Write the Book of Your Heart:
Career, Passion and Publishing in the Romance Writing Community

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Anthropology
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how a solitary writer becomes a social writer, entering into the industrial and community relations of mass publishing. A significant part of this transformation is managed through writing organizations which mediate between the corporate world and individual writers. Despite being one of the most prolific and commercially successful book-markets in a time when both publishing and reading are perceived to be under threat, romance fiction, because of its gendered and classed status, is often neglected by the academy and patronized in the media. Researched through observation of the largest romance writers groups in Canada, which I call City Romance Writers, this dissertation explores how writers’ associations help shape would-be writers into players in the professional market, negotiating the boundaries between professional and amateur, local and global, creative and market-driven. It explores how romance writers organize to manage risk and uncertainty in the publishing industry and how they make claims to legitimacy and authority in the public sphere. Finally, it examines how structures of gender, race and class shape the communities romance writers form and the claims they make. I argue that romance writers’ discourses and practices surrounding writing and publication are a revealing terrain for the exploration of contemporary issues of media production, flexible labour,
gender and community. In part because of the particular characteristics of romance writing itself, these themes are also underpinned by the constant presence of love, as a discourse, an activity and a story. While revealing the importance of affective discourses of passion and love in mobilizing writers to embrace their own flexibility, this dissertation also argues that writers’ affective relationship with their writing is not fully contained by capitalism.
Acknowledgments

Thank you to everyone involved in making this dissertation possible. As romance writers have shown me, writing is never really a solitary practice. All mistakes, of course, are mine.

Thanks to the writers of CRW who let me tag along to their meetings and gave so generously of their time and to all the editors and other publishing professionals who gave me interviews and insight into the publishing world.

Thanks to my co-advisors, Sandra Bamford and Joshua Barker, for supporting this project, to committee member Mary Nyquist for her valuable feedback and to external reader Ilana Gershon for her very helpful comments. Thanks also to Girish Daswani, Naisargi Dave, and Holly Wardlow for agreeing to be on various committees along the way and to the Department of Anthropology, the School of Graduate Studies and the Ontario Graduate Scholarship for their financial and institutional support.

Thanks to all my colleagues and fellow graduate students, especially the members of the Dissertation Writing Group and our informal Accountability Group, especially Kori Allan, Lindsay Bell, Sheri Gibbings, Sharon Kelly, Lauren Classen, Carmen Nave, Anna Polonyi, Laura Sikstrom, Alyson Stone and Zoe Wool, and to Andrew Gilbert and Tania Li for supporting graduate student writing.

Thanks to family and friends for putting up with me during the disserting process, especially my girlfriend Anna Wilson for giving me feedback on the entire thing, my dad Christopher Taylor for turning a writer’s eye to the penultimate draft, and my friend Elah Feder for being my working companion and keeping me on track.
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Introduction

Writing a book, publishing it and then quitting your day job is a common dream in North America, a dream which embraces individual creative enterprise and the glamour of the culture industries. But becoming an author in the early twenty-first century involves more than simply putting words on paper. Writing for yourself may be a solitary activity but writing for the public is a social enterprise and publishing even more so.¹ The first advice many aspiring writers get from industry professionals is to find a writing group, take a writing course or join a writing association. In one of the many coffee shops in which I interviewed writers during my fieldwork, romance author Sarah² told me that when she first began to write, she read a number of textbooks which suggested getting involved with local writing organizations:

I didn’t intend to write a romance novel, but that’s just kind of where it was going, where it was leading. It was a love story, so then I kind of thought, well, in some of the textbooks it said get involved with your different writing organizations so I went, oh? There’s writing organizations out there? And then, you know, I checked more textbooks and one of them somewhere mentioned Romance Writers of America and so when I looked them up on the internet, or it was a book in this case, and then I found them and then I found that they had a branch in [city] and so I called them and was very nervous and so I found my way.

The above quote points towards the role of the romance writing community in the formation of a romance writer and the place of both texts and people in forming this community. This dissertation explores how a solitary writer becomes a social writer, entering into the industrial and community relations of mass publishing. A significant part of this transformation is managed through writing organizations which mediate between the corporate world and individual writers. I argue that romance writers’ discourses and practices surrounding writing and publication are a revealing terrain for the exploration of contemporary issues of media production, flexible labour, gender and community. In part because of the particular characteristics of romance writing itself, these themes are also underpinned by the constant presence of love, as a discourse, an activity and a story.

Flexible labour is both an analytic description of work outside of long-term permanent, full-time employment, encompassing casual, part-time, and contract-based employment, and a

¹ See Camille Bacon-Smith (2000) for discussion of another, different, social enterprise of writing in fan-culture.
² Most of the names of writers in this dissertation are pseudonyms, due to the confidentiality requirements of my research ethics approval. Some of their personal characteristics have also been blurred.
A prescriptive term circulating in the public sphere which describes the ‘ability’ of both employers and employees to change their arrangements at any moment. While the language of creativity and independence is often used to sell the new flexible work arrangements, anthropological approaches to flexible work have largely overlooked the culture industries. My research, however, reveals that studying such seemingly old-fashioned people as romance writers can provide an important insight into how individuals negotiate these new conditions of work.

Anthropological studies of flexible labour have largely focussed on the restructuring of the factory and of the corporation. While this is an essential perspective on flexible capitalism, by beginning with the corporation and working outwards, these studies fail to capture one of the central features of flexible labour from the employees’ point of view: the experience of being ‘outside’ and ‘in-between’. My research begins with romance writers and takes their perspective on flexible media production. I examine how writers attempt to manage the precarity of flexible work arrangements through forming mediating associations and communities. As is typical of the growing ranks of flexible middle-class workers, romance writers experience not only individual companies, but the industry as an (incomplete) whole. Their flexibility is not simply mandated from the top down; it is learned by writers from their peers in the process of becoming romance writers. My dissertation examines a feminized creative industry, the ‘inspiration’ for flexible work arrangements, showing how the creation of flexibility is not achieved merely on factory floors or within the walls of the corporation but through worker associations and communities of practice.

In 2010 romance fiction generated $1.538 billion in sales and had the largest market share of book publishing in terms of revenue at 13.4 percent (larger than mystery, science fiction and religious titles). There were 8,240 new romance titles released in the United States in 2010. Despite being one of the most prolific and commercially successful book-markets in a time when both publishing and reading are perceived to be under threat, romance, because of its gendered and classed status, is often neglected by the academy and patronized in the media.

City Romance Writers, my dissertation explores how writers’ associations help shape would-be writers into players in the professional market, negotiating the boundaries between professional and amateur, local and global, creative and market-driven. It explores how romance writers organize to manage risk and uncertainty in the publishing industry and how they make claims to legitimacy and authority in the public sphere. Finally, it examines how structures of gender, race and class shape the communities romance writers form and the claims they make. Studying romance writers associations in particular gives us an insight into the place of affect in flexible labour. My work reveals the importance of affective discourses of passion and love in mobilizing writers to embrace their own flexibility. At the same time, I argue that writers’ affective relationship with their writing is not fully contained by capitalism. While the entwining of love and work enables flexible capitalism, it is not determined by it.

I began my research in the midst of an economic downturn, after the dot-com bubble burst in 2000-2001 and the US Housing crisis of 2007 brought on a recession both in the United States and more widely. Yet the excitement over the so-called ‘New Economy’ which pervaded the public sphere in the 1990s lingers, as does the economic re-structuring which accompanied the excitement. The hallmarks of postmodernity, including advances in information technology, new management and production techniques, and global integration (Fisher and Downey 2006: 1), form the social context of work for both aspiring and published writers. The short-term contract employment, based on self-management and networking, which has often characterized work in the creative sector is expanding across sectors. While there is a significant amount of theorizing about this trend, there is still much to be done in terms of examining what work looks like on-the-ground for workers outside of corporations. In addition to work on flexible labour in anthropology which examines labour from inside the factory, the physical workplace or the company, this study argues that we also need to look at communities that form outside of corporations. As I have argued above, examining these communities reveals that the self-government necessary for middle-class flexible labour is neither imposed top-down by companies nor naturally occurring in creative workers. These communities re-situate flexible labour and shape members’ identities as creative workers. Like guilds and unions, these

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7 Due to the confidentiality requirements of my research.
8 See the introduction to *Frontiers of Capital* (2006), edited by Melissa S. Fisher and Greg Downey, for a discussion of the ‘New Economy’.
9 For example, Ross (2009) and McRobbie (2002).
10 Such as the ‘new teamwork’ which Angela McRobbie (1998) discusses in her work on young British fashion designers and the networks Fisher (2006) examines in her work on women’s networking organizations on Wall Street.
professional associations, networks and communities play an essential role in the world of work. Drawing on mostly middle-class members with diverse employers, these professional communities often focus less on collective labour action than on individual achievements and networking.\textsuperscript{11} This dissertation is about workers’ efforts to manage flexible labour from the outside.

**Romance Writers and Mass Publishing**

Romance writers organizations are at the centre of this dissertation. In the mid-twentieth century, romance writers began to form a number of strong professional associations. In the UK, some well-known writers of romantic fiction formed the Romantic Novelists Association in 1960.\textsuperscript{12} In North America, a few writers and an editor formed the Romance Writers of America (RWA) in 1980. It currently has more than 10,000 members, 1,885 of whom have published a romance.\textsuperscript{13} Unlike most other writers associations such as the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Association, RWA does not require members to have published professionally. This means that RWA’s activities involve both published and unpublished writers, highlighting the association’s role in socializing new writers and professionalizing amateur writers.\textsuperscript{14} RWA is a non-profit trade association with the stated mission of advancing “the professional interests of career-focused romance writers through networking and advocacy. RWA works to support the efforts of its members to earn a living, to make a full-time career out of writing romance—or a part-time one that generously supplements his/her main income.”\textsuperscript{15} Some of RWA’s activities include a monthly magazine, a national conference which is attended by both writers and editors, a set of awards (the RITAs and the Golden Hearts), an insurance program, an academic grant, and outreach to the media and the industry. There are three levels of membership: PAN (Published Authors Network), which requires a sale with an advance of at least $1000 to belong; PRO (Professional), which requires submitting a manuscript to an agent or publisher, but not the acceptance of that manuscript; and General, which only requires being serious about pursuing romance writing.

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\textsuperscript{11}This is not to say that groups like RWA, for example, do no collective advocating. They do. But unlike the Writers Guild, for example, they have never gone on strike and are not set up for that kind of traditional union labour action.

\textsuperscript{12} As a side note, romantic fiction in the UK is not entirely the same thing as romance fiction in North America. It includes novels which would not be described as romance in North America.

\textsuperscript{13} http://www.rwa.org/cs/authors_and_books; accessed July 13, 2012.

\textsuperscript{14} Amateur here refers not to the quality of a writer’s writing, but to its practice as a hobby or a non-remunerated activity. Compare with, for example, the distinctions between amateurs and professionals in sport.

\textsuperscript{15} http://www.rwa.org/cs/about_rwa, accessed Sept 2, 2011.
RWA also has a number of geographic and thematic chapters. While RWA is based in the United States, it has members worldwide and there are a number of Canadian chapters. The chapter I worked with for this dissertation, City Romance Writers (CRW), was founded not long after RWA in 1986 by a group of mostly unpublished writers. As one writer who was there in the early years described it to me, it was “the blind leading the blind in a lot of cases” but they “built up a good membership and […] started a lot of really good traditions.” CRW currently has around 120 members from all around the city and surrounding municipalities. It holds monthly meetings in libraries in the north end of the city. Each meeting has a business portion and a guest speaker, usually a writer discussing the craft of writing or the industry. Around thirty members usually attended each meeting, depending on the popularity of the topic and the time of year. Afterwards, some of the board members, insiders and other members would go out for drinks with the speaker in a restaurant near the library. On special occasions, CRW held receptions in a nearby hotel. CRW also had separate email lists for general, published and PRO members, and a monthly newsletter.

There was a fair amount of turnover over the two years I attended CRW meetings, as people’s lives and involvement with writing changed. A few writers who had just received contracts when I began my research had continued success and became more involved in the industry. Others stopped attending meetings as family or work commitments drew them away. Writers went to CRW for support and information. They sometimes found new friends and colleagues and formed their own critique groups. Others found critique groups online, on sites such as eharlequin and Romance Divas. The romance writers I met were mostly women, mostly white and native speakers of English, varying in age from mid-twenties to late-fifties. Most were heterosexual, some married, some unmarried, many had children. Most had had or currently had other jobs, ranging from office work, nursing, financial work, design, management, and so on. The writers involved in CRW were very welcoming and helpful to an inquiring PhD student.

Publishing a book is a different experience for aspiring writers and published authors. There are two main ways to get a contract for a book. The first is to complete a manuscript and submit it to agents and publishers; the second is to sell a proposal and then write the book. First-

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16 Such as Beau Monde, a chapter for writers who write regency historical romances, and Georgia Romance Writers, a geographical chapter.
17 Also referred to as ‘loops’.
18 A critique group is a group of writers who meet regularly to read each other’s work and offer suggestions.
time authors generally go the first route. Writers who are a known quantity are much more likely to get a contract on proposal, especially if they are doing well and are proposing a book in a subgenre in which they are already published. Initial publication, however, is not a guarantee for future publication. Even published authors have proposals rejected, manuscripts not picked up and contracts not renewed. Rejection is a universal experience for writers.

The path to publication for any individual writer, however, is not as straight-forward as the description above. As the following quote from an interview with Patricia shows, building a career in publishing involves a lot of persistence and false starts as well as success. Writers travelling this path find support, feedback and connections in writing communities:

Patricia: I joined [CRW] because I put the novel in a contest. I got all kinds of lovely feedback that said, you don’t know what the hell you’re doing. And joined [CRW] and- I was secretary of [CRW] for a while, so I really got to know the ropes. Took lots of courses and I went to the [local college] course on writing romance. It’s not a credit course, but it was a good course. Met my critique group there. [She names them] So then we, we meet once a week to look at our work. Yeah, so, very hardworking group. […] And, so I think I wrote three after that. Then I wrote [title of novel] and it got into the American Title contest. I don’t know if you know that one, but it’s with Romantic Times and Dorchester. And the prize is a published book with Dorchester. Every week you put a part of your book into their magazine and then people vote for you. […] It was lots of fun, got some great exposure, and at the end of that contest, someone else won the contest, but my book got picked up. And I, just as I’d gone into that contest, I had published, I had an earlier book picked up by Five Star, which was Thomson Gale publisher, small, it’s hardcover, library books, so they’re in libraries all over the place, but, you know, they’re twenty-five to thirty dollars each, so they’re not really, you know-

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20 That is, they write a full manuscript and revise it until it is polished. Often writers will show parts or the whole of this manuscript to their critique partners and writing group or submit it to a contest. The next step is to submit a query letter (an enticing description of the novel) to either an agent or a publisher. While many publishers do not take unagented submissions, a number of romance publishers, such as Harlequin, do. Often writers with a ‘category’ romance will submit it directly to the publisher, since the advances are generally low and many agents do not take on first-time category writers. The pile of unagented (and unrequested) submissions at a publisher is called ‘the slush pile’. A query submission generally includes the first five pages of the novel. If the agent or publisher is interested, then they will request a synopsis and the first few chapters of the manuscript, called a ‘partial’. If they are still interested (and think they can sell the novel), they may request the full manuscript and, if they are happy with that, may take on the writer as a client or offer a contract for the novel.

The agent will then begin either a round of revisions to the manuscript if they think there are changes to be made or a round of submissions to editors, in a manner similar to the way authors query agents. If an editor likes a novel, they will try to get their publisher to agree on making the writer an offer. The final result is a contract, wherein the writer agrees to let the publisher publish their book in exchange for certain terms, such as a percentage of profits or cover price as a royalty and, usually, an advance on royalties. The author then works with the editor to make any changes to their manuscript and the publisher assembles a marketing plan, a schedule, cover art, and so on. The author may be involved in publicity for the book or may simply wait to see their book on the shelves.

21 Generally, a writer will come up with a few ideas that they are interested in and they think are viable, and will pitch them to their agent. Together they decide which ideas might work best and then either pitch those directly to an editor or put together a more formal proposal. The author will put together a synopsis of the potential book and perhaps write the first few chapters. They may then be offered a contract for the book, often with a certain portion of the advance given at the beginning of the contract and another portion given upon delivery of the manuscript. Occasionally, publishers will approach authors or agents directly to solicit proposals.
Jessica: It’s not a mass market

Patricia: No. And in-between times I wrote short stories for a small press. Just to you know, keep things going. And then, in July I got a book contract with Harlequin. So, my first book with them comes out in April. But I’m writ– I wrote a short story for them as a prequel to that book and it’s out in January as an ebook.

The Romance Publishing Industry
The form that romance writers’ organizations take is greatly influenced by the shape of the romance publishing industry. The origins of romance fiction as a standardized publishing venture lie with the founding of the British publisher Mills & Boon in 1908.22 Originally a general publisher, Mills & Boon began to concentrate on romantic fiction, finding success in lending libraries and in cheap editions branded by their distinctive brown covers. In 1957 Harlequin, a small Canadian publishing company founded in 1949, began publishing reprints of Mills & Boon romances in Canada and soon in the United States. From the beginning Harlequin was a transnational enterprise. The novels were written and edited in Britain, but their content was influenced by what would also sell in other markets. As Harlequin’s reprinting venture gained in popularity its influence over editorial matters also grew. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, romance novels became even more popular, as Harlequin used marketing techniques originating in the selling of consumer goods to sell novels as a uniform product. In 1971 Harlequin bought out Mills & Boon and throughout the 1970s and 1980s it expanded its operations globally.

Seeing the profitability of romance publishing, American publishers also began publishing romances. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Harlequin’s authors were almost entirely British, with a smattering of predominantly white Canadians and Australians.23 American writers trying to break into the business had little luck. In 1980, American publisher Simon and Schuster took advantage of this gap and began publishing Silhouette Romance, drawing on the backlog of American manuscripts. More publishers tried to get in on the romance business, leading to the intense competition and so-called ‘Romance Wars’ of the early

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22 This brief history draws heavily from Grescoe 1996, McAleer 1999 and Dixon 1999. See them for a more detailed history.
23 Readers of popular romance, while almost entirely women, were not necessarily all white (Foster 2007:106), but the mid-twentieth-century protagonists of the novels were predominately white Anglo-Saxons, with a few Mediterranean and South American heroes. Foster states that it was not until 1980 that “a black female journalist published the first ever black-themed romance novel, *Entwined Destinies*, under the pseudonym of Rosalind Welles” (2007:106). Even then, Harlequin continued publishing books with almost exclusively white protagonists. In 1994, Kensington Publishing began a new line of black romances called Arabesque, which was bought out by BET books in 1998 (Patrick 2004). Harlequin acquired BET Books in 2005 and has continued to publish the lines under the name Kimani Press.
1980s. In 1984 Harlequin acquired Silhouette which it continues to publish as a separate set of lines. In 2008, when I did my research Harlequin was no longer the only game in town. Other large publishers of romance include Berkeley, Avon, St. Martin’s and Ballantine. E-publishers such as Samhain and Ellora’s Cave publish mainly erotic romance.

While writers are dispersed, publishers’ offices are centralized. Most publishers are located in New York. Harlequin has offices in Toronto, New York and London. Its romances are edited and published first in English for the North American or British market. The same books may then be translated and edited to be sold in other countries where Harlequin has offices. However, not all books are sold everywhere and the version of a book sold in an international market may not be exactly the same as the one sold in North America. As the market for romance novels has expanded, the number of romance authors has also grown. The increased number of publishers means that writers can be more ‘flexible’ in who they publish with. Like Patricia above, they may publish with a number of publishers sequentially or concurrently. The social identities of writers can enable or limit their flexibility. Harlequin, for example, depends on a core group of predominantly white authors to write for a number of different lines (e.g. Romance, Blaze, Historical), as well as a smaller group of black authors writing for the African-American centered Kimani lines. While black authors do write for lines other than Kimani, they are often steered towards the lines which are explicitly marked as ‘black’. I have not heard of any white authors writing for Kimani. Asian-Canadian writers have no separate lines and the ones who were part of CRW submitted to Harlequin’s non-racially marked (that is, generally white) lines.

Flexible Labour: Beyond Factories and into the Middle Class
While the success of mass-market romance fiction has depended on standardization, the quote from romance writer Patricia above shows how writers’ experiences of publishing are marked by flexibility. Flexibility is a keyword in current North American society; its force is enabled by its fuzziness. There are two main meanings of flexibility in the sphere of work and each offers an alibi for the other. From the perspective of employers, flexibility is the ability to move a plant to a country with lower wages, to hire and fire at will, to hire on contract and not full-time. From the perspective of workers, flexibility is the ability to work from home when necessary, to pursue

24 Australia, Brazil, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Holland, Hungary, India, Italy, Japan, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.
25 See Raymond Williams (1976) for a discussion of keywords.
personal interests, to change careers mid-stream. For workers flexibility offers possibilities, but it also offers uncertainty. In this dissertation I examine how romance writing communities enable and challenge various facets of flexible labour in global mass media production.

David Harvey’s (1990) work offers a framework for the transition to flexibility and postmodernism. He contrasts Fordist modes of capitalist accumulation and production with a post-Fordist or flexible capitalist regime, which he argues is on the rise as a response to the crisis-tendencies of capitalism (1990: 191-194). Emily Martin’s *Flexible Bodies* (1994) is an early influential study of the new regime of ‘flexibility’ in corporate, medical and popular American culture. Martin brings together work on immunology, the history of polio, corporate training and popular ideas about health and the immune system to argue that ‘flexibility’ is now a pervasive concept in American culture. She suggests that the “bundles of ideas about flexibility [have] become central to a substantial movement in contemporary human resource management and, through this route, [have] had an enormous impact on the way in which many manufacturing and service industries are reorganizing themselves” (1994: 144). She emphasizes the tensions in this key term between the ability (and necessity) of workers to be flexible (enabling their creativity, self-management, and so on) and the ability of companies to be flexible (that is, fire workers, employ them on short-term contracts, change hours, and so on) (144-146).

These tensions are visible in sociologist Richard Sennett’s work on the rise of flexible labour. In *Corrosion of Character* (1998), he argues that new labour conditions, while enabling certain opportunities, disrupt long-term attachments to work as a source of identity and personal value. That is, when workers cannot be certain about their future work, they cannot plan for the future in the same way. If they cannot depend on a predictable career path and pension, then they have less incentive to identify with any particular company or employment. Their experience of their identity as a worker is fractured and mutable. Sennet’s argument does not concern the negative economic effects of flexibility for workers but the negative cultural and personal consequences. He traces the notion of flexibility through philosophers such as Mill and, like Harvey, contrasts the new conditions of labour to the (albeit recent and short-lived) conditions of work under Fordism.

As discussed in more detail in Chapter One, Sennett argues that this regime of flexibility arose partially from the wide-spread entry of middle class women into the working force in the mid-twentieth century (1998: 57). Poor and working class women, he suggests, had already worked in larger proportions than middle-class women. These women workers, then, needed
“more flexible working hours; in all classes, many of them are part-time workers and remain full-time parents” (57-8). These changes, over time, “crossed gender lines, so that men also have more plastic work schedules” (58). At the same time, the consequences of this flexibility vary between classes. As Sennett describes it, “flextime is a privilege of the working day; work in the evening or at night still is passed on to the less privileged classes” (58). For workers in Deborah Barndt’s (2007) study of the tomato food chain, ‘flexibility’ means the ability of employers like packing plants, grocery stores and fast food restaurants to take advantage of women’s marginalized status and require their workers’ flexibility. For middle-class workers, though, Sennett suggests that “if flextime is an employee’s reward, it also puts the employee in the institution’s intimate grip” (58). This dissertation explores Sennett’s suggestion that women were at the centre of the development of flexible work by studying a highly gendered group of flexible workers. Romance writers could become the poster image of flexible workers, professional women in a creative sector, except for romance’s lingering associations with working and middle-class feminine sentimentality. The ‘feminization’ of work has not necessarily meant the valuing of women’s work.

Sennett suggests that the new regime creates anxiety for workers: “people do not know what risks will pay off, what paths to pursue. […] In attacking rigid bureaucracy and emphasizing risk, it is claimed, flexibility gives people more freedom to shape their lives. In fact, the new order substitutes new controls rather than simply abolishing the rules of the past – but these new controls are also hard to understand. The new capitalism is an often illegible regime of power” (1998: 9-10). Groups like RWA exist in part to decipher these new rules and share guesses about which paths to pursue. This system also foregrounds risk and risk-taking, where, as Sennett describes it, “large numbers of young people gamble that they will be one of the chosen few. Such risk-taking occurs in what the economists Robert Frank and Phillip Cook call ‘winner take all markets’. In this competitive landscape, those who succeed sweep the board of gains, while the mass of losers have crumbs to divide up among themselves” (89).

Throughout the dissertation, I argue that many of the recurring activities and discourses in CRW are efforts to manage this risk and uncertainty. I am examining a group of people who choose this kind of flexibility, who have invested it with desire and emotion and creativity. But I am also looking at how they strategize around the kind of anxieties and uncertainties and lack of social connections which Sennett suggests are part and parcel of this new arrangement of work. Romance writing groups like the ones I worked with offer socialization in the new rules and constraints of flexible labour, but they also offer community, insight and affinity. How does “the
grip of the company” make its way to workers removed from it? Are the activities of these communities fully determined by this grip? How is a system maintained under the conditions of ‘flexibility’ and uncertainty?

While romance writers may seem like an atypical group of workers, many of their concerns resemble those of flexible workers worldwide. Examining their organizations can tell us a lot about how flexible work is being managed as it expands throughout employment sectors, as well as the role of gender issues in its development. As Andrew Ross states in *Nice Work if You Can Get It*, “the rise in the percentage of contingent employment, both in low-end service sectors and in high-wage occupations, has been steady and shows no signs of leveling off” (2009:2). The study of creative labour in the cultural and entertainment industries illuminates the promises and perils of this “flexibilized” work. *Creative* labour (set apart as such by social scientists in numerous fields, e.g. Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010) has long been carried out within flexible and contingent contexts. Eitan Wilf (2011) argues there is a growing tendency among “modern organizational settings to mobilize metaphors from the sphere of art in order to come up with organizational models that foster organizational flexibility under conditions of economic uncertainty” (473). That is, metaphors of creativity have been used outside of the cultural industry to facilitate ‘flexibility’. Yet, flexibility is not a natural feature of creative work. As I suggested at the beginning of this Introduction, there is a need for ethnographic studies of how systems of flexible work play out for workers. Studying how creative workers develop and understand flexibility denaturalizes the ways in which creativity and flexibility have been linked together in industry discourse. Self-disciplining is not something which happens ‘naturally’; yet, as workers move outside of corporations this is something which happens. A flexible creative worker does not simply appear; they develop themselves within the spaces of romance writers groups.

Narrative and myth as cultural forms and practices have long been objects of anthropological study. Anthropologists like Franz Boas and Claude Levi-Strauss have both collected myths and built theories of culture upon them. Yet work on these narratives often focused less on the context of telling and hearing than on the content and structure of the narratives (see Briggs and Bauman’s (1992) discussion of genre). As mass-mediated narratives have grown in popularity and reach, anthropology has often removed itself from the analysis of

26 See McRobbie (2002).
27 I would not want to give the impression here that only ‘professional’ easily self-disciplined subjects get into romance writing. This is not the case. But this subject position is the focus of these groups and is seen as the ideal.
these narratives and their production.28 Studies of media have tended to focus on media users or on the representations of ‘traditional’ anthropological subjects.29 Mazzarella (2004: 349-350) argues that anthropological work on global media in the 1960s and 1970s focused on a ‘cultural imperialism’ perspective, while in the 1980s scholars critiqued this approach by examining resistance and local use of media. Yet Mazzarella suggests that this approach had its limitations, as “by locating the site of politics and complexity at the level of the family den, it diverted critical attention away from the complex of institutions, mediations, and interests that used to be known as the culture industries. The ironic upshot was that reception studies actually helped to perpetuate the image of a monolithic, seamlessly functioning capitalist culture-machine, kept from achieving total hegemony only by the mischievous “agency” of what used to be called the masses” (350-351). Studying writers and their media practices, however, can give us insight into the importance of media as an industry. Linguistic anthropological work on genre, speech and communication offers an insight into the importance of the process of textual production. As Judith Irvine argues in “Talk Isn’t Cheap: Language and Political Economy” (1989), the production and circulation of texts are caught up with the political economy. Linguistic objects, which is what romance novels ultimately are, have economic value. But the economy is also constructed and lived through linguistic interactions. This dissertation adds to the work in linguistic anthropology on words, discourse and linguistic interaction in the arena of political economy.30

Studies of media production which take an ethnographic approach are developing outside of the disciplinary boundaries of anthropology. As Mazzarella suggests, “while we have a large and growing ethnographic literature on the cultural politics of consumption, a critical anthropology of the culture industries is only beginning to emerge” (2003: 4). In the world of media studies and studies of culture industries, on-the-ground approaches, often described as ‘production studies’, are becoming more popular.31 John Thornton Caldwell (2008) explores the cultural practices of film and video production workers in Los Angeles, arguing that the industry’s own self-analysis is a key form of “cultural negotiation and expression” for production communities. Informed by a Geertzian interpretative anthropology framework, Caldwell (2008: 4-5) draws on trade and worker artifacts, interviews, ethnographic observation and economic

28 Barring studies such as Hortense Powdermaker’s (1950) work on Hollywood, Faye Ginsburg’s work on indigenous media (2004) and Zeynep Gursel’s (2012) work on the production of news images.
29 See, for example, Lutz and Collins (1993) on National Geographic.
30 See Gal (1989) for a review of some work on language and political economy.
31 See, for example, Caldwell (2008), the edited collection Production Studies (2009), Mazzarella (2003), McRobbie (1998) and Abu-Lughod (2005).
analysis. Like Caldwell, I am interested in how writers’ own theories about their work and the industry both serve as a form of cultural negotiation and are interconnected with broader developments, in my case, the flexibilization of work. For example, Caldwell argues that “explicit industrial theorizing” by producer/directors reveals changes in the assignment of artistic authority within television from writer/producers to producer/directors; these changes, he argues, are driven by changes in shooting schedules and production values and then theorized by producers. While Caldwell examines a range of film workers’ cultural practices, I focus in more detail on one group’s cultural practices. In particular, studying the gendered work of romance writing highlights the connections between the gendered of flexibilization, creativity and work.

Industrial reflexivity, Caldwell argues, “adds value to and sanctions contemporary post-Fordist industrial practices, […] and] promotes flexibility and responsiveness in new forms of media conglomeration” (2008: 32). Anthony Giddens (1991) has argued that reflexivity is a central activity in late modernity. Caldwell, however, argues that “the industrial reflexivity [he] examines in this book is not so easily explained as a symptom of a general human or historical condition” (32). He argues instead that industrial reflexivity in Hollywood takes on a particular form due to the particular context of Hollywood, which maintains both “old forms of Fordist industrial predictability” such as a unionized workforce and “new forms of post-Fordism” such as narrowcasting (34). In this context, Caldwell suggests that “reflexivity operates as a creative process involving human agency and critical competence at the local cultural level as much as a discursive process establishing power at the broader social level” (34). While I argue that romance writer reflexivity is indeed connected to larger currents in late modernity, romance publishing is also a distinctive industry; it is the character of writing as an activity and the gendered status of romance writing in particular which shape many of the forms of industrial reflexivity discussed in this dissertation.

How do creative workers learn to be creative workers? An important location of industrial reflexivity is in educational contexts, yet the presence and type of these educational contexts differs between sectors. In her 1998 book, Angela McRobbie examines the shaping of fashion design in the United Kingdom through art schools. Fashion had a bumpy journey to institutionalization in art schools for a few of the reasons that romance writing itself is not yet integrated into writing instruction in universities. Creative work that was mainly done by women and often done by working-class women was not thought of as disinterested or high-status enough to belong in higher institutions of art. McRobbie argues that “art schools produce and give credit to certain types of working practice. They also reproduce the field of artistic
production through the constitution of creative subjects who demonstrably possess and display the same ‘disinterested’ or ‘gratuitous’ approach to their work. They are self-disciplining subjects for whom creative work is understood as an expressive extension of self” (1998: 66).

Romance writers learn about theories of the practice of romance writing through writers’ organizations like RWA and its local chapters, online communities, occasional courses in continuing education programs and how-to writing manuals. They also learn through interactions with their agents, editors and publishers. These are the places from which romance writers develop and contest what Caldwell (2008) calls ‘industrial reflexivity’ and what Ilana Gershon (2010) calls ‘media ideologies’. In this dissertation I consider CRW as a ‘community of practice’: “an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour” (Eckert and McConell-Ginet 1992: 464). The description of romance writers as belonging to a community (or multiple communities) both adheres to writers’ own self-description and introduces an outside analytic category. My understanding of romance writers as actively forming communities emerges from the discourses of community (with its multiple meanings) writers circulate amongst themselves, but also from my ethnographic experiences of the practices of the writers’ organizations. As Bonnie McElhinny (2012) argues, ‘communities of practice’ have become a focus of both academic and corporate rhetoric, offering spaces for the management of flexible employees and work-related knowledge in the context of post-Fordist labour arrangements. Romance writer organizations and communities are not unconnected with industry; for example, publishers contribute both financial support and content to conferences. In

32 There is currently one MFA program at Seton Hill University in the United States which offers romance.  
33 See de Geest and Goris (2010) for a discussion of writing manuals.  
34 I use the phrase ‘romance writing community’ in a few ways in this dissertation. Most narrowly, the central definition includes people who purposefully participate in communities such as CRW, who socialize, network, organize, and so on, based on a common interest in romance writing. At different points in their careers, writers may participate more or less in this community. I also use ‘romance writing community’ in a more expansive way, to include anyone who is affiliated with romance writing at all. This would then include people writing romance novels who do not participate in ‘community’ activities, do not read the blogs, do not go to RWA conferences. I also discuss the ‘romance publishing industry’ which includes everyone involved in the production and distribution of romance novels: writers, editors, agents, marketing workers, booksellers. Finally, there is what Lynn Coddington (1997) calls the “romance literacy community/ies” (25): “the people who regularly use and produce romance novels, including readers, writers, publishers, and booksellers” (26). She includes readers in this because, as she says, “most writers come to their romance writing practices as readers first, drawing on their practices as readers to inform and construct their writing practices. [...] Most writers are also readers (though not all are), and many readers aspire to write romances (although not all will do so successfully)” (28).

‘Community’ also references Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined community’: the nation formed through the circulation of texts (1983). Not all members of the romance writing community know each other personally or face-to-face. Yet the circulation of texts such as the Romance Writers Report works to form a community, with articles written by members, an address to the community from the RWA President, letters to the editor, naming of members’ second sales, and so on. On a smaller scale, the circulation of a monthly local chapter newsletter also forms an imagined community, reaching out to other chapters with articles republished from other local newsletters.
this dissertation I explore what reflexive theories are developed within romance writer communities of practice and the role these communities play in shaping writers practices.

The use of the term ‘community’ could be heard as harkening back to an imagined idyllic state of storytelling. Writers use the term ‘community’ with positive connotations, but the community shapes at the same time as it supports. ‘Romance writer’ is not simply a natural category formed by inner desires or publication; to the extent that I am interested in it, it is formed by practices of affiliation, distinction, representation and identification. In Chapter Three I go into more detail about how CRW in particular is formed as a ‘community of practice’. There are certain nodes of activity where ‘community’ crystallizes and is intensely formed: where ‘romance writer’ comes to the forefront. This community is not simply an instrumental one. Besides the distribution of information and craft skills, many writers sought out community for a feeling of fellowship. Writing can be a solitary activity. Many writers said that they enjoyed the course, the meeting or the group because of being able to meet people who thought like them, like writers. Many writers felt that their friends and family did not necessarily understand what being a writer is about, both the affective experience of inspiration and the everyday work that needs to be put in. Romance writing communities offer economic advice, but they also offer an affective experience.

**Studying Mass-Market Romance: Love and Commerce**

There are two levels of argument in this dissertation. First, I am making an argument about flexible labour and the role of communities of workers in managing it. Second, I am making an argument about a little-studied arena of creative work: romance writing. The particular context and content of *romance* writing communities are an essential aspect of this dissertation.

At the centre of romance writing communities is the subject of love and romance. Eva Illouz has examined how, throughout the twentieth century, romance in the United States has become “incorporated into the culture of consumer capitalism” (1997: 22), as “in the early years of this century courtship and marriage, romance and love became increasingly tied to new markets for leisure and personal commodities” (77). The connection between love and commerce runs through the entire dissertation, as does love which seeks to draw away from commerce, or which is simply unrelated to commerce. The connections between gender, love and twentieth

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35 For example, Coddington describes the meetings of the San Francisco RWA chapter: “We come not so much for the programs, which are sometimes good, sometimes not so good, but to network and see our friends” (131); “the roar of conversation carries laughter and congratulations, as well as grim faces and sobering news” (131).
century feminist approaches to love and work are an essential part of this dissertation. Arlie Hochschild (2003) examines the interconnections between broader emotional life (what she calls caring) and the economy. She argues that “just as Protestantism, according to Max Weber, ‘escaped form the cage’ of the church to be transposed into an inspirational ‘spirit of capitalism’ that drove men to make money and build capitalism, so feminism may be ‘escaping from the cage’ of a social movement to buttress a commercial spirit of intimate life that was originally separate from and indeed alien to it” (13). That is, she suggests that feminist discourses are now shoring up commercialism and the language of finance and commerce has made its way into private life; for example, advice books for women use the language of investing and management in giving advice on women’s emotional and family lives. I offer a slightly more optimistic examination of the meaning of love and emotion to those whose work is creating a story about love.

As I discuss in Chapter One, scholars working on late capitalism have argued that the notion of the necessity of passion to work is typical of the period. McRobbie (1998) argues that young designers just out of art school in the 1990s were very vulnerable as small producers. Even if they were ‘successful’ they often ended up without enough capital to keep running the business, overworked, or sewing and selling on a small scale. As McRobbie describes it, young fashion designers drew on discourses of love and artistry to explain their working lives: “‘artistry’ provides a supremely effective vehicle for the production of a workforce for whom creative labour is also a labour of love. Being willing to create their own labour market as well as put in long hours for low returns, and to opt for independence through freelance or consultancy work, could not be more opportune” (1998: 82). Drawing on Donzelot, she suggests that creative industries show a “new form of creative self-disciplining in work. These young people might be seen as ‘subjects of creative enterprise’, willing workers who surrender themselves to the promise of ‘pleasure in work’ (Donzelot 1991). This represents a new and more subtle form of self-government in tune with the requirements of a post-industrial economy” (McRobbie 1998: 82). Yet while the discourse of passion does encourage self-government, I argue that for romance writers it also goes beyond the needs of capital.

Romance, however, is more specific than love in general. Erin Young’s (2010a, 2010b) work on romance novels from the 1990s and early 2000s brings together questions of economic flexibility and romance. Based on a textual analysis of romance novels, and not engaging directly with romance novels’ conditions of production, Young’s dissertation (2010b) argues that two recent romance subgenres, ‘corporate romances’ and paranormals, are particularly formed by the
current conditions of flexibility. Drawing on Harvey’s work on post-World War II capitalism, Young argues that “the corporate romance formula of the 1990s reveals the great transformation wrought by the regime of flexible capital and its inescapable impact on gender roles and gender relations” (2010a: 94). Like Sennett and McRobbie, Young links these changes in capitalism with changes in gender relations, suggesting that “the advent of flexible capital has so unsettled the traditional division of ‘masculine and feminine,’ and ‘private and public,’ that a new corporate romance comes to pose new challenges” (96). ‘Corporate romances,’ Young argues, contain a hero and heroine who are “initially constructed as ‘good’ at work and ‘bad’ at love”, but who ultimately “become part of a successful and contented romantic couple due to their transference of management skills and business ethics into the relationship” (97). As I discuss in Chapter One, these same themes of work and love show up in romance writers’ own practices and discussions. The negotiations of distinctions between public and private, however, are not resolved by a romantic love for a person, but love for an activity and a community. At the same time, while Young suggests that the ‘traditional’ division of male and female has been disrupted, flexible labour is highly feminized and gender remains an important aspect of romance writer communities. Looking at romance writer communities in particular can reveal some interesting facts about the intersections of gender and flexibility.

In the context of the North American publishing industry and this dissertation, ‘romance’ has a very particular meaning. As Pamela Regis suggests in The Natural History of the Romance Novel (2003), “the term ‘romance’ is confusingly inclusive, meaning one thing in a survey of medieval literature, and another, not entirely distinct, in a contemporary bookstore” (19). She cites Ellrich’s definition of the “old, encompassing term ‘romance’: ‘the story of individual human beings pursuing their precarious existence within the circumscription of social, moral, and various other this-worldly problems…the romance…means to show the reader what steps must be taken in order to reach a desired goal, represented often, though not always in the guise of a spouse’ (274-275)” (19). For Northrop Frye the conventions of romance in this broader sense “are very stable; the basic story, Frye notes, has not changed in the centuries that followed its advent in ancient times (Secular 4)” (Regis 2003: 20). The romance novel, Regis argues, can be more narrowly approached as “prose fiction love stories,” where Samuel Richardson’s Pamela (1740) is often offered as an early example of the form (21). Regis herself defines the romance novel as “a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines” (22).
While the definition of romance above is constructed within the tradition of literary studies, as a linguistic anthropologist I must move beyond the texts and into the social context of their production, reception and circulation and consider how for writers ‘romance’ is more than the form or even the content of the novels they write. To writers involved with RWA, ‘romance’ means something both more and less than Regis’s definition. ‘Romance’ also means a form intimately connected with the commercial system of publication and distribution. It means writing to readers’ expectations of a romance, submitting to a publisher who explicitly takes romances, and having one’s novel marked ‘romance’ on its cover and shelved in the romance section of the bookstore. It usually, although not always, means writing for mass-market paperback publication, with the attendant restrictions and possibilities. It may also mean finding one’s manuscript which one did not originally think of as a ‘romance’ being classified that way by others, to position it in the market. Although all romances in this context are ‘love stories’, not all love stories are ‘romances’. And the definition of a ‘romance’ is contested and changing.

RWA defines the two essential elements of a romance as a central love story (“two individuals falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work”) and an emotionally-satisfying and optimistic ending (“In a romance, the lovers who risk and struggle for each other and their relationship are rewarded with emotional justice and unconditional love”). Romance publishing divides romance novels into two main formats: series, or category, romances and single-title romances. Romance publishers like Harlequin put out a number of fairly standardized shorter books monthly, divided into ‘lines’ depending on length, theme, time period, degree of sexuality and so on, which are classified as category romances. Lines often orient towards slightly different markets or reader interests. For example, Steeple Hill is intended for the Christian market, while Kimani Press is aimed towards the African-American market and Nocturne is intended for those who like to read paranormal romances. Single-title romances are longer and do not have series identities.

Scholarly work that takes romance novels seriously has been growing since the 1970s. There is little ethnographic work, however, on writers or publishers. Early studies of romance

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36 In Chapter Four, I discuss linguistic anthropologists’ approaches to genre and its social production.
37 http://www.rwa.org/cs/the_romance_genre; accessed September 2, 2011. Earlier definitions specified the individuals as a man and a woman, but the growing popularity of romances with two men as protagonists and increasing awareness of gay and lesbian issues led to a change in definition, one that is not accepted fully by all.
fiction took an approach frequently applied to popular culture in general which has been particularly tenacious in the case of romance. Romance fiction was considered trash fiction, notable only for its florid prose and its likely negative effects on its presumably helpless consumers: shop girls and housewives. As popular literature became a more respectable topic of investigation, analyses became a bit more considered. Many feminist scholars (for example, Modleski 1982) looked at the content of romance novels (generally the most standardized category romances) to consider the appeal they might have to women, while still arguing that romances ultimately reinforced patriarchy.

As studies of reception were becoming popular in media studies, Janice Radway (1984) examined how a particular group of American romance readers actually read romances, considering their reading as social practice. While still holding on to the utopian vision of another more feminist genre of novel, Radway argues that for many women reading romances was an empowering practice, as it gave them the ability to claim time for themselves and to claim knowledge of faraway places they learnt about through the novels. Studying readers in India, both Parameswaran (2002) and Kamble (2007) have argued for the empowering possibilities of romance reading, as well as the different meanings novels take on as they travel. Neal’s Romancing God (2006) examines interviews with both readers and writers of evangelical romance, exploring how they use romance novels both as a practice of ministry and as a way to support their own faith. Drawing on more textual analyses, Thurston (1987) troubles the static view of romance by looking at the changes in romance in the early 1980s to suggest that the developing erotic romances were in fact envisioning the possibilities of remaking gender relations. All of these scholars approach romance novels from the perspective of women’s empowerment and gender relations. While gender is an essential term of analysis for this dissertation, the notion of empowerment is not.

Work itself has often been touted as the location of women’s empowerment. What I am more interested in, though, is how work is socially organized, whether ‘empowering’ or not. Academic approaches to romance fiction are both influenced by and influence how romance is discussed in the public sphere; writers are aware of this and develop some of their strategies of

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Views of Popular Romance Novels and Eva Hemmungs Wirten (1998) Global Infatuation: Explorations in Transnational Publishing and Texts, the case of Harlequin Enterprises and Sweden, for further discussion of the history and mechanics of the industry (with a focus on Harlequin). See also Lynn S. Neal (2006) Romancing God: Evangelical Women and Inspirational Fiction and Lynn Coddington (1997) “Romance and Power: Writing Romance Novels as a Practice of Critical Literary” for some discussion of romance writers and their experiences. 39In an updated article, Radway wonders whether her initial approach to romance readership was flawed due to academic suspicions about “fantasy, daydream, and play” (date: 214).
self-presentation in reaction to the discourses circulating in the public sphere. In Chapters Two and Five, I explore how writers have self-reflexively addressed these reception studies as well as their imagined audience in the production of romance novels. I examine how writers anticipate their readership as well as the critical reception of their work, drawing on analysis of both romance writers’ discussions of the practice of writing and romance novels themselves.

Recent approaches to romance have also expanded the gaze of scholars from a concentration on texts to the larger field (e.g. Thomas 2007; Paizis 2006). Scholars such as Wirten (1998) and Coddington (1997) are some of the few who have examined how romances are actually produced. These scholars emphasise the work that goes into the production of romances, as a genre, and the possibilities for both continuity and change generated by the circumstances of its production. Wirten (1998) has looked at how the process of transediting (translation and editing) allows local editors to reshape texts to what they perceive to be local standards. Coddington (1997), herself a romance writer, focuses on a Californian romance critique group, arguing that for many writers writing romance is an empowering literary practice, which they enjoy and which allows them to push back at and play with the conventions of the genre. Finally, she argues that satisfaction within the romance writing group in part depends on ‘affinity’ with other writers as readers of romance. She examines the practices of romance writers as women writers, and the possibility of transformation through writing and love. While Coddington’s work is very important to my own, her focus is more on individuals writers’ literacy practices within the social context than on how romance writer communities socialize writers into positions as workers.

Much of this work has concentrated on gender relations in romance novels and the possibilities (or not) for empowerment for women readers. There is, however, a need for more work which examines questions of nation, race and class (Rampure 2005; McAfferty 1994; Bach 1997; Taylor 2007; Haddad 2007; Foster 2007; Nyquist 1993). There has been surprisingly little discussion of race and its place in popular romance, given that one of the most persistent conventions of romances like Harlequins has been the whiteness of their heroine and hero. Scholars such as Nyquist, Rampure and Bach have begun to trouble the often unspoken whiteness of this system. A few scholars have examined race and ethnicity in the subgenres of Native American romance (McAfferty 1994) and sheik romance (Taylor 2007; Haddad 2007; Bach 1997) and there is a small amount of work on African-American romance (Foster 2007; Dandridge 2004). Much as other feminist scholars have begun to look at the role of empire and colony in the writings of British and American white women, especially in the 19th century.
Rampure has proposed that since its inception, the romance genre has been structured around an imperial system. She argues that textually, the sub-genre of medical romance resolves issues of imperialism and inequality through the individual solution of transformative love. Both class and race are often underlying unspoken structures to the identities and systems that romance writers negotiate in this dissertation, just as they structure the labour market and media systems in North America. I argue in Chapter One that flexible labour’s benefits have often been more available to white middle-class women and that the flexible labour of creative work is often a classed category. In Chapter Five, I examine how writers imagine a public composed of a ‘universal’ woman and how the tensions between similarity and difference are written on this universal woman.

The Field: Among the Romance Writers

One of the basic methodological assumptions of this dissertation is that the social world is a network of texts and practices (and textual practices). By this I am not suggesting that, like Geertz (1972), I am considering cultural events as texts, as “a story they tell themselves about themselves”. With the exception of Chapter Two, where I analyze actual stories romance writers tell about themselves, there are very few events which make good stories in this dissertation. Rather I am interested in the networks of discourses and texts from a linguistic anthropological tradition, where discourse is both an abstract set of repeated frames and a series of interactions. What words are used when? Which recur and circulate? How do romance writers both describe and make themselves as romance writers? How do romance writers use words such as ‘professionalism’ and ‘passion’ in both their interactions and the texts that they write and circulate? How do the interaction and practices at CRW meetings both enact and create writers’ identities?

My methodology is also influenced by what has been called ‘multi-sited’ ethnography (Marcus 1998; Greverus et al. 2002; Hannerz 2003). Marcus defines multi-sited ethnography as research that “moves out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space” (1998:79). While the core of my ethnographic research was with one group of romance writers, I also connect them to texts like the RWR which circulate among many locations and to publishers who influence writers often from far away. I consider how writers imagine what the circulation of their texts means. I also consider the places to which romance writers themselves travel for conferences and gatherings. Overall, I take a political economic
linguistic perspective on the production of writers and their texts, drawing on linguistic theories of intertextuality and sociocultural methods of multi-sited ethnography.

I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork in a large Canadian city, with trips to other major North American cities, between July 2008 and January 2010. The backbone of the fieldwork is my work with City Romance Writers. I attended monthly meetings, board meetings and receptions, went out for drinks with writers and helped out with a presentation to librarians. I also attended a romance writing course at a local college taught by a former editor who was now a freelance editor and writing course teacher. There were about ten students in the course, all women of various ages. From that course, a number of women formed a writing group which met at members’ apartments for about six months. I also attended a writing group which met before CRW meetings. I conducted interviews with local romance writers and aspiring writers at coffee shops all over the city. I also attended events put on by the City Public Library during one term in which it had a romance-writer-in-residence. As well, I went to two RWA National conferences: in San Francisco and Washington, DC. I also attended BookExpo America in New York, the yearly trade-show for the publishing industry, and conducted interviews with publishing professionals at Harlequin’s offices in Toronto, with a few agents, and with editors at a few other major romance publishers at their offices in New York. In addition, I draw on blogs and the internet presence of authors, agents and editors, media coverage of the industry and the monthly publication of the Romance Writers of America Romance Writers Report.

The yearly highlight of RWA’s activities as a writers’ organization is the RWA National conference. RWA National is run every summer in a large US city, over the period of about a week. It usually has an attendance of one to two thousand authors and aspiring writers, plus editors, agents, publishers, and so on. RWA holds the event in hotels which have large conference spaces. Like most conferences, RWA National was a busy event. The lobby of the hotel was generally full of women standing waiting for friends, and every available space was full of people meeting and having coffee, or filling the bar, or sitting to read their program or go

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40 Many of the events I attended that year were either workshops or receptions. Romance writers depend on informal networking and information sharing as well as organized meetings to form their communities and manage their careers and writing life. CRW has a reception after events for big guests so we could all have some cake and meet with the guest speaker, discuss the genre and the state of publishing. At the RWA Nationals, writers met with their editors formally, but also chatted with them at parties and on the way to workshops. They also had more formal individual lunch or coffee meetings with agents or editors, to touch base and perhaps discuss business. One writer was excited about the fact that the editors of the line she was published in took all the writers in that line out for a meal. Informal meetings are a way of maintaining and forming ties; this is one reason why writers’ agents and editors often told them to go to RWA (if they had not already) when they first got published.

41 Including editors at Berkley, Dorchester and Harlequin’s New York offices.

42 In fact, the same hotels at which the American Anthropological Association holds their annual meetings; I attended RWA in Washington DC about a year or two after I had attended the AAAs there.
over their pitches for a pitch meeting. It was a space of hope, stress and business-as-usual for writers hoping for a successful pitch, worrying about their next contract or planning to meet up with an editor they do not see that often. For editors and publishers, however, RWA National is a very different experience. While I interviewed editors, agents and other publishing professionals, my efforts to get more day-to-day ethnographic data on their work lives were generally frustrated. While flexibility has moved into the publishing world for editors, proofreaders and so on, this dissertation focusses on writers’ experiences and organizations.

Throughout my fieldwork, I began to see many similarities between my experiences as an academic writer and worker and romance writers’ experiences of both writing and work, which I discuss briefly in the Conclusion. The increasing flexibilization of academic work and its impact in particular on women academics, generated many of the same feelings of uncertainty in me as the ‘uncertainty of the market’ did in romance writers. The notion that the ‘love’ of the particular work is necessary to sustain a professional identity is as current in academia as it is in fiction writing, while it often takes on slightly different connotations. I also participated in the romance writing communities both as an anthropologist in the process of writing a dissertation and as a long-time fiction writer. While I am not a romance writer, I am both a romance reader and a writer of other types of genre fiction, as well as poetry. Romance writers have mixed experiences of involving themselves in the public sphere, as I discuss in the following chapters. Romance, as a genre, and the writing of it, are often dismissed as jokes, excessively emotional, or full of retrograde sexism. In negotiating initial access to CRW, I drew on my own history as a reader of romance novels to allay writers’ worries that too much of an outsider perspective would lead to a dismissal of what romance writers value both in the process of writing and in romance novels themselves. Like many romance writers, I too have become invested in presenting romance writers seriously, emphasizing in my own analysis discourses such as professionalism which romance writers draw on partially as legitimizing strategies. Whether this strategy succumbs to discourses which subsume everything within the reign of capital is a question which I have wrestled with and left unresolved.

The writers I worked with range from beginning writers to writers who have been publishing for many years. This dissertation is, in a way, about how aspirations are formed and guided through the social organization of writers. Desires to write are informed by courses, groups like CRW and the many books available on writing. People who were at first only

43 And I am very grateful to them for their time and openness.
44 In the romance writing course I took at the local college, I began a young adult fantasy novel which I unfortunately had to set aside as my other book-length project, the dissertation, took priority.
readers learn the categories of the writing business and learn how to see books from a writer’s perspective and how to see themselves and their practices from a working writer’s perspective. Romances become visibly structured and personalities become voices. Writers move from taking workshops on craft, to workshops on the business, to running workshops themselves. And yet this line of movement is also not always straightforward. For every congratulatory email, there is someone who never finishes a novel, who cannot get published, who decides to self-publish, who is trying to get into traditional publishing, who is trying to get another contract, who has their series cancelled. An orientation towards the possibilities of the future, which at times seem completely uncontrollable, and the success stories and hope of those who have been there before, becomes essential and central to the writerly life.

**Layout of the Dissertation**

Flexible labour, then, blurs the boundaries and structures which characterized the Fordist system of capitalism. In the case of romance writers, flexible labour intensifies a pre-existing set of arrangements. In the following chapters, I examine five facets of the world of writers working in the context of flexible labour and mass media: work and love, reflexivity and affect in writing, communities of practice and genre, authorial identity, and audience and location. Together the chapters build a picture of how romance writing communities and organizations enable individualized writers to work in a flexible labour situation; they also build a picture of the identities and practices which are created in this context.

The first chapter examines how RWA and other writers groups prioritize professionalization for romance writers, while at the same time nurturing an affective relationship with writing. As an organization in-between the individual writer and the publishers, RWA orients writers towards the industry. Through local chapter meetings and texts such as RWA’s monthly journal, RWA enables the transformation of amateur writing activities into professional ones. The flexibility of these professional writing activities, however, is enabled by the maintenance of an amateur passion for writing which sustains writers in times of uncertainty.

These discourses of professionalism and passion are greatly affected by the gendered position of both the romance novel and the women who write it. References to both professionalism and passion serve as efforts to legitimize romance writers’ activities. Writers make a claim to a professional identity as a source of respect in the public sphere, where romance writing is not seen as a respectable artistic activity. These claims to respectability, however, depend on the reinforcement of middle-class norms of respectability and on the acts of
self-disciplining and self-management which have often been required of women workers. I argue that this mix of self-disciplining professionalism and amateur affectivity is typical of the developing middle-class flexible work.

In Chapter Two, I examine how romance writers think about the character of their work in another venue: romance novels themselves. I argue that in the late 1980s and 1990s, in concert with the rise of flexible labour, a focus on reflexivity in writing arose. Anthropologists and feminist literary theorists questioned the role of authority, and the social construction of both writers and those written about, in the activities of those who write for a living and their public reception. These reflexive examinations of the position of ‘author’ were threaded through with the role of gender in forming these subject positions and claims to authority and legitimacy.

In this chapter, I argue that romance writers also participate in this reflexive questioning of the act of writing. The primary form of this questioning and experimentation, however, is not in academic texts, but in romance novels themselves. The priorities writers set in these romance novels are different from those set in academic articles or even other fiction. In romance novels about romance writers, authors explore the possibilities of an affective relationship with writing. They defend the legitimacy of romance writing and the value of writing which crosses the boundaries between reality and fantasy. They also emphasize the role of community, in particular communities of women writers, in the life of writers. Romance novels with romance writers as characters offer another view of the construction of creative work, one which foregrounds affectivity rather than professionalism.

In Chapter Three, I illustrate how local chapters of RWA are formed as communities of practice and how these communities of practice discuss the craft of creating genre fiction. I argue that communities of practice play an important role in enabling the flexibility of labour. As both a term of academic analysis and a business buzz word, ‘community of practice’ is entangled with notions of flexibility. Communities of practice like CRW offer a place to socialize new writers and to generate continuity. I examine the opening of CRW meetings to see how this community is created and how community norms and values are reinforced, not through explicit statements as in Chapter One, but through practices. I also examine the role of jokes within the community in creating bonds and argue that these bonds then depend on reinforcing heterosexual gender identities. Here I point to the persistence of societal structures in what is often offered up as an opportunity for those excluded by these structures (that is, flexibility).

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45 Romance writers were also writing reflection on romance writing in other forms, but I focus on the fiction in this chapter.
In the second half of Chapter Three, I examine the formation of genre in CRW meetings. I situate this discussion within the context of theories of genre in linguistic anthropology. These theories emphasize the role of communities in genre formation, as well as the importance of intertextuality in the creation of texts. I argue that in their discussions of romance writing, writers emphasize the role of structure in writing, foregrounding generic ties rather than individuality. While flexibility often implies the ability to embrace individual whim, romance writer organizations emphasize both industrial structures and the structures of storytelling to create coherence and manage uncertainty.

Chapter Four describes how romance writers develop individual identities as authors within the context of mass publishing. I argue that an individual’s image or reputation is an essential part of middle-class flexible work. Romance writers are concerned with developing professional identities in order to manage their relationships both within the industry and with readers. Writers use the terminology of ‘voice’ to argue for the role of authentic individuality and emotion in attracting publishers and readers. They are encouraged to choose a variety of pennames which both develop and segment authorial identities for the mass market. These pennames transform private individuals into public authors. Finally, the development of self-branding makes the authorial identity itself a product and blurs the public/private distinction. Here the reflexivity of postmodernism lends itself to making the self a brand. These discourses of identity play out in a particular fashion for women writers, whose claims to authorial identities have often been disregarded.

Finally, Chapter Five explores how romance writers imagine the relationship between themselves and their audience(s) and negotiate the tensions between local particularity and global universality. The flexibility of local writers is enabled by discourses on their subject-matter’s universality, yet writers also worried about the limitations of their own experience appealing to mass audiences. I use theories of publics to argue that writers groups create unity in their imagined publics by grounding them in the image of a universal woman reader interested in universal emotions. Yet due to their position as Canadian writers writing for an American and global audience, the romance writers I worked with wondered whether romances set in Canada could indeed be universal.

Through the lens of romance writing organizations, this dissertation examines how the possibilities of feminized middle-class flexible labour are developed by communities of practice in the realm of creative labour. The professional woman, one united by commonalities of heterosexuality, class, education and ethnicity, becomes here the gendered location for neoliberal
entrepreneurial-ness. The romance writer is not a backwards housewife cynically smothered in chocolates: she is the flexible knowledge worker, producing in her own home, nurtured by her sisters, for the global market of universal woman (through the publishing conglomerates).
Chapter One: Becoming a Romance Worker: Professionalism, Labour, and Emotion

“Romance Writers of America is dedicated to advancing the professional interests of career-focused romance writers through networking and advocacy. The association represents more than 10,000 members in 145 chapters offering local or special-interest networking and education.” – RWA National

“Maybe we suffer a lack of respect because we too often use the words ‘book’ and ‘heart’ in the same sentence. Maybe we need to stop talking about our dreams and put our hearts on the shelf while we get down to business like the big boys do. Yes, there’s wisdom in treating business like a business. On the other hand, it’s kind of hard to write a romance that will please fans and contribute to a successful career if we lock away the very thing that makes our books different from the rest.” – ‘From the President’ RWR September 2008

Introduction
July 29, 2008 I was on my way to my first big romance writers conference, organized by the Romance Writers of America. I had just started my doctoral fieldwork and I was still nervous about it. In my field notes for that day, written on the plane to San Francisco, I have this note: “I’ve been unusually worried about seeming ‘professional’ and together – although I’m almost certain I won’t…I do have business cards, though.” I soon realized that seeming professional was not just a concern for beginning anthropologists hoping to convince busy people to talk to them. It was also a concern for the authors and aspiring writers attending the conference. A month before the conference, RWA’s magazine Romance Writers Report gave advice on proper professional conference behaviour, focussing particularly on dress. In the article, “Schmoozing in San Francisco,” Jacqui Jacoby suggested that “at any stage of your career, newbie to published, you want to give the impression of professionalism. Three-piece lawyer suits are not required, but shorts or t-shirts should be avoided during the bulk of the conference, though they are okay for your off-hours and sightseeing.” Some writers employed the same legitimizing strategies I did and I received a number of business cards at that conference. Yet while business

48 Jessica Taylor, field notes, 23.
49 RWR, June 2008 vol 28, no 6, 34.
was clearly the focus of the conference and professionalism a common rhetorical anxiety, I was also consistently reminded of the inescapable presence of emotion, in particular love, in the romance writing community. The conference awards ceremony, like any awards ceremony, was full of celebratory emotion. Before the ceremony, writers returned to their hotel rooms to change into evening makeup and formal gowns. I awkwardly failed to reassure a nervous nominee as we took the hotel elevator up to the event together. But it is the name of the awards given to promising unpublished writers, the Golden Heart Awards, which points towards the rhetorical centrality of ‘the heart’ (in North America associated with love, passion and individual human agency) in the romance writing community. As the RWA president at the time writes in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, romance writers experience a tension between a focus on ‘business’ and one on ‘heart.’ Business is seen as a practical necessity and a source of respect for romance writers. Yet ‘heart’ is understood to be what makes the romance novels they write unique and what brings pleasure to their readers.

The division of the social sphere into business and emotion, work and home, public and private, production and consumption has been an important process in nineteenth and twentieth-century North America and ‘the West’ in general. These divisions have often been gendered, setting up the second term of the binary, the home and private for example, as a feminine domain. This division has been associated with the rise of labour which took workers outside of their homes and, in the twentieth century, with a Fordist division of labour. Yet according to some scholars, in the twentieth and twenty-first century the expanding processes of commodification and the market have worked to disrupt these divisions, through the commodification of desire and romance, of leisure, and of culture (often in the context of tourism). These divisions have also been disrupted by post-Fordist changes in the economic system such as the reorganization of the spatiality of work, the growing role of affect in business and the increasing movement of women into wage labour. In a 1985 paper, Leslie Rabine suggests that in the late 1970s and early 1980s Harlequin romances began to “respond to specific

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50 The RWA National conference is known as a business conference, in comparison to, for example, the Romantic Times conference which is known as more of a party and reader-based conference.

51 Compare this with Lisa Rofel’s (1999) discussion of early 20th century China’s division of inside/outside, which gendered inside as feminine, but did not separate it from work. This is also a classed and racialized division.


needs of working women,” who had to “contend […] with a masculine power both at home and at work,” (39, 44) by romanticizing the workplace and unifying the domains of the public and the private through stories of working women engaged in romances with their bosses. More recently, Erin Young (2010a, 2010b) has examined romances published in the early 1990s in which the protagonists also meet in the workplace. Young argues these romances resolve the difficulties of navigating the division of ‘home’ and ‘work’ with happy endings where the “protagonists’ private and public lives become comfortably conflated as their marital union signifies a corporate merger, and as they embrace ‘parental’ roles at the helm of a family-run corporation” (Young 2010a: 93). This happy resolution of the home/work binary, however, is enabled by the heroine’s “significant socioeconomic status” and thus restricted to women of a certain class (93). As I will argue throughout this dissertation, the ways in which work and home reorganize themselves in the post-Fordist economy are greatly shaped by class, race and gender. The advantages (and possibilities) of flexible labour are often most open to those with the advantages of being upper middle-class, white or male. Flexibility without advantages is most often required of women, working-class and racialized people. Yet in the romances that Young discusses, women (the heroines) are the characters who are able to embody flexibility: to successfully merge home and work and teach the heroes to do so as well.

These tensions also play out in the romance writing community itself. Writing and storytelling, as activities, are neither naturally business-like nor naturally emotional. Groups like RWA and other sites of writer socialization like courses and how-to guides mediate between business and emotion, offering a model of flexible middle-class labour. While romance novels cannot be taken as straightforward representations of writers’ own attitudes towards the intersections of work and love, the tensions in them as discussed by Young and Rabine bear some resemblance to the discourses in writers’ communications amongst themselves. Romance writers are, after all, working women55 and their negotiations of a position for romance authors is shaped by wider discourses of gender, work and love.

In this chapter I argue that the current system depends on harnessing romance writers’ affective and artistic orientations through processes such as professionalization and creating from them flexible labour. The maintenance of this labour then depends on the continued generation and presence of passion and positive affect. This is not always easy. At drinks after a monthly CRW meeting, one aspiring writer joked that learning about the industry from an insider’s

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55 Generally women, that is. There also men who write romance novels.
perspective has taken some of the sparkle out of it;\textsuperscript{56} yet, this writer also worked very hard to create an atmosphere of enthusiasm at local chapter meetings. Because of the ways in which both emotion and work have been gendered, as well as the position romance writing in particular occupies within them, this maintenance of both professionalism and passion generates tension and contradictions for romance writers trying to construct their place within it. Organizations like RWA and CRW offer a space for writers to learn about the industry and their role as writers, as well as a place for the generation and support of both creativity and positive affect. As workers increasingly work outside of companies, associations like RWA do a large part of the labor of socializing workers. This chapter explores how writers become romance workers, examining the discourses and practices in the romance writing community which enable both published and aspiring romance writers to create and maintain a legitimated subject position.

I begin this chapter with a look at how the practices of the romance writing community orient writers towards business and the market. This is not a necessary feature of a writing community. Fan fiction communities, for example, while centered on media texts circulated in the market, are not themselves oriented towards production for the market. I argue that practices such as ‘Accolades’ work to initiate writers as romance workers and to harness the pleasurable affect associated with romance writing and reading. This pleasurable creativity is, for most, a necessary precursor to involvement in the business. I follow by situating this community within the context of what has been termed the ‘New Economy’\textsuperscript{57}, arguing that creative work (and perhaps especially that done by women) is exemplary of the direction of white-collar work in North America. As such, an examination of how romance writers find their place as workers may resonate with those studying other North American industries, and perhaps even with those new and aspiring academics such as myself experiencing the increasing flexibilization of the university itself (see, for example, Ross 2009).

This restructuring of the economy is a global restructuring. Examining the anthropological work on gender and global labour, I go on to argue that the flexibilization, feminization and casualization of labour work to intensify tendencies already present in the writing industry. These conditions make romance writing especially suitable for a market orientation, a process which involves the transformation of what could be a hobby into a set of flexible work skills. While some of the elements were already present in the romance writing industry, they have been intensified as the industry has grown, writers organized and the

\textsuperscript{56} Field notes 462.
\textsuperscript{57} Also ‘fast capitalism’, ‘post-Fordism’, the ‘knowledge economy’, and various other terms.
economic climate shifted. In the next section, I sketch out the general dimensions of the publishing industry and how romance writers are placed within it, as gendered, flexible, entrepreneurial subjects. Romance writers stand in a particular relation to writing, one influenced by past media representations of romance authors as flaky women sitting in bathtubs, surrounded by chocolates, candles and flowers: neither serious business people nor serious artists. Writers’ focus on professionalism becomes a way to legitimate romance writing as a practice, making claims to respect based on the image of authors as business people. At the same time, this focus requires writers learn techniques of self-management and self-governing in order to become professionals. This professional identity, however, also depends on the continued generation of pleasure sustaining writers and giving value to their books (as evidenced in the quote at the beginning of this chapter). I suggest that reiterated statements of love for writing by writers partly emerge due to tensions generated by the incorporation of writing into the market, as well as by the market’s uncertainties. These statements of love are also due to the changing character of work itself. Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose (1995) argue that work is often currently understood, not as separate from personal emotions and self-fulfillment, but as an important location for their development. In this context, developing a passion for one’s work becomes a marker of commitment and quality. This is particularly apt for writers whose job, after all, is to write love stories. In Chapter Two, I discuss how the emotional involvement with writing, taken to its extremes in romance novels about romance writers, disrupts conventional media ideologies which censure women’s presumed inability to separate fantasy and reality. In this chapter, I examine how talk of ‘love’ offers authors another kind of relation to writing - one understood to be outside of the structures of the market (yet which serves their role as workers) - and legitimates their artistic identity in an industry that often feels out of their control.

**Making Pleasure Work**

Desire, affect, pleasure and emotion (related, if not identical, analytic concepts) have all recently been the subject of increased academic attention (see, for example, McElhinny 2010 for a summary of linguistic work on affect). Some of this work has suggested that late capitalism is particularly concerned with and supported by desire. Roger Lancaster (2003) argues that late capitalism is “foremost about harnessing desires and marketing them to disparate populations,

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thereby soliciting new needs, new wants, new identities, and new experiments in lifestyle” (315). In the world of work, “communication and affect are increasingly central in service jobs in healthcare, education, finance, entertainment, and advertising, where for the workers and their clients the production of feelings of well-being and even passion are key” (McElhinny 2010:316). The entertainment industry is itself “focused on the creation and manipulation of affects” (Hardt 1999:95), but beyond this, according to Hardt, affective labour as one form of what he calls ‘immaterial labor’ is now also “at the very pinnacle of the hierarchy of laboring forms […] with respect to the other forms of labor in the global capitalist economy” (1999:90).

Indeed, the prominent role of affect in the current economy extends beyond the selling of affect to affective involvement with work. In their study of international management literature, Gee et. al contrast ‘old’ and ‘new’ capitalism, suggesting that “work in the old capitalism was alienating. Workers were forced to sell their labour, but often with little mental, emotional, or social investment in the business. Today they are asked to invest their hearts, minds, and bodies fully in their work. They are asked to think and act critically, reflectively, and creatively. While this offers a less alienating view of work and labour, in practice it can also amount to a form of mind control and high-tech, but indirect coercion” (1996:7). As they suggest, this offers workers both opportunities and restrictions.

As pleasure and capital are closely intertwined, each moves into the other’s spheres. The orientation towards ‘professionalism’ by romance writers is emblematic of the movement of the market into other arenas of social life. Anne Allison’s book Nightwork (1994), which examines corporate outings to hostess bars in Japan, offers important prompts for my project on the boundaries between work and leisure and how they are gendered. In the 1980s and early 1990s, mostly male groups of sarariimen went out as work-sponsored groups to hostess bars, where they drank and discussed women, in a way which Allison argues worked to bond them together as male workers. This activity blurred the boundaries of work and leisure and Allison (1994) uses it to discuss how ideas of private/public and the division of home/work which are important in American contexts are not the same in the Japanese contexts. While the context I am examining is very different, Allison’s work points towards the importance of understanding these divisions as constructed and variable. The social relations of work may be brought into the arena of leisure; the affects and relations of leisure may then also be used to build work relationships.

59 Bars where a large part of the experience is socializing with female bar employees, ‘hostesses’.  
60 White-collar middle-class workers in particularly coveted jobs.
Leisure activities are increasingly integrated into the market. In North America, productive leisure activities, often associated with the affective labour of feminized home labour which is notoriously undervalued by the capitalist system, are in the midst of a periodic resurgence of popularity. Knitting, crafting, cooking, baking, and DIY (do-it-yourself) are all ‘in.’ As is writing. Romance writers organizations, in particular, are located at an interesting place at the intersections of labour, the market, and leisure. RWA has 10,000 members. While it is technically a business league, only approximately one fifth (1,885) of those members are published, and the proportion who are full-time writers is even smaller. Yet as an organization, and as a crystallization of the romance writing community in North America, RWA exemplifies the orientation of pleasure towards the market, not simply in terms of consumption (for example, of romance novels), but through orienting participants towards the market as producers and workers within the system. RWA blurs the line between amateur and professional and shapes the ideal of a universal orientation towards the ‘professional’. The activity of writing a story, which might in another context be leisure or gift, then, becomes potential work, potential labour, potentially enmeshed in the market and oriented towards participation in the business and consumption by a mass audience.

For women, these tensions are particularly salient. In an article re-examining her seminal work on romance novels, Janice Radway suggests that “feminism, it seems to me, first made its way into romances through the career aspirations of the middle-class writers of the genre” (1994:218). She argues that this change is visible in issues of the Romance Writers Report: “the newsletter, which was initially dominated by a highly personalized and conversational, even chatty tone, focused first on romances themselves rather than on the activity of writing and publishing them. However, it soon developed into a bimonthly professional magazine complete with current marketing information, advice about how to deal with agents and editors, and material on how to integrate a writing career with home and family responsibilities” (218). Radway goes on to suggest that romance writers during the late 1980s and early 1990s “constructed themselves as women actively participating in social change by narrating

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61 Integrated into the market through instructional books, supplies, courses, but also through commerce: e.g. craft fairs and the popular site etsy.com. Of course, some might argue these activities in fact never went away.
63 I would not want to give the impression that this is an insidious creeping of the market into a formerly free and innocent area of leisure and love. As mentioned earlier, the distinction between leisure and market has come out of a particular arrangement of capital. And, importantly, this is not how most participants see it. For many of them, writing as a full-time source of income is their dream and a vision of escape from the day-to-day involvement in the working world (or occasionally home working world).
pleasurable fantasies about newly imagined individuals and relationships. Like their academic sisters, romance writers also seemed to be sensing that fantasies had validity—that they too could be real and thus might have an impact on other aspects of daily life” (219). Here the wide-spread entry of middle-class women into the workforce and into professions and careers is linked with a mode of feminism which aimed to claim spaces of legitimacy and social capital for women. As I argue more generally in this dissertation, RWA and its local chapters play an important role in managing this amalgam of leisure and business. Glen Thomas suggests that “RWA provides the ideal nexus between romance readers and writers”, providing “the perfect creative industries milieu for those who seek a career in romance. RWA sessions include discussion of market trends, the legal and taxation aspects of writing for a living, editorial feedback, and training sessions for authors on how to develop plot, character, or sexual tension. Harlequin is a partner in the sponsorship of the RWA annual conference, as a means of both remaining in contact with their established authors and contacting aspiring authors” (2007: 27-8). RWA conferences and chapter meetings as well as the RWR become a site for socializing new and aspiring writers.

Let me give an example here, that of ‘Accolades’ at City Romance Writers meetings, which illustrates how this market orientation is inculcated through common practices. CRW has monthly meetings with guest speakers in public library meeting rooms. They begin with an organizational portion. The Board (President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, Member Liaisons, and so on) sits at the front of the room and the rest of the members sit facing them in rows. After formal announcements and any specific business come ‘Accolades.’ Here the president goes through a list of various potential accomplishments and gives chocolates (sometimes from a heart shaped tin) to members who have accomplished them in the recent months. This is a standard list passed on from previous Presidents and sometimes members have to prompt their friends to stand up and share. It includes releasing a book, getting a contract, getting an agent, being rejected by an agent, winning or final-ing in a contest and occasionally other items (very occasionally finishing a manuscript).

As I discuss in Chapter Three, this activity serves to form community through sharing and support. Generally CRW was a very supportive group which celebrated members’ successes and commiserated with their difficulties. At the same time, ‘Accolades’ both reinforces and inculcates the market orientation of romance writers groups. The repeated list of successes and

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64 See Chapter Two for an examination of this in romance fiction.
65 I go into further detail about how ‘professional’ is used in the community later in the chapter.
failures directs attention towards actions that are market-oriented and assumes their centrality. Likewise the encouragement to participate in the PRO group which is usually also part of the business section of the meeting and the name of the group itself prompts members to move to the centre of the organization through fuller integration into the industry. It also expands the category of Professional; participating in PRO only requires demonstrating an orientation towards the industry through proof of having submitted a manuscript to an agent or publisher, not publication.

Another less formalized practice of market orientation is the fact that when romance writers get together, they often talk about news of the market. They pass along information on what is selling well and what is on the downturn. The Romance Writers Report contains updates about publishers, current ‘hot’ subgenres and other workings of the industry. At any panel that is aimed at writers and aspiring writers, the question of market ‘trends’ is certain to arise. In this case, knowledge of the ‘business’ and of the ‘market’ is seen as power, something that gives an individual writer control of their career and their work. In a flexible labour market, information and rumours become objects of strategic interest. Many successful authors advise aspiring and beginning writers that they need to understand the business and the market. They then often follow that up with an explanation of the structure of publishing and a set of facts about the industry. When giving an all-day talk at a City Romance Writers meeting in 2008, Ellen F. emphasized the “need to understand the market for period” and publishing structure and then discussed some idiosyncratic facts which have affected her own publishing history. For example, when her books have the word duke or duchess in title, they sell more, especially at Walmart. In contrast, her editor told her that readers do not want to read about France, Germany, Holland and a book of hers set in Paris had the lowest sales. One of the yearly panels that CRW chapter runs is a ‘published authors panel’, which is often paired with the end-of-year social. At one of these, when asked about trends Anne B. reeled off a list of subgenres recently mentioned in Publishers Marketplace: paranormal, sexy historicals, steampunk, YA (young adult). These facts and trivia work to orient aspiring and published writers towards ‘insider’ knowledge, where the inside is defined as inside the industry. Thus talk of the market functions as an entertaining exercise in knowledge gathering, bringing writers into the industry through business knowledge, creating them as knowledgeable professionals: romance workers.

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66 Period fiction or historical fiction, generally organized by period.
67 Taylor, Field notes, 58.
On an individual level, many of the writers who I interviewed, most of whom participated in some way with CRW, also talked about writing as a career. On a summer day in 2009, I met with Sandra in a Starbucks on a busy downtown street across from the headquarters of a music video channel. She had driven her daughter downtown and thus had some free time to speak with me. The Starbucks was busy and there is a lot of background noise in the recording I made of our conversation, the flute music playing on the speakers a diegetic soundtrack. Sandra was finishing a postgraduate degree in screenwriting when we met for the interview and had not been able to attend as many CRW meetings as she had in the past. Right after we discussed how she had gotten an agent, I asked her about RWA’s focus on career:

Jessica: Um…oh, I’m finding it interesting that RWA talks about, like, career a lot. This idea of career. I was wondering, I don’t know, what your, do you see writing as a career, or…

Sandra: Oh yeah. Absolutely. For me, I’m a professional writer and I try to make a professional income. That’s my goal. That’s been from number, day one.

Jessica: So you write full time then.

Sandra: More than full-time sometimes. That’s really what it turns out to be.

Career, for Sandra, meant making a professional income and being a professional writer. This approach to writing was not the only one, but it was the one favoured by RWA. When describing a workshop given by a well-known and well-respected editor, Jane, another writer who had been active in CRW, described what she saw as the two kinds of writers:

Jane: But you can tell who’s in the audience, because it kind of breaks down into two—two kind of camps when it comes to writers, right? And there’s the— the camp that’s sort of very artistic and sensitive and there’s the camp that, there’s a few of us there, that are very aggressive and competitive, alpha females, right. So you can see everybody go ((indistinct)) and then my girlfriend and I who’re both alpha females are like ((indistinct)) - we want her.68 There’s none of this kind of hand holding, it’s just, this is the way it is, this is what I expect, do it or move on. I like that. But, oh, it was a brutal moment. She’s fantastic, though, if you ever get a chance to hear her speak or to talk to her, she’s, she’ll have the best stories in the industry.

Romance writer and academic Lynn Coddington, in her dissertation on her own writing group, also describes her writing life in terms of ‘profession’ and ‘career’: “of all my professional selves, being a romance writer has been the most satisfying and meaningful in the course of my day-to-day life, yet it is the most stigmatized, the least understood” (1997: 4). She

68 Referring to the editor.
states that writing romances has “given me a productive locus for my efforts to claim a professional voice and to consciously create my life” (21) and suggests that within her writing group, “the problems we came together to work on critically were how to create careers as publishing romance writers” (102). Coddington’s vision of professionalism, however, is not one without emotion: “I cannot betray my friends’ trust by constructing their experiences as clinical, cold, detached, or objective. We are women writers who write of love, of bodies, of hearts, of life. We write as tricksters, and we write with integrity, with humor and compassion, with imagination and spark. Sacred and profane, we write ourselves and our own hearts. Our spirits fill our words and make, reflect, and make again our worlds” (7-8).

**Writers and the Romance Publishing Industry**

Given this orientation towards the industry and careers, what does the industry look like for writers? When I began my research on romance publishing, it seemed as if everyone I talked to in the city knew someone who worked at Harlequin, in all arenas: financial, editorial, proofreading, cover-modeling. Romance publishing, perhaps self-evidently, is an industry. Much of this talk of professionalism and passion is how romance writers **themselves** try to understand their place as workers in the industry. In this chapter I focus on the discourses of professionalism and passion, rather than strictly the economics of publishing as such. The question is what these discourses require of romance writers and what kinds of subject positions they create. Yet, ‘discourse’ and ‘economy’ are not separate (see Raymond Williams (1973) for a classic discussion of this) and the organization of the industry both is formed as discourse and affects the discourses which circulate among writers.

While the romance publishing industry is seldom given as an example of the much discussed new Knowledge Economy\(^69\), it could be said to be a perfect example (despite publishing’s reputation as an economic dinosaur). Glen Thomas has described romance publishing as “an industry that is fully flexible and adaptable in the face of wider social change, rather than a static producer of formulaic narratives” (2007: 28). This is especially the case when we consider the romance author, who as I discussed earlier exemplifies the post-Fordist

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ideal worker: flexible, entrepreneurial, gendered. In the Introduction I have argued that studying how writers in talk about their work and are socialized as writers can challenge some of the ways in which creative work is used as a metaphor in the reorganization of work in general.

The connection that writers make between their writing, creativity (and emotions) and work varies. Although most writers I spoke with at CRW did have this dual subject position of worker and artist, other romance writers have written just for the money and seen it as neither a career nor an artistic endeavor. This attitude may have been more common in the past. In her book on Australian romances, Juliet Flesch discusses writers’ attitudes about their writing: one author from mid-twentieth century “viewed romance writing as a money-spinner and journalism, editorial work and nursing as her primary careers,” while another romance author from the 1950s “valued her romance writing principally as a means of paying the educational and medical bills of her family” (2004: 82).

Most of the writers I worked with had careers outside of writing and many had post-secondary degrees. This is consistent with what Flesch found of current Australian writers, most of whom had “professional careers (ranging from librarianship to marine biology) which they interrupted to look after small children or abandoned because of their success in writing romance” (2004: 100). Furthermore, Flesch found that “the age at which a novelist published her first romance is often consistent with an interrupted career pattern” (101); seven of nine of the writers Flesch surveyed published professional articles or books in their twenties and then published their first romance between 30 and 50. Sarah, a CRW member, wrote her first romance when she was on maternity leave. As she described it,

My daughter came along and I wanted to be on mat leave with her. So then I decided, oh hey, this is kinda like retirement. That’s a joke for all those mothers out there, ‘cause it’s not at all. You don’t have time to yourself, you know. That’s what I was thinking at the time and then I found out how much hard work it was, with her and with writing. So that’s kind of how I got into it. But I also worked for a while. I’ve had a number of different careers that all helped me in my writing.

At a coffee shop in the mall, I met with Patricia, who had been a professional administrator. When I first interviewed her, she had been previously published, but was making the transition to publishing historical romances with Harlequin. She was organized and goal-

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70 As Urciuoli suggests, “[i]n the post-Fordist era of corporate contraction, outsourcing, and the new workplace, the ideal worker is imagined as the flexible worker, willing to adapt, self-train, and generally internalize the structures of work” (217).

71 Most (75%) of the writers were married.

72 Interview with Sarah, 2009.
oriented. In an interview, Patricia describes how she wrote her first novel while she was the chief executive officer at a university, during a strike when she was on the negotiating team for the university:

*Patricia:* Locked up in a room with five men I guess, you know, and the union went, they were doing what they’re doing now, they’re refusing to negotiate, they’re just playing, playing silly games and so I wrote a novel. 11 weeks, I think I had it about halfway finished. And then I finished it after that. Yeah. A lot of down time. […] It was interesting. Interesting experience. And I got a novel out of it. (Interview 2008)

The romance publishing industry (and publishing in general) has an arrangement of labour characterized by the location of the main producers of ‘creativity’ outside of the companies. That is, writers are not full-time, in-house employees of the publisher. Instead they contract with publishers, giving the publisher the rights to publish their work on a royalty basis (often between five and ten per cent) and receiving an advance. Even those who are currently being published are both physically and institutionally outside of the companies that hold much of the power over their work. Authors do not work from inside the publisher’s building. Often they do not even work in the same city as their publisher. They do not attend Christmas parties or company picnics, the quintessential moments of corporate self-creation, nor do they receive health benefits or pensions. In fact, a significant proportion of the socializing writers do do with publishers is mediated through RWA events. Publishers like Harlequin and Avon throw parties or hold dinners for their authors on the dates of RWA National. I attended one of these at RWA National 2009 in DC, enjoying the decade-themed drinks and desserts to celebrate Harlequin’s 60th anniversary and enthusiastic DJ. Even there, though, writers from the local RWA chapter socialized mainly with each other, as did the editors, PR agents, and so on also attending the party. This difference was reflected spatially in the locations of my interviews during my fieldwork. Interviews with editors were conducted at institutional locations, in their offices at various publishing companies, while interviews with authors were conducted almost

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73 This is not to say that labour within the company is not also creative. It is simply that authors are identified as creators of the work in a way that editors, for example, are not.
74 Technically on advance on royalties, but it is not usually taken back if sales do not match the advance. This is in contrast to other ways in which writers are paid for writing: salary (e.g. journalists, in-house technical writers – both of whom typically do not retain copyright); per work (freelance writing, some occasional romance contracts, ghostwriting – also usually does not involve retaining copyright); per word (if fiction, does often involve retaining copyright).
75 Although they do attend parties and dinners hosted by publishers at the large writers conferences. See Michael Rosen, *Turning Words, Spinning Worlds: Chapters in Organizational Ethnography*, Australia: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000 for an analysis of company parties as forming corporate identity.
exclusively in Starbucks. As workers, authors are expected to be both flexible and entrepreneurial, especially aspiring writers who are actively trying to ‘get in.’ When things are going well writers can publish with a number of different companies (contract permitting) and are free to move on if they feel their work is not being properly promoted. They are not bound to an office or a factory or to particular work hours. And if their book is a bestseller, they can make money that a copyeditor, for instance, will not. But this flexibility also means that writers (especially those not in the top tier at their publisher) experience themselves as in a contradictory situation: while they are positioned as the source of creativity for the book, they are not inside the company and thus can feel like they have little control over the book’s journey.

It is in the context of both an orientation towards the market within the romance writing community and these specific labour relations that the focus on professionalism has developed. While the industry can be tough, because romance is such a popular genre it is also one area in publishing where a writer has a hope of making a living out of writing. As Brenda described it in a talk to the City Romance Writers, in bookselling the expression goes: “romance pays the rent.” That is, romance sales pay the rent for booksellers, but the implication is that they can also pay the rent for romance writers. She went on to suggest that one thing that writers love about romance is the money, since with romance they can actually make a living, more so than other genres. She attributed this to the fact that romance readers read more quickly than authors write and therefore it is possible to have a more frequent publishing schedule. In fact, according to RWA, on average a published romance writer releases one to two books a year.

Writers also supplement their writing income through involvement in the romance publishing ancillary industry: through teaching workshops and courses and writing ‘how-to’ books. While authors of literary fiction often obtain positions in MFA programs and at universities and colleges, the romance ancillary industry is less institutionalized in ‘official’ institutions. Romance writing courses are more likely to be run out of small community colleges, continuing education, through writing groups like CRW and other RWA groups, and independently by workshop runners themselves. RWA as an organization also makes money, while not a profit, as such, as it is a non-profit trade association. Money made by the RWA is

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76 A much talked about ‘trend’ for flexible workers – coffee shop offices.
77 Many authors support themselves through teaching jobs, freelance editing, corporate writing and other day jobs.
78 Taylor, Field notes, 95.
put back into the organization and goes towards supporting its activities and maintaining its
continuance as an organization. RWA charges membership dues, both for local chapters and
for the national one. Then there are conference and contest fees. The institutions and
organizations enable flexible work both by serving as a location of information, subject position
formation and emotional generation and by employing these flexible workers themselves.

Thus, in a course on how to write romance and ‘chick lit’ which I participated in, the
instructor, a former editor, handed us a list of publishers who publish romance and ranked them
according to the money they pay, giving us a break-down of advances, earn-outs and royalties.
As I discussed earlier, the underlying assumption is that even beginning writers are, and should
be, interested in writing for publication and thus should be paying attention to the financial side
of the industry. This attention to publication is not just about the money, but also about the
industry validation of the work and the relationship with a mass audience that publication offers.

For example, in an interview with a published author, we discussed writing a series (versus a
stand-alone romance):

*Patricia*: And it’s pointless writing a series when you haven’t published the book. Unless
you’re really lucky or really good.

*Jessica*: Yeah. Or you just, you know, really like writing series.

*Patricia*: Well. If nobody buys the first one, you can’t sell anything else. You know,
you’re done. So you spent a lot of time doing something that. Unless you like doing it
just for your own purposes, but I’m assuming that people are interested in getting
published, so. That’s my theory.

Writing for most romance writers is something that is done with the goal of entering the book
into the publishing system, engaging in its industrial relations and, ultimately, being read by
readers. Involvement with RWA, CRW or a romance writing course transforms one from a
person who might enjoy writing romance stories, to a romance writer and romance worker.

**The ‘New Economy’ and Cultural Labour**
Practices within the romance writing community, then, serve to orient participants towards
‘professionalism’. This orientation of possible leisure towards production and capital is not

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80 During my fieldwork, for example, RWA bought a building to house its operations.
81 Interview with Patricia, 2008.
82 Cf. Science fiction and fantasy conventions which, while they may be organized on a business basis as Camille
Bacon-Smith (2000) discusses, are more oriented towards fan practices than market production; see for example,
pub rants blog Thurs Sept 23 2010 – ‘Kristin goes webinar.’
surprising if we take seriously the work on late capitalism as being characterized by flexibility (see, for example, Emily Martin (1994) and Bonnie Urcioli (2008)). To take a leisure activity and convert it into a potential skill, a potential contribution to labour, is to enable the flexibility of the system and to embody flexibility as a worker. If we think of flexibility as something that has been especially applied to women workers, then the flexibilization and feminization of labour go hand in hand. Writing can be done at home, requires very few materials and can be fit in with other labour or work done at home such as reproductive labour. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was one kind of labour accessible to middle-class women as a source of income.

As I discuss in the introduction, recent scholarship such as that of Emily Martin (1994), Richard Sennett (1998) and Angela McRobbie (2002) has suggested that the current “emphasis on flexibility is changing the very meaning of work” (Sennett 1998:9). As Karen D. Hughes states in her study of women and enterprise in the ‘New Economy’, “since the mid-1970s, self-employment has accounted for one quarter of all job growth in Canada” (2005: 4). In 2000, nearly one in every six Canadians was self-employed (4). ‘Creative labour’ has become a model in public policy and media for the possibilities of this new labour\(^\text{83}\). But on the ground, creative workers also experience the pitfalls of flexibility. Andrew Ross argues that “artists, designers, and other creatives […] are becoming the new model workers – self-directed, entrepreneurial, accustomed to precarious nonstandard employment, and attuned to producing career hits. All of these features are endemic to a jackpot economy, where intellectual property is the glittering prize for the lucky few. More to the point, the proven ability of ‘creative clusters’ and mega-events to boost land value is a key factor in the state’s attention to this sector of cognitive labor” (2009:10).

Angela McRobbie argues that an important part of the changing economy is the expansion of the relations of creative labour into more sectors and arenas of the economy. She suggests that, in the UK, “the flamboyantly auteur relation to creative work that has long been the mark of being a writer, artist, film director or fashion designer is now being extended to much wider section of a highly ‘individuated’ workforce” (2002:517). This kind of contingent, flexible labour (while not necessarily the identity of auteur) has long been associated with women in the workforce and, as Sennett (1998) suggests. Romance writers experience these connections between gendered, flexible and contingent labour.

\(^{83}\) See, for example, Richard Florida (2002).
These conditions produce anxiety. Romance writers are often attentive to the parallels between their work arrangements and those of other types of contingent labour populated mainly by women, like temp work, which offer little security and little professional respect. An interview I had with an author who, after publishing a number of books, had found herself drifting in the industry brings out a number of these issues. Sarah, an over-fifty, well-educated woman, had been an exemplary flexible labourer, writing books on requested themes for a number of different publishers. Yet she felt that this flexibility had created a situation where she felt like “the moveable kid with my finger in the hole in the dyke. And I, I just (.) I didn’t have a really good sense that this was a career. It was more like temping.” The contrast between writing as a career, however flexible, and writing as temp work, or simply a temporary source of money, was a central issue for romance writers. Sarah pointed out the anxieties that both published and unpublished writers felt over their feelings of control within the industry:

Sarah: There’ve been years where for whatever reason unpublished members just got this bee in their collective bonnet that the published members somehow had control enough of the industry to keep them from getting published. And we’re thinking, where’d they get that idea? We have no control over our own stuff, let alone, how can we hold them down? […] You know you’d go to a conference and you’d be standing alone somewhere and some idiot would say, I would give my work away just to have – be published and you’d think, oh yeah, there goes the rest of our advances […] You know, there’s the portion of the advance on signing and then there’s the portion of the advance on delivery and then the portion of the advance on publication and that is not nice because in some cases it held up a book for two years. So if you’re expecting to feed your canary on that, you’re screwed.

According to Sarah this large pool of aspiring writers eager to get in gives publishers the upper hand, allowing the publishers to choose among writers and treat them as, to a certain degree, interchangeable. This gives writers less leverage to advocate, as a group, for higher advances and more timely payment schedules. Meanwhile, both published and unpublished writers can feel outside of the decision making process. As Sarah went on to say,

Sarah: The industry can be tough. And I know there were a lot of people - I was on the [publisher] loop for a long time. And there were a lot of people they’d get to eight books and then, as they said, it’s like they’d forgotten how to write. Because everything that they submitted was rejected. Basically it was a kiss-off. But they will never tell you, we’re getting rid of you. They will just, we’re not interested in this.

84 Interview with Sarah, 2009.
85 Interview with Sarah, 2009.
87 Listserv.
Jessica: This one doesn’t work for us.

Sarah: Right. Right. You know, when I started I sort of got the whole idea that [publisher] always, that they want two books minimum from all their authors. I’m not good in math, but I finally figured out, they have way too many authors, excluding [well-known author]’s reprints, they have way too many to get two from everybody.  

Here again, Sarah expresses her frustration with the industry, the ways in which publishers relate to authors, and the lack of control that writers have over their books once they submit them. This perspective is not everyone’s, but it seems an inevitable one in an industry with a high supply of authors, who are understood as interchangeable to a certain degree. In Chapter Four I discuss the ways in which authors manage their uniqueness, through such things as voice and branding. In an effort to build some continuity in the context of flexibility, Sarah had organized a brainstorming and critique group with some other members of the local RWA chapter, which met in the food court in the same building as the monthly chapter meetings. At the meetings I attended, they discussed industry news, cats, relationships and synopsis writing.

I interviewed Elizabeth at yet another Starbucks, in a suburban municipality. I was almost late for the meeting due to my reliance on the public transit system and my faulty prediction of how long a bus would take me to get somewhere I had never been before. I had first encountered Elizabeth when she and another member of CRW had given a workshop on networking. Throughout the course of my fieldwork (and by the time of our interview), she had been able to quit her job as a graphic designer, as she had begun to earn enough income from advances and royalties. She was an involved member of the local chapter and was the president for one year during my research. While she had some challenges with her publishing career, she was always trying something new and as I write this has been publishing a number of books with Harlequin Desire. When I asked her whether she was writing full-time, she replied with a description of the unpredictability of writing work:

Elizabeth: Yes. Yes I am. And it’s- I have a book due August 1st. My last contracted book. But I have about three proposals out right now. And I think things are. Things are going to be good for another year. There’s no security though. So it’s hard. I mean, I’m used to. I was a graphic designer. I still do that a little on the side. You know, every two weeks you get a cheque for the same amount of money. And now it’s like, every now and then you get [a bit] of money and then, nothing. And you gotta put your tax money in another account, because you know, they expect that, once a year. Actually, they expect it four times a year. But. That’s another story. So no, but it’s. I wouldn’t want to go back full-time graphic design, if I can help it. I wanna do this forever. As long as it stays fun.

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88 Interview with Sarah, 2009.
This persistence and willingness to be flexible and risky also carries over to writing processes. When I asked Elizabeth how she decided which idea to pursue, she replied:

**Elizabeth:** Usually it will just take a hold and I can picture scenes and sometimes if they don’t I’ll write it down and I’ll leave it. Usually an idea for me takes about a year to percolate. And then finally it’ll say, yes, write this. And yeah, certain things will just, it’s almost like a top ten list in my head. And top number one is like, okay that one’s marketable. And I want to write it. So then. I mean, I write lots of proposals that don’t sell. So I try not to get too attached to them anymore. My track record’s been pretty good, I have to admit. I’m pretty lucky.

But these conditions also appear to individuals as “an important source for self-actualization, even freedom and independence” (McRobbie 518; see also Sennett 9-10, Martin 1994, Walby et al 2007). As Elizabeth stated above, she wants to do this forever: “as long as it stays fun”. The demands for flexibility, after all, came from workers themselves (Ross 5). As McRobbie argues, flexible, creative work is especially appealing for women “for whom work is an escape from traditional marriage and domesticity, young people for whom it is increasingly important as a mark of cultural identity, and ethnic minorities for whom it marks the dream of upward mobility and a possible escape from denigration” (518). At the same time, however, this individuated workforce places the burden of structuring careers on the workers themselves, depending on practices of self-monitoring, reflexivity and ‘self-exploitation’ (McRobbie 518; Caldwell 2008). Given this responsibility for structuring their own careers, workers organize, forming associations, guilds and unions to try to manage these relations of work: to determine what kinds of conditions and identities are possible, to ‘network,’ and to form a block of workers who can negotiate with companies and employers.

These new structures of work are also shaped by the categories of gender, ethnicity and class. Anthropologists like Aihwa Ong (1987), Carla Freeman (2000) and Nicole Constable (2007) have examined the feminization of certain kinds of labour within the system of global capitalism. Much of this literature suggests that global capital in its mobility makes use of and shapes the gendered position of generally non-Western and/or racialized women in order to depress wages and cultivate supposedly more docile and nimble workers. In this context the ‘feminization of labour’ refers to both the movement of women into the labour force and the ways in which various kinds of labour are then gendered (and often lower paid, casualized, etc.). The development of a ‘knowledge economy’ in North America depends at the same time on the export of other kinds of work. Thus, factory and manufacturing jobs are moved overseas, where wages and other costs are lower. The movement of middle-class women into the work-force in
places like Canada and the United States is enabled by the employment of often migrant women in food service, house-cleaning and family caregiving work. The most prominent of these anthropological studies focus on the global dynamics of factory labour (e.g. Ong 1987) and caring labour (e.g. Constable 2007).

Michael Hardt (1999) suggests that in fact these two domains of work, that of service and caring work and cultural production, can be unified under the category of affective labour. Yet the divisions between these types of labour and the categories of people who participate in them occasionally became quite visible in my fieldwork experience. For example, at the conference in San Francisco I mentioned earlier, I noted, sitting in the hallway after lunch and watching a stream of people pass by, first the romance writers dressed in business casual, who were mostly white women, and then the hotel workers in their uniforms and casual work clothes, both men and women and about three-quarters non-white.

Romance writers in North America are a generally English-speaking, white, middle-class group and thus positioned in many ways at the advantageous side of the system. The intimate labour of writing is a far cry from working as a care-giver or a flight attendant (see Hochschild (1983)). Class shapes the instantiation of flexibility, as flexibility in the knowledge work sector is much more ‘freely’ chosen. The work of romance writing takes a different toll on the body than that of caregiving or being a flight attendant. And, as I discuss shortly, the norms of behavior which aspiring writers are asked to follow and which they draw on for legitimacy are a classed set of norms.

Using the example of the early film industry, Laurel Smith-Doerr has suggested that ‘flexible’ organizations offer more opportunities for women to participate at a higher level\(^\text{89}\). This, however, may simply mean that less prestigious and steady work is more open to women. Because it can be initially pursued alongside another job, romance writing is very flexible labour. Many of the writers I met and interacted with during my fieldwork began their writing while employed full-time or during a maternity leave, and then quit when they were able to make enough income from their writing. Writers had been, and still were, administrators, nurses, reporters, and homemakers. Here romance writing can be considered beside direct sales, another entrepreneurial enterprise often practiced by women. I met with Sarah at yet another Starbucks in another of the city’s neighbourhoods. It was a boiling hot day and I had biked up a notorious hill to reach the Starbucks, giving up and walking the final stretch. Sarah was dressed for the weather

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in long flowing skirt. Our conversation ranged from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (a popular show among a number of the romance writers I spoke with), Desmond Morris, and the differences between the automobile business and the publishing business, to the principles of storytelling. She was a longtime member of CRW and in fact had given the very first workshop I had attended. She was very straightforward and pragmatic about the industry, while clearly still passionate about writing and storytelling. When I mentioned to Sarah that I would be attending the upcoming RWA National Conference and that I found it funny that it was going to be at the same conference hotel at which I had attended the AAA Annual meetings a year earlier, she described the intersection of a romance and a direct sales conference she had encountered a few years ago:

*Sarah:* I’ll tell you one of the weirdest experiences I ever had was—was my first—I think it was my first RT ((Romantic Times)). Oh no, it was an RWA conference. We were checking out and the Mary Kay conference was checking in. There was more screeching and everybody’s voice was up in like the way high octaves. [J: wow] Oh, it was, it was amazing. And there were a lot of women piled into that lobby. But it was interesting, the—the two groups. Yeah. Cause you know you think about Mary Kay and that’s—that’s a pretty popular successful business based on girliness.

*Jessica:* Yeah, yeah exactly.

*Sarah:* And the romance industry is based on girl stuff and it’s a huge proportion of the publishing market. So I thought that was kind of interesting.

Both romance writing and direct sales offer women the hope of a source of income which can accommodate their other commitments and the opportunity to become ‘entrepreneurs,’ transforming flexibility into possibility. As Preston-Werner suggests, “in Costa Rica and abroad, women and older workers increasingly face part-time work, irregular scheduling, requirements, and remuneration, and few or no fringe benefits (Harvey 1989:153–157; see also Farnsworth-Alvear 2000; James 2000). Direct sales companies reframe these conditions as desirable qualities of work that anyone can embrace, regardless of age, socioeconomic status, or gender” (2007: 23). Romance writers likewise understand writing working as ‘professional’ and want it to be accorded the proper status. In her work on the ‘intimate’ economies of Bangkok, Ara Wilson has also examined direct sales in Thailand, suggesting that through direct sales, companies can “extend their reach into intimate spheres and personal relationships” (2004: 164). Here flexibility becomes a marker for control over one’s own working conditions and the possibility of the individual to direct and change their own circumstances.

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90 A well-known direct sales cosmetics company.
As I argue throughout this dissertation, associations, networks, and so on are an essential part of understanding labour in the ‘new economy’. This flexibilization affects the focus of workers associations. Fisher (2006) examines how these new conditions of work shape the kind of gendered organizing women financial workers in New York do. She argues that changing definitions of success have changed the focus of organizations: “notably, contemporary women’s success narratives and associated activities, including their increased focus on gendered corporate social responsibility and diversity, are increasingly concerned with finding ‘one’s destiny’ beyond the parameters of the workplace” (213). The Financial Women’s Association (FWA), for example, began by trying to “forge a stable collective identity around the category of the professional financial female subject and to construct an institutional structure that would undergird that identity” (214). Much as I argue RWA creates romance workers, Fisher argues that the FWA “created female financial subjects. Specifically, the network provided a space for women to slowly take on a corporate habitus. Through participating in FWA events, women gradually developed a system of bodily movements, gestures, expressions, eating habits, and ways of dressing that helped distinguish them as professional-managerial-class women (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 192)” (219).

With the changing economic climate, Fisher argues, came changes in women’s networking groups. Fisher argues that 85 Broads, a network exclusively restricted to former and current female Goldman Sachs employees, came about as a response to flexible, short-term work (221). She argues that the “goals of 85 Broads are driven by the women’s structures of anxiety over their next move in a world void of clear-cut career paths” (221). This organization holds all-day conferences which, according to Fisher, draw on a notion of the self as “an essence to develop and cultivate. This version of success as self-fulfillment and empowerment, embodied in new age thought, promises compensation for the degradation of or loss of work. […] In the New Economy, one in part trades traditional career advancement for the emotional fulfillment of finding one’s inner gift and destiny” (223). This particular view of work, then, is not unique to RWA and is visible in statements such the following quote from an 85 Broads conference: “you can distinguish and differentiate yourselves in your level of preparation and in the passion that you bring to the business” (224).

Taken together, these studies suggest that there is a connection between the flexibilization of the workplace and the focus on passion. They suggest that questions of desire, passion and creativity were one motivation behind some of the flexibilization and changing relations of work, but also that these new conditions depend on passion and desire to compensate and support.
workers in conditions of anxiety and uncertainty. My research supports this by giving an insight into how writers are incorporated into these flexible passions through communities of practice like RWA and how ‘professionalism’ becomes a tool of self-management for these flexible workers.


Given the orientation towards selling their work and the unpredictability of those sales, romance writers use ‘professionalism’ as part of a claim for legitimacy and power: in the industry, the media and their personal lives. This ‘professionalization’ is also in the interests of companies. Other scholars have discussed this appeal to professionalism as a way of conferring legitimacy on mostly female-dominated occupations. One of the appeals of informatics work to the female workers in the Caribbean Freeman (2000) discussed was its ‘professionalism’. This appeal to ‘professionalism’ is an appeal to class, but it also works to distinguish writing and participating in the writing community from both leisure activities and domestic work.

When I talked with the then-president of RWA at BookExpo America (the largest trade publishing conference in North America), these were the terms she discussed it in. As the quote at the beginning of this chapter states, RWA’s mandate is to be an advocate for the “professional interests of career-focussed romance writers” and the current leadership quite self-consciously focuses on emphasizing romance writers’ seriousness and business status. As the RWA President described it, her work is a strategic intervention into the public sphere’s discussions of romance writers. RWA attempts to refocus attention towards an image of romance writers as ‘grown-up business women’ and towards the (financial) popularity of romance. Money, and women who deal with money seriously, are seen to command respect:

RWA President: As I was saying to you earlier we wanted to be taken seriously. You don’t have to like to read romance, you don’t even have to respect it if you don’t want to, it’s fine. But it is here, people do read it, people do love it, people honour it, people cherish it, good writers are writing in the genre, and we’re tired of being, you know, with eyes rolled up to the heavens, you know. And you know, if people don’t read them, fine, that’s okay. But, the judgement factor has been obnoxious. You know, so…we’d like to have more respect. And this is happening, more and more. It really is.


92 Kiran Mirchandani (1998) has examined how claiming something as ‘work’ is an important part of managing domestic time for telecommuters (which could describe many romance writers).
Jessica: So how, how do you work to get that, that’s always the question. How do you work to get –

RWA President: Well, things. PR is good. Like, this year, romance sales are the recession proof industry. Things like getting, Oprah has read some. In other words, there are some actual people that read them. Our authors are marvellously skilled at presenting themselves well. We have many dyed-in-the-wool feminists in our genre, including myself by the way, who represent us very well. We don’t, you know, we don’t come out in flowery dresses and southern accents and big hats, we present ourselves as grown-up business women who have chosen a field that we care about and have a gift for.

In this context, the focus on job and work is a focus on legitimacy. Romance makes money, so it should be taken seriously. Writers are business-women in a field they care about, so they should be taken seriously. Readers love romance, so it should be taken seriously. Feminism is aligned with taking women’s work seriously. Making money is also specifically seen as a source of legitimacy. For example, in an article in RWR called “Snappy Comebacks,” Eilis Flynn passed along some authors’ responses to the ‘digs’ at romance writing:

Nonetheless, there are those who persist in being rude, with one of the standard queries being, ‘When are you going to write a real book?’ For those, Douglas has a snappy comeback: ‘When my contracts run out and they stop sending me all those lovely checks.’ Being open about the money doesn’t hurt […] Then there’s the tiresome ‘When are you going to write a real book?’ Leto’s reply: ‘When the fake ones stop making me money.’

The financial success of romance authors here becomes the counter to portrayals of them as illegitimate authors.

Portraying creative work like romance writing as a job like any other comes with its contradictions, as it often clashes with expectations of what making ‘art’ should be like. After one day-long CRW workshop, we all filled an event-room at a nearby hotel, drank gin and tonics and ate cake. I chatted with a writer who has just gotten her first contract and she told me about an argument she was having with her sister over whether or not writing is a job. Her sister felt that writing was not like a job, as it was ‘creative’, but the author I was talking to felt it was a job, as it was something you have to sit down and put the time in for. This is the quandary romance writers are in; romance, as genre fiction, and as a genre mainly read and written by women, is not given respect as an art-form, but then is also not seen as a serious work. The focus

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on money and professionalism is part of an effort to make visible the work that goes into writing romance.  

To differing degrees, this discourse of professionalism is directed at and appealed to by writers at all levels, from those who make a full-time living from their writing to those who have yet to make a first sale. For example, the September issue of the RWR (sent to all members, a large proportion of whom are unpublished) contained an article titled “The Consummate Professional.” Connor begins the article by suggesting that “publication does not make a writer a professional. Professionalism is a series of traits or behaviours that display integrity, respect, talent, and dedication, and it’s never too soon to put those skills into practice.” In this context, professionalism is a way of governing oneself in order to promote success. It is both a classed and a gendered ideal which requires a certain kind of middle-class femininity. In the same article, Connor lists the “Top 10 Professional Traits” for writers, according to editors and agents:

1. timely, courteous, respectful communication
2. market/industry knowledge
3. commitment to craft
4. honouring deadlines/commitments
5. realistic expectations
6. ability to accept and implement suggestions/advice criticism
7. respect for other people’s time/talent
8. proactive in advancing one’s career
9. utilizing professional tools such as blogging, having a web site, etc.
10. upbeat, positive attitude

and then follows them up with the “Top Nine Unprofessional Behaviours”:

1. inappropriate submissions
2. unrealistic expectations
3. arrogance
4. gossip
5. inappropriately mixing personal and professional relationships
6. revealing too much personal information

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94 RWA has other strategies which work to claim romance as an art-form, such as the annual awards the RITAs and an academic grant which aims to promote scholarly approaches to romance. Rhetorically, writers I worked with tended to claim romance in the context of ‘storytelling’ and craft, rather than make an explicit claim on the title of ‘art’.

95 Not everyone participates in this. While I have demonstrated that the community in general orients itself towards the market, for some members conferences like RWA National are not networking opportunities, but opportunities to go to interesting craft workshops, meet up with friends (not mutually exclusive with networking) and buy amusing tchotchkes.

96 Maria Connor. September 2009 vol. 29 no 9, 32.

97 See for example, Bourgois’ discussion of the class and gender dimensions of office culture in the United States and Gibbings and Taylor’s (2010) discussion of how demands of professionalism and dress are often especially applied to women.

98 34
7. speaking without thinking
8. jealousy
9. getting too emotional\textsuperscript{100}

To be a professional according to these lists and thus eligible for respect from the agents and editors who are seen by authors as having an enormous power over their work, is to be both self-managing and accommodating and to separate out emotion and business. If one can manage this, then success will follow. For example, one article in the August 2008 issue of \textit{RWR} tells the story of an author who refocused on business and then found her writing career stabilizing itself:

When Pollero found the courage to treat her writing business as a business, she found herself, only one week later, ‘…with an offer for more money than my second home cost. So now I have a new agent, a new publisher, a new editor, and a post-it note in my office reminding me that professionals don’t get girly.’\textsuperscript{101}

Here a business, professional focus entails separating public and private, where emotions are gendered as ‘girly’ and seen as inappropriate for business. Being ‘professional’ means being accommodating (“upbeat and positive”) in ways that women are often expected to be\textsuperscript{102}, but also means not being limited by those expectations (“getting girly”). Emotions belong in the books, not in the industrial relations.

In some ways these enjoinders to self-manage emotionally resonate with some of the ways in which the workplace has been described in romance novels themselves, while also offering an often ‘less emotional’ pictures. In Young’s dissertation, she suggests that “an integral characteristic of the Krentzian corporate heroine is her ability to negotiate the rules of ‘emotional labor’ that govern the contemporary white-collar workplace” (2010b: 33), embodying both “the passion and vitality (i.e. the excess emotion utilized outside of the workplace) associated with leisure activities, \textit{and} the ‘cold’ professional mastery of the workplace that is a major component of her suitability for [the hero]” (39). Young draws on work by Alan Liu (\textit{The Laws of Cool: Knowledge Work and the Culture of Information} (2004)), which suggests that “[T]wentieth-century emotional life dominated by the middle class was all about ‘management.’ It was about managing the allowable range and intensity of productive affect, displacing excess affect into indirectly productive acts of consumption, and thus establishing the modern paradox of deadpan professionalism and binge leisure” (Liu 88 cited in Young 2010b: 34). Young argues that in “in Krentz’s corporate romances, this dichotomy between ‘cool’ work and ‘hot’ leisure is distinctly

\textsuperscript{100} August 2008 Volume 28, no 8, Feature – Career “When Bad Things Happen to Good Writers” by Colleen Thompson, p 16
\textsuperscript{101} For example, the paralegals Jennifer L. Pierce (1995) discusses whose work is seen as feminine are expected by their employers to produce positive emotions.
gendered; while the corporate hero embodies professional ‘coolness,’ the corporate heroine effectively utilizes ‘hot’ emotions in the workplace. In other words, a key component of the domestication process is the heroine’s ability to ‘thaw out’ both the hero and the work environment’ (35). The heroine’s management of both sides is enabled by the kinds of careers Krentz’s heroines pursue, generally careers related in some fashion to the arts (e.g. event planner, director of a museum) which, like romance writing, are thus also associated with ‘hot’ leisure (Young 2010b: 40). Romance writers are not characters in novels, but they do engage with the tensions between the various emotional requirements of professionalism. While the ‘cool’ side of emotion management is visible in lists of professional and unprofessional behaviours like that above, the subject position of romance worker also encompasses the ‘hot’ as do the heroines in Krentz’s novels. Both approaches, however, depend on a romance writer who self-manages, determining when to bring professional ‘coolness’ to the encounter and when to bring ‘hot’ emotions.

This focus on authors as professionals who self-manage their careers through practices such as attention to the market is characteristic of the discourse of neoliberalism, where workers are expected to be self-motivated, entrepreneurial subjects. The everyday talk of authors both buys into these notions and serves as a strategy for authors to understand and negotiate their way through publishing, an environment that can often seem irrational and unpredictable. Romance writers, as creative workers in a highly gendered industry, are especially suited to the ‘new economy’ and can be seen as predictors of middle-class work in the next few decades. As writers, they are already expected to work independently and contingently. As women, they are accustomed to emotional self-management and the blurred boundaries between emotion and work.

**The Book of Your Heart**

Yet while the professional is imagined as separate from emotion, the article on professionalism discussed above ends with an instruction to writers to:

- Do keep the passion in your art.
- Don’t let passion overlap into business.103

Much like the heroines of Krentz’s novels discussed by Young, romance writers are expected to bring both ‘cool’ and ‘hot’ to the table. The question becomes where art ends and business

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103 Connor, 36.
begins. The counterpart to the market and professionalism-based discourse is a seemingly contradictory edict, often repeated after discussions of the market: ignore the market, write the book you love. When I asked Jane, a writer with experience in journalism and corporate writing, whether she thought about the industry when forming writing plans, she replied:

*Jane:* No. No. I don’t. I don’t pay attention to the industry all that much. I did for a little bit. I thought, oh, you know, I should write this, because that’s in. But it just doesn’t work that way. At least not for me. I know there’s some writers who can do it. But I’m- you’ve got to do what you love. You’ve gotta write what you love, or it doesn’t tend to come out as well as it could otherwise, right. Which means if paranormal goes down I’m gonna be sitting on about twelve manuscripts until it comes back around.

This discourse focuses on the pleasure and emotional ties that writers have with the process of creativity, the way they love a particular character, manuscript, or genre. This discourse, while common in other areas of writing, is particularly visible and apt in romance writing, where emotion takes centre stage in the text, as well as in its process of creation. De Geest and Goris (2010) argue that in how-to guides the discourse of industry structures is also paired with a simultaneous emphasis on the ‘spontaneous’ aspect of the writing process: “the suggested tips and guidelines are mainly presented as strategies that enable and even optimize the spontaneity and individuality of the writing process. Accordingly, the handbooks suggest that following the norms and constraints will contribute to the optimal realization of personal freedom and the creation of an original romance novel” (88). Talk of love addresses some of the same anxieties that market talk does, serving as a motivator and legitimizer for an enterprise which can often feel externally unrewarding.

As discussed earlier, recent work on labour and gender104 has shone an important light on the gendered, classed and racialized work of emotional labour, especially in the ‘caring’ industries such as nursing and childcare where the management of emotions and the emotions themselves are an essential part of the labour being sold. The management of one’s own and others’ emotions is evident in romance writers’ discussions of professionalism. In the article discussed above, Connor suggests that “professionals recognize the importance of acknowledging and meeting the needs of others instead of focussing exclusively on their own agendas. This awareness, and the willingness to commit to it, may be the defining attribute of a

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consummate professional. Given the energy and effort this requires, you might ask just how valuable reputation is in the real world” (34). This talk of managing the emotions of others as a form of professionalism lines up well with the socialization of women in North America more generally. For example, in her examination of the law workplace in the United States, Pierce (1995) looks at the emotional labour and economic situation of two gendered law jobs: that of litigator, which is masculinized, and that of paralegal, which is feminized. She argues that litigators pick up the emotional labour of combat, while paralegals are expected to be supportive, resulting in a situation where mainly women are in an emotionally supporting role to mostly men and are paid much less for it. Beyond relations within the industry, the end product, the romance novel itself, is intended to produce emotions in its readers. This is the affective labour that Hardt (1999) talks about: the creation of a product designed to produce certain feelings in the readers. The line between readers, who consume the emotions and writers, who produce them, however, is not a firm one. Writers are also readers and emotionally involved with romance novels they read and write.

The talk of love I am interested in here is also about the obligation (and desire) to have a certain kind of emotional relationship with the work itself: to find fulfillment in it, as Miller and Rose (1995) describe. Certain kinds of labour carry with them the expectation that one should not be alienated from them – that one should love them instead. Love is described as an essential motivating factor for romance writing. When writers discuss trends and the market, the counterpart of a market trend is spoken of as the author’s own passion. At the published authors’ panel I discussed earlier, when asked about trends one very popular author said she does not believe in trends. As she described it, her “passion was in this paranormal”105, which she wrote before paranormal was a publishing trend, and that is what sold. Similarly another writer cautioned us against writing historical romances set in the medieval period (not currently on trend) but went on to say that “if you really really love it, go for it”106. This is not unique to romance writing; as I have argued above ‘love’ and ‘self-fulfillment’ are common rhetorical references in both other creative work and other work in general. Yet in the context of romance writing, it takes on a particular and emphasized form. As another author stated when asked about what she wished someone had told her about writing, she “wishes she would have listened [to the

105 Taylor, field notes 144.
106 Taylor, Field notes, 145.
edict…] write what you love reading.” She went on to state that she was “in love with Han Solo when [she was] seven, [and] should have stuck with that.”

This ideal of a writer in love with their manuscript is a neighbour to the Romantic ideal of the author as an inspired lone genius, an ideal which has often been described as both masculine and heterosexual. In the next chapter I examine how these contradictions in the subject position of romance writer (worker) play out in romance novels, in particular in the stories that romance writers tell themselves and their readers about being romance writers. I look at how authors explore emotional involvement with writing and books through romance novels about romance writers. For romance writers, passion and love, rather than inspiration, are the terms used to describe this element outside of business which is necessary to writing as a creative and artistic endeavour. As Holly Jacobs describes it in an article for RWR called “Romancing the Trends”, the title of which suggests the possibilities of becoming romantically involved with the market itself:

We, as authors, don’t control the trends. It makes business sense to stay aware of them, but writing isn’t just business, it’s an art, and writers need to stay true to their muse. Authors walk a tightrope, balancing their art with the realities of business. All we can do is continue writing books of our hearts, stories that speak to us, and trust that they will also speak to our editors and, eventually, our readers, no matter what the current trends are.

Here writers are the first step in an emotional conversation, which begins in their hearts, goes to their editors and then to their readers. Thus, while professionalism gives legitimacy to the occupation, love, in a sense, gives legitimacy to the writer as an artist. The books come from writers’ hearts and that is what makes them sincere and “true to the muse.”

Beyond artistic involvement, love also fills the gaps left by the tactics of professionalism. It is an inescapable fact that market based advice is not infallible. As one author said at the published authors panel, one of the worst pieces of advice she received was that you “can’t sell a werewolf novel,” given that she later quite successfully did so. As another writer described it, “editorial enthusiasm” for a manuscript is “a strange and unpredictable beast.” To a certain degree, a writer’s passion for a particular book is seen as one of the only things she can count on and one of the few things she can control. Focussing on passion also works to emphasize the

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107 Taylor, Field notes, 141.
108 For example, Jaszi and Woodmansee 1996.
110 Taylor, Field notes, 142.
111 Taylor, Field notes, 104.
non-interchangeability of a particular writer (as I discuss in more detail in Chapter Four). While professionalism may be seen as levelling the playing field, love and passion are more linked with a writer’s individuality and their own creative ties to the books they are writing, something that would make an editor, or reader, buy their book rather than anyone else’s. As the best-selling author Ellen F. suggested at her talk: “the reality has to come from your life, your heart”\textsuperscript{112}.

Conclusion

I have argued here that as workers and potential workers located as flexible outsiders in the publishing industry, romance writers draw on discourses of professionalism and passion to understand, and manage, their roles within the industry. These discourses are developed within the contexts of writers associations which offer a space between the flexible individual worker and the market or corporation. An appeal to professionalism becomes a way to advocate for respect for romance writers as a group, as well as a way to self-manage one’s career as an individual within the industry. Complementarily, love and passion serve to maintain writers’ artistic identities, as well as working as markers of both commitment and individuality. These discourses together resonate with popular romance publishing’s position in the current economy and the industry’s role as a mass producer of art.\textsuperscript{113} They are also particularly interesting because of the ways in which the industry is gendered and how this interacts with the discourses of professional work and artistic love. Writers making claims on both professionalism and artistic passion are making claims on positions that have historically in Anglo-American discourse been positions reserved for men. Yet they are making claims on these positions in ways that also draw on their gendering as women: business women and writing women.

I have argued that romance writers can be located in a constellation of other categories of workers, structured by gender, class and race. Like other writers, romance writers’ work is flexible and artistic, but romance writing communities focus in more detail on the value of professionalism. Like factory and service workers, romance writers are contingent workers, but they are located outside of corporations, developing self-management techniques through communities like CRW. Like women involved in direct-sales and informatics work, romance writers use the middle-class discourse of ‘professionalism’ to legitimate their subject positions. Like other middle-class workers in North America, romance writers have developed discourses

\textsuperscript{112} Taylor, field notes, 58.
\textsuperscript{113} See Walter Benjamin’s (1968) discussion of art and mass production: “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”
of passion which legitimate and motivate their work, but due to the particular character of *romance* writing these discourses take on more gendered forms.

Romance writers’ discourses of professionalism and passion exemplify the way new flexible regimes of labour have shaped workers’ relationships with the subject position of worker. They also demonstrate how this subject position is shaped by gender, suggesting that new regimes of labour may be underwritten with the ‘feminization’ of labour. This chapter has also show the importance of writer communities and their texts to the socializing of both new and experienced writers into professional romance workers. Romance writers are neither naturally passionate nor naturally professional; they learn these discourses and practices through their participation in the romance writing community, by attending meetings, reading articles and participating in workshops.

In the same issue of *RWR* as the professionalism article I have drawn on above, there is an article called “Romance writers rock!” In it the author discusses her positive experience at the recent RWA conference. She praises a speech given at the conference by a well-known romance writer as touching her emotionally. She follows this up with some thoughts about her feelings about RWA and romance writers in general:

I know of no other writers’ organization where members share not only their skill, but their hearts as well. I know of no other writers’ organization where writing about love is not only taught, but love itself is lived [...] Could it be that in sharing love with others, we enhance not only our inner selves but also our professional selves?114

This suggests that it is the combination of love *and* work, passion *and* professionalism, which is seen by the romance writing community as the ideal. This is characteristic of certain types of post-Fordist labour, but it is also genuinely and personally felt. In the next chapter, I examine how some of these same issues are drawn out in another set of texts reflecting on the practice of romance writing work. In romances with romance writers as protagonists, the same issues of work, emotion, professionalism and creative love arise. Yet these texts present an alternate vision of the possibilities of romance writing work, one where the emotional involvement with the process of writing is foregrounded, rather than the business relationship.

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Chapter Two: Loving the Novel: Writers, Texts and the Ideology of Fantasy

“Maybe I should tell you right now so, if you are offended, you can stop reading this book. I write romances [...] I just invent stories about what we all dream about: having someone to love who loves us in return [...] But no, the world is upside down as far as I can see, and romances and their writers are ridiculed, hissed, and generally spat upon. [...] And for what reasons? One of my favorites is that women who read them might get mixed up about reality and imagine a man is going to rescue them from Life. According to this theory, women are so stupid that they can’t tell a story from reality. Is anyone worried that the men who read spy thrillers are going to go after their neighbors with an automatic weapon? No, I don’t remember anyone thinking that. [...] Honey, if any woman thought a gorgeous hunk was going to rescue her, romance novels wouldn’t be forty percent of the publishing industry” (Deveraux Remembrance 5-6)

“I guess I’m explaining so much about my life to make you, my readers, think I’m a normal, sane, person because something happened to me that isn’t normal and maybe not even sane.

You see, I fell in love with one of my fictional characters” (Deveraux Remembrance 11)

What can romance novels themselves tell us about the work of writers in the romance publishing industry? In Jude Deveraux’s Remembrance (1994), quoted above, the narrator and heroine Hayden is a romance author who falls in love with one of her characters, discovers that he in fact exists and is her soul mate, and travels through time encountering him in her past lives. This image of a romance writer might seem out of line with the ‘grown-up business women’ of the previous chapter. Yet, just as much as RWR articles, novels like Remembrance are representations of the work of romance writers: reflexive texts offering narratives of practice. This chapter approaches the work of romance writing through examining romance novels which have as their protagonist a romance writer, which I call ‘writer romances’\(^\text{115}\). These reflexive texts explore some of the central issues of romance writing, not through straightforwardly representing writers’ ‘actual’ lives or providing a model for the ‘best’ way to be a romance

writer, but through placing them into a romance plot which explores the boundaries between reality and fantasy and mounting a defense of an affective approach to writing. The above quotes from Deveraux’s novel show the contradictions of these texts: at the same time as the narrator defends romance readers’ ability to distinguish reality and fiction, she herself blurs and crosses these boundaries by falling in love with a fictional character who then turns out to be real. As fiction, ‘writer romances’ offer a space where these boundaries can be blurred and where a narrative, rather than argumentative, case can be made for the value of emotion in writing work.

In Chapter One, I discussed the development of a ‘romance worker’ subject position within the flexible communities of writers associations. I argued that through talk of professionalism and of love, romance writers manage their position in regards to the industry in a way which both draws on and is structured by their gendering as women writers of romance in particular. This seeming tension between love and work, affect and rationality, as I briefly suggested with reference to both Young (2010a) and Rabine’s (1985) work, also appears in romance novels themselves. Romance writers have opinions on the position of romance writers and the tensions involved in maintaining that subject position. Like other writers, including anthropologists, in the 1980s and 1990s they turned their analytic pens towards themselves. The novels considered in this chapter are a kind of auto-ethnography of romance writers, yet, unlike works of reflexive anthropology, are not bound by the conventions of academic knowledge production. They are not concerned with objectivity and bias; rather they reflexively address critiques of ‘romance’ and deny the validity of those critiques’ assumptions. In the context of ‘media ideologies’ (Gershon 2010)\textsuperscript{116} in the public sphere which undervalue romance writers, suggesting their work is too emotional and mixes real and fantasy life too convincingly, ‘writer romances’ explore the possibilities of representing an emotional process of writing as a valid one, playing with the boundaries between involvement and over-involvement with texts.

While a number of writers told me that romance writers have been discouraged by their publishers from writing about romance authors\textsuperscript{117}, there are a substantial number of novels with romance writers as protagonists, many of them written by well-known writers like Georgette Heyer, Nora Roberts, Jayne Ann Krentz and Catherine Coulter. Many of these writers have also

\textsuperscript{116} By using the term ‘media ideology’ here, I am suggesting that these dismissals of romance fiction are based on romance, as a genre, not matching the preferred norms for novels, as a medium (where literary fiction is considered the optimal form of novel). These media ideologies are also intertwined with what might be called ‘genre ideologies’, as romance writers often reply to these dismissals by defending romance writing as a particular genre, rather than generalizing to all forms of the novel.

\textsuperscript{117} Presumably because it would be too self-referential.
written non-fiction about romance as a genre. Jayne Ann Krentz, for example, edited a collection of romance writers writing about romance *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women* (1992) which was published around the same time as a number of the novels. The novels I discuss here were mainly published in the period between 1984 and the present.118

This period coincides with both a focus on reflexivity in other genres of writing and the rise of post-Fordist labour arrangements. Anthony Giddens (1991) has argued that ‘late’ modernity is characterized by institutionalized reflexivity. Middle-class flexible labour depends on workers constantly turning their gaze on themselves and reflecting on their trajectories, their skills, their self. For romance writers, this reflexivity is shaped by an awareness of the stories that others tell about them. ‘Writer romances’ play with some core stereotypes about romance writers: romance writers are too involved with their characters, they draw too closely on autobiographical materials using their own love-life in their novels or, in contrast, they are love-starved spinsters writing fantasies about a life they do not have themselves. ‘Writer romances’ take these stereotypes and push them to their extremes, creating heroes who come to life, writers who time travel back to the period they write about and real men who teach the writer heroine about romance. They often include a long defense of the genre and those who write it, yet they also refuse to deny the possibility of a connection (both practical and emotional) between author and character. They locate romance writing in a history of women writers, and place women and friendship groups of women squarely at the center of current publishing. As I argue later in this chapter, these novels explore the possibilities of affective fantasy, crossing the line between fact and fiction which is the focus of many critiques of popular romance.

Why include an analysis of fiction in an anthropology dissertation? One of the basic methodological assumptions of this dissertation is that the social world is a network of texts and practices. Romance novels, just as much as romance writer meetings, have something to tell us about the world of the romance writers. But they do not necessarily tell us the same things. As texts articles in the *RWR*, for example, tell us one kind of thing about how romance writing associations socialize writers as flexible workers. In the previous chapter, I drew on that genre of texts, as well as on interviews and practices, to show the foregrounding of discourses of work and the role of affect within them. ‘Writer romances’ are another set of texts where the role of the romance writer/worker is worked out. ‘Writer romances’ have a different generic form (which I discuss in Chapter Three) and a wider set of audiences. As fiction and as romance

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118 While the romance genre has changed over the course of this time period, in this chapter I focus on ‘writer romances’ as a set, focusing on similarities rather than exploring the changes over time or their variation by subgenre or author.
fiction, they are working within a different set of genre conventions and priorities. The space of the romance novel allows writers to explore a more radically affective construction of what romance writing could look like, a construction which might be dismissed in a non-fictional setting. The different genre allows for a different argument. Yet, as I argue throughout this chapter, these works are still situated within and intertextually connected to the other kinds of texts forming the romance writing community which I engage elsewhere in this dissertation. While romance novels are not straightforward representations of the lives of romance novelists, they are also not an easily separated ‘fantasy’ contrasted with ‘reality’. They are one kind of story that romance writers tell about themselves.

This chapter also hopefully serves as a balancing corrective to the impression that the rest of the dissertation may give by keeping in view the object of romance writing communities: romance novels themselves. Romance writers are not simply producing widgets. They are writing novels. While this dissertation argues that there are similarities between romance writers and other flexible workers, romance writers are also particular. The rest of the dissertation is often very focused on the business side of the writing community. At times, it may seem like affective engagement is simply an alibi for capitalist exploitation. While affective engagement is indeed useful to the system and to those making a profit\(^\text{119}\), it is not just that. Romance writers have a relationship with writing which does not fully overlap with the profit motive. Their interest in the craft of writing and pleasure in the particular stories they write goes beyond a straightforward equivalency between writing and working. Many writers believe sincerely in the value of writing and stories beyond their economic value and it would be reductive to ignore the stories which contain this value. The romance novel deserves to be taken seriously and not left out of the analysis. This chapter thus serves two functions: one, to give a more detailed picture of some contemporary romances and two, to explore what this subgenre of romances reveal about romance writers’ reflexive practices.

**A ‘Writer Romance’**

According to the RWA website 9,089 new romance titles were released in 2009\(^\text{120}\). Romance is an almost overwhelmingly large genre and it is daunting to try to introduce it without

\(^{119}\) Publishing is not a high profit industry.

\(^{120}\) [http://www.rwa.org/cs/the_romance_genre/romance_literature_statistics](http://www.rwa.org/cs/the_romance_genre/romance_literature_statistics); accessed Aug 8, 2011.
misrepresentation to those who may not have read widely within it\textsuperscript{121}. In this chapter I give a short insight into romance fiction by focusing on one very small subset of the genre. Through this, I hope to give the reader of this dissertation an idea of the general structure and form of romance novels.

In the early 1990s, Jayne Ann Krentz, a well-known romance author who also writes historical romances under the penname Amanda Quick, published a trilogy of books with romance writers as heroines. The novels were called *The Pirate*, *The Cowboy* and *The Adventurer*; each was about one member of a group of friends who are all romance authors and how she finds a man who is like the heroes she writes about (the titular pirates, cowboys and adventurers). All three books are what are referred to as ‘contemporary’ romance (romances set in the present) and were published as mass-market Harlequin Temptations. I read the first book, *The Pirate*, in a reissued 2001 large-print version. It opens with the heroine Katherine Inskip discussing with her friends, also romance authors, whether or not she has become a workaholic after her recent divorce. She replies: “What’s wrong with being a workaholic? I like my work. In fact, I love it. You know I do. I’m not happy unless I’m writing. I’ll go nuts if you take me away from it” (8). Her friends think otherwise, so they have booked her into an island resort called Amethyst Island (with her money). Kate writes historical romances with pirate heroes, so her friends try to entice her with the notion that she is “heading for genuine pirate territory. The real thing. Just like a setting from one of your books” (11). Like many romance novels, *The Pirate* opens with the heroine uninterested in, too busy for and too hurt by love. In this case, Kate is busy with her writing career and hurt by the circumstances of her divorce (ultimately her husband divorced her because he was jealous of her writing success). While her friends hope she will find both adventure and love at the resort, they are resigned to the fact that, as they say, “we three may write about romance and adventure for a living, but we live in the real world” (14). Here Krentz sets up the opposition between fiction (“romance and adventure”) and fact (“the real world”), the perennial focus of public sphere anxieties about romance fiction. Yet this is a romance novel, so readers know that its real world must itself also be one of romance and adventure.

While the beginning of Kate’s trip is adventurous, it is not, at first glance, romantic. The airline loses her luggage. She finds the island heat oppressive. A man tries to mug her, but she kicks the knife out of his hand and verbally assaults him. At that moment, she meets the hero of

\textsuperscript{121} Critiques by other romance scholars of analyses of romance often centre on their use of Harlequin or ‘bodice-rippers’ to stand in for all romances.
the book Jared Hawthorne, who owns and runs the island resort and who, to her eyes, resembles the pirates she writes about. Jared, for his part, is immediately attracted to Kate, but believes she is not his type romantically. Jared had been happily married to a less feisty woman who died a few years ago and has a young son. He does not think he will ever love again and if he did, he believes it would be someone like his late wife.

As the novel continues, Kate begins to enjoy the resort, thinking it could be inspiration for a novel, gets to know Jared’s son and connects with Jared. They often have verbal sparring matches, but they also have a sexual and romantic connection. We learn that Jared’s ancestor who first owned the island actually was some sort of pirate. We also learn that Kate had chosen her previous husband thinking he was the kind of guy that modern women were supposed to like, not like the arrogant pirates she loves to write about. But he turned out to be a jerk nonetheless and so she focused on “the one true love she could always count on – her writing” (70).

Krentz sets up parallels between Kate’s historical fiction and her real-life romance, as well as between the ‘real life’ historical past in the book and the book’s current events. When the resort has a masquerade party, Kate attends dressed as a Regency lady (Regency England being the era she writes about). She encounters Jared dressed as a buccaneer and they kiss, only to be interrupted by his son. Eventually they consummate their passion, but their conflict continues as they are both strong-willed people. Kate has intended to leave the island at the end of her vacation, so the future of their relationship is uncertain. In the midst of their relationship, Jared lends Kate the diaries of the wife of his pirate ancestor. The historical couple also had a tempestuous relationship and Kate sees the parallels between the relationship of the pirate and his wife and her and Jared’s own relationship. One of the resort workers suggests Jared should read Kate’s books to understand her. He does and then suggests to Kate that he is like the hero in her book (247). Kate almost leaves Jared and the island completely a number of times after fights based on lack of trust and uncertainty. At the end of the book they resolve their emotional conflicts; Kate feels that she can trust Jared and he realizes he wants her, not another version of his dead wife, and Jared proposes.

Romance novels often have another plot running alongside the romance plot. In The Pirate, as the romance is developing it also appears to Kate that there is something suspicious going on the island, involving Jared, a man in a white suit and some mysterious activity at an abandoned castle. This exacerbates the couple’s conflict, as Jared refuses to tell Kate what is happening. The adventure turns out to be a government investigation concerning equipment theft on cruise ships. It ends dangerously, due to the man in the white suit betraying both the
government and the thieves, but Kate and Jared together get themselves both into and out of trouble and resolve the investigation.

This plot summary may fail to fully convey the essence of the novel, which to me lies in the emotional conflict. In any case, though, *The Pirate* is fairly representative of contemporary romance novels of the early 1990s. The central conflict is that between the two protagonists (commonly a hero and heroine) whose experiences in the past have lead them to think that love will not be possible in the future, but they find out differently when they meet each other. The heroine is independent, but the hero is still arrogant. They are both white and American (as American as a Caribbean island owner can be) and both have careers which will presumably continue after their marriage. While island-resort-owning does not lend itself to mobility, writing is, luckily, very portable. The heroine ends the novel with two loves: her love of writing and her love of the hero. I have summarized *The Pirate* here to give the reader who has never read a romance an idea of what a romance might look like. I discuss this novel further as a ‘writer romance’ later in this chapter. In the next section, I discuss the various ideologies of writing which serve as the context for the defense of romance which follows and the novels’ exploration of fantasy and affective writing.

**Ideologies of Writing**

The relationship between a writer and the texts they produce is a culturally structured and a contested one. In North America there are currently a number of competing ideologies, often structured by gender, about the proper relationship between texts and writers and texts and readers. Linguistic anthropologists in the past two decades have framed cultural norms and practices surrounding language and language choice in terms of ‘language ideologies’122. Recently, Ilana Gershon and a number of other anthropologists working on media have taken this approach and applied it to media. As Gershon defines it, an approach to media drawing on ‘media ideologies’ focuses on “how people understand both the communicative possibilities and the material limitations of a specific channel [that is, kind of media], and how they conceive of channels in general” (2010: 283); specifically, “how people understand a channel’s impact on the creation of authorship, remediation, entextualization, knowledge storage, referentiality, address, and publics” (284). As a relatively long-standing channel in comparison to more recent media channels such as television and the internet, the novel is implicated in a well-developed set of

media ideologies. Yet, as Gershon suggests, media ideologies are also “multiple, locatable, partial, positioned, and contested” (284). These multiple ideologies of texts, both fiction and non-fiction, and the conflict between them are at the centre of the themes I explore in the rest of this chapter. In ‘writer romances’ romance authors narrativize these competing media ideologies. When they align, they “often generate or support locally persuasive perspectives on what selves and social interactions should be” (Gershon 2010: 284).

A self-consciousness about these ideologies of writing and the roles of writers within them emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s in three different areas relevant to this dissertation: anthropology, feminist literary criticism and romance writing. The questioning of the meaning of writing was related to the reflexive character of late modernity as discussed by Giddens (1991), as well as the increasing entry into these areas of writers who did not fit previous ideologies of writing. As women made gains in the workplace, including academia, they contested the gendered structures of professional writing. At the same time as the role of author was opening up to women and others for whom author had been a closed category, its acquired institutional authority was also being shaken up.

This self-reflexive moment in professional writing crossed genres, from literary fiction, to anthropological non-fiction, to commercial fiction. Because of the different contexts of the production and reception of these genres, though, the instantiation and meaning of this reflexivity varied. While anthropologists focused on decentering authority and feminist literary critics focused on authorizing women’s writing, in their fiction romance writers both drew on feminist critiques of the literary establishment and offered a counter-discourse valuing the very elements which de-authorized their writing. For both romance writers and anthropologists these are not simply matters of literary form, but also matters of work. Considering ‘writer romances’ beside anthropological writing on reflexivity brings romance writers into conversation with other kinds of writers and emphasizes the connections between writing cultures, refusing to consider romance writers as completely different kinds of beings.

In anthropology this reflexive moment manifested as an increased awareness of the role of writing and texts in anthropological knowledge production. Influential collections such as Writing Culture (Clifford and Marcus 1986) turned an eye towards anthropologists’ own texts as being written by particular anthropologists with particular histories, as well as towards the form of texts as generating certain genres and power differentials. Prompted in part by changes in the colonial conditions in areas where many anthropologists did research, scholars questioned the power structures of representations and the textually created scientific objectivity of
‘anthropologist’ and experimented with new forms and strategies of writing (see McCarthy 1992). This so-called ‘crisis of representation’ was not always positively received; as various ideologies of writing clashed some suggested that analysis which approached anthropologists as writers was misguided (for example, Carrithers 1990: 54). As McCarthy describes it “key features of this crisis are an acute self-consciousness of the constructed nature of ethnographic texts and a radical experimentation with the received conventions of this genre, with the aim if not of removing, at least of displacing, ‘ethnographic author-ity’” (1992: 639).

The reflexive turn in anthropology also gave attention to the role of anthropologists as people in their research. The separation of personal and rational (or anthropological) in the developing norms of anthropological writing was brought into relief by the publication of Levi-Strauss’s Tristes Tropiques, (1955, English translation 1973) and Malinowski’s diaries, prompting questions of the involvement of affect in anthropological research, writing and knowledge production. Collections such as Taboo: Sex, Identity, and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork (edited by Don Kulick and Margaret Willson) questioned how “the sexuality of an anthropologist conducting fieldwork bears on the production of anthropological knowledge” (Latham 1997: 626), both in the metaphors of writing and in their role in the field. Anthropologists were challenged to defend the ideology of anthropological writing which (counter to the ideology of romance writing I discuss later in this chapter) requires an emotional detachment between the writer and those written about (Latham 1997: 626).

Gender was an underlying structuring element of the ideology of ethnographic writing being challenged and examined, yet it was dealt with to varying degrees of attention. As Behar suggests in her introduction to Women Writing Culture (1995), an important gap in the anthropological reflexivity of Writing Culture was that of gender. To a certain degree the ideology of anthropological writing has depended on a masculine quest narrative, where women were often put in the role of untrained anthropologist wife (Behar 1995: 15; see also Newton 1993). A model of objective anthropological writing often depended on the unmarked masculine authority which underpinned rational scientific analysis. If writing was the work of a professional, then women writing anthropology were often relegated to the role of amateur, or to that of fiction.
Feminist Literary Criticism and a Defense of Romance

At the time, feminist literary scholars were also questioning the gendering of authorship (and had been going back to Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and earlier). Perhaps the most well-known of these is Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), which examined the construction of literary authorship as male (beginning with the question “Is the pen a metaphorical penis?” (91)) and questioned where this left literary women, who wanted to claim authorship for themselves. Feminist literary scholars worked to reclaim ‘lost’ women authors whose conditions of writing had not met the hegemonic academic ideologies of literature and theorized the possibilities of women writing, in both the fields of literature and of academia. This awareness of the place of women, in particular, in the literary field was not restricted to academic feminists and it made its way into the rhetoric and fiction of romance writers who were carving a place for themselves as writers writing a genre which met few of the ideologies of detached, realistic writing.

These reflections on development of authority within the literary field have given insight into how masculinizing a field is often used as a strategy for legitimation and what strategies women writers have used to find space for themselves within changing fields. Batchelor (2010) has examined how women writers of the late 1700s wrote about women and work, and themselves as writers and workers, at a time when the literary world and the political economy in general were being reorganized. As writing was professionalized in the 1700s, Batchelor suggests it moved into a masculinized domain, whereas women were relegated to a less valued ‘feminine’ amateur domain. Examining work by Charlotte Smith, Sarah Scott and Mary Wollstonecraft and letters by women writing to the Literary Fund, she examines the ways in which these women writers employed discourses of work (and gendered work) to justify the value of their writing. They often justified their writing by emphasizing the way they used it to support their families. Batchelor situates these discourses within contemporary debates “about the nature and status of authorship: what it meant to think (or to refuse to think) about writing as work,” suggesting that these were “experienced differently by women writers for whom the pressures exerted by literary labour were greatly intensified by their obligation to perform the cultural work of femininity” (2010: 2).

Examining women authors in the context of the growth of mass-market publishing in the early twentieth century, McKenzie (2002) argues that L. M. Montgomery’s *Emily trilogy*123

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123 A series of novels about a young woman who wants to become an author; published in 1923, 1925 and 1927.
“focuses on a writer’s struggle for a voice against cultural and social domination” (100): in particular a Canadian woman writer’s struggle. Gerson (2008) suggests that part of Montgomery’s focus in her fiction on literary struggles can be attributed to the changing conditions of writing at the time (a set of changes which seem at first glance very similar to those Batchelor describes). As Gerson states, Montgomery “began her career in full enjoyment of her ability to master the genres at which she excelled: Sunday school fiction, stories for girls, and domestic comedy and romance. But she became increasingly uneasy with their devaluation by the masculine modernists who began to prevail in the 1920s” (2008: 77). Gerson argues that books such as the Emily trilogy, then, responded “to the closing-in of modernism that had constructed an elitist and implicitly masculine vision of literary value” (68) in the same way as did “the feminist literary statements of Macbeth’s Shackles and Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own” (68). Female writers must engage, not only with changing ideologies of writing, but also with how those ideologies are gendered.

In her book Figuring the Woman Author in Contemporary Fiction, Mary Eagleton (2005) examines the portrayal of fictional women authors within the context of current literary theory and feminism. Yet the issues which Eagleton suggests are central for novels with female academic writer-characters (questions of how to merge writing and femininity, or fighting for space within a male-dominated literary field) are not the main issues in ‘writer romances’. Portrayals of romance writers in romances engage with feminism and literary theory from a different direction, representing as they do mainly women authors who have a field of their own, one which is markedly feminine. These characters are the women authors who literary fiction women authors often try to distinguish themselves from. For example Eagleton suggests that in Anita Brookner’s novel Hotel du Lac (not a romance), Edith, a romance author, is “caught between rational and impassioned responses. On the one hand, she is aware of all the frequent anti-romance arguments and, to an extent, agrees with them. [...] Yet, from another perspective this rational understanding is completely irrelevant. Edith is impelled to write” (121). Unsurprisingly, perhaps, this alignment of anti-romance with rationality and the dilemma of choosing between them is not a common theme in ‘writer romances’. Instead of fighting with the distinction between rationality and emotion, ultimately devaluing emotion, the novels in this chapter play with these binaries and explore the possibilities of their union.

‘Writer romances’ do not focus on women writers’ struggles to make it in a male-dominated literary establishment. The writers here defend themselves against the public perception of their genre, but they are generally doing very well in the industry. Their struggles
are not with the literary establishment, as such, as they accept and embrace their situation in mass-market romance publishing. Their concern is more with the public perception of their genre, which is itself enabled and structured by the divisions between literary and popular fiction. While in the classic novels *Little Women* and *Anne of Green Gables*, aspiring writers Jo March and Anne Shirley take the advice of men in their lives to switch from sensational writing to domestic fictions of the kind within which they are contained as characters (‘real life’ over ‘romance and adventure’), writer-characters in romance novels instead mount a defense of romance fiction. They are in this way unlike the romance author-characters Eagleton analyses, who “question the legitimacy of romantic discourse and their own role as authors” (2005: 12). Indeed, they defend against the kind of analysis that Eagleton herself engages in which dismisses the legitimacy of romance fiction completely. Discussing *Hotel du Lac, The Lives and Loves of a She-Devil* and *Lady Oracle*, for example, Eagleton suggests that the “inadequacy of the language of love” poses:

> a real problem for the [fictional] authors of romantic fiction. The language is always derivative, hackneyed, inauthentic. In face of this, Edith, the most honourable of our authors, is driven to silence, Mary cynically plays with the clichés of romance and then becomes a victim of them, while Joan relishes the language and conventions with little thought for value or discrimination and thus, with disastrous consequences for herself. (12)

This complete dismissal of romance fiction, based on an ideology of writing which depends on radical originality and lack of sentimentality, is not possible in a genre which embraces generic ties and overflowing emotionality. In almost all of the novels I discuss here, especially the contemporary ones, the author-character engages in a defense of romance writing, publishing and novels to someone not involved in publishing themselves and often to the hero. Their defenses draw on the dual discourses of the romance writer discussed in the previous chapter: the combination of work (financially rewarding work at that) and love.

Chelsea, the heroine of Catherine Coulter’s *Afterglow* (set in San Francisco; originally published 1987) is a romance novelist who starts dating a slightly stuffy doctor named David. The novel contains a number of conversations between Chelsea and David about romance novels and writing, an enactment of the meeting of two different media ideologies. These conversations are situated within the context of larger public discussions about women and work, as they begin with an argument about why there are not more women surgeons (19). Chelsea writes historical romance, often also set in San Francisco. Initially David believes she is just a conceited rich girl, but then he discovers she works for her money. When David discovers she is a writer, he asks
Chelsea what she writes and is a little disappointed to find she writes mass-market books. Accustomed to this kind of response, she replies “Of course, and the distribution is so much greater. One would rather have two hundred thousand readers instead of just five thousand” (30). When he finds out she writes romance novels, David cannot help blurting out with “incredulous distaste” “You write romance novels?”, following this up with a question about whether she plans “to switch to more…literary work in the future?”. Chelsea refuses to be disparaged for writing romance and draws David out, forcing him to make the logic behind his distaste explicit:

‘Exactly what do you mean, David?’ Chelsea asked, not moving a muscle.
‘Well, really, Chelsea, that stuff is drivel. It’s pap for idiots and frustrated women –’
‘I’m not a frustrated idiot, David,’ George [Chelsea’s friend] said, winking at Chelsea.” (31-2)

She challenges him regarding his own reading, for example of Westerns, which he says:

‘aren’t exactly great literature, but they have value, good plots, historical insights’
‘My novels also have good plots, historical insights and accuracy.’
‘But it’s tripe! Good grief, men and women never behaved the way those novels have them behave!’
‘Have you ever read one?’
‘Certainly not,’ he snapped.
‘Why not? As a doctor it would seem to me to be the epitome of idiocy to draw a conclusion based on not one shred of evidence, or, if you will, make a diagnosis without examining the patient.’ (32-3)

Chelsea goes on to suggest that perhaps he is so dismissive because romance is women’s literature (33), which David counters by arguing that he is dismissive because romance is not true to life. Pressing the argument, Chelsea suggests that “people need romance, all people. Even you, Dr. Winter, must have had those marvelous, romantic feelings with a woman you loved or were infatuated with. Unfortunately, for many people those intense feelings don’t last. That’s why they read books and go to movies. It fills a need, it presents an ideal, brings back their own memories” (33). Later in the book, she suggests that due to the exigencies of ‘real life’ women in fact do not want to read about it: “I ask you, if the very hassled woman of today takes time to read, does she want to read about the trials and tribulations of a real woman and her real husband – real people have to worry about bills, taxes, kids […] does a real woman want to read about a man who’s too tired to give her pleasure […] I write entertaining literature - yes, literature, David. It’s not Proust or Stendhal. I have never wanted to write the great American novel. I just want to write what I enjoy reading, and I enjoy writing romance novels” (47). As
he gets to know Chelsea better, David buys a number of her books, finds that he actually enjoys them, and later on defends them to his ex-wife (153).

These defenses of romance come from writer-characters who, like their authors, are career novelists. They are successful and happy writing romance. They speak from a position of strength and against dismissals it is clear they have heard before, more than once. Significantly, they are generally defending romance and themselves as writers to the heroes and defend it as a female activity, which can be defended on the basis of the meaning it has to women. These defenses draw on feminist literary criticism while challenging some of this criticism’s own terms. Likewise, Krentz’s The Pirate contains an ever-increasing number of female characters who turn out to be readers of the heroine’s books and a hero who eventually reads some of the heroine’s work. His acceptance is juxtaposed with the attitude of her ex-husband, who did not respect her work and always thought his writing was more worthwhile despite the fact that he was unsuccessful, if we take the measure of success to be publication.

These defenses generally draw on the points seen in the excerpt above, a developed ideology of the value of romance fiction and thus romance writing. One, they give as a defense the fact that romance is read by many. Here, an activity which is popular is constructed as a legitimate activity. Because it is popular, it is also a reliable source of income. Thus it is not a dilettante ‘artistic’ activity (the gendered dismissal of women’s amateur writing which could never, like men’s writing, be a ‘serious artistic activity’), but serious work. Two, they compare them with masculine popular genres such as Westerns and suggest the different valuations are due, not to difference in quality, but to sexism. Three, they suggest that the novels as romances offer readers an important and valid emotional experience. As Chelsea suggests, this reading experience, while it is related to real life feelings of being in love or infatuated (33) is valuable precisely because it is also different from these experiences (47). Writer-characters seldom defend the novel on what might ideologically be termed ‘artistic grounds’. They concede the ground of the ‘great American novel’ to others but stand firm on the value of their own genre, one which they like to write.

These defenses do not necessarily mean that the writer-characters in the novels think everything is perfect in the business. Often critiques of cheesy-ness and excess in romance novels are displaced onto publisher-mandated titles and covers. Author-characters make fun of the titles amongst themselves (Afterglow 12), or the covers (Afterglow: “not at all romantic, just more and more skin, and fake rapturous looks – and the write-ups” (106)). The one thing they are not conflicted about, though, is romance writing being a viable kind of writing.
Valuing Affective Writing and Crossing the Boundaries between Fantasy and Reality

The defense of romance writing found in these novels, then, emphasizes the value of readers’ emotional experience, one which is contrasted with both ‘real life’ and literary fiction, although the experience is based on ‘real life’ emotions like love. This valuing of this particular emotional involvement in texts is in contrast to critiques of the romance which worry about readers’ over-involvement with texts. These critiques often draw on the fear that emotionally-involved readers will be unable to distinguish between real life and fiction and will act accordingly, with negative consequences. As Linda Holmes writing on a blog for NPR describes it, some critics “just think they’re [romance novels] bad for women to read, because women can’t tell the difference between fantasy and reality and therefore throw over their poor husbands and boyfriends because they expect perfect, idealized relationships.”

These fears of the effects of fiction reading in general on women readers are not new; for instance, they are gently parodied in Jane Austen’s Northanger Abbey as the heroine is unfoundedly led by her love of gothic novels to imagine her real life taking a gothic turn. It is within this context of anxieties about the blurring of fantasy and real life for readers, seen as a negative possibility, that romance writers write these reflexive novels. This ideology of reading is tied to the ideology of writing. Emotional over-involvement in texts is also seen as a potential pitfall for authors themselves. For example in her discussion of Margaret Atwood’s Lady Oracle, Eagleton describes how Joan, the romance-writer protagonist of that novel, can no longer distinguish between reality and fiction and is “adrift in a Baudrillardian universe where not only is the distinction between reality and image, depth and surface, industry and art obliterated but also that between image and image” (128). She “moves between the Gothic in life and the Gothic in fiction. She constructs the real world in Gothic terms and conversely, finds her daily life seeping into the Gothics. So every man she meets is a Gothic hero until, that is, he turns into the Gothic villain and the most transitory interchange is refashioned into a dark drama” (130). Here fantasy becomes something which sucks a writer in. The real world is empty of romance and engaging in fantasy only leads to misjudging the world’s realities.

Writing, for women, has a slightly disreputable public image. As I discuss later in Chapter Four, pen names are standard (if not universal) practice in romance publishing. In Victoria Dahl’s *Talk Me Down*, the heroine, a writer of erotic romance, has kept her job a secret from everyone. She believes that they will not respect her erotic writing, and she is also afraid of revealing too much, since her first book was inspired by real people. She occasionally tells people she does secret computing work for the government instead. The hero is the police chief of the small mountain town and as he becomes more interested in her, he is upset she will not tell him what her work is and starts a list of his own to try to figure out what it might be. These speculations occasionally begin the chapters from his point-of-view and range from stripper to online sex performer: all jobs in which women exchange some sort of sex work for money.

Affective writing, then, in the public discourse is understood as potentially crossing the boundaries between a detached involvement with work and one in which a woman’s feelings, sexuality and perhaps even her body are involved.

In contrast to these discourses outside of romance, which point to the dangers of involvement with writing, the ‘writer romances’ *embrace* an affective relationship with writing and reading and the possibilities of blurring the boundaries between reality and fantasy. In essence, they propose a different ideology of writing (and reading). Discussing the academic work on romance and rethinking her own seminal book *Reading the Romance*, Janice Radway suggests that while her book made an effort to “claim the romance for feminism” (1994: 214), it still drew on the “the sexist assumption that has warranted a large portion of the commentary on the romance. It was still motivated, that is, by the assumption that someone ought to worry responsibly about the effect of fantasy on women readers” (214). This kind of analysis, she suggests, relies on a commentator who “distances herself as knowing analyst from those who, engrossed and entranced by fantasy, cannot know” (214). The romance novels I examine in this chapter disturb this binary in two ways. First they suggest that the wall between real life and fantasy is not solid. Second, they suggest that this blurring and the romantic fantasies which it enables can be positive, given the proper relationship with them.

Many of these novels, then, explore writers’ emotional involvement with writing and by extension with work, mainly crystalized in the heroine writer’s emotional involvement with the hero she is writing. Dahl’s *Talk Me Down* describes both emotional and physical involvement with writing. At one point Molly Jennings, a writer of erotic romance and the novel’s heroine, opens a new document on her computer: “the tingly feeling that started in her stomach reminded her of the joy she’d taken in her work up until six months ago. Not as good as sex, but very
close to being turned on” (18). The act of writing a book and of falling in love are structurally aligned so that writing a book becomes an act of heterosexual\textsuperscript{125} romantic engagement. In Debbie Macomber’s *My Hero*, the heroine is revising her novel as she falls in love with a man who, to her, resembles the hero of it. Where some romance novels have an epilogue showing the new couple with a new baby (the result of their love and demonstration of the new family they are beginning), Macomber places an epilogue showing the heroine in the midst of a book-signing (the culmination of her writing love). And she is pregnant.

The plots of ‘writer romances’ challenge dominant writing ideologies by blurring the lines between fiction and fact, past and present. This ranges from the heroine meeting a man who possesses some of the qualities of her heroes, as in Jayne Ann Krentz’s *The Pirate*, to the writer-heroine basing a hero on a real-life man and drawing on her own experiences for the novel, as in Dahl’s *Talk Me Down* and Macomber’s *My Hero*, to Lynsay Sands’ writer-hero passing off his writing about the real romances of his vampire family members as fiction. The earliest of the novels I consider, Heyer’s *Sylvester, or the Wicked Uncle*, has a writer-heroine who has written the hero into her book in the form of the villain (the titular Wicked Uncle). Unfortunately, unbeknownst to herself, she has written him a little too close to life (she did not know he was actually his nephew’s guardian) and while she changes her mind on his character as she grows to know him more deeply, according to his own mother some of her portrayal of his flaws is accurate.

Other plotlines turn on the discovery by the writer-heroine that the characters she is writing about, especially the hero, actually exist and her subsequent falling in love with them. In Jude Deveraux’s *Remembrance*, the narrator falls in love obsessively with the written hero, discovers that he in fact her destined soul-mate and travels through time to meet him in a number of different time periods. The heroine of Kristin Hannah’s *When Lightning Strikes* travels back in time to what she initially thinks is a hallucination of the setting of her current historical Western romance, but which turns out to be the actual past. The controlled world of writing slips from her control as she falls in love with a man who she had written as a villain. In both of the novellas contained in Angela Knight and Diane Whiteside’s *Captive Dreams*, the writer-heroines each find out that the hero they have been writing about is actually a real person in another dimension and then fall in love with him. Love, then, becomes powerful enough to cross the boundaries between fiction and reality.

\textsuperscript{125}This is conventionally gendered as a heterosexual romance (mirroring the heterosexuality of the masculine artist creation story of Pygmalion), but there are a few romances which write this as a same-sex romance.
Lynsay Sands’ *Single White Vampire* (2003) is one of the few writer romances with a male protagonist who is a romance writer. While it engages with some of the issues I have discussed above, it does not engage with others.\textsuperscript{126} The hero Lucern Argeneau is a six hundred year-old vampire and an accidental paranormal romance writer. He began writing by publishing a few historical texts of time periods he had lived through and then wrote up the romances of his parents, his brother and his sister (all vampires), which were published as paranormal romances. These books are also presumably the earlier three books in the series *Single White Vampire* is part of. Kate C. Lever is his new editor at Roundhouse Publishing in New York and comes to Toronto to convince Lucern to do publicity for his books. She persuades him to attend the Romantic Times Convention (an actual convention) and we get a view on the eccentricities and fun of the convention and the fans, editors and authors. Within the book, then, reality is being passed off as fiction, the very fiction that we are reading. Near the end of the book, Lucern begins writing the book of his romance with Kate, although we do not hear if it is ever published. Blurring the boundaries even further, Kathryn Falk (Lady Barrow), a well-known real-life figure in the romance publishing world,\textsuperscript{127} shows up as a character in the novel. Yet there does not seem to be as much blurring between the actual author and the writer hero. What this novel lacks is the discourse of the writer being in love with their characters; while Lucern writes about people he loves (his family), it is not a romantic love or a passionate love which involves him in writing (except for the moment at which he is writing the story of him and Kate, in an effort to figure out his feelings). It is only as he becomes more involved in the romance writing community through his participation in the conference and involvement with other romance writers that his emotional relationship with writing becomes a romantic one.

In the context of the negative characterization of romance writers and readers as women unable to tell the difference between fact and fiction, these novels offer a counter discourse, one which finds positive value in this mixing of fact and fiction, which suggests that an author’s emotional involvement with her writing (and in particular with the hero she writes) is an important part of her creative process. While the crossing of reality and fantasy opens up emotional possibilities for the writer-characters, these blurred boundaries are not always positive. The novels also contain non-heroic characters who have difficulty distinguishing between real life and written life. For example, the mother of the nephew in Heyer’s *Sylvester* believes the heroine’s novel to be an accurate representation of Sylvester’s wickedness and takes as a model

\textsuperscript{126} While I am suggesting that this may be gender related, with a sample of one it is hard to be conclusive.

\textsuperscript{127} She owns RT and runs the conference.
for her behavior its plot point of kidnapping the nephew and taking him to France, with disastrous consequences. In Dahl’s *Talk Me Down*, when her identity as an erotic romance writer is revealed, Molly’s ex (who has had difficulty accepting she has broken up with him) reads her books, believes the latest one is about him and then tries to reenact some of the BDSM scenes in it with her, mistaking Molly’s character’s desires for those of Molly herself. In Sands’ *Single White Vampire* a jilted husband who has confused the boundaries of reality and fiction tries to kill Lucern. He believes that his wife left him because of her romance reading. Specifically he believes that Luc, the author of these books, is actually a vampire and seduced his wife. Ironically, while Luc actually is a vampire, he had nothing to do with the wife. Only for writers is this blurring productive. These novels suggest a *writerly* identity which is not simply one of professional procedure and flexible labour, but which draws strength from emotional involvements with fiction writing and fictional characters. It is writers who can harness this affective relationship with writing into both a successful career and a successful romance.

Paratextually, these novels continue to play with boundaries. The existence of a trilogy about three different romance writers, with their different personalities and heroes, written by Jayne Ann Krentz does not allow us to stabilize the real life author as equivalent to her character (although Jayne Ann Krentz herself does have three pseudonyms). Yet the writers of these novels and the novels themselves do not allow us to stabilize the full separation of character and author either. The heroine of Victoria Dahl’s *Talk Me Down*, Molly Jennings, is in the midst of writing a book called *The Wicked West* throughout the novel. Victoria Dahl then published that novel as an e-book with Harlequin, writing under the pseudonym the character Molly Jennings had in her novel, Holly Summers. Nora Roberts did likewise when she published the novel her heroine Jackie had been writing in *Loving Jack*. Some writing on *Little Women* discusses how the boundaries between L. M. Alcott and her writer character Jo March were blurred by the author’s publicity, readers, publisher and by subsequent scholars and the most recent movie version. Englund, for example, discusses how the recent film has Jo March receiving her recently published book, titled *Little Women*, with her name on the title page (1998: 201). She suggests that “the film’s scene is predicated upon a slippage between historical author and fictional author. […] Armstrong’s film version of *Little Women* re-inscribes a well-established and continuing understanding of the novel” (201). Englund questions this reliance on the biographical as an interpretive method and overwhelming focus. These romance novels both encourage and discourage this simple biographical interpretation of novels by creating an emotional reality corresponding to their romantic fantasy. As reflexive texts, ‘writer romances’
offer a space for romance writers to develop a counter-discourse to dominant ideologies of writing.

A Community of Women: Past and Present

These explorations of emotional writerly practice are particularly explorations of women’s writerly practice. As I argue earlier in this chapter, re-visitations of writing ideologies in the late twentieth century were often on the ground of the gendering of authorship. Mary Eagleton begins Figuring the Woman Author in Contemporary Fiction with a quote from Sean Burke: “It would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that the struggles of feminism have been primarily a struggle for authorship – understood in the widest sense as the arena in which culture attempts to define itself” (2005: 1). Eagleton suggests that the women author characters in the novels she examines engage with the intertwinement of ‘authorising’ and authority as a recurrent concern of recent feminism (2). She points out the juxtaposition of the influence of Barthes’s “The Death of the Author” in the late 1970s and the growing feminist work on authorship: “a curious contradiction in intellectual history, how one group of academics was declaring the ‘death’ of the author as a figure of origin, meaning and power at precisely the same moment as another group, from varying feminist positions, was looking for the ‘birth’ of the author in terms of a reclamation of women’s literary history and with an exhortation to women to claim a voice” (3). In her book on representations of women artists, Deborah Heller (2005) suggests these novels both represent and create a sisterhood of women creators. These questions of recovering female authorship in the past, as well as forming a community of writers, surface in writer romances. Romance-writer novels construct writing, and more specifically romance writing, as an activity done by women within a community of women writers and readers. Cumulatively, writing becomes, not an unusual activity for a woman (as for the embattled authors in some of the novels Eagleton analyses), but a common, if not commonplace, employment.

In fact, the current and past community of writers in many of the novels is an almost exclusively female one. In The Pirate, Kate’s ex-husband is an unpublished literary writer, who felt his writing was more important than hers, but who was unsuccessful in entering the market. The novel’s villain says that he is also a writer, but has never finished his novel. In Nora Robert’s Sullivan’s Woman, the heroine is an aspiring, and then successful, writer, while the hero
is a painter. In Wendy Wax’s *The Accidental Bestseller*, the four main characters are women writers and the editors and agents are women, while the male characters are involved in religious TV and architecture, for example. In Lisa Kleypas’s *Suddenly You*, the heroine is an author, while the hero owns a large publishing company (although there are male authors in that book). In Heyer’s *Sylvester, or the Wicked Uncle*, the heroine is a writer and the hero’s mother is a published poet, while the hero is simply an aristocrat. Only in Lynsay Sand’s *Single White Vampire* is the male protagonist an author (the only male writer in the book), while the heroine is an editor.

Writer romances situate themselves and their writer-characters within a long history of women writers and authors. Catherine Coulter’s heroine in *Afterglow* has a best friend named George who is married to a man named Elliot. Jayne Ann Krentz’s *The Pirate* includes excerpts from the pirate’s wife Amelia’s diaries. The question of the legitimacy of women’s writing arises, as the hero and heroine have a teasing argument about the diaries. He says that he had not read them because “Who wants to read a woman’s diary?” (151). He is more interested in the pirate’s own writings. Yet, Amelia’s diaries are excerpted in the novel and help the heroine to reinterpret her own situation.

The historical ‘writer romances’ (that is, the ones set in the past) explore this history in more detail, placing writers in the past into romance’s current form and claiming them for the genre. The origins of the current mass-market romance novel have been variously traced back to medieval French romances, 18th century novels such as *Pamela*, Goths, Minerva Press novels, and Jane Austen, through into the 20th century with Mills and Boon, Harlequin’s mid-century foundation, and the ‘Romance Wars’ of the 80s. Historical ‘writer romances’ are snapshots of particular moments in this history of women’s writing, guided by the constraints of current publishing in which only a few time-periods and places are popular settings for romances: for example, Regency England is popular, 1950s Canada is not. This explains the lack of historical romances about writing romances in the 1930s or the 1960s. In these books, the heroines write in genres associated with women readers and writers. For example, in Georgette Heyer’s *Sylvester, or the Wicked Uncle* (originally published 1957), the heroine publishes anonymously a gothic adventure romantic novel called *The Lost Heir* which involves a wicked uncle, a pair of virtuous lovers and the satire of aristocratic society. As it is described in the

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126 This is “women’s fiction” rather than strictly romance, but was recommended to me by romance writers and readers.
129 Heyer herself is commonly understood to be one of the foundational writers for the current form of popular romance fiction.
novel, “its plot was as extravagant as anything that came from the Minerva Press; the behavior of its characters was for the most part wildly improbable; the scene was laid in an unidentifiable country; and the entire story was rich in absurdity. But Phoebe’s pen had always been persuasive” (53). The novel becomes the talk of the town as readers devour its rather implausible plot and gossip about who is who in the book and real life.

Lisa Kleypas’s Suddenly You is set in the publishing industry of the 1830s and makes links to a number of different strands of women’s writing at the time. Miss Amanda Briars, the heroine, supports herself by novel writing, although not of the kind that would be classified as romance now as her books do not necessarily involve happy endings (24). She writes about ‘country folk’ and their emotional dramas. The novel also presents a number of other generic ancestors of current day romance. Kleypas references the Minerva Press, a well-known popular press at the time, as does Heyer in the quote above. At one of the literary parties that Amanda attends, we meet Francine Newlyn, who writes sensation novels (another genre written mainly by women; 55) and is a bit scandalous herself. There is also mention of a book of memoirs written by the madam of a brothel and published by the hero’s company. The hero becomes the heroine’s publisher and ventures into publishing a previously unpublished novel of hers serially. While not directly part of the ancestry of romance, but part of the history of women writing, at the end of the book the author-heroine becomes involved in editing a literary journal under a male pseudonym bought by her then-husband, expanding the possibilities of women writing for those who follow.

As the novels’ time periods move into the present, with a larger romance publishing industry that is further divided from the rest of publishing, the communities represented become more explicitly and exclusively romance communities. As I discuss in the next chapter, romance writing groups build a community based on camaraderie and a common focus on publication. The contemporary romances take up this representation of a romance writing community which is also a friendship community. As I discussed earlier, Krentz’s trilogy is set around a group of friends who are all romance authors. Debbie Macomber’s My Hero has an aspiring writer heroine Bailey York, who had written a manuscript by herself and then meets a fellow aspiring writer Jo Ann on the subway train and joins her writing group. As described in My Hero, the members of the group are “all striving toward the same ultimate goal – publishing their stories. Since joining the group, Bailey had come to realize she’d made several mistakes,

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130 Kleypas’ novel Suddenly You has a vibrant sense of a literary London community not separated by gender, contrasting the historical time period with the contemporary novels, in which the writing community is one of women writers.
all typical of a novice writer, and had started the rewriting project” (13). This group runs like a
typical RWA chapter: they have writers visit them and run a critique group. Jo Ann beta-reads
Bailey’s manuscript-in-progress. Wendy Wax’s The Accidental Bestseller is also based around a
friendship group of women writers who end up writing a book together.

While some romance subgenres and lines, often due to their shorter length, have a
tendency to focus on the romantic couple to the exclusion of the surrounding society, these
novels (as many other romance novels) often situate the writer-heroines within friendship
groups. As Coulter writes about writing conferences in Afterglow, “writing was a lonely
business, just you and your computer. That was why, she knew, writers, when they were
released into the world, danced and laughed and talked until they were dizzy” (103). These
novels link the individual writer to a social context, one structured around publication and
market circulation, but also kept together by friendships. This community of writers is shaped by
the structure of the publishing industry, as romance writers are friends with romance writers and
not with, for instance, science fiction writers. I have argued that as reflexive texts, ‘writer
romances’ offer another view of how romance writers value their work. ‘Writer romances’
emphasize the community of writers as a location from which individual heroines explore their
affective writing.

Conclusion

Romance novels about romance writers create a romance with writing itself. Here the activity of
writing, through fantasy, opens up a space of emotional possibility. These novels offer a
counter-discourse to those critiques of romance fiction which deride fantasy and women’s
attachment to it. Instead, the writer-characters offer a defense of romance and themselves as
writers, one which resembles that used by real life authors themselves in organizing as a class of
writers. The structuring of the role in fiction, however, explores possibilities not explored in
RWR articles. ‘Writer romances’ cross the boundaries between reality and fantasy, offering a
reflexive consideration of writerly identity which posits as its core emotional involvement with
writing. The novels construct a community of women writers and readers which extends into the
past forming a genealogy of romance writing and which positively values gendered writing
practices.

These fictional explorations of ideologies of writing arise, not surprisingly, at a point in
time when romance writers are organizing and reflecting on their own practices, as well as a
point in time when writers in other genres (such as anthropology) are also revisiting the construction of authority and their relationships with texts. Giddens (1991) has argued that self-reflexivity is required of individuals in late modernity. In the rest of this dissertation I examine the role of romance writers’ reflexivity in facilitating their work as flexible labourers and their development of writerly identities. This reflexivity is often guided through spaces of community like RWA and CRW. In ‘writer romances’ romance writers reflect on the valuing of their occupation, offering values of community and emotion which exceed, while not being completely separate from, profit values. These counter-discourses are shaped by feminist discourse, but do not have the ‘suspicion’ of fantasy that Radway (1994) argued characterized much feminist work on romance at the time. ‘Writer romances’ offer a vision of love and work united in romance writing, but they are not how-to guides for flexible labour. They are romances with writing and, like the romance, the writing always ends happily.

In the next chapter I examine how communities of romance writers are formed on-the-ground through participation in writing group meetings. I consider how the formation of writers groups as ‘communities of practice’ facilitates the formation and contestation of romance as a genre. This community embraces an exuberantly emotional relationship with writing and with fellow writers, but is also based on an assumed core of heterosexuality and middle-class femininity. While ‘writer romances’ defend the practice of writing romance, in practice writers also decode the practice of writing genre. In writing workshops, writers present the importance of structure and intertextual ties in romance as a genre. Community and genre ties create cohesion for writers in the context of flexibility and uncertainty.
Chapter Three: Making Romance Communities: CRW, Reflexive Practice, and Structuring Genre

Introduction
In this dissertation I argue that middle-class flexible labour is currently managed through non-state, non-corporation networks, guilds, associations and communities such as RWA and CRW. As women writers, romance writers have always been flexible workers. However, it is only in the past thirty to forty years that they have formed widespread communities which bring together and enable individual flexible workers. How then are these ‘communities’ formed on the ground? How do the actors of flexible labour come together and share the knowledge necessary to conducting their work? How is coherence of both community and genre created from multiplicity, flexibility and contingency? What is the relationship of the individual (person/text) to the collective (community/genre)? In Chapter Two, I argued that in ‘writer romances’ romance authors foreground the role of a community of women writers, both synchronic and diachronic, in the practice of romance writing. In this chapter, I focus in more detail on the formation of the romance writing community as a community which has as its focus the reflexive practice of genre production. In particular I focus on the formation of the City Romance Writers as a ‘community of practice’ (see Lave and Wenger 1991 and Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992) and examine how writers within this community reflect on and (trans)form their own practices of writing the romance genre.131

Work by linguistic anthropologists such as Charles Briggs and Richard Bauman (1992) and Africanist Karin Barber (2007) pushes us to examine how texts and genres are enmeshed in the activities of individuals, groups, and communities. In Chapter One I examined how the circulating discourses of work and love enable this particular arrangement of flexible labour for romance writers and industry alike. Discourses like this are picked up by and supported by communities of practice. It is these communities which, in part, set the norms for the day-to-day understanding and talk of individual romance writers. This chapter takes a linguistic anthropological approach to romance writers’ practices and theories of romance writing and aims

131 In contrast to Chapter Five, where I discuss more how writers envision their readership and thus engage with theories of publics, this chapter is more about writers as writers. It is about how they see this particular activity, so the activity itself is the focus.
to situate them within the context of the community which is itself constructed through practices. This approach emphasizes the work that goes into creating both communities and genres. Given that both female communities and the romance genre are often naturalized in public discourse, examining how these particular communities and this current version of romance are created through linguistic practices can help us to see their place in the particular historical context.

In *Production Culture* (2008) John Thornton Caldwell examines how film and television workers “critically analyze and theorize their tasks in provocative and complex ways” (2) and suggests that these self-analyses should be considered within the “play of power and politics” (2). As should already be evident in this dissertation, media producers and creative workers have their own theories about the production of media texts and the organization of the systems of production. Romance writers’ positions as flexible workers outside of the corporation encourage the development of reflexive communities wherein writers share their own theories about the nature of the romance genre, as it is published. What form these communities take is intimately related to the question of flexibility. In a neoliberal context where responsibility is downloaded onto the ‘individual’, associations and other organizations pick up the slack in enabling the necessary self-management. The formation of communities and of genre, that is, of coherence and continuity, also helps to manage the uncertainty created within the industry for writers. The formation of these communities is also, in part, grounded upon certain kinds of underlying and unnamed similarities, such as sexuality, class, ethnicity and race. These communities then (re)produce the genre itself. That is, I am suggesting that the genre cannot be separated from the communities that produce it.

The romance writing community is not the only place where the romance genre is produced, of course. Writers know this, and in other chapters I have discussed how they try to reach out and understand other players and forces in the genre: markets, publishers, editors, agents and readers. Publishers have a large influence on the formation of the genre. They are the gatekeepers; they manage the genre, edit the books and polish them. They hold a lot of the power in this interaction. But, ultimately, it is romance writers who write the books. They are an essential part of genre formation and genre formation is an essential part of their community activities.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part I examine one way CRW in particular is formed as a community of practice. I examine how CRW meeting openings set norms for the community which depend on foregrounding certain similarities among members. I then discuss the place of reflexive communities of practice within the business world. In the
context of flexible labour, communities of practice (specifically voluntary associations and networks like RWA) become important nodes in the smooth running of creative labour (especially in the absence of more formal education, as is the case for romance). In the second part, I discuss genre and the romance genre’s development within the context of these communities. The activities of writers in meetings which focus on ‘craft’ are in many ways para-academic activities, focused on an insider exploration of the structures of the genre. In the second part I examine how workshops and other activities attempt to uncover and make explicit romance’s underlying structure. Just as CRW meetings create cohesion among individual members, within these communities practices of genre work to create cohesion between individual texts.

Creating a Romance Writing Community of Practice
As I argued in the Introduction, the romance writing field is made up of a number of different communities. Most narrowly, the central definition includes people who purposefully participate in what I am terming ‘communities of practice’ such as CRW; that is, they socialize, network and organize together based on a common interest in romance writing. City Romance Writers is a group of people (mostly women, ranging in age from mid-twenties to late-fifties, mostly middle class, white, English speakers) based in a large city in Canada who are interested in writing and publishing romance novels. As a group, CRW is centred around a few main hubs of activity: the monthly meetings, the listserv, the website, the newsletter, and then a few off-shoot groups, such as the executive board, critique and friendship groups. The monthly meetings are one point at which CRW coalesces as an audible, visible, tangible ‘community’. Run at meeting rooms in libraries in the north end of the city, these meetings are generally composed of an opening ‘business meeting’ section, a short break, and then a guest speaker. Guest speakers tend to focus on what RWA writers call ‘craft’ issues: ‘How to Plot Your Novel’, ‘Writing Young Adult Fiction’ and so on. Attendance ranges from twenty to thirty people, to the occasional much larger 60-70 person special meetings.

As I discuss in more detail later in this chapter, ‘community of practice’ began to be used by both academics and business-people as both a descriptive and prescriptive term in the mid-1990s, coinciding with the spread of flexible labour practices in white-collar industries. RWA itself uses the term to describe subgroups such as PRO and PAN. In this dissertation, the term

132 And occasionally just in writing itself – since RWA is so organized, they occasionally attract other writers looking for a group that discusses writing.
then serves both an analytic function, analyzing how I see romance writers organizing themselves, and a descriptive function, describing the conscious emphasis romance writers themselves have put on developing communities. Terms like ‘community of practice’ and ‘genre’ recursively journey through the arguments of academics, business-people and practitioners like romance writers.

From an analytic perspective, the use of the term ‘community of practice’ foregrounds the action and practices that go into forming CRW. Romance writer is not simply a natural category formed by inner desires or publication; to the extent that I am interested in it, it is formed by practices of affiliation, distinction, representation and identification. Writers use the term ‘community’ with a positive connotation, but I want to remain aware of the fact that community shapes at the same as it supports. Local communities of practice which socialize new writers and support continuing writers are important locations for the management of romance writing.

Penny Eckert and Sally McConell-Ginet have suggested ‘community of practice’ as a useful frame of analysis for understanding how gendered identities are constituted through linguistic practice (1992: 464). Building on Lave & Wenger’s original concept (1991), they define a community of practice as:

an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations - in short, practices - emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour. As a social construct, a community of practice is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages. (Eckert and McConell-Ginet 1992: 464)

As Bonnie McElhinny argues in her examination of the use of ‘community of practice’ in both business and academia, in academic contexts ‘community of practice’ has been mainly used in language and gender work, where it “participates in a family cluster of notions in studies of language and gender -- gender as activity, gender as performance, gender as accomplishment, gender as practice — all of which suggest that gender is something one continually does in order to challenge the idea that gender is something one has” (2012: 240). McElhinny suggests that “like other kinds of practice theory, the notion of CofP [community of practice] reacts against structural-determinist social theories (e.g. British-American structural-functionalism, determinist strands of Marxism and French structuralism) that did not incorporate a sufficient sense of how human actions make structure” (242).
Community of practice has often been used to foreground how gendered norms of linguistic behaviour are both generated by and practiced within specific communities, while still allowing that these norms also link into larger societal norms. Scott Kiesling, for instance, has used the community of practice analytic to discuss how certain kinds of gendered power are valued within a fraternity, a community which, like CRW, has a rotating membership “yet manages to retain a unique history and ideology” (1997: 113). Kiesling argues that the fraternity, as a community of practice, chooses certain kinds of power sources to value (valuing physical and demeanour power over, for instance, wealth), which are then enacted through the kinds of power the members draw on in discussions, pushing members to create in interactions “identities which do not challenge the perceived values of the fraternity or of dominant US society” (113). As I discuss in more detail later in this chapter, I argue that these communities of practice outside of corporations are becoming more important to middle-class working lives.

But how are these communities formed? In his work, Kiesling points out how initiations set some of the norms and values which are then enacted throughout the practices of the fraternity. Schnur et al (2007) suggest that meeting openings are a particularly interesting place to look at language use within communities of practice, as openings “are features which are inherently associated with power: meeting openings are often considered the prerogative of powerful participants” (716). In this section, I examine how a City Romance Writers community of practice is formed at one particular point in their activities: meeting openings133. I argue that a few aspects of the opening of a romance writing group’s meetings set the tone and participant structure for the rest of the meeting and the orientation of the group as a whole. They orient participants towards particular interpretations of what follows and shape their interactions, in a way not dissimilar to the way in which the openings of romances themselves shape readers interpretations of the text which follows.

Screenwriters and romance writers have something they call a ‘meet cute’, when two protagonists of a movie or novel meet in some sort of cute accidental situation: perhaps the heroine is bowled over by the hero’s St. Barnard or she accidentally runs into his rental car on her scooter. These openings let us as the readers or viewers know that these two characters are meant for each other, in a romantic comedy way (as opposed to a tragic drama way). Openings are rich points for understanding the framing of interactions; they mark the working out of an interaction’s direction as well as often being the most conventionalized segments. They let

133 I am using a rather expansive definition of openings which includes everything that is emic-ly marked as ‘beginning’ material in CRW meetings. This means it is also ‘skippable’ by those uninterested in this kind of community forming or who feel they have already sufficiently formed community ties.
participants know what their roles might be in the upcoming interaction. This is especially the case for the openings of events undertaken by occasional communities of practice such as CRW who depend on them to frame the interaction in the absence of long-term stability of participants. I suggest that repeated opening features of CRW meetings such as raffles and Accolades work together to create a community of practice oriented towards the market (as discussed from a different perspective in Chapter One). I also suggest that less formalized, but repeated speech acts such as jokes objectifying men also serve to unite the group as a community based on affective ties drawing on affinities of sexuality, class and ethnicity. This community formation, as I have discussed in Chapter One, harnesses and guides what could in other circumstances be ‘leisure’ activities into flexible production for the market. At the same time, it orients members towards a common focus, setting the stage for the practice of genre formation discussed later in this chapter.

But first a few more details about the group which suggest why the opening of meetings might be particularly important. Firstly, the romance writers group is composed of women from all over the greater City area who generally did not previously know each other before joining the group. Each meeting is made up of both new and established members and usually has at least three or four new members or guests attending. Likewise, even among long-time members not everyone is a constant attendee of meetings, so every meeting is made up of a subset of members. There are not many opportunities for the group’s values to be expressed by the physical space, as it is in many ways a ‘no place’ – a series of meeting rooms in public libraries which, while often used by CRW more than one time, do not have markers of the history of the group in the physical presence of the room. CRW leaves nothing behind and there are no room decorations. These rooms are passing-through spaces that anyone can create a meeting in. Even the chairs and tables are mobile, set up by CRW’s executive board at the beginning of the meeting and stacked neatly at the side of the room by the members afterwards. Members come to meetings from many different areas of the city and its surroundings, with different levels of knowledge and involvement in the wider romance writing (and writing) community.

Yet a supportive community is one of the goals of the group. When discussing CRW, members often emphasize how supportive and helpful the group (and the romance writing community in general) is. Thus this community and its values must be created and continually recreated and re-enacted. In the rest of this section I will discuss two explicitly institutionalized ways in which the community of practice is created through the meeting opening practices, the
values which are enacted, and one informal way in which some of the underlying grounds of community affinities are re-enacted.

**Accolades and Raffles: Celebrating the Market**

Saturday afternoons are busy times at the library branches where CRW holds its monthly meetings. After a long subway journey, I would make my way past teenagers and young families going into the library proper and enter one of the meeting rooms that CRW usually used. The meeting usually begins with CRW Board Members sitting at a table at the front of the meeting room. As members enter, they fill out a name tag and are given a raffle ticket by one of the member liaisons. People chat and slowly take their seats in rows facing the front of the room. The board begins by introducing themselves, then discussing any group business. They then get any new members and guests to stand up and introduce themselves, usually in the form of name and the subgenre of romance they write: ‘my name is X and I write paranormals’.

As I discussed in Chapter One, after the formal announcements and any specific business come ‘Accolades.’ Here the CRW President goes through a list of various accomplishments and gives chocolates (sometimes from a heart-shaped tin) to members who have accomplished them in the recent months. This list includes book releases, getting a contract, getting an agent, being rejected by an agent, contest wins and finals and occasionally other items such as finishing a manuscript, becoming engaged. Members stand up and introduce themselves and their accomplishment, positive or negative. Sometimes members have to prompt their friends to stand up and share. The rest of the membership will cheer or clap, an audible manifestation of communal interest, and occasionally comment on the news. For example, one month Clare, a woman in her late twenties who had completed a rare MFA in popular fiction, stated that she had gotten a ‘landmark’ rejection from a Canadian agency: the first one to mention the economy as a reason not to pick up the book. Another member piped up to state that they too had gotten that same rejection from the same agency and joked “it’s not you, it’s the economy” (field notes April 2009; 230), applying a phrase often used in romantic relationships to the context of commercial relationships.

As an opening activity ‘Accolades’ frames subsequent interactions in terms of community sharing and support, where members’ role is to celebrate other members’ successes and commiserate with their difficulties. Guided by the CRW President, members both offer up

134 Master’s of Fine Arts.
their own accomplishments and celebrate others’. ‘Accolades’ institutes an affective relationship with a community of writers. The presence of food in the form of chocolate, the food of desire and especially feminine desire in popular media, echoes this affective orientation. At the same time, Accolades both reinforces and inculcates the market orientation of CRW. The repeated list of successes and failures directs attention towards actions that are market-oriented and assumes their centrality. That is, the named accomplishments are not just about romance writing, but about writing oriented towards the industry: publishers, agents, contracts and publication. The practice of Accolades also, while forming a community of sharing, focuses attention on individualized market actions. Individual members stand up with their successes or failures and are recognized by the group. In Chapter One I have written about the orientation of RWA in general towards professionalization, and Accolades is one of the activities which create and reinforce this orientation.

After Accolades comes the raffle. As I mentioned earlier, when everyone enters the room they are given a ‘raffle’ ticket by one of the member liaisons. The matching tickets are then put into a bag or a box and raffle winners are chosen one by one. The prizes are usually new books from published members and occasionally other items such as books from the guest speaker, romances by authors not involved with the group, and once a set of ‘man titty’ playing cards donated by a member who had recently gotten a contract. The process of the raffle is a mixture of, depending how long it goes on, slight inattention and gleeful ribbing and celebration. Long-term members often lead the cheering for whoever won a particular item. Members then walk up to the front to choose their prize and select the next winning ticket. The raffle process also enables a circulation of members’ books. Like Accolades, the raffle highlights the group’s values of community, sharing and celebration. It works to both focus attention on the accomplishments (that is, books) of members and to include new members in the sharing through the opportunity to win things. Interestingly in the context of an industry which can often feel like ‘a lottery’, the raffle introduces an aspect of chance into the meeting, offering a counterpart to the Accolades’ focus on individual agency.

These two opening activities shape the participant structure of the group and mark it as one with a high level of member involvement and co-creation, rather than a lecture style speaker/audience participant structure. The focus on both affective involvement and market orientation mirrors RWA’s understanding of writers’ role in genre production in general. This structure follows through into the more lecture-style presentations in the second half of meetings,

135 That is, playing cards with shirtless men on them.
which often involve audience questions and comments throughout (often proportionally related to how close the presenter is to the romance community) in a way that is enabled by how the meeting begins. That is, the meeting begins with the board members seated at the front of the room, directing the interactions, but able to be interrupted by members. But the opening activities require members to stand and talk, to move up to the front, to look around and see the members behind them speaking. These two activities repeated at the beginning of every meeting work to both form the group into a community of practice and to set the central values and concerns of this community. They form a community which supports and directs individuals’ activities in the industry. They also form a space where individual actions and experiences of the industry can be shared and linked together to form group experiences and perspectives. In a context where workers are detached from each other, these kinds of spaces offer a space for connection and action. The formation of a community of practice joins individual writers into a community engaged in a common practice, while at the same time encouraging the individuality and flexibility of writers.

Bring on the Cabana Boys
Yet as Eckert and McConell-Ginet point out, participation in communities of practice is not simply open to all: “People’s access and exposure to, need for, and interest in different communities of practice are related to such things as their class, age, and ethnicity, as well as to their sex” (472). The membership of CRW is structured by gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and race, just as romance novels themselves are. The majority of CRW members are white middle-class women in heterosexual relationships whose first language is English. This is not the totality of membership. There are also a number of Asian Canadian and African Canadian members, as well as members with ties to other ‘ethnic’ communities in Canada such as the Portuguese community. Some members worked in factories. There was at least one gay man who used to attend meetings. The norms of the group, however, are structured by these wider societal affiliations. These kinds of larger structures are visible in jokes made by members throughout meetings and other interactions. In an examination of how jokes are used in two different communities of women centred around lesbian or queer identities, Robin Queen argues that “being ‘in’ on a joke relates to the collaboration between social actors, social actions and social evaluations necessary for a joke’s reception,” suggesting that “humour, teasing, and joking

136 Here I am suggesting that a community of practice is something beyond a group; these activities orient members towards the norm setting, information sharing and focus on practice described as typical of communities of practice.
activate social personae that are recognizable” (2005: 240). Examining jokes which work to reinforce ties between people can make more visible the kinds of shared identities these ties draw on.

CRW meetings have a casual and joking atmosphere. Perhaps not surprisingly given the community’s focus on writing romance novels, jokes are often based on the common ground of exuberant heterosexual femininity. These jokes are especially present in the group’s listserv and the less formal meetings of writers (for example, receptions and informal chats), but they are also present in the opening sequences of monthly meetings, more so than in the lecture portion. Recurring jokes about the desirability of certain kinds of men work to reinforce the centring of this community on heterosexuality and a particular classed and ethnic set of norms. Comments are often made about the ubiquitous half-naked men on the covers of some new releases (an appeal to the heterosexual female gaze by the publishers themselves). Cabana Boys (a joke instituted by one particular member and then picked up by other members) are sent as congratulatory agents for any good news, especially news which is announced on the listserv. For example, in an email titled ‘Cabana boy delivery notification,’ one member said: “My goodness there’s been a truckload of good news on this loop! Thanks to you all for sharing these awesome accomplishments with us! Cabana boys have been just been shipped out (sorry, had them on back order) to the following fantabulous CRW members (and if I missed you, my apologies, the boys will find you).”

These jokes reinforce the supportive and enthusiastically involved community of practice developed in the opening sequence of CRW meetings. They create an atmosphere of positivity and possibility. They also class members as middle-class female recipients of ethnic/racialized and sexualized male labour. They draw attention to some of the not explicitly sought after factors that go into creating this community of practice. Jokes about men, their desirability and their differences from women (generally within the context of a heterosexual relationship) pass as unremarkable and mostly unremarked upon, although some members did express discomfort with the overt use of male sexuality in marketing directed towards a female readership. As was the gender-reversed case in Anne Allison’s work (1994) with salary men at hostess bars in Japan, men and men’s bodies become a focus of conversational bonding between members of the community in a way that inevitably excludes those who are not (or not only) interested in men in that capacity. This also serves to exclude men (specifically straight men), who perhaps have already excluded themselves (although there were occasionally men at the meetings, and a man
who is involved in the listserv right now). As Angela McRobbie (2002) argues about changing forms of creative work in the UK, in a context where networking and personal connections are at the forefront of obtaining creative work the structures of gender and ethnicity are easily reinforced (522-23).

When I first presented the paper which lead to this section, a colleague pointed out the similarities between some of the opening activities at CRW monthly meetings and those of WeightWatchers, another industry which is geared mostly towards women. It is interesting to consider how much the norms and values generated in this community of practice are indeed grounded in ideologies of gendered language practice. Certainly values which have been discussed as central to women’s linguistic practice such as cooperation, positive involvement and shared floor (see for example, Tannen 1995) are valued within this community of practice, which by virtue of its gendered composition could then be seen as marking it as a ‘womanly’ kind of way to run a writing group. Yet I wish to avoid falling into the (perhaps inevitable) trap of relating everything done by women only to gender. The identities developed here are certainly marked by gender, yet, as with the fraternity identities Kiesling discusses, there are different kinds of gendered identities which are valued, marked and drawn on at different points in time. The openings of meetings frame the values of the community of practice as a combination of individualized professionalism and communal enthusiasm. These values are marked by gender, but they are also significantly marked by the labour context.

Communities of Practice, Business and Reflexivity
While my conclusions may be different, much of what I argue here is not something that CRW members, particularly those who have been involved in the executive board and group organizing over the years, have not thought of. The structure and practice of the meetings were deliberately chosen both for practical and ideological reasons and have been refined over the years. As Caldwell (2008) has discussed, cultural producers often also have a culture of reflexivity, not entirely separate from that of the academy (as I will explore in the second part of this chapter). One of the early founding members of CRW has mentioned to me that she was the one who instigated ‘Accolades’. That these practices serve to join the community together is very much in the interests of the group, and consciously so. That they focus the group on the

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137 It does not exclude a queerness which focusses on the consumption of male sexuality – for example, a number of the members wrote m/m fiction, often coming out of the slash fan fiction community. There have been gay male writers also involved in the chapter.
market may not be consciously in mind when they are enacted and developed, but I am sure most members would not disagree with this outcome.

While a large part of the mandate of the parent organization RWA is advocacy for romance writers within the industry and in the public sphere, chapters like CRW generally focus on the more local production of writing communities, mutual support and the exploration of writing practices. In the ‘writer romances’ discussed in Chapter Two, romance writing communities appear as friendship communities of women writers, based on affective ties and common interests. As I have been arguing, these communities also serve a role in the organization of the larger industry. Bonnie McElhinny (2012) has examined the spread of the analytic “communities of practice” in both the business community and linguistic anthropology, arguing that the use of this term in the two communities is not unconnected. She suggests that the term’s uptake in the business community is connected to the increasing focus on flexibility (as discussed by Martin 1994) and new arrangements of work, arguing that “‘community of practice’ (and related concepts, like ‘best practices’) has become a keyword in the new knowledge economy” (2012: 232). The popularity of this concept for both business and academia, according to McElhinny, “can be seen as an attempt to meet the late capitalist challenge of developing new tools, new definitions of community, and new definitions and forms of interaction that go beyond the traditional focus on fixed places, moments, and groups” (231).

In fact, RWA itself uses the term to describe subgroups such as PRO and PAN. In their description of PAN, they state that “In an effort to meet the needs of all its members, RWA has several Communities of Practice (CoP) which are communities of people who come together with a common interest to share ideas, find solutions, and build innovations.” I argue that viewing RWA and CRW as communities of practice within the context of the uptake of this term in business can point us towards an important aspect of flexible labour.

In Chapter One, I discussed how romance writers are quintessential flexible labourers: contract-based, outside the corporation, women. Communities of practice like CRW socialize writers for the industry and enable this flexibility. McElhinny quotes a business article which discusses ‘communities of practice’ as “a strategy for enhancing organizational performance and making the most of intellectual capital” (2012: 231). Writers are interested in assembling and accessing this capital, by acquiring and sharing knowledge about the industry. Groups like RWA

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138 Not exclusively, though. For example, a group of published CRW authors organized a meeting for librarians in the public library system (one of the largest in North America) to inform them about romance (and local writers) and energize positive engagement with romance.

139 http://www.rwa.org/cs/become_a_member/about_pan; accessed April 16, 2012.
and CRW become places where writers can share knowledge of market trends, as I discussed in Chapter One, or of generic conventions, as I discuss later in this chapter. The question of maintaining and developing ‘intellectual capital’ is also an issue for publishers, as writers are (as discussed in Chapter One) outside of the physical corporation and often move between companies. Writers’ necessary ‘intellectual capital’, their knowledge, is something that companies would like to access and influence, just as writers try to access the knowledge contained within companies. Publishers would like to encourage in writers an approach to the industry which parallels the publishers’ own approach. Publishers manage this by creating their own communities of practice: for example, Harlequin’s popular eharlequin community which serves as both a writer’s and reader’s community and Penguin’s new online writers’ website, focused on genre writing. They also reach out to communities such as CRW and RWA through giving workshops, having spotlights at the national conference, funding it, and so on.\textsuperscript{140}

Groups like CRW and RWA could be seen as ‘outsourced’ communities of practice, serving in some ways the interests of the companies (although in other ways advocating for authors, for better contracts and so on). Their existence enables the flexibility of the system. McElhinny suggests that within the business community, ‘communities of practice’ are seen “as being useful for (1) socializing novices, (2) developing and managing institutional memory and knowledge, (3) being more flexible than traditional corporate hierarchies, (4) serving as ‘safe’ places to try out innovation, and (5) helping to construct virtual communities in a global economy” (2012: 237). Each one of these could be applied to CRW. As McElhinny argues, then, the use of ‘communities of practice’ in both business and academia “thus could be said to reflect ideologies of social relations framed within Anglo-American industrial structures” (239).

The structures and distribution of these communities of practice are also class related. Gee (cited in McElhinny) argues that “their elaboration in businesses is shaping their instantiation in schools which, in complex and class-linked ways, are retooling themselves to produce the new kinds of workers required in a knowledge economy. He argues there is class differentiation in the implementation of different organizational forms in schools, with peer-centred communities of practice given more prominence in classrooms serving middle class students, while more highly structured back-to-basics programs with more discipline and less flexibility are aimed at working class and poor youth” (McElhinny 2012: 249). That is, communities of practice enable a particular middle-class kind of flexibility and are mobilized to prepare people for those sectors. Sectors which require a different kind of flexibility from

\textsuperscript{140} There are also other non-community based efforts to create this kind of knowledge in disparate writers.
workers (for example retail or manufacturing) do not enable or encourage communities of practice. In the next section I discuss one area of knowledge which CRW focuses on: the generic structure of romances.

**Practicing the Romance Genre**

In the section above I discussed how one particular community of practice creates itself through the beginnings of monthly meetings. The second half of these monthly meetings, like the second half of this chapter, focuses on the craft of writing itself, in particular the craft of writing the romance genre. In the publishing world in North America, the term genre is used to describe ‘genre fiction’ which sets off romance, science fiction, fantasy, mystery, thriller and horror from the unmarked category of literary fiction. Romance fiction, then, is genre fiction. As a genre romance is understood to be uniform in a certain sense, to be governed by a set of structures and rules and conventions. The term ‘genre’ is seldom unmarkedly used to describe what is often called ‘literary fiction’. This division is reproduced in the organization of writers’ organizations, with a separate romance writers’ organization, science fiction and fantasy organization and Writer’s Union.

In this half of the chapter I examine how this understanding of genre can be enriched by a linguistic anthropological approach to genre. As Barber defines it, genre is “a concept by which we group texts into categories or families” (2007: 32). As Barber argues, “the idea of genre is constitutive of the texts themselves. The conventions of a genre are tools or templates for giving specific forms to utterance. Genre orients a speaker’s or writer’s utterance towards a listener or reader; and it orients the listener or reader towards the text. The producer of a text operates in the expectation that the receiver will identify the genre and in turn bring the right kind of expectations to bear on it” (32). Genre is not simply about the conventions observed within a text but also about the conventions governing how it is produced, who produces it, and how it is circulated and read. Romance fiction is a genre largely shaped by the way publishing organizes it\(^1\). It is not a static genre; there are discussions and disagreements within the community about what is included in romance.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) For example, the definition of ‘romance’ differs between North America and the UK.

\(^2\) For example, gay male romance (commonly referred to as m/m – male/male) is now more visible in the romance writing community after initially becoming popular in fan fiction slash romances such as Kirk/Spock, called ‘slash’ for the slash between the two characters’ names. RWA’s official definition of a romance now does not say that it involves a man and a woman as the protagonists, but two individuals. Others argued that ‘romance’ should be reserved for heterosexual couples. Popular romance fiction (in North America) has been historically quite white, a genre convention which was not part of official definitions, but was a convention none the less. It was not until the
Publishers and booksellers (and what they assume about readers) have been a large part of how romance has grown as a genre. Publishers put out guidelines for writers and what they choose to publish or not ratifies which examples of the genre circulate. Publishers create, divide and end new lines. Likewise, readers are an essential part of genre formation. In this chapter, I focus, though, on the role of writers’ groups in genre formation. Many romance writing group meetings are concerned with naming (and contesting) the conventions of the genre in order to guide members’ own writing practices. These conventions may be broad narrative structures or more in-depth conventions of conveying emotional point-of-view. At the beginning of every calendar year, CRW has a ‘Romance 101’ meeting where the speaker sets out the history, organization and conventions of the romance genre. At the level of more individual writing practices, every year CRW has a critique meeting exclusively for members. Members bring four or five copies of a five-page scene to the meeting, having previously signed up for a group focused on topics such as Opening Scene, Sex Scene, Action Scene, Dialogue Scene, Synopsis, Brainstorming, GMC (Goal, Motivation, and Conflict), or Young Adult. Each group has at least one published member in it. Writers read each member’s piece silently and then offer their thoughts on it. This is framed as a learning experience, as the published member usually directs the group and may not bring pages to get feedback on or may only get feedback if there is extra time. Likewise, smaller writing groups tend to be centred around workshopping pieces of writing which are either pre-circulated or read at group meetings.

In her dissertation on the workings of a long-term writing group, Lynn Coddington suggests that “achieving this [good reading experience for readers] means observing and working creatively with conventions […] thus, any satisfactory marking of the genre’s boundaries must see them as dynamic and contested because any given romance writer’s reality is that she may contest the bounds freely, but not all bids for new borders will be accepted” (1997: 78). Coddington uses examples from group meetings “to analyze how romance writers use small group meetings to collude with, contest, resist, and revise dominant discourses about writing romance” (176), for example, whether a manuscript with a homeless hero was a ‘romance’ or not (180). Most CRW meetings which focus on craft, in contrast, focus more often on setting out what the conventions of the genre are. Because they are not discussions among participants about particular pieces of writing, but rather talks by individual writers presented as learning.

1990s that African American romance became a significant subgenre. Other aspects have also changed over the decades – the level of explicit sex, popularity of various historical periods, length, humour, popularity of certain tropes (e.g. alpha heroes, secret babies, suspense plots, etc.). Narrative conventions such as point-of-view (pov) have also changed and now it is common to include both protagonists’ pov.
experiences, they set up models and prototypes. Exercises for participants often involve fitting their potential book into the structures set out by the speaker. What I am examining here is how the romance genre is abstracted by writers into a structure much like that which might be produced by an academic of narrative structure.

Here I focus mainly on normative statements in CRW meetings and communications which aim to make explicit the norms of romance texts: the underlying structures which tie individual texts together into a genre. Briggs and Bauman (1992) suggest that genre works to create cohesion between texts. In this section of the chapter I examine the kinds of genre characteristics which become central to discussions in the romance writing community. Within the context of a market-focussed community, these practices of genre cohesion serve to manage uncertainty. Much like meeting openings link together a collectivity of individuals, discussions of genre provide a collective setting for writers to understand their individual writing. Writing by women is often directed into the romance genre due to characteristics of its production: romance’s popularity, its mainly female readership and gendering. Romance has a reputation amongst the general public as an extremely generic form of writing, one that is often referred to as having a ‘formula.’ Yet romance writers in reality must write their novels without reference to a formula, while still maintaining close links with the generic conventions (as well as testing their limits). Romances do have a ‘structure’ and writers attend meetings to learn how best to integrate that structure into their own writing. The market demands a certain amount of cohesiveness and thus writers work to discover the abstract genre form and produce works which will be considered both well-written novels and well-written romances. One place where writers work through these links between texts and assemble the genre is in group meetings.

The Concept of Genre

In her work on the anthropology of texts, Karin Barber (2007) argues that genre is the “key to textual organisation, to the interaction between composer and audience, and to the emergence of new forms in new social circumstances” (30). In examining the production, reception and circulation of mostly oral texts in Africa, she begins with genre, suggesting that “all anthropological, sociological and historical approaches to texts need to have at their heart a concept of genre” (32). Genre is the organizing principle for the romance writing community

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143 For example, one author wrote her first novel and it was classified by her agent as a romance, not her, which then generated some issues, because the romance was actually not the central storyline.
and thus, in a way, an organizing principle of this dissertation. What I am suggesting here is that the romance genre is not simply a set of formal features found in romance texts, but is also a cultural competence; as Barber suggests, a “localised way of organizing speech activity, understood not as a set of morphological features, but as a repertoire of skills, dispositions, and expectations, ‘an orienting framework for the production and receptions of discourse’ (Briggs and Bauman 1992:142-3)” (37). As a community of practice, CRW offers one way to acquire and refine that cultural competence.

During the course of my fieldwork, I participated in the CRW writing contest as a preliminary judge (one of many) as both a learning experience and a way to contribute to the group. CRW has a popular and well regarded yearly contest, where writers submit thirty pages (about two or three chapters) and a synopsis and receive a comprehensive set of comments and marks from three judges, at least one of whom is a published author. The top three entries in each category are then judged by guest judges (usually editors in appropriate lines) and the top three of those are also read and judged by a well-known agent. The score sheet for the contest and the accompanying lessons for the judges crystallize much of the work on the genre which also plays out in CRW meetings on craft and in critique group advice. To give feedback on a romance manuscript one must situate it within the context of the genre, within the (changing) conventions and one’s own reading and writing experience. Advice and feedback constructs a web of intertextual links, tying a particular or hypothetical romance text to other romances, popular fiction, narrative theory, and ‘actual’ life. In the following few paragraphs I elaborate on Briggs and Bauman’s influential discussion of genre in linguistic anthropology, suggesting that this approach can help frame the work that romance writers do in craft conversations.

According to Briggs and Bauman, ‘genre’ began in anthropology as a means of categorizing folkloric texts, but has “achieved currency in contemporary linguistic anthropology largely under the stimulus of the ethnography of speaking, performance-centered approaches to verbal art, and the work of Mikhail Bakhtin” (1992: 132). Thus genre moved from a category applied to narratives (like literature) to one which was applied to other kinds of speech acts, but which still contained within it traces of a narrative approach. Briggs and Bauman suggest an “alternative approach to the study of genre” might begin with Bakhtin’s view of intertextuality. This approach would see “structure, form, function, and meaning […] not as immanent features of discourse but as products of an ongoing process of producing and receiving discourse” (146), a process which “is not centered in the speech event or creation of a written text itself, but […] in its interface with at least one other utterance” (146). That is, an examination of genre depends on
examining its intertextuality. Genre is something that is not inherently present in any one particular text, but is created through a text’s production and reception and the ways in which it is connected to other texts, through things like similarity in form, direct reference, use of the same vocabulary and so on.

A genre, then, is constructed through the connections people make between texts. As Briggs and Bauman suggest, genre can be viewed as “quintessentially intertextual. When discourse is linked to a particular genre, the process by which it is produced and received is mediated through its relationship with prior discourse. […] however, the link is not made to isolated utterances, but to generalized or abstracted models of discourse production and reception” (147). This formation of genre “thus provides a textual model for creating cohesion and coherence, for producing and interpreting particular sorts of features and their formal and functional relations all the way from particular poetic lines to the global structure of the narrative” (147). In CRW workshops and meetings, writers engage in generating genericity in their work through setting the models of discourse production. These abstracted models become indexes of genre writing itself. Romance publishing has worked to create this cohesion between more and more novels (for example, encompassing paranormal romances within the genre) while still allowing for variation.

The romance writing community thus emphasizes through their practices the generic ties of their texts. As Briggs and Bauman describe it “invoking a genre thus creates indexical connections that extend far beyond the present setting of production or reception, thereby linking a particular act to other times, places, and persons. […] Generic features thus foreground the status of utterances as recontextualizations of prior discourse” (1992: 147-8). This is in contrast to writing communities which foreground other textual qualities such as ‘originality’. These communities might dismiss close connections as unoriginal and formulaic. Romance writers attach positive values to these connections and links. Yet, as Briggs and Bauman also state, “the fit between a particular text and its generic model—as well as other tokens of the same genre—is never perfect; to paraphrase Sapir, we might say that all genres leak. Generic frameworks thus never provide sufficient means of producing and receiving discourse” (149). That is, despite the rumours, there is no formula for romance, in the sense of a generic equation which would generate popular texts time after time. And if there were, it would not be sufficient to produce desirable texts.

How producers relate to this gap can differentiate between approaches to the production and reception of particular genres. Briggs and Bauman argue that “the process of linking
particular utterances to generic models thus necessarily produces an intertextual gap. Although the creation of this hiatus is unavoidable, its relative suppression or foregrounding has important effects” (149). They contrast texts which attempt to minimize this gap with those which attempt to maximize it. Those which minimize the intertextual gap render

the discourse maximally interpretable through the use of generic precedents. This approach sustains highly conservative, traditionalizing modes of creating textual authority. On the other hand, maximizing and highlighting these intertextual gaps underlies strategies for building authority through claims of individual creativity and innovation (such as are common in 20th-century Western literature), resistance to the hegemonic structures associated with established genres, and other motives for distancing oneself from textual precedents. (149)

While, as Briggs and Bauman suggest, claims of creativity and quality in 20th century Western literature are often grounded on maximizing the generic gap, romance writing craft meetings tend towards efforts to minimize gaps, while forming the best and strongest model of the possibilities of the romance genre. That is, while romance writers acknowledge that there is in fact a necessary gap, that not all romances are the same, they also foreground ties with previous instances of the genre and with what is described as the generic structure. The idea is that romance texts draw their strength from their generic ties, that the underlying generic structure is a necessary base for individual creativity (much as Coddington 1997 discusses).

In romance, these generic ties are formed within the context of the production and distribution of romance fiction; as I discussed earlier in this chapter, romance writing communities of practice orient towards commercial literary production. This fact is evident in Dirk de Geest and An Goris’ (2010) examination of romance writing handbooks, a genre of writing which many of the authors I worked with read. They suggest that romance writing handbooks combine a normative narratology drawn from the elements of classic narratology “with institutional advice, since actually getting published is seen as an integral part of the literary activity. Hence the dimension of commercial and economic viability cannot (or must not) be left out when one discusses norms and constraints formulated in handbooks for writing romance novels” (de Geest and Goris 2010: 85-6). Romance as a genre and as a writing practice cannot be understood outside of the institutional context of publishing. I am not trying to suggest (as McElhinny cautions against in her discussion of ‘community of practice’) that market forces have invaded a heretofore pure realm of creativity. What I am suggesting is that this realm is formed in the context of the market, as well as of other forces. As a result, as de Geest

144 The article considers romance in the context of ‘constrained writing’ – an analytic usually applied to certain literary movements.
and Goris suggest, “the economic, commercial, and institutional frameworks surrounding popular genres such as the romance novel constantly influence the formulation of their norms, despite the fact that the illusion of writing as a free and autonomous creative activity is maintained throughout the handbooks” (86).

Learning and Teaching the Romance Genre

Given this orientation towards genre as a practice, then, how does the CRW community in particular envision the generic structures and their place in individual writing practices? In CRW monthly meetings writers draw on two kinds of intertextuality to order the genre of romance: first, references to other novels and films classified as romantic and second, references to scholarly work on romance and story structure. These intertextual ties work to guide writing into accepted channels, but they can also open up new connections and new possibilities for the formation of romance.

These discussions often begin with a reference to the romance reading a writer has done. Romance writing handbooks, according to Goris and de Geest, construct a “conceptual framework in which writing is simultaneously conceived of as a natural, free, even self-evident practice and as a constrained utilization of norms based on hard work, study, tools, and above all the writer’s own extensive reading experience” (2010: 85). In their corpus of handbooks, they saw three trends: “(1) the continuous appeal to the aspiring author’s own experience of romance reading, (2) the conception of writing as a craft and a profession, and (3) the infrequent but strategic recourse to overtly normative language” (88-9). These approaches appear in CRW meetings and workshops as well, in particular in the form of appeals to writers’ own reading practices which must be integrated into their understanding of generic models.

The guidelines for judging CRW’s contest begin with a reminder not to be swayed by one’s own biases. When a new judge wondered on the judging listserv whether she could compare the entries to the published books she reads and love which might at times not match up to the ‘rules’, an experienced judge suggested that, yes, entries should be ready to be published. She then suggested that the new judge compare the entries with good first novels which have been recently published and recommended the RITAs, RWA’s yearly awards, as a good place to find these. This focus on the writer’s own reading practices and experiences and their presumed enjoyment of previous texts, as de Geest and Goris suggest, allows norms to be presented as
“self-evident and natural” and “not as extrinsic (e.g., commercial) factors, imposed upon the creative process in an authoritarian way, but rather as aids to creativity” (89).145

Similarly to the guidelines de Geest and Goris discuss in the case of romance handbooks (2010: 85-6), the judging guidelines, distributed through a special judging listserv, were structured by some classical narratological categories, framed as the ‘craft of writing and storytelling’ in the context of the romance genre. These guidelines have been developed over the years that CRW has run the contest and, as the woman running the contest this year suggested, have been passed on to her by ‘wise writer women’. They covered ten topics: Bias and Other Mistakes to Avoid, Overall Scoring Guidelines, Style, Plot and Conflict, Characterization, Dialogue, Synopsis, Mechanics, Overall Impression, and Contest Logistics and Tips. The guidelines for Style, Plot and Conflict, Characterization, Dialogue and Synopsis especially reveal some of the basic conventions of the romance genre which are formed through CRW interactions. In the rest of this section, I will discuss these aspects of the genre, bringing in examples from workshops and monthly meetings. I will focus both on how intertextuality works to form the genre and the focus there is in craft discussions on structure and unity.

It may be unsurprising that groups centred around the practice of writing a structured genre like popular romance engage so significantly with the question of structure. There were a number of workshops which focussed on structure in my two years at the CRW. The course I took on romance writing at a local college also had a focus on the structure of a romance. Talks at CRW meetings create temporary ‘experts’ within the community of practice and these experts often draw on the language of expertise from outside the community. As a number of writers who give these talks are either from an English literature background or have a personal interest in theorizing literature, many of these talks about structure draw on academic and popular academic work on either romance or narrative in general. For instance, Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey in *Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) is often mentioned as a guide to the structuring of a narrative. The assumption then is that a good piece of romance fiction will be clearly and cohesively structured. What this means exactly is part of what romance writers are trying to determine through their meetings, but it includes such things as thematic unity, a plot structure which begins with unresolved questions and ends with their resolution, characters whose motivations are contained within the text and who act predictably according to these motivations, and scenes which follow each other both temporally and thematically.

145 In cases where these norms are not experienced as coming out of the writer’s own reading practices, as in the case of one of the writers that Coddington discusses, norms may be felt more as impositions than guides to creativity.
As I discussed above, openings are seen by writers as highly influential parts of the romance novel. They are the readers’ entry point into the story and are especially important when those readers are agents or editors deciding whether or not to take on a manuscript. In the college course we had one full class where we discussed the openings of stories and how they express different genres. During class we wrote openings to stories with mixed-up subgenres, using the gap between subgenres to spur our creativity while at the same time learning the conventions. There are perennial discussions in romance writing circles about whether or not prologues are a good idea. This ideology of openings is one of recognisability, genre, and straightforwardness. That is, the opening should begin with the action and should transparently reveal to readers (that is, to readers who have the generic knowledge) the kind of novel which will follow. If it is a romance, the first page should introduce both the hero and heroine and show us that this will be a romance. This is emphasized in romance writing courses and meetings, despite the fact that in published books this is not always the case. Our class on openings emphasized that the hero and heroine should meet as early in the book as possible; yet, when the writing group which came out of that course invited an author to come to talk to us (who worked as a teacher and had published a number of romance novels), a number of us read some of her books beforehand and noticed that her heroes did not get introduced until later on in the books. Workshops and courses, however, emphasize the generic models, rather than the gaps. Openings also have the most attention focussed on them in the work practices of aspiring writers: contests usually take the first 5-30 pages; there is a category in the annual CRW critique meeting for Openings. Agents (and occasionally editors) look at the first five pages of a manuscript (as well as a query letter and synopsis) when initially deciding whether or not they might be interested in the book.

In CRW’s contest, writers submit the first thirty pages of their manuscript and the judging guidelines on plot and conflict start with openings:

**Opening draws reader immediately into story.**

The opening pages of a book are arguably the most important. For an unpublished manuscript, they’re undoubtedly the most important because if an agent or editor doesn’t get drawn in right away, they won’t read more. (Some readers are more patient – especially if they’ve already invested in the book. Agents and editors will never be patient on the hopes it’ll get better later. If they don’t like it immediately, they’re done.)

So, the first thing to consider in this area is how well the writer pulls you into her/his story. […]

Some techniques writers use to draw the reader in are: to start with action, or to start with dialogue, or to start by putting a big question in the reader's mind. Anything that captures the reader's interest so they want to read more. Use your judgment. Were you drawn in?
The opening, then, sets in motion the romantic plot, an essential element in romance and the focus of many structure discussions. The judging guidelines describe plot as an essential element of genre/commercial fiction:

**External and internal conflicts are evident in the plot.** Fiction is boring without conflict and, well, without a plot it’s not really fiction—certainly not genre or commercial fiction. Nika Rylski defines fiction as ‘interesting people in difficult situations.’ Plot and conflict goes to the "difficult" part. Not that the situation needs to be life or death, but it needs to be high stakes for the main characters. The main characters should be facing some kind of problem/conflict at the start of the book – even if it’s not the ‘main’ conflict that will carry the whole book.

Romance writers have a reflexive theory of writing which divides writers into two groups: ‘pantsers’ and ‘plotters’. ‘Pantsers’ write without a previously set-out plot and ‘plotters’ do a lot of planning and plotting before beginning to write. Pantsers, as a category, could be seen as focussed around the ethic of inspiration and spontaneity (a Romantic ethic of authorship and writing), whereas it could be suggested that plotters are focussed more on the structure and consistency of writing (that is, on the explicit elements of genre). To some extent, there is an idea that some elements of writing cannot be taught, and should not be mandated. That is, many writers will argue that everyone writes differently and what works for one person might not work for another. This division of writers into two groups mirrors the tensions between affective and practical orientations towards romance writing which appear in other areas of the discourse community. Yet an orientation towards the generic forms of romance is not just a practical one, it is also an emotional one.

While there is a community understanding of writers as being either plotters or pantsers, CRW meetings and workshops focused greatly on structure and the structure of a story was seen as being essential to creating a good one. De Geest and Goris suggest that this is also the case in romance writing handbooks: “As the romance’s basic plot structure is among the genre’s indispensable narrative conventions and thus familiar to the reader, the constraints on the plot appear to the reader as both far more self-evident and more obligatory than those concerning other aspects of the novel and the writing process” (2010: 91). Many workshops focussed on creating a structure or framework for one’s story, often a symmetrical one. These structures often drew on handbooks in romance writing, screenwriting and academic work on story structure.

146 As in, by-the-seat-of-your-pants.
In the college course I took, the instructor set out the seven parts of a story. In the first workshop I went to at CRW, Sarah, who had done a Master’s in English on detective novels, discussed the Hero’s Journey (which has travelled in the writing community from Joseph Campbell through the screenwriter Christopher Vogler (2007) to romance). The Hero’s Journey is often mentioned as a guide to structuring a narrative, although it generally has to be adjusted for the fact that romance, as a genre, usually has two protagonists rather than one. Another author, discussing ‘Character Driven Plotting,’ drew on a three-act structure, which she suggests “has been used for over 3,000 years” (fieldnotes 432). She went on to discuss other structuring elements, such as “pinch points (learned from Syd Fields on screen writing) [which are intended to act as] buttresses for your Act 2” (fieldnotes 433). Another romance author who had done academic work on fan fiction drew on popular texts such as Casablanca (1942) to discuss the structure of the character journey. She suggested that writers could think of theme as a dialectic, asking us if there were “any Hegelian sticklers out there?” She broke it down into “thesis – antithesis – synthesis” (418), suggesting that viewing texts this way can “help to assemble plot events.” She then gave an example of a dialectic using a “common theme in genre: 1st thesis ‘you can escape your past,’ 2nd antithesis ‘you can’t escape your past,’ 3rd synthesis ‘only by accepting your past can you transcend it’” (418). Another author, too, discussed plotting, talking about setting up five plot points, the most important being the first plot point and the ‘black moment’. These activities of structuring overlap with academic work on romances such as Pamela Regis’s The Natural History of the Romance Novel (2003), where she suggests eight essential narrative elements which form the deep structure of romances. Romance writers reach out to other texts and genres to form the structure of romance.

Beyond plot, romance writers embrace other structure-based ways of understanding novels, such as GMC or scene and sequel. GMC, or Goal Motivation Conflict, suggests that each character should have a clear goal, motivation and conflict (that is, something preventing them from reaching that goal). Scene and sequel is more micro-analytic, an approach which suggests that both are building blocks of the narrative; broadly speaking ‘scene’ is the action and ‘sequel’ is the aftermath. Two writers from CRW went to a workshop at a university together and were startled that the students there did not seem to know about scene/sequel. The main focus of these structures in romance writer discussions is on the characters and their journey: the necessity for characters to start at a clearly defined emotional point in the beginning, then through the romance move to a new more stable point. The interior life of the characters is essential and they must have a clear psychological motivation for their actions. Often these motivations are, Freudian
style, linked to past events (often in characters’ youth) which lead them to a viewpoint on the world which needs to be adjusted so they can live a stable romantic life.\textsuperscript{147}

These workshops reach out and centre the genre in the context of popular films (\textit{Casablanca}, etc), romance novels (often by the workshop giver, but also others), fairytales (such as Cinderella), and occasionally other genre fiction and other fiction (generally through references to well-known names, such as Faulkner and Stephen King). This was also apparent in handbooks de Geest and Goris studied, where “sample texts from the established romance canon (and often excerpted from the oeuvre of the author of the handbook) are used to exemplify certain writing tips or certain reading effects. […] Using example scenes effectively helps explain and illustrate a tool; it also adds to the overall impression that these tools—and by extension the whole writing process—are indeed accessible and easy” (95). They suggest that the importance of these examples is “related to the fact that romance forms a rather conventional and constrained genre, in which the modeling upon canonized texts is a major factor” (95).

What does all this work around genre, the numerous workshops, books and discussions, reveal about the state of the industry or the state of writing in general? In the Introduction and Chapter Two, I have linked reflexivity with both work practices in the media industry (see Caldwell 2008) and patterns of behavior during late capitalism (see Giddens 1991). This kind of generic reflexivity was at the centre of CRW’s activities. First, most (if not all) of the writers I talked to had attended university. A number had advanced degrees. They were used to research and education as a way of learning how to do something. At least one writer said that when she decided she wanted to write romance, she then went out and got all the books on writing romance, and writing, that she could find. One of the authors who had done an MA in English Literature gave me a list of books I might want to read which included both popular and academic works. Writers who give workshops are, perhaps unsurprisingly, those who are interested in the workings of the genre and in analyzing it, for the purpose of writing it better, but also for the enjoyment of analysis. The author who was the City Public Library writer-in-residence had theories about the trajectory of the romance genre; she had a bachelor’s degree in history and a personal interest in medieval vernacular literature, which she integrated into her writing and her workshop teaching. These workshops normalize this questioning, self-reflexive and analytic approach to writing in the genre (while also emphasizing the creative aspect, often suggesting that this analytic work is then done second, after the first draft is out, so that it does not stifle the writing). These writers then become ‘representatives’ of the genre, who can defend

\textsuperscript{147} In fact, one author ran a “Creating characters with psychology” workshop.
and represent it because they understand how it is put together, what it is good at, its historical roots and relations to other genres. These reflexive activities are part of CRW’s existence as a ‘community of practice.’

These workshops, books, and so on also become part of the flexible labour arrangements of the industry. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, writing groups provide training to those hoping to get into publishing, producing a pool of potential writers, while also offering sources of income to authors (and former editors). This is a voluntary activity. Workshops are also a way of ‘giving back’ to the community, as the workshops (especially for RWA and CRW) are not large income-generating machines for writers. The writing also becomes a locus of possible control (while writers still refer to characters who do what they want, synopses and plans which then change completely, etc.) in this context of uncertainty. As I have discussed in previous chapters, writers (and publishers, to a certain degree) often feel like the industry is out of their control. The formation of these communities (of practice and otherwise) allow for spaces to structure uncertainties and make explicit norms, to determine whether their manuscript will be judged a member of the genre by publishers and readers. Communities of practice like CRW become in-between spaces mediating between individual writers and the publishing industry at large. Workshops on narrative structure marshal the uncertainties of a manuscript-in-development into a clear abstract structure.

Outside of writer communities, publishers become gatekeepers of generic ratification. Harlequin, for example, posts online guidelines for writing romance. They also at one time had a program where one would send Harlequin a manuscript and they would give you feedback. This feedback would often concern both the quality of the writing and the degree to which it conformed to expectations for the romance genre in general and the line it had been submitted for in particular. For example, “Although you have written a good story, it does not conform to these expectations. You can choose to leave your story as is and look for a single title mainstream market, or proceed to read as many historical romances as you can to see what these expectations involve”. Here, the comments work to discuss the gap between the story submitted and the genre at hand. The question becomes, is this too large of a gap to be crossed? If the gap can be crossed, then the genre shifts, as a new text has been incorporated. If not, then the text will simply be judged ‘not a romance’ and if it is published as a romance, may result in angry or confused readers.
Conclusion
But what is the ideal amount of generic gap? If there is no gap and you are a new author then it is assumed that you will not get published, because your manuscript will not be different enough. But too much of a gap and it will not be accepted. The concern of genre here is different for writers than it is for, for example, critics and analysts or for readers. Writers are trying to determine what genre is because they want to produce a text which will be accepted in that genre. They want to enact it, to practice genre. Genre is a practice, not just a category. It is not a formula, but a process and a relationship to a body of past texts. Romance writers talk about this relationship to a body of past texts as necessarily one of enjoyment. That is, to write romance novels, one must have read a lot of them and have enjoyed reading them, to be a fan (although there are writers about which this is not true). This does not guarantee you will be able to produce a successful instance of the genre. There was a woman in the local college class whose plots whenever she described them seemed very out of the usual for a Harlequin, even though she was clearly a frequent reader. It is this affective engagement with past texts, as a reader, which is understood to be an essential part of the affective engagement with the future text, as a writer, in addition to the other kinds of craft learning that I have discussed here.

In this chapter I have discussed how this kind of affective community is formed and maintained through practices such as meeting openings. These meetings orient writers to viewing the genre and themselves within the context of the romance publishing industry. I have argued that CRW meetings help form the group as a ‘community of practice’. Romance writing groups (as many groups that concentrate on the production of linear texts, including academic ones) as part of their larger practice make a great emphasis on beginnings as the entry-point of the audience into the text. It is not surprising that they carry over this awareness to the beginnings of the interactions of their groups. The opening sequences of these meetings serve the function of setting the values and norms of the group, as a group with a changing membership. I argued that the activities of Accolades and Raffles, by requiring members to participate and be audible and visible, form the community as a participatory one, centred around production for the market. I have also suggested that while these chosen activities foreground explicit values of the community, jokes can also reveal some of the less explicit factors structuring the community of practice, in particular the norms of white middle-class heterosexual femininity.

148 As I recall, one of her plots involved a murder by the heroine, which while not entirely out of the question, is not usual.
Angela McRobbie has argued that new forms of creative work depend highly on informal networking, without the support of “any institutional ‘trade association’” (2002: 519). Yet, in North America at least, groups like RWA and CRW have grown to serve some of the functions of more longstanding trade unions. They have also served as spaces for romance writers and workers who did not initially feel very welcome or respected in the pre-existing writers unions. Yet RWA’s structure is not simply a replication of that of a trade union. It offers something much more ‘flexible’, encompassing both aspiring and published writers and providing a space for community support and writer socialization outside of the industry. Drawing on McElhinny (2012), I have argued that ‘communities of practice’ as both on-the-ground communities and analytic concepts coincide with changing forms of work and changing styles of business practice. ‘Communities of practice’, touted by business writers as flexible ways of managing knowledge and workers, have been taken up by romance writers seeking to enable their own professionalization. This community of practice could then be seen as serving purposes of interest to publishers and the industry, while at the same time serving as the location of writer advocacy, education, socializing, and a place to discuss the romance genre and how to write it. I argue that communities of practice like these are becoming and will become more important in the world of flexible middle-class labour in North America, as workers seek locations to learn their positions from outside the corporations. Communities of practice like CRW unite both an affective approach to work and an individualized practice of worker agency.

This chapter is also about the interconnections between the academic and writerly worlds. Much like ‘community of practice’ which has travelled from the academic world, to the business world, to the discussions of romance writers and back again, academic approaches to genre structure appear in romance writers’ discussions of the craft of writing. I have argued that taking a linguistic anthropological approach to genre, one which considers the relationship between form, context and intertextuality in the formation of genre, helps us to understand how the romance genre is created in meetings of romance writers. I argued that romance writers value tight generic ties between texts in their discussions of the craft of romance writing. Writers giving workshops on the romance genre at CRW meetings often drew on academic approaches to narrative which foregrounded narrative structure. In this way academic work which has tried to abstract generic forms from a collection of texts becomes a tool for writers learning to produce texts which will be accepted as instances of the romance genre. I have argued that this focus on structure within the publishing context is both a tool for writing practice and a strategy for managing uncertainty. Plot structures create cohesive texts which are valued for their
recognizable structures which link them to the set of texts forming the textual affective community, just as meeting openings create cohesive communities.

This chapter has focussed on how cohesion is enabled and valued within the romance writing community. This kind of cohesion is particular to the context of flexible, individualized labour and creativity. Chapter One focussed on how action is individualized within the industry through an emphasis on professionalising oneself and one’s individual relationship with writing (love as the action of an individual) while it also considered the consequences that these individual actions have for members of the group (e.g. public reputation) and the way in which these actions are structured through group discourses. This chapter is about the formations connections and collectivity through communities and genre ties. Yet the focus of these communities is the promotion of individual agency through group support. The next chapter is even more about specific individuality in the context of the market. These approaches to individuality are developed within the context of these communities of practice, and an approach to genre which emphasizes the structure of romance and its intertextuality. While writers orient towards generic structures and foreground the generic status of their texts, they also struggle to develop a distinct writerly identity. This identity is the location for self-management in an effort to take advantage of and manage the conditions of flexibility. In the next chapter, I discuss how in the context of the mass market, name and voice become markers of individuality for writers and locations for the development of ‘brand’ identities.
Chapter Four: Voice, Pennames and Branding: Creating Romance Authors and Market Individuals

“On behalf of its many members who write for Harlequin and Silhouette, Novelists, Inc. urges Harlequin Enterprises to revise its contractual policy on pseudonym use. Inequities exist between Harlequin and Silhouette authors who write under their own names and those who write under pseudonyms. These inequities are unfair and should be abolished.

It makes no sense that authors who write under their own names for Harlequin and Silhouette have the freedom to write under their names for other publishers, while Harlequin and Silhouette authors who use pen names must first seek permission (not always granted) from Harlequin to use their pen names when writing for other publishers. […] Novelists, Inc. believes that Harlequin should not in any way control authors’ use of their pseudonyms, just as the company doesn’t control the names of authors who don’t use pseudonyms.”

- excerpt from a Novelists, Inc. position paper

In the previous chapter, I discussed how romance writing associations emphasize cohesiveness and collectivity while forming a romance writing community and discussing writing romance as a genre. While practices that foreground genre are central to the romance writing community, this does not mean that writers have no notion of individual authorship. In this chapter I discuss the ways in which the category of author becomes tied to individuality in the context of the publishing industry. Middle-class flexible labour emphasizes the individual, who must self-manage and self-promote. Writerly identity and individual reputation is a much discussed topic in romance writing communities. How do writers make efforts to distinguish themselves and create themselves as authors? How are these efforts managed through flexible organizations like CRW and RWA? An author is not just a person who writes a book. As Foucault (2006 [1977]) argues, they are a function of the discourse: a legitimating name. Who is understood to be an author at any given point depends both on the legal arrangements of copyright, as discussed by Matt Stahl (2009) in the context of cultural industry workers, and the system of production. As such, the identity of ‘author’ is caught up in the context of the production of discourse. Here authorship is both a relationship of ownership (over texts) and an identity category. It is not simply a function of the discursive regime, but also of the people and

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149 undated; http://www.ninc.com/position_papers/pennames.asp ; includes an update at the bottom: Note: Harlequin Enterprises Limited dropped the Pseudonym and Real Name clauses from their contracts, effective June 14, 2002.
practices involved in that regime. In the current conditions of book production in North America, the identity of a romance author is a market one, crystallized in their penname(s). The author’s name is an important part of their ability to sell a particular novel and to continue to sell further works linked to previous ones by the name. As the excerpt above from Novelists, Inc. suggests, who has rights of ownership over a pseudonym is therefore of great interest to professional writers. As commercial and genre authors in North America organized more concretely in the second half of the twentieth century\(^{150}\), they advocated for a stronger position in relationship to the publishers. Eventually they succeeded in gaining some control over their names. The names, however, did not stay still, but instead went forth and multiplied, as the market itself divided further and further.

Anthropologists like Marilyn Strathern (1996), legal historians like Davies and Naffine (2001), and sociologists like Celia Lury (2009) are examining the new forms of property and personhood which have developed through the rearrangement of capitalism and work, for example new forms of intellectual property such as cultural intellectual property and the branding of biological organisms. I argue that in the context of flexible labour these new forms of personhood and property become essential for workers *themselves* to develop. Groups like CRW, then, become the location for figuring out exactly what kind of identity should be foregrounded. What I am interested in here is how writers develop identities (plural) for engagement in the market and what kinds of relationships with other (personal and public) identities they advocate. As I have discussed in previous chapters, within the context of flexible labour communities of practice become important locations of development for workers. Yet, at least in the context of romance publishing, these communities of practice do not, as such, develop communal identities oriented towards the audience; instead they encourage and support individualization and writers’ development of individual identities. While the focus on genre foregrounds community knowledge and intertextual ties, writers still depend on the construction of individual authorship. This chapter is about how writers through local groups build up the category of author and their own relationship with it. As I have discussed in Chapter Two, this relationship is a particularly complicated one for women writers, as the identity of ‘author’ has been through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries more readily available to men (and specifically white men).

The story of the names above encapsulates a number of themes I want to address in this chapter: namely the relationship between post-Fordist capitalism, the individual and identity.

\(^{150}\) Romance Writers of America was formed in 1981; Novelists, Inc in 1989.
While identity is often discussed in modern and post-modern moments in relation to consumption, I am interested in how it develops when the person themselves becomes the representative of the product. That is, how is identity in production? Richard Sennett (1998) has suggested that the changing relations of work are also effecting the relations of identity. He compares the brief period of consistent work/home separation in the mid-twentieth century, which he argues allowed for a certain kind of development of ‘character’, with the flexibilization of labour. He suggests that these new arrangements of labour lead to uncertainties and anxieties for individuals, which he provocatively refers to as the ‘corrosion of character’. This chapter is an examination of another kind of development of character in the context of flexible labour. It is an exploration of how names and voices, often considered markers of individual identity, are taken up as market related tokens in the form of author brands. It is about how the category of individual is developed and used in this particular moment and relationship with the global system of capital and circulation. In this context, ‘voice’ (that is, the ‘voice’ of the author) becomes a marker of the private individual (but a private individual suitable for publicity), who moves into a public individual in the form of a penname, and then a market individual in the form of a brand.

The focus in this chapter is not mainly on how writers develop their particular identity, but how they mark whether or not they have such a thing as an identity, that is, how they become an individual. To a certain extent, this focus on individuality by writers is influenced by the association of individuality with agency. As I described in Chapter One, writers often feel a lack of control in the industry. One strategy writers use to combat this lack of control is focussing on individual identity as a category in the context of the market. ‘Brand’, or the association of a company/product with a person-like identity, has moved into the way authors think about themselves as ‘products’. Pennames become a tool for personal identity formation within the context of a market which steers authors towards certain kinds of brand. In this case, voice becomes the marker of the individual outside of the structures of social markets, the source of authenticity required by agents and editors which allows an authentic link between author and reader.

The Individual Voice
In Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium.FemaleMan(c)_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience (1997), Donna Haraway theorizes the process by which property, both material and immaterial, attaches to individuals rather than collectives and how individuals then...
themselves become property. She suggests that brand names bear similarities to genders, in that as “asymmetrical, congealed processes” they offer rights to some that are not offered to others. As such, Haraway argues,

the copyright, patent, and trademark are specific, asymmetrical, congealed processes – which must be constantly revivified in law and commerce as well as in science – that give some agencies and actors statuses in sociotechnical production not allowed to other agencies and actors. By sociotechnical production I mean the knowledge-power processes that inscribe and materialize the world in some forms rather than others. Only some of the necessary ‘writers’ have the semiotic status of ‘authors’ for any ‘text.’ (Haraway 1997: 7)

These processes, in the publishing world most importantly that of copyright, sort participants into those who have rights in the works, those who have control but no ownership rights and those who have neither. In the world of publishing, the semiotic status of individual, although not necessarily the power, is assembled around the authors. At the RWA National conferences, editors and agents are famously rumoured to take off their nametags or turn them around. They are the unnamed in the publishing world in terms of their name accessibility to readers, standing between the named publisher and the named author. In this first section of the chapter, I examine how the category of ‘individual’ becomes an important locus of agency in the romance publishing system through the metaphor of voice.

Nearing the end of my fieldwork in November 2009, I went to a City Public Library Writer-in-Residence panel called “The Business of Writing Romance” composed of an author, an agent, and an editor. The auditorium in the large library in the north of the city was full of eager writers, including a number of women from CRW and a woman who had taken a course on romance writing with me. When asked what makes her take on a work, the agent on the panel replied “Something about her voice, I know it sounds so trite”, while the editor said “Stories are a dime a dozen […] voice […] if your voice stands out” (field notes 438). In workshops and panels, articles and blog posts, romance writers and publishing professionals in North America continually refer to an author’s ‘voice’ as something which is essential to their publishing success. Writers are exhorted to find their voice and the voice of the author is discussed as separate from their work’s story and characters. Within this discourse, a writer’s voice is something that identifies their uniqueness and unity, valuable qualities in the current publishing market. It is their voice which performs the actions of attracting agents and editors. I suggest that a voice that “stands out” is seen as one which will attract readers interested in an individual
author rather than simply a genre and which will thus lead to author brand loyalty. This use of voice contrasts with a previous point in romance publishing when publishers, as one author described it, did not want voices, but instead wanted a more uniform style where the publisher rather than the writer was, in a way, the determining speaker (fieldnotes 439). This focus on voice as a marker of individuality, however, works to efface the larger structures through which authorship and voice are molded.

What is ‘Voice’?
As the category is currently used more generally in North America, ‘voice’ indexes a speaker’s materiality, individuality, and agency. Elsewhere (Taylor 2009), I have examined how the American movie media discussed ‘voices’ in the transition from silent to sound film in the 1920s and 1930s. I argued that anxieties about immigrants, women and the American public played out in discussions of good and bad voices, as not just anyone’s voice was understood as suitable for projection through mass media. In that paper I also discussed how ‘voice’ has been used in the context of modernity and anthropology. As Webb Keane describes in his article on ‘voice’, in linguistic anthropology voice is “the linguistic construction of social personae”; it “addresses the question ‘Who is speaking?’” (2001:268). Yet when ‘voice’ is used in anthropology it often “slides into metaphor. Amanda Weidman, in her study of the politics of voice in classical music in South India, suggests that ‘in anthropology especially, the voice […] has been identified as a vehicle of empowerment, self-representation, authentic knowledge, and agency. The assumption that underlies this metaphorization of voice, a central tenet of western philosophy, is that the speaking subject is the ground of subjectivity and the source of agency’ (2006:11)” (Taylor 2009:2). In that paper, I went on to discuss how Weidman “suggests that modern subjectivity itself hinges on the notion of voice as a metaphor for self and authenticity and on the various techniques – musical, linguistic, and literary – by which particular voices are made to seem

151 In this chapter, I am engaging with how writers (and industry gatekeepers talking to writers) use these key terms. Pen names, authorial identity and branding do also have a meaning for readers. In fact, most writers are also readers, so this is not completely separate. For example, the popular romance review site Dear Author in October 2010 posted a discussion of genre and originality [http://dearauthor.com/features/letters-of-opinion/originality-in-genre-fiction-an-oxymoron (Oct 19, 2010) – accessed March 20 2012] – and in the comments the term ‘voice’ became a focus of how they, as readers, became attached to particular (individual) writers. The original poster suggested that “when we talk about originality in genre fiction, I think we need to focus more on voice and develop a better vocabulary for talking about it. I realize that the alchemical quality of the reader's "hearing" that voice as a siren's call is less tangible and more difficult to discuss in crisp specifics, but I suspect that it’s voice most readers resonate to, even if they cannot articulate that clearly. The way voice is intertwined with plot, character, and theme creates another level of difficulty in distinguishing it, but I still don't think it's impossible to talk about in a more direct, focused way.”
authentic’ ([Weidman] 2006:8). This association between the speaking subject and modernity has been traced by a number of those interested in language ideologies such as Bauman and Briggs (2003). As Weidman suggests, within the context of modernity there are two main ways in which the voice becomes conceptualized:

on the one hand, the association of voice with agency and sincerity is at the heart of notions of the rational subject; the voice in this sense is imagined as referring to, or directly expressive of, an individual, interiorized self. On the other hand, such a notion of voice is formed in relation to other voices that come to be labelled in their plurality “oral tradition” – those voices which call attention to performance, sound, and materiality and thus fail to privilege referentiality. [2006:8]” (Taylor 2009:3)

As some of the examples later will show, ‘voice’ is used in many of these ways in romance publishing; it expresses ‘agency and sincerity’ as well as ‘an individual, interiorized self’. Yet the use of ‘voice’ is not necessarily one which privileges referentiality, but rather the ability of voice to express individuality, bringing sound into the context of mass-distributed written work. It is impossible to discuss ‘voice’ in the novel without mentioning Mikhail Bakhtin. In “Discourse in the Novel” Bakhtin argues that the modern novel has a particular arrangement of ‘voices’ which differentiates it from other genres of literature. In this analysis, the novel is polyvocal, containing the voices of individuals of various social classes, genders, identities (“a multiplicity of social voices” (Bakhtin 1981: 263)), all managed by the author (“drawn in by the novelist for the orchestration of his themes and for the refracted (indirect) expression of his intentions and values” (292)). While romance writers and associated professionals do occasionally use ‘voice’ to refer to the voices of the characters as a multiplicity, most often what they are referring to is voice as an index, and a unifying one, of the author, a link between the novel and the individual who wrote it. As the teacher of the romance writing course I took suggested, the “single most important element of writing is voice”: “the personality of the writer” (field notes 119).

In her consideration of brand, Haraway draws on Mark Rose’s work on the development of copyright in England in the 18th and 19th century to discuss how the individual and the market are linked together. She quotes Rose who suggests that “copyright is founded on the concept of the unique individual who creates something original and is entitled to reap a profit from those labours” (Rose 1993:2) and then goes on to discuss the argument that:

before the modern concept of an author with legally enforceable rights to intellectual property could make sense, literary production and consumption went through changes like those of land: the literary commons were ‘enclosed,’ and collective processes of production were appropriated by and to individual owners, who came to appear as sole authors and as proprietors of the self. Individual genius came to be seen as the source of
originality and value in a work; the person stamped its products with the force of its mind and soul. The reworking the models of nature and of the classics gave way to conceptions of originality and the bounded individual with property in the self. The many actors involved in making a literary text gave place to the inspired author of a work. Literature was commodified in new and socially powerful ways that reached to the heart of what would count as a person and a person’s products. (Haraway 1997:71-72)

Romance writers experience the tensions generated by this enclosing of the literary commons. As discussed in Chapter Three, in their community writing practices romance writers often foreground generic ties, rather than ‘individual genius’. Yet, their notions of authorship and interests in authorship as a profession also depend on this “modern concept of an author with legally enforceable rights to intellectual property.” The use of the term ‘voice’ in the romance writing community connects to this system of literary production and copyright where the individual is an essential term. Romance writers are writing for a mass audience, yet have to pass through a narrow set of gatekeepers (editors and agents) to do so. They are also working in an atmosphere of both massification and individualization. Writing in the romance genre works to create similarity (that is, the genre has been fairly standardized), while the publishing climate also requires a certain amount of differentiation (for example, romance subgenres are currently proliferating). The question of the ‘individual,’ then, is of great interest in interaction between writers and these publishing gatekeepers.

But just as ‘voice’ is often used on the boundary of metaphor among anthropologists, it is similarly fuzzy in its use in romance circles. Like ‘flexibility’, that fuzziness may be part of its appeal. A July 2008 feature in the Romance Writers Report called “Love your voice” begins with the following:

Writers pray they have it, agents live to sell it, and editors want to print it. But what is it? We hear about voice all the time. In rejection letters (great voice, but the story just wasn’t right for us), contest score sheets, and critiques (awesome voice, but work on your hook), and that all important call from an agent or editor (love your voice!).

What exactly this emphasis on voice means, though, is sometimes opaque to both authors and editors. This can be frustrating for writers. Here voice means something ineffable, the feel or texture of a novel. It is not simply how voice indexes the social identity of the author. ‘Voice’ becomes a marker of the quality and desirability of their novel. But it especially means something individual and unique.

152 Vol 28, No. 7, pg 14, Julie Rowe.
Voice, Individuality and Authenticity
As an excellent example of how ‘voice’ comes to mean individual, when used by editors in conjunction with ‘new’ ‘voice’ is often metonymic of author. At the RWA National conferences, publishers hold ‘Spotlights’ where editors describe what they are looking for and currently publishing, usually using some current authors and novels as examples and thus serving both an informational and a marketing function. At the RWA National conference in San Francisco editors at the ‘Spotlight on Harlequin’ described themselves as “always looking for new voices”, “new voices and seasoned authors” (field notes 42, 41). New ‘voice’ here means new writer.

As I mentioned earlier, this linking of voice and individuality and the need for ‘new’ voices is a feature of the current publishing market; as Mills and Boons, and later Harlequin, developed genre romance in the early 20th century, there was a certain degree of variation in the novels (see Rampure 2005, Dixon 1999). Through the 1960s and 1970s, however, they became more standardized, as Harlequin managed their brand identity, thrived at selling romances and took over the market. While there were a number of authors who commanded an audience based on their own name, the brand of Harlequin was at the forefront of novels’ identities in terms of promotion and readership (see Grescoe 1996). Through the 1980s and 1990s, more publishers began to seriously publish genre romance and various subgenres were codified. As this happened, author identity and author promotion were also fore-grounded. For example, romance writers do book signings which was not common in romance in the 1960s. To a certain extent, there is the idea that because of both the vastness and particularity of the market, differentiating oneself as an author is more important. As an author in the above-mentioned article from RWR suggests, “that’s why you should never directly compare yourself to another writer—editors don’t want another Janet Evanovich, they already have one. They want someone new, with an equally powerful, but different, voice” (15).

Writers directed to ‘find their voice’ or told that editors are looking for a ‘voice’ are often faced with the same quandary as those directed to ‘be yourself’ while being uncertain as to what exact parts of themselves are being judged and how exactly they are not currently ‘being themselves’. While editors, agents and writers occasionally mention a specific author as an example when discussing voice, generally there is no specific referent for ‘voice’. That is, unlike the film media I have discussed (Taylor 2009), there are few examples of ‘bad voices’ or

153 It is a much discussed idea among writers (not just romance writers) that authors are now expected to be much more active in promoting their work themselves. This self-promotion is more generally a feature of flexible capitalism.
segments of text which demonstrate good versus bad voices. The unspoken ‘other’ is more often no voice, rather than ‘bad’ voice.

The issue here is that ‘voice’ is understood to be an inextricable part of a person’s interior identity, hence the other meanings of ‘finding your voice’: being able to express your deepest desires, wishes, claims to power, and so on. For example, in an RWR interview with author Lynda Sandoval, the interviewer and author discuss voice:

Q: “...You do workshops on helping writers find the voice they were born with. But doesn’t voice also develop over time? A writer’s voice at the beginning of her career may not be the one she uses in multiple genres or as her talent emerges. How does a writer know when the voice is right?”

A: “...Our writing definitely changes and develops over time; however, I think the core of one’s voice is and has always been there. [...] In my first manuscript] my writer’s voice, the essence of who I am and how I say things—my world view—was there, just raw and undeveloped.”

Here the ‘writer’s voice’ is equated with who she is – a unitary enduring ‘core’ that she was ‘born with’. But while ‘voice’ is understood to be an expression of interiority, a ‘voice’ in a literary sense does not necessarily come ‘naturally’. A writer cannot take their ‘everyday voice’ and simply transpose it onto the page. They have to learn or find what it means to express individuality in the context of the publishing industry. The ‘voice’ has to be, as acknowledged above, ‘developed’ and prepared for the market.

In his work on creative writing programs and jazz education, Eitan Wilf argues for the importance “to contemporary notions of modern subjectivity” of a semiotic ideology where the “materiality of semiotic forms is fully incorporated into the architecture of the self and is seen as a condition of possibility for the self’s articulation” (2011:463). He suggests that the artist “has become one of the key models for modern subjectivity (Taylor 1989:376)” (Wilf 465). According to Wilf, this semiotic ideology is “epitomized in the normative ideal of self-expression that has emerged from Sentimentalism and Romanticism” (463). Romance writers’ discussions of ‘voice’ fit in very well with this semiotic ideology. As Wilf argues, although “this semiotic ideology has emphasized the radical uniqueness of each individual, it has also allowed the mobilization of the materiality of semiotic forms as a means for realizing and articulating this uniqueness” (2011: 463).

Drawing on Colin Campbell’s work on consumerism and the Romantic ethic, Wilf argues that “at the end of the 18th century, Sentimentalism evolved into full-blown Romanticism.

Romanticism criticized Sentimentalism for promoting public displays of emotions that were conducive to insincerity and resolved the problem by advancing a normative ideal of radical interiority and self-creativity, while retaining Sentimentalism’s emphasis on the role of the imagination, feelings, and pleasure. Drawing on organic metaphors, Romanticism argued that each individual has his or her own nature or voice with which he or she must be in touch and to which he or she must remain faithful. However, crucially, such organic metaphors also stipulated that this nature cannot be known prior to its articulation.” (2011: 470-1). Romance writers’ discussions of voice exemplify both Sentimentalist and Romantic approaches to sincerity.

Although Wilf does not discuss the gendering of these ideologies, Romanticism’s rejection of Sentimentalism was also caught up with masculinizing of authorship. If the creative artist is one of the “key models of modern subjectivity” as Wilf argues, studying romance writers can remind how subjectivity has been gendered and push us to re-center subjectivities which have been left out of the story.

In another interview in RWR an author discusses how they began writing romance: “I sat down in the local library for a month and learned everything I could about the publishing world […] Eventually, I found my voice and went on from there”155. Just as Wilf argues, here the voice, the location of individual authenticity, can be discovered through the process of creation. At the same time, the voice must not lose its authenticity through over-working. For example, at a CRW panel, one author suggests the worst advice on writing she got was “people trying to ‘change [her] voice’” (fieldnotes 143). Likewise, at an RWA conference editors from Bantam Dell cautioned against over-critique-grouping a manuscript156, suggesting that the work needs to stay “authentic” (fieldnotes 51), whereas the agent discussed at the beginning of this section stated that things go wrong when the voice sounds “like they’re trying to do something too hard […] not natural to them […] falseness, stilted” (fieldnotes 445). The ‘voice’ must then express an individual self who is authentically market appropriate; that is, their particular authenticity is appealing in some way.

Categorizing Individual Voices: Subgenre and Genre

While voice marks the individual as an authentic individual in the marketplace, it also marks their appropriate place in the marketplace. Different voices are aligned with subgenres of romance one ought to be publishing in. In the romance writing course I took at a local college,

155 Romance Writers Report June 2008 vol 28, no 6, interview with Celeste O. Norfleet, p. 42
156 That is, changing it too much based on feedback from one’s critique group.
the instructor told us that it was ‘crucially important’ to ‘find your voice,’ to ‘create your voice.’ He said that the other half was “finding out what you should be writing – what genre – what kind of voice”, suggesting in the case of one student that perhaps she “should be going towards humour, not romance” (field notes 214). That is, he suggested that her voice did not match the generic expectations of romance writing and that rather than trying to change either her voice or the genre, she should redirect her attentions to another genre.

A writer’s voice, then, can be also understood as something that makes them appropriate or not appropriate for a certain sub-genre of romance. For example, from an interview with Gena Showalter in *RWR* (December 2008, Volume 28, no. 12, pg 42):

Q: “You discovered that your voice was contemporary, not historical, even though you read a lot of historicals and wanted to write them. If a voice doesn’t come naturally, do you think a writer can develop it?”

A: “Sure. I think anything can be learned with enough practice and study. I played with the genres until I not only found a fit, but something I enjoyed.” (42)

Here contemporary and historical, two subgenres of romance, are understood to require different voices. This quote exposes the tensions between ‘voice’ as an expression of the authentic individual and ‘voice’ as a craft technique, worked on to sell books in the market. Thus, a ‘voice’ can be ‘discovered’ yet also ‘learned’; it can be ‘practiced’ but also needs to have a ‘fit.’ Gena Showalter suggests that one can learn voice, yet she has found success writing in the subgenre which came ‘more naturally’.

Yet while writers’ voices then are categorized into subgenres oriented towards the market, a writer’s ‘individuality’ rather than simple adherence to subgeneric ‘voice’ is seen to be an important factor in their success. At the City Public Library Residency talk quoted above, the Writer-in-Residence suggested that this is something which was not always the case in romance writing. As I mentioned earlier, Harlequin in particular went through a period of standardization during the 1960s and 1970s, where the brand was the most important thing about the books. Here, voice as a marker of individuality was not necessarily a good thing. But in the current conditions, while urged to know their genre and be writing within it, writers are cautioned not to lose their individuality:

Author Gemma Halliday (*Scandal Sheet*) was at the point where she had nothing to lose when she made the leap and began writing from her strengths. ‘When I first started writing, I really tried to force my voice into the mould that I thought would sell best. I wrote five full novels that way—all of them garnering me interest from editors, but no offers. I was really frustrated at that point and decided to just forget every ‘rule’ I knew and write what I wanted, what felt natural and fun to me. That book really helped me
find my true voice as a writer, and, while it didn’t sell, it grabbed the attention of an editor who bought my next book.\(^\text{157}\) (32)

**Voice and Society**

In an article on film (Taylor 2009), I argue that anxieties around literal voices in sound films were not simply about actors’ recorded voices in isolation, but about their effects on hearers: audiences and publics. While referring to a written manifestation of voice, rather than voice as an oral and aural medium, the use of voice in the context of publishing also points to the connections between writer and reader (metaphorically speaker and hearer), placing them in a relationship of immediacy and intimacy. Voice is understood as something that connects the writer to the audience directly, in a way that story and character do not. Voice, because it is heard as expressing the individual, means that the reader is connecting with the author, not simply the mass-produced book they are currently reading. In her RWR article, Rowe suggests “it puts one of the elements of voice center stage: emotion. The reader should *feel* there is a writer behind the words” (15). Here, voice allows the reader to ‘feel’ the writer, and is a written embodiment of the authentic, individual emotional author.

Yet what is effaced here by the focus on the individual and authentic voice is the very social categories and identities which linguistic anthropologists talk about being tied up with voice. In contrast to the film context, in romance writing discussions voices are not explicitly linked to ethnicity, class or gender. Writers are not exhorted to have a more ‘womanly’ voice or a more Anglo one, but these *are* factors which go into the gate-keeping systems which form the romance genre. For example, until relatively recently, almost all genre romance was written by white women, about white women and men. Now black authors, while not published exclusively in these lines, are often published in separate African-American lines such as Kimani. Voice then can become a way to evade questions of social class, education, and race and focus attention on the individual stripped of these categories, the rational speaking subject as discussed by Weidman (2006). Like other discourses of flexible labour, it focusses on the individual as a free agent whose self is desired by companies.

### Sign of the Writer: Pennames and Market Identity

As I have argued above, discussions of writing between writers and publishing gatekeepers often refer to the category of individual manifested in ‘voice’ to explain success in the publishing

market, eliding the social forms which also structure the market and individuals. Discussions amongst writers often materialize this writerly market individuality in the form of pennames. In this context, a name is a marker of an individual and a penname a marker of an individual entered into the market. If ‘voice’ focuses attention on the interior individuality of a writer, pennames, complementarily, give that interiority an exterior social identity, one more explicitly marked by gender, ethnicity, and so on. Pennames in the romance writing community exemplify two aspects of names Bodenhorn and Vom Bruck foreground in their introduction to The Anthropology of Names and Naming: “the property-like potential in names to transact social value” and “the powerful connection between name and self-identity” (2006: 2). While voice focuses on individual unity, however, pennames enable multiplicity and the separation of public and private selves. They are thus especially relevant for romance writers entering the marketplace as women. Pennames enable a separation of public ‘author’ self and private, often familial or marital, self. Yet in practice pennames (and the market) are not so clearly separated between public and private and the connections between names and self-identity emerge in creative ways.

Market Identity, as Individual

As the quote at the beginning of this chapter concerning author/publisher disputes over control of pennames indicates, in romance publishing pennames are inextricably bound up in author/publisher relations. Many of the published authors who I spoke with first chose pennames at the suggestion of their publisher. Brenda had three pennames by the time I spoke to her, about fifteen years after she was first published, although one of them was ‘asleep,’ as she described it. Just before I recorded the interview I quote from below, I was hanging out with Brenda as she signed books at a bookstore in the downtown core of the city. We chatted in-between visits from women on break from the surrounding offices. Later we walked through the underground mall to the food court for our interview. Since she was signing books under two names, the question of pennames arose:

Jessica: Oh, so you were mentioning about pen names. Would you rather not have one?

Brenda: I don’t know. It’s not a simple thing. It’s, uh, it’s not something that I consciously ever thought about. Or planned. Initially. When I sold my first book (early to mid nineties), I was told that I had to take a pseudonym. I am not certain whether that was actually true, even then. But you know, what people say to you, when you don’t

I acknowledge here the irony of using pseudonyms to talk about pennames.
have representation (\textit{(that is, an agent)})\rq. When you don
\textquote{t know anybody in the industry. You- It might not even have been stated as- I don"t remember. It might not even have been stated as you must. It might have been we"d prefer. [J: Right] You know. I don"t even remember it was so long ago. I know that the house ((the publishing house)) wanted people to take a pseudonym. And so, it didn"t bother me, particularly. I thought, why not. Wouldn"t it be great to have a cool name?

In this context, a penname is an expression of market relations. As Brenda states above, often publishers were the source of penname impetus, sometimes pushing for more than one. For publishers the factors that go into choosing a penname involve a certain view of the readership and how they interact with books and authors. Most prominently, this reflects a concern with the social identity that is projected by a penname and with the clear organization of the field into authors and subgenres.\textsuperscript{159} That is, pennames are chosen which index a generally Anglo identity and are \textquote{appropriate} to the subgenre. Romance publishers depend on consistency to keep readers. This is another way in which generic ties are emphasized in genre publishing, as discussed in the previous chapter. The generally accepted wisdom is that readers need to know what they are getting when they open a book. These expectations are managed through book design, cover copy and titles, but also through pennames. Publishers use pennames to manage readers’ interactions with books, by standardizing names to match up with an imagined audience’s ease of recognition and by segmenting an individual author’s output into various names that match up with slightly different genres or subgenres of books. The prototypical example writers give of an occasion when they would use two different pennames is if they were writing YA and erotica, two genres which are seen as being as far away from each other in audience as possible.\textsuperscript{160} As the initial quote indicates, publishers have also used pennames as a tool to manage authors and their ability to capitalize on their \textquote{name recognition}.

In this way the link between publisher and penname persists, while they may no longer have complete ownership of the name in the way they did earlier.\textsuperscript{161} Chatting with a soon-to-be-published author at the reception after the October 2009 CRW meeting, I mentioned pennames and she told me her publisher had asked her for one. Apparently they thought her last name was hard to spell and not \textquote{romantic} enough.\textsuperscript{162} They also suggested she choose a new last name which began with a letter in the middle of alphabet. She agreed and got help from her critique

\textsuperscript{159} See Chapter Five for another discussion of the literary \textquote{field} as a concept.\textsuperscript{160} Two genres for which writers may not want readers of the one (or their parents) to know they also write the other.\textsuperscript{161} Interestingly, I never heard a story about a writer refusing to choose a penname if asked, although not all romance authors have pennames.\textsuperscript{162} From my perspective her last name seemed neither unusual nor difficult to spell.
group and agent to choose a new last name (field notes 423). Another author I interviewed also mentioned pronounceability and spelling as a reason for writing under a penname:

Jessica: And uh. Did you start out. Do you write under a pen name? Or is it. How did that come about?

Sandra: Well my real name, nobody could ever spell my real name, or pronounce my real name. So I thought, well, that’s not very good in a book store. Walk into a book store, they can’t remember who I am. And I really think it’s really fun to choose a pen name. It was the fun factor with me. Number one reason. And it is a lot of fun. You know, you don’t really get to choose your own name in life, but you do with a pen name. You can be you know, whoever you want to be. It adds a bit of mystery to it. It’s just fun. (Interview 2009)

The concern over ‘pronounceability’ and spelling reveals a view of a mass audience which finds a subset of generally Anglo last names ‘easy’ to pronounce and spell. These names then index a relationship of accessibility between genre authors and readers. This is an interesting contrast with the genre of literary fiction, where the question of reader ease of pronunciation does not seem to arise and pennames are currently less prevalent. For genre fiction though, the author’s market identity, as indexed by their last name, is one where differences of language and ethnicity have been smoothed away. In the next chapter I will discuss in more detail how writers’ organizations imagine the relationships between authors and mass global audience.

Yet while certain differences are smoothed over, the market still requires differentiated individuals. In August 2009, the monthly CRW meeting was held in a temporary location, a Jewish community centre near a university campus, and the speaker had not shown up due to her plane being delayed in Denver. The CRW members who came anyway sat in a circle and unpublished members asked for advice from the published members. In addition to discussions about trends, publishers, finishing a book and crafting themes, the topic of pennames arose. One author mentioned that when she started publishing with Harlequin they wanted her to choose a new penname. They were especially keen on her changing her first name, as they published another author in the same subgenre with the same first name (field notes 387-8).

The last names of writers for Kimani seem to equally tend towards short ‘Anglo’ last names, like Thomas and Jackson.

She had been writing under her own name for another publisher.
These requests for pennames operate under the premise that the field of books and names must be clearly distinguished so that readers can make their choices in the most straightforward fashion. Pennames become micro-equivalents of ‘lines’ and subgenres which guide readers’ expectations of the contents of novels. An arena of clearly segmented subgenres requires clearly segmented authors, distinguished from each other by the sign of their name. Author identity, like voice, must be unique. What constitutes unique though is market determined; that is, authors must be unique compared to other authors writing for the same publisher. Unlike the world of day-to-day life, where people often have the same names, the public market requires that the author’s name indexes them only.

Publishers also prefer that each distinct name authors books in one distinct subgenre. At the same meeting discussed above, Claire mentioned that her publisher asked her to pick a new pseudonym for a urban fantasy series she just started writing. That brought the total up to three pennames. Her YA publisher had asked her to split off her website, since she had just published a category romance with a higher level of sex. This separation is common in romance publishing. In an interview with RWR, Elizabeth Hoyt discusses her pennames:

Q: You also write contemporaries as Julia Harper. How did that shift come about? Will you stay with both genres?

EH: I started out writing historicals, and when they didn’t immediately sell, I wrote a contemporary—Hot. Once I sold The Raven Prince to Grand Central Publishing, we offered Hot to my editor as well, and to my surprise, she loved it! Suddenly, I had not one, but two careers. (RWR October 2009:42)

Flexibility is then marked by the willingness to take on other names and write in many genres. A penname becomes even more clearly a market directed identity; different market contexts require a different penname/identity. As Brenda stated when describing the evolution of her second penname:

So, when I went there (a second publisher), they were concerned, there was concern about my option clause with (first publisher) (.) about branding them differently because they were time travels which were half contemporary and the magic ones were all contemporary, so there would be a mixed message for the reader and so I thought, nobody can say (previous penname) anywhere, who knew, so let’s just Anglicize it. And do (second penname). (Interview 1 with Brenda)

Separating pennames by subgenre is one way of managing reader expectations, along with other methods which brand books by genre such as cover art, back copy, imprint or series name. The downside of this is that readers who like books published under one penname may not move into the readership for their other penname. It is important to understand, though, that for most
authors these pennames are not necessarily meant to conceal each other. Elizabeth Hoyt’s website, for example, links to Julia Harper’s and vice versa. When I went to visit Brenda at a signing she was having in the underground malls of downtown, she had books written under both of her currently active pennames out on the table and paused each time she signed one to make sure she was signing the correct penname.

This is not necessarily a stable system, however. Brenda told me that she believes that

This is starting to change, because everything’s cyclical, right. I think that we’ve come through the biggest phase of dividing author’s work by brand into more of a phase of conglomerating under one name […] I know people who have four or five names, it’s crazy. It’s just crazy. It’s gonna go the other way. There’s a middle ground that works.

Pennames and Authorial Identity
The penname is not simply a publisher imposition, however. As Bodenhorn and vom Bruck suggest in the context of Derrida’s discussion of the author signature, “the signature makes a name the intermediary between public and private” (2006: 15). Authors use pennames to create an authorial identity, one both separate from one’s life elsewhere and existing in the public sphere of books. A pseudonym both hides one name and creates another for itself. In this way, it is different from both a ‘real’ name, which posits a unity between author and self, and from the literary name of Anonymous, which hides a name without creating one. Romance fiction is a genre particularly dominated by women: as authors, editors, publishers and readers. Women writers are no strangers to the changeability of names, both in the field of literature and in their own personal lives. As Judith Butler argues:

for women, then, propriety is achieved through having a changeable name, through the exchange of names, which means that the name is never permanent, and that the identity secured through the name is always dependent on the social exigencies of paternity and marriage. Expropriation is thus the condition of identity for women. Identity is secured precisely in and through the transfer of the name, the name as a site of transfer or substitution, the name, then, as precisely what is always impermanent, different from itself, more than itself, the non-self-identical. (1993:153)

As women in contemporary North America, most of the authors I spoke to were also accustomed to the changeability of women’s names through marriage. At the RWA National Conference 2009, members of the Beau Monde chapter (writers of Regency romance), ate, drank and chatted at their evening party. A number of the writers had come in costume, in Regency-style dresses that they had made themselves or purchased on e-bay or from a costume store. I
was regaled with the tale of the writer who attended the party the year before dressed as a Regency Rake. I noted down the following conversation in my field notes:

They’re chatting about A [the editor of an author I knew]’s wedding last year – someone comes up and makes a comment about how A looked familiar, but last name different – then get into conversation about name changes – A says she found it pretty easy – sometimes gets correspondence in old name and is like ‘that woman doesn’t exist’ – C talks about how when she got married, wanted to change credit cards, etc. into married name, but would have needed husband’s signature – and rebelled against that – so for a while, she worked with two sets of ID, in 2 names (fieldnotes 339)

A number of authors use their maiden name as their penname. One of the authors I mentioned above chose her maiden name as a penname when asked by the publisher to choose a new last name (field notes 387-8). This familiarity with the changeability of names might be one reason why so few writers seemed intent on publishing under their ‘real’ name. Flexibility of identity has often been required of women.

Separating an author-identity from the author’s personal and other work-life is another reason romance writers chose a penname. Given the reputation of romance fiction in the general public, as I discussed in Chapter One, being known as a romance writer by those in your non-writing life is not always a desirable thing. It is well-known within the romance community that English Professor and historical romance author Eloisa James, for instance, started writing under that name in part to conceal her identity from her academic department and only came out as a romance author after she received tenure. My roommate at the RWA National Conference in 2008 said she would write under a penname because she did not want any of her extended family finding out she was a writer.

Writer, then, is not a fully respectable identity and romance writer even less so. Many discussions concerning pennames mention the role they play in keeping children in the writer’s life from finding out about the books they have published. In an interview in RWR, Delilah Devlin discusses how she kept her identity as a writer of erotic romance secret from her high school students:

Q: “In a TV interview, you said you didn’t want the high school kids you taught finding out that you wrote steamy romances. Did they?”

A: “I did have to dodge the bullet for the two years I taught there because the principal let slip […] that I was a writer. […] Of course, the word got around and every day was a twenty questions quiz. I’d get, ‘I bet you’re Laurel K Hamilton’ (they knew I loved vampires.) I had only two students who discovered my identity due to their superior hacking ability. They came and whispered the secret name in my ear, and I told them if they wanted me to remain their teacher, they couldn’t tell a soul” (RWR February 2009:42)
A penname, while a public name, could then also become a ‘secret name,’ keeping two (or more) arenas of an author’s life separate.

Creating a penname is for most writers, however, more about constructing a public authorial identity than obscuring or hiding an everyday one. A number of authors I talked with mentioned wanting to be a writer, but not initially feeling like they fit the identity of author. Sandra, a multi-published author of historical romances, told me that

Ever since I was a teenager I read a lot and I always thought that I would someday write a novel. I always knew that I would, but I always thought that old people wrote novels. Cause if you looked at the back jacket, it’s always older people, so I figured I had to do something first, and then when I retired, I would, I would write. (Interview 2009)

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the identity of ‘author’ in the West has not been equally available to all people, especially women and non-white men and women. Western literature has a long history of women writing under male or gender-neutral pennames in an effort to conceal or neutralize their identity as a woman author. At the October CRW meeting, the speaker, an author and academic, discussed the status of bestseller lists and their tendency to be, as she saw it, dominated by men. “Women writers are bilingual,” she said and pointed to the names J.D. Robb (Nora Roberts’ other penname) and J.K. Rowling. “Now the big thing is,” she continued, “they use initials.” Comparing these writers to George Eliot, she wondered if we had “come no further?” (field notes 409). Pennames in romance fiction, though, are almost entirely clearly female. There are a few men writing under male names and a few more writing under female pennames. The readership is predominately female and as such writers are not expected to conceal their gender. If they want to move into a genre with a larger male readership or more ‘masculine’ image, as Nora Roberts did when she started to publish mysteries as J.D. Robb, then they are more likely to take on gender neutral names or initials. Romance writer pennames then express the possibility of a female authorial identity, in the context of a female-gendered publishing sector.

Writer, then, is not an everyday identity. It is something that must be created, constructed. This process can be experienced as a creative endeavour. For example, Brenda discussed the thought that went into choosing her first penname:

My husband has a unique name and he’s just always like, oh, life would have been so much easier if my name had not been so distinctive and so it’s, we always want what we don’t have, I guess. So I thought, hey cool, I could have a French name. Wouldn’t that

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165 In fact, as I discuss in the next chapter, the appeal of the genre is imagined to be grounded on the universality of gendered interests in romance.
be fun? And I never really thought about it very much. My first book was set during the Crusades, the protagonists were French during the twelfth century. Thirteenth century. And so I thought, a French name, ((name)) would be perfect, because it’s all about the crusades, right. And also I always thought that romance was very much larger than life. It was a heroic genre. I remember going to the ((indistinct)) museum and seeing the paintings of ((painter)), which I had seen in school of course, in slide projectors and in books. And they are epic and they are heroic. […] His work, his use of colour, his dramatic moments […] , I thought, that’s really evocative of like, what romance is all about and so that would be a really cool name. (Interview with Brenda 2009)\(^{166}\)

Brenda (like Sandra) found the process of choosing a penname an enjoyable one, which used her creative skills and offered her the opportunity to create an interesting, ‘cool’ name. While my discussions of flexibility at times focus on obligation, it is important to remember that the experience for writers is also often one of enjoyment. The two are often connected. ‘Creative’ careers give writers an opportunity to choose a ‘cool’ career, as well as a ‘cool’ name.

One stage of developing an author identity, then, is choosing a pen name. In July 2009, one of the writers emailed the CRW general listserv to get our advice on a penname, linking us to her blog with two posts. In her first post she discussed her motivation for choosing a penname:

“It’s a totally counter-intuitive choice—I’m not even willing to take [husband]’s name when we get married, but as many articles and advice column suggest, romance authors choosing nom de plumes should take on identities and stick to them. I’ve never been anything other than me, and I’m rather sheepishly unapologetic about it (why yes, that is an oxymoron, but so am I). So how do you go about turning yourself into someone else?”\(^{167}\)

This blog post makes clear the connections between a penname and a new identity: ‘someone else.’ While some found that possibility exciting, others like the author above found it awkward. Likewise, in another interview, sitting in the Starbucks, Patricia took the ethics form I had for all my interviews and asked “Do you want me to sign my real name? Or my penname?”

The stage at which writers feel like they can or should make that claim on an author identity varies. Talking to one unpublished writer at the October 2009 CRW meeting, I mentioned I might be writing something about pennames. She replied that she finds it odd that non-writers always ask her if she has one, despite the fact that she is unpublished. In fact, she

\(^{166}\) Here the tendency towards Anglicizing last names was in conflict with a (not currently as popular?) tendency towards ‘romantic’ and ‘evocative’ names – often French in origin. As I mentioned earlier, however, her latest pennames are not French.

\(^{167}\) I have not cited the web address here, for purposes of maintaining anonymity.
does not have a penname as she thinks the first stage in becoming a writer is to finish a book manuscript and the second is to publish. Only then will she feel like author (field notes 423). And, by implication, only then would she choose a penname. In Chapter One I discussed how writers groups orient writers to producing for the market; the role of pennames is another example of that orientation. Taking on a penname(s) indicates an orientation towards a new, market author-identity. Like the professionalism discussed in Chapter One, the penname too becomes a locus of strategies of control.

“Seven letters or less”: Pennames and Control

“[author] says the business is ‘like a lottery’, but you need to buy a ticket; [another author] says Jennifer Crusie said it was like ‘getting struck by lightning’” (October 2009 field notes - 424)

The penname, then, is a marker of a new identity, that of author, and as such becomes the repository of many theories and strategies from both the publisher and author side. In the second post on her blog on choosing her penname, the previously mentioned writer set out a few strategies that went into making the choice:

I thought I’d share a few tips from various persons in the industry about choosing a pen name. I learned a lot, especially, from a workshop romance author Eloisa James gave the [CRW] a while ago:
1. Make the name short, less than seven letters long. The size of the font used on the cover will be bigger this way. Don't forget, you're competing with a whole bunch of other romance books and authors--make yours stick out.
2. On choosing your last name, think about who you’ll be close to, and who you want to associate your work with.
3. Be wary of picking letters at the end of the alphabet: in big bookstores, that usually means you'll be at the bottom right-hand corner of the bookshelf, where no one will see your books.\(^{168}\)

Here the penname is invested with numerological and alphabetical properties, which structure how it mediates between an author and their audience. It can determine, physically, how readers interact with the book whose cover it marks and can influence their buying decisions, by placing the book at certain locations on the shelf, by being more (or less) visible. In some ways, discussions about pennames seem less about the name itself, than about trying to control an industry which is often unpredictable (like the lottery and lightning, as above). This

\(^{168}\) I have not cited the web address here, for purposes of maintaining anonymity.
was not the only reference authors made to either themselves or the publishers suggesting they choose a penname starting with a letter in the middle of the alphabet.

A new penname, as well as a change of subgenre, is also discussed as a strategy to fix a stagnating or declining career. An article in the August 2008 RWR suggested that “author Emily Bryan (Distracting the Duchess) had only to take a pseudonym and choose a more marketable setting and lighter tone for her historical romances to find success after sales of the Viking romances she had written as Diana Groe proved weaker than expected” (RWR August 2008 :15). In our interview, Brenda explained how pennames could be used to ‘get around’ certain technical aspects of the industry itself:

If people take pseudonyms, what’s happened in the last five years, so people have started over with pseudonyms, because of the- I don’t want to be overly dramatic, but there was a really big dip in sales volume in the US book market after September 11th. It depends who you’re talking to, the book market either dropped by a third or half, in terms of gross dollar value. And that subsequent year. And it’s made some recovery. But, the problem is, that your numbers are tracked by your name. So when the distributors all consolidated. […] You only have six big accounts, generously speaking, I mean in Canada you technically have one. And you call up that buyer and say, hey, we’ve got the next Jessica Taylor book coming out and we’re really excited about it and we think you should take a bunch and she goes, let’s see how Jessica sold. I sold, last time I ordered eight thousand copies of her book, we sold, four thousand. I’m only gonna buy four thousand, right. And so those four thousand. what happens, not necessarily, so those four thousand will get distributed over their whole book network and there are gonna be stores where you sell better than others, for whatever reason, and they’re not always gonna be in the right place. So, the place where you’re selling really well might not have any and the place that can’t sell you for love or money had twelve. And so then they- So the next time they say, oh we only sold 3, 200 of Jessica’s book and you can get into this kind of spiral. And when you change houses, or you start a new project, or you do something fresh, which is usually what authors do to reinvent themselves, what has been happening is in the last five years, is the house says, Jess, we love this, we know we can sell this, we can take this out and we can ((indistinct)). Could she write under another name? Because then they can’t pick up your numbers. No, seriously. They cannot look at your number. The order size will not be condemned by your sales history. We can take it out and say, this is a new author, this is a new project, even if we tell you who you are, you know, we can give them, they can talk about the promotional budget, what we’re gonna do to take it out, the package, the buzz, whatever marketing platform you have and you know, maybe they’ll take 15 thousand. And so that’s it’s been a way of getting authors back. (Interview with Brenda 2009)

In an extreme form, then, the penname can become the whole of a writer’s market identity and a new name offers the possibility of a new start.

In an RWR interview, Jayne Ann Krentz (the author of one of the novels I analyzed in Chapter Two) discusses how her pseudonyms have been part of her efforts to manage her career, although not always completely successfully:
Q: “Your career has been hugely successful, but also you’ve had to reinvent yourself to survive what you’ve labelled as ‘near-death career disasters.’ Tell us about those’

A: “I’m living proof that an author can shoot herself in the foot on a number of occasions and survive. Disastrous career moves? Let me count the ways. There was my very first book, for starters, a novel of futuristic paranormal romance. It never sold. I went back to the drawing board and fired up my contemporary career. Managed to lose the first of what turned out to be a number of pennames by signing a bad contract. Had to start all over again with a new name. Changed publishers again and had to start over yet again with another new name.

A few years later I managed to nearly kill off my successful Jayne Ann Krentz (JAK) career by, yes, once again trying to publish some futuristic paranormal romances under the same name that I was using for the contemporaries. Big mistake. The sinking print runs meant I had to start over again—with a new name and a new subgenre this time. That’s when I invented Amanda Quick (AQ) and launched my historical romance career […]

And so it goes, I’ve come to see the ability to reinvent myself as the key to survival in this business.” (RWR August 2009 – 41)

Thus pennames are self-inventions, both by and of the self, for a particular purpose in the market of selves. They can be reinvented by a change in both form (names) and content (subgenre). Like the self in the context of neo-liberalism, they are the subject of management, quantification and risk. While talk of voice from gatekeepers focuses attention on writers as individuals, talk of pennames amongst writers disrupts the vision of authentic identity found in voice by focussing on how identities are developed in relation to markets and (while still muted) social categories. Like voice, though, discussions of pennames participate in the effort to corral agency within the system and locate it in the authors. In the final section of this chapter I will discuss the culmination of market identity in the form of brand.

**Market Identity, as Brand**

Russ set the tone for me when she opened Part Eight of *The Female Man* with the words of Jael, the techno-enhanced warrior woman: ‘Who am I? I know who I am but what’s my brand name?’ (Russ 1975:157). Sibling to Jael, the FemaleMan© is generic woman ‘enterprised up’ (Haraway 1997:70)

As more attention is focussed on individual authors in romance, market identity and professional identity coalesce into brand. In his review of the semiotics of brand, Paul Manning argues that ‘brand’ has come to be seen as exemplifying the current state of capitalism: “a privileged semiotic object that is felt to epitomize the contemporary period of capitalism” (34). Celia Lury has explored the place of brands and branding in the contemporary economy. In a 2009 paper she gives a brief history of the development of ‘branding’ over the 19th and 20th centuries.
Drawing on Anne McClintock’s (1995) work, Lury argues that branding initially became important during a period when markets became more geographically dispersed (2009: 68). This, according to McClintock, led to “a major transformation in the economy: generic items formerly indistinguishable from one another - soap sold simply as soap - came to be marketed as distinctive through the use of corporate signatures or brand names, such as Pears and Monkey Brand” (Lury 2009: 68). That is, brands were developed in order to mediate between producers and consumers in a context where the two were geographically dispersed. As Lury puts it: “the early stages of the development of the brand were intended to allow the producer to speak ‘directly’ to the consumer through presentation, packaging and other media. In other words, the development of corporate and product personalities that characterizes the early stages of the development of the modern brand was in part an attempt to circumvent or limit the role of the retailer as markets were stretched geographically” (68). Brand, then, is parallel to ‘voice’ in connecting readers and writers through personality. As I explore in more detail in the next chapter, this geographical distance between producer and reader shapes the ways in which writers think about their work and their relationship to their reading audience(s).

In romance publishing, brand first became important for publishers. Harlequin’s brand was developed through the 1960s and 1970s, as it discovered that its romances were selling best and then constructed ‘Harlequin’ as a brand which equalled romance169. As McKnight-Trontz writes in *The Art of Love*, “as early as the 1970s, Harlequin president W. Lawrence Heisey, a former executive for Proctor and Gamble, argued that the qualities of the product itself were unimportant in designing sales campaigns. ‘Of greater significance,’ said Heisey, ‘is the ability to identify an audience or consuming public, the discovery of a way to reach that audience, and finally, the forging of an association in the consumer’s mind between a generic product like soap, facial tissue, or romantic fiction and the company name through the mediation of a deliberately created image’” (2002: 28). While current editors and authors would certainly disagree that the qualities of ‘the product’ are unimportant, they are well aware of the importance of branding to selling. Currently publishers, especially Harlequin, have a tendency to push towards a unity of brand and specific product. That is, not all of the books published by Harlequin are published under its main brand. At the centre of its brand identity and published under the name Harlequin are the genre romances. But Harlequin currently also publishes a few other things not quintessentially ‘Harlequin’ – for example, their Golden Eagle line (men’s

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169 Mills and Boon went through a similar branding experience in the early 20th century, when their brown-covered novels became iconic of the kind of books they published.
action adventure), Luna (fantasy), Mira (single title, more mainstream) -- which do not have ‘Harlequin’ marked on their books.

Brand is a relationship between the company and the audience, but it is not a unitary one, as described by an editor at Harlequin New York I interviewed in 2009:

Jessica: Are there, um, is the North American market a unified market or are there divisions within it?

Editor: Oh, well I mean I think any readership has division within it. We have series readers, we have single title readers. We have people who love historicals, we have people who love contemporaries, who love commercial literary fiction, we have paranormal romance fiction, we want people who love baby stories, people who love western stories, people who love spy stories, military stories. It is incredibly differentiated, in many ways. There are people who love Harlequin, people who hate Harlequin, people who think they hate Harlequin and don’t actually realize that the Susan Wiggs that they’re reading or the Nora Roberts they just bought is actually a Silhouette or Harlequin title. And when you tell them that, they’re appalled. But, you know, they really enjoyed the story when they were reading it. We also have in our company as I’m sure you’re aware, the Gold Eagle men’s action adventure line. So, you know, that’s segmented in a different direction. So, yes, I - I mean I think we have people who are who like a wholesome story and who you know don’t want any sex in their books and people who want Spice, who want Blaze, and lots of sex. So, it is incredibly differentiated, disseminated and separated out. Disseminated is not the word. But - it’s incredibly segmented. [J: segmented, okay, yeah.] But good writing is gonna appeal to the largest possible and a good story is gonna appeal to the largest possible person, so that’s what we focus on.

Harlequin here has both the positives and negatives associated with a strong brand identity: it can sometimes be off-putting for those who associate negative things with the brand identity. The segmentation of the publisher brand can allow them to sell books which appeal to readers who might not imagine that they would enjoy a Harlequin book, but would enjoy a Gold Eagle book. Yet author names (Susan Wiggs and Nora Roberts) are also offered as items which might overshadow publisher brands, if they are recognizable enough.

Beyond the creation of publisher brands, there is also a movement towards understanding authors themselves as having or being brands. Scholars have argued that ‘brand’ has expanded from its application to commodities such as soap and is now “frequently extended to a whole new range of experiences, services, and quasi-commodities that are not in themselves conventional economic objects (including experiences, selves, nations, political programs, and revolutions)” (Manning 34; see also Lury 2009:73). Lury argues that these shifts in the application of the brand concept are related to “the centrality of choice and self-making in many arenas, including both social movements and the rhetoric of the new economy. As such, it is
central to other recent accounts of shifts in identity, such as that described by Ulrich Beck and Elizabeth Gernsheim Beck as a process of individualization (2002)” (593).

Thus ‘branding’ (like ‘communities of practice’) becomes a key word in the self-help and management literature for middle-class professionals, as well as artists and other creative workers. Lury analyzes a self-help book from the late 1990s which exemplifies this trend:

Tom Peters describes the project of becoming ‘brand you’ in *The Brand You 50: Fifty Ways to Transform Yourself from an ‘Employee’ into a Brand that Shouts Distinction, Commitment, and Passion!* (1999). In this self-help manual for the professional classes he provides a number of exercises [...] As the back cover makes clear, Peters believes the choice to take up this opportunity is driven by the need for survival in a changing labour market.

In today’s wired world, you’re distinct . . . or extinct. Survive, thrive, triumph by becoming *Brand You!* The fundamental unit in today’s economy is the individual, a. k. a. YOU! Jobs are performed by temporary networks that disband when the project is done. So to succeed you have to think of yourself as a freelance contractor – *Brand You!* Someone who is savvy, informed, always learning and growing, who knows how to sell herself, and – most important – *does work that matters*. (Lury 2002:594)

Lury compares this marketing of ‘brand’ in the middle classes to the restrictions and failures in the context of working-class access, citing “Susan Faludi’s account of the aspirations of one of the young American working-class men she observed in her study of contemporary masculinity” who knows that he was ‘meant to be a brand name’ but is afraid is he simply ‘a common person,’ happy to get attention from being arrested after a bar fight (Faludi 1999:5 cited in Lury 2002:594). As Lury suggests, “the centrality of forced choice to the self-identities described in these examples is overwhelming, inescapable; it is an increasingly obligatory means of self-differentiation in the quest for cultural survival (Butler 1990). But many people cannot present themselves in terms of choice at all, and some of these people are denied not only the commodity kinship of the brand but also the possibility of a life at all” (594). Flexibility is presented as an opportunity for choice, yet these choices are shaped through class and the industry.

The expansion of the concept and language of branding can be seen in the romance writing community, as both publishers and writers discuss authors as a ‘quasi-commodity’ who can have/be a ‘brand’. Lury (2005) has examined how Damien Hirst, a British artist, became a brand, himself. She suggests that brand is changing and this is a concomitant change with changes in the ‘author function’: “increasingly the brand name is not the mark of an originary relationship between producer and products but is rather the mark of the organization of a set of relations between products in time (Lury, 2004). In the shift away from the attribution of value in relation to an origin, the contemporary brand is a mark of a transformation in the author
function” (93). Brand does not only apply to postmodern artists like Hirst, but also romance writers.

This language of brand and branding then has also moved into the way romance authors think about themselves as writers and manage their careers. Thus, the City Romance Writers had an online workshop called “Brand Your Way to Success” from a guest author. Much of what this course covered is similar to the manuals discussed by Lury (2002). The first lecture opened with the following paragraph:

The subject of Branding can often take authors by surprise, particularly if they have no previous experience in business or marketing. But Branding is actually a very natural extension of your work and yourself as an individual.

In fact, the moment you have something to communicate or sell... you have a Brand, whether you intend to have one or not. Not everyone is comfortable with the concept of “selling” themselves (or their ideas, their story, etc.), so that’s why I include the term “communicate” as well... but at its heart, successful Branding is about persuading someone to buy (or accept, believe, or choose) what you have to sell.

Here author brand has two orientations: one industry-centred and the other reader-centred. An author brand can be something that an author develops before they are even published, something to help market themselves to editors, something that will guide their interactions. This is something that unifies their various products: both their books and themselves. Like voice, it is an extension of the writer as ‘an individual’ and like pennames, it is inextricable from the market. It is about ‘persuading someone to buy.’ Here then agency is located within the individual, as a brand, and the individual identity is formed as a market identity, oriented towards selling. An author should have a brand, should be compact and unified. A brand is also a tool of affect. What it generates are feelings and emotions. As described in the workshop:

The only reason to have a Brand is if you’re selling something—in this case, your books and yourself as a writer. The only reason someone would want to buy your Brand is because you offer something that has value to them. Your Brand’s benefits can best be described as the “feel-good” quality of your Brand. What is it about working with you, buying your book, or listening to your advice that helps your audience to feel good? Many times these are perceptions rather than complete reality. In Branding, however, perception often equals reality.

A brand unifies the things about the writer (their personality, their writing, and so on) which make the readers and editors ‘feel good’.

Branding, though, is understood, like ‘voice’ to not be something necessarily external, but based on the core of the individual. In a reply to one of the writers’ Week One homework (basically a self-introduction), the instructor said: “I’m a little bit of a zealot when it comes to
Industry Branding, but believe me--I come by it honest! I've just seen too many silly things happen that could have been avoided (or at least managed) with a strong focus on Industry Brand. IB goes deeper than you think--truly getting at the core of your personality.” In another email: “Question 10: Here is where things get a bit personal. Branding is an extraordinarily individual process, even if the outcome, in this case, is marketed to external audiences. What else would you like to keep in mind as you develop your Writing and Industry Brands?” Branding is presented as something which is not simply an external requirement, but something that comes from inside the writer’s own authentic self. Like the passion for writing which I discussed in Chapter One, it requires that the writer’s passions and self be put to work in the marketplace.

Yet ‘a brand’ is not so easily achieved as the self-help manuals suggest and authors have a complicated relationship with this requirement to be a market individual. One weekday about ten or twelve published authors from CRW and I were having lunch at a restaurant, socializing before we began setting up an event for librarians from the City public library system. Some of the authors were discussing how they try to balance their work and private life. Two of their husbands wanted them to spend less time on their writing and have more ‘balance’, as they had both recently had a very busy publication schedule. One of the writers, Marilyn, said it was difficult, because if she got offered a three-book-in-a-row release again, she would take it. The career she left for writing was very successful and she wants the same for her writing career. Sandra chimed in and said she felt likewise. Patricia said she already had her career, so for her the experience can be more about writing and she can enjoy it (although from my perspective she approaches it very much as a professional). Marilyn said she got into it for the writing. Patricia said something like, ‘you’re [author’s publishing name]’ and Marilyn joked: “Yes, the no-name brand” (fieldnotes 454).

Conclusion
This chapter has been about how the individual, exemplified by the author, is built up as a category within the system of mass production and how that category is shaped through the professional organizations like RWA and CRW. In the context of the romance publishing world, the focus on authors as individuals and as the location of personal artistic genius which many scholars have argued developed through the 18th century is not taken for granted. It is instead still in development, contested and fought for. In the context of a well-developed publishing system authors work to develop their individual name separate from the publishers’. I have argued that individual identity becomes the focus of interactions between gatekeepers and
writers, metaphorized in the form of ‘voice’. This identity then is concretized and managed as a market identity in the form of pennames. Finally, I have considered the ways in which the marketization of this identity leads to a focus on individual authors as brand rather than identity, in the context of brand-conscious publishing. Pennames and brands are the focus of author efforts to manage the publishing system, but they are also the location of creativity and emotion. Voice is described as enabling an intimate connection between writer and reader. Pennames are strategic instruments, but they are also opportunities for creating new enjoyable identities.

The importance of this development of an individual identity (‘voice’, name and brand) is intimately related with the workings of the flexible economy. Romance writers focus on their reputation (linked to their name, perhaps in the form of a personal ‘brand’) as a location of enabling and managing their own work. What is being created is a reputational self: a self oriented towards the public in the form of the industry, the market and the readership. Authorship (and authority) is then not a given, but built up. It depends on the individualized magic of the voice (containing both the ‘authentic’ self and the self developed through the activity of writing) tied to a penname, which relationally becomes a brand. In the romance writing community, individual identity thus becomes a focus of writerly agency, as ‘voice’, pennames and brand become locations of efforts by writers to control the ‘risk’ and unpredictability of the industry. I argue that this kind of individual artistic identity, ranging from ‘voice’ to brand, is an essential feature of middle-class flexible labour. If the individual must move between companies and employers, then their self-identity becomes a focus of strategies for success. This focus on the individual emphasizes individualist strategies for negotiating labour. It is particularly apt in the arena of publishing, where the individual has been developed as the location of ‘authorship’ and agency over the past few hundred years. Communities of practice like CRW are one place where the development of these artistic identities is enabled and individual writers learn what identity strategies have worked for other writers. But how do writers and writers organizations think about the public, the readership for which they are creating this outward-looking identity? In the next chapter, I discuss another aspect of writers’ efforts to locate themselves in the context of mass distribution of their works. I will examine how writers groups work to ground the ‘mass’ audience on the basis of gender and how writers with a certain ‘local’ position (Canadian-ness) try to imagine how this will travel in the North American (and global) market.
Chapter Five: Locating Production: The Nationality of Mass Culture and Universal Love

Introduction
In July of 2008 as my plane from Canada touched down in San Francisco, I overheard a child ask their parents “Is this America? Do they speak English here?” (field notes 23). I was on my way to the Romance Writers of America National Conference in San Francisco. The theme that year was ‘Romance -- Bridging the World’ and the conference’s logo included San Francisco’s famous Golden Gate Bridge and a representation of the globe. Free bags, pens, coasters and so on from publishers and authors at the conference were marked with the global theme, as were a number of the panels. But what does ‘bridging the world’ mean to romance writers?

One characteristic of ‘flexible labour’ is its tendency to be mobile, its shiftiness in terms of location. While publishers do still have brick and mortar buildings which house their editorial and marketing departments, corporations are increasingly distributed geographically. The audience for media texts is also disparate, spread over the city, country and globe. These individual readers are joined together as publics through the circulation of romances. This audience is also a market; that is, readers are ideally people who will pay for the romances they read. In theory, to be successfully flexible in this context one should know one’s audience. Yet, such a widely dispersed audience is not wholly knowable from the perspective of individual writers. Writers cannot speak to each reader individually and do not have the resources to survey readers in the fashion of a publisher. But writers do still imagine the readership as an aggregate and try to imagine how that audience is part of the practice of writing. For writers this experience of the audience is in part mediated through organizations like RWA and CRW which allow for the possibility of a collective, rather than individually idiosyncratic, picture of the global audience of romance novels. Yet unlike publishers who often aim to systematize their knowledge about audiences, both national and global, as flexible workers writers have more fragmented, individualized experiences of and knowledge about the circulation of their texts. Examining the writers I worked with can give us an unique view of the place of the global public in the mass production of media, as Canadian romance writers are decentralized workers writing for an
initial audience (an American one) that, while similar in culture, is predominantly non-local and a secondary audience which is global.

In some ways, the circulation of this form of popular romance globally is about making a certain version of private arrangements (that is, the love between individuals in novels) very public (that is, global). In Chapter Three I examined how a community of practice is created through CRW meetings and how writers discuss the practice of writing the romance genre. The linguistic anthropological approaches to genre which I discussed in that chapter emphasize the role of reception and audience in textual production. Yet romance writers, like many people creating texts for a mass audience, do not produce romances with the mass audience ‘at hand’. How do writers manage their textual production in the absence of a clearly defined or knowable audience? How do writers and publishers draw boundaries between the universal and the particular in culture? That is, what aspects of romance as a genre are understood to be universal and what are understood to be national, individual, urban, and so on? For writers the possibility of viewing readers as a public, an unknowable group which the circulation of texts joins together, is grounded in the universalization of gender, on which particularities of nationality can then be scattered. Stories of love are understood to be eminently flexible.

In the first section of this chapter, I set out the practicalities of the distribution of romance fiction internationally. Next I examine the place of the universal in writers’ understandings of the locality of the romance genre. Then I discuss the place of the nation in the distribution of the literary field, arguing that because of the way the genre and its publics are imagined, Canadian writers encounter anxieties about their own abilities to ‘stand in’ for readers in the writing process. Finally I argue that writers’ particular and collective knowledge of the global circulation of their novels is often scattered and individual. As flexible workers, writers have an interest in the structures of the mass distribution of their work, but they do not often have the tools to access that information or to use it.

**International Romance Publishing**

“It just goes to prove that stories about love and feelings and relationships are truly international.” - Harlequin author Kate Walker on the popularity of her books in Japan (BBC News online Monday April 12, 2004)

Publishing in general, and romance publishing in particular, is an international enterprise. While copyrights and distribution rights are usually managed nationally, publishing has been a part of the global tendency towards the international conglomeration of media corporations.
Harlequin is one example of this tendency in the romance publishing world.\textsuperscript{170} As discussed in the Introduction, in 1957 Harlequin, a Canadian publisher, began publishing reprints of UK publisher Mills & Boon’s romances in Canada and soon in the United States. From the beginning, then, Harlequin was a transnational enterprise, selling books written in the UK to English-speaking North American audiences. In 1971, Harlequin bought out Mills & Boon and throughout the 1970s and 1980s it expanded its operations globally, through buying local publishers, starting joint ventures with local publishers and opening separate ventures. For example, it opened Harlequin Holland in 1975 and Harlequin Japan in 1979. Seeing the popularity and profitability of romance, other publishers in the United States began publishing romance lines. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Harlequin’s authors were almost entirely British, with a smattering of Canadians and Australians\textsuperscript{171}. American writers trying to break into the business had little luck. In 1980 publisher Simon and Schuster took advantage of this untapped author pool and began publishing Silhouette Romance, which drew on the backlog of American-authored manuscripts. Eventually Harlequin acquired Silhouette, which it continues to publish as a separate set of lines. In 1994 Kensington Publishing started the Arabesque line for African-American romance readers, which was subsequently acquired by Harlequin in 2005. Other large US publishers based in New York such as Avon and St. Martin’s now have romance lines. This shift in the orientation of Canadian publishing from a British-facing to a more American-facing one parallels the more general turn in Canada towards a North American rather than Commonwealth identity.

In all of its markets, Harlequin walks a fine line between maintaining its product’s brand uniformity and adapting it to local cultures (or what it imagines those cultures might be). While romance writers are geographically dispersed, the initial stage of Harlequin’s production process is highly centralized; at the time of my research Harlequin only accepted manuscript submissions to its Toronto, New York and London offices.\textsuperscript{172} If accepted, romances are published in Canada, the United Kingdom or the United States first and these countries publish the greatest variety of ‘lines’. After publication in English in the UK or North America, books are then picked up (or not) by one of the other ‘local’ offices. As a friend of a friend who was a proof-reader at Harlequin told me, due to the “high cost of editing” it makes sense to repackage novels for as many markets as possible (field notes 82). However, all of the novels which reach global

\textsuperscript{170}This history of Mills & Boon and Harlequin draws heavily on Grescoe (1996) and McAleer (1999).

\textsuperscript{171}In addition, they were mostly white British, Canadian and Australian.

\textsuperscript{172}This is always open to change. While revising this chapter in 2011, I checked Harlequin’s site for Mills and Boon India and they are currently seeking writers from India to write for them.
distribution are translated locally, and according to Wirten (1998), local offices have a great deal of freedom in their editorial choices, “decid[ing] what books to publish, they edit, translate and print. This is done to ensure maximum adaptability to the particulars of their respective markets” (22). Thus, Wirten argues, “what in one sense stands forth as the quintessential global product becomes local through the tangible influence of a crucial set of key players on the local level; it is incorporated, appropriated, even altered, to fit another cultural context” (Wirten 22). Not all books have an equal opportunity to become globally local books, though. Books in the Kimani line do not seem to be sold in any of Harlequin’s overseas markets. Books published in the line American Romance, while more likely than Kimanis, are also less likely than other lines to make their way overseas.¹⁷³

This internationality, or globality, is a large part of Harlequin’s corporate identity. When I asked a senior editor at Harlequin whether she thought of the imprint she was in charge of as Canadian or North American, she answered forcefully, “No”:

_Jessica:_ Um, do you think of Mira as like a Canadian imprint or [A: No] North American?

_Editor:_ No, we think of it as a global imprint. We publish Mira, there’s a Mira publishing stream in the UK, in Australia. Of course in Canada and, and, the United States. So I think of it as a global - yeah. (2009)

Karen Ho (2008) (as well as Tsing 2008 and Rofel 2007) has argued that as anthropologists we must not take the global as a given. In viewing global capitalism as imagined from Wall Street, Ho (2008) suggests that we must pay attention to how companies use the idea of the global in their own self-constructions. When a company describes itself as global, it is not simply a neutral descriptor, but also a claim to a certain kind of importance and mastery. Certainly this seems to be one of the motivations behind the RWA’s 2008 conference theme. The claim that Romance ‘bridges the world’ is to a certain extent a claim for its (and its writers) importance and legitimacy (see Chapter One for the similar role of professionalism in claiming legitimacy¹⁷⁴).

Harlequin is not the only publishing company with an international profile. Publishing in general is a highly transnational venture, with ownership of publishing companies (as in other areas of media) being more and more consolidated. Authors belonging to CRW also published

¹⁷³ It is interesting to compare the lack of globalization of African-American romances with the much touted globalization of another African-American cultural product, hip-hop. I am not entirely sure why there is such a difference in this, whether it related to the gendering of the industries (hiphop being masculinized and romance feminized) or their modalities.

¹⁷⁴ One could argue that both professionalism and globalization play a similar role in legitimating this very dissertation.
with large and small publishers based in the US. Other large publishers like Penguin and Avon, while organized differently from Harlequin also have a global reach in terms of distributing romance. Books also become published internationally through channels of distribution accessed by authors’ agents. Finally, while online distribution is not the focus of this chapter, the rise of e-publishers and e-books in general also enables a widening of distribution channels.

Gendered Publics and Universal Love
A characteristic of mass publishing in general, and especially of globalized fiction, is that writers do not necessarily know much about their audience as an aggregate. This property of mass media is of concern to many producers, in media beyond publishing as well. Media scholar Ien Ang in *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (1991) examines how media institutions seek to quantify and objectify audience(s). In the case of television, she suggests that “the audience, *sine qua non* for both television’s economic viability and cultural legitimacy, forms its ultimate insecurity factor because in principle there is no way to know in advance whether the audience will tune in and stay tuned. It is not surprising then that a constant need is felt within the institution to ‘catch,’ ‘capture’ or ‘lay hold of’ the audience” (Ang 1991: 18). Within the industry, then, Ang argues that “institutional knowledge is driven toward making the audience visible in such a way that it helps the institutions to increase their power to get their relationship with the audience under control, and this can only be done by symbolically constructing ‘television audience’ as an objectified category of others” (7). Ang (152) also suggests that this knowledge may not be necessary to individual creators so much as to the larger institutions in the system. While publishers, like television institutions, have an interest in capturing ‘audiences’ systematically,175 this is less of a concern for individual writers. Romance writers tend to understand the audience through encounters with individuals or in a largely abstracted way. In this section I argue that romance writers’ experience of the audience(s) as a type of mass public leads to both their dependence on themselves and fellow writers as an audience stand-in and the rhetorical creation of a universal audience grounded on gender.

In trying to understand the social and political meaning of the mass publication and circulation of texts, anthropologists and other social theorist have turned to theories of publics. As Francis Cody (2011) suggests in a review of anthropological work on publics and publicity, “anthropology has become increasingly concerned with providing accounts of large-scale

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175 Harlequin, for instance, is well known for its market research.
political subjects, or ‘publics,’ that are thinkable and practicable by means of mass-mediated communication” (38). Cody traces this ‘turn toward publics’ to the publication of Benedict Anderson’s (1983) Imagined Communities and the English translation of Jurgen Habermas’s (1989 [1962]) Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. Habermas argued for the rise of a bourgeois public sphere composed of mainly property owners. According to Cody, “this concept of a public that is assembled of private citizens who mediate between state and society rests on the premise that critical discourse can only play its political function if arguments are made in terms of rational common interest and if communication remains free from coercion. Newspapers and places of public discussion stood as paradigmatic sites for this type of communication because they interpenetrated, with conversations between strangers at coffeehouses and critical essays circulating in print self-consciously echoing each other” (2011: 38-39). Anderson’s work, on the other hand, is not focused “on publics, as such, but rather on the emergence of national communities characterized by deep ties among people whose sense of belonging to a mass political subject is nevertheless mediated by ‘print capitalism’” (39). As Cody suggests, the connections between communication, capitalism and mass politics are central to these studies, as “both theorists insist on the centrality of a form of stranger sociability that arises with the conjuncture of print-mediated discourse and new modes of imagining public life enabled by capitalist production” (39).

This newly developed ‘public sphere,’ while ostensibly for all, was in fact divided by gender, class and race. As I discussed in Chapter One, the division of the social sphere into two parts created a private sphere alongside the public one. As Cody states, “accounts that focus on the rise of print, especially the modern novel, argue that the new social orientation to strangers that characterizes the rise of modern publicity correlates with a new sense of “private” interiority” (40). This private sphere was made the province of women, while the public sphere became masculine. Yet while women may have been, and still are, excluded from the political public sphere, they played a large part in the circulation of mass texts (that is, the novel). As I argued in Chapter Two, historical writer romances foreground this history of women fiction writers and readers. Due to the gendering of these divisions, romance fiction, for instance, has been considered private reading, rather than reading suitable for discussion in public institutions such as the universities.

But is the political a necessary component of a public? In a paper on interkom, a form of chat network in Indonesia, Joshua Barker (2008) suggests that interkom offers “a kind of real

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176 See Cody 2011: 40 for a discussion of some of the feminist interventions into theorizing the public sphere.
world laboratory where people can learn how discourse publics are created and experiment with some of the pleasures, challenges and disappointments of participating in public life” (130). Barker argues that the self-conscious political subject is not a prerequisite of a public, stating that “the example of interkom publics is instructive on these questions, since for the most part—at least, to the best of my knowledge—interkom publics have had [sic] never expressed an interest in politics. Politics is not what gives these publics their meaning. Rather, like so much of telecommunication today, the importance of interkom is first and foremost as a space for what Georg Simmel refers to as sociability” (130-131). Here Barker argues that what might make a public is the discourse itself, rather than the subject matter of that discourse.

Given the role of gender in shaping scholars’ approaches to publics, I argue, along with Barker, that the notion of ‘public’ as an analytic tool is not only applicable to explicitly political publics. While foundational work by Anderson and Habermas focussed on the development of national publics through the circulation of texts, concentrating on publics highly formed by their masculine gendering, here I am examining an imagined public which is global, not explicitly political\footnote{Other arguments can be made, in the vein of the classic feminist statement that the personal is political, for its political aspects.}, and united as a public by its imagined universal female gender. What I am interested in here is not so much the actual public\footnote{If there is such a thing, certainly readers worldwide may or may not imagine themselves as part of the same public, although they may be encouraged to do so by publishing companies and by the novels themselves.} or even the process of publicity, but how those who are producing the texts to be circulated amongst various readers try to grasp hold of what the readers may be as a group, an audience, a public and what their own individual relationship as a romance writer with that public might be. That is, I am interested in how romance writers in North America imagine the possibility of a mass global public for the novels that they are at that very moment writing.

Writers’ organizations in Canada and the US socialized writers to imagine first a local readership of other writers, then of publishing professionals, then a public of North American readers and finally a global public. Here Michael Warner’s discussion of publics may be useful for thinking about both the absence and presence of the readership in discussions amongst romance writers. Warner focuses on textual public(s) which come “into being only in relation to texts and their circulation” (2002: 50). He suggests that this kind of public is a product of discourse; it is formed only in the circulation of discourses and exists “by virtue of being addressed” (50). An important aspect of this kind of public is that it is to a certain extent unknowable. Romance writers, for example, cannot know who specifically is reading any
particular novel of theirs. A discourse public brings together strangers simply by virtue of their participation in the circulation of texts, while at the same time depending on the paths of circulation and commonalities in address. Warner argues that the orientation to strangers is essential to a public, as it depends on addressing people “who are identified primarily through their participation in the discourse and who therefore cannot be known in advance” (56). In fact, Warner suggests that:

a public might almost be said to be stranger-relationality in a pure form, because other ways of organizing strangers—nations, religions, races, guilds, and so on—have manifest positive content. They select strangers by criteria of territory or identity or belief or some other test of membership. One can address strangers in such contexts because a common identity has been established through independent means or institutions (e.g., creeds, armies, parties). A public, however, unites strangers through participation alone, at least in theory. (56)

This is in contrast to the communities of practice discussed in Chapter Three, which have a ‘manifest positive content’. While a community of practice like CRW has members who are identified “primarily through their participation” in the activity of romance writing, they are not imagined as strangers, but as friends. The audience of a globally distributed fiction could be said to be, for writers, the limit of this stranger-composed public. Most of the readers will never be known to the writers, or to each other. Yet, in the process of writing the circulating text, romance writers must have some sort of public in mind. At the very least, as discussed in Chapter Three, writers often assume that the audience’s expectations of the genre match up to their own.

Writers writing works intended for a mass public face the tensions between addressing an unfixed and unpredictable public and fixing that public in order to enable the texts’ circulation. As Warner suggests, “discourse addressed to a public seeks to extend its circulation […] yet the need to characterize the space of circulation means that the public is also understood as having the content and differentiated belonging of a group, rather than simply being open to the infinite and unknowable potential of circulation. Reaching strangers is public discourse’s primary orientation, but to be a public these unknowns must also be locatable as a social entity, even a social agent” (75-6). Thus Warner argues that discourse addressed to a public seeks to universalize (that is, extend the circulation of) a culture which is already particular; while “the language addresses an impersonal, indefinite, and self-organized expanse of circulation, it also elaborates (and masks as unmarked humanity) a particular culture, its embodied way of life, its reading practices, its ethical conventions, its geography, its class and gender dispositions, and its
economic organization (in which the serial essay circulates as it does because it is, after all, a commodity within a market)” (76).

How do romance writers manage these “unknowns”? A number of writers mentioned how they found it difficult to generalize from their own experiences with individual readers:

*Jessica:* Okay, so, um, I was wondering when you’re writing are you thinking of a certain audience?

*Sarah:* Novels?

*Jessica:* Yeah, novels, yes.

*Sarah:* Well, I’ve really tried from the beginning to figure out, what are the demographics of people who read my stories. Like the American westerns. So when my first novel came out I thought, well, they’re probably a bit older, so I kind of thought, maybe that. And then my very first fan letter was from a fourteen year old girl. And I thought, oh my god, what are you doing reading this book, this isn’t for you. I had some really hot scenes in it. So that totally blew away my- my conception of who was reading them - my books. So now, I get a variety of different fan letters from, you know, all ages. Fourteen to eighties, nineties…so, it’s quite a wide spectrum. So, I try not to write- I try to write just like, what do I think is funny, or what do I think is really interesting about this scene.

Here Sarah discusses the uncertainty of audience and how that leads her to depend on her own experiences as a reader. The writer stands in, in their own process, for the uncertain mass audience(s). The writing community is also organized to provide writers with stand-in audiences: their critique partners, ‘beta’ readers, and critique groups.179

The second way in which writers (and editors) manage the dilemma of the public is by grounding romance’s narrative structure and genre in a ‘universal womanhood’ centred around emotions. When asked about the international reach of romance novels, both editors and writers often reply that love is ‘universal’. In an *RWR* article, Holly Jacobs quotes a director of global editorial at Harlequin saying: “‘romance is a universal language,’ which makes it natural for Harlequin’s books—both their series lines and their single titles - to travel worldwide” (8). Yet, as Cody suggests, “much of the critical thrust of research on publics has, in fact, turned on the question of how representations of ‘the public’ rest on the erasure of social structures, allowing universalizing claims to be articulated only by particular types of people” (2011: 38). Writers argue that the central core story of the romance novel (two people meet, fall in love and discover that love is the most important thing) is indeed universal. Yet, this universality depends on an unmarked universality of gender. That is, ‘woman’ as a universal category undergirds the

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179 See also Coddington (1997) for a discussion of this in the context of a writing group.
universality of love, where the ‘universal’ does not include men. While heterosexual romantic relationships involve both men and women, it is women who are understood to be speakers of the language of romance. While the meaning of ‘romance’ varies worldwide, in discussions like these it is assumed to be ultimately the same underneath the differences. This rhetorical smoothing over of differences echoes the influence of romance fiction on the global ideology of love visible in examples such as Wardlow observed, where Papua New Guinean nurses “often spoke of Harlequin Mills & Boon novels – particularly those concerning relationships between doctors and nurses – as instruction manuals for how to conduct their romantic lives” (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006:10).

Groups like RWA and CRW play an important role in constructing these discourses of the universal female interest in love as a part of the romance writer’s repertoire. This grounding was very explicit in a workshop at the RWA conference in San Francisco called “Emotion, Emotion: Romance and Global Appeal”. This workshop was given by three authors and an editor. The goal of the workshop was to offer some ideas for attendees, also romance writers, to consider when trying to increase the global appeal of their novels. Throughout the workshop, the speakers referenced the connection which they saw between both readers and writers identities as women and the global reach of their books. One writer began with the statement that “it’s emotion that really appeals to women” (field notes 44). They described themselves as “different women [the presenters] on different continents” writing for “women who are as different from us” (44). They pointed to the importance of the global appeal of their novels to them financially; as one author indicated, a significant part of her income comes from foreign sales. One writer suggested that she writes “stories relevant to me/friends, because we’re women – relationships, problems, emotional issues, etc.” (44). Another writer put up a slide which said: “universal emotions, universal settings; universal themes – more travel; interactions; love; humorous; sadness, etc.” (field notes 45). This workshop offered both of the strategies for conceptualizing the audience which I discussed above as guides to the participants. The speakers grounded their reading audience in “me and my friends” and in the universal appeal of emotions, especially love, to women.

Here universality is built on an unquestioned grounding of gender. The world can be encompassed by the circulation of romance novels because of the underlying ‘natural’ interest of women in emotions and the emotional narrative. This is not necessarily a conservative movement, as at its most expansive it encompasses an ethic of love between all (ménages included). It is also not a radical movement, as it depends on a notion of love as individual and
the necessity of ending up in couples (ménages included). This grounding of gender and love moves through time and space – through space in its circulation in texts and through time in its movement into the past and future in historical and futuristic romances. The Harlequin panel mentioned above included the following statement about historical romances: “a range from ancient world to WWII – keeps an eye on global requirement – Regency is most popular period. […] love is timeless” (field notes 43). Just as love blurred the boundaries between reality and fiction in ‘writer romances’ as I argued in Chapter Two, love here joins together disparate moments in time and space. Within romance novels themselves, culture and personal histories have often negatively impacted the protagonists’ ability to have coupled romantic love, but through the course of the story their universal potential for love is uncovered. Textually, love unites both men and women (in another paper, Taylor (2007), I have discussed how love bridges the gap between East and West in sheikh romances), while discussions of romance reading focus on women. This formation of a universal woman is in contrast to other universalized visions of publics which depend on the universalization of the individualized rational male subject, yet it too depends on extrapolating local approaches to a global context.

Talk about the differences in international interests (which I discuss later in the chapter) also works to form an underlying ‘sameness’. The differences which are discussed are seldom ones of far-reaching proportions or ones that question the founding structures of romance. This is clear in discussions of Harlequin’s entry into Japan. According to Grescoe, Harlequin initially approached Japanese publishers for a joint venture in the late 1970s, but the publishers argued that “that sort of book was not read by their female readers” (1996: 115). Certainly, as John Boon describes it, “‘I think of all of the countries in which we publish, or to which we sell books, probably Japan’s social background differs most from that of the United Kingdom. Traditionally the Japanese like unhappy endings in which everybody parts in sorrow and tears but having done their duty, whereas we have happy endings’” (Grescoe 1996: 115). Indeed, the current tagline on Harlequin Japan’s website is “Love story with a happy ending”. After a trip to Japan by several of the senior executives, Harlequin decided to go into business there independently. It hired a local consultant and after two years of market research was “convinced […that] foreign romances were a viable product for the Asian marketplace” (Grescoe 115) and it released its first Japanese language romances there in 1979. By 2004, Japan was Harlequin’s biggest overseas market (Japan Today) and the managing director of Harlequin Japan, Belinda Hobbs, predicted that it would sell about 5.5 million books in Japan that year. In 2004, Harlequin Japan was publishing 46 new titles a month (Japan Today).
Stories like these reinforce the discourse that love stories are, indeed, universal, although that discourse erases the work put into ‘localizing’ these universal stories (the years of market research and so on). The differences between countries which writers discuss, then, are often ‘surface’ differences: whether or not one country likes cowboys, or needing to change the American slang or product names. This reinforces the idea that there is an underlying sameness between people and that this similarity is grounded in emotions; everyone (that is, women) is interested in love and the love is always of the same kind. In this way, romance really does bridge the globe for the romance writers themselves.

As Warner discusses in terms of publics, this universal is a particular masked as ‘unmarked’ humanity. In discussions among writers while certain experiences are understood as universal, others are not, or are more commonly understood as ‘diversity’. In an RWR article, the RWA president discusses the theme of diversity:

the fact that romance can be a bridge that spans all kinds of societies, races, and ages, and how we need to celebrate our differences. During her term, Sherry consistently emphasized how healthy diversity was for all of us. Terrific, I muttered darkly, but only to myself. She took the one really great goal and used it for herself.180

African-American romance is often talked about as expressing diversity, but with universal storylines and emotions:

A: “along with universal teen issues, Kimani TRU novels also explore believable African American characters that live and work in a realistic family or cultural setting. As with all characters, they have to be shown as true to their background and present setting”181

And in another interview, a writer and her interviewer discuss whether mainstream readers will read romances with lesbians as protagonists:

Yeah, I’m with you. Love is love is love. Love is a human condition, not one based on sexual orientation, race, nationality, ethnicity, or any other factors. I believe – 100 percent—romance is universal, just like laughter. (38)182

Writers here do not question whether lesbian or African-American readers will read romances with white heterosexual couples, but they do wonder the reverse. But, they add, “love is a human condition”. It unites all of the differences.

Romance writers and publishers in this context are also part of a movement which makes this kind of story universal, by distributing it and promoting it. This is generally seen as a good

180 From the President – Diane Pershing (November 2008 Volume 28, no 11; 2).
181 Romance Writers Report June 2008 vol 28, no 6 Writers on Writing – interview with Celeste O. Norfleet (42)
182 September 2008, volume 28, no. 9; Column – Writers on Writing – interview with Lynda Sandoval (by Eileen Putman) (38)
thing. Many writers value romantic love as a positive force in the world. Thus, in an effort to locate their writing in the context of a global mass audience/public, writers produce sameness in their readers. Yet while the writer can stand in for the reader during the writing process, they can only do so to a certain extent. This substitution reaches its limits at a few locations for writers in the major Canadian city where I did my research. These limits are not natural ones, but determined by the structure of publishing field. The main limit for Canadian writers, their location in Canada, is determined by the fact that the primary market for romance fiction is the United States. While love is imagined to be universally appealing, Canadian writers believe they must produce national flexibility in their love stories in order to appeal to American (and global) audiences.

The Literary Field and the Nation: “Can I set it in Canada?”

Early on in my fieldwork I usually borrowed a copy of Quill and Quire, Canada’s publishing magazine, from my local library. The March 2008 issue had a countdown of the 30 most influential people in publishing in Canada. At the time, I was surprised to find that it did not mention anyone at Harlequin. Yet, Harlequin could be said to be the most successful Canadian publisher currently. Pierre Bourdieu has described the literary world as a field, made up of “social positions that are both occupied and manipulated by social agents, which may be isolated individuals, groups or institutions” (1983: 311-312), where each position in the field depends on the existence of other positions (312). According to Bourdieu, “the literary or artistic field is a field of forces, but it is also a field of struggles tending to transform or conserve this field of forces” (312). This concept of the field has been helpful to me in thinking about how romance writers and aspiring writers experience the industry, pointing as it does to the connections between different players and their structural positions, as well as the power, economic and social capital which accompany their struggles.

In this section of the chapter, I examine the plot in the field of literary production which is romance in Canada. As is typical of a Canadian when faced with our southern neighbour, I focus on questions of national identity and how writers experience the field as “Canadian” or not. These discussions are just as concerned with determining the audience or public of romance fiction as those which posit a ‘universal’ woman interested in well-written love stories. Yet these discussions reveal the work that goes into producing this ‘universal’ woman and suggest this production is never stable and complete. Romance writers are not convinced that their own identities and potential manuscripts are universally appealing. And the elements of their story
which they question are structured by the arrangement of the literary field. First, I examine how the identification of the Canadian literary field with particular forms of fiction through the media and the structure of government funding, for example, shapes the position of romance writers and publishers. The counterpart to this structuring of the national field is the identification of the romance literary field with American-ness. In the second part of this section, I look at how writers experience this division and try to write Canada in or out of their novels. Since the imagined audience for romance fiction is a (North) American and global one, writers often wonder if they can set their romances in Canada. Do ‘Canadian’ experiences meet the standards of a ‘universal’ audience? Is there romance in Canada? And if so, will anyone want to read about it?

In general discussions the prototypical ‘Canadian’ literature, or CanLit, is what is referred to as ‘literary’ fiction. Returning to my apartment in 2009 after a Valentine’s Day spent at a City Romance Writers meeting, I was met by my roommate who told me about an interview on CBC Radio which had annoyed her. A Canadian academic had been on the book show ‘The Next Chapter’ to discuss “love and lust in Canadian fiction”. Yet (and this was what had annoyed my roommate), the academic had repeatedly said that it was difficult to find romance in Canadian fiction, describing us as “an icy country” and wondering “where is the bodice ripping passion that I assumed was there on my shelves?” (1.30). When the host, Shelagh Rogers, pointed out that “we certainly have Harlequins galore. I mean Harlequin, isn’t Harlequin headquartered in Canada?” (9.30), the guest brushed this suggestion off as if she had not even thought of it, saying “I haven’t read very many of them”.

This act of ‘forgetting’ is the same one performed in the article I mentioned earlier. To be labelled CanLit or ‘Canadian’ publishing, a book must fit certain criteria which romance does not. National identity is seen as forming around the centre of literary fiction. The media position in this area in 2008-9 crystallized other divisions in the field. Authors I spoke with mentioned how hard it was to get publicity in Canada and how they felt the

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183 Interestingly, not British-ness to the same degree, at least not in this generation of writers.
184 Since my research was with English-speaking writers, there is an obvious gap in my understanding of the literary field in Canada – that of French language publication, especially genre publication in French, which does not tend to move into English.
185 The national public radio station, a crown corporation, which is broadcast nation-wide and includes such shows as ‘Canada Reads,’ where a panel of well-known Canadians vote on a book for all of Canada to read.
186 The episode’s title in the online archive is “The Next Chapter uncovers Canadian bodice rippers” (first aired: Feb. 14, 2009)
187 As I discuss later, this situation has changed – something which people at Harlequin who I spoke with in part attributed to Harlequin’s successful publicity efforts for their 60th anniversary (e.g. Quill and Quire had an article on Harlequin, as did The Walrus). I recently saw that (now former) roommate again and she mentioned that the CBC is now covering romance novels in their online ‘book club’.
Globe and Mail (a national newspaper) was dismissive of Harlequin as a company. While getting any book into the media is difficult in both Canada and the US, genre fiction and especially romance have been particularly maligned by the literary establishment. In Canada, our complicated relationship with the United States focuses national identity attention on writing that can be clearly distinguished from commercial fiction, which is seen as more ‘American’. Distinction is an important process in the literary field in Canada. The field of literary production in Canada is divided into literary and commercial/genre fiction; what is literary is CanLit and vice versa, while genre fiction is often seen as being unmarked by Canadian nationality.

This division is also manifest in the industry itself, divided into Harlequin, which mostly publishes romance, and the other large publishers in Canada (under various ownerships) which do not publish romance. Canadian writers writing romance are most likely published by a New York publisher, if they are not published by Harlequin. Likewise, most agents in Canada, not a large number to begin with, do not represent romance. These divisions are also maintained by the structure of government funding for literary culture. In November of 2009, I talked to an author while she was signing books at a bookstore downtown and she described “how Canada Council won’t fund romance – [the public library] genre residences took so long to happen because needed other funding – she guesses this may be why [a college with a respected writing program] doesn’t do romance – funding issues” (427). In these ways the part of the literary field in Canada which is identified as ‘Canadian’ is formed and segregated.

“I am in Canada, but I don’t focus on the Canadian market”:

Romance Writing in Canada

This is not to say that there are not romance writers who identify as Canadian. Certainly the meetings of the CRW that I went to were always well attended. Romance writers are well aware, though, of the ambivalent position they occupy in this field. As a market, the US dominates the genre imagination in Canada, in a way that it does not that of literary fiction (although it does certainly have an influence in that context as well). Canadian romance writers are in the

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188 From my field notes: “[author] rants a little about how globe and mail always blames hqn’s profitability on ‘favourable exchange rates’ – they say ‘newspaper’ side not doing well, she feels like they should give hqn credit for knowing what they’re doing, as Canada’s business newspaper; she always talks about this with her husband. – latest article actually acknowledged not just exchange rate, ‘cause rate terrible right now” (429).

189 An interesting side note about this, from my field notes: [author] who came to visit the local college writing group June 2009 – writes for superromance – “she gets paid foreign royalty rate (2%?) for books sold in Canada (vs. US, which is higher)” (311)

190 From fieldnotes, a statement by an agent (437).
situation of primarily writing for an American audience. The structure of the literary field suggests to writers that this makes a difference and that romance writers, therefore, cannot seamlessly stand in for their audience in terms of nationality. Writers then try to gather information about these possible differences, a process which also serves to produce ‘Canadianness’ as different from ‘American-ness’. This information gathering is understood to be one which will enable their book’s flexibility, its ability to be read by a wider audience, and therefore their own flexibility as an author.

The counterpart, then, to CanLit situation I just described is the feeling that romance is an American genre. As I have discussed earlier in this dissertation, a local romance author was the first ever romance writer-in-residence at the City Public Library in 2009 and gave a number of talks on the romance genre and publishing. In one she suggested that “romance is primarily an American genre” (401). When asked a question about subgenres and trends she contrasted them with what one might expect them to be if interpreted from a ‘Canadian’ perspective. “A lot of the trends are named out of New York,” she said. In this city, she went on to explain, you might expect “multicultural romance” to be just that, “multicultural”, but no, it means African-American. Likewise, “inspirational” means Christian romance. It’s “very American centric,” she concluded (401).

Aspiring romance writers were uncertain of the ramifications of this positioning towards the American market. When I mentioned this subject to a friend who had worked at Harlequin (not an author), she reported that she was under the impression that Harlequin often changed the setting of novels originally set in Canada, substituting an equivalent US city for the Canadian one, for example Seattle for Vancouver. This would mirror the way in which Canadian cities like Vancouver and Toronto stand in for American cities in Hollywood films and American television. Yet there are romance novels set in Canada. The question of whether it was possible to set a novel in Canada arose many times in the course of my fieldwork and was answered in ambivalent ways.

At one of the public library talks mentioned above, an audience member asked “can you set it in [Canadian city]?” (403), and the speaker answered that “‘there are settings that sell better’ – ‘Italy a tough sell’, ‘Americans love Scotland,’ contemporary ‘will have an easier time

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191 For example, some of Michelle Rowen’s novels, Kate Bridges’, Kelly Armstrong’s, a Harlequin Presents titled Wolf Man.
192 From field notes: “Overhear [author] telling friend about how got agent – sent chaps set in [Canadian city], and agent asked if could set in US city. Thought, okay and reset in city had recently visited.” (436)
if set in American city”” (403). At her second talk, which was a panel with an agent and an editor, the author herself passed the question on to the panel:

Author: Do you think Canadian settings are marketable?

Agent: ‘Really how you incorporate and use your setting’ – have sold a [Canadian city]-set suspense to St. Martin’s - ‘If it’s well done and there’s a reason that it’s there’

Editor: ‘Need to look at where the target audience is’ – category – American ‘want to make it accessible’ (field notes 437-8).

Thus, for a romance to be set in Canada there must be a reason. The setting must be purposefully Canadian, if it is to differ from the unmarked American big city. ‘Accessible’ is a key word which is in tension with ‘universal’. Aspiring writers did take this advice to heart and wondered about their own manuscripts. When I discussed the talk afterwards with a woman with whom I had taken a romance writing course earlier in the year, she wondered “about fact that her book set in [Canadian city]. [The course instructor had] said it wasn’t a problem, but she wonders” (406).

Here the gap between the writer and reader in terms of nationality leads writers to wonder whether they can depend on their own knowledge of location to be understood, or desired, by readers. The fact that this question recurred again and again suggests that the mass nature of the audience was at times an issue for writers, especially those not fully integrated into the publishers’ systems of audience management. The knowability of the public and the universality of the romance story are in tension here and writers turned to community spaces to try to sort out these tensions. I have suggested that certain sets of relations between social actors and institutions work to structure the field so that romance written in Canada is seen as belonging to an American (and worldwide) literary field rather than a Canadian one.

Yet setting a book in Canada was not ruled out completely. While she began trying to write comedy contemporaries, Sandra was inspired by Julie Garwood’s For the Roses to try writing American-set historicals. After she was successfully published in that area, she began wondering about the history of the Canadian West. She was initially worried about her first Mountie romance because it came out right after Canada had declined to join the United States in the (second) Iraq war and she was worried that the American market would not want a book so clearly identified with Canada. But her Canadian-set historical romances have been generally successful worldwide:

*Sandra*: yeah, something about the Western doesn’t, like, most countries don’t pick them up. Like the traditional American Western. But, my Westerns in Canada were picked up in many countries and translated in many languages and I’ve gotten fan letters and things
like that and comments from editors from other countries picking up the stories, so that’s how I know they’re doing very well. Because, the American-set historicals are not.

Yeah. Even the ones that I’ve written, the American-set Don’t sell. You can see there’s a difference. Isn’t that neat?

I gauchely asked if it might be that everyone likes the Mounties and Sandra responded that:

it could also be, maybe the way that I write them. I’m told that I have like a, that my voice is a worldly voice. I don’t really know what that means, but, I see things maybe from worldly view. Even with my American-set historicals, they’re not really the traditional ones where they have a lot of slang in them. Like those kind of things I look at it from say my guy is a surgeon, the hero is a surgeon, I’ll show like immigration, the immigrants coming in through the West and what it was like for them, homesteading and so even my outlook is more I think global, than, a Clint Eastwood would be. [Jessica: (indistinct)…like a very, just American] Yeah, so when people tell me I have a worldly voice, I think that’s what that means. But I haven’t figured it out.

What might a ‘worldly voice’ mean in this context? It means a book without a lot of slang, which here would mark the local. But it also means attending to the movement of people world-wide, to immigration. American-set Westerns (not romances) have in fact in the past been quite popular globally, so it is interesting to think of contrasts here. What this does reveal is the element of unpredictability in the success of novels, especially from writers’ points of view.

**International Market Knowledge**

As evident above, authors are aware that there is not always a match between themselves and readers. In contrast to media institutions like those Ang (1991) discusses, however, this does not necessarily lead writers to try to systematize and objectify their audience(s). When I began my fieldwork, I was much more focussed on globalization in publishing and would mention this in my first encounters with writers. Often they would then point me towards someone else who they thought had more knowledge of ‘globalization’. Few writers, especially unpublished writers, thought they themselves knew a lot about the topic. This is in contrast to companies like Harlequin, where I talked to publishing professionals who had the word ‘global’ in their title.

The knowledge, then, that writers form and share on the ‘international’ market tends to be fairly scattered. It is often shared in the form of short propositions about national reading preferences. For example, in Germany they like more traditional regencies. Or, in Japan they like matchmaker stories. Writers find information on global readership interesting, but not necessarily essential to their writing process.
These bits of trivia are shared at writing meetings or talks, in passing. So far as I can tell, this knowledge is not shared for the purpose of implementing it in writers’ own writing. It would be impractical to write a story that they might like in Germany in the hopes of eventually getting it picked up and translated there. This kind of information is of most use to publishers, who can use it to choose the books they promote to international markets, or perhaps choose not to publish books which would not do well in any international market. So what is all this information sharing among writers about the global reach of romance about? First, it is interesting. Romance writers tend to be interested in the world and those who attend writers groups and talks are, by self-selection, interested in the workings of the publishing world (as I have discussed in Chapter Three). For example, RWR had an article for writers about the workings of the international publishing system (“Books around the World” by Holly Jacobs), which the author described as follows:

In this article, we’re going global and exploring how foreign distribution works [...] Harlequin is definitely a worldwide entity. Over the course of writing more than 30 books for the company, I’ve worked directly with editors based in both Toronto and New York—and there’s a London based editorial team as well. My books for the company have been distributed in more than 25, but I don’t feel I’ve exhausted my overseas publication chances since Harlequin books are distributed in more than 100 countries.

She went on to list a number of propositions about international markets:

So what are overseas editors looking for? They publish as wide a variety of stories as Harlequin’s North American and Mills & Boon offices acquire. I asked Coquet what was popular right now in France. ‘In the category romance genre: babies (all types of stories from matchmakers to secret children) sell like hotcakes, as well as office romance stories, Greek and Latin tycoons, i.e. very traditional selling hooks. We’ve also been successful for almost 30 years with medicals, and we still need more of them.’ She goes on and adds, ‘sexy, intense, traditional stories (from mostly Desire and Presents) sell very well: we have upgraded our Presents series from eight to nine books, and our French program for Desire needs to be upgraded too because of its incredible performance last year!’

This creates a map of the world as a series of nations with unified tastes and small particularities, while the North American market is divided up into segments, like a little world, with their own

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193 For example, in an interview with Brenda, she mentioned how problems with marketing historical romances with fantasy elements internationally had lead her publisher to ask her to write historical romances without those fantasy elements: “I had done a couple books for them that were historical with fantasy elements and they had a hard time marketing those, in the 90s. And so they said to me, in late nineties, 96, 97, we just want straight historicals now. No fantasy elements at all. Because they had a hard time marketing them. They had a hard time marketing them in foreign markets. Which is always a big part of the decision at harlequin. So, that was fine, I did straight historicals for them.”
tastes and particularities. Writers learn about these tastes through editors, in RWA communications like *RWR*, and at workshops and spotlights.

**Conclusion: Public and Private in a Global System**

In this chapter I have argued that the mass distribution of romance novels produces for writers an unknowable public, which they manage through theories of universality and sameness grounded in gender. Yet a global market also requires difference and thus writers work to understand what is particular, especially in terms of nationality. In some ways, the travel of this genre of romance narrative globally makes a certain version of private arrangements, love, very public. We might argue that these private arrangements were never very ‘private’ to begin with. In any case, perhaps this succeeds because it creates love as the ultimate of private, which would then be the universal. Some scholars have argued that the content of the romance novels constructs love as something that is separate from society; that is, what becomes important are the private emotions of two people who must overcome their false ideas of their own emotions, often based on society and their own personal histories. Importantly, they are successful in this. Rhetorically, discussions among writers echo this division, as they propose that romantic love is the core interest of readers all over the world. Part of making romances global is removing markers of particular publics like slang, dialect, sometimes even cities, if seen as too local.

This chapter has examined the relationship between romance writers and their mass global audiences through two main theoretical lenses: publics and field. While writers’ relationship with their readers is partially managed through their publishers, they also turn to each other to try to understand the in many ways unknowable audience. This is especially the case for writers who audience is especially unknowable: aspiring writers who have yet to publish a novel. I have argued that the context of mass media and global distribution shapes how writers think about their audiences. While publishers may seek to systematize their knowledge of audiences, writers seldom do so. Instead, they draw on themselves and their writer friends as stand-ins for the mass audience, using their own reading experiences and personal interests as guides to those of others. These experiences and interests are grounded rhetorically in the notion of a universal feminine concern with love and emotions. While ‘the public’ from the perspective of Habermas developed as a union of land-owners with common interests in politics, I argue that there are other kinds of imagined communities uniting strangers through the circulation of texts. To find this public we must look beyond the gendering of the public as masculine and concerns
such as romance as belonging to the feminine private sphere. For writers, the concern is in imagining a public that will enable their books to circulate as widely as possible.

While the public of readers is imagined to be united by their universal interest in romance, writers also worry about the predictability of this supposed universality. In the second part of the chapter, I argued that writers concerns about their ability to extrapolate from themselves to their audience come from the arrangement of the literary field. The division of the Canadian literary field into that of literary fiction, identified as Canadian, and genre fiction, identified as American, places Canadian romance writers in an ambiguous position. Writers often wondered whether setting their novels in Canada would prevent their easy circulation in a field identified with American-ness. They questioned whether their novels would be flexible enough to succeed in the mass market. Creative producers in countries like Canada which are neither at the center of the mass media networks nor the periphery walk the line between imagining the world as composed of universal women interested in the same subjects and acknowledging that they themselves do not match the unspoken qualifying characteristics of this universal woman.

Publics and audiences are the amorphous counterpart to the communities of practice discussed in Chapter Three, from the writer’s perspective. Yet, the overlap between audience and producer is an essential element of the system. Romance writers are encouraged to be readers and, as demonstrated by the large number of RWA members who are unpublished, readers are encouraged to be writers. Writers stand in themselves as private readers for their public audience and try to determine the gap between themselves and their audience. Writers organizations stand as mediators in this exercise, enabling writers to pass along knowledge of the global audience(s). While global ownership of media is becoming more consolidated, almost paradoxically, creators organize as flexible workers – necessary to the system, but not fully incorporated into it.

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194 Given my focus on writers, I have not considered here how audiences themselves form communities, both online and in-person. The romance reading community, however, is an active one.
The Conclusion

Creative work has often been offered by governments and public thinkers as both the literal future of work and a metaphorical model for the possibilities of work in the new economy. Workers are exhorted to have both the passion and the flexibility supposedly held by writers, musicians, artists and filmmakers. Yet the actual working lives of cultural workers are often hidden behind romanticized images. Passion and flexibility are not natural components of creative work; they are constructed from the cultural and economic context as much as the flexibility of a management consultant is. A major contribution of this dissertation is its examination of how a particular group of creative workers, romance writers, learn how to be creative workers through the in-between spaces of writers associations. I argue that these organizations, in-between corporations and individual workers, are an overlooked and growing component of middle-class flexible labour in North America. Similar, but not identical to, unions, writers associations like the Romance Writers of America form communities of practice where writers band together as individual workers, learning both the business and the craft of writing. It is in this context that writers circulate and construct discourses of passion and professionalism.

In this dissertation I have explored how romance writers become workers in the system of publishing, writing for a global mass audience. Groups like RWA and CRW both shape writers into individual workers (and writers) and help them manage the industry. I have explored how creativity and affect become caught up in market systems and how market systems get caught up with affect and creativity. I have considered the social organization of work for the gendered category of romance writers in particular in the context of three themes: flexibility, community and love. For romance writers and workers in a system of contracted-out, flexible labour, writers groups and associations become locations of camaraderie, learning, solidarity and networking. These groups become places to work out the tensions of writing a genre which is very popular, but simultaneously receives little respect from the mainstream media. Here writers work out possible subjectivities as gendered workers and writers, embracing both professionalism and as an affective relationship with writing. Romance novels themselves are also locations for the representation and working out of public discourses about ideologies of writing, where romance writers present in fictional form an emotional relationship with writing texts, exploring the
possibilities of falling in love with one’s characters. In meetings and on listservs, writers form communities of practice centred on genre, where they discover and re-form the underlying structures of the romance genre, creating a space for their own writing practices to relate to. While they foreground generic ties in these workshops and meetings, writers also strive to make claims on individual authorship, carving a niche in the market (or a number of niches) for each individual through pennames and branding. As they move into the mass market, writers then try to stabilize their notions of the readership, grounding the uncertain public on the idea of a universal womanly interest in the matters of love, and wondering whether that universal woman is interested in Canadian love in particular.

The journey that romance writers take through the world of flexible labour and publishing is highly shaped by gender. The increasing emphasis on flexible labour in North America has been linked to the increasing entry of women, especially middle-class women, into the workforce (see Sennett (1998)). Writing in general, and romance writing in particular, has been an ideal source of flexible income for women, requiring as it does few tools and little space. Romance writing, as both a mass and gendered genre, has received little respect from both the wider public and the literary establishment. As the number of romance writers and aspiring writers grew, they formed writers associations to support each other and increase the profile of their genre. The form that meetings, articles and discourses of RWA and CRW take are influenced by feminist discourses which locate work as a source of value for women. RWA emphasizes the professionalization of writers as a source of legitimacy and power. At the same time, writers also value the ways in which love has been located as an equal source of value. ‘Writer romances’ emphasize the power of an affective relationship with writing, in contrast to a purely rational one; writers’ discussions of the mass appeal of romance fiction ground it in the figure of a universal woman interested in love. Romance writers’ gendered positions and identities reveal the tensions and fault-lines of flexible creative labour; the incorporation of public and private, the requirements of self-management and the necessity of flexibility of self, match what has frequently been required of women.

If women have frequently been excluded from the structures of the middle-class workplace, then it is no surprise that they might turn to endeavors which seem to evade those structures. Yet while these endeavors offer space for counter-discourses, writers cannot fully escape the effects of a flexibility which often benefits employers more than employees. Romance writers enjoy many aspects of their work’s flexibility; however, the industry’s flexibility is also enmeshed with uncertainty and unpredictability. Writers groups employ a number of strategies to
manage this uncertainty. Many of these strategies focus on individualizing agency: encouraging professional self-presentation and management, celebrating individual market-directed actions, sharing alphabetical pennenames technologies. Writers groups create a space for writers to share these strategies and other kinds of industry knowledge. Meeting openings and workshops on craft create cohesion between individuals and texts, offering a counterpoint to the discourses of flexibility. Contrary to approaches which assume creativity’s ‘flexibility’, I argue that groups like RWA and CRW work to enable flexibility and socialize writers’ approaches to writing as a creative practice.

As ‘in-between’ reflexive communities of practice, groups like CRW develop and circulate models of practice. As Giddens (1991) and Caldwell (2008) have argued, with slightly different takes on the matter, reflexivity is a characteristic of late capitalism. Romance writing communities are reflexive communities in part because they are the main location for the socialization of writers into the industry. Writers learn to view themselves as well as their novels as subjects within the market. Communities of women writers are represented as essential features of romance writing in ‘writer romances’. In practice these communities are products of both a collegial approach to writing which offers writing groups as places to find communitas, emotional and creative inspiration and friendship, and a business approach to ‘communities of practice’ which views writing groups as places for knowledge-sharing and skill development. While communities of practice give writers this space, they also depend on commonalities of social identity to enable this.

Finally, I have argued that RWA straddles the lines between professional and amateur writers, crossing the boundaries between doing an activity ‘for love’ or ‘for money’. The affective approach of the amateur sustains the professional in uncertain and lean times. The subject matter of the texts which romance writers produce also greatly shaped how writers talked about and imagined their work. Romance writers are not producing just any cultural texts: they are writing romances. The parallels that writers saw between their own work and the narrative structure of romances appeared in ‘writer romances’ where writers fall in love with their own characters. The division of writers into pantsers and plotters mirrors the tensions between affective and practical orientations towards romance writing which appear in other areas of the discourse community. Yet the way that romance writers talk about these tensions is as productive, not destructive ones. The ideal is the union between affective and practical

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195 Where amateur is not a term of dismissal, but one which indicates whether or not an individual is being paid for their work.
orientations towards both writing and being a writer. That is, the professionalization of romance writing does not remove the ‘creative’ and ‘emotional’ part of it and create purely practical businesswomen. In fact, it is seen as practical and necessary to have an affective relationship with the romance genre and with writing. While the discourse of passion in some ways does enable the system, writers are not dupes to the system. I have argued that these discourses of love work both within and without the system, escaping the confines of capitalism and shoring up its banks.

“And are you writing a romance?” I was asked that question what felt like a million times over the course of my fieldwork with romance writers and publishers in North America. Writers asked me. Academics asked me. Acquaintances asked me. It was not an unreasonable question. After all, I fit the profile of many aspiring writers: middle class, educated, female. The answer, sadly, was no. But I was writing a dissertation. And while the content of a romance novel and a dissertation are quite different, there were many similarities of experience in my romance writing and dissertation writing. The activities of becoming a self-managing, self-organizing, flexible worker, doing their best to discover how to write (and get paid for) their genre, seemed surprisingly similar between romance writers and myself as a graduate student. I formed writing groups and accountability groups with my fellow graduate students at the same time as I participated in writing groups with CRW. Graduate students commented on the commonalities they felt with the writers I described in papers on how romance writers banded together to try to gather information, how they tried to manage the uncertainties and anxieties of an uncertain audience for their texts and how they thought and went about writing. The distance between the two writing communities was not as far as one might initially imagine, nor were the strategies which both romance writers and I drew on to give our material legitimacy. We both drew on the economic to support our professional identities. Romance writers reply to public critiques of their books as not ‘real books’ with the rejoinder of the ‘real money’ they get for writing them; I draw on the economic to remind readers of this dissertation that romance writers are indeed ‘important’. Both I and a number of the romance writers situated their writing practice within feminist critiques of gender, work and the literary canon. We hoped that our choice of creative or knowledge work would offer us both emotional and financial rewards. I cannot deconstruct the ways in which the romance writing community of practice entwines business and emotion in an effort to manage a system which is not designed for their benefit without acknowledging that the same system encloses my own strategies of writing, community and reputation.
Studying groups like RWA and CRW may point towards the future of work: the blurring of hobbies and work, the growing importance of communities of practice, but also the individualization of action and the feminization of flexibility. While the publishing world has a reputation as a slow-moving industry, even in it changes were happening faster than I can capture in this dissertation. From the time at which I began this research to the time at which I am now writing it up, the use and popularity of e-books skyrocketed, as did the possibilities of self-publishing. Visions of what publishing will look like in five years are changing all the time, as self-publishing becomes easier and easier and the global mass audience becomes closer within reach through the potential of e-publishing. Romance writers are in the midst of this, as romance publishers have been fairly thorough in their use of e-books and e-book publishers have been very popular in the genre of romance and have pushed boundaries both for publishing and romance. Writers and writers’ organizations struggle to discover how this will affect writers and to manage control of their intellectual property and maintain their sources of income. The possibilities of e-publishing were already being taken advantage of by writers I knew at the beginning of this research and they are being used in new and more numerous ways now. It may be that in twenty years all romance readers will also be romance writers and romance will be something very different than what it is now. But right now, from the perspective of romance writers, the creative economy is a space of risk and possibility. It is a space to develop a gendered professional identity and a space of practicalities, but it is also, at the core, a space of emotions. As one writer described it to me, the experience of first being published was “so exciting. Still is, really exciting. No, there’s nothing like it. I’ll remember that phone call for the rest of my life. It was really like a (life altering) (indistinct). A lot more exciting than I thought and a lot more difficult than I thought. A lot more everything than I thought. It’s just packed to the brim with emotions.”
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