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ROMANTIC LOVE, ECSTASY, AND DEPRIVATION

by

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Abstract

This thesis treats the concept of romantic love in relation to women. It attempts to show that the stereotype of romantic love is a fantasy construction which supplies compensation to women who lack status and identity.

The qualifier 'romantic' refers to the ecstasy which is thought to occur within the love experience. This ecstasy was present within the concept of courtly love and it has now become popularized as the prerogative of any lover and as a hallmark indicating the validity of love itself.

In order to show the relationship between the present concept of romantic love and the social position of women, modern love-novels were examined and romantic love was then compared to spirit possession.

A sample of books from the Harlequin Romance series was described and status differences between characters were counted. The difference between the initial and final situations of the romantic hero and heroine were noted. The analysis of love in the books shows that inequality in terms of gender membership is a precondition for love and that the heroine suffers some kind of initial lack which is fulfilled by her final unification with the hero.

It is concluded that the dynamics of possession and romantic love are similar, that both kinds of ecstasy provide compensation for deprivation, and that individuals who succumb to possession, and women who are attracted to romantic love, are in a similar position in their societies.

Thus romantic love functions as a way of dealing with deprivation. Women who lack status and identity seek the compensation of ecstatic love wherein they feel themselves to be possessed by a superior man.

Table of Contents

	Page
<u>Introduction</u>	1
<u>Chapter One</u> - Popular Romance Fiction	16
description of the two novels	20
observations on the novels	38
<u>Chapter Two</u> - Romantic Love and Ecstasy.....	49
<u>Conclusion</u>	69
<u>References</u>	71

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Introduction

This thesis treats romantic love in relation to women in the West. It attempts to show that the stereotype of romantic love is a fantasy construction which supplies compensation for women who lack status and identity. This thesis will not treat the relationship between men and the romantic love experience.

Although the term 'romantic love' is in everyday use, we know only imprecisely what the term means. We have considerable intuitive recognition of what is meant by the words 'romantic love', but organizing a definition becomes problematic. Goode (1959) notes that we have no such problem when defining hate and suggests by this comment that the creation of an adequate definition of love is an equally simple matter. This is not the case. Literature and film have idealized and mystified the notion of love while extolling the romantic love experience. Hate is rarely the theme of literature or the subject of conversation and, if it is examined at all in everyday life, its nature is rarely questioned. But the nature of love is discussed with the avidity of Medieval theologians discussing the nature of God. We are not concerned here with the problem of discovering the real or true nature of love. We are examining a concept, which requires a definition for the purpose of clarity.

The concept of love is complex. Common speech gives evidence that different people have different ideas concerning the nature of love. We might say that a certain affectional relationship cannot be called "true love" or "really romantic", that it is just based upon sex and not love. Of adolescents we smile and speak of "a crush", "infatuation" and "puppy love". Social scientists, among

others, look upon romantic love as a form which is peculiarly western, but the expressions listed above indicate considerable individual variation within the general consensus.

Consensus, nevertheless, does exist. The meaning given to the term is not completely idiosyncratic, although it may seem dishearteningly ambiguous. If we ask a librarian for a love story, we will receive a book rich in the desired subject matter. Certain pocket books are self-described as "novels of enduring romance" and they deal with forms of affectional relationships which satisfy the expectations of their readers. For the purposes of everyday life we do not need a complex definition of romantic love.

While we presuppose the existence of such a consensus we also assume that social factors will operate to modify this and that variations in belief may differ by groups according to age, class, education and sex.

The types of information such groups use will correspond to their views, which will, in turn, be reinforced by their intake of that information. It is thought that the popularity of certain television shows such as "soap operas" and books classed as romance novels indicates that these depictions of love are compatible with conceptions held by their devotees. We can assume that such books and T.V. shows will be self-selecting.

Still, we cannot discuss the differences in conceptions of love in the West until we understand what is meant by romantic love.

Since the term is in common use, it is not our purpose to create a specialized definition for use in this paper. We have previously noted the existence of ideas which already operate to give meaning to the concept of love and it is our problem to clarify these ideas. We must also take into account the fact that the two key terms are involved, "romantic" and "love", and we should have some idea of the situations and experiences of which both are descriptive. Conjugal love is not thought to be of a romantic nature, at least not by many marriage counsellors (Goode, 1959: 38-9). Poets have written of love as a universal human experience. This may be so, but the meaning of the concept and the form it takes is culturally derived. We have for the most part ignored the possibility that what we call love does not mean the same thing as that which is called love by a New Guinea tribesman. Or, closer to home, we use the word as if it meant the same thing to a feudal lord as it does to a twentieth-century Canadian. As we shall see, this is not the case at all; although, in the West, the concept has certain associations which result from the evolution of the idea. Since literature codified the concept of love and records the development of its portrayal, we shall briefly review the expression of love in literature.

We will begin, predictably, with courtly love. De Rougement, in Love in the Western World, (1956), can be numbered among those who see courtly love as one among a multitude of twelfth-century heresies. In his discussion of this 'religion of love' he does not differentiate between religion and mysticism as he applies these terms to courtly love. In fact, courtly love did exhibit many features of religion: it incorporated ritual, a moral code, worship, and the possibility of transformation

or salvation. It did not supply a world-view of much consequence and, since this is an important function of religion, courtly love cannot be equated with what is generally called religion. That it was modeled upon the paramount medieval religious pattern is obvious. But it differed by expressing, from a similar pattern, a changed meaning.

What de Rougement calls passion is transforming in the same way that religious vocation constitutes a transformation: the low-status courtly lover gained new knowledge, purity of character, and humility, through the adoration of his high-status Lady. He had a new purpose or orientation for his life which was found in service to his Lady. Critics have not concerned themselves with discovering what benefits women received from such relationships. These were less tangible: women were adored. As objects of adoration, and therefore by definition changeless, women were excluded from the kind of experiences described above. Courtly love defined women in terms of role and then explored that role only as it related to the feelings and activities of men. Women were static and men dynamic in courtly love literature and any mystical vocation offered by its code was a male prerogative. In fact some noble ladies of a court in Brittany came to this very conclusion.¹

Courtly love was the most aestheticized, formalized model for love ever offered to the Western World. Its ritualization of love as a mystical self-improvement course for young knights was related to the nature of medieval elite society. In the milieu of the castle, these young men found themselves ranked near the bottom of the

¹ Paris (1879:65-66; II. 71-92) as cited in Benton (1968:35).

social ladder. Reaching the age of majority and inheriting wealth, or performing valorous deeds, could raise their social status in the future. Until that time they lived a life of service to their social superiors.

Clerics warned them of risking spiritual contamination by consorting with women: repression of sexuality was evidence of purity of soul. Marriages were arranged for dynastic and financial reasons and young knights were not yet in a position to marry. In fact, love and marriage were thought to be incompatible and even in bad taste, since women who performed a sexual service willingly could not be idealized. They could not inspire men to virtuous behaviour unless they were morally superior to men and, in the medieval imagination, women were either dangerous temptresses, filled with the putrifaction of sin and lust, or they were elevated to the status of goddesses. Spiritual superiority was strongly associated with elevated social status.

The courtly lover's lady was far above him in status and the code of courtliness defined this difference as necessary for the operation of courtly love. The connection between spiritual and social elevation is best shown by the fact that young knights did not extend their gentle, courtly treatment of women to country wenches. The rape of a country girl was a lesser sin than mutually acceptable relations with a Lady of the castle. Indeed, this view was held by Andreas Capellanus, a medieval cleric who wrote De arte honeste amandi, in which he advised young knights to overcome the objections of peasant women by the use of force (Silverstein, 1968:79).

Men of inferior status desired the enhanced self and public-image conferred by their alliance, however distant, with a noble Lady. The atmosphere of sexual

repression and the danger of the wrath of a cuckolded Lord were conducive to the peculiarly abstract nature of courtly love. Sexual intercourse with a Lord's wife was considered not only adultery, but treason.

Long after courtly love disappeared, its pattern and code of behaviour, which constitute a system, became the concern of historians and literary scholars, but the experiential meaning of this system is still expressed in literature. The mystical elements in courtly love, which cause de Rougement to refer to it, wrongly, as mysticism, are the concepts of transformation and the possibility of transcendence through ecstasy, which are also found in later romantic love literature. Although these features exist in modern romantic fiction, the roles of the sexes have been reversed. Transformation and transcendence are limited to women in the popular novels that will be examined later.

De Rougement, in his examination of tragic love literature, again points out the mystical nature of love. He attempts to discover the existential meaning of love by examining it in literature, using Tristan and Iseult as a chief source, as an archetype of romantic love. Since the pattern found in Tristan and Iseult is represented in much of literature, de Rougement points out that it is not necessary to read Tristan (1956:23). The Tristan myth, by which term de Rougement refers to the fact that the archetype of tragic love is intensely powerful and strongly integrated into its social context, offers a pattern that is recognizable not only in the great tragedies but even in sentimental Hollywood movies. Its pervasiveness causes us to be familiar with its entirety, though we may be acquainted only with its various fragmented and distorted forms.

De Rougement's thesis claims that there is an important connection between love, suffering and death, and he explores the meaning of this relationship. We are aware of the pattern of tragedy, which may be expressed very simply as follows: love realized ——— suffering due to the obstructions to love ——— death. Some critics have dismissed the importance of these obstructions, except insofar as they function as literary devices.

But the obstacles which supply motive power in the Romance cannot be explained simply in terms of their literary function. These are necessary to a specific concept of love wherein love is a method of reaching understanding through suffering. It is for this reason that obstructions exist and that they are accepted by audiences and readers, despite the fact that they are arbitrary and far-fetched (de Rougement, 1956: 35-44). De Rougement notes that "Happy love has no history. Romance only comes into existence where love is fatal, frowned upon and doomed by life itself" (1956: 9). It is a curious fact that the happy ending is not a feature of great literature and that love finds its usual consummation in death within the pages of such tales. It is equally peculiar that the code of courtly love included an obstacle to love. The chivalrous lover chose to love a woman who was already married and sexual intercourse between the two was strictly prohibited, not only by moral standards existing within medieval society, but by the code of courtly love itself. Sexual intercourse between lovers proved that their love was neither pure nor true. De Rougement concludes that the object of passion in literature is obstruction and death (1956: 42). Suffering is the real focus of the plot. Love as a theme is treated less as a

complex relationship between the lovers than it is explored as a mode of reaching understanding through suffering. De Rougement points out that this is connected to a typically Western notion of the relationship between understanding and suffering:

"Why does Western Man wish to suffer this passion which lacerates him and which all his common sense rejects? Why does he yearn after this particular kind of love notwithstanding that its effulgence must coincide with his self-destruction? The answer is that he reaches self-awareness and tests himself only by risking his life - in suffering and on the verge of death."

(1956: 51)

This alliance between suffering and understanding is evident in accounts of the lives of saints, in stories within the Old and New Testaments, and in Hegelian philosophy. Although the idea that understanding may be reached through suffering is not limited to the West and in fact is found in many diverse cultures, it remains an important model for the pursuit of self-awareness in Western society. This process, which de Rougement calls "the capital feature...of our most self-conscious mysticism" (1956: 55) is specially mystical when linked with the concept of transcendence. The description of the transforming power of suffering in literature is given its cultural credibility by its similar meaning within Western religion and philosophy.

This suffering is of a special type: it is thrilling (de Rougement, 1956: 16) just as the torments of martyrs are exalting. This is why we do not react with horror and repugnance to the wretchedness of romantic lovers in literature. We are deflected from immediate reaction to what is actually misfortune by its disguise as that which is transforming and elevating. Passion appears desirable and may even be admired.

This is especially so since an important feature of the expression of romantic love in literature is the abdication of responsibility by the lovers. Tristan and Iseult drink a love potion by mistake. Then they are in the power of a passion which they have done nothing to bring about and which they can do nothing to control. In this sense they are beyond moral responsibility. The lovers are thought to be possessed by love! But in modern writing the suffering caused by love does not usually result in death. The concept of love has been altered by the impact of a bourgeois readership that replaced death with marriage.

Courtly love and tragic love are essentially the products of elite culture in which the social reality of status can be transcended only in a mystical sense. The harshness of this point of view is especially evident in tragedy where the disruption of society by love is resolved by the death of the lovers.

Both forms of love spring from dissatisfaction and offer a kind of transcendence to participants. The description of courtly love is especially important to an examination of romantic love because it shows that this form of worshipful love was produced in men who were assigned low status, promised the possibility of high status later on, and forced to function for years in a servile role. In short, these were dissatisfied men. Courtly love functioned to allow these men to at least feel and certainly act less worthless. Women, by being worshiped, may also have gained psychological benefits but these were incidental, as were women, to the operation of courtly love. Later in this thesis the connection between social position and the present form and nature of love will be examined in relation to women.

Courtly love was a medieval creation and the love-romance dealt with the activities of the nobility. We have already indicated that the lover of the romance was of low status but this position is defined in relation to that of his Lady and others in the high-status environment in which courtly love operated. The common people were invisible to members of this class (we use the term loosely in reference to the Middle Ages) and it is not possible to speculate upon the concept of love which existed among the masses, although we know they were aware of the goings-on at the castle. Courtly love as a practice ceased to exist before the end of the Middle Ages and now provokes only articles in scholarly journals.

Features of courtliness still appeared in Renaissance romance. By this time, though, despite the fact that chastity was still a virtue, sex and love were thought to be compatible. Not until the Renaissance did these become integrated with marriage. Germaine Greer, in The Female Eunuch (1971), notes Shakespeare's role as an apologist for this new view of marriage. Even Romeo and Juliet, which is a manifestation of the Tristan archetype, links love and marriage. However, it was unthinkable that marriage could exist successfully in the face of family disapproval: Romeo and Juliet are destroyed. Before their deaths they both develop, dynamically, towards self-awareness and maturity. This itself is a significant difference from male and female roles in courtly literature where only males were dynamic.

For our purposes, the concept of love in literature becomes most interesting when the ideals expressed within its pages are representative of a larger group in society.

Popular literature began to be important at a time when the middle class was well established, and this class exerted considerable influence upon writers and their work. Before the eighteenth century private patrons influenced the style and content of artistic production because they supported the artist. During the eighteenth century a switch from private to public patronage occurred. Leo Lowenthal (1968) notes that during this period "the potentialities and predispositions of the audience assumed new urgency for the writer because his audience became now the exclusive source of his livelihood" (1968:55).

And this audience demanded fiction which was provided by book sellers and circulating libraries in the form of the new and popular novel. These were condemned by many critics for their detailed descriptions of tender emotions and their exaltation of sentiment (1968:81). Worse still, while, in the past, the characters and settings of romance were remote from ordinary experience, now middle and even lower-middle class characters experienced grand passion.

The debate about the comparative worth of high and low culture which raged at the time did not concern itself only with the lack of artistic quality in the novel. Reading such novels was thought to have a deleterious effect upon the young, and upon women of all ages. Women were evidently especially attached to novels and the 'reading Miss' was considered bound for 'Ruin'.² This enthusiastic feminine readership, and women novelists in general, were blamed for the excessive sentimentalism of the eighteenth-century novel (1968:83-85).

² See Taylor (1943:52-86) for a catalogue of the objections to feminine novel reading.

Although novel reading provoked much sighing and weeping, often collectively (for they were often read aloud to groups), love in such stories did not usually culminate in death. Suffering was still associated with love and obstruction was a popular device, but there were more Pamelas who managed to marry their tormenters than there were Clarissas who resolved their "ruin" only in death.

In fact, Pamela is similar to today's paperback romances in which the heroine's virtue and beauty lead to her successful marriage with a high-status man - the modern equivalent of the gentleman. The hard facts of social reality in Tristan and Romeo and Juliet were, in the eighteenth century, replaced by the myth that love overpowers not only individuals but also the barriers of class. Suffering did not lead to a mystical transformation any longer and men were not transformed at all. Women characters experienced the mundane, but no less exciting, transformation of status provided by marrying into the aristocracy.

De Rougement states, perhaps with some regret, "Most people do not bother about understanding or about self awareness; they merely go after the kind of love that promises the most feeling" (p. 52) and this is true of the characters of eighteenth-century romance novels.

This sentimentalism developed into romanticism with its belief in love as a divine creative principle, its exploration of sensuality, and its promise of the possibility of ecstatic transcendence. The concept of transcendence fused with that of love as intense feeling and inflated the power of love to cosmic proportions. This does not imply that the Romantics simply snatched a concept from eighteenth-century literature. Intensity of feeling was very much a part of the Romantic conception. They merely

attempted to isolate intense emotion from eighteenth-century sentimentalism. Also, the re-emergence of transcendent desires was related to the resurrection of medieval forms and thought in the later nineteenth-century.

Dominant nineteenth century writers defined themselves in opposition to their society, unlike even the best eighteenth-century writers. They were concerned with highly individualistic, intense experience, and with making themselves 'special', and so, superior to society. They sought after ecstasy in order to transcend the society which they repudiated in their poetry. They did not seek this ecstasy only within male/female relationships. Possibly the best known instances occurred while contemplating beauty in nature. However, they did contribute to the evolution of the concept of love by their stress upon its power and their recognition of the ecstatic possibilities of the love experience.

The romantic conception of the world was tested by the countermovements usually called 'realism' and 'naturalism' but these were not strong enough to overwhelm romanticism until the twentieth century.

The Victorians, for their part, tended to idealize the love relationship but this did not significantly alter the model already provided by the eighteenth-century novelists. The concept of intense, transcendental love has survived even twentieth-century cynicism. This has been popularized by the entertainment industry in literature and film.

We must emphasize this experience of ecstasy as the hallmark of romantic love. The concept of romantic love includes only the intense feeling stressed in

eighteenth century literature coupled with the concept of transcendence popularized by romanticism.³ Transcendence implies ecstasy and although this concept was most explicitly formulated by the romantics, it was certainly a part of courtly love and it has been more or less emphasized since that time. The present difference, and the reason for the statement that ecstasy is the hallmark of romantic love, is that now the presence of ecstasy certifies the authenticity of the love experience. This definition fulfills our purpose of discovering what is meant by the term in everyday speech, and it takes into account the two key words: romantic, as ecstasy, qualifies love as intense feeling.

We have seen that love has been called mysticism because it bears some resemblance to mysticism in its formula for gaining knowledge and awareness through suffering and in its offer of the possibility of transcending an intolerable personal or social situation. These features still operate in modern romantic literature but now identity and transcendence occur as ecstasy, in a moment, rather than as a developmental process.

To examine modern conceptions of romantic love we will again turn to the depiction of love in literature. The first chapter of this thesis describes the stereotype of romantic love in a series of love-novels which are directed towards a feminine

³ We must avoid the confusion of including romantic love beliefs, such as the ideal of the 'perfect mate', within a definition of the concept of romantic love. The elements of belief associated with this concept are not part of the meaning of romantic love as it is commonly used. These beliefs and ideals should be considered separately, as part of a romantic love pattern or complex. Goode correctly included marriage within a romantic love complex (1959: 42), clearly differentiating this from the experiential meaning of 'romantic love'.

readership. We will show that, in these books, romantic love offers compensation to heroines who lack status and identity. Because the compensatory effect of romantic love is only operative when the hero is of superior status to the heroine, we conclude that the traditional position of the sexes is a precondition for this form of love.

The second chapter develops this interpretation of romantic love by comparing love and spirit possession. Since we have defined romantic love as ecstatic, and use this term in an accepted anthropological sense, we outline the similarities between religious and love-ecstasy. We then develop our argument that love is compensation for women by showing that religious ecstasy often compensates possessed individuals for deprivation in the secular sphere. We argue by implication based upon the fact that women suffer deprivation and are interested in romantic love, that women seek an ecstatic union with a superior man as compensation for lack of status and identity.

Chapter One

Popular Romance Fiction

In order to show that romantic love is mystical compensation for feminine lack of status and identity we will examine fictional accounts of romantic love.

description of corpus

We will examine modern pocket books which are part of a series self-described as 'romances'. The sample documents chosen are Harlequin Romances, inexpensive pocket books sold mainly at drugstores and corner stores. They all contain love stories set mostly in present and past Commonwealth countries and often combine the love story with an account of the heroine's travel.

They are published by Mills and Boon in England and then in Canada and the United States by Harlequin, an imprint of Pocket Books Inc., which is, in turn, a subsidiary of Simon and Schuster Inc. There is usually little time lag between their appearance in England and in North America.

A survey completed in 1968 by Peter H. Mann, senior lecturer in Sociology at the University of Sheffield, shows their readership to be composed, for the most part, of housewives who have held clerical jobs in the past and who now have young children at home. Still, a sizeable proportion of their readers are single (34 percent)⁴ and if we add divorced and widowed, (1 percent and 10 percent)⁵ together with single respondents we find that their readership is divided equally between married

⁴ Peter H. Mann, (1971:4).

⁵ Mann (1971:4).

and non-married groups. The majority of readers fall between the ages of 15 and 45, disproving the theory that Harlequin Romances are read chiefly by old ladies, and most readers have completed high school.⁶ They are a remarkably loyal group of readers, as evidenced by their enthusiastic response to the questionnaire and the surprising frequency of their rereading these books: 46 percent read the romances over again "very often" and 38 percent reread them "now and then".⁷

The popularity of the books is indicated by the fact that eight new titles are published every month and have been since 1954. Sales in the English language run at about 30 million a year and the books are translated into 14 foreign languages.⁸ Harlequins, unlike other paperbacks, are handled by magazine distributors and new titles appear in every drugstore at the same time because their readers, like those of magazines, are waiting for the distribution date. In Vancouver, their popularity is comparable to that of Playboy, the best-selling men's magazine.⁹

Pop fiction, which has a much higher readership than serious fiction,¹⁰ falls mainly into the categories of love and mystery stories. Harlequins, as examples of the first type, seem less embroidered, for example, than historical romances, and yet what is romantic is similar in each type. They constitute the archetype of the light love fiction world and were chosen as documents because they exhibit this quality.

⁶ Mann, (1971:3 and 6).

⁷ Mann (1971: 4).

⁸ Personal Communication from Alan Boon of Mills and Boon Limited.

⁹ Information received from computer estimate made by Vancouver Magazine Service Ltd. of Vancouver sales over a six-month period in 1972.

¹⁰ Kenneth Kister (1967: 510-513 and 531).

The sample of eighteen books was selected without the intervention of conscious choice. Using a table of random numbers a random sample of 50 books was selected from a catalogue, listing 651 books, of Harlequin Romance titles. All titles which identified main characters as doctors or nurses were eliminated before the selection was made as the relative subordinate and superordinate roles were already defined by professional status in these stories. Then a search was made of second-hand book stores for the titles selected and not all these titles were found. Only 27 out of the possible 50 books were found and two of these had to be rejected since they were the doctor and nurse stories. The first eighteen books selected constitute the sample used in this study. As there may be a difference between books which do and those which do not appear on the shelves of such book stores, the randomness of the sample was destroyed. However, since these books are extremely stereotyped this problem of selection will not interfere with the nature of the sample as it is representative of typical Harlequin Romance novels.

In Harlequin Romance novels, the story is told by the all-seeing observer with a focus upon the female main character. Her emotions and her interpretation of the emotions and actions of her potential mate are described in some detail. We are not given an interior view of the male main character, yet, by various literary techniques, the author makes us aware of the general state of his feelings also.

This provides a certain tension in the novels for while the reader's interpretation of the hero's feeling for the heroine is correct, the heroine's view is based upon misunderstanding. The reader knows the hero loves the heroine, but she, throughout

the story, feels that he dislikes her. This recognition on our part is due both to the cues provided by the author and our knowledge of the typical nature of a love story.

The story begins with a confused and unhappy woman who must change her life-style: her parents die; her love affair is unhappy, etc. She then meets a man who seems to disapprove of her, who unnerves her and who may even have some control over her. The plot then enters the complication stage in which there are obstacles to the resolution of a romantic love relationship which usually stem from misunderstanding. The woman is plunged alternately from depths to heights of emotion. While she agonizes, within this portion of the novel, her potential lover remains controlled.

Only when provoked by the insolence, disobedience or apparent unfaithfulness of the heroine does the hero lose control over his temper - but he still controls the situation. He physically attacks the heroine, either shaking or kissing her. The kiss is depicted as degrading, brutal, and erotic. The 'punishing kiss' leaves her bruised, shaken, and in tears, acknowledging the hero's physical and sexual power over her.

Strong implied eroticism persists throughout the stories and is especially evident in the heroine's awareness of the hero's body and physical nearness. The erotic tension is increased by the fact that the heroine is usually too innocent and inexperienced to correctly interpret her own sexual feelings, while the hero, as a sexually experienced man, is aware of the feelings he evokes. Male sexual power is dependent upon wealth and status, and sexuality is presented as an area of behavior useful to the hero in his task of controlling and manipulating the heroine. Despite this eroticism, premarital

intercourse never occurs in Harlequin Romances as this would violate the rigid romantic love morality displayed in the stories. Sexual intercourse is prohibited except in the case of the co-existence of mutual love and marriage.

Of those characters in the books who may be classed as possible candidates for romantic love experiences, usually only the hero and heroine are successful. There is a difference between the typical attributes of successful and unsuccessful candidates for romantic love. Within the successful group we find a good, plucky and beautiful heroine and a characteristically masterful, wealthy, attractive and tall hero. The unsuccessful secondary female main character is aggressive, beautiful, sexy and sophisticated. The secondary male character is weak, immature and perhaps even sneaky or, if he is a positive character, he will be the "good-joe" type - boring.

This very general description of the Harlequin Romance novels needs to be supplemented by a more detailed one in order that a final analysis may take into account the nature of the content of these books. The next section provides a setting for the analysis which it precedes. The two novels described in some detail were chosen from our selection. We did not employ sampling methods here and merely chose those books intuitively considered typical and representative. The following description is noncritical and it includes much material quoted from the books themselves.

description of the two novels

Court of the Veils (1969) was written by one of the most popular Harlequin writers, Violet Winspear, and although its setting is exotic the action of its plot and

the personalities of its characters are typical of the bulk of these novels. For example, in a sample of 10 books, it is similar to 7, 2 represent a variant form, and one fits into neither class. It will be examined as an archetype of sorts and the most important variant will be described.

Typically, the hero and heroine of such stories meet after the heroine's life is changed in some way leaving her confused and usually unhappy. In Court of the Veils this takes the form of a plane crash which the heroine miraculously survives only to find herself an amnesiac who must be informed that the same crash took the lives of her fiance, Armand Gerard, and her close friend, Juliet Grey. Actually, although she was discovered among the wreckage clutching Armand's ring and is assumed to be Roslyn Brant, his fiancée, she is, in fact, Juliet Grey, a stewardess on the flight. We refer to her here as Roslyn until her identity as Juliet is established in the novel.

In the first few pages her helplessness is stressed. She is in a hospital in a foreign country and she has no family, no home and no close friends. She is dejected and upset because she has no memory and she tries to remember something of her past: "Roslyn Brant...Roslyn...Armand. They might have been names in a book for all the personal meaning they had for her." (p. 7). When she repeats these names, it is to summon the memory of a love relationship and she feels especially helpless when this has no effect. Later, when she regains her memory she says "It always mystified me that love could be forgotten as easily as I seemed to forget it". (p. 182).

While in the hospital in El Kadia, an oasis in the Sahara, she is visited by Armand Gerard's grandmother who invites her to stay at the family plantation. The wealth of the Gerard family is indicated by Madame Gerard's aristocratic manner, Paris dresses, and large ruby ring but, lest a reader wonder whether or not Roslyn is attracted to wealth and social position, the author stresses her independent and unmercenary nature. Roslyn insists, very sincerely, that she does not wish to impose upon the Gerard family and that she will return instead to England. It is only when Madame Gerard is affronted by Roslyn's refusal that the young woman "flushed sensitively" (p. 6) and accepted the invitation.

In the preliminary section of the novel which takes place in the El Kadia hospital and during the trip to the plantation, Madame Gerard's conversation supplies a quantity of background information about the other members of her family.

Her grandson, Duane Hunter's personality is suggested by the metaphorical ramifications of his name and by the fact that he is the son of the "proud and stiff-necked Britisher" (p. 7) who married Madame Gerard's daughter Celeste. Celeste died when he was ten years old and as a young man Duane studied in England, returning to help manage his father's plantation in British Guiana. When Madame Gerard's son died she called upon Duane, rather than her other grandson, Tristan, or the late Armand, for help. At thirty-one years of age, Duane has been managing the Gerard plantation for four years.

He runs the plantation singlehandedly and has mastered nature to the extent that date production has flourished along with that of the various other fruits he has

introduced. Over the objections of his grandmother he chooses to live alone in the supervisor's residence near the main house. Madame Gerard says "He has a will of iron which bruises a woman until she gives in to him" (p. 13).

In this matter he is quite different from his younger cousin, Tristan, who is also staying at the plantation. Tristan is composing an opera based on a legend of unhappy love and he is neither interested in, nor qualified for, the management of a plantation. His moderate height and slender build are matched by his warm sympathetic manner and his deference to others. "Roslyn had an idea she was going to have tastes in common with Tristan, but his cousin sounded tougher, more formidable." (p. 10).

Madame Gerard's late husband was very like Duane. Her description of her late husband as an ideal mate tells of life with a man of this sort: "Such men are not often made...How they can love and wound, and make life a heaven and a hell! A woman might find peace with a gentler man, but how she would miss the fighting and the making up" (p. 8).

The plantation's name of Dar al Amra is translated as "House of the Master" referring to the days when it was owned by an Aga who kept a large harem. Duane Hunter is the present master of the plantation and his behavior in all situations is in keeping with his lordly role. As a forceful and autocratic man, like Madame Gerard's late husband, his relationships with women are also similar.

That this is so is evident in the first meeting between Roslyn and Duane:

Roslyn on her hassock glanced up and saw framed in the moorish archway a man in a bush hat that was bent down at one side. He removed the hat lazily, and a shaft of

sunlight fired the dark bronze of his hair.

En garde! leapt into Roslyn's mind. There was so keen a quality about the man's tawny-green gaze that she felt a wild urge to shield herself from it. He was as brown as rawhide from the desert sun, lean and hard and uncompromising as a lash that always found its mark.

(p. 16)

The challenge to battle is expressed in the first exchange between Roslyn and Duane:

He crossed the room with long strides and stood over her. She had to tilt her fair head to look at him, a towering, booted challenge of a man.

'H - how do you do, Mr. Hunter?' She held out a hand, but he didn't take it. Thumbs in the slant pockets of his breeches, he stood quizzing her through the narrowed lids of a perpetual sun-dweller.

'So you are Roslyn Brant?' His voice matched his hard, brown looks. 'Somehow I pictured you differently. Funny, eh?'

His tone was like the jab of a spur and Roslyn leapt recklessly to answer him. 'I pictured you exactly as you are, Mr. Hunter,' she said, 'and that isn't funny.'

(p. 17)

'Corny' thought it may seem her reply indicates that she is spunky indeed as Duane is described as potentially dangerous: "his look was that of a hunting hawk about to spring on its prey" (p. 19).

To the extent that the man is dangerous he is also protective. This latter quality, in Duane's case, is most evident in his treatment of his grandmother.

During her first few hours at Dar al Amra, Roslyn also meets Isabela Fernao, a houseguest and friend of the Gerard family. Duane and Isabela have been out riding together and we learn from his account of their ride that she is charming and somewhat spoiled. She, like Duane, is adept at the dramatic entrance:

(Roslyn) saw dark eyes sparkling about a lace fan, held so it concealed the lower part of the newcomer's face like a yashmak. The carved woodwork of the central archway was a perfect frame for her lovely figure, draped in a dress of silk the colour of sunlight.

'What did I tell you about that entrance?' Duane's laughter was indulgently mocking. (p. 19).

Yet unlike Duane she is considered affected.

She is also aggressive. Duane notes that it was she who initiated their ride together when she coquettishly upbraids him for his ungallant behavior in riding fast when she could scarcely keep up. He, quite in character, demanded that she conform to his pace.

She is tall - a characteristic usually associated with dominance in the novels and the author hastens to mention that Duane "made her look fragile" (p. 19). Her physical appearance is contrasted to that of Roslyn: Isabela has dark hair and "Latin" eyes while Roslyn's eyes are "rain grey, under a boyish cap of fair hair" (p.19). Isabela's image fits the stereotype of the seductive woman and Roslyn is the "good girl".

Yet Roslyn is not portrayed as smug. The fact that she can be classed as a "good girl" is the result of her innocence. The description of Roslyn is that of a child who is not yet conscious of her attractiveness. Roslyn is unsure of herself and concludes that Duane categorizes her as unappealing - hence his doubt that she actually was Armand's fiancée. The author makes us aware of Roslyn's attractiveness and suggests that Duane finds her pleasing: "His tawny-green eyes had flicked from her hair to her thin, sensitive face, down the slim arrow of a body that would feel lost

in a man's arms" (p. 21), although Roslyn came to a quite different interpretation of this same incident.

After the first meeting of the main characters in Court of the Veils the plot enters the complication stage in which a series of obstacles to romance occur. The first of these is a misunderstanding between Roslyn and Duane.

The night of her arrival Roslyn stands at the edge of a parapet and, supposing she is alone, she whispers "I'm Roslyn - Roslyn Brant...I'm twenty-two and I work for an airline..." (p. 32). Although she says this to calm her fears, Duane, who overhears, assumes that she is a deliberate imposter rehearsing for her role. He threatens her:

"...let me warn you, Roslyn Brant, that if you're playing a game with us, you'll be made to pay in a way you won't like. Nanette is an open-hearted woman, and I won't see her led up the garden path by some little chit who sees her as a soft touch, someone to provide free board and lodging not to mention other prerequisites." (p. 34).

When she tries to walk away he "clamped a restraining hand on her arm and gave a pull that jerked her back against the parapet: and "he pressed her to the ...wall and came closer, his muscular warmth, his possible intention, making her shrink back until she was in real danger of tumbling through the parapet opening" (p. 34).

Roslyn is not crushed by his accusations and actions; on the contrary, she attempts to kick him only to stub her toe against his hard shin. "Oh - you! How dare you treat me like this?" she gasped, half in pain from a stubbed toe and half in helpless rage. (p. 34). He secretly approves of her response - we are told that

he enjoyed her struggles. His admiration of her pluck is confirmed by his statement that he likes "the desert best when it is wild, untamed, like a horse to be broken, or like a woman" (p. 35).

And Duane plays with her fear:

Duane's eyes raked her face, then deliberately he turned to a mass of flowers cloaking the wall beside them, creamy blossoms with hidden hearts. He plucked one and ruthlessly forced back the petals in order to expose the hidden heart. Roslyn watched him and it seemed to her that the gesture was a threat (p. 37).

Duane's cynicism about love, he calls it "The biggest joke perpetrated against mankind" (p. 33), causes his grandmother some concern. She questions him about his lack of "the romantic spirit" (p. 43) and asks "Was it a woman, Duane?" (p. 42). This query causes the next misunderstanding and obstacle to romance within the novel for later, when Roslyn is in bed, she hears Isabela asking Duane to tell her the identity of the woman of whom his grandmother speaks. He replies "She's someone I never talk about" (p. 44) and Roslyn concludes that Duane is still in love with this woman in his past. Actually Duane is referring to his mother who deserted his father when he was a child of ten. She was killed in a car crash with her lover and since that time Duane has distrusted women. He never speaks of this because he wants to protect his grandmother from knowledge that would cause unhappiness. This is not revealed to Roslyn until the final section of the novel.

Roslyn's interpretation of Duane's reply to Isabela is reinforced by Duane's later actions. The next morning she decides to walk through the plantation (she is unaware that it extended for fifty square miles) and loses her way. When she is in

danger of being attacked by a mountain cat Duane appears, rescues and castigates her for wandering so far, and takes her to his house for breakfast. He provokes her by such statements as "Women are too often less loyal than the horse" (p. 58) and "kids don't matter, and you look like one in pants" (p. 59) until she resentfully accuses him of arrogance:

'You're so sure of yourself, aren't you?' she accused.
'Armoured against most of the pricks and pains felt by other people?'

'Most of the pricks and pains?' He cocked an eyebrow.
'Surely I'm immune to all of them?' (p. 59).

In reply she reveals that she knows that a woman has managed "to find a chink in his armour" (p. 60) and she is unnerved by the violence of his response:

The patio was hung with silence, then Roslyn's gasp was almost a cry as Duane's hands caught hold of her shoulders.
'Who told you that?' His face above her was a series of harsh, cold angles...

...He shook her and strands of fair hair fell into her eyes. 'Come on, tell me!'

'I - I heard you telling Isabela - last night.' Roslyn was suddenly frightened of his touch, which bruised, and the copper flames in his green eyes.

It only hurt her all the more to struggle...(p. 60).

She concludes "...he cared still for the woman he had known before he came to Dar al Amra" (p. 60).

The series of instances during the complication phase of the novel do not serve to create an increasing accumulation of different obstacles to romance. This would require a more complicated unravelling than already takes place at the end. It is only necessary that the obstacles be of the sort which can create interesting situations in which misunderstanding increases while romantic attraction develops. The most serious impediments to romance are Duane's suspicion of Roslyn (which is actually not as strong as she concludes is the case) and Roslyn's idea that Duane is in love with

another woman. Of lesser consequence are Duane's conjecture that Roslyn may be attracted to Tristan and Roslyn's assumption that Duane and Isabela are having an affair.

This latter misunderstanding on Roslyn's part occurs when she sees Isabela, clad only in a chiffon robe, coming out of Duane's bedroom. Although Isabela came to his room to borrow something, she pretends, for Roslyn's benefit, that Roslyn's interpretation of the situation is correct. Since Isabela is worldly enough to recognize Roslyn's charm for men, and she herself is in pursuit of a romantic relationship with Duane, it suits her purposes if Roslyn believes that she and Duane are involved in an affair.

Isabela also plants the idea that there is a romantic attachment between Tristan and Roslyn. She happens upon the two in an embrace but, as Roslyn later explains to Madame Gerard, "He kissed me because he feels sorry for me, he said so. And I let him kiss me because sometimes I feel sorry for myself" (p. 80). This along with her thought that "there had been no passion in Tristan's kiss. What first kiss holds passion?" (p. 78) reveals both her knowledge that she and Tristan are not 'in love' and her lack of experience as to the nature of romantic love. When the romantic love relationship reaches the stage of resolution the "first kiss" is depicted as passionate indeed. Tristan is attracted to Roslyn but he manifests this in a kind of protective brotherliness and there is little evidence of passion in any of their interactions.

The dealings that Duane and Roslyn have with each other always produce intense feelings, especially on Roslyn's part. When Duane notices that his grandmother has made Roslyn a gift of an enamelled bracelet the following incident ensues:

They were half-way along the corridor when he caught at her left wrist and took a long, hard look at the panelled bracelet. She didn't look at him, but there was a glint of undersilver through her dark lashes as she felt the savage aliveness of his fingers. It was frightening that a man could be so alive, filled with the kind of power that left a woman with only her wit to defend her.

...He stared down at her with narrowed eyes, then she gave a gasp as his grip tightened and she was brought up against him, her imprisoned hand an inch from his face.

...'Let me go!' she struggled for release, wildly, helplessly, as a bird caught by a cat. (p. 82)

She tells him that she hates him and yet the writer notes that "in the silence, held close to him as she was, she felt the beating of his heart. Such intimacy was unbearable..." (p. 83).

In this situation, although Duane is angry and despite his physical aggression, his emotions are controlled. It is Roslyn who loses control, as evidenced by her consequent emotional outburst and her pallor.

She is later reduced to tears when he forces her to dance with him to test her dancing ability. He knows that Armand was a skilled dancer and doubts whether Armand would have chosen a girl who dances badly. The rest of her evening is spoiled, her hands shake, her face is pale, she runs from the nightclub and becomes somewhat hysterical on the way to her hotel. This is interpreted as evidence of sensitivity by Tristan.

The same evening Roslyn walks to the edge of a lake while she strains to remember her past. Duane appears behind her and she flees:

The moonlight played over the scene. A girl pursued in the age-old way by a man, but not in fun, in fear

that made her cry out as he caught her...

He pinned her to the scaly trunk of one of the trees, easily, ruthlessly. 'You little wildcat!' he growled... 'don't you realize that a storm is brewing?'

She heard only the thunder of her heart...agitated by that wild chase along the shore and the closeness of this man, his black sweated chest against hers...she felt his breath in her hair and she struggled weakly with him. 'Let me go!' she implored. 'Please, Duane!' (p. 115)

This time she realizes, to some extent, the nature of her own feelings:

'You're hurting me,' she said. But it wasn't quite the truth. Though he had her pinned against the palm tree, her hands were within his and shielded from the scaly trunk. Though he was close enough for her to feel the lift and fall of his chest, the wool of his sweater was chunky and warm...warm, drugging, so that quite irrationally she wanted to rest her churning head against him and be lost in the woolly blackness.

Their eyes clung and afraid she would guess how weak she was in that moment, she looked quickly away...(p. 115)

The storm breaks and Duane leads her to a boatshed where he makes her strip off her wet clothes and provides her with a canvas sarong for modesty's sake. He also massages her wrenched shoulder using a technique learned from Indian women. When he pulls up her sweater to massage her shoulder more effectively he is detached and scientific and when he demands that she take off her wet clothes he curtly dismisses her objections and is mildly amused at her modesty. Roslyn's emotions are comparatively undisciplined.

While Roslyn is frightened by a bat and then by a spider Duane displays his resourcefulness. In addition to producing a make-shift sarong and treating her shoulder, he ejects the venomous spider from the shed and prepares a warm bed when

they find that they must stay the night. (A landslide has blocked the path). Finally, he saves Roslyn's life while they are climbing the cliff back to the hotel.

Their night in the boatshed reveals Duane to Roslyn as a more complex person than she had thought him to be previously and she is disturbed by this knowledge and by the state of her emotions. She finds it comforting to be with Tristan though her thoughts wander. She thinks of Duane. While she ponders the relative value of quiet companionship and excitement Madame Gerard's words supply an answer:

'...I married for love - though I tell you now that I had my misgivings about doing so. Other men seemed more understanding than Armand. They were happy to give in to my whims, to be led rather than followed. Armand gave in to nobody. A woman either accepted him as he was, knowing he would cherish her or be cruel as the mood took him, or she turned her back on him and married a more moderate man for a husband.' (p. 148)

Roslyn also tries to avoid Duane and Madame Gerard describes a similar action in her youth though she does not realize that Roslyn and Duane are attracted to each other and that Roslyn will not admit to such feelings. Madame Gerard remembers "each time I saw him I wanted to run away, but I ran in circles from him like a doe from a stag. I had to show some fight even when the circles narrowed to the circumference of his arms" (p. 149). It is difficult to know whether or not the writer descended from fantasy into reality when she has Madame Gerard speak the words 'I had to show some fight' suggesting no small amount of duplicity.

The secret which Roslyn and Duane have kept - the fact that they spent the night together - is discovered, with disastrous results, by Isabela. The enraged Isabela, under the guise of friendship, invites Roslyn along for a drive into the desert. Although

Isabela knows that a sandstorm is coming she tricks Roslyn into getting out of the car and then drives back to Dar al Amra leaving Roslyn to walk the several miles back to safety. Duane discovers Roslyn, gives her water and limes, and remarks that his mother was as selfish as Isabela. One misunderstanding is erased just before the force of the sandstorm hits. Roslyn realizes that the woman who has made Duane cynical is his mother and that he is not involved with Isabela, moments before she hits her head on the windshield of the car and regains her memory. She tells Duane that she is Juliet Grey, a fact that he has known all along. She confesses that her probable subconscious motivation for assuming Roslyn Brant's identity was "a need for love"...it wasn't her fiance I wanted, it was his family" (pp. 183-4) for she and the real Roslyn had been reared in an institution and she has fantasized about warm family life.

The final obstacle to romance is removed when Duane asks if she will marry Tristan:

'Don't you care enough for Tristan?
'I care for him very much - as a friend,' she replied.
'And that is how he cares for me.'
Duane's eyes were tigerish in the gloom as they raked her face. 'Are you sure of that' He spoke savagely.
'You said that at the time of the crash your heart belonged to no one - what about now?'
'My heart is my own business.' Suddenly she was struggling with him, for all at once it hurt too much to want to be close to him.)p. 184)

Roslyn's resistance is overcome by Duane's physical strength:

His savagery seemed to be getting out of control. 'You've said often enough that you don't want my touch, or my friendship so I've nothing to lose if I do this.'
'This' was being tipped over his arm...being lost for an eternity of breathless, unimaginable seconds in his kiss.

His mouth on hers was relentless, hurting her until she ceased to struggle...then, eyes closed, senses fully awake, she surrendered to the kiss that searched through all her being until it plundered the heart right out of her. (p. 184)

She calls him "darling tyrant" (p. 185) and is happy in submission: "Juliet rested against Duane's shoulder, home, found, safe in the strength of the man she had fought and finally come heart to heart with. She loved and was loved and the knowledge was sweet" (p. 186). Her identity is established as the future wife of Duane Hunter: "I have a Ruth-like nature. Whither thou goest, Duane, I'll follow and be happy" (p. 185).

Although this kind of literature is stereotyped various patterns are represented in the novels so that books which deal with city-girls from England who fall in love with Australian sheep farmers form a special class for example. Yet these are similar enough to Court of the Veils to need no detailed description here. We should examine the variant form represented by those novels in which the male and female main characters marry at the beginning of the book.

Isobel Chance's To Marry a Tiger (1971) is an example of this latter group.

It begins in Naples where Ruth Arnold and her younger sister Pearl are on holiday. Ruth teaches history and wants to "discover ancient Rome" (p. 9) not so much to further her career but rather because she is interested in the romance of early history. She has brought Pearl along because the girl is interested only in men and Ruth is worried both about her sister's lack of education and by the possibility that some man might take advantage of her. In Naples Ruth's alarm is increased when Pearl begins seeing the

aristocratic Mario Verdecchio. When Ruth is introduced to Mario she acts cold and disapproving: "Ruth had glared at him. For one thing he was far too handsome, and, for another she hadn't liked the way he looked at Pearl" (p. 8). When Pearl tells Mario that she and Ruth have different mothers and he replies "That also is clear!" (p. 8) Ruth imagines that he thinks that she is plain for Pearl is a great beauty. Ruth does not recognize that she herself is attracted to Mario and she is filled with anxiety for Pearl's safety: "Mario was no boy to be teased and slapped down at her (Pearl's) youthful whim. Mario was a man, and a dangerous man at that!" (p. 9) She warns Pearl that since the Verdicchios are an old and important Sicilian family they are conservative about romantic encounters and that Sicilians generally allow women little freedom. In fact Ruth is rather outraged as she quotes from a newspaper report of a Sicilian girl being forced to marry the man who compromised her. She suggests that Mario would not feel as strongly about the honour of an overly friendly English girl such as Pearl. Pearl ignores all warnings and advice so that when a letter addressed to Pearl is mistakenly given to Ruth, who notices the Sicilian postmark, she feels justified in reading its contents. It contains an invitation to Pearl to come and stay with Mario in Palermo, Sicily. Since this is accompanied by a boat ticket and some money, as if Mario had no doubt that her sister would accept, Ruth plots revenge for the implied insult. She goes to Palermo herself quite determined to shock the waiting Mario: "She would show him!" (p. 19). On the boat she meets his aunt who ferrets out the whole story and is amused and pleased by Ruth's course of action. Signora Verdecchio promises to come to Mario's home before evening to protect her from Mario's wrath.

Unfortunately Mario is not at home when Ruth is chauffeured to the house and as neither he nor his aunt arrive by night time Ruth must spend the night in the bedroom which had been prepared for Pearl. (It adjoins Mario's). Ruth is frightened when Mario discovers her in bed in the early morning but she displays the spunk usual to Harlequin heroines and explains her motivation. To her horror Mario informs her that "as far as the whole of Sicily is concerned you are hopelessly compromised!" (p. 45) and that she must marry him for the honour of this family. Although this seems preposterous she actually does marry him with the blessing of his family who consider her a respectable young woman. Mario sends her off to the beauty salon where she is made to look beautiful for the wedding and after an attempted escape which Mario prevents she agrees: "He touched her hair lightly with his fingers, 'Was this all for yourself?' He bent and kissed her on the lips. 'I think not' he said...Ruth said nothing ...She knew if she had, it would have been total surrender" (p. 69). For she is already in love with him although she thinks that he does not love her. He does love her and he is almost certain of her love for him but he wants her to be quite sure of her own feelings. He also demands complete authority against which concept she rebels:

"You won't rule me!" she shot at him.

"Another challenge?" he asked her.

To her dismay he chuckled.

"I am determined!" she insisted, more to boost her own morale than to convince him.

Mario smiled...

"So I am determined," he said briefly.

"And as no house can stand if it is divided against itself, I am afraid that one of us will have to give way and it will not be me."

"Because you are a man and I a woman?"

"Exactly!" He sounded amused. (p. 75)

Throughout the novel he educates her towards becoming a woman in the sense of being subject to himself, and he does not sleep with her until she realizes the depths of her feeling for him and submits to his authority. There are many misunderstandings wherein she thinks she is not attractive, and that he fancies Pearl and does not love her, and so on, but finally she realizes that:

From the moment he had come into her bedroom she had been lost. First he had made her laugh and then he had tormented her: lastly, he had kissed her and she had been vanquished: There was no denying that she had fallen very deeply in love with him. (p. 185)

And she finds herself ready to be utterly submissive even though she still is under the impression that he does not love her:

"Well? Do I ask too much?" he prompted her. It would be different if he had fallen in love with her too, but he hadn't. Was it too much to ask of her? That she should love him so completely and gain in return his interest, his children, and his wretched Sicilian honour? No, she admitted to herself with honesty, it was not too much. She would rather anything than not have him at all. (p. 187)

Only when he makes her understand that he also loves her can their marriage be consummated and when this last obstacle is resolved the novel closes upon the bedroom scene. Mario is exultant at discovering that Ruth was willing to acquiesce to his demands even when she thought her love was not returned: "Carissima, would you really have given me your life without my love?" (p. 191) and he delights in her blushes. She "felt that she had come home" and "laughed with sheer happiness" (p. 192).

The novels of this type are possibly more far-fetched than most Harlequin Romances chiefly because it is difficult to concoct a believable reason for marriage in the earlier part of the books. However, the romantic love interest is not lessened

and the erotic overtones are heightened by the nature of the denouement which may be expected.

observations on the novels

Beliefs about romantic love influence the structure of the books, the kind of information offered about the characters and the tone in which this is expressed.

Tone is most important in incidents which involve the hero and heroine. It expresses the level of romantic eroticism present. In Court of the Veils Roslyn is pressed against the parapet by Duane "until she was in real danger of tumbling through the parapet opening" (p. 34). And the author mentions... "his possible intention" and "his muscular warmth" (p. 34). It may seem startling that eroticism is present even when a fall from a parapet is imminent but this is certainly the case. Any situation in which the romantic hero uses his superior strength to dominate the heroine is described as having erotic content. In The Time of the Jacaranda the hero grabs the heroine's shoulder "in a bruising grip" (p. 45) and as a consequence "She would bear the marks for weeks" (p. 46). She concludes, appreciatively, "This man was dynamite" (p. 45) and has palpitations of the heart.

The heroine is afraid of the hero and this response is justified by his description and actions. When Duane exposes the heart of the rose, "ruthlessly", Roslyn concludes that this is a threat. Of course it was a threat but more than that it alludes to the sexual overtones which characterize their encounters for it is a metaphorical description of rape. The incident which is closest to rape in the books is the "punishing"

kiss. In *To Marry a Tiger*, Mario admonishes Ruth for going for a car ride with a male friend.

...You are a Sicilian, and so you'll live according to our ideas of what is permissible and what is not. And you have nothing better to do than to please me, and this is why!" He pulled her into his arms and kissed her so hard that she had no breath left with which to defy him...she stood stock still, shaken and more than a little frightened...(p. 144).

This is his reminder to Ruth of his complete power over her..."she was a traitor to her own cause and with a little sob, she strained towards him, eager in submission to the warmth of his lips and the unyielding strength of his arms" (pp. 144-5). Although she is in tears she is "shocked by the urgent desire...to fling herself back into his arms and tell him she would be pleased, proud, to do whatever he wanted of her" (P.146). The suggestion is that she needs and wants to be dominated. The sado-masochistic elements in this are even more evident in *Dear Puritan* (1973) when the heroine angers the hero by insulting him.

In an instant his features had a look of menace, and pain shot through her bones as he gripped her by the shoulders and pulled her with a sudden fierceness against him. His hand was curved like a talon around the nape of her neck and her head was held immovably as he bent and took her lips and kissed them for a long time without any mercy or tenderness. His kiss was a total punishment...(p. 115).

To the heroine this was "a tormenting reminder that he could master her whenever he wished" (p. 120)...and she is unable to forget "the fiery pressure of his lips (122) especially when she sees his "implacable" lean jaw and his mouth "that gave him away as a passionate man" (p. 123).

The effect of the erotic tone serves to transform the actual brutality which is present. The reader is not outraged by the conduct of a man who leaves bruises

on a woman which "last for weeks". We are not expected to deplore the conduct of a heroine who enjoys such treatment. The heroine herself never appears to find this sort of action peculiar or unjust. The next step from this situation is a fantasy of whips and boots, which presumably is less acceptable to the readers of these books who prefer their vicarious pleasure in the socially appropriate form of the love novel.

The hero's body is described in such a way as to suggest that it will be possible for him to inflict pain. In Dear Puritan the hero's hand was "a talon" (p.115) and in Court of the Veils Duane's "hard brown looks" (p. 17) made him seem "uncompromising as a lash that always found its mark" (p. 16). This is similar to the language of pornography, especially the pornography of flagellation. The words "uncompromising", and like "a lash" suggest the image of the punishing parent transformed by erotic fantasy. Women in these books deserve brutal treatment. Whatever the romantic hero does is right. This is merely punishment, a term usually employed to cloak the motivation and cruelty of the punisher. It is thrilling to the heroines to be singled out for punishment - especially if the punishment is a kiss. The fact that the kiss is punishing is not only related to the hero's roughness. It depends more on the fact that the heroine is forced to admit that her will cannot withstand the overpowering sexuality of the hero. Male dominance and female submission are essentially romantic even in the extreme form. Romantic love in the Harlequins is a possible way of dealing with oppression by making this oppression not only palatable, but exciting.

Another way in which erotic tone is used to influence the reader is in descriptions of the female body. In Court of the Veils Roslyn's "slim arrow of a body...

would feel lost in a man's arms" (p. 21) we are told. Her body is not rated so much for how much it would be perceived by the embracing man. The emphasis is in the other direction. What is assessed is Roslyn's potential for feeling lost, small and child-like, while held by a large man. This narcissistic point of view is found repeatedly in the Harlequin romances.

This element of narcissism is implied throughout the novel by the writer's style which treats female appearance more often, in more detail, and in a more erotic tone than is accorded to the male body. For the female body is the erotic object par excellence in these novels. This point of view explains why it is that Harlequin heroines, even in an embrace, have a solitary delight, without a thought as to whether their lover experiences a similar rapture. In romantic sexuality the woman enjoys the feeling of being an object manipulated by the romantic man - a superior sexual technician. Since women are generally treated as objects to be acted upon (not only in sexual encounters), this is not a surprising state of affairs. Also, since romantic sexuality is repressed sexuality the heroine's state as object rids her of any responsibility for her own condition. It is the man, as a subject being, on whom all responsibility rests.

The supreme qualification of the romantic hero is formidableness. Previously, in Court of the Veils, Roslyn notes that she would "have tastes in common with Tristan, but his cousin sounded tougher, more formidable" (p. 10). It is not romantic to share common interests. In The Man in Possession the heroine states:

'All I know is that when you fall in love you don't care whether the person is rich or poor or likes travel

or listening to Beethoven. You just love - and want, naturally, to spend every minute of the rest of your lives together.' (p. 101).

indicating several romantic love beliefs about the power of love. (Regardless of these beliefs romantic love in these stories only occurs when the heroine is poor in relation to the hero). This power does not operate in the case of Tristan. Although he is handsome, charming and kind, he is not at all masterful. When Duane enters the room dramatically he is not considered affected, as is Isabela. We are meant to think that Duane's similar action is natural and that its effectiveness springs from the fact that he really is fascinating and powerful. The drama which makes him central places him in a position which is rightfully his. Isabela is a usurper.

These qualifications, power and overwhelming sexual attractiveness, belong to the romantic hero by right of his superior social position. The information offered about the characters in these novels always includes the primary determinants of social status. If the hero is to possess the heroine he must be in a position analogous to a god. And if the heroine is a likely candidate for ecstatic love she should occupy a low social position. In fact, this is the case in Harlequin Romances. In an analysis of a small sample, eighteen books, it was found that high-status males and low-status females were more often successful in romance, as evidenced by mutual declaration of love and a proposal of marriage, than were low-status males and high-status females:

Love

		Success	Lack of Success
18 cases of F ¹ 18 cases of M ¹ 17 cases of F ² 13 cases of M ²	high status	18 M ¹	14 F ² 1 M ²
	low status	18 F ¹	12 M ² 3 F ²

* In this table F¹ signifies the heroine; M¹ the hero; and F² and M² the secondary female and male main characters respectively.

It should be mentioned that the status difference between the low-status female in relationship with the high-status male is vast. For example, they are paired as follows:

a twenty-year-old governess with a forty-year-old baron;

a twenty-one-year-old, unemployed orphan with a thirty-six-year-old playwright;

an eighteen-year-old office girl with a thirty-five-year-old, rich architect;

and so on. In fifty books read, the only deviation from this pattern was the case of a young heiress who paired with an older district officer of a British colony. She was naive and a little silly (so charming) and he, of course, was experienced and wise.

There was no doubt as to who was dominant in their relationship. The fact that this formula is followed in most of the books read shows that there is an important connection between the relative status of the hero and heroine and a successful romantic denouement. The high status of men and the low status of women are romantic characteristics. Low-status men and high-status women have no romantic appeal since the feminine romantic love experience requires an ecstasy in which the woman is possessed by a superior man.

The heroine's low social position in these books is but one evidence of her deprivation. The initial situation of the heroine in the novels emphasizes this interpretation.

In the initial situation the heroine's life is unsatisfactory. She suffers, and she does not have a definite place in the world. In Court of the Veils a plane crash plunges her into the hero's world where she is helpless. In To Marry a Tiger, she enters an unfamiliar environment where her capabilities as a teacher are of no use. This has the effect of making the romantic resolution more powerful and connects helplessness with the heroine, (though it is a circumstance which causes this initially). As a prince only rescues women who are helpless and ignores women who are well able to conduct their lives, this helplessness on the part of the heroine is a necessary precondition for romance. Since the heroine is usually a spunky woman, worthy of being dominated by a superior man, this helplessness is merely the result of circumstance. In a sample of eighteen books the heroine's initial situation is one of deprivation or lack in fifteen cases. In all fifteen cases the heroines were unhappy with their condition. Deprivation and dissatisfaction, then, evidently predispose the heroines to romantic love experience. In Court of the Veils, Roslyn's destiny and the nature of her role are revealed by Duane's remark that she is like a "Sleeping Beauty" (p. 21) who will regain her memory in a rush. Like the Sleeping Beauty she is presented as a child, unconscious and in a kind of limbo until she becomes a woman, and gains both consciousness and identity through the expression of a man's love. This idea is so consistently found within the Romances, (although here it is given its special clarity by an amnesiac heroine), that it may be assumed to represent a necessary element within the complex of romantic love beliefs.

The books are neatly structured into three main sections. The initial section provides information about the characters and a description of the first meeting between the hero and heroine. This is followed by the complication stage - the largest section in the books - and in the final section mutual love is revealed.

During the complication stage the romantic heroine is usually contrasted with a secondary female character who is unworthy of romantic love. This character is often seductive, like Isabela and Pearl in the two novels described. This functions to show more clearly the innocence of the heroine.

This is important as the heroines of these novels must be innocent and virginal. It is endemic in the romantic love ideal expressed in the Romances that not only is the virgin worthy of love but she is also eminently sexually attractive. Such attraction does not lead to denouement in an affair. Phrases such as "the kind of girl you marry" have very serious meaning within Harlequin Romances. They are simply lifted out of the usual mundane setting. The rewards of virtue in the books are more exciting than the rewards of vice. The moral seems to be that sexual repression, in the long run, may lead to true love. (As a badge of their status all Harlequin heroines blush with great frequency). In this sense the romantic world of these novels is a simple one. The good and modest woman and the aggressive vamp love the same man, but he, in his wisdom, extends the blessing of his love to the pure virgin.

The final misunderstandings which prevent resolution in this section often cause near hysteria on the part of the heroine. This occurred in Court of the Veils

when Duane forced Roslyn to dance and it serves to indicate the intensity of the feeling that only Duane evokes. Within these romantic novels this kind of behavior is considered quite normal. In The Time of The Jacaranda the heroine has a fit of hysterical laughter (p. 185) provoked by the fact that the hero is late returning from a business trip. This lack of control demonstrates the sensitive, emotional nature of the heroine. But these outbursts, which characterize especially the latter part of the books, and provide evidence of some suffering, result only in the heroine's realization of her love for the hero. This does not lead to any awareness, as suffering does in tragedy, of individual identity. On the contrary, the awareness is of the other, and of her need for union with him.

At last misunderstandings are erased, swiftly followed by romantic resolution and culminating in what Germaine Greer calls "the psychedelic kiss" (p. 173). In Court of the Veils the romantic love response produced on the occasion of the kiss is described as ecstatic: Roslyn allows herself to be possessed and the experience takes on the quality of timelessness. Still, the pain of being forced to submit exists, but it disappears the moment she accepts his dominance. In The Time of the Jacaranda the heroine's nerve centres crackle as she is "overcome" by this kiss (p. 188). Generally, the symptoms evoked by the kiss are typical of ecstasy. Time has no meaning, the heart beats erratically; the feeling is intense and indescribable and so on. This is a most potent demonstration of the hero's power and the final capitulation of the heroine: "She chooses to desire her enslavement so ardently that it will seem to her the expression of her liberty..." (de Beauvoir, 1970:604), and Roslyn's statement "my heart is my own business" (p. 184) becomes the last expression of her sovereignty. The

transports she enjoys in Duane's embrace are her reward.

This is true love. Marriage is the natural consequence of true love and a Harlequin Romance does not close without a proposal of marriage. Finally, the Harlequin heroine gains a permanent position in the hero's world by linking herself with him. She gains status and identity through romantic love and her insufficiencies are met. Romantic love beliefs cannot account for the fact that dependent status and dependent being are inauthentic. In fact romantic beliefs obscure this.

The final situation of the heroine in the books is changed from her former position while the hero's final position is usually identical to his initial one. Although the hero is undoubtedly happy due to his relationship with the heroine there is rarely a suggestion that he felt his life to be incomplete previously. In the case of the heroine it is clearly the case that her insufficiency is supplied by the romantic resolution. Her final unification with the hero supplies more than status and wealth. In Court of the Veils the heroine feels that she is "home, found, safe..." (p. 186) and in To Marry a Tiger "she felt that she had come home" and that "He was the sum of her pride, her life..." (p. 192). The heroines of these books seem to gain feelings of "belonging" and identity through their romantic experiences.

This account of the pattern of romantic love as it appears in Harlequin Romances will, in the next chapter, be compared to spirit possession. We should remember that the romantic hero is in a position similar to that of a possessing agent and the heroine, of low social position, initially experiences some form of felt deprivation.

Romantic love in these books is a solution to her problems. It is offered as a mystical and instantaneous eradication of all her difficulties.

These distortions help to perpetuate a situation in which women seek love as a way of transcending an intolerable existence. The existence of women is not justified unless they are loved. And romantic love means amalgamation with a superior man, ecstasy, and finally marriage.

The reality of marriage is not suggested by books in which the man is of such high status as to offer luxury to his bride. The process of 'dwindling into a wife' is not explored.

Chapter Two

Romantic Love and Ecstasy

We have proposed a definition of romantic love which emphasizes ecstasy as the definitive experience which causes certain affectional relationships to be classed as romantic. Ecstasy does not merely signify heightened emotion. We use the term here as it is commonly used by anthropologists to classify certain religious and mystical experiences.

Since religious ecstasy is the subject of serious study and romantic love is thought to be, by comparison, a less important social phenomenon, at first glance a comparison between the two seems peculiar, if not far-fetched. Nevertheless, we propose to show that romantic love shares characteristics with spirit possession, and that it does so because it is thought to be a form of possession for women. More importantly, by drawing this parallel, the relationship between romantic love and the social position of women is clarified.

Ecstasy is the experience of being possessed by or filled with a divine spirit. The dynamics of possession are remarkably similar cross-culturally despite the fact that the expressive elements of the experience vary according to the nature of the possessing agent and the social context in which possession takes place. It is therefore possible to construct a model of possession which can be used in comparing religious or mystical ecstasy with the ecstasy which characterizes romantic love.

The characteristics of possession are: (1) initial reluctance and (2) transcendence. Initial reluctance occurs fairly regularly in descriptions of the initiatory

experiences of shamans and members of possession cults. This phase of the process is characterized by symptoms such as illness and peculiar behavior. Such suffering draws the attention of the community to the plight of the acolyte though the sufferer often denies the role of spirits in producing such hardship. (Once vocation is accepted this situation is always interpreted as a part of the spiritual process). The preparatory period is most dramatic and important in cases in which an individual cannot claim the hereditary right of shamanic election (Lewis, 1971:67). At such times this unsought suffering is thought to proclaim the elective role of spirits who seize man against his will. Writing of Shamanic election in Vietnam and Thailand, Guy Morechand concludes: "The more he ostensibly refuses this destiny, the more he resists, the more striking will be the signs, the more gripping and dramatic his vocation..." (1968:208)¹ At this stage symptoms constitute compelling evidence of an individual's candidacy. What this means in terms of the individual's "spiritual journey" is described by Ian Lewis, Professor of Anthropology at the London School of Economics:

Thus the shaman's initiatory experience is represented as an involuntary surrender to disorder, as he is thrust protesting into the chaos which the ordered and controlled life of society strives so hard to deny, or at least to keep at bay. No matter how valiantly he struggles, disorder eventually claims him and marks him with the brand of a transcendental encounter. At its worst, in peripheral cults, this is seen as a baneful intrusion of malign power. At its best, in central possession religions, it represents a danger-laden exposure to the powers of the cosmos. In both cases the initial experience withdraws the victim from the secure world of society and of ordered existence, and exposes him directly to those forces which, though they may be held to uphold the social order, also ultimately threaten it (1971:188).

¹ Cited in I. M. Lewis (1971:187).

Thus the initiatory experience functions much like a rite of passage because it signals the individual's movement from the ordinary state of existence towards a participation in a more power-laden, mythic world.

Although community recognition of the significance of the individual's experience is usual at this stage, such recognition is not required. Especially in cases where possession does not imply vocation, the initiatory period may be nimal indeed. Many possession experiences described in the form of "testimony" by fundamentalists mention mundane afflictions such as lack of success in business, mild illness and so on, which preceded their being filled with the Holy Spirit. Their former sufferings were private when they occurred. Later, these hardships were re-evaluated as spiritually meaningful in the light of their ecstatic experience. Then they were made public and interpreted as part of a spiritual process.² However, in societies where possession is suspected in cases of illness, for example, the initiatory experience is publicly significant while it is taking place.

The second phase of the possession experience, which supplies meaning to the first, is the state of altered consciousness in which transcendence occurs. The individual is entered by a spirit and feels himself to be "at one" with the gods. Lewis uses the terms 'trance' and 'possession' interchangeably to indicate this state although other writers differentiate between the two. Erika Bourguignon states: "While some types of spirit possession do indeed involve trance, others do not" (1965:40) and "...trance is a psychiatric term while a belief in spirit possession involves a cultural theory..." (1965: 41).

² For many examples of this after the fact interpretation of affliction see The Full Gospel Businessman's Voice (Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International, Los Angeles).

This phase may also be referred to as a "state of dissociation" (Shorter: 1970) which is defined as "mental mechanism whereby a split-off of the personality temporarily possesses the entire field of consciousness and behavior" (M. J. Field: 1960:19)³ and which is also a psychiatric term. Trance, for Bourguignon, refers to the mode in which possession may manifest itself while Field's definition of 'dissociation' refers to the psychological dynamic which is believed to occur. This latter definition is itself based upon a cultural theory which substitutes "a split-off part of the personality" for "a spirit". Social scientists have not been able to improve upon the definition of possession that is offered to field workers: an individual is inhabited by a spirit and this may or may not imply "soul-loss" depending upon the society in which it occurs.

This always implies submission on the part of the spirit's 'host' (Lewis, 1971: 57) in forsaking his old identity and this is especially clear in rituals and explanations which indicate belief in an acolyte's mystical death and resurrection (Eliade, 1964:76).

The death and resurrection theme points to the rite of passage aspect, mentioned previously, of the possession experience. The separation of the person from his old relationship with his society concludes with a new social and personal identity. His new relationship with his society may be expressed in terms of his marriage to, or kinship with, spirits, after his resurrection. He may then be inducted into a possession cult or considered a shaman. Such terms and roles help to define the person's changed identity. However, many possessed individuals do not obtain 'specialist'

³ cited in Bourguignon (1965:41).

status and consequently what is termed here as "new identity" is, for these people, less clearly defined. Nevertheless, union with a superior power always has implications for self-definition, and identity, symbolized in the death and resurrection theme.

As for the problem of identifying a phenomenon as a case of possession, it seems that there are no signs or symptoms of possession which automatically validate such an interpretation. Lewis concludes that "whether or not people are actually in a trance, they are only 'possessed' when they consider they are, and when other members of their society endorse this claim" (1971: 65) and Shorter shares this view (1970: 112). But Lewis includes drug-induced trance under the heading of possession which suggests that subjective interpretation alone is sufficient evidence for possession. Presumably a person who concludes that his drug experiences were authentic possessions supplies an interpretation which receives very limited, if any, support from his community. It is assumed here that subjective interpretation alone is all that is needed to classify certain phenomena as possession in cases where possession has direct personal, and not social, consequence.

The process of the possession experience has been divided into two stages, the second of which is the most important because it constitutes the definitive experience. The first, or initiatory phase of reluctance and suffering, is significant when followed by transcendence or ecstasy proper. During the initiatory phase the individual is not responsible for his condition - this is the result of the activity of a spirit. To an extent this abdication of responsibility is also characteristic of the

second phase of possession but some element of choice may exist at this stage. At least, this is suggested by the fact that the individual "submits". The description of possession offered here constitutes a model which can be compared to romantic love as it is for women. Within this model, and necessary for the production of religious ecstasy, are cultural beliefs which attest to the superiority of certain beings who are able to possess ordinary mortals. Such a doctrine of superiority must also form the cultural background for romantic love if this form of love is a possession experience for women.

In fact women generally do consider men to be superior beings, in relation to themselves, and women are socialized to want to be possessed by men perceived as Gods. Love, for women, is depicted in literature as a mystical vocation in which women offer themselves to superior beings to be possessed. The heightened psychic state they experience is described as ecstatic in romantic fiction.

The process of 'Falling in love' is often described as having two stages in much fiction. The first phase is comparable to the initiatory stage of spirit possession. A woman is much attracted to a superior sort of man and this causes her some degree of suffering. Although she attempts to maintain control of her emotions she is helpless against the powerful attractiveness of the hero. Her thoughts are dominated by images of her lover. During this stage she comes to the awesome realization that she is "in love" and realizes that no amount of will-power can rescue her from this state. In this sense she is like the spirit-possessed person - she is not

responsible for her condition. The final phase of this fictional romance is characterized by a kiss in which the heroine feels herself to be possessed and mutual love is declared. This embrace is described in extravagant terms and, apparently, it signals a "state of altered consciousness" for the heroine. This model for love is comparable to the process of religious ecstasy: the description of the process, and its interpretation, are alike in both cases.

Simone de Beauvoir, while examining love as it is for women, connects love and mysticism in the following manner. Love is assumed to be a vocation for women and as such demands a total gift of self and dedication to the object of love. In this, there occurs an element of exaltation, especially since de Beauvoir assumes that a woman's love is directed towards a man in order to seek God in him (de Beauvoir, 1970:630). The woman who is a true mystic seeks to adore only God.⁴ But women who choose either category of experience are similar in their search for ecstasy. Both offer themselves to a master in order to transcend their own existence. This is ecstasy. It is presented, in literature, at least, as an intense mystical experience and as such has meaning. It is not merely heightened feeling or over-indulgence in emotion. We must judge it by its consequences, which give self-definition to a participant. How long this stance may be maintained is another question altogether. Certainly the experience of ecstasy itself is momentary and if a mystical integrative system does not exist the consequences of the experience are lessened and the new identity will begin to seem false. A struggle to maintain this new position

⁴ Simone de Beauvoir thinks the female mystic is motivated by a desire to be united with an omnipotent male God, and a feeling of identification with a suffering and degraded Christ. See Simone de Beauvoir (1970:630-38).

ensues and this struggle's success is dependent upon the extent to which the idea of the particular male's superiority can be preserved.⁵

De Beauvoir provides an analysis of this struggle: "the woman who finds pleasure in submitting to male caprices also admires the evident action of a sovereign free being in the tyranny practiced on her. It must be noted that if for some reason the lover's prestige is destroyed, his blows and demands become odious" and "This transforming power of love explains why it is that men of prestige who know how to flatter feminine vanity will arouse passionate attachments even if they are quite lacking in physical charm. Because of their lofty position they embody the Law and the Truth" (1970:613 and 618).

⁵ The difficulty for the woman of preserving a self-created image of her lover's superiority is excellently described by E. M. Forster (1959:3-27). After a romantic interlude in a garden with Paul, a young student, Helen, a naive intellectual who thinks she is in love (since her feelings when embraced were so intense), cannot maintain this position. In a conversation with her sister Margaret she describes the intrusion of mundane affairs upon romance, and the effect of Paul's frailty upon her affection for him:

"It was over at once."

"How, Helen?"

"I was still happy while I dressed, but as I came downstairs I got nervous, and when I went into the dining room I knew it was no good. There was Evie - I can't explain - managing the tea-urn, and Mr. Wilcox reading the Times."

"Was Paul there?"

"Yes; and Charles was talking to him about Stocks and Shares, and he looked frightened."

By slight indications the sisters could convey much to each other. Margaret saw horror latent in the scene, and Helen's next remark did not surprise her. "Somehow, when that kind of man looks frightened it is too awful. It is all right for us to be frightened, or for men of another sort - Father, for instance; but for men like that!"

"...Paul was so broad shouldered; all kinds of extraordinary things made it worse, and I knew that it would never do - never."

(Forster, 1959:25-26)

De Beauvoir rejects the hypothesis that women who seek a superior man do so because such a man is a father figure. She points out that the father is attractive because he is a man: "he dazzles the girl child and every man shares in the magical power" (1970: 606).

Although women tend to seek the safety of childhood and like being called "baby" and so on, it is by the exercise of choice in the face of restriction that women attempt to define themselves:

Shut up in the sphere of the relative, destined to the male from childhood, habituated to seeing in him a superb being whom she cannot possibly equal, the woman who has not repressed her claim to humanity will dream of transcending her being toward one of these superior beings, of amalgamating herself with the sovereign subject. There is no other way out for her than to love herself, body and soul, in him who is represented to her as the absolute, as the essential. Since she is anyway doomed to dependence, she will prefer to serve a god rather than obey tyrants - parents, husband or protector. She chooses to desire her enslavement so ardently that it will seem to her the expression of her Liberty; she will try to rise above her situation as inessential object by fully accepting it; through her flesh, her feelings, her behaviour, she will enthrone him as supreme value and reality; she will humble herself to nothingness before him.

(de Beauvoir, 1970: 604)

De Beauvoir does not mean that husbands, when perceived as Gods, are not tyrants. On the contrary, this situation of tyranny is what provokes the romantic love response in its present idealized form. Woman "humbles herself to nothingness" in a process of unification with "the absolute" and as a consequence she experiences a heightened psychic state.⁶ Although this ecstasy may be highly erotic, as is much religious ecstasy,

⁶ For numerous descriptions of this experience see Simone de Beauvoir (1970: 603-629).

it cannot be dismissed as a spiritual metaphor for orgasm. In fact sexual intercourse is often described as ecstasy because the experience is interpreted within the meaning offered by the romantic love concept. For example: "When she receives her beloved, woman is dwelt in, visited, as was the Virgin by the Holy Ghost, as the believer by the Host. This is what explains the obscene [sic] resemblance between pious hymns and erotic songs; it is not that mystical love always has a sexual character, but that the sexuality of the woman in love is tinged with mysticism" (de Beauvoir, 1970:610). It should be remembered that the ecstasy which makes this kind of love romantic is related to a particular kind of social situation in which women are discriminated against both ideologically and psychologically.

De Beauvoir's interpretation of love and sexuality as mystical does not ignore the fact that women give themselves to be possessed, ecstatically, in a milieu of inequality. Women are socialized to want this experience and the production of ecstasy is related to women's perception of the different states of being and status separating male from female. This desire on the part of women is a response to a particular social situation in which women cannot accept the societal definition of themselves and seek to become equal to men by unifying themselves, ecstatically, with men.

As we shall see, women who seek romantic love, who have 'no other way out', are in a social position similar to that of members of possession cults. Far from being an anachronism which has persisted in literature and film, the concept of romantic love is dependent upon, and interwoven with, other social realities.

The theory that possession itself is a compensation for lack of privilege and status is formulated most fully by Ioan Lewis (1971). He asks "How does the incidence of ecstasy relate to the social order? Is possession an entirely arbitrary and ideosyncratic affair; or are particular social categories of person more or less likely to be possessed" (1971:27-28)? While exploring the connection between mystical transcendent experience and social position, Lewis offers considerable evidence to support his thesis that individuals within relatively powerless strata of society are those most likely to experience possession. According to Lewis this occurs also on the level of societies: ecstasy is produced most frequently in oppressed societies such as colonies.

Although Lewis draws his most detailed examples of possession from Somali society, since his field work was done among the Somali, this is supplemented by an enormous amount of documentation, descriptive of this mystical experience as it is found globally. From this evidence he notes that spirit possession is widespread among women but that even women's possession cults include a minority membership composed of men. These "are downtrodden categories of men who are subject to strong discrimination in rigidly stratified societies" (Lewis, 1971: 32) and their presence provides grounds for refuting those arguments which claim that women have a genetically derived propensity to experience hysteria or, more properly, ecstasy:

...the circumstances which encourage the ecstatic response are precisely those where men feel themselves constantly threatened by exacting pressures which they do not know how to combat or control, except through those heroic flights of ecstasy by which they seek to demonstrate that they are the equals of the gods. Thus if enthusiasm is a retort to oppression and repression, what it seeks to proclaim is man's triumphant mastery of an intolerable environment.

(Lewis, 1971:35)

He therefore concludes that the important variable is social position and not sex.

Lewis makes a distinction between what he calls 'peripheral' and 'central' possession cults. Peripheral possession cults are those which involve spirits which 'play no direct part in upholding the moral code of the societies in which they receive so much attention' (Lewis, 1971:32) and in which such spirits often originate from another neighboring society. Central cults or religions, which Lewis also calls 'main morality possession religions' (1971:32), are those which involve "sternly moralistic mystical powers" which "uphold and sustain public morality" (1971:34). Peripheral members of society, e.g., low status men and women in general, are most likely to form the membership of peripheral possession cults while people of higher status are more likely to become members of central possession cults. However the status of persons who belong to each cult is not the result of the "appeal" of the different spirits. Central possession cults often exclude women, for example, from the full exercise of religious vocation. This distinction between peripheral and central possession cults must be mentioned in order to correctly present Lewis' point of view vis-a-vis social position and possession but we are not about to draw an exact parallel between women in peripheral cults and women in romantic love.

It is sufficient to note the prevalence of people of low social position among the victims of possession.

Referring to the work of Yap (1960 and 1969) and Rycroft (1968), Lewis mentions the psychological preconditions which facilitate ecstatic experience, i.e., submissiveness, dependence, a feeling of insignificance, and so on. One would expect

these characteristics to be most prevalent in a low-status and relatively powerless segment of society. Although these traits are typically feminine, they too result from social position and not gender membership. For example, women in North America are certainly submissive and dependent in relation to men because they are socialized in a manner appropriate to their social position (Bem and Bem, 1971:90).

Women in North America are members of a low-status group and they share the psychological attributes of people who experience possession. They are also attracted to the romantic love experience.

The definition of romantic love as ecstasy contributes to an understanding of the quite different motivations men and women have for engaging in affectional relationships and marriage. Men are more likely than women to stress sexual interests, while women deem romantic love to be of greater importance than do men (Burgess and Wallin, 1953: 669; Burgess et al, 1963:368).⁷ Women are also more likely to hold a romantic love moral which considers sexual activity appropriate only when partners are "in love" and this attitude is significantly correlated with sex and not with other factors such as class (Israel and Eliason, 1972:73). De Beauvoir thinks that because of their existential position, women do see themselves as objects, especially in the sex act, and that romantic love beliefs are necessary to transmute the woman's being from object of prey to something of rare worth (1970:609-611). And Collins (1971), when developing his thesis concerning the basis of sexual stratification in various types of societies, acknowledges that romantic sexual repression is in the

⁷ cited by Randall Collins (1971: 14).

economic interest of women as a strategy for bargaining for the wealth and position which can only be obtained through association, preferably permanent, with men. Certainly sexual repression as strategy has traditionally been recognized as being in the economic interest of women. This assumption lies behind much of the advice given to young girls. The reason women, rather than men, hold a romantic love moral is, however, not only due to the fact that women are discriminated against in the economic sphere. It is related more strongly, as de Beauvoir indicates, to the broad social context in which these beliefs occur, and in which women are thought, and consider themselves to be, inferior to men.

After establishing the connection between social position and ecstasy Lewis attempts to answer the question "What does ecstasy offer them" (1971:28)? He thinks that in what he calls male-dominated societies the relationship between the sexes is one of conflict and that possession is an instance of "oblique redressive strategy" (1971:88). A possessed woman may demand gifts from her husband while insulting him in language she would not dare to use in her ordinary state. For example, Gananath Obeyesekere records the case of a Sinhalese woman whose possessing spirit demanded toddy, (which was given), and expressed a desire to kill her husband (1970: 97-111). Obeyesekere concludes, and Lewis would agree, that the woman was projecting her desires onto the demon. This incident is an example of what Lewis calls the redress of grievances (1967:626) which occurs primarily in peripheral possession. A possessed individual can get things which are tangible, i.e., gifts, or intangible, i.e., the therapeutic release of unacceptable emotions.

The main opponent of Lewis' 'sex war' theory is Peter Wilson who, in his reply to Lewis' 1966 Malinowski Lecture, uses data cited by Lewis to support his own claim that spirit possession is correlated with conflict and competition between members of the same sex (1967:366). He argues that women in male-dominated societies do not feel deprived in relation to men because they do not compete for the same goals and rewards (1967:368). In Wilson's view, women compete with each other for status as women. Women who are threatened by their husbands' acquisition of a new wife, for example, are likely to become possessed, unless the socio-cultural situation defines the new wife's position as inferior to that of the older wife. Wilson concludes that such possession functions to confirm the first wife's status. However, Lewis' theory does not state that women are competing with men for male roles and hence feel deprived when they cannot obtain similar 'goals and rewards'. Referring to his use of the term "sex war", Lewis states: "I used this in the widest possible sense to include all categories of competition and conflict related to, or arising from a nexus of relations between the sexes"... "and my point was specifically that where women are not in a position to press their demands explicitly and effectively in secular terms they are likely to resort to mystical modes of ventilating grievances" (1967:626). Therefore, although Wilson would not agree, his proposition is not incompatible with Lewis' sex war theory. In fact, Lewis makes just this point: "I do not dispute that competition between women for men, or even men for women, may also be involved and I welcome this extension of the argument. But I do hold that these conflicts often become mutually entangled..." (1967:627).

For our purposes the most important conflict is the psychological conflict experienced by the victim of possession. Lewis' statement that "women are not in a position to press their demands" is pertinent to this point of view. For we may also infer that women are not conscious of the real nature of their grievances and of their own desires. In the example of possession cited by Obeyesekere, a woman demanded toddy but it would be a superficial interpretation of this situation if one concluded that this is what the woman desired. Even in the release of the trance state it is possible that the woman's needs were expressed in symbolic form. Obeyesekere thinks that this case of possession was a way of dealing with inner psychological conflicts arising from the social and personal situation of the victim.

Since low status is causally related to possession, what people "get" from ecstasy is certainly related to the desires which are likely to occur in low-status and relatively oppressed groups. And such desires are not only directed towards possibilities open to members of such groups as Wilson thinks. People within low-status groups also yearn for what is perceived as possible within the context of thought known as fantasy. Possessed individuals are not the pragmatists that Wilson would have them be.

This is especially so in the case of romantic love. Women who "give themselves" to be possessed by a man do gain exaltation and happiness. They "get" enhanced identity and gain feelings of self-worth. This is the model found in many love stories. But this experience is based upon a reality construction which cannot be stabilized. In this sense ecstatic love is different from spirit possession. The possessing god, in romantic love, soon appears to be an ordinary mortal and the contradictions

are too great to be overlooked. This is why love stories end with the "psychedelic kiss". Spirit possession often results in a new social role for a possessed individual, but a person who has experienced ecstatic love only gains such a role through marriage. The role of "lover" is socially inconsequential in North America. Despite the fact that romantic love is similar to spirit possession, and appeals to people in a social position similar to that of members of possession cults, the parallel cannot be too finely drawn.

However, by comparing both kinds of experience, and their similarities, it is possible to gain insight into the experiential meaning of romantic love. Since this study of romantic love has limited itself to discovering how romantic love operates in relation to women, the parallel drawn here is illuminating. Both kinds of experiences, spirit possession and romantic love, are mystical modes of dealing with oppression. Romantic love does, in Lewis' term, constitute a kind of revolt, but it is not directed against men. It is directed away from the limitations of social position and towards the enhanced self-definition provided by ecstatic unification with a superior being.

The feminine preoccupation with romantic love, indicated by the content of much popular fiction geared to women readers, is related to women's dissatisfaction with their own identities. And their conception of themselves is, of course, related to their social position.

The interpretation of romantic love as compensation is supported by an analysis of the social factors which provided a setting for courtly love.

In his article entitled "The Social Causation of the Courtly Love Complex" (1959), Herbert Moller attempts to isolate the causational factors present in areas where courtly love flourished. He uses as examples 11th century Muslim Spain, 12th century south-western France, and late 12th and early 13th century southern Germany (1959: 140). He departs from the usual method of 'explaining' courtly love by referring to the various philosophical influences which contributed to courtly literature. Instead he examines the social situation in each of the above regions and notes that in these areas, at the time when courtly love was popular, the sex ratio within the upper classes was imbalanced due to migration and upward mobility.

In regions where influx into the ranks of the nobility was taking place, courtly love flourished, and in regions with a fixed or closed nobility, the courtly love complex was weak. Since upward mobility was only possible for men, this influx created a surplus of men in the lower upper-class. These newcomers could not marry women who were beneath them in social status. The usual consequence of hypogamy was the immediate and permanent loss of social status for the man and also "public opinion and usage insisted that a marriage to a woman of lower social status necessarily depressed the status of the issue from this union" (Moller, 1959: 155). Men with ignoble backgrounds needed to consolidate their position, and women were free to marry beneath their rank, so it is not surprising that historical records from the time show men to be hypergamous.

Despite the fact that entry into the upper class was possible, arrivals were in a shaky position. They had managed to attain a measure of success but they were

considered upstarts by their social betters. Added to their difficulties was the fact that they had to marry upwards when few women of high status were available.

The difficulties of this situation are evident and are mirrored in courtly writing: "the symbolic contents of courtly poetry expressed not only amatory discontent and hope of marrying upwards, but it also reflected the strains and stresses of the whole life situation of the knightly class (Moller, 1959: 159). In this respect the persons who were the most likely to follow the courtly code and produce its literature were in a situation similar to that of Western women who are also aware that their status is dependant, legally and socially, upon marriage. Women cannot usually make claims to social superiority upon their own merits.

In addition to this, women are in a situation which produces anxiety since feelings of self-worth are dependent upon male approval just as the minnesingers were dependent upon recognition by great ladies.

Moller concludes that, in the case of courtly poetry, "The unconscious symbolic significance of the lowly poet's aspiration should be seen in the desire for approval by an unquestioned authority figure who is able not only to judge the knight, but also to raise his self-respect, even despite his shortcomings and in the face of all rivals and detractors" (1959: 160). This sounds much like the conclusions of this thesis in reference to romantic love in relation to women.

Moller's interpretation of courtly love as generating from the anxiety-ridden social and personal situation of young knights suggests that an attraction for

love as compensation is not importantly correlated with gender membership. That is, the present feminine interest in romantic love, indicated by a female-oriented literature consisting of love stories, is not the result of feminine "emotionalism". Like the case of spirit possession, the important variable here is social position.

Conclusion

We have described the pattern of love in Harlequin Romances and have attempted to explain the significance of this phenomenon in terms of the social position of women.

Love in these novels operates in cases where the hero is of elevated social status in relation to the heroine. The hero's superior status is associated with his other romantic characteristics - his powerful sexual attractiveness, and his masterful personality. Because of the sexual inequality associated with the operation of romantic love, eroticism in the books tends to drift towards sado-masochism. In this way, what might be perceived as actual brutality on the part of the hero, is actually transformed into a rather thrilling 'punishment'. And the objectification of the female as a subject being underlies many recurring instances of narcissism.

Romantic love morality relating to premarital intercourse is justified by the depiction of love in the books. The virginal heroine is always more desirable than a less virtuous woman. Like the subtitle of Pamela, "virtue rewarded", describes these novels in which the romantic hero rewards the pure virgin with his love.

When finally the spunky heroine submits to the masterful hero and experiences ecstasy during the 'psychedelic kiss', she gains feelings of 'belonging' and identity. Her characteristic initial lack of status and identity is supplied by her amalgamation with the hero.

The concept of romantic love is related to its social setting in which sexual inequality exists and is justified by the belief that men are superior to women. Love in the books endows this inequality with a romantic mystique. For deprived, dissatisfied women, the hope is offered that some day a huge, arrogant baron will transform their life by making submission exciting in true Harlequin Romance fashion.

By showing that romantic love and spirit possession are similar in terms of their psychological dynamics and that, despite cultural differences, they attract people from the same social category, we have offered an interpretation of romantic love as compensation for deprivation.

This study has been bounded by our intention and by no means claims to offer a complete treatment of the subject of romantic love. However, the compensation theory of possession applied to romantic love does offer interesting insights into the problem of romantic love in relation to women.

We hope it has been made clear that romantic love is much more than a simple human emotion and that this form of love is culturally derived and is a response to a particular kind of social milieu.

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Harlequin Romances

All books listed below are published by Harlequin Books:

Titles within the sample are indicated by an asterisk:

Airlie, Catherine.

1968 The Green Rushes. Winnipeg

1969 The Last of the Kintyres. Winnipeg

1968 Nobody's Child. Winnipeg.

Arbor, Jane.

1973 The Flower on the Rock. Toronto.

Armstrong, Juliet.

1968 Isle of the Humming-Bird. Winnipeg.

1971 Orange Blossom. Toronto

* 1969 Wind Through the Vineyards. Winnipeg.

Ashton, Elizabeth.

1971 Cousin Mark. Toronto.

Barnie, Susan.

1967 Rose in the Bud. Winnipeg.

*Bevan, Gloria.

1970 The Distant Trap. Winnipeg.

Blair, Kathryn.

1972 Mayenga Farm. Toronto.

1971 No Other Haven. Winnipeg.

Britt, Katrina.

1971 The Fabulous Island. Winnipeg.

* 1973 The Gentle Flame. Toronto.

1972 A Spray of Edelweiss. Toronto.

Burchell, Mary.

1971 But Not for Me. Toronto.

1972 Meant for Each Other. Toronto.

- Burchell, Mary.
1971 Take Me With You. Toronto.
- *Burghley, Rose.
1967 A Quality of Magic.
- Chace, Isobel.
1969 The Damask Rose.
1971 The Flowering Cactus. Winnipeg.
1966 The Japanese Lantern. Winnipeg.
- * 1972 To Marry a Tiger. Winnipeg.
1972 The Wealth of the Islands. Toronto.
- Clemence, Ruth.
1972 Happy with Either. Toronto.
- Danbury, Iris.
1969 Hotel Belvedere. Winnipeg.
1972 Jacaranda Island. Toronto.
- * 1968 Rendesvous in Lisbon. Winnipeg.
- *Dingwell, Joyce.
1970 I and My Heart. Winnipeg
1972 Red Ginger Blossom. Toronto.
- Donnelly, Jane.
1972 A Stranger Came. Toronto
- * 1970 Take the Far Dream. Winnipeg.
- Doyle, Amanda.
1971 Dilemma At Dulloora. Toronto.
- * 1972 Escape to Koolonga. Toronto
1972 Kookaburra Dawn. Toronto.
- *Fenwick, Patricia.
1968 Dream Come True. Winnipeg.

- Gillen, Lucy.
1972 My Beautiful Heathen. Toronto.
- Hampson, Anne.
1971 Eternal Summer. Winnipeg.
1972 Gold is the Summer. Toronto.
1973 The Rebel Bride. Toronto.
- Hilton, Margery.
1971 Trust in Tomorrow. 1971
- Hoy, Elizabeth.
1969 Be More Than Dreams. Winnipeg.
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- Kidd, Flora.
1967 Whistle and I'll Come. Winnipeg.
1971 The Dazzle on the Sea. Toronto.
- *Lane, Roumelia.
1969 A Summer to Love. Winnipeg.
- Malcolm, Margaret.
1972 Not Less Than All. Toronto.
1972 This Tangled Web. Toronto.
- Mather, Anne.
1972 Masquerade. Toronto.
1972 The Reluctant Governess. Winnipeg.
- Neels, Betty.
1972 Victory for Victoria. Toronto.
- Peake, Lillian.
1973 The Real Thing. Toronto.
- *Pressley, Hilda.
1971 A Summer to Remember. Toronto.

- Reid, Henrietta.
1971 The Made Marriage. Toronto
- Rome, Margaret.
1972 Chateau of Flowers. Toronto.
- Seale, Sara.
1972 The English Tutor. Toronto.
1969 The Truant Spirit. Winnipeg.
- Shore, Juliet.
1969 The Listening Palms. Winnipeg.
1972 Tree of Promise. Toronto.
- Smith, Doris E.
1970 Seven of Magpies. Winnipeg.
- Starr, Kate.
1971 The Enchanted Trap. Toronto.
- Summers, Essie.
1965 Bride in Flight. Winnipeg.
1967 A Place Called Paradise. Winnipeg
* 1971 Sweet Are the Ways. Winnipeg.
- Thian, Valerie.
1971 "O Kiss Me, Kate". Toronto.
- Thorpe, Kay.
1943 Olive Island. Toronto
- *Way, Margaret.
1971 The Man From Bahl Bahla. Winnipeg.
- * 1969 The Time of the Jacaranda. Winnipeg.
- *Winspear, Violet.
1969 Court of The Veils. Winnipeg.
1973 Dear Puritan. Toronto.
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