, and this seemed strange to him. . . . He knows that they traded lists of current information, that she was thinking of buying a car but hadn’t had the time to shop around, that he was thinking of investing in a Macintosh computer” (195). This particular list of Tom’s runs almost to a page. Providing more detail than necessary creates a confidence that this place exists. However, this amount of detail can also be a cue to the scene’s importance. Tom’s mesmerizing recollection of this walk gives the event a kind of mythic quality. It becomes one of those moments that are fixed in the mind forever, and brought out on special occasions to entertain the grandchildren—“This is how I met your grandmother.” This same accretion of detail builds the Gothic atmosphere of *Manderley* in *Rebecca*. Du Maurier chooses strong verbs, specific nouns with evocative adjectives

and menacing metaphors to create this effect: “The drive twisted and turned as a serpent”; “Even the midday sun would not penetrate the interlacing of those green leaves, they were too thickly entwined”; “It was very silent”; “there was no wind”; “Even the engine of the car had taken a new note, throbbing low, quieter”; “the trees came in on us”; “and still this drive that was no drive twisted and turned like an enchanted ribbon through the dark and silent woods, penetrating even deeper to the very heart surely of the forest itself” (71-2). All of these images belong to the same paragraph. The paragraphs that follow are in a similar vein and added together they build a threatening and menacing effect. Similarly, Georgette Heyer’s novels abound in surface realism. Her novels are rich in details of dress, hairstyles, dinner menus and descriptions of carriages, drawing rooms and promenading in Hyde Park. However, rather than showing her characters’ state of mind or indicating the importance of a scene, her details lend authority to the historical world that she creates and helps make that world comprehensible to her readers.

Category romance implements this same technique of particularity—of paying close attention to detail—to create a world that corresponds with its reader’s world. The surface realism that Heyer incorporates in her novels is used to paint a clear picture of the fictional Blue Mountains town of Clara Falls in *Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep*. Providing more detail than is strictly necessary can create an effect of plausibility, confidence that this place actually exists and that it closely corresponds to the world that a reader inhabits. The particularity of the descriptions lends authority to the story. While there is little room in a category romance to expend the same word count on detail that Du Maurier does in *Rebecca* to create her marvellously Gothic atmosphere, category authors can still create the atmosphere they desire with a few well-chosen details. One example in the creative work is when Jaz persuades Connor to draw again (113-14). She recreates a familiar scene from their past—from the way they sit (him relaxed and sprawled out, she hunched over her sketch pad) and what they sit on (he leaning against a tree and she sitting on a rock), to what they draw (he draws panoramas while she focuses on the smaller view), and then to the details of the physical setting (bird calls, the scent of eucalyptus, the way the sun glints off the leaves, the

warmth of the sun). By recreating the harmony that had once existed between them, it creates a sense of peace in the story, a temporary respite from conflict.

The details that proliferate throughout a category romance are not some kind of tokenism towards the deeper themes or aims of realism. Details are included in a romance narrative because the effects they create add to a reader's pleasure. This world is like their world and, therefore, this romance could conceivably happen to them. Or, more precisely, these worlds are like parts of the reader's own world, for each of the different lines under the Harlequin banner delivers a different promise to the reader and offers a different view of the world. In the Sexy/Modern/Presents and Desire lines, glamour and wealth are important components of the novels. The reader is promised the thrill of vicariously experiencing the glamour and luxury of the ultra-wealthy. The Sweet, American and SuperRomance lines are thematically centred on the home and hearth, so the details that proliferate in these stories are centred on family and community. The Medical line is also thematically concerned with community but with the added details and explanations of medical emergencies and procedures to give it both drama and verisimilitude. These different lines offer the reader the chance to vicariously experience different facets of the social world.

The viewpoint or perspective that provides the lens through which the story is experienced is another major technique that lends verisimilitude to a fictional narrative. The most common type of viewpoint in a category romance is third-person-limited point of view (although, occasionally, first-person point of view stories are published). In this viewpoint a reader is privy only to what the viewpoint character knows, experiences only what the viewpoint character experiences, and sees only what the viewpoint character sees. This viewpoint attempts to reflect how we experience the world in our day-to-day lives. One of the benefits of this viewpoint is the comprehensibility of the viewpoint character's motivations. For example, Jaz returns to Clara Falls to save her mother's bookshop from financial ruin in an attempt to allay her guilt and make amends. The reader is both told and shown this. In real life, of course, motivations are never this clear-cut and simple. Real life is much messier and often there is little (or no) clear-cut cause and effect. Conversely, within the

pages of a novel the plot demands tight cause-and-effect coherence to satisfy probability.

Improbability not only undermines credibility, but also ruins a reader's pleasure in the story. It interrupts and draws the reader out from what John Gardner calls the "fictional dream" (32). Hence, being privy to a main character's thoughts and reasoning processes, knowing what the character wants and how they hope to achieve it, lends coherence and plausibility to a story.

Probability in a category romance centres on the thematic focus of romantic love, which is depicted in the developing relationship between the heroine and the hero. Therefore, the heroine's observation and interpretation of the hero's words and actions (and vice versa) is of major importance to the story. This leads to another proliferation of details—details of the hero as seen through the heroine's eyes, and details of the heroine as seen through the hero's eyes. These kinds of details are important because they reveal information about both characters. In *Bachelor Dad on Her Doorstep* we see Jaz through Connor's eyes:

Her boot—a pretty little feminine number in brown suede and as unlike her old black Doc Martens as anything could be—echoed smartly against the bare floorboards. Or maybe that was due to the silence that had descended around them again. He hooked his thumbs through the belt loops of his jeans and told himself to stay on task. It was just . . . that lipstick.

He'd once thought that nothing could look as good as the mulberry dark matt lipstick she'd once worn. He stared at the peach shine on her lips. He'd been wrong (27).

In this passage the reader is made privy not only to how the heroine has changed in eight years, but also to the hero's unwilling fascination with her. That is, readers are given a physical description of the heroine and the hero's physical and emotional response to her. In category romance, emotions are events. The third-person viewpoint helps to generate the tight narrative design that equates to the cause and effect of probability that lends coherence and believability to the plot and allows the reader to remain submerged in the fictive dream. Although not bound by the same constraints,

emotions are often events in romance novels too. In the scene where Lizzy unexpectedly meets with Darcy at Pemberley the reader is immediately made aware of Lizzy's confusion and embarrassment and Darcy's discomposure: "Their eyes instantly met, and the cheeks of each were overspread with the deepest blush. He absolutely started, and for a moment seemed immovable from surprise; but shortly recovering himself, advanced towards the party, and spoke to Elizabeth, if not in terms of perfect composure, at least of perfect civility" (241). In the paragraphs that follow, Lizzy and Darcy's confusion, embarrassment and discomposure are reinforced, as is the change in Darcy's manner. This description of Lizzy and Darcy indicates their awareness of each other, their desire to please each other and to be thought well of by the other, at the same time as they are unsure and far from confident that they are achieving any of those objectives. In a similar fashion, Jane Eyre's observation that Blanche Ingram fails to make Rochester fall in love with her, while Jane instinctively sees "how she might have succeeded" (245), reveals something about each of the characters—that Blanche Ingram will never be Rochester's soul-mate, that Jane could be that soul-mate, and that Rochester will perhaps marry a woman he does not love.

Our experience of the real world informs us that the power of romantic love does not always triumph over every obstacle, and that those who are most deserving are not always rewarded with emotional justice. However, by firmly embedding the imaginary world of a category romance in world that closely reflects the reader's world, with precise details that resonate because of their familiarity and with viewpoint characters who are also similar to the reader, a sense of verisimilitude can be generated. The confidence and authority created by this sense of verisimilitude enables a reader's willing suspension of disbelief. As Gardner states: "Whereas the realist argues the reader into acceptance, the tale writer charms or lulls him into dropping objections; that is, persuades him to suspend disbelief" (24). Category romance, like the tradition of romance that it follows, presents an ideal world where things work out for the best. They are feel-good stories, fantasies that provide pleasure and comfort. In a strictly realistic sense an ending to a romance novel may not be probable, as we have seen in *Jane Eyre* and *The Grand Sophy*; however, in terms

of the emotional justice of the story it is the hoped-for outcome. In those terms, the ending of a romance novel with the happy union of the heroine and hero is credible.

Emotional intensity and Cawelti's "believable kind of excitement" can be generated and maintained by focusing on the developing love relationship between one heroine and one hero, and implementing the techniques of identification and suspense. This helps not only to capture a reader's interest in a story, but also to heighten their pleasure in that story too. However, by focusing on the developing love relationship to the exclusion of the heroine and hero's other relationships and responsibilities such as family, friends and work, in concert with the word count that binds it, category romance sacrifices an all-encompassing picture of the world as it really is, even as it in part reflects it. Every category romance ends happily. Not every love affair in the world does.

Category romance is not literary fiction. It does not aspire to experiment with language or wish to portray dramas that reveal life's grimmer realities with characters having to settle for second (or third or fourth) best. It does not aim to provide a faultlessly realistic picture of the world. While it shares many of the same narrative structures and elements of realistic, mimetic fictions, its aims are different. In category romance, realism may at times be sacrificed for the comfort and pleasure of a story ending as the reader would ideally like it to—with villains punished and sympathetic characters rewarded. Category romance is a form of entertainment that is primarily concerned with privileging a reader's pleasure, providing through its pages a temporary escape from the humdrum of ordinary life. In providing stories in which love conquers all and overcomes every obstacle to the heroine and hero's triumphant union, category romance fulfils an inherent desire for wish fulfilment.

Category romances are bound by strong generic constraints. When a reader picks up a category romance they expect two key elements: that the story that will focus on the developing love relationship, and that the story will end happily in the heroine and hero's union. Harlequin's booming sales and category romance's enduring popularity indicate that these stories continue to

resonate with readers today. Category romance, by providing short intense stories about romantic love that end happily, is concerned with a reader's entertainment and pleasure. In striving to achieve this, realism and credibility may in part be sacrificed, but wish fulfilment and fantasy are not. Triumph and joy always hold sway at the close of a category romance.

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