

THE PARODY OF ROMANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

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In Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature, Janice A. Radway studies the romance formula, identifying a set of generic criteria which offer its readers escapist purposes. Christian writers have established their own formula on the romance. In my thesis, I look at the parallel formulas found in secular and inspirational romance fiction, searching how inspirational romance evangelizes and gives spiritual instruction to its readers.

Secular romance creates stories which explore the idea of everlasting love. They create a relationship between a flawed hero and innocent heroine who fall in love at first sight; out of this imperfect relationship forms a perfect love. Inspirational romance manipulates this premise, creating a parody of secular romance. How can perfect love be found in imperfect beings? Inspirational romance creates a split-focus. The characters find perfect love only in Jesus Christ, making this relationship primary to the love relationship between hero and heroine.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In her 1984 book, Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature, Janice Radway studies the romance genre and its popularity, surveying a small population of women from the mid-west town of “Smithton.” In her study, she develops the “Narrative Logic of the Romance,” a thirteen-step formula found in what her readers consider the best-sold romances of the 20th Century. In this formula, the heroine meets the hero amidst certain diverse situations causing conflicts to develop between the two characters to create sexual tension and a deepening commitment to one another; eventually, this tension-filled commitment allows the heroine to respond to the hero sexually and emotionally, producing a happy ending.

The climax of the formula greatly focuses on the consummation of the relationship between the hero and heroine, offering the reader explicit sex scenes to include rape/rape-like scenes. Radway develops these comprehensive generic criteria, based on what romance readers enjoy reading, using the stereotypical images found in the romance genre to discuss the importance of the escapist purpose of these novels.

Breaking from this generation of the secular romance novel and explicit sex scenes, Christian writers have created a sub-genre: inspirational romance fiction or Christian romance. The new sub-genre typically parallels Radway’s formula on the romance, but it offers a seemingly more conservative version. It excludes explicit sex

and rape scenes, implying that sex should only occur within the bonds of marriage. Furthermore, this relationship runs secondary to the faith relationship the characters must first find with Jesus. The purpose is two-fold: these novels continue to offer escapism, but their primary focus is evangelism and spiritual instruction.

So, who reads this sub-genre, and exactly what do they gain from this type of fiction? Ideally, based on the aforementioned two-fold purpose, the readership of this sub-genre should be those women within the population who are considered non-Christians; realistically, the readership of this sub-genre relies on women within American Evangelical Protestant Culture - Christian women.

Rebecca Kaye Barrett finds that these novels “provide comfort, relaxation, encouragement, challenges, and spiritual reassurances that, with faith, everything can turn out well for those who love the Lord” (8). In 2003, Barrett surveyed over one hundred women and found that many of them experience an emotional and spiritual transformation when reading inspirational romance. Her findings beg the question – at what point does spiritual instruction enter the novel? Specifically, how can Christian doctrine instruct its readers in the mores of Christian life when its roots are so strongly intertwined in the genre that claims truth in immediate sexual pleasure as long as it’s “love at first sight”? To begin to answer this question, I read several different types of inspirational romance novels, creating a list of items that parallel Radway’s findings. My findings establish inspirational romance fiction as maintaining its own formula.

To summarize, as a rule, the formula for this sub-genre requires two plots to work within each novel – the physical plot (love relationship between the man and

woman) and the spiritual plot (the love relationship between God and man). The conflict between good and evil emphasizes positive Christian living, establishing the main themes in the novels – forgiveness, trust, hope, love and family. Authors utilize a character(s) who acts as mentor(s) or surrogate to the heroes and heroines to aid in their journey toward each other and toward God.

During the primary stages of plot development, in the majority of the novels, the heroine experiences some sort of loss – emotional struggles, such as an estrangement between herself and the community or a physical death – leaving the heroine isolated. Her conversion experience stems from this loss and relies on both the hero's spiritual knowledge and teaching, and the heroine's desire to come to know more about the Bible and its teaching. Usually, if the characters use any scripture at this point, the majority originates in the Old Testament; the characters introduce New Testament scripture as the heroine draws closer to the conversion experience. Any spiritual imagery and/or symbols ideally allow the reader to focus on the heavenly - a higher power.

CHAPTER II

INSPIRATIONAL ROMANCE FORMULA

Two plots work within each of the novels, each character-driven – that of the love relationship between the man and the woman (the physical) and the love relationship between God and man (the spiritual). More often than not, the spiritual relationship must be worked out first in the characters so that when the physical relationship occurs, no barriers exist between the characters. In order for the heroine to understand her need of the spiritual relationship, many of the authors place their heroines in situations where a death occurs – most of the time literal, sometimes figurative - and they are left alone. Their overwhelming need for companionship and guidance sets the stage for arranged marriages to the eventual hero – convenient in that they offer something for both the hero and the heroine devoid of sex initially.

Formal marriages run counter to the standard romance formula where characters enter into a less formal relationship that includes sex. Radway claims “this structural device insures that the heroine and hero function as the single, dynamic center of the novels” (123). Inspirational romance manipulates the “center” of the novel making the spiritual relationship between the heroine and God central and the relationship between man and woman secondary.

In Janette Oke’s Love Comes Softly (1979), during the pioneer days, Marty and Clem travel west to obtain land for farming when he tragically dies. Marty, left alone,

must fend for herself on the outskirts of town. The community comes together for the funeral, and a man, Clark Davis, approaches her proposing marriage. His wife died leaving him with a toddler. He needs a mother for Missie, and Marty needs a place to live until the spring. Marty enters a celibate marriage with Clark. Her sense of loss moves the plot into motion bringing about the spiritual as well as the physical climax.

However, the spiritual climax does not happen until the last few pages of the novel. Marty's spiritual climax, found on page 166, occurs at a church service on Easter Sunday. She spent months in Clark's house listening to his morning devotional, working at raising his child, yet never touching him as a wife. Only when she hears the story of Christ's crucifixion and then his resurrection does she experience her own conversion. "Marty's heart was torn as she listened to the words... He personally took the punishment for her sins, as well as for the sins of all mankind, [it] was a startling and sobering discovery" (166). She repents and asks the Lord to come into her heart. She reaches over and clasps Clark's hand somehow indicating to him that she now shared "his God" (167). Shortly after this spiritual climax, the physical climax occurs and Marty and Clark consummate their relationship. Marty "reached out and took his sleeve. He turned to her. She could only look at him, imploring him to read in her eyes what she could not say with her lips" (188). Looking at this novel structurally, the physical climax actually occurs in the denouement while in the standard romance novel the physical (sexual) climax actually occurs only when the hero declares his love to the heroine, which takes place a little over halfway through the novel. "The heroine responds sexually and emotionally" (Radway 134). This act solidifies the heroine's

identity in relation to the hero and thus concludes the novel. Ideally, “the romance’s conclusion promises her (the heroine) that if she learns to read male behavior successfully, she will find that her needs for fatherly protection, motherly care, and passionate adult love will be satisfied perfectly” (Radway 149). This perfect satisfaction and fulfillment between hero and heroine is never promised in inspirational romance, rather true fulfillment comes only in the relationship between the heroine and God.

Stranded in Paradise (2002), by Lori Copeland parallels Love Comes Softly. The main character, Tess Nelson, has been estranged from her mother, Mona. This emotional loss between mother and daughter follows Tess throughout the novel. Her emotional state becomes central to her spiritual climax, thus affecting her physical climax with Carter McConnell, the hero.

The story, set mainly in Hawaii, becomes the teaching ground through which Carter shares Christ with Tess. However, not until Tess returns home to Denver does she fully realize her need to make amends with her mother, forgiving her for her past. Once Tess has accomplished this through prayer and action, she seems to be given a second chance. She finds salvation before she leaves for a job interview; on her knees, she prays “I want the faith and assurance as I leave this room today that my life is no longer temporal, but eternal, in Your service” (233). Tess claims that “when she got on that plane to Hawaii her life had been in shambles, and look what God had done” (235). Her renewed sense of spirit brings her closer to the physical climax.

Because Carter and Tess are not already married, their physical climax transpires when they voice their love and commitment for one another; “He leaned

slightly to kiss the tip of her nose. The gesture promised a lifetime of commitment. ‘I love you, Tess Nelson’” (239). She realizes that only through “His grace,” God’s grace, could this physical love relationship take place (239). As the novel comes to a close, Carter and Tess walk arm-in-arm, deciding the courtship will last at least a year as they get to know each other better. Simultaneously, Copeland places the physical climax in conjunction with the denouement and leaves the readers to assume their relationship ends “happily ever after.”

In the secular romance novel, the authors usually characterize the denouement by not only a verbal admission of the love shared between the hero and heroine but also a sexual admission. Radway asserts that “it becomes essential that she [the heroine] learn to distinguish those who want her sexually from that special individual who is willing to pledge commitment and care in return for her sexual favor” (140).

In Lucy Monroe’s 3 Brides for 3 Bad Boys (2005), three vignettes that tell the story of three brothers, the first characters, Rand Sloane, the hero, and Phoebe Garrison, the heroine, cut a deal. She, a virgin, gets one week in his bed in exchange for an uninhabited island off the coast of Mexico, which he needs for his business. Mid-week she tries to call the deal off because she has fallen in love with him and realizes he cannot truly love her because of his past. She wants a lifetime commitment in return for the week. He resolves the conflict by declaring his love for her; “I want to sleep with you every night for the rest of our lives, but I want so much more than that, baby. I want

your friendship. You've been the most important person in my life for four years, and I didn't even realize it" (87). Phoebe finds that man Radway speaks about and the scene closes: "They made love with a fierce passion that superceded even what they had known before, and her completion sent her into a dead faint" (88). This scene counters Tess and Carter's love scene where commitment is promised in the very modest gesture of a brief kiss on the tip of her nose. Copeland places more attention on Tess' spiritual conversion than on Carter's admission of love, making the focus of her novel spiritual.

Woven into inspirational romance's plot structure is the major conflict, the battle between good and evil. In many of the novels, the heroine struggles not only with the physical/emotional death of someone, but she also struggles with a physical evil. This is the case in Wild Rose by Ruth Axtell Morren (2004), a historical romance set in the fishing town of Haven's End. Because both of her parents have passed, Geneva becomes a fisherwoman, donning men's overalls, in order to make a living. Since her work is not considered the acceptable norm in Haven's End, she isolates herself from others within the community, and in doing so runs the risk of being raped by the town's evildoer, Lucius Tucker.

Caleb Phelps, the novel's hero, and Mr. and Mrs. Stillman rally around her battle against Lucius. Caleb ends up marrying Geneva by novel's end, while the Stillmans seem to act as her surrogate parents or even her guardian angels. Mr. Stillman saves Geneva from Lucius, acting as a father to her, and Mrs. Stillman nurses Geneva back to health when she became ill.

Because inspirational romance novels tend to strongly support the roles and the power of the family unit as a whole, Morren must include the Stillmans because Geneva herself cannot make up her own family unit. She is alone in the world. She cannot fight against Lucius by herself, so others must come to her aid. This artificial family, made up of members in her community and parishioners of the local church, function as one of the catalysts in Geneva's life moving her closer toward the spiritual climax.

Other inspirational romance novels use characters as mentors, especially when family members cannot understand the heroine's struggle. In Robin Lee Hatcher's book Beyond the Shadows (2004), Deborah, the heroine, struggles with the death of her first husband, Andy. When she meets her second husband, Gideon, she fails to recognize him as an alcoholic until it's too late. Deborah's battle then becomes a fight against Gideon's alcoholism.

Deborah comes from a Christian home where drinking never was a problem. In fact, this conflict isolates Deborah from her family because she is the first one in her family to struggle with this issue and her family does not understand how to help. Alone, she turns to Janelle Burns, who becomes Deborah's mentor.

Deborah and Janelle work together at an accounting firm and eat their lunches together. Janelle states, "we talked about many things during those lunch hours, but my favorite topic of conversation was always the Lord" (103). Although Hatcher never mentions Janelle's age, Janelle seems ageless as she guides Deborah through Gideon's alcoholism to embrace God's comfort and peace.

Incidentally, most of the mentors found in inspirational romance fiction tend to be elderly women who have experience with the same struggles that affect the heroine. Mentors offer road maps of their life experiences to include scripture and spiritual teaching, guiding the heroine on her way. They act in stark contrast with the evil figures in the novels, who tend to offer hopelessness and immorality.

In Beyond the Shadows, alcohol acts as the evil ripping apart Deborah's family. It draws Gideon further and further away from his responsibilities as a husband and a father, and leads to a job loss and a nearly tragic accident that could have cost him the life of his child. Janelle understands Deborah's struggle because Janelle's younger brother, Willie, is an alcoholic as well. Willie accidentally killed someone in a barroom brawl and was sent to prison for it. He was only nineteen years old. In this tragic story, Hatcher redirects the focus from Willie's problem to Janelle's conversion, making her relationship with Christ the issue: "it was partly what happened to Willie that brought me to Christ... I don't know how anyone makes it without Jesus" (113-14). She brings evangelism to the forefront, making sure Deborah knows her testimony.

Many authors direct the mentors' conversations toward their personal testimony and biblical scripture. In Wild Rose, Morren uses a prolific amount of scripture through Geneva's mentor, Mrs. Bradford. As mentioned previously both Geneva's parents have died, so she has been living alone for quite sometime, focusing mainly on surviving. Caleb enters her life; a friendship begins as well as a seemingly complicated relationship. As with many of these novels, arguments erupt between the hero and

heroine, and Geneva says things to Caleb she later regrets. Geneva, unsure as to how to apologize, turns to Mrs. Bradford for help. Mrs. Bradford advises, “First, you go to your Father... Your Heavenly Father is God, the Father, our Creator. You must first tell Him of your wrong and ask His forgiveness. Then ask His help in making it right with the one you wronged” (98).

Mrs. Bradford follows this brief lesson in forgiveness with a lesson in how much God loves and cares for Geneva; although she never cites where she finds the scripture, she quotes from the New Testament books: Matthew 6:25 through 27, John 14:16, and John 16:6. These verses move from God’s knowledge and care for mankind, specifically Geneva, to gaining eternal life through Christ.

Just as inspirational romance employs mentors guiding the main characters’ lives, secular romance employs minor foil characters within their novels “who embody those features of the female and male personalities that must be eradicated if women and men are to continue to love each other and fill one another’s needs...its secondary characters...sketch a faint picture of male-female relationships characterized by suspicion and distrust in order to set off...[the] finished portrait of the perfect union” (Radway 131). These secondary characters negatively instruct the main characters on how to unsuccessfully love each other. In Sandra Brown’s Love’s Encore, Erica Hazelett plays the foil character. Selfish, protective, “artificial, phony” – she is the complete opposite of Camille who takes care and spends time with the people around her (68).

On the other hand, Mrs. Bradford gives instruction to Geneva as how to pray for forgiveness. Morren sets the prayer off using italics, as do many authors of inspirational romance. Other authors employ bold italics denoting the voice of Jesus. Jesus becomes an ethereal character, distinguished through scripture and spoken words. The authors sometimes cloak Jesus within nature, making his voice a gentle breeze or a quiet peace. If the characters listen and search for God in the novels, these techniques work, ringing true to the Christian faith. However, this makes keeping the faith sound so simple.

In Redeeming Love (1997), Francine Rivers uses italics, just as Morren does for the prayers the characters speak and also uses bold italics for Jesus' voice. Michael, a Christian farmer, sees Angel in the street one day and, prompted by Jesus, he takes her to be his wife:

Michael couldn't take his eyes off her. His heart beat faster and faster as she came near...

This one, beloved.

Michael felt a rush of adrenaline mingled with joy. *Lord. Lord!* (53)

Unbeknownst to him, Angel works as a high-paid prostitute. Rivers uses bold italics throughout the novel, portraying not only God's voice but also the conflict – the ever present battle between good and evil.

In her book, the conflict becomes spiritual in nature. Because the good in the novel carries a voice, the evil must have one as well. For Angel, Duke portrays the evil, the one who forced her into the life of prostitution. Rivers shows Duke's voice, albeit

only in Angel's head, through the use of bold font. This inner monologue, stemming from the pain and guilt lived in a horrible lifestyle, causes Angel to doubt Michael's love and her own self worth. Duke claims, "**There's still a way out**, came the dark voice, counseling her. **Tell him the worst of what you've done. Tell him about your father. That'll poison it ...** (279). The "it" the bold voice refers to represents Michael's unconditional love for Angel. In this battle, the bold voice wins and Angel confesses all to Michael, thinking that she will lose him forever.

Yet, her confession does not destroy their relationship; instead Michael responds tenderly to Angel, fighting against the monologue in Angel's head. She thinks "How could she of all women, be loved so much by a man like this? [She prays] *Oh, God, if you are there listening, why did you do this to him?* [God answers] ***For you, beloved***" (318). God's voice, in bold italics, and Michael's love erases the other voices in her head. Angel's inner conflict and Michael's outward portrayal of acceptance and forgiveness become the pervading themes found in the novel.

Both themes, as well as the dialogue created within many of these books between God and the characters, and evil and man, support and clarify the two-fold purpose of inspirational fiction - evangelism and spiritual instruction. Yet, not all inspirational fiction conveys the purpose in the same way. Some construct a more question/answer approach as found in Stranded in Paradise. In most all of these novels the heroines experience a sense of loss through death or estrangement; this in turn, as the authors unfold the plot, gives the heroines an opportunity to fill the void left open from that loss, but they must first find the desire to fill it.

In Stranded in Paradise, Tess approaches God rather logically, almost taking an inventory of her life. She has just lost her job, which was her whole life. She questions how to define the meaning of life - “Wasn’t there supposed to be a deeper meaning to all of this?... Did he [God] love some people more than he did others?... [Did] trusting in some mystical God keep you from having troubles?” (81, 86, 87). Carter answers these questions for her minus the scripture, “He loves us – without reservation” (111).

Furthermore, much of the scripture that Copeland mentions in the novel comes from Tess’ own childhood memories of attending church; they converge in direct correlation with her worrisome experiences in Hawaii. She remembers Matthew 6:26-27, the exact verse previously quoted in Wild Rose: “*Are you far more valuable to Him than the birds of the air? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?*” (204). These verses discuss the amazing value God imparts to man. It reminds the readers of their own relationships with God.

Still other inspirational romance novels give spiritual instruction on how to live the Christian life for those already considered Christians. These novels continue to follow the same formula, the difference being that both the heroes and heroines are Christians. In Lori Wick’s novel The Princess (1999), a modern-day fairy tale, the hero Prince Nikolai, loses his spouse as a result of a heart attack at a very young age. As part of the kingdom’s tradition, he must be married by the time he celebrates his twenty-sixth birthday to ensure the royal line. His marriage to Shelby becomes one of convenience, not of love. Both parties involved agree to the terms, understanding

initially that their roles as prince and princess overshadow their roles as husband and wife.

As the text unfolds, their relationship evolves. They practice their faith as Christians and begin to pray for each other and their relationship; they know the roles they must play as husband and wife if they believe what the Bible says. In fact, Shelby begins to realize that as a wife she must fulfill her obligation to Nikolai just as Nikolai must fulfill his obligation to her; she reads in First Corinthians 7:

The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again...
(201).

One chapter later, Shelby and Nikolai consummate their relationship, not out of love, but out of duty and lust.

Wick makes the act of making love unconventional, considering that implicit sexual intercourse found within most inspirational romance fiction is based on love. Furthermore, the act itself, working within the plot structure, usually implies either the physical climax within the novel or the denouement, but this is not the case in Wick's novel. Sex becomes more of a choice for the couple as did the marriage and as will love. Choice, then, becomes the pervading theme of the novel.

In standard romance, choice does not have any bearing on the decisions the characters make. They react on their irrational compulsion to “love at first sight,” setting the precedent to always follow their impulses. In Nan Ryan’s Cloudcastle (1987), a historical novel set in the Rockies during the time of settlers and Indians, the heroine Natalie Vallance and hero Kane Covington meet during an Indian raid.

Out of fear and loneliness, Natalie turns to Kane for comfort, passionately spending the night with him, regardless of the consequences - “never before had she surrendered so completely, so brazenly, to the fleshly delights of raw, uninhibited sex” (25). They had only known each other for a few hours, but Natalie feels she cannot control the power he has over her. The scene lasts for seven pages. Radway claims the “romance functions always as a utopian wish-fulfillment fantasy through which women try to imagine themselves as they often are not in day-to-day existence” (151). Fantasy has no room for the practicality of choice in the romance genre.

In inspirational romance, writers use practical fantasy, mixing reality and morality among fantastic plot sequences. In The Princess, Shelby comes to Nikolai after they have formed a friendship in their arranged marriage. Their sex scene counters Natalie and Kane’s scene in that Wick begins the scene with a kiss and ends the scene in half a page; much of what they do is implied.

Shelby was amazed at his gentle touch and found herself smiling up at him.

“I should have known you would be nice.”

Nikolai's smile matched her own. He spoke with his hand on her hair. "I should have known you would be amazingly soft."

Shelby laughed a little, thinking it was a lovely note to begin on. She was also very glad she had come (208).

Choice runs consistent with Christian doctrine - the idea of free will. A person makes a choice to accept or decline grace, the gift of salvation. Shelby chooses to accept Nikolai as her husband just as he makes the choice to love her, just as both of them chose to accept Christ in their lives before they met, before their story began. Shelby and Nikolai's relationship is successful because of the choices they made.

These rational decisions the characters make in inspirational romance can also be found in the broader genre of 'chick lit.' Single heroines search for their own identity and the meaning of life, but the center of the novel is not solely based on the love relationship between the man and woman. The writers may include sexual fantasy, but many times it's comically real and does not necessarily happen the way it would in a romance novel, or it's only found in their dreams. The women deal with the everyday struggles of the corporate world, creating to-do lists. The characters, fraught with embarrassing situations, have to learn to live with themselves and others. Oftentimes the heroines in these novels struggle with choosing to go on blind dates arranged by do-gooder family members and friends.

In Bridget Jones's Diary (1996), after much agonizing, Bridget accepts Mark Darcy's invitation to his parents' ruby wedding. Believing that he is really not her type,

she attends the wedding to find him cold and distant at first. Then, they warm up to each other. By novel's end, she realizes her practical choices have led her to love.

In much the same way, Robin Hardy's book, Streiker's Bride, discusses the role choice plays within the novel. Hardy writes a conventional inspirational romance novel. She places the heroine, Adair Weiss, in a dead-end job. She works as an inept teller in a bank. However, somehow she convinces herself accounting is where she needs to be. She lives in a one-bedroom apartment, owns a fairly nice car, and dreams of somehow changing her life.

Fletcher Streiker, the hero, a rich philanthropist, decides to make Adair his wife. The crux – she must choose to marry him sight unseen. Much of her choice depends on a folder that reveals his life through newspaper articles, brochures, and partial letters. After only two weeks, she accepts his proposition. The rest of the novel portrays her new life and the adjustments she must make to be Fletcher's wife, centering the entire plot on Adair's choices. In fact, most of the novel excludes her husband's physical presence.

Throughout the initial chapters after Fletcher and Adair have consummated their relationship, he leaves on business, not returning until novel's end. This absent hero frustrates me as a reader because Adair has to deal with some major issues, making snap decisions. What if she makes the wrong choices? Unbeknownst to Adair or the readers, Fletcher has placed safety nets around Adair that include an unseen bodyguard. Although the choices Adair makes turn out to be the right ones, Adair does not always come across as a likeable character. She is whiny and overindulgent at times, partly due

to the fact that Fletcher is gone. Other times, she seems confident and able to handle any situation.

Fletcher can be compared to the Gothic romance novel's hero in the mystery that surrounds him. Modleski, in her book, Loving with a Vengeance, declares "the heroine comes to a mysterious house, perhaps as a bride, perhaps in another capacity, and either starts to mistrust her husband or else finds herself in love with a mysterious man who appears to be some kind of criminal...She tries to convince herself that her suspicions are unfounded, that, since she loves him, he must be trustworthy" (59). By novel's end, her fears have been negated and the hero is proven innocent.

Although Adair comes to Fletcher's penthouse as a bride, she lacks complete faith in him and finds herself doubting their marriage and his intentions. Once the mystery has been solved and Fletcher returns, all is well. In the Gothic romance, a heroine's love for the hero transforms to one of fear. This never happens between Adair and Fletcher. In fact, despite Hardy's exclusion of this element in Streiker's Bride, Hardy's plot works within this sub-genre because as Modleski states, "in Gothics the concern is with understanding the relationship and the feelings involved once the [marriage] union has been formed" (61).

Hardy explains that the conflicts Adair experiences with the physical absence of her husband represent the struggles the church goes through with the physical absence of Christ. Fletcher claims, "I had to... give you the freedom to decide how badly you wanted to be with me and what you were willing to do about it. So I gave you the opportunity to handle the kinds of things I deal with everyday. You couldn't discover

the extent of your abilities with me hanging over your every move” (266). Hardy uses Fletcher and Adair as Christ and the church personified in order to explain the importance of the unified relationship, the strength they carry as “one.”

Hardy includes only one verse of scripture in the entire novel and virtually no other mention of God or the church or prayer. Hardy claims the book represents Ephesians 5:31-32: “*For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church*” (4). In other words, the novel presents an allegory of Christ and the church as represented in the above verse. She assumes her readers, knowledgeable about the New Testament church, understand how Fletcher symbolizes Christ and how Adair symbolizes the church.

Much inspirational romance employs some sort of symbolism. The authors of these novels want to point to Christ, so the imagery and language applied in these novels must advance this purpose. In Beyond the Shadows, the novel about alcoholism, Deborah and her first husband originate from a town called Amethyst. When Deborah marries Gideon, she keeps the farm in Amethyst; they return to the same farm after Gideon loses his job due to alcohol, and Gideon turns to the same town in order to help him recover from his alcoholism. Amethyst, originally from the Greek word *amethystos*, literally means remedy against drunkenness.

Redeeming Love is based on the Biblical story of Hosea and Gomer. Many of the names Rivers chooses for her characters carry symbolic meaning. Sarah’s captor dubs her “Angel,” forcing her into a life of prostitution. It seems ironic that someone in

that line of work would be given this name; originally, it meant messenger. Still by novel's end, Angel lives up to this name, establishing a house for "fallen women, women like me who want to change their lives" (454). They learn how to read, write, cook, sew, and run a small business. Angel becomes a messenger of hope.

As each theme becomes apparent in this type of genre, the heroines face, again and again, the idea of community: reconciliation with the community or presenting themselves to the community. This concept arises from the physical or emotional loss the heroines experienced in their lives. With this type of loss, isolation begins, working in tandem with the love relationships between man and woman, and God and man. Authors explore issues like forgiveness, trust, love, and family values to show spiritual instruction in action.

Barrett claims that "in reading about the triumph of these values over evil, Christian women find affirmation for their beliefs. This affirmation results in an emotional response...that emotional response to popular culture is not only possible but positive and potentially useful" (3). Authors hope this will empower their readers with the knowledge to make a difference in society as well as to remind their readers that they are not alone in their own struggles with these issues.

Angel, in Redeeming Love, uses her past life in prostitution to reach out to prostitutes, showing them a better way to live. Geneva, in Wild Rose, does not identify with or fully understand the community she lives in until they come to her aid when she becomes ill after her dog dies. Haven's End's acceptance of Geneva, as a woman who dresses in men's overalls, as well as just a woman, comes full circle in her marriage to

Caleb. She finally realizes how gracious and kind her community is: “What was the most amazing was the way they were looking at her. Smiling and welcoming, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for Salt Fish Ginny to be strolling down the wharf, dressed in city finery, with the town’s most prominent citizen” (Morren 360).

Tess, in Stranded in Paradise, finally grasps the importance of dealing with the past and her mother in her present identity as a Christian. “Instinct told Tess that Mona held the key to her emotional restoration, and she knew the key could not turn in the lock without forgiveness and compassion” (Copeland 221). Tess’ compassion toward her mother opens up Tess’ community. She begins to pay her mother’s monthly bills; she begins to give back to her community, which happens to be her family.

If the readers take what they have learned from the novels about relationships between God and man, and man and society, two types of communities are engaged - the fictitious community and the real-life community. These can work in conjunction with each other to bring about a better society. This is not the case in standard romance. Radway claims the greater community of readers and writers participate in this particular genre because they can escape and do not have to actively respond.

Passivity *is* at the heart of the romance experience in the sense that the final goal of each narrative is the creation of that perfect union where the ideal male, who is masculine and strong yet nurturant too, finally recognizes the intrinsic worth of the heroine. Thereafter, she is required to do nothing more than *exist* as the center of this paragon’s attention. Romantic escape is, therefore, a temporary but

literal denial of the demands women recognize as an integral part of their roles as nurturing wives and mothers (97).

Inspirational fiction foils this “passivity,” requesting its readers take action, to use what they have read to help them to live in this world in love and servitude.

For some readers of secular romance, escape is not the only reason to read romance. Just as inspirational romance offers their readers spiritual instruction, authors of secular historical romance offer its readers simulated travel to far-off countries, where studies in culture and customs resound. Radway claims that “in populating her imagination with the attractive and exotically employed individuals found in romances, the woman whose intercourse with the community has been restricted in favor of her family widens her range of acquaintances and vicariously enriches the social space she inhabits” (113). Radway’s claim can be found in both secular and inspirational romance, but inspirational romance desires its readers take away something spiritual as well.

A couple of inspirational romance novels incorporate rape or the foiled rape into their novels. Rivers tells Angel’s story of how she became a prostitute. She was sold when she was just eight years old to Duke.

“Look at me, little one.”

When Sarah did, her heart pounded until her whole body shook with terror.

He held her face so she couldn’t look away. “As long as you do exactly what I tell you to do, we’re going to get along fine... What’s your name?”

Sarah couldn't answer.

He touched her hair, her throat, her arm. "It doesn't matter. I think I'm going to call you Angel...Come on now, Angel. I have things to teach you." He lifted her and sat her on the big bed. "You can call me Duke, when you get your tongue back." He took off his black silk coat. "Which you will. Shortly." He smiled again as he removed his tie and slowly began to unbutton his shirt (44).

Her age and circumstances leave her powerless to stop the downward spiral she must endure in her life, but Rivers maneuvers this horrible beginning in Angel's life as a catalyst for growth.

In much the same way, Morren includes the foiled rape in Wild Rose. This scene, quite different from Rivers, occurs in Geneva's adult life after her conversion experience. Lucius Tucker bursts in on her while she bathes and threatens to rape her. In her fear, Geneva screams out to Jesus. As she continues to struggle to get free, they hear a noise outside the door:

Then Mr. Stillman stood in her half-opened doorway taking in the sight of her and Lucius. His hounds jumped around behind him... To Geneva, he looked like an avenging angel with a whole troop behind him come to her rescue... She shut her eyes for an instant, knowing beyond a doubt Who had sent him to her (301).

The angelic imagery located in this passage, the "Who," alludes to the power the authors give Jesus in these novels, portraying him as a very real presence – a force with

which to be reckoned. Rivers does not include this type of spiritual presence when looking at Angel's childhood scene. Neither scene is bathed in a positive light.

In inspirational romance, authors draw a very distinct line between rape and the hero. Heroes do not participate in these types of scenes because authors prefer not to blur those lines. Romance writers do. Radway declares that "authors of ideal romances always make a clear distinction between men who rape as an act of aggression against women and those who, like their heroes, do so because they misinterpret a woman's actions or find her irresistible...it might also be said about rapes in the ideal romance that because the hero initiates the sexual contact that the heroine later enjoys, it is ultimately he who is held responsible for activating her sexuality" (141, 143). The authors of the ideal secular romance shed a positive light on the hero's misinterpretation of the heroine, masking the brutal violence of rape. Many authors use the hero's misinterpretation as part of the plot, causing conflict between the hero and the heroine. The hero will resolve the conflict through extreme acts of tenderness until the next conflict and resolution takes place, which will eventually lead the heroine into his arms once and for all.

CHAPTER III

INSPIRATIONAL ROMANCE AS PARODY

Inspirational romance jumbles the characteristics found in secular romance and proposes a serious parody of the romance. It requires its heroes and heroines to answer to Jesus first before they can answer to each other. In the foiled rape mentioned in Wild Rose, Caleb, the hero, did not come to Geneva's rescue nor did he cause the scene between Geneva and Lucius. Her true hero becomes Jesus and therein lays ultimate fulfillment. Inspirational romance seems to poke fun at the idea of complete fulfillment coming from a flawed individual – a hero who has already hurt the heroine in some way and who will, more than likely, hurt her again.

In Radway's study, the ideal hero can be forgiven of his flaws. In fact, the "terrorizing effect of his exemplary masculinity is always tempered by the presence of a small feature that introduces an important element of softness into the overall picture" (128). The heroine's beauty, exaggerated by her "fiery disposition" and "rebelliousness," initially attracts the hero, but the heroine's tender care and nurture will help the hero transform into an individual capable of expressing emotion and dependence, feminizing his "terrorizing" masculinity to make him more tender-hearted and compassionate (123, 127). Her illusory power over the hero is really an exchange between the hero and heroine. Just as the hero becomes more compassionate, the

heroine's childlike innocence and experience is replaced, through sexual awakening, by womanly virtues.

CHAPTER IV

PATRIARCHS AND FEMININE IDENTITY

Radway maintains in the opening pages of most romance novels, that the “heroine’s social identity is destroyed” (134). That is, she experiences some sort of heavy loss and emotional isolation, but the novels will move from that feeling to connection and the “promise of a mature, fulfilled female identity” (135). Thematically, romance novels become a search for the heroine’s identity.

Patriarchal figures play a profound role in this search. So, this argument takes a psychological view as presented by Radway’s summary of Chodorow’s theories on female personality development. “Her [Chodorow’s] argument is grounded in object-relations theory and its primary insight that a child’s social-relational experience from earliest infancy determines its later growth. This occurs because the child’s early social relations with its primary caretaker(s) are internalized as its most basic model of itself as a self-in-relation. Thus the affective tone and residue of the intense mother-infant relationship in the patriarchal family continues to control the way the child encounters people and relies upon them to fulfill its adult needs” (135).

The bond formed between mother and daughter, especially strong in these relationships, can prolong the pre-oedipal state in the girl’s development, causing the mother to feel like she is an extension of her daughter and vice versa. “The end result of this process, according to Chodorow, is an internalized portrait of the female self as a

self-in-relation, which is later generalized as a view of the self as an extension or continuation of the world and others” (136). The daughter will develop an “‘incomplete oedipal resolution.’ The girl becomes erotically heterosexual but at the same time carries an internal emotional triangle into adulthood, a triangle that is completed by her continuing need and desire for her mother” (136).

The triangle, made up of three points, places the mother at the top point and the man (hero) and woman (heroine) at the two bottom points. Romance writers will place the heroine in this role to ensure that as the novel progresses, the heroine works in-relation to the hero, trying to “understand what the fact of male presence and attention means for her, a woman” (139). As she works in-relation to the hero, she finds love and resolution for this “emotional triangle;” her self as awakened sexually wakes womanly virtues as well, giving her back her identity. Suzanne Juhasz, in Reading from the Heart: Women, Literature and the Search for True Love, claims that “romance fiction is dedicated to the pursuit of forever” (70). The ideal romance ends with the adult relationship between hero and heroine in first place.

Inspirational romance tends to replace and substitute these roles. Authors establish the hero as already mastering his “terrorizing” masculinity and incorporating tenderness and compassion into his role. Considered a practicing Christian – faithfully praying, attending church if there is one, and daily reading the Bible, he has lived alone and has learned to listen to God. He might have a past, but essentially it has no hold on him; rather, his past acts as a teaching tool and will help him as he deals with the heroine. The heroine, who usually has little or no knowledge of God, comes into contact

with the hero by chance. She might or might not be a virgin. Essentially her lack of faith and religious ignorance acts as substitute for sexual inexperience in the inspirational romance. This replacement makes the heroine seem childlike, so she needs the hero's influence to help her to mature spiritually and emotionally.

As heroines always suffer some type of loss – literal or figurative, authors cope with the loss by placing the heroes in roles as husbands in arranged marriages or the heroines cope by barricading the walls of their hearts against love and trust. These barricades come down as the heroines establish relationships with Christ and the heroes.

Patriarchal figures in inspirational romance play an important role in the heroine's life. Many of the barricades that the heroines build up stem from the roles the mothers played in their daughters' lives. However, in this sub-genre, the argument deviates from the psychological viewpoint to the spiritual. This argument does not discount Chodorow's theories, but rather adds to her study.

Inspirational romance writers, steeped in Christian doctrine, believe God created humans with an innate desire to love and be loved – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The model for perfect love is the relationship Jesus has with humankind. Marriage between a man and woman should mimic this love, which is what inspirational romance writers essentially do. Barrett describes this love as a “triad – God, man, and woman – forms the Christian marriage, a marriage that allows both men and women growth” (4). This triad, synonymous to Chodorow's emotional triangle, substitutes the mother figure at the top point with Jesus. The hero and heroine work with one another in relation to service to God. Fundamental to the triad, the heroine

awakens spiritually, understanding that her identity depends on Jesus. Heroines must place him first.

In Love Comes Softly, Oke places her hero and heroine directly in line with this structure. Oke describes Clark as a single parent raising his two-year-old daughter. He consistently prays and has morning devotion with scripture reading. He lost his wife after childbirth, and he has learned to live alone, to inexplicably trust God in and through everything. He meets Marty by chance. She is pregnant and alone in the world.

Oke characterizes her as “a little thing” and “she reached down and slipped her small hand into his strong one” (131, 167). Oke places patriarchal images in marital context: the image of a small hand slipped into a larger one is reminiscent of a child to a parent. It offers comfort, guidance, and protection synonymous to the only verses mentioned in this novel, Psalm 121:

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help.

The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.

The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.

The Lord shall preserve thee from evil: he shall preserve thy soul.

The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and even for evermore (32).

The Lord offers comfort, guidance, and protection for his people just as a father would offer to his children, comparable to what Clark offers Marty – shelter and peace.

Through the marriage relationship, Marty views God’s relationship to her and eventually places him first.

In secular romance, authors characterize childlike heroines by their initial desire to change their personalities and/or activities to be more like a man's. The heroine will dress in men's attire, will do men's jobs, and will voice her opinion at all costs, unlike Marty who acquiesced willingly to a marriage she did not want nor did she speak out against her circumstances.

In Wild Rose, Morren characterizes Geneva in much the same way a secular romance author would do. She wears men's overalls and boots, makes a living fishing, and never wears anything feminine until she becomes friends with Caleb. She defends Caleb to the community, stating:

Poor folks seem to think they're above mindin' their own business. Guess they've never heard gossipin's a sin just like stealin'. Nor 'bout hittin' a man when he's down, even though he's never done nothing to them (17-8).

He has been falsely accused of embezzling money from his father's company and has come to Haven's End to get away from Boston. Caleb differs from the typical inspirational romance hero because he does not consider himself a practicing Christian until he confronts his past and repents.

Geneva's illiteracy and sexual purity contributes to her child-like innocence. Initially, Caleb treats Geneva the way a parent would treat a child or a teacher would treat a student. They begin with reading, and he orders special reading books and a slate for her from a company in New York. Geneva's primary reason for wanting to learn to read was because of her mother; she always read from a French Bible, and Geneva yearns to read from the Bible to understand what her mother believed.

Mrs. Bradford inspires Geneva as she learns to read, declaring that the Bible is more than what it seems (John 1:1) – “It’s more than just a book, Geneva. It’s Jesus Himself. The Bible says, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’” (140). By teaching Geneva to read, Caleb gives her the means to draw closer to God. Morren, then, removes Caleb from the picture, placing him back in Boston to deal with his parents and leaves Geneva in Haven’s End. Geneva accepts and learns about God without Caleb, making God first in her life.

Converse to the childish heroine is the over-confident hellion who needs taming. Angel, from Redeeming Love, fits this stereotype. While most inspirational romance fiction establishes their heroines as childlike, Rivers makes Angel a tough, unyielding heroine who has built up walls around her heart. Her confidence, albeit an unhealthy confidence, is directly related to her sexual knowledge, which she tries to use against the hero.

She does not trust Michael, so finds ways to make him angry enough to kick her out. It never works. Neither does he retaliate through violence nor harsh words, but he treats Angel with respect and unconditional love, giving her the space, sexually, that she needs to find peace. Her taming relies on her knowledge of Michael and his knowledge of Christ. Until she understands this knowledge, she does not have the capability to fill the triad – to serve God alongside Michael. Much like Morren’s Geneva, Rivers separates Angel from Michael, so that she can truly learn God’s grace and peace.

CHAPTER V
CHRISTIAN FEMINISM

The contrasting roles these heroines play end up pointing to the same thing: they place God at the center of their relationship and one assumes that everything turns out fine. Stated rather simplistically, this becomes the rallying statement behind modern-day Christian feminism.

Looking at Redeeming Love in that context, the initial closing scene makes sense. Angel returns to Michael three years after she left him. She went to the city, found a good job, confronted her past, was born-again, and finally realized she needed to return home. She found him working in the fields.

She wanted to shed all the barriers that had kept her from him...If only things had been different. She wanted so desperately to be clean for him, to be new. She wanted to please him. She would give the rest of her life to that end if he would let her. She wanted to strip away her past. Oh, if she could only be Eve again, a new creature in Paradise. Before the Fall.

With trembling hands, she removed the trappings of the world...With each garment she removed and dropped, she cast away anger, fear, and her blindness to the multitudes of joy in life, her own desperate pride. She had one single, abiding purpose: to show Michael she loved him, and she peeled away the layers of pride one by one until she was humbled by her own nakedness.

Last of all, she stepped out of her thin leather shoes and drew the pins that held her hair... (460-1).

She stands before him completely naked, falls to the ground and weeps, washing his boots with her tears, wiping them with her hair.

He took hold of her and drew her up again. She couldn't look into his face, wanting to hide her own. Michael took off his shirt and put it around her shoulders... "I hoped you would come home someday," he said and smiled...and pulled her into his arms to kiss her. He felt her arms around him as she kissed him back...When they drew breath, Michael swung her around and lifted her above him joyously. She threw back her head and spread her arms wide to embrace the sky, tears of celebration streaming down her cheeks (461-2).

This very long passage can be looked at in two ways: from the secular standpoint, it portrays anti-feminist tendencies, cementing women back in their inferior roles of domesticity; from a Christian perspective, it portrays the completed union of husband, wife, and God.

Looking at this passage from a secular viewpoint, it goes against some of the feminists' beliefs. Angel kneels naked at her husband's feet, asking forgiveness, embodying submission. Michael lifts her from that position and clothes her with his own shirt, signifying possession. While this scene might seem somewhat disparaging to the feminists, readers must not forget where Angel has just come from.

She actively leaves Michael, not to return to the life of a prostitute, but to run from her past. She returns to the city and becomes a cook (a respectable job for a

woman in the 1800's). She eventually establishes herself as a businesswoman, opening a non-profit organization for women to help them get off the streets. She makes the choice to return to her husband and her life as a wife.

Authors of inspirational romance wish to empower women with moral strength, values, and self-esteem. As Brenda Ray claims, "the ever present faith element gives the woman a sense of innate worth aside from her relationship with man" (McClain 4). This freedom runs consistent to Nancy Hardesty's definition of evangelical feminism – "a woman's freedom to choose her own destiny apart from sex-determined roles, society's rules, or any of the social relationships in which she participates...[emphasizing only] justification by faith" (9). While Angel personifies this definition, Rivers remembers the conventions of formulaic romance writing, so must place Angel back in the role of Michael's wife to complete the triad.

Radway feels that feminism, in secular romance, is slowly burgeoning. Romance acts as a compensatory exchange for their readers. It helps women escape from their everyday lives, but at the same time allows women to become part of a community where in the end the heroine wins all and is all (54). Radway claims that "romance reading originates in very real dissatisfaction and embodies a valid, if limited, protest" (220). Her claim answers the call to feminism if romance readers unite and learn how to protest their dissatisfaction in the right arena.

In either case, romance remains stuck in the same formula. Readers desire that perfect love intended to bring fulfillment and happiness, but a dichotomy exists between the reader and the novel. At some point, the book ends, and reality crashes back in.

Juhasz so eloquently stated, “Reading enhances the loneliness as much as it reduces it. After all, engaged, stimulated, *active* as you may be, all of this exertion is taking place inside one person, one solitary mind” (9). Readers cannot live in a fantasy world even though ultimate gratification exists there.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Inspirational romance manipulates secular romance's formula to produce a serious parody of the romance. It initiates a satiric look into the formula, poking fun at the idea of 'love at first sight.' The happy ending, incorporated into the very formula itself in both the secular and inspirational romance, relies on the hero and heroine falling in love.

However, this involves several factors. In the plot development, the point of entry into the story sets the heroine amidst a figurative or literal loss usually related to the maternal patriarch. This creates an emotional void in the heroine which needs to be filled, creating a split focus.

In secular romance, psychologically, the heroine continuously looks for that relationship that she once shared with her mother. This affects the relationship she maintains with the hero. Using her childlike qualities, she begins to try to alter him, making him more kind and compassionate. Secular romance engages minor foil characters to the hero and heroine, portraying superficial love. This portrayal pushes the main couple together, stimulating the desire the hero must embrace if he wants to become a nurturing individual. Finally, the transformation is complete just as her sexual innocence is replaced with womanly virtues in the climax.

In inspirational romance, the void is spiritual in nature. The split focus in the plot attempts to first reconcile the heroine to God and then to focus on the love relationship between heroine and hero. Authors place mentors within the hero's and heroine's lives, pushing them along toward Jesus and each other. Mentors extend spiritual instruction through scripture, prayer, and evangelism – lending a hand in the spiritual climax the heroine must experience before she can reach the physical climax (marriage or a declaration of love) with the hero. Religious ignorance, used in place of sexual innocence in the secular novel, directs the heroine's action. By novel's end, her total focus involves serving God first and then her husband.

The parody of the romance relies heavily on the premise of the “forever” kind of love. In the secular romance, authors yearn to write about the perfect kind of love; however, they fail to reconcile how the hero's “brusque indifference [toward the heroine] can be transformed into unwavering devotion” (151). Christian doctrine stipulates that perfect love can readily be found in Christ, and that it will not ever be found in man, who is imperfect. Inspirational romance uses this stipulation, describing a hero who understands his imperfections and who continuously works toward maintaining an “unwavering devotion” to God first and then to the heroine. The hero and heroine complete the triad when they serve God, thus mimicking the love relationship between God and humankind.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Tara Donalson attended the University of Texas at El Paso earning a Bachelors of Arts in English. Minorng in Secondary Education, she earned a certificate to teach. She taught high school freshmen English before coming to the University of Texas at Arlington. She had every intention of studying British literature, but her interests changed. She found she was more intrigued with American and popular literature. She formulated the beginnings of this paper in a genre fiction class taught by Tim Morris. She plans to use the knowledge she learned about English studies to help her students understand literature and popular culture.