

14 Weeks of Love and Labour: Teaching Regency and Desert Romance to Undergraduate Students

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Abstract: This article describes the proceedings of a single semester module, delivered in fourteen weekly ninety-minute units, focusing on the (British) popular romance and three novels from the Regency and desert romance subgenres in particular: Georgette Heyer's *Bath Tangle* (1955), E.M. Hull's *The Sheik* (1919), and a recent Mills & Boon category romance, Marguerite Kaye's *The Governess and the Sheikh* (2011), which falls into both the Regency and desert subgenres. Taught entirely in English during the 2012 summer semester at the Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg (Bavaria, Germany) to second- and third- year BA and teaching degree students, the class offered cultural as well as literary studies approaches and analyses and required student participation. The latter happened via team tasks, group discussions and joint presentations on either introductory or advanced topics concerning the two subgenres, thereby giving the students the opportunity to specialize in the analysis of a specific field of (British) popular culture and literature. This article outlines and reflects on: schedule planning; various teaching approaches and class activities; the students' choice in assessments; and their reaction to and evaluation of the seminar.

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In February 2012, after finishing my *Magister* thesis on the popular Regency romance and getting my degree,[1] I was offered the opportunity to become a doctoral candidate at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU), along with the chance to start teaching English Literary and Cultural Studies at the Department of English and American Studies.[2] In addition to two first-year introductory modules on cultural studies, I had the opportunity to design and structure a fourteen-week seminar to be offered as an elective module[3] on (British) popular romance. While many seminars had included references to popular romantic structures and Christine Feehan's *The Scarlett Curse* (2001) was analysed in a seminar titled "The Gothic Vision," popular romance had not been the focus of a seminar in our Institute of English Studies before.

This article examines the proceedings of the seminar and the applied approach to teaching the popular romance in three distinct ways. First, it documents and reflects on the planning, structuring, and delivery of the module. Secondly, it considers the students' development and progress and their response to the pedagogical measures. Lastly, it argues popular romance as a topic for academic study can appeal to both BA and teaching degree university students who study English in a German academic setting.[4] Popular genres in general (such as crime or detective, but also horror fiction—seminars on which generate a lot of student interest and participation in my experience) have a strong appeal as a subject, presumably since they connect directly to many students' reading preferences and interests. Of course, there is also a case to be made for the idea that some of my students started to express during classes: that a seminar on popular culture initially often gives rise to the (very quickly corrected) notion that this topic would contain "less difficult and complex" texts to analyse, not involve much abstract theory, or require much personal effort. But this did not deter the participants from engaging in the texts and assignments. Thus, student interest can definitely be generated, even among those who picked popular literature as a topic because they assumed it would just be "easy." Moreover, dealing with popular genres can motivate students by demonstrating that academic approaches are more than dry, abstract theories, but can and should inspire critical reflection on their own lives, how they conceive of the world, their own habits, contexts and reading practices. Finally, with regard to the academic setting, it will be shown that such a module can very well be integrated into courses which focus on the study of literature and culture in general, and can enliven academic discussion by shedding light onto genres which are underrepresented even in the study of popular culture.

The students were permitted to choose the elective class after having acquired knowledge of basic approaches to both literary and cultural "texts,"[5] leaving me with the task of recapping that knowledge and encouraging them to apply it to the study of popular romance novels and their structures. This seminar was designed to provide insight into the workings of specific popular romance subgenres, as well as to offer an overview of criticism levelled against the genre in general, and to enhance student's abilities to analyse a popular cultural environment of production and consumption.

The seminar "Reading the Popular Romance" was thus one of a number of similarly structured elective seminars on various topics offered in the respective semester. Which of these seminars the students attended was up to their preference in topic and depended on how they managed their personal study schedule. For them, the module offered the chance to actively incorporate and apply the knowledge they gained in introductory and advanced seminars, which focus mainly on theoretical approaches and exemplary case studies. Thus,

working within the constraints of one genre and on selected texts with given literary and cultural studies approaches would help them to think critically and perform academic analyses both orally and in written form. In pursuit of their degree, the *Proseminar* is intended to be the next step in becoming proficient at producing coherent (close) readings and analyses of a text, followed by incorporating the analyses into a sound argumentative structure—first with the lecturer in class and then with a more narrow focus in their end-of-term-papers. Acquiring academic skills at this level also includes honing research abilities and being able to conform to the desired formalities both when preparing presentations and the end-of-term-paper, especially with regard to the bibliographical details. In order to facilitate this learning, I used a mixture of teaching approaches. Learning objective oriented measures, such as recaps on central approaches and summaries of the results of analyses, were central in relaying the necessary information to the students (Johansen 11-13). In addition, some elements of activity-oriented teaching (Johansen 89-91) were incorporated to enliven the teaching style and encourage student participation as well as increase interest. The most important measures in this respect were group work/working with a partner (Johansen 73) and interactive class discussions which were partly designed to help students with their soft skills, developing the capacity to work in a team and dealing with possibly conflicting opinions of others in an academically appropriate manner. However, these approaches were subject to revision throughout the duration of the seminar, since “no single strategy works for every teacher in every situation” (Daniel 91). The pedagogical aims in the first stages of planning and structuring the seminar were quite basic, since it is difficult to judge the exact possibilities of a class without getting to know the students and the dynamics among them first. The seminar structure was in itself very conducive to discussions and group work, as it let students develop trains of thought and arguments on their own, share them in a group of their peers, and then present them to other groups and the lecturer. Developing skills at both accepting but also formulating constructive criticism and delivering it to a fellow student were likewise part of the aims for this module. The “point of departure” for the students also varied, with some having read popular romances before, but not the specific subgenres we were to touch upon, while others’ experience of the genre was mostly limited to ideas from Hollywood cinema. Thus, bringing everyone onto a level that the class could start from was of utmost importance in the first weeks.

Concerning linguistic abilities, the seminar provides a stage for the students to practice speaking English freely in front of an audience (especially important for those doing a teaching degree) and bringing them closer to complete fluency in the English language. By the time they attended the *Proseminar*, the students also had undergone two language training courses with the university’s language department, in addition to at least five years of English in school. Therefore, the students’ language capabilities allowed for the seminar on popular romance to be held entirely in English. At times, though, especially in group discussions, it became apparent that their passive language skills and vocabulary were more developed than their active ones. Most prevalent were problems with grammar and tenses in spoken English. As a result, the class was comprised of a medium-level group of readers, speakers and writers, with exceptions on both ends of the spectrum. Some of the students also intended to go abroad at the end of their second year in order to perfect their language skills.

Since the class was offered as part of the English Literary and Cultural Studies elective seminar for second to fourth year BA and teaching degree students, the syllabus material had to be limited to primary literature by British authors. Thanks to the work I had done in my *Magister* thesis, I was deemed capable of choosing the primary and secondary texts myself, running them by my supervisor for final approval. However, a US-American angle was included by providing an overview of the romance genre and its place in popular culture, as well as in the publishing industry and the importance of marketing and producing the book as an “object” in the UK and in the US. The idea of analysing the popular romance novel in its book form as an object was motivated by my background in the analysis of book markets and book production, acquired as a result of research conducted for a degree course called “Study of the Book” (*Buchwissenschaften*), also taught at FAU.

During the fourteen-week semester, with one ninety-minute unit per week at my disposal, the focus was on three primary texts which were analysed in depth, namely Georgette Heyer’s *Bath Tangle* (1955), E.M. Hull’s *The Sheik* (1919), and a more recent Mills & Boon category romance, Marguerite Kaye’s *The Governess and the Sheikh* (2011), which falls into both the Regency and desert subgenre. Special emphasis was put firstly on an introduction to the popular romance as a genre, as a mode, and a functioning cultural construct within an economic context. Secondly, we concentrated on the aspects of hierarchical difference presented in the texts, which were supposedly overcome by the end of the novel. One important objective was to foster students’ capacity to work actively on texts with theoretical concepts from postcolonial studies, gender studies, and media/film studies, and also to show them the breadth of possible fields of research to specialize in during their own studies and maybe even for their BA final papers.

Twenty students signed up for the class—nineteen female students and a “minority” of one male—a ratio that already hints at the very gendered perception of the genre, considering that I advertised the class under the heading of “Reading the Popular Romance.” This overall number of students is quite common for seminars, since they are designed for relatively small groups in order to allow for more intense discussion and a teaching style that also focuses on individual students and their performance. That the popular romance genre had not been on students’ radars as a viable area for academic interest emerged in the first session when I conducted a short oral survey of the reasons why they had selected this class and what expectations they had for it. It turned out that a few of the students were actually romance fans while others were either oblivious to the genre beyond the common stereotypes, or reluctant to admit that they had read popular romances before. Consequently, it became another goal of the seminar to show how current common stereotypes mostly still refer back to 1970s/80s feminist criticism of the genre. When I inquired as to why the students had actually chosen this particular class, the majority of them admitted that they had seen the title and had never encountered a seminar that dealt with popular romance before and were actually quite surprised it would be a topic that fourteen weeks could be devoted to in academia.

Of immediate concern to the students were, of course, the assessments. To successfully complete the seminar, they had to perform an in-class presentation which was mandatory in order to be admitted to the final assessment. The latter was in form of an end-of-term paper (10-12 pages, i.e. roughly 4,000 to 5,000 words) on a topic of interest pertaining to one or more appropriate texts and approaches we dealt with in class.[6] With

prior discussion and approval of the lecturer, it was also possible to work on a suitable text not discussed in class beforehand. All topics were primarily chosen and worded by the individual students themselves, thereby making them familiar with the thought processes that go into putting together and verbalizing a thesis on a specific topic as well as researching and describing it in a limited number of words. A further requirement was the weekly reading of required texts designated as essential for each session. In preparation for the assessment, individual meetings were offered and one week's teaching unit focused entirely on the academic skills and research abilities needed to complete the task successfully. In the last session of the semester, the students were required to present their assessment topic of choice to the whole class and to elaborate on their approach to the assessment, getting feedback and constructive advice from both their colleagues and the lecturer.

Structurally, the lessons were divided up into a presentation (which was a collaborative effort of several students), a discussion about the required reading (with the lecturer adding information from various other texts), and finally the application of the approaches and ideas we had talked about to the primary text(s) in question. I probably should mention that, though I was talking about the "romance," it was made clear from the outset that the findings of the seminar would only relate to the two specific subgenres we would analyse and sweeping generalizations were to be avoided. The overall structure of the fourteen-week seminar was as follows:

Week	Topic
1	Introductory session Why analyse popular romance? Introduction to romance in a pop cultural context. Introduction to critical voices concerning the romance.
2	Basic concepts in dealing with and approaches to romance/ Romance Defined <i>Presentation:</i> Overview: The History of the Romance Genre
3	The framework of popular romance in the US and the UK: A look at the publishing industry <i>Presentation:</i> Mills & Boon and Marketing
4	Academic Skills Session
5	Literary analysis & close reading: <i>Bath Tangle</i> (1955) <i>Presentation:</i> The Regency as historical period

6	Gender and gender difference in <i>Bath Tangle</i> (1955) <i>Presentation:</i> Gender and the popular romance
7	Representations of History in <i>Bath Tangle</i> (1955) <i>Presentation:</i> History Inside and Out – Romance Book Covers and Contents and the Re-Presentation of History
8	Foundation of all desert romance: <i>The Sheik</i> (1919) <i>Presentation:</i> Orientalism and the Popular Romance
9	Intersections of race/nationality and gender in <i>The Sheik</i> (1919) <i>Presentation:</i> Self and Other: Constructions of Race and Nationality
10	A change in media: <i>The Sheik</i> (1921) starring Rudolph Valentino <i>Presentation:</i> Introduction to (Silent) Film Studies
11	Combining desert and Regency romance: <i>The Governess and the Sheikh</i> (2011)
12	Changes in the popular romance from Hull to Heyer to Kaye <i>Presentation:</i> Sexuality and Sexual Encounters in Modern Popular Romance
13	Results and Question session
14	Presentation of End-of-term paper topics

After the introductory session, we started out with the basics: general facts about the popular romance as a genre in terms of definition (Hollows 68-88; Engler 7-12), and in terms of approaches that had been used in order to analyse the romance to date. We then set out to have a look at the cultural framework of producing (publishing industry guidelines, marketing techniques, authors as figures of fame) and consuming the popular romance in a popular cultural context. Here, students were asked to participate and comment based on their own experience (also by making comparisons to other popular genres they knew). Having outlined the basic premises of the publication conventions and possibilities, the students again had a chance to contribute, this time via group activities. They had to select three romances at random out of a substantial number of recent and older ones I brought to class and identify what form of publication (single-title/category or formula) as well as sub-genre they belonged to and what the target audience could be,

judging from the cover, in-book ads, author presentation, and paratextual elements. This exercise drove home the possible distinctions to be made within a certain set of current romance publications. The students responded positively to the activity and made observant remarks about the romances they had chosen and how they thought the elements of marketing were incorporated in order to ensure high customer interest. The discussion soon turned to the question of whether the romance novel covers were actually designed to attract new consumers or whether they were more a “marker” of genre for an already existing readership. All groups had at least one older historical romance cover that featured the stereotypical bodice-ripping male protagonist and the heroine with excessively luxuriant hair. Most students commented that even if they were looking for a novel with a romance plot, the covers would quite possibly deter them from buying the book for fear of the reactions of the cashier and people who might observe them carrying or reading a book with such a cover. A discourse of negation and self-censorship became apparent in the groups of students (“I might actually buy the novel, the blurb sounds good but the cover is just too embarrassing.”). Public acquisition of texts which were openly advertised as having “explicit” sexual content and were aimed at women was obviously taken to signify affiliation of the consumer with the stereotype of the frustrated housewife/woman and thus with discontent about one’s position in life and with regard to relationships in particular. Consequently, even though we had discussed and dispelled this stereotype of the reader, it became obvious that it is so ingrained in cultural imaginations about the popular romance as to become almost unshakeable. Fixing images of excessive heterosexual interaction onto the cover and thus referencing both a female tradition of romance production and female pleasure in the consumption of (romantically motivated) sexual action indicates connections to possibly illicit, private reading practices that could be considered culturally transgressive and maybe even part of a taboo which surrounds female-centric depictions of sexual interaction. Of course, this interaction on the cover is entirely expressed in terms of exaggeration, hyperbole, hyper-femininity and -masculinity, clearly marking the representation as a construct, as “fiction,” thereby containing anxieties about active female desire, projecting the latter into the realm of fictionality.

Mixing up these historical romances with Mills & Boon Modern category and single-title romances, like J.D. Robb’s/Nora Roberts’s *Naked in Death*, made for an interesting discussion, since students thought that the crime and science fiction elements as well as the cover of Robb’s text were much closer to genres usually coded as masculine or connected to male traditions of writing. Throwing authors like P.D. James, who writes crime fiction, into the discussion made some of the students realize that if no full name with indication towards the sex of the author is given on the cover or in the paratexts, the genre and cultural practices associated with it are most often the origin of assumptions about gender identity and writing practice. Especially surprising was also the fact that students very quickly started to pick up on the (sexualized) codes of the cover tradition and its system of signification which had been shortly discussed the week before. This indicated an aptitude with visual signifiers that boded very well for the planned film analysis.

Part of assessing in-class participation was having the students give presentations on topics such as the historical development of the genre, marketing techniques, gendered and heterosexual discourses in the popular romance, and the depiction of sexuality and sexual interaction in the novels examined. When it came to literary analysis, we started out by going over the narrative basics and laid the groundwork for understanding the subgenre

specific plot motifs, settings, and the recurring set of stereotypical characters. Analysis was conducted mostly through close reading and was based strongly on Pamela Regis's eight central plot points (Regis 30-38) as well as George Paizis's work on characterization in his book *Love and the Novel* (10-26). Here, the notion of a text operating as a "closed system [that is] both an ideal world and an unreal world" (Paizis 99) as well as issues of power and quality of the characters were examined, establishing the different hierarchies and power relations between various (groups of) characters. Group work at this stage included tasks like describing the (structural) function of select chapters in relation to the whole novel and discussing the importance of analysing them (also with regard to how the chapters would fit into Regis's eight points of the popular romance). Moreover, it encompassed analysing the narrative situation and devices (on the level of discourse), and figuring out how the different characters are constructed by the text, taking into account different levels of mediation.

The Regency romance deals with a set of stereotypical characters (for example the rake, the Byronic hero, and the bluestocking or the spinster), which were introduced in order for the students to be able to judge adherence to and deviation from these roles. Going over constructions of gender and gender difference in *Bath Tangle* required a short introduction to Freudian psychoanalysis and Lacanian psychosemiosis (especially the concept of the mirror stage) in order to illustrate the emergence of structures of difference and desire. Psychoanalytical questions included inquiries into oedipal structures and absent parental figures. Furthermore, Judith Butler's concept of performativity, as incorporated into an analysis of Heyer by Lisa Fletcher in *Historical Romance Fiction* (13-24), was subsequently dealt with and proved to be a notion that the students understood very well and could transfer onto *Bath Tangle*. With respect to gender as such, the general inquiry started off with the students identifying and discussing the nature and characterization of patriarchal authority figures and other structures of patriarchy in Heyer's text. We then moved on to questions of how the gender roles presented in the novel are constructed as normative. This was achieved by an analysis of the linguistic and stylistic markers which have become conventionalized and thus help consolidate the gender stereotypes within the fictitious realm. Lord Rotherham and Serena Carlow, the protagonists, were examined in relation to their respective doubles or foils in the narrative, Serena's stepmother Fanny and Major Kirkby. This doubling allows two separate courtship plots to unfold and while one is given more narrative space, it was interesting to note that the more conventional (pseudo)historical upper class courtship failed, whereas the courtship depicted and constructed as not in keeping with the ideals of the Regency romance upper class was the more successful and more prominent one. On the level of discourse, however, the love-hate type of romance is still a stereotypical feature of the Regency romance since it provides more internal obstacles to be overcome by the potential couple, as the students determined.

Historical difference was another topic examined in connection with Heyer's novel, starting out with the postmodern dissatisfaction with "history"[7] as such, and then opening up the pop cultural historical setting as a liminal space into which discussions of current problems get displaced or projected and then negotiated. Claims to verisimilitude are "an illusion, created by the structural features of the text" (Hughes 18); therefore the analysis of these structural features and the effect they achieve was an important task. The students' assignment was to examine the function of the Regency setting, how the reader

encounters historicity and to decide whether there is a degree of metafictionality to the novel. For this purpose, Helen Hughes's chapter on "The Structures of Historical Romance" (13-28) enabled the students to make the proper connections. Another important part of this task was gaining the ability to identify history as related to tradition and nostalgia on the level of story. On the level of discourse, history became visible as a combination of "dated" language and Regency markers. These markers could take the form of dress or customs, but could also surface in allusions to contemporaneous (political or social) Regency events and historical persons.

Concerning the second subgenre of choice, the desert romance, we began by determining the specific plot motifs, the set of what are now stereotypical characters, and the aspects of the setting that are specific to the subgenre. Moreover, we established the notion of Orientalism as a vital concept in analysing the setting and the characters constructed as "other" (Teo 241-261). The motifs of the harem and captivity became important in this context too, especially in connection with Emily Haddad's article "Bound to Love" (42-64). The narrative analysis was done as group work and again focused strongly on pivotal scenes of the novel, such as the Recognition (Regis 36-37), the Point of Ritual Death (35-36) and the Declaration/Betrothal (34-35; 37-38). The self/other distinction and, in addition, the resulting colonial discourse inherent in *The Sheik* were examined by the students in order to be able to understand the intersections of the categories of race/nationality and gender—an approach that was transferred onto the 1921 US-American silent film adaptation starring Rudolph Valentino. The differences between the book and the film, such as the omission of rape scenes or the change in the first meeting of the protagonists, were analysed in light of the background of the time and place of production (e.g. laws banning inter-racial marriage/relationships and miscegenation) and with regard to plausibility to the intended audience of both book and film. Questions of ethnic/racial affiliation and their respective representations within the power dynamics of the desert romance were raised and led to an investigation into stereotypes of race and gender and the privileging of different sides of the hierarchical binary oppositions. The construction of dynamic hierarchies between protagonists and supporting characters in the text through narrative representation became one of the foci of the analysis as well as the heroine's privileged narrative status as character focalizer. These differences and hierarchies also became apparent in the analysis of the different cover illustrations that have graced the novel *The Sheik* throughout the decades. Furthermore, the silent film version was used to illustrate the practice of hiring European actors to play non-European characters, thereby enforcing the notion of a possible slippage from the privileged category of difference into a non-privileged one, but prohibiting any movement from the non-privileged category to the privileged one. Silent film practices such as title cards, intertitles, background music and the distinctive acting style were analysed in comparison to contemporary and current expectations of a narrative film, in addition to the general implications of choice of actors and scenery. Here, the students' initial reactions to the acting style, which encompassed statements such as "He [Valentino] looks completely ridiculous. I can't take this film seriously" soon gave way to a deeper understanding of historical and technological developments of film as a medium, and its debt to theatrical traditions as well as, in case of the silent film, to melodrama.

Teaching in this segment was also highly influenced by student input. For example, one of the presenters on silent film analysis was not sure how to rate the importance and

effect of the real name of an actor appearing beneath the name of his character on the intertitle instead of being named in the final credits. This warranted further contextualization of the medium film within a wider debate concerning the moving image as illusion versus representing “reality.” The analysis identified the instance of the appearance of actor’s name on the intertitle as a means of breaking the fourth wall. This consequently serves to curb anxieties about miscegenation and the threatening Other for an audience that was still primarily perceived as passive and therefore open to the notion of the film as a reflection of “reality” at the time of the film’s production. In so doing, it was possible to demonstrate the impact these seemingly tangential questions that arise during a presentation can have, and to expose the intricate network of discursive effects that affects each and every form of representation in a certain medium.

The combination of Regency and desert setting in Kaye’s *The Governess and the Sheikh* confronted the students with their first category romance (published by Mills & Boon). By now, the students were, for the most part, able to work with concepts such as Orientalism on their own in study groups with only marginal input from the lecturer and could present their findings to the other groups, who had been performing analyses using a different approach. The gaze, interpreted as a narrative gaze in the sense of a focalizing character, representing a “point of view,” showed the incorporation of the male perspective into the desert romance novel. Whereas in *The Sheik* the male protagonist and his thought process remain closed-off from the heroine, and, by extension, also from the reader, the hero of *The Governess and the Sheikh*, Jamil, becomes available not just from the outside, by being described and looked at by the heroine, but actually by having his thought processes and feelings represented through character focalization as well. This serves to establish his attraction to and developing love for the heroine from the start, as opposed to the older novel, where the Declaration (Regis 34) has to take place in direct speech at the very end of the novel.

Moreover, the historical setting again provided for an interesting interpretation of the Regency and desert setting as liminal spaces for the negotiation of modern cultural issues. A group task for the students involved applying Jessica Taylor’s ideas on “[...] Gender, Race, and Orientalism in Contemporary Romance Novels” (1032-1051) to the novel. According to her article, the construction of the Orient as an imaginary space and place is made believable by citing detailed (often stereotypical) images (of furniture, clothing, architecture) which evoke verisimilitude, even though the texts are set in “imaginary [desert] locations” and realms (1038). Thus, a fantastical space is produced that is nevertheless imbued with plausibility. The Orient consequently becomes knowable and controllable along with the male hero who is “tamed” by the white, Western heroine. The hero’s choice of the white female protagonist as a partner and thereby his participation in heterosexual monogamy is contrasted with the myth of the Oriental harem, the latter being subsequently dispelled in its function as a threat to the protagonists’ relationship. This clears the future for a modernized (i.e. westernized) Orient under the positive influence of a white female figure (1040-1024). The opening chapter of *The Governess and the Sheikh* was under particular scrutiny here, since it starts out from the male character’s perspective, making it obvious it is his society which is defined and centring the romance more firmly on equal ground in later chapters where the representation of both the male and female protagonists’ views are concerned. The description of lavish surroundings as well as the hero’s dealings with matters of state establish the contrast between what Taylor

calls details of reality and an imaginary (desert) realm (Kaye 7-18) and thus prove Taylor's point.

A further issue of interest in this modern Mills & Boon romance was the fact that this was the first novel we read that contained explicit levels of (hetero)sexual longings and activity. A student presentation on the development of the rise of the more sexually explicit romance dealt with Jay Dixon's chapters on this topic in her book *The Romance Fiction of Mills & Boon 1909–1990s* (133-153; 155-178) and detailed the relations between the Mills & Boon romance's concept of "legitimate" or privileged expressions of heterosexual love, physical desire, and also violence as a form of character interaction. Concerning the actual description of the characters' experience during sex, narrative perspective was of utmost importance, as well as Catherine Belsey's idea about the bodily union being able to bridge a sort of Cartesian dualism (23). Talking about sex and sexual interaction, especially in connection with the emotions portrayed in the novel, it was surprising to see that most students were quite reluctant to discuss these scenes in detail in class—and if they did, they employed either rather inventive euphemisms that rivalled the romance's vocabulary or they reduced a scene with full intercourse to the expression: "physical contact." Generally, I had assumed that the session which incorporated psychoanalytic approaches to literature and the repeated use of terms like "penis envy" or "phallus" would have done away with this disinclination. Even more interesting was the fact that it turned out a majority of my students wanted to incorporate Kaye's "explicit content" novel into their end of term papers, and most of them willingly made reference to one or more of the sex scenes in order to analyse power structures, discourses of gender or the body. Therefore, the reluctance to discuss these scenes seemed to be directed towards an official teaching (or semi-public) context, and not the result of a general aversion towards reading and analysing them—thereby giving strong indication that the Mills & Boon romance that was dealt with constitutes part of a pleasure which is considered private, or at least experienced as belonging to a non-public space. The male student, in contrast, was confident in discussing the sexual aspects of the books, and was particularly interested in applying a psychoanalytical approach to the romances we discussed.

The final topical session was dedicated to the noticeable changes in the popular romance as we had traced them in the three exemplary texts. The wider context for these changes was covered by a discussion of Dawn Heineken's article "Changing Ideologies in Romance Fiction" (149-172), which led to a further categorization and comparison of the novels' protagonists as well as the pivotal plot points and developments.

The seminar ended with a revision session in which we collected the knowledge we had accumulated concerning the popular romance in general and the exemplary sub-generic texts in particular, while applying different approaches to the novels. Interactive collection of assembled knowledge made up most of this session, with the students devising a huge blackboard sketch with colour coding for information we had collected over the semester. This exercise was met with much enthusiasm and carried out very satisfactorily.

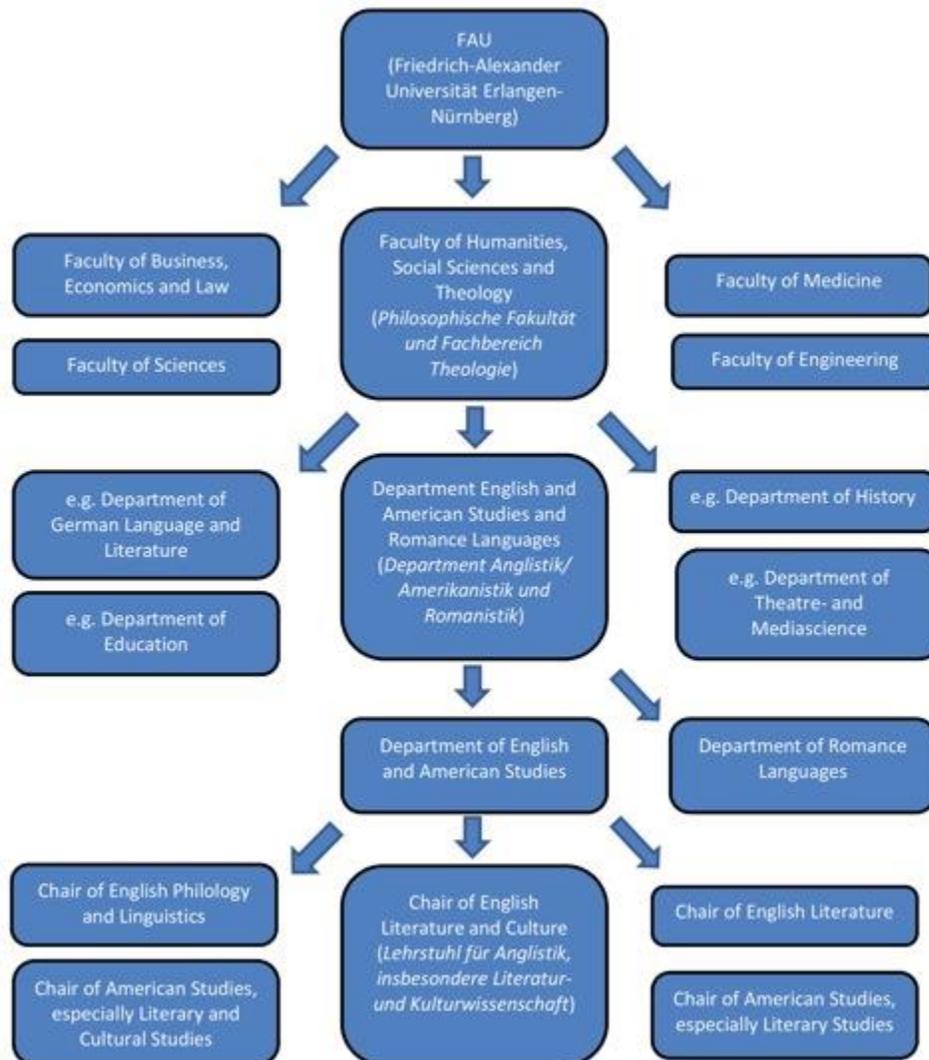
Noticeable among the students during the whole semester was that they had trouble shaking off their quick stereotypical judgments about the popular romance audience as "frustrated housewives," even though the issue was made a topic of discussion at several points, clarifying that this idea about the popular romance audience was rooted in a 1970s/1980s feminist backlash and an older tradition of romance plots. Finally, I

conducted an anonymous evaluation of the seminar to get the students' feedback in an attempt to judge the impact the seminar, the teaching style, and the information exchange had on them and if they thought any of this would shape their future studies. The overall feedback for the seminar was (grade-wise) between an A- and a B+ (overall average mark in numerical grading system was 1.58), and most of the students remarked on how surprised they had been that there were so many different things one could "do" (i.e. analyse) with a popular romance. The evaluation reflected a positive reception of the seminar's structure and choice of primary and secondary texts. General topic preference was divided between desert and Regency romance and the respective approaches, but marketing strategies and the "romance industry" were also noted as subjects of great interest. Also, out of fourteen students who took part in the evaluation, eleven claimed a notable increase in their interest in and knowledge about the topic of the seminar. The focus of this interest was also reflected in the choice of seminar paper topics. Twelve students completed the end-of-term assignment and were successful. The rest of the students finished the seminar as such, but did not hand in a seminar paper, some due to internships abroad and some due to mismanagement of time. *Bath Tangle* was the students' favourite romance to work on in their papers, and was thus analysed by five students, who wrote about gender and gender difference, love relationships as a consequence of difference in categories of power, the function of the depiction of traditional gender roles, and issues of class and class distinctions. Three incorporated Hull's *The Sheik* into their papers and examined issues of discourses of race and nationality, power relations and the gaze, as well as constructions of masculinity. As for *The Governess and the Sheikh*, four students decided to work with the text, respectively analysing gendered discourses, the gaze, Orientalism and the construction of power relations through categories of difference. One student was very interested in venturing into another romance subgenre for analysis and focused on Christine Feehan's *The Lair of the Lion* (2002) and the protagonists' adherence to gender stereotypes in the gothic popular romance in comparison with stereotypical gothic novel characters. In general, the students exhibited a very good grasp of the approaches to the romance, even though a small number of the seminar papers that were handed in proved that they sometimes had difficulty distinguishing between the levels of story and narrative mediation. Moreover, they tended to conflate the retrospective fictional construct of a historical era as a setting in the novel with the actual historical era and its characteristics—especially when dealing with topics such as gender constructions in *Bath Tangle*. Here, one of the papers kept referring to "actual" Regency gender positions and comparing them to the characters' in the romance novel, not taking into account Heyer's version of the Regency as a post-Regency retrospective construct. This level of abstraction was, however, achieved by most of the students after having dealt with the issue in class in the session on constructions of history.

In conclusion, if I offered this seminar again, I would attempt to incorporate different secondary texts and include one session to actually analyse first-wave romance novel criticism in detail to help historicise judgments about the popular romance and its readers. Moreover, I would try to direct some of the discussion even more, since sometimes the group works did, for all of some students' efforts, not result in as much academic interaction as previously anticipated—which then had the effect of the lecturer having to intervene in order to bring the session to a satisfactory ending. It would also be interesting to focus on different subgenres, such as paranormal romance and maybe historical

paranormal romance, with emphases on conceptualizations of the Other and the inclusion of gothic or horror elements. To sum it up, though, the seminar touched upon various literary and cultural studies approaches and demonstrated the multiplicity of possibilities as well as the versatility of the Regency and desert romance and its changing strategies of negotiating social position, class issues, gender standards and stereotypes as well as ideas of racial and ethnic categories.

Appendix I.



[1] My degree course was started before the German university system switched to the BA and MA system in late 2007 (“Studiengänge und Prüfungen.”). Thus, the degree I studied for was the *Magister Artium* (*M.A.*), a degree mainly designed to prepare the student for a further academic career in his or her field. The average period of education was nine semesters, i.e. four and a half years. This period could be extended if, for example, students were to go abroad for one or two semesters. The final paper (called *Magisterarbeit*), roughly probably equivalent to a Master’s thesis, with eighty to a hundred pages in length, was the *Magister* thesis I handed in at this stage. After passing final examinations in both written and oral form, I was awarded the title *M.A.* The main difference to the Master of Arts is that there was no prior degree (like a BA) that had to be attained before you could complete your studies at *M.A.* level. Thus, subsequently, I was accepted as a doctoral candidate/ PhD candidate and started working towards my PhD thesis (called *Dissertation* in German).

[2] For a better understanding of the hierarchical structure at the FAU, see Appendix 1. It has to be noted that the term 'Chair' does not denote just one professor and his/her position but instead encompasses one professor who holds the chair as well as various subordinate members of staff, ranking from post-doctoral lecturers to doctoral candidates who can also hold a teaching position.

[3] The term module is here intended in the British English sense of "each of a set of independent units of study or training that can be combined in a number of ways to form a course at a college or university [...]" ("module."). In this context of meaning, module is taken to be interchangeable with the term seminar, which, also being in the German descriptive title of the module, signals a preoccupation of both a limited number of students and the teacher with one overall topic which is discussed in a thorough, if not exhaustive manner ("seminar."). Both terms also hint at the difference from a lecture, which would mainly involve input from the lecturer and less actual work (i.e. group work, discussions, presentations) on the students' part.

[4] An especially interesting aspect here is that most of the popular romance publications in Germany are actually translations from the US-American or British market. There are some German romance authors, like Michelle Raven, for example, who writes romantic suspense, but they are few and far between. Thus, those students who attended my seminar and professed to be actual fans of popular romance were already familiar with the genre being dominated by British and US-American authors. Therefore, they were already familiar with authors like Georgette Heyer or Barbara Cartland.

[5] The module on popular romance as such, a type of seminar officially called *Proseminar* in German, is an independent elective module, to be taken after the students have completed a basic seminar and advanced seminar in literary studies (*Grund- und Aufbaukurs Literature*) as well as at least the introductory module in cultural studies (*Grundkurs Culture*). The advanced module in Cultural Studies, in which the students are supposed to read and analyse first-hand scholarly texts, is obligatory only for BA students (Krug 4-5), not for those pursuing a teaching degree (Mittmann 4-7). These basic or advanced seminars last one semester each, so by the time the students are eligible to attend the *Proseminar* described here, they are at least into their second year, i.e. third semester. The majority of my students were advanced undergraduates, most of them in their fourth semester, with two fifth-semester students, one sixth-semester student, and one who was in their eighth semester at the time. BA students made up the bulk of attendees, followed closely in number by the teaching degree students, the latter aspiring to become English teachers for the German classroom.

[6] These assessments are part of the general structure of the seminar as fixed in the examination rules for the whole course of study. For the different *Proseminare* to result in students having the same formal academic training in oral and written argumentation, which is essential in order to advance to the next level of their studies, the examinations and final assignments have to be comparable concerning their basic requirements.

[7] Here, a general introduction to postmodern conceptions of history was attempted, featuring scholars such as Hayden White and his notion of Meta-history, Jean-Francois Lyotard's idea of grand narratives as well as Linda Hutcheon's term historiographic metafiction.

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