

Pedagogy Report: Embedding Popular Romance Studies in English Units: Teaching Georgette Heyer's *Sylvester*

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Abstract: This article outlines one model for introducing popular romance studies to undergraduate English programs: teaching romance texts and topics alongside canonical and contemporary literary texts. It discusses the authors' approach to teaching Georgette Heyer's *Sylvester* in a unit on historical fiction offered at the University of Tasmania in 2010 and analyses student responses to this initiative through examination of selected assessment tasks.

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Jennifer Kloester first read Georgette Heyer's novels while living in the jungle in Papua New Guinea and re-read them while living in the desert in Bahrain. In 2004 Jennifer completed a doctorate on Georgette Heyer and her Regency Novels. She has written extensively about Heyer, the Regency and history in fiction. She is the author of *Georgette Heyer's Regency World* and *Georgette Heyer: Biography of a Bestseller* to be published by Random House in October 2011.

Keywords: embedding approach, Georgette Heyer, historical romance fiction, history in fiction, Jennifer Kloester, Lisa Fletcher, Pedagogy, popular romance studies, Regency, Rosemary Gaby, Sylvester, teaching

Introduction

This paper outlines one model for introducing popular romance studies to undergraduate English programs: teaching romance texts and topics alongside canonical and contemporary literary texts. This “embedding” approach has clear advantages over the teaching of “specialist” popular romance units, not least because of its flexibility in relation to diverse curricula. We discuss one recent example of teaching popular romance—specifically, popular historical romance—at the University of Tasmania, Australia (UTAS), where the authors recently collaborated on the design and teaching of a new unit in which students read Georgette Heyer’s *Sylvester* alongside literary classics such as William Shakespeare’s *Henry V* and Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*. The paper explains the unit design in detail, presents the case for adopting an embedding approach to teaching popular romance fiction, describes the teaching strategies Lisa Fletcher and Jennifer Kloester used in their lectures on Heyer, and analyzes student responses to this initiative through examination of selected assessment tasks.

1. The Teaching Context: *Sylvester* and “Fictions of History”

In 2009 a new team-taught unit, “Fictions of History,” was introduced in the English major at UTAS; it was taught for the first time in Semester 2, 2010 (June—November) and will be offered again in Semester 2, 2011. The unit is an elective at the advanced level, aimed principally at students who have completed introductory and intermediate English; however, the prerequisite allows students who have only completed introductory (or first-year) English to enroll. “Fictions of History” was designed to:

- build students’ knowledge of historicist approaches to analyzing literary texts;
- encourage critical reflection on the relationship between the treatment of history in literary and popular texts; and
- enhance skills in conducting research on a diverse range of texts.

An additional impetus for developing this unit was to facilitate collaborative teaching, which would bring together the research interests of academic staff. One common thread linking the work of the lecturers (Elizabeth Leane, Ralph Crane, Rosemary Gaby, and Fletcher) who contributed to this unit is a focus on the intersections of literature and history. At UTAS, achieving a “teaching-research nexus” is especially important at the advanced level as we seek to engage students’ interest in pursuing honors and postgraduate study. The embedding approach therefore has clear benefits for popular romance scholars (in this case, Fletcher) looking to motivate students to pursue

postgraduate research, but who may not have the opportunity to teach units devoted to the field.

Unit Description

How does literature represent the past? This unit introduces students to key theoretical frameworks for interrogating the complex and contentious relationship between “fiction” and “history.” Students have the opportunity to discuss “fictions of history” from a range of historical, cultural, and national contexts. Texts will range from literary classics to popular genre fiction to postmodern tours de force. .

(<http://www.utas.edu.au/english/units.htm>).

Required Texts (in order taught)

- Shakespeare, William *Henry V*
- Scott, Walter *Ivanhoe*
- Heyer, Georgette *Sylvester*
- Farrell, J. G. *The Siege of Krishnapur*
- Bainbridge, Beryl *The Birthday Boys*

Teaching Pattern

The unit is taught over thirteen weeks. Students attend a fifty-minute lecture each week and a 90-minute weekly tutorial from the second week of semester. The bulk of lectures focus on analysis of the set texts; two lectures (delivered by Fletcher in 2010 in the 4th and 7th weeks of semester) introduce theoretical approaches to reading fictions of history.

Assessment

Students in this unit are required to complete a 1000-word essay, a 2500-word essay and a 2-hour exam:

- 1000-word essay: this task is worth 20% of the final mark and gives students the “opportunity to write a detailed explication in response to one of the set texts [*Henry V* or *Ivanhoe*]” (http://www.utas.edu.au/english/outlines/2010_sem_2/02_2010_HEA370_Fictions_of_History.pdf).
- 2500-word essay: this task is worth 40% of the final mark. It asks students to “develop an extended argument based on both your analysis of selected texts and your investigation of other critical responses” (http://www.utas.edu.au/english/outlines/2010_sem_2/02_2010_HEA370_Fictions_of_History.pdf). The analysis below of student responses to studying Heyer focuses on this assignment.
- Exam: this task is worth 40% of the final mark. Students are required to write two essays in response to the set texts.

2. Teaching Popular Romance Fiction: Why Take an “Embedding” Approach?

The embedding approach to teaching popular romance fiction is based on the view that Literature and popular fiction are distinct, but interrelated fields. Ken Gelder uses the capital “L” for Literature in his book, *Popular Fiction: The Logic and Practices of a Literary Field*, in order to distinguish the two major sub-fields of the broader literary field. He argues “popular fiction is best conceived of as the opposite of Literature” (11). For Gelder, popular fiction and Literature are antagonistic fields; they each define themselves against the other. Gelder gives us the best starting point yet for theorizing the relationship between the popular and Literary fields of cultural production, especially when the focus of study is on particular genres. He writes: “Popular fiction is, essentially, genre fiction” (1). However, he misses the extent to which *genre* cuts through the curtain he brings down between, to use different terms, “lowbrow” and “highbrow” texts (Fletcher 4). The tropes and conventions of the romance genre cut across the boundaries of these cultural fields in fascinating and important ways, which the pedagogy of popular romance studies must take into account. Teaching popular romance texts alongside Literary texts can help students recognize that considering the form and function of popular romance is not a trivial pursuit with only narrow cultural relevance.[\[1\]](#)

Critics often speak up for the value of studying romance fiction because of the sheer, unparalleled popularity (in global terms) of the distilled or purer versions of the form—most commonly category romance novels. Readers of *JPRS* will recognize this argument: studying popular romance fiction is important because of the sheer magnitude of texts and readers it looks to (and respects). The embedding approach begins with a slightly different argument: Romance is relevant to students of English because it does not stop working at the boundaries of the field of popular romance fiction. Heyer is a pertinent example here. While her novels clearly participate in the popular romance genre—she is, after all, the Queen of the Regency Romance—they are both influenced by and influence texts that fall outside the strict parameters of romance. So, perhaps the first step to getting the burgeoning field of popular romance studies into the classroom is to identify texts that, like Heyer’s *Sylvester*, connect in important formal, thematic or historical ways to texts that already have an established place in the curriculum.

3. Teaching *Sylvester*

The unit includes two lectures on *Sylvester*. In 2010, the first lecture was delivered by a guest of the UTAS English program, Jennifer Kloester, author of *Georgette Heyer’s Regency World* and Heyer’s official biography (forthcoming 2011). Kloester’s lecture explained the historiographic and literary traditions that informed Heyer’s depiction of the Regency period, and encouraged students to think critically about the relationship between “history” and “fiction” in *Sylvester*. The following week, Lisa Fletcher delivered a lecture focused more closely on the novel, in which she introduced the term “romance” to the discussion and examined Heyer’s self-reflexive use of genre conventions. Kloester and Fletcher worked closely together to plan their approach to the lectures; in particular, they

were concerned to spark interest in a text (and genre), with which tutors in the unit had reported most students were unfamiliar.^[2] They were aware too of quite open resistance from some students (especially males) to studying a romance novel and concerned to use the lectures to model “serious” scholarly research and analysis.

Lecture Summary: Kloester

In short, the first lecture on *Sylvester* provided students with background to assist with their study of a novelist and a sub-genre with which they were largely unfamiliar. The first aim of this lecture was to introduce Heyer as a writer, not only of historical romance novels, but also as someone who had a remarkable ability to seamlessly integrate historical fact with enduringly readable fiction. Heyer is universally recognized as the creator of the Regency genre of historical fiction and lauded for her ability to “bring the past to life” (Fahnestock-Thomas; Fletcher; Kloester). Her historical fiction offers students an accessible medium for examining the methodologies required to create this sense of the past and to look at some of the issues rising from the diffusion of historical facts through a fictional text.

The second aim was to raise the students’ awareness of Heyer’s own historical context and how this affected her understanding of what history was and the kinds of historical data she accrued for her novels. An understanding of this aspect of her writing is particularly important given the dramatic shift in historiography that occurred throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century which eventually resulted in the professionalization of history. In order to assess Heyer’s writing and her historical methodology the students needed to know that hers was a nineteenth-century approach to the past. She was greatly influenced by the grand narrative histories written by famous nineteenth-century historians such as Macaulay, Carlyle and Froude as well as by novelists such as Sir Walter Scott, Stanley Weyman, and Charles Dickens, among others.

There are several useful parallels to be drawn between Scott and Heyer: both were the number one best-selling authors of historical fiction in their day and both had a concern for historical accuracy; each attracted a wide audience, introducing many new readers to history; both were innovative in their depiction of the past and each came to be identified by a particular type of novel or historical period. But there were also differences in their treatment of history and in the focus of their novels. Scott was a more historical writer than Heyer, with a more scholarly approach to the past and, unlike Heyer, much of his history is overt—as demonstrated in the later editions of his books where he was at pains to include in their introductions, notes and appendices, many of his novels’ historical underpinnings. By contrast, Heyer made little or no concession to her readers’ possible interest in the historical sources from which she drew her portrait of the Regency. Apart from her two Waterloo books, *An Infamous Army* and *The Spanish Bride*, her Regencies are devoid of footnotes or bibliographies and offer their audience no clear way of discerning the historical facts from Heyer’s fictional imaginings.

This narrative paradox forces the reader to trust Heyer in her recreation of the historical period. There is an expectation that factual detail will be accurate and that she has rendered the past faithfully. For Heyer this meant creating fictional stories that were not merely set against a backdrop of historical scenes but that were actually *dependent* on the historical realities of the era. As in Scott, in Heyer’s novels, the history is an essential element of the books—an inherent part of the story, plot structure and writing technique;

the historical past is so closely woven into the fictional story that the history cannot be extracted from the novels without destroying the textual entity. Unlike many modern category historical romances, Heyer's romantic plots both depend upon and are informed by the historical past she depicts.

This is especially true in *Sylvester*, a novel which relies for part of its plot on Regency society's attitudes to women. When Phoebe Marlow is told she is to receive an offer of marriage from the hero, Sylvester, she is aghast. She understands, however, that her social and domestic situation makes it impossible for her to refuse such an offer—even from a man she purports to despise. Heyer's knowledge of the era, gleaned from her intensive reading of mainly primary source material (especially contemporary letters, diaries, journals and other eye-witness accounts) allowed her to develop her plot in keeping with the known customs and attitudes of the day.

At this point in the lecture it was necessary to explain to the students how Heyer's specific knowledge of the social aspects of the Regency period pre-dated many of the comprehensive histories of the period. This is vital to understanding the nature of Heyer's history and her portrait of the Regency. One of the reasons she stuck so closely to the primary sources was because in 1935, when she wrote her first Regency novel, *Regency Buck*, there were very few secondary sources about the period. Most writing about the era was incorporated into much larger histories of the nineteenth century or books on specific subjects such as the Napoleonic Wars.

An analysis of three major historical bibliographies (Royal Historical Society; Chaloner and Richardson; Brown and Christie) reveals that general recognition by historians of the "Regency" as a specific or distinctive historical period did not begin until the late 1940s (by which time Heyer had already written nine bestselling Regency novels). In the 1950s there was a gradual increase in written accounts of the era, with a more marked increase in historiographical interest occurring in the 1960s and 1970s, which has continued to the present day. From 1950 onwards there was a significant shift in the number of history books with the word "Regency" in their title. Whereas only twelve books were published with the word Regency in their title in the 120 years between 1830 and 1950, in the thirty years between 1950 and 1980, twenty-five books such books were published. Since then the number has grown exponentially (in fact, the increase from the late 1940s runs parallel to the huge growth in popularity of Heyer's Regencies from 1944).

In *Sylvester* Heyer makes deliberate use of her knowledge of the era by drawing on the experience of the historical figure, Lady Caroline Lamb. Not only does Heyer refer directly to Lady Caroline and her novel *Glenarvon* in *Sylvester*, but she also has her fictional heroine Phoebe anonymously write her own scandalous *roman à clef*. This parallel juxtaposition of the factual and the fictional typifies Heyer's approach to her writing. By constructing her novels with an invisible scaffolding of meticulous historical detail she strengthens the verisimilitude of the emotional drama (though only the most knowledgeable readers may be aware of it).

The tone, the style, the *color* with which history was written in the nineteenth century legitimized and strengthened Heyer's own work. This is evident not only in her approach to research and her perception of the historical process, but also in the literary construction of her prose. Her form of history was not always so very far removed from the rhythm and language of the works of the great nineteenth-century historians such as Macaulay, Carlyle, and Froude. Heyer was not a historian, if a historian is defined as one

who analyzes the past in order to solve a puzzle, or to explain the causes and consequences of a specific event or to clarify the evolution and significance of ideas and movements. She was not interested in “causation”—although a close reading suggests that she was interested in social realities (mainly for the upper class) such as class relations, marriage, money and the role of women. Nor was she an analyst or an explicator; she was a narrator of the past; though she was not a historian, her books are full of history: historical fact, people, events and a remarkable sense of period. She was not interested in critiquing her sources—either for their interpretation of the past or for the internal machinations of their writers’ minds. For her the sources were just that—sources: “authentic” records of past moments waiting to be perused by the researcher and mined for any relevant information which might contribute to the accurate reconstruction of some aspect of the past. Heyer was, in some ways, a consumer—rather than a practitioner—of historical research; she absorbed the historical past and understood it but she did not seek to *explain* it to her readers.

Ultimately, Heyer offered a picture of the Regency that was (and is) far more than a mere painted backdrop against which her characters perform: she created a carefully constructed social matrix (based on her understanding of the primary source material), which was true to the structure of the society about which she wrote. Heyer was rigorous in her application of historical fact within her chosen slice of the Regency period. By immersing herself in its broader economic, political and social structures as well as in its lively and engaging minutiae, she was able to create characters who not only “lived” within the Regency but whose (albeit fictional) lives were also shaped by its customs, manners and mores.

Lecture Summary: Fletcher

This lecture began by reading two brief 1958 reviews of *Sylvester* in order to introduce a focus on “romance.” *Kirkus Reviews* classifies *Sylvester* as “Another Regency Romp [which] pursues the obstacle course of true love in the marital stakes of Sylvester, Duke of Salford, and authoress-incognito, Miss Phoebe Marlow.” It concludes, “Nothing to put you in a gudgeon [*sic*] but a pleasant entertainment for Heyer’s following.” The review published in *Library Journal* is similar: “Period romance of Regency England. [. . .] All ends happily. Frothy, readable, and full of delightful Regency dialogue.” According to these reviews, *Sylvester* is an uncomplicated, formulaic novel. Neither reviewer takes Heyer’s novel very seriously, but treats it as a light read. For both reviewers, the novel’s defining feature is the love story between the Duke of Salford and Phoebe Marlow; historical detail (“delightful Regency dialogue”) provides the backdrop for the romance, but is not significant in itself. The reviews were a useful starting point because they invited students to consider *Sylvester* as a historical *romance* fiction and to examine the meaning and significance of the term “romance” in this context. In brief, this lecture raised and addressed the following questions:

- What are the implications of describing Heyer as a “romance” novelist? Is this how critics usually classify her?
- Heyer’s fiction has attracted very little attention in literary studies, certainly in comparison to popular genre writers such as her close contemporary Agatha

Christie. To what extent is this neglect related to her reputation as a “romance” writer?

- Does Heyer’s meticulously researched period detail simply provide the backdrop of a love story, which could be set in any time or place? Or, are the history and the romance ultimately inseparable?

The aim of this lecture was to encourage students to think more critically about their response to *Sylvester*; and to model the value of close textual analysis when developing arguments about popular romance texts. To this end, we used Gillian Beer’s broad definition of “romance” as a broad and diverse category of literature, which is unified by the “imaginative functions” of “escape” and “instruction.” These two terms were central to the first serious critical responses to Heyer: A.S. Byatt’s essays “Georgette Heyer is a Better Writer Than You Think” and “The Ferocious Reticence of Georgette Heyer.” Byatt writes, “the act of research was for Georgette Heyer, the act of recreating a past to inhabit” (“Ferocious” 37). *Sylvester* is an ideal text to include in “Fictions of History” because Heyer uses the form of the historical romance novel to reflect on her approach to combining historical and romantic elements, and to consider the role and responsibilities of the historical romance writer.

On the first page, *Sylvester* is introduced as a man who has forgotten the “lure” of medieval romances; “He and Harry, his twin, had slain the dragons, and ridden great wallops at the knights” (1). *Sylvester* is consistently described with reference to stock heroic figures from fairytale, but makes the mistake of assuming reality and romance are unrelated categories: “No bad fairy had attended his christening to leaven his luck with the gift of a hunchback or a harelip” (2). He mocks his mother’s belief in “love-matches” (23) and asks whether she would prefer him to behave “like the prince in a fairy-tale” (23). Soon after he says to his godmother “Now if you were a fairy godmother, ma’am, you would wave your wand and so conjure up exactly the bride I want!” (30). *Sylvester* may have forgotten how to play childhood games of knights and dragons—how to imaginatively inhabit a romance—but he is nonetheless cast by his mother and godmother as the knightly hero in a fairly standard romance plot. *Sylvester* shocks both women with his anti-romantic plans to marry; to be, in his words “leg-shackled” (11) to a “well-born girl of my own order” (12). But his “godlike” (4) manner is based on a misunderstanding of his role in writing his life story. *Sylvester*’s confidence that he can plan his transition from the “muslin company” (13) to the “Marriage Mart” is based on his faith that a man of his “rank, wealth, and elegance” (2) is in control. The name of his country estate—Chance—is an early hint in the novel that *Sylvester* is not necessarily the author of his own fate.

Clearly, on a thematic level, this novel is about novels and novel writing because the chief impediment to Phoebe’s romance with *Sylvester* is the publication of her novel *The Lost Heir*, which she and others describe as a “dashed silly book” (282), a “trumpety novel” (283) and a “wretched romance” (313). But *Sylvester* is also about romance authorship because of the roles played by *Sylvester*’s mother and godmother (the “Duchess” and the “Dowager”) in their “scheme” to match-make *Sylvester* and Phoebe. In fact “scheme” is the key word in this book. There is something gorgeously comic in the inclusion of these two women schemers—they are both immobilized by illness, so can’t inhabit the Regency world of the novel to the same degree as other characters. But they’re more in control of the course of events than anyone else. The Duchess is a published poet and the Dowager a

careful and accomplished letter writer. So, in effect, they can be read as romance writers—as women like Heyer—possessing unparalleled knowledge of the Regency and its people, they bring the romance to its happy ending without the main players realizing the degree to which they have been manipulated.

The Dowager and the Duchess can be read as surrogates for Heyer within the fictional world. Stranded at the Blue Boar, Sylvester exclaims “I wonder why I embroiled myself in this affair” (101). Of course, he is in this affair because he has been set up by a conspiracy of romancers and their “skilful handling” (206). There are numerous examples of the characterization of the Dowager and the Duchess as romance authors, both in relation to the relationship between Phoebe and Sylvester and in relation to their portrayal of characters in Regency society more broadly: “Unusual: that was the epithet affixed to Miss Marlow. It emanated from Lady Ingham, but no one remembered that” (195).

This section of the lecture focused on the question: how is Phoebe’s literal authorship of her book *The Lost Heir* and of the Duke’s reputation as a wicked uncle related to Lady Ingham and the Duchess of Salford’s more figurative “authorship” of the romance between Phoebe and the Duke? In effect, all three of these women are *rewarded* for their roles as authors. The risk that Phoebe will be ruined is never genuine because her book is subsumed by the greater text of her “fairy godmothers” scheme to marry her to a Duke. There is another “authoress” in the novel: Lady Henry Rayne. Ianthe tells stories to “blacken” her brother-in-law’s name. When Sylvester learns that Phoebe has been talking to Ianthe he asks “Did I figure as the Unfeeling Brother in Law or as the Wicked Uncle?” (192). Ianthe is the actual villain in this novel—vain, petty, unmotherly, seduced by a parody of the Regency hero, Sir Nugent Fotherby. The characterization of Fotherby is a further example of Heyer’s self-reflexive depiction of the Regency as a constructed fictional world. In order to encourage students to look for further metafictional elements in the novel, the lecture concluded by suggesting that they examine Heyer’s depiction of the relationship between genre and gender. For instance, Tom Orde assures Phoebe that Sylvester will never read *The Lost Heir*, because only “girls” are interested in such books. Soon after he is surprised—and disconcerted—to learn that Sylvester is an avid reader of novels exactly like Phoebe’s “wretched romance.” He shares his mother’s love for popular novels, for whom reading is her “greatest solace” (128).

4. Student Responses

Of the 84 students enrolled in this unit, 26 (31%) chose to write their 2500-word essay on *Sylvester*. Heyer was also a popular choice in the exam. For one of their exam questions students could choose to answer on Heyer, Shakespeare, or Sir Walter Scott and here 40% of students chose *Sylvester*. Predictably, although 24 students in the class were male (28%), only one male student chose Heyer for his essay and only four chose to write on Heyer in the exam. Of students with results within the top 15% of the class only one chose to write on Heyer for the essay, and three chose Heyer for the exam. These results suggest that Heyer appealed more to female students and that some of the more serious English students either preferred Shakespeare and Scott, or assumed the choice of more canonical writers might earn higher marks.

Students could choose one of the following broad questions to answer in relation to one or more of the set texts:

Essay Questions

1. "When historical figures are the central figures in works of fiction, there is a danger that the novel will not present the atmosphere of the age, but a picture of an individual in that age . . . Ideally the protagonist of an historical novel should be a fictitious character within whom the wider and often conflicting pressures of the period can be seen at work."
Discuss with close reference to one or more of the texts studied in this unit.
2. Discuss the representation of at least one category of difference (e.g. race, gender, class, religion) in one or more of the texts studied this semester. How does this relate to the text's treatment of history?
3. "Fictional texts which tell stories of the past are inherently contradictory because they cannot meet the competing demands of 'literature' and 'history.'" Discuss with close reference to one or more of the texts studied this semester.

Five students chose to discuss Heyer in the context of question 3, but all other students chose question 2 and focused on gender and (less frequently) class. Nearly all students chose to focus on *Sylvester* alone, rather than comparing it to other texts in the unit. Results spanned the full range from fail to high distinction, but the small cluster of students choosing to discuss Heyer in relation to "the competing demands of 'literature' and 'history'" did produce the strongest work. These students tended to engage more closely with the theorists introduced through the unit (including Georg Lukács and Hayden White) and grappled with the problem of reconciling Heyer's meticulous historical research with her adherence to romance genre conventions.

Overwhelmingly students were interested in writing about the social restrictions placed on young women in Regency society, and many thought that *Sylvester's* unconventional heroine, Phoebe, provided some critique of nineteenth-century gender roles and expectations. Essays generally revealed a limited understanding of the roles occupied by women in Regency society however, and a tendency to view all periods and societies prior to the present as consistently and similarly oppressive. Aspects of *Sylvester* that worried students included the depiction of Ianthe, particularly in regard to the implicit dismissal of her rights as a mother. According to one essay, "outrage on behalf of the reader at her neglect of Edmund is likely to obscure a more understated reality, which is that regardless of whether Ianthe was motherly or not, in the patriarchal world of the English Regency, a widowed woman's child could be legally left to another male relative with no argument to be made about it." The student maintained that in this particular instance *Sylvester* is "uncritically faithful to the sensibilities of the English Regency period." A number of the more thoughtful essays on gender also argued that Heyer's depiction of the pressures and constraints placed on young Regency women is complicated and/or compromised by the pleasures and expectations generated by the romance genre.

Students writing about class often demonstrated difficulty understanding the subtle social distinctions informing relationships in *Sylvester*, but many essays noted Heyer's focus on aristocratic characters and found an uncritical acceptance of class difference in

her work. One student wrote, “although Heyer makes the reader aware of the hierarchal society; it is, in her novels, essentially a happy and content hierarchy in gender and in class.” Students seemed generally well-informed about Regency fashion and manners, yet despite Kloester’s detailed introductory lecture, occasional references to Sylvester’s “eighteenth-century” or “Victorian” setting still cropped up. Overall the essays on Heyer reflected a strong engagement with the lectures, with several students citing details mentioned in Kloester’s lecture. Many mentioned the interesting preponderance of female authors in the text and some responded productively to Fletcher’s suggestion to explore its metafictional dimensions in further detail.

Although *Sylvester* did not appeal to all students (and some disliked it intensely), it proved a particularly useful text for tutorial teaching. Most classes contained some dedicated Heyer fans and the range of impassioned responses for and against *Sylvester* generated lively debate. Perhaps the most important function the text served within the unit was that it operated as an excellent touchstone for measuring the other texts and for considering the various themes of the course. Students were struck, for example, by the contrast that emerged between Scott’s intrusive omniscient narrator in *Ivanhoe*, whose nineteenth-century view of twelfth-century attitudes is always obvious, and Heyer’s more discreet use of free indirect discourse to guide responses to her characters. *Sylvester* was followed in the course by J.G. Farrell’s *The Siege of Krishnapur* and again the contrast in narrative style and tone helped students to recognize and appreciate Farrell’s ironic late-twentieth century take on a nineteenth-century colonial world view. Interestingly, questions about the depiction of heroism, masculinity and British nationalism that arose in relation to the other texts in the unit also proved apposite for *Sylvester*. By the end of the course most students acknowledged that the inclusion of a popular historical romance added breadth to their understanding of the development and range of historical fiction. *Sylvester* helped to focalize questions about the relationship between fiction and history; about what constitutes valid subject matter for both history and fiction; and about how writers of fiction shape our understanding of the past.

[1] A similar argument drives the teaching of popular romance texts in two other advanced-level units taught by Lisa Fletcher at UTAS: “Popular Fiction: From Page to Screen,” and “Cinema, Costumes and Sexuality,” in which students read romance novels and films under the rubrics of “popular fiction studies” and “feminist film theory.”

[2] The tutorials in this unit were run by Gaby and Guinevere Narraway. We would like to acknowledge Guinevere’s contribution to the planning and research for this paper.

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