

## Georgette Heyer: The Nonesuch of Regency Romance

Laura Vivanco

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**Abstract:** Georgette Heyer is one of the most influential authors of popular romance novels and it is a mark of her continuing popularity that after her death she became the subject of two biographies: Jane Aiken Hodge's *The Private World of Georgette Heyer* (1984) and Jennifer Kloester's *Georgette Heyer: Biography of a Bestseller* (2011). However, as reported in the former, Heyer once stated that "You will find me [...] in my work": this essay finds Heyer in *The Nonesuch* (1962) and argues that there are parallels between Heyer's life and work and that of her eponymous hero. It also suggests that there are a number of points of resemblance between her novels and the entertaining yet educational and "quite unexceptionable" gifts which the Nonesuch bestows upon young Charlotte Underhill to ease her convalescence.

**About the Author:** Dr. Laura Vivanco is the author of *For Love and Money: The Literary Art of the Harlequin Mills & Boon Romance* (Tirril, Penrith: Humanities Ebooks, 2011) and *Death in Fifteenth-Century Castile: Ideologies of the Elites* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2004). She is an independent scholar who has written extensively about popular romance fiction and is currently working on a series of essays about Americans' beliefs and attitudes as expressed in US romance novels. She blogs at both Teach Me Tonight ([www.teachmetonight.blogspot.com](http://www.teachmetonight.blogspot.com)) and her own website ([www.vivanco.me.uk](http://www.vivanco.me.uk)).

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Georgette Heyer's "invariable answer, when asked about her private life, was to refer the questioner back to her books. You will find me, she said, in my work" (Aiken Hodge ix).<sup>[1]</sup> Although *The Nonesuch* (1962) is probably not Heyer's best-known or best-loved Regency romance, there is a great deal of Heyer in this novel. Its eponymous hero, Sir Waldo Hawkrige, is "straitlaced" (234) and Heyer's son "described her, to her amusement, as 'not so much square as cubed'" (Aiken Hodge 41). Both Heyer and Sir Waldo were left

fatherless at too early an age: until George Heyer unexpectedly collapsed and died when Georgette was twenty-two he “had been by her side, advising and encouraging her, her closest ally” (Kloester, *Biography* 85) and Sir Waldo acknowledges that when his “father died, I was too young for my inheritance!” (16). Their fathers did, however, remain important influences on their lives. Sir Waldo’s “father, and my grandfather before him, were both considerable philanthropists” (275) and he followed them in devoting “half my fortune” (275), and a considerable proportion of his time, to charity. As for Heyer, it seems her choice of career was also shaped by family “Tradition, and upbringing” (275): her grandfather “was described by his daughter Alice as being ‘full of little pithy stories [...] and very witty’” (Kloester, *Biography* 10) and Heyer declared that “I inherited my literary bent from my father” (Kloester, *Biography*, 17). Perhaps, then, Heyer, “the acknowledged Queen of the Regency romance” (Robinson 208), would be better styled its Nonesuch, “first in consequence with the ton, and of the first style of elegance” (Heyer, *Nonesuch* 20).<sup>[2]</sup>

As for Heyer’s historical romantic fiction, it could be said to offer her readers pleasures akin to those to be derived from the “book, or some trifle” (*Nonesuch* 190) which Sir Waldo gives to young Charlotte Underhill. Heyer certainly described her novels as though they were trifles, for she “referred to her own work with a persistent, broadly funny self-mockery” (Byatt, “The Ferocious” 297). She did, however, admit that her writing was “unquestionably good escapist literature, and I think I should rather like it if I were [...] recovering from flu” (Aiken Hodge xii).<sup>[3]</sup> By her own assessment, then, Heyer’s romantic fiction may be considered to resemble the presents Sir Waldo brings to “amuse” (190) Charlotte Underhill during her convalescence.

The book Sir Waldo chooses for Charlotte is Sir Walter Scott’s *Guy Mannering* and the value of this work is forcefully defended by Miss Ancilla Trent, who is both the heroine of *The Nonesuch* and “a very superior governess! [...] Besides such commonplace subjects as water-colour sketching and the use of the globes, I instruct my pupils in music—both pianoforte and harp; and can speak and read French and Italian!” (87).<sup>[4]</sup> She is also “intelligent [...] and had a sense of humour” (59) and this gives some weight to her opinions. When Mrs Mickleby confesses to being “an enemy to that class of literature, but I daresay that you, Miss Trent, are partial to romances” (190), Ancilla Trent retorts “When they are as well-written as this one, ma’am, most certainly!” (190). Although Heyer’s Regency romances are not “romances” of exactly the same kind as Scott’s, it seems possible that she may have intended Miss Trent’s defence of Scott’s romance to serve as a subtle rebuke to those who denigrated the quality of her writing.<sup>[5]</sup> According to A. S. Byatt, Heyer’s criticism of her own work “hid a sense that it had more real value than was acknowledged” (“The Ferocious” 297) and Jennifer Kloester has stated that

Georgette was [...] prepared to acknowledge her own ability (up to a point), though any hint of self-praise or a suggestion in a letter that what she had written was good was invariably and immediately qualified or contradicted. To have publicly admitted that she thought her writing good would mean committing the unforgivable sin of vulgarity [...] to Georgette’s mind a well-bred person never bragged about her own success. (*Biography* 324)

It would appear that Heyer, like Mrs Chartley in *The Nonesuch*, believed “A lady of true quality [...] did not puff off her consequence: anything of that nature belonged to the

mushroom class!" (125). Nonetheless, Heyer would have been happy to have heard her own romances described as "well-written": she "remembered with pleasure" that "the critic St John Ervine [...] had once written about her 'seemly English'" (Aiken Hodge 95).

Mrs Mickleby and Miss Trent's exchange of views about romances is a very short one but it leaves the latter feeling that she has "a score to pay" (191). An opportunity to do so is soon provided by a "dissected map" (190) which, like *Guy Mannering*, is a gift from Sir Waldo to Charlotte. Since "The Misses Mickleby had not seen one [...] Miss Trent [...] advised their mama, very kindly, to procure one for them. 'So educational!' she said. 'And quite unexceptionable!'" (190-91). The use of the map to avenge the criticisms made of romances perhaps subtly suggests that some romances should also be considered both "educational" and "quite unexceptionable!" It is certainly the case that in Heyer's *The Grand Sophy* (1950) this latter phrase is used to express approval of another of Scott's novels: Hubert Rivenhall "went into raptures over that capital novel, *Waverley*" (50) and Miss Wraxton, whose family is "very particular in all matters of correct conduct" (11), "graciously said that she believed the work in question to be, for a novel, quite unexceptionable" (50). Heyer may have been subtly claiming an "unexceptionable" pedigree for her own historical romances by placing them in the tradition of Sir Walter Scott, a respected author of historical fiction. She may also have considered their subject matter "quite unexceptionable" inasmuch as they have "no sex in them" (Laski 285). They are not entirely devoid of either passion or discreet references to sexual activity but Heyer was fiercely determined that they should not be confused with "salacious novels" (Kloester, *Biography* 278): she was repulsed by a film version of her *The Reluctant Widow* because "It seems to me that to turn a perfectly clean story of mine into a piece of sex-muck is bad faith" (Kloester, *Biography* 278) and, angered by some of the covers Pan produced for the paperback editions of her novels, she protested "against any suggestion that a book written by me will be found to contain lurid sex-scenes. I find this nauseating" (Kloester, *Biography* 346).

In addition to having a claim to be considered "unexceptionable" in both subject matter and literary status, *The Nonesuch* may also be considered "educational." Education is an important theme in the novel, and not simply because its heroine is a governess and its hero is a "social mentor" (79) who is quite explicitly described as teaching others: "to Julian Sir Waldo was [...] the big cousin who had taught him to ride, drive, shoot, fish, and box; a fount of wisdom" (8). Such things as a conscience and a sense of responsibility are not acquired in quite the same way as these practical skills but Heyer implies that they, too, must be taught and learned. In *Cotillion* (1953), an earlier novel of Heyer's, Freddy Standen asked "How the deuce would you know the right way to go on if you was never taught anything but the wrong way?" (266-67). In *The Nonesuch*, Tiffany and Laurie serve as demonstrations of the negative consequences of a lack of a suitable education. Tiffany has "been ruined by indulgence" (27) and Miss Trent observes that "it is never of the least use to appeal to her sense of what is right, because I don't think she has any—or any regard for the sensibilities of others either" (42). Laurie can also be considered a case study in how indulgent treatment, no matter how well-intentioned, can spoil a character. As Sir Waldo frankly acknowledges, "I ruined Laurie" (16) by inadvertently "encouraging him in the conviction that he would never be run quite off his legs because his wealthy cousin would infallibly rescue him from utter disaster" (156-57) and "By the time I'd acquired enough sense to know what it signified to *him*, the mischief had been done" (16). Sir Waldo

therefore feels responsible for “Laurie’s idleness, his follies, his reckless extravagance [...]. By his easy, unthinking generosity he had sapped whatever independence Laurie might have had, imposing no check upon his volatility” (156).

Although lessons, particularly in bad habits, can be imparted without much effort, reversing the ill effects of those lessons is more difficult and may require a combination of knowledge and cunning. At the beginning of *The Nonesuch* we learn that Sir Waldo, now older and more sensible, has attempted to trick Laurie into adopting a new lifestyle by telling him he will no longer pay his debts. Sir Waldo may not mean it, “but [...] Laurie thinks I do” (15). Sir Waldo’s plan depends for its success on his knowledge that “Laurie won’t go back on his word” (17) and that “Laurie is no more a gamester than I am!’ [...] All he wishes to do is to sport a figure in the world. Do believe that I know him much better than you do” (17).

Another of Sir Waldo’s plans also requires cunning and knowledge in order to succeed: having reached the conclusion that neither Tiffany’s “disposition nor her breeding made her an eligible wife for young Lord Lindeth” (79), Sir Waldo sets to work to teach his cousin the truth about Tiffany’s personality. Since he is aware that “Julian might ignore, and indignantly resent, warnings uttered by even so revered a mentor as his Top-of-the-Trees cousin, but he would not disbelieve the evidence of his own eyes” (80-81), Sir Waldo proceeds to provoke Tiffany into “betray[ing] the least amiable side of her disposition” (78). He does so with such skill that Julian remains unaware “that Waldo’s lazy complaisance masked a grim determination to thrust a spoke into the wheel of his courtship” (78).

Ancilla Trent, who owes “her present position to the knowledge, which had made it possible for her, in the past, to manage the wayward Beauty rather more successfully than had anyone else” (25), employs equally “unorthodox” (43) methods to educate her pupil:

when informed of Tiffany’s determination to marry into the peerage [she] not only accepted this as a praiseworthy ambition, but entered with gratifying enthusiasm into various schemes for furthering it. As these were solely concerned with the preparation of the future peeress for her exalted estate, Tiffany was induced to pay attention to lessons in Deportment, to practise her music, and even, occasionally, to read a book. (28)

In addition, she attempts to teach Tiffany to give at least the impression of modesty by insisting, “without the least hesitation” (23), that “whenever you boast of your beauty you seem to lose some of it” (22-23).

Unlike Miss Trent, Heyer was not the grand-daughter of “a Professor of Greek” (86) but her father was “a natural and inspiring teacher” (Aiken Hodge 3) and her younger brother Frank “became a schoolmaster, teaching for twenty-one contented years at Downside” (Aiken Hodge 4). Heyer herself can perhaps be said to have employed subtle educational methods which “masked” the didactic elements of her novels beneath highly entertaining plots. Jane Aiken Hodge has suggested that Heyer “did her best to conceal her [...] stern moral code behind the mask of romantic comedy, and succeeded, so far as her great fan public was concerned” (xi). The comic aspects of Heyer’s novels enable them to appeal to those who, like Tiffany, would be “Bored by the reproaches and the homilies of [...] a parcel of old dowdies” (27). Nonetheless, in *The Nonesuch* there is clear authorial

approval of Patience Chartley, “a modest girl” (21) “so free from jealousy that she wished very much that Tiffany would not say such things as must surely repel her most devout admirers” (22), who is also capable of putting herself in considerable danger to rescue a “slum-brat from under the wheels of a carriage, with the greatest pluck and presence of mind!” (239). She is contrasted with the vain and selfish Tiffany and since both receive their just deserts, they serve as examples of both the right and the wrong way for a young woman “to go on in society” (202). *The Nonesuch* can therefore be considered “didactic love fiction—romance that has a didactic project, is future-directed, and attempts to represent a moral way of living” (Lutz 2) rather than “amatory fiction” which “cannot be, generally speaking, recuperated morally” (Lutz 2).<sup>[6]</sup>

It should be noted, however, that the lines between the two types of fiction are somewhat blurred by the ubiquity of “the enemy lover” who, “Contrary to all expectation [...] appears in [...] didactic fiction” (Lutz 3), albeit when he is the hero of a work of didactic love fiction he is “set up as dangerous only to then be reformed in the end” (3). Heyer divided her romantic heroes into two categories: “her hero, Mark II [is] ‘Suave, well-dressed, rich, and a famous whip,’ as opposed to her Mark I hero who is ‘The brusque, savage sort with a foul temper.’” (Aiken Hodge 49). The Mark I hero is of the “enemy lover” type and, as Heyer made very clear, he is not truly marriage material:

my youthful fans [...] seem (from their letters) to be convinced that my Ideal Man is the prototype of what I call the Heyer Hero, No. I pattern—a horrid type, whom no woman in the possession of her senses could endure for more than half a day. (Aiken Hodge 197)

*The Nonesuch*, with its Mark II hero, is therefore fully didactic in nature since it does not encourage “youthful fans” to hanker after a type of man who, as *Cotillion*’s Freddy Standen says of his rakish cousin Jack, “wouldn’t make you a good husband” (Heyer 333).<sup>[7]</sup> Instead it provides the reader with both a youthful and a more mature version of the Mark II hero and outlines the characteristics required in a woman who wishes to be a good match for him. Tiffany is deemed unsuitable because “she hasn’t a particle of that sweetness of disposition which is in your cousin, and nothing but misery could be the outcome of a marriage between them!” (91). By contrast, Julian and “The Rector’s well-brought up daughter” (134) Patience are, in Miss Trent’s opinion, “very well-suited to one another” (134) and Sir Waldo, too, is “much inclined to think that [...] Julian had found exactly the wife to suit him” (197-98). Heyer never became as involved in her readers’ love lives as Sir Waldo is in Julian’s, but the owner of one romance review website recounts that

a commenter at the site who goes by the name DreadPirateRachel told me, “The first romances I ever read were by Georgette Heyer. They taught me to hold out for a partner who would share my intellectual passions and respect me for the person I am. I’m glad I paid attention, because I ended up with a husband who is funny, kind, supportive, and adoring.” (Wendell 196)

Clearly Heyer’s novels have helped at least one person find exactly the spouse to suit her.

The most obviously didactic aspect of Heyer’s romantic fiction, however, is her use of historical detail. As Karin E. Westman has observed,

Her Regency romances [...] made Heyer a household name and continue to grant her lasting narrative power within contemporary culture. [...] Heyer's presence on the cultural landscape [...] is not even limited to the literary: her name is frequently invoked to conjure for the general reader the Regency period as a whole [...], the mention of "Georgette Heyer" guarantees that readers have in mind the leisured upper-class social world of Regency England that Heyer created. (167-68)

Some of those readers may resemble Tiffany, who acquired no more than "a smattering of learning" (*Nonesuch* 28) despite all of Ancilla Trent's efforts. Penny Jordan, an author of contemporary Harlequin Mills & Boon romances, appears to have depicted at least one reader of this type in *Past Loving* (1992). During a scene set at a charity event with a Regency theme,

Holly [...] glanced briefly at the outrageously *décolleté* dress that Patsy was wearing. The chiffon skirt of the dress was so fine that it was almost possible to see right through it.  
'That's how they wore them in those days,' Patsy told her defensively [...].  
'They used to damp down their skirts so that they would cling to their bodies.'  
'I know,' Holly agreed drily. 'I read Georgette Heyer as well, you know.' (54)

Other readers have learned rather more: Jennifer Kloester, for example, has acknowledged that Heyer's Regency novels "beguiled my leisure hours, affording me enormous pleasure, but also giving me a great deal of useful information about the English Regency period" (*Regency World* xv). It was not until she began to write *Georgette Heyer's Regency World*, however, that Kloester realized

just how much accurate and factual information there was in the novels [...] and, although I'd always been under the impression that Heyer was meticulous in her communication of the period, I hadn't appreciated the scope of her research, nor the degree to which she immersed herself in the Regency era. (xv)

Aiken Hodge states that Heyer was

so deeply grounded in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that she could date a book effortlessly by the most casual of references to contemporary events. She hardly ever uses an actual flat-footed date. [...] It is almost a game that she plays with the reader. (65)

Dating the novels can thus become an interesting and educational challenge.

The first of the references which helps to date *The Nonesuch* is to be found in Sir Waldo's questions to Miss Trent regarding her brother being "engaged at Waterloo" and currently "with the Army of Occupation" (85). Following the defeat of Napoleon at

Waterloo, “Article V of the definitive treaty between France and the allies, signed on 20 November 1815, [...] set up a multinational occupation force” (Veve 99) and

The arrangements to end the occupation were signed at the conference of Aix-la-Chapelle on 9 October 1818. All allied forces were to be removed by 30 November [...]. The allied withdrawal did, in fact, begin almost immediately, and all British forces were disembarked in England within a few days of the planned departure date. (Veve 106-07)

Since we are told that “the event which started the succession of gaieties which made that summer memorable was Mrs Underhill’s informal ball” (76) which took place on “a warm June night” (74), and the Army of Occupation did not yet exist in June 1815, one may assume that *The Nonesuch* is set in either 1816, 1817, or 1818. The precise year in which the novel is set can be identified thanks to Sir Waldo’s mention of “Lady Spencer—the one that died a couple of years ago, and was mad after educating the poor” (275). This Lady Spencer is not an invention of Heyer’s but was the wife of the first Earl Spencer and

one of the first in the higher classes to adopt Sunday-schools; and her name will be found among the bountiful supporters of many of the most useful plans originated in her day, for ameliorating the condition of the poor [...] she expired, after a very short illness, on the 18th March, 1814, in her seventy-sixth year. (Le Marchant 6)

If Sir Waldo’s memory is accurate, the events in *The Nonesuch* must be taking place in 1816, a few months and a “couple of years” after Lady Spencer’s death.

Heyer was truly interested in getting her historical details right, had “her own [...] library of about 1000 historical books” (Byatt, “The Ferocious” 300) and only occasionally made mistakes.<sup>[8]</sup> Although in general, when

Reading her books, one remembers with surprise that the post-Waterloo years in which many of them are set were ones of appalling depression and poverty in England, with ex-servicemen begging in the streets and a very real danger of revolution [...] in fact [...] Georgette Heyer does occasionally look below the smiling surface of things. (Aiken Hodge 88)

Since Sir Waldo’s philanthropic efforts are focused on “collecting as many of the homeless waifs you may find in any city [...] and rearing them to become respectable citizens” (275), *The Nonesuch* is one of the novels in which Heyer looks “below the smiling surface of things.” In it Leeds is presented as both a commercial centre which is a suitable destination for “the tabbies [who] spend the better part of their time jaunting into Leeds to do some shopping” (256) and as a potential source of “homeless waifs”:

Leeds was a thriving and rapidly expanding town, numbering amongst its public edifices two Cloth Halls (one of which was of impressive dimensions, and was divided into six covered streets); five Churches; a Moot Hall; the Exchange (a handsome building of octangular design); an Infirmary; a House

of Recovery for persons afflicted with infectious diseases; a Charity school, clothing and educating upwards of a hundred children [...]; a number of cloth and carpet manufactories; several cotton mills, and foundries; inns innumerable; and half-a-dozen excellent posting-houses. The buildings were for the most part of red brick, beginning to be blackened by the smoke of industry; and while none could be thought magnificent there were several Squares and Parades which contained private residences of considerable elegance. There were some very good shops and silk warehouses. (131-32)

The accuracy of this description can be ascertained by a comparison with the details given in John Ryley's *Leeds Guide* (1806), John Bigland's Yorkshire volume of *The Beauties of England and Wales* (1812), and Edward Baines's *Directory, General and Commercial, of the Town & Borough of Leeds* (1817).<sup>[9]</sup>

Heyer was certainly familiar with works of this type since they are mentioned in the texts of her novels on more than one occasion. In *Cotillion* Kitty Charing acquires "*The Picture of London*, and it says here that it is a correct guide to all the Curiosities, Amusements, Exhibitions, Public Establishments, and Remarkable Objects in and near London, made for the use of Strangers, Foreigners, and all Persons who are not intimately acquainted with the Metropolis" (141). Kitty is quoting here from the extended title of a guide which actually existed (*Picture*) and which was reprinted many times in the early nineteenth century. In *Lady of Quality* (1972) Corisande Stinchcombe observes that Farley Castle is "a place any visitor to Bath ought to visit, because of the chapel, which is very interesting on—on account of its relics of—of mortality and antiquity!" (61) and she is promptly accused of "having 'got all that stuff' out of the local guidebook" (61). Her recommendation and description are indeed rather similar to the ones in John Feltham's *A Guide to all the Watering and Sea-Bathing Places* (1815) in which it is stated that "Farley Castle, six miles from Bath, [...] deserves a visit; particularly on account of its curious chapel, with some remarkable reliques of mortality and antiquity" (66).



Bigland's work contains an engraving of what he calls the "Dropping Well" at Knaresborough which may have formed the inspiration for the one spotted by *The Nonesuch's* Lord Lindeth in Leeds: "A picture hanging in the window of a print-shop caught his eye; he recognized the subject, which was the Dripping Well" (Heyer 136). Heyer's

“Dripping Well” must be the same as Bigland’s “Dropping Well” since it can be found in Knaresborough (Heyer 91) and Bigland states that

The walk along the margin of the river, from the dropping well to the bridge, is extremely delightful. [...] The precipitous rocks which run along the north side of the river, are not less than a hundred feet in height. At the bottom [...] are many dwellings, scooped out of the rock, and inhabited from time immemorial [...]. The most remarkable of these, is that called the Rock-house, a large cavern, supposed to have been the retreat of some of those banditti, who, in former times, infested the neighbouring forest. (642-43)

Some of this information appears to have made its way into *The Nonesuch* since Lord Lindeth “told us of the wild, ragged rocks, and the cavern which was once the lair of bandits” (Heyer 91).

Heyer’s inclusion of Leeds’ charitable institutions in her description of the town hints at the social problems created by rapid industrial expansion.<sup>[10]</sup> She reveals them even more vividly via a minor character, a “ragged urchin” (136), who steals an apple and has to be reassured by Patience Chartley that he will not be handed over to “the beadle (an official of whom he seemed to stand in terror” (138). Ryley describes the beadle, along with the Chief Constable, as “personages who are, to vulgar thieves, as terrific as the Chief Justice himself” (89). Heyer’s

urchin hails from the slums: either in the eastern part of the town, where the dyeing-houses and most of the manufactories are situated, or on the south bank of the river. [...] So far as I am aware there is no epidemic disease rife there at the moment, but most of the dwellings are little better than hovels, and there is a degree of squalor which makes it excessively imprudent for you [...] to enter them. (145)

Once again, Heyer’s description is congruent with that provided by contemporary sources. Bigland observes that “On the eastern side, the town falls into a deep valley, through which runs a rivulet, having on its banks a great number of dying houses. [...], on the banks of the abovementioned rivulet, the houses are mean, and the streets and lanes dirty, crooked, and irregular [...]. The southern edge of the town [...] is almost equally disagreeable” (775).<sup>[11]</sup> For his part Ryley comments that in the families of women who work in the large factories “we find an offensive neglect of cleanliness, a total disregard of frugality, and every appearance of the most squalid poverty; the children are dirty, diseased, and in rags” (102). He concludes that it “remains for the philanthropist [...] to apply correctives, and more especially to apply assiduously to the forming of the minds of the rising generation to habits of virtue and religion” (102).

Heyer, like the philanthropic Sir Waldo, has had an effect on “the rising generation.” Pamela Regis goes as far as to claim that Heyer’s “influence is felt in every historical romance novel written since 1921, particularly in the Regency romance novel. Heyer is the mother of this kind of romance” (125). Heyer’s work is in some respects comparable to Sir Waldo’s: he has for many years been engaged in “collecting as many [...] homeless waifs [...] as I could, and rearing them to become respectable citizens. [...] The important thing is to

enter them to the right trades" (*Nonesuch* 275). As Sir Waldo admits, "we've had our failures, but not many" (275) and although Heyer was horrified by instances of blatant plagiarism of her novels, on the whole the authors she inspired might be described as "respectable citizens" of the society of romance authors.<sup>[12]</sup> Prominent among them are Stephanie Laurens, for whom Heyer's *These Old Shades* "is unquestionably the one that has most strongly contributed to, not just what I write today, but the fact that I write at all" (ii) and Mary Balogh, who first encountered Heyer when she picked up a copy of *Frederica*:

I was enchanted, enthralled. I could not bear for the book to end. I started gathering about me and devouring every other book she had written. Then I discovered that other people were writing the same kind of books—Regency romances. To say that that one book changed my life would not be overstating the case at all. (24)

For Mary Jo Putney, another author of Regency-set romances, Heyer's influence, albeit exerted indirectly, was also decisive: "discovering the modern Regencies inspired by her books was the first step on my path to authorhood" (ii). Directly or indirectly, then, Georgette Heyer's novels have introduced some authors to what would become, for them, "the right trade."

To this day Heyer's attention to historical details sets a high standard for others to follow. Linda Fildew, Senior Editor of Mills & Boon Historical/Harlequin Historical romances, has stated that

Georgette Heyer is known and respected for her accuracy and in our historical line at Harlequin we certainly ask that authors do their research. The process is such an engrossing, enjoyable one that we know the challenge for some authors is what to put in and what fascinating facts to leave out.

Heyer herself left out some "fascinating facts" about the Regency period; as Aiken Hodge observed, "Her Regency world is a very carefully selected, highly artificial one" (87-88). Although Heyer worked hard to ensure her novels were historically accurate, her depiction of the Regency is coloured by her own beliefs. For example, as already mentioned, she did not wish her novels to be considered "salacious." In addition, it seems highly unlikely that Heyer, who "consistently criticised the feminist stance, and could be vehement in her condemnation of women in business" (Kloester, *Biography* 134), would ever have considered creating heroines such as those to be found in Paula Marshall's *Dear Lady Disdain* (1995) and Michelle Styles's *His Unsuitable Viscountess* (2012), who respectively run a bank and a foundry. These two Harlequin Mills & Boon authors had, nonetheless, done their research. As Styles notes, there were

successful Regency businesswomen—women like Eleanor Coade, whose factory made the famous Coade Stone statues [...] and Sarah Child Villiers, Lady Jersey, who inherited Child and Co from her grandfather [...]. Lady Jersey served as the senior partner from 1806-1867. She never allowed the men in her life to take an active part in the bank, and retained the right to hire and fire all the other partners. [...] In 1812 in England fourteen women

literally held licences to print money because they were senior partners in a variety of private banks. The two wealthiest bankers in London in the 1820s were the Peeresses—Lady Jersey and the Duchess of St Alban's, who was the senior partner at Coutts. (2)

Heyer's personal views certainly affected her depiction of class and racial differences. It might be said of her that "the mushroom-class" was one which she, like Lord Lindeth, "instinctively avoided" (*The Nonesuch* 64). In her biography of Heyer, Kloester states that "Georgette's own view of herself was as someone who was well-bred and most comfortable in upper- and upper-middle-class circles" (133) and "Her notion of class and breeding underpins all of her writing [...] she held to the idea of a natural social hierarchy" (132). This was certainly not a view exclusive to Heyer: Helen Hughes, in her study of "historical romances written between 1890 and 1990" (8), observes that one of the "themes which remain[ed] the same throughout the century [...] is the portrayal of class. In the texts [...] upper-class characters are seen as belonging to what amounts to a different species from lower-class ones" (136-37). In Heyer's oeuvre the clearest example of this portrayal is perhaps to be found in *These Old Shades* (1926). Here the cross-dressing heroine's "gentle birth," which "One can tell [...] from his speech, and his delicate hands and face" (12), is more readily discerned than her sex while the true parentage of the peasant-born boy who has taken her place is betrayed by the fact that he is "A boorish cub [...] with the soul of a farmer" (51) who has it as his "ambition to have a farm under his own management" (37). The young man's supposed paternal uncle does not suspect the deception, but he is nonetheless certain that the youth cannot be the product of pure aristocratic bloodlines: "there must be bad blood in Marie! My beautiful nephew did not get his boorishness from us. Well, I never thought that Marie was of the real nobility" (51). The effects of descent from "good [...] yeoman-stock" (47) are noted in *A Civil Contract* (1961): Jenny Chawleigh tells Lady Nassington that "my mother was a farmer's daughter" (115), is told in reply that "you have the look of it" (116), and her subsequent enjoyment of country living reveals that she "owed more to her mother's ancestry than [...] she herself had known" (241). The idea that particular personality traits could be ascribed to entire social groups also underpins Heyer's depiction of "Mr Goldhanger, [...] a literary caricature of an avaricious moneylender whose antecedents were undoubtedly Dickens' Fagin and Shakespeare's Shylock" (Kloester, *Biography* 368). Mr Goldhanger appears in *The Grand Sophy*, in which he is described as "a thin, swarthy individual, with long greasy curls, a semitic nose, and an ingratiating leer" (190) and "*The instinct of his race* made him prefer, whenever possible, to maintain a manner of the utmost urbanity" (191, emphasis added).

As with the *Nonesuch's* gift of a "dissected map [...] all made of little pieces which fit into each other, to make a map of Europe" (190), "The impression given of 'history' in these novels can be summed up as an imaginative creation, a selective version of the past" (Hughes 139). The nineteenth-century dissected map, "born in the same workshops as its more formal sibling, the imperial map" (Norcia 5), offered children "narratives of power and authority which are incumbent in the business of building both nation and empire" (2). Such maps were not simply neutral depictions of the world: they were "often strategically colored or marked to catalog the resources and opportunities for imperial inscription; titles reflect the moving horizon of imperial ambitions" (10). Heyer's historical romances are also shaped by ideologies which ensure that, despite the historical accuracy of many of their

details, they will not be universally accepted as “quite unexceptionable.” Mrs Chartley cautioned Miss Trent that

Sir Waldo belongs to a certain set which is considered to be the very height of fashion. In fact, he is its leader [...]. You must know, perhaps better than I do, that the manners and too often the conduct of those who are vulgarly called Top-of-the-Trees are not governed by quite the same principles which are the rule in more modest circles. (207)

Heyer is the Nonesuch of Regency romance: like Sir Waldo she led her “set,” conforming to such high standards of historical accuracy that she too can be considered a “paragon” (20). Nonetheless, neither Heyer nor Sir Waldo embodied “perfection” (20) and the manners and conduct endorsed by Heyer’s novels are not governed by quite the same principles as those which are the rule in many more modern circles.

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[1] I am very grateful for the assistance I have received from: Linda Fildew at Harlequin Mills & Boon; Louise-Ann Hand, Information Librarian: Local and Family History Library, Leeds City Council, who was a fount of useful information about the streets and inns of early nineteenth-century Leeds; Greta Meredith, Assistant Librarian, Thoresby Society, who pointed me in the direction of useful primary and secondary sources about Leeds; and Harlequin Mills & Boon author Michelle Styles.

[2] Although Lillian S. Robinson qualified the description of Heyer as “Queen of the Regency romance” by adding that “later paperback editions make some such peculiar claim” (208), it is a claim which has persisted down the years: in 1983 Rosemary Guiley observed that “By the time she died [...] Georgette had long reigned as the Queen of the Regency romance” (190) and the backcover copy of the Arrow (2006) edition of Jane Aiken Hodge’s biography of Heyer states that “An internationally bestselling phenomenon and queen of the Regency romance, Georgette Heyer is one of the most beloved historical novelists of our time.”

[3] A. S. Byatt and Rachel Law, *Lady Ellenborough*, have offered support for the last two of these assessments: the former described Heyer as a “superlatively good writer of honourable escape” (“Honourable” 258) while the latter declared that “Georgette Heyer [...] was the only reading for a hospital bed” (Aiken Hodge 209).

[4] Jennifer Kloester has noted that *Guy Mannering* is “the story which so enthralled Mrs Underhill and her family in *The Nonesuch*” (*Regency World* 342). Although it is not explicitly named in Heyer’s novel, enough details are given by Mrs Underhill to enable reliable identification. She describes the book that “Miss Trent reads [...] after dinner to us” as being “so lifelike that I couldn’t get to sleep last night for wondering whether that nasty Glossin would get poor Harry Bertram carried off by the smugglers again, or whether the old witch is going to save him—her and the tutor” (190).

[5] Regarding the term “romance,” Clive Bloom notes that “Before the First World War there was simply too little popular fiction to need categorising, almost all popular writing being designated with the vague title of ‘romance’, which had not itself become a term used exclusively for women’s fiction” (86). Heyer is known to have used the word to

describe her own work: in 1955, while writing *Sprig Muslin*, she mentioned her need to “turn out another bleeding romance” (Aiken Hodge 112).

[6] Deborah Lutz acknowledges her debt to Ros Ballaster who, in *Seductive Forms: Women’s Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740*, writes that “The early eighteenth century [...] saw a split between female-authored pious and didactic love fiction, stressing the virtues of chastity or sentimental marriage, and erotic fiction by women, with its voyeuristic attention to the combined pleasures and ravages of seduction” (33).

[7] Jack Westruther is very much in the Mark I mould. Freddy himself is a Mark II hero, and Kitty has by this stage in the novel come to recognise their relative merits:

‘I was never in love with Jack in my life! [...] I thought I was, but I know now it was no such thing. He seemed just like all the heroes in books, but I soon found that he is not like them at all.’

‘No,’ agreed Freddy. ‘I’m afraid I ain’t either, Kit.’

‘Of course you are not! No one is! And if somebody was, I should think him quite odious!’ (333)

[8] Kloester reports “an uncharacteristic error” (*Biography* 142) in *Regency Buck*:

In describing (in loving detail) the minaret-domed exterior and the magnificent Chinoiserie interior of the Pavilion, Georgette described a building which did not yet exist in that form. [...]. While it remains the fiction writer’s prerogative to adapt history to suit the needs of a story, this had never been Georgette’s approach. Her mistake in *Regency Buck* came from her reading of the limited source material [...]. Georgette made very few mistakes in her historical novels and the discovery of an error always caused her considerable distress. (142-43).

Another is noted by Aiken Hodge:

When *Frederica* began to come out in *Woman’s Journal* a reader pointed out a rare error. Researching Felix’s beloved engineering works at the London Library, Georgette Heyer had been misled by a reference to an iron foundry in Soho and placed it in London instead of Birmingham. (168)

A minor error of a slightly different nature can be found in *The Nonesuch*. The shopping party made up of Tiffany, Patience and Ancilla “alighted from the carriage at the King’s Arms” (Heyer 131), and they return there to eat “cold meats, fruit, jellies and creams” in a “private parlour” (132) hired by Lord Lindeth. Later in the novel, however, the King’s Arms seems to have metamorphosed into a rather different area of the royal body, for Tiffany coerces Laurence into taking her to “the King’s Head” (248) and they are “ushered into the same parlour which Lindeth had hired for his memorable nuncheon-party” (249). Both the King’s Arms and the King’s Head are listed in early nineteenth-century sources. According to Baines’s 1817 *Directory*, the King’s Head was to be found in Kirkgate (195). The King’s Arms is one of the Leeds inns (Cooke 33, 40) included in “An Itinerary of all the Direct and Principal Cross Roads in the West Riding of Yorkshire in which are Included the Stages,

Inns, and Gentlemen's Seats" (Cooke 17). It is also included in Baines's Directory, in the list of "Inns, Taverns, &c. in the Borough of Leeds" (194) which mentions that it is to be found on "Lower head row" (195) and had as its proprietor an H. Dawson (195). Since "Lower Headrow (today known just as the Headrow) [...] was located at the northern/top part of Briggate" (Hand) and "Briggate [...] has historically been, and indeed still is, the main shopping street in Leeds" (Hand), the shopping party could easily have left the King's Arms, walked along "Lower head row" until they reached Briggate, and then "set forth on foot down the main shopping street" (Heyer *Nonesuch* 131).

[9] Ryley begins his survey of Leeds's public buildings by describing its "five Churches of the established religion" (20), and "From the description of the edifices appropriated to the exercise of religious worship, the transition is natural to those devoted to its best fruit—Charity" (43), including the Infirmary, House of Recovery and Charity School. He also describes the White Cloth Hall (57), the Mixed Cloth Hall with its "six long streets or aisles" (57), the Moot Hall (63), the Exchange, which he deems "a beautiful building, on an octagan [sic] form" (57), the cloth factories (103-04), cotton mills (104), foundries (104-05), squares and parades (67-68). Baines's *Directory*, in addition to containing descriptions of the White Cloth Hall (29), the Mixed Cloth-Hall (28), "The Exchange, [...] an octagon building, adjoining this Cloth Hall" (28), the churches (24-25), the Moot-Hall (23), the General Infirmary (31), the House of Recovery "intended for the reception of persons attacked by infectious fevers" (31) and the Charity School (35-36), provides a long list of "Inns, Taverns, &c. in the Borough of Leeds" (194). Bigland describes the Mixed Cloth Hall's "six covered streets" (785), mentions that there are "carpet manufactories," "cotton mills" and "founderies" (787) and observes that Leeds is "in general well built, almost entirely of brick" (775), although "the western part displays the greatest degree of elegance. In this quarter is a spacious square environed with handsome brick houses [...]. Park Square is also composed of elegant modern houses" (777). Bigland also notes that at the Charity School "70 boys are taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, and 50 girls reading, writing, and knitting" (784). Ryley does not give the precise number of children at the school (51-52). Baines's *Directory*, published in 1817, a year after Sir Waldo's fictional visit to the town, relates that the Charity School had "been lately rebuilt, in the Gothic style, and is intended in future solely for the reception of girls. The boys have been removed to the National School" (36). No publication date is given for G. A. Cooke's *Topography of Great Britain* but the archive which makes it available online dates it to 1820 and in the text itself Cooke comments that in Leeds "New buildings even in the latter end of the summer of 1819, were erecting, and excited the appearance of a town in a thriving state" (186). This would appear to suggest that Cooke visited Leeds during the summer of 1819. His statement that "The charity school instructs seventy boys and fifty girls in reading and knitting" (183) agrees with Bigland's 1812 work rather than with the 1817 *Directory*. His comments regarding the Charity School cannot be regarded as entirely reliable, however, since his description of Leeds often appears to repeat Bigland verbatim. For example, Bigland states that Leeds is "one of the most commercial and opulent towns in Yorkshire" (775) and Cooke uses precisely the same words (179).

[10] Ryley states in his *Guide* that "Within the last thirty years the town has increased to more than double its number of inhabitants, and it is annually augmenting in its dimensions" (19). According to Cooke, "In 1811 the population of Leeds was 62,534 persons, an increase of nearly ten thousand since the census of 1801" (185). Cooke would

appear to be giving the total for “the town and parish of Leeds” (Bigland 789), not just the town of Leeds itself. Ryley sets the total population of the town in 1801 at 30,669 (118), a figure accepted by Steven Burt and Kevin Grady in their modern history of Leeds: “Its population of 17,117 in 1775 had mushroomed to 30,669 by 1801. By 1811 another 5,000 had been added, and in 1821 the total had reached 48,603” (95). Bigland includes the figures quoted by Cooke and those given by Ryley (789).

[11] This is another passage which Cooke includes almost verbatim in his work (179-80).

[12] Regarding those who are alleged to have plagiarised Heyer’s novels, Aiken Hodge mentions that “In the spring of 1950, a letter from a fan drew her [Heyer’s] attention to a series of books by a successful romantic novelist [...]. When Georgette Heyer read the books in question, she found so obvious a debt to her own work that she seriously considered filing a suit for plagiarism” (80). Kloester identifies the author in question as Barbara Cartland (*Biography* 281). In the early sixties Heyer’s attention was drawn to another suspected case of plagiarism, this time involving Kathleen Lindsay (Kloester, *Biography* 335) and she wrote that “It makes me feel quite sick to know that another slug is crawling over my work” (Aiken Hodge 139).

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