

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

RECOVERING THE READER:
LITERARY THEORY, MASS CULTURE, AND THE MODERN ROMANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

Since the early 1930s, literary critics have dismissed and disdained popular novels, labelling them unfit for critical study. Their disdain can be traced to two pervasive forces, namely New Criticism and The Frankfurt School. The New Critics argued that only books which possess certain aesthetic qualities have meaning, thus excluding popular novels as objects of study. The Frankfurt School *did* analyse popular art forms, but condemned them, insisting that such works impose a false consciousness onto audiences, brainwashing them into embracing ideologies not in their best interest. Feminist literary critics attempting to analyse popular fiction for women, eg. modern romances and Gothics, have not escaped the influence of New Criticism and the Frankfurt School. For the most part, feminist critics have either dismissed these books as meaningless or reacted to them with hostility, accusing them of reinforcing patriarchal values.

However, in the 1970s, a new approach to mass culture emerged. This approach maintains that though manipulative, mass art does not force a false consciousness onto consumers. Instead, these products manipulate by tapping into people's repressed fears, anxieties, hopes, and fantasies about the social order. It follows that mass culture works *can* reveal information about people, and should be analysed by scholars.

In the wake of this trend, feminist readings of modern romances and Gothics have undergone a recent shift. Two of the most important of these include Tania Modleski's Loving With a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women and Janice Radway's Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature. Both critics reveal information about

women that challenges long-standing assumptions about popular novels and their readers.

However, *the way in which* Modleski and Radway refute traditional beliefs about popular fiction is as important as the fact that they do so. Because Modleski and Radway are literary critics, the results of their methodologies have significant implications for literary theory. Modleski is a psychoanalytic critic whose approach incorporates several New Critical tenets. She assumes that a formalist critique of romances and Gothics based solely on her reading of texts will illuminate their meaning. Radway is a semiotic/reader-response/psychoanalytic critic who believes that textual meaning is made by readers in conjunction with the text's verbal structure. She conducts a literary analysis of romances only after consulting readers to find out what these texts are for those who read them.

This thesis performs a comparative analysis of both studies, and will argue that although both Modleski and Radway supply insights into women and mass culture, Radway's results are superior. The thesis therefore has profound implications for many aspects of literary theory, including the definition of literature, the role of the author, the role of the reader, the role of the text, the role of the critic, and the text's relationship to reality.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Literary Criticism and Popular Fiction

Since the 1930s, literary critics have disdained popular fiction, deeming its products unworthy material for critical study. In fact, scholars have either dismissed mass culture products and their consumers entirely, or treated them with hostility and contempt. However, a new way of looking at mass culture has emerged over the last two decades. This view purports that mass culture products contain valuable information about people and should be taken seriously if society's dominant ideologies are to be overthrown. As a result of this trend, critical readings of popular fiction for women, such as romance and Gothic novels, have undergone a recent change. Two of the most important of these include Tania Modleski's Loving With a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women and Janice Radway's Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature.¹ Unlike mass culture critics before them, Modleski and Radway do not explain the popularity of these novels by dismissing them as meaningless and their readers as simple-minded. Their innovative perspective, as well as the fact that they use different methodologies, means that both studies have significant implications for literary criticism. This thesis analyses and evaluates these methodologies, spelling out their ramifications for literary theory.

Critical disdain for popular fiction owes its origins to two long-standing assumptions: first, that every book selected for critical study must have

¹ For the most part, Loving With a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women is referred to in the main text using the abbreviation LWV, and references to Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Fiction cite the abbreviation RR.

certain aesthetic qualities; and second, that popular novels deliver manipulative ideological messages to unsuspecting, passive readers.² The first assumption can be traced to the influence of Formalism and New Criticism. These literary theories carry specific definitions of "literature." Formalists define literature as writing which transforms ordinary language to the point where it deviates from everyday speech. The literary work does this by assembling certain devices (eg. sound, imagery, rhythm) which perform different functions within a total textual system (Eagleton 2). Formalists also emphasize the study of the work's form over the study of its content. In other words, form is not an expression of content but vice versa: content is merely the "motivation" of form, an occasion for a particular kind of form. For example, Formalists would not consider The Handmaid's Tale an allegory of totalitarianism; on the contrary, totalitarianism would simply provide a useful opportunity for the construction of this allegory.

New Criticism also offers a specific definition of literature. New Critics favour an intrinsic rather than an extrinsic approach to literature. They maintain that the poem is a self-enclosed object possessing special literary qualities and a distinct structure (Thompson 35). According to Cleanth Brooks, poems as different as Pope's The Rape of the Lock and Keats' Ode on a Grecian Urn still boast a structure which manifests itself in a complex organic unity. By "structure" Brooks is not referring to the poem's metrical pattern or sequence of images, but something even more internal:

² It is important to point out here that the tendency of intellectuals to devalue mass entertainment is an old one with roots in a number of religious and philosophical doctrines. However, because the focus of this thesis is literary theory, I have limited my discussion to two persuasive influences on literary critics, namely New Criticism and the Frankfurt School. For a more comprehensive look at the traditional devaluation of mass entertainment, see: Mendelsohn, Harold. Mass Entertainment. New Haven, Connecticut: College University Press, 1966.

The structure...is everywhere conditioned by the nature of the material which goes into the poem. The nature of the material sets the problem to be solved, and the solution is the ordering of the material...The structure meant is a structure of meanings, evaluations, and interpretations; and the principle of unity which informs it seems to be one of balancing and harmonizing connotations, attitudes, and meanings (Brooks 178-9).

Brooks notes further that the essence of the poem is not merely the logical statement we abstract from it, but the ability of its structure to display a pattern of resolved stresses: "the structure of a poem resembles that of a ballet of musical composition. It is a pattern of resolutions and balances and harmonizations developed through a temporal scheme"(Brooks 179). Brooks is not implying that poetry does not make use of ideas, nor is he denying the close relationship between the poem's intellectual components and its other materials. He simply means that poetry includes ideas *and* attitudes. For this reason, poetry does not offer us a logical conclusion:

The conclusion of the poem is the working out of the various tensions--set up by whatever means--propositions, metaphors, symbols. The unity is achieved by a dramatic process, not a logical; it represents an equilibrium of forces, not a formula...it is easy to see why the relation of each item to the whole context is crucial, and why the effective and essential structure of the poem has to do with the complex of attitudes achieved (Brooks 189).

For New Critics, then, the literary text consists of not only what is said, but the way in which things are said (Jefferson and Robey 8). Cleanth Brooks quotes W. M. Urban to illustrate this point: "form and content, or content and medium, are inseparable. The artist does not first intuit his object and then find the appropriate medium. It is rather in and through his medium that he intuits the object" (Brooks 182). Of course, the difficulty in separating form and medium makes it virtually impossible to paraphrase any good poem. Critics may paraphrase in order to reference a point quickly, but they must not forget that this paraphrase is not the poem's *real* core of meaning (Brooks 188). In reality, such a proposition cannot be accurately made, or else the poet would have not had to write the poem--he could have just formulated the proposition (Brooks 188).

Formalism and New Criticism also define the literary text's relationship to reality. Formalists believe that this relationship is none of the critic's business. They claim that the literary work is neither a vehicle for ideas, a reflection of social reality, nor an incarnation of transcendental truths (Eagleton 3). The text's only relationship to reality involves its literary qualities. By deforming language or "making it strange," literature also makes the everyday world seem unfamiliar: "Literary discourse estranges or alienates speech, but in doing so, paradoxically brings us into a fuller, more intimate possession of experience" (Eagleton 4).

On the other hand, New Critics investigate literature's ambiguities in order to learn what is permanent and essential about man. They declare that poetry has a precise, intuitive value which allows man to cognitively grasp the knowledge he requires to develop his human intelligence (Thompson 38). T.S. Eliot, for example, argued that poetry's value comes from its ability to synthesize the rational and the non-rational, eg. thought and feeling

(Thompson 42). J.C. Ransom agrees that poetry's combination of the rational and the non-rational gives us wisdom of a special kind, unavailable through logical discourse or scientific analysis (Thompson 48). Finally, Brooks' contention that poetry combines logical statement with the expression of emotional attitudes implies that literature teaches readers both about the nature of reality and how to come to terms with this reality: "The poet...must...dramatize the oneness of the experience, even though paying tribute to its diversity....He is...giving us an insight which preserves the unity of experience and which, at its higher and more serious levels, triumphs over the apparently contradictory and conflicting elements of experience by unifying them into a new pattern" (Brooks 195).

Given the nature of Formalism and New Criticism, we can see why literary critics under their influence have denied popular fiction any serious attention. Both theories assume that in order for texts to qualify as objects critical study, they must have certain aesthetic qualities. For Formalists, these qualities are related to the work's ability to transform everyday language; for New Critics, they include the work's organic unity and unique linguistic qualities. Works that do not meet these requirements (eg. popular novels) would be automatically excluded from the critical canon.

Formalist and New Critical beliefs concerning the text's relationship to reality imply that it is fruitless to study aesthetically deficient novels. Formalists believe that the text's only relationship to reality involves its ability to make everyday language seem strange: hence the critic's goal is to point out the way in which the text's form does this. It follows that analyses of novels whose form boasts little more than ordinary language are a waste of time. Similarly, since New Critics posit that the literary work's combination of the rational and non-rational supplies special cognitive insight into man

and that the critic's goal is to attain this insight, the study of works which lack this structure is also pointless.

Moreover, the New Critical emphasis on literature's "organic unity" implicitly places some genres above others in the literary hierarchy. Terry Eagleton observes that this is not an uncommon occurrence: "Most literary theories...unconsciously 'foreground' a particular literary genre, and derive their general pronouncements from this" (51). The New Critics were no exception in this regard. Some dealt with drama; but for most of them, "literature" meant poetry. This is not surprising if we recall the New Critical definition of the literary work. The organic unity Brooks describes is more easily achieved in poetry than in novels, which tend to have a less stylized form. In addition, of all the literary genres, poetry is the one most clearly sealed off from history. As Eagleton remarks, "It would be difficult to see Tristram Shandy or War and Peace as tightly organized structures of symbolic ambivalence" (Eagleton 51). Therefore, since New Critics are already inclined to dismiss novels as objects of critical study, it is not surprising that they have traditionally ignored popular, aesthetically deficient ones.

Although many critics have refused to analyse mass culture products, some *have* undertaken a study of them. However, critics in this latter group have tended to condemn such works. The Frankfurt School, which included critics such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse, has been very influential in this regard. The Frankfurt School attacked popular art, arguing that its aesthetic deficiencies lead to negative political consequences (Marcuse 121). According to these critics, mass culture is a degraded version of high art, the latter being the product of a society which separates artistic production from mundane and utilitarian functions. The School believed high art to be aesthetically valuable in itself, and assumed

that only those who had special training could perceive its formal complexities ("Identifying Ideological Seams" 94).

According to the Frankfurt School, the value of high art stems from its ability to preserve human yearnings for a society beyond today's present one (Horkheimer 292). Through its harmonious reconciliation of form and content, function and expression, subjective and objective elements, high art offers a "true" foretaste of this future society and keeps alive the utopian promise once held by religion (Jay 179; Marcuse 114-5). The contradictions embodied within the structure of high art forms thus allow these works to express the idea of harmony negatively (Jay 179-180). Using this negative, utopian harmony, high art maintains an element of protest until social contradictions are reconciled in the real world. And although high art might reflect the substance of domineering societal institutions, it remains a force of protest against them (Adorno 678).

In contrast, mass culture products lack the qualities of negation and transcendence. As a result of this deficiency, such works eradicate the notion of the utopian promise entirely (Jay 180). Mass culture's tendency to imply a premature reconciliation of contradictions also poses a threat to social revolution and to utopian hope (Jay 181). This occurs because these works suppress the potential of their consumers by denying them an awareness of their own exploitation ("Identifying Ideological Seams" 94). Mass culture products accomplish this in several ways: by distorting truth; by diverting energies from transformative activities; by promoting the status quo; by hiding the realities of people's exploitation; and by forcing false needs, false desires--a "false consciousness"--on the public (Mendelsohn 29). In short, the Frankfurt School saw mass culture products as little more than an ideological tool of the bourgeois ruling class ("Identifying Ideological Seams" 95). They

saw mass art as overwhelmingly persuasive, capable of disarming all revolutionary potential in society (Studies in Entertainment x).

Given the Frankfurt School's conception of mass culture products and consumers, it is not surprising that these critics viewed them with contempt. Seeing mass art as sheer manipulation and its consumers as brainwashed recipients of ideologies not beneficial to them, the Frankfurt School critics were routinely pejorative when analysing mass culture phenomena (Radway 6).

It is important to note here that although the Frankfurt School emphasized the manipulative side of mass culture, these critics did not believe that individuals deliberately conspired to create these products for this end. Rather, they viewed culture dialectically, seeing art as a social as well as an individual expression of creativity. Works of art express objective social tendencies unintended by their creators: simply put, the artist's alleged creative freedom is illusory (Martin 177, 182). Horkheimer, for example, believed that a common element of humanity informed every aesthetic act; he saw the individual subject as historical, not transcendental (Horkheimer 291). Frankfurt School critics also argued that the subjective appreciation of art is limited by social factors. Leo Lowenthal contended that the erosion of the autonomous subject in modern society has completely undermined the liberal notion of "taste" (Lowenthal 12). In short, the Frankfurt School refused to reduce mass culture to an ideological reflex of class interests.³ Adorno, for instance, cautioned that the critic's job is not to

³ The exception in this regard was the Frankfurt School's Walter Benjamin, who tended to seek out relationships between specific social groups and mass culture products. For more detail, see: Jay, Martin. The Dialectical Imagination. Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Company, 1973. 197-212.

assign specific interest groups to specific mass art works but rather to uncover the general social tendencies expressed in such works (Jay 178).

Theodor Adorno's article "The Stars Down to Earth: the Los Angeles Times Astrology Column," is a good example of a Frankfurt School appraisal of mass culture. Adorno discusses the appeal of and ideology behind astrology in this article. According to him, astrology combines two contradictory features: 1) irrationality, because people want to learn from occult signs what to expect and do; and 2) rationality, because the column pretends to offer helpful answers to the practical, everyday problems of readers (Adorno 16). However, while the column *seems* to satisfy the longings of people who think that an unknown agency knows more about themselves than they do, its messages rarely express social or psychological reality. Instead, they manipulate readers' ideas of such matters (Adorno 17).

Adorno argues that the L.A. Times column has an implicit ideological function: to quell reader anxieties and ensure society's capitalist status quo by creating an atmosphere of social contentment. The column does this in part by hinting that all problems caused by objective circumstances (eg. economic difficulties) can be solved by adjustments of private, individual behaviour or psychological insight into the self and others (Adorno 34). The column also furthers this objective by suggesting that problems arising out of social conditions and antagonisms can be solved by social conventionality (Adorno 35). In addition, its advice also stresses accepted values. In fact, its messages consist of nothing but values from the status quo the way it is envisioned by the column (Adorno 36).

According to Adorno, the column employs other techniques designed to encourage the reader to embrace the ideological status quo (Adorno 89). For one thing, it preys on the reader's personality flaws. The columnist has a good

idea of what kind of person he is addressing, and shapes his material so as to encourage certain behaviours in him/her. The threat/help dichotomy that often appears in the column is an example of this. The column puts forth a vague suggestion of a threat (knowing that most people feel threatened in some way), which creates anxiety in the reader. The column then promises help and mitigation, but is careful not to require any responsibility on the part of the individual: "While the subject has to follow closely what this agency indicates, he does not really have to act on his own behalf as an autonomous human being, but can content himself with relying on fate" (Adorno 31). The columnist, who knows that the reader is basically dependent (only this type of person would rely on his column) calculates his advice to fit the specific needs of the dependent reader. However, he is careful never to refer to this weakness (Adorno 32). Although the columnist may have psychological insight into his reader, unlike a real psychologist he moves to strengthen his readers' defenses, not to shatter them (Adorno 30). With the soothing promise that "everything will be fine" and assurance that the reader's problems will be solved as long as he follows its advice, the column transforms more and more people into dependent ones (Adorno 34). The psychological syndrome promoted by astrology (that of dependence) reinforces its conservative capitalist ideology, which relies on obedience and unquestioning acceptance of authority (Adorno 34).

Adorno's article is a good illustration of the Frankfurt School's conception of a mass culture product. Calculated, persuasive and tempting, the astrology column lulls the unsuspecting reader into embracing a capitalist ideology not necessarily beneficial to him.

We have seen that scholars have traditionally ignored or reviled mass culture products. Popular narratives for women have also received their

share of disdain, and some feminist critics have argued that this disdain is even more pronounced towards popular novels for women. In their view, modern romances and Gothics have been dismissed and/or deplored because they are produced by and for females. Tania Modleski calls this phenomenon today's "double critical standard":

One cannot find any writings on popular feminine narratives to match the aggrandized titles of certain classic studies of popular male genres....At a time when courses on popular culture have become semirespectable curricular offerings in the universities, one is often hard put to find listed on the syllabi a single novel, film, or television program which makes its appeal primarily to women (LWV 11).

Margaret Jensen agrees that critical contempt for women writers and their books exists, noting that it has been prevalent since the early history of the novel. The first female writers to produce popular novels were attacked by patronising male critics, and even dedicated female writers like George Eliot scorned their efforts (Jensen 21). Despite the fact that sexist attitudes are not what they once were, Jensen maintains that

In a sexist society, the association of women with a phenomenon, whether it be an occupation, a name, a political party, a play activity or literature, is enough to lessen its value and desirability....Although women cross over into masculine fantasies such as westerns and thrillers, men do not read romances. Their avoidance of the novels, in conjunction with women's association with them, contributes to romances' reputation as 'trash' (23).

Feminist literary critics attempting to analyse popular romances and Gothics have not escaped the influences of Formalism, New Criticism, the Frankfurt School, and sexism. Until recently, few feminist critics have ever taken these novels seriously enough to study them in detail. Those who have done so have reviled them because of the political dilemma they seemingly pose (LWV 13). This dilemma revolves around the question: how can books which emphasize things like the primacy of love in a woman's life, female passivity, and domestic values remain popular in today's feminist era? (Fantasy and Reconciliation: Contemporary Formulas of Women's Romance Fiction xii).

For the most part, feminist critics have viewed romance and Gothic novels as formulaic, stereotyped narratives which feature a passive heroine who finds true happiness in submitting to a masterful male. According to them, romance novels indoctrinate women with an oppressive, patriarchal ideology which helps keep them in their socially and sexually subordinate place (Jensen 25). Barbara Welter, for example, argues that nineteenth-century romances pacified female audiences by encouraging women to conform (Welter 152). Joanna Russ claims that the most striking thing about the modern Gothic is its combination of intrigue, crime, danger, and a completely passive heroine (678). Russ contends that the Gothic genre is sado-masochistic material that portrays the heroine as a passive, incompetent victim in all situations (686). She concludes that modern Gothics are

a direct expression of the traditional feminine situation
 (at least a middle-class feminine situation)...they
 provide precisely the kind of escape reading a middle-
 class believer in the feminine mystique needs, without
 involving elements that either go beyond the feminine

mystique or would be considered immoral in its terms
(671).

In the same vein, Kay Mussell argues that the Gothic genre's portrayal of sexuality reinforces conservative views of heterosexual relations. The triumph of the chaste, old-fashioned heroine over the sexy female villain ultimately "reinforces traditional views of men, marriage, and sexuality" ("Beautiful and Damned: The Sexual Woman in Gothic Fiction" 85).

Janet Patterson's examination of Harlequin romances also leads her to conclude that they reaffirm patriarchal values. According to her, although "falling in love" in a patriarchal society for women means gaining emotional and financial security, it also means entering into an intimate relationship that makes them feel powerless (Patterson 30). This experience leaves women feeling confused, unstable, and fearful of exploitation. Patterson claims that there are two ways of solving the woman's conflict: conventionalizing the power element of the relationship so as to allow for the successful culmination of intimacy (paternalism), or the feminist alternative of challenging the man's exercise of power. Although paternalism institutionalizes the unequal man-woman relationship, this option is attractive because it ensures the woman's emotional and economic security (Patterson 30). However, Patterson warns that paternalism is also the basis for patriarchy: although men achieve *collective* power using the law, physical intimidation, and control over private property, they maintain their *individual* power over women through paternalism. Patterson therefore concludes that "Conventional love is the ideological expression and mechanism for the bond of paternalism" (31).

Patterson claims that modern romances are popular because their central concern is the power struggle inherent in heterosexual relationships.

While this focus is not necessarily a negative thing, Harlequins constantly tell women that the "solution" to their feelings of confusion and helplessness is paternalism (Patterson 31). The romance's messages, then, are quite conservative:

The Harlequin solution assures us that, of all the heroine has seen and heard, only the hero's declaration of love is real (all the rest has been a schism between appearance and reality) and that this reality is more pleasant, human, safer and sexier than the apparently hostile world...the apparently oppressive and exploitative face of male authority disguises the true love which may be consummated in paternalism (Patterson 32).

Some feminist critics have objected to popular romances because of the way they portray sexuality. Barbara Cartland (a prolific author of modern romances) has observed that the tendency of recent romances to feature explicit sexual detail has reduced them to soft pornography ("Cartland Comes Down on Soft Porn" 28). These critics do not use the term pornography lightly. In their view, romances that depict the submission of a passive heroine to a sexually masterful man valorize things like rape, female masochistic tendencies, and the notion of women as sex objects (Fantasy and Reconciliation 21). Martha Nelson agrees that when romances tell the reader that the man she thinks is *hurting* her is really the one who *loves* her, they are endorsing female masochism: "This mingling of pain and love, of humiliation and rapture, is a key element in all romance fiction, reinforcing the notion that women are by nature masochistic" (97).

A few feminist literary critics have even interpreted the popularity of romances as *evidence* of female masochism. Ann Douglas is one proponent

of this view. Douglas openly labels Harlequin romances as anti-feminist soft porn material, declaring that they chronicle the heroine's "inevitable loss of control" after she encounters the hero (Douglas 26). Douglas argues that Harlequins evolve into dramas of dependency not unlike those dramatized in hard core porn. After meeting the hero, the heroine spends her time learning about his male world, retains few female friends, and remains in love with him regardless of how viciously he treats her. The male ego is preferred, protected, and stabilized. At the same time, women's independence is made unattractive and unrewarding, while her dependence is made synonymous with excitement. In fact, the Harlequin heroine never grows up. Her ignorance of life continues, because she allows sexual bondage rather than experience to accomplish her maturation. Just as in hard core porn, the idea of true maturation is taboo in Harlequins. Harlequins therefore appeal to the female reader because they allow her to identify with a heroine who "averts the pain of not knowing who she is by courting the...apparently greater pain of addicting herself to a powerful and totally unknown male" (Douglas 28).

Douglas adds that the depiction of sexuality in Harlequins is also reprehensible. In her opinion, the emotional force of Harlequin sexual encounters comes from the brute energy of the male and the over-responsiveness of the female (Douglas 27). While the heroine sometimes attempts to "hold out" on the hero sexually, her feeble protests are usually short-lived; and when she is successful in doing so, she aligns herself with hard core porn heroines who in resisting domination only manage to increase the hero's sadism. Douglas concludes that "the women who couldn't thrill to male nudity in Playgirl are enjoying the titillation of seeing themselves, not necessarily as they are, but as some men would like to see

them: illogical, innocent, magnetized by male sexuality and brutality" (Douglas 28).

Many feminist critics, then, have followed the lead of other literary critics by ignoring and/or disdaining popular romances and Gothics. However, a new approach to mass culture has been developed over the last two decades. Supporters of this approach reject the notion that mass culture products are either devoid of literary meaning or sheer manipulation bent on forcing a "false consciousness" onto the masses. They argue instead that mass culture products appeal to the very real needs, anxieties, and fantasies of audiences. One such proponent, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, criticizes the Frankfurt School for reducing the consciousness industry to the concept of manipulation. Enzensberger contends that the drawing power of mass culture products can be traced to their ability to exploit people's real and legitimate needs (Enzensberger 111). According to him, any socialist movement wishing to succeed ought to take these needs seriously, investigate them, and make them politically productive (Enzensberger 112). Declaring them false the way the Frankfurt School did only increases the likelihood that the socialist movement will fail (Enzensberger 113).

If mass culture works are popular because of their ability to tap into real human fears and desires, it follows that they are capable of revealing information about the people who consume them. Fredric Jameson draws this conclusion in his 1979 article "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," which presents a revision of the Frankfurt School's concept of mass culture. Jameson objects to the School's conclusion that mass culture is sheer manipulation, commercial brainwashing and empty distraction (138). Instead, he argues that the mechanisms of manipulation, diversion, and degradation

at work in mass culture products illustrate how they transform the *real* social and political anxieties and fantasies of the audience (141).

Jameson invokes Norman Holland's work in The Dynamics of Literary Response dealing with Freud's notion of repression, the psychological mechanism triggered when a traumatic, guilty or threatening desire/anxiety threatens to emerge into an individual's consciousness. Holland suggests that the psychic function of the literary work has two contradictory features: 1) a wish-fulfilling function and 2) a symbolic structure to protect the psyche against the revelation of powerful, potentially damaging desires. Embracing Holland's theory, Jameson hypothesizes that the art work

strategically arouses fantasy content within careful
symbolic containment structures which defuse it,
gratifying intolerable, unrealizable, properly
imperishable desires only to the degree which they can
again be laid to rest (Jameson 141).

Jameson does not limit his theory to mass culture art works. In his view both modernist and mass culture works use society's repressed hopes, anxieties, ideological contradictions, and fantasies for their raw material. However, there is an important difference between the two. While modernist art manages this raw material by providing compensatory structures, mass culture works repress it using imaginary resolutions and offering an optical illusion of social harmony. The end result of this repression is the ideological manipulation of the audience (Jameson 141). Jameson, then, agrees that mass culture works have an ideological function. However, unlike the Frankfurt School, he believes that if the manipulation of the masses is to be realized, people's genuine social and historical concerns must first be tapped into and given some expression (Jameson 144).

Jameson separates himself from the Frankfurt School even more by arguing that critics cannot fully assess the ideological function of mass culture works unless they also recognize their utopian or transcendent potential, defined as

that dimension of even the most degraded type of mass culture which remains implicitly, and no matter how faintly, negative and critical of the social order from which, as a product and a commodity, it springs (Jameson 144).

Although the Frankfurt School insisted that mass culture works lack a negative or utopian moment, Jameson argues that these works cannot perform their ideological function without offering a utopian element to the audience: "they cannot manipulate unless they offer some genuine shred of content as a fantasy bribe to the public about to be so manipulated" (144). Successful mass culture works, then, do two things not previously recognized by critics: they revive public anxieties about the social order and give them some rudimentary expression (even if they later lay them to rest); and they give a voice to the most fundamental hopes and fantasies of the public (even if their function lies in legitimating the existing order) (Jameson 144).

Using the popular film The Godfather as an example, Jameson explains exactly how mass culture works operate. According to Jameson, the ideological function of the Mafia paradigm in this film is obvious:

When...we reflect on an organized conspiracy against the public, one which reaches into every corner of our daily lives and our political structures to exercise a wanton ecocidal and genocidal violence at the behest of distant

decision-makers and in the name of an abstract conception of profit--surely it is not about the Mafia, but rather about American business itself that we are thinking, American capitalism in its most...dehumanized, 'multinational' and corporate form (145).

By serving as a substitute for big business, the Mafia paradigm displaces America's rage at the injustices of the capitalist system onto a clever mirror-image of it. Over the course of the film, the audience is encouraged to believe that the deterioration of daily life in the United States is the result of the country's ethical problems, not their economic ones. Indeed, the film implies that this deterioration is not related to profit motives, but rather to dishonesty, or "some omnipresent moral corruption whose ultimate mythic source lies in the pure Evil of the Mafiosi themselves" (Jameson 146). The Godfather does not offer genuine political insights into the economic realities of late capitalism. Instead, it displaces political analysis with ethical considerations. In The Godfather, the "solution" to social contradictions is incorruptibility, honesty, crime fighting, and law and order. This is clearly a different prescription from that of social revolution, which might be one solution to the economic injustices of capitalism (Jameson 146).

Jameson notes that the object of the audience's utopian longing in The Godfather is the family itself (147). In the United States, although dominant white middle-class groups control ethnic groups, they also envy them for their social unity. At a time when these white communities have been blaming their fragmentation on things like the deterioration of the family, the growth of permissiveness and loss of authority of the father, the ethnic group of The Godfather projects an image of social reintegration through the patriarchal family of the past: "the tightly knit bonds of the Mafia family, the

protective security of the (god)-father with his omnipresent authority, offers a contemporary pretext for a utopian fantasy" (Jameson 147). Thus, The Godfather's drawing power can be attributed to its twin capacity to perform both an ideological function and provide a desperate utopian fantasy for its audience (Jameson 148).

Jameson is careful to note that not all successful mass culture works disguise their ideological and utopian functions. When they do not, these works become very political, unmasking their own ideologies to become blatantly self-critical. In The Godfather II, for example, the original film's displacement techniques are exposed when the Mafia paradigm "slowly transforms itself into the overt thematics of business itself, just as 'in reality' the need for the cover of legitimate investments ends up turning the mafiosi into real businessmen" (Jameson 147). Eventually, the ideological myth of the Mafia is transformed into a utopian vision of revolutionary liberation, when imperialistic American business meets its match in the Cuban revolution (Jameson 147). Similarly, the formerly utopian family paradigm reveals its origins in a backward and feudal Sicily, ultimately showing itself as the survival of archaic repressive, violent, and sexist values (Jameson 147). Indeed, by the end of The Godfather II, all of the original film's previous displacements have become visible to the naked eye. However, Jameson observes that regardless of these revelations, like other mass culture products The Godfather II still has as its underlying impulse our "deepest fantasies about the nature of social life, both as we live it now, and as we feel it in our bones it ought to be lived" (Jameson 147).

Jameson's theory that mass culture products harbour a utopian strain which taps into people's real anxieties and fantasies implies that these works can provide insight into human nature. This idea openly refutes the New

Critical and Formalist assumption that aesthetically deficient art forms are meaningless. At the same time, Jameson's proposal casts doubt on the belief that mass culture forces false needs and desires onto audiences.

In light of Jameson's theory, feminist critical readings of popular romances and Gothics have undergone a recent shift. Two of the most notable of these are Tania Modleski's Loving With a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women and Janice Radway's Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature. Both Modleski and Radway agree that the popularity of these novels invites literary scholars to discover the meaning of these seemingly simple narratives. Unlike the majority of feminists critics before them, however, Modleski and Radway do not express disdain for these works. Both critics instead claim that modern romances and Gothics contain a utopian element implicitly critical of patriarchy which taps into the fears, concerns and desires of female readers. Therefore, these books are powerful informing agents about women and their relational experiences.

The fact that Modleski and Radway challenge traditional notions about mass culture is important, but the way in which they do this is equally important. Both critics bring different theoretical approaches to the study of popular fiction. Modleski is a psychoanalytic critic whose methodology incorporates several New Critical assumptions, while Radway is a semiotic/reader-response/psychoanalytic critic who recovers the reader before conducting a literary analysis of romance texts.

Because Modleski and Radway are literary critics, the fact that their methodologies yield different results has many ramifications for literary theory. Therefore, Loving With a Vengeance and Reading the Romance carry profound implications about the definition of literature, the role of the author, the role of the reader, the role of the text, the role of the critic, and the

text's relationship to reality. It is these implications, in conjunction with the work of Modleski and Radway, that will be examined in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER TWO

Loving With A Vengeance: The Text and the Critic

In Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women, Modleski examines two of the most popular forms of fiction consumed by women in recent years: Harlequin romances and Gothic novels. However, she does not bring a traditional view of mass culture to these texts. As we indicated in Chapter One, this view tends to ignore and/or revile such products, assuming either that they lack the aesthetic ingredients required to produce meaning or that they impose a false consciousness onto a passive, unsuspecting audience. According to Modleski, the contempt for popular fiction created by this view has prevented critics who have analysed romances and Gothics from explaining their appeal accurately (Modleski 14). In an attempt to give them the "right kind of attention," (14) she undertakes the problem of evaluating these novels given the discrepancy between critical reactions (dismissal, scorn) and consumer reactions (pleasure, admiration) to them. Insistent that they can reveal information about people, Modleski sets out to explain the popularity--and thus the meaning of--narratives which offer little in the way of aesthetic value.

Modleski is able to recuperate romances and Gothics as objects of study by demonstrating that although their literary quality is low, their informative value about the women who read them is high. In order to grasp this information, she brings a psychoanalytic approach to these texts. Psychoanalytic literary theory was founded on the work of Freud, who was concerned with the unconscious and developed the idea that the human mind is essentially dual in nature (An Autobiographical Study 38). Freud's

understanding of human nature was conservative and pessimistic. He maintained that people are dominated by a desire for gratification and an aversion to anything that might frustrate it (Beyond the Pleasure Principle 5). Freud hypothesized that because human beings need to labour to survive, they must repress some of their yearnings for pleasure and gratification. They therefore repress the "pleasure principle" using the "reality principle" (Beyond the Pleasure Principle 6). In this process, peoples' consciousnesses act as censors which drive underground thoughts deemed unacceptable (An Autobiographical Study 52-53). As a result, people come to be what they are only through a massive repression of the elements which have gone into their making. Freud called the part of the psyche which harbours all of the basic human drives the id, and the part which is predominantly conscious and rational the ego. The id is entirely unconscious, remote from human understanding, and difficult to manage. The ego, while not out of control like the id, is in a precarious state because it must balance the demands of the id, the reality principle, and the superego. The superego, or third part of the psyche, receives its information from parents, schools and religious institutions. Sometimes referred to as one's conscience, it is the part of the human mind which makes moral judgements and demands sacrifices for good. Id impulses that the ego and superego tell man not to indulge in are repressed into the unconscious mind (New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis 58-62).

Because Freud believed that people are permanently torn between conscious and unconscious impulses, he considered the unconscious a key to the human subject. According to him, dreams are the road to the unconscious. He maintained that dreams are fulfillments of unconscious wishes cast in symbolic form (On Dreams 16). In the dream state, the psychic

self renounces the external world and the reality principle which dominates it. The dream expresses wishes that are opposed by the conscious world in waking life. However, the unconscious censor is careful to conceal and distort dream meanings, rendering them symbolic texts that need deciphering. This occurs because if the censor were absent or completely relaxed, all of the dreamer's unconscious wish-material would rush forward in its undisguised horror. In order to avoid this unbearable condition, the censor allows these wishes to express themselves in disguised form; consequently, they enjoy a temporary and pleasurable expression without distressing the dreamer (An Autobiographical Study 83). Freud referred to the dream's disguised unconscious wishes as its "latent content" and the dream's appearance (the images we remember in the morning) as its "manifest content." (An Autobiographical Study 82). In psychoanalysis, the Freudian analyst examines the manifest content of the dream in order to discover its meaning or latent content (On Dreams 21-27).

The psychoanalytic approach to literature began with Freud, who was interested in writers and how they cloak ideas in symbols that make sense only after they have been interpreted (Murfin 116). Psychoanalytic criticism constructs an analogy between dreams and novels. Like dreams, novels are inventions of the mind which "though based on reality, are by definition not exactly and literally true. Like a novel, a dream may have some truth to tell, but, like a novel, it may have to be interpreted before that truth can be grasped" (Murfin 113). The contribution psychoanalysis makes to literary criticism is its ability to unfold the unconscious content of the literary work: "When one looks at a poem psychoanalytically, one considers it as though it were a dream or as though some ideal patient could speak from the couch in iambic pentameter" (Holland 131). In psychoanalytic criticism, the literal

surface of a work is referred to as its manifest content. Just as the psychoanalyst tries to figure out the latent content of the dream, the psychoanalytic critic tries to discover the latent content of a work (Murfin 118-119).

Psychoanalytic literary criticism can be divided into four kinds, depending on its object of attention. The critic can focus on the author of the work; on the work's contents; on its formal construction; or on the reader (Eagleton 179). Psychoanalytic critics, such as Modleski, focus on the psychology of the reader. They study the literary work as though it were a dream of the reader, believing that "What draws us as reader to a text is the secret expression of what we desire to hear, much as we protest we do not. The disguise must be good enough to fool the censor into thinking that the text is respectable, but bad enough to allow the unconscious to glimpse the unrespectable" (Wright 117).

Modleski's psychoanalytic approach is based on Fredric Jameson's concept of mass culture, set forth by him in "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture."¹ Like Jameson, she rejects the assumption that mass art is designed to create false anxieties, manipulate false needs, and impose a false consciousness on readers. She agrees with him that mass culture texts tap into *real* social and political anxieties and wishes of audiences. In LWV, she claims that the manifest content of popular romances and Gothics disguise a latent content that is responsible for their mass appeal. In other words, the ability of these texts to tap into women's unconscious anxieties and fantasies about men and patriarchy has made them extremely popular. In a twofold process these texts "stimulate...social anxieties" only to "symbolically satisfy the

¹ For a summary of this article, see Chapter One, pp. 16-20.

'properly imperishable' desires and fantasies of women"' (Modleski 28). However, since they fulfill the reader's wishes in symbolic form only, the reader is protected from recognizing these fears and desires (Modleski 27).

Modleski's approach to romances and Gothics suggests that she views literature as a means to an end. For her, the form of a work is little more than a mode of concealment for its latent content. Although the text itself is important, its distinct literary qualities are significant only if they reveal information about the object of her study--the reader. This is why popular novels are valuable objects for critical study. For the psychoanalytic critic, aesthetic value judgements are not an issue; the text is "good" or "bad" only in relation to its ability to convey its latent content. Modleski also assumes that all romances have the same fixed features, and as a result exert similar effects on readers. Her analysis implies that these fixed features, as well as the text's meaning, are undeniably *in* romances and Gothics from the start (Radway 7). Thus, by viewing the literary work as an enclosed object, Modleski at least partially upholds the New Critical definition of literature.

Focused on the reader, Modleski does not emphasize the intentions of individual authors. This approach is consistent with her psychoanalytic approach; just as the dreamer is unaware of the latent content of her dream, the author is similarly unaware of the text's "true meaning". In fact, Modleski even doubts that romances and Gothics are even under the creative control of individual authors: "the company which produces them requires its writers to follow a strict set of rules and even dictates the point of view from which the narrative must be told" (32).

Similarly, although Modleski undertakes her study in order to learn more about female readers, she is unconcerned with their interpretations of romances and Gothics. She assumes that the meaning of such texts is

available only to a trained reading scholar who can explain the buried significance of things like plot development, characterization, and literary tropes. This is why she is able to explain the popularity of feminine texts without consulting any actual readers (Radway 7). Modleski believes that for the reader, the reading process is an act of consumption, not production. Readers are either unaware of the text's latent content or cannot consciously admit its true nature. However, Modleski does not gloss over reader responses completely. She is careful to point out that their willingness to buy popular novels reveals information about women. It is not romances and Gothics themselves, but rather the combination of these texts and their popularity that tells us about the "very real problems and tensions in women's lives" (Modleski 14).

Clearly, Modleski believes that literature has a relationship to psychological and social reality. Literature is valuable not for its own distinct qualities, but for its ability to reveal information about readers. Just as dreams tell us things about the anxieties, fears and wishes of the dreamer, popular feminine texts tell us about the psyches of female readers. Indeed, these texts are significant *because* they tell us about the female reader. Quoting Richard Dyer's observations on the utopian lure of mass culture, Modleski describes LWV as a "search for the utopian promises of mass art for women" (30) which may reveal what women "'want deeply that their...day to day lives don't provide'" (Modleski 112).

Although Modleski's theoretical approach is guided by some New Critical tenets, it also implicitly opposes several traditional Formalist doctrines. Her analysis of romances and Gothics is text-centered, but she does not champion the text's form over its content. Modleski also rejects the Formalist inclination to totally discount the reader by stressing the

importance of reader preferences for romances and Gothics. Finally, her conviction that mass cultural texts are important because they tell us about psychological and social reality openly refutes the Formalist notion that the literary work is completely self-referential.

In her examination of Harlequins and Gothics, Modleski outlines the basic plot of each. She then hypothesizes that the appeal of both genres can be traced to two mild neuroses in the female reader: hysteria and paranoia.² Reviewing the basic elements of both genres (point of view, characterization, etc.), Modleski next explains how they correspond to these neuroses. Her method assumes a strong level of identification between reader and heroine: when the reader is reading about the heroine's struggle with the hero, she is working through these problems vicariously. Modleski goes on to explain how the resolution of this struggle reveals the secret anxieties and desires of readers. In her conclusion, she attempts to discover how Harlequins and Gothics affect the everyday lives of female readers.

Modleski notes that each Harlequin romance novel is approximately 190 pages in length and contains the following formula:

a young, inexperienced, poor to moderately well-to-do woman encounters and becomes involved with a handsome, strong, experienced and wealthy man, older than herself by ten to fifteen years. The heroine is confused by the hero's behaviour since, though he is obviously interested in her, he is mocking, cynical, contemptuous, often hostile, and even somewhat brutal.

² The terms hysteria and paranoia are used in specific ways by Modleski, not according to their clinical psychological definitions. For their specific definitions, see pages 31 and 39 respectively.

By the end, however, all misunderstandings are cleared away, and the hero reveals his love for the heroine, who reciprocates (36).

One of the Harlequin's most compelling features is its explanation for the puzzling behaviour of the hero: why does he mock the heroine, and why is he so often angry at her? (Modleski 40). According to Modleski, the hero's indifference and contempt echoes the way men assert their masculine superiority over women in real life: "they treat the woman as a joke, appraise her as an object, and give her less attention than they give their automobiles" (40). At first glance, it would appear that this type of narrative would be unpleasant for the reader who is identifying with the heroine. However, Modleski explains that the reader ends up enjoying Harlequins because they allow her to interpret the hero's behaviour as the result of his intense love for the heroine (Modleski 40). The Harlequin can do this because the reader is acquainted with the formula of the book *before* she reads it. Although the reader is identifying with the heroine, she is still superior in wisdom to her because she knows that the ending will bring the hero's surrender to love. In fact, the reader is able to identify emotionally with the heroine partly because she is intellectually distanced from her and does not have to suffer her confusion (Modleski 40). As a result of her superiority, the reader is able to interpret the hero's actions as evidence of his love for the heroine:

Knowing the hero will eventually...state that he has loved the heroine from the beginning, the reader can attribute the hero's expressions of hostility and derision to his inability to admit, perhaps even to himself, how much the sight of the woman...inflames his passion and rouses his admiration (Modleski 41).

Thus while the heroine is attributing the hero's behaviour to things like the weather, the reader is attributing it to happier causes unsuspected by the heroine (Modleski 42). Harlequins consequently assure readers that although some men may actually enjoy inflicting pain on women, the meanness of many "bullies" is nothing more than the overflow of their love or a measure of their resistance to female charms (Modleski 43). Readers are told that male brutality is a not manifestation of contempt, but of love. Thus, Harlequins are enjoyable because they dispel the reader's doubts about men and protect her from the evils of a sexist society (Modleski 43).

According to Modleski, Harlequins are particularly appealing for females suffering from hysteria. Using a definition of this condition developed by Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, she reports that hysteria begins with the female's habit of daydreaming to escape from her monotonous family life. This habit leads her to develop a "double conscience" which, among other symptoms, causes her to tell stories about herself in the third person. Next, the female starts to feel plagued by the feeling that she is being watched by a "clear-sighted and calm observer" sitting in the corner of her brain looking on (Modleski 32). Modleski concurs with John Berger's observation that in modern society woman "must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself....From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually" (Modleski 36). Further, she observes that today's woman lives in a society whose mass culture products have "turned women into delectable sights for consumption" (Modleski 36). All of these things lead women to suffer from an exaggerated awareness of their physical selves.

Modleski notes that a central element of the Harlequin is the heroine's "disappearing act." At some point in the narrative, the hero becomes aware of

Modleski notes that a central element of the Harlequin is the heroine's "disappearing act." At some point in the narrative, the hero becomes aware of the heroine's infinite preciousness after she has "run away, disappeared, fallen into a raging river, or otherwise shown by the threat of her annihilation how important her life really is" (Modleski 45). According to Modleski, the heroine's longing to "disappear" or destroy her consciousness of her physical presence appeals to the female reader's hysterical state. Given the common female condition of hysteria, she concludes that it is easy to see why female readers would want to obliterate the consciousness of self. Harlequins fulfill this female wish to disappear, because the heroine's "disappearing act" allows the reader to believe that she can transcend her divided self (Modleski 37).

The heroine's disappearance also provides pleasure for the reader by creating what Modleski calls a "female revenge fantasy". During the heroine's disappearance, the reader derives a great deal of satisfaction from watching the hero's reaction to the disappearance of the heroine. The reader feels good because "the woman is bringing the man to his knees...all the while he is being so hateful, he is internally grovelling, grovelling, grovelling" (Modleski 45). This fantasy is especially satisfying for the reader because the heroine is allowed to express her anger at the hero without jeopardizing the book's happy ending. The heroine's disappearance also avoids placing her in a situation wherein she expresses her resentment and then is ridiculed for it by the hero, an occurrence which would only lead to self-hatred and more anger at the man for putting her in such an impossible situation (Modleski 47). In the revenge fantasy, then, the reader gets to express her anger at men without having to acknowledge her angry feelings or relinquish the happy ending she anticipates.

indicate that women are angry and hostile, not that they are seeking chains of bondage (Modleski 48). Agreeing with Karl Marx that suffering allows people to avenge themselves on the world while appearing fatalistic about their lot, Modleski concludes that the heroine's romantic suffering is not an expression of masochism, but a protest against real suffering (Modleski 48). Harlequins, by channelling women's deep-seated desire for vengeance into a female revenge fantasy, have provided an outlet for female resentment not realized by critics until now (Modleski 45). Therefore, although psychoanalysts such as Helen Deutsche believed that women's anxieties about rape (the manifest content) conceal the desire to be taken by force (the latent content), Modleski reveals that the desire to be taken by force (the manifest content) conceals anxiety about rape and longings for power and revenge (the latent content) (48).

Modleski subsequently argues that the female reader's hysteria explains another central element of the Harlequin, namely its pre-occupation with finding out whether or not the heroine is a "scheming little adventuress" (Modleski 48). Harlequins routinely expect a poor girl to marry a rich man, preferably of the nobility, yet emphasize that the girl never set out to get him and the money. As with the hero's brutality, this element of the book appeals to readers because it reflects a double bind imposed upon women in real life: "their most important achievement is supposed to be finding a husband; their greatest fault is attempting to do so" (Modleski 48). Harlequins solve this problem by getting the heroine from loneliness and poverty to romance and riches without making it seem as though she tried to do so. One way they do this is by having the heroine initially "hate" the hero for his arrogance. This technique absolves the heroine from all self-interested motives; at the same time, however, the knowing reader doubts the heroine's dislike of the hero

and is pleased when the heroine's aversion to the hero excites him (Modleski 50). Furthermore, by endowing the heroine with certain traits, Harlequins also make her capture of the hero's heart appear unintentional. For one thing, she is self-deluded: "If a woman is chiefly deceiving herself about the nature of her feelings, she can't be accused of willfully deceiving others" (Modleski 51). The inconsistent emotions she feels as a result of her self-delusion turn her into a charming enigma, allowing her to charm the hero without being suspected of deliberately trying to engage his interest (Modleski 51). In addition, the heroine is always young and possesses a high level of innocence: "A heroine must not...understand sexual desire, for knowledge entails guilt; but since she is a child and knows not what she does...she can arouse the hero by her appealing looks...and whimsical behaviour" (Modleski 51). Often, the novel renders her sick or unconscious so that she can arouse male desire without being responsible for doing so (Modleski 52).

Several other elements of the Harlequin can be traced to the problem of proving the heroine's artlessness. For example, this problem explains the heroine's extreme passivity. In order for the heroine to remain unaware of herself and the effect she is having on the hero, she must appear to be completely swept away by him. By yielding to the force of the hero, the heroine loses "all sense of herself" (Modleski 54). The difficulty of proving the heroine's artlessness also accounts for the romance's narrative point of view, which tries to convince the reader that self-forgetfulness can be achieved while male desires are being met. In order to do this, Harlequins use what Barthes describes as "personal narration." Modleski explains that although written in the third person, "personal narration" is nevertheless a first person narration. The story is written so that all actions can be easily changed in the reader's head from "she" to "I". For example, a sentence like

"she left the flower shop" is easily altered to "I left the flower shop" in the reader's mind. Little critical distance separates the heroine and reader, who quickly adopts the heroine's fantasy as her own (Modleski 55). However, the third person point of view is necessary if the novel is to keep the heroine unaware of her appearance yet still convey how appealing she is. For example, the line "She had no idea how lovely she looked with her hair loosened and dishevelled" must be written in the third person in order to achieve this end (Modleski 55).

Harlequins, then, are appealing in part because they tell readers how to cope with a society that assumes women are guilty of scheming to get a husband until proven otherwise (Modleski 52). However, Modleski concludes that because of the way romances try to alleviate female self-consciousness, they only exacerbate it. This occurs because Harlequins solve the problem of making the heroine appear artless by "making men into eavesdroppers" (Modleski 53). Harlequin heroes appear in doorways, behind bushes, and in nearby rooms, only to learn that the heroine is not scheming to get him (Modleski 53). In the end, the eavesdropping device fails. Harlequins do not convince the hysterical female reader that self-forgetfulness is possible. While the *heroine* may be able to establish her innocence because she is unaware of the hero's presence, the *reader* is only too aware of his presence. By placing the reader with the hero who is watching the heroine, the eavesdropping device actually aggravates the reader's split consciousness: "Ultimately, romances help instill in women a sense of the impossibility of ever achieving self-forgetfulness" (Modleski 53). In addition, because the Harlequin's "personal narration" technique is designed to draw the reader into its fantasy (the reader is meant to rewrite most of the sentences to incorporate the use of "I"), the reader cannot help but

incorporate these descriptions of the heroine into her experience. As a result, part of the reader is forced to become a male surveyor, while another part of her remains the surveyed female. In this way, the Harlequin provides an already hysterical reader with an even greater awareness of self (Modleski 54). Although the disappearing act of the Harlequin may temporarily convince the reader that she can transcend her divided self, on the whole the novel fails in this respect (Modleski 56). By creating a scenario in which women watch other women the way they are watched, romances not only reflect the heroine's hysterical state, but contribute to it. As Modleski declares, "women readers reemerge feeling more visible--and hence more guilty--than ever" (Modleski 57).

According to Modleski, Harlequins are potentially harmful to women. Building on Cawelti's hypothesis that "art derives from some persistently disturbing psychic conflict, which, failing of resolution in life, seeks it in symbolic form of fantasy" (Cawelti 11), Modleski contends that romances, by exaggerating the reader's consciousness of self, exacerbate her hysteria. Like tranquilizers, Harlequins actually create their own demand by increasing the hysterical anxiety that sent the reader to the book in the first place:

Harlequins, in presenting a heroine who has escaped psychic conflicts, inevitably increase the reader's own psychic conflicts, thus creating an even greater dependency on the literature. This lends credence to the other commonly accepted theory of popular art as narcotic...certain tranquilizers taken to relieve anxiety are, though temporarily helpful, ultimately anxiety-producing. The user must constantly increase the dosage

of the drug in order to alleviate problems aggravated by the drug itself (Modleski 57).

Despite this observation, Modleski refuses to condemn popular romances, cautioning that "the contradictions in women's lives are more responsible for the existence of Harlequins than Harlequins are for the contradictions" (Modleski 57). These books also serve as important information source about women. For one thing, they illustrate that readers have an enormous amount of psychic energy; as Modleski notes, "it is no mean feat for a grown woman to make herself disappear" (58). Romances also reveal female resentment over being ridiculed by the opposite sex; being viewed as an object for consumption; and over being suspected as adventuresses even after being told by society that their value depends on attracting a man. Modleski therefore concludes that "Each novel...is as much a protest against as an endorsement of the feminine condition" (58). Given these observations, Modleski claims that there is hope for societal change, provided women rechannel their anger into finding ways of affirming and asserting the female self (58).

Turning to the modern Gothic, Modleski notes that these narratives are similar to Harlequins. She observes that they routinely describe the fate of a young heroine who

comes to a mysterious house, 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 may suspect him of having killed his first wife or someone else...She tries to convince herself that her suspicions are unfounded, that since she loves him he must be trustworthy. Often...the man is proven innocent

of all wrongdoing and the real culprit is discovered and punished (Modleski 59).

The heroine of the Gothic is brave, resourceful, and self-reliant until she falls in love (Modleski 78). Often the heroine's real mother is absent and a mother substitute has taken her place. Over the course of the narrative, the heroine commonly experiences a separation from home, a series of internal and/or external conflicts with the mother figure, and a gradual understanding of the "mother's" situation. The heroine may also befriend a small child (Modleski 68).

Once the heroine has fallen in love with the hero of the Gothic, she becomes paranoid, fearing that her hostile husband is a lunatic or a murderer (Modleski 61). Romantically disillusioned, she feels socially isolated, despised, and confused (Modleski 62). She becomes obsessed with the activities of the hero and broods over the slightest fluctuations in his emotional temperature. She often has the uncanny feeling that the past is repeating itself through her, feeling a strong identification with a woman from the past who has been involved with the hero and has died a mysterious death (Modleski 69). She feels a desperate need to find out who her enemy is and to blame him for her discomfort; she also needs to be assured that her enemy is not the hero. Throughout the story, the heroine tries to deny evidence of the hero's guilt, telling herself that true love means maintaining absolute faith in the loved one (Modleski 74).

Inevitably, however, the hero displays unsuspected reserves of tenderness and love, and the heroine learns that either she has become involved with the wrong man (and the right man comes along and saves her from the villainy of the first man), or that the lover/husband has "changed" and is the true hero (Modleski 80). Regardless, it is established beyond any

doubt that the lover/husband is not guilty. In the typical Gothic solution, the heroine discovers what really happened to the victimized woman with whom she has been identifying (Modleski 71). Often, a woman is made responsible for the crimes in the story (Modleski 79).

Unlike the plot of the Harlequin, it is impossible to attribute the hero's undesirable behaviour to his suppressed passion for the heroine (60). According to Modleski, herein lies the major difference between the two genres: in Harlequins, the heroine's feelings are transformed from fear into love; in Gothics, from love into fear (60). But there are other differences. In the Harlequin reading experience, the reader has a certain amount of control over the situation, because she knows that the heroine has nothing to fear but love. In Gothics, the reader shares the heroine's uncertainty about what the husband/lover is up to (Modleski 60). Thus in Harlequins, the preoccupation is with getting a man; in Gothics, with understanding the relationship once the union has been formed (Modleski 61). Generally speaking, Harlequins correspond to the courtship phase of a woman's life, Gothics to the married phase (Modleski 61).

Modleski's central argument is that Gothics appeal primarily to the paranoid female reader, who uses these novels to come to terms with her contradictory feelings for her parents (Modleski 68). By paranoid, Modleski does not mean that Gothic readers are neurotic and unstable. She cites the observation of psychoanalyst Jule Nydes who has stated that "paranoid traits may be quite mild, are almost universal and are often found in persons whose ego strengths may be...quite sound" (81). Using William Meissner's definition of the paranoid self developed by him in The Paranoid Process, Modleski explains that the paranoid female usually comes from a family whose power structure is imbalanced and anger-provoking for the child. One

of the parents is perceived by the child as omnipotent and domineering, while the other parent is perceived as submissive and victimized by the stronger partner. Modleski also claims that paranoid traits in women can be traced to their common experiences: "The structure of the Western family, with its unequal distribution of power, almost inevitably generates the kinds of feminine conflicts and anxieties we have been discussing" (81). As well, women's relational experiences later in life may reinforce these feelings. For instance, many women undergo feelings of social isolation and paranoia when they are first married, since this experience often thrusts them into an unfamiliar environment chosen and dominated by another. Such feelings are exacerbated by the post-honeymoon letdown, when the female's dreams of romance and marital bliss (dreams which Harlequins promise will be fulfilled) conflict with harsh reality (Modleski 64).

Modleski explains that Gothics appeal to the paranoid female reader because they allow her to work through her love-hate feelings towards her parents, an experience Meissner contends is the cure for paranoia. The paranoid condition of the female reader explains why the heroine's mother is often absent and why she must undergo a separation from home only later to understand the "mother's" situation. Concurring with Meissner that the paranoid child feels anger at her mother for allowing herself to be a victim, Modleski also agrees with Patricia Meyer Spacks that one way of dealing with anger towards the mother is to eliminate her from the text (67-68). The substitute mother figure of the Gothic novel allows the female reader to explore her ambivalence towards her mother without asking her to confront the mother/daughter relationship too closely (Modleski 68). Accepting Gertrude Ticho's argument that the female's separation from home (most notably in marriage) revives early separation anxieties, Modleski concludes

that the heroine's separation from home allows the reader work through her love and hostility for mother and to tolerate the difficulties of the mother-daughter relationship (67-8).

Modleski contends that the heroine's uncanny sensation that the past is repeating itself through her appeals to the reader's need to work through her separation anxieties. In order to explain this (as well as other elements of the Gothic), Modleski draws upon Nancy Chodorow's theory of female personality development. According to Janice Radway, Chodorow claims that the tone and residue of the intense mother-infant relationship in the patriarchal family determines how the child encounters people, and that the consequences of the mother-infant relationship are different for male and female children (Radway 135). Specifically, the early mothering of the female child tends to cement the daughter's identification with the mother, a state that later produces difficulties in the daughter's individuation. This early symbiotic union between mother and daughter, and the lack of sexual difference between them, leads to "a prolonged pre-oedipal state...that tends to continue her dependency, ego-boundary confusion and affective ambivalence about her mother" (Radway 138). Because the daughter also experiences her mother as an extension of herself, she has difficulty recognizing herself as a separate person. As a result, the female views herself as a self-in-relation, seeing herself as an extension of the world and others (Radway 136).

In light of Chodorow's theory, Modleski contends that for the female reader, the hero's previous victim represents her mother. In chronicling the heroine's struggle not to follow in the path of the hero's former wife, the Gothic depicts the female reader's struggle not to follow in the path of her mother (who was also victimized by a man). Since the female child fears she will never develop a sense of autonomy from her mother, when the Gothic

heroine reassures herself that what happened to a previous heroine will not happen to her, the female reader not only reassures herself that she will not share the same *fate* as her mother, but also that she is *not* her mother (Modleski 70). The appearance of the child in the Gothic novel also relates to this fear. In befriending and protecting a child in the Gothic, the heroine reaffirms once again that she is not like the "mother"--a helpless, depressive victim unable to protect her child from the father or to provide it with adequate nurturance (Modleski 77).

Modleski argues that the female reader's unresolved separation anxieties and oedipal conflicts as articulated by Chodorow are responsible for both the heroine's need to find out who her enemy is and her need to learn that he is not the hero. According to Chodorow, both male and female children see the father as an "enemy" capable of taking away their first and strongest attachment--the mother. As a result, children develop hostility towards both parents: towards the father because he is the "tyrant" who controls the mother, and towards the mother because she cannot resist this control (Modleski 73). Eventually, however, both children must use the father as a symbol of freedom from the mother in an attempt to separate from her. While the boy does this by identifying with the former "enemy," the girl must relinquish her first love (mother) and make her "enemy" her "lover". However, this process can become problematic if the father is perceived by the child to be remote and rejecting. While the male child may still identify with such a father, the girl's problem in this situation is twofold: she has more difficulty separating from the mother, and in the face of father's rejection may feel renewed hostility towards the father, who once again becomes the enemy (Modleski 74).

In short, Meissner's paranoid female reader needs to vicariously establish boundaries of self by projecting an enemy and deny her hostility by insisting that she is being persecuted (Modleski 74). The reader also needs to know that this enemy is not the father (whom the hero represents), because seeing the father as enemy would thwart the female's attempt to separate from the mother. Such a father would confirm, not weaken, the young girl's identification with the mother (Modleski 74). In the Gothic, the female reader can externalize her anger at the power structure which makes the male dominant while denying her angry feelings at someone she is emotionally dependent upon. For example, when the hero appears to be persecuting the heroine, the female reader can be angry with him and simultaneously identify with a passive heroine who appears to be an innocent victim (Modleski 66). As well, although the heroine tries to convince herself that she must accept the idea of feminine self-sacrifice by maintaining absolute faith in her loved one, the Gothic ending never requires her to perform this sacrifice. The hero is always found innocent, thus allowing the heroine to accept him. In turn, the female reader can reconcile with the father and break her identification with the victimized mother (Modleski 76). By making either a feminized male rival or a woman responsible for the crimes in the story, Gothics further reinforce women's distance from their victimized mothers, proving that men--"real men" anyway--are not tyrants and brutes (Modleski 81).

Modleski concludes that just as Harlequins are expressions of the normal female hysterical character, Gothics are expressions of the normal female paranoid personality. In the former, the primary anxiety of the reader is guilt; in the latter, it is fear (Modleski 81). Unlike the Harlequin reader, however, the Gothic reader is able to regard herself more purely as a victim:

"Because Gothics have evolved such complex mechanisms such as externalization, projection, doubling, and plotting, they permit women to experience hostile emotions without forcing them to see this hostility turned against themselves" (Modleski 82). In Gothics, feminine resentment is fully justified (the heroine has not fallen in love with her victimizer), and is satisfied through locating and punishing a criminal outside the self (Modleski 83). This distinction shows why Gothics have been more acceptable to women writers and feminists than romances. As Modleksi remarks, the Gothic genre explores women's profound psychic conflicts "in relation to a society which systematically oppresses women....It has been used to show how women are at least potentially 'pure victims' but how, in coming to view themselves as such, they perpetuate the cycle of victimization" (83).

Modleski concludes that like Harlequins, modern Gothics also reveal important information about women. First, Gothics affirm that females who are parented primarily by women have difficulty individuating from their mothers. Second, they disclose women's extreme discontent with societal arrangements (eg. the typical Western family power structure) that turn them into victims. This is obvious because although Gothics may contain statements endorsing notions of feminine self-sacrifice, their plot workings actually suggest the opposite: "modern Gothics may inform us that 'mutilation' is 'truly the gift of gifts' but they also assure us, to our immense relief, that it won't be extracted from us" (Modleski 84).

The achievements of Loving With A Vengeance are noteworthy. First, given that Modleski's goal is to learn about women by examining their fiction preferences, her use of the psychoanalytic approach is appropriate. As we saw earlier, psychoanalytic theory holds that the fundamental motivation of all human behaviour is the avoidance of pain and the gaining of pleasure.

Because people consume mass culture products for pleasure, there is an obvious link between psychoanalysis and mass culture. Psychoanalysis seeks to discover what people find gratifying and how they can relieve their misery (Eagleton 192). It follows that a fuller understanding of the pleasures derived from popular fiction can shed some light on romance and Gothic readers.

It is also difficult to argue with Modleski's contention that the romance's portrayal of the gruff hero is appealing because it reassures female readers that male hostility can stem from intense passion for a woman. Romances not only encourage this interpretation of the hero with happy endings, they also encourage it in the main text. In The Flame and the Flower, for example, Brandon (the hero) is often curt and verbally abusive towards Heather (the heroine). However, the omniscient narrator is careful to explain the reason behind the hero's moods. In this novel, Brandon vows that because he has been blackmailed into marrying Heather, he will never make love to her. Despite his vow, he finds her irresistible, and finds himself reacting to her with annoyance. Heather, unaware of Brandon's inner turmoil, is baffled by his dramatic mood swings. In the following scene, Brandon has just dispatched two bandits who have attempted to kidnap his wife:

Still chuckling, Brandon slid into bed beside Heather who now sat in the middle of it, watching him quietly, her eyes a little wide. He grinned at her.

'I wonder what damage befell the last one. He screamed the loudest, don't you agree, my pet?'

She met his gaze, then as she nodded, a soft ripple of musical laughter escaped her.

'Oh, I do indeed agree," she laughed. "And I suppose I must feel honored that they lied about what I should bring. No man would pay such a price for a woman.'

He looked at her for a moment in a queer manner, listening to the sound of her voice, watching the bright, happy smile. His gaze fell to the smooth, silky breasts rising full and tantalizing above her gown and to the soft transparency of her dress which concealed very little of her slender body. Moisture broke from his brow as he experienced once again a familiar tightening. A muscle in his cheek flexed as he turned away, and a sudden impulse to hurt surged upward within him.

'Considering what you must weigh it wouldn't have been very much,' he said harshly before he blew out the candle, and in the dark he added coldly, 'If they had offered more I might have been tempted.'

Bewildered by his sudden change of mood, Heather crept to her pillow and lay down. She did not know what she had done or said to cause him to want to hurt her so cruelly. He was so unpredictable. How could she understand him? One moment he was gentle and kind as he had been earlier, the next she was left speechless by his irascible disposition (The Flame and the Flower 131-32).

The Flame and the Flower, then, suggests that modern romances do tell female readers that although masculine behaviour is distasteful at times, the force behind it (love) is a very palatable one.

Modleski's argument that the disappearing act of the heroine constitutes a female revenge fantasy is similarly convincing. The

disappearing act "kills two birds with one stone". First, the act punishes and humiliates the formerly ambivalent hero, who is forced to beg for the heroine's return. Second, it protects the reader from having to accept that she is identifying with an angry woman. The stigma of the angry woman has been a pervasive force in literature for centuries, and suggests that the woman who openly displays her will and passion is unnatural (Woman Question 89). In contrast, the woman who behaves as an "an inspiring figure of purity and selflessness" is considered a true or "womanly" woman (Woman Question 81). Modleski suggests that the threat of this label explains why the romance heroine expresses her anger using indirect rather than direct means. Since the reader is identifying with the heroine, her conscious recognition of the heroine's anger might prompt the uncomfortable realization that she herself is an "angry woman." As Modleski observes, the disappearing act eliminates this problem entirely.

Modleski's analyses of the romance's portrayal of the hero and the heroine's disappearing act do undermine the assumption that women want to read about heroines being dominated because they are masochistic. According to Modleski, the key to understanding why female readers want to read about a moody hero is the heroine's disappearing act. Because this act reveals that the *real* reaction of the heroine and the reader to the hero's behaviour is anger, it follows that romances only feature a puzzling hero in order to alleviate readers' confusion about masculine behaviour. Readers do not consume romances because they enjoy watching men mistreat women. They do so in order to express anxiety over this problem: "the so-called masochism pervading these texts is a 'cover' for anxieties, desires and wishes which if openly expressed would challenge the psychological and social order of things" (Modleski 30).

Modleski's analysis of the modern Gothic is also insightful. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the ease in which her theory can be applied to a specific Gothic novel. For example, in the Gothic novel Marshwood, (a random selection from a used bookstore) we can see the forces Modleski has described at work. The opening of Marshwood finds the heroine's mother on her deathbed. Just prior to dying, however, she gives her daughter (Kimberly) a brooch and utters the word "Marshwood." Determined to uncover the mystery of these gestures, Kimberly prolongs her visit to her uncle's family in New Orleans. During this visit, she learns that "Marshwood" is the name of a double estate inhabited by a handsome man named Fortney Ballaine (the hero). After a few romantic encounters with Fortney (who, it turns out, is engaged to a woman named Natalie Marsh), the heroine is stalked repeatedly by a masked man intent on stealing her brooch. Later, when Kimberly investigates the Marshwood estate, she is bitten by a poisonous snake. Although she is saved by the hero, the heroine is forced to remain inside the Marshwood mansion until she has fully recovered.

Once inside Marshwood, Kimberly meets the members of the two families who occupy the double estate: the Marshes, including Octavia Marsh, the elderly widow of Sumner Marsh; her middle-aged sister, Zilda Laurent; Zilda's son, Valetton Laurent, a sensitive, "artist" type; Octavia's eldest daughter, Natalie Marsh, the beautiful fiancée of Fortney; Octavia's youngest daughter, Liana; Damas Ballaine; and his nephew, Fortney Ballaine. Kimberly soon resumes her quest to unravel the mystery of her mother's past. She learns from Liana that Fortney's great-great-great grandfather, Beau Ballaine, was a "ruthless corsair" who went about "pillaging and raping innocent women" (Marshwood 127). Recognizing the similarities between Beau and Fortney, Kimberly becomes more and more afraid of the hero: "it was much

too easy to imagine Fortney in the role she had described to me. Especially when I recalled the look of arrogant triumph that had come onto his face after he had so boldly kissed me in full view of everyone, including Natalie" (Marshwood 127). But this is not all she learns. According to family lore, several years earlier Beau Ballaine had impregnated Honorine, the wife of Clement Marsh, the co-master of Marshwood. In a fit of rage after discovering his wife's infidelity, Clement allegedly buried his wife alive in the dungeons of Marshwood and flung her newborn baby into the bayou. Since then, the "ghost of Marshwood," Honorine, had reportedly been haunting both mansions, searching for her murdered child (Marshwood 130-31). Kimberly also learns that although Clement's brother and sister-in-law must have suspected something, neither reported anything to the police. According to Liana, this occurred because the sister-in-law hated Honorine and wanted to be the sole mistress of Marshwood:

'Clement's sister-in-law had grown to hate Honorine with a passion by then, perhaps because Honorine was much prettier than she...In any case, she was delighted to find herself sole mistress of Marshwood, with two men at her beck and call instead of just one....In that one respect, at least, Natalie is a great deal like her....She's not immune to Valetton's charm, even if it is Fortney she wants to marry...She'd like nothing better than to have men argue over her' (Marshwood 130).

During Kimberly's stay at Marshwood, both Valetton and Fortney make amorous advances towards her, despite the latter's engagement to Natalie (it is rumoured that the two are marrying for property gain). Kimberly is also approached by Honorine's "ghost" who tells her "You must go away from

here, before it's too late. Go away from here, before he finds out about you and flings you into the bayou for the alligators to fight over" (Marshwood 156). During this time, the heroine becomes more and more attracted to the hero, but still suspects him of being the masked stalker who has continued to pursue her (Marshwood 170).

In Marshwood's solution, Kimberly discovers that Octavia had a younger sister named Mignon who had been engaged to Damas Ballaine. However, after becoming pregnant by a secret lover (Sumner Marsh, Octavia's husband), Mignon died giving birth to twins (Marshwood 167). While the male child was accidentally killed by Valetton shortly after his birth, the female child (Kimberly) was spirited away in the middle of the night by the Cajun housemaid, Janel LaLaurie, who raised her as her own daughter. The sole child of Mignon, Kimberly was scheduled to inherit Sumner's fortune, making her a prime target of the greedy Valetton, Sumner's second heir. Marshwood climaxes when Valetton attempts to kill Kimberly, and the reader learns that it is he who has been stalking her all along. Of course, Fortney saves the heroine just in time. The two are subsequently married, but not before Kimberly learns from her father's diary that he had only been unfaithful to Octavia because of her refusal to share his bed during their marriage.

Marshwood sets up some obvious parallels between Kimberly and Honorine, Kimberly and Honorine's victimized child, Beau Bellaine and Fortney, and between Clement Marsh and Fortney. Kimberly's main fear is that Fortney Bellaine will victimize her the same way Beau Bellaine and Clement Marsh destroyed Honorine and her baby. Beau Bellaine is symbolic of Fortney's attempts to victimize Kimberly using his sexuality, while Clement Marsh represents Fortney's potential to harm her as a father. As

Modleski has suggested, the story of Marshwood is the story of Kimberly's attempt to come to terms with her mother by accepting and understanding her substitute mother, and to individuate from her mother by 1) reversing the cycle of female victimization at Marshwood and 2) overcoming the problem of accepting the enemy (father) as lover. This is particularly obvious in the final page of the book:

I shall always be grateful for Fortney's suggestion then that we give both Mignon and Honorine's remains a decent burial. We laid them both to rest in the old cemetery, along with Mignon's murdered infant, who, had it lived, would have been my twin brother.

I shall always be grateful as well to the only mother I had ever truly known for keeping the Queen of Rex brooch hidden from me for so long. She must have guessed that had she told me about it sooner, I might never have grown to have the stamina and courage I needed to accept the tragic circumstances of my birth.

But most of all, I am grateful to her for finding the courage to give me the brooch in the end. For the new joy I have found here at Marshwood as Fortney Ballaine's wife far outweighs the fears and the tragedies, now that the aura of evil that hovered over these old houses so long has finally been lifted

(Marshwood 187).

These concluding paragraphs state almost explicitly that as a result of her investigation, Kimberly has laid to rest her fears of being victimized; reconciled herself with her mother; and completed her individuation by accepting a lover (father) and beginning a new life with him. The remarkable

symmetry between Marshwood and Modleski's analysis of the modern Gothic indicates the strength of the latter.

Modleski's theories about the puzzling behaviour of the hero, the disappearing act of the heroine, and the modern Gothic all suggest that popular romances and Gothics contain a utopian strain implicitly critical of patriarchy. Specifically, this strain is critical of the misogynistic, violent behaviour of some men; the male tendency to behave inconsistently towards the women they are attracted to; the male habit of viewing women as objects of consumption and adventuresses; and of the fact that the patriarchal power structure of some families perpetuates the cyclical victimization of females.

Modleski's detection of a utopian strain in romances and Gothics allows her to erode some traditional critical assumptions about mass culture. First, although these novels reaffirm traditional values and attitudes, their utopian element also challenges these very things, giving a voice to very real female concerns and anxieties (Modleski 112). As a result, these books are filled with important information about women. Romances and Gothics not only disclose female resentment over certain masculine behaviours, they show us how women want to be seen and how they want to live their lives (Modleski 113). LWV, then, demonstrates that popular fiction can provide information about people and should be taken seriously by scholars.

In recovering popular feminine texts as objects of study, Modleski also challenges the tendency of critics to condemn such works. She argues that just as it serves no purpose to deplore their "omissions, distortions and conservative affirmations," it is just as pointless to deplore their readers. According to her, the only way of achieving the radical goal of the feminist movement is to stop opposing the enjoyment of mass-produced feminine

fantasies and to start incorporating them into our study of women (Modleski 114).

Modleski also questions the assumption that the culture industry functions as though a group of conspirators were orchestrating the production of mass culture. As we saw in Chapter One, although the Frankfurt School did not propose that individual bourgeois conspirators deliberately create mass culture to manipulate the public, their concept of mass culture (which emphasizes their manipulative side) implies that the culture industry ends up functioning in this manner. Modleski openly refutes this conspiracy model of mass culture. In its place, she explains the production of popular fiction without falling back on the notion of individual authorship. Modleski claims that these books have not been produced with the intent of reconciling readers to a patriarchal status quo not in their best interests. Rather, they are the product of the interweaving of the complex forces of ideology and the unconscious as conceived by Althusser. Althusser views ideology not as an explicit set of doctrines but as a subtle, persuasive and unconscious force, the very medium in which individuals live out their relation to society (Althusser 160). Re-working the concept of ideology in terms of Lacan's work, Althusser claims that ideology exists outside of the child while he/she is in the "imaginary" state, and that his/her socialization involves the acceptance of this ideology into his/her unconscious (Althusser 162-63). Modleski believes that Althusser's concept of ideology and its relationship to the unconscious explains how feminine texts come to reaffirm patriarchal ideology even though individual authors do not have this goal in mind. She argues that feminine texts can be traced to the unconscious "as it is structured in and by the family" (29). In other words, Harlequin producers and authors are not conspirators: they are merely

socialized human beings whose unconsciousnesses are contaminated by society's dominant ideologies.

A final accomplishment of LWV involves the symmetry between Nancy Chodorow's theory of female personality development and Modleski's theory of the appeal of the modern Gothic. Common sense dictates that since Chodorow's theory is able to at least partially explain the appeal of books read by millions of women, it is likely that her theory has merit. We are thus forced to realize the weaknesses in Freud's theory of female development, which was transferred largely from a male model of the same. By expanding Freud's ideas "most fruitfully," (Modleski 31) Chodorow forces us to reconsider generally accepted Freudian notions about female personality maturation according to a *female* model of psychic development.

Despite its achievements, Loving With a Vengeance has several flaws. First, although the psychoanalytic approach is a good speculative tool (particularly with regard to mass culture works), the conclusions generated by this approach are difficult to test. Logically, if a critic tries to discern the unconscious desires, anxieties, fears and fantasies of consumers, his/her conclusions will be difficult to confirm. As Eagleton remarks, "Freudianism has been attacked on a great number of grounds...There are problems, for instance, about how it would test its doctrines, about what would count as evidence for or against its claims...as one...psychologist remarked in conversation: 'The trouble with Freud's work is that it just isn't *testicle* !'" (Eagleton 161-62). This does not mean that the psychoanalytic approach is not valuable, nor does it mean that the conclusions it generates cannot be evaluated, for we can evaluate them using common sense. It simply means that the reader of LWV should keep in mind the difficulties inherent in this methodology.

The New Critical assumptions Modleski brings to LWV are also problematic. Modleski assumes that because romances and Gothics are formula fiction, they are identical.³ She also believes that her reading of these texts is indistinguishable from those of real romance and Gothic readers. In other words, Modleski assumes that all readers respond to the text in the same way. These convictions limit the achievements of her study. For one thing, they limit her ability to completely refute the long-standing myth of female masochism. Modleski does manage to cast some doubt on this assumption through her analyses of the hero's puzzling behaviour and the heroine's disappearing act; however, she is still at a loss to explain why women would purchase romances such as Rosemary Roger's The Insiders repetitively. This novel takes great pains to describe the hero's sexual torture and humiliation of the heroine until pain and pleasure become one and the same for her. It is worth quoting the novel at length to demonstrate this:

...he shoved her backward off the divan, forcing her down onto the floor with her arms twisted behind her. When she was lying on her side, moaning with rage and hurt and fear, she felt his free hand rip away her thin cotton shorts...

She found she couldn't move--the breath hissed out of her lungs every time he thrust himself even deeper inside her unprepared, resisting vagina.

³ Although Modleski refers to her study of romances specifically as a study of Harlequin romances, she does not explain why she has singled out this particular commercial line of books, nor does she acknowledge that there are other types of romances with different narrative features. In fact, her chapter on Harlequins uses the terms "Harlequin" and "romance" interchangeably, implying that Harlequins are representative of all popular romances.

'Don't--don't--don't' she cried out to him, hating him. But it was too late...she knew it and finally lay there...accepting his violation of her because she had to, and screaming again only when he pulled out of her brutally and unexpectedly forced himself into her the other way...the pain of his intrusion was excruciating, and she kept screaming until he put his fingers up her vagina at the same time, and suddenly the pain became pleasure, and she...cried out instead with excitement and shame that she could obtain such perverse ecstasy from the way he was using her.

This was being punished and possessed and taken.... She made wordless sounds of protest and need and lust...suddenly it was over and they were lying together, exhausted and shaken and spent. She suddenly started to cry again, helplessly and quietly (The Insiders 304).

Because she assumes that they are identical, Modleski puts forth the same explanation for the popularity of all romances. According to her, a book like The Insiders is appealing because it allows female readers to express anxiety about masculine behaviour and to take revenge on the hero through the disappearing act of the heroine. The obvious objection to this claim is that given the content of The Insiders, it seems inconceivable that these rewards would be capable of overcoming the strong disgust and anger this book would inspire in readers. If we accept Modleski's presumption that readers enjoy books like The Insiders as much as other romances, it is difficult not to conclude that romance readers are, at least to some degree, masochistic.

Modleski's New Critical approach also raises the question of whether the utopian strain she detects in romances and Gothics is experienced by other romance readers. Again, because Modleski assumes that 1) there is little discrepancy between her reading of popular feminine texts and the readings of other readers and 2) that only the trained literary critic can decipher textual meaning, she does not place emphasis on reader interpretations of romances and Gothics. However, Radway warns that the critic who believes that readers cannot shed any light on the meaning of popular novels runs the risk of explaining a text which does not resemble the one readers are encountering (Radway 7). If, as reader-response critics argue, readers do contribute to textual meaning, then Modleski's explanation of the appeal of romances and Gothics for a group of readers from an interpretive community different from hers *based on her reading of the text only* should be viewed with caution.

Moreover, although Modleski's argument that Harlequins alleviate hysteria in female readers has merit, she exaggerates the role of the eavesdropping techniques in creating reader addiction to them. Romances *are* pre-occupied with proving the heroine's artlessness, but as Modleski points out, these books have developed more than one device to accomplish this end. The Flame and the Flower, for example, emphasizes that Heather is completely unaware of things like her attractiveness, the effect she is having on the hero, and her desire to seduce the hero without resorting to one eavesdropping scene. At the beginning of the novel, Heather is raped against her will by Brandon and responds to him with fear and anger. And although Heather eventually marries Brandon, the narrator makes it very clear that she does so only because she is pregnant and has few other choices. Passive and sexually innocent, Heather is completely oblivious to the effect she has on her husband:

..sorely aggravated watching her dress and undress, he was about at his limits. He couldn't stand much more....Brandon looked away again and shifted his position in the chair. At least the gown Heather wore now covered her bosom and he was safe for a while if he chose to glance back at her. She was standing there so innocently, wondering why he was agitated. Didn't she know what she did to a man? Couldn't she guess? Just because he had given his word never to touch her, it didn't mean that he wasn't affected by the sight of her in a shift that left nothing to the imagination...(Flame and the Flower 167).

Although romances like The Flame and the Flower can (and do) demonstrate the heroine's artlessness without eavesdropping scenes,⁴ Modleski suggests that this device is partially responsible for reader addiction to them. According to her, female readers repetitively consume popular romances because their split consciousness is exacerbated by the eavesdropping scenes in these novels. Since their anxiety increases with each reading, readers feel compelled to purchase romances for the relief the heroine's disappearing act provides. There are several problems with this claim. For one thing, it means that Harlequins are essentially a *negative* experience for readers, because each reading experience makes women more hysterical and anxious. If this is true, we may ask how many Harlequins a reader needs to read before her anxiety

⁴ In a small sample I conducted of 10 popular romances published between 1970 and 1990, not one featured an eavesdropping scene of the nature Modleski describes. These titles included: Love's Ransom, Undercover Affair, Cimarron Glory, Corrupted, Moonstruck Madness, The Flame and the Flower, Maggie's Man, The Insiders, The Matchmakers, and Illusive Lover (see Works Consulted for more detail).

level is increased to the point where she becomes addicted? How can we account for readers who read Harlequins only occasionally? Jameson's hypothesis (that mass culture works are popular because they tap into, express, and allay the unconscious desires and anxieties of audiences) is a better explanation for reader addiction than Modleski's theory. As Radway proposes in RR, modern romances are popular not because they increase women's anxieties about masculine behaviour and patriarchy, but because they allay reader anxieties about these very things.

Modleski does raise some questions about traditional views of mass culture products and consumers, and several of her arguments are theoretically convincing. However, because they are based on the assumption that the readers encounter romances and Gothics in the same way she does, Modleski can only offer speculations rather than conclusions about the meaning of these novels.

CHAPTER THREE

Reading the Romance: The Reader and the Critic

Janice Radway agrees that modern romances warrant the attention of literary critics and in Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature attempts to explain their popularity. Like Modleski, she refuses to believe that their aesthetic deficiencies have rendered them meaningless or that romance readers are merely passive recipients of these texts' conservative ideological messages. Radway, then, undertakes the same problem as Modleski: that of explaining the different responses of critics and consumers to popular romances without bringing a traditional view of mass culture to them.

Although Radway undertakes the same problem as Modleski, she approaches it with a different methodology. First of all, because she realizes that romances do not "appear miraculously in...the hands...of...readers," Radway begins by explaining how the advertising, marketing and distributing techniques of publishing houses have influenced the sales of romances. Next, Radway embarks on an unusual investigation. Influenced by a view of human behaviour and culture called semiology, Radway explores the meaning of the *activity* of romance reading before examining actual romance texts. Defined briefly, semiology (or, as it is termed in anthropology, ethnography) is the study of signs. In semiology, signs (eg. words, behaviours, objects) have meaning only in relationship to other signs and the entire system of signs (Murfin 266). The semiotician assumes that signs have meaning within the context of a specific culture. In determining their meaning, he/she therefore attempts to identify the conventions of that

culture (Culler 31). The meaning the semiotician strives to apprehend, then, is the meaning a behaviour has for participants and observers of a certain culture (Culler 50). This may mean making explicit a set of unconscious cultural norms which members of that culture might deny (Culler 32).

In RR, Radway conducts a semiotic investigation into the behaviour of romance reading. Her goal is to discover what the *activity* of romance reading means for the women who read them and the people who watch them read:

To know, then, why people do what they do, read romances, for instance, it becomes necessary to discover the constructions they place on their behaviour, the interpretations they make of their actions. A good cultural analysis of the romance ought to specify not only how the women understand the novels themselves but also how they comprehend the very act of picking up a book in the first place....it is necessary to ask...what precisely is 'getting said' both to readers and others each time a woman turns her attention away from her ordinary routine and immerses herself in a book (Radway 8).

In her semiotic investigation, Radway asks a sample group of real readers why they enjoy reading. She then uses their conscious statements to infer covert significances of this activity. These significances include meanings not consciously acknowledged by the readers themselves (Radway 9). RR, then, includes an ingredient LWV does not. While Modleski analyses only the romance text, Radway goes beyond a "text only" methodology to supply a cultural analysis of romance reading.

Radway also examines actual romances texts. However, she does not perform a traditional formalist analysis of them. Rejecting many of the New

Critical principles evident in previous studies of mass art, she proposes a combination reader-response/psychoanalytic approach to them instead. Because Radway cites reader-response critic Stanley Fish as a major influence on her view of literature, a review of his theory is useful here. Unlike the New Critics, Fish does not define the literary text as an objective entity with its own exclusive properties. He defines the text as the reader's experience, or the process of signification which materializes in the practice of reading. Literature exists when it is read, and its force is an affective force. Fish believes that the meaning of the literary text is an event; the text is what it *does* in the mind of the reader. For him the reading process is a temporal process, not a spatial one ("Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics" 73, 78).

Fish claims that the reader has a significant role in the reading process. The reader is not a passive recipient of the ideas an author has planted in the text, he/she actively participates in the making of the text ("Literature in the Reader" 79). Accordingly, formal textual features do not exist independently of the reader's experiences. Fish maintains, however, that the reader is not free from textual restraints. The reader's experience is the product of his/her interpretive strategies, which have been shaped by that reader's education, opinions, concerns, and linguistic and literary competence. Readers with similar interpretive strategies belong to the same interpretive communities (Is There A Text in This Class? 167). Interpretive communities, then, consist of those who share interpretive strategies, or what Fish calls "writing," texts, i.e. constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. These strategies exist prior to the act of reading and determine the shape of what is read, not the other way around. Interpretive communities explain the stability of interpretation among different readers (they belong to the same

community) and for the regularity with which a single reader will employ different interpretive strategies (he belongs to a number of different communities) (Is There a Text in this Class? 171-172).

Fish believes that the text has a relationship to reality in that the reading process gives the reader a sharpened awareness of the mental processes language provokes. And, since the meaning of the literary work is the reader's experience while reading, the goal of literary criticism is a description of the reader's experience ("Literature in the Reader" 89). As Jane Tompkins observes about Fish's theory, "This re-definition of what literature is, i.e., not an object but an experience...makes the responses of the reader rather than the contents of the work the focus of critical attention" (Tompkins xvii).

Embracing several tenets of Fish's theory, Radway decides to "investigate what real readers *do* with texts" in RR (243). She refuses to accept that the romance text is composed of fixed textual features that have certain effects on the reader: "It is, rather, an entity produced by a reader in conjunction with the text's verbal structure. The production process is itself governed by reading strategies and interpretive conventions that the reader has learned to apply as a member of a particular interpretive community" (Radway 10-11). Radway therefore rejects Modleski's assumption that because romances are formulaic all readers (including critics) respond to them the same way. Because the reading process is one of production as well as consumption, Radway insists that any critical enquiry into the popular romance must begin with what readers have said about these books. Otherwise, the critic runs the risk of explaining the appeal of texts which do not resemble the ones readers are encountering. In order to explain the meaning of the romance text, then,

we must first know what a romance is for the woman who buys and reads it. To know that, we must know what romance readers make of the words they find on the page; we must know, in short, how they construct the plot and interpret the characters' intentions....We are forced...by the nature of meaning itself as the construct of a reader always already situated within an interpretive context, to conduct empirical research into the identities of real readers, into the... assumptions they bring to texts, and into...the interpretations they produce (Radway 11).

At this point, the theories of Radway and Fish diverge. Unlike Fish, Radway's final goal is not a mere description of how readers experience the popular romance. Although her methodology begins with a representative reading process that approximates the way real readers read, she goes on to perform a literary analysis of select texts using a psychoanalytic approach.¹ Her objective is to reveal the conscious and unconscious needs romances fulfill in readers (Radway 14-15).

Radway's methodology reveals her view of literature. Unlike Modleski, she views the literary text as a temporal experience rather than a spatial object. Starting with the words on the page, the reader makes the text according to his/her interpretive strategies. However, Radway's definition of literature does resemble Modleski's in that she does not insist that the literary text conform to a certain aesthetic standard before considering it an object of study.

¹ Radway's psychoanalytic approach is similar to Modleski's. For a summary of this approach, see Chapter Two, pp. 23-26.

Radway places little emphasis on the intentions or personal lives of individual authors. This is consistent with her reader-response/psychoanalytic approach. If readers create the text in conjunction with the words on the page, then authorial intention is relatively unimportant in the search for textual meaning. In addition, psychoanalytic literary theory holds that because authors are human beings with a dual consciousness, they cannot be aware every impulse in a text. Authors might be cognizant of what they intended to place in a work, but this does not mean they can illuminate the meaning of the entire text.

However, Radway does emphasize the role of the reader. She agrees with Fish that readers actively make the text in conjunction with the words on the page. But this does not mean the reader is free to interpret the text anyway he/she likes: the reader "makes" the text according to his/her interpretive strategies, which have been moulded by his/her interpretive community. And although Radway agrees that readers play a role in shaping textual meaning, she also maintains that few individual readers are able to discern and articulate this meaning. Readers may be able to supply her with the proper text to analyse, but they are unable to fully explain its latent content. For this, a trained literary critic is required.

Finally, Radway assumes that literature has a relationship to reality. In her view, romance novels are powerful informing agents about female readers and their relational experiences as members of a patriarchal society.

Radway's reader-response assumptions implicitly oppose the main tenets of New Criticism and Formalism. As we saw in Chapter One, both New Critics and Formalists view the literary work as a self-contained, objective unit of study that holds the text's meaning. For them, textual meaning is separate from the intentions of the author and the subjective

responses of the reader. In contrast, Radway argues that treating the literary work as a spatial object ignores or suppresses what is really happening in the act of reading. Readers have a significant role in the reading process, and to regard the text the way New Critics and Formalists do is to "petrify the human act of signification, to ignore the fact that comprehension is actually a process of making meaning" (Radway 7). Lastly, while Formalists do not view the literary work as a reflection of psychological reality, Radway maintains that romances can tell us much about the psyches of women who read them.

The first chapter of RR attempts to explain how changes in the publishing industry have influenced the sales figures of the paperback romance. Radway claims that the increased sales of the romance can be attributed in part to twentieth century technological innovations. These innovations include: the improvement of machine-made paper; the introduction of mechanical typesetting and sophisticated flatbed presses; and inventions such as the Napier and Hoe cylinder press, the rotary magazine press, and synthetic glue (Radway 19). Radway also contends that increased romance sales are the result of a philosophical shift within the publishing industry over the last two hundred years. Between the early nineteenth and late twentieth century, authors, editors and publishers ceased to view reading as a personalized activity and books as individual entities. Instead, these professionals began to see books as products that could be sold to a large public on a regular basis (Radway 22-23). In the late 1900s, the takeover of many publishing houses by communication conglomerates forced publishers to place more emphasis on profit than ever before; they therefore began to make decisions about manuscript selection, print orders, and advertising campaigns based on market-research techniques rather than on editors' intuitions (Radway 35).

Radway cites the ability of publishers to perfect distribution, advertising, and marketing techniques as a major factor in the increased sales of the paperback romance (Radway 13). The most successful of these publishers, Harlequin Enterprises, increased sales by treating books like any other commodity (Radway 40). In the early 1970s, Harlequin began emphasizing things like identifying the consuming public; reaching that audience; and using a calculated image to forge an association in the consumer's mind between the Harlequin product and company name (Radway 40). Using these basic principles, Harlequin parlayed its original sales of 19,000,000 copies in 1970 to 168,000,000 copies worldwide by 1979 (Radway 41). Success stories like Harlequin's thus prompt Radway to observe that while romances are popular because they provide a pleasurable reading experience, "To conclude...that the increasing domination of the paperback market by the romance testifies automatically to some *greater* need for reassurance among American women is to make an unjustified leap in logic....The romance's popularity must be tied closely to these important historical changes in the book publishing industry as a whole" (45).

Radway's second chapter reveals how she will manage both a semiotic account of romance reading and an analysis of the romance text real readers encounter: through a survey of actual romance readers. "The Readers and their Romances" describes the results of her survey, which were gathered from sixty hours of personal interviews with sixteen romance readers, questionnaire responses from forty-two romance readers, and several interviews with romance salesclerk Dot Evans (a pseudonym) between June 1980 and February 1981 (Radway 12). Since the bulk of RR is based on the results of this survey, I have limited my discussion of Radway's second

chapter to a brief summary of the demographic characteristics and reading habits of the readers interviewed.

At the time of her survey, Radway's select group of romance readers (hereafter referred as the "Smithton" readers) resided in the second largest city of a central, midwestern state of the United States, population 850,000 in 1970. The majority (76%) of the Smithton readers were married. Eighty-eight percent were mothers, and all lived in single-family homes (Radway 55-56). Radway notes that these statistics corroborate those collected in a survey by Margaret Jensen in 1980, which indicated that of the readers surveyed, 75% were married, and of this 75% all had children. Radway's survey also suggested that most romance readers are either in young adulthood or early middle age (Radway 56). Of the Smithton women, 38% were housewives on a full-time basis and 21% worked part-time (Radway 57). Radway therefore posits that romance reading goes hand in hand with motherhood and the care of slightly older children: "This seems logical because the fact of the older children's attendance at school would allow the women greater time to read" (57). Forty-three percent of the Smithton readers reported a family income of between \$15,000 and \$24,000, while 33% claimed an income between \$25,000 to \$49,000 (Radway 58). Exactly 50% of the Smithton readers had earned a high school diploma, 24% had completed less than three years of college, and 19% claimed at least a college degree or better (Radway 58). Radway is careful to point out that the Smithton group does *not* constitute a scientifically designed random sample. The results of her survey can be considered representative of other romance readers only with extreme caution (Radway 48).

The Smithton readers reported distinct reading habits. All of these readers had consulted salesclerk Dorothy Evans for her book recommendations at one time or another, and some had been doing so on a

regular basis (Radway 46-47). Eighty-eight percent of them read "religiously" every day, viewing it as a necessary part of their daily routine. The majority of readers indicated that once they have begun a romance, they do not like to stop reading before witnessing the resolution of the narrative. In other words, romance readers have a "profound need to arrive at the *ending* of the tale and thus to achieve or acquire the emotional gratification they already can anticipate" (Radway 59). All of the Smithton readers also admitted a desire to identify with the heroine: for them, the story chronicles what it feels like to be the object of a romance (Radway 65). Radway thus concludes that popular romances involve the reader vicariously in "the gradual evolution of a loving relationship whose culmination she later enjoys through a description of the heroine's and hero's life together after their union" (66).

In chapter three, "The Act of Reading the Romance: Escape and Instruction," Radway uses her survey results to analyse the *activity* of romance reading (86). When asked why they enjoyed reading, the Smithton readers replied that it allowed them to escape by a) denying the present and b) experiencing relief through identification with a heroine whose life is unlike their own in certain crucial aspects (Radway 90). Radway explains that reading allows women to deny the present because it is a private act which requires their participation. Reading provides pleasure solely for themselves, because it demands that women remove themselves from the draining task of attending to the needs of their families (Radway 92). Further, romance reading supplies readers with emotional sustenance by giving them access to a story in which a heroine with needs similar to theirs is emotionally fulfilled (Radway 93).

Radway claims that women's dual need to escape and find emotional fulfillment exists for good reason. Invoking Nancy Chodorow's concept of the social structure of the American family, Radway concurs with Chodorow that because they are held responsible for home maintenance and early child care, "women as wives and mothers reproduce people--physically in their housework and child care, psychologically in their emotional support of husbands and their maternal relations to sons and daughters" (Chodorow 36). However, although women are expected to perform this demanding task, they do so without being formally reproduced and supported themselves, because there is no institution which guarantees the daily emotional reconstitution of mothers: "men are socially and psychologically reproduced by women, but women are reproduced (or not) largely by themselves" (Chodorow 36). Radway therefore concludes that women's demanding job of meeting others' needs, along with their desire for emotional nurturance, explains their wish to lose themselves in romances (96). Romance reading provides them with an emotional release denied them by their social role, which prohibits the guiltless pursuit of pleasure (Radway 96).

Radway's explanation for the appeal of the *activity* of romance reading challenges the notion that women read about passive heroines because they are masochistic and have a secret wish to be dominated. Passivity may be a central part of the romance (once the hero recognizes the intrinsic worth of the heroine she is required to do nothing thereafter except exist as the center of his attention), but Radway argues that this passivity appeals to women because it allows them to escape their draining roles as wives and mothers. The popular romance is a

figurative journey to a utopian state of total receptiveness
where the reader, as a result of her identification with the

heroine, feels herself the object of someone else's attention...
 the romance permits its reader the experience of feeling cared
 for and...of having been reconstituted affectively (Radway 97).

Radway's semiotic investigation of romance reading also reveals another important need in readers. Radway's survey disclosed that many Smithton readers felt guilty about the time and money they spent on reading. However, these readers also claimed their romance reading to be worthwhile because it teaches them about the world. In light of this contradiction, Radway speculates that readers make this latter claim to convince others that these novels are "not merely frothy, purposeless entertainment but possess a certain intrinsic value that can be transferred to the reader" (107). The nature of her survey results bear out this hypothesis: during personal interviews, nearly every reader insisted that romances provide her with information about different eras and foreign lands. Under the guise of an anonymous questionnaire, however, only nineteen readers selected this reason, a mere six citing it as their primary reason for reading (Radway 107).

Radway contends that by believing that romances have the ability to educate them, readers give these novels the status of an important commodity. This occurs because the Smithton readers assume that acquiring education will advance their social position. The conviction that romance reading educates them therefore allows readers to feel as though they have gotten something in exchange for their time and money: "When the reader can demonstrate...that an exchange has taken place...then her activity is defined retroactively as goal-directed work, as labor with a purpose, which is itself desirable in cultural terms"(Radway 107). Thus, the "education" explanation allows readers to believe that they are hard-working achievers. It also reassures them that their education has not ceased (Radway 113). The

activity of romance reading, then, serves two contradictory needs simultaneously: the reader's need to indulge herself emotionally through the consumption of a romance, and her need to show that she is a hard-working achiever (Radway 118).

Radway's semiotic look at romance reading suggests that by allowing women to escape the demands of others, giving them emotional sustenance, and rewarding them with intellectual validation, this activity is not necessarily a conservative thing. It may be an activity of "mild protest and longing for reform," necessitated by the failure of institutions like marriage to satisfy the emotional needs of women (Radway 213). However, Radway also points out that this leisure-time withdrawal leaves women's domestic role in patriarchal culture intact. Romance reading may prompt a reader to recognize her dissatisfaction, but it does not change her social situation. In fact, this hobby may "obviate the need or desire to demand satisfaction in the real world because it can be so successfully met in fantasy"(Radway 212).

In "The Ideal Romance: The Promise of Patriarchy" Radway examines the romance text itself. Using the results of her survey, Radway first maps out the matrix of the "ideal" romance novel as readers understand it. She then performs a psychoanalytic analysis of this composite text (Radway 119). Applying a critical method described by Vladimir Propp in The Morphology of the Folk Tale to twenty select titles, Radway's psychoanalytic analysis reveals the significance of romances by pinpointing the unconscious needs fulfilled in readers by this genre (Radway 120).

According to Propp, the morphology of a story is a description of its component parts and the relationship of these components to each other and to the story as a whole (Propp 18). Like Propp, Radway identifies the functions of the romance (functions being the acts of *dramatis personae*) and explains

their significance for the tale's course of action. She also explores the romance's characters and their relationships (Radway 120).

The Smithton readers reported that a primary element of the ideal romance is its focus on a single, developing relationship between the book's heroine and hero. Radway reveals that "it is this preoccupation with the gradual removal of emotional barriers between two people who recognize their connection early in the story that sets the novels apart from other run-of-the-mill romances" (123). Usually, the ideal heroine is very intelligent, has a fiery disposition, and displays an early rebelliousness against parental structures (Radway 123). In fact, her personality and behaviours are quite masculine early in the novel (Radway 124). The heroine desires to be a man's equal, but she is also very compassionate, kind, and understanding. Characterized by childlike innocence and inexperience, she is usually unaware of her passionate sexual urges. However, she is considered by everyone else in the novel (including the hero) to be an extraordinary example of "full-blooming womanhood". While not all heroines are beautiful, most are alluring, albeit unaware of their attractiveness (Radway 126).

In the successful romance, the heroine's rival is always the complete opposite of her. Focused on the self-interested pursuit of a comfortable social position, the rival views men as little more than tools for her own success, and manipulates the hero by flaunting her sexual availability. Typically, the heroine fears that the hero loves the rival, but in the ideal romance the rival is always removed or destroyed in the end (Radway 131).

The hero of successful romance (as described by the Smithton readers) is spectacularly masculine. Every aspect of his being (his body, his face, his general demeanor) is characterized by the purity of his maleness. Almost

everything about him is hard, angular, and dark (Radway 128). Usually, the hero is wealthy and/or aristocratic, and participates in some major public endeavour. Inevitably he has had sexual experiences before he meets the heroine, and in many cases has been promiscuous (Radway 130). The most important thing about the hero, however, is that the "terrorizing effect of his exemplary masculinity is always tempered by the presence of a small feature that introduces an element of softness into the overall picture" (Radway 128).

In contrast, the male "villain" who attempts to steal the heroine from the hero is usually ugly, morally corrupt, and interested only in her sexual favours (Radway 133). Like the female rival, he is always removed or destroyed in the ideal romance.

Radway claims that the successful romance has a distinct narrative structure which chronicles the heroine's transformation from an "isolated, asexual, insecure adolescent who is unsure of her own identity, into a mature, sensual, and very married woman who has realized her full potential and identity as the partner of a man and as the implied mother of a child" (134). This structure can be summarized in a list of 13 related functions:

- 1) The heroine's social identity is destroyed;
- 2) The heroine reacts antagonistically to an aristocratic male;
- 3) The aristocratic male responds ambiguously to the heroine, often wounding her emotionally by toying with her affections;
- 4) The heroine interprets the hero's behaviour as evidence of a purely sexual interest in her;
- 5) The heroine responds to the hero's behaviour with anger or coldness;
- 6) The hero retaliates by punishing the heroine;
- 7) The heroine and hero are physically and/or emotionally separated;
- 8) The hero treats the heroine tenderly;
- 9) The heroine responds warmly to the hero's act of tenderness;
- 10) The heroine reinterprets the hero's ambiguous behaviour as the product of previous hurt;
- 11) The hero proposes/openly

declares his love for/demonstrates his unwavering commitment to the heroine with a supreme act of tenderness; 12) The heroine responds sexually and emotionally; 13) The heroine's identity is restored (Radway 134).

Like Modleski, Radway explains the appeal of the ideal romance by drawing heavily upon Nancy Chodorow's concept of female personality development. However, her theory emphasizes a different aspect of Chodorow's theory. While Radway agrees that the early mothering of a female child tends to cement a daughter's identification with her mother (a state that later produces difficulties in the daughter's individuation), she is more concerned with the way in which the female creates emotional bonds later in life than with the female's problem of harbouring ambiguous feelings towards her parents.

Radway explains that according to Chodorow, the prolonged pre-oedipal state created between mother and child not only makes it difficult for the female to recognize herself as a separate person, but encourages her to view herself as a self-in-relation, i.e. an extension of the world and others (Radway 136). Because the strong pre-oedipal mother-daughter bond persists during the oedipal period, even the oedipal shift of attention to the father is partially motivated by a daughter's desire to escape her intense symbiotic union with her mother: "Penis envy, identification with the father, and admiration of the male...are simultaneous expressions of a wish to assert her independence and of her love for and desire to win back the mother she has begun to relinquish" (Radway 136). Although her genital and erotic desires are focused on the father, the female child continues to maintain an intense emotional commitment to her mother and all that is female. Despite the fact that she becomes erotically heterosexual, her continuing need and desire for her mother provides her with an internal emotional triangle even in

adulthood: "This finally produces in women a continuing wish to regress into infancy to reconstruct the lost intensity of the original mother-daughter bond" (Radway 136). The typical female personality produced by the patriarchal family therefore experiences herself as less differentiated than boys. She harbours an ongoing need for nurturance well into her adult life, and her adult internal psychic world demands the completion provided by other individuals (Radway 136).

Radway observes further that in Chodorow's view, most adult males cannot fulfill female emotional needs completely. Men cannot provide the nurturance women require because the process of male personality development encourages a definition of masculinity as "all that is not female." In order to fully differentiate from his mother, the pre-oedipal boy must "suppress his feelings of dependence and his sense of having been merged with her...Later, in the oedipal period, when he must repress oedipal attachment to her to avoid the competitive wrath of his father, he further denies his connection with anything womanly" (Radway 137). The final result of the boy's oedipal resolution is a personality structure defined by autonomy and independence and a tendency to devalue women (Radway 137). Since men cannot always fulfill women's relational needs, the female turns to mothering: "By indentifying with the child she mothers, she imaginatively regresses to that state where all her needs were anticipated and satisfied without any exertion on her part" (Radway 137). Radway points out, however, that there are significant hidden costs in this route to emotional fulfillment. The act of nurturing a child forces a woman to focus completely on the infant at the expense of herself: "the very act of reinforcing her female identity and sense of self also draws on that self and may...deplete or negate it entirely" (Radway 138).

Given the nature of the female personality as a self-in-relation, the inability of most men to function as completely adequate relational partners, and the demands made on women by their children, Radway argues that there is a correlation between some romance reading and the social roles of wife and mother (Radway 138). The ideal romance re-creates for the female reader

the symbolic fulfillment of a woman's desire to realize her most basic female self in relation to another...she desires both the sense of difference achieved through unity with an 'other' and the removal of boundaries of consciousness that is accomplished by bonding with someone not distinguishable from the self (Radway 155).

When the heroine of the romance finds someone who is interested in her and her needs exclusively, the story validates the reader's desire for tender nurture and her pre-oedipal wish to re-experience the primary love of her initial caretaker (Radway 149). By connecting her with an autonomous, powerful male, the romance also fulfills the reader's longing to be protected, provided for, and sexually desired. Therefore, despite the romance's apparent focus on heterosexual love and marriage, Radway concludes that the goal of all romances is the "original, blissful symbiotic union between mother and child" (Radway, 156).

By examining the "ideal" romance in light of Chodorow's theory, Radway is able to account for many of the romance's features. First, the ideal romance's emphasis on the "one-woman-one man" relationship is important because it facilitates an intense identification between reader and heroine. Since the reader is not required to pay attention to other characters for long periods of time, she can live the heroine's relationship with the hero

without distraction (Radway 123). Next, the heroine's early identification with characteristic male behaviour signals her first step in both rejecting and regaining her mother. This action appeals to the reader's impulse toward individuation from her own mother (Radway 24). The heroine's childlike innocence affirms that at this stage in the narrative the heroine is a "symbolic representation of the immature female psyche" (Radway 126). At the same time, though, her beauty and womanly qualities reassure the reader that she is capable of carnal passion; similarly, the heroine's compassionate nature informs the reader of her true femininity. This femininity will later enable her to transform the hero's emotional indifference into expressions of love (Radway 127).

The personality of the rival heroine represents those things women consider threats to heterosexual love and traditional marriage. When the rival heroine is removed or destroyed, the reader is able to view these fears as unwarranted. Likewise, the destruction of the male villain reassures the reader that what she most fears from men is only a minor threat that can be removed by the protection of a man who cares for her (Radway 130-1).

Chodorow's theory also sheds light on the narrative structure of the modern romance. Radway explains that in the first narrative function of the ideal romance, (the heroine's social identity is destroyed), the heroine's terror evokes in the reader distant memories of her initial separation from her mother: "the romance's opening exaggerates the very feeling of emptiness and desire that sent the reader to the book in the first place" (138). With her celebration of the masculine, the heroine rejects her mother and embarks on a quest for a new self. In so doing, she locates the reader's sense of loss within a developmental pattern that will erase this feeling through a future union with another (Radway 139).

The successful romance next examines the problem of how women can realize a mature self and achieve emotional fulfillment in a culture filled with inadequate male partners (Radway 139). Function two of the romance (the heroine responds to an ambiguous hero in a frightened, antagonistic way) deals with the problems posed by typical masculine behaviour. Puzzled by the combination of the hero's hard exterior and hidden gentleness, the heroine tries to figure out his behaviour and motives. Radway claims that function two appeals to readers because in a culture that denies women full entry into the public realm, the woman who cannot align herself with man runs the risk of poverty (particularly if she has children). In order to survive, the female must be able to distinguish between the man who wants only her sexuality and the man who will commit himself to her in return for her sexual favours (Radway 140). Figuring out male behaviour is also important because male reserve can prevent women from satisfying their basic needs for emotional nurturance. As Nancy Chodorow has pointed out, females emerging from the oedipal complex require an intense emotional bond with someone who is reciprocally nurturant in a maternal way. Since women in our society are denied an intense relationship with an individual resembling her mother (as men are not), they must either suppress this need entirely, satisfy it through a relationship with a man, or seek its fulfillment elsewhere. Function two of the ideal romance confirms the reader's life experience by acknowledging the difficulty in relying on men for affective intensity (even though later the book reassures her that such satisfaction is possible in a relationship with a man) (Radway 140).

Although function three (the hero responds ambiguously to the heroine and attempts to emotionally wound the heroine) superficially suggests that the hero will *not* fulfill the heroine's needs, the romance's

omniscient narrator allows the reader to interpret his behaviour in a more positive light. In functions four, five and six (the heroine interprets the hero's behaviour as evidence of a purely sexual interest in her; the heroine responds to the hero's behaviour with anger; the hero retaliates by punishing the heroine), the female reader is allowed to vicariously experience anger towards the hero (and men) while receiving assurance from the narrator that his actions stem from his fear that the heroine will hurt him. These narrative functions thus tell the reader that men do not threaten women and are not obstacles to their fulfillment (Radway 140).

Functions seven and eight (the heroine and hero are physically and/or emotionally separated; the hero treats the heroine tenderly) fulfills the desires of the female reader by transforming masculinity to conform with female standards (Radway 147). However, Radway emphasizes that when this apparent transformation of the hero occurs, *no explanation is given for it*. It is at this point in the narrative that the most crucial ingredient in the hero's character, his small reserve of tenderness, becomes important. This ingredient explains the hero's attitude change by suggesting that the hero never *actually* transformed, because he was a kind and compassionate person to begin with (Radway 129). Thus the romance only "pretends" to explore the path to ideal male-female relationships. In reality, the romance tells the reader that she will receive the care she desires only if she can find a man who is *already* tender and nurturant (Radway 148). She is not shown how to find a nurturant man or how to blame a distant one for his emotional unavailability, nor is she encouraged to believe that male indifference and independence can really be altered. Instead, she is encouraged to interpret any small expression of tenderness the hero might display as evidence of his true character. Functions nine and ten (the heroine responds warmly to the hero

and reinterprets his actions as a product of a previous hurt) tell the female reader that if she learns *how to read* a reticent man properly, she will "reinforce his better instincts, break down his reserve, and lead him to respond to her as she wishes" (Radway 148).

Function eleven (the hero declares his love for the heroine) suggests that when the heroine manages this trust of the hero, she will be rewarded by his response. In so doing, the ideal romance hints that if a woman believes that her man loves her even in the face of evidence to the contrary, she will be rewarded by his commitment to her. This commitment, which implies his need for her, is the condition for her response, which occurs in function twelve (the heroine responds to the hero sexually and emotionally). This sets the stage for function thirteen (the heroine's identity is restored). By the end of the novel, the female reader has learned that if she reads male behaviour successfully, her desire for fatherly protection, motherly care, and passionate adult love will be satisfied (Radway 149).

Radway's analysis of the ideal romance is followed by an examination of novels the Smithton readers labelled as unsuccessful. In "The Failed Romance: Too Close to the Problems of Patriarchy," Radway notes that all romances, good and bad, evoke feelings of anger towards the hero and men in general. However, while the ideal romance disarms these feelings by explaining the hero's actions and transforming the hero, the failed romance does not. Romances fail because they exacerbate rather than quash the reader's concerns about male behaviour (Radway 158). A bad romance may exaggerate the hero's taciturnity, cruelty, and violent nature; transform the hero too suddenly; or fail to make the happy ending convincing (Radway 167). Indeed, the Smithton readers' primary complaint about failed romances concerned the "degradation, violence, and brutality that the heroine is forced

to endure before the hero is transformed into her lover" (Radway 165). The Smithton readers also reported a dislike for stories that violate the ideal romance formula. Romances which suggest that the ideal relationship is a temporary fantasy and that the reader should settle for compatibility rather than sexual passion are not favourites (Radway 176). Similarly, books that do not describe the deepening of love into commitment but rather the problems that must be overcome if sexual attraction is not to deteriorate into violence or indifference are not very popular either (Radway 162).

Radway concludes that romances are popular because they explore the meaning of masculine behaviour (168). Regardless of how they are judged by readers, all romances hint that when properly interpreted, masculinity implies only good things for women. Although bad romances do not transform the hero successfully, these books still insist that masculine behaviour does not necessarily imply a lack of love on his part:

They suggest, in fact, that male aggression,
independence, and reserve are the causes of sexual
attraction, which, in these romances, is taken to be the
first step toward the love that is the heroine's
goal....masculinity...is the sign of sexual difference and
thus is a fundamental condition for the love,
marriage, and attention women seek (Radway 168).

Radway argues that her analysis of romances refutes the idea that female readers are masochistic. Women do not read romances out of a desire to see women abused; in fact, the Smithton readers reported that they refuse to subject themselves, even in the imaginary realm, to misogynistic treatment (Radway 71, 160). They read romances in order to understand the meaning of masculine behaviour and to be reassured that a woman can be

nurtured even by a man who appears cold. As Radway remarks, "The romance may express misogynistic attitudes not because women share them but because they increasingly need to know how to deal with them" (71-72).

Radway's examination of romance texts as they are understood by readers confirms that these books contain an oppositional moment. Radway accepts Jameson's concept of the utopian moment in mass culture works and argues that the presence of this strain is clearly evident in popular romances. Instead of offering a complete endorsement of patriarchy, popular romances allay and fulfill very real anxieties and desires of female readers. The oppositional triumph of the heroine demonstrates this. The heroine's triumph is oppositional because it allows the reader to protest against several things: the insensitivity of men (by triggering the transformation of the hero); brutality against women (because the story suggests this brutality is either an illusion or something she can control); and the domination of public commodity values over personal ones (because the heroine draws the hero away from the public world of money) (Radway 214). Radway thus concludes that women who seek out ideal romances are not reading out of contentment, but out of "dissatisfaction, longing, and protest" (215).

In chapter six, Radway examines the language and narrative discourse of romances in an attempt to assess their ideological impact (Radway 186). To what extent are female readers absorbing the romance's conservative messages? When asked whether or not they viewed romances as an information source about life, the Smithsonian readers supplied contradictory answers. On one hand, they replied that they considered the hero-heroine relationship sheer fantasy. On the other, they reported that they believed the historical and geographical information in the novels to be accurate (Radway 186).

Radway claims that the language and narrative discourse of the romance delivers conservative ideological messages and encourages readers to believe that these messages are "fact." For one thing, the text's attention to the material details of the world (eg. to domestic detail or women's fashions) creates doubt in the reader's mind that she is reading a fantasy book. Because the romance describes details with accuracy, when readers encounter description^s of foreign places or distant times they interpret them as fact. Radway therefore speculates that if a reader interprets some of the romance as true, then she may also unconsciously view the heroine's story as applicable to her own: "The success with which the ordinary is...mimed in the romance thus seems to confer factual status on all of its other verbal assertions as well" (Radway 195). If romance readers believe statements about subjects they know nothing about, then they also might be inclined to believe that achieving a relationship like the heroine's is possible (Radway 195).

Furthermore, although Radway believes that readers never discover meanings "in" the words on the page because they actively contribute to textual meaning, her survey confirmed that the Smithton readers read romance texts as though a simple discovery of meaning were possible (Radway 189). These readers assume that objective reality exists, and that language is nothing more than a system of names for this reality. They consequently believe that the romance describes a world entirely congruent to their own. The language of the romance encourages this belief. Characterized by cliché statements, simple vocabulary, elementary realism and standard syntax, the romance's language is so familiar that it facilitates quick reader comprehension (Radway 190). When perceived in a certain way by readers, these techniques suggest that language is nothing more than a transparent window opening out onto an existing world. Such techniques also reduce the

amount of labour the reader must perform while reading (Radway 189). The reader is never forced to recognize that she is supplying the significance of the words on the page; as a result, she comes to her view herself as the recipient of the story (Radway 197). It is as though she is receiving a completed tale, a story whose meaning is already known by both teller and listener because they have "heard" it before:

Popular romances, as they are habitually read and understood by the Smithton readers...resemble the myths of oral cultures...they exist to relate a story already familiar to the people who choose to read them...they all *retell* a single tale whose final outcome their readers always already know....romantic novels function for their reader...as the repetition of a single, immutable cultural myth (Radway 198).

Paradoxically, the romance also resembles a realistic novel. Readers are asked to accept the romance as a story which chronicles development of particular individuals: "the novelistic character is intended to appear as a complex, human figure whose...traits and motives are a function of the need to deal...with...a particular reality that is itself not only incomplete but unpredictable as well" (Radway 200). The romance's realistic structure also works to convince readers that its events occur in a "real" world, in a plausible manner, to quite believable people (Radway 204).

This combination of narrative features prompts Radway to hypothesize that romances supply a myth in the guise of the truly possible. This myth allows readers to read about what "might" occur in an individual woman's life without really having to face the threat of the unknown (207). The romance, then, provides a contradictory experience for readers. On one hand,

because the book seems to be about the destiny of a particular heroine, it suggests that women are unique individuals capable of living original existences. The heroine's union with the hero is presented as a combination of luck and individual choice rather than something dictated by social and political institutions. The reader is therefore invited to view her destiny as a freely chosen course of her own making (Radway 208). On the other hand, the identical ending of every narrative hints that the heroine's freedom is an illusion: that despite individual differences, all women end up with a female identity informed by the social roles of wife, lover, and mother (Radway 207). By undercutting the idea that the romance is an individual woman's story, romances reaffirm the conservative belief that women are primarily valuable for their biological sameness and role of maintaining others (Radway 208). Thus, Radway concludes that although female readers may be reading romances with the *intention* of protesting their roles as wives and mothers, the ideological force of this experience could ultimately be a conservative one (187).

In the final analysis, Radway believes that romantic fiction may actively maintain the ideological status quo of patriarchy. Despite its utopian element, Radway asserts that the popular romance "avoids questioning the institutionalized basis of patriarchal control over women even as it serves as a locus of protest against some of its emotional consequences" (Radway 217). First, the romance suggests that the heroine's initial anger at the hero is unjustified: her anger has been a mistake, brought on by her inability to read him properly. The novel therefore only gives the reader a strategy for making her present situation more comfortable, not for reorganizing of her life so that her needs might be met (Radway 215). Second, the structure of the ideal romance, which tells the reader that the hero had a gentle side before the

heroine met him, places responsibility for the hero's transformation on the heroine. Thus, the text sidesteps the issue of whether or not our social construction of masculinity obviates nurturant behaviour in men (Radway 216). Third, by suggesting that rape is either a mistake or an impulse of uncontrollable desire, the romance gives readers a false sense of security. It also shows them how to rationalize violent behavior (Radway 216). Fourth, by accepting the division of the world into public and private categories, the romance also avoids refuting the male right to the public spheres of work, politics, and power (Radway 217). Consequently, popular romances leave unchallenged the system of social relations whose flaws created the need for these texts (Radway 215). Radway adds that the *activity* of romance reading may also serve to maintain the patriarchal status quo by patriarchy by "deflecting and recontaining real protest and by supplying vicariously certain needs that, if presented as demands in the real world, might otherwise lead to the reordering of heterosexual relationships" (Radway 217).

In conclusion, Radway argues that RR reveals complexities about mass art previously ignored by mass culture critics. She claims that the combination semiotic/reader-response/psychoanalytic approach provides a more comprehensive, accurate analysis of romance reading than a pure New Critical approach. Unlike the latter, this approach provides a three-pronged analysis: it discovers the meaning of reading as an activity; supplies the critic with the text as it is encountered by real readers; and discerns the unconscious needs and desires of readers fulfilled by the text. Radway adds that the development of this superior methodology is a necessary breakthrough for mass culture studies. In her view, finding out *exactly* how people interact with mass culture products is crucial if we are to access their utopian strain and overcome their enormous ideological power (Radway 222).

Radway's achievements in RR are significant. First, by describing how marketing and distributing techniques have contributed to the commercial success of the romance, Radway confirms that the reader's decision to purchase a romance is not based solely on the content of the text. She therefore silences critics who might have otherwise posed the question: if romances are popular because they address female concerns about patriarchy, why have romance sales *increased* in our current age of feminism? "The Institutional Matrix" provides the answer: romance sales have not necessarily increased because women's anxieties about patriarchy have increased. Women have probably always enjoyed romance narratives, but before the late 20th century could not acquire them so easily or so cheaply.

Radway's semiotic investigation of romance reading adds a dimension to RR that previous literary analyses of popular fiction have lacked.² In fact, her investigation revealed some oppositional elements of romance reading (i.e. this activity lets women escape their family responsibilities and validates them intellectually) that a sole focus on the text could never have disclosed. These revelations suggest that romance readers are less vulnerable to the influence of the text's ideological messages than was previously thought. Rather than using romances solely as an exercise in wish-fulfillment, readers may be deriving rewards from reading that actually subvert the text's conservative messages. The success of Radway's semiotic approach warns that a "text-only" methodology, even one that recovers the reader, may not be able to fully apprehend the meaning of mass cultural activities.

Radway's combination psychoanalytic/reader-response methodology is excellent. As we saw in Chapter Two, the obvious link between

² As we saw in Chapter Two, Modleski's study did not include this element. For additional examples of see literary critiques that have lacked this dimension, see Chapter One pp. 11-15.

psychoanalysis and mass culture means that the psychoanalytic approach is effective when analysing mass culture products.³ Radway's psychoanalytic critique of the composite romance text also prevents RR from being little more than a description of the Smithton readers' reactions to popular romances. It is her psychoanalytic analysis which allows Radway to discover the conscious and unconscious anxieties addressed by the modern romance. As she explains, to rest content with readers' explicit statements about how they understand the story would not provide the probing insights she seeks. While the description-oriented results extracted from a "pure" reader-response approach might be attractive because their conclusions could be tied to observable evidence, this approach's "conception of reading, not to mention human understanding, seems much too mechanical and unnecessarily superficial" (Radway 15).

At the same time, however, the reader-response ingredient of Radway's methodology allows her to avoid the New Critical pitfalls of the "pure" psychoanalytic approach.⁴ Because she analyses romance texts as readers encounter them (or at least as a critic understands reader interpretations of them), Radway recovers the reader. This allows her to refute several assumptions about mass culture and its consumers. For one thing, Radway's survey results explode the myth of female masochism. Given that the Smithton readers admitted a desire to escape the task of reconstituting other family members from time to time, it is likely that they enjoy identifying with a passive heroine for the pleasure of being the sole object of someone else's attention. Radway's survey also showed that some romance readers dislike romances which feature the degradation,

³ For more detail, see Chapter Two, p. 44.

⁴ For an expanded version of these pitfalls, see Chapter Two, pp. 55-57.

humiliation, and brutalization of the heroine. These readers will only tolerate a cruel hero if his behaviour is explained away convincingly, and even go so far as to consult a third person (eg. Dot Evans) to avoid the "bad" ones. Romance readers, then, are not masochistic: they read about cruel, puzzling heroes not for pleasure, but for the chance to dissipate their confusion and fear over masculine behaviour.

The Smithton readers' rejection of some romances, in addition to their use of Dot Evans's services, indicates that mass culture consumers do not passively absorb every product offered to them. In contrast, romance readers respond to specific novels, not just any reading experience. We can therefore conclude that romances do not impose a false consciousness on readers. As Radway asserts, "opportunities still exist within the mass-communication process for individuals to resist, alter, and reappropriate the materials designed elsewhere for their purchase" (Radway 17).

Moreover, Radway's analysis of the "ideal" romance is thoroughly convincing, revealing that popular romances do carry a utopian strain implicitly critical of patriarchy. This strain taps into women's very real fears and anxieties about masculine behaviour, particularly men's insensitivity to female needs for nurturance and their violent behaviour towards women. Therefore, although romances do reaffirm traditional sex roles and stereotypes, they also protest against a social order that leaves women feeling unfulfilled and powerless as relational partners. The existence of an oppositional moment in romances also means that these novels and their readers do not deserve the condemnation they have traditionally received. Popular romances are not mere brainwashing tools that force a false consciousness onto the masses: they are texts which address the profound anxieties and fantasies of women. Similarly, romance readers are not merely

passive simpletons; rather, they are normal females whose relational experiences have prompted them to seek out reassurance in the form of a vicarious reading experience.

Finally, as in LWV, Radway's success in using Chodorow's concept of female personality development to explain the appeal of popular romances indicates that the latter's theory has merit. The symmetry between Chodorow's theory and the content of the "ideal" romance text as it is encountered by readers suggests that Chodorow's revision of Freud's ideas about women is a progressive step for psychoanalysis. Freud viewed women as "passive, narcissistic, masochistic and penis-envying," and his work was clearly influenced by sexist leanings (Eagleton 162). In contrast, Chodorow's theory of female personality development is based on a more accurate appraisal of women. RR therefore implies that scholars should continue to re-work Freud's notions of female personality development using a more objective view of the female gender.

However, RR is not without problems. Its most serious flaw is that Radway's reader survey does not constitute a scientifically representative sample. RR is written as though Radway's survey results can be applied to other romance readers; however, the size and nature of her sample group indicates that we should do so only with caution. Radway herself admits this: "It is clear that the Smithton group cannot be thought of as a scientifically designed random sample" (Radway 48). Radway's audience should therefore keep in mind that the narrowness of the Smithon sample group limits the scope of RR.

Radway also neglects the issue of who produces romance novels and why. At one point in RR, she indicates that publishing houses are motivated primarily by profit. At another, she mentions that many romance authors are

ex-romance readers. These references suggest that Radway does not think romance producers (corporate or otherwise) are conspiring against female readers. However, her negligence in addressing this issue directly weakens RR, which only implicitly challenges the long-standing assumption that the culture industry functions like a group of conspirators.

Furthermore, Radway's analysis of the "ideal" romance, though insightful, needs to be developed. Radway claims that functions seven and eight (the heroine and hero are physically and emotionally separated; the hero treats the heroine tenderly) fulfill desires of the female reader by transforming masculinity to conform with female standards (Radway 147). She argues further that since at the time of the hero's transformation no explanation is given for it, the romance suggests that the hero's transformation occurred because was a tender, kind person to begin with (Radway 129). Radway therefore concludes that

The romance inadvertently tells the reader, then, that she will receive the kind of care she desires only if she can find a man who is *already* tender and nurturant...The reader is not shown how to find a nurturant man nor how to hold a distant one responsible for altering his lack of emotional availability. What she is encouraged to do is to latch on to whatever expressions of thoughtfulness he might display, no matter how few, and to consider them, rather than his more obvious and frequent disinterest, as evidence of his true character. In learning *how to read* a man properly...she will reinforce his better instincts, break down his reserve, and lead him to respond to her as she wishes (Radway 148).

Following the hero's dramatic change, functions nine and ten, (the heroine responds warmly to the hero; the heroine reinterprets his actions as a product of a previous hurt) bring about what the heroine desires, namely function eleven (the hero declares his love for the heroine).

The problem with Radway's analysis of functions seven to eleven is her assumption that the physical and/or emotional separation of the hero and heroine does *not* qualify as an explanation for the hero's transformation. She writes that "Although the hero's punishment of the heroine results in his separation from her, the separation is never connected explicitly at this point in the story with his ensuing act of kindness" (148). Therefore,

the romance author avoids having the hero openly declare his dependence on a woman. He continues to be seen as a supreme example of unchallenged, autonomous masculinity. Later in the text when the hero and heroine are finally united, he confesses that it was the prospect of losing her that frightened him and prompted his decision to woo her with tenderness. By falling back on this kind of retroactive interpretation, however, the romance avoids considering the problem of the contradiction between admission of dependency and relationality and the usual definition of masculinity as total autonomy...the genre fails to show that if the emotional repression and independence that characterize men are actually to reversed, the entire notion of what it is to be male will have to be changed (Radway 148).

While it is true that the romance does not solve the problem of the hero's unrealistic transformation, the timing of the hero's transformation

(i.e., it follows on the heels of the hero and heroine's separation) serves as a partial explanation for his attitude change. In addition, many popular romances feature an explicit recognition by the hero of his dependency needs *before the hero and heroine have re-united*. In The Matchmakers, for example, the heroine leaves the hero because he insists that as a result of his heavy career workload, he cannot marry her (even though he is content to have her for a mistress). However, after her departure, the hero's suffering is made very clear:

The telephone stopped ringing, then started again....Kathleen uncurled from the chair and walked to answer it....

'Hello,' she said indifferently.

There was a crackle of interference, then an achingly familiar voice answered, 'Kathleen?'....

'Jordan?' she whispered after a panicked silence when she was certain she had imagined his voice on the other end.

'Yes.' It was his voice, tense and strained, but it was his voice.

'How--why--' Tears spilled from her eyes. She should hang up the telephone, but she couldn't.

'I had to phone you. The employment agency gave me your number,' he explained tautly.

There was more interference and Kathleen asked, 'Where are you?'

'In Arabia.'

'But--' She glance at her watch. 'The time--'

'Yes,' Jordan interrupted, 'I know, but I couldn't sleep. I've been thinking about you--which shows you the state of my mind if I have to phone you at three o'clock in the morning here. Kathleen, I--'....

'Jordan, no,' Kathleen protested,...'There's no point.'

'I can't leave things the way they are.'....

Kathleen didn't dare see him again....Before she let him persuade her to reconsider, she very slowly replaced the telephone receiver on its cradle (The Matchmakers 173).

Thirteen pages later, the hero's dependency needs are made explicit when he surrenders to the heroine's demand for a more solid emotional commitment:

'Do you love me?' Jordan asked at last...

Kathleen turned her head away. 'Yes,' she answered calmly, her heart beating so fast that she was certain he could hear it. 'But it doesn't change anything. I want to share more than just the physical side of love with you....Don't tempt me. I know now how much you want me, and I want you too, but--'

'Want you!' The harshly spoken exclamation indicated that Kathleen had understated his need....'I don't simply want you. I need you, Kathleen, I haven't been worth a damn since you left. I made such a mess of things in Arabia that the company had to send over another man to straighten it out....I couldn't open my eyes without picturing you nor breathe without catching

a hint of your fragrance. I kept remembering the feel of your body in my arms and the taste of your lips. It was your voice I heard on everyone's lips...They all thought I was mad, and I am. No woman has ever destroyed me the way you have. I love you, Kathleen, and I can't live without you. I haven't even the strength to try.' (The Matchmakers 186).

The desperate nature of hero's admission, as well as its timing, suggests that romances *do* imply a connection between the heroine's disappearance and the hero's transformation. This connection is simple. The hero's transformation is more likely to occur if he experiences the real or actual loss of the heroine. In one sense, Radway is right: romances do not resolve adequately the contradiction between the hero's admission of dependency and the usual definition of masculinity. But they do suggest to female readers that women may be able to influence the personality structure of men by "disappearing" in the right way at the right time. Popular romances, then, encourage the reader to do the following: to remember whatever expressions of thoughtfulness her man might display and interpret them, rather than his frequent disinterest, as evidence of his true character; to trust her man and believe that he loves her even in the face of massive evidence to the contrary; and *to believe she can prompt his transformation by manipulating him with the threat of her absence*. If she does these things successfully, she will be able to break down his reserve, bring out his dependent side, and lead him to respond to her as she wishes.

Consequently, the utopian strain of popular romances does not just protest the brutalization of women, the insensitivity of men, and the domination of the public sphere over the private. It also gives a voice to

female frustration over the fact that men do not alter their basic personalities and suddenly embrace their dependency needs at the request of women. Romances therefore not only reveal women's concern over being unfulfilled emotionally. They also reveal women's resentment at being unable to influence this phenomenon.

Reading the Romance develops and extends many of the issues raised in Loving With a Vengeance. Radway provides valuable information about women and their relational experiences under patriarchy. She also convincingly refutes many traditional critical views of mass culture. Moreover, as Chapter Four will show, the fact that her methodology enjoys a superior level of success than Modleski's means that both studies have significant implications for literary theory.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion: The Reader and the Romance Recovered

Loving With a Vengeance and Reading the Romance go a long way in challenging traditional views of mass culture. First, both studies demonstrate that mass culture products can and do harbour a utopian strain implicitly critical of the ideological status quo. This strain attracts mass audiences by tapping into people's most pressing fears, anxieties and fantasies about the social order. In contrast to the beliefs of Formalists and New Critics, it follows that mass culture works *can* reveal information about the people that consume them. The recent work of Allan Bloom affirms that mass art has this ability. A modern-day professor of political theory, Bloom is dedicated to comprehending the natures of his students in terms of their "potential and capability for reaching the goal of human completeness" (19). In The Closing of the American Mind, he attempts a "mediation on the state of our souls, particularly those of the young, and their education" (19). Bloom argues that to attain such insights,

Attention to the young, knowing what their hungers are and what they can digest, is the essence of the craft. One must spy out and elicit those hungers. For there is no real education that does not respond to felt need;...What each generation is can best be discovered in its relation to the permanent concerns of mankind. This in turn can best be discovered in each generation's tastes, amusements, and especially angers...Particularly revealing are the various impostors whose business it is

to appeal to the young. These culture peddlars have the strongest of motives for finding out the appetites of the young--so they are useful guides into the labyrinths of the spirit of times (19).

Radway adds that mass culture products can also tell us about the workings of ideology in society. In a recent article, she notes that

if mass culture does indeed allow for differential interpretation and use, if particular groups can adapt messages designed by others for their own purposes, it is conceivable that the ideological control achieved by any particular mass culture form may not be complete... If this is true, there remains some hope that resistance and discontent might be developed into a more deliberate opposition to dominance ("Identifying Ideological Seams" 97).

Thus while twentieth-century academics have tended to dismiss mass culture, the recent work of critics like Jameson, Modleski, Radway and Bloom affirms that these art forms are legitimate objects of critical study.

Modleski and Radway's detection of a utopian strain in mass culture also implies that mass culture art forms and their consumers are not as simple or as contemptible as was previously thought. Instead of indoctrinating the masses with a false consciousness, mass culture products express and allay people's desires and fears. By the same token, the fact that mass culture consumers respond to the utopian strain in these products means that rather than being duped by the text's conservative ideology, these people are indulging in the work's protestation of the status quo. Radway's

discovery that women discriminate among romances also confirms this: most of the *Smithton* readers rejected romances that did not properly protest the patriarchal status quo, i.e., those that did not transform the hero convincingly. Furthermore, two of their prime reasons for reading (to escape their family duties and to feel validated intellectually) were unrelated to the text. Consequently, we can conclude that critical contempt for mass culture works and their consumers has been exaggerated and even unfair at times.

LWV and RR suggest further that critical contempt for mass art and its consumers should be eradicated if scholars wish to challenge specific ideologies and the consciousnesses they produce. Not only does contempt encourage critics to dismiss mass culture works, it hinders them from discerning their oppositional moment. This occurs because the critic who harbours disdain for the mass culture consumer will not be able to objectively explore the consumer's perspective. And as RR demonstrated, the analyst who comprehends the world of the mass culture consumer stands a far better chance of battling ideologies than the analyst who dismisses him/her. As Radway remarks,

In the case of the Marxist or feminist ethnographer, it seems essential to acknowledge that one is seeking to understand other cultural worlds, not simply to enlarge one's sense of the extraordinarily diverse character of human development but rather to understand better the connection between world views, ideology, and relationships of power ("Identifying Ideological Seams" 105).

Lastly, LWV and RR affirm that the culture industry does *not* function like a group of conspirators. It is unlikely that individual authors are consciously trying to brainwash millions of women into embracing patriarchy. More often than not, authors must conform to a plot formula dictated by a publishing company. By the same token, romance publishers are concerned with profit, not ideology. Beyond a desire for commercial success, these publishers neither know nor care about the reasons for their product's appeal. Popular romances and Gothics probably reaffirm patriarchal values because authors and publishers have been indoctrinated by society's dominant ideologies, not because they have a conscious desire to brainwash readers.

In addition to challenging several traditional beliefs about mass culture, LWV and RR also provide insights into the lives of romance and Gothic readers. First, we have learned that romance readers are not masochistic. Readers *do* derive pleasure from reading about the relationship between a cruel hero and a passive heroine. However, their pleasure stems not from their wish to see women dominated, but from the relief provided by the romance's assurance that the hero's behaviour is a reaction to the heroine. By telling readers that undesirable masculine behaviour is a reaction to women, the romance lets readers convince themselves that such behaviour is under their control, and therefore harmless. Similarly, the Gothic's assurance that the hero is not the real "enemy" tells readers that women do not really have anything to fear from men.

Although they are not masochistic, romance readers are angry. In LWV, we learned that women resent the following: the mocking, cruel treatment they sometimes receive from men; being suspected as

adventuresses while at the same time being told that their value depends on the ability to attract a man; men's tendency to regard them as objects for consumption; and the fact that their physical and emotional victimization by men is a cyclical thing, perpetuated by families with a traditional Western power structure. In RR, we learned that women often feel emotionally drained by their role of reconstituting others; resent being undervalued intellectually by society and unfulfilled emotionally in their relationships; and are frustrated at men's inability to meet their relationship expectations.

The information yielded by LWV and RR about women confirm Nancy Chodorow's hypothesis that a social arrangement which makes females primarily responsible for the caretaking of infants may have negative repercussions for women. LWV points out that the female who is mothered exclusively by a woman and raised in a family with a typical Western power structure may suffer several psychic conflicts. She may have difficulty individuating from the mother; harbour ambivalent feelings towards both parents; and have trouble accepting the male as "lover" rather than "enemy." RR reveals that this social arrangement prompts the female to view herself as a self-in-relation and to seek considerable emotional nurturance. At the same time, however, this arrangement encourages males to define themselves as independent, autonomous, and "all that is not female." Such an arrangement, then, may cause women to remain emotionally unfulfilled in relationships, and force them to seek fulfillment in other ways, eg. romance reading.

LWV and RR also demonstrate that women are fearful of challenging patriarchy. The fact that so many readers prefer modern romances to more radical feminist narratives suggests that despite their resentment over some

of the emotional consequences of patriarchy, most women want male-female conflicts resolved within conventional institutions. Romance readers may have a strong distaste for some masculine behaviours, but they have an even stronger distaste for the prospect of undergoing a complete reorganization of their social and psychic lives.

When comparing LWV and RR, we can see that both offer insights complimentary to the other's. Although Modleski recognizes that the romance heroine's disappearing act reveals women's resentment over certain masculine behaviours, Radway does not fully grasp the significance of this act. She therefore overlooks the fact that the disappearing act discloses women's frustration at being unable to transform the independent, puzzling behaviour of men. In the same manner, although Radway realizes that the romance's central attraction is its ability to reassure women that men can fulfill their emotional needs, Modleski does not stress this aspect of the romance. Taken together, though, these studies provide a comprehensive explanation for the appeal of popular romances.

In the final analysis, however, Reading the Romance is superior to Loving With a Vengeance. First, RR is more comprehensive. Although Modleski assumes that the romance's popularity is due to the content of the romance text alone, Radway takes into account influences such as corporate publishing practises and the cultural significance of romance reading. Thus while Modleski explains the meaning of romance and Gothic *texts*, Radway explains the meaning of *romance reading*. Second, Radway's survey allows her to challenge traditional assumptions about romance and Gothic readers more convincingly than Modleski. Since Radway recovers the reader, her conclusions about readers (eg. they are not masochistic, passive simpletons),

are difficult to refute. But because Modleski's conclusions are based solely on her reading of romances and Gothics, they are not as credible. Third, Radway's approach ensures that the utopian strain she detects in romances also exists for real readers. Modleski's methodology, however, cannot guarantee this. Therefore, Modleski can refute traditional assumptions about mass culture only tentatively. Fourth, Radway's explanation for the addictive nature of romances is more persuasive than Modleski's. Modleski's hypothesis, that romances increase reader hysteria, cannot account for romance addictions when many romances do not even use the eavesdropping technique supposedly responsible for increasing hysteria. It is also doubtful that a negative experience creates addictions in millions of women. As Radway argues, it is far more likely that romances are addictive because they supply positives such as emotional fulfillment and intellectual validation rather than negatives like anxiety and self-consciousness.

Moreover, LWV and RR also have profound implications for literary theory. Modleski and Radway have shown that despite their low level of aesthetic quality, popular romances and Gothics have the ability to inform us about the people who read them. This revelation means that the narrow definitions of literature put forth by the Formalists and New Critics are not only outdated, but detrimental to the investigative spirit of literary criticism. Modleski and Radway instead recommend a much more broad definition of literature, one whose criterion stresses the ability to yield information, not value judgements.

LWV and RR also imply that authorial intentions are not an important source of textual meaning. The fact that Modleski and Radway offer worthwhile explanations for the meaning of modern romances and

Gothics without investigating the intentions individual authors suggests that textual meaning can be apprehended without this type of information. As well, Modleski's convincing refutation of the long-standing conspiracy model of the culture industry affirms that authors cannot be aware of every impulse in a text. Authorial intentions are therefore not crucial ingredients in the search for textual meaning.

Moreover, this thesis' comparison of LWV and RR indicates that the literary critic must recognize that the reader has a role in determining textual meaning. Radway's superior results imply that if the critic's goal is to apprehend the meaning of the popularity of a text that is read by readers from a different interpretive community, *the critic must investigate this text as it is experienced by those readers*. RR showed that there is an important difference between a pure New Critical analysis of a text and an analysis that is grounded in the responses of real readers to this text. In the former method, the critic begins with his/her reading of the text only; in the latter, he/she begins with the text's identifiable features and a composite text made up of those features the text's readers have identified as central to the reading experience. The difference in these two methods is evident when we recall the discrepancy between the Smithton readers' description of romances and Modleski's. Although some similarities existed (eg. both emphasized the hero's puzzling behaviour and transformation; both stressed the artlessness of the heroine), many of the textual features identified by the Smithton readers were not emphasized by Modleski. Thus, since 1) readers have a role in shaping the literary text and 2) popular romances and Gothics are read by readers from a different interpretive community than the literary critic, the critic of popular fiction must analyse a composite text made up of two parts: the actual words

fiction must analyse a composite text made up of two parts: the actual words on the page, and those textual features identified by a group of readers as being central to the text.

Allan Bloom agrees that the scholar analysing mass culture products must take into account the viewpoint of the consumer and in The Closing of the American Mind does just that. Bloom's methodology is simple. A teacher who has "for more than thirty years, with the most intense interest, watched and listened to students" (21), Bloom makes observations on the mass culture preferences of "thousands of students of comparatively high intelligence" (Bloom 22). From these observations, Bloom is able to explore the nature of popular art forms, the reasons for their popularity, and the effect of mass culture on the intellectual soul of today's students. Bloom is not a mass culture critic, and his methodology is not identical to Radway's (he relies on observation, she on empirical study). Nevertheless, The Closing of the American Mind emphasizes the necessity of understanding mass culture works from the consumer's point of view.

Our recognition of the reader's role in shaping textual meaning does not mean that textual meaning changes markedly with each reader, or that literary criticism is reduced to the "inchoate impressions of a variable and various reader" (Fish 400). RR also emphasizes that the reader is not free from textual restraints: each reader's experience of a text is regulated by his/her interpretive strategies, which have been moulded by his/her interpretive community. For example, the Smithton readers' experience of romances were very similar. Not only did these readers rely on the recommendations of the same salesclerk, but Radway was able to develop a composite romances text from their responses. Thus readers from the same

is when the interpretive communities differ (eg. literary critic versus popular fiction reader), that the critic attempting to explain the meaning of the text must analyse the text as it is experienced by another interpretive community, even if this means soliciting reader responses.¹ It is important to point out here that recovering the reader is particularly important when dealing with popular fiction. This is because generally speaking, popular fiction audiences are more diverse than audiences of high culture texts. For example, Milton readers of the twentieth-century are a much more homogenous group in terms of their literary competency than modern day popular romance readers.

Furthermore, LWV and RR indicate that the critic plays a paramount role in the apprehension of textual meaning. LWV, with its pure formalist analysis of Harlequins and Gothics, implicitly assumes this; but Radway also acknowledges the importance of performing a literary analysis of texts. In the end, both Modleski and Radway suggest that it is critics, not authors or readers, that ultimately ferret out the meaning of the text. Although readers shape the text and may supply the critic with an accurate entry point for analysis, it is this analysis that actually unearths textual meaning. According to Modleski and Radway, readers lack an awareness of three crucial things: the critical concepts and categories needed to perform a meaningful analysis; the unconscious impulses in texts; and the ethnographic significances of behaviours within their culture ("Identifying Ideological Seams" 100). Thus

¹ Obviously, a literary theory that acknowledges the reader's role in making textual meaning implies many practical problems, eg., what if the critic does not have the resources available to conduct a survey of real readers? However, our evaluation of LWV and RR leaves little doubt that readers from different interpretive communities respond to texts differently. As a result, any defensible literary theory must acknowledge these differences. Despite the practical problems that emerge, it is the best we can do given the nature of the reading process.

while the *reader's* ability to articulate the "meaning" of the literary works is limited, the *critic's* is not.

Finally, LWV and RR also testify that literature is worldly, or that literary texts are "a part of the social world, human life, and...the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (Said 4). With their discoveries about the women, their relational experiences, and the workings of patriarchy, LWV and RR affirm not only that literature has a relationship to social and psychological reality, but that the study of literature is one way of discovering this reality.

This last observation may be our most important one. For in the end, what Modleski and Radway do best is remind us that literary criticism is sometimes guilty of forgetting an underlying *raison d'être* of the humanities: the investigation of human nature. Given this goal, as well as the realization that popular fiction is a part of literature, literary critics must throw aside outdated prejudices, recover the reader, and attempt to learn from these long-despised texts.

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