



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE
STUDY OF POPULAR ROMANCE

Think Globally, Love Locally?

The 7th International Conference on Popular Romance Studies
Sydney, Australia, June 27-29, 2018

PROGRAM



REGISTRATION | 8.30 – 9.30 AM

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION | 9.30 - 10.00 AM

SESSION 1: Romancing Australia | 10.00 - 11.30 AM

Chair: Kim Wilkins

“Colonial Reinscription and Imperial Nostalgia in Tricia Stringer’s *Flinders Ranges Series*” - Amy T. Matthews and Amy Mead (Flinders University)

“Women in Akubras: Paratexts, patriotism, and a professional blurb-writer” - Kate Cuthbert

“Australia as Bachelor Nation: Falling in Love Locally on *The Bachelor/ette Australia* - Jodi McAlister (Deakin University)

MORNING TEA | 11.30 - 11.45 AM

SESSION 2: Gender and Sexuality | 11.45- 1.15 PM

Chair: Lisa Fletcher

“Asexual romance in an allosexual world: how asexual characters (and authors) create space for romantic love” - Ellen Carter (University of Strasbourg)

“Rural habitus, young love and control: Young men talk about (hetero)romance, ‘territory-marking’ and living rurally in Aotearoa/New Zealand” - Christina Vogels (AUT New Zealand)

“‘Shipping’ Larry Stylinson: What Makes Pairing Appealing Boys Romantic?” - Andrea Anne Trinidad (Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines)

LUNCH | 1.15- 2.00 PM

SESSION 3: Places and Spaces of Love | 2.00 – 3.30 PM

Chair: Amy T. Matthews

“Finding One’s Place, Making a Home in Nora Roberts’ *Divine Evil* (1992) and *The Obsession* (2016)” - Kecia Ali (Boston University)

“For the Love of the Farm: Romance and Locale in TV’s Queen Sugar” - Jacqueline Jones (LaGuardia CC, City University of New York)

“Nobody puts romance fiction in the corner: the cognitive dalliance of physical places and digital spaces in public libraries” - Vassiliki Veros (University of Technology, Sydney)

AFTERNOON TEA | 3.30-3.45 PM

SESSION 4: KEYNOTE PANEL | 3.45 - 5.00 PM

Chair: Eric Murphy Selinger

“Romancing Popular Fiction Studies: A Theory of Genre Worlds”

Beth Driscoll (University of Melbourne), Lisa Fletcher (University of Tasmania) and Kim Wilkins (University of Queensland)

SESSION 5: History and Romance | 9.00 - 10.30 AM

Chair: Sarah Ficke

“Georgette Heyer’s Unruly Eighteenth Century” - Stephanie Russo (Macquarie University)

“History Ever After: Fabricated Historical Chronotopes in Romance Genre Fiction” - Jennifer Wallace

“‘He Looks like he’s Stepped out of a Painting’: the Idealization and Appropriation of Italian Timelessness through the Experience of Romantic Love” - Francesca Pierini (Academia Sinica, Taiwan)

MORNING TEA | 10.30 - 10.45 AM

SESSION 6: Power and Patriarchy | 10.45-12.45 PM

Chair: Amy Burge

“The Soft Power of Popular Romance” - Heather Schell (George Washington University)

“Dangerous Loves Endangered: Nationalism, Violence and Territorialization in US Paramilitary Romance Fiction” - Nattie Golubov (Centro de Investigaciones sobre América del Norte, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México)

“The Single-Mother and the Law: Romance Novels Making Room for Female Voices in Patriarchal Spaces” - Therese Dryden (University of Newcastle)

“One of the Guys? Eve Dallas as a Masculine Worker Heroine in J.D. Robb’s *In Death* series” - Jayashree Kamblé (LaGuardia CC, City University of New York)

LUNCH | 12.45 - 1.45 PM

SESSION 7: 19th Century Legacies | 1.45 - 3.15 PM

Chair: Erin S. Young

“House, Home, and Husband in Historical Romance Fiction” - Sarah Ficke (Marymount University)

“Beloved Monstrosity: Romance and Romanticism in *Frankenstein*” - Steven Gil

“Reader, I mirrored him: the recasting of romance tropes in Jane Eyre fanfiction” - Lucy Sheerman

AFTERNOON TEA | 3.15-3.30 PM

SESSION 8: Muslim and Middle Eastern Romances | 3.30-5.30 PM

Chair: Kecia Ali

“Muslims Reading Romance: Bruneian considerations of “halal” and romance novels” - Kathrina Daud (University of Brunei)

“Reading and Writing Muslim Romance Online” - Claire Parnell (University of Melbourne)

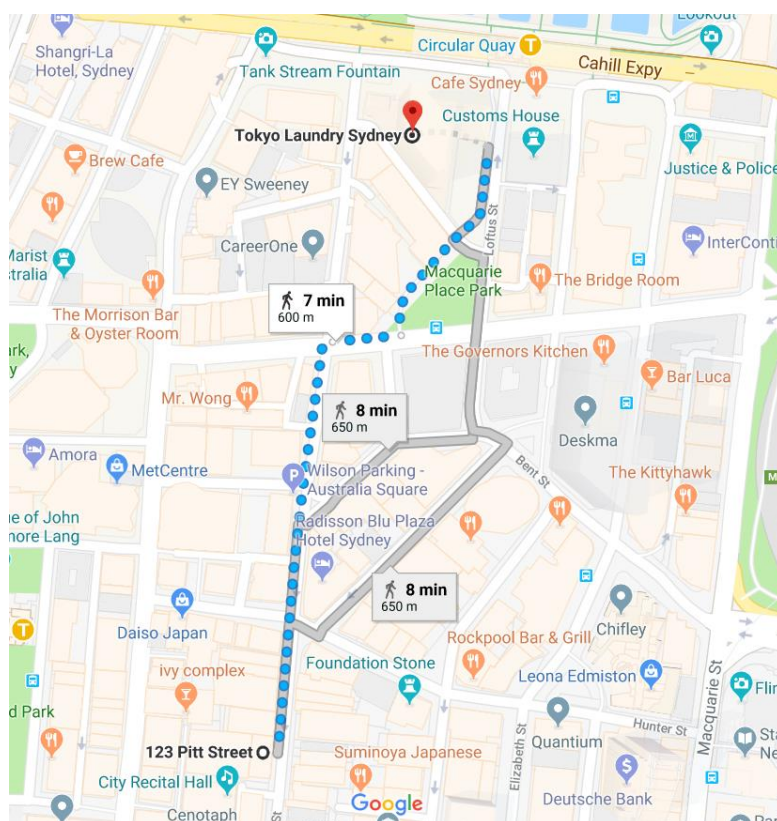
“The Kitchen and Beyond: Romantic Chronotope of Pakistani Popular Fiction” - Javaria Farooqui (University of Tasmania)

“*Girls of Riyadh* and *Desperate in Dubai*: Reading and writing romance in the Middle East” - Amy Burge (University of Birmingham)

CONFERENCE DINNER | 6.30 PM

Tokyo Laundry

Level 1, Gateway Shopping Centre, 1 Macquarie Place, Circular Quay.
\$30pp excluding drinks



SESSION 9: Romancing Chinese Worlds | 9.00 - 11.00 AM

Chair: Hsu-Ming Teo

“Topography of Romantic Love: Journeys, the Fantasy of Love, and Identity Crisis” - Fang-Mei Lin (National Taiwan Normal University)

“On the Way to a Better Life: Countryside themed romance in recent Chinese Television” - Huike Wen (Willamette University)

“Life Is Elsewhere: The Economy of Food and Sex in Chinese Web Romance” - Jin Feng (Grinnell College)

“Romance in Chinatown: The Love Stories of Edith Maude Eaton” - Erin S. Young (SUNY Empire State College)

MORNING TEA | 11.00 - 11.15 AM

SESSION 10: South/South-East Asian Romance Communities | 11.15 - 12.15 PM

Chair: Jayashree Kamblé

“Negotiating Romantic Love in India: Family, Public Space, and Popular Cinema” - Meghna Bohidar (University of Delhi)

“In conversation with Mina V. Esguerra” - Kat Mayo

LUNCH | 12.15 - 1.15 PM

Book launch: *The Popular Culture of Romantic Love in Australia*, edited by Hsu-Ming Teo

SESSION 11: Subversions of Race, Culture and History | 1.15 - 2.45 PM

Chair: Athena Bellas

“The Wild Heart of the Continent: Love and Place in Sherry Thomas’s Silk Road Romance Novels” - Eric Murphy Selinger (DePaul University)

“Love is (Color) Blind: Race, Belonging, and Nation in 21st Century Historical Romance Fiction” - Mallory Jagodzinski (Indiana University South Bend)

“‘You stayed’: Love, law and the reservation in Jenna Kernan’s Apache Protectors series” - Johanna Hoorenman (Utrecht University)

AFTERNOON TEA | 2.45-3.00 PM

SESSION 12: Love in Other Worlds | 3.00-5.00 PM

Chair: Jodi McAlister

“Love in Outer Space: Science fiction romance—the ideal place to explore gender and love” - Donna Hanson (University of Canberra)

“Representations of Otherness in Paranormal Romance: Nalini Singh and J.R. Ward” - María T. Ramos-García (South Dakota State University)

“*Outlander’s* Tactile Caress: a Multisensory Romance” - Athena Bellas (University of Melbourne)

“Basically Quite Weird”: The Queer Medievalist Virtual Romance of Alexis Hall’s *Looking for Group* - Kristin Noone (Irvine Valley College)

CLOSE OF CONFERENCE – Eric Murphy Selinger | 5.00-5.15 PM

SESSION 1: Romancing Australia**“Colonial Reinscription and Imperial Nostalgia in Tricia Stringer’s *Flinders Ranges Series*”**

- Amy T. Matthews and Amy Mead (Flinders University)

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The rise in Ozstorical fiction (romantic sagas of the nineteenth century Australian frontier) has seen the return of colonial values and the fetishisation of Australian settler myths. Tricia Stringer’s *Flinders Ranges* trilogy (*Heart of the Country*, *Dust on the Horizon*, and *Jewel in the North*) follow three families from the 1840s-1890s as they make their fortunes in the ‘beautiful and brutal’ landscapes of the Flinders Ranges in remote South Australia. Ozstorical fiction has yet to receive the same critical attention that Australian historical literary fiction has been subject to, particularly in terms of colonial representation and the reinscription of racism. When Kate Grenville released *The Secret River* and their sequels, she was under intense critical scrutiny. Tricia Stringer (and other Ozstorical authors such as Tea Cooper and Darry Fraser) have evaded such attention, perhaps because of their positioning as commercial (and particularly romantic women’s fiction) authors. Yet the very nature of their commercial status, and thus their wide readership, makes them a powerful cultural and colonial force, particularly when it comes to narratives of white settlement and the impact on First Nations people. Revisiting Renato Rosaldo’s concept of imperial nostalgia and Homi Bhabha’s colonial fetishism, we will argue the naïve romantic filter of these fictions reinscribes colonialism, acting as another wave of whitewashing and a further act of possession of history and country.

Amy T. Matthews is an award-winning novelist, Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at Flinders University, and the Chair of Writers SA. She writes literary fiction under her own name, and historical romance under the name Tess LeSue. Tess’s ‘Frontiers of the Heart’ series is published by Penguin Random House/Jove USA. Amy’s research focuses on the politics of representation, from the ethics of representing the Holocaust to the intersections of feminism and race in romance.

Amy Mead

Amy Mead is a PhD candidate in English at Flinders University. Her thesis is preliminarily titled ‘Melbourne after Jill Meagher: Contemporary Australian Culture and Women’s Right to the City.’ Amy is co-editing special issues of *Westerly* and *M/C Journal*, due to be released in September and October 2018 respectively. She has been published in *Antipodes* and *M/C Journal*.

“Women in Akubras: Paratexts, patriotism, and a professional blurb-writer” -

Kate Cuthbert

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One should never judge a book by its cover, but a book’s cover, blurb, shoutline, and marketing text are a rich source of potential analysis. Drawing from Gerard Genette’s work on paratexts as a threshold between the text and the work that accompanies a text, this paper examines the presentation of commercially produced Australian rural romance novels (RuRo). I will analyse the key terms and images on RuRo covers that are used to denote, describe, and evoke rurality as a setting, and examine the rhetoric that seeks to persuade a potential reader to purchase the book. Considering four key paratextual elements – cover, blurb, shoutline, and marketing text – this paper will argue that publishers are accessing and broadcasting an emotional vocabulary, still strongly associated with pastoral living, through their choice of images (for example,

women in hats), their choice of title vocabulary (the use of naturally occurring elements), and the call outs included in the blurbs to home, community, and connection. These elements combine to link the marketing of a halcyon past with the present commercial success of RuRo in the literary marketplace.

Kate Cuthbert is Managing Editor of Escape Publishing, Harlequin Australia's digital-first imprint. She is also an award-winning book reviewer and critic, and is currently pursuing a PhD examining rural settings in Australian popular fiction.

“Australia as Bachelor Nation: Falling in Love Locally on *The Bachelor/ette Australia*” - Jodi McAlister (Deakin University)
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The Bachelor/ette is a franchise with iterations in multiple major Anglophone countries. It began in the USA in 2002, but in the last five years, new versions of the franchise have emerged in the UK (2011-12), Canada (2012-), Australia (2013-), and New Zealand (2015-). While *The Bachelor/ette* is an instantly recognisable global franchise, the proliferation of national versions has made clear that there are also important local variations. The American version of the show frequently invokes “Bachelor Nation”: and this is, I will argue, a space with distinct national borders.

This paper will centre on *The Bachelor/ette Australia* (colloquially known locally by the term *Bachie*). By reading *Bachie* cross-culturally and comparing it to other iterations of the franchise, I will explore the ways in which romantic love is imagined in a nationally specific way. I will examine the important departures *Bachie* has made in structure from other iterations and the ways in which these departures contribute to the construction of a mode of romance which is distinctively local as well as global. This will involve an analysis of the role played by sex in *Bachie*, the spaces in which it is and is not appropriate for *Bachie* and contestant to kiss, and the semantic emphasis placed on phrases like “I love you” and “I’m falling in love with you”.

As well as exploring specific case studies from various seasons of the show, this paper will examine fan reactions. Australia has a strong culture of recapping and livetweeting *Bachie* (a practice I participate in). By exploring Australian fan interactions with *Bachie* and the ways in which contestants can become fan favourites, I will examine what kind of romantic narratives and hero/ines appeal to the Australian audience, and the ways in which these might be specifically local as well as global.

Jodi McAlister is a Lecturer in Writing and Literature at Deakin University in Melbourne. Her research focuses on representations of romantic love and popular fiction. She is also an author of young adult fiction, and her novels *Valentine* (2017), *Ironheart* (2018), and *Misrule* (2019) are published by Penguin Teen Australia. You can find her on Twitter at @JodiMcA.

SESSION 2: GENDER AND SEXUALITY

“Asexual romance in an allosexual world: how asexual characters (and authors) create space for romantic love” - Ellen Carter (University of Strasbourg)
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Recent years have seen a surge in contemporary romance novels with asexual main characters who, despite not experiencing sexual attraction, still yearn for romantic and emotional connection and their ‘happily ever after’. They must navigate as outsiders in an allosexual (non-asexual) world where sexual attraction is deemed ‘normal’, and where asexuals are pitied, assumed to be unwell, or suspected of having survived sexual abuse.

This corpus study of forty novels explores four approaches adopted by asexual characters when negotiating romantic space in an allosexual world: an open or closed relationship with an allosexual character; a polyamorous relationship with two (or more) allosexuals; or pairing up with another asexual character. Except for asexual–asexual relationships, these novels therefore tread unfamiliar territory in romance fiction because the sexual desires of the main characters are not aligned. In allosexual romance novels, a libido mismatch signifies an underlying physical or emotional problem to be overcome by one or more characters. However, in asexual romance fiction, non-aligned libidos are the norm and the characters must work together to understand each other’s sexual and romantic desires, and to co-create a new space in which all can thrive.

In analysing how asexual romance fiction achieves HEA (or HFN), I look at several factors, including the process of coming out as asexual, the co-occurrence of other LGBTQIA orientations and identities, and the impact of #ownvoices: how depictions of asexual characters by authors who share this marginalised identity with their protagonists differ from those written by allosexuals.

Ellen Carter is a senior lecturer in English language and translation studies at the University of Strasbourg (France) and a member of the LiLPa (Linguistique, Langues, Parole) research group. As well as asexual romance fiction, her current research is on the phonology of hero/ine’s names in straight and gay romance fiction.

Rural habitus, young love and control: Young men talk about (hetero)romance, ‘territory-marking’ and living rurally in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Christina Vogels (AUT University)

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Research on rurality and (hetero)romantic relationships indicates that adult men and women who live rurally are more likely to take on traditional notions of gendered roles within these romantic couplings (see Little, 2003, 2007). This presentation will contribute to this body of work by analysing how younger men (aged 16) from a rural high school in Aotearoa/New Zealand make sense of (hetero)romance. Like their adult counterparts, young men endorsed conventional ways of being ‘good’ boyfriends, like protecting one’s girlfriend and carrying out populist romantic gestures like buying flowers and paying for dinner-dates. Alongside these seemingly innocuous suggestions, however, were endorsements of more malevolent boyfriend practices designed to control women. By specifically exploring young men’s talk about ‘territory-marking’ (defined here as boyfriends using possessive strategies to control *how* their girlfriends interact with other young men), I argue that a rural habitus may influence how young men make sense of this practice. In particular, the rules of territory-marking that young men discussed privileged a rurally-situated muscular ‘farmer’ body who would be able to mark his territory by fist-fighting other young men. This evoking of the ‘farmer’ body within young men’s talk indicates that embodying a “muscular morality” (Mangan, 2012, p. 10) is integral to achieving a rural version of hegemonic masculinity (Schippers, 2007). Within this presentation, I will tease out these findings as well as discuss how these sense-makings speak to the kind of boyfriends rural young men think they *should* be.

Dr Christina Vogels is a senior lecturer from Auckland University of technology’s School of Communication Studies. Her research is underpinned first and foremost by a passion for violence against women prevention. Her doctoral work involved a feminist analysis of how young men, from a rural high school in Aotearoa/New Zealand, understand being boyfriends. At the core of this study was an exploration of young masculinities and how femininities are constructed in young men’s sense-makings. Her other research interests also include interrogating gender representations within young adult fiction/film and exploring the popular

romance. Christina's conceptual influences include feminist Bourdieusian theory, critical masculinities studies and a critical feminist appraisal of femininities within the social world.

“‘Shipping’ Larry Stylinson: What Makes Pairing Appealing Boys Romantic?” - Andrea Anne Trinidad (Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines)
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This paper intends to focus on Filipina teenager fans (who also call themselves as 'Filo Fangirls') who write and consume texts such as fan fictions, fan arts, Alternative Universe or AUs, real events turned into conspiracy theories and social media posts focused on the Male to Male (M/M) Romantic and Erotic Relationship of one of the most talked about ship (a frequently used term in fangirl vocabulary that refers to a fictional relationship supported by a fan) in the music industry at present-- Larry Stylinson, from the combined names of Harry Styles and Louis Tomlinson, who are members of the British-Irish boyband One Direction who won 3rd place in the reality-talent television show X-Factor UK in 2010 and who are now venturing the world of entertainment by being solo artists with top charting hits. Despite existing for 7 years, the strong fan base, who calls themselves as 'Larry shippers' or simply 'Larries,' supports the continuous production and circulation of a huge volume of texts through online discussions and writer (producer)-reader (consumer) collaboration embedded in channels designed to contain fan-written fictions such as Wattpad and Archive of Our Own and other social media sites.

These female reader-writers who on one hand try to conceive a non-heteronormative environment for M/M relationships to thrive in order to display their belief of a real, but management-hidden and manipulated relationship of Harry and Louis to sustain the required boyband image, also uses heteronormative conventions of what is romantic as a backbone for their narratives. In doing so, it is also apparent that their writing-reading process do not fail in presenting its alternative formula in terms of genre, theme, character types, etc. to make the romantic, domestic, and erotic relationship between Harry and Louis romantically desirable and sometimes sexually pleasurable for the female fans who are not precisely familiar with the situation and environment a gay couple is immersed in on the basis that they themselves do not directly belong to this particular kind of relationship they write and read about.

Andrea Anne I. Trinidad obtained her AB Filipino Literature degree from the Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines and is currently on the final stage of completing her MA in Filipino Literature in the same university. She has been a graduate assistant of the Filipino Department for a year where she took over various Filipino classes for College Freshmen and helped oversee the first Filipino Studies Conference spearheaded by the department where she presented a critique of gender studies in the Philippines. Being a proud fan girl on the side, her academic interests include fan studies and its underlying practices and dynamics as an online/ offline community.

SESSION 3: PLACES AND SPACES OF LOVE

“Finding One’s Place, Making a Home in Nora Roberts’ *Divine Evil* (1992) and *The Obsession* (2016)” - Kecia Ali (Boston University)
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In a book in progress, I survey Nora Roberts’ extensive oeuvre and argue that her imagined good life depends on four interdependent elements: being where one is supposed to be, with the correct romantic partner, supported by extended family or community, doing the work one is supposed to do. The prominence of each element varies from book to book and series to series. Recognizing one’s rightful place—a region, a town, or even a house—is sometimes merely a background thread. Sometimes, however, it forms the warp on which a novel’s narrative is

woven. While there has recently been some attention to Roberts' island settings (Crane and Fletcher 2017), and to the role of New York in her pseudonymous Robb novels (Kamblé 2017), there is no synthetic account of how place functions in her work. This paper contributes to that endeavor by exploring two romantic suspense novels which emphasize place.

Although they are separated by twenty-four years, *Divine Evil* (1992) and *The Obsession* (2016) mirror each other significant ways. Both heroines are artists who have escaped, in one way or another, from childhood encounters where they witnessed sexual violence. Their relocations to places where they can work productively—settling in a new locale in *The Obsession*, returning to a hometown in *Divine Evil*—catalyze the novels' plots, both suspense and romantic. Reading the books in tandem reveals continuities as well as shifts in Roberts' concerns: for instance, her more recent work lavishes greater attention on domestic interiors while maintaining the same insistence on the importance of finding the place one fits. Once in the right place, the rest of the elements necessary for happily ever after can fall into place.

Kecia Ali is Professor of Religion at Boston University. In addition to her most recent book, *Human in Death: Morality and Mortality in J. D. Robb's Novels* (Baylor 2017), she is the author of several books about Islam. Her research focuses on gender, sexuality, and ethics. Her current projects include an introductory book on *Women in Muslim Traditions* as well as a study of Nora Roberts' romances. You can read more about her at www.keciaali.com.

"For the Love of the Farm: Romance and Locale in TV's Queen Sugar" - Jacqueline Jones
(LaGuardia CC, City University of New York)
jacjones@lagcc.cuny.edu

From *When the Levees Broke* (2006) and *Treme* (2010), to *Beast of the Southern Wild* (2012), in American television and film post-Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans and rural Louisiana have been portrayed as dark spaces in which African Americans contend with poverty, displacement, and gentrification. While these issues remain central concerns for Louisiana's black community, Ava DuVerney's *Queen Sugar* (2016) also portrays these locales as romantic.

Queen Sugar follows estranged siblings Nova, Ralph Angel, and Charley Bordelon who are reunited through the sudden death of their father, which results in the siblings inheriting an eight-hundred-acre sugar cane farm. Ralph Angel, a single father and ex-con, lived and worked with his father at the farm; Nova is a journalist and activist living in New Orleans; and Charley is the wife and manager of a NBA basketball player. Charlie and her son move from Los Angeles to Louisiana after her husband is involved in a cheating scandal.

Queen Sugar features long breathtaking shots of landscapes, the making of southern food, as well as community gatherings. The show's depictions of Louisiana are reminiscence of an older idyllic image of the south. However, *Queen Sugar* simultaneously depict a romantic south without ignoring the presence of important issues such as the Black Lives Matter movement. It is within this context that each Bordelon sibling begins and develops romantic courtships.

This paper explores the parallel narratives of romantic courtship and romanticized locale in Charley and Remy Newell, and Nova and Calvin's courtships on *Queen Sugar*. In each courtship, there is a dual effect in which the characters' engagement with and affection for their locale (for Charley and Remy it is the farm, but for Nova and Calvin its primarily a desire to strengthen New Orleans) deepen and enhance their romantic courtships.

Dr. Jacqueline Jones is an Associate Professor of English and the program director of the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Option at LaGuardia Community College. She earned her PhD from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in African American Studies in 2010. Her research interest includes 20th and 21st century African American literature and media studies, Black Women's Literature, and Literature of the Civil Rights Era. Publications include "It Still Matters: *The Cosby Show* and Sociopolitical Representation on Television" (*The 25 Sitcoms that Change Television*, ABC-CLIO 2018), and "We 'the People': Freedom, Civics, and the Neo-Slave

Narrative Tradition in August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*" (*Modern Language Studies*, Summer 2016).

"Nobody puts romance fiction in the corner: the cognitive dalliance of physical places and digital spaces in public libraries" - Vassiliki Veros (University of Technology, Sydney)

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Perceptions of public libraries see them as being democratic places providing social capital in aim to provide equal access to information including fictional reading (Goulding, 2008). However, choice of shelving and floor locations, and the separation of fiction collections according to genre can challenge this notion of equity. Through an examination of physical locations of romance fiction collections, analysis of catalogue records and interview data with public librarians, library practitioners are shown to "other" romance fiction in the library. This perception of lack of equity extends beyond the physical space to the cognitive space of the catalogue where the bibliographic record of a book is represented by its metadata; these analytical characteristics stand as surrogates in the record of the library's collection. This digital space of a library catalogue is cognitively intertwined with the library's physical location of its objects as the two are not mutually exclusive as in a digital dualism, but instead are an augmented reality of the everyday practices of the profession (Jurgenson, 2011; Gourlay, 2015). This study finds that the physical locations of romance fiction collections create inequity among the collections of the public library which can be mirrored in the cognitive space of the library catalogue. These places and spaces can be seen as expressions of the attitudes librarians hold towards romance fiction, a genre collection which is, thus, deemed less than equal.

Vassiliki Veros is currently a doctoral candidate in Information and Knowledge Management/Digital Information Management at the University of Technology Sydney. She has been a public library practitioner and educator since 1989 with experience in readers' advisory, collection development and information services. She is a founding member of the NSW Readers' Advisory Committee and has an ongoing interest in reader advocacy. Her research interests are in library practices, metadata interplays, Public Lending Rights and romance fiction. Her journal publications have been on romance fiction in public libraries, and on the marginalisation of children's reading.

SESSION 4: KEYNOTE PANEL

“ROMANCING POPULAR FICTION STUDIES: A THEORY OF GENRE WORLDS”

Beth Driscoll (University of Melbourne), Lisa Fletcher (University of Tasmania) and Kim Wilkins (University of Queensland)

This panel argues that romance fiction is at once distinctive for its textual conventions, social milieu and market profile, and similar to other popular genres in its patterns and practices. The study of romance—and of popular fiction more broadly—invites interdisciplinary research that straddles literary and cultural studies, as well as publishing studies and book history. To achieve this, we propose a theory of genre worlds. Our theoretical framework is attuned to the specificity of particular genres, recognises their commonalities, and situates them in relation to each other in the wider cultural field. Our central concept of the genre world is an adaptation of sociologist Howard S. Becker’s definition of an “art world” (1982). In art worlds, cultural works are viewed as the result of collective activity, reorienting study towards the network that helps create the work. These networks embody knowledge about how things are done via “conventions” which are “known to all or almost all well-socialized members.” Extending this, a “genre worlds” approach to research describes the collective activity that goes into the creation and circulation of genre texts, and is particularly focused on the communities, collaborations, and industrial pressures that drive and are driven by the processes of these socio-artistic formations. As we demonstrate through a series of case studies focused on twenty-first century Australian novels, the concept of genre worlds provides a methodology for a deeper understanding of romance and, more broadly, popular fiction, yielding new knowledge about how some of the most widely enjoyed texts in the world come into being.

Beth Driscoll, Lisa Fletcher and Kim Wilkins are chief investigators on the Australian Research Council Discovery Project, “Genre Worlds: Australian Popular Fiction in the Twenty-First Century” (2016-2018). They are currently co-authoring a monograph based on this research.

Beth Driscoll is Senior Lecturer in Publishing and Communications and Coordinator of the Arts and Cultural Management program at the University of Melbourne. She is the author of *The New Literary Middlebrow: Tastemakers and Reading in the Twenty-First Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). She researches contemporary cultures of publishing and reading and is a chief investigator on “New Tastemakers and Australia’s Post-digital Literary Culture” (2017-2019).

Lisa Fletcher is Associate Professor in English at the University of Tasmania. She is the author of *Historical Romance Fiction: Heterosexuality and Performativity* (2008), *Cave: Nature and Culture* (2015), and *Island Genres, Genre Island: Conceptualisation and Representation in Popular Fiction* (co-authored with Ralph Crane, 2017), and the editor of *Popular Fiction and Spatiality: Reading Genre Settings* (2016).

Kim Wilkins is Associate Professor in Writing and Program Director of the postgraduate writing, editing, and publishing program at the University of Queensland. She is also a writer of popular fiction, and has published 30 books across a number of genres, and for a range of audiences. Her work has been translated into twenty languages. Her academic work encompasses scholarship about fantasy fiction, the uses of medievalism in popular culture, genre fiction, and creative writing.

SESSION 5: HISTORY AND ROMANCE

“Georgette Heyer’s Unruly Eighteenth Century” - Stephanie Russo (Macquarie University)

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Georgette Heyer’s fame, both in her own time and in ours, is inextricably connected to her representation of Regency England. However, before Heyer wrote about the Regency, she was writing about the eighteenth century, setting her first six novels across the eighteenth century in both England and France. In this paper, I consider Heyer’s representation of the eighteenth century as a time of extremes: a time marked both by radical possibility and aristocratic decadence and violence. The men of Heyer’s eighteenth century, elaborately dressed in all manner of frills, jewels, wigs, and vibrant colours, have considerably more latitude for display than their Regency brothers, who must conform to the rigid standards of masculinity embodied by Beau Brummell. Heyer’s eighteenth century novels are also notable for their gender play, with cross-dressing heroes and heroines proliferating the narratives in ways not often possible in her later novels. However, the eighteenth century is also represented as a time of dangerous, casual violence. Heyer’s eighteenth century heroes think nothing of murder, gamble their entire fortunes in an evening, and have an acute sense of their own untrammelled power within the social worlds over which they rule: characteristics that become rather muted in Heyer’s later Regency heroes. Far more so than Heyer’s Regency world, Heyer’s eighteenth century is fundamentally unruly. Romance in Heyer’s eighteenth-century novels is thus figured as one of the few safe spaces for women, even while the heroes of these novels are radically, spectacularly unsafe. I argue that one of the reasons that the Regency became Heyer’s most popular setting was the comparative safety of the Regency world she creates: a much calmer locale than the decadent eighteenth-century world of her earlier novels.

Stephanie Russo specialises in early modern and eighteenth-century women’s writing. Her work has focused on exploring representations of politics, monarchy, power, and revolution. She has published widely on a range of female novelists of the eighteenth century. She is particularly interested in recovery work on non-canonical women writers of the eighteenth century. Her current research is focused on exploring the ways in which Anne Boleyn has figured as a symbol for a whole range of ideas about sex, history, politics, gender, religion and power. She is writing *The Literary Afterlife of Anne Boleyn* for Palgrave Macmillan’s *Queenship and Power* series (due to be completed in 2020). This project will span five hundred years of writing about the Tudors, from the work of Sir Thomas Wyatt, to contemporary literary, televisual and digital texts.

History Ever After: Fabricated Historical Chronotopes in Romance Genre Fiction

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Over eighty percent of bestselling historical romance books published in the first half of 2018 were set in Britain, either during the 19th century or the medieval period. These two fabricated chronotopes are selectively accurate to history and narrowly focused on high ranks of the nobility—in other words, they are “escapism.” This presentation will consider what escapism means in this context, who it serves, and who it harms. While any reader can enjoy a good duke Regency every once in a while, the net impact of the most popular chronotopes may be to corrode our understanding of history, marginalize anyone writing from a wider palette of settings and characters, and exclude authors of color.

Jennifer Wallace is the Head of the History Department at Groton School in Groton, Massachusetts. She has lived and worked in the Philippines and teaches one of the only secondary school courses specifically on American empire in the Philippines and Asia. Writing as Jennifer Hallock, she has set her own Sugar Sun historical romance series in the middle of the Philippine-American War. She has her bachelor's and master's degree in international affairs from the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. She also speaks at writing conferences on how to use microhistory to develop plot and character.

“He Looks like he’s Stepped out of a Painting’: the Idealization and Appropriation of Italian Timelessness through the Experience of Romantic Love” - Francesca Pierini

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Marina Fiorato's *The Glassblower of Murano* (2008) tells the story of Eleonora, a young woman who travels to Venice in search of her genealogical past and existential roots. Coming from London, Eleonora incarnates a “modern” outlook on what she assumes to be the timeless life and culture of Venice. At one point in the novel, admiring the old houses on the Canal Grande, Eleonora is “on fire with enthusiasm for this culture where the houses and the people kept their genetic essence so pure for millennia that they look the same now as in the Renaissance” (2008, 15). This discourse of pure origins and unbroken continuities is a fascinating fantasizing on characteristics that extend from the urban territory to the people who inhabit it. Within narratives centred on this notion, “falling in love in Italy” occasions the appropriation of a privileged relation with history and the past, often contrasted with the displacement and rootlessness that seem to characterize the modern places, people and lifestyles of England and North America. Through a discussion of two Anglo-American popular novels set in Italy, this paper proposes an exploration of the notion of romantic love as a force reconnecting displaced and fragmented souls with a supposedly timeless and unbroken society; a society perceived as holding a privileged relation with ancient traditions and the past. From a point in time when the dialectics of history have been allegedly transcended, Anglo-American popular narratives observe Italy as a timeless, pre-modern other, a place where the experience of romantic love carries within it the promise of a new identity.

Francesca Pierini is a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute of European and American Studies, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. Adjunct Assistant Professor of Italian at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University (2011-2015), she was an International Scholar at KU Leuven (2015-16). Forthcoming publications include the articles “Michel Foucault and Edward Said: The Knowledge of Power and the Foundation of Colonial Discourse Analysis” (J.Vrin); “Such is the Working of the Southern Mind: A Postcolonial Reading of E.M. Forster’s Italian Narratives” (Cambridge Scholars Publishing); “La Fiaba Oscura: Narrating Italy in Sarah Hall’s *How to Paint a Dead Man*,” in *Sarah Hall: Critical Essays*, Glyphi Contemporary Writers.

SESSION 6: POWER AND PATRIARCHY

“The Soft Power of Popular Romance” - Heather Schell (George Washington University)

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Political scientist Joseph Nye introduced the term “soft power” as a way of describing how nations might win hearts and allies without the use of military force or economics. Power, he says, is “a way to alter the behavior of others to get what you want”; soft power does this via “attraction” (Nye, “Think Again”). The potential for soft power resides in political values, policies, and, most

important for our purposes, culture. Culture is a resource requiring no governmental encouragement, yet it can still be leveraged. This concept has become quite popular in foreign policy circles. While indices of soft power focus on film, music, and sports as their metrics for cultural influence, it's obvious that Harlequin, with, as a NewsCorp press release from 2014 notes, "titles in 34 languages and sold in over 100 international markets," is a good example of soft power.

This paper will explore the value of soft power as a unifying lens for examining the popular romance. Political science scholarship has already employed it as a way to think about the international influence of Turkish soap operas; however, we can usefully extend the concept of soft power as a framework for popular romance more broadly. I will test it on four areas: the international distribution and influence of North American/Anglosphere popular romance; the feminist savior fantasy in sheikh romance; the fantasy many romance authors and scholars see as inherent to the genre, of the heroine "winning" by converting the hero to her worldview (through the soft power of his love of her); and, finally, pundits' recurring anxiety about the soft power of popular romance, expressing fears that the genre may shape the values of its readers.

Heather Schell has a background in Victorian popular literature and science studies (PhD, Stanford University). Before turning to the study of love and popular romance, she worked on tiger hunters' memoirs, pandemic disease thrillers, and the motif of the wicked seductress. Her current book project examines the exchange of romantic ideas and texts between Turkey and the United States. She is an assistant professor at the George Washington University, where she teaches courses on the politics of American science, as well as on the culture and practice of romantic love in the United States.

"Dangerous Loves Endangered: Nationalism, Violence and Territorialization in US Paramilitary Romance Fiction" - Nattie Golubov (Centro de Investigaciones sobre América del Norte, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México)
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This paper will discuss the geopolitical imaginary and the social as they are produced - defended and questioned- by romance novels written by contemporary US writers who focus on the relationship between ex-military men and women who belong to paramilitary organisations devoted to protecting national territory from within and abroad, either legitimately or illegitimately. I am thinking here, in particular, of novels written by Maya Banks, Cynthia Eden, Cindy Gerard, Lora Leigh or Tracy Hunter Abramson, among many others, who have authored best selling series based around the members of closely-knit civilian groups or security organisations and agencies. Although the geopolitical space imagined by this hybrid romance subgenre varies from one author to another and in accordance with the location and nature of the threat (foreign or domestic, individualised or from an organised group), I will argue that the risk-taking heterosexual couple enacts a distinctive US patriotism by embodying the virtues, beliefs, work ethic and character traits of a desirable (usually white) citizenship that defines itself against the enemy at home and abroad.

Danger is both a plot device and a condition of possibility for the relationship to flourish and endure, suggesting that the prevailing structure of feeling is one of "low-level fear", to quote Brian Massumi. Fear inevitably marks the representation of the social: the utopian impulse of the paramilitary romance is embedded in the dynamics of an ideal community, a self-regulated and self-sufficient social formation composed of independent individuals who choose to live together though they are not necessarily kin; though homosocial bonds prevail, the extended family is a metaphor for a nation that is manifestly identified as a homeland. Those novels set abroad critically address the personal and collective costs of a normalised state of perpetual war while simultaneously supporting US interventionism. In both settings, home and abroad, the novels explore the tensions between lawfulness, civilian resistance as national defence and a

patriotic coupledness that territorializes space in an effort to demarcate a safe zone in a social order experienced as increasingly threatened and precarious.

Nattie Golubov is professor of English at the Centro de Investigaciones sobre América del Norte, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Her research interests include literary and cultural theory. Her most recent publication is *El amor en tiempos neoliberales: apuntes críticos sobre la novela rosa contemporánea* (2017).

“The Single-Mother and the Law: Romance Novels Making Room for Female Voices in Patriarchal Spaces” - Therese Dryden (University of Newcastle)

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Single mothers are routinely subjected to scorn and censure from the media and political discourse, often dismissed as conniving welfare queens and as a drain on society. Research proves these images are fundamentally false. However, the biases these representations generate expose single mothers to potentially punitive measures. Nowhere is this more starkly reflected than within the patriarchal structure of the law. The law has been a primarily male province/space. Feminists in law and literature studies are demanding the inclusion of texts in law and literature courses that represent woman and her particular demands upon the law. My paper argues that romance novels have the potential to forge such a space for the female voice.

For my doctorate, I reference a corpus of twelve contemporary, single-title romance novels. In eight of these novels the heroine is confronted with a custody battle—or, more specifically, the threat of a custody battle. The corpus was not chosen with this theme in mind, it was coincidental, but as Janet Fink notes: “[romance fiction] takes the specific problems faced by women in a male-dominated world and explores possibilities for change and resolution”. This paper explores how these novels portray the injustices rife in the legal system, revealing an apparatus designed to promote male interests, often at the expense of women, and, in doing so, how they are issuing a challenge that protests against the current status quo.

Therese Dryden is a PhD candidate at the University of Newcastle. She has been writing for Harlequin Mills & Boon since 2007, under the pen name Michelle Douglas. Her 25th Harlequin Mills & Boon romance novel will be published in August this year.

“One of the Guys? Eve Dallas as a Masculine Worker Heroine in J.D. Robb’s *In Death* series” - Jayashree Kamblé (LaGuardia CC, City University of New York)

Harriet Bradley’s study of gender in work history documents how gender roles affect the practice and perception of labor. Her observations are crucial to understanding the labor of Eve Dallas, the murder cop in J.D. Robb’s long-running *In Death* romantic suspense series. This presentation examines how Eve’s job situates her in relation to the traditional binary of men’s work (dangerous, exciting, physical, outdoorsy) and women’s work (mundane, boring, domestic, and involving what Bradley terms a “personal care motif”).

Not only does Eve fall into the former (as a New York City homicide detective), the character is written in pointed opposition to the so-called womanly traits “natural” to her sex. She swears, enjoys physical challenges, and demonstrates roughness in humor and personal grooming. This portrait seems to reflect one consequence of the “double-bind” that Bradley says women encounter when they enter male dominated professions: either act like one of the guys and set aside female self-identity to get accepted in the workplace or be labelled as too female and by extension, an inferior worker.

Additionally, Bradley and Ruth Milkman’s argument that co-ed professional spaces are gendered differently depending on the inhabitant—e.g. the presence or absence of family photos—is key in recognizing that Eve’s office geography is framed as masculine.

Yet as the series progresses, the double bind loosens, showing Eve as possessing dual-gender professional traits. Further, while she still holds her own with the guys, her professional work space alters to include more “feminine” features. The series thus stages the operation of sex-typing in jobs, especially in a profession traditionally seen as androcentric, and the romance heroine’s journey from this reductive professional self toward an authentic worker self that rejects the double-bind.

Jayashree Kamblé is Associate Professor of English at LaGuardia Community College (CUNY). She is the author of *Making Meaning in Popular Romance Fiction* (2014) and has recently completed a chapter on how romance novel cover art influences media discourse on the genre (for the forthcoming Routledge *Research Companion to Popular Romance Studies*). She is one of the co-Vice-Presidents of IASPR.

SESSION 7: 19th century legacies

“House, Home, and Husband in Historical Romance Fiction” - Sarah Ficke (Marymount University)

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"My dearest sister, now be serious. I want to talk very seriously. Let me know every thing that I am to know, without delay. Will you tell me how long you have loved him?"

"It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley."

~ *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen (353)

Home. For Elizabeth Bennet, as for many real middle- and upper-class women during the Regency and Victorian periods, “home” was a concept fraught with anxiety. Legal restrictions on women’s right to own property, entailed estates, and limited economic opportunities meant that marriage was the most certain way for a woman to acquire a home of her own. It is no wonder that romantic novels from this time feature houses almost as prominently as they feature heroes. While legal and economic conditions have changed for British women since the nineteenth century, historical romance novels set in the Regency and Victorian periods often feature impoverished or otherwise disadvantaged women whose search for a husband is also a search for a home. In this paper, I will examine the role of houses and homes in twenty-first century historical romance fiction by authors like Courtney Milan and Cecilia Grant in order to discover how modern authors negotiate the husband-home dilemma that was so central to nineteenth-century British female novelists. Do these novels “offer the reader a retrospective view of how things *were*” in order to foreground the real possibilities of social change? (Wallace 154) Or are these books a “symbolic expression of female concerns” that persist today? (Hughes 107) How do these stories reimagine the historical conditions that fueled Elizabeth Bennet’s teasing remark to her sister, or Charlotte Lucas’s unromantic acceptance of Mr. Collins and his parsonage? Through these and other questions, I plan to shed light on the significance of the grand London houses and country estates that are too-often seen as merely a backdrop in historical romance fiction.

Dr. Sarah Ficke is an Associate Professor of Literature at Marymount University in Arlington, VA, USA. Her research and teaching interests focus on nineteenth-century British literature, early African-American fiction, and popular culture. Her publications include “Constructing a Post-Victorian Empire: *Rupert Gray, a Tale in Black and White*” (2015) and “Crafting Social Criticism: Infanticide in ‘The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point’ and *Aurora Leigh*” (2013), and she has presented conference papers on steampunk, time travel romance, and the works of

Beverly Jenkins. Her chapter on Historical Romance will appear in the forthcoming *Ashgate Companion to Popular Romance Fiction*.

“Beloved Monstrosity: Romance and Romanticism in *Frankenstein*” - Steven Gil
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Upon its bicentennial anniversary, Mary Shelley's, *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (1818) remains vested with significance. Most are aware of a simplified version of her narrative where a man 'playing God' creates new life only to be ultimately destroyed by his work. However, beneath this now archetypal mad science plot *Frankenstein* is also a tale of love found, sought, and lost. Previous examinations of romance in *Frankenstein* focus heavily or exclusively on the relationship between Victor Frankenstein and his Creature, variously cast as either abortive paternal/filial emotion or homoeroticism. But the dynamics between the characters are also heavily coloured by their own respective efforts to find romantic love: substantial parts of Victor's biographical portrait concern his love and eventual marriage to Elizabeth Lavenza; and when the Creature finds Victor he demands that the scientist produce another creation, a female, to be his bride. Despite the usual representation of him as wantonly irresponsible, it is Victor's fear for what a 'race' of these creatures will do to humanity that keeps him from completing the task. Denied his bride, the Creature then takes reciprocal revenge by killing Elizabeth. Space and place are key to the novel in general and have specific importance for both the Romantic and romance elements of the story: the domestic environment fosters Victor's love for Elizabeth (his cousin in the original and adopted sister in Shelley's 1831 revision) and is ultimately broken when the monster enters it to commit murder; and Victor is forced to hide his work on a female creation by conducting his efforts on the Orkney Islands. In line with its 200th anniversary, the main focus of this paper will be on Shelley's original novel. However, comparative assessments of the role and altered dynamics of romantic love in major adaptations will also be included.

Steven Gil is the Founding Editor of the *Journal of Science & Popular Culture*. His research focuses on the cultural history of science. Many of his current publications examine the presence, representation, and use of science in science fiction. Currently he is a Visiting Fellow at Queensland University of Technology's Science and Engineering Faculty. He is the author of *Science Wars through the Stargate* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015) as well as several articles and chapters.

“Reader, I mirrored him: the recasting of romance tropes in *Jane Eyre* fanfiction” - Lucy Sheerman
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Representations of Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* have proliferated since its publication. Within three months a play had been staged and at least eight plays had been performed by 1900. From 1910 onwards the story was also re-cast for film. Eight silent and fifteen feature film versions of the novel have been produced, each one offering distinct depictions of key scenes. Meanwhile fan fiction responses have created entirely new rooms, scenes and landscapes which further expand the imagined space of this iconic work.

In my paper I will consider how film versions of *Jane Eyre* have influenced recent fan fiction. Two of the most popular scenes recast by fan fiction authors are the first view of the hero - Jane Eyre's dramatic first encounter with Rochester as he plummets from his horse in a literal figuring of the coup de foudre - and the story's 'Happy Ever After' scene in which the hero and heroine achieve romantic union and resolution of the various obstacles faced during

the novel. These key scenes in *Jane Eyre* have fundamentally shaped the imagined territories of the romance novel.

Many fan fictions are directly inspired by cinema, by the desire to pair specific actors within the Jane Eyre storyline, and by the ability to assert individual preoccupations and fantasies onto the narrative. In a complex interplay between author and reader, actor and character, heroine and hero, fan and star, these versions subvert the authority of Charlotte Brontë's vision even while they remain in thrall to it.

Lucy Sheerman was an artist in residence at Metal (2014-17) where she co-created a new Evensong for Peterborough Cathedral. Two plays, including a collaboration with Apollo astronaut and poet Al Worden, were commissioned by Menagerie for their New Writing Festival. She has been working on a series of fan fiction versions of iconic novels including *Rebecca* (Dancing Girl Press) and *Jane Eyre*. Her writing and reviews have been widely published. Before taking up writing full time she worked at the Arts Council. She has a PhD from the University of Cambridge, on Innovative Writing by Women in the Twentieth Century.

SESSION 8: MUSLIM AND MIDDLE EASTERN ROMANCES

"Muslims Reading Romance: Bruneian considerations of "halal" and romance novels" -

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In 2017, Bruneian writer Aisha Malik self-published "Jewel: An Attempt at a Halal Romance", the first Anglophone romance of its kind by a Bruneian. The novella traces out a burgeoning relationship between the newly religious Prince Danial and the half-American, half-Kadazan Yasmin Colburn, and asks what a halal romance looks like in contemporary Southeast Asia.

Malik's novel is timely. Over the last decade, there has been an upsurge in the production of Muslim romance novels globally, spanning from the Kano market literature of *Littattafan Soyayya* (books of love) in Nigeria, to the "halal" love stories of Na'ima B. Robert in the UK, to the blockbuster success of Habiburrahman El Shirazy's *Ayat-ayat Cinta* (Verses of Love) in Indonesia. Nevertheless, this production remains very marginalized and localized in the billion-dollar global juggernaut of romance publishing, which is still dominated by Anglophone romance produced by American, Australian and British writers, sometimes in translation, but mostly in the original English form.

These Anglophone romance novels occupy a prominent place in conventional Bruneian bookstores, but in recent years there has been a notable increase in the number of local "Islamic" bookstores which, in comparison, foreground "halal" romances or exclude the genre entirely. Malik's novel is part of a wider conversation about Muslim romances as well as to what extent Muslim readers generally are invested in "halal" romance.

This paper seeks to examine the reading practices of Bruneian Muslim readers of romance novels through a comparison of the curation of these novels in local conventional and Islamic bookstores, as well as through a qualitative and quantitative analysis of how Bruneian Muslim readers perceive "halal" ness or consider it important in their consumption of romances. Part of this analysis will be drawn from interviews conducted with Bruneian Muslim readers and writers of romance in 2017.

Kathrina Mohd Daud is an Assistant Professor in Literature and Creative Writing at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam. She holds a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Manchester (2011), and has previously held visiting research fellowships at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (2013), the University of Washington (2014) and most recently at the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies at Kyoto University (2017-2018). She has published on Bruneian literature, popular fiction and global fiction in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*,

the *Kyoto Review*, and *World Englishes*, amongst others, and recently co-edited the volume *The Southeast Asian Woman Writes Back: Gender, Nation and Identity in the Literatures of Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines* (2017) as part of the Springer "Asia in Transition" series. She also co-founded a local female theatre company, Salted Egg Theatre and published a children's book *The Halfling King* with Heartwrite.co in 2017.

"Reading and Writing Muslim Romance Online" - Claire Parnell (University of Melbourne)
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Participatory media production through online self-publishing platforms affects the publishing field in interesting and important ways. In particular, the call for diverse representation in genre fiction has been growing in online communities, such as Wattpad, for some time. Narratives that have traditionally been excluded from publication are now able to be self-published through various online retailers and user-generated online platforms. Romance texts published on Wattpad that feature Muslim protagonists and Muslim-centred love stories demonstrate the popularity of these stories. This paper explores their social and political impact.

Wattpad is a free social media writing and reading platform and mobile application. It has an impressively ubiquitous reach, with more than 35 million global users each month, with stories often published in serialised format. Wattpad's affordances tap into the contemporaneous way Internet users consume content online – socially and interactively, on mobile devices, and in easily digestible chunks.

A Muslim's Romantic Journey by Wattpad user KittyCrackers is considered the platform's first successful Muslim Romance story. This paper analyses the text and online conversations about it to understand its form and reception. In doing so, this project intersects two largely understudied areas of genre fiction research: non-Western centred Romance texts, and the function of digital publishing channels. This research serves as an exploratory study for a larger research project on the impact of digital media in generating greater inclusion in the field of genre fiction publishing. Results are expected to shine a light on marginalised cultures and groups, as well as explore the practices of online participatory culture, within the literary field.

Claire Parnell is a PhD student at the University of Melbourne researching digital publishing practices. Her thesis is on diversity in digital romance publishing, focusing on Wattpad, Archive of Our Own and Amazon. This research builds on from her Honours thesis which looked at traditional and self-publishing practices for romance fiction. She is an RA for Dr Beth Driscoll on her ARC grant, *Genre Worlds: Australian Popular Fiction in the 21st Century*. @cparnell_c

"The Kitchen and Beyond: Romantic Chronotope of Pakistani Popular Fiction"

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This paper aims to explore the popular romance reading culture of Pakistan which includes, but is not limited to, magazines designed specifically for female readers. It is my contention that the works of fiction, published in these magazines, focus on imbuing the importance of sacrifice and patience in its female readers, as a pre-requisite for a romantic relationship. These various novellas, series and short stories, henceforth referred to as Kitchen-literature, are inscribed primarily for the middle class Pakistani women. In Kitchen-literature, romance is thickly veiled under the varying questions of female ego, male dominance, domesticity and social class. This sub-genre of romance is not didactic in nature but it does set quite a few indicators for its readers to facilitate their image of a perfect relationship.

Drawing upon the previous scholarship of Janice Radway, Tania Modleski, Catherine Belsey and Lynne Pearce etc, the present study is primarily an analysis of the various romantic chronotopes in Kitchen-literature and the objectives behind their formation.

Javaria Farooqui is a PhD student at the University of Tasmania. Her project is about the transnational, historical popular romance reading culture in Pakistan. She has also explored the characteristics of Urdu popular romance in her country, to provide a broader contextual frame for her Anglophonic romance project.

"Girls of Riyadh and Desperate in Dubai: Reading and writing romance in the Middle East"

- Amy Burge (University of Birmingham)

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The Middle East has long held a romantic fascination for the west, characterised by the popular sheikh romance. Yet, as myself and others have argued (Burge 2016; Jarmakani 2015; Teo 2012) in these novels Middle Eastern women are often depicted as helpless, veiled, and silent. This paper approaches romance, gender and the Middle East from a different perspective, analysing two novels written by Middle Eastern women that respond to and challenge the way western popular romance has represented women and the Middle East.

Desperate in Dubai by Ameera Al Hakawati (2011) and *Girls of Riyadh* by Rajaa Alsanea (2005 in Arabic, 2007 in English), both 'Arabic best-sellers', describe the romantic lives of four women in Dubai and Saudi Arabia, respectively. The novels are influenced by western popular culture, most obviously the TV shows *Sex and the City* and *Desperate Housewives*, and the romance and chick-lit genres. This has been controversial; Roger Allen criticised the 'new phenomenon' of Arab women writing for a western readership (2011) and Marilyn Booth (who translated *Girls of Riyadh* into English) claimed the novel became depoliticised through translation into English (2010).

Yet, by looking at these novels in the context of popular romance, we can see how each writer adapts these influences, blending them with references to Arab culture to critique approaches to gender in both the Middle East and the western world. I argue that these novels are responding, in their own way, to a global genre (romance/chick-lit) that has, for decades, monopolised definitions of the 'romantic Middle East'. By globalising their own local forms of romance through international publication, Al Hakawati and Alsanea are developing a unique form of popular romance that offers a new perspective on the romance genre and the Middle East.

Amy Burge is a teacher and researcher in English Literature. She will be taking up a Lectureship in Popular Fiction at the University of Birmingham in August 2018. Her research interests are comparative and intersectional - she approach modern ideas about love, relationships, gender, race, religion, and sexuality from an historical perspective. She has published research on contemporary women's historical fiction, medieval and modern literary representations of masculinity, as well as gender, ethnicity, and religion in Middle English and modern popular romance.

SESSION 9: Romancing Chinese Worlds**“Topography of Romantic Love: Journeys, the Fantasy of Love, and Identity Crisis” -**

Fang-Mei Lin (National Taiwan Normal University)

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Taiwanese author Wu Zhuo-Liu's novel, *Orphan of Asia*, was written during the end of WWII and Japanese colonial rule. This celebrated novel, which depicts the hero Taiming's unsuccessful pursuit of identity among three options: the Japanese, the Chinese, and the Taiwanese, has been widely read as a national allegory of identity crisis. In addition to this point, I will argue that Taiming often engages himself in circular journeys among three places (Taiwan, Japan, and China) in search of his ideal woman. His longing for national identity is combined with his romantic imagination of femininity.

Picturesque landscapes inspire his fancy for Japanese and Chinese young ladies. He marries a Chinese girl in Nanjing, China. But his wife turns out to be a “new woman” who is interested in public issues and ignores housework. While *Orphan of Asia* has been lauded as a national allegory which vividly depicts a Taiwanese man's self-pursuit of identity and male subjectivity, this paper will point out that Taiming is unaware of his self-indulgence in projecting romantic imagination onto Japanese and Chinese women. He is awakened in the end to see himself as a Taiwanese not because of enlightenment but because of romantic failure. The subject position of being a Taiwanese man is instigated through a sense of shame caused by disillusionment of love. Romantic imagination and disillusionment are essential elements in the constitution of Taiwanese national consciousness, which is based on male one-sided projection of ideal femininity. This paper will conclude with an analysis of the interactions among social and cultural space, geographic landscapes, and the formation of emotional trauma which leads to the final self-awakening of national consciousness.

Dr. Fang-Mei Lin received her Ph.D. in sociology from University of Pennsylvania. Her areas of specialties include: sociology of literature, popular culture, gender studies. She is a professor at the department of Taiwan Culture, Languages and Literature, National Taiwan Normal University. She teaches courses such as Gender and Nationalism, Romance Fiction and Modernity, Taiwan Literature in the Japanese Colonial Period. She has published a book about Qiong Yao, the most famous romance writer in Taiwan and in the global Sinophone community. She is particularly interested in how Gothic romance and desert romance have been translated into Mandarin Chinese and appropriated by local Taiwanese romance writers.

“Life Is Elsewhere: The Economy of Food and Sex in Chinese Web Romance” - Jin Feng
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It is stated in the Confucian classic *The Book of Rites*: “Food and sex are the primary desires of human beings.” However, little can be taken for granted about what food and sex mean in any particular context. Anthropologist Jack Goody sees the cooking of food by the woman “as the reciprocal of the coital acts of the man,” while Chinese author Lu Wenfu characterizes a female chef's marriage to a male gourmet as following the economic principle of bartering culinary skills for financial security.

Chinese Web romance creates a new form of narrative economy: cooking for a better life. In most time-travel romances, modern men or women travel backward in history. But protagonists in food-oriented romances in the last decade usually travel from premodern to modern societies or from contemporary to future universes. Equipped with up-to-date

technologies ranging from holographic games to VR webcast, they apparently represent a “futurist” outlook.

However, women or female-gendered characters continue to serve as food preparers. Even when they become master chefs revered by students and consumers, they play the main nurturer in the family, workplace, or community. Further, these “forward”-looking works show similar insecurities rooted in contemporary life. Authors unanimously portray the future as a utilitarian, military power deplete of beauty, pleasure, and gourmet food. Many reveal anxieties about food safety and security, though disguised as “doomsday fantasies” or tales of magic tools for food production. Most tellingly, they deploy culinary arts developed through magic or technologies to compensate deficiencies in romance, family, and career in a previous life.

Food-focused works thus follow the same trajectory as other Chinese Web romances by turning discontent about current situations into redemptive tales in alternative times and spaces. Ultimately, food functions as socio-cultural and sexual-romantic currency that propels the time-traveling protagonist into a better life elsewhere.

Jin Feng is Professor of Chinese and the Orville and Mary Patterson Rount Professor of Literature at Grinnell College, United States. She is the author of *The New Woman in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Fiction* (Purdue, 2004), *The Making of a Family Saga* (SUNY, 2009), and *Romancing the Internet* (Brill, 2013), in addition to numerous articles in Chinese and English. She is currently working on a book project on food nostalgia in China.

“On the Way to a Better Life: Countryside themed romance in recent Chinese Television” -
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Thousands of romantic stories are told in East Asian media landscape while few of them happen in a rural area. Romantic love seems only belong to the city folks, which probably because romantic love is highly embedded in metropolitan consuming culture and media audience’s imagination of a progressive, good, passionate and adventurous life. If media, as many scholars have argued, provide a fantasy for individuals’ imagination and pursuit of certain types of romance, the fact that rural space is underrepresented in Chinese TV romance speaks two issues: 1) the rural area probably can’t provide a space for people to imagine romantic love; 2) the rural area is ignored by the media producers who are mainly upper middle class metropolitan urbanites.

Tracing the history of the representation of rural romance in socialist Chinese media, in this paper, I want to examine the representation of romantic love (or unromantic love) in countryside in recent Chinese television. From a gender studies perspective this paper is a critical analysis of the representation of romantic love in one of the most well-known countryside themed romances, *Rural Love Story* (Xiangcun Aiqing Gushi) series. Initially released in 2006, the story has developed into nine serials and undoubtedly the most long lasting and viewed television drama that focuses specifically on rural people’s life. Based on the detailed examination of the beginning, developing, conflicting and temporary ending of the main protagonists’ love stories, I argue that *Rural Love Story* can’t imagine a romance in which heroines can find agency and freedom to love due to the duties and ethics to take care of not only their conjugal families and village but also as the symbol of a strong and progressive Chinese economy and subject embedded with neoliberalism ideology.

This representation of romance is rooted in the long tradition of using women as the symbols of national objectives. At the same time, unlike the romantic stories of and by metropolitan urbanites, which often reflects individuals’ struggles and anxieties, the stories in rural romance have to carry the double duties of simultaneously reflecting the urgency to change and catch up with the urban peers and the moral values of keeping traditional community values and remain that way. The double duties are not only self-contradictory but apparently conflict with the romantic adventure of modern love stories—to explore

possibilities, enjoy freedom and focus on individual's self-realization. But these stories also reflect a Chineseness that has been consistently reemphasized in the TV programs themed with romantic love in recent Chinese media.

"Romance in Chinatown: The Love Stories of Edith Maude Eaton"

Erin S. Young (SUNY Empire State College)

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This project will explore romantic relationships in the short fiction of Edith Maude Eaton (Sui Sin Far), with a particular focus on her 1912 collection of stories, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*. Since the critical rediscovery of Eaton's writings in the 1970s, her work has become canonical in American Realism and Asian American literature anthologies. Sometimes referred to as the foremother of Asian (North) American literature, Eaton is notable for her accessible and sympathetic portrayals of Chinatown at the turn of the twentieth century. Existing Eaton scholarship is rich with analysis of her engagements with race, gender, nationality, and citizenship. What has yet to be fully explored, however, is her strategic use of courtship, romance, and marriage as vehicles for challenging the dominant racial and national narratives of her time. My goal is to analyze both the intra- and interracial Chinese/white romantic relationships in her stories as sites of Americanization. I am also interested in how the Chinatown landscape frames the construction of these romances. If time permits, I may conduct a comparative examination of Edith Maude Eaton's love stories and the romantic writings of her sister, Winnifred Eaton (Onoto Watanna), whose *Miss Nume of Japan* (1899) is arguably the first Asian American romantic novel. While the sisters were similarly positioned as "Eurasian" and transnational women, they employed notably different strategies in their use of romance to address Asian American concerns.

Erin S. Young, PhD is an Associate Professor of Literature and Cultural Studies at the State University of New York (SUNY) Empire State College. She serves as the managing editor for the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies (JPRS)*. Her research interests include constructions of racial identity in popular romance novels, Asian American literature, and science fiction.

SESSION 10: South/East Asian Romance Communities

"Negotiating Romantic Love in India: Family, Public Space, and Popular Cinema" -

Meghna Bohidar (University of Delhi)

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This paper highlights some particularities of the romance culture produced in India by popular Hindi cinema from the 1990s to the contemporary. The 1990s saw distinctive shift from previous eras of cinema by focusing on escapist, family-oriented romance, aided by the rise of the right-wing political campaign and their juxtaposition of "Indian values/culture" with the increasing globalization and assimilation of Western ideals of romance. More significantly, the issues faced by the male protagonist no longer revolved around injustice, violence, and unemployment as in "realist" cinema of earlier periods; rather, the search for romantic love became essential.

In this paper, I discuss how urban subjectivities, dreams, and desires regarding romantic love are reflected in and produce by the thematic repetition of lovers' rebellion against parental authority. This feature owes its uniqueness to the family playing a crucial role regarding choices of love/marriage in India, unlike the West where the romantic couple is the central unit of the society. Specifically, this rebellion was articulated through the deployment of song and dance sequences in urban public spaces (e.g., buses, marketplaces, parks, promenades), often dream sequences situated in either foreign landscapes or Indian cities. Ironically, through these

sequences, lovers are able to undermine the parental authority and find privacy in public spaces where they are able to express love openly. Besides being produced as romantic locations, such public spaces are accessed by couples in the real-world to express love without parental interference. However, their existence in these spaces is fraught with regular violence from conservative groups.

By analysing these themes central to popular Hindi cinema, I demonstrate how this representation of the romantic ideal facilitates a reading of “true love” in the Indian context as not simply requiring the ability to negotiate private and public spaces, but also courage, subversion, and transformation to navigate romantic aspirations strategically.

Meghna Bohidar is a PhD scholar at the Department of Sociology, University of Delhi. Her research interests include love/romance, bodies in public space, gender, and Hindi cinema. Her ongoing study focuses on the lived experience of couples in New Delhi who navigate and occupy diverse urban public spaces, like parks, shopping malls, cinema halls, and monuments to perform love/romance.

“In conversation with Mina V. Esguerra” - Kat Mayo
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Author Mina V. Esguerra has single-handedly defined the English-language romance genre in the Philippines through the #romanceclass initiative, which has helped over 100 Filipino authors publish over 200 new titles. This interview will explore the evolution of #romanceclass and its role in nurturing new writing talent, commissioning works to fill gaps in cultural reach, broadening the audience for Filipino-authored romance, and gathering data sets about the romance community.

English-language romance is dominated by authors and publishers from developed countries, and little attention has been given to authors and readers outside these traditional publishing markets. The #romanceclass initiative provides insights on writer development, market creation, and community building outside traditional publishing processes, and offers a template for local romance markets that can compete for a global audience.

This session will explore the evolution of the #romanceclass community, and in particular:

1. The evolution of the community from a writer development initiative to one that includes live readings, trade stalls at book festivals, and inclusion in high school reading lists.
2. Gaps in the market that #romanceclass has actively sought to fill: how were they identified, and how effective was the community in meeting readers’ needs? In what ways do cultural enablers or roadblocks influence the creation, production and consumption of Filipino romance fiction?
3. Reactions by the broader literary community, local and abroad, to #romanceclass, and the efficacy of online channels to reach a global audience for Filipino authors.
4. Key lessons learned through #romanceclass initiatives, data collection methods, and some initial findings from this data.

Kat Mayo blogs at bookthingo.com.au and hosts a podcast that explores the place of romance fiction in literary culture. She is an experienced public speaker and panelist, having presented at the Wheeler Center, City of Sydney Library events, Australian Romance Readers Convention, and Romance Writers of Australia conference. Her reviews have appeared in *Books+Publishing*, and she received the 2014 Romance in the Media Award from the Romance Writers of Australia for her essay, [Dear columnists, romance fiction is not your bitch.](#) @BookThingo

Mina V. Esguerra is an author and publisher of contemporary romance novellas. She holds writing workshops and founded #romanceclass, a community for Filipino authors and readers of romance in English. In a separate but somewhat related career as a communications consultant, she manages online communities for international development organizations. For

news about her writing, publishing, and events, visit minavesguerra.com. For more about #romanceclass, visit romanceclassbooks.com. Mina lives in Metro Manila, Philippines.

SESSION 11: Subversions of Race, Culture and History

“The Wild Heart of the Continent: Love and Place in Sherry Thomas’s Silk Road Romance Novels” - Eric Murphy Selinger (DePaul University)

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Chinese-American novelist Sherry Thomas sets two acclaimed books in the Silk Road regions of Central Asia: *Not Quite a Husband* (2009; RITA 2010), set in the Swat Valley during the 1897 Pathan Revolt; and *My Beautiful Enemy*, set partly in Chinese Turkestan, a region coveted by Russia and Britain during the imperial “Great Game.” A “liminal zone” where egalitarian relationships and authentic selfhood flourish (Illouz, 92), each setting evolves from the “green world” that has been crucial to romance since the Renaissance (Frye), and the latter novel also invokes the *Jianghu* (“rivers and lakes”) traditions of *wuxia* fiction. However, interpreting these settings *only* in these structural/generic ways slights Thomas’s interest in history, and it occludes important differences between their representations of “the wild heart of the continent” (MBE, 136).

As Jane Stafford explains, “romance is the quintessential colonial literary form” (64). In *Not Quite a Husband* the *romantic* Silk Road, where wounded love can heal, is also a *white-imperial* setting where English wit, grit, and resolve shine forth in contrast to the anticolonial uprising led by the “Mad Fakir.” In *My Beautiful Enemy*, by contrast, Thomas presents European imperialism as one more chapter in millennia of contact and contest along the Silk Road. She emphasizes the region’s multi-ethnic and multi-religious character, not least through the character traits that make the Rumi-quoting, Muslim-impersonating, Persian-disguised white English hero, Leighton, appealing to the Kazakh-disguised biracial heroine, Bai Ying-Hua. As they fall in love in a bodhisattva-carved cave that invokes the spatial metaphor of four *Brahmaviharas*, or “divine abodes”—*mettā* (lovingkindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity)—Thomas subverts the presumptively Protestant underpinnings of the white romance hero (cf. Kamblé, 131-156), complicates distinctions between East and West, and recasts “romance” as, at least potentially, a decolonized space of cultural exchange.

Eric Murphy Selinger is President of IASPR, Executive Editor of the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, and Professor of English at DePaul University in Chicago. His books include *What Is It Then Between Us? Traditions of Love in American Poetry* (Cornell UP) and several co-edited collections, including *New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction* (McFarland, 2012) and *Romance Fiction and American Culture* (Ashgate, 2015). With Hsu-Ming Teo and Jayashree Kamblé he is currently editing the *Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Romance*; he and Laura Vivanco are co-writing a book on reading popular romance as theological fiction.

“Love is (Color) Blind: Race, Belonging, and Nation in 21st Century Historical Romance Fiction” - Mallory Jagodzinski (Indiana University South Bend)

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This paper incorporates the space and place theme of IASPR 2018 by examining how three American authors—Theresa Romain, Meredith Duran, and Courtney Milan—utilize the British/Indian colonial relationship in their historically set romances (*Secrets of a Scandalous Heiress*, *The Duke of Shadows*, and *The Heiress Effect*, respectively) to argue for a racially inclusive understanding of citizenship in the United States. Within these novels, uncomfortable

issues of the present are worked upon from the comfortable distance of the past. I argue that by incorporating racial justice into the emotional justice promised by the American Romance Writers Association's definition of a romance novel, the authors discussed in this paper ask their readers to envision a society of greater racial equality, one where every individual is considered part of the national community.

In writing about interracial relationships between white women and mixed-race Indian/Indian men during Britain's height of colonization, these American authors are working out and responding to issues of race and racism in the United States in the twenty-first century by displacing these issues onto a distant, yet somewhat similar, past. By writing a romantic pairing that is white/Indian, these authors and their audiences sidestep America's legacy of slavery, which continues to be a point of contention 150 years after its abolition. For the majority of romance readers, slavery cannot be made romantic. The novels studied here make the rules and norms of white supremacy more obvious by utilizing the colonial encounter to explore contemporary issues of racism. In effect, these American authors draw from a British historical past to create a historical fiction that then addresses an American present with regard to race. The authors of the texts presented in this paper look beyond patriarchal oppression to consider other ways traditional American power structures limit citizenship.

Mallory Jagodzinski is Assistant Director of Alumni Relations at Indiana University South Bend where she specializes in alumni engagement, event logistics, board management, and strategic planning. She earned her PhD in 2015 from Bowling Green State University in Ohio, and she is fascinated by discussions of race, gender, and economics in popular romance. You can find her on Twitter @FeistyHeroine.

“‘You stayed’: Love, law and the reservation in Jenna Kernan’s Apache Protectors series” -
Johanna Hoorenman (Utrecht University)
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Native American themed romance has long been one of the most popular subgenres of popular romance. For a number of years, the Romantic Times had specific Reviewer's Choice Awards for "Best Indian Romance," "Best Historical Indian Romance," and "Best Indian Romance by a new author." Its popularity testifies to an enduring fascination with imagined romantic Anglo-Native American encounters. It shows a longstanding fixation on the imagined romantic chronotope of "the Native American tribe" that romanticizes pre-contact tribal cultures while often obscuring the effects of the Anglo-American colonial expansion. However, while the settings of Native Romance have overwhelmingly been historical, one of the most popular series at the moment is Jenna Kernan's Apache Protector series in Harlequin's Intrigue line. These are romantic suspense novels, in a contemporary setting, involving Apache characters.

This paper focuses on the initial four books in the Apache Protector series, published in 2015 and 2016, revolving around four brothers (and one missing sister) on an Apache reservation in Arizona. All brothers work in some form of law enforcement, and the books explore questions of crime and justice, love and trust specifically in relation to the indigenous heritage of the brothers, and the special legal status of Native reservations. Place functions in this series as a form of anchored identity, centralizing questions of land, community, family and off-reservation adoption in the romance plots, as well as questions of borders, immigration, trafficking and land rights in the suspense plots. The paper will examine the way in which this series subverts the dominant mode of historical settings, and how its crossover with suspense provides a space to engage with questions of (in)justice for its Apache heroes. I draw on Gilles Lipovetsky's theory of hypermodernity to explore to what extent these novels supply a form of cultural tourism to an imagined space of tribal community for a hypermodern, largely non-native audience. I compare linguistic anthropologist Keith Basso's use of the term chronotope in relation to Apache lands to the representation of the physical environment in the novel and its importance to the romance and suspense plots.

Johanna Hoorenman is Lecturer in American literature at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. Her fields of research are American poetry, with a particular interest in animal poetry and posthumanism, and American popular romance fiction. She is currently working on a comprehensive study of Native American themed popular romance novels, informed by Native American studies and Cultural Memory studies.

SESSION 12: Love in Other Worlds

“Love in Outer Space: Science fiction romance—the ideal place to explore gender and love” - Donna Hanson (University of Canberra)

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Science fiction romance disregards localities in time and space and extends ‘romancelandia’ beyond present human frontiers and cultural norms. Heroines can be spaceship captains, scientists, and explorers and more than a man’s equal. They can have relationships with fellow officers, space barbarians, aliens or more. Gender norms can be bent, reversed, enhanced or removed all together.

Science fictional settings expand the breadth of romance in ways similar to paranormal romance by taking the reader outside the mimetic now or reconstructed historical boundaries. Sometimes science fiction settings allow narratives that appear regressive by depicting social situations outside present cultural norms. Kristina Deffenbacher (2014) argued that paranormal romance and urban fantasy narratives allowed women readers and writers ‘to engage issues of sexual violence and female agency in a space that is at once like and safely beyond their world’ and also to use the fantasy of “a woman warrior who not only fights against rape and refuses rapability as an aspect of her being but also finds passionate love” (Deffenbacher, 2014:924). This argument also applies to science fiction romance.

A comparison of a recent example of science fiction romance, *On a Barbarian World* by Anna Hackett (2017) with Johanna Lindsey’s *Warrior’s Woman* (1990), reveals stories that feature a futuristic, human woman dealing with alien but humanoid warriors and warrior cultures as well as similar structure, plot and setting. This paper argues that while there are similarities with regard to the representation of female agency and the academic and physical prowess of the female protagonist in these stories, there are differences in the approach to the depiction of sexual consent.

“Representations of Otherness in Paranormal Romance: Nalini Singh and J.R. Ward” - María T. Ramos-García (South Dakota State University)

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There is currently a very heated debate in progress regarding diversity in the romance novel in the USA, both in terms of the characters represented and the authors published and promoted. In this context, the paranormal subgenre is an especially rich site of analysis due to the dual nature of its representations of diversity and otherness. On the one hand, characters are identified as other due to their supernatural characteristics (they may be a different species, or have been transformed by scientific or magical means, or just be humans with special abilities). On the other hand, such narratives cannot escape the racialized context in which they are written, and characters are consciously or unconsciously identified in racial and ethnic terms regardless of their supernatural characteristics or lack thereof.

This paper will analyze the representations of racial and ethnic diversity in two mainstream paranormal romance series: J.R. Ward’s *Black Dagger Brotherhood* and Nalini Singh’s *Psy-changeling*. Both authors show clear attempts to portray a racially diverse world,

however both are problematic. In Ward's novels, the main race, the vampires (they actually call themselves "the race", while insisting they are a separate species) is clearly identified as white. There are other more marginally represented species: The shadows, who only appear later on in the series, are identified as looking black, but not actually being black, and the sympathes, androgynous in their appearance, are seen in an extremely negative light. Even more disturbingly, humans are depicted in increasingly negative terms as the series progresses, as when they are described as "rats without tails". Finally, there is another species, the *doggen*. None of the characters in that species is ever the hero or heroine in any novel. They are servants to the vampires and seem to enjoy their subservient position, a situation that is always celebrated, never problematized in the series.

If class and race appear to be clearly delineated and hierarchized in Ward's series, economic doctrines are at the heart of Singh's social values. While Ward is a white American, Singh is a New Zealander of South East Asian descent. However, her novels are set in a globalized world in which the United States of America is clearly the center of power. Her characters are post-racial, especially the Psy, a subspecies of humans with a variety of psychic powers who have, for generations mixed individuals from across the globe in order to bring to the world offspring with the best genetic combinations to potentiate their powers. But even in the other human groups the multiracial appearance and background of the characters is constantly emphasized and celebrated, as Jayashree Kamble has indicated. Furthermore, the series is constantly creating hybrid couples within the fictional world. However, this post-racial world is also a post-cultural world, and while there are different cultures depending on the subspecies, actual world cultures have been erased. The resistance to the utopic universalism promoted by the series is blamed on the unwillingness of some groups to compete in an open market. The struggles for power are ultimately struggles for economic hegemony in terms very similar to those studied by Amira Jarmakani in the Sheikh romance novel. She illustrates how the values of humanist liberalism become intertwined in post-9/11 sheikh novels with neoliberal economic values. These authors offer very different examples of the dual nature of diversity in paranormal romance, and how their interactions reveal unresolved tensions and contradictions.

María Teresa Ramos-García is a professor of Spanish and Global Studies at South Dakota State University. While her dissertation and early work studied Latin American Literature and Film as well as second language acquisition, since 2012 she has centered her research efforts on the study of Paranormal Romance and Urban Fantasy (PNR-UF). Since then, she has presented 10 papers on this topic at national and international conferences (mostly PCA and IASPR) and she is working on two chapter-length projects. In 2015 she designed and taught a course on PNR and UF for the Honors College at SDSU, which was a success. The course is scheduled to be offered again in Fall 2018.

"Outlander's Tactile Caress: a Multisensory Romance" - Athena Bellas (University of Melbourne)
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Much of the existing literature on television series *Outlander* (STARZ 2014–) emphasises its prioritisation of a female gaze at the scene of erotic pleasure. This is important to a discussion of shifting representations of gender and sex on the contemporary screen. However, there is another dimension to this series, which is skirted around but not fully explored in the existing literature: its luscious tactility. In the series' sex scenes, formal techniques like high contrast lighting, caressing gestures, extended shot duration, heavy use of close-ups and extreme close-ups, slow panning camera-work that brushes up against the *mise-en-scène's* textures, and a rich, warm colour palette, all encourage a particularly fleshy spectatorial encounter with the screen image. The purpose of this paper is to theorise this carnal dimension of watching *Outlander*.

This paper undertakes a sensuous analysis of scenes from the series' famous Wedding episode, as well as fan-made GIFs of the episode. These GIFs manipulate elements like duration, colour saturation and framing, and use techniques like superimposition, to further emphasise the minute details of tender touches, micro-gestures, and lush, enveloping textures and temperatures. I focus on *Outlander's* textures, tactile surfaces, and tender traces that connect the screen body and spectatorial body to the scene of desire. I remain at the surface of the image, at the site of its skin, rather than attending to narrative matters or the politics of the gaze. In so doing, I explore the significance of the carnal relationship between spectator and screen, which affirms and celebrates female pleasure at an embodied, material, and emotional level. I argue that the sensuous elements of the episode and its paratexts subvert the usual fixed, limited position to which women are ordinarily relegated in mainstream representations of sex onscreen. This multisensory aspect of the romance is worth investigating more closely, for it creates a new network of relations between female spectators and the image of desire.

Athena Bellas lectures in Screen and Cultural Studies at the University of Melbourne. Her book, *Fairy Tales on the Teen Screen: Rituals of Girlhood* was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2017. She also hosts a popular podcast on iTunes called Teen Screen Feminism.

“Basically Quite Weird”: The Queer Medievalist Virtual Romance of Alexis Hall’s *Looking for Group* - Kristin Noone (Irvine Valley College)
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In a recent blog post, award-winning romance author Alexis Hall comments that “something we’re grappling with as twenty-first century people is the way our assumptions about relationships are changing and that’s something I tried to explore in the new book, both explicitly and implicitly...the ways people interact in virtual words, and the reality of those worlds as spaces.” The “new book” in question, *Looking for Group*, utilizes a medievalist virtual reality space to explore identity, romantic possibility, queer sexualities, and heroism. As Eric Selinger has observed, Hall’s romances are concerned with games-playing and pastiche, whether in terms of genre, temporality, or multimedia connections, e.g. the steampunk Lovecraftian Cockney street slang of *Prosperity* or recipes for comfort food in *Glitterland*. In *Looking for Group*, Hall invents a medieval quest world—the online role-playing game *Heroes of Legend*—to suggest that virtual spaces might both destabilize and create new possibilities of romance and desire, both medievalist and queer, that invoke other temporalities and imaginary settings. Largely set within game-space, the novel is a romance with queer (gay and bisexual) protagonists who explore multiple identities; it exists at the intersection of narrative and game design, with the (fictional) game’s rules, medieval-fantasy backstory, and history of updates freely available, enhancing the multimedia experience of reading the romance. Hall writes that “it’s very much about the reality and the value of online spaces, which is something—as a long-time gamer—I always took for granted. Since then I’ve obviously been moving in romance circles, but the message remains the same....” *Looking For Group* optimistically suggests that the message does remain the same: one value of these temporally complex online spaces might lie in the emotional and affective connection of the romance’s happily ever after.

Kristin Noone is an English instructor and Writing Center faculty at Irvine Valley College; her research interests include medievalism, romance, fantasy, and popular culture studies. She has published articles on Arthurian references in *World of Warcraft*, collaborative adaptations of Robin Hood, and Neil Gaiman’s many Beowulfs, as well as (with Audrey Becker) having edited the essay collection *Welsh Mythology and Folklore in Popular Culture* (McFarland, 2011). Her current academic book project explores ethics and identity in the works of Terry Pratchett. In her not-so-secret other identity, she is also a published romance author with Less Than Three Press and JMS Books.