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**READING THE CRITICISM: GEORGETTE HEYER'S
AND THE ROMANCE NOVEL'S (MIS) FORTUNE**

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**READING THE CRITICISM: GEORGETTE HEYER'S
AND THE ROMANCE NOVEL'S (MIS) FORTUNE**

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*Romance lives by repetition, and repetition
converts an appetite into an art.*

Oscar Wilde, **The Picture of Dorian Gray**

RESUMO

‘Romance novels’ são populares desde o seu surgimento; *Orgulho e Preconceito* é um dos livros mais famosos do mundo – se não o mais famoso – e uma longa lista de obras canônicas podem ser inclusas nesta categoria. A Harlequin Book por si só publica mais de 110 títulos em 34 línguas a cada mês e o site da organização Romance Writers of America afirma que o gênero teve volume de vendas de 1,08 milhões de dólares somente em 2013¹. Seria de se esperar que um gênero literário tão prolífico, popular e lucrativo teria um vasto estudo crítico – este não é o caso. As ‘romance novels’ vem sendo marginalizadas há bastante tempo, feministas e outros críticos não poupam esforços quando se trata de atacar e culpar o gênero pelo o que eles chamam de ‘servidão’ feminina no patriarcado e de diminuir o mesmo a um passatempo descerebrado e trivial para mulheres enquanto esperam a roupa lavar. A maior parte dos estudos críticos a respeito do gênero foram escritos na década de oitenta e no começo da década de noventa. A obra de Janice Radway - intitulada *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* – mostra um estudo conduzido com um grupo específico de leitoras de um subgênero específico de romance. Deste subgênero foram selecionadas vinte obras que são então usadas para apresentar conclusões sobre todo o gênero de ‘romance novels’. Se a crítica do gênero em si é escassa, a crítica de autoras em específico é ainda mais difícil. Georgette Heyer foi a precursora do subgênero ‘Regency romance novels’ e umas das escritoras britânicas mais populares. Ela escreveu mais de cinquenta romances e mais de quinze contos, além disso, costumava vender, pelo menos, dez mil cópias de cada obra lançada (KLOESTER; 2011). Apesar de tudo isso, estudos críticos da sua obra são raros. Em contraponto a este cenário, este trabalho propõe uma retrospectiva da crítica sobre o gênero com foco na produção da escritora Georgette Heyer. A teoria proposta aqui é que a falta de crítica em torno do gênero – costumeiramente atribuída à falta de qualidade do produto – pode, possivelmente, estar relacionada ao uso inadequado de ferramentas e teorias de estudo literário. Estudos e visões mais recentes sobre o gênero são apresentadas como contraponto e atualizações da primeira onda de estudos críticos sobre o gênero, bem como uma atualização da forma como a relação entre a leitora e o ‘romance novel’ é vista.

Keywords: 1. Literatura inglesa; 2. Romance novels; 3. Georgette Heyer; 4. Crítica literária.

ABSTRACT

Romance novels have been popular since they began existing. *Pride and Prejudice* is one of the most famous books in the world – if not the most famous one – and a long list of canonical works can be included in the row. Harlequin Books alone publishes more than 110 titles in 34 different languages every month, and the Romance Writers of America Nonprofit’s website claims that the genre had a sales value of 1.08 billion dollars in 2013 alone. It is expected that such a prolific, popular, and lucrative branch of literature must have a vast critical array of studies. That is not the case. Romance novels have been marginalized for a long time. Feminists and other critics have spared no weapons when it comes to slaying and blaming romance for what they call the ‘bondage’ of women within the patriarchy and for diminishing the genre into a trivial, brainless pastime for women to read while they wait for the laundry to be done. Most of the serious criticism regarding the genre was written in the 1980s and early 1990s. Its most canonical work, Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, shows a study conducted with a specific group of readers, who read a specific subgenre of the romance – from which the twenty works studied were selected – and presents conclusions about the genre. If criticism of the genre itself is scarce, the scene for specific authors is even grimmer. Georgette Heyer is the creator of the Regency romance genre and one of Britain’s most popular romance writers, having written over fifty romances, and more than fifteen short stories, with sales of at least ten thousand copies with each new book (KLOESTER; 2011). Yet, critical studies of her works are rare. In answer to that, this work proposes to provide a retrospection of the criticism surrounding the genre romance novel, focusing on the production of the author Georgette Heyer. The thesis I propose is that the lack of criticism on the genre, which is usually attributed to the scarce quality of the product, may instead lie in the inappropriate tools used by the critics who analyze the genre. Some recent views are presented as a counterpoint to this first wave of criticism, and as an updated way to look at the relationship between the reader and the romance novel.

Keywords: 1. English literature; 2. Romance novels; 3. Georgette Heyer; 4. Literary criticism.

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INTRODUCTION

Since this journey began, I have been questioned numerous times on the reason I choose romance novels as my focus of study and why, specifically, Georgette Heyer – who seems to be a popular British author everywhere except in Brazil. The truth is that I am not sure why, I have been in love with the idea presented by romance novels since I first watched *Cinderella* at the age of four and the love has only grown since then. Georgette Heyer came into my life much later and quite by chance; I had just finished taking a class where we discussed *Pride and Prejudice* as well as several of its film adaptations, and was curious about novels that focused on the Regency period. In addition to this, as a feminist, it has always been a source of great curiosity (and sometimes consternation to me) the fact that stories that portray the journey of two individuals towards marriage have such a great appeal upon so many people (and – especially – to myself). Reading romance novels made me feel well and gave me an opportunity to relax after stressful or good days, and I was curious about what the critics thought of them.

The traditional critical studies on the romance novel have pointed to the genre as an enslaver of women, and have accused it of contributing to the perpetuation of the patriarchal system. Tania Modleski (2008) equates romance reading to the use of narcotics in the sense that the longer you take them to treat an illness, the more you have to take to counteract the side effects and the more dependent you get on it. Janice Radway (1991) theorizes that women read romance novels so they can understand, rationalize, and justify male behavior – especially anger. Many other critics have equated the liking of romance to lack of critical thinking, attempts of escape from an unhappy life and subjection to patriarchal values. My work is not meant to argue that these impressions are false. My point is that different people read different stories for different reasons, and that such radical generalizations can prove too harmful to the acknowledgment of the merit of some authors. The case of the critical fortune of Jane Austen can exemplify that. There are millions of women who

are independent, professionally successful, well pleased with their own lives – some of them married, others are not so interested in the white picket-fence dream – who read romance novels voraciously. These women do not necessarily abide by the patriarchy, they are not unhappy with their lives and it is unfair to preach that they lack critical thinking. Laura Kinsale, in *The Androgynous Reader* (1992), quotes a lawyer, mother of three, on her wrestling with the choice she made of getting married saying that “this has nothing to do with my relationship to my husband, my children or dominance in my marriage. IT HAS TO DO WITH MYSELF” (KINSALE in KRENTZ; p. 40). This capitalized sentence seems to sum up the whole problem surrounding the criticism of romance novels: it is not about the reader’s husband, male friends and coworkers or her male boss; nor is it about her children, or her family. Reading romance novels is about the reader herself, about dealing with the feelings and struggles within herself, and possibly works as a way to come back to the ‘real world’ stronger and more aware of herself. At this point you may have noticed that I keep referring to the reader as ‘her’, it is done so because the readership of romance novels is comprised mainly of women – 84 per cent, according to the Romance Writers of America website. Another reason for this choice is the fact that it serves as a statement of sorts, this work is about literature written by women and for women and I wished to make it clear.

If the whole romance genre has been unfairly treated, it would be no different when it comes to specific writers. I bring Georgette Heyer as the author to be analyzed here because she was the founder of the Regency romance novel sub-genre, was very popular – ate her own time and even today, and was one of the contributors to the development of romance novels’ popularity. *Regency Buck* was and is to this today extremely popular among romance readers and is the reference when it comes to the Regency subgenre. The bibliography studying her works is scarce, with two biographies and a collection of unpublished works and essays and critiques, as well as a couple of articles in other collections.

When compared, the popularity and size of the market of romance novels and its critical fortune, as well as Georgette Heyer’s, the incongruity of the situation is glaringly obvious. Harlequin Books alone publishes more than 110 titles in 34 different languages every month and the Romance Writers of America Nonprofit claims that the genre had a sales value of 1.08 billion dollars in 2013 alone. These

numbers do not include any other lines of serials or single titles not related to publishers specialized in romance novels. After I started researching for this work, I became more and more confused by the disparities surrounding the genre. This work presents a review of the critical fortune of the romance novel genre and of the author Georgette Heyer and her work *Regency Buck*. The main critical studies on the genre written in the 1980s and early 1990s are analyzed in an attempt to understand where the prejudice and rejection of the genre as what is considered 'real' literature come from. This work is also an attempt to understand the appeal behind this genre, understanding what makes it so invaluable, especially for myself.

1. GEORGETTE AND HER WORLD

1.1 GEORGETTE HEYER

Born on August 16, 1902 in Wimbledon, England. Heyer was the daughter of Sylvia Watkins, an accomplished musician, and George Heyer, a Cambridge graduate who spoke fluent French and taught for five years at Weymouth College in Dorset before being invited to teach at King's College London. The eldest of three children, Heyer had two brothers, Boris and Frank, respectively four and nine years younger. According to biographer Jennifer Kloester,

Georgette grew up in a sheltered world in which people were assumed to know their place and many believed that the worth of a man could be told from the cut of his coat. As the eldest child of a mildly affluent middle-class family she understood and accepted as natural such things as servants, horses and carriages, good manners, correct speech, the right clothing and a certain level of education and cultural literacy. (2011; l. 155)

Early in 1914, George Heyer accepted a job as manager on bank in Paris and that spring Heyer and her family moved to the French capital. In August of 1914, the conflict began and Germany declared war. The Heyer family stayed throughout August and September and Heyer celebrated her twelfth birthday in Paris. Meanwhile her parents sought information and talked to friends in order to make the decision of whether they would stay or go back to England. After the Battle of the Marne, George decided to take his family back home. Shortly after, he enlisted and was assigned a post in the British Expedition Forces, a situation that brought great pain and discomfort to a shy and introspective teenaged Heyer.

Like her idol Jane Austen, Heyer also received the bulk of her education at home. Her mother kept many details of her growing up in a baby book and Kloester notes that “her father read aloud to Georgette from babyhood, telling her tales from

Shakespeare and the Bible, reciting poetry and nursery rhymes and delighting her with made-up stories of long ago” (2011; l. 204). Heyer loved to read and her father encouraged her by showing books she might like reading. Kloester says, “She read Dickens at a young age and by ten was familiar enough with David Copperfield to have absorbed the books characters and expressions into the family vernacular” (2011; l. 407). In addition to recommending books, her father gave her the run of the library and freedom to choose what she wanted to read and when. Unlike most Victorian fathers, he never forbade her of reading a certain material, although he would sometimes “advise her against it”. However, the comfort and freedom of home schooling would only last until the war. Kloester says that “her father’s departure meant Georgette would have to go to school for the first time at the age of thirteen” (2011; l. 661). Heyer’s shyness was one of the reasons for her parents’ decision to educate her at home, since George was a more than capable instructor. Her time in school was not the most pleasant; Heyer was intensely shy, obviously much more knowledgeable and well-read than her classmates. She was unaccustomed to the structure and formality of school; before she would read whatever stroked her fancy and whenever she wanted to, now she was expected to study set subjects for a specific time, something she found very difficult and, according to a school friend, for a long time Heyer’s only friends at school were the teachers.

According to Kloester, Heyer loved creating stories from an early age; she would make up characters, give those lives and stories and then acted them out with her school friend. This friend says to have recognized several characters and plots from their childhood in Heyer’s novels. Writing came easy for Heyer,

partly because she grew up in an era in which letter writing was *de rigueur* for a well-bred person, and partly because of the War (...) She had written regularly to her father while he was stationed in Rouen, and cultivated the art of writing while she spoke and penning sentences which exactly captured the mood of the moment (2011; l. 813).

In these letters, Heyer would describe their daily lives, her brother’s antics and her own feelings and thoughts and this helped her in the development of her talent for writing dialogues and recreating funny scenes that might make her readers laugh. She

had a natural talent for storytelling and knew exactly how to capture the readers' attention and curiosity for what would happen next in the stories.

By the end of 1920, her literary efforts paid up. The previous winter she had made up a story for her brother Boris, who was ill, and her father advised her to work on it and send it to a publisher. Constable, a well-known publisher, offered a £100 advance, which was an incredible achievement for a girl of only seventeen. But Heyer's young age did not mean she was naïve, before signing the contract she wrote to the Society of Authors for advice on the contract offered by Constable. In September 1921, *The Black Moth* was released, earning Heyer reviews in England and in the US, including one in *The Times Literary Supplement*. Kloester affirms that "Georgette's first novel is a surprisingly mature work, which reveals a mastery of prose unusual in a seventeen-year-old and an ability to create characters that are sufficiently interesting and complex to give the book an extraordinary longevity" (2011; l. 981). That is so true that ninety-three years after its publishing *The Black Moth* is still in print.

In 1925, she married mining engineer George Ronald Rougier whom she had met five years before during a family vacation. In 1926, *These Old Shades* was released amidst the United Kingdom General Strike, which meant it got no advertising, newspaper coverage, or reviews, and yet was able to sell 190,000 copies. Since the lack of publicity had not harmed her sales, Heyer refused to promote her books in any way for the rest of her career and claimed that her private life belonged to her and her family and no one else. After living in remote locations in Africa and Southeast Europe, Heyer insisted on returning to England before starting a family and in 1929 Rougier quit his job making Heyer the primary source of income for the household, which she remained to be throughout the years.

Heyer wrote for a living, her production rate was directly linked to her family's wealth. George, her husband never really stood out in a career path or made enough money to provide for his family, so the duty of taking care of not only their finances but also her mother's and to some extent her brothers' fell to Heyer. The alchemy attributed to literature, the magic of the *inspiration* had no part in her career. She was systematic in the creation of characters and plot devices as well as in the writing of her texts. In fact, unlike most people in the post-war period, she mourned the death of old traditions, of the upper class's respectability and nobility. She did not

wish for the world to change. In one of the few interviews she ever granted, published in the New Zealand Gazette, the journalist Jane Mander says,

Smilingly, she called herself a sheltered daughter, and said she was glad of it. She has never been to a university and considers herself a Victorian. She hates Bohemians and studio parties, loves home life and country sports. She calls herself a reactionary and loathes the Freudian, and speaks slightly of certain famous modern realists. She detests the average modern novel, and loves the old ones, particularly Jane Austen (sic) and Thackeray. (2011; 1. 843).

Heyer's earliest romance novels happened before 1800 and, in 1935; she released *Regency Buck*, her first Regency novel. With Jane Austen as a clear inspiration in the writing of her works, Heyer described the Regency period and its society in detail throughout her books. Unlike Austen, the events of Heyer's stories had taken place over a century before she wrote them so she had to include many details of the period so her modern day readers could understand what was happening. Because she wanted to make her novels as accurate as possible, Heyer collected reference works and research material on the Regency period to use while writing. She once went as far as purchasing a letter written by the Duke of Wellington so that she could copy his style writing. Heyer was so knowledgeable of the period that she rarely used dates, instead preferring to reference historical events that took place during the same time.

In addition to romance novels, Heyer also wrote mysteries, her first being *The Conqueror* that told the story of William the Conqueror, whose life she researched as thoroughly as to traveling the route he took when crossing England. Her husband was in a lot of her writing, proofreading her romances to ensure there were no historical errors and supplying the plots for her detective stories. After he gave her the plot idea, she would create the characters and bring the story to life. Her mysteries, however, did not receive as good a critic review as her romances. They were said to feature unoriginal means, reasons, and character, having inheritances as the reason behind many of the crimes. Her specialty was, generally speaking, upper-class families' murder.

Heyer suffered several financial problems after her husband was called to the Bar, having to move first to Brighton and then to Hove so he could easily commute to

London. In World War II, her brothers served in the army and her husband was a member of the Home Guard but since he was new to the career, he did not earn a lot of money. That coupled with the paper rationing – which caused lower sales of Heyer's books – led her to sell the Commonwealth rights of her books to her publisher. In addition, to earn more money she would review books for her publisher and allowed her romances to be serialized in magazines before being published. In 1950, Heyer began writing a medieval trilogy that would cover the House of Lancaster between the years of 1393 and 1435. This was later interrupted due to her fans requests of new Regency romances and her financial difficulties. The first volume's manuscript stops in mid-sentence and was posthumously published.

With the increase of Heyer's popularity, came the copycats. In 1950, a reader informed her that an author by the name of Barbara Cartland had several novels published using the same style, characters' names and traits, plot points and descriptions from Heyer's books. Heyer did a thorough analysis of the copies, and even though no apology was ever made, the copying stopped. In 1961, another reader brought to Heyer's attention to Kathleen Lindsay's work. She copied plot, characters, last names, and even Regency slang from Heyer's books. When Heyer's fans started to accuse her of publishing low quality work under pseudonym she wrote to the other publisher complaining. Lindsay declared herself offended by the accusations so Heyer compiled a list of the material copied and of the historical mistakes in the books. Included in the list was the expression "to make a cake of oneself" which Heyer had found in memoir not available to the public.

Heyer was extremely popular in the US and Germany as well as in the UK and - by the time of her death - 48 of her books were still in print. It is undeniable the influence that Heyer's work has had in the romance genre. She virtually invented the historical romance genre and was the creator of the subgenre Regency romance. Despite her prolific and inspirational career Heyer was ignored by the critic world and by Encyclopedia Britannica, whose 1974 edition – published a year after Heyer's death – included popular women writers such as Agatha Christie but completely ignored Heyer.

1.2 REGENCY BUCK

This novel was published in 1935 and is Georgette Heyer's first novel involving the Regency period; it is also one of the only novels she wrote combining the two genres she was famous for – regency romance and mystery novels. Additionally this is the only novel written by her in which Beau Brummel¹ is an active character and is not just mentioned as a historical character. The story is set in 1811-1812.

Judith Taverner is a wealthy beautiful heiress who goes to London to join high society, accompanied by her younger brother Peregrine – a handsome boy with very little sense and a lot of money to spend, which constantly gets him in trouble – whom she calls Perry. She is instantly displeased by her guardian, the Fifth Earl of Worth, whom she met on the road in a small town full of bucks watching a boxing match and in which he treated her in a way reserved for women of loose behavior. She soon becomes a sensation in London and receives many marriage offers, including from the Duke of Clarence but Julian refuses them all, something she learns to appreciate. Judith's cousin, Bernard, is always so caring and attentive and seems so earnest that he could not possibly be insincere – at least in Judith's eyes. Peregrine is challenged to a duel, is held up, and almost is poisoned. Every time it is Worth who saves him and the prime suspect for him is Bernard. Worth then recruits the help of his brother, Captain the Honorable Charles Audley, to protect Perry. In the meantime, Bernard tries to convince Judith it is Worth who is trying to kill Perry.

In the end, with a plan concocted by Worth, Bernard is forced to act and kidnaps Judith in an attempt to force her to marry him, giving Worth the opportunity to expose him as the culprit behind everything. After being released of his guardianship, Worth declares his love for Judith and the couple is finally united after months of sparring and misunderstandings.

¹ George Bryan "Beau" Brummel was an iconic figure of the Regency period in England. A friend of the Prince Regent – the future King George IV – he was the arbiter of men's fashion and created what was latter called the dandy style. He rejected overtly ornate clothing, choosing instead overstated and perfectly tailored bespoke garments.

2. A DEFINITION OF ROMANCE NOVELS

Regency romance novels are a subgenre of romance novels; therefore, they present a similar structure in the development of the plot. The difference lies on the society in which the story develops. While generally romance novels' stories take place at different times in world's history, regency romances, as its name suggests, are situated during the Regency period in England – between 1811 and 1820 – although they have been written after it. In *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, scholar Pamela Regis defines a romance novel as “a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines” (2007, p. 19). Regis divides the plot into eight core elements that must be present in a work of fiction for it to be considered a romance novel. The story has to define the society in which it is situated, hero and heroine have to meet, a barrier has to be put in place showing the reasons why they should not be together, they have to be attracted to each other, then a moment or situation has to arise in which it seems impossible for the two to be together. After this point of ritual death, heroine and hero have to recognize their attraction, declare their mutual love and get married – or, at least, engaged. These core elements will be explained through the plot of the novel *Regency Buck*, by British author Georgette Heyer.

2.1 THE EIGHT ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

The definition of the society will take place near the beginning of the story. Regis says that “this society is in some way flawed; it may be incomplete, superannuated, or corrupt. It always oppresses the heroine and hero” (2007, p. 31). In *Regency Buck*, the society is sketched at the beginning of the novel when Peregrine and Judith meet several people that will be a part of their social circle in London, but it is only really defined after their arrival in the city. This specific society is flawed in the sense that it defines people's worth by their connections and acquaintances, fashion, money and title. It constantly represses Judith's individuality, opinions and actions. It is also corrupt in its treatment of her, her cousin tries to force her into

marriage by kidnaping her and the Prince Regent himself behaves in an abhorrent way when he gets her alone and makes unwanted sexual advances towards her.

The second element is the meeting between hero and heroine; it is often placed at the beginning of the novel but can also be presented as a flashback. In *Regency Buck*, the first meeting between Judith Taverner and Lord Worth happens during her journey to London. Judith and her brother, Peregrine, had arrangements to stop at Grantham for him to watch a boxing match. While on the road, their gig and Lord Worth's crash and he acts with what she perceives as indifference and a provocation and "her anger veered irrationally towards the stranger. His manner, his whole bearing, filled her with repugnance. From the first moment of setting eyes on him she knew that she disliked him." (2013; p. 12)

The third element is the barrier, which can be found dispersed throughout the novel, dictates why hero and heroine cannot be married. The barrier can be external, as in something that exists outside of their minds, or internal, a psychological struggle in one or both of their minds. In *Regency Buck*, the barrier manifests itself in several moments. As we know Judith showed an extreme dislike of Lord Worth, which only increased the next day when Judith encounters Julian while on a walk. He stops his curricle and, after having his offer of a ride denied, picks her up, and forcibly puts her in the car. After a very unsuccessful struggle on her part, he tries to teach her how to throw punch and when she does not engage him, kisses her. This situation represents and internal barrier, Judith's dislike of Worth and his total lack of consideration for her. The external barrier lies on the fact that Worth is her guardian until she comes of age. He cannot ask her to marry him as long as she is underage for it would be considered inappropriate seen as he is the one who decides who she can or cannot marry. Another impediment to their marriage is the fact that Judith and everyone else might suspect he is marrying her for the substantial inheritance she will receive when coming of age. Further along in the story, Judith decides to race her brother to Brighton without Worth's consent and when he finds her on the road, he becomes enraged and orders to travel by post the rest of the way. In this encounter, they argue and Judith shares her hatred for him, making the reader and characters think that a union between the two is quite impossible.

The fourth element is the attraction, which consists of one or more scenes in the story that shows why the couple should marry. We see this with Judith and Worth

on different occasions. When Judith decides to purchase a perch-phaeton, Worth makes her prove she can drive by having her drive his team, something that had never happened before. He is surprised and impressed by her ability. Her interest in snuff – a subject in which Worth is an expert – brings them closer and he even creates a special mixture for her. Later on, he invites her to spend Christmas at his estate, an invitation that Judith happily accepts after realizing that “she was by no means averse from going on a visit to Worth” (2013; p. 190) especially after the Duke of Clarence decided to do everything in his power to marry her. While away on Worth’s property, his brother convinces Judith to go on a ride using Worth’s horses and she is surprised at his response of “my dear Miss Taverner, I am not in the least angry (...) my horses are at your service” (2013; p. 214).

The point of ritual death is the moment in the story where it seems impossible for hero and heroine to be together, either due to an actual death threat to one of them or because of a separation. Regis makes use of Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* to explain this element of the plot. Behind this moment in the narrative is the myth of death and rebirth, which echoes Persephone’s myth. Just as she has to escape Hade’s reign of death to restore balance on Earth, the romance heroine must overcome her “death” to see the promise of betrothal. In *Regency Buck*, the point of ritual death occurs when Judith’s cousin lures her to a faraway cottage with a promise of having found her brother. That was a lie, he used it as an excuse to take her there and had plans of keeping her there until she agreed to marry him, or of imprisoning her for long enough so that her reputation would be destroyed and she had no other choice but to marry him. At this point of the plot, it seems impossible that Judith and Worth will ever be together.

The recognition comprises the scene or scenes in which the author presents the reader with the information that will overcome the barrier.

“In older comedies, where the opposition to the marriage is paternal, the hero is often recognized (...) sometimes the heroine’s true lineage is revealed or (...) the heroine’s true gender emerges from beneath the man’s clothes she has been wearing” (REGIS; p. 36).

In *Regency Buck*, this recognition takes place right after Judith and her cousin arrive at the cottage. Worth comes in from the window and reveals Bernard's several attempts at killing Peregrine. He saves Judith's reputation and at the same time reveals that he has been protecting Peregrine from Bernard's plans from the beginning. In Judith's case, the barrier was external as well as internal. The second part of the recognition happens when Worth explains to her all he has done to keep Peregrine safe and to restrain his affections towards her. It is then that Judith realizes that her feelings for him – that so far had been suppressed due to her belief that Worth hated her – do not have to be kept hidden. She can finally admit to the world, and, more importantly, to herself that she loves Worth.

Another core element of the story is the declaration, where hero and heroine declare their love for each other. It can occur at any point in the story, making the variety of plots within the genre possible. In *Regency Buck*, the declaration occurs at the end of the novel. A day before her birthday, Judith receives a note from Worth requesting a visit so that he can hand over some documents regarding his guardianship. During their conversation, he calls her by the nickname he gave her the first time they met and she reproaches him saying he used abominably that day. He answers saying that he did indeed use her abominably and that he has "been waiting ever since to do it again" (2013; p. 351). After kissing her, he says, "I have been in love with you almost from the first moment of setting eyes on you" (2013; p. 352).

The betrothal may happen in one or more scenes and is comprised of the hero proposing and the heroine accepting. From the last quarter of the twentieth century, marriage no longer became necessary as long as it is made clear that hero and heroine will be together in the end. In Judith's and Worth's case the proposal and acceptance happen in the same scene, when after being relieved of his duties as guardian, Worth gives Judith an engagement ring as her birthday present.

2.3. JANE AUSTEN AND THE REGENCY ROMANCE

When comparing two sub sequential works of literature, it is fundamental that we accept the similarities and recurring elements especially in cases where one of

them was fundamental in establishing the specific genre in question. With that in mind, let it be established that Georgette Heyer was a Jane Austen fan, aspired to write works of the same quality and admitted clearly Austen's influence not only in her writing but also in the themes of some of her writings. Taking into consideration the fact that Georgette Heyer and her work are not overtly popular in our country, a comparison will be done of her *Regency Buck* and Jane Austen's classic, extremely well-know, and pioneer of swoon-inducing heroes *Pride and Prejudice*. This parallel is made in hopes that it will facilitate the understanding of the work under analysis.

Before I start, it is important to point out some significant differences between these two works. Jane Austen wrote contemporary novels, her readership lived among the society depicted and understood its deep complexity. Georgette Heyer wrote historical novels about the 1800s on mid-20th century. Although it is reasonable to think British society still remembered some aspects of its past culture, the advent of electricity, fuel and the War had changed considerably their worldview, costumes, and values. These changes made the description of the setting, the clothes, the means of transport and social norms fundamental to the understanding of the story. In addition to that, Heyer had a passion for history and was extremely fastidious about the historical accuracy of her novels. Some critics and readers think this makes her works tedious and too descriptive, most however disagree. There is nothing quite like reading her descriptions of dresses and historical monuments. They take the reader back in time and, for a second you can see yourself among the muslin-clad, embroidering ladies of the Regency, making calls and spending their afternoons in sitting rooms discussing the latest fashionable poem.

The heroines of both novels have many things in common. Judith and Elizabeth are independent, smart, and opinionated women who do to allow society to decide their future. Elizabeth Bennet – described as to have “a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous” (AUSTEN; p. 13) – was the second daughter to a country gentleman of moderate means, whose property is entailed to a male heir. This requires that at least one of his five daughters marry a gentleman of substantial income or the cousin who is to inherit the Bennets' home, the likely candidates being Elizabeth herself or her older sister Jane. Judith is described as a “fine young woman, rather above the average height, and had been used for the past four years to hearing herself proclaimed a remarkably handsome

girl” (HEYER; p. 1). She was the daughter of a gentleman from Newark who had a “very considerable fortune” that was left to his children, the considerable amount that was not entailed, to Judith. This meant that Judith, unlike Elizabeth, was not as pressed for a husband of good income. She has a lot more freedom to choose her spouse based on common interests and affection.

One of the main differences between Austen’s work and Heyer’s is that the later wrote heroines who lived in the 19th century but had as given their right to property, companionate marriage, and affected individualism of a 20th century one. Regis points out that “Heyer does not write historically accurate heroines. Instead, they have unusual notions about how to behave (as the conventional-minded characters surrounding them are constantly pointing out) and those notions are distinctly twentieth-century” (2007; p. 127). Elizabeth Bennet, a heroine who actually lived in the Regency period has to fight to keep even a small amount of affective individualism, had little property to her name, and had her wish for companionate marriage almost made impossible by Mr. Collins and her family’s actions.

Heyer’s heroes are similarly constructed. The Regency fops, dandies, gamblers, and bucks are never the hero. They appear as figures to be frowned upon or a reason for laughter. Heyer’s heroes have distinctive “twentieth-century sensibilities”. Her heroes live “among a society full of men who spend their money and time gambling, drinking, and keeping mistresses” (Idem). As is the rule in romance novels, Heyer’s heroes are alpha males who have to be tamed or healed. In *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*, romance writer Robyn Donald points out “it is the hero’s task in the book to present a suitable challenge to the heroine. His strength is a measure of her power. For it is she who must conquer him” (1992; p. 93). Still on the matter of the hero, Donald says, “in most cases he is a mean, moody, magnificent creature with a curling lip and mocking eyes and an arrogant air of self-assurance—until he meets the heroine. She is the only person who can make him forget his natural courtesy, lose his rigidly-controlled temper” (Idem).

Lord Worth, Heyer’s hero, is described as “the epitome of a man of fashion”. He has a look of self-consequence, his eyes show only boredom and his mouth seems to be constantly sneering. On their first meeting, Judith declares him “insufferable”. He makes decision about her life without consulting her and reprehends her in public when she disobeys him. He claims to dislike her, acts as if being her guardian is

almost unbearable and is constantly telling her cannot wait for the day he is free of her. Of course, by the end of the story we know he actually has been in love with her since they first met.

As has been stated previously, for a work to be classified as a romance novel, there have to exist some specific elements in the plot. The definition of the society that the protagonists will be a part of is set up differently in each novel. In *Pride and Prejudice*, we meet the group of people that will be a part of the story right at the beginning. Elizabeth's family, friends and neighbors are presented mainly through Mrs. Bennet's gossiping and, by chapter three the ball is under way. *Regency Buck* presents a more gradual introduction of its cast, Worth and Judith meet days before her arrival at London. The reader, however, gets to meet the vital characters – Worth, Judith, Peregrine and their cousin Bernard – right at the beginning.

Elizabeth and Darcy meet at a very public and popular event, under the watchful eye of their acquaintances. Judith and Worth meet at an empty road twice, the first time in the company of Peregrine and later essentially alone, since Worth's tiger would obviously not run any type of interference. In both stories, the meeting is in itself a barrier, considering that the first impressions caused by both Darcy and Worth are not exactly becoming. Darcy is declared by Mrs. Bennet as "a most disagreeable, horrid man, not at all worth pleasing. So high and so conceited that there was no enduring him!" (AUSTEN; p. 14). Judith's opinion regarding Worth is not much better, upon their first meeting she declares him insufferable due to his look of self-consequence, his bored look and sneering mouth.

The barrier manifests itself in several other moments throughout the stories. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Wickham convinces Elizabeth that Darcy is unjustly cruel to him and later talks Lydia into eloping. Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth. Darcy is reluctant to admit his feelings for Elizabeth due to her family's behavior and her social status. Lady Catherine de Bourgh takes an active opposition to their union due to personal interest. In *Regency Buck* there are far less barriers to the couple's union, however, they are much more difficult to overcome. Worth is morally prohibited of courting Judith due to his position as her guardian and Judith makes it clear throughout the story – even though she has some momentary changes of heart – that she despises Worth and cannot wait to be free of his guardianship.

Darcy's and Elizabeth's attraction happens slowly, they have to overcome their prides and prejudices to be able to love each other and that happens evenly throughout the story. In *Regency Buck*, we are only made privy to Judith's and Worth's feeling in the last six pages. He has been in love with her since they first met whereas she had taken a long time to change her feelings for him and had given them up after their big fight in Cuckfield. Judith spends the whole story divided between fondness and hatred towards Worth.

One of the most important moments in a romance novel is the point of ritual death – the moment where it seems impossible that the couple will ever be together. For Elizabeth and Darcy it is Lydia's elopement, if Darcy had not paid Wickham, the Bennet's name and reputation would have been destroyed, making it impossible for any of the Bennet girls to marry a respectable man. In *Regency Buck*, the point of ritual death also revolves around the theme of elopement and ruined reputations. The difference is that the attempted elopement is not consented and the reputation at stake is Judith's. Had Worth not found out about Bernard's plan, Judith would have no choice but to marry Bernard, otherwise she would have to risk ostracizing from society.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that Darcy set up an extremely high standard for all men. It is hard in most female eyes to do better than he did when it comes to declarations of love. Since then men should tell us of how ardently they love us and of how they have struggled in vain. Elizabeth of course is incensed by his sense of superiority, his veiled critiques, and his reluctance in loving her. In spite of that, Darcy's declaration is considered the best of them all and hard to top. Worth's declaration, although not as eloquent as Darcy's also has its appeal. When he calls Judith by the nickname he bestowed her – Clorinda – she tells him that he used her abominably, referring to his kissing of her. He responds to that by saying, "I did use you abominably, and I have been waiting ever since to do it again. Now, Miss Taverner, you are not my ward, and I *am* going to do it again!" (HEYER; p. 351). When she points out her belief of him planning to marry her to his brother he remarks, "I have been in love with you almost from the first moment of setting eyes on you". (Idem). Their mutual declaration happens when they become and see each other as equals, Worth explains his actions and reasoning, apologizes for having hurt her in any way, and finally sees her as the adult, independent and intelligent woman she is.

In both novels, the declaration of love and the betrothal happen in the same event; however, that is not always the case.

3. CRITICAL (MIS) FORTUNE

3.1 A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING

In 1982, Tania Modleski published one of the first in depth critical studies on romance novels titled *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women*. She begins her report by pointing out the bias pervading mass-culture studies; you can find plenty of critical work aggrandizing popular male genres, the same, however, cannot be said of popular feminine narratives. She quotes Virginia Wolf's pointed observation that "football and sport are 'important'; the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes 'trivial'. And these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction" (2008; p. 1). This masculine mode of aggrandizement of male heroes and male texts – by both fiction and criticism, she claims, is traceable in part to the male oedipal conflict, which she notes, "is resolved at the expense of women and necessitate her devaluation" (2008; p. 2). Taking into account the many different ways in which women are disabled in fiction in order for the men to assert their masculine superiority, Modleski points out that "it is hardly surprising that since the beginnings of the novel the heroine and the writer of feminine texts have been on the defensive, operating on the constant assumption that men are out to destroy them" (2008; p. 3).

In a chapter entitled *The Disappearing Act*, Modleski discusses the phenomenon of Harlequin Enterprises, Ltd. and points out that this level of popularity requires further analysis. At the time of her study, Harlequin was already a huge business with over 2,300 titles published, translated into six different languages and with around 140 writers, whom were all women, and mostly British. There were twelve books of serialized stories released each month, sold on bookstores, supermarkets, pharmacies, and chain stores. This, backed up by heavy advertisement on TV, allowed for cheaper books, and ensured that every book was a best seller. The formula, Modleski says, rarely varied, showing "a young, inexperienced, poor to moderately well-to-do woman encounters and becomes involved with a handsome, strong, experienced, wealthy man, older than herself by ten to fifteen years" (2008; p.

28).² Like in Richardson's *Pamela*, the heroine is extremely confused with the hero, for even though he seems interested in her, he is also dismissive, mocking and at times brutal. In the end all the misunderstandings are cleared and heroine and hero are free to have their happily ever after. Still on the subject of classics, Modleski affirms that “the critics have overestimated the amount of fantasy in the novel and underestimated the extent to which Brontë’s [Charlotte] novel attempts to undercut the fantasy” (Idem). She goes on to say that Jane Austen’s contribution to the formula of romance has not been “sufficiently recognized” and that “while there is no denying Austen’s genius, we will see how she hit upon a perfect method of presenting feminine fantasy under the guise of ‘realism’” (Ibidem).

Citing a Harlequin commercial in which a reader is in bed getting ready for her “disappearing act” within her Harlequin romance, Modleski says, “I can’t think of a better phrase to describe at once both what is laudable and what is deplorable in the appeal of such fiction” (2008; p. 28). For her, disappearing in the sense of social erasure is one of the biggest problems with romance novels, for women should be showing themselves instead of disappearing behind the curtains and this will hardly happen while they feel the need to “escape”. At the same time she believes that women’s wish to disappear in relation to their physical presence – to the objectification and consumption of the female body – cannot be condemned since these instances are becoming rarer with each passing day. Modleski cites John Berger’s - an art critic, screenwriter, and novelist – theory on how the displaying of women in visual arts causes a split within them as they are forever aware of themselves as objects of the male gaze and survey. For Modleski, romance helps readers to believe that it is possible to overcome this division of the self and that “the price of being taken care of does not have to be eternal vigilance” (2008; p. 29). Not all of us has to be like Jane Eyre, who lived in constant fear of being abandoned by Rochester because of the inequalities between them.

According to Modleski, the complexity of women’s reaction to romance has not been properly acknowledged. For her romance does indeed works to “keep women in their place” but this does not exclude the possibility that it is “concerned with real female problems” and this duality has so far been ignored by critics of the

² This specific sub-genre of romance novels, published by Harlequin Enterprises Inc., will be called Harlequin(s) in the text as a way to simplify its reading.

genre. The fantasy of the romance had previously been seen “either as evidence of female ‘masochism’ or as a simple reflection of dominant masculine ideology” (2008; p. 29). As proof, she points to one of the pioneers on the critical analysis of romance, feminist Germaine Greer’s conclusions on the idealized male of the romance and Susan Brownmiller’s “reflection theory”. Greer claims that the characteristics of the hero have been created by women who “cherishing the chains of their bondage” which, for Modleski, makes the women the only guilty and presumes a freedom of choice that is not always the case in a patriarchal society. In opposition, in Brownmiller’s theory women have no participation in the creation of the fantasy. For her, when women fantasize about sex it is actually a men’s fantasy and not their own. For Modleski the answer lies between these two extremes and she quotes psychologist Clara M. Tompson’s description of women’s ‘masochism’ as a “form of adaptation to an unsatisfactory and circumscribed life”.

In each Harlequin, there are two enigmas: the hero’s behavior towards the heroine, and, how he will be able to see that – unlike other women – she is not “a scheming little adventuress”. She claims that the basic premise of Gothics is that it is hard to recognize a good man and that the one who seems the most dangerous and suspicious is the one - this can be said about all romances. She claims that Greer’s theory that these heroes have been invented is incorrect, since they affirm their masculinity much in the way men do in real life: they “treat the woman as a joke, appraise her as an object, and give her less attention than they give their automobiles” (2008; p. 32). For Modleski the fantasy in romance has less to do with the hero himself and more with how the reader interprets his actions. A reader who is familiar with the genre and its ending in marriage will see the hero’s actions as what is known as his reaction and inability to admit – even to himself – that he has been in love with the heroine since the beginning. They know that at some point the hero will declare his love for the heroine, so they read all his action based on this knowledge. From this perspective “male brutality come to be seen as a manifestation not of contempt, but of love” (Idem). It is important to note that the author constantly refers to the romance novel genre as ‘the formula’ with a connotation that it is somehow less than other genres, something extremely common in the critical analysis of romance novels. She claims that an important aspect of the ‘formula’ is the fact that it is simple to presume an identification between the reader and the heroine, something most critics have

done, but the subject is much more complex. For her, the reader's knowledge of the formula makes her superior to the heroine and detaches the two. At the same time, this detachment means that the reader will not have to go through the same emotional suffering as the heroine because she is "intellectually distanced" and this creates a "very close emotional identification". This ability to understand the hero's action, Modleski says, allows women to deal with some of the doubts they have regarding men. Here the author falls into one of the traps people who are not familiar with the act of reading romance often do. The common idea is that the reader – presumably a woman – will logically identify with the female character – the heroine, however, as it will be discussed later on, that may not be the case.

One of the instances in which Modleski shines in her analysis of romance is when she discusses the normalization and justification of the hero's aggressive behavior towards the heroine, both in treatment and in their sexual encounters. She argues that language has an important function in this instance as it has the power of destruct the reader's relationship with the heroine if it becomes too specific when describing the way the hero treats her. Most of the viable reasons' for the hero's behavior are explored in the novels and "they range from charitable explanations: his temper really has nothing to do with me, but with weather and the workload (...) to explanations which posit the emotional inferiority of men" (2008; p. 34). The first explanation is common in real life and may very well be true, but the reader of a romance always knows what the real reason for the hero's actions is. The second possibility, Modleski says, gives space for women to feel a certain amount of dignity and superiority that is not acceptable "since their whole lives are supposed to revolve around men" (Idem). Another important aspect of the hero's behavior explored by the author is his overt sexual aggression. According to her, "the most constant suspicion in the novel is that men are using sexuality to punish and humiliate women" (Ibidem). She quotes a heroine who at first thinks the hero is going to hit her but then realizes he is going to do something "very different", a confusion that Modleski questions since they are so "very different" as the heroine herself says. For Modleski, "the novel perpetuates ideological confusions about male sexuality and male violence, while insisting there is no problem" (Ibidem). Modleski equals this to the discourse that claims that the boy who mistreats a girl in school is actually doing it because he has a crush on her. To explain this Modleski cites Roland Barthes' concept of inoculation:

we recognize a small amount of evil in an institution or cultural belief so we do not have to admit the corruptness of the whole situation. When it comes to male behavior, we accept that the little boy hurts the girls he is fond of so that we do not have to admit that he only does that because our culture normalizes men having a right over women and treating them as inferior in some way.

As she has established that romance serves to keep women in place but also is concerned with their problems and anguishes, Modleski delineates how these stories give women the chance to express their anger and frustration towards the patriarchal system in a safe and contained way. The revenge is exacted as the heroine supposedly brings the hero “to his knees” and that is where the pleasure of reading these works comes from. In this reality, the “disappearing act” of the reader is “a way of channeling the anger and frustration expressed in the novel, and it is the logical outcome of an entire process of self-subversion the heroines are forced to undergo”, the heroine exacts her revenge against male oppression while at the same time causing her own belittlement. The reader faces a dilemma, at the same time that she identifies with the heroine’s frustration over the hero’s behavior and agrees with her rebellion, she also wishes to reach the happy ending in marriage and that can only happen if the heroine submit to the hero, therefore “a part of us wants the man to see the heroine as a pert adorable creature rather than a true rebel” (2008; p. 38). This representation of women’s “anger and hostility” is what makes the idea that these “love stories” are about “women cherishing the chains of their bondage” illogical. For Modleski “the fantasy of death and resurrection enables people to avenge themselves on the world while appearing fatalistic about their lot” (2008; p. 39).

The second enigma pointed by the author is the contradiction she expresses perfectly by saying, “their most important achievement is supposed to be finding a husband; their greatest fault is attempting to do so”, portraying a situation that only reflects what is imposed on women in real life (2008; p. 40). To exemplify this, Modleski cites both Richardson’s *Pamela* and Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. In the first, Mr. B is always accusing Pamela of “artfulness” when he is the artful one to pin on her the guilt of their being up together. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the characteristics of Darcy’s personality which most irritate and bring displeasure to Elizabeth are intrinsically connected to what makes him an attractive potential husband: his “pride and aloofness”. This contradiction makes it impossible for the reader to empathize

with the heroine without “feeling manipulative, for we are repeatedly shown that although it is socially, economically, and aesthetically imperative for a woman to get a husband and his money, she achieves this goal partly by not wanting them” (2008; p. 42). For a situation like this to happen in real life, “pretense and hypocrisy must be practiced”.

It is due to this incongruity that the heroines must have “certain character traits”, they must be, as the author calls it, “self-deluded”. If they are deceiving themselves about their feelings, they cannot be accused of “willfully deceiving others”. Because her emotions are uncertain, she can afford to act inconsistently and thus cause the endearment of the hero through her mysteriousness without being accused of deliberately attracting his attention. More than that, “the subversion of the heroine’s negative reaction to the hero can appear as a process of self-discovering and growing self-awareness, not self-betrayal” (Idem). Modleski cites other ruses employed by the romance formula to ensure that the heroine is not seen as a conniving wench, such as sickness. According to her, Harlequins often use illness or unconsciousness as excuses for the heroine to parade her body to the sexual appraisal of the hero, a situation that is accepted since she was obviously out of her sound mind with sickness or had to have her clothes changed by the hero.

For Modleski, Harlequins are read for the way they deal with the contradictions between real life – “in which women are presumed guilty (of their own rapes, of scheming to get a husband)”, and the “ideal” life presented in the romances (2008; p. 44). This makes for a situation impossible to win for once women are aware of the suspicion upon them, they must make themselves look innocent, which in itself makes them guilty of manipulation. This situation is further aggravated by the fact that women are constantly being surveyed and inspected by the male eye. Modleski quotes Berger on the male look, “men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at”. For the author women can only be free of the guilt of artfulness in the absence of men, an unfortunate reality since men are the ones they have to convince of their innocence. In Harlequins this situation is solved by having the hero eavesdrop on the heroine, they disguise themselves, hide “in doorways, behind bushes, in nearby rooms listening, looking, and, finally, loving” (2008; p. 44-45). The author claims that this “man-in-the-closet plot device” serves only to further the split in women's consciousness and to instill “a sense of the impossibility of ever achieving

self-forgetfulness" for "when men are not around is precisely when they should be present" (2008; p. 45). The fantasy of being swept away must be seen under the light of this discussion, for the passivity of this fantasy is directly in conflict with the "constant mental activity women must generally engage in".

In this complex situation, the narrative point of view is the key to understand the psychology of romance novels. The use of third person makes it possible to show both the heroine's thoughts and action and the hero's, since otherwise the heroine would be privy to information that she should not have known and her innocence would be questioned. It is important to note that even though the stories are written in third person, in most scenes, the stance is that of a first person narrative. This can be proven by replacing the pronouns 'he' and 'she' for 'I' and if the sentence remains the same and makes sense, then the stance is certainly that of the character in question. The situations in which this is usually untrue are the ones in which the heroine is being watched and appraised by the hero. This personal third person brings an approximation between reader and heroine and allows us to feel part of the fantasy of the romance. When the third person is impersonal - i.e. when the hero is appraising the heroine's figure - we cannot help but to incorporate this objectification into the fantasy. Here again, Modleski turns to Berger's theory and explains, "the surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns into an object - and most particularly, an object of vision: a sight" (BERGER apud MODLESKI; p. 47).

The section of the book dedicated to the romance novel ends with a discussion of the Freudian concept of "repetition compulsion" popularly applied to formula literature. For Modleski, the presentation of a heroine "who has escaped psychic conflicts, inevitably increase the reader's own psychic conflicts, thus creating an even greater dependency on the literature" (2008; p. 48). Despite that, the author still believes that "the study of romance shows cause for optimism", for the reader of these works is engrossed in an intensive psychological exercise. She also argues that the intensity needed to end women's anger and to normalize male hostility in these novels points out how great women's discontentment is and that each novel is as much a protest as it is endorsement of women's reality. For her, "the desire to perform a disappearing act suggests women's suppressed wish to stop being seen in the old ways and to begin looking at their lives in ways that are perhaps yet to be envisioned" (2008; p. 50). Modleski's study is certainly much more detailed than most studies

surrounding popular feminine literature and shows a lot more respect in its approach, however, it fails in its most basic assumption; women do not necessarily read romance novels for the ending, they may read it for the process of self-discovery – their own and the character's.

Janice Radway's study of the romance genre, presented in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, first published in 1984, is based on interviews and questionnaires done with a group of forty-two readers who were clients of a specific bookstore in the fictional Midwestern suburb of Smithton. They were all white, middle-class, married and most of them had children. These readers preferred a specific subgenre of romance, and always selected their reading material under the guidance and advice of a bookstore employee – who was quite famous due to a periodical of reviews of romance novels. During the interviews and while answering questionnaires, the readers listed favorite novels and authors, from which Radway selected the twenty works she used as her corpus. From these twenty works and the opinions of her group of readers, she believes that an analysis could be made to “reveal the crucial generative matrix of the genre *as the readers understand it*” (1991; l. 1850). The focus of this work seems to be more on the effects the literary works have on the reader and the relationship between them than the actual structure and history of these works.

Through the joining of reader response theories and Propp's ideas on narrative functions, the author analyzed the works to determine if patterns of narrative functions appeared in them. Radway explains that she used the classification of “good” and “bad” applied by her subjects in choosing the works she would analyze, which distanced her from the common analysis of publisher's lines or “narrative subgenres”. She claims to have “used this set [of novels] to probe into the psychological significance of the genre for its readers and to infer further unconscious needs that underpin and reinforce the more conscious motives investigated earlier that prompt them to seek out the romantic fantasy” (1991; l. 1846). More than narrative, Radway uses the development of the characters and their patterns of behavior and personalities in these stories as an attempt to “understand what those behaviors signify to these readers”. One important aspect of the romance pointed as “good” and favorites by the Smithton readers is the absence of love triangles. Their preference points to “one man-one woman” stories in which rivals may be presented but are

usually the fruit of misjudged or erroneous impressions of their feelings by hero and heroine.

The author also points out that these selected romances all have heroines who are differentiated by an exceptional intelligence or a “fiery disposition”, though she is reluctant to claim that the romances selected by the Smithton women “deliberately challenge male and female stereotype”. She explains that, though these novels show a certain ambivalence about the female gender at their beginning, they end with recommendations of the usual “sexual division of labor that dictates that women take charge of the domestic and purely personal spheres of human endeavor” (1991; l. 1894). It is certainly tempting to categorize this as an evidence of “female masochism and a desire to see feminist tendencies succumb to the power of love”, but Radway points that it is closely related to “the reader’s impulse towards individuation and autonomy” (Idem). Radway then lists and analyzes the thirteen narrative functions she identified within these romances. These narrative functions are very similar to Pamela Regis’ eight essential elements of the romance novel. The difference is that while Regis maintains a neutrality in her naming of these elements and is much more open to the variation within different subgenres of the romance novel, Radway names through descriptions such as “the heroine’s social identity is destroyed” and “the aristocratic male responds ambiguously to the heroine” what she calls “the narrative structure of the ideal romance” (1991; l. 2058).

Radway discusses the first narrative function – “the heroine’s social identity is destroyed” – represented by their distancing from their family and loved ones, a move that terrifies them, through the theories of Nancy Chodorow on female personality development. She explains that Chodorow thesis is that

the characteristic sexual and familial division of labor in the patriarchal family, which accords mothering to women, results in asymmetrical personality development in women and men that prompts them to reproduce this same division of labor. Her argument is grounded in object-relations theory and its primary insight that a child’s social-relational experience from earliest infancy determines its later growth. This occurs because the child’s early social relations with its primary caretaker(s) are internalized as its most basic model of itself as a self-in-relation. Thus the affective tone and residue of the intense mother-infant relationship in the patriarchal family continues to control the way that the child

encounters people and relies upon them to fulfill its adult needs (1991; 1. 2081).

For Chodorow, a mother's exclusive caring for her daughter in the early stages of the baby's life influences the child's identification with her mother, making the daughter's later individuation more difficult. This symbiotic relationship is especially intense because the mother tends to see her daughter as an extension of herself and because "the father is rarely present continuously to act as a countering love-object" (1991; 1. 2083). All this leads girls to "experience themselves as less differentiated than boys" and to feel "related to the external object world and thus possess quite permeable ego-boundaries" (1991; 1. 2105). Due to this inability to fulfill themselves as women in their bond with the mother, women often turn to motherhood as a way to fill their need for nurturance, which cannot be filled by men due to their different relationship with their mothers and their nurturing nature. This turn to motherhood ends in a frustration, for women inevitably end up negating their own nurturing needs and sense of self to fulfill those of their children.

According to Radway, if we consider all this it is no surprise that there may be correlation between romance reading and the "social roles of wife and mother". If we gather the fact that the female personality validates itself on others, that men are incapable of being "completely adequate relational partners", and the demands made by the children they count on to fulfill their own unmet needs, it becomes easy to see why many women would get pleasure from repeatedly indulging in romantic fantasy. The author affirms that, "the romance is an account of a woman's journey to female personhood *as that particular psychic configuration is constructed and realized within patriarchal culture*" (1991; 1. 2121). In other words, the romance works as a "symbolic display and explanation" of a process that is common to most women. Concomitantly, when the romance reproduces "real female needs" in its stories and successfully fulfill them, it confirms for the readers how inevitable and desirable the "institutional structure within which those needs are created and addressed" is (Idem). One topic that is made clear by the group of readers Radway interviewed is that a good romance is light, fun and escapist and any story that does not fall into those categories are considered "bad". This badness comes from the proximity the relationships within the story have to those in the readers' real lives. They read to

escape from a problematic and exhausting life; therefore, their reading material should be the opposite of that.

Radway's findings may have been relevant and real at the time she made them, the fight for women's rights and for sexual freedom were at their peak, the salary inequality was an even bigger issue back then than it is now and women were starting to get tired of being seen as helpless waifs who would remain pure until the day they met their prince charming and fulfilled their white picket fence dream. If back in the 1980s women were getting tired of reading about the "poor dumb little chit who lets everyone walk all over her before she starts to wise up", today's women simply do not tolerate this type of portrayal (romance reader, 2008; THURSTON p. 46). Even though we are far away from reaching equality, women today are infinitely freer than they were back then. If back then readers of romance were crying "no more rape" today's reader rarely have to deal with this situation in their romance reading unless it is portrayed as the actual violent act it is and is, save some exceptions, treated with the seriousness and respect it deserves. If Radway had kept her analysis to that specific subgenre and that specific set of readers, her conclusions would have made plenty of sense. The fact is that the author tends to generalize her conclusion to the whole genre and all the readers. This becomes a problem in the sense that her corpus of study, of both literature and readers is not broad or varied enough to allow the ample conclusions she claims in it.

3.2 UNDER NEW EYES

"Few people realize how much courage it takes for a woman to open a romance novel on an airplane. She knows what everyone around her will think about both her and her choice of reading material. When it comes to romance novels, society has always felt free to sit in judgment not only on the literature but on the reader herself."

Jayne Ann Krentz (*Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers in the Appeal of Romance Novels*)

In the opening paragraph of *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*, romance writer Jayne Ann Krentz defines perfectly the real bondage that enslaves romance readers. Reading romance novels is not approved by society and those who do read these 'trashy' works are considered "unintelligent, uneducated, unsophisticated, or neurotic". The fact is that a reader will either enjoy a novel or not. If she enjoys it, there is no need for further explanations on the appeal of the book, and this applies to all genres. Most of the famous and successful genres of fiction are based on fantasies: sci-fi, crime, fairy tales, horror, suspense, and the list goes on. Take Stephen King for example, his novels are often about the supernatural, Carrie has psychic powers, and John Coffey can cure illnesses. People who read his books do so with the understanding that this is a fantasy – make believe. Furthermore, the public understands that these readers are capable of discerning between what is fantasy and what is real life. But, somehow, "when it comes to romance novels critics worry about whether the women who read them can tell the difference between what is real and what is not" (1992; p. 2). This attitude not only shows a lack of knowledge of the genre but also a lack of respect for the millions of readers and writers of romance novels – who in their vast majority are women.

Romance scholar Pamela Regis points out that "more than any other literary genre, the romance novel has been misunderstood by mainstream literary culture – book review editors, reviewers themselves, writers and readers of other genres, and, especially, literary critics" (2007; p. 3). This critical rejection, she says comes from the feminist wave that started in the 1960s. One of the leaders of that movement, Germaine Greer began the modern wave of criticism of romance in 1970 with a theme that has become commonplace when criticizing romance – the romance novel as an enslaver of women. Regis quotes Greer saying, "The traits invented for [the hero in romance novels] have been invented by women cherishing the chains of their bondage. ... Such ... creatures [heroes of this type] do not exist, but very young women in the astigmatism of sexual fantasy are apt to recognize them where they do not exist" (2007; p.4). This type of conclusion comes from a culture of generalization when it comes to women literature and romance novels in specific. It may be true that some romance novels reproduce patriarchal values and pay a disservice to women, however, the same can be said of many books, and yet critics do not extend this criticism to other genres as a whole. It seems that this type of generalization itself

pays a disservice to women in its dismissiveness of the particularities natural to all literary genres. Here, again, we face the concept that women are incapable of seeing the difference between real life and fiction. Hand in hand with this belief come several others that serve only to harm the female readership and its longtime fight for equality. We are not only considered incapable of differentiating real from fictional, but we are also thought to read exclusively for moral development and to escape wretched lives that make us miserable. If we do not have a man in our life, then we read to fill that void. If we do, we read to compensate for his inadequacy. Either way, it seems that the concept of reading for pleasure does not apply to the female sex.

The assumption so far has been that the reader of a romance novel will ‘identify’ with the heroine of said novel. This belief stems mainly from the fact that the vast majority of romance readers are women, therefore, they must identify with the female character or characters of a story. Due to this, critics of romance have been hard on the genre for its ending in marriage, which would put readers in the danger of modeling their lives after the heroine, a character who “might be submissive, passive, or obsessed only with romantic love and maintaining her virginity” (KINSALE; p. 31). This conclusion is not only shallow, for it is based on and constricted by stereotypical gender constructs, but it is also a disrespect to the readers’ intellect to assume that they would not be able to discern fiction from reality and would define themselves and their lives based solely and without criticism on the literature they read.

Critics are not the only ones who fall into this trap; romance writers often draw the same conclusion and end up creating heroines impossible to identify with and sympathize. They are “so powerful in the corporation, so skilled at swordsmanship, so infallible with a rifle, talented at politics, tough-nosed in managing the ranch hands, invested with psychic powers, adroit with magic, highly educated, widely read, strong, smart, an excellent dancer and full of independent sass”, the sort of person anyone would fell like killing if they ever existed in real life (Idem). This is also the stereotype current society has of what a modern woman should be like and what sets all of us up for failure. No one is ever in complete control of their lives and on top of their game, people are always juggling and struggling with their personal, professional and social lives. Any character that portrays someone in complete control of her or his life will be difficult for readers to identify with.

If this supposed identification with the heroine were true, the type of works that portray these insufferable heroines would never be successful. The matter at hand is that they often are successful. This brings forth a problem, if romance readers identify with the heroine, then these books should not be successful. It does not add up, unless we take a different approach. If books with unpopular heroines are successful despite them, then it must be something else that carries the story for the readers. According to Laura Kinsale, the hero carries the story, and she proves it by taking a classic – Kathleen Woodiwiss' *Shanna* (1977) – as an example. Few romance readers wish to be like the “annoying little shrew (...) but to be *in her place* —that is another matter” (1992; p. 32). These heroines represent placeholders for the readers and Kinsale tranquilizes us all, “feminists need not tremble for the reader - she does not identify with, admire, or internalize the characteristic of either a stupidly submissive or an irksomely independent heroine. The reader thinks about what she would have done in the heroine’s place” (Idem). Moreover, she identifies with the hero, the typified male in the story.

Amber Botts, in her essay, *Cavewoman Impulses: The Jungian Shadow Archetype in Popular Romantic Fiction* - published in the collection *Romantic Conventions*, explores the use of Jung archetype theory as a mean to explain the major success of romance novels all over the world. Jung identifies certain archetypes are common to all people within the collective unconscious. According to him, self-actualization can only be reached by the integration of several archetypes, including the anima, animus, and shadow (BOTTIS in KALER; p. 64). Representative of denied anger, envy, greed, and sexual desire, the shadow is the best known and the most difficult archetype to integrate. These impulses, curiously, are very well known by romance readers for they are frequently seen in the heroes' actions. The problem with applying Jung's theories to women is that - as Jung himself admitted - he used his own mind as object of research, therefore his theories are not focused on the female collective unconscious and its archetypes. In this instance, critic Annis Pratt advises us to adapt what we can of his theory and discard what is not useful. With that in mind, it becomes easier to address the gender differences that create the discrepancy in Jung's concept of the shadow. Botts explains it:

"for men, another man would be a greater threat for physical, social, and economic reasons since men hold more power in these areas than women. However, for women, who face greater social, economic, and sexual prohibitions by society and whose psychological development relies on connection to others, (...) a man would be a much greater threat than a woman." (BOTTIS in KALER; p. 65)

Bottis goes to explain Pratt's theory that women attempt self-actualization, in which they encounter shadows, through novels. Her findings, however, show that women's encounters with men such as *Wuthering Heights'* Heathcliff usually end in their destruction, representing women's punishment of themselves for the violation of gender norms. This punishment then prevents the self-actualization of the shadows. Pratt makes these findings in her research of literature written by women, however, she did not research romance novels. In romance, the heroes are every bit as dangerous as Heathcliff, yet the heroin always succeeds in taming the shadow hero.

Bottis quotes Northrop Frye's theory that archetypes are more easily studied and observed in highly conventional literature, or as he calls it "naive, primitive, or popular literature". He may not have been referring to romance novels, but it can be easily applied so. The archetypes are easily represented in these types of work and the sexuality, aggression, and danger represented by the shadow - all impulses frowned upon when acted on by a woman - can be seen in the actions of the hero. This projection of the shadow on the hero allows for its taming within the reader's psyche through the taming of the hero by the heroine.

The most talked about characteristic of the shadow's sexuality is the explicit aspect of it. Romance heroes are usually well experienced and often promiscuous, which critic Janice Radway affirms to come from the "non-presence of love" (BOTTIS in KALER; p. 74). A more plausible reason for this extreme sexual behavior can be the fact that it is considered inadequate for women to act in such way, which brings forth the need for it to be self-actualized by the reader. Another aspect of the shadow sexuality is sexual prowess. Sexual skill is a requirement for the shadow for heroine and reader are denied this skill. Women, unless they are prostitutes, are not supposed to be sexually experienced or skilled and should learn of these subjects from their much more skilled male partners.

"Integration is achieved with the heroine's sexual fulfillment; the heroine not only accepts her right to societally denied pleasure, but gains skills to equal the hero's. The reader can then also accept her shadow sexuality with the integration of this marriage of the sexually perfectly matched" (BOTTS in KALER; p. 68).

Other critically studied characteristics of the shadow hero are anger and aggression. For critic Janice Radway this portrayal of male violence serve as a means through which the reader can deal with the "consequences of masculinity", however, these shows of male power and aggression are more than "a way to illustrate that there is nothing to fear"; they also serve to show that these impulses also exist in women - even when they have been raised to be nurturers (BOTTS in KALER; p. 69). The utmost level for this aggression and anger is danger. Like the heroin who is attracted and repelled by the hero-villain, the reader is attracted and repelled by her own dangerousness. This dangerousness in an even bigger opposition to nurturing and for the reader to be fully able to experience this dangerousness the heroine must be endangered at some level. In this case, "the hero acts out the reader's dangerous tendencies" and occasionally threatens the heroine directly, however, he must have some softness in him for a romance to be successful and for the hero's transformation to be credible. For Botts, this vicarious experiencing of the hero's life and actions reassures contemporary readers because it plays out the "integration of the inner self". For her the reader can 'live' forbidden impulses and feel integrated by the end of the story, therefore, "romance doesn't reinforce the patriarchy as a social institution as much as it fulfills a desire within a female reader's collective unconscious to observe a strong woman attracting, and more importantly, taming the shadow forces represented by the hero, which exist within the self" (BOTTS in KALER; p. 72).

In the article entitled *This Is Not Your Mother's Cinderella: The Romance Novel as Feminist Fairy Tale*, romance author Jennifer Cruise Smith explores the similarities between fairy tales and romance novels and the elusive aspects that make them so enchanting for modern, feminist women in spite of their values and morals. She starts her text by pointing out that "times are grim for the Brothers Grimm: feminist revisionists keep messing with their fairy tales, trying to expunge misogyny while holding on to that elusive something that makes the tales vibrate in the reader's mind" and goes on to form a parallel between the structure of the stories in fairy tales and those in romance novels. She points out that a Proppian analysis of

the texts would not be helpful, since they would only point out the form and not the specificities of context. Starting from the fact that the opposition between Cinderella and her stepsisters immediately creates an investment by the reader since “evil, vain, lazy, dirty sisters are high status while the good, modest, hardworking, clean Cinderella is low status” (SMITH in KALER; p. 52). Smith exemplifies the changes that have happened in this structure of female conflict by summarizing JoAnn Ross’ *The Prince and the Showgirl* where “not only do the steprelations not vilify the Cinderella figure (here named Sabrina), they turn to her for help, look to her for leadership, and hand over power to her as they travel to a Monaco-like country to sing as a sister act at the coronation of the country’s prince in order to restore the family’s fortune” (SMITH in KALER; p. 52-53). The idea of “unmarried = low status and married = high status” is also removed from Ross’ romance, thus making the prince’s influence and offer of a comfortable life moot since by the end of the story, Sabrina and her stepmother and stepsisters have earned the fame they needed to be self-sufficient and to pay off their debts. In this story, the heroine “doesn’t need the prince to return to living well, although she certainly rises in status when she marries royalty” (SMITH in KALER; p. 53).

For Smith, theme is “the spine of the story” and theme in fairy tales is consistent, “if you have a lack in your life and you undertake a quest for an answer, you will be rewarded” (SMITH in KALER; p. 54). This is the central theme for romance novels, the quest for self-knowledge and acceptance of our flaws and socially inadequate feelings or impulses. While in fairy tales the “warmth and love are the rewards that a good woman gets naturally”, in romance novels, the heroine’s quest is rarely related to romantic love. Romance heroines go after “worthy goals” and achieve it by themselves, while “the romance plot” happens along with their quest. As Smith says,

the romance is something the heroine achieves inadvertently while working to win her external goal. She doesn’t have to earn her hero’s love; she gets it as freebie, unconditionally, because she is intrinsically worthy of being loved, and her worth is demonstrated to the reader by the way she conducts her quest. Her hero doesn’t love her because she wins; he loves her because of the person she is. (SMITH in KALER; p. 55).

As the author points out, fairy tales are about the “larger drama of life” which is often about male life, a situation that has “led many women to feel both drawn to the original tales and uncomfortable with them” (SMITH in KALER; p. 56). This uncomfortableness was, as Smith points, greatly captured by Candace Bergen at the Academy Awards when she told the audience that her favorite fairy tale as a child was Snow White “because she learned that someday a prince would come and sweep her away on a white horse, and then added, ‘It took me years to get over that’” (p. 56). This getting over is not easy for what we internalize as children stays at a “very deep level”. Even though fairy tales have been said to inspire the reader with “strength and confidence” because he senses “the fundamental truth” of it, if we ask a woman how she feels about the heroine’s in fairy tales, she will most likely not trust this “fundamental truth” as Candace Bergen pointed out in her speech. The reader believes that Prince Charming will come along if she waits long enough, however, at some point, reality knocks on the door – waiting is not the way to a happy ending. As Smith says, “here’s this delightful fairy tale all about women achieving love and security, and it just doesn’t work” (SMITH in KALER; p. 57). All this inadequacy does not make fairy tales less appealing and so they were revised so that women could truly identify with the story. For Smith, “the magic of the specific fairy-tale-based romance is that it resolves the problems women have with the specific stories by revising the detail without altering the central truth of emotional justice”, this way readers get “the resonance of the story” and this time it is told correctly.

3.3 WHAT ABOUT GEORGETTE HEYER?

As Pamela Regis has pointed, Heyer’s contribution to romance novels goes well beyond the writing of historically accurate Regencies, her use of the Regency costumes and settings as a tool for contrast with the characters and their actions and vice-versa is what makes her stand out. Heyer uses the backdrop of the Regency period to maximize the independent and modern actions of a heroine who, in a contemporary setting, would not stand out all that much, the setting “spotlights” the beliefs and the heroine and the hero. For some reason, despite her extensive

contribution to the romance novel genre and her mastery of dialogue and of Regency culture, Georgette Heyer has been ignored by the critical field. Her own dubious thoughts regarding the merit of her success are understandable for we are all a little insecure about our capabilities. For Heyer, her success had “less to do with her ability or style (...) and more to do with the fact that ‘since I write historical romances, my books don’t date’” (KLOESTER; l. 5735).

I have found exactly four published books totally dedicated to studying Heyer and her work: two biographies, Hodge’s *The Private World of Georgette Heyer*, and Kloester’s *Georgette Heyer: Biography of a Best Seller* and *Georgette Heyer’s Regency World*; and the collection of essays and short stories entitled *Georgette Heyer: a Critical Retrospective*³. If we allow ourselves to draw a comparison between Heyer’s and Austen’s popularity – even with the considerations necessary due to the different times in which they lived and published – Heyer was more popular than Austen during her living years. She was regularly reviewed on *The Times*, has several stories published in the *Women’s Journal*, and had a vast fan base that rush to her defense at the slightest show of dislike or disrespect. Her first editions were being published by the number of 60 thousand copies that were sold within the first months of their publishing. Biographer Jennifer Kloester quotes one of Heyer’s private letters in which she writes about her then publisher, Frere, reporting him to have said

acidly that I had always had an apparently ineradicable belief in the huge sales enjoyed by authors who don’t come within touching reach of my sales, but that I would PERHAPS allow him to know rather more than I did about such matters (...) he said (...) that there are many problems confronting publishers, but there is only one confronting the publisher of Miss Georgette Heyer’s new books: whether to publish a first edition of 40, 50, or 60 thousand copies!” (KLOESTER; l. 5752).

With a glowing career since her first published book, a great sales record, and popularity, it is hard to conjecture about why Georgette Heyer has not been the object of more research. Perhaps it has something to do with the taboo and prejudice that has surrounded the romance genre since it arose, or maybe it is related to the fact that

³ The last is not even available for partial visualization on Google Books, costs over fifteen dollars and about twenty dollars for shipping to Brazil and the other three works cost at least the same amount. The prices are from the Amazon.com website – the only seller available in our country that has all four books.

some people consider her a copycat of Jane Austen's style. This last claim seems to me a bit condescending towards the romance novel genre as a whole for it assumes that Jane Austen herself defines the whole genre and any other writer that uses the same plot structure as her would be copying her work. The fact is that Heyer never hid or denied her admiration for Austen and her wish to be as great a writer as she was. Whatever may be the reason for the absence of interest in studying Heyer, it seems that her body of work has proved itself more than relevant to the history and development of the romance novel genre and it is high time it starts being treated as such.

In an essay titled *The "Managing Female" in the Novels of Georgette Heyer*, published in the collection *New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction: Critical Essays*, K. Elizabeth Spillman discusses the lack of criticism and studies concerning Heyer's work. She beautifully summarizes the situation by saying that "over nearly a century, her romances have been popularly acclaimed but critically ignored, heralded but neglected, widely influential but overlooked by the literary establishment" (2012; p. 84). We can say the same of many writers, but Heyer is different due to the endurance of her work, it is still successful in the category it created and for her placement in literary history, "spanning periods and genres, and confounding easy compartmentalization". For Spillman, studying Heyer's work is to "look backwards and forwards" in the history of romance novels for "in reacting against the conventions of the genre her novels helped shape its development, mostly notably through her creation of heroines whose agency and self-awareness challenged the traditional limitations of a romantic heroine" (Idem).

CONCLUSION

What most of the traditional critics of the romance novel seemed to ignore was that there were romance novels created outside the serial Harlequins and some other serials published during that time. The modus operandi for these critics was to take one or two dozen romance serials and use them to conclude truths about the whole romance genre. Harlequins especially – and other serials in a minor scale – have played an important part in the popularization of the romance novel, but they were not, and did not aspire to be, the sole source of romance novels in the world. If you choose to analyze a group of these books, they will follow a formula, almost the same story, which is due to the specific guidelines writers have to follow to be published by the house. These books have roughly the same number of pages and words, and the characters follow a certain type. A young girl-next-door like protagonist who is not sure of who she is and of her place in the world meets an older, self-assured, powerful, mysterious, and handsome man who will rescue her from societal erasure – a female version of the hero's journey described by Joseph Campbell. However, many of them present the type of heroine Carol Thurston points out in *The Romance Revolution: Erotic Novels for Women and the Quest for a New Sexual Identity*. She analyzed sixty-five erotic series romance published between the years of 1982 and 1985. Nine per cent presented heroines who were career oriented and resembled in no way the simpering heroines from the 1970s Harlequins who had marginal careers and worked for “pin money”. She also quotes the guidelines for Harlequin Temptation, Silhouette Special Edition, Dell Candlelight Edition and Ballantine Love and Life. They all present heroines who are independent and strong, who have careers that bring them satisfaction and pleasure and who do not need a man to achieve what they want in life and to feel fulfilled. Amber Botts problematizes this situation at the beginning of her essay, *Cavewoman Impulses*, when she quotes romance writer Penelope Williamson's theory that romance novels have such a big appeal due to the woman's “cavewoman impulse (...) to tie the primary Alpha Male to her, in order to ensure the survival of the woman and her child” (p. 64). This theory becomes a

problem from a feminist standpoint, for we do not accept the parallel male difficulty towards monogamy based on a caveman's instinct to reproduce. Still, discarding the reproduction instinct would mean discarding the survival of the human species.

Studies like the ones conducted by Pamela Regis and her contemporaries show that romance reading goes well beyond understanding or accepting men and their actions. In fact, it is as far removed from the men in the reader's life as it can be. By conducting a serious analysis of romance novels, in the same fashion it is done with other genres, it is possible to see all the intricacies and the complexity not only of the literary works but also of the community and culture formed around them. The gendered society we live in makes it so that women must suppress parts of their nature and force aspects that are not necessarily natural for them in order to fit in and succeed. The ideas that all women are nurturing and gentle, that they are not competitive and aggressive, makes it so we have to bury a side of ourselves, feel ashamed of it and apologize whenever we cannot control our maleness. The idea that to be nurturing means not to be aggressive is at least inadequate, for everyone has both sides in them and must learn to conciliate them. The key in this situation is to move away from generalizations, each of us has a unique way of interacting with the world – and there is nothing wrong in realizing your suppressed 'male' traces by reading romance novels.

Psychoanalysis and other fields of studies have notoriously been focused on men and their nature, making it so that women have to adapt them to fit the very different circumstances and reality in which we grow up and live in. In this reality, the hero works as "the shadow self of the heroine, complementing her characteristics – the union at the end of the book is not a marriage, but a reintegration of the heroine's psyche" (ZIDLE in KALER; p. 28). Jung's archetypes theory has proved to be a good lens through which we can observe romance. The idea that for self-actualization we must integrate several archetypes, among them the shadow – representative of "denied anger, greed, envy, and sexual desire", is particularly interesting when we take into consideration the fact that these same feelings are constantly suppressed in women (BOTTS in KALER; p. 64). Reading romance is for women an enactment of "trips into the unconscious", the hero then represents her shadow and the heroine her conscious struggle with it and the taming of the hero stands for the reader's taming of her shadow.

The prejudice and dismissiveness of researchers towards romance novels has been perfectly illustrated in the analysis of the critical work surrounding Georgette Heyer's extensive body of work – or, better yet, the lack of it. Her influence in the romance novel genre is indisputable, even though the popularity of Regencies has decreased since the 1990s. More than the influence of her work, her influence as a person, a woman living in the early twentieth century who was for most of her married life the sole provider of the household, is indubitably great. She not only provided for her family but also did so by writing fiction that was largely read by women and that reached a large degree of notoriety in her time and still today. The characters in her story had little resemblance to those presented by the traditional critics towards the genre, in fact, in her biography of Heyer, Kloester calls attention to the fact that “her fictional heroes were often men prepared to wait for the heroine to know her own heart and mind. One of the consistent themes in her writing is that a successful relationship takes time and that true love requires mutual understanding and empathy and not mere physical attraction” (2013; l. 1063).

After all the reflections and opinions presented in this work it is my hope that whoever reads it will have a broader understanding of the romance novel genre and perhaps a more gentle regard for it. It is easy to dismiss these works as simple women's opium, but that would not be wise and would be in fact perpetuating the sexist belief that women's culture is not complex nor valuable. I hope that in our daily struggles we can grow and rise above difficulties and that we can be kind and understanding towards each other and our struggles, like the heroines in these beloved romance novels for it is only in sisterhood that we will reach the so long dreamed and deserved equality.

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