

CORPORATE HEROINES AND UTOPIAN INDIVIDUALISM: A STUDY  
OF THE ROMANCE NOVEL IN GLOBAL CAPITALISM

by

ERIN S. YOUNG

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David Leiwei Li, Chair of the Examining Committee

5-18-10

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Date

Committee in Charge:      David Leiwei Li, Chair  
Mary Elene Wood  
Cynthia H. Tolentino  
Jiannbin L. Shiao

Accepted by:

---

Dean of the Graduate School

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Approved:

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This dissertation explores two subgenres of popular romance fiction that emerge in the 1990s: “corporate” and “paranormal” romance. While the formulaic conventions of popular romance have typically centralized the gendered tension between hero and heroine, this project reveals that “corporate” and “paranormal” romances negotiate a new primary conflict, the tension between work and home in the era of global capitalism. Transformations in political economy also occur at the level of personal and emotional life, which constitute the central problem that contemporary romances attempt to resolve. Drawing from sociological studies of globalization and intimacy, feminist criticism, and queer theory, I argue that these subgenres mark the transition from what David Harvey calls Fordist capitalism to flexible or global capitalism as the primary social condition negotiated in the popular romance. My analysis demonstrates that corporate and paranormal romance novels reflect changing ideals about intimacy in a globalized world

that is increasingly influenced, socially and culturally, by the values and philosophies that dominate the marketplace.

Each of these subgenres offers a distinct formal resolution to the cultural and social effects of a flexible capitalist economy. The “corporate” romances of Jayne Ann Krentz, Nora Roberts, Elizabeth Lowell, and Katherine Stone feature heroines who constantly navigate the dual and intersecting arenas of work and home in an effort to locate a balance that leads to success and happiness in both realms. In contrast, the “paranormal” romances of Laurell K. Hamilton, Charlaine Harris, Kelley Armstrong, and Carrie Vaughn dissolve the tension between home and work, or the private and the public, by affirming the heroine’s open and endless pursuit of pleasure, adventure, and self-fulfillment. Such new forms of romantic fantasy at once reveal the tension in globalization and the domination of corporate and masculinist values that the novels hope to overcome.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Erin S. Young

### GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon  
San Diego State University, San Diego, California  
University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks, Alaska

### DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy, English, 2010, University of Oregon  
Master of Arts, English, 2003, San Diego State University  
Bachelor of Arts, English, 2000, University of Alaska Fairbanks

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon, 2004-2009

### GRANTS, AWARDS AND HONORS:

Risa Palm Fellowship Award, University of Oregon, 2008-2009  
Composition Instructor of the Year, University of Oregon, 2006-2007

### PUBLICATIONS:

Young, Erin S. "Escaping the 'Time Bind': Negotiations of Love and Work in Jayne Ann Krentz's 'Corporate' Romances." *Journal of American Culture*.  
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To Mom and Dad, for their endless support and faith in my abilities

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION: FLEXIBLE CAPITALISM AND TRANSFORMATIONS  
IN THE POPULAR ROMANCE GENRE

**Kathleen Woodiwiss' *The Flame and the Flower* (1972)**

"Do you think you could have remained chaste for long with the face and body you have, my sweet?" he murmured against her hair. "You were meant for love, and I am not saddened because I snatched you before other men tried you, nor do I feel guilty over the pleasure you've given me. Pray do not blame me for being infatuated with your beauty and wanting you for my own. It would be a task for any man not to. You see, in truth, m'lady, I am your prisoner, caught in your spell" (45).

**Jayne Ann Krentz's *Sharp Edges* (1998)**

"This is no way to resolve an interpersonal conflict," [Eugenia Swift] warned. "You follow your theory of personnel management," [Cyrus Colfax] said against her mouth. "I'll follow mine" (223).

**Laurell K. Hamilton's *Narcissus in Chains* (2001)**

"I was suddenly aware that we were standing on the dance floor near the metal framework and the waiting 'actors.' We had the audience's attention, and I didn't want that [...] I suddenly wanted the privacy that Jean-Claude had offered earlier. But staring from Jean-Claude to Richard, I realized I didn't trust myself alone with them. If we had a room to ourselves I couldn't guarantee that the sex would be merely metaphysical. Admitting that even to myself was embarrassing. As uncomfortable as it was to do what we had to do in public, it was still better than in private. Here I knew I'd say *stop*, anywhere else I just wasn't sure [...] Jean-Claude held out his hand to me. 'Come, *ma petite*, we delay their show'" (32).

In *Fantasy and Reconciliation: Contemporary Formulas of Women's Romance Fiction* (1984), romance critic Kay Mussell describes Kathleen Woodiwiss' *The Flame and the Flower* (1972) as "a story of sexual and exotic adventure or domestic melodrama in a heightened and exciting setting" (38). The uncontested favorite of Janice Radway's *Smithton* readers,<sup>1</sup> this novel marked the development of the romance formula from "the purest and simplest romantic type" to the more plot-detailed and erotically explicit "bodice-ripper," epitomizing the archetype of romance fiction for contemporary non-

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<sup>1</sup> See *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984).

readers of romance. Epigraph I reveals a key characteristic of the conventional romance's formulaic construction of gender relations. Despite the fact that Captain Brandon Birmingham, the novel's hero, is literally holding the heroine, Heather Simmons, prisoner aboard his ship, and despite his enormous economic, political, and social power over the orphaned and impoverished Heather, he defines himself as *her* prisoner. What makes his language particularly ironic here is the context of its utterance. He has just returned to his quarters to find Heather tidying up: "needing some task to occupy her thoughts, she began putting order to the cabin, which was littered with clothing" (45). Although Heather Simmons is his captive, Captain Birmingham claims himself a metaphoric prisoner in his infatuation, surrendering himself and his ship, the space of both his home *and work*, to Heather's charm and conversion. The scene foreshadows the novel's inevitable formulaic conclusion: Heather domesticates Brandon by transforming him from a domineering rake to a man who values marriage and family above all else.

Epigraph II, a passage from Jayne Ann Krentz's *Sharp Edges* (1998), reveals that substantial changes have occurred in the romance genre in the twenty-six years that have passed since the publication of *The Flame and the Flower*. While historical romances remain popular among readers, the early 1990s marks the emergence of contemporary romances featuring ambitious working heroines with substantial economic power. As successful white-collar professionals who are collaborators at work yet lovers on the side, Eugenia Swift and Cyrus Colfax appear equals both professionally and personally. What is intriguing about their dialogue, as opposed to the mutual captive narrative of Brandon

and Heather, is the absence of the rhetoric of home as haven. The language of the workplace is transferred, playfully and almost seamlessly, into the private space of the bedroom. Conflicts of feeling between lovers are to be resolved through theories of “personnel management,” for in the novel’s contemporary setting, distinct boundaries between the public and the private, or between work and home, begin to disappear.

An even greater departure from Woodiwiss’ prototype of conventional romance is observable in the tenth installment of Laurell K. Hamilton’s Anita Blake series, *Narcissus in Chains* (2001). While the previous books in the multi-volume narrative explore Anita’s strained negotiation with the “love triangle” that exists between her, Jean-Claude (a vampire), and Richard (a werewolf), *Narcissus in Chains* marks not only her exploration of a polyamorous relationship with both heroes, but also her utilization of public spaces for sexual encounters, as suggested in Epigraph III. While representative of the “paranormal” romance subgenre that emerges alongside Krentz’s work-centered romances in the 1990s, this sexual encounter deviates significantly from the conventional romance formula’s standard “love-making” scenes, which are typically reserved for the private realm of the domestic sphere. Although exceptions certainly do occur—various outdoor (“natural”) places are often constructed as romantic spaces in the genre of romance—the heroine and hero are never granted an audience, let alone an audience that facilitates the safety and enjoyment of the heroine’s erotic experience. In this series, as in many paranormal romance series, homes are rarely safe places; rather, they are the primary targets of invasion and destruction by the various supernatural creatures who

wish to do harm to the heroine. Thus, the degraded domestic sphere constitutes one of the central features of this subgenre.

In his seminal analysis on the development and significance of popular fiction, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (1976), John G. Cawelti notes that “when literary formulas last for a considerable period of time, they usually undergo considerable change as they adapt to the different needs and interests of changing generations” (4). Krentz’s and Hamilton’s respective restructuring of Woodiwiss’ rendition of the domestic sphere suggests that such a formulaic shift in the genre of popular romance likely correlates to a cultural shift worth examining. In fact, *Sharp Edges* is exemplary of an emergent subgenre of the romance novel that I designate as “corporate romance.” Unlike the orphaned and imprisoned Heather of *The Flame and the Flower*, typical of conventional romances, heroines of corporate romances are just as capable of commanding attention in an executive boardroom as they are of preparing fine cuisine at home. They possess economic and social power equal to that of their heroes, and because of this, they have the agency to enter (and exit) a romantic relationship on their own terms. Their heroes, who are typically characterized by a “cool” professionalism that facilitates their career success, require little taming. Corporate heroes are not misogynistic cavemen; they recognize a lucrative partnership—in business and love—when they see it. Gender inequality, in other words, is not the primary tension negotiated in the corporate romance. Rather, the hero and heroine of this subgenre are faced with the challenge of navigating the demands of “home” and “work,” and as the genre’s requisite happy ending reveals, they are ultimately successful in this endeavor.

The “paranormal” romance, despite being loosely defined as a subgenre that “includ[es] any element beyond the range of scientific explanation,” typically centralizes a heroine with some form of paranormal ability that also enables her to gain substantial economic and social power (Tobin-McClain 294). Unlike the heroine of the “corporate” romance, however, the paranormal heroine does not utilize her extraordinary endowments to navigate the home/work binary. The heroine’s paranormality almost universally signifies reproductive sterility, and she often makes a conscious decision to reject not only the institution of marriage, but also the long-term monogamous romantic relationship. This subgenre, in other words, features female protagonists who couldn’t adhere to the gendered expectations associated with the domestic sphere even if they wanted to—and they don’t want to. Paranormal romance narratives, typically in multiple installments, explore the episodic lives of heroines who experience a seemingly infinite number of short-term adventures as they defeat villains, save the world, and seek diverse romantic and sexual escapades in the interim. Like the “corporate” romance, the “paranormal” romance decenters the conventional romantic tension between heroine and hero. However, the primary concern of this subgenre is not the satisfactory negotiation of home and work life; “paranormal” romances reject the home/work binary altogether, instead featuring heroines involved in the endless pursuit of pleasure, adventure, and self-fulfillment.

While much has been said, and indeed said meaningfully and perceptively about conventional romance of the kind of which *The Flame and the Flower* is representative, little has been remarked upon about the arrival of the corporate romance or the

paranormal romance, and even less the critical examination of these subgenres' potential cultural and political importance. What I take upon myself in this dissertation is precisely the task of engaging corporate and paranormal romance in the immediate contexts of their emergence. As generic departures from their predecessor, conventional romance, these subgenres appear a discursive and formal negotiation of "the needs and interests," to use and revise Cawelti, arising from not just a different generation but out of different geopolitical and socioeconomic conditions.

Here, I find David Harvey's periodization of post-WWII capitalism insightful. In *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (1989), Harvey uses "Fordism" and "flexible accumulation" to describe and divide two different phases of capitalism. While Fordism stands for the time of postwar mass production (at the hands of stably employed, often unionized, working-class laborers), flexible capital refers to the urgently paced small-scale production (and consumption), service-oriented jobs, and a greater numbers of workers in "flexible" (i.e. temporary, subcontracted, and/or part-time) positions of employment. He argues that these economic transformations inflect the political and social realities of people on a global scale, from U.S. workers and consumers to outsourced laborers—including women and children—in developing nations. Harvey's periodization of two modes of capitalism receives critical elaboration in the pioneering work of feminist sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild, whose study of contemporary labor practice and its reconstitution of gender and family relations reveals how the social circumstances from which conventional romances emerge are radically altered.



If the conventional romances of the 1980s and prior depict romantic relationships in the context of Fordist capitalism, I argue that the corporate and paranormal romance formulas of the 1990s reveal the great transformation wrought by the regime of flexible capital and its inescapable impact on gender roles and gender relations. These subgenres represent new configurations of male and female subjectivity, and of work and home spaces, in such fantastic form that the current canon of romance criticism provides an inadequate framework for analysis. It is my objective to unpack the corporate and paranormal romances' generic implications and contribute to a new understanding of romance's social significance in the era of flexible global capitalism. To do so, I shall begin with a brief overview of conventional romance and its foundational criticism.

### **Fordist Capitalism, the Conventional Romance Novel, and Its Criticism**

Under Fordism, which characterizes the period of welfare capitalism in the United States between the 1950s and 1970s, the labor market was rigidly structured and stable; for the most part, workers maintained steady jobs that required specific skills for the making of specific products, earned "real" wages, and could rely on trade union power. Although the "rigidity" of Fordism also facilitated clear-cut, largely unsurpassable class distinctions between laborers and the owners of corporations (and did little to help women and people of color penetrate and/or succeed in the labor market), its strict boundaries simplified the process of self-identification for its workers. An individual could define himself/herself by his/her job skill, position of employment, location in the company hierarchy, etc. The roles of non-wage-earning women were clearly marked as

well. In this manner, Fordist capital continues the economic and gender division endemic to the rise of capitalism. As noted by Eli Zaretsky in *Capitalism, the Family, & Personal Life* (1976), “It is only under capitalism that material production organized as wage labour and the forms of production taking place within the family, have been separated so that the ‘economic’ function of the family is obscured” (26-7). The unpaid domestic labor of women (such as childrearing, food preparation, and cleaning) clearly enabled men to produce and sell goods and services, but women’s perceived lack of direct participation in industrial production and commerce relegated them to a social space distinct from the economic, public world. “Since the rise of industry,” Zaretsky argues, “proletarianization split off the outer world of alienated labour from an inner world of personal feeling. Just as capitalist development gave rise to the idea of the family as a separate realm from the economy, so it created a ‘separate’ sphere of personal life, seemingly divorced from the mode of production” (30). Fordist capitalism tends to stabilize the distinctly gendered realms of early capital that Zaretsky takes on as his point of departure.

Until recently, the conventional romance has reflected and negotiated this distinction between the public, economic, and political world of men, and the personal, emotional, and domestic world of women, and so has the field of romance criticism. The 1980s witnessed the publication of significant studies of domestic fiction and popular romance, with such notable contributions as Jane Tompkins’ *Sensational Designs* (1985), Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987), Tania Modleski’s *Loving with a Vengeance* (1982), Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance* (1984), and Kay Mussell’s

*Fantasy and Reconciliation* (1984), that establish conventional romance as a respectable field of academic inquiry. In spite of their respective generic foci, these feminist scholars highlight the cultural work performed by both domestic fiction and romance novels, examining how both women writers and women readers have negotiated (and continue to negotiate) their positions within a patriarchal culture, and demonstrating how the constitution of women's subjectivity is tied to the gendered construction of the domestic sphere. Situating romance within the recognized female literary tradition of domestic fiction, Tania Modleski contends that elements of the Harlequin originate with Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and can be traced through the works of Charlotte Bronte and Jane Austen (15). Like the sentimental and domestic novels that preceded them, Harlequins contain what Modleski calls the "reformed-rake plot," which involves the hero's adoption of the heroine's domestic values: "In [romance] novel after novel, the man is brought to acknowledge the preeminence of love and the attractions of domesticity at which he has, as a rule, previously scoffed" (17). The values associated with the domestic sphere are perhaps most thoroughly explored in Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, in which she argues that gendered subjectivities were created and naturalized in domestic fiction, resulting in a distinct boundary between the political and economic public domain dominated by men, and the apolitical, moral, and emotional domestic realm ruled by women (8). The heroine's ability to domesticate the hero by convincing him to reject his "masculine" values in favor of her "feminine" ones suggests an inversion of the patriarchal hierarchy that has far-reaching implications. The transformed hero reemerges into the public realm with a "feminine" value system; thus, the heroine also enables the

taming of the predatory values of capital that are central to the economic and political “masculine” sphere. As contemporary romance novelist, Jayne Ann Krentz, notes as recently as 1992 in *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*, “[Romance novels] celebrate female power, intuition, and a female worldview that affirms life and expresses hope for the future” (8). The gendered divisions are not called into question, but female values of caring are privileged over male values of competition; the romantic couple and the family are prioritized over the individual, home is more important than work, emotion is more trustworthy than reason, and actions guided by morality are superior to those driven by profit.

The critical consensus among leading scholars on the romance novel seems ambivalent at best. The genre allows women to work through the anxieties that are a product of the patriarchal division of gender and labor, and they propose solutions that bring temporary satisfaction: “women writers have always had their own way of ‘evening things up’ between men and women, even when they seemed most fervently to embrace their subordinate status” (Modleski 16). However, for Tania Modleski, as is the case of other prominent critics, the mere inversion of gendered hierarchies does not justify feminist affirmation of the genre:

[W]hile popular feminine texts provide outlets for women’s dissatisfaction with male-female relationships, they never question the primacy of these relationships. Nor do they overtly question the myth of male superiority or the institutions of marriage and the family. Indeed, patriarchal myths and institutions are, on the manifest level, whole-heartedly embraced,

although the anxieties and tensions they give rise to may be said to provoke the need for the texts in the first place (113).

Janice Radway's ethnographic analysis of a particular group of romance novel readers yields similar findings: "when the act of romance reading is viewed as it is by the readers themselves, from within a belief system that accepts as given the institutions of heterosexuality and monogamous marriage, it can be conceived as an activity of mild protest and longing for reform necessitated by those institutions' failure to satisfy the emotional needs of women" (213). Kay Mussell, providing the most comprehensive evaluation of romance subgenres and lineages to date, sidesteps the question of feminist potential of the genre with the following caveat: "[*Fantasy and Reconciliation*] does not defend romances—either as art or as appropriate models for female lives—but I hope it respects, understands, and thus defends those women who choose to read them" (xv). Mussell's tone of resignation seems to betray a sense of critical exhaustion both at the persistence of patriarchal conditions that the romance genre continues to mediate and at the absence of new narratives with which to revitalize feminist critiques. Recent development in the production of romance novels, however, has turned Mussell's mid-1980s anxiety superfluous, for the advent of flexible capital has so unsettled the traditional division of "masculine and feminine," and "private and public," that new subgenres of romance arrive to pose new challenges.

### **Flexible Capitalism and the “Corporate” Romance Novel**

Flexible capitalism gives rise to a shift in subjective identifications and the location of meaning and value. In *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work* (1997), Arlie Hochschild identifies the transition to flexible capital and its effects on the transformation of the workforce:

[A] far wider range of people are coming to work these days. Forty-five percent of them are women, and the majority of women workers are mothers. Today, 74 percent of mothers with children six to seventeen, 59 percent with children six and under, and 55 percent with children one and under are in paid work, about half of them full time [...] Fifty-five percent of working women now earn about half or more of family income (xix).

These statistics reveal a significant increase in the numbers of working women, particularly mothers, compared to 50 years ago: “while in 1950 12.6 percent of married mothers with children under age seventeen worked for pay, by 1994, 69 percent did so; and 58.8 percent of wives with children age one or younger were in the workforce” (Hochschild 6). The increasing numbers of female white-collar professionals has also changed the face of the American corporation:

[H]iring the best now often means hiring a woman. Women now make up half of the graduates of departments of business administration and receive a third of all bachelor degrees in computer and information sciences. One way to gain an edge in what looked like an increasingly competitive hiring

environment, [Amerco] figured, was to outshine its competitors in work-family policies (30).

“Family-friendly” policies include programs like Amerco’s “flexplace” (working at least part-time outside the office) and “flextime” (working earlier or later shifts), as well as on-site daycares. Hochschild also notes that many corporations are “bringing the mall to work” by offering conveniences like gymnasiums, banks, dry cleaners, etc. (xxii). The result of such changes is a blurring of the distinctions between work and home: “The cultural world of paid work was growing stronger, while families and local communities—the social worlds with which we associate our deepest bonds of empathy—were growing weaker” (Hochschild xxi). Hochschild’s analyses suggest that the transition from Fordist to flexible capitalism has informed a significant transformation in the realms of work and home. The domestic/private and economic/public spheres distinguished and solidified through Fordist capitalism overlap as domestic care (such as childrearing, cleaning, and cooking) becomes more frequently outsourced so that employees can spend more time—and devote more energy—to work.

Flexible capitalism also changes consumers’ relationships to products, which in turn informs their own perceptions about identity. New technology, innovation, and organizational forms under the flexible accumulation model led to faster turnover time in production, which inevitably resulted in faster rates of consumption. Harvey claims that these accelerations in both production and consumption made possible our current brand of American cultural materialism: “The relatively stable aesthetic of Fordist modernism has given way to all the ferment, instability, and fleeting qualities of a postmodernist

aesthetic that celebrates difference, ephemerality, spectacle, fashion, and the commodification of cultural forms” (156). The majority of production is centered on the creation of goods that are only temporarily desirable (or intangible and inherently evanescent, like a Hawaiian vacation) to consumers and meant to be replaced. According to Harvey, nearly every aspect of the culture we live in—and our lives in general—is submerged in the instantaneous and disposable. Furthermore, because so much of our own self-worth and ability to self-identify is intrinsically connected to what is currently “fashionable,” identity (in the Foucaultian sense) is not only self-constructed but without a referential base: “Insofar as identity is increasingly dependent upon images, this means that serial and recursive replications of identities (individual, corporate, institutional, and political) becomes a very real possibility and problem” (289). This phenomenon contributes to the destabilization of both gendered and familial identities; the roles of women and men, as well as mothers and fathers, are no longer clearly defined.

In short, the economic shift from Fordist to flexible capitalism has produced a cultural shift as well, and this cultural shift is apparent even in our most intimate relationships, giving rise to “confluent love,” as Anthony Giddens posits in *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love & Eroticism in Modern Societies* (1992):

Confluent love is active, contingent love, and therefore jars with the ‘forever,’ ‘one-and-only’ qualities of the romantic love complex. The ‘separating and divorcing society’ of today here appears as an effect of the emergence of confluent love rather than its cause. The more confluent love becomes consolidated as a real possibility, the more the finding of a



'special person' recedes and the more it is the 'special relationship' that counts [...] Confluent love presumes equality in emotional give and take, the more so the more any particular love tie approximates closely to the prototype of the pure relationship (61-2).

Giddens defines the "pure relationship" as "refer[ring] to a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it" (58). While romantic love has been, historically and traditionally, desexualized and unegalitarian (Giddens correlates romantic love with the "grim domestic subjection" of women), confluent love offers a more democratic restructuring of intimacy that is heavily influenced by the language and philosophies of the marketplace (62). Individuals who enter relationships do so via an implied contract of mutual benefits; either party feels justified in exiting the relationship when the implied contract is broken. This is not to suggest, however, that love is no longer supposed to be "hard work," as "the work ethic has managed to brownnose its way into all spheres of human existence" (Kipnis 18).

Hochschild, Harvey, and Giddens reveal how the foundation of gender division and hierarchy upon which the conventional romance articulates its desire and fulfillment is giving way to modes of work and forms of sociality that are rather different. This idea is continually explored in corporate romances, in which the hero and heroine are initially constructed as "good" at work and "bad" at love, yet they both ultimately become part of a successful and contented romantic couple due to their transference of management

skills and business ethics into the relationship. What Harvey and Hochschild note about flexible capital's reorganization of labor and family life in fact gives rise to Giddens' theorization of the "pure relationship" and "confluent love," as well as Kipnis' grievance against love as a "domestic gulag." Together, they evidence the acute transformation of intimacy under the condition of global capitalism, a condition, as I argue, that constitutes the emergence of the "corporate" romance. Corporate romances rearticulate the condition of global capitalism by a generic reconfiguration of time and space. The formulaic convention of "happily ever after" becomes, in the corporate romance, "happy for the moment"; the corporate hero and heroine typically explore a sexual relationship early in the novel, before feelings of love are recognized, because the capitalist logic that informs their perspectives on work also influences their romantic choices, resulting in a blurring of the distinctions between the realms of home and work, and private and public. Thus, the descriptive label of "corporate" for this genre takes on multiple significations. In addition to reflecting the environments in which these novels unfold, the term "corporate" also highlights the centrality of a conjugal union that is almost entirely informed by the economic entity that is the embodiment of capital in flexible capitalism. Further, the corporate romance narrative always concludes with a dual "marriage"; the hero and the heroine enter into a marital contract and a business contract almost simultaneously. Thus, the corporate union is a fusion of both the individual, biological bodies of the protagonists and the corporate entities they represent.

As early as 1982, romance author Jayne Ann Krentz introduced new "corporate" elements into the conventional romance. Novels like *A Corporate Affair* and *A*

*Passionate Business* not only contained working protagonists, but also centralized the work environment as the setting in which romance blossoms and gains form. Krentz developed a recognizable formula that has been utilized by other contemporary romance novelists. By now, the corporate romance genre has matured with a discernible set of key characteristics apparent in 1) the characterizations of the protagonists, 2) the type (and cause) of the conflict between hero and heroine, and 3) the narrative resolution of the conflict. First, the hero and heroine are both white-collar professionals. Either character, in the novel's contemporary setting, may be more accurately described as a small-business owner or entrepreneur, but even these seemingly less corporate protagonists once excelled, in their recent pasts, as corporate players. The hero and heroine both love their work. These are not protagonists who experience dissatisfaction with their chosen professions and desire drastic change. Both view their careers as the ideal manifestations of their innate talents and abilities. Both perceive their professions as accurate reflections of their personalities. Second, the hero and heroine initially distrust one another, much like their more conventional counterparts. However, this distrust is not derived from the gendered tensions familiar to readers of more conventional romances. Rather, its root is marketplace competition. Upon first acquaintance, the hero and heroine in the corporate romance are always forced into a reluctant professional partnership (often the result of a corporate merger of some sort). There is not a battle of the sexes; it is a conflict centered on control of the workplace. The necessity of the teamwork is also centralized in the requisite secondary plot of the corporate romance, which always entails the hero and heroine's solving of a mystery (typically a murder, a series of murders, or a kidnapping)

and becomes resolved almost simultaneously with the protagonists' declarations of love for each other. This additional plot also affords the hero and heroine an adventure that weaves them in and out of the corporate world. Lastly, the corporate romance narrative concludes not only with the hero and heroine's domestic partnership (typically conveyed through marriage, or at the very least, a betrothal), but also with a contractual business partnership. The corporate heroine, in other words, doesn't merely get to keep her job after marriage; she gains considerably more corporate power by joining forces with her hero. Further, the hero and heroine essentially gain a "family" twice-over. Their conception of a child (often revealed in an epilogue) corresponds to their conception of the new corporation that has resulted from their merger. The hero and heroine become "mom and dad" at home, as well as in the workplace. Corporate romances feature protagonists who constantly negotiate the dual (and intersecting) arenas of "work" and "home" in an effort to locate a balance that leads to success and happiness in both realms. Hochschild's theoretical insight that "the emotional magnets beneath home and the workplace are in the process of being reversed" achieves its narrative manifestation in Krentz's corporate romances, in which corporate heroines navigate (and ultimately resolve) the tensions between home and work by domesticating the workplace, and with it, the corporate hero (44).

## Flexible Heroines, Flexible Narratives: The “Paranormal” Romance and Its Formulaic Conventions

The “paranormal” romance is not a neatly contained, monolithic subgenre. The definitions offered by the few scholars who have contributed critical work on the paranormal romance are understandably generic, considering the substantial range of paranormal characters, realms, and situations explored in these novels. In her introduction to *Best New Paranormal Romance* (2007), Paula Guran states quite simply, “to be ‘paranormal’ a romance needs involve the supernatural ... or have a futuristic or science-fictional element” (7). Although the paranormal romance term appears to encompass a rather large category of fiction, given the rather strict definitions of “romance” discussed previously, the label of “romance” is applied far more cautiously than its laidback counterpart, “paranormal.” Using Pamela Regis’ definition of romance—from *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2007)—as the foundation of her argument, Guran discusses the distinction between “paranormal romance” and “paranormal Romance”: “I contend that although *some* twenty-first century paranormal romance is still definitional Romance, another type of ‘paranormal romance’ has emerged that is *not* Romance. Perhaps it is time to acknowledge this duality or at least explore the idea” (8). Guran suggests that “the betrothal,” which signifies “happily ever after” at the conclusion of the conventional romance narrative, is the definitive element that distinguishes “paranormal Romance” from “paranormal romance.” Romance novelists such as Jayne Ann Krentz,<sup>2</sup> Nora Roberts, Christine Feehan, Sherrilyn Kenyon, and

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<sup>2</sup> Krentz writes futuristic romances under the pseudonym of Jayne Castle.

Maggie Shayne, who occasionally venture into paranormal territory, are producing “paranormal Romance.” In contrast, the works of Kelley Armstrong, Laurell K. Hamilton, Charlaine Harris, and Carrie Vaughn—all of which will be the central foci of the latter chapters in this project—are more appropriately labeled “paranormal romance,” because these novels violate the conventional romance formula by omitting “the betrothal,” as well as any other indicator of “happily ever after.”

Guran’s argument reveals the fundamental paradox that exists at the core of romance criticism. The “betrothal” must occur at some point in the romance novel. A romance novel without a betrothal is not a romance; it may contain a love story, but it should be categorized as belonging to some other genre. This logic suggests both the impossibility of a feminist reading of popular romance—if a romance novel must conclude with at least the promise of marriage, then the genre *does*, by critical definition, affirm “patriarchal myths and institutions”—and more importantly perhaps, and it suggests that women’s concerns, experiences, and ideas about love have changed minimally in the 200-plus years that have passed since the emergence of the domestic novel (Modleski 16). In my view, it is more fruitful to read the “paranormal” romance’s nearly universal rejection of marriage—and reproduction—as a reflection of shifting ideals about intimacy that arise from the cultural effects of flexible capitalism. In his discussion of “time-space compression,” David Harvey notes that the “the time horizons of both private and public decision-making have shrunk, while satellite communication and declining transport costs have made it increasingly possible to spread those decisions immediately over an ever wider and variegated space” (147). Further, “the primary

effect” of time-space compression “has been to emphasize the values and virtues of instantaneity ... and of disposability [...] The dynamics of a ‘throwaway’ society ... mean[s] more than just throwing away produced goods ... but also being able to throw away values, lifestyles, stable relationships, and attachments to things, buildings, places, people, and received ways of doing and being” (156, 286). The heroines of “paranormal” romance, like the multi-volume narrative structures that contain them, fully embrace the “dynamics of a ‘throwaway’ society” as they experience a multitude of romantic relationships, sexual encounters, and adventures that yield only temporary satisfaction.

Paranormal romances share particular formulaic conventions that are symptomatic of a “throwaway” culture in both form and content. The majority of these novels contain the following characteristics: a first-person female narrator; a multi-volume narrative structure; and the setting of a parallel or alternate universe that is eerily similar to our own, with the notable exception that magic exists, in some form or another. The first-person narrator is significant for our purposes in that it, quite literally, privileges the “I” voice; the paranormal romance explores the individual pursuit of adventure, pleasure, and self-fulfillment. The multi-volume narrative structure suggests that this pursuit is open and endless. None of the paranormal series explored in this project, for example, is complete.

Further, as previously noted, this subgenre is marked by the absence of both marriage and reproduction. The transformative bodies of the werewolf heroines discussed in chapter five are constructed as incompatible with the process of childbirth. The heroines of chapter six sacrifice the possibility of pregnancy by pursuing romantic

relationships with vampires who, being “undead,” are no longer fertile. The absence of reproductive potential in paranormal romances effectively enables these protagonists to access what Judith Halberstam, in *A Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, identifies as “queer time”: “‘Queer time’ is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance” (6). Noting that “queer time” emerges out of the AIDS crisis of the late twentieth century, Halberstam argues that David Harvey—among other postmodern geographers—inadequately addresses sexuality as an analytical category in his examination of the cultural effects of flexible capitalism on time and space. She contrasts “queer time” with “reproductive time,” which describes “those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (2). For Halberstam, “longevity” is one of the hallmark characteristics of “reproductive time”: “we create longevity as the most desirable future, applaud the pursuit of long life (under any circumstances), and pathologize modes of living that show little or no concern for longevity” (4). Paranormal romances offer the best of both worlds; lycanthropy—“werewolfism”—is constructed as a disease that lengthens human lifespan considerably, and the heroines who exchange blood with their vampire lovers also access their immortality, but there is little correlation between longevity and risk. Paranormal heroines typically possess extraordinary strength, speed, and recuperative abilities. Further, they are often immune to all human diseases, including sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. For these



protagonists, sex is never associated with the possibility of death; unlike humans, they rarely need to restrict their life choices in order to ensure longevity.

The absence of reproductive time means there is no recognizable, finite framework for paranormal romances: “This wasn’t one of those fairy-tale romances where the heroine realizes her undying love for the hero after he’s placed in mortal danger. There were no heroes or heroines in this story and there would be no happily ever after ending” (Armstrong 395). In *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Anthony Giddens explores the gendered distinctions between the “linear” and “episodic” narratives constructed by women and men. Citing Sharon Thompson’s study of the views of American teenagers on love and sex in the late 1980s, Giddens notes that “boys appeared unable to talk about sex in a narrative form, as a connection to an envisaged future. They spoke mainly about sporadic sexual episodes, such as early heterosexual play or diverse sexual conquests” (49). Girls, on the other hand, “could produce lengthy stories ‘imbued with the discoveries, anguish, and elation of intimate relations’” (49). Thompson called the girls’ stories “quest-romances,” arguing that “Romance gears sexuality into an anticipated future in which sexual encounters are seen as detours on the way to an eventual love relationship” (50). Giddens identifies the “quest-romance” as a linear narrative, a story that progresses toward the specific and desirable end of achieving permanent love, an end that is notably absent in the boys’ “episodic narratives” of multiple sexual imaginings and encounters.

I discuss this distinction because paranormal romances are also episodic in their exploration of sexual relationships and adventures in general. The absence of

consequences—particularly reproduction, disease, and death—enables paranormal heroines to experience sex, love, and adventure not as logical steps in a narrative sequence that progresses toward a specific conclusion, but as temporary pleasures that are self-fulfilling. Although each novel focuses on a central conflict that typically involves the heroine saving herself, her family and friends, or the world from a dangerous threat, the resolution of the threat never suggests an end to the heroine’s adventures. The multi-volume narrative structure that characterizes this subgenre is a stark contrast from the single-volume format that typifies the conventional romance novel. As Kay Mussell argues in *Fantasy and Reconciliation*, the conventional romance novel reaches its conclusion when the heroine and hero either get married, or agree to marry. Mussell’s analysis here echoes Giddens’ conceptualization of “romantic love” as oppressive to women; conventional romance novels rarely have sequels, because marriage, or the promise of it, signifies the end of a woman’s adventure. This argument underlies Guran’s claim that the works of Armstrong and Vaughn should be categorized as “*not* Romance”: “Women see romance as part of life’s adventure. The guys adventured with blood-drenched brawny swordsmen with sinewy muscles and big ... weapons. Wipe out a horde of bad guys, grab a princess who adores you or a convenient wench, make whoopee, and depart to slaughter more monsters” (8, 14). Guran’s assumption that there is a firm gendered distinction between the types of adventures that male and female readers prefer is clearly in alignment with Thompson’s findings; women’s romantic adventures are linear and finite, while the violent and sexual adventures of men are explored in a never-ending loop of exciting experience, with no clear beginning or end.

In other words, paranormal romances offer specifically male fantasies, and therefore should be located squarely within the male-centered genre of science fiction/fantasy. It would be more fruitful to acknowledge, however, that “time-space compression” has facilitated the erosion of a clear distinction between men’s and women’s ideal fantasies of love and adventure.

### **The Multiple Manifestations of “Corporate” and “Paranormal” Romance**

As this project analyzes two subgenres of romance that emerge in the 1990s and reflect divergent negotiations of love and work under flexible capitalism, my examination of “corporate” and “paranormal” romances is essentially divided into two parts. In chapters 2 – 4, I explore three different manifestations of “corporate” romance, each with its own set of discernible characteristics: the Krentzian “corporate” romance, the “small town” romance, and the “interracial corporate” romance. Because I identify Jayne Ann Krentz as the romance writer who pioneered this subgenre and thereby established its formulaic conventions, three of her corporate romance novels serve as the focal point of chapter two: *Sharp Edges* (1998), *Flash* (1998), and *Soft Focus* (1999). Arlie Hochschild’s argument that “the emotional magnets beneath home and the workplace are in the process of being reversed” is reflected in Krentz’s corporate romances, in which corporate heroines navigate—and ultimately resolve—the tensions between home and work by domesticating the workplace, and with it, the corporate hero. However, although the corporate romance posits the possibility of a successful navigation of this tension, it becomes clear that the heroine’s position as a white, upper-class

inheritor of the corporation facilitates her ability to integrate work and home life satisfactorily.

Chapter three identifies a different construction of the “corporate” romance in the “small town” novels of Nora Roberts, which offer an alternate resolution of Hochschild’s “time bind” through a nostalgic return to pre-industrial capitalism. In *Sanctuary* (1997) and *Jewels of the Sun* (1999), Roberts’ heroines abandon unsatisfying white-collar jobs and seek refuge in the childhood or ancestral communities they claim as “home.” The small town of Roberts’ imagining, which seems to exist simultaneously in the past *and* outside of real time and space, is a locus of healing for the heroine; she experiences an emotional re-education that enables her to develop meaningful relationships—romantic and familial—and pursue a more fulfilling career upon her return to “the city.” I argue that the “small town” romance, in addition to addressing the complex navigation of work and home life, also attempts to resolve the tension between the “global” and the “local” in its reassertion of community boundaries. Roberts constructs a fantastical version of a closed community that appears to be unaffected by the global economy, and is beyond the reach of global tourists—with the notable exception of the heroine.

The racial dimension of the divergent capitalist fantasies offered by “corporate” and “small town” romances is a central concern of this project. Just as the “corporate” romance’s happy ending hinges upon its protagonists’ white corporate supremacy, the “small town” romance requires a white “ethnic village” that Roberts’ (white) heroine can legitimately claim as a place of ancestral and physical belonging. Whiteness, in other words, appears to be a key characteristic of the corporate romance’s resolutions. My

analysis of interracial corporate romances—corporate romances featuring protagonists in interracial relationships—explores this idea further. Chapter four examines the novels of Elizabeth Lowell (*Jade Island*, 1998) and Katherine Stone (*Pearl Moon*, 1995), both of which explore romantic relationships between a white hero and a mixed-race Asian (and white) heroine. These interracial romances invert the conventional romance formula by featuring white heroes who domesticate their Asian heroines, and in turn, the family-owned companies they represent, thereby “modernizing” corporations that are portrayed as overtly patriarchal, regressive, and anti-capitalist. Lowell’s and Stone’s respective narratives reveal that a racial and nationalist hierarchy is (re)affirmed in the subgenre of corporate romance.

The final chapters of this project explore two, largely distinct, categories of “paranormal” romance. Although, as I claimed earlier, paranormal romance is a relatively amorphous category of popular fiction, readers of these novels have identified more specific subgenres within this classification. Paranormalromance.org, for example, arranges titles in subcategories like “Shapeshifter” and “Vampire.” Paranormalromancewriters.com offers the additional topics of “Mermaid/mermen,” “Dragons,” “Ghosts and Spirits,” “Fey/Goblins,” and “Werewolves or Wolves.” These websites indicate that readers develop preferences for particular types of supernatural creatures, each of which requires unique parameters and thereby provides a very specific fantasy. In both sites, the categories of “vampire” and “shapeshifter/werewolves” contain the longest list of titles. It is not surprising, then, that fansites like [vampireromancebooks.com](http://vampireromancebooks.com) and [werewolferoticromance.com](http://werewolferoticromance.com) exist. Due to the popularity of these two very different

“monsters” in paranormal romance fiction, as well as the antithetical relationship constructed between them in multiple forms of popular media, I have chosen “werewolf romances” and “vampire romances” as the respective foci of this dissertation’s final chapters.

Both “werewolf” and “vampire” romances utilize the formulaic conventions of paranormal romance discussed earlier, including the heroine’s first-person point of view; a multi-volume narrative structure; protagonists’ prolonged life spans, immunity to disease and extraordinary strength and speed; and the absence of “happily ever after.” However, werewolf and vampire narratives each offer very particular interrogations of romance in the context of flexible capitalism. My research has revealed a virtually dialectical relationship between the character types that these sub-subgenres are named for. Werewolves typically thrive in rural environments; vampires are creatures of urbanity. Vampires are cerebral; werewolves fully occupy their bodies. Vampires are immigrants and consummate travelers who have spent so much of their long lives in different parts of the world that their loyalty to a particular nation is a moot point. Werewolves and shape-shifters, on the other hand, are profoundly territorial and distinctly American. I read the distinctions between these species in paranormal romance—and more importantly, the utilization and adaptation of these specific “monsters” that have long held cultural significance—as explorations of competing and sometimes contradictory fantasies that have emerged within U.S. flexible capitalist culture.

Chapter five analyzes the werewolf romances of Kelley Armstrong's *Women of the Otherworld* series<sup>3</sup> (2001 to the present) and Carrie Vaughn's *Kitty Norville* series (2005 to the present). Armstrong's and Vaughn's heroines embark on a variety of adventures in their respective narratives—many of which are romantic relationships—that epitomize the search for “escape, fantasy, and distraction” (Harvey 302). Unlike the women who read their stories, the protagonists' uninhibited pursuit of pleasure is not restrained by bodily limitations (due to aging, disease, disability, etc.), income level, marriage, reproduction, or social/cultural norms. This last point is directly connected to the bodies they occupy. In addition to embodying the significance of capitalist flexibility through their biological ability to transform their bodies from human to animal (and animal to human) at will, these women are also depicted as possessing what amounts to a biological exemption from many of the rules that govern U.S. culture. Being a werewolf may complicate life at times, but it also functions as a convincing excuse to view cultural taboos like total sexual liberty and even murder with ambiguity and ambivalence. More interestingly perhaps, lycanthropy is constructed as a racial category that grants these women access to the perceived privileges of non-white status, the primary privilege being the right to claim entitlement to U.S. land—and arguably the nation at large—and in turn claim a “place-identity,” the term used by Harvey to describe the hoped-for result of that “search for secure moorings in a shifting world” (302). This claim is legitimized in the genre, in part, through the parallels constructed between werewolves defending their

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<sup>3</sup> Armstrong's *Women of the Otherworld* series also contains novels that centralize other paranormal heroines who appear as minor characters throughout the multi-volume narrative, including a witch, a vampire, and a necromancer.

territories from the encroachment of white humans attempting to spread urbanization and the familiar historical plight of Native Americans. Further, lycanthropy is a condition that appears to transcend the distinctions between humans and animals, providing werewolves access to the unconscious memories and instincts of their animal ancestors, thereby positioning them within a lineage that, arguably, has the strongest claim on the disputed land. The parallel created between shape-shifters and indigenous peoples, however, is a false one. There is virtually no trade-off (i.e. persecution, racism, inability to defend territory) for these shape-shifters, who are racially white in human form, and therefore can—and do—access all of the privileges afforded to whiteness when they “pass” as human. What werewolves seem to embody, then, is the near elimination—or resolution—of a flexible capitalist cultural contradiction: they manage to be both utterly flexible and utterly stable.

This project’s final chapter examines the vampire romances of Laurell K. Hamilton’s Anita Blake series (1993 to the present) and Charlaine Harris’ Southern Vampire series (2001 to the present), both of which feature heroines with paranormal attributes who are *not* vampires but become romantically involved with vampires throughout their respective narratives. Hamilton and Harris construct alternate universes in which vampires “come out of the coffin”—to use Harris’ term—and participate fully in consumer capitalism. Drawing from Zygmunt Bauman’s “Tourists and Vagabonds,” I argue that the vampire heroes of this subgenre are depicted as ideal tourists. The human heroines who date them gain access to bodily and geographical mobility in the process.



These novels suggest that tourism (of places, experiences, and bodies) has replaced marriage as a primary romantic fantasy.

## CHAPTER II

ESCAPING THE “TIME BIND”: NEGOTIATIONS OF LOVE AND WORK  
IN JAYNE ANN KRENTZ’S “CORPORATE” ROMANCES

In *Soft Focus* (1999), *Flash* (1998), and *Sharp Edges* (1998), Jayne Ann Krentz interrogates the complicated lives of men and women under flexible capitalism. Each novel’s premise reveals the centrality of work-related conflict. *Flash*’s Olivia Chantry owns 49% of a high-tech lighting firm after her uncle dies, but his silent partner, Jasper Sloan, owns the other 51%. In *Sharp Edges*, Eugenia Swift, art institute director, must cooperate with the private investigator (and owner of a high-tech security company), Cyrus Colfax in order to ensure the acquisition of a much-desired glass collection. *Soft Focus*’ Elizabeth Cabot, the CEO of a company that provides start-up capital for entrepreneurs, regrets having entered a contractual agreement with Jack Fairfax, a turnaround specialist, to save a particular company from bankruptcy; Elizabeth and Jack join efforts to protect the failing company in order to meet the obligations of their contract expediently. The readers are exposed to protagonists who, like themselves, struggle to cultivate meaningful relationships with others while remaining competitive in the workplace, and these protagonists are ultimately successful in this endeavor. Thus, the corporate romance enables readers to envision positive, caring relationships with loved ones (i.e. family, friends, and romantic partners) from within a consumption- and possession-driven capitalist culture. While the hero and heroine both ultimately attain

this necessary equilibrium between love and work, it is the heroine, specifically, who is equipped to create this balance. She, above all other characters, understands the importance of pursuing a career that is meaningful and creative, and that utilizes her “female intuition.” For the corporate heroine, there is little conflict between home and work, because rather than allowing work to invade home, she possesses the ability and the resources to domesticate her workplace and, in turn, her hero. However, while the corporate romance formula offers a satisfying resolution for the tension that many working women must negotiate between work and home, it becomes clear that the heroine’s position as an upper-class white woman is largely responsible for her access to the resources that make the transformation of work and hero possible.

### **“Cool” Heroes and “Hot” Heroines: The “Corporate” Romance’s (Re)gendering of Emotional Labor**

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. In *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (1983), Arlie Hochschild defines “emotional labor” as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*” (7). Alan Liu offers a contemporary re-elaboration of Hochschild’s claim in his discussion of “emotion management”:

Not the family ... but the great impersonal organizations of modernity—above all, the workplace—have set the tone of modern emotional

experience [...] [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 (88).

In *The Laws of Cool: Knowledge Work and the Culture of Information* (2004), Liu argues that an emotional “coolness” characterized by “low affect” pervades the contemporary middle-class workplace (98). In following the rules of “emotional labor,” workers convey a cool professionalism while on the job, and direct excess emotions toward leisure practices and consumption: “[J]ust when ‘American cool’ arrived as the mainstream emotional style, popular culture began, antithetically, to use the term *hot* for depersonalized sexuality and commodity goods” (99). Liu discusses Hollywood’s negotiation of the “oscillation between cold and hot feeling” that pervaded the 50s and 60s, noting that “It created for fantasy a whole breed of characters able to bring that oscillation to a perfect point of convergence: steely-eyed heroes of the Western, gangster, noir, war, biker, and other film genres who had ice in their veins, who were so ‘cool’ they were ‘hot’” (100). These character types, in other words, enabled middle-class workers to consume “hot” personas and experiences vicariously in their leisure time. In Krentz’s corporate romances, this dichotomy between “cool” work and “hot” leisure is distinctly 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.

The corporate hero, in contrast to his more conventional incarnation, is the epitome of "cool." In *Romance and the Erotics of Property: Mass-Market Fiction for Women* (1988), Jan Cohn discusses the characteristic traits of the hero in romance novels that contain career-driven heroines: "he must be moody, he must move incomprehensively back and forth between seduction and rejection of the heroine" (114). The hero she describes is standard fare in the majority of romance novels, as revealed by Cohn's inclusion of an undated description of the hero offered by Silhouette Books for potential romance writers: "He is self-assured, masterful, hot-tempered, capable of violence, passion and tenderness. He is often mysteriously moody" (qtd. in Cohn 42). Yet, this version of the hero is markedly absent in Krentz's corporate romances. The Krentzian corporate hero is never on the verge of being flooded with dark emotions, but neither is he overly friendly or warm. This is not to suggest that the corporate hero lacks the woundedness of his more traditional counterparts. He still has a dark past—one that, in the corporate romance, typically involves the betrayal of a family member, fiancée/wife, or business partner—meaning that he still has internal demons to slay before the romantic couple can achieve "happily ever after." However, he has so far managed to subdue his demons by focusing on his career: "He slid into that distant, dispassionate state of mind that came over him whenever he concentrated on work" (*Flash* 12). The corporate hero wears a professional mask that is impenetrable to everyone but the heroine. Further, because the hero is obsessed with his work, this

professional mask is not something that gets removed on the weekends. Prior to meeting the heroine, he is portrayed as a character who never stops working, and certainly never takes vacations. In *Flash*, Jasper Sloan's initial business partner and two adopted sons force him to accept the Hawaiian vacation they purchase out of concern for his health: "Al sighed. 'I've known you for over five years. I can tell you that you never do anything the usual way. Stands to reason that you wouldn't have a typical, run-of-the-mill midlife crisis. Instead of an explosion, you're going through a controlled meltdown'" (10). Jasper goes on the vacation, but he is unable to enjoy himself: "He still did not know if he was in the midst of a midlife crisis, but he had come to one definite conclusion: He was bored. He was a goal-oriented person, and the only goal he'd had until now on Pelapili was to get off the island" (11). Unable to utilize his work skills in this environment of leisure, Jasper chooses to return home early.

Even though the corporate hero's interest in his work appears to override any enjoyment of leisure activities, it is not unusual for him to pursue one particular hobby that effectively synthesizes work and leisure, as well as productivity and domesticity: martial arts. Many of Krentz's corporate heroes practice some form of martial arts<sup>4</sup>, although *Soft Focus* is the only novel of the three explored here that features such a hero. In *The Laws of Cool*, Alan Liu situates the appeal of the Far East (and its myriad representations), along with the appeal of the open road, within the counterculture movement that emerged in the 1960s. Although intended to function in opposition to the

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<sup>4</sup> See also *Deep Waters* (1997), *Midnight Jewels* (1987), and under the pseudonym Amanda Quick: *I Thee Wed* (1999), *Lie By Moonlight* (2005), and *Wicked Widow* (2000).

work/leisure binary, the alternative lifestyles promoted by the counterculture movement were never completely removed from the influence of technology:

[E]ven the far out disliked being so far off the map as to be beyond reach, figuratively or literally of a plug. We notice, therefore, that alternative lifestyle required *technique* and often also *technology*, even when some of the technology involved was antimodern (organic rather than machinic, for example [...] Meditation, yoga, batik, t'ai chi, and other Eastern methods, in other words, were many things, but one of the things they surely were as received by the West was technique—a way of working some vast, cosmic phantom keyboard” (133).

The corporate hero's appreciation of martial arts always functions dually as an effective escape from the workplace and a tool to help him navigate the workplace successfully:

He had been spending a lot of what little spare time he possessed these days at the dojo. The hard physical and mental exercise provided a badly needed outlet (*SF* 46).

At the time [Elizabeth] had taken [Jack's] interest in the exotic exercise and philosophy as an indication of a deeply buried romantic streak [...] It was perfectly clear now that Jack studied the ancient theories of strategy and defense because he was endowed with a ruthless, not a romantic, streak. The bastard was a born predator (*SF* 27-8).

Martial arts enable the hero's control of his emotions, thereby positively affecting his performance at work, and they require the dedication, perseverance, and discipline that

define his approach to work already. They also signify that the hero is capable of being transformed by the heroine; even though his martial arts practice and his professional practice are clearly in alignment, his interest in Eastern philosophy foreshadows his belief in a “traditional” system of values and his desire for internal fulfillment, two commonalities that he eventually realizes he shares with the heroine.

The corporate heroine’s transformation of her hero begins with a disruption of his “coolness.” Krentz’s heroines never attract their heroes with beauty; they are described as interesting-looking, but never beautiful. Instead, they exude a “vitality” that immediately intrigues the hero: “She was not especially pretty, let alone beautiful, but there was a striking *vitality* about her that made it hard for [Cyrus] to look away”; “Wilder had got it all wrong, Jasper decided. Olivia Chantry was not an arrogant, imperious, ball-busting Amazon with predatory marketing instincts. She was a sharp, intelligent, *vital* woman who gave off sexual sparks” (emphasis mine *SE* 33, *Flash* 28). The hero’s attraction to the heroine’s vitality, as this chapter will establish shortly, should be read as his attraction to her lack of “cool,” which is emphasized in his imaginative representations of her in costume. Although she is always stylishly and professionally dressed in business attire, in the hero’s imagination, she becomes the embodiment of a “hot and wild” popular culture figure:

She looked more than ever like a cat burglar tonight [...] Not just any cat burglar, he decided. A very sexy cat burglar (*SE* 64).



She wore another pair of flowing menswear trousers, gleaming oxfords with chunky stacked heels, and a rakish pinstripe jacket. She looked as though she had just stepped out of a 1930's gangster film (*Flash* 45).

He saw her coming toward him, an avenging warrior princess in a crisp black business suit and high heels (*SF* 1).

The hero's fantastical construction of the heroine in these passages invokes images of Liu's "hot" cowboys, gangsters, and bikers. The hero's introduction to "hot" leisure is essentially his introduction to the heroine, who contradictorily embodies the passion and vitality (i.e. the excess emotion utilized outside of the workplace) associated with leisure activities, *and* the "cold" professional mastery of the workplace that is a major component of her suitability for him.

Although the corporate heroine, like the corporate hero, is fully capable of performing professionalism in the workplace, she is portrayed as anything but "cool." Krentz situates her heroines within careers that arguably require a lack of emotion management. For the heroes, the "cool" approach is depicted as necessary in their lines of work. *Sharp Edges'* Cyrus Colfax is a private investigator who consistently wears Hawaiian shirts and affects a laidback, "cool" persona that contributes to his rate of success in solving cases. *Flash's* Jasper Sloan, a venture capitalist who provides funding for high-risk projects, as well as *Soft Focus'* Jack Fairfax, a turnaround specialist who saves companies from bankruptcy, both handle their stressful jobs by remaining "cool," calm, and dispassionate at all times. In contrast, the job responsibilities of corporate heroines seem to require the genuine expression and acknowledgement of feelings.

Krentzian heroines' success in the workplace is reliant upon their experience and expression of authentic, arguably "domestic," emotion.

The heroines of Krentz's corporate romance novels nearly always pursue careers that involve some aspect of the arts. In *Flash*, Olivia Chantry is the founder of Light Fantastic, an event firm that specializes in designing high-end affairs for successful corporations. Eugenia Swift, the heroine of *Sharp Edges*, is the director of the Leabrook Glass Museum. *Soft Focus*' Elizabeth Cabot, while not directly employed in an artistic field, is the CEO of the Aurora Fund, which provides start-up capital for innovative female entrepreneurs. All three of these heroines have achieved success in their jobs because they are inherently creative and intuitive: "[Eugenia] had a talent for looking beneath the surface. It was a gift that had led her into a successful career"; "Light Fantastic never repeats a production. Uncle Rollie always said it was the perfect career for me because it allows me to combine my creative side with my business side" (*SE* 8, *Flash* 106). These heroines possess a passion for creative work that has been nurtured and affirmed in the workplace. In other words, their lack of "cool"—or low affect—becomes one of their most valuable assets. While one of the obvious benefits to this portrayal of a positive relationship between passion and work is that the corporate heroine finds happiness in the workplace that is normally reserved for leisure, a further benefit is her strong belief in the meaningfulness of the work she does. Because these heroines are constantly surrounded by tangible, artistic forms of expression, they never doubt that they are contributing to a significant human project:

“There’s something intriguing about objects made out of such fragile material that have survived for so long, isn’t there?” (SE 44).

The ancient history of glassmaking, a craft and an art with roots that reached back thousands of years, was an inescapable part of the allure, she thought. Tonight, Jacob Houston used a blowpipe to work glass in a manner that would have been familiar to Roman artisans two thousand years ago (SE 212).

As always, the Leabrook collection of rare and spectacular glass was the main attraction. It glowed in the carefully lit display cases, fragile but powerful links to the past that never failed to enthrall Eugenia (SE 317).

These passages demonstrate that Eugenia’s attraction to artistically rendered glass objects is rooted in their connection to history, as well as the craftspeople who created them. In *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (1951), Charles Wright Mills notes that “As a proportion of the labor force, fewer individuals manipulate *things*, more handle *people* and *symbols* ... The one thing [white-collars] do not do is live by making things; rather, they live off the social machineries that organize and coordinate the people who do make things” (65). Eugenia finds great enjoyment in her work, in part, because it places her in close proximity to “real” things, their creators, and their historical contexts. During his first visit to her home, Cyrus observes the similarities between Eugenia’s workplace and her domestic space: “‘You know something, Eugenia? You live in an art gallery.’ She gave him a strange smile. ‘Funny you should say that. I was just thinking the same thing. I never noticed the similarity until today’” (282). Although this passage reveals

that Eugenia's work has thoroughly permeated her home, her realization that Cyrus' comment is correct does not trigger a re-evaluation of her priorities. Rather, the reader is left feeling that the consolidation of work and home can be extremely satisfying for a woman who not only enjoys her career as much as Eugenia does, but who has also utilized her core values and attributes to make work so enjoyable in the first place.

Krentz also validates her heroine's approach to work by ascribing "female intuition" with substantial value in the marketplace. Eugenia's ability to differentiate between the "authentic" and the "fake" is what launches her career: "Our Ms. Swift sailed on to new heights a year later when she detected a forgery in a collection of early-Roman cameo glass that had been loaned to the museum for an exhibition. She pulled off the same trick again six months later when she curated a display of eighteenth-century Chinese glass [...] After that, her reputation was made" (*SE* 34). Throughout the novel, Eugenia's ability is not depicted merely as a natural skill or talent; rather, it is portrayed as a symptom of her finely tuned female intuition: "The same intuition that she relied on so heavily when it came to art was sending small warning signals concerning Cyrus Chandler Colfax. It told her that he was not what he seemed; "When it comes to art, I rely on my intuition. And I'm almost never wrong" (*SE* 20, 86). Krentz's corporate world is one in which female intuition enables women to achieve ample success in the workplace. However, the value of female intuition far exceeds the boundaries of the market. Due to the impenetrability of his professional mask, most characters in these novels find the corporate hero very difficult to read, if not entirely inscrutable. The corporate heroine is the only character who recognizes that, despite the persona he

affects, the hero possesses some degree of “authenticity” that makes him salvageable: “[Eugenia] was certain that Cyrus’ laid-back ways were a façade. She knew that as surely as she knew the difference between fourteenth-century Islamic glass and Chinese glass from the early years of the Qing dynasty” (*SE* 16). Similarly, *Flash*’s Olivia Chantry is the only character to realize that Jasper’s “coolness,” rather than concealing a cold, calculating corporate player, is indicative of his strength and stability as a romantic partner: “He looked so incredibly solid and strong and substantial, she thought. The kind of man who controlled his inner demons. Not the sort who would ever be controlled by them. Not the kind who would use them as an excuse for weakness and self-indulgence” (115). Thus, the corporate heroine’s female intuition, which has served her well in the workforce, is also what enables her recognition of the hero as transformable.

Furthermore, the significance of female intuition in these novels extends beyond the romantic couple alone. In the requisite secondary plot of the corporate romance, the importance of teamwork is emphasized through the very different assets that each protagonist brings to the case. The hero possesses “instincts,” which become particularly handy when the protagonists are forced into physical confrontations along the way. The unidentified villain often hires thugs to “discourage” the protagonists’ investigation of the case; this discouragement may consist of attempting to use a vehicle to run the hero and/or heroine off the road, breaking into one of their homes, or attacking one of them in a deserted parking structure. The hero’s keen instincts usually alert him to the trouble in time to resist effectively. While such events clearly allow the hero to demonstrate more traditional forms of masculinity that can’t be appropriately indulged in a corporate

environment, his key contribution to solving the mystery is his ability to analyze a situation calmly, rationally, and logically. In contrast, the heroine contributes her intuition: “‘I don’t have anything concrete. Just a feeling.’ ‘Just a feeling?’ he repeated neutrally. ‘Yes.’ She frowned. ‘And don’t you dare ridicule my intuition. Everyone knows I have very good instincts’” (SE 76). The hero often expresses doubt about the heroine’s interpretation of events: “‘Jack greeted that with a short, undiplomatic snort of disgust. ‘Page? In love? Give me a break.’ For some reason his complete disdain annoyed her. ‘Why is that so unbelievable? It might explain why he stole *Soft Focus*. He’s obviously got an obsessive passion for film. Maybe he’s got an obsessive passion for a woman, too’” (SF 134). Yet, despite the hero’s skepticism, the heroine’s intuition always ultimately leads her in the right direction; in *Soft Focus*, the protagonists eventually discover that the actions of the thief, Tyler Page, were motivated by his love for a woman. In *Sharp Edges*, Eugenia’s intuition for art leads to the identification of the murderer: “‘Eugenia’s skin cooled with shock. She had seen this artist’s work before in Daventry’s gallery of ex-lovers. Her intuition told her that whoever had created this monstrous thing was capable of murder’” (SE 244). In these novels, female intuition is more than a lucrative skill and a trustworthy detector of solid relationship material; it is also a key ingredient for survival. However, Krentz’s legitimization of female intuition is only one component of the domestication process explicated in the corporate romance, as the following section will illustrate.

### **“When Work Becomes Home”: Krentz’s Family-Run Corporation**

In *The Time Bind*, Arlie Hochschild explores the lives of contemporary workers who struggle with the “time bind” that occurs when the spheres of work and home become conflated. She finds that, oftentimes, overworked mothers and fathers who fail to be “good” parents at home channel their parental energies into the workplace, in which their co-workers become their surrogate families: “In truth, it was hard for most of these executive father figures to imagine pulling themselves away from work. It was simply more satisfying being Dad here than anywhere else” (63). Similarly, “For Vicky, work was a well-ordered, high-pressure world in which she could blossom as a competent, helpful ‘mother’” (75). Hochschild discusses such occurrences as time “stolen” from the family by the corporation. While Krentz’s corporate romances always explore the conflation of home and work, she effectively eliminates the complications of this arrangement for her heroines by constructing their co-workers as literal, rather than perceived, family members. Olivia Chantry, the corporate heroine of *Flash*, inherits 49% of a high-tech lighting firm called Glow Inc. after her uncle dies. The majority of the employees of Glow Inc. are Olivia’s blood relatives. The primary work-related conflict in *Flash* begins with the passing of Uncle Rollie, the CEO of the company (and the Chantry family patriarch), whose shares (51%) now belong to Jasper, his silent business partner, as well as the novel’s corporate hero: “Everyone’s first reaction to the prospect of having a stranger at the helm of the family firm had been instant panic. Not without reason, she reminded herself. One way or another, most of the Chantry clan had a strong, personal interest in Glow” (*Flash* 23). For these employees, there is virtually no conflict

between their roles at home and their roles at work. Their familial roles essentially define and determine their positions in the company:

“[Rollie] had a very strong sense of family responsibility. He provided jobs for relatives who needed them and summer employment for their kids. He helped finance first homes and first cars. Established college funds. Never forgot birthdays” (133).

“Rollie had explained to Olivia that he relied on [Aunt] Rose to give him early warning of everything from impending births, divorces, and office romances to low-level grumbling among the staff” (50).

Uncle Rollie was as much a paternal figure at work as he was at home, and Aunt Rose, his secretary, is depicted as his maternal counterpart. Jasper, who has never before been exposed to such a thorough integration of work and family, initially finds the constant presence of family disturbing: “‘Tell me something,’ he said quietly. ‘Do you always rush to the aid of any member of the Chantry or Glow family who comes to you for help?’ She scowled. ‘What kind of question is that?’ He exhaled slowly. ‘Forget it. You’re right. It’s a stupid question.’ One to which he already knew the answer” (68). The heroine’s transformation of the hero, however, always entails a transformation of his perspective on the workplace: “His new offices down the street were considerably less plush, he thought. The décor was more utilitarian. The view was not nearly so panoramic. But he already felt more at *home* in Glow’s executive suite than he ever had here at Sloan & Associates. He did not know how to explain that to Al. He could not even explain it to himself” (emphasis mine 123-4). The hero’s embracing of familial ties



is a key characteristic of his transformation in the conventional romance formula, but it is worth noting that, in the corporate romance, his desire for family arises specifically from his exposure to a domesticated workplace.

Interestingly, the hero's eventual attraction to the domesticated workplace does not begin with the realization that he desires familial fulfillment; rather, it begins with the recognition that family participation in the workplace is extremely lucrative. Because all of the members of the Chantry family, whether they work for Glow Inc. or not, view the preservation of the company as the preservation of the family as well, they are motivated to network. When Olivia's brother, Todd, begins dating a state representative who is running for governor, he convinces the candidate to employ Light Fantastic, the event production company that Olivia owns separately, for campaign events. When Jasper expresses to Olivia that he is impressed with this arrangement, she replies, "'Don't be.' Olivia gave him a cheerful, conspiratorial grin. 'I've got an inside track'" (*Flash* 29). Although Light Fantastic belongs solely to Olivia, it always utilizes Glow Inc. products in the events it produces. Thus, Todd's recommendation is beneficial not only to Olivia, but to the Chantry family as well. In *Soft Focus*, Elizabeth's assistant, Louise, is not a blood relative, but she is described as a "confidante" who had a very close relationship with Elizabeth's aunt, as well as Elizabeth. Although they are technically employer and employee, these characters enjoy the kind of informal rapport that suggests an almost familial connection: "Louise ... peered more closely at Elizabeth. 'Talk to me. Tell me what's going on here. Are you up to something stupid?' There really was no point trying to keep secrets from Louise" (*SF* 52). When the invention known as "Soft Focus" goes

missing in the novel's secondary plot, Elizabeth and Jack deduce that the thief is hiding out in a resort town called Mirror Springs that is fully booked for an independent film festival. Due to Elizabeth's close relationship with Louise, she is able to locate lodgings in this town that wouldn't be available otherwise: "Think you can find me something?" "Probably [...] I've got plenty of contacts from the old days in the news business. I'll make some calls. Seems to me one of my editors has a vacation place in Mirror Springs" (*SF* 55). Louise's phone call ensures the protagonists' access to a cozy residence while they search for the stolen invention (which they ultimately find, thereby securing the fates of their respective corporations) *and* enables the development of their romantic relationship. In Krentz's domestic workplaces, employees offer up such contacts both because they have a genuine interest in the success of the corporation, and because they have extremely close (often familial) ties with their employers. Further, *Flash* suggests that employees of blood relatives work effectively and creatively in a nurturing environment: "The people who worked at Glow brainstormed readily and easily without fear of being shot down ... Above all, Jasper thought, he wanted to retain that essential element of the Glow corporate culture" (88). The incorporation of family into the workplace becomes a valuable corporate asset.

Clearly, Krentz's ability to rewrite the corporate environment is very much dependent on her situating the heroine within a family-controlled corporation, in which she has inherited (or is on the verge of inheriting) a dominant position in the company. *Soft Focus*' Elizabeth Cabot, like *Flash*'s Olivia, has also inherited her position as CEO of the Aurora Fund from a relative: "Elizabeth had inherited [her assistant] when she had

inherited the Fund from her aunt” (51). In *Romance and the Erotics of Property* (1988), Jan Cohn discusses the function of nepotism in romance novels that feature working heroines:

The motif of inheritance in recent romance stories of career women appears with obsessive frequency, for it provides a strategy by which women writers can make their stories responsive to social change by allowing the heroine to enter and succeed in the marketplace. Work has long been a necessity for the heroine of romance, but success in the marketplace threatens to defeminize her; ambition and womanliness are incompatible. The inheritance theme solves this dilemma, allowing the heroine to achieve high position without having to fight for it in the male world of business (122).

Cohn’s claim that the heroine’s inheritance of the family corporation helps to eliminate any compromises to her femininity is likely still relevant. I believe, however, that in the contemporary subgenre of corporate romance, the most significant effect (and cause) of nepotism is its elimination of the contradiction between work and home. Corporate heroines not only get to be “mom” at work legitimately; they get to do so with tangible corporate power.

It must also be emphasized that spousal contradictions are eliminated in the relationship between hero and heroine as well. Arguably, corporations can’t “steal time” from husbands and wives if they work together. One of the most interesting factors in these romances is the protagonists’ tendency to feign coupledness for the sake of a

corporation. When rumors begin to circulate about the effect that Jasper's 51% ownership of Glow Inc. will have on the company, Jasper and Olivia decide to publicly fake a camaraderie that they're not actually feeling yet: "I'm sure you understand that it's absolutely essential that you and I present a united front to the employees of Glow, Inc.' She blinked again. 'A united front'" (*Flash* 49). Later, when Olivia's cousin inquires about their relationship, he makes the following observation: "Sure would make things simpler [...] If you and Sloan, uh, you know ... [g]ot serious. And, like, maybe even got married.' 'Barry.' 'Well, you know, it would sorta fulfill Uncle Rollie's dream of keeping Glow a family-owned company'" (165). The most beneficial outcome for the Chantry family is, of course, realized in the novel's conclusion; Jasper and Olivia become engaged, thereby ensuring that Glow, Inc. will remain a family-run corporation. A similar resolution is offered in *Soft Focus*, in which the protagonists become enemies after a business-related misunderstanding arises, but they remain trapped in a legal partnership: "She could walk away from what had happened between them last night, but she could not walk away from the business contract they had signed. For better or worse, for richer for poorer, it bound them together more securely than any wedding license could have done" (7). By the end of the novel, the misunderstanding has been cleared up, and the protagonists are not only planning a joint business venture that will involve a new contractual partnership; they are also engaged to be married. In *Sharp Edges*, Eugenia and Cyrus, believing it will be the most effective cover story, pretend to be a romantic couple as they investigate the disappearance of Eugenia's friend. Their make-believe

relationship quickly evolves into a real one, and like the other protagonists, they become engaged at the novel's conclusion.

The type of resolution analyzed here is arguably reminiscent of Tania Modleski's discussion, in *Loving with a Vengeance*, of the Harlequin romance novel's resolution of the rape threat. Modleski notes the frequency with which heroes utter thinly veiled threats of rape to their heroines, such as "I doubt if you would be prepared for the retribution I would exact" (42). The anxiety the heroine feels upon hearing this is eventually alleviated as she realizes (long after the reader) that the hero's threat is the product of his intense and frustrating romantic feelings for her. Modleski argues that the transformation of the possibility of rape into a symptom of love enables romances "to partially 'inoculate' against the major evils of sexist society" (43). Corporate romances, in their focus on flexible capitalism as the primary social condition that requires negotiating, appear to be inoculating against the major evils of a capitalist society. A different resolution is offered to eradicate the effects of the "time bind" on professional and personal life. The "couple façade" enacted in all of these novels becomes real; heroines who, for reasons related to work, must spend the majority of their time with their business partners (instead of their families) are absolved of guilt, because these business partners are transformed into family members (i.e. husbands). Thus, anxieties about corporate dominance over home life in Hochschild's "time bind," like anxieties about male dominance in Modleski's analysis, are alleviated through marriage. Business contracts and marital contracts become conflated, and heroes (like heroines) become corporate parents; the end result verges on the aristocratic.

The fusion of these contracts marks a radical departure from the conventional romance formula that has been established since the emergence of domestic fiction. In her analysis of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong notes that the hero, Mr. B, proposes two different "sexual contracts" to the heroine, Pamela (128). The first offer is a request for an illicit sexual relationship with Pamela, unsanctioned by marriage. Her refusal of this contract leads to a revised offer: a marriage proposal. As Pamela is a paid servant in Mr. B.'s home, her rejection of the initial contract is also a rejection of the monetary exchange implicit in his offer. Similarly, Mr. B.'s revised proposal relinquishes any economic benefits that could be attained through marriage: "Affection cannot coexist, this novel argues, with an economic motive for marriage, and neither fortune nor birth can therefore constitute particularly desirable features in a woman, even though they remain unqualified in a man" (Armstrong 129). The "marriage of affection," signifying the middle-class "modern notion of love," replaces the aristocratic "marriage of convenience" as the conjugal ideal (ibid). In its reconciliation of economic and romantic motives, the corporate romance functions similarly to the Latin American "national" romances analyzed by Doris Sommer in *Foundational Fictions* (1991). Sommer argues that "The classic examples in Latin America are almost inevitably stories of star-crossed lovers who represent particular regions, races, parties, economic interests, and the like. Their passion for conjugal and sexual union spills over to a sentimental readership in a move that hopes to win partisan minds along with hearts" (5). The conjugal union becomes representative of a national/political union. The corporate romance, as a product of

flexible capitalism in a global economy, is not concerned with national unity. Rather, it reflects a reconfiguration of the conjugal tie as a “marriage” of corporations.

### **The Flexible Capital of Racial and Class Privilege**

What becomes clear, then, is the absolute necessity of a white, upper-class heroine in a corporate romance narrative that offers a positive re-evaluation of the domestic and the feminine. If nepotism is the primary vehicle through which the heroine’s transformation of the workplace (and the hero) is realized, then what opportunities are available for lower- to middle-class white women or women of color? It must also be noted that the hero and heroine’s positioning as white, upper-class corporate workers enables the development of their romantic relationship amidst their crime-solving adventure and their stressful work duties. In *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1997), Eva Illouz argues that “romance” is unevenly distributed along class lines; those who are in positions of power have much more freedom (in terms of time and money) to redefine their own roles in both professional and personal relationships: “the spheres of private life and commodity exchange intersect in different ways for the middle class and the working class; romance is a good unequally distributed in our social structure; love provides personal freedom only to those who already have a measure of objective freedom in the workplace” (294). Hochschild’s observations of Amerco’s unskilled workers in *The Time Bind* also suggest that the working class has limited means in negotiating the tensions between work and home: “unskilled workers are unlikely to have either a civic

life at work, or the money to outsource many aspects of family life. The new workplace offers no solutions for them” (xxiv). It is precisely because these characters are white-collar workers (as busy as they might be) that they are able to find such a perfect balance between work and love: “The better-educated and better off thus have the easiest access for and to the commercial-ritual formula of romance but at the same time are least functionally dependent on it and can extend the scope of what they define and live as romantic” (Illouz 286). Because the protagonists in the corporate romance exercise complete control over their work, they also have access to an unusual amount of “free time.” Their relationship blossoms in the extra time that they create for themselves, particularly through the mystery-solving adventure: “He glanced at his watch as he went into the inner office. ‘I’m going to be out of the office for the rest of the day. Call Tyler. Tell him what’s going on. He can handle things until tomorrow’” (*Flash* 148). As business owners and managers, these characters basically create their own schedules. Although their corporate positions facilitate an egalitarian relationship (and thereby create an equality between the genders), they are also unexpendable in this particular romance formula; one would have to be a CEO or a successful entrepreneur in order to have access to such a relationship.

Within these novels, there is also a notable absence of “daily life” outside of work in the corporate world and romantic encounters. Krentz’s female protagonists find it possible to balance love and work largely because they have few domestic responsibilities; the reader never sees them cleaning house or doing laundry. As one reader of such novels states in “Reading Romance, Reading Ourselves” (2001), “Part of



the fantasy is that homemaking doesn't have to interfere with love-making. The former gets taken care of by figures that are invisible or conveniently other" (Clark et al 369). Again, high class status becomes a necessary component for the corporate romance novel; those who have the financial resources to "outsource" their domestic duties have more time in which to fall in love and solve mysteries.

In fact, the only domestic practice these characters typically partake in is the art of cooking. Krentz's protagonists always enjoy fixing exotic (and often organic) meals from scratch: "Through the opening above the counter that divided the two rooms, Jasper could see a lot of gleaming pans suspended from iron hooks. Not the kitchen of a woman who lived on take-out and microwave, he thought" (*Flash* 61). Initial friendships are often formed over dinner, because the characters realize that they share common ground when it comes to preparing and appreciating fine cuisine. In such scenes, the "down-to-earth" qualities of the protagonists are emphasized; these are people who, despite their upper-class lifestyles, still enjoy preparing their own meals. However, as Hochschild suggests in *The Time Bind*, the process of making meals from scratch is a time-consuming one that the majority of modern workers do not have the privilege of exploring: "capitalism and technological developments have long been gradually deskilling parents at home. Over time, store-bought goods have replaced homespun cloth, homemade soups and candles, home-cured meats and home-baked foods. Instant mixes, frozen dinners, and take-out meals have replaced Mother's recipes" (209). As individuals have become increasingly "deskilled" in the domestic sphere, the preparation of food has lost its place in daily routines and taken on ritual significance. In today's

flexible capitalist society, the act of cooking can be read as a luxury reserved for those who have the economic power to “control” their usages of time. Unlike most contemporary families, Krentz’s characters, by preparing and enjoying a meal together, are able to create a domestic space in which they can forge intimate connections with each other:

There was something about working with someone in a kitchen that that broke down the usual social barriers, Jasper reflected (*Flash* 69).

She unfolded her arms and pushed herself away from the counter. ‘I’m the first to admit that I’m not the world’s best judge of what makes a relationship work.’ ‘Neither am I.’ Jasper was startled by the sound of his own words. He did not know where they had come from. He had not intended to say them. But there they were, hovering in the air alongside hers, stark admissions of past failures (*Flash* 70).

It is typically in this space that the protagonists first realize they not only have similar tastes, but similar past experiences and values as well.

Further, these characters use only the “finest” ingredients in their cooking; they often prepare meals that many readers will likely never taste for themselves: “I brought some radicchio and arugula with me. Maybe I’ll do a little goat cheese salad and some zaru soba” (*SE* 113). While food (especially “exotic” or foreign food) has always played a sensual role in the romance novel, Lynne Pearce, in “Popular Romance and Its Readers” (2004), claims that it serves a dual function in more contemporary romances: “I would argue against reading these elaborate descriptions of food and dining as *merely*

metaphors for the sexual act: equally important is the role they play in marking the cultural ‘commodity’ appeal of the text” (524). In other words, the consumer indulgences of the characters trigger the consumer within the reader; the successful romantic relationship becomes implicitly tied to particular consumer habits. However, as previously argued, only the most financially comfortable individuals have access to such commodities, a point best illustrated with a passage from another of Krentz’s corporate novels, *Deep Waters* (1997): “He savored her astonished wonder. ‘I’ll admit that I was surprised to find the biscotti in the Whispering Waters Cove Grocery.’ ‘You reaped the results of my months of negotiation with the grocery store manager. Mr. Gedding and I have a deal. He stocks the items I request, and I pay rip-off prices for them’” (109). These characters are able to accentuate their romantic interludes with gourmet food only because they have the economic power to bring these goods to their doorsteps.

Their incomes also allow them to create their homes as comfortable, private refuges in which romantic encounters may take place:

She had paid extra for the view of Elliott Bay, but she considered the money well spent. Something about vast expanses of water was soothing to her soul (*SE* 19).

The effect was sultry, vibrant, and compellingly sensual in a way Jasper could not explain. Interior design had never ranked high on his list of interests. Straightforward comfort and clean functionality were his chief requirements in his personal environments. But Olivia’s sunny little villa on the eleventh floor made him see new possibilities (*Flash* 61).

While “travel to an exotic locale” is a common trope in the corporate romance novel, as in more conventional romance novels, it is not a requirement; the characters in *Flash* do not have to leave Seattle in order to have their adventure or realize their love for each other, because they have the financial ability to bring the “exotic locale” into their own homes: “while the more classic romance may be seen to use its ‘romantic locations’ to prompt or fulfill the desires and ‘expectant emotions’ of the lovers, popular romance tends to make them into a ‘lifestyle statement’ which is (in part) the undisguised *object* of the romance” (Pearce 533). One of the more amusing moments in *Soft Focus* involves the reader’s realization that both Jack and Elizabeth, prior to resolving their misunderstanding, have attempted, fruitlessly, to spy on each other’s homes: “Once or twice she’d dug out Sybil’s old bird-watching binoculars to see if she could get a closer look at the thirtieth floor. But the tinted windows had defeated her foray into voyeurism”; “A purely scientific experiment with a set of binoculars had confirmed that there were too many plants and bushes on the balcony outside Elizabeth’s bedroom to allow for a clear view of the interior” (*SF* 52, 57). These protagonists’ fail to be successful voyeurs because both of their homes are too private. This excessive, purchased privacy, while intentionally frustrating for a peeping Tom, is one of the factors that enables the cultivation of a romantic relationship between hero and heroine. Illouz argues that “the standard definition of romance demands a middle-class cultural competence and lifestyle”; contemporary notions of romantic love are inextricably bound with certain consumer practices (285). Access to the kind of loving relationship offered in these novels is predicated on access to particular goods and services.

The Krentzian corporate romance offers necessary layers of complexity to the conventional romance formula. In pioneering this subgenre, Krentz has provoked readers and critics alike to acknowledge that romance novels are not merely about gender, and that contemporary women have additional concerns to finding a husband. Although I am compelled to end this analysis on a critical note, I want to re-emphasize that the centrality of work in Krentz's corporate romances, particularly her concern for posing potential solutions to the conflation of home and work, deserves respectful recognition. As Charles Hinnant argues in "Desire and the Marketplace (2003)," "it seems apparent ... that the distinction between the economic sphere and the sentimental sphere, so familiar to us in the modern world, is precisely what the genre of romance seeks to contest. We might say that romance fiction represents the vision of a capitalism transformed from within, indeed purged of its more brutal features" (164). Krentz's novels imply that romantic and familial connections, and the loving care that is integral in maintaining and cultivating these ties, are not impossible to attain in contemporary U.S. society. Further, even if such relationships can be construed as idealistic, in that they are not immediately realizable for most individuals, their existence in romantic narratives arguably makes "real life" more bearable for those who desire to achieve such a balance between love and work. This is not to suggest that such stories merely facilitate readers' complacency with a capitalist system that rewards people unevenly; rather, they offer readers the ability to envision a more effective and satisfying future for themselves, as well as the potential means to turn this vision into a reality.

The problem that ultimately cannot be ignored, however, is that no matter how unrealistic, idealistic, or fantastic we may view the corporate romance narrative to be in its current incarnation, if any of the heroines discussed previously were women of color, or of a certain class, the texts would be truly implausible. If nepotism, as Cohn argues, is a “motif that ... appears with obsessive frequency” in romance novels featuring career-driven heroines, then the corporate heroine is, frankly, drawing from her access to the “old boys” network of corporate power, access that, regardless of its invisibility in the text, is highly dependent on her white racial background (122). These novels suggest that particular intersections of class and capital are mandatory in the satisfactory negotiation of love and work. More disturbingly, however, these novels also affirm the corporate union that effectively dictates this solution as the only recipe for success. The family-run corporation may function as an appealing symbolic fantasy for readers who struggle to balance work and home in their own lives, but its construction in the corporate romance obscures the unavoidable truth that most American workers are not members of such a family, and would certainly experience limited upward mobility if employed in such a corporation.

CHAPTER III  
THE RETURN HOME: PRE-CAPITALIST NOSTALGIA IN NORA  
ROBERTS' "SMALL TOWN" ROMANCES

Many contemporary romance novels explore what Rachel Potter, in her 2003 interview with romance writer Kathleen Gilles Seidel, refers to as “Small Town Mythology.”<sup>5</sup> To my knowledge, the “small town” romance is not a named subgenre that has been identified by critics, publishers, or fans, but it is absolutely a type of contemporary romance that is immediately recognizable to readers. The “small town” romance formula is typically some variation of the following: the heroine leaves her small-town home, as a young woman, to create a life and career in the city; the heroine returns to her hometown near the beginning of the novel because something in her life is missing, she needs to solve a mystery from her childhood (often a murder), or an experience in the city has traumatized her (a divorce, a broken engagement, a work-related scandal, etc.); in this small town, the heroine meets the hero (often her first love from childhood) and (re)connects with family members and eccentric, well-meaning locals; the heroine and hero fall in love, she comes to terms with her past, and they live “happily ever after.” Here are a few examples of romance novels that adhere to this particular formula: Jayne Ann Krentz’s *Eye of the Beholder* (1999)—Alexa Chambers returns to her hometown of Avalon, Arizona to begin a small business, *Elegant Relic*,

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<sup>5</sup> See “Kathleen Gilles Seidel – Thoughtful Writer, Buried Treasure” at All About Romance for full interview.

after having her reputation as an art expert destroyed in Scottsdale; Krentz's *Eclipse Bay* (2000)—Hannah Harte returns to her hometown of Eclipse Bay, Oregon and reconnects with Rafe Madison, despite the bitter rivalry that has consumed their families for three generations; Sandra Brown's *Best Kept Secrets* (1989)—Alex Gaither is an attorney whose mother died 25 years ago under mysterious circumstances, so she returns to Purcell, Texas to solve her mother's murder; Jennifer Crusie's *Welcome to Temptation* (2000)—Sophie Dempsey travels to Temptation, Ohio to make a film and falls in love with the mayor, Phineas Tucker. The heroine of Crusie's novel is actually a city girl who travels to Temptation for the first time, and this deviation from the small-town formula proper is not unusual, because the outcome is exactly the same: the heroine finds love, community, and "herself" (i.e. healing) in the small town that she claims as home.

In Potter's interview, Seidel offers the following justification for the appeal of the small-town romance:

I think a lot of American women feel that their relationships are compartmentalized. They work all day with people who have never met their husbands and kids. The people they worship with don't belong to the same swimming pool or send their children to the same school. As a result their lives feel fragmented. The Small Town Myth depicts a society in which everyone does know your name. So the consoling aspect of the myth is less that life is simple than that it is more integrated. The Small Town (in myth) also gives you time. No long commutes, no spending a day looking for the perfect pair of shoes because there are just two shoe



stores so you just find the best that they've got and make do. The mythic Small Town removes many routine, nagging irritants. Small Towns have plenty of parking ([www.likesbooks.com/seidel.html](http://www.likesbooks.com/seidel.html)).

The corporate romances discussed in the previous chapter explore heroines who thrive in fast-paced, urban environments by transforming these environments into more desirable ones; co-workers become both family and community, “feminine” intuition and care-giving translate into lucrative business practices, and economic resources enable the creation of special places that seemingly exist outside of the space and time of the workplace, where relaxation, recreation, and adventure can be pursued. “Small town” romances may seem, initially, to offer a different solution to the tensions that contemporary women experience in negotiating love and work, and work and family, since their heroines physically abandon their corporate environments—often after having been victimized in them—and discover true happiness, love, and community in antithetical surroundings. The small town is appealing because it appears to be everything that the city is not. Here, people work to live (rather than live to work), everyone knows his/her neighbors (and aside from participating in the usual griping and gossip that contribute to small-town charm, everyone but the villain is ethical and decent), time moves more slowly, and no one cares much about designer clothes or fancy cars.

This chapter aims to identify and analyze the formulaic conventions of the “small town” romance, both because it is in need of scholarly definition, and because its positing of an alternative solution to the conflict between home and work make it an integral

counterpart to the corporate romances discussed previously. Instead of domesticating their corporate environments, small-town heroines escape to communities that seem to be located outside of real time and space, and are therefore untouched by capitalist influences. By immersing themselves in these small towns, the heroines begin to “unlearn” the ideas and feelings that are constructed as negative consequences of the cultural effects of flexible capitalism. The heroine who emerges from this process is a woman who now possesses the tools to transform the workplace. While both corporate and “small town” romances offer particular solutions to the tensions that arise between home and work life in a globalized economy, the “small town” romance places far greater emphasis on the problem than its resolution. In *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), Svetlana Boym notes that a desire to return to the kind of fantastical community and/or homeland explored in these novels is nothing short of a “global epidemic,” “an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world. Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals” (xiv). The “small town” romance does not offer a reconstructed vision of the home or the workplace; rather, it redraws and redefines community boundaries. “Small town” life in Roberts’ novels, through the particularity of its construction, functions as a compelling critique of the effects of globalization on contemporary U.S. women’s intimate relationships.

### Nostalgia and the “Pre-Capitalist” Community

It is no coincidence that both Potter and Seidel refer to this fictional construction of the small town as a “myth.” In *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (2001), Zygmunt Bauman discusses the nostalgic concept of “community” and its significance for people living in a globalized world: “‘community’ stands for the kind of world which is not, regrettably, available to us – but which we would dearly wish to inhabit and which we hope to repossess [...] ‘Community’ is nowadays another name for paradise lost – but one to which we dearly hope to return, and so we feverishly seek the roads that may bring us there” (3). Seidel’s “integrated” small town is a pre-capitalist imagining of a community with clearly marked boundaries; there are no global travelers here, and there is no outsourcing of labor. People live, work, and care for their families within the parameters of the small town. As a result, the lives of the community members are interdependent, and their identities are defined in relation to one another:

In pre-capitalist society the family performed such present functions as reproduction, care of the sick and aged, shelter, the maintenance of personal property, and regulation of sexuality, as well as the basic forms of material production necessary to sustain life. There were forms of economic activity that were not based upon family units—such as the building of public works, and labour in state-owned mines or industries. But they do not compare in extent or importance to peasant agriculture, labour based upon some form of the family, or upon the village, an extension of one or several families (Zaretsky 6).

The small town of popular romance becomes synonymous with the pre-capitalist “village” described here. Seidel’s contrast between a “compartmentalized” real life and an “integrated” fictional life corresponds to Raymond Williams’ theorization of the concepts of “city” and “country” in *The Country and the City* (1973): “the common image of the country is now an image of the past, and the common image of the city an image of the future. That leaves, if we isolate them, an undefined present” (Williams 297). Williams’ claim suggests that Bauman’s formulation of “community” is unavailable precisely because it is located distinctly in the past. This inaccessible community becomes a contemporary object of nostalgia, “a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy” (Boym xiii). As the symbol of a (re)imagined history that is attractively incompatible with contemporary life, the community takes on a “utopian dimension” that is directed toward the past rather than the future (Boym xiv).

The desirability of community should be read as an acknowledgement of the perceived failings of capitalist society and its negative effects on interpersonal life: “The emphases on obligation, on the open door to the needy neighbor, are contrasted, in a familiar vein of retrospective radicalism, with the capitalist thrust, the utilitarian reduction of all social relationships to a crude moneyed order” (Williams 35). The face-to-face community is constructed, in romance fiction as well as the popular imagination, as a safe haven; the residents are reliable, trustworthy, and caring, and they are never motivated by economic incentives. Individuality is never prioritized over community.

Further, the community is a place where people do meaningful work. They farm their own land, build homes, raise children, and run small businesses that provide sole and necessary services to the community. Work is instilled with “dignity, worth or honour,” because it is done to sustain community and family life, and is therefore never alienating (Bauman 29). The interrelatedness of work, family, and community in the small town also means that everyone’s role is clearly defined. As a result, there is little confusion concerning how people should identify themselves, or what they should be feeling in any given situation. In the mythic small towns of romance, “the responsibility for managing emotions belong[s] primarily to what might be called an extended personal sphere consisting of the individual amid his or her family, extended family, friends, village, parish, local market or trade circle, and so forth” as Alan Liu writes of pre-capitalist societies centuries ago (89). In *The Managed Heart* (1983), Arlie Hochschild uses the term “feeling rules” to describe the regulation of emotions within a particular community or culture: “[feeling rules are] the standard used in emotional conversation to determine what is rightly owed and owing in the currency of feeling” (18). According to Liu, “feeling rules” clarify the relationship “between ‘what I do feel’ and ‘what I should feel.’ [...] The answer to this complex dynamic were to be found in the home, village, parish, and so on” (89). Within the starkly demarcated boundaries of Liu’s pre-capitalist village, “feeling rules” were clearly defined, because the members of the community possessed stable roles in relation to their work and each other. Under capitalism, the dissipation of the community, as well as the rise of the service industry, led to the commodification of feelings as an integral part of the service package. Hochschild observes that “a

nineteenth-century child working in a brutalizing English wallpaper factory and a well-paid twentieth-century American flight attendant have something in common: in order to survive in their jobs, they must mentally detach themselves—the factory worker from his own body and physical labor, and the flight attendant from her own feelings and emotional labor” (17). Unlike the “corporate” heroine, whose career in the arts is depicted as meaningful work that is associated with positive and productive feelings, the “small-town” heroine suffers emotional estrangement in her private life as a result of the feelings she has expended at work. The idealized version of community portrayed in small-town romances, then, serves to address multiple consequences of capitalism on personal life: the meaninglessness of work, the alienation of mind and body that results from it, and a general loss of intimacy in relationships.

### **Nora Roberts and the “Small Town” Romance**

The following analysis focuses on two small-town narratives by best-selling romance novelist, Nora Roberts: *Sanctuary* (1997) and *Jewels of the Sun* (1999). Roberts was the first romance author to be inducted into the Romance Writers of America Hall of Fame<sup>6</sup>, and her novels have made the *New York Times* Best Sellers list 68 times since 2001 (Regis 184). For these reasons, as well as others, Pamela Regis characterizes Roberts as “the most successful romance writer writing at the turn of the twenty-first century” (184). I have chosen to focus my analysis on two of Roberts’ novels both because she is a recognized master of the romance genre at large, and because she is a

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.rwanational.org/cs/authors\\_and\\_books/hall\\_of\\_fame](http://www.rwanational.org/cs/authors_and_books/hall_of_fame)

prolific writer of what I designate as small-town romances. The novels that comprise the Three Sisters Island Trilogy, the Gallaghers of Ardmore Trilogy, the Born in Trilogy, the Garden Trilogy, the Key Trilogy<sup>7</sup>, as well as stand-alone romances like *Birthright* (2004), *Carolina Moon* (2001), *The Reef* (1999), and *Spellbound* (2005) all explore the development of romantic relationships in a small town. *Sanctuary* and *Jewels of the Sun*, in particular, throw the formulaic conventions of the small-town romance into sharp relief.

*Sanctuary*'s heroine, Jo Ellen Hathaway, is a successful photographer in New York City who experiences an intense emotional and psychological breakdown. After spending weeks in a mental health facility, she returns home to the island of Desire, located a short distance from Florida's coast. Desire has become a tourist attraction for wealthy urbanites, and her father, brother, sister, and cousin have turned their ancestral home, Sanctuary, into an inn for visiting tourists. Although the members of this family live and work together, their relationships are marked by miscommunication and misunderstanding. Jo's return serves as the catalyst for the mending of these relationships. Jo is "healed" in Sanctuary, she is reunited with her childhood friend and love interest, Nathan, and she returns to New York with a reinvigorated devotion to her work.

While Jo returns to the home of her childhood, the heroine of *Jewels of the Sun* experiences small-town life for the first time as she explores her ancestral roots. Jude Murray abandons her career as a professor of Psychology in Chicago and travels to the

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<sup>7</sup>Roberts' exploration of small-town romance in trilogies is not merely coincidental. The relevance of the small town to the development of multiple romantic narratives will be explored later in this chapter.

small town of Ardmore, Ireland, the birthplace of her grandmother. She acquires knowledge about her familial history and becomes romantically involved with Aidan Gallagher, whose pub has been family-owned for 150 years. The Gallagher family helps Jude develop a new appreciation for life, and she chooses to marry Aidan and remain in Ardmore while writing and publishing psychological studies of Irish folklore through a publishing company in New York City.

### **Small-Town Nostalgia: The Return Home to a Closed Community**

Both novels begin with the heroine's recognition of her own emotional and mental instability. In *Jewels of the Sun*, the reader is introduced to Jude Murray as she drives a rental car along the Irish countryside, pondering her sudden and uncharacteristic decision to abandon her career:

Steady-as-she-goes Jude Frances Murray, one of the sturdiest branches of the family tree of Chicago Murrays ... quit her job [...] She'd come [to Ireland] because she'd been mortally afraid she was on the verge of breakdown. Stress had become her constant companion, gleefully inviting her to enjoy a migraine or flirt with an ulcer. It had gotten to the point where she wasn't able to face the daily routine of her job, to the point where she neglected her students, her family. Herself (2, 22)

Although Jude has proven to be successful in her chosen profession, her work yields little enjoyment and fulfillment: "She'd been on some verge, had looked down at the vast, dark sea of sameness, of monotony, of tedium that was Jude Murray. She'd pinwheeled her



arms, scrambled back from the edge—and run screaming away” (2). Rather than prompting a mere career change, Jude’s unhappiness with her work also inspires an abandonment of city and country, and a search for her lost “self” in her ancestral hometown. The novel suggests that, even though Jude has never been to Ardmore, Ireland, her bloodline enables her to claim this town and its community as a place of belonging. Further, the novel suggests that Jude’s core self is waiting to be found, in this unfamiliar place, at the end of her journey.

*Sanctuary*’s narrative unfolds from a similar premise. Jo Ellen Hathaway is a critically acclaimed photographer in New York City who is hospitalized after a severe anxiety attack: “Could she tell [her family] about her breakdown? Could she tell anyone that she’d spent two weeks in the hospital because her nerves had snapped and something in her had tilted?” (63). She initially perceives her condition as a “normal” side effect of her professional success: “[S]he had studied, and she had worked, and she had made a life for herself. If she was a little shaky just now, it was only because she’d overextended, was letting the pressure get to her. She was a little run-down, that was all” (9-10). However, recurring dreams about Sanctuary, along with her hospitalization, prompt her return home to the small island of Desire and the family she hasn’t seen in ten years: “The door was locked. She twisted it right, then left, shoved against the thick mahogany panel. *Let me in*, she thought as her heart began to thud in her chest. *I’ve come home. I’ve come back*” (4). Like Jude, Jo searches for the emotional and mental healing that she believes can be found through her (re)integration into the small-town community of her youth.

For both heroines, the small town facilitates an emotional re-education that is essential to the healing process. Jude and Jo are more than simply dissatisfied with their lives; when they are not fluctuating between extreme states of anger and sadness, they are too exhausted to feel anything:

[Jude] was one sob away from a crying jag. She felt it flood her throat, ring in her ears. Before the first tear could fall, she let her head roll back, squeezed her eyes shut, and cursed herself (*Jewels* 4).

The thought of opening [her suitcases], of taking clothes out and hanging them in the armoire, folding them into drawers was simply overwhelming.

Instead [Jo] sat down in a chair and closed her eyes (*Sanctuary* 40).

Their emotional instability is depicted as a consequence of the centrality of work in each heroine's life. Photography has enabled Jo to avoid confronting the traumatic disappearance of her mother, as well as her estrangement from her father and siblings: "It soothed her as nothing else could. With a camera in her hand and an image in her mind, she could forget everything else" (8). For Jo, photography is a profession devoid of intimacy; she works alone, she develops her photos within the privacy of her own home, and she specializes in landscape photography: "It was rare for her to take portraits, even candid ones" (122). The more detached she becomes from other human beings, the more success she achieves in her career.

Jude's profession poses a slightly different set of emotional problems. While there is nothing about her career that she appears to enjoy, her decision to quit her job seems to hinge primarily on her dislike of teaching: "*I ran here [to Ardmore], and here I*

*feel somehow more real [...] Certainly more at home than in the classroom. Oh, God, oh, God, I hated the classroom. Why couldn't I ever admit it, just say it out loud?"* (136).

The classroom is the single component of Jude's job that is thoroughly abandoned after her move to Ireland. She continues to utilize her skills in researching and publishing as she transitions to a career in writing. Her teaching responsibilities not only necessitated human interaction; they involved what Arlie Hochschild, in *The Managed Heart*, refers to as "emotional labor": "I use the term *emotional labor* to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*" (7). Jude's comparison between these two different versions of "home" (the college classroom and the small Irish town) raises a larger issue than the lack of boundaries between public and private in her former life. Her expectation that the classroom should have felt like "home" suggests that her profession required the transfer of private feelings into a service for her students. Jude's erratic emotions and quest for "lost" identity should be read as the consequences of her "emotional labor": "Beneath the differences between physical and emotional labor there lies a similarity in the costs of doing the work: the workers can become estranged or alienated from an aspect of the self—either the body or the margins of the soul—that is *used to do the work*" (7). The "emotional labor" that Jude has expended in her professional relationship with her students has resulted in a detachment from feelings that she can clearly identify as her own. By traveling "back" to the community of her ancestors, Jude aims to find the "self" that her career has taken from her.

In both novels, the heroines' emotional re-education begins with a nearly visceral reaction to the beauty of the small town and its surrounding landscape, both of which are portrayed as existing outside of real space and time. Jude's drive along the Irish countryside becomes a journey to a different, fantastic world:

“The hulk of [the mountains] rambled against a sky layered with smoky clouds and pearly light that belonged in paintings rather than reality.

Paintings, she thought, as her mind wandered, so beautifully rendered that when you looked at them long enough you felt yourself slipping right into them, melting into the colors and shapes and the scene that some master had created out of his own brilliance” (5).

Roberts' ethereal construction of pastoral Ireland suggests that Jude has not simply traveled from one nation to another; rather, she appears to have entered a fantastic realm with almost magical possibilities. In *Sanctuary*, the island of Desire is constructed as an exotic tropical paradise: “At first light the air was misty, like a dream just about to vanish. Beams of light stabbed through the canopy of live oaks and glittered on the dew. The warblers and buntings that nested in the sprays of moss were waking, chirping out a morning song. A cock cardinal, a red bullet of color, shot through the trees without a sound” (21). The vibrant colors and sounds that comprise Desire's landscape are described in stark contrast to the New York City that Jo has left behind: “Below her kitchen window, the streets were dark and empty, slicked by late-winter rain. A streetlamp spread a small pool of light—lonely light, Jo thought” (8). Jo's journey to

Desire is a transition from an alienating and colorless urban environment to a mystical world full of light and life.

Further, both “small towns” seem to be located outside of “real” time, as well as “real” geographical space. Jo’s return to Desire is depicted as an almost literal return to her past: “Birds and butterflies, the tinkle of wind chimes, the drift of puffy clouds overhead in a soft blue sky were treasured memories from her early childhood [...] She could smell the wisteria that rioted over the nearby arched iron trellis—another vivid memory of childhood” (38, 53). Jo’s home-coming is essentially a journey backward in time. The authenticity of her childhood memories is never challenged by present realities; the island remains virtually unchanged, and in some ways, so do its residents. Jo’s reunion with her father, after a decade-long separation, does not register any acknowledgement of his having aged. Instead, it merely triggers another memory: “Another long-forgotten picture snapped into her mind. She saw herself as a little girl with flyaway hair racing down the path, giggling, calling, then leaping high. And his arms had reached out to catch her, to toss her high, then hug her close” (64). On this island, both the people and the landscape are firmly rooted in a past reality that can be visited and experienced again.

In *Jewels of the Sun*, Ardmore, Ireland, is also located distinctly in the past. The town’s ancient ruins seem to function as a conduit, granting Jude tangible and vivid access to local historical events: “What would you feel, she wondered, if you crossed the field and walked up the smooth slick steps left standing in those tumbling stones? Would you ... feel the centuries of passing feet that had trod those same steps? Would you ... be

able to hear ... the music and voices, the clash of battles, the weeping of women, the laughter of children so long dead and gone?" (6). Jude's search for her "roots" is facilitated by this construction of Irish history as present reality; like Desire, Ardmore is frozen in time and physically available to the heroine. The residents of Ardmore, many of whom become conflated with the landscape, also contribute to this evocation of past living. Jude observes, with a sense of marvel, a woman hanging freshly laundered clothes on a line: "It occurred to [her] that she'd never actually seen anyone hang clothes before. It wasn't something even the most dedicated of housewives tended to do in downtown Chicago. It seemed like a mindless and thereby soul-soothing process to her" (28). A contrast is created here between the kind of work that characterizes "past" rural life and the "present" urban and intellectual work that she has recently abandoned; the former is simple, "natural," utilitarian, and therefore meaningful, while the latter is perceived as deeply unsatisfying due to its artificiality and detachment from both the land and the body.

For the heroines in both novels, the "productive" actions of cooking, cleaning, gardening, etc. lead to "productive" (i.e. positive) feelings. Like the interdependent forms of work that dominated pre-capitalist village life, these tasks represent "material production necessary to sustain life" (Zaretsky 6). Jude soon becomes acquainted with the rewards of small-town manual labor, since modern conveniences are lacking everywhere. She searches her rental cottage in vain for an automatic can opener, eventually concluding that the owner "had lived not only in another country ... but another century" (20). This Spartan depiction of small-town life introduces Jude to the

emotional and psychological benefits that can be attained through manual labor, or more specifically, the kind of “work well done” that, prior to capitalist industry, was associated with “dignity, worth or honour” (Bauman 29). Jude becomes solely responsible for the upkeep of her cottage, and she learns to take pleasure from “preparing” her own food and doing her own laundry: “Laughing, she got a can of soup out of the pantry and set to opening it with her little manual opener. ‘I was a bit appalled, let me tell you. And I’ve done more in this kitchen and enjoyed what I’ve cooked here more than anything I ever put together in my condo. And that kitchen’s state of the art, Jenn-Air range, sub-zero refrigerator” (209). Jude’s observation here draws the reader’s attention to the irony of modern conveniences. The brand-name appliances that decrease time spent in the kitchen should improve the quality of life by providing more “free” time. However, Jude finally begins to feel good about her life, and herself, only when these conveniences are removed. When Jo returns to Desire in *Sanctuary*, her cousin, Kate, notes that Jo seems to be suffering from an “inside hurt” (48). Kate suggests that Jo’s participation in menial labor will contribute to her healing process: “‘It’s good you’ve come home. A couple of weeks of Brian’s cooking will put some meat on you again. And God knows we could use some help around here. Most of the rooms, and the cottages, are booked straight through the summer” (43). Despite the fact that Jo’s “inside hurt” has manifested itself into physical symptoms like severe weight loss, cousin Kate immediately puts her to work cleaning rooms, mopping showers, and serving food in the family inn. Hard work and a home-cooked meal become conflated in this novel; both function as a cure for Jo’s emotional illness.

The small-town community is as integral to the heroine's healing as small-town work. In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams discusses the contrasting fictions that distinguish these two concepts: "In the city kind, experience and community would be essentially opaque; in the country kind, essentially transparent" (165). The isolation and loneliness that have characterized both heroines' lives in their respective urban environments dissipates when they transition to the "small town," in which people's lives are interrelated to the extent that everyone knows virtually everything about everyone else. When Nathan Delaney, Jo's romantic interest and an outsider to the community of Desire, inquires about the town's residents at a local gathering, it is easy for Jo to share detailed information about their lives: "'That's Mr. Brodie [...] He fought in World War Two as a gunner and brought his wife back from Paris. Her name was Marie Louise, and she lived here with him till she died three years back. They had four children, ten grandchildren, and now four greats. He always carries peppermint drops in his pocket'" (157). Because Jo possesses intimate knowledge about the people who live on Desire, it becomes impossible for her to maintain the detachment from other human beings that she cultivated in New York City. Similarly, in *Jewels of the Sun*, a casual afternoon visit to a neighbor's home introduces Jude to an overwhelming amount of information about the Ardmore community: "Before the hour was over, Jude's head swam with the names and relations of the people of Ardmore, the feuds and the families, the weddings and the wakes. If there was something Katherine Anne Duffy didn't know about any soul who lived in the area during the last century, well, it wasn't worth mentioning" (59). Interestingly, the lack of privacy that is clearly a consequence of this aspect of small-



town life is never depicted as a drawback. When the novel's hero, Aidan Gallagher, leaves his car parked overnight outside of Jude's cottage, he warns her that their relationship will now be the subject of local gossip: "'There'll be talk now, about that Gallagher lad cozying up to the Yank.' Her eyes glittered. 'Will there, really? How wonderful'" (210). For Jude, the town's knowledge of the most intimate details of her life signifies a type of belonging that was unattainable in Chicago.

Small-town transparency also has a deeper relevance to Jude's emotional re-education. In *The Managed Heart*, Arlie Hochschild observes that the more definable communities of past centuries, in which people possessed specific and stable social roles, enabled a clearer understanding of appropriate feelings:

Ordinary people nowadays move through many social worlds and get the gist of dozens of social roles. Compare this with the life of the fourteenth-century baker's apprentice described in Peter Laslett's *The World We Have Lost* (1968): it is a life that begins and ends in one locale, in one occupation, in one household, within one worldview, and according to one set of rules. It has become much less common that given circumstances seem to dictate the proper interpretation of them or that they indicate in a plainly visible way what feeling is owed to whom, and when, and how. As a result, we moderns spend more mental time on the question "What, in this situation, should I be feeling?" (22).

In *Jewels of the Sun*, appropriate feelings are easily determined by the social rules that have been established in the transparent network of relationships that comprise the

community. Jude is shocked and disturbed by a fight she witnesses between Aidan and Jack, a regular patron of Aidan's pub. She suggests calling the police to have Jack arrested for attacking Aidan. When Aidan refuses on the grounds that Jack is his friend, Jude attempts to communicate the seriousness of Jack's offense: "'He hit you in the face.' Perhaps if she said it slowly, clearly, the meaning would get through. 'He said he was going to break your nose.' 'That's only because he's tried to break it before and hasn't found success. He'll be sorry for it in the morning'" (83). It soon becomes clear that Jack's drunken aggression is a part of an established ritual in this community, and so is his regret the following day. The appropriateness of Jack's and Aidan's feelings, as well as their subsequent behavior, cannot be measured by an outsider like Jude. Both male characters feel and behave "correctly" according to the rules that dictate their friendship and respective positions in the community. Jude is eventually incorporated into this community through the relationships she builds with the townspeople; she becomes Aidan's girlfriend (and later, his wife), his sister Darcy's best friend, and a gatherer of local folklore. As her role in the community stabilizes, she begins to develop and recognize proper feelings about herself and her neighbors.

Once the heroines in both novels learn to appreciate themselves and their contributions to their respective communities, they also gain new perspective on how to revitalize their careers. Jude uses the skills she acquired in academia to collect and record the oral tales about Ardmore's magical past that have been passed down for generations. She incorporates these stories into a journal she has been keeping about her experiences in Ardmore. Jude's writing is initially depicted as a hobby, an enjoyable way

to pass the time: “*Can’t I, just for this little piece of time, indulge myself with something that doesn’t have any solid, guaranteed-practical purpose or goal?*” (136). Assuming that no one in the corporate world would be interested in publishing this manuscript, Jude gives herself free rein to write creatively and honestly. She eventually realizes that, when she’s not working under duress or within the strict boundaries dictated by the university, she finds her former work of researching, writing, and analyzing data immensely pleasurable: “Darcy pursed her lips. ‘You really enjoy it, don’t you? Working.’ ‘Yes.’ Surprise, surprise, Jude thought. ‘I enjoy the work I’m doing now very much’” (143). At the novel’s conclusion, Jude’s experiment in enjoyable work is rewarded: “Holly Carter Fry, literary agent, told Jude F. Murray she very much liked the sound of her book and instructed Jude to send a sample of her work in progress” (323). The novel suggests that there are emotional *and* financial benefits to doing the work that you love.

In *Sanctuary*, Jo’s return to Desire also functions as a catalyst for her work. Although she has avoided portrait photography in the past, Jo becomes compelled to photograph the residents of Desire: “[She] indulged herself, letting them mug or preen for the camera, framing them in, adjusting the angle, letting the burst of light from her strobe flash illuminate them” (122). Similar to Jude’s work, these pictures are initially a mere “indulgence.” However, as Nathan quickly points out, they are some of the finest work she has produced: “‘For someone who claims to have no interest in portrait photography, you sure hit it dead on.’ Scowling, she walked over and saw that he’d homed in on one of the shots she’d taken at the campground. ‘That’s hardly work, it’s—’ ‘Terrific,’ he finished. ‘Fun, even intimate [...] And it shows the photographer’s connected, not in the

picture maybe, but of it'" (141). Jo's portraits become the subjects of her next book, again suggesting that work conducted in the small town (work that was never intended to be work) is extremely lucrative. Like Jude, Jo transitions to the next stage of her career after she (re)connects with the members of her small-town community.

While the small town clearly transforms the heroine, the heroine also transforms the small town. In *Sanctuary's* secondary plot, a serial rapist and murderer is hiding on Desire, and Jo is his primary target. Having no police force of its own, the community of Desire is ill-equipped to handle this criminal. However, the killer leaves photographs of his victims, and Jo's expertise in photography enables her to interpret his psychological state: "They aren't as carefully composed, certainly not as artfully composed [...] In fact ...'—she began to frown as she went through them again, shot by shot—'if I'm remembering right, it looks to me as though the later the photo was taken, the less professional, the less creative it is. As if he's getting bored—or careless'" (305). Jo is eventually confronted by the killer, and she uses the knowledge she has divined from his photographs to stay alive until Nathan arrives and shoots him. Although it is Nathan who ultimately subdues the killer, Jo's work skills are essential to apprehending him in the first place. By saving Desire, she transforms the small town back into a safe place.

In *Jewels of the Sun*, Jude offers a different kind of transformation to the residents of Ardmore. As the town's sole "professional," Jude possesses (or more accurately, is perceived to possess) the ability to grant professional status to the townspeople and their actions. During a conversation with her friend, Brenna, Jude discovers that Brenna has

just bought her mother a new refrigerator. Jude imagines how her own mother would react to receiving such a present, and she offers the following comment:

“If I gave my mother a major appliance as a gift, she’d think I’d lost my mind.” “But then, your mother’s a professional woman, as I recall.”

“Yes, she is, and she’s wonderful at her job. But your mother’s a professional woman, too. A professional mother.” Brenna blinked, then her eyes gleamed with amused pleasure. “Oh, she’ll like that one” (122).

In this passage, Jude essentially elevates the domestic, unpaid labor of Brenna’s mother by inscribing it with “professional” value. Something similar occurs when Jude begins collecting local folktales. As a “former” academic who records the stories of the townspeople for eventual (albeit unintentional) publication through a New York corporation, Jude transforms the private narratives of Ardmore’s residents into something that has public and monetary value. The illusion of the self-contained small town that is far removed (in both time and space) from capitalist influences and logic is disrupted here. While the novel has created a clear dialectic between “country” and “city,” with the former in a position of superiority, it concludes with an inversion of this hierarchy that cannot be ignored.

Both novels, despite their obvious arguments concerning the importance of community, produce heroines who, more than anything else, become stronger individuals. Jude’s hard work (including her domestic manual labor as well as the writing that takes place within the private walls of her cottage) increases her self-sufficiency in addition to her self-esteem. The primary conflict in *Jewels of the Sun*

centers on Jude's indecision about Aidan's marriage proposal. The conflict results from Aidan's poor framing of the marital contract, in which he expresses a "need" for a wife, instead of declaring his love for Jude. Although Aidan's love for Jude is apparent to the reader, the continuation of his family line is also a necessary consideration. Gallagher's Pub has been family-owned for 150 years, and Aidan wants to maintain the Gallaghers' role in the community: "If Aidan intended Gallagher's to go on—and he did—he would have to think about finding himself a woman and going about the business of making a son—or a daughter, for that matter" (49). When Jude refuses his proposal, she does so claiming that she wants to be loved, not needed. However, the protagonists' next conversation reveals a substantially different reason: "I think I'd like to see Venice with its wonderful buildings and grand cathedrals and mysterious canals. And the wine country in France [...] And England" (301). Jude's desire to travel indicates that she has not refused his marital offer simply because he failed to declare his love. Rather, the idea of being permanently locked into the Gallaghers' prescribed position in the community of Ardmore, particularly now that she has the tools to be a confident individual, is not entirely attractive. In fact, it is not Aidan's declaration of love that prompts her reconsideration of his proposal. He suggests that they travel to these places together: "[D]o you think that my pub would crumble or your work vanish? What's two weeks or so in the grand scheme of things, after all?" (304). Once it is apparent to Jude that being Aidan's wife does not necessarily mean being trapped in Ardmore, she agrees to marry him. The resolution of this conflict reveals that the small town functions only as a

temporary respite. The heroine essentially abandons the small town after she has been healed by it.

After Jo's career is reinvigorated in *Sanctuary*, she also expresses a desire to return home to New York City: "I don't want to live here [...] I want to know I can come back now and then [...] Lexy and me, we just can't stay here the way you do. But I guess we both need to know that Sanctuary stands on the hill like always and nobody's going to lock the door on us'" (337). Jo's rejection of Desire as a permanent home is motivated by a fear similar to Jude's. Staying on Desire means accepting a stable role in the community, as well as in the family business: "Kate lost two girls she had on cottage duty the week before I got here. They took jobs on the mainland. And since I'm here ... she hasn't bothered to replace them yet'" (245). The menial work that has facilitated Jo's emotional healing is depicted positively only as a temporary solution. Once healed, the heroine again desires a return to her former, "city" existence. However, since there's no telling what damage the heroine may suffer in the future, the small town must remain accessible to her. Only then can she return to the city and live a more fulfilling life. Thus, for both heroines, the small town is ultimately depicted as a sort of private resort: "What is idealised is not the rural economy, past or present, but a purchased freehold house in the country, or 'a charming coastal retreat,' or even 'a barren offshore island'. This is then not a rural but a suburban or dormitory dream" (Williams 47). Because Jude and Jo possess the socioeconomic mobility to leave their respective small towns at will, the aspects of small-town life that will clearly lose their charm in the long term (i.e.

manual labor, lack of privacy, stable identity) can remain novelties that are also embraced at will.

A complication is created here in that the “small town” can only retain its definition if it remains relatively closed. In *Community*, Zygmunt Bauman discusses the impossibility of maintaining a “natural” community in a globalized world, in which people and ideas travel so easily that community boundaries become artificial: “Once information could travel independently of its carriers, and with a speed far beyond the capacity of even the most advanced means of transportation (as in the kind of society we all nowadays inhabit), the boundary between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ could no longer be drawn, let alone sustained” (13-4). In *Sanctuary* and *Jewels of the Sun*, Roberts attempts to locate the small town in a time and place beyond the reach of global citizens, yet it is easily accessed by a heroine who occupies an ambiguous position between “insider” and “outsider.” This raises an important question: if nearly anyone can travel to the small town, marry an “insider,” and reject a permanent role in the community, then how does it manage to clearly remain a small town? Both novels utilize a key characteristic of the small-town romance formula to resolve this issue. Unlike the corporate romances discussed in chapter one, small-town romances necessitate the exploration of multiple romantic relationships, one of which must occur between characters who are clearly marked as “insiders” of the small-town community. This is where Roberts’ trilogies become particularly relevant. *Jewels of the Sun*, the first installment in the Gallaghers of Ardmore trilogy, focuses solely on the relationship between Jude and Aidan, but it also introduces the potential for romance between Aidan’s brother, Shawn, and Jude’s best



friend, Brenna O'Toole. Shawn and Brenna become the protagonists in the second novel of the series, *Tears of the Moon* (2000). Both of these characters, like their ancestors, were born and raised in the small town of Ardmore, and neither has any intention of leaving. Their marital union at the conclusion of *Tears of the Moon* reestablishes the boundaries of the community that were disrupted by Jude's arrival and her resistance to permanent relocation.

In the stand-alone novel of *Sanctuary*, the "insider" relationship occurs between Jo's brother, Brian, and the town physician, Kirby Fitzsimmons. Brian was born on Desire and has no interest in living elsewhere: "Desire, with all its virtues and flaws, was his" (21). Kirby's position in the community, like Jo's, is initially portrayed to be tenuous; she is a descendant of one of the island's four founding families, but she was raised and educated in New England. The conflict between Brian and Kirby centers on his concern that she, like Jo, will tire of the small town and return to the city: "He kept expecting to hear that she'd gone back to the mainland, closed up the little cottage she'd inherited from her granny and given up on the notion of running a clinic on the island. But month after month she stayed, slowly weaving herself into the fabric of the place" (26). Once it becomes clear to Brian that Kirby has no intention of ever leaving Desire, the characters get engaged. So while *Sanctuary* concludes with the protagonists, Jo and Nathan (who is a tourist, and thus clearly positioned as an "outsider") planning their exit from the island, it simultaneously concludes with a union between two of Desire's founding families. The marriage between Brian and Kirby assures Jo, as well as the

reader, that the community of Desire will remain accessible for her enjoyment and healing, but otherwise closed.

The required marriage of “insiders” in the small-town romance is significant not only because it facilitates a division between the abstract concepts of “city” and “country.” In both of these novels, it also serves to resist the effects of globalization. In *Jewels of the Sun*, the marriage between Shawn and Brenna reaffirms the national boundaries of Ireland that were disrupted by Jude’s access to global tourism; in *Sanctuary*, the marriage between Brian and Kirby helps to salvage Desire from its position as a popular tourist attraction. It must also be acknowledged, however, that there is an implied racial dimension to the definition of “insider” status in both novels. Jude’s ability to claim Ardmore as an ancestral home is predicated on her ethnic affiliation. There are no characters of color in *Jewels of the Sun*, but the Irish setting serves to eliminate some of the complications that would arise if the novel featured a racially and ethnically homogenous community in small-town USA, as is the case with *Sanctuary*. Although there are zero living characters of color in this novel, Roberts at least acknowledges the ugly history of slavery on the island of Desire: “[Brian] knew the history of his home, that once cotton and indigo had been grown there, worked by slaves. Fortunes had been reaped by his ancestors [...] Sanctuary had been an enclave for privilege, and a testament to a way of life that was doomed to failure” (23). This passage can be read as an attempt to critique the island’s involvement with slavery, as well as the racial and socioeconomic privilege of its founders. However, because past and present become conflated on Desire, and because the past is glorified and romanticized, the novel

resists any clear separation between the “good” and “bad” elements of Desire’s history. Brian’s attachment to Desire is firmly rooted in his own privilege, and his fondest memories of island life include an African American domestic servant who was a descendant of the slave population: “Born in the big oak tester bed he now slept in, delivered by his own father and an old black woman who had smoked a corncob pipe and whose parents had been house slaves, owned by his ancestors. The old woman’s name was Miss Effie, and when he was very young she often told him the story of his birth” (21). Brian’s proprietary claim of Desire as a place of genuine belonging is the direct result of an inherently racialized and aristocratic privilege that is reaffirmed, in the novel’s present and future, with his marriage to Kirby, the descendant of another founding family. In recasting the boundaries of Desire, this marital union not only serves to exclude urban mainlanders and global tourists; it also ensures that insider status is reserved for people of a certain class and race.

Ultimately, Roberts’ particular construction of the small-town fantasy suggests that this subgenre may be less concerned with the navigation of home and work life than with the tension between global and local communities. It should be apparent from this analysis that the heroes of “small town” romance are characterized far less vividly than the picturesque communities in which they reside. In fact, a “small town” romance novel is immediately recognizable because of its cover, which invariably features a rural setting—or a home—instead of the protagonists. The romantic subjects of this subgenre, in other words, would be more accurately defined as the heroine and the small-town community; it is, after all, the relationship between heroine and community that is

marked by mutual transformation. What the “small town” romance attempts to mitigate, then, is the effects of a globalized economy on local spaces and ties.

## CHAPTER IV

SAVING CHINA: THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF WHITENESS  
IN THE INTERRACIAL CORPORATE ROMANCE

This chapter will examine a final manifestation of the “corporate” romance novel: the interracial “corporate” romance. Elizabeth Lowell’s *Jade Island* (1999) and Katherine Stone’s *Pearl Moon* (1995) mark their departure from romances that centralize white protagonists; these novels feature romantic relationships between white heroes and mixed-race Asian heroines. *Jade Island*’s Lianne Blakely is a Chinese American woman, the product of a Chinese father and a white American mother; and *Pearl Moon*’s Maylene Kwan is a Chinese British woman, the product of a white American father and a Chinese mother. The heroines in these two novels not only find themselves negotiating the tension between work and home, but they also find themselves at the intersection of two international corporations of competing national interests. As corporate romances, *Jade Island* and *Pearl Moon* are set in the respective urban environments of Seattle and Hong Kong. Both feature heroines who have achieved substantial corporate success in artistic fields: Lianne is a renowned jade expert, Maylene is an up-and-coming architect, and both heroines enter into reluctant professional partnerships with their heroes. In *Jade Island*, Kyle Donovan, co-founder of Donovan’s Gems & Minerals, hires Lianne to instruct him on jade history and craftsmanship. *Pearl Moon*’s Sam Coulter is the builder hired to transform Maylene’s architectural vision into a three-dimensional reality. In

both novels, these professional partnerships transition into romantic relationships and eventually marital (and corporate) unions.

In order to offer a thorough analysis of the significance of racial difference in the characterizations of these novels' corporate protagonists, it will be useful to rearticulate the defining features of the "corporate" and "small town" romances discussed in the previous chapters. The Krentzian corporate hero embodies a "cool" professionalism—evident in his affect, his emotional detachment from others, and his continual reliance on "reason" and "rationality" in corporate decision-making processes—that has contributed substantially to his success in the workplace, while the Krentzian corporate heroine is passionate, creative, intuitive, and family-oriented. The heroine's approach to work (and home) ultimately proves to be more lucrative—and more satisfying—than the hero's; in highlighting the advantages of a "domesticated" workplace, she succeeds in domesticating the hero as well. The narrative resolution of the corporate romance is one that dissolves the tension between the spheres of home and work by erasing the distinction between them. This subgenre concludes, like its conventional predecessor, with a victory gendered feminine, albeit one that is highly dependent upon the heroine's socioeconomic and racial identity.

Nora Roberts' "small town" romances also explore the lives of corporate heroines who struggle to reconcile work and home. This subgenre poses the solution of the "return home"; the female protagonists abandon their careers—and their urban lifestyles—and escape to childhood or ancestral communities that are fantastic in their construction, existing seemingly outside of real space and time. Here the heroines

undergo an emotional reeducation that facilitates their ability to build intimate relationships with other human beings, and to identify and pursue meaningful work. This mythic small town—in order to ensure its preservation—is carefully constructed as a closed community that only the heroine can freely access. Racial homogeneity is a key feature of this closed community; because Roberts' small town is virtually untouched by the effects of globalization, and because the romance heroine (in both conventional *and* corporate novels) is racially white, the community that she calls “home” is predominantly—if not entirely—white as well. Thus, whiteness is a central aspect of the transformative power that is held by both the Krentzian corporate heroine and the idealized community of Roberts' small-town romances.

In their negotiations of interracial romantic relationships, both *Jade Island* and *Pearl Moon* construct conflicts between “East” and “West” that invoke aspects of “small town mythology.” While Krentz's white corporate heroines domesticate, and therefore transform, both their corporate environments and their heroes, the Asian corporate heroine, like the small-town heroine of Roberts' novels, becomes the object of transformation. An important difference exists, however, between the source of trauma for Roberts' heroines and that of Lianne and Maylene. The Asian heroines, rather than being the victims of flexible capitalism and its effects on personal life, have been traumatized by a particular depiction of Chinese culture and its anti-capitalist leanings. The (white) American and/or Irish family and community may serve as a catalyst for emotional healing by offering an escape to a better place and time in which roles are clearly and pleasantly defined, but the Chinese family and community functions as a

regressive past in which individual desires and feelings are painfully oppressed, and defined roles are marked by an extreme enforcement of gender inequality. These contrasting portrayals of “community” illuminate what Zygmunt Bauman identifies as a paradoxical element of the community fantasy: “Missing community means missing security; gaining community, if it happens, would soon mean missing freedom. Security and freedom are two equally precious and coveted values which could be better or worse balanced, but hardly ever fully reconciled and without friction” (5). Roberts attempts to resolve this contradiction of values by enabling her heroines to move freely in and out of the community space via their racial and class privilege. Stone and Lowell, on the other hand, construct small-town “Asianness” as something that must be rescued from itself. *Jade Island* and *Pearl Moon* are essentially narratives of progress, in which the Chinese community may offer security at the expense of freedom, but the British and/or American corporation has the ability to offer more satisfactory versions of both.

Thus, the interracial corporate romance is marked by a significant alteration of the romance formula. The hero, who represents the (white) British or American corporation, introduces the Chinese heroine to a “domesticated” workplace—one that is specifically racialized and nationalized—and she is transformed in the process. The Krentzian corporate heroine’s gendered victory, which is fully realized in the merger of the protagonists’ corporations under her model of negotiating work and home life, is reconfigured as a racial and national victory for the corporate heroes of interracial romance. These novels reveal that whiteness, despite its invisibility in the majority of romance novels, is central to the formulaic conventions of the genre. More importantly,



perhaps, they suggest that corporate romances offer a far more complicated fantasy than the satisfactory resolution of the contemporary working woman's negotiation of home and work: they also alleviate particular racial and national anxieties that emerge out of a global economy.

### **“The Other Asian Man”: *Jade Island* and the Return of the Foil**

The object of transformation in the interracial romance is, primarily, the mixed-race heroine, much as the primary object of transformation in Krentz's corporate romances is the hero. In both cases, the transformed protagonists serve as vehicles for the larger transformations of the workplace; the protagonist is converted to a new set of values—such as the integration of work and family life—and the corporation s/he represents follows suit. In *Jade Island*, the character of the “Other Woman”—the foil of the romance genre—plays an integral role in this transformation: “The Other Woman represents all that the heroine is not, thereby highlighting the heroine's innocence, love, and true womanliness” (Cohn 48). If the foil's beliefs and actions lead to a destruction not only of herself but also larger marital and familial relationships, the heroine's beliefs and actions enable an alternative in the natural conversion of the hero and the creation and development of family and community. In other words, the foil ultimately justifies the healthy transformation of the hero by the heroine essential to the romance plot.

It is worth noting here that the “Other Woman” is unusual in contemporary romance narratives, corporate or otherwise. Modleski's and Mussell's identification of the foil character in their seminal works emerged from a focus on 1970s and 1980s

Harlequins, which typically contained the single plot of romantic development between hero and heroine. Contemporary romances (both category and single-title) are now characterized, almost without exception, by the secondary plot narrative discussed in chapter one. The villain of the secondary plot is essentially the foil: s/he espouses values in opposition to those of the romantic couple, s/he poses a serious threat to both the romantic couple and the larger society in which they live, and s/he is punished at the end of the story. The “Other Woman” proper is arguably too dated to serve a valuable function in the contemporary romance, in which working, educated, middle- and upper-class heroines rarely need to concern themselves with transcending clear-cut class distinctions via marriage, and in which the boundaries of inappropriate sexual behavior for women are much more difficult to define. Krentz’s heroines, after all, are not condemned for having selfishly pursued sexual relationships with men in the past, nor are they judged for sleeping with their heroes early in the novels.

The character of the foil, however, makes a provocative reappearance in *Jade Island*, in which the constitutive narrative function of the “Other Woman” is assumed by the “Other *Asian* Man.” This character is Lee Chin Tang, the greedy Chinese businessman who courted Lianne in order to ingratiate himself with the Tang family, and then abandoned her to marry a distant but legitimate Tang cousin. Lee is described as “a dark, slender, very handsome Asian man,” “an incredibly good-looking leech” with “feline, almost feminine beauty” (105). When small, dark, and “almost feminine” Lee meets Lianne’s hero, “big blond Anglo” Kyle, for the first time, it is clear that their differences extend well beyond their physical characteristics (18). Upon seeing Lianne

with Kyle, Lee becomes jealous of her new companion and attempts to seduce her immediately by professing his renewed romantic interest in Cantonese, a language that Kyle cannot speak or understand. Although Lianne politely rejects his verbal advances, she enjoys his reaction: “There was a very personal, very female part of her that was delighted to encounter Lee while on the arm of Kyle Donovan, a man who drew a woman’s eye whether the woman was Chinese or Caucasian” (106). Clearly, the implication here is that Lee does not possess the same cross-cultural appeal. They then exchange the following verbal blows, again in Cantonese:

[H]is left hand shot out and wrapped around her free arm, stopping her.

“Better that you be my cherished concubine than a foreign devil’s whore.”

“I am neither concubine nor whore. Let go of me. Johnny won’t be pleased if his honored guest, Kyle Donovan, is late.”

“Johnny is only Number Three Son.”

“Far better than zero,” she said coolly. “That is your number, Lee. Zero.

You married a distant, undistinguished cousin of Uncle Wen’s and changed your name to Tang. You are no man’s son.”

“Do not speak to me, female spawn of a foreign whore!”

“It would be my pleasure not to speak to you at all.”

Lee’s smile was as cold as his eyes. “May your fondest wish come true.”

It was an old Chinese curse. Lianne’s eyes narrowed and her chin went up (107).

This altercation reveals much about Lee Chin Tang, as well as the culture that he is intended to represent. In the conventional romance formula, the heroine is rewarded with marriage precisely because she does not assume any entitlement to wealth and fortune; in other words, she wins because she has no ulterior motive. The “scheming adventuress”—Tania Modleski’s term for the “Other Woman”—on the other hand, is punished with death, divorce, or isolation because she actively pursues marriage for financial gain. Lee meets all of the requirements for “the scheming adventuress”: he has used his feminine beauty to seduce both Lianne and the distant Tang cousin for the purpose of marrying into a wealthy family. As a result, he reaps no reward; he possesses the Tang name, but he is too far removed from the powerful members of the family to enjoy any political power or economic prosperity. Further, the portrayal of Lee’s character in this passage emphasizes, as it should, Kyle’s particular brand of appealing American masculinity. Rather than directing his anger toward Kyle, Lee targets Lianne with his insults, knowing that the language barrier will prevent Kyle from intervening. It also becomes evident that Lee’s primary weapon (a weapon that has been firmly established as feminine in the romance tradition) is words; his final utterance to Lianne is a curse. Kyle, on the other hand, who has deduced much from the tone of their conversation, is clearly prepared for more than mere speech: “Why don’t you tell this elevator jockey to take his thumb off the button [...] Or should I just pick him up and carry him along for you like a pet?” (108). While Lee is depicted as small, feminine, vindictive, and physically incapable, Kyle is established as a large, confident “man of action” who prefers the direct (and more honest) approach to conflict.

Although *Jade Island* is clearly a contemporary romance (the entire narrative takes place fully in the present), its treatment of Chinese culture as regressive, rigid, and overly patriarchal enables its invocation of the traditional “scheming adventuress” figure. Like the heroines of contemporary historical romances, which often continue to utilize the character of the foil, the protagonists of *Jade Island* are situated precariously between the “contemporary” (American) values and perspectives accepted by readers, and the behaviors and actions that characterize the specific setting in which the novels take place. Contemporary China, unsurprisingly, is located firmly in the past. The structure of Chinese society, as it is explicated, is easily comparable to that of the Regency novels that are also enjoyed by romance readers; it prevents characters from achieving the “American dream” of economic independence and social/political power through merit, leaving them with the difficult choice of a) “scheming” to attain their desires, like Lee Chin Tang, or b) finding the strength to be true to themselves in a restrictive, stifling society, like Kyle.

While Kyle’s Americanness clearly provides him with a greater degree of mobility, the outcome of the novel depends on the delicacy of his interactions with the Tang family. His ability to navigate the nuances of “traditional” Chinese culture affect (seemingly) not only his relationship with Lianne, and not only the position of his family’s business in an international market, but also the relationship between the U.S. and China: “The Chinese just threatened to break off all relations with the U.S. if the Jade Emperor’s treasure turns up on our soil” (11). However, Kyle does not allow the magnitude of these cross-cultural negotiations to influence his behavior. During a

conversation with Lianne and her parents, Kyle breaches the Chinese cultural code of conduct by openly acknowledging the blood relationship between Johnny and Lianne, Johnny's illegitimate daughter:

“Let your father talk,” Kyle said calmly.

There was a crash from the open kitchen area as Anna dropped a brandy snifter.

Lianne jerked, but not because of the broken snifter. She wasn't used to hearing Johnny referred to as her father. Certainly not in Anna's presence, much less in Johnny's.

“Sorry,” Kyle said sardonically. “Did I point out that there's a lump the size of the Empire State Building under this fine Chinese rug?” (294).

Kyle's brashness in this moment could conceivably cause even further harm to the fragile relationship that Lianne has with her father (and with the rest of the Tangs), but instead it functions as the initial step of a necessary and overdue wakeup call to the Tang family. Although in a previous scene Johnny responds angrily to Lianne's indirect reference to her parentage, here he is immediately impressed with Kyle's outspokenness: “Looks like Lianne has finally brought home a man who doesn't give a damn about the Tang Consortium” (294). Again, a contrast is established between Kyle, who speaks the truth regardless of consequences, and Lee Chin Tang, who allows consequences to determine his life choices.

However, it is important to note that Johnny's response to Kyle is a critique of himself as well. Unwilling to risk the loss of his powerful position as the third son of the

Tang family patriarch, Johnny never married Anna, Lianne's white mother. Although Johnny and Anna are still romantically involved, Johnny married a Chinese woman who met the approval of the Tang family, thereby gravely affecting the lives of both Lianne and her mother: "Lianne's mother was neither prosperous nor Chinese nor a wife. She had built her life around being the mistress of a married man for whom family, *legitimate* family, was the most important thing in life; whose Chinese family referred to Anna only as Johnny's round-eye concubine, a nonentity" (20). Johnny's unwavering loyalty to the "traditional" Chinese version of family creates dysfunctional relationships among Anna, Lianne, and himself. Lianne struggles to find respect for her mother, whom she sees as a "very willing participant in her second-class status" (8). Further, Lowell suggests that because Anna and Lianne have only each other, the mother-daughter bond that emerges from a network of complex familial relationships is also absent: "She and her mother were quite close, more like lifelong friends than parent and child" (68). More importantly, Johnny's difficult choice emphasizes the inherent dysfunction of a culture that prioritizes familial obligations over individual interests, or more specifically, what David Leiwei Li<sup>8</sup> refers to as the difference between "the ascriptive—the biological and social givens that one inherits—and the acquisitional—the individual acts of both overcoming the conditions of one's birth and marshaling the resources for self-invention" (107). While Johnny has chosen to embrace the ascriptive normality of his Chinese

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<sup>8</sup> See "On Ascriptive and Acquisitional Americanness: The Accidental Asian and the Illogic of Assimilation." *Contemporary Literature*. 45.1 (2004): 106-34.

culture, Kyle, like the members of his own family, represents the acquisitive normality that characterizes American culture.

Kyle's ability to correct the "backward" Tang family emerges from the knowledge he has gained as part of the successful, loving, American family that is thoroughly developed in this novel. In the Tang family, the male members are ranked according to their birth order. The younger sons of Wen, the Tang patriarch, are subordinate to their older brothers. It's not clear exactly how women are positioned within this system; Lowell only emphasizes that they are generally powerless in this extreme example of a patriarchal family: "The Chinese much prefer sons over daughters. First sons are greatly preferred over other sons, second sons are more valued than third, and so on" (295). In Kyle's American family, however, the sons and daughters of the Donovan patriarch are equally valued: "[Kyle] butted heads with his brothers and sisters on a regular basis, his independent and stubborn sisters made him crazy, yet he wouldn't have traded any of it for peace and quiet" (67). The Donovan family is portrayed as a boisterous group of loving, teasing adults who have been given free rein to pursue independent and successful lives, but still willingly reconnect with one another on a regular basis. Further, their complete acceptance of each other's faults, and their desire to take care of each other "no matter what" is revealed in a conversation between Kyle and his older brother, Archer. Their younger sister, Faith, is engaged to a man who has not met the approval of their family, but the brothers agree to let her make her own mistakes and offer their support if the relationship ends badly: "What if Faith gets pregnant before her common sense takes over?" "Then we'll have a niece or nephew to



spoil,' Archer said softly. 'And that lucky baby will have as many fathers as there are Donovan men'" (137). While the Tang family has rejected Lianne because of her illegitimate status, it becomes clear that if the Donovan family were faced with a similar situation, they would love the child unconditionally.

The Tangs' and Donovans' differing perspectives on family translate into differing perspectives on work as well. Both the Tang Consortium and Donovan International are family-run corporations. Donovan International is an "international import-export business," and the Tang Consortium has "international business dealings ranging from realty to trade goods to banks," although Wen's passion is the acquisition of priceless jade goods (67, 272). One of the primary plot tensions in the novel is the theft of Wen's most valuable jade artifacts. Lianne is arrested for the crime, although Kyle—and the reader—knows that she has been wrongfully accused. Lianne and Kyle suspect that another member of the Tang family must be responsible, since only an insider would have access to the vault. They eventually discover that the culprit is Joe, Wen's eldest son and Johnny's brother, whose birth order has determined his obligation to the jade collection, despite his lack of interest: "It galled Wen to give over control of Tang destiny to a son who had little knowledge and less love of jade [...] An emotional preference for [his nephew] didn't sway Wen from his duty to Joe, any more than emotion had swayed Wen from wedding the flat-footed eldest daughter of a rich merchant" (148-9). Joe develops a gambling problem and attempts to resolve his debts by selling pieces of the family's collection and setting up Lianne, Wen's illegitimate granddaughter, to take the fall. Although Joe almost destroys Lianne's life, his confession near the novel's

conclusion renders him a pitiable character: “Kyle watched slow tears well from Joe’s dark eyes and down his lined cheeks. In a distant way Kyle felt sorry for the man” (366). The real culprit, rather, appears to be the Chinese culture that has so rigidly structured this family’s business dealings according to tradition instead of passion.

Unlike Wen, “the Donovan” has encouraged his children to pursue their passions: “‘Donovan Gems and Minerals,’ Kyle said. ‘The four brothers got together and went into business for ourselves. We’re an independent affiliate of Dad’s company’” (67). Each of the Donovan brothers is interested in a particular type of precious stone; Kyle’s passion is Neolithic jade. Here, as in the Krentzian corporate romance novel, passion for work equals success in work. A lack of passion, as revealed by Joe’s near-destruction of the Tang family’s assets, equals a lack of success in work. And Kyle, like the corporate heroines he resembles in every way but gender, has a passion for art, for jade that has been artistically manipulated by early craftsmen. The Donovan family corporation, as a whole, benefits literally when its individual members pursue their own independent interests. Although Wen has cultivated Lianne’s knowledge of jade, he has done so as an employer only, not as an employer *and* a grandfather: “When Wen finally despaired of training a son in the love and lore of jade, and it was too late to mold his own daughters in that role, he began Lianne’s schooling. She would never be a Tang, but that didn’t mean her gift for jade appreciation had to go to waste” (147-8). After Joe’s confession, in the final exchange between Kyle and Wen, Wen finally acknowledges that Lianne *is* a Tang, but her exposure to (and acceptance from) the Donovan family has altered the direction of her familial loyalties: “‘She has a family,’ Kyle said fiercely. ‘Mine. There

isn't a Donovan who wouldn't go to war for her. Pass the word through the Tang family, Wen. Lianne isn't alone anymore'" (370). Wen, like his son, Johnny, is impressed with Kyle's forthrightness, and he immediately offers his approval of a marital union: "I wish I could see my granddaughter's defender ... It would give me an idea of what my great-grandchildren will look like" (370). Kyle has thus enabled a dual transformation of the Tang family: 1) he has proven Lianne's innocence, forcing Wen to acknowledge that his negotiation of work and the traditional Chinese family structure requires transformation in order for both to be successful, which results in the complete acceptance of Lianne as a passionate worker *and* a cherished granddaughter; and 2) he has ensured his own legal alliance with two jade experts who now fully embrace his system of values regarding both family and the workplace.

Additionally, Kyle is given access to the conventional romance heroine's happy ending. He falls in love with Lianne despite the fact that she is not a legitimate member of the Tang family, *and* despite the fact that she is hated by its most powerful members. By the end of the novel, Lianne is transformed through her embracing of American family values, but *Kyle* is rewarded for his motiveless love for Lianne. After he proposes marriage to her (the timing of this event, again, affirms his lack of motive), Wen reveals that their family has long possessed the contents of the Jade Emperor's Tomb, the very objects that Kyle and his brother have been searching for throughout the novel. Kyle's marriage to Lianne thereby ensures his access to the Tang family's treasure. In *Romance and the Erotics of Property*, Jan Cohn claims that "Work ... is never the route to success and security for heroines in patriarchal society. Success and security rest in property"

(11). It could be argued that, for the white hero in the interracial corporate romance novel, American success and security also rest in property, as the following analysis of Katherine Stone's *Pearl Moon* will illustrate further.

**Reconstructing Hong Kong: “Democratic” Reform in *Pearl Moon***

*Pearl Moon*, set in Hong Kong, explores the development of two romantic couples: James Drake and Allison Whitaker, and Sam Coulter and Maylene Kwan. These four characters become relevant to one another through a complex web of relationships. James is Sam's former employer (as well as the man who once saved Sam's life), Sam is an old friend of Allison's father, Allison and Maylene are half-sisters (a fact only known to Maylene), and in the present, all are working together to create James Drake's dream hotel: the Jade Palace. James is the developer, Sam is the builder, Maylene is the architect, and Allison is the photographer. The novel takes place in 1993, and one of its primary tensions centers around the completion and success of the Jade Palace prior to the “the turnover”: “The impending turnover of sovereignty to the People's Republic of China had escalated rather than diminished Hong Kong's building boom. As a provision of the Joint Declaration, the government of Beijing agreed to honor all existing land leases for at least fifty years. It seemed prudent, however, to have the buildings completed and fully operational before 1997” (109). The other tension exists between three of the characters and the location of Hong Kong itself; for James, Allison, and Maylene, Hong Kong invokes traumatic past events that need to be resolved: the man who murdered James' wife is residing in Hong Kong, Allison's father and

grandparents become mysteriously tense and secretive whenever Hong Kong is mentioned, and Maylene is returning to Hong Kong after a nine-year absence, knowing she will eventually have to face her estranged mother. Hong Kong, like the small towns in *Jewels of the Sun* and *Sanctuary*, becomes synonymous with the past, even though it is considerably more metropolitan than Allison's and Sam's home cities of Dallas and San Antonio.

Stone effectively situates Hong Kong in the past with two recurring motifs. First, the visceral effects of the city continually trigger often painful memories of past events for her characters. For Maylene, Hong Kong's complicated blend of Eastern and Western influences represents her own genetic makeup, and the embarrassing true story of her birth that her mother kept secret: her father was a white, American sailor who impregnated her Chinese mother during a brief visit to Hong Kong. Maylene's return to Hong Kong invokes memories of her happy childhood (during which she believed that her father was dead, not committed to a different family in Dallas), and her discovery of her mother's lie: "Maylene had been away from Hong Kong for nine years, and during the twenty hours since her return, she had tried to remain sharply focused on the reason she was here. But it was impossible. The past was all around her [...] [S]he was swept by rushes of anger—and of anguish—that were far more powerful than she expected them to be" (66).

Second, anthropomorphic descriptions of Hong Kong centering on the tension between East and West become conflated with the tension between past and present. Throughout *Pearl Moon*, Hong Kong is depicted as the embodiment of the commingling

of East and West: “The hotel would be a symbol of the unique harmony that was Hong Kong, the improbable yet spectacular marriage of East and West, of mystical dragon and majestic lion” (9). James hires Allison, a noted photographer, to capture the essence of Hong Kong in a series of photographs that will be displayed in the lobby of the Jade Palace. Descriptions of Allison’s photographs reveal that the “marriage of East and West” is more specifically a marriage of *past* East and *present* West:

And in every photograph one saw the magic of Hong Kong, the fascinating cosmopolis of contrasts ... where ancient Buddhist temples nestled beside towering skyscrapers [...] In one, taken in Mah Wa Lane, a shopkeeper made swift calculations with his abacus, while the next, taken just blocks away, revealed the ultra-high-tech inner sanctum of the Hang Seng Stock Exchange (277).

Stone’s “Orientalist” construction of Hong Kong in these passages enables a reading of *Pearl Moon* as a small-town narrative, because in addition to it being the locus of past personal trauma for several of her characters, its Asian components also render it distinctly anti-modern at times.

Further, it justifies real estate developments like the Jade Palace. Stone suggests that this hotel has greater significance than merely the continued wealth of James Drake: “Despite the constraints placed on Chinese women by centuries of tradition, in Hong Kong there was extraordinary freedom. The laissez-faire capitalism that flourished here was both gender-blind and race-blind” (29). The tension that surrounds the completion of the Jade Palace is national as well as economic. The American and British developers,

by maintaining their footholds in Hong Kong real estate, are essentially attempting to ensure that Hong Kong will remain “democratic” (i.e. capitalist, gender-blind, and race-blind). Here Stone is invoking a familiar Orientalist narrative that suggests a paternal relationship between West and East: “[Orientals] are a subject race, dominated by a race that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves. Their great moments were in the past; they are useful in the modern world only because the powerful and up-to-date empires have effectively brought them out of the wretchedness of their decline” (Said 35). Although *Pearl Moon*, unlike *Jade Island*, does not emphasize the noble intentions of its white hero (James Drake) by contrasting him with an Asian male foil, it *does* emphasize the supremacy of democracy by contrasting Drake with the novel’s villain (his wife’s murderer), the aristocrat, Sir Geoffrey Lloyd-Ashton: “Sir Geoffrey’s claim to the crown of Hong Kong was quite legitimate, of course. As the territory’s wealthiest and most powerful citizen, Hong Kong was, arguably, his own private kingdom” (178). Although James and Sir Geoffrey are both British aristocrats, James is outspoken in his support of a democratic Hong Kong. When Maylene’s mother, Juliana Kwan, uses her position as a recognized public figure to denounce Sir Geoffrey’s opposition to “rapid democratization” (thereby putting herself at risk of being considered a traitor), James publicly supports her claims: “By his wholehearted endorsement of Juliana’s views, James hoped to share the burden with her. Indeed, he wished he could shift it entirely to himself, to assume all the risk” (353, 366). James does not have a personal (or even a professional) relationship with Juliana Kwan, and he is not aware of the familial relationship between Juliana and Maylene. The novel

suggests that his only motivation for backing Juliana's position is a heartfelt belief in democracy.

While many contemporary romances contain villains that must be vanquished in order for the hero and heroine to achieve their "happily ever after" ending, Sir Geoffrey is a peculiarly anti-capitalist villain: he is aristocratic, wealthy, insane, and evil. The critique of capitalism that is typically central to the small-town romance is complicated by the defeat of this rich, blue-blooded villain who exploits Hong Kong's lower- to middle-class workers. The hero and heroine are ultimately responsible for bringing this villain to justice,<sup>9</sup> but something rather unusual occurs in *Pearl Moon's* final confrontation. Geoffrey holds three people (including Allison) at gunpoint in his castle, and James attempts to rescue them, as well as seek revenge against his wife's murderer. Before he can fight Geoffrey, however, (a fight that he would inevitably win, and would inevitably result in his choosing justice according to the law rather than retaliation by murder), the castle floor opens up and swallows Geoffrey. The characters present conclude that a Hong Kong dragon spirit has killed Geoffrey because of his blatant disregard for *feng shui* in the construction of his castle: "[I]t was something about which none of them would ever speak. The world would believe that the colossal winds had shaken the castle to its very foundation, as indeed they had. But those who had been there knew the truth. The blinded dragon had exacted its revenge" (477). This bizarre resolution appears to be one more example of the novel's recurring exoticization and

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<sup>9</sup> In complete adherence to the prototypical good vs. evil confrontation scene, the hero and heroine do not consciously endeavor to kill the villain, but s/he may inadvertently cause his/her own death by fighting unfairly (i.e. the villain attempts to stab the hero in the back and then falls out of an open window).



mystification of the clearly Asian elements of Hong Kong. However, it would perhaps be more fruitful to read this incident as part of the novel's obvious promotion of democratic reform. Apparently, the city of Hong Kong (or at least the ancient spirits that reside deep within it) desires "rapid democratization" as strongly as its heroes and heroines do.

Because *Pearl Moon* utilizes conventions of the small-town formula by establishing Hong Kong as the location where the past is confronted and resolved (i.e. the location of healing), it would seem that a contradiction would arise between the economic and nationalistic necessity of transforming Hong Kong into a locus of Western democracy and the formulaic necessity of enabling Hong Kong to transform and heal the novel's heroines. This contradiction is mitigated through an interesting inversion; Hong Kong cannot, in fact, heal its characters' wounds, but Texas can. Sam and Allison, the two characters who arrive in Hong Kong from San Antonio and Dallas respectively, are the least in need of healing and the most capable of administering care to James and Maylene, the characters with the most traumatic pasts (and the characters who were actually raised in Hong Kong). There is a bit of "wounded hero" in Sam, but the novel suggests that he has, for the most part, resolved his personal issues: "Sam Coulter was quite capable of such self-destruction, of course. His father's savage blood flowed, *seethed*, in his own veins. But unlike his father, Sam never permitted the violence to spill over onto anyone else" (161). Sam's only indulgence of his tendency toward self-destruction is his cigarette smoking, a habit he easily quits after falling for Maylene. Allison has two personal issues she endeavors to resolve. The first is her desire for independence (the result of a sheltered, comfortable life with a loving family), which she

gains, again quite easily, after winning a half-hearted battle with her family about taking the photography job in Hong Kong. The second involves solving the mystery of her family's dislike of Hong Kong. However, Allison doesn't actually solve this mystery; rather, her father eventually flies to Hong Kong and confesses that he once had an affair with Juliana Kwan, and that Maylene is also his daughter. The reader does not witness this conversation. S/he only hears the heroines' father tell Maylene that Allison is happy to have a sister.

Sam and Allison, in other words, do not experience their own profound transformations in this novel. Instead, they facilitate the necessary transformations of their loved ones, particularly Maylene. Maylene is virtually consumed with hatred for the father who abandoned her and her mother. She believes that being conceived from an illegitimate relationship devoid of love has made her psychologically and emotionally imbalanced at the very least, but possibly even "evil" as well: "[T]his unkindness, this calculated hurtfulness, was part of her, an inheritance, no doubt, from her cruel and heartless father. It had been there all along, in hiding, and now both she—and her mother—knew the truth about the evil that lurked in the dark shadows of Maylene's soul" (75). When James sends Maylene to the airport to welcome Allison to Hong Kong, she fears that the evil part of herself will lash out at her sister: "What if something deep within suddenly compelled her to lunge, to attack, to destroy? What if some vicious impulse she could neither detect nor control forced the sharp fingernails that now dug so mercilessly into her own flesh to find a new, deep, *bloody* home in Allison's long ivory neck?" (136). This darkness within Maylene, which she conceals by exerting complete

control over her emotions, firmly places her in the position of the “wounded hero”: “The romance hero is very often a man with a past, a dark history of involvement, suffering, and disillusionment” (Cohn 48). Although corporate and small-town heroines are rarely as innocent and naïve as their more conventional counterparts—particularly historical romance heroines—they are almost never as dark and tormented as Maylene,<sup>10</sup> who immediately finds camaraderie with James (the novel’s other “wounded hero”) during their first meeting: “Perhaps I can talk to James, who knows about rage and who, already, I trust far more than I’ve ever trusted any man” (71). Despite the fact that these two protagonists are both attractive, fundamentally “good,” and extremely successful at their respective careers (the typical setup of any corporate romance narrative), there is a complete absence of romantic attraction between them. The extent of their “woundedness” effectively renders them a poor match for each other; they are destined for other protagonists who are more capable of facilitating their transformations. Maylene and James, because of their traumatic, unresolved pasts, have both mastered the art of “emotion management”:

James’s childhood in Hong Kong had instilled in him an interest in the martial arts. He was a black belt now, quite capable of committing swift, silent murder with his bare hands. He would never perform such a deadly act, of course, because, above all, James Drake was a master of his emotions.

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<sup>10</sup> *Jade Island*’s Lianne, however, contends with a similar inner turmoil, due to the rejection she has also faced from her family.

For the past nine years Maylene had lived a life of rigid control, as perfect as she could possibly be (70, 76).

These characters need warm, passionate, and reasonably well-adjusted Texans to expedite their emotional re-education.

The romance between James and Allison is relatively standard romantic fare, but the development of the relationship between the sisters, Maylene and Allison, as well as the romance between Maylene and Sam, again demonstrates that inversions to the romance formula are necessary in the negotiation of Maylene's racial difference. The small-town heroine typically locates family/community, emotional awakening, and healing in the small town that is starkly contrasted with the city she escaped. In this case, Maylene returns home to the city of Hong Kong, but she is actually healed by the small-town (American) characters who arrive shortly thereafter. Prior to meeting Allison, Maylene resents her for being raised and loved by the father who rejected Maylene and her mother, and because Allison has had the privilege of being nurtured by a wealthy, loving family, Maylene assumes the worst about her character. However, her opinion of Allison begins to change once she sees a photograph of her sister's face: "She was golden! Her honey-colored hair shined brightly, as if caressed by its own private moon, and her face was radiant, too, glowing from the inner warmth of love. The litter sister of bewitchingly beautiful Maylene Kwan was neither sultry nor glamorous, but there was a wholesome loveliness, a beguiling, wide-eyed innocence" (73). Allison is not the spoiled society daughter of the Dallas elite; rather, she is the "wholesome" and innocent girl-

next-door.<sup>11</sup> Further, despite Maylene's fear that she will attack her sister without provocation upon their first meeting, Allison's presence immediately triggers familial feelings in Maylene: "As Maylene saw brave, delicate sparkles of hope dance in Allison's eyes, she felt a powerful wish to protect. It was an almost forgotten emotion, in hiding for fifteen years and badly rusted by countless tears spilled deep within" (149). The feelings that Allison inspires in Maylene enable her to begin the process of forgiving her mother, Juliana. In other words, Allison reawakens Maylene to familial emotions that she hasn't felt in years, and this reawakening eventually compels Maylene to contact her mother.

Maylene's response in this passage is also particularly interesting in light of the *Wizard of Oz* imagery that surrounds Allison: "She felt like Dorothy, beholding for the first time the dazzling brilliance of the Emerald City. Hong Kong was *beyond* the Emerald City, though, far more than simply a shimmering green [...] And unlike the Land of Oz, the glittering jewel-bright Crown Colony was very, very real" (133-4). In addition to the metaphors of Hong Kong as Oz (which facilitates the portrayal of Hong Kong as a truly exotic locale), and Allison as Dorothy, Allison also views James as the Wizard, and even though she does not explicitly align Maylene with the Tin Man, Maylene's "badly rusted" "forgotten emotion" is an undeniable allusion. The implication is that Maylene has returned to Hong Kong in search of a heart, and Allison is the Dorothy figure who will aid her in this quest. The centering of Allison as Dorothy,

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<sup>11</sup> Repeated references to Allison as "golden" bear a marked similarity to descriptions of Kyle in *Jade Island*, who in addition to being labeled as Lianne's "white knight" throughout the novel, is also depicted as angelic: "All [Wen] saw was a tall shadow with a golden nimbus around his head, like an angel in an old Christmas hymnal. A very large angel" (122).

however, is undermined as this analogy changes toward the end of the novel. Upon further consideration of the sisters' development since their arrival in Hong Kong, Allison decides that she is the Cowardly Lion who has found the courage to seek her own independence, and it is actually Maylene who is Dorothy: "And at last Maylene spoke, a query of wonder and hope. 'I'm Dorothy, aren't I?' 'I think so,' Allison answered with matching wonder and hope. 'You're searching for your home, the place where you belong'" (410). This metaphoric adjustment effectively establishes Maylene as the central focus of the small-town narrative, the heroine who has somehow managed to locate Kansas within the bustling metropolis of Hong Kong, but who has done so primarily with the assistance of a substitute, American Dorothy who has facilitated her emotional transformation.

While Allison helps Maylene heal her relationship with her mother, it is Sam, Maylene's hero, who enables a reunification with her father, Garrett Whitaker. Maylene's initial dislike of Sam is directly related to the similarities that she believes exist between Sam and her father: "[Sam's] body was absolutely still, yet absolutely powerful, and his face seemed carved in stone, proud, hard, uncompromising. He was a portrait of arrogance, and a portrait, too, of a loner, a maverick, a man who cared only about his horses, his cigarettes, his range ... the kind of man who would abandon his daughter without a backward glance" (100). Maylene conflates Sam with her father, believing that both are stereotypical cowboys who value themselves more than family, a belief that is further reinforced by the fact that Sam is eight years older than Maylene. Although this is not an unusual age difference in the conventional romance formula, it is

overtly stated in the novel as one of several reasons that Maylene has hostile feelings for Sam. During their first confrontation, she accuses him of being prejudiced: “You really are a bastard, aren’t you? A rednecked Texan complete with all the prejudices” (104). In addition to her race and gender, she lists her age as one of the factors that is inducing him to treat her disrespectfully. This aspect of their argument is resolved when Sam frames his answer in the context of their working relationship: “Sam didn’t need to elaborate that—in their business—eight years translated into a vast difference [...] ‘I have no problem with your age, Maylene, although I fully admit that when I first saw you I was concerned about your experience—or lack thereof. But I’m getting over that” (105). By taking Maylene’s work seriously, Sam establishes that he takes *her* seriously as well, something she clearly believes her father did not do when he abandoned her as a child without regard to the consequences. Further, as their romantic relationship is developed within the framework of their working relationship, Sam’s substantial experience in his field serves as the catalyst for Maylene’s transformation.

As the architect of the Jade Palace, Maylene is the visionary of the project; the success of the hotel ultimately rests on the execution of her design, which James chose amongst hundreds of submissions from more experienced architects. Maylene’s vision of the hotel emerges from her lifelong negotiation of her own racial blend of “East and West”: “sketching a building that symbolized Hong Kong was simply a matter of putting on paper an image that had danced in her mind for years [...] It was ... a reflection of her own experiences in Hong Kong, an intensely personal statement about the agony of being split in two and yet yearning to be whole” (67). Despite the ample roles that the other

protagonists play in the construction of the Jade Palace, it is Maylene, specifically, who is continually conflated with the actual hotel: “The beautiful, gifted, complicated woman who sat before him was so very like the extraordinary building she had designed: a portrait of harmony and conflict, one moment Asian, the next British, the next a rare and intoxicating blend of both” (69). The hotel is depicted as the architectural manifestation of Maylene’s mixed race heritage, and Maylene is portrayed as an object in need of construction.

As the hotel’s builder, it is Sam’s job to turn Maylene’s vision into a physical reality, and his role in their romantic relationship is to, essentially, reconstruct her into a “whole” person. When Maylene accuses Sam of prejudice, what provokes her into confrontation is the nickname he gives her: Jade. She initially believes this to be a racial slight, a reference to the green eyes that clearly mark her as mixed-blooded. Sam’s response, which she finds oddly satisfactory, is as follows: “When I called you “Jade” I meant it as a compliment. We’re building the Jade Palace, after all, and it’s my understanding that jade is highly prized” (107). Maylene smiles and confirms that jade *is* highly prized in Chinese culture, and from this point on, she accepts the nickname without reservation, going so far as to sign notes to Sam with “J.” The resolution of this argument marks the beginning of the positive romantic development between these characters, and it establishes the foundation of their relationship as one in which Maylene is conflated with a “highly prized” object, facilitating Sam’s repeated allusions to the building of the hotel as the “building” of Maylene: “the master builder who knew so very little about building relationships of the heart nonetheless saw the *J* for what it was: the



small yet monumental cornerstone of what could be the most extraordinary creation of his life; in this most important creation of his life, he had to build slowly, carefully, lest he frighten her away” (117, 254). Due to the frequency of these allusions, it comes as no surprise when the “unwrapping” of the completed hotel is almost directly followed by the “unwrapping” of Maylene in the protagonists’ first sexual encounter: “‘I guess I won’t be absolutely certain until it’s unwrapped’”; ‘I want to see you when I make love to you Jade’ [...] He undressed her slowly, kissing each shadowed discovery” (382, 385).

It is also worth noting that these allusions work both ways; in other words, not only does Sam regularly see Maylene in the Jade Palace, but the Jade Palace is clearly evident in descriptions of Maylene as well. In the early stages of the novel, when it is yet unclear whether the Jade Palace can be physically rendered as it has been envisioned (or if it will actually be an economic success), Maylene is repeatedly observed walking around in inappropriately high heels: “Today’s heels seemed even higher than yesterday’s model; Maylene teetered, but she did not stumble, a feat accomplished through sheer will; Maylene’s perfect silk-stockinged legs teetered atop high fashion’s highest heels” (101, 136). The precarious state of the hotel, as well as the precarious state of Maylene’s emotional and psychological health, are both emphasized in these images of her “teetering” in stilettos. Productive work on the hotel (i.e. productive collaborations between hero and heroine) begins after their confrontation is resolved, and Sam presents Maylene with a pair of low-heeled cowboy boots as a gift. Maylene’s acceptance of the cowboy boots signifies several developments in the novel: the stabilizing of the hotel, the beginning of her coming to terms with her father’s

abandonment, her embracing of Sam's small-town brand of nourishment, and overall, the Americanization (i.e. transformation) of Maylene, who finally manages to accept her "whole" self: "She was a child of two worlds, and at long last, Maylene Kwan was proud of who she was" (506). By proving to Maylene that he is honest, trustworthy, warm, generous, etc., Sam makes it possible for her father to possess these qualities as well (and it turns out, of course, that he does), thereby enabling Maylene not only to love the piece of herself that she inherited from her father, but also to aid Sam's construction of a lucrative hotel that *can* be physically rendered, that is cohesively harmonious rather than on the verge of falling apart at the seams. Sam's transformation of Maylene, like Kyle's transformation of Lianne in *Jade Island*, results in more than a personal, romantic reward. It is also a reward, again, for democracy, through its assurance of James Drake's pre-Turnover foothold in Hong Kong real estate.

The fact that Maylene's artistic vision holds greater economic benefits for James than for herself (and for Great Britain over China) parallels *Jade Island*'s "happy ending," in which Lianne's passion and skill for jade, while ensuring her own economic survival, results in considerably more substantial economic gains for the Tang family, the Donovan family, and the U.S. in a much more general sense. In Krentz's corporate romances, corporate heroines' passion for (and knowledge of) some aspect of the arts primarily facilitates *their* financial success and independence. Although the marriage between corporate hero and corporate heroine, of course, ensures that each protagonist benefits from the other's business savvy, the melding of two sizable bank accounts suggests that hero and heroine benefit equally. Even if the hero makes more money than

the heroine (if, for example, he is a venture capitalist and she is the entrepreneur of a successful, but small, company), because *she* has transformed *him*, the novel implies that his vast resources are now at her disposal, not that her particular talent will be exploited for his continued profit. In *Jade Island* and *Pearl Moon*, however, the white heroes' transformation of their Asian heroines leads to what can only fairly be described as exploitation, because the heroines lack transformative power, the primary bargaining chip available to white corporate heroines. White heroes essentially increase the marketability of their Asian heroines' skills for their own benefit. The conventional romance formula's inversion of the gendered hierarchy may "bring ... the hero to his knees," but in these novels, it is the heroine who is made to submit, along with the Chinese corporation that she represents (Modleski 37).

CHAPTER V  
 “PLACE-BOUND IDENTITIES”: THE “MONSTROUS” INHERITANCE OF  
 CORPORATE/CORPOREAL POWER IN THE WEREWOLF  
 ROMANCE

While the previous chapters have examined three different manifestations of what I call “corporate” romance—the Krentzian corporate romance, the “small town” romance, and the “interracial corporate” romance—the final chapters of this project will explore the emergence of “paranormal” romance in the 1990s and beyond. This chapter analyzes the New York Times bestselling werewolf romances of Kelley Armstrong’s *Women of the Otherworld* series (2001 to the present) and Carrie Vaughn’s *Kitty Norville* series (2005 to the present). The first installments of each series, *Bitten* and *Kitty and the Midnight Hour* respectively, will serve as the primary texts for this analysis, although the narrative developments in later novels will be addressed when necessary. *Bitten* follows the adventures of Elena Michaels, a journalist who was “bitten” by her fiancé, Clay, and transformed into a werewolf without her consent. At the beginning of *Bitten*, Elena is attempting to live a normal human life in Toronto. She has abandoned her werewolf Pack and is living with a human man, Philip, who is unaware of her lycanthropic identity. Elena is summoned by her Pack, which is located in Bear Valley, New York, to help resolve a dangerous threat: two non-Pack werewolves are transforming human serial killers in an effort to overthrow the Pack’s authority. Elena is reunited with Clay, their

romantic relationship is rekindled, and she leaves Philip. However, Elena explicitly rejects Clay's renewed offer of marriage, and she refuses to attempt procreation. In *Kitty and the Midnight Hour*, Kitty is a radio DJ in Denver who becomes an overnight sensation when she engages her callers in discussions about the possible existence of supernatural creatures. Kitty is also a werewolf who was "turned" after being date raped and abandoned in a secluded forest. This novel traces Kitty's rise to fame and the negative impact it has on her relationship with Carl, her pack leader and lover. Kitty's success in the workplace motivates her to challenge Carl's authority, and she is eventually exiled from the pack. At the novel's conclusion, Kitty is traveling across the U.S. with her radio show. In the installments that follow, Kitty explores a number of romantic relationships with different partners in different locations.

What both of these series offer, then, are heroines whose paranormal attributes play a key role in their refusal—and sometimes, inability—to marry and bear children. Through the absence of these two central characteristics of romance, Elena and Kitty (as well as the readers of their narratives) are granted access to a very different kind of capitalist fantasy than that discussed in the previous chapters. While the heroines of "corporate" romances locate various resolutions to the "home/work" binary, these werewolf heroines reject the binary altogether and fully embrace the cultural effects of flexible capitalism. In particular, their bodies and their choices reflect a transformation in cultural values under what David Harvey calls "time-space compression." He argues that the acceleration of production and consumption practices has created a "'throwaway' society" that "emphasize[s] the values and virtues of instantaneity ... and of

disposability” (156). In the works of Armstrong and Vaughn, lycanthropy functions as a paranormal inheritance that endows their heroines with altered physical bodies and perspectives that facilitate the indefinite pursuit of temporary and disposable pleasures. Lycanthropy also enables Elena and Kitty to interrogate and reject traditional “human” standards of gendered behavior, thereby reflecting the dissolution of stable identities in a flexible capitalist economy. However, while the werewolf romance interrogates gendered and sexual cultural norms, it also contradictorily (re)affirms racial and national boundaries.

### **The “Werewolf Romance” and Its Formulaic Conventions**

The werewolf romances of Kelley Armstrong and Carrie Vaughn share particular formulaic conventions that are identifiable throughout the genre of “paranormal romance,” including a first-person female narrator, a multi-volume structure, and a parallel universe in which magic exists. In addition to these formal characteristics, the rules that govern the magical setting of the werewolf romance clearly reflect the cultural effects of “time-space compression.” While the werewolf figure has certainly been associated with a wide range of physical attributes in various times and places, one depiction of the werewolf is notably absent from contemporary paranormal romance: the half-wolf, half-human construction that is recognizable in film examples like Lon Cheney Jr.’s “Wolf Man” and Michael J. Fox’s “Teen Wolf.” The werewolves of werewolf romance transform completely, from human to wolf, and from wolf to human. They also possess a great deal of control over the transformation. In Vaughn’s first installment,

*Kitty and the Midnight Hour*, Kitty states that “The only time we had to change was on full moon nights. But we could Change whenever we wanted. Some did as often as they could, all the time” (9). The ability to “Change whenever we wanted” is a hallmark feature of werewolf romances, yet it marks a substantial deviation from the popular conception of werewolves as creatures whose bodies are determined by the phases of the moon. This alteration in the conventional werewolf narrative suggests the appeal of flexible survival strategies under flexible capitalism. Further, the transformation does not involve a loss of memory. The werewolf heroines of these novels continue to narrate their experiences in wolf form, and while it becomes harder to control the wolf’s inclinations and instincts in this form, the protagonists’ personalities do not change drastically: “The only part of me that remains are my eyes, sparking with a cold intelligence and a simmering ferocity that could never be mistaken for anything but human” (Armstrong 3). There are, of course, a great number of complications to negotiate when one is a werewolf, but for the most part, there are few negative consequences: no undesirable bodies, no helpless lack of control, no tragic loss of memory or fear of the atrocities one may have committed in werewolf form. These werewolves revel in their flexibility, in the conscious enjoyment of two distinctly different yet equally beautiful bodies: “As my paws thump against the hard earth, tiny darts of pain shoot up my legs, but they make me feel alive, like jolting awake after an overlong sleep. The muscles contract and extend in perfect harmony. With each stretch comes an ache and a burst of physical joy [...] I couldn’t stop if I wanted to. And I don’t want to” (Armstrong 7).

Lycanthropy also naturalizes excessive consumption. Werewolf women, even in human form, have the appetites of wolves. Armstrong's *Bitten* is filled with images of Elena experiencing hunger pangs and gorging herself with food: "I wait until I hear the shower running, then head for the kitchen. Sometimes I get so hungry [...] I sat down and dug in. The pancakes came from a mix, but I wasn't complaining [...] I gulped down the first stack and reached for a second" (13, 56). One of the most appealing aspects of being a werewolf, in this universe, is werewolf metabolism. Elena can eat whatever she wants, and as much of it as she wants, without the fear of weight gain, diabetes, or other health-related problems. To be a werewolf is, for the most part, to consume without consequence. In Armstrong's novels, this logic also applies to werewolf spending habits. The werewolf Pack, which has existed for centuries, has accumulated a great deal of wealth. As a high-ranking member of this Pack, Elena has access to its financial resources: "Jeremy's bank account was also in my name and Clay's, allowing any of us to withdraw money for household needs" (255). Household needs, for these werewolves, include sports cars and designer clothing: "a guy who looked like Clay stood as much of chance of going unnoticed as his Porsche Boxster did in the local parking lot"; "[Nick] didn't ... mind spending an entire day touring Fifth Avenue" (165, 132).

Lycanthropy also naturalizes the rejection of traditional human values. Werewolf packs are hierarchical structures in which the alpha leader establishes and enforces particular codes of conduct, most of which are designed to protect the Pack from human notice and interference. However, the laws that govern Pack life rarely regulate sexual or violent behavior, particularly against humans, who are considered prey, or at the very



least, less evolved lifeforms. The killing of humans is considered unacceptable behavior only when it threatens the Pack by drawing the attention of human law enforcement. In *Bitten*, Elena becomes disturbed not by the fact that she has killed a man, but by her lack of remorse afterward: “I’d killed him [...] Afterward, I’d gone back to my hotel, cleaned up, and enjoyed a good sleep. When I awoke, the full impact of what I’d done hit me. No, not so much *what* I’d done, but how I’d done it, how easily I’d done it. I’d killed a man with as much moral compunction as I would have swatted a fly” (58-9). Elena recognizes that her response to this act is “inhuman(e),” and having once been human herself, she is aware that some of her human morals have not survived her transformation from human to werewolf, but at no point does she lament this loss. Elena kills humans continually throughout this series. This example highlights the genre’s use of magical elements to defy traditional social and moral boundaries, which are often in contradiction to the values of the marketplace.

This defiance is most apparent in the werewolf romance’s treatment of sexual boundaries. Like wolves, werewolves are neither modest about their bodies nor monogamous in their sexual relationships. When the reader is first introduced to Elena in *Bitten*, she is attempting to live a normal human life in Toronto with her live-in human partner, Philip. She is eventually reunited with her former werewolf lover, Clay, and they resume sexual relations while Elena is still dating Philip. After the fact, Elena again experiences no remorse or regret over her actions: “I didn’t call Philip, but it wasn’t because I felt guilty. I didn’t call him because I knew I should feel guilty, and, since I couldn’t, it didn’t seem right to call” (113). Elena’s reaction here is palatable partially

because Clay is her first love, and as the reader is encouraged to expect, the man she eventually returns to. More importantly, however, the werewolf lens enables a critique of the monogamous relationship and the institution of marriage. In Vaughn's *Kitty and the Midnight Hour*, there is nothing romantic nor loving about Kitty's sexual relationship with her pack's Alpha: "Alpha's prerogative: He fucks whomever he wants in the pack, whenever he wants. One of the perks of the position. It was also one of the reasons I melted around him. He just had to walk into a room and I'd be hot and bothered [...] With the scent of him and the wolves all around us, I felt wild" (28). Although there are some disturbing gendered implications in this description, which will be explored later in this chapter, it is worth noting that Kitty's sexual desire for her Alpha does not require any romantic justification. In both series, sexual intercourse is depicted as a "natural" indulgence for werewolves, especially when it follows a successful hunt. In contrast, the strict boundaries that surround acceptable forms of human sexuality (that it must be explored with only one other person, that it must be associated with love, and that it must be legally sanctioned by the State), are portrayed as heavily constructed rules of behavior that are distinctly "unnatural."

It might seem that an exploration of "natural sex" would necessarily lead to the procreative purposes of sex, which would clearly problematize much of this analysis. However, the impossibility of reproduction is also a common trope in the werewolf romance. In Vaughn's series, Kitty long suspects that female werewolves are incapable of giving birth, and this suspicion is finally corroborated in *Kitty and the Silver Bullet* (2008). In this fourth installment of the series, Kitty learns that female werewolves can

conceive, but their mandatory full moon changes induce miscarriage. Werewolves in the Kitty universe are always “made.” Armstrong’s series offers both “made” and “born” werewolves, but the born ones are always the product of male werewolves and human women, and only male children become werewolves: “The werewolf gene is passed only through the male line, father to son, so the only way for a woman to become a werewolf is to be bitten and survive” (22). In fact, Elena is the only female werewolf in existence, and while she is dubious about her ability to reproduce, she is firm in her conviction not to: “There was no record of a female werewolf giving birth, but even if I was willing to take the risk, I could never subject a child to the possibility of life as a werewolf. No husband, no children” (170). Armstrong does, however, construct a parallel between Elena’s transformations from human to wolf and “a woman feeling the first pangs of labor”: “My skin stretches. The sensation deepens and I try to block the pain [...] I inhale deeply and focus my attention on the Change, dropping to the ground before I’m doubled over and forced down” (1-2). Elena may never have children, but Armstrong’s utilization of birth imagery here suggests that she reproduces herself time and again, thereby emphasizing the genre’s focus on a heroine’s individual pursuit of adventure and pleasure in an episodic multi-volume narrative. While Armstrong’s and Vaughn’s series arguably offer “masculinized” fantasies—particularly in their elimination of reproduction and “feminine” sexual norms—both also feature heroines who continually negotiate the tension between their own “selfish” desires and societal expectations about what they should, as women, desire. In other words, the werewolf romance offers a much more complex fantasy than the mere re-gendering of its female protagonists. Rather, this

subgenre facilitates an interrogation of the incompatibility between the flexible capitalist values of a “throwaway society” and the patriarchal ideologies that continue to pervade contemporary U.S. culture. The following section explores this idea through an analysis of gender performance in *Bitten*.

### **“Pull[ing] it off”: Gender Passing and the Performance of Femininity in *Bitten***

Armstrong’s *Bitten* offers the following premise: a female werewolf, uncomfortable with her lycanthropic identity, chooses to abandon her Pack and “pass” as an ordinary human woman with a stable career in journalism and a loving live-in boyfriend. In “The Politics of Passing” (1996), Elaine K. Ginsberg claims that “the possibility of passing challenges a number of problematic and even antithetical assumptions about identities, the first of which is that some identity categories are inherent and unalterable essences” (4). Jayne Ann Krentz’s defense of the romance novel, in *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*, bears repeating here: “[Romance novels] celebrate female power, intuition, and a female worldview that affirms life and expresses hope for the future” (8). The conventional romance novel, as well as the corporate romance novel discussed previously, accepts the traditionally gendered categories of “male” and “female” as “inherent and unalterable essences.” Werewolf romances do not share this assumption; human standards of appropriate behavior—particularly along gender lines—are continually rendered “strange” as they are observed through the eyes of the werewolf protagonist. Elena’s painstaking attempt to “pass” as a human woman forces the reader to question the innateness of behaviors and values that

are conventionally coded as “feminine.” Thus, *Bitten* poses a unique challenge to the romance genre; its focus on a werewolf heroine who is always conscious of performing human femininity is simultaneously a focus on gender as a socially constructed category of identity.

Because the werewolves of Armstrong’s universe are essentially “in the closet”—or perhaps more accurately, “in the cage”—they are all forced to “pass” to a certain extent: “They are actors playing a role, sometimes enjoying their turn on the stage, but usually relieved to get off it” (20). The difficulty of passing, however, is explored specifically through the character of Elena, for obvious reasons; she is the novel’s protagonist, and she’s the only werewolf who desires to fully assimilate into human culture. But Elena’s gender is also a key source of the problems she experiences with passing successfully. For the other (male) werewolves in the novel, passing as human men merely involves muting their lycanthropic characteristics; their aggressiveness, arrogance, emotional distance, and bodily appetites must be carefully controlled, but not severely altered. Male werewolves, essentially, aim to resemble untamed conventional romance heroes: “Pack werewolves have developed more finesse ... [they] even have mistresses and girlfriends, although they never form what humans would call close relationships. They certainly never marry”; “Nick was a playboy, plain and simple” (53, 215). Male werewolves behave like human bachelors resisting domestication. Because they age so slowly, and because they are performing behavior that is socially condoned for young human males, they are able to maintain these personas almost indefinitely without arousing suspicion.

For Elena, passing requires a performance that is significantly more complicated. She becomes romantically involved with Philip, a human man who desires a monogamous relationship that will eventually lead to marriage and children: “Philip wooed me with all the patience of someone trying to coax a half-wild animal into the house and, like many a stray, I found myself domesticated before I thought to resist” (17). Elena agrees to Philip’s suggestion of cohabitation, because she believes this to be the expected response of a “normal” human woman who has been offered a committed relationship from a successful, attractive man who is also a loving and caring partner. Further, she is interested in testing the limits of her performative abilities: “Part of me couldn’t resist the challenge of seeing whether I could pull it off” (17). In this universe, the performance of femininity and the performance of domesticity are conflated. If Elena can avoid detection while residing with Philip, then she will know that she can pass successfully as a woman in the human world, both because of Philip’s close proximity in their shared living quarters, and because the domestic space is where femininity is most thoroughly performed. Armstrong effectively offers a new spin on what Kay Mussell, in *Fantasy and Reconciliation*, refers to as “the domestic test”:

Romances always have female protagonists, but not all women are heroines; only women who pass a domestic test by conforming to a set of expectations in values and activities may earn the reward of being chosen by Mr. Right. Although its requirements have changed over time, the domestic test has shaped the conventions of romance fiction for more than two centuries. Its several aspects conform to the three traditional and

interrelated roles of female socialization: wife, mother, and homemaker.

Heroines must pass the test in all three areas (89).

The conventional romance heroine's ability to pass "the domestic test" is never obstructed by her class status or family upbringing. A heroine raised in an orphanage, for example, may demonstrate impeccable mothering skills by caring for the younger children, even though such behavior has never been modeled for her. The heroine's requisite passing of "the domestic test," regardless of external circumstances, furthers the genre's argument that certain "feminine" characteristics are innate to "good" women: "Heroines make decisions intuitively rather than logically, for the domestic test assesses women's performance in solving problems that yield to intuition, charity, compassion, and caring" (Mussell 89). In other words, the conventional romance heroine passes the domestic test without utilizing reason; she reacts "naturally" and immediately, and her decisions demonstrate her innate adherence to traditional female values. For Elena, there is nothing natural about passing the domestic test. Her mission to "pull it off" suggests that being a romance heroine (and a "good woman") is a thoroughly unnatural performance that requires a great deal of work.

If, as Mussell argues, the roles of "wife, mother, and homemaker" are the "traditional and interrelated roles of female socialization," then Elena ultimately fails to perform all three (89). The possibility of biological motherhood is taken from Elena long before she meets Philip: "Not having had a family as a child, I became determined to create one for myself. Becoming a werewolf had pretty much knocked those plans into the dumpster" (20). Elena does not know for certain that she is sterile, but she is

unwilling to risk passing her lycanthropy to her child, so she chooses not to attempt pregnancy. Whether Elena has a genuine choice to procreate is ambiguous, but her lack of “mothering instincts” is not. Unlike many conventional romances, *Bitten* does not contain any scenes in which the heroine interacts with children. Thus, it offers the reader zero assurance that Elena would be a “good” mother if only she had the opportunity. More importantly, Armstrong emphasizes that Elena is skilled in taking lives, rather than nurturing them: “I was far better at killing things than keeping them alive. Good thing I never planned to have children” (330). Elena’s talent for killing is most starkly revealed in her encounter with Victor Olson, a pedophile-turned-werewolf who possesses information on the location of her kidnapped lover, Clay. She traps Victor in his car and slashes his wrists with werewolf claws, promising to let him go if he reveals Clay’s whereabouts: “He told me everything I needed to know and more, babbling madly as if every word he spoke would improve his chance of survival” (411). Nonetheless, Elena decides to let him die with the following justification: “I thought of all the girls he’d victimized and imagined all the times he’d made promises to them, promising not to hurt them, promising never to do it again. He hadn’t kept his promises. Why should I? I walked away and left Victor Olson to bleed to death in the forest” (411). Although this passage encourages a reading of Elena as a protector of young girls, other narrative events resist an easy interpretation of Elena as a reframed mother figure. The reader is already aware that Elena suffered intense and prolonged sexual abuse at the hands of her various foster fathers, and her “imagining” of the promises Victor made to his victims is more likely a remembering of the promises made to her by the men who “slipped into



[her] room at night” (33). Elena’s destruction of a pedophile who preys specifically on girls is the culmination of a process that she began as a teenager: “By the time I was midway through high school I was lifting weights and working out daily. My foster father wasn’t touching me by then. I wasn’t anyone’s idea of a victim by then” (34). Her enhanced werewolf body enables her to do what her human body never could: punish her rapist. Thus, Elena’s decision to kill Victor Olson is selfishly motivated, and the safety it affords his future victims is a positive side effect. Further, that Elena kills Victor by walking away, rather than using the weapons that her werewolf body provides, suggests that being “better at killing” is as much an internal characteristic as an external one; there is no “good” mother trapped within the body of this killer. More importantly perhaps, Armstrong’s refusal to depict Elena as a natural mother figure despite her traumatic childhood, as would be expected of a conventional romance heroine, highlights the significance of social and environmental factors in the construction of identity: “I was a monster [...] Yet I had to admit the truth. Being a werewolf didn’t make me that way [...] Everything that I was, I’d been before Clay bit me” (429). The early loss of her own mother to a car accident, followed by a chain of passive foster mothers who refused to acknowledge their husbands as sexual abusers, contributed to Elena’s inability to intuit, let alone embrace, the role of mother.

Elena also demonstrates that she has little potential to be a “good” wife. The institution of marriage is heavily critiqued throughout *Bitten*, particularly in a poignant but subtle passage explaining why she was placed in the foster care system: “After my parents died, the only person who tried to claim me was my mother’s best friend and she

was refused on the grounds that she was unmarried” (32). The implication here is that the State’s heterocentric decision condemned Elena to a monstrous life; if she had been permitted to live with her mother’s unmarried best friend, she wouldn’t have endured extensive sexual abuse from State-approved (married) foster fathers, and she wouldn’t have been made into a “monster”: “I don’t know what Clay saw in me to make him overlook his contempt of humans. He says it was a mirroring of something he recognized in himself” (205). The novel establishes early on that blind reverence for the institution of marriage can lead to arbitrary and potentially harmful decision-making, and that marriage should not be automatically equated with happily ever after. This latter point is further emphasized in Elena’s observations on female servers at a Bear Valley cafe, The Donut Hole: “The staff were all middle-aged women who’d raised a family, decided to spend their empty-nest years earning some cash, and discovered this was the only job for which the world considered them qualified” (166). In Armstrong’s universe, life continues after “the betrothal” and marriage, and for her female characters, this life is never easy. Elena’s own romantic relationship with Clay exemplifies this idea; in a series of flashbacks, it is revealed that Clay turned Elena into a werewolf, without her consent, shortly after she accepted his proposal of marriage: “Clay [had] stolen all my dreams and hopes of a family in one act of unforgivable selfishness” (170). In this novel, marriage—or the promise of it—always induces trauma.

Despite her cynical view of marriage, Elena believes that her acceptance of the institution is essential to her performance of human womanhood: “Stability. Normalcy. Family. A permanent place in the human world. Marriage could give me that” (358).

She may not value the institution, but her experiences with foster care have taught her that marriage, in the human world, signifies acceptance and approval—both culturally and legally. However, Elena struggles with the level of intimacy and honesty that Philip expects from her, particularly within the domestic sphere. *Bitten* not only challenges the idea that a romance heroine must demonstrate aptitude as a “homemaker”; it also interrogates the conventional construction of a home as a comfortable and familial place. In order to “pass” successfully at home, Elena must continually lie to Philip. She consumes additional meals when he is asleep or in the shower, hiding extra food throughout the house so he doesn’t ask questions: “Philip headed to the bathroom. I sneaked to the fridge and grabbed a hunk of provolone that I’d hidden amongst the vegetables. When the phone rang, I ignored it. Eating was more important” (25). The consumption of food typically furthers the development of romantic relationships in conventional and corporate romance novels by functioning as a bonding experience for hero and heroine. In *Bitten*, however, it is a clandestine affair that literally takes place when Elena and Philip are in separate rooms. When they do eat meals together, they consume only takeout: “Philip chatted about work as he took the cartons from the bag and set the table. I graciously shifted my papers to the side to let him lay out my place setting. I can be so helpful sometimes” (23). Elena’s sarcasm here highlights her disengagement with domestic duties, as well as Philip’s dinnertime conversation.

That said, she succeeds in concealing her secret eating binges from Philip, and due to her demanding work schedule, fair-minded Philip has few expectations about her role in the home. Her primary obstacle to passing successfully as a “homemaker” is her

disinterest in claiming the domestic space as her own, which results from her lack of need to do so: “Marriage was for women who wanted someone to take care of them. I didn’t need that” (358). Elena, of course, means this quite literally; due to her supernatural attributes, she is fully capable of protecting herself. This idea is emphasized in her continual evacuations of the home at two o’clock in the morning. As a werewolf, Elena can only control her Changes for a limited amount of time. Eventually, “nature wins out. It always does” (1). Here Armstrong aligns “nature” with lycanthropy—sometimes the wolf will have its way. In addition to establishing a sharp contrast between the “naturalness” of the wolf and the “unnaturalness” of human femininity, Armstrong also suggests that the behaviors and values that mirror those of Harvey’s “throwaway society” are more authentic than the traditional values they’ve replaced. Elena escapes into the shadowed alleys of downtown Toronto, transforms into a wolf, and roams the streets until her wolf form is satisfied. She encounters homeless men and street thugs, none of whom pose a physical or sexual threat to her well-being. The private sphere, in other words, holds little appeal for a female protagonist who has nothing to fear in public spaces, even during the times when they are most dangerous for women. This idea becomes especially apparent when Elena returns home and is confronted by an agitated Philip: “‘It’s not safe. Damn it, Elena. We’ve discussed this. Wake me up and I’ll go with you.’ ‘I need to be alone. To think’” (11). Philip’s inability to offer Elena protection, or more accurately, her inability to need it, foreshadows the impossibility of a happy ending for this romantic relationship: “As he sits on the edge of the bed, watching me, I know we’re doomed [...] My first step should be to go to him, crawl in bed, kiss him and tell him I love him, but I

can't. Not tonight. Tonight I'm something else, something he doesn't know and couldn't understand" (12-3). Elena's "true" self, in other words, is located outside of the physical (and imaginary) space of the home. By extension, it is also located outside of the traditionally gendered roles of "wife, mother, and homemaker." Her lycanthropy effectively denaturalizes the domestic sphere, along with its gendered expectations and values.

As a result of the above analysis, it may seem logical to conclude that the werewolf trope is utilized in this subgenre to remove women from a social and historical legacy of gender-based oppression. Elena's physical enhancements enable her to "take back the night," as well as exact vengeance on human men who prey on women and girls. And in a significant deviation from the conventional romance formula, Elena's inability to pass the "domestic test" is configured as a positive reflection of her character; the roles of "mother, wife, and homemaker," as well as the domestic sphere itself, are depicted as rigidly constructed and ultimately stifling concepts that suppress Elena's "true" identity. Her eventual rejection of these roles—and Philip—in favor of an "unconventional" relationship with fellow werewolf, Clay, suggests a fantasy of gendered liberation for the novel's female audience. However, both Armstrong's and Vaughn's narratives resist an oversimplified reading of the werewolf heroine as a fully "liberated woman."

Lycanthropy, in both series, is explicitly constructed as a patriarchal inheritance; Elena and Kitty are transformed by men under traumatic conditions, and upon gaining lycanthropic power, they become unwilling members of the hyper-patriarchal werewolf community.

### **The Patriarchal Inheritance of Lycanthropy**

In chapter two of this project, I examined the significance of the “inheritance motif” in Jayne Ann Krentz’s corporate romances by building upon Jan Cohn’s argument, in *Romance and the Erotics of Property* (1988), about career-women heroines in the romances of the 1980s. Cohn observes that the heroine’s inheritance of a corporation enables her to “enter and succeed in the marketplace” without compromising her femininity (122). I argue that, in the corporate romances of the 1990s and beyond, the motif of inheritance offers the additional benefit of eliding the distinction between work and home, thereby resolving what Arlie Hochschild refers to as the “time-bind.” However, while the inheritance motif poses a narrative solution to the difficult negotiation of home and work experienced by most contemporary women, the patriarchal conditions that necessitate its utilization in the first place, as well as its unavailability to working class women and women of color, is largely unexamined in the corporate romance novel. The werewolf romances of Armstrong and Vaughn also contain the motif of inheritance; for Elena and Kitty, the contraction of lycanthropy affords many economic, social, and cultural privileges. These heroines experience substantial success in their chosen careers, and their enhanced bodies, as well as their Packs’ protection, provide them with increased mobility and a greater range of choices than those available to the majority of romance heroines and their female readers. However, unlike the corporate romance, the primary point of tension in the werewolf romance is not the delicate negotiation of home and work. The absence of marriage and reproduction in these novels effectively eliminates the domestic sphere as a central narrative focus. The

source of internal conflict for Elena and Kitty is the lycanthropic inheritance—including its initial contraction and the consequences, both positive and negative, that follow. In their exploration of lycanthropy as a pathological condition that simultaneously grants ordinary women significant social and economic independence in the human world, *and* enforces their dependence on a markedly patriarchal werewolf society, Armstrong and Vaughn suggest that corporate success, for contemporary working women, is a double-edged sword.

While corporate romances feature heroines who inherit successful companies from benevolent father figures, the transfer of lycanthropic power to werewolf heroines is explicitly linked to patriarchal trauma and abuse. This idea is particularly evident in Vaughn's first installment, *Kitty and the Midnight Hour*; in her final hours as a human woman, Kitty goes on a date with a man named Bill, who drives her into the woods, rapes and beats her, and drives away. Minutes later, she is attacked by a werewolf: "Later, I learned that the wolf could smell the blood from my injuries, and instinct had told it a wounded animal was near. Easy prey" (183). These two events become fused for both Kitty and the reader, in part because one immediately precedes other, but also because the attacks are constructed in a similar fashion. Vaughn's description of the werewolf attack can easily be read as a second rape: "I kept screaming when its jaw clamped on my hip. Using that as purchase, it climbed up my body, scratching the whole way" (183). Kitty's futile attempt to stop Bill by biting him is also mirrored in the wolf's perception of her as a "wounded animal": "When he brought his face close, I bit him. He slapped me [...] I tasted blood. I'd bitten my cheek, and my nose was bleeding" (182). Although some of

Kitty's injuries are the result of Bill's slap, Vaughn is careful to articulate that her rape served as the primary attraction to the werewolf who bit her. The leaders of the local werewolf pack make the following observations when they find her dying in the woods: "She smells like sex.' 'Sex and fear.' 'There's blood. Not from the bites and cuts'" (186). Kitty's experience of physical and sexual abuse provides the context for her introduction to lycanthropy, and this abuse becomes more pronounced as she accepts her place at the bottom of the werewolf pack's social structure.

Elena's transformation into a werewolf is no less traumatic. Even though she was molested repeatedly as a child, she considers her contraction of lycanthropy to be the "one act of unforgivable selfishness," and, as the title *Bitten* suggests, it functions as the primary source of conflict that must be resolved by the novel's conclusion (170). When Elena first meets Clay at the University of Toronto, she is an undergraduate student majoring in Journalism, and he is a renowned professor of Anthropology. Their romantic relationship is marked, from the very beginning, by an unequal power dynamic. Elena and Clay fall in love, Clay proposes marriage, and the two characters become engaged. Not knowing that Clay is a werewolf, Elena believes she has finally earned a ticket to a "normal" and happy life that will include marriage and children. Clay takes Elena to his childhood home of Stonehaven in Bear Valley, New York to introduce her to his adopted father and Pack leader, Jeremy. Leaving Elena and Jeremy to get acquainted, Clay disappears and later returns in wolf form. Elena assumes that the friendly wolf is Clay's dog, and as she reaches down to pet him, he bites her gently on the hand, thereby infecting her with lycanthropy. Although Elena is clearly not the victim of a vicious



physical attack, she is bitten without offering consent, and the consequences are devastating. She is stripped of the agency to determine her own life choices on her own terms—particularly the choice to procreate: “[H]e had made sure I would never be okay again [...] No husband, no children, and without either, no hope for a family or a home” (170). Clay’s betrayal effectively severs their engagement, and it functions as one source of Elena’s cynicism about the institution of marriage. For Kitty, lycanthropy is inextricably tied to her own physical and sexual abuse. For Elena, it is linked more specifically to the promise of marriage, which, in this novel, signifies the loss of a woman’s control over her life decisions, as well as her body. In both cases, men are responsible for making the transfer of lycanthropic power a traumatic event.

These heroines experience additional abuse as they are forced to accept membership within their respective werewolf communities. Elena loses consciousness after being bitten, and she awakens in a bedroom, sick with fever, days later. Jeremy, as Pack leader, becomes her caretaker and captor: “The bedroom arrangement didn’t last. Within a week, Jeremy had to lock me in the cage” (54). Armstrong is careful to construct Jeremy as a well-intentioned werewolf whom Elena eventually embraces as a desirable father figure: “Jeremy had taken me in, sheltered me, fed me, and taught me how to control my Changes, rein in my impulses, and fit into the outside world” (72). However, he proves to be the exception rather than the rule; Armstrong creates a distinct parallel between male werewolves and male serial killers who prey on women. This idea is particularly evident in her depiction of Clay, who describes himself as “the local psychopath”: “The far wall [of Clay’s bedroom] was covered with pictures of me—a montage of

photographs and sketches that reminded me of the ‘altars’ found in the homes of obsessed psychopaths, which, all things considered, wasn’t a bad description of Clay” (49, 87).

Further, while “Pack werewolves have developed more finesse” in their treatment of human women (under Jeremy’s leadership) they value women only for their sexual and reproductive capacities, and they suffer no moral qualms about taking these by force:

“Women played the most insignificant of roles in the world of werewolves. A werewolf’s only reason for delving into the mind of a woman is to find the best way to get her into bed. Most of them can’t even be bothered learning that. If you’re ten times stronger than the gorgeous redhead standing at the bar, why waste your money buying her a drink?” (53). Elena essentially becomes the only female member of a community of serial rapists and killers. This idea is made especially apparent in the actions of the novel’s villain, a rogue werewolf named Daniel, who begins creating his own Pack by Changing convicted rapists, pedophiles, and murderers into werewolves. While Elena’s werewolf status sets her apart from human women, her interactions with Thomas LeBlanc, a newly Changed werewolf who spent his human years raping and murdering women, reveal that lycanthropy does not function as a simple gender equalizer:

[LeBlanc] fell into silent bug-gazing mode again. It took all my strength to stay beside him. I fought to keep things in perspective; he was a new werewolf; I was an experienced werewolf. No sweat. But my frame of reference kept shifting. He preyed on women; I was a woman. No matter how much I rationalized, no matter how tough I tried to be, this man scared me (285).

Elena's lycanthropic inheritance, in other words, does not mitigate the objectification she experiences as a result of her gender. If anything, it makes her an irresistible challenge and a rare prize, particularly for werewolves like Daniel, who wants to test her reproductive abilities for his own benefit: "We aren't immortal, Elena, but there is a way to ensure our immortality [...] Children, Elena. A new breed of werewolves. Not half-werewolf, half-human, but complete werewolves, inheriting the genes from both parents. Perfect werewolves" (401). Ironically, lycanthropy grants Elena a wider range of life choices by denying her the ability to procreate on her own terms, but it also ensures that she will be valued (i.e. objectified) primarily for her reproductive potential.

Kitty's experiences of patriarchal abuse are even more explicit. There are plenty of female werewolves in Vaughn's world, and all of them are subordinate to the Alpha male leaders of their packs. Kitty's Alpha is Carl, and in exchange for her total submission to his authority (and sexual urges), he offers the protection of his pack:

I needed the pack, because I couldn't protect myself. In the wild, wolf cubs had to be taught how to hunt, how to fight. No one had taught me.

Carl wanted me to be dependent. I wasn't expected to hunt for myself, or help defend the pack. I had no responsibilities, as long as I deferred to

Carl. As long as I stayed a cub, he would look after me (28).

Kitty's relationship with Carl, in other words, is a textbook case of domestic violence. He ensures that Kitty never receives the training that would permit her to escape the "protection" he offers. In short, Carl demands that Kitty remain in a state of perpetual childhood: "*Speaking in her ear, he says, 'I'll take care of you, and you don't ever need*

to grow up. *Understand?*<sup>12</sup> (28). As Kitty transitions from one abusive encounter to another—her date rape, her werewolf attack, and her humiliating relationship with Carl—she is clearly depicted as a victim in a patriarchal cycle of violence.

However, Kitty begins to gain independence from Carl and his pack when she becomes an overnight success at work. At the beginning of *Kitty and the Midnight Hour*, she is struggling to make ends meet by working as a DJ at an alternative public radio station: “Not much of a human life, all things considered. I had a rapidly aging bachelor’s degree from CU, a run-down studio apartment, a two-bit DJ gig that barely paid rent, and no prospects” (10). Everything changes when Kitty accepts a call, on air, from a man who asks if she believes in vampires. It is soon clear that Kitty has a knack for engaging her callers in discussions about the possible existence of the supernatural. Because “monsters” in this world are, at least for the moment, “in the closet,” Kitty’s “Midnight Hour” becomes a haven for suspecting humans, as well as paranormal creatures who are tired of lying about their identities. Kitty achieves, in her human work life, the respect and independence that Carl has denied her in the pack. Carl feels increasingly threatened as the show gains popularity, and eventually, national syndication: “Carl didn’t like the show because he didn’t have any control over it. It was all mine. I was supposed to be all his. I’d never argued with him like this before”; “The show is making you cocky. You think you have an answer for everything” (25, 65). Further, Kitty begins to usurp Carl’s leadership when her listeners come to identify her as an expert on all things supernatural: “He says that some of his people have been calling

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<sup>12</sup> Vaughn transitions to a third-person narration in present tense when her characters are in wolf form.

you for advice instead of going to him. It's a challenge to his authority" (23). The success that Kitty attains through her career ultimately results in her exile from the pack, and its territory, at the conclusion of *Kitty and the Midnight Hour*. Although she eventually returns to Denver and defeats Carl in battle, thereby securing herself as the pack's new leader<sup>13</sup>, her achievement of independence through work is no small victory: "I bought a car, a little hatchback with enormous gas mileage. I doubled my salary when I stopped paying off Carl. I'd even buy myself some new clothes. With a car I could go anywhere. I'd be traveling at my own speed from now on. And traveling, and traveling" (255). Because Kitty's career is in radio, it is not restricted by geographical boundaries; she begins broadcasting her show from radio stations all over the continental United States. Thus, her work not only offers her newfound independence and recognition, but mobility as well. It is important to remember, however, that Kitty's lycanthropic inheritance is almost wholly responsible for the success that she achieves in the workplace. What few of her listeners realize is that Kitty's ability to moderate intriguing on-air discussions of paranormal issues is the direct result of her position as an insider to those issues. Vaughn's readers, on the other hand, are fully aware of Kitty's werewolf identity, and its instrumental role in her rising fame. Ironically, then, lycanthropy is portrayed as simultaneously the source of Kitty's most traumatic experiences, and the source of her emotional and economic independence; it is both the locked gate that ensures her victimhood at the hands of abusive men, and the key that enables her escape.

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<sup>13</sup> This development occurs in the fourth installment, *Kitty and the Silver Bullet* (2008).

In *Bitten*, Elena's successful career in journalism is also, in part, a product of her lycanthropic inheritance. Her achievements pre-Change are substantial; despite growing up in a chain of abusive foster homes, Elena performs well academically and gets accepted into the University of Toronto's Journalism program. Once she is bitten, Jeremy assumes financial responsibility for her education and living expenses: "When I was well again he'd encouraged me to finish my university degree, footing the bill for tuition, an apartment, and anything else I needed. When I'd finished school and started doing freelance journalism he'd encouraged and supported me. When I'd announced I wanted to try living on my own he'd disagreed, but he'd let me go and watched over me" (72). It becomes clear that Jeremy's financial assistance plays a major role in Elena's decision to move back to Toronto and "pass" as a human woman. As she leaves her apartment building to embark on a two-a.m. adventure, Elena observes that "People who can afford the rent this close to downtown Toronto are comfortably asleep by this time" (2). The prime location of Elena's apartment is also a contributing factor in the development of her relationship with the upstanding Philip: "He'd been living in an apartment a few blocks away. Since our buildings shared a property manager, tenants in his complex had access to the health club in mine" (16). Jeremy's economic resources, in other words, facilitate Elena's ability to pursue both work and love satisfactorily. Further, prior to her return to Toronto, Elena hones her journalistic skills through her work for the Pack: "One of my jobs with the Pack was to keep tabs on non-Pack werewolves. I'd built a dossier on each of them, complete with photos and behavioral sketches"; "Sixteen months ago, I'd gone to investigate a report of someone selling

werewolf information” (75-6, 57). Elena takes this experience back to Toronto, where she achieves substantial success.

Clearly, both series offer complex explorations of the lycanthropic inheritance as a specifically gendered form of power. Lycanthropy is constructed contradictorily as a condition that empowers its female hosts by granting them sexual, geographical, and economic mobility, while also signifying the source and consequence of patriarchal oppression. The explicitness of this contradiction may seem critically inconvenient, but it must be noted that the werewolf romance exposes a central contradiction at the heart of every romance novel. The conventional romance heroine is “empowered” by her access to the patriarchal institution of marriage at the novel’s conclusion, much to the dismay of early romance critics. Similarly, the Krentzian heroine’s empowerment is dependent upon her access to the patriarchal business world—access that is solely the result of a fortunate accident of birth. Werewolf romances, in other words, may offer yet another fantasy of female empowerment—albeit one that suggests substantial changes in the needs and desires of women under flexible capitalism—but at least they reveal the incompatibility of that fantasy with the patriarchal conditions that continue to affect the choices available to contemporary women.

### **The Racialized Inheritance of Lycanthropy**

As the previous discussion has shown, the werewolf romance addresses the heroine’s lycanthropic inheritance as a complicated negotiation of patriarchal power. It is also, however, constructed as an ethnic inheritance that offers the heroine membership to

an exclusive community with shared history, traditions, and interests. In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Harvey identifies “two divergent sociological effects” of “time-space compression”: “The first suggests taking advantage of all of the divergent possibilities ... and cultivating a whole series of simulacra as milieux of escape, fantasy, and distraction [...] The opposite reaction ... can best be summed up as the search for personal or collective identity, the search for secure moorings in a shifting world” (302). The beginning of this chapter focused on the relevance of Harvey’s first “effect” to the werewolf romance; lycanthropy—in particular, its effect on the “choices” heroines make regarding marriage and reproduction—offers the fantasy of ultimate flexibility, both in relation to the physical body and the nearly infinite number of episodic adventures enabled through its contraction. The lycanthropy motif, and by extension, the werewolf romance, is also unique in its offering of “place-bound identity,” an additional and seemingly contradictory fantasy that embodies Harvey’s second effect:

Place-identity, in this collage of superimposed spatial images that implode in upon us, becomes an important issue, because everyone occupies a space of individuation (a body, a room, a home, a shaping community, a nation), and how we individuate ourselves shapes identity. Furthermore, if no one ‘knows their place’ in this shifting collage world, then how can a secure social order be fashioned or sustained? (302).

Lycanthropy is constructed as a condition that fully enables its inheritors to recognize “their place” in the world, both literally and figuratively. Through its physical effects, it establishes a clear connection between identity and the individual body, and in turn, the



bodies of others who are also afflicted, thereby starkly defining the parameters of the community. More importantly, perhaps, it normalizes the claiming of particular geographical spaces as rightful territories. While human social mores and values are continually deconstructed in both series, “animal values” are readily affirmed; the novels suggest that, as wolves, it is “natural” and legitimate for these lycanthropic characters to claim and defend certain spaces as Pack land. Werewolf romances, then, offer the dual fantasy of ultimate flexibility and ultimate stability. Their protagonists enjoy limitless adventures, both sexual and other, in their constantly transforming bodies, but they also have a clearly defined “home” to which they can always return.

Due to the centrality of home and community in the werewolf romance, it should come as no surprise that Armstrong’s and Vaughn’s series contain the primary characteristics of the “small town” romance. Both narratives feature heroines who “return home” to small-town communities after experiencing dissatisfaction and isolation in urban environments. Despite Elena’s desire to “pass” as human in Toronto, and despite the substantial career success she achieves there, her wolf never quite acclimates to life in the city:

In the alley I change then yank my clothes on and scurry to the sidewalk like a junkie caught shooting up in the shadows. Frustration fills me. It shouldn’t end like this, dirty and furtive, amidst the garbage and filth of the city. It should end in a clearing in the forest, clothes abandoned in some thicket, stretched out naked, feeling the coolness of the earth beneath me and the night breeze tickling my bare skin (10).

Werewolves weren't meant for urban life. There was no place to run, and the sheer crush of people often provided more temptation than anonymity. Sometimes I think I chose to live in downtown Toronto simply because it was against my nature, one more instinct for me to defeat (31).

Rural spaces are constructed as essential to werewolf survival. By returning to Stonehaven, the Pack's territory in "remote upstate New York," Elena regains access to a rural location that her wolf identifies as home: "As a human, I could deny that Stonehaven was my home, that the people here were my Pack, that the woods were anything more than a patch of someone else's land. But as a wolf in Stonehaven's forest, one chorus trumpeted through my head. This forest was mine" (31, 39). Stonehaven, like the small towns discussed in chapter three, is the only place where Elena can truly be "herself."

Although Kitty's "return home" is to the city of Denver, Vaughn is careful to emphasize that its Midwestern location allows her werewolf characters easy access to rural spaces: "[Carl] drove us twenty minutes out of town, to the open space and private acreage that skirted the foothills along Highway 93 to the west. This was the heart of the pack's territory [...] The land was isolated and safe for us to run through"; "That was one of the things I liked about Denver: It had all the benefits of a city, but forest and mountains were a short drive away" (25, 214). Denver is not a small town, but its surrounding rural expanse belongs to the werewolves. For Kitty, the source of unhappiness that prompts her return home to Denver is paradoxically the reward she receives at the conclusion of *Kitty and the Midnight Hour*: her mobility. Kitty's career

success is amplified as she travels around the country, broadcasting from one radio station to another, but a life “on the road” is also a life without the “secure moorings” of a clearly defined home or community. The second installment of Vaughn’s series, *Kitty Goes to Washington* (2006), reveals her anxiety over the approach of the full moon, and the transformation she must endure alone in a strange place: “My stomach felt like ice. This was never going to get easier. I used to have a pack of my own. I’d been surrounded by friends, people I could trust to protect me. A wolf wasn’t meant to run on her own” (9). The absence of community, like the absence of rural space, is portrayed as distinctly “unnatural” for lycanthropes.

In *Bitten*, the primary conflict is resolved when Elena acknowledges the Pack as her family and community: “Everything I’d chased in the human world was here. I wanted stability? I had it in a place and people who would always welcome me, no matter what I did. I wanted family? I had it in my Pack, loyalty and love beyond the simple labels of mother, father, sister, brother [...] Stonehaven was my home. I wouldn’t run from it anymore” (428-9). This passage suggests that Elena has finally interrogated her strict definition of family, choosing to embrace the unconventional family she does have instead of longing for the nuclear family of her imagination. Interestingly, however, Elena’s acceptance of the Pack yields far more stability than would a family of her own making. If she had never been bitten, she might have married and had children, but this “new” family would not have replaced the parents she lost; it would have granted her access to a familial future, but not a familial past. Her lycanthropy, on the other hand, offers both a past and a future by situating her firmly within a defined lineage. The Pack

places significant value on its ancestry and history, as evidenced in its keeping of the Legacy, “a centuries-old book” that “purported to tell the history of werewolves, particularly of the Pack [...] Every Pack Alpha had added what he considered important, making it a mishmash of history, genealogy, and lore” (76). Elena rereads the Legacy almost immediately upon her return to Stonehaven, even though “[she’d] read it so many times before [she] could recite most of it from memory” (76). Her own name has been recorded in the text by Jeremy, one of the more recent entries in a substantial collection of “family trees” and “brief descriptions of each person’s history and life story” (79). The Legacy, then, offers Elena a history and a culture that she can claim as her own, because it specifically includes her as part of that history and culture. Harvey notes that “the search for historical roots [is a] sign of a search for more secure moorings and longer-lasting values in a shifting world” (292). Elena’s repetitive reading of the Legacy affirms her place within the werewolf community, and within the larger world as well. It also enables her to access what Judith Halberstam calls the “time of inheritance: “The time of inheritance refers to an overview of generational time within which values, wealth, goods, and morals are passed through family ties from one generation to the next” (5). Halberstam argues that “queer time” exists outside of the “time of inheritance,” as well as outside of “reproductive time”; while a “body-centered identity” informs the latter, the former is based upon “a model of [postmodern geography] that locates sexual subjectivities within and between embodiment, place, and practice” (ibid). Elena’s lycanthropic inheritance makes it possible for her to reside in “queer time,” but it also

paradoxically grounds her within a vertical lineage. As a young werewolf, Elena is the inheritor of both the Pack's monetary assets and a particular cultural history.

In exchange for the benefits of "time" and "place" that Elena receives from this inheritance, she must accept responsibility for protecting the Pack in order to ensure that its legacy will continue. When two rogue werewolves, Daniel and Marsten, begin infecting human serial killers with lycanthropy in order to overthrow the Pack, Elena is summoned back to Stonehaven to help destroy them. These werewolves pose two additional threats to the Pack: 1) they follow no rules, so they risk human discovery of the existence of lycanthropes; and 2) they challenge the boundaries of the exclusive Pack community. The latter point is never explicitly stated in the text, but it becomes particularly evident in the language that Armstrong uses to differentiate Pack and non-Pack werewolves. A werewolf who is not a recognized member of the Pack is referred to as a "mutt." While the Pack consists primarily of "born" werewolves—werewolves who were conceived from a werewolf father and a human mother—a "bitten" werewolf, like Elena, may be integrated into the Pack by a ruling member: "For reasons that had nothing to do with me and everything to do with the status of the werewolf who'd bitten me, I'd been part of the Pack from the time I was turned" (22). "Mutts," however, are always "bitten," and never "born." Even though all werewolves in this universe claim both lycanthrope and human parentage, and are thus "mixed race," the designation of "mutt" is utilized to construct a dividing line between those who are racially "pure" and "impure." "Pure" werewolves can locate themselves in one of the Legacy's family trees; whether born or made, they can claim a position in the Pack's vertical lineage. It is no surprise,

then, that Elena thinks of the Pack as a werewolf aristocracy: “Every society has its ruling class. In the werewolf world, it was the Pack”; “As someone who’d once been a human in a democratic society, the idea of an all-powerful, unquestionable leader rankled” (22, 208). The “racial” distinction between these two groups of werewolves is configured as a class-based difference as well. Further, the consequences of being a “mutt” are not merely social. “Mutts” are denied the privilege of claiming their own land: “The Pack routinely roused mutts who seemed to be settling into a non-nomadic lifestyle. Making a home for oneself meant claiming territory and only the Pack could claim territory. So most mutts wandered from city to city, stealing enough to stay alive” (228). “Mutts” are condemned to “unnatural” urban lifestyles, and they are prohibited from settling down and establishing their own homes and communities. Although Elena expresses criticism about the Pack’s elite hierarchical system, she shares its prejudice toward “mutts”: “[Cain would] say anything to save himself from torture, even if it meant condemning his coconspirators to death. The loyalty of a mutt was an inspiring thing to behold”; “Mutts were predictable beasts” (267, 298). The persecution of “mutts,” in other words, is never interrogated in Armstrong’s novels. “Mutts” are always “bad” werewolves who pose a significant threat to the sanctity of the Pack and must therefore be eradicated. A clear connection is implied between their assigned “impure” racial and class status and their destructive behavior. By destroying “mutts,” Elena not only protects the Pack from the overt threat of an overthrow; she also reinforces the dual borders that surround it: the imaginary boundaries that designate the Pack as a “pure” community with common lineage, and the geographical boundaries that situate the Pack within a particular “place.”

*Bitten* suggests that both borders must be secure in order for the Pack to remain a viable community. More importantly, perhaps, it suggests that Pack werewolves alone, via their “racial” and class privilege, possess a rightful claim of ownership on certain geographical spaces.

This privilege, as it is constructed, also supersedes any human entitlements to land ownership. To be a werewolf, in both Armstrong’s and Vaughn’s series, is to be inextricably connected to a specific physical location. When Kitty returns home to the city of Denver in *Kitty and the Silver Bullet*, she makes the decision to dethrone Carl and replace him as the pack’s Alpha. After securing the support of a few pack members, Kitty challenges Carl’s leadership by claiming his territory as her own: “*With their ground-eating strides ... they cover miles of ground on plain and hill. All the while, at junctures and borders, they mark. At the reeking places where the other pack has marked they especially linger*” (203-4). The pack community becomes conflated with the land it occupies; to claim one is to claim the other. This idea is illustrated further in Elena’s return to Stonehaven’s forest: “It was Pack territory and therefore it was mine [...] Mine. I rubbed against an oak tree, feeling the bark scratch and pull away tickling clumps of dead fur. Mine” (39). Her experience of the land, as a wolf, is visceral. In marking her territory, Elena leaves behind pieces of herself, thereby eliding any clear distinction between the land and her own individual body. Her actions also suggest that werewolves access what amounts to a wolf “collective unconscious.” The lycanthropic inheritance, for both Elena and Kitty, is an inheritance of ancestral memory. Their initial transformations involved not only the transfer of genetic attributes, but also a transfer of

information about wolf behavior and social rankings: “*They hunt, and she shows him he is God by waiting to feed on the rabbit until he gives her permission. He leaves her skin and bones to lick and suck, but she is satisfied*” (Vaughn 27). Kitty’s understanding of her place within the pack’s pecking order, and her ability to demonstrate it appropriately, is not depicted as a learned trait. Rather, it is an innate characteristic that was inherited along with the physical changes to her body. In other words, there is an alternate, yet equally significant, vertical lineage alluded to in these passages; as descendants of “real” wolves, in both external form and internal memory, their claim to the land holds equal validity to that of its earliest human inhabitants. Elena’s relationship with the Stonehaven forest is particularly relevant here, because in the human world, she is actually a Canadian citizen: “One of my few memories of my parents was of a Canada Day party. I only knew that it was Canada Day because, in my memory, I could see a cake in the shape of a flag” (352). Armstrong constructs an explicit link between Elena’s original family and her national origin. Both the local and the national aspects of “home” become conflated in this recollection. However, the crossing of national boundaries necessitated by her claim of Stonehaven as home is not addressed in *Bitten*; a werewolf’s bond to his/her territory trumps—in fact, precedes—national borders.

Considering that the lycanthropic inheritance of “place” is depicted as more legitimate than any other, and that lycanthropy is constructed as a racialized category, it is not an unwarranted leap to suggest that the werewolves of werewolf romance are “passing” as indigenous people; their territorial claims are not recognized by the larger governing State of the human world, and unlike werewolves, humans hold little reverence



for the land: “The postindustrial world wasn’t kind to werewolves. Urban sprawl swallowed deep forests and wide open spaces” (45). In *Bitten*, Armstrong also portrays humans as dangerous “outsiders” encroaching upon Pack land: “The other day when we’d found hunters on the property, Clay had been furious. His territory had been invaded” (122-3). As the existence of lycanthropes and other paranormal creatures becomes public knowledge in Vaughn’s universe, questions about their entitlement to legal rights and political representation are raised on Kitty’s radio show: “Would lycanthropy victims be included in the Americans with Disabilities Act?” (13). The werewolf communities in both series are constructed as minority groups that face persecution by the dominant human race.

It is worth noting, however, that the majority of lycanthropes, when in human form, are racially white. In *Bitten*, the whiteness of the Pack werewolves is clearly indicated through Armstrong’s descriptions of their physical characteristics, from Clay’s “close-cropped gold curls” to the Italian features of Antonio Sorrentino and his son, Nick (55). Early entries in the *Legacy* confirm that the Pack can trace its origins to Europe. Even the mutts in this universe, as former human serial killers, fit the expected profile: they are white men in their twenties and thirties. Elena’s whiteness is highlighted through repeated references to her blond hair, a feature that remains prominent even when she is in wolf form: “I am a wolf, a 130-pound wolf with pale blond fur” (3). Kitty is also a blond-haired werewolf, and while the greater number of lycanthropes in Vaughn’s world results in a handful of references to werewolves of color, none of them are in positions of leadership. What both series offer, then, is a very particular racialized

fantasy. When they “pass” as human, these heroines reap the benefits of their whiteness. This idea becomes evident in *Bitten* during Elena’s investigation of the “mutts,” when she loiters outside of a motel: “Two people came out of a room near the end, but they ignored the young woman having such difficulty finding the room number written on her scrap of paper. People make special allowances for the mental capacities of blondes” (176). Elena’s whiteness is a key factor in her ability to move easily within the human world. The same can be said of Kitty, whose continual road trips across the U.S. are never hampered by her racial identity, and whose physical appearance plays a significant role in her rise to national stardom. As werewolves, however, both women also inherit a racialized identity that affirms their belonging to a particular community and a particular geographical space. Through their constructions of race, Armstrong and Vaughn offer a dual fantasy of flexibility *and* stability that encompasses both of Harvey’s “divergent sociological effects.” To be a werewolf, in the werewolf romance, is to experience simultaneously the best of both worlds. Thus, this subgenre seems to reflect conservative and progressive attitudes of contemporary American culture under flexible capitalism. As Harvey argues, “there are abundant signs that localism and nationalism have become stronger precisely because of the quest for the security that place always offers in the midst of all the shifting that flexible accumulation implies” (306). These werewolf heroines may revel in their transformable bodies and the multiple variances of mobility they enable—all the while negotiating the patriarchal source of their power—but at the end of the day, they have a stable and permanent place that they can legitimately claim as home.

CHAPTER VI  
TOURISTS AND TOURIST ATTRACTIONS: VAMPIRE HEROES AND THE  
HEROINES WHO LOVE THEM

This chapter will expand upon the analysis of the paranormal romance genre by exploring the werewolf romance's equally popular counterpart: the vampire romance. The foci of this chapter are the bestselling multi-volume narratives of Laurell K. Hamilton's Anita Blake series (1993-present) and Charlaine Harris' Southern Vampire series (2001-present), the latter of which has served as the basis for the successful HBO television show, *Trueblood*. In contrast to the novels examined in the preceding chapter, which feature werewolf heroines, both Hamilton's and Harris' respective series explore romantic relationships between human heroines and vampire heroes. Hamilton's 18-volume narrative follows the adventures of Anita Blake, a female protagonist who raises zombies for a living in St. Louis—typically to resolve legal disputes—and moonlights as a licensed vampire executioner, paid by the government to eliminate law-breaking vampires. While the first five books in the series adhere to the format of hard-boiled detective fiction, the sixth novel—*The Killing Dance* (1997)—marks the narrative's significant transition to romance (much to the dismay of many of Hamilton's original fans) as Anita initiates a romantic relationship with the vampire Jean-Claude. This relationship is explored throughout the remaining novels, even as Anita pursues a variety of other supernatural lovers with Jean-Claude's consent. The series, in short, traces

Anita's transformation from a Christian-identified woman who believes that vampires are inherently evil, to a woman in a polyamorous paranormal relationship who views "monstrosity" in much more ambiguous terms.

Charlaine Harris' Southern Vampire series also explores a female protagonist's experiences with love and adventure. Sookie Stackhouse, a virginal telepathic barmaid in the small town of Bon Temps, Louisiana, meets and falls in love with a vampire named Bill. Bill introduces Sookie to the ruling vampires of the deep south, whom, upon learning about her extraordinary telepathic abilities, employ her as a mind reader. Sookie's relationship with Bill comes to a dramatic conclusion in the narrative's third installment—*Club Dead* (2003)—at which point Sookie becomes a serial monogamist who explores romantic relationships with a range of different paranormal men. For both heroines, the introduction to their vampire heroes marks the beginning of a series of otherworldly adventures and sexual exploits. The vampire romance shares several formulaic conventions with the werewolf romance, including a first-person female narrator, a multi-volume narrative structure, and an alternative, magical universe. However, while the werewolf romance offers heroines whose bodies and lifestyles reflect the economic and cultural phenomenon of "time-space compression," the vampire romance (re)constructs the figure of the vampire as a specific metaphor for consumer capitalism. In initiating romantic relationships with vampires, Anita and Sookie access pleasure and adventure through consumerism and global tourism.

It is worth noting that, while critical work on the literary werewolf has been scarce at best, the Western literary vampire has long been recognized by scholars as a

significant cultural and political metaphor that, through the particularities of its construction at any given moment, provides insight into the fears and anxieties of the culture from which it emerges. In *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1995), Nina Auerbach claims that “There is no such creature as ‘The Vampire’; there are only vampires,” “more formidable in their flexibility than in their love, their occult powers, or their lust for blood” (5, 8). Auerbach traces the adaptable figure of the Western vampire from nineteenth century England—originating in its role as an intimate friend in Lord Byron’s “Fragment of a Novel” (1816)—to its depiction as an horrific “Other” in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) and the many film adaptations the novel inspired in twentieth century America. In their introduction to *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture* (1997), Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger note that in the 1970s and beyond, more ambiguous and sympathetic representations of the vampire gain prominence in literature and film: “One of the most interesting and significant metamorphoses in the conventional figure of the literary (and cinematic) vampire has to do with ... its ‘domestication.’ Whether we mourn or celebrate these changes, the contemporary vampire is no longer only that figure of relatively uncomplicated evil so famously represented by Count Dracula” (2). In fact, “many writers now narrate their horror stories from the inside, as it were, filtering them through the consciousness of the horrors that inhabit them” (ibid). The Western literary vampire, in other words, has transitioned from a transparently “monstrous” villain to a postmodern, often empathetic, (anti)hero.

As the figure of the vampire has evolved, so has its relationship to capital. Milly Williamson argues in *The Lure of the Vampire* (2005) that “The Western vampire is a creature of capitalism: it enters the Western imagination concurrently with the emergence of the culture of the bourgeoisie, giving expression to its fears, denials and contradictions” (183). Referencing Franco Moretti’s Marxist critique of Stoker’s *Dracula*, Frank Grady elucidates this point in his essay, “Vampire Culture” (1996):

[*Dracula*] operates on one level as a parable about the dangers of monopoly capitalism, constituted by Stoker as an external threat in the monstrous, predatory, acquisitive, and above all utterly foreign figure of the count [...] Opposing *Dracula* in the name of individualism and economic liberty, then, are a small band of valiant Britons ... who struggle to use their considerable economic power to do good, and thus to engineer the “purification” of capital used for a moral purpose (225).

In *Dracula*, the line between good and evil—and human and vampire—is determined by the use of capital. In contemporary vampire narratives, such as Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles* (1976-2003), the distinction between good and evil, as well as the distinction between moral and immoral use of capital, becomes obfuscated. Grady cogently observes that “what distinguishes Rice’s vampires from Stoker’s is what the former spend their money on” (227). Her protagonists use their vast financial resources to acquire Western cultural artifacts, not to seduce unwitting mortals, thereby embodying a form of “aesthetic eclecticism”: “Capital is purified not by its separation from but by its association with the aesthetic and cultural realm represented by this vampiric

connoisseurship” (228-9). Through her deconstruction of the vampire figure as a metaphor for predatory capitalism, Rice creates characters who are both monstrous and sympathetic, and who are themselves “obsessed with questions about good and evil” (Hollinger 203).

Rice’s innovations in the genre of vampire fiction are particularly relevant to this analysis; like the *Vampire Chronicles*, Hamilton’s and Harris’ respective series position vampires explicitly as consumers with money to spend on both products and services. More importantly, perhaps, Rice introduces the concept of vampires “coming out of the coffin”—Harris’ phrase—and working for their money. From her *Theatre des Vampires*—a vampire theatre troupe—to her construction of Lestat as a 1980s vampire rock star, Rice offers characters who perform their vampirism for human audiences, and get paid well for doing it. Rice’s universe, however, is one in which humans are unaware of the existence of vampires; for the fans of these vampire entertainers, the appeal of the performances lies in their frighteningly “realistic” depictions of creatures that cannot possibly be real. Rice’s protagonists may be capitalists and consumers, but they are not—to use Zygmunt Bauman’s term—“tourists”; they still exist separately from the human world, as well as the realm of legitimate commerce. Their spending, like their “living,” takes place underground, where they are constantly aware that each interaction with humans, monetary or otherwise, carries with it the risk of discovery and the possibility of their own destruction.

Bauman’s “Tourists and Vagabonds” (1998) provides a useful framework for analyzing the literary vampire’s evolving relationship with capital. Bauman claims that

“degree of mobility,” or the “freedom to choose where to be,” determines one’s status, at any given time, as “tourist” or “vagabond” (86). Further, he explores the strong correlation between tourism and consumerism: “the consumer is a person on the move and bound to remain so” (85). David Harvey’s discussion of “time-space compression” in *The Condition of Postmodernity* establishes this link between tourism and consumerism as a product of flexible capitalism; Harvey notes that one of the developments “in the arena of consumption” “was a shift away from the consumption of goods and into the consumption of services—not only personal, business, educational, and health services, but also into entertainments, spectacles, happenings, and distractions” (285). Bauman describes consumers as “fun-loving adventurer[s]” who “are first and foremost gatherers of *sensations*” (83). Because Rice’s vampires are not truly “out of the coffin,” they are constructed as adventures rather than adventurers—tourist attractions rather than tourists. Like Dracula, they occupy “vagabond” status, because they are denied the choice of remaining in any one place for very long; both their eternal youth and their dietary habits keep them perpetually on the move.

That said, the vampire’s potential to be a tourist is apparent in many aspects of its characterization. Even if vampires are traditionally denied the choice of when and where to move, at least they never have to stand in line at the county courthouse to renew their passports, or face the rejection of an immigration visa. Vampires, in other words, are truly global travelers. Not contained by national boundaries or allegiances, they wander the world with faint but unidentifiable accents and knowledge of various languages and cultures. They would be tourists, if only they had the “freedom to choose where to be.”



The premise of this chapter is that a particular development in the subgenre of vampire romance enables the vampire to transition thoroughly from vagabond to tourist. The crucial difference between the vampire romances of Hamilton and Harris, and the vampire narratives that precede them, is that the former make vampires “visible”; vampires reveal their existence to humanity and demand legal rights and political representation. This visibility leads to full participation in consumer capitalism. The premise of each series, both of which offer parallel universes that differ from ours only in their positing of mythical creatures as real, is essentially a vampire “coming out” back story. The defining moment of the Anita Blake narrative is the landmark court case of *Addison v. Clark*: “[It] gave us a revised version of what life was, and what death wasn’t. Vampirism was legal in the good ol’ U. S. of A.” (*Guilty Pleasures* 3). In the Southern Vampire series, a Japanese invention enables vampires to publicly announce their existence: “When the Japanese had perfected the synthetic blood that actually enabled vampires to ‘live’ without drinking human blood, it had been possible for vampires to come out of the coffin” (LDD 26). The vampire heroes in both series are fully fledged tourists; they are legitimate entrepreneurs and consumers who make money, spend money, and go (or stay) wherever they please. The human protagonists, Anita and Sookie, who explore romantic relationships with these heroes, become tourists in the process. Both women are initially positioned, for different reasons that will be explored shortly, as vagabonds. However, they both soon transcend their vagabond status and embrace a tourist’s lifestyle of endless consumption, sexual pleasure, and adventure. In aligning themselves with vampires—and this contemporary re-imagining of the

vampire's association with capital—these heroines make choices and life experiences that provocatively suggest the journey to marriage is no longer a woman's "greatest adventure" in romance fiction (Mussell 59).

### **The Vampire as Tourist and Tourist Attraction**

As previously stated, vampires are prime candidates for tourism; they have always been "globally mobile," even if they didn't have complete control over which part of the globe they called home. However, Harris' Southern Vampire series is unique in its positioning of vampires as a target market for consumerism. In *Dead Until Dark*, the first Southern Vampire novel, Sookie explains that only two years have passed since the Japanese invented synthetic blood, and since vampires "came out of the coffin." In that time span, multiple brands of synthetic blood, with a range of different blood types, have been marketed to vampire customers ("Trueblood" is one of them). Further, a wide range of services that cater specifically to vampires also becomes available. Much of the series' second installment, *Living Dead in Dallas*, is set at the Silent Shore hotel: "The Silent Shore was the only hotel in the Dallas area that had undergone the extensive renovation necessary to accommodate vampire patrons" (72). These accommodations include bedrooms designed with extra space for coffins, and an updated version of room service that offers human blood donors. To reach the Silent Shore, out-of-town vampires utilize the services of Anubis Air, an airline that ensures safe travel for vampires with its coffin shuttle service and armed guards. Vampires also become consumers of illegal services like prostitution. Sookie's brother, Jason, who frequently partakes of the service

himself, shares his knowledge of this development: “Speaking of prostitutes ... there’s one in Monroe specializes in vampires. She keeps a guy standing by with a stake in case one gets carried away. She drinks synthetic blood to keep her blood supply up” (23).

These examples indicate that vampire “visibility” and access to human experiences become possible through consumerism, and that vampires, like humans, are primarily consuming “sensations” that are gathered through the tourism of places and bodies.

Vampires become a target market for various tourist services because they possess the financial means to make extravagant purchases. As Sookie notes in *Living Dead in Dallas*, “I was uneasily aware that any vampire worth his salt could become wealthy; after all, when you can control the minds of humans to some extent, it’s not that difficult to persuade them to part with money or stock tips or investment opportunities” (25). In Harris’ universe, vampires are not only stock market investors; they’re also entrepreneurs, and the most typical vampire business is the “vampire bar”:

Bars were favorite enterprises for vampires, naturally, because their heaviest traffic came at night. Somehow, fanged all-night dry cleaners didn’t have the same allure that a vampire-studded bar did. In the past two years, vampire bars had become the hottest form of nightlife a city could boast. The pathetic humans who became obsessed with vampires—fangbangers—hung out in vampire bars, often in costumes, in the hopes of attracting the attention of the real thing. Tourists came in to gape at the undead and the fangbangers. These bars weren’t the safest place to work (LDD 86).

Vampires effectively make money by commodifying themselves as tourist attractions for humans. For vampire bar owners, there is no additional motive to humanize vampires by providing safe spaces for vampires and humans to interact, nor is there an effort to deconstruct vampire mythology or interrogate vampire stereotypes. The vampire bar owner is interested only in profit:

Fangtasia, the vampire bar, was located in a suburban shopping area of Shreveport, close to a Sam's and a Toys 'R' Us. It was a shopping strip, which was all closed down at this hour except for the bar [...] The walls were lined with framed pictures of every movie vampire who had shown fangs on the silver screen, from Bela Lugosi to George Hamilton to Gary Oldman [...] Wall placards proclaimed, 'No biting on premises.' [...] 'Your patronage is appreciated. Proceed at your own risk' (100-3).

The strip mall setting and the wacky photographs, combined with the vampire owners' tendency to don caped costumes for their adoring fans, suggests that the vampire as tourist attraction has become a mainstream consumerist adventure in this alternate universe.

The commodification of vampirism is explored even more explicitly in Hamilton's Anita Blake novels. A central theme of the series is that anything supernatural can, and will, be exploited for profit. Vampire-owned businesses flourish in St. Louis' "Blood Quarter," "our town's hottest vampire commercial district. Big tourist attraction. You'd think that the Ozark Mountains, some of the best fishing in the country, the symphony, Broadway level musicals, or maybe the Botanical Gardens would be

enough, but no. I guess it's hard to compete with the undead" (*Laughing Corpse* 95). While the vampire bar is the preferred enterprise in Harris' Southern Vampire series, vampire entrepreneurs provide a wide range of entertainment for their human patrons in Hamilton's Blood Quarter. *Guilty Pleasures*, "the world's only vampire strip club," capitalizes on the vampire embodiment of erotic violence: "Robert the vampire began to dance. He moved with a careful violence, pumping to the music [...] The vampire had stripped, showing a smooth expanse of chest. He dropped to the stage and did fingertip push-ups. The audience went wild [...] The vampire looked out at the audience and hissed, fangs flashing in the lights" (*Guilty Pleasures* 17-8). Other businesses in the district include *The Laughing Corpse*, a vampire comedy club; *Dead Dave's*, a vampire bar; and *Circus of the Damned*: "One banner showed a man being hung; 'The Death Defying Count Alcourt,' it said. Zombies crawled from a graveyard in one picture; 'Watch the Dead Rise from the Grave' [...] *Guilty Pleasures* treads a thin line between entertainment and the sadistic. *The Circus* goes over the edge and down into the abyss" (*GP* 201). For their human customers, these vampire establishments function similarly to the tourist resorts in developing nations. They offer a range of new sensations and experiences in controlled environments, but part of their appeal lies also in the promise of the possibility of danger. Anita, while surveying the weekend crowd at *Guilty Pleasures*, observes that "There was an undercurrent of fear. The peculiar terror that you get on roller coasters and at horror movies. Safe terror" (*GP* 14). The vampire entrepreneurs in Hamilton's world sell themselves as objects of fear and desire, recognizing that the

feelings and sensations they provoke in their patrons hold significantly greater market value than any tangible product.

More interestingly, perhaps, the vampire business owner's self-commodification, as well as the financial rewards it yields, enables the vampire to stake a more absolute claim on the position of tourist. Vampires now possess the ability not only to travel wherever they want, whenever they want; they can also choose to stop traveling and settle, indefinitely, in the location of their choice. Sookie's love interest, vampire Bill, explains his intention to remain in the house he has just inherited from his deceased descendant (because this descendant had no surviving relatives, ownership of the house reverted back to vampire Bill): "I plan on living there, as long as I can. I'm tired of drifting from city to city. I grew up in the country. Now that I have a legal right to exist, and I can go to Monroe or Shreveport or New Orleans for synthetic blood or prostitutes who specialize in our kind, I want to stay here [...] I've been roaming for decades" (54). Bill isn't the only vampire to stake a permanent claim on a particular place.

Unbeknownst to the humans in Harris' series, the most powerful vampires have established "kingdoms" throughout the United States. Each state has a vampire king or queen, and each state is divided into numbered "Areas" that are controlled by "Sheriffs." Similarly, the vampires in Hamilton's novels vie for the coveted position of "master of the city," as each major metropolitan area in the United States has a single vampire ruler. In both series, territory ownership is equated with business ownership. The vampires in charge are entitled to claim some of the profit from all of the vampire businesses operating within the boundaries of their designated land. Corporate power, more than

supernatural power, determines the extent of a vampire's "freedom to choose where to be." The vampire's embodiment of the tourist in the context of consumer capitalism is starkly contrasted with the characterizations of the subgenre's heroines. As the following section illustrates, Sookie and Anita demonstrate an avowed disinterest in both corporate power and consumption practices.

### **Vagabond Heroines and the Reward of Tourism**

In Harris' novels, the vampires who decide to take up residence in Bon Temps and its surrounding areas may do so freely, but the human residents lack the ability to make such decisions. Bauman argues that while tourists occupy the first world, vagabonds reside in the second world, which he describes as "the world of the 'locally tied,' of those barred from moving and thus bound to bear passively whatever change may be visited on the locality they are tied to" (88). The residents of Bon Temps watch with frustration and anger as vampires begin encroaching on their territory: "The first thing I noticed was that local folks were really pissed off at the vampires who nested in Monroe. Diane, Liam, and Malcolm had been touring bars in the area ... They'd been behaving outrageously, offensively. The three vampires made the escapades of the Louisiana Tech students look bland" (169). These locals, whose immobility due to poverty, lack of education, and limited job skills clearly positions them as vagabonds, ultimately handle their frustration by making the only choice that affords them any degree of agency: they set fire to the house in Monroe, thereby killing its vampire occupants.

Sookie is initially depicted as the least mobile of these vagabonds. Born and raised in Bon Temps, her most significant move has been from her parents' house to her grandmother's, and her current occupation as a waitress at Merlotte's Bar and Grill is the highlight of her employment history. Sookie's immobility is a consequence of what she refers to as her "disability": telepathy—meaning that she actually possesses the extraordinary *ability* to read people's thoughts. For Sookie, telepathy is a disability because it has made her a social pariah in Bon Temps, and although she considers herself to be intelligent, it has prevented her educational success: "I did poorly in school because it was hard for me to concentrate when so few others were [...] Sometimes my folks thought I was lazy [...] Sometimes the teachers thought I had a learning disability" (DUD 52). With little education and few job skills, Sookie has limited options and meager finances: "I have no inkling of how to run a business, or manage business dealings, having been just a step or two ahead of poor all my life" (LDD 27). Before she meets vampire Bill, Sookie's life consists of low-paid work, household chores, and some backyard sunbathing. As Bauman argues, she is "crushed under the burden of abundant, redundant, and useless time [in which] 'nothing ever happens,'" an idea that becomes particularly evident in the sentence that begins Harris' series: "I'd been waiting for the vampire for years when he walked into the bar" (DUD 1).

The initial meeting between Sookie and vampire Bill marks the beginning of Sookie's transition from vagabond to tourist. Bill arrives at Merlotte's Bar and Grill while Sookie is working; he is the first vampire customer the bar has ever had. She serves him a glass of wine (this bar has not yet begun to stock synthetic blood) and



notices that Denise and Mack Rattray, married ex-cons who engage in illegal business dealings, have observed vampire Bill with significant interest. A few minutes later, she realizes that both the Rattrays and vampire Bill have disappeared from the bar, and she quickly surmises that the Rattrays have lured Bill outside with the intention of holding him captive, draining his blood, and selling it on the black market. Sookie chases after the Rattrays and finds them draining blood from vampire Bill, who has been restrained with silver chains. A violent and bloody fight ensues, and eventually Sookie succeeds in rescuing Bill from his captors. The following verbal exchange occurs after he is released:

“Would you like to drink the blood they collected?” he asked unexpectedly. “It would be a way for me to show my gratitude.” He gestured at the stoppered vials lying on the blacktop. “My blood is supposed to improve your sex life and your health.” “I’m healthy as a horse,” I told him honestly. “And I have no sex life to speak of. You do what you want with it.” “You could sell it,” he suggested, but I thought he was just waiting to see what I’d say about that. “I wouldn’t touch it,” I said, insulted. “You’re different,” he said (DUD 13).

It is crucial to read this conversation within the framework of romance criticism, because a formulaic convention of romance is utilized here, I believe, quite intentionally. In her analysis of Harlequin romances from the 1970s to the 80s in *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women*, Tania Modleski notes that heroines are rewarded with marriage, and the economic and social benefits it affords, precisely because they do not explicitly desire it:

Male popular culture is to female popular culture as “adventurer” is to “adventuress.” If heroes must deserve the former title, heroines must take care not to earn the latter [...] While the novels are always about a poor girl finally marrying a rich man, preferably of the nobility, they must be careful to show that the girl never set out to get him and his goods. This is of course a simple reflection of the double bind imposed upon women in real life: their most important achievement is supposed to be finding a husband; their greatest fault is attempting to do so (48).

To highlight the heroine’s innocence and lack of greed, the conventional romance typically contains a foil character that Modleski identifies as “the scheming adventuress,” who blatantly desires marriage for economic gain, and is willing to lie, cheat, and steal to get it.

In Harris’ Southern Vampire series, the primary conflict between Sookie and Vampire Bill relates to tourism, not marriage; however, the formula unfolds in a compellingly similar way. By rejecting Bill’s blood offering, Sookie has declined the cheap thrill it will provide. In essence, she has rejected both the roles of “tourist” and “consumer.” Her refusal convinces Bill that she is different from the “fangbangers”—which are, of course, this series’ version of the “scheming adventuress”—that patronize vampire bars to access vampires as tourist attractions. Her refusal is then rewarded; Bill insists that she drink his blood to heal the wounds that she has acquired in her fight with the Rattrays. This encounter marks the beginning of their romantic relationship, during which Bill and Sookie exchange blood frequently. It is not long before Sookie begins to

reap the benefits of this consumption: “After the first infusion of Bill’s blood ... I’d felt healed, healthy, stronger [...] After my second draft of Bill’s blood, I’d felt really strong, and I’d been braver because I’d had more confidence. I felt more secure in my sexuality and its power. It seemed apparent I was handling my disability with more aplomb and capability” (DUD 211). In fact, as Sookie embraces the role of consumer, her “disability,” which she had previously blamed for her immobility, is reconfigured as a lucrative talent that grants her mobility; she becomes a paid consultant for vampires who hire her, in different parts of the U.S., to read the minds of employees and business rivals. In other words, Sookie is rewarded with the position of tourist precisely because she has proven to Bill that she doesn’t desire it.

Anita’s initial refusal to accept tourist status is also a central plot development in Hamilton’s series. Unlike Sookie, Anita is not a conventional vagabond—an issue that will be explored more fully in the following section. She has a college degree and a lucrative career as an animator: “Animating had only been a licensed business for about five years. Before that it had been just an embarrassing curse, a religious experience, or a tourist attraction. It still is in parts of New Orleans, but here in St. Louis it’s a business. A profitable one, thanks in large part to my boss” (LC 1). She also earns an additional salary by sidelining as a licensed vampire executioner. Although Anita makes a considerable sum of money each time she raises the dead or executes vampire criminals, Hamilton continually emphasizes that she is not motivated by profit. Anita’s primary concern is being able to use her “natural talent” in her professional life. Her choice to major in “biology with an emphasis on the supernatural” and minor in “creatures of

legend” reflects her lack of interest in economic power: “It was like having a degree in ancient Greek or the Romantic poets, interesting, enjoyable, but then what the hell can you do with it? I had planned to go on to grad school and teach college. But Bert came along and showed me a way to turn my natural talent into a job. At least I can say I use my degree every day” (LC 119). Anita would have pursued a career in academia if she had not been wooed, directly out of college, by the owner of Animators Inc. In other words, Anita did not find this job; the job actually found her. Her subsequent wealth is essentially constructed as a fortunate accident.

Further, like Sookie, Anita interacts with the undead in ways that set her firmly apart from the human tourists that surround her. Anita’s visit to Guilty Pleasures is not motivated by a desire for vampire entertainment. Rather, she arrives as the reluctant guest of a bachelorette party, obligated to attend because she has agreed to be a bridesmaid for an old friend. In contrast to the club’s other patrons, Anita refuses to enjoy the show: “He threw his white gloves into the audience. One landed at my feet. I left it there [...] I looked out at the crowd. They were with the vampire, feeling his hunger, his need [...] I was apart from it, and glad” (GP 17, 19). Anita’s reaction to the performance—or lack thereof—draws the attention of Jean-Claude, the vampire owner of Guilty Pleasures (as well as *The Laughing Corpse* and *the Circus of the Damned*), and, by novel’s end, the “master” of St. Louis. For Jean-Claude, Anita’s refusal to be seduced by vampirism makes her unique among humankind, and therefore worthy of the very attributes that everyone *but* her finds desirable. When Anita is attacked and nearly killed by another vampire, Jean-Claude administers a bite that not only saves her life, but also

transfers some of his power to her: “he has shared with you what we consider a great gift to be given only to people who have proven themselves invaluable” (GP 45). The “great gift” includes immunity to the hypnotic gaze that all vampires possess, rapid healing abilities, and a lengthened lifespan: “He had offered me immortality without the messy part of becoming a vampire” (LC 96). Along with these bodily enhancements, Anita also inherits Jean-Claude’s appetite: “I was starving. Usually the thought of eating before ten made me nauseous. This morning I wanted food, needed food” (GP 88). Although vampires in this universe don’t eat, the blood connection Jean-Claude establishes with Anita enables him to vicariously enjoy the flavors of the food that she ingests. Like the werewolf romance, the vampire romance explores consumption through the metaphor of food hunger. When Jean-Claude bites Anita, he not only rewards her with the physical attributes that facilitate a tourist lifestyle; he also transmits his voracious desire for consumption. For both heroines, as with their werewolf counterparts, these vampiric adjustments to their bodies, their appetites, and their mobility lead to a rejection of marriage and reproduction in favor of episodic adventures.

### **Dating Vampires: The Heroine’s Rejection of Domesticity**

From a romance perspective, it is interesting that many scholars like Gordon and Hollinger read the contemporary vampire as a “domesticated” figure (2). It certainly makes sense that in order for the vampire hero to become a viable romantic partner, like the human hero in conventional romance narratives, he would need to be purged of some of his more “monstrous” characteristics. In both Hamilton’s and Harris’ series, there do

appear to be a few ground rules for the vampire hero. He cannot kill (or want to kill) the heroine, and although he may want to kill a few of her friends or family members, he loves her enough not to do it. He also should not enjoy killing too much or too often; both narratives suggest that there is a significant difference between being a vampire and being a sadist. That said, the vampire heroes in these novels spend little time pondering whether they are innately evil, or how to be a “good” vampire. Vampire heroes actually enjoy being vampires; they revel in their strength, their speed, and their substantial economic resources. While the vampire hero of this subgenre may reflect a transformation in the literary vampire, he is not transformed by his human heroine within the narrative. Nor does he neatly transform her; both Sookie and Anita continually make a conscious choice to remain human in their surface refusal to become fully fledged tourists, an important point that will be addressed shortly. The vampire hero does, however, introduce the human heroine to an alternative life model that is decidedly *un-*domestic.

Historical characterizations of the literary vampire have not only made him (or her) a prime candidate for tourist status. As several scholars of vampire literature have argued, the figure of the vampire has also posed provocative challenges to Western cultural norms regarding domesticity and femininity, and therefore holds a particular relevance—and appeal—for women readers. In *Reading the Vampire* (1994), Ken Gelder observes that much contemporary vampire fiction “share[s] a number of characteristics usually associated with women’s romance—notably, the tracing out of the vampire’s search for fulfillment, for a ‘complete’ love relationship” (109). Nina

Auerbach reads the vampire as both an empathetic figure for women and one who offers the possibility of a life not determined by gendered expectations: “Vampires are supposed to menace women, but to me at least, they promised protection against a destiny of girdles, spike heels, and approval” (4). Milly Williamson explores this argument further in her analysis of “costuming” and female fandom: “Part of the pleasure of appropriating vampiric symbols is in producing a sense of self (as outsider) not tied to a feminine ideal which the fans find impossible to achieve. The women fans’ self-presentation as vampiric ... is a specific response to the broader context of gender that all women face, but experience and deal with differently” (143). In the tradition of the conventional vampire, the heroes of vampire romance symbolize an escape from feminine ideals and the institutions—like marriage—that enforce them. However, these heroes offer the particular escape of tourism, which is constructed as attractively incompatible with marriage and domesticity.

In the Anita Blake novels, marriage is depicted, quite literally, as a dead institution. This argument is graphically rendered, in *Guilty Pleasures*, in the zombified character of Estelle Hewitt: “[She] may have been pretty once, but a hundred years in the grave takes a lot out of a person. Her skin was an ugly grayish white, waxy, nearly expressionless, fake-looking. White gloves hid her hands, stained with grave dirt. The dress was white and lace-covered. I was betting on wedding finery. Dear God” (159). Estelle functions as an explicit metaphor concerning the relevance of marriage in Hamilton’s alternate universe; in a magical world driven primarily by profit and the pursuit of ephemeral pleasures, marriage is portrayed as gruesome, archaic, and wholly

undesirable. Anita is constantly at odds with the institution, particularly in her recurring role as a bridesmaid. The antagonism between Anita's lifestyle and the ritual aspects of marriage is highlighted in a scene from *The Laughing Corpse*, in which she examines herself in a bridesmaid dress: "The dress showed almost every scar I had" (13). Anita's scars, accumulated over the course of her career as a vampire executioner, make her appear monstrous in the frilly pink dress: "I looked like Frankenstein's bride goes to the prom" (ibid). The monstrousness of marriage is further illustrated in her second experience as a bridesmaid, when Anita dons a hideous orange gown for a Halloween wedding in the narrative's twelfth installment, *Incubus Dreams* (2004). Ironically, in a world defined by the existence of the paranormal, nothing is more frightening than the institution of marriage.

Domesticity—or more specifically, the possibility that safety and contentment can be found within the domestic sphere—is also deconstructed in both series. Once inducted into their respective supernatural worlds, Sookie and Anita endure repeated home invasions; Sookie, especially, often finds herself channeling her newfound wealth into reconstructions of her home in the aftermath of yet another monster attack. Hamilton also introduces the concept of the "freak party" in the Anita Blake novels, the preferred pastime for average Americans drowning in middle-class malaise. Those who can afford to do so hire vampires to entertain them in their own homes: "A few more blocks and we were in suburbia [...] The house was dark red brick, two, maybe three stories, lots of windows, at least two porches. Victorian America does still exist" (GP 135). The married couple that occupies this home is desperately in want of the kind of cheap thrill



that a few paid vampires can provide. In Hamilton's universe, there is no such thing as domestic bliss, a point rendered somewhat comically in an unusual encounter that occurs between Anita and the freak party's host, Harvey. Anita, who has attended the party for the sole purpose of gathering work-related information, enters the bathroom for a few moments of peace and quiet. She soon realizes, however, that Harvey is leering at her through the bathroom window: "I turned slowly, like a bad horror movie. Twilight hung against the sheer drapes, and a face peered out of the coming dark. It was Harvey, Mr. Leather" (148). Harvey's enjoyment of his own home seems to hinge upon his position as an outsider looking in. That Anita equates Harvey's view through the bathroom window with a "bad horror movie" further illuminates the tourist's desire for "sensations," as well as the subgenre's interrogation of the appeal of domestic spaces.

Harvey's objectification of Anita also serves as one of many examples that contributes to her construction as a particular type of vagabond. Unlike Sookie, Anita's mobility is not affected by a lack of money, education, or career opportunities. Prior to her romantic involvement with Jean-Claude, however, Anita constantly faces limitations on the basis of her gender. Both of her jobs—necromancy and vampire execution—require close and typically violent contact with supernatural creatures, and Anita's physical disadvantages in this line of work are addressed repeatedly: "I would bet on me against any human bad guy my size. Trouble was, there just weren't many bad guys my size. And vampires, well, unless I could bench press trucks, I was outclassed" (GP 91). Anita is effective in her chosen professions mainly because she is extraordinarily well-armed, but Hamilton often devotes lengthy passages to the difficulties that Anita

experiences in attempting to conceal her weapons in her clothing: “If you keep the gun in your purse, you get killed, because no woman can find anything in her purse in under twelve minutes [...] I finally settled on a less than professional look [...] It made me look and feel about sixteen, an awkward sixteen, but when I turned to the mirror there was no hint of the gun on my belt” (GP 91-2). Anita’s lines of work are depicted as incompatible with her gender, a point also illustrated in her inability to wear a bridesmaid dress without showing off her job-related scars. Further, most of Anita’s encounters with men—human or otherwise—during her investigations are punctuated with blatant sexism: “He spoke softly, and there was a look in his dark eyes, a curve to his mouth. I didn’t have to speak the language to know that I was being propositioned. Or insulted” (LC 37). Anita is perfectly capable of defending herself if necessary, but her gender is a near constant obstacle in her working life. In his discussion of vagabond immobility, Bauman argues that “To desire is not enough; to make the desire truly desirable, and so to draw the pleasure from the desire, one must have a reasonable hope of getting closer to the desired object” (85-6). Anita’s gender is the single component of her identity that inhibits her ability to fully experience the adventures that her professions should afford.

Furthermore, Anita finds it impossible to reconcile her work identity with any conventional form of romance: “A very ex-boyfriend once described me as a little china doll. He meant it as a compliment. I didn’t take it that way. There are reasons why I don’t date much” (GP 9). As a woman who tracks and executes vampires for a living, Anita not only has zero interest—and zero stake—in becoming a “little china doll” during her off hours; more importantly, her ability to do her job (and not get killed in the

process) depends upon her refusal to be “soft.” As Linda J. Holland-Toll argues in “Harder than Nails, Harder than Spade: Anita Blake as ‘The Tough Guy’ Detective” (2004), Anita struggles to navigate a gendered “double bind”: “If Anita is not tough physically and mentally, the monsters will eat her for breakfast, but if she is tough, she faces constant disapproval from a culture that defines women as not tough” (182). It should come as no surprise, then, that Anita rejects any possibility of romance—or sex—for the first five novels of the series, opting instead to focus on her dual career.

When Anita finally consummates a sexual relationship with Jean-Claude in *The Killing Dance*, it becomes clear that vampires are the most desirable romantic partners for a woman in her position: “I’d been virtuous for so long, but when I lost it, I lost it big time. From celibacy to fucking the undead” (*Burnt Offerings* 247). Her ongoing blood exchange with Jean-Claude functions as a gender equalizer; she gains the strength, speed, and stamina—as well as healing abilities—to become more competitive at work. By the eleventh installment, *Cerulean Sins* (2003), Anita has achieved federal marshal status for vampire execution. In other words, her relationship with Jean-Claude leads to geographical mobility at work, as she is no longer restricted by state boundaries. More importantly, Jean-Claude has no desire for a conventional, heteronormative relationship with Anita. As a tourist himself, he enjoys variety; Jean-Claude has numerous sexual partners—male, female, vampire, shape-shifter, and human—and he never imposes a double standard on Anita’s sex life. Like werewolves, vampires subscribe to few of the cultural norms that govern human behavior; the former view the containment of sexuality as “unnatural,” while the latter have experienced—firsthand—

too many cultural transformations to ascribe value to any particular set of sexual behaviors or choices. When Anita chooses Jean-Claude, she also chooses to embrace his perspective on sexuality. The fact that she chooses Jean-Claude over a more “conventional” hero—the werewolf, Richard<sup>14</sup>—highlights her rejection of traditional romance: “What to do with the two men in my life? [...] In Richard’s arms ... is the closest I’ve ever found to my mother’s arms [...] There is nothing comforting about Jean-Claude’s arms. He doesn’t make me feel safe in the least. He’s like some forbidden pleasure that you know eventually you’ll regret” (*Bloody Bones* 370). In vampire romances, werewolves like Richard function as foils to the vampire heroes. Richard desires monogamy, marriage, and children with Anita; despite their transformative abilities, Hamilton’s male werewolves are constructed as family-oriented protectors in regressive contrast to her vampire heroes. Anita, like the werewolf heroines of the preceding chapter, has no need for the safety and protection that Richard offers, especially once she exchanges blood with Jean-Claude. It is precisely the lack of safety—i.e. the promise of adventure—that ultimately makes Jean-Claude a more desirable partner for Anita.

Harris creates a similar contrast between vampires and shape-shifters in the Southern Vampire series. In the fourth novel, *Dead to the World* (2004), Sookie’s brother, Jason, becomes romantically involved with a local girl named Crystal, who is later revealed to be a werepanther. Although both Sookie and her brother explore paranormal relationships, Harris suggests that the consequences of dating a shape-shifter

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<sup>14</sup> Anita eventually reinitiates a relationship with Richard, once he accepts that their relationship will never be monogamous.

are significantly different than those of dating a vampire. While her vampire heroes enjoy full economic and geographical mobility, her werepanthers are poverty stricken and “locally tied”: “Hotshot was even smaller than Bon Temps. It was about ten miles away and had a reputation for being a strange little community [...] These were small houses, none of them brick. Most of them had several cars in the front yard. Some of them sported a rusty swing set” (DTTW 117, 131). In addition to having meager financial resources, the werepanther community of Hotshot is territorial and extremely suspicious of outsiders, which has led to severe inbreeding: “The way he moved was not human [...] Felton, I thought, was closer to reverting to his animal nature. Inbreeding had definitely left its mark on him” (DTTW 271-2). Werewolf romances feature shape-shifters who transform absolutely and revel in their bodily flexibility. Harris’ werepanthers, on the other hand, become trapped in bodies that are neither fully human nor fully feline. The werewolf’s access to “place-identity” is reconfigured, in vampire romances, as vagabond status. Shortly after Jason begins dating Crystal, he is bitten by one of her cousins and transformed into a werepanther. Jason then becomes a reluctant resident of Hotshot, and his membership in the community is sealed when he marries Crystal in what amounts to a “shotgun” wedding. In both series, shape-shifters—and the lifestyles they represent—are linked to the institution of marriage. Anita’s rejection of Richard is also a rejection of the institution of marriage; neither will free her from the confines of a gendered identity. Similarly, Jason’s wedding to Crystal highlights the fact that marriage—for a resident of Bon Temps, Louisiana—only helps ensure that its practitioners remain vagabonds. Marriage, like shape-shifters, becomes conflated with a stifling and undesirable stability.

Ultimately, both series seem to argue that marriage constitutes the absence of adventure, and that tourism offers a far more seductive fantasy for contemporary readers of vampire romance. That said, the heroines' refusal to fully embrace tourism—by becoming vampires themselves—suggests that this fantasy is not explored without guilt and anxiety. The downside of vampires “coming out of the coffin” is that they, like humans, are subject to laws and regulations. A universe filled with vampire tourists is also a universe in which vampires don't transform humans against their will; the existence of “fangbangers” certainly alleviates the need, and any vampire who is tempted to break the law knows that an executioner like Anita Blake is ready to mete out punishment. Unlike werewolf heroines, in other words, the protagonists of vampire romance must consciously choose to become vampires, and their heroes are certainly willing to effect the transformation. As Hamilton and Harris illustrate, this is an impossible choice; the heroines gain access to tourism only because they demonstrate that they don't desire it. To choose otherwise would locate Anita and Sookie as “scheming adventuresses,” arguably a more compelling description of Bauman's global tourists than the conventional romance characters who had the audacity to acknowledge the economic benefits of marriage. These novels suggest that the rise of consumer capitalism has facilitated provocative new fantasies for women readers of romance, but the double bind that enforces a careful negotiation of this fantasy remains virtually unchanged.

### **Conclusion: The Corporatization of Popular Romance**

This dissertation project identifies “corporate” and “paranormal” romance, in their multiple manifestations, as subgenres of popular romance that emerge in the 1990s to specifically address changing ideals about love and intimacy in the context of a flexible capitalist economy and its effects on contemporary culture. That said, in explicating the formulaic conventions of these romance types, I have come to realize that all twenty-first century romance fiction with a contemporary setting contains some of the primary characteristics of corporate romance. The romance heroine of today is a woman with a fully fledged career who faces the difficult negotiation of work and home life. Similarly, while the paranormal romance offers a wide range of supernatural creatures with their own unique attributes, the subgenre’s core fantasy always seems to entail the exploration of flexible identities and consumption practices. The ongoing popularity of historical romances suggests that more traditional (and distinctly gendered) fantasies about love and romance remain appealing for many readers, but it is worth noting that such narratives are now located firmly in the past.

More interestingly perhaps, the “corporate” and “paranormal” subgenres seem to mark the emergence of a uniquely American romance novel. As noted in the introduction, the formulaic conventions of popular romance can be traced back to the British novel of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first mass-market romance novels sold in the U.S. were British imports; it was not until the early 1970s that American writers—like Kathleen Woodiwiss and Janet Dailey—began contributing to the genre (Mussell 30). The United Kingdom also remains a dominant setting for contemporary historical

romances, a point that becomes particularly apparent in the Romance Writers of America's classification of the Regency romance as a distinct subgenre, due to the plethora of historical novels with a Regency setting.<sup>15</sup> Of course, authorship and setting alone cannot define a novel's national concerns. What should be clear, however, is the centrality of "Americanness" in the romances that have served as the foci of this project. At the core of the Krentzian corporate romance is a specifically American corporation that affects—and is affected by—the protagonists who identify it as both work and home. The American corporation and the American family are similarly conflated in Elizabeth Lowell's *Jade Island*; Kyle's transformation of Lianne is also an American transformation of the "regressive" Chinese corporation. Katherine Stone's *Pearl Moon* suggests, on the surface, that it is concerned with the international tension between China and Great Britain, yet it is the "small town" American characters who ultimately facilitate the "democratization" of Hong Kong. The romances of Nora Roberts elaborate on the healing power of a small-town community that is also specifically American in its construction; Ardmore may be physically located in Ireland, but it is legitimized by an American heroine who claims it as home and gives voice to its history through an American publication. In the werewolf romances of Armstrong and Vaughn, lycanthropy enables the protagonists to claim a "place-identity" that is also firmly rooted in American soil; for Elena, especially, becoming a werewolf means becoming an American citizen. Even the vampire romances of Hamilton and Harris, which seem to celebrate global tourism and the erosion of national borders, centralize an American consumer identity.

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<sup>15</sup> See <[http://www.rwanational.org/cs/romance\\_literature\\_subgenres](http://www.rwanational.org/cs/romance_literature_subgenres)>



In Hamilton's universe, the United States is the only nation in the world to legalize vampirism, and in Harris', it becomes the nation of choice for vampires who wish to fully explore entrepreneurialism and consumer capitalism. The identification of an authentic America, in the face of globalization, appears to be a central concern in these emergent subgenres of romance fiction. What these contemporary romances ultimately reflect are the experiences and anxieties of American women who are negotiating significant tensions under flexible capitalism—the navigation of home and work (and romantic and confluent love), the erosion of a clear boundary between the local and global community, as well as competing fantasies of flexibility and stability. Further, they suggest that the reconciliation of changing cultural norms with persistent patriarchal conditions is, for heroines and readers alike, perhaps the most difficult negotiation of all.

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