QUEERING THE ROMANCE: AN EXPLORATION OF QUEERNESS IN POPULAR TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY ROMANCE NOVELS

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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July 2024

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is the first in-depth look at the queer romance genre that examines the genre from its evolution in the twentieth-century to the genre it is today in the twenty-first century. Namely, it looks at the publishing ecosystem that surrounds queer romances, the portrayal of bodies in queer romances, the Happily Ever After (HEA) in queer romances and how the community of readers and authors perceive the genre's engagement with LGBTQ+ activism.

It uses the genre worlds method that was first applied to the romance genre by Lisa Fletcher, Beth Driscoll and Kim Wilkins in 2018 in their study about Australian romances. As part of this it incorporates data from surveys and focus groups with readers and writers, data gathered on traditionally published queer romances and publicly available information on queer romance novel authors. It argues that the queer romance genre has a dual literary heritage of LGBTQ+ fiction and the popular romance genre. As a result this is a genre that is balancing the commercial viability of the popular romance genre with the needs of its LGBTQ+ community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of numerous people. I would like to thank my mum, dad, brother and sister-in-law for their tireless support, the late night facetimes and countless trips home to recover and recharge. I couldn't have done this without you. Next I would like to thank the friends who listened to me ramble about this topic for five years without complaint. A special thanks goes to Laura, Jay, Charlotte, Katie, Evvie and Carly for being part of team PhD! You got me through the emotional and mental world wind that is a PhD with friendship and laughter. Finally I would like to thank my supervisors Dr Amy Burge and Dr Deborah Longworth for their endless support and advice.

Finally, I want to acknowledge all the dyslexic people out there who've ever been told by a teacher, a parent or even a loved one that you can't do a PhD. I'm here to say you can and you should. I did it. So can you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT **2**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS **3**

TABLE OF FIGURES **7**

INTRODUCTION **10**

What is Queer Romance? *15*

The Development of Queer Romance *18*

Scholarship of Popular Romance *25*

Methodology *43*

Readers' Survey 51

Writers' Survey 60

Reader Focus Groups 69

Writer Focus Groups 75

Publishing Data 81

Thesis Outline *86*

HISTORY OF QUEER ROMANCE **91**

Covert Queerness (1900 – 1929) *95*

Pulps and Romance (1930s – 1968) *102*

A Queer Revolution (1969 – 1989) *111*

Technological Revolution & Political Conservatism (1990 – 2010) *118*

Commercialised Queer Love (2010 - 2024) *123*

Conclusion *156*

THE BODY IN QUEER ROMANCES **158**

Introduction 158

The Male 'Romance Body' 162

Queer Male Bodies in the Captive Prince Trilogy by C.S. Pacat 166

The Female 'Romance Body' 180

Queer Female Bodies in One Last Stop by Casey McQuiston 186

The Trans 'Romance Body'* 199

Trans Bodies in Peter Darling by Austin Chant* 205

Trans Bodies in A Lady for a Duke by Alexis Hall* 214

Conclusion 222

THE QUEER HAPPILY EVER AFTER **225**

Introduction 225

Defining the HEA 226

Heteronormativity and Homonormativity 229

Marriage and the Romance Genre 237

Marriage in D'Vaughn and Kris Plan a Wedding by Chencia C. Higgins 244

Stability, Monogamy and Polyamory 256

Monogamy in Where We Left Off by Roan Parrish 262

Conclusion 280

QUEER ROMANCES TODAY **284**

The Journey to Queer Romance 287

Fanfiction and Heteronormative Expectations 289

Why Queer Romances? 293

Rejection of Heteronormativity 295

Validation of Self 299

Form of Support 304

America or Bust? 307

Reader Perspectives 313
Writer Perspectives 325
Politically engaged or fantastical fluff? *331*
Conclusion *345*
CONCLUSION **350**
The Queer Romance Market: Publishing Ecosystem *350*
Queer Romance Novels: Homonormative Constraints *357*
Queer Romance Identity: Audience and Activism *363*
BIBLIOGRAPHY **373**
APPENDIX 1: PUBLISHER IMPRINT LIST **404**
APPENDIX 2: QUEER ROMANCES 2010 - 2019 **406**
APPENDIX 3: READER SURVEY **444**
APPENDIX 4: WRITER SURVEY **456**

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Bar Chart showing the Racial Disparity Among Reader Survey Respondents 56
Figure 2 Bar Chart the showing the Nationality Breakdown of Reader Survey Respondents 56
Figure 3 Bar Chart showing the Age Breakdown of Reader Survey Respondents 57
Figure 4 Bar Chart showing the Gender Identity Breakdown of Reader Survey Respondents 58
Figure 5 Bar Chart showing the Sexual Identity Breakdown of Reader Survey Respondents 59
Figure 6 Bar Chart showing the Disability Breakdown of Reader Survey Respondents 60
Figure 7 Bar Chart Showing the Racial Disparity of Writer Survey Respondents 64
Figure 8 Nationality Breakdown of Writer Survey Respondents 65
Figure 9 Bar Chart showing the Age Breakdown of Writer Survey Respondents 66
Figure 10 Bar Chart showing the Gender Identity Breakdown of Writer Survey Respondents 67
Figure 11 Bar Chart showing the Sexual Identity Breakdown of Writer Survey Respondents 68
Figure 12 Bar Chart showing the Disability Breakdown of Writer Survey Respondents 69
Figure 13 Bar Chart showing the Breakdown of Reader Focus Groups by Age 72
Figure 14 Bar Chart showing the Breakdown of Reader Focus Groups by Gender 73
Figure 15 Bar Chart showing the Breakdown of Reader Focus Groups by Sexuality 73
Figure 16 Bar Chart showing the Breakdown of Reader Focus Groups by Race 74

Figure 17 Bar Chart showing the Breakdown of Reader Focus Groups by Nationality 75
Figure 18 Bar Chart showing the Breakdown of Writer Focus Groups by Age 77
Figure 19 Bar Chart showing the Breakdown of Writer Focus Groups by Gender 78
Figure 20 Bar Chart showing Breakdown of Writer Focus Groups by Sexuality 79
Figure 21 Bar Chart showing the Breakdown of Writer Focus Groups by Race 79
Figure 22 Bar Chart showing Breakdown of Writer Focus Groups by Nationality 80
Figure 23 Bar Chart showing the Book Catalogue Data by Publisher 82
Figure 24 Bar Chart showing the Big Five Publishers Contribution to Book Catalogue 84
Figure 25 Bar Chart showing the Book Catalogue Data by Publisher Country 85
Figure 26: Bar Chart showing the number of queer romances published yearly between 2010 - 2019 131
Figure 27: Line Graph showing the annual books published by Bella Books, Bold Stroke Books, Dreamspinner Press and Totally Entwined 132
Figure 28: Line Graph showing the number of self-published books in my data between 2010 - 2019 134
Figure 29: Bar Chart showing writer survey respondents to the question 'How often do you consider/include LGBT+ milestones in the queer romance novels you write?' 137
Figure 30: Bar Chart showing the yearly % breakdown of queer romances published between 2010 - 2019 by queer romance type 139
Figure 31: Stacked Bar Chart showing Queer Romances Broken Down by Subgenre 141
Figure 32: Line Graph showing the % of Contemporary Queer Romances published 2010 - 2019 142
Figure 33: Bar Chart showing the % Breakdown of Main Character's Sexuality in Queer Romances published between 2010 - 2019 146

Figure 34: Bar Chart showing the disparity in Main Character's gender identities in queer romances published between 2010 - 2019 148
Figure 35: Bar Chart showing Main Character's gender identities (excluding cisgender main characters) in queer romances published between 2010 - 2019 149
Figure 36: Pie Chart showing the % breakdown of main character's nationalities in queer romance published between 2010 - 2019 150
Figure 37: Pie Chart showing the % Breakdown of Main Characters by Race in Queer Romances published between 2010 - 2019 151
Figure 38: Bar Chart showing Writer Survey respondents' answer to the question 'What is your sexual identity?' 154
Figure 39: Bar Chart showing Writer Survey respondents' answer to the question 'What is your gender identity?' 154
Figure 40: Bar Chart showing Reader Survey Respondents' answer to the question 'What is your sexual identity?' 155
Figure 41: Bar Chart showing Reader Survey respondents' answer to the question 'What is your gender identity?' 155
Figure 42 One Last Stop by Casey McQuiston 2021 cover 189
Figure 43: Pie Chart showing the % breakdown of Authors by Nationality for Queer Romances Published between 2010 - 2019 310
Figure 44: Pie Chart showing the % Breakdown of Main Characters by Nationality in Queer Romances published between 2010 - 2019 311
Figure 45: Line Graph showing the difference in queer romances published between 2010 - 2019 in the United States and the United Kingdom 324

INTRODUCTION

If you walked into Waterstones, Foyles, or any large bookshop in the UK today, you would likely find a queer romance novel.[1] In fact, you would probably encounter numerous queer romance novels in a variety of sub-genres, ranging from a contemporary M/M Romance like *Husband Material* (2022) by Alexis Hall to a fantasy F/F Romance like *Payback's a Witch* (2021) by Lana Harper.[2] Queer Romance might even have a dedicated section, depending on the size of the shop, the type of books sold, and the intended demographic. A similar story has played out for queer romances in Australia and the US. According to NPD BookScan, an organisation that tracks the sales of a vast portion of the printed books sold in the US, 'about 850,000 L.G.B.T.Q. romance books sold at traditional retail outlets in 2021 – a 740 percent increase over a five-year period'.[3] A mere decade ago the likelihood of finding a queer romance novel in a physical bookshop that didn't specialise in LGBTQ+ fiction was unlikely. In just a few years, queer romance evolved from a niche sub-genre, primarily produced by small independent publishers and authors, to being prominently displayed in bookshops and published by mainstream publishers.

The recent growth in the genre's popularity is truly remarkable and is, understandably, celebrated by the authors and readers of these novels. As queer romance author Chencia C. Higgins stated, 'having queer romcoms

[1] I will define queer romance novel later in the introduction.
[2] The terms M/M and F/F romance are defined later in the introduction.
[3] Elizabeth A. Harris, '"I Just Want Something That's Gay and Happy": L.G.B.T.Q. Romance Is Booming', *The New York Times*, 30 March 2022 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/books/lgbtq-romance-novels.html> [accessed 6 November 2023].

exploding the way they're doing has been so awesome'.[4] Part of the reason for this celebration is because romance novels that focus on LGBTQ+ individuals have become a vital form of expression and representation for members of the LGBTQ+ community. As author Tess Sharpe put it 'representation can be transformative and lifesaving… portraying our queer community's intersectionality and diversity is vital'.[5] The representation found in queer romance novels is vital because even in the twenty-first century, it remains one of the few spaces where people can reliably find positive, emotionally re-affirming stories with a happy ending for LGBTQ+ characters.

The success of queer romances is also reflected in the TV and film industries, where several queer romances that started as books have gone on to become mainstream successes. For example, the Amazon Prime movie *Red, White & Royal Blue* (2023), based on the Casey McQuiston novel of the same name, became Prime's global number one movie during its premiere weekend.[6] Similarly, *Heartstopper* (2022 -), a Netflix TV series based on the graphic novels by Alice Oseman, 'garnered *53.46 million* hours viewed in its first three weeks, reaching the top ten chart in 54 countries'.[7] It is worth noting that

[4] Ella Braidwood, '"Queer, Hilarious and Full of Joy": The Rise of LGBTQ+ Romance Fiction', *The Guardian*, 21 June 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/jun/21/the-rise-of-lgbtq-romance-fiction> [accessed 6 November 2023].
[5] Yasmin Wakefield, 'Why the Rise in LGBTQ+ Romance Novels Is Important', Blot, 2023 <https://blot.jusmedia.shef.ac.uk/2023/05/22/why-the-rise-in-lgbtq-romance-novels-is-important/> [accessed 6 November 2023].
[6] Marcus Wratten, 'How Red, White & Royal Blue Breaks the Mould for Joyous Queer Stories in Mainstream Cinema', Pink News, 15 August 2023 <https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/08/15/red-white-royal-blue-queer-joy-cinema-heartstopper-bros/> [accessed 6 November 2023]; Matt Galea, 'The Success of Red, White & Royal Blue Is More Proof That Queer Stories Can Absolutely Put Butts In Seats', Pedestrian, 17 August 2023 <https://www.pedestrian.tv/entertainment/red-white-royal-blue-success/> [accessed 6 November 2023].
[7] Juno Dawson, 'How Heartstopper Changed the World', Attitude, December 2022 <https://www.attitude.co.uk/culture/how-heartstopper-changed-the-world-414800/> [accessed 6 November 2023].

both of these stories focus on the queer male experience, featuring gay and bisexual leads, whereas queer female stories still struggle to find commercial success.[8] Despite this, the success of *Heartstopper* and *Red, White & Royal Blue* demonstrates that queer romance novels have significant cultural and social capital, despite the small number compared to the wider romance genre. In addition, the success of these adaptations led to even greater sales of their books and other similar titles. Although the percentage of queer romance novels published remains small, hovering around 4% of romance novels, its recent cultural and commercial success is one of the reasons why it is critical to study this evolving and growing sub-genre.[9]

I investigate how queer romance novels are constructed, produced and received in the twenty-first century and how queerness is performed in these texts. This is a genre that matters to its readers, who are often outspoken about their love for queer romances and the sense of safety, joy, community, and celebration it provides in a world where they are 'surrounded by straight stories'.[10] As reader Laura Sackton wrote 'my decision to read only queer romance… is not a political statement. It is simple, joyful, unabashed celebration – of queer love, queer brilliance, queer pleasure, and, most of all, queer happily ever afters'.[11] It is not just the recent commercial popularity of this genre that makes it worthy of study, it is the impact that it has on its

[8] Queer Forty Staff, 'Why Are so Many Queer Women-Led Shows Getting Canceled?', Queer Forty, 2022 <https://queerforty.com/why-are-so-many-queer-women-led-shows-getting-cancelled> [accessed 24 November 2023].
[9] Harris, '"I Just Want Something That's Gay and Happy": L.G.B.T.Q. Romance Is Booming'.
[10] Laura Sackton, 'I Only Read Queer Romance and I Feel Great About It', *Book Riot*, 24 October 2017 <https://bookriot.com/queer-romance/> [accessed 13 December 2023].
[11] Sackton, 'I Only Read Queer Romance and I Feel Great About It'.

readership and the dedicated community that surrounds these novels. This dedication and the implied importance for the readers of these novels makes it worthy of academic attention.

The increasing popularity of the queer romance genre has happened so rapidly that scholarship has struggled to keep up. I aim to address this oversight by using a literary sociological approach that combines textual analysis with quantitative and qualitative data of the queer romance publishing ecosystem. One methodology that has been central to my approach is the genre worlds method first articulated by Lisa Fletcher, Beth Driscoll, and Kim Wilkins in 2018. The driving desire behind the creation of the genre worlds theory was to 'move beyond decisionist accounts of popular fiction, especially romance, which over emphasises the textual dimensions of genre in their attempts to evaluate the feminist credentials of the genre and its readers'.[12] The genre world encompasses the texts, the social networks that surround the genre and the distinct industrial practices that construct the genre. They refer to these three elements as 'the industrial, the social and the textual', which are 'three stacked layers that cannot be easily prized apart'.[13] The industrial, the textual and the social are interconnected domains that help define the boundaries of what a genre world is, and what it is not. These boundaries create insiders and

[12] Lisa Fletcher, Beth Driscoll, and Kim Wilkins, 'Genre Worlds and Popular Fiction: The Case of Twenty-First-Century Australian Romance', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 51.4 (2018), pp. 997–1015 (p. 1000).
[13] Kim Wilkins, Beth Driscoll, and Lisa Fletcher, *Genre Worlds: Popular Fiction and Twenty-First Century Book Culture* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2022), p. 2.

outsiders with 'badges of belonging' whose 'entry and exit points' help 'regulate membership and cultural production' of the genre.[14]

One of the boundaries that shape a genre world is the commercial and cultural power that often dictates a genre. For romance, this is largely determined by global publishing houses based in New York and London, with 'the domestic U.S. market shap[ing] global popular fiction trends'.[15] With my thesis I wanted to explore 'the transnationalism of contemporary book cultures and industries' by looking at queer romances written by Australian, British and American authors.[16] In addition, I spoke with readers and writers from these three countries and gathered publishing data on the global queer romance market during the 2010s. This was important because 'a key argument' for Wilkins et al. is that 'genre worlds are both national and international' which 'runs counter to a tendency in culture and academia to see popular fiction as part of a homogenized global market'.[17] By exploring queer romances through the genre world method I am able to explore how queer romances across these three countries compare, while still noting their textual, industrial and social commonality. Like Wilkins et al., I have combined textual analysis, interviews, and publishing data to understand the 'communities, collaborations, and industrial pressures' that have historically, and still, impact

[14] Wilkins, Driscoll, and Fletcher, *Genre Worlds: Popular Fiction and Twenty-First Century Book Culture*, p. 3.
[15] Wilkins, Driscoll, and Fletcher, *Genre Worlds: Popular Fiction and Twenty-First Century Book Culture*, p. 4.
[16] Wilkins, Driscoll, and Fletcher, *Genre Worlds: Popular Fiction and Twenty-First Century Book Culture*, p. 5.
[17] Wilkins, Driscoll, and Fletcher, *Genre Worlds: Popular Fiction and Twenty-First Century Book Culture*, p. 5.

the queer romance genre.[18] I differ slightly from Fletcher et al. in my approach as rather than talking to professional readers, which they define as editors or bloggers connected to the texts, I talk to readers with no identified professional connection to the queer romance genre.

What is Queer Romance?

What is meant by the term 'queer romance novel'? When people refer to this genre two phrases are used almost interchangeably: LGBTQ+ romance novels or queer romance novels.[19] I have chosen to use the phrase queer romance novel as it allows a more fluid and broad interpretation of the genre that goes beyond the individual identities of the main characters. This thesis defines queer romance as any novel, or novella, where at least one of the main characters identifies as LGBTQ+, whose narrative plot revolves around a romantic relationship, and concludes with a happy ending for the relationship.[20] This builds upon the definition found on the Romance Writers of America (RWA) website which states, a romance novel is 'a central love story [whose] main plot centers around individuals falling in love' and has 'an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending… [where] the lovers… are rewarded with emotional justice and unconditional love'.[21] This definition is

[18] Fletcher, Driscoll, and Wilkins, 'Genre Worlds and Popular Fiction: The Case of Twenty-First-Century Australian Romance', p. 998.
[19] The interchangeability of these two phrases is visible even in recent academic scholarship, for example Bridget Kies' 2024 article 'Saying 'I Don't': Queer Romance in the Post-Marriage Equality World' in Volume 13 of the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*.
[20] It does not include fanfiction unless it has been reworked and re-published as original fiction
[21] 'About the Romance Genre', *Romance Writers of America* <https://www.rwa.org/Online/Education/About_Romance_Fiction/Online/Romance_Genre/About_Romance_Genre.aspx?hkey=dc7b967d-d1eb-4101-bb3f-a6cc936b5219> [accessed 18 October 2022].

arguably the industry standard for a romance novel and is accepted by most authors, readers, and publishing professionals. I have considered this definition due to its inclusive language, which is important because it doesn't limit the romance genre to a particular type of relationship formation, as such this definition works for both heterosexual and queer romance novels.

I also considered the definition put forward by Pamela Regis in *The Natural History of the Romance Novel* which identified a romance novel as 'a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines' and 'requires certain narrative events'.[22] Regis argues that the romance genre is a subset of the comedy genre, but one that puts the heroine at the centre and as a result is a genre focused on women's problems. Regis places romance within the wider tradition of the comedy genre to lend it academic credibility; the same reasoning led her to identify and analyse *Pamela* (1740) by Samuel Richardson and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by Jane Austen, among other literary classics, as the beginning of the romance genre. Regis' focus on the heroine and the importance of the romance ending in a betrothal resulted in an interpretation of the genre that had 'an insistence upon heteronormativity'.[23] This oversight was partly corrected when Regis revised 'her definition of the genre… to replace the term 'heroines' with 'protagonists''. Despite this revision, the study still examined the genre through the lens of the heterosexual female experience.[24] Nevertheless, the focus on

[22] Pamela Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 27.
[23] Jonathan A Allan, 'Reading the Regis Roundtable: An Outsider's Perspective', *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, 3.2 (2013), pp. 1–6 (p. 3).
[24] Eric Murphy Selinger, 'Rebooting the Romance: The Impact of A Natural History of the Romance Novel', Journal of Popular Romance Studies, 2.3 (2013).

narrative structure and written prose fiction with a long literary tradition are important elements that are missing from the industry-focused definition. Therefore, these elements of Regis' definition have been incorporated into my definition of queer romance by considering the evolutionary history of the queer romance genre.

This thesis distinguishes queer romance novels by their type, as well as their sub-genre. Queer Romance sub-genres largely follow sub-genres found in heterosexual romance novels, for example, science-fiction or contemporary. They often denote the setting and/or period in which the romance will take place. The queer romance type refers to the relationship dynamic/formation that the queer romance novel is depicting but also considers the publishing ecosystem from which it has evolved. I have identified six types of queer romances: M/M, F/F, Lesbian, Gay, Queered and Queered Heterosexual. The distinctions between these types will be explained further in the History of Queer Romance chapter but briefly, M/M and Gay both denote queer romances that revolve around two or more men, F/F and Lesbian refers to romances between two or more women. Queered encompasses any romance that features one or more love interests who don't conform to the gender binary and Queered Heterosexual is a term to denote a romance where it may appear outwardly heterosexual as it is between a man and a woman but where one of the love interests is a member of the LGBTQ+ community.

The publishing ecosystems from which queer romance novels emerge has a strong impact on the tone of the books and their intended audience.

The queer romance type, therefore, goes beyond just the relationship configuration to also encompass the cultural and social environment the book was created in and the audience it was intended for.[25] Dividing queer romance not only by sub-genre but also by type allows for more detailed analysis, for example, if certain relationship configurations are more popular than others. It also makes it possible to assess if publishers were only publishing one type of queer romance, therefore implying that some types of queer romance were considered more commercially viable than others. It also allows the tracking of trends over time to see if certain types of queer romance fell or grew in popularity. This is useful information, as it allowed the different types of queer romance sub-genres to be compared and contrasted against each other.

The Development of Queer Romance

Queer romances entered the publishing mainstream around 2019, although they have existed in some form since the early 1900s. Before the twentieth century, stories featuring an LGBTQ+ individual that focused on a romantic relationship typically ended in tragedy for one, if not both, of the love interests.[26] The recent development of the genre, and its propulsion into the mainstream, should not and cannot be separated from its unique historical and publishing origins. Although the development of this genre will be explored

[25] I have determined the intended audience for the different types of queer romances by analysing the language of marketing campaigns and editor interviews of different publishing houses.
[26] This statement is expanded upon and justified in the 'Covert Queerness' section of Chapter 1: The History of Queer Romance.

in more detail in Chapter 1: History of Queer Romance, it is useful to give here a brief overview of how this genre has developed in the last one hundred and twenty years.

One of the first novels to depict a queer relationship with a happy ending was *Imre: A Memorandum* (1906) by Edward Prime-Stevenson, a novel which Prime-Stevenson himself described as 'a little psychological romance'.[27] Prime-Stevenson an American by birth, wrote *Imre: A Memorandum* in Europe and self-financed its private publication through A. Rispoli of Napoli who printed 500 copies. The novel tells the story of Imre and Oswald who meet in Budapest, Hungary, and form a friendship that cautiously evolves into love. Although it contains the narrative elements of a romance, given the time it was written, it is as much about the struggle for 'non-normative gender and sexual desires and identities' during the early twentieth century as it is a romance story.[28] Another early example of a queer romance novel is *The Price of Salt* by Patricia Highsmith (1954), which is often cited as an early Lesbian Romance. This arguably doesn't end with a modern definition of a happily-ever-after because it 'suggests that a happy ending for a queer couple comes at a high price', with one of the protagonists having to concede full custody of her child due to her sexuality.[29]

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[27] James J. Gifford, 'Stevenson, Edward Irenaeus Prime- (1868 - 1942)', *Glbtq: An Encylopedia of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, & Queer Culture* (glbtq, Inc, 2004) <https://web.archive.org/web/20150204040147/http://www.glbtq.com/literature/stevenson_eip.html> [accessed 17 December 2023].

[28] Margaret S Breen, 'Homosexual Identity, Translation, and Prime-Stevenson's Imre and The Intersexes', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 14.1 (2012), pp. 1–9 (p. 8).

[29] Len Barot, 'Queer Romance in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century America: Snapshots of a Revolution', in *Romance Fiction and American Culture: Love as the Practice of Freedom?*, ed. by William A. Gleason and Eric Murphy Selinger (Routledge, 2016), pp. 389–404 (p. 391).

The 1950s saw the arrival of the lesbian and gay pulps which meant that for the first-time queer fiction was readily available. Many of the lesbian pulps, which were far more commercially successful than their gay counterparts, were written by heterosexual men and women as well as by queer women. Michael Bronski proposed that the gay pulps were less popular because in the 1950s, gay male novels 'had little crossover appeal for a substantial heterosexual readership' whereas 'the titillating nature of lesbian sexuality… outweigh any potential threat… to the social order'.[30] The widespread popularity of the lesbian pulps meant that for many queer women in America, the books were their only source of knowledge about lesbian life and, even if they presented a warped view, they provided these women with proof that they were not alone.[31] Elizabeth Matelski has even argued that these paperbacks did not 'simply reveal lesbian life' but that 'the authors helped *create* lesbian identity' in post-WWII America.[32] Many of these pulps, did not end happily for the queer characters, however, their influence on the Gay and Lesbian Romances of the 1970s is noteworthy primarily because of the literary tropes and image of queerness they helped create.[33]

[30] Michael Bronski, *Pulp Fiction: Uncovering the Golden Age of Gay Male Pulps* (St Martin's Griffin, 2003), pp. 2–4.
[31] Katherine V Forrest, *Lesbian Pulp Fiction: The Sexually Intrepid World of Lesbian Paperback Novels 1950 - 1965* (Cleis Press, 2005), p. 440.
[32] Elizabeth Matelski, '"I'm Not the Only Lesbian Who Wears a Skirt": Lesbian Romance Fiction and Identity in Post-World War II America', in *Romance Fiction and American Culture: Love as the Practice of Freedom?*, ed. by William A. Gleason and Eric Murphy Selinger (Routledge, 2016), pp. 71–88 (p. 78).
[33] Whitney Strub, 'Historicizing Pulp: Gay Male Pulp and the Narrativization of Queer Cultural History', in *1960s Gay Pulp Fiction: The Misplace Heritage*, ed. by Drewey Wayne Gunn and Jaime Harker (University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), pp. 43–77; Yvonne Keller, '"Was It Right to Love Her Brother's Wife So Passionately?": Lesbian Pulp Novels and U.S. Lesbian Identity, 1950 - 1965', *American Quarterly*, 57.2 (2005), pp. 385–410.

The 1970s saw the emergence of a distinct publishing ecosystem for queer romance, separate from mainstream (heterosexual) romance publishing. This occurred partly as a result of the June 1969 Stonewall Riots, which sparked a more militant and radical gay and lesbian movement.[34] Although the *Gay Liberation Front*, among others, was formed to champion both gay and lesbian rights, lesbians soon broke away due to a lack of gay men's understanding of the institutionalized sexism that was forced on lesbians.[35] As a result, the lesbian movement of the 1970s was heavily influenced by feminist ideology and set out to create an ideology of lesbianism that challenged heterosexuality and mainstream feminism.[36] The most famous lesbian publishing house producing romances from this time is Naiad Press which was cofounded in 1973 by two couples: Barbara Grier and Donna McBride and Anyda Marchant and Muriel Crawford.

Naiad and similar presses set out to portray positive depictions of queer women with romantically, professionally, and personally fulfilled lives. They produced a regular number of titles for a select list of readers, rather than relying on large marketing campaigns that could have drawn unwanted attention. Knowledge of the presses was therefore spread through word of mouth and selective advertising in targeted queer spaces. These presses,

[34] David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked The Gay Revolution*, 2nd edn (St Martin's Griffin, 2010).
[35] Mark Blasius and Shane Phelan, *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook in Gay and Lesbian Politics* (Routledge, 1997), p. 352.
[36] Sue Katz, 'Working Class Dykes: Class Conflict in the Lesbian/Feminist Movements in the 1970s', *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture*, 10.2 (2017), pp. 281–89, doi:10.1080/17541328.2017.1378512; Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967 - 1975* (University of Minneapolis Press, 1989), p. 210.

largely found in the US, were important to their respective communities.[37] Naiad and other presses were known for their 'commitment to the publication of lesbian material' as shown by the fact that they frequently used 'profits from one book to produce the next' as money was often tight.[38] This was in part due to the closed publishing environment and the inability to market to a wider audience. In addition, these presses didn't necessarily correspond to mainstream heterosexual romance trends. For example, Lesbian and Gay Romance novels of the 1970s mostly favoured the contemporary romance sub-genre, although there were outliers such as the infamous *Gaywyck* (1980) by Vincent Virga, which is often cited as the first gay gothic romance and which was inspired by DuMaurier's *Rebecca*.[39] In contrast, heterosexual romances favoured the historical sub-genre, which came into prominence after the publication of *The Flame and The Flower* (1972) by Kathleen E. Woodiwiss. 'Erotic historicals' would dominate 1970s heterosexual romances.[40]

In contrast, it is perhaps not surprising that Gay and Lesbian Romances produced during this time favoured the contemporary sub-genre as they were often written to represent the queer community and the 'genuine' LGBTQ+ experience. In fact, reviewers of these novels considered 'contemporariness… a quality both deeply politicized and highly prized' resulting in a 'demand for

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[37] Marie J. Kuda, 'Queer Print in Chicago, 1965 - 1985: A Personal History', in *Gay Press, Gay Power: The Growth of LGBT Community Newspapers in America*, ed. by Tracy Baim (Prairie Avenue Productions/Windy City Media Group, 2012), pp. 165–84; Joanne E. Passet, 'Barbara Grier and the World She Built', *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 18.4 (2014), pp. 315–32, doi:10.1080/10894160.2014.901843.

[38] 'Biography and Corporate History' (The Naiad Press Collection - GLC30).

[39] Kathryn Falk, *How to Write a Romance and Get It Published* (New American Library, 1984), p. 302.

[40] Janice A Radway, 'The Institutional Matrix of Romance', in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. by Simon During, 2nd edn (Routledge, 1999), pp. 564–76 (p. 572).

contemporariness [that] functioned in tandem with a demand that fiction provide a transparent representation of reality'.[41]

By the mid-1990s the lesbian and gay independent presses producing romance fiction had largely shut down or shifted away from romance.[42] The desire for romance, particularly the Lesbian Romance that had flourished during the 1970s until the late 1980s, had waned and readers wanted something new: 'in the world of lesbian nation, romance is sameness'.[43] In general, the 1990s and early 2000s saw a global shift in how LGBTQ+ communities formed and socialized. In a post-AIDs world the queer community was displaced, with the dedicated LGBTQ+ neighbourhoods that had helped the presses to flourish in the 1970s and 80s disappearing.[44] This, combined with the increased prominence of queer-coded, and explicitly queer, characters on cult TV shows like *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995 – 2001) and *Will & Grace* (1998 – 2006), made it easier to find LGBTQ+ representation on mainstream TV. Although a readership for queer romances still existed, it was seemingly less centralized and smaller than in the previous decades.[45] I argue that these factors, combined with a general shift to more right-wing, conservative, politics in the US, the UK and Australia made it difficult for queer romance to flourish.

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[41] Brian J. Distelberg, 'Mainstream Fiction, Gay Reviewers, And Gay Male Cultural Politics in the 1970s', *GLQ*, 16.3 (2010), pp. 389–427 (p. 406), doi:10.1215/10642684-2009-036.
[42] Naiad Press, the largest and longest running Lesbian Fiction Press, closed in 2003
[43] Anna Wilson, 'Death and the Mainstream: Lesbian Detective Fiction and the Killing of the Coming-Out Story', *Feminist Studies*, 22.2 (1996), pp. 251–78 (p. 261), doi:10.2307/3178413.
[44] Michael Frisch, 'A Queer Reading of the United States Census', in *The Life and Afterlife of Gay Neighborhoods*, ed. by A. Bitterman and D. B. Hess, The Urban Book Series (Routledge, 2021), p. 80.
[45] This is a decade of queer romance fiction that is highly under-researched. It is a decade notable for its l*ack* of queer romance novels, publishing houses or academic scholarship. This makes it hard to gather concrete information on what, if much, was happening for queer romance in this decade.

In the early 2000s, the M/M Romance appeared. It would transform the genre and bring it to a wider, heterosexual audience.[46] Although M/M Romances are arguably some of the most well-known and commercially successful queer romances today, in the early 2000s many of the bigger publishers were unwilling to take a risk on the unknown genre given the expensive upfront costs and the lack of a clear audience. Deborah Kaplan in her article on slash fiction and genre romances positions *All Through the Night* (2007) by Suzanne Brockmann as one of the earliest 'mainstream romance starring gay characters', despite there being numerous earlier examples of romances featuring same-sex pairings.[47] It highlights the unknown and unremarkable nature of these early novels that arguably started the M/M Romances type.[48] The sporadic nature of the M/M Romances published during this time does not suggest a centralized or coordinated effort to 'launch' a new type of queer romance. However, these novels do represent a new shift within queer romance because these M/M Romances were not being written, produced, and read with a specifically LGBTQ+ audience in mind. Instead, they represented the start of queer romances being consumed by a wider, less explicitly queer, readership.

Queer Romances would not truly re-emerge until the commercial success of Amazon's Kindle in 2007. This eReader made it cost-effective to

[46] For clarification I consider an M/M Romance a romance that focuses on a same-sex, in this case male, pairing but otherwise adheres to heterosexual romance genre convention.
[47] Deborah Kaplan, '"Why Would Any Woman Want to Read Such Stories?": The Distinctions Between Genre Romances and Slash Fiction', in *New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction*, ed. by Eric Murphy Selinger and Sarah S.G. Frantz (McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012), pp. 121–32 (p. 128).
[48] The specific books will be expanded on in the Underground Once More section of Chapter 1: History of Queer Romance

publish digital novels to a large pre-existing customer base, which benefited both independent authors and smaller niche publishing houses. Readers could easily find and consume eBooks due to the reduced price of digital novels and the search engine that Amazon's Kindle gave customers easy access too. eBooks offered a new level of privacy, as readers could read a queer romance in public without anyone being aware of the book's content or the potentially explicit cover. All these factors benefitted the queer romance genre, which has continued to grow in readership and commercial prominence ever since.

Scholarship of Popular Romance

Existing scholarship on romance has often looked at the books or at the readers, but rarely considered the publishing environment or the authors of these novels. Very few scholars have explored all four of these aspects of the popular romance genre in one study. By combining close literary analysis of the novels and a sociological approach to the publishing industry, I will bridge this scholarship gap. I will demonstrate where this thesis fits into the field of romance scholarship, particularly how it relates to existing scholarship on queer romance novels.

There are arguably three waves of romance scholarship. The first wave of scholars came about in the 1970s, and largely dismissed the genre as one that diminished women and lacked literary merit; for these scholars, the genre was merely 'a mass-produced form of entertainment for mediocre readers'.[49]

[49] Irene Pérez-Fernández and Carmen Pérez Ríu, 'Romantic Escapes in Contemporary Popular Romance Fiction', in Romantic Escapes: Post-Millennial Trends in Contemporary Popular Romance Fiction (Peter Lang, 2021), pp. 11–25 (p. 12).

Germaine Greer in her feminist tract *The Female Eunuch* (1970) described romance writers' depiction of the male hero as 'women cherishing the chains of their bondage' with novels encouraging their readers to embrace patriarchal subservience.[50] Similarly, Ann Barr Snitow claimed that 'the Harlequin formula glorifies the distance between the sexes. Distance becomes titillating'.[51] These critics were influenced by second-wave feminist ideology and considered romance novels as a tool of subjugation in a patriarchal world. Carol M. Thurston describes the first wave of romance scholarship as 'curled-lip service by a number of academic feminists', an apt description considering the ideological approach and attitude that dominated this first wave.[52] The focus on female subjugation meant no consideration was paid towards the queer romance novels that were beginning to make an appearance during this time.

The second wave of romance scholarship happened during the 1980s and, like Greer and Snitow, focused primarily on the romance readers. Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984) explored through psychoanalytical and feminist lenses the value and effect reading romance novels had on its female readers. Radway argued that romance writers and readers engaged in 'a collectively elaborated female ritual through which women explore the consequences of their

[50] Germaine Greer, The Female Eunuch (4th Estate, 2020), p. 88.
[51] Ann Barr Snitow, 'Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women Is Different', *Radical History Review*, 20.Spring/Summer (1979), pp. 141–61 (p. 146).
[52] Carol M Thurston, 'Popular Historical Romances: Agent for Social Change? An Exploration of Methodologies', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 19.1 (1985), pp. 35–45 (p. 36).

common social condition'.[53] Thurston also takes a sociological approach to the romance genre in *The Romance Revolution* (1987), where she argues that given the widespread popularity of the genre, it is 'one of the most effective channels for communicating feminist ideas to [a] broad base of women'.[54] In *Loving with a Vengeance* (1982) Tania Modleski challenges the first wave of scholarship that paid attention to the genre only from a place of 'hostility or ridicule' and instead wanted to 'explore the reasons for the deep-rooted and centuries-old appeal', which 'suggests that they speak to very real problems and tensions in women's lives''.[55] These critics focused on the connection between the novels and their readers and took a more neutral approach to the genre than the previous wave.

However, that does not mean they went without criticism; Kay Mussell points out in *Fantasy and Reconciliation* (1984) that romance fiction fails 'to elaborate mature and triumphant models for female life beyond marriage, motherhood and femininity'.[56] Romance criticism during this time was still focused on the heterosexual romance novel, often prioritising the experience of its (assumed heterosexual) female readership. The first wave condemned its female readership, the second wave attempted to understand them and the novels they read; neither wave considered readers or romance novels that did not fit into the heterosexual romance mainstream. Despite moving romance

[53] Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 212.
[54] Carol M Thurston, *The Romance Revolution: Erotic Novels for Women and the Quest for a New Sexual Identity* (University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 163.
[55] Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women*, 2nd edn (Routledge, 2008), p. 5.
[56] Kay Mussell, *Fantasy and Reconciliation: Contemporary Formulas of Women's Romance Fiction* (Greenwood Press, 1984), p. 189.

scholarship forward in how it treated the genre and those who read it, critics from this period continued to view romance through the lens of gender and often placed this topic at the centre of the debates and their arguments. A large proportion of the scholarship continued to be concerned with 'whether romance is empowering or oppressive – good or bad – for women'.[57] This focus left little space in the scholarship for queer romance novels, despite the growing number of independent LGBTQ+ presses in the US during the 1980s which largely published queer romances.

The third, and current, wave of romance scholarship has moved beyond the debates of the genre's worthiness and the questions of gender that dominated the first and second waves. Instead, it is characterised by a more nuanced approach. Regis' *The Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003) is often credited with re-igniting scholarly interest in the romance genre and kicking off the third wave. Rather than focusing on the reader experience like previous scholars, Regis combined a historical and structuralist approach to the genre, intending to establish a romance canon. Perhaps her biggest influence on romance scholarship was her identification of a romance novel as 'a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines' that 'requires certain narrative events'.[58] As explained above, this definition helped inform this thesis' definition of a queer romance novel whilst recognising the heteronormative limitations of Regis' approach.

[57] Hsu-Ming Teo, 'The Contemporary Anglophone Romance Genre', Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature, 2018, p. 19 <https://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-415.> [accessed 8 November 2023].
[58] Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 27.

However, Regis' definition of a romance novel, particularly her eight essentials, is regularly used and referenced by scholars when determining whether or not a piece of fiction fits into the romance formula.[59] This thesis explores the final element, 'the betrothal', whose very name implies a heteronormative ending that includes the institution of marriage in Chapter 3: The Queer HEA.[60] Regis even goes as far as to argue that romance novels are 'the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines' further cementing the narrative relationship between the romance genre's Happily Ever After (HEA) and marriage.[61] How does this need for a betrothal or marriage translate to the queer romance genre? Especially considering that same-sex marriage is, at the time of writing, only legal in thirty-five of the world's one-hundred and ninety-five countries and was not legal anywhere before the Netherlands legalized it in 2001.[62] I examine queer romance's relationship with marriage and its place in the queer romance HEA in Chapter 3. In doing so I will build upon the work of Regis and expand this eighth essential element of the romance genre to be a more inclusive one.

Regis' influence on romance scholarship is hard to understate, and the effectiveness of her strategy to legitimise the romance genre as worthy of study is clear. Her book led to the re-igniting of interest in romance scholarship by a burgeoning collection of interdisciplinary scholars, who produced more

[59] Regis eight essential elements have been used as a benchmark to assess whether other forms of media - TV, Film, comics, music etc – follow the romance genre conventions despite not being a piece of prose fiction.
[60] Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 30.
[61] Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 19.
[62] HRC Foundation, 'Marriage Equality Around the World', *Human Rights Campaign* <https://www.hrc.org/resources/marriage-equality-around-the-world> [accessed 27 January 2024].

focused and nuanced research into the romance genre, with projects often studying a single aspect or element. This was a stark contrast to the previous two waves that often treated the romance genre as a homogenous whole.[63]

It is during this third wave that scholarly attention turned to the queer romance genre, a full three decades after their heterosexual counterparts. Queer romance scholarship is still in its infancy and therefore research is irregular. A handful of critics have used queerness as a tool to explore the heterosexual romance genre: Jami McFarland in 2016, Stacy Gillis in 2015, and Kathleen Therrien in 2012 all applied a queer lens to various heterosexual romances.[64] McFarland looks at the queer undertones in the *Twilight Saga* (2005 – 2020), Gillis explores queer desire in Georgette Heyer's *These Old Shades* (1926), and Therrien examines how queer side characters are used in heterosexual romance novels. A criticism of these articles is that they all utilise a close literary analysis method on a small handful of novels, with little incorporation of wider queer romance trends.

Other critics have explored the queer romance genre from a wider perspective, looking at book and/or publishing trends. In 2016, Len Barot gave a historical overview of the development of queer romance in America during

[63] For example: Samantha F Quinn and Arrington Stoll, 'An Exploration of Sexting as a Form of Infidelity in Consensually Non-Monogamous Relationships', *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, 11.Special Issue Pieces (2022).

[64] Jami McFarland, 'Resuscitating the Undead Queer in Stephanie Meyer's Twilight Saga', *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, 5.Special Issue: Queering Popular Romance (2016) <https://www.jprstudies.org/2016/07/resuscitating-the-undead-queer-in-stephanie-meyers-twilight-sagaby-jami-mcfarland/>; Stacy Gillis, 'The Cross-Dresser, the Thief, His Daughter and Her Lover: Queer Desire and Romance in Georgette Heyer's These Old Shades', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 26.1–2 (2015), pp. 57–74, doi:10.1080/09574042.2015.1035024; Kathleen Therrien, 'Straight to the Edges: Gay and Lesbian Characters and Cultural Conflict in Popular Romance Fiction', in *New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction: Critical Essays*, ed. by Sarah S.G. Frantz and Eric Murphy Selinger (McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012), pp. 164–77.

the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with a focus on Lesbian and F/F Romance novels.[65] Christine Larson and Ashley Carter incorporated the role of publishing in their analysis in 2023, where they adopted a 'neo-institutionalization framework to reveal how [queer] romance, became legitimized in mainstream publication through *isomorphism*'.[66] They primarily wanted to explore how 'digital self-publishing processes came to influence traditional publishing' through interviews with seven romance editors and ten 'authors whose work features same-sex protagonists'.[67] My thesis similarly explores the interplay between the publishing ecosystem and the queer romance genre to answer how and why this genre has developed so rapidly in the last decade.

Researchers like McFarland, Gillis, Therrien, Barot, and Larson and Carter and the articles they have produced are outliers, however, as the majority of research into the queer romance genre has focused on M/M and Lesbian Romances.

Most critics researching the M/M Romance genre have focused on the interplay between the novels and their female audience. Guy Mark Foster explores the connection between straight women, bisexuality, and pleasure in M/M Romances featuring gay protagonists. He argues that the M/M Romance allows some of its heterosexual female readers to channel bisexual desire

[65] Barot, 'Queer Romance in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century America: Snapshots of a Revolution'.
[66] Christine Larson and Ashley Carter, 'Love Is Love: Reverse Isomorphism and the Rise of LGBTQ+ Romance Publishing', *New Media & Society*, OnlineFirst (2023), pp. 1–22 (p. 2), doi:10.1177/14614448231218991.
[67] Larson and Carter, 'Love Is Love: Reverse Isomorphism and the Rise of LGBTQ+ Romance Publishing', p. 7.

'through [their] idiosyncratic practice of reading and/or writing *as if* [they] were [a] man'.[68] This argument that M/M Romance novels act as a form of escapism, in Foster's case sexual, for its largely female readership is also echoed by other scholars. Emily Brooks, Alex Buben and Fender Lauture argued that M/M Romance 'writers effectively remove stigma from the equation and allow readers the 'escape' that is part of the draw of the romance genre'.[69] Similarly, Caroline Duvezin-Caubet in an exploration of the HEA in the Neo-Victorian M/M Romance suggests that for 'female readers, it can be liberating to invest emotionally in a relationship where the heteropatriarchal policing of female bodies and minds is completely off the table'.[70] Although this is not the focus of the article, it is interesting that the M/M genre is once again being presented as a form of escape for female readers. Catherine M. Roach's erotic faith theory argues that romance novels (regardless of type) offer a view of the world where 'love conquers suffering… sex isn't fully meaningful without love [and] that partner love ultimately provides more fulfilment than political activism'. This supports the argument that M/M Romances offers their readers a form of escapism.[71] Roach argues that 'these stories of love – gay and otherwise – offer a woman-centred fantasy

[68] Guy Mark Foster, 'What To Do If Your Inner Tomboy Is a Homo: Straight Women, Bisexuality, and Pleasure in M/M Gay Romance Fictions', *Journal of Bisexuality*, 15.4 (2015), pp. 509–31 (p. 519), doi:10.1080/15299716.2015.1092910.
[69] Emily Brooks, Alex Buben, and Fender Lauture, 'M/M Romance', *Unsuitable: Conversations about Women, History & Popular Fiction*, 2015 <https://sites.duke.edu/unsuitable/malemale-romance/> [accessed 6 March 2020].
[70] Caroline Duvezin-Caubet, 'Gaily Ever After: Neo-Victorian M/M Genre Romance for the Twenty-First Century', *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 13.1 (2020), pp. 242–69 (p. 259).
[71] Catherine M Roach, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture* (Indiana University Press, 2016), p. 175.

of the end of patriarchy' and that the M/M heroes' 'story represents the end of patriarchy – the *fantasy* of the end of patriarchy'.[72]

All these critics provide an interesting starting point to the discussion of why, and to an extent, how, readers of M/M Romances (and other queer romances) are interacting with these novels, but they all make the basic assumption that these novels are largely being read by a heterosexual female audience.

I wish to challenge the assumption that M/M Romances are only read as a form of escapism by heterosexual women: firstly by determining if it actually is a sub-genre predominantly read by heterosexual women and secondly by going beyond just the M/M Romance genre to ask readers why they read any form of queer romance. In doing so I hope to move the conversation beyond the 'romance-novels-are-a-form-of-escapism' argument that has been around since Radway first proposed it forty years ago in 1984.[73]

When considering the depiction of the male body in queer romances, it is interesting to note that in heterosexual romances the male body has remained almost unchanged since the 1980s. Radway in 1984, famously identified the 'spectacular masculinity' of the popular romance hero as one which is 'hard, angular, and dark' with 'every aspect… [being] informed by the purity of his maleness'.[74] Abby Zidle in her article 1999 about the 'New Romance Hero' pointed out that even if the personalities of the romance hero change, they 'should 'look' like a conventional man' and will often maintain

[72] Roach, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*, p. 180.
[73] Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 93.
[74] Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 128.

the physical appearance of the heroes first identified by Radway.[75] Jonathan A. Allan and Jayashree Kamblé have more recently reaffirmed this assessment of the heterosexual romance hero's body. Kamblé argues that romance heroes continue to be 'good-looking… strong, protective' and Allan states that the heterosexual romance hero's 'body is muscular, strong, virile'.[76] Eirini Arvanitaki in 2022 agreed with the above critics, saying 'it is rather unlikely to encounter a hero… [with] an average body shape or form' in a heterosexual romance novel.[77] These romance heroes clearly display 'hegemonic masculinity'. The concept of hegemonic masculinity was first coined by R. W. Connell in 1995 as a way of understanding the culturally idealized form of masculinity in a given society that helps men legitimise and maintain their dominance over women and other individuals who do not conform to hegemonic masculinity.[78] Most importantly for this thesis, which is interested in the portrayal of the queer male body, Connell states that the body 'is inescapable in the construction of masculinity'.[79] Before examining the male body in the queer romance genre, it was important to first establish what the hegemonic masculinity of the heterosexual male heroes' body was to determine how the queer male body conformed or challenged the hegemonic ideal.

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[75] Abby Zidle, 'From Bodice-Ripper to Baby-Sitter: The New Hero in Mass-Market Romance', in *Romantic Conventions* (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), p. 25.
[76] Jonathan A Allan, 'The Purity of His Maleness: Masculinity in Popular Romance Novels', *Journal of Men's Studies*, 24.1 (2016), pp. 24–41 (p. 29), doi:10.1177/1060826515624382; Jayashree Kamblé, *Making Meaning in Popular Romance Fiction: An Epistemology* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 110.
[77] Eirini Arvanitaki, *Masculinities in Post-Millennial Popular Romance* (Routledge, 2022), p. 56.
[78] R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Polity Press, 1995); R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', *Gender & Society*, 19.6 (2005), pp. 829–59, doi:10.1177/0891243205278639.
[79] Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 54.

Allan is the only critic who has explored how these ideas of hegemonic masculinity have been drawn across to queer romance. In *Reading from the Behind: A Cultural Analysis of the Anus* (2016) Allan argues that one of the M/M 'genre's growing pain might well be its continued interest in what we might call 'hegemonic masculinity''.[80] In the text he analyses Ann Tenino's M/M New Adult romance *Frat Boy and Toppy* (2012), where he argues that Brad, one of the heroes, is 'defined in terms of [his] purity… he is strong, virile, almost excessive in perfection, representing a hyperbolic ideal of the male body'.[81] In other research Allan relates this continued need in M/M Romance novels for 'hegemonic masculinity' with homophobia, because 'the male body must be constructed by what it is not: feminine, queer, and homosexual'.[82] Allan consistently asserts that heroes in M/M Romances conform to the 'hegemonic masculinity' of the wider romance genre. Chapter 2: The Queer Body will build upon the research mentioned above to determine how the portrayal of the male body in queer romances challenges, or perhaps conforms to, the romance genre's hegemonic masculinity.

One of the few full-length studies on Lesbian Romance is Phyllis M. Betz's book *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis* (2009). One of the main areas of research for Betz compares lesbian to heterosexual romances, particularly the dynamic between the two heroines. Betz admits that in Lesbian Romances 'there tends to be a reliance on some variation of the butch/femme dyad', whose origins she traces to the popular TV show

[80] Jonathan A Allan, *Reading from behind: A Cultural Analysis of the Anus* (University of Regina Press, 2016), p. 71.
[81] Allan, *Reading from behind: A Cultural Analysis of the Anus*, p. 75.
[82] Allan, 'The Purity of His Maleness: Masculinity in Popular Romance Novels', p. 35.

Xena: Warrior Princess.[83] Betz argues that although the butch/femme divide is lessening in other media, particularly in the representation of the butch whose physical appearance is often softened, in the Lesbian Romance 'the portrait of the dominant female retains its traditional appearance'.[84] Barot in 2016 supports Betz argument saying, 'butch-femme archetypes, remain a powerful influence and recognizable force in many present-day Lesbian Romances', although Barot concedes that these stereotypes are beginning to lessen in more recent Lesbian Romances.[85] Katherine Lynch and Ruth E. Sternglantz, alongside Barot, also explored the queer female heroine in 2012; they related the lesbian heroine to the figure of the alpha female whose 'dominance, aggression, and territoriality are innate' and who narratively 'serve[s] the same function in a romance as does the alpha male… with unquenchable erotic power'.[86] This interpretation of the female heroine again reinforces the idea of a butch/femme divide that is mimicking the physical dynamic of the hero and heroine from heterosexual romances. There are a few issues with these assessments. Firstly they primarily consider the more butch or dominant women with little attention being paid to the more femme or submissive women.[87] Secondly, although both Betz and Barot mention the image of the butch

[83] Phyllis M Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis* (McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2009), p. 15.
[84] Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis*, p. 96.
[85] Barot, 'Queer Romance in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century America: Snapshots of a Revolution', p. 400.
[86] Katherine E Lynch, Ruth E Sternglantz, and Len Barot, 'Queering the Romantic Heroine: Where Her Power Lies', *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, 3.1 (2012) <http://jprstudies.org/2012/10/queering-the-romantic-heroine-where-her-power-lies-by-katherine-e-lynch-ruth-e-sternglantz-and-len-barot/> [accessed 20 October 2019].
[87] Words butch/dominant and femme/submissive have been used to mimic the language of the previous researchers and are not necessarily reflective of all heroines and relationships dynamics found in female/female or lesbian romances.

lesbian is lessening or softening in Lesbian Romances they do little to explain how or what the impact of this lessening is on the relationship dynamics. Finally, none of these academics places the depictions of these queer heroines within the literary context of the heterosexual romance heroine. How does the depiction of the romance heroine in queer and heterosexual romances differ or compare? Crucially, what can this difference tell us about the depiction of the queer female body? I hope to answer these questions and address these oversights to determine whether female-focused queer romances continue to mimic the physicality of the hero and heroine from heterosexual romances. It is also clear that current literature on the female body in Lesbian Romances has predominantly focused on the figure of the 'butch' or 'dominant' heroine with little attention paid to the more 'femme' or 'submissive' heroine. This is another oversight which I want to address by analysing the 'femme' queer heroine within the context of the romance genre. This will be combined with an analysis of the queer male body and the trans* body in queer romance in The Queer Body Chapter.[88] Currently, there is no published research into the portrayal of the trans* body in the romance genre. Therefore this thesis uses more general research into the trans* body. I have incorporated trans* studies research by Richard Ekins and Dave King (2006), Kristina Gupta (2019), Jack Halberstam (2018), J.R. Latham (2016), Joanne Meyerowitz (2002), Jay Prosser (1998), Alison Rooke (2010), Holiday Simmons and Fresh! White (2014), David Valentine (2007), and Riki Wilchins (2002), among others, into my analysis of the

[88] the words trans* was first coined by Jack Halberstam in 2018 and is being used in this thesis to denote any bodies that fall outside of cisgender expectations

trans* body in queer romance novels.[89] I have also built on the research into the cisgender male and female bodies mentioned above to analyse the depiction of trans* heroes and heroines in queer romance.

A handful of critics have researched the Gay Romance novel. Margaret Breen explored homosexual identity in Prime Stevenson's *Imre* and Marlon Ross researched contemporary Black Gay Romance novels written during the 1980s.[90] Ross paid particular attention to how these novels emerged in response 'to the kind of pop heteronom performed by mass mediated hip hop… consolidated white gay rights agenda [and] the rising homonorm that aims to exclude Black man-on-man desire'.[91] Rather than connecting them to their literary heritage, Ross considers these 1980s romances through the lens of queer activism. This is an element left out of the majority of analyses about queer romance novels, particularly M/M Romances. However, exploring the rise of queer romances while considering the unique cultural and social

[89] Richard Ekins and Dave King, *The Transgender Phenomenon* (SAGE, 2006); Kristina Gupta, 'Gendering Asexuality and Asexualizing Gender: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Intersections between Gender and Asexuality', *Sexualities*, 22.7–8 (2019), pp. 1197–1216, doi:10.1177/1363460718790890; Jack Halberstam, *Trans* A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* (University of California Press, 2018); J.R. Latham, 'Trans Men's Sexual Narrative-Practices: Introducing STS to Trans and Sexuality Studies', *Sexualities*, 19.3 (2016), pp. 347–68; Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*, 1st edn (Harvard University Press, 2002); Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (Columbia University Press, 1998); Alison Rooke, 'Telling Trans Stories: (Un)Doing the Science of Sex', in *Transgender Identities: Towards a Social Analysis of Gender Diversity*, ed. by Sally Hines and Tam Sanger (Routledge, 2010); Holiday Simmons and Fresh! White, 'Our Many Selves', in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves: A Resource for the Transgender Community*, ed. by Laura Erickson-Schroth (Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 3–23; David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Duke University Press, 2007); Riki Wilchins, 'A Certain Kind of Freedom: Power and the Truth of Bodies', in *Genderqueer: Voices from beyond the Sexual Binary*, ed. by Joan Nestle, Clare Howell, and Riki Wilchins (Alyson Books, 2002), pp. 23–63.

[90] Breen, 'Homosexual Identity, Translation, and Prime-Stevenson's Imre and The Intersexes'; Marlon B. Ross, '"What's Love but a Second Hand Emotion": Man-on-Man Passion in the Contemporary Black Gay Romance Novel', *Callaloo*, 36.3 (2013), pp. 669–86.

[91] Ross, '"What's Love but a Second Hand Emotion": Man-on-Man Passion in the Contemporary Black Gay Romance Novel', p. 676.

environment from which they emerged is a key approach for the History of Queer Romances chapter.

The political nature of queer romance has been explored more thoroughly by academics interested in Lesbian Romances. One of the earliest critics to directly address Lesbian Romances was Joke Hermes in 1992, who states that Lesbian Romances 'invite[s] its readers to identify not only with the text but with the position of the authors' and argues that 'one of the most important aspects of lesbian romance fiction' is the 'balance struck between the narrative role of sexuality and the political stance of the author'.[92] For Hermes, there needs to be more separation between the author's own political opinions and the novels in order to 'provide truly gratifying lesbian and escapist reading'. Hermes also finds an uncomfortable interplay between politics and escapism in the Lesbian Romances published before 1992, which detracts from the overall enjoyment of the novels.[93] The political role of Lesbian Romance is something that later researchers also comment upon. Jill Ehnenn in 1998 proposed that although the notion of escape was a motivator for lesbian readers, they also read to 'make the invisible visible [with Lesbian Romances] reinforc[ing] the existence of romantic and erotic possibilities between women'.[94] For Ehnenn, who uses a psychoanalytical approach, Lesbian Romances are political because they provide a form of representation that is otherwise difficult to find.

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[92] Joke Hermes, 'Sexuality in Lesbian Romance Fiction', *Feminist Review*, 42.Feminist Fictions (1992), pp. 49–66 (p. 64).
[93] This is interesting considering the research outlined earlier by Foster, Brooks, Buben and Lauture that argues M/M Romances provide an escape for their largely female readership.
[94] Jill Ehnenn, 'Desperately Seeking Susan Among the Trash: Reinscription, Subversion and Visibility in the Lesbian Romance Novel', *Atlantis*, 23.1 Fall/Winter (1998), pp. 120–27 (p. 126).

Suzanne Juhasz's 2001 research into Lesbian Romance fiction builds upon this argument saying that 'the very literalness of the writing… disrupts rather than maintains dominant social structures: specifically, heterosexuality and phallocentrism'.[95] For Juhasz, the very act of putting women-centric desire and relationship in the forefront, is a political act. This argument that Lesbian Romances are political is continued more recently by Carolyn Bronstein who argues that Lesbian Romance fiction *Macho Sluts* (1988) by Patrick Califia[96] was a political novel against 1980s anti-pornography feminism.[97]

The final area to receive academic attention is sexuality in queer romances. This topic is discussed and expanded upon, including a look at relationship dynamics in queer romance novels, in Chapter 3: The Queer Happy Ever After. Ellen Carter explored how ace-spectrum characters negotiate and potentially disrupt the accepted relationship dynamics found in romance novels (both heterosexual and queer). Carter found that asexual romances presented 'an opportunity to interrogate norms by requiring characters to externalize attitudes towards sex for themselves and others'.[98] This insight is particularly interesting when considering Jodi McAlister's theory that most romance novel protagonists adhere, unknowingly, to compulsory

[95] Suzanne Juhasz, 'Lesbian Romance Fiction and the Plotting of Desire: Narrative Theory, Lesbian Identity, and Reading Practice (1998)', in *Women and Romance: A Reader*, ed. by Susan Ostov Weisser (New York University Press, 2001), pp. 276–91 (p. 289).
[96] Califia is a bisexual trans man who transitioned genders in the mid-1990s. Prior to transitioning, Califia lived as a woman and lesbian and was known as Pat. When Califia first published *Macho Sluts*, he identified as a woman and a lesbian..
[97] Carolyn Bronstein, 'The Political Uses of Lesbian Romance Fiction: Reading Patrick Califia's Macho Sluts as a Response to 1980s Anti-Pornography Feminism', *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, 4.1 (2014).
[98] Ellen Carter, 'Asexual Romance in an Allosexual World: How Ace-Spectrum Characters (and Authors) Create Space for Romantic Love', *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, 9 (2020), p. 13.

demisexuality.[99] McAlister argues that in romance novels 'women are innately demisexual, needing an emotional connection for sex to be pleasurable' and that during the course of the romance 'heroes become demisexual' as they fall in love with the heroine.[100] For McAlister's theory, sex is an important part of the romance genre, because it is attached to an emotional connection. Carter, on the other hand, suggests that ace-spectrum characters disrupt relationship dynamics in romance novels because any emotional connection without sex is considered platonic in Western society. McAlister's argument, despite the use of demisexuality as a theoretical concept, only considers romances where the hero and heroine identify as straight and cisgender. Can her argument be applied to explicitly queer romance novels?

Another concept that was crucial to my analysis of polyamorous romances in Chapter 3: The Queer Happily Ever After was compulsory monogamy, which was first coined by Elizabeth F. Emens in 2009, to describe the idealisation and romanticisation of the emotionally and sexually exclusive couple.[101] Within her article Emens showcases that the majority of romance fiction not only conforms to compulsory monogamy but pioneers the idea of 'supermonogamy' – 'the idea that only one 'right' partner exists for each person… the search for one's soulmate… is monogamy's most potent fantasy'.[102] Compulsory monogamy is increasingly being normalised and

[99] Jodi McAlister, '"That Complete Fusion of Spirit as Well as Body": Heroines, Heroes, Desire and Compulsory Demisexuality in the Harlequin Mills & Boon Romance Novel', *The Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*, 3.3 (2014), pp. 299–310, doi:10.1386/ajpc.3.3.299_1.
[100] McAlister, '"That Complete Fusion of Spirit as Well as Body": Heroines, Heroes, Desire and Compulsory Demisexuality in the Harlequin Mills & Boon Romance Novel', pp. 304, 307.
[101] Elizabeth F. Emens, 'Compulsory Monogamy and Polyamorous Existence', in *Feminist and Queer Legal Theory*, ed. by Martha Albertson Fineman, Jack E. Jackson, and Adam P. Romero (Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), pp. 259–85 (p. 261).
[102] Emens, 'Compulsory Monogamy and Polyamorous Existence', p. 263.

idealised by LGBTQ+ individuals, despite queer people's long history with relationship anarchy. The adoption of monogamy is a 'neoliberal sexual politics… [that] upholds and sustains… dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions' rather than contesting them.[103] By applying the ideas of compulsory monogamy and homonormativity to an analysis of polyamorous romances I aim to challenge the assumption that 'the happily-ever-after ending… [of] gay [and queer] romance[s] maintains the status quo'.[104] Ultimately my research aims to answer how homonormative the queer romance's HEA is, particularly when considering its relationship with marriage and monogamy.

I aim to build upon the work of these researchers by considering the political implications of not just Lesbian Romances, but queer romances more broadly, in the twenty-first century. By considering all queer romances as a collective whole I hope to move current debates about M/M Romances and Lesbian Romances to a more nuanced place. It is important to not treat these novels as existing in a vacuum and instead connect them with the political and social developments that have affected, and continue to affect, LGBTQ+ communities. I build on the work of Ross, Hermes, Ehnenn and Bronstein in the History of Queer Romance chapter where I trace the development of queer romance novels from the early 1900s to the present day and the Queer Romance Today chapter where I analyse the reader and writer focus groups I

[103] Lisa Duggan, 'The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism', in *Materialising Democracy: Towards a Revitalised Cultural Politics*, ed. by Russ Castronovo and others (Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 175–94 (p. 179).
[104] Roach, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*, p. 175.

conducted in 2021, which includes a discussion on the political nature of queer romance novels.

Methodology

The thesis focuses on countries with the biggest romance publishing industries: Australia, the UK and the US. This moves the existing scholarship on queer romances forward, as most research has focused on a single country, usually America. By considering three countries, it is possible to assess national differences and determine the transnational nature of queer romance. I analyse novels with a range of LGBQT+ characters, including bisexual and transgender individuals, two identities with little to no research within the queer romance genre. For example, there is currently no research into the portrayal of transgender bodies in queer romance novels. The six novels that form the case studies for this thesis were chosen for two primary reasons: firstly, they needed to provide an interesting angle for the relevant topic and secondly, they had to be published in, or after 2010.[105] Although not an explicit criterion for the novels to be chosen as a case study, it is interesting to note that all six novels were published by authors who have at some point publicly stated they are members of the LGBTQ+ community.

As previous mentioned, one methodology that has been central to my approach to queer romance novels is the genre worlds method first pioneered by Fletcher, Driscoll and Wilkins in 2018. They built upon the work of sociologist

[105] I have chosen to focus on queer romances published after 2010 as they reflect the latest evolution of the queer romance genre, as shall be discussed in chapter 1.

Howard S. Becker's 'art worlds' model that offered 'a sociological study of how art is produced, circulated, and enjoyed'.[106] Fletcher et al. sought to build upon existing romance scholarship by applying this approach to the popular romance genre as most research 'had focused overwhelmingly on… conceptual frameworks and analytical techniques of literary critics'.[107] In contrast, their approach sought to analyse romance novels, particularly Australian romance novels, 'alongside interviews with authors', and 'publishing data [to] yield new insights and [provide] a fuller, richer understanding of how genre fiction operates'.[108] This approach was chosen because it provides a broader, more cohesive view of a genre, a view that is currently lacking in the field of queer romance scholarship.

I chose to collect qualitative data from readers and writers who are actively engaging with the queer romance genre using small focus groups of readers and writers from Australia, the US, and the UK. In addition, I designed, distributed, and analysed two digital surveys to inform this thesis: a survey for readers and a survey for writers of queer romance novels. Both surveys were conducted digitally and were open from 1st December 2020 to the 31st January 2021. A two-month timeframe was chosen for both surveys, allowing sufficient time to advertise the surveys in a variety of places and increase the odds of people responding during the festive season. The inclusion criteria for the reader survey was an initial question that asked if the participant had read a

[106] Fletcher, Driscoll, and Wilkins, 'Genre Worlds and Popular Fiction: The Case of Twenty-First-Century Australian Romance', p. 998.
[107] Fletcher, Driscoll, and Wilkins, 'Genre Worlds and Popular Fiction: The Case of Twenty-First-Century Australian Romance', p. 997.
[108] Fletcher, Driscoll, and Wilkins, 'Genre Worlds and Popular Fiction: The Case of Twenty-First-Century Australian Romance', p. 998.

romance novel featuring at least one LGBTQ+ protagonist in the last 12 months. If they had not they did not progress with the survey. This question filtered out two individuals, resulting in 393 respondents to the reader survey. The writer survey also included an initial question that asked if the participant had written at least one romance novel featuring at least one LGBTQ+ protagonist. This question filtered out one individual, resulting in 86 respondents for the writer survey. Neither survey asked participants for their names as I wanted the respondents to have anonymity. The final question on both surveys asked participants if they would be willing to share their email address and be contacted about taking part in a focus group with other readers or writers of queer romances. These email addresses were only used to contact respondents about the focus groups.

The decision was made to keep the questions in the reader and the writer surveys as similar as possible. This allows greater comparison between the two datasets; and reflects the fluid relationship between readers and writers of queer romance novels. From speaking to writers of queer romances, throughout this project, it became clear that many writers started as readers of queer romance novels and still engage with reader communities, both as an author and as a fellow reader.

Finally, I collected publishing data on English-language queer romance novels published between 2010 and 2019. In doing so, this thesis hopes to move the conversation about queer romances beyond just the texts and their cultural meaning by also exploring the networks that surround the genre. Fletcher, Driscoll, and Wilkins applied this approach to Australian romance

fiction and in doing so 'uncovered some of the key ways in which popular novels function in terms of industry, craft, and community'.[109] This thesis seeks to expand on this work, and the scholarship done by Barot and Larson and Carter, by applying a genre worlds approach to the queer romance genre. I want to build on the work started by Barot in 2016 by looking beyond the US to other countries, primarily the UK and Australia.[110] Equally, my thesis adds to the work by Larson and Carter in 2023 by including an in-depth quantitative analysis of 3,493 traditional and hybrid queer romance novels published between 1st January 2010 and 31st December 2019.[111] This overcomes some of the limitations of sample size that Larson and Carter themselves highlight within their article.

As a result I have collected quantitative data on the queer romance genre to assess wider trends within the genre itself. At the moment, there is little existing quantitative data on the queer romance genre, and what does exist typically focuses on a narrow range of texts or readers. In contrast, this thesis has catalogued 1,030 authors writing queer romance novels and 3,493 queer romance novels published between 1st January 2010 and 31st December 2019. This is significant because it allowed for the assessment of wider trends in the genre, gives an idea of the interconnectivity of the genre, and also provides a data basepoint for future comparative research into the queer romance genre. Combined with the reader and writer surveys and focus groups

[109] Fletcher, Driscoll, and Wilkins, 'Genre Worlds and Popular Fiction: The Case of Twenty-First-Century Australian Romance', p. 1000.
[110] Barot, 'Queer Romance in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century America: Snapshots of a Revolution'.
[111] Larson and Carter, 'Love Is Love: Reverse Isomorphism and the Rise of LGBTQ+ Romance Publishing'.

undertaken by this project, it gives a previously unexamined snapshot into the queer romance genre that considers the texts, the readers, the writers, and the publishing industry in its analysis.

The destruction of LGBTQ+ data, the exclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals from data and the misuse of data against LGBTQ+ individuals has a long history; critics like Ian Hacking (1982), Evelynn Hammonds (1994), James C. Scott (1998), Heike Bauer (2009), Dean Spade (2015), Petra L. Doan (2016) Bauer (2017), Elizabeth M. McDermott (2017), Christina Burns (2018) and Kevin Guyan (2022) have explored the consequences and challenges of this history in greater detail than can be discussed in this thesis.[112] Given this history, I therefore felt a responsibility to collect data from LGBTQ+ individuals about their reading/writing practices in as thoughtful and considered a way as possible. Part of the historic misuse comes from asking LGBTQ+ individuals to divulge their identities; it also has continuing political contexts of discrimination, by groups that have not respected their identities or privacy. To combat this, I allowed participants to select multiple options when defining their identities to

[112] Ian Hacking, 'Biopower Nd the Avalanche of Printed Numbers', *Humanities in Society*, 5 (1982), pp. 279–95; Evelynn Hammonds, 'Black (W)Holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 6.2–3 (1994), pp. 126–45; James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Conditions Have Failed* (Yale University Press, 1998); Heike Bauer, 'Theorizing Female Inversion: Sexology, Discipline, and Gender at the Fin de Siécle', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 18.1 (2009), pp. 84–102, doi:10.1353/sex.0.0040; Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* (Duke University Press, 2015); Petra L. Doan, 'To Count or Not to Count: Queering Measurement and the Transgender Community', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 44.3/4 (2016), pp. 89–110; Heike Bauer, *The Hirschfield Archives: Violence, Death, and Modern Queer Culture* (Temple University Press, 2017); Elizabeth McDermott, ''Counting' for Equality: Youth, Class and Sexual Citizenship', in *Sexualities Research: Critical Interjections, Diverse Methodologies, and Practical Applications*, ed. by Andrew King, Ana Cristina Santos, and Isabel Crowhurst, Routledge Advances in Critical Diversities (Routledge, 2017); Christine Burns, *Trans Britiain: Our Journey from the Shadows* (Unbound, 2018); Kevin Guyan, *Queer Data: Using Gender, Sex and Sexuality Data for Action*, Bloomsbury Studies in Digital Cultures (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

avoid prescribing limitations and ensure participants could self-define in a way that felt comfortable for them. I also deliberately did not clean the data in order to preserve as much texture and nuance as possible in participants' responses. The BIPOC community is another that is often mistrustful of academic research due to historic mistreatment and mismanagement of individuals and their data. This could account for the small number of BIPOC respondents for the reader and writer surveys, which is not necessarily reflective of the queer romance community. During the data collection process, I did actively reach out to BIPOC groups and individuals as I wanted my data to be as reflective of the community as possible. I also made a point to gather data from various publishing houses – including those that specialised in BIPOC authors and stories such as Love Africa Press.

When it came to the focus groups, I was conscious of my role as a researcher and the need to provide a safe environment and establish comfort and trust between myself and the participants. As such I took care to facilitate a safe place for discussion by highlighting in the focus groups that I was also a reader of queer romance novels and that my passion for the topic came from my love of the books. In addition, I deliberately had small focus groups of three to four individuals plus myself as the smaller number helped create a safe environment where participants could bond over their shared love of the queer popular romance genre. As such they felt more comfortable openly sharing their experiences and opinions about queer romance genre and its connection with the LGBTQ+ community. This creates an interesting situation where participants discussed the feeling of kinship they gained from these

novels while simultaneously establishing a form of kinship with each other as fellow enthusiasts, while still maintaining a space for disagreement or divergence of opinion. This was helpful for ethical data gathering because it allowed disparate voices, experiences and opinions to be heard with equal weight and importance.

In addition, I made sure to use a triangulation data method, which is the adoption of 'two or more collection methods and combining data during analysis'.[113] The triangulation of data is recommended because 'triangulating data collected from both quantitative and qualitative methods helps address the limitations of any one approach'.[114] The reader and writer surveys and the publishing data provide important quantitative information on the queer romance genre, however, it is the qualitative data that can seek to provide the context of those numbers and provide insight into 'how people perceived situations'.[115] The quantitative data from the surveys and the publishing data can provide concrete, statistical answers to questions such as: who reads queer romances? What types of queer romances are published? Who is writing queer romances? What sub-genres are most commonly published? What has changed in the last ten years? What genders/sexualities are most common? Although this is useful data, when combined with the qualitative data from the reader and writer focus groups, a richer picture can be built about the queer romance ecosystem because the *why* behind these questions can be evaluated. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data is

[113] Guyan, *Queer Data: Using Gender, Sex and Sexuality Data for Action*, p. 64.
[114] Guyan, *Queer Data: Using Gender, Sex and Sexuality Data for Action*, p. 64.
[115] Guyan, *Queer Data: Using Gender, Sex and Sexuality Data for Action*, p. 63.

particularly important to this thesis due to the historical misuse of data collected about LGBTQ+ individuals.

The relationship between quantitative data and queer studies is complicated because 'quantitative methods have long been characterized as both positivist and reductionist, and thus unable to represent systems of oppression such as sexuality, gender and race with complexity and nuance'.[116] Whereas quantitative data 'require[s] the use of categories', a queer approach 'often eschews the use of labels and definitional fixities', making them uneasy bedfellows.[117] This incompatibility has resulted in several problems regarding quantitative data collected about LGBTQ+ individuals. Firstly, the methods used to collect such data (for example, surveys) often reflect the cis/heteronormative assumptions of the data collectors. Secondly, quantitative data typically undergoes extensive cleaning: the process of removing any data that breaks the established rules. This step can take up to 80% of data analysis time.[118] This time consuming process is damaging towards LGBTQ+ identities because 'the cleaning of data can remove its queerness' as it forces responses into these predetermined categories, thereby removing any of the nuance and fluidity that often accompanies LGBTQ+ identities.[119] As a result I deliberately chose not to heavily clean the answers to my surveys to fully retain the original intent and linguistics of the people submitting the surveys.

[116] Laurel Westbrook, Jamie Budnick, and Allya Saperstein, 'Dangerous Data: Seeing Social Surveys through the Sexuality Prism', *Sexualities*, Online, 2021, p. 2.
[117] Kath Browne, 'Queer Quantification or Queer(y)Ing Quantification: Creating Lesbian, Gay, Bsiexual or Heterosexual Citizens through Governmental Social Research', in *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theoried and Social Science Research*, ed. by Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash (Farnham, 2010), pp. 231–49 (pp. 231, 248).
[118] Tamraparni Dasu and Theodore Johnson, *Exploratory Data Mining and Data Cleaning* (Wiley, 2003).
[119] Guyan, *Queer Data: Using Gender, Sex and Sexuality Data for Action*, p. 114.

Similarly, in the collection of author identities and book character identities the 'splitters' method – which argues that 'grouping of identity characteristics should reflect individual nuances and complexities' – has been used for the organisation of sexuality and gender characteristics.[120] This concept was implemented by allowing a book character, or an author, to have multiple identity labels rather than restricting them to just one. For example, a book character could be tagged as gay, demisexual and polyamorous in the data, thereby showcasing the full interconnectivity and complexity of the character's sexual identity. The splitters method was also employed in the reader and writer surveys as respondents could select multiple options from a broad range of categories when answering the sexualities and gender identity questions. In doing so, it is hoped that the nuanced and complex nature of LGBTQ+ identities are represented in the data.

This combination of approaches – literary analysis, surveys, focus groups, and publishing data – are used in partnership with each other to provide an informed and well-rounded analysis of the queer romance genre.

Readers' Survey

The reader survey was completed by 393 respondents who met the inclusion criteria of having read at least one queer romance novel in the last 12 months. The survey consisted of thirty-two questions: twenty-three related to the queer

[120] James D. Weinrich and others, 'A Factor Analysis of the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid in Two Disparate Samples', *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 22.2 (1993), pp. 157–68 (p. 63), doi:10.1007/BF01542364.

romance genre, seven demographic questions, and two logistical questions.[121] The questions about the queer romance genre were split into three broad categories: reading habits (13 questions), buying/community habits (5 questions), and genre analysis (5 questions).[122]

The thirteen questions on reading habits were designed to establish how frequently respondents read queer romance novels, if they predominantly read queer romance novels, what sub-genres of queer romance they were reading, if they gravitated towards any particular publishers, and which genders and sexualities were featured in the queer romance novels they read. The survey also included four questions on reading heterosexual romances in order to provide a comparison with reading habits for queer romance novels. I wanted to see if the participants exclusively read queer romances or if they read a mixture of queer and heterosexual romances and, if they read a mixture, what was the correlation between the frequency of books read and length of time they had been reading the two genres. All the questions mentioned above were designed with multiple choice answers, although some questions like the one about publishers, had an 'Other' box, which was used by 94/393 respondents.

[121] The demographic information shall be expanded on below but respondents were asked the following demographic questions: 'What is your racial or ethnic identity?', 'What is your nationality?', 'What is your age?', 'What is your gender identity?', 'What is your sexual identity? (Tick all that apply)', 'If applicable, please specify your religion' and 'Have you been diagnosed with any disability or impairment?'.
The logistical questions were: 'How did you hear about this survey?' and 'If you would be willing to participate in a focus group with other queer romance readers, expanding on some of the topics covered in this survey, please submit your email address below. It will only be used to contact you about the focus group and will not be shared with any third parties'
[122] A full list of the questions for the reader survey can be found in the appendix 3 of the thesis.

The group of questions about buying habits and engagement with other readers of queer romance were designed to establish how readers were acquiring and discovering queer romance novels. They were asked about their chosen format, whether they felt they belonged to a community of queer romance readers, and if, and how, they engaged with other readers. These questions generated primarily quantitative, but also qualitative, evidence on how the queer romance genre had evolved in the twenty-first century. I argue that the invention of the Kindle contributed to the explosion of queer romance but is this supported by the reader's chosen format for reading queer romance novels?[123] These were designed as multiple-choice questions that allowed respondents to select multiple appropriate options. The only question that provided an 'Other' option asked about their engagement with other readers of queer romance novels.[124]

Finally, the third set of questions asked respondents their opinion on the queer romance genre. I was interested in what tropes they read, if they considered queer romances diverse, what sort of diversity they felt was most needed in the genre, and how often they felt queer romance novels portrayed or represented real-life LGBTQ+ milestones. These questions were asked for numerous reasons. The answers to these questions could provide an interesting comparison with the publishing data. For example, respondents overwhelmingly said that more racial/ethnic diversity was needed in the queer

[123] I demonstrate how the technological advancement of the Kindle helped the growth of queer romance novels in Chapter 1: A History of Queer Romance

[124] This was because the way readers could engage with other readers was so varied they couldn't all be accounted for and 'Other' box allowed for this variety while still offering the primary options.

romance genre, but how does this correlate with the number of queer romances published in the 2010s that featured non-white main characters? These type of questions are useful because they give an insight into the participants' thoughts and opinions on the queer romance genre in a quantifiable and measurable format.

The reader survey was originally distributed through the University of Birmingham's English department website, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. The link was subsequently shared by respondents to the survey in a variety of places, such as author KJ Charles' Facebook group, via the respondents' social media channels, and privately between friends and relatives.[125] The decision was made to advertise the reader survey online because of the need to gather responses from a variety of countries, including Australia, the US, and the UK. In addition to social media, I contacted the Australian Romance Readers organisation and asked them to share the link in their newsletter; this was necessary as I was struggling to get Australian respondents. Afterwards, the number of Australian respondents increased to 6.6%, making them the third most represented country, with the US (49.4%) and the UK (15.3%) forming the other largest groups of responses.[126]

I collected demographic data from reader survey participants for three reasons. Firstly, having data on who filled out the survey helps to determine if there have been any false positives in the data; 'if there is under- or over-

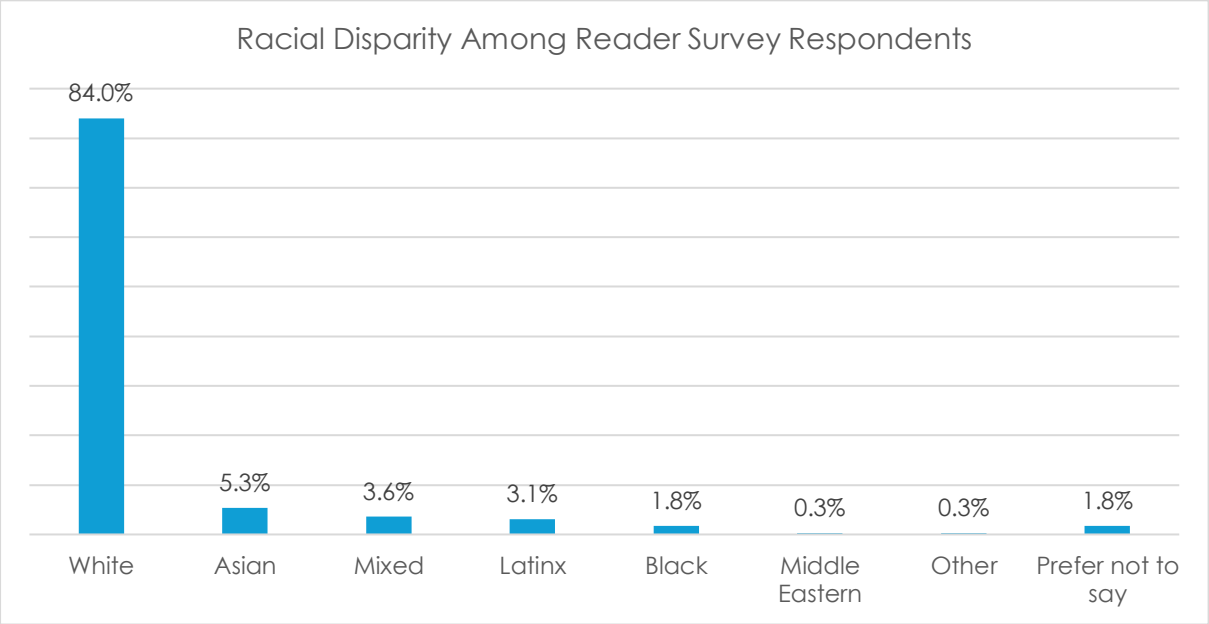
[125] I know it was shared in these ways due to respondents answer to the question 'Where did you hear about this survey?'. It worth noting that some authors were mentioned multiple times by respondents in their answer to that question, the authors mentioned were KJ Charles, Hannah Walker, AJ Sherwood, Hailey Turner, Jordan L. Hawk, TJ Klune, Josh Lanyon, Amy Lane, K.A. Merikan, Rhys Ford, Renae Kaye and Harper Bliss.
[126] Lucy Hargrave, 'Readers of Queer Romance Novels Survey Responses', 2020.

representation of certain groups, the analysis will likely over or underestimate the impact' of certain questions.[127] Secondly, as mentioned, LGBTQ+ individuals have historically been excluded from data collection processes. Asking these demographic questions using inclusive language and transparency helps combat this previous exclusion. This is why the questions surrounding sexuality and gender were designed to be as inclusive and fluid as possible, reflecting the fluidity and nuanced nature of human identity. Finally, by collecting demographic data from the participants I can determine the diversity of the sample. Crucially, this is one of the first times that data has been collected specifically on queer romance readers. This information is important because it provides information on who is reading and engaging with queer romance novels.

I asked respondents for demographic data relating to race, nationality, age, gender, sexuality (multiple choices allowed), religion, and whether they consider themselves to have a disability/impairment. The following graphs detail the demographics of the reader survey respondents across those categories.

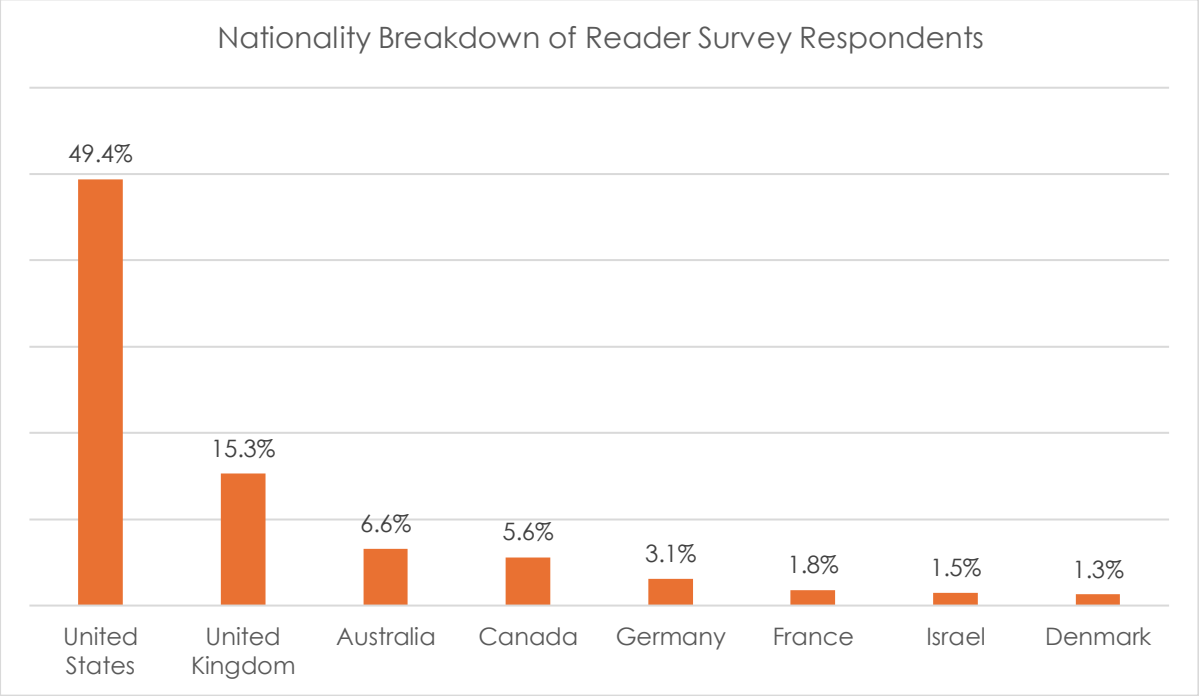
[127] 'The Importance of Collecting Demographic Data' (2020), pp. 1–7 <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/1.15.20_Congressional-Testimony_Ray_Rashawn.pdf>.

Figure 1 Bar Chart showing the Racial Disparity Among Reader Survey Respondents



This graph shows that the vast majority of the respondents identified as white, with 84% writing some version of white, Caucasian or Anglo-Saxon in the free-form box when answering this question.

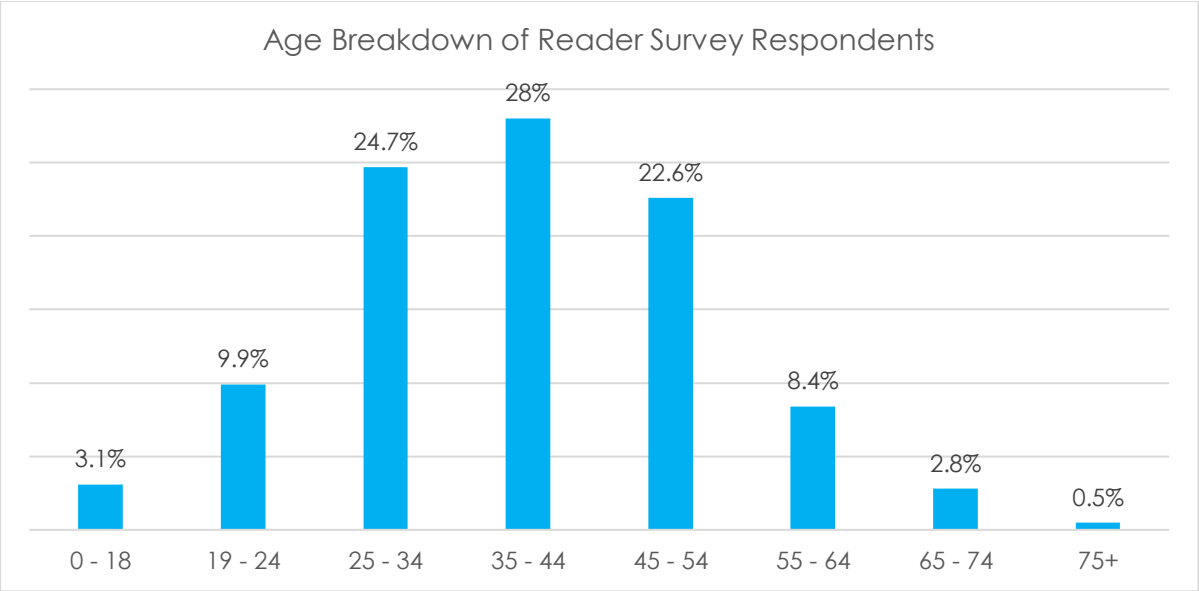
Figure 2 Bar Chart the showing the Nationality Breakdown of Reader Survey Respondents



In terms of nationality, the respondents of the survey were provided with a drop-down box listing the 195 countries recognised by the United Nations.

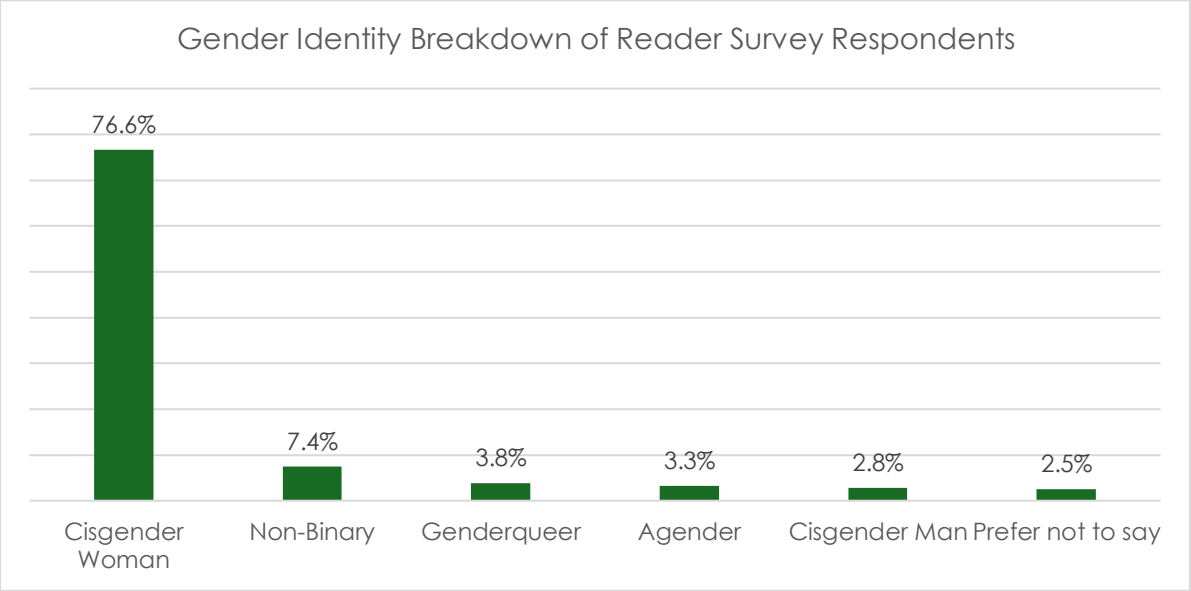
Just under half, 49.4%, of the reader survey respondents, chose the US. It is therefore important to be aware of American bias for some of the questions.

Figure 3 Bar Chart showing the Age Breakdown of Reader Survey Respondents



The 74.6% of reader survey respondents were between the ages of 25 – 54, with 35 – 44 (28%), 25 – 34 (24.7% and 45 – 54 (22.6%) being the three biggest categories. It is imperative to consider this age range when assessing the questions related to the length of time they've been reading queer romance, to see if it relates to the development of the queer romance genre more broadly, particularly as the majority of respondents were born before 1996 and have therefore come to a reading age (even if they didn't read romance) since the modern explosion of queer romance novels in 2007.

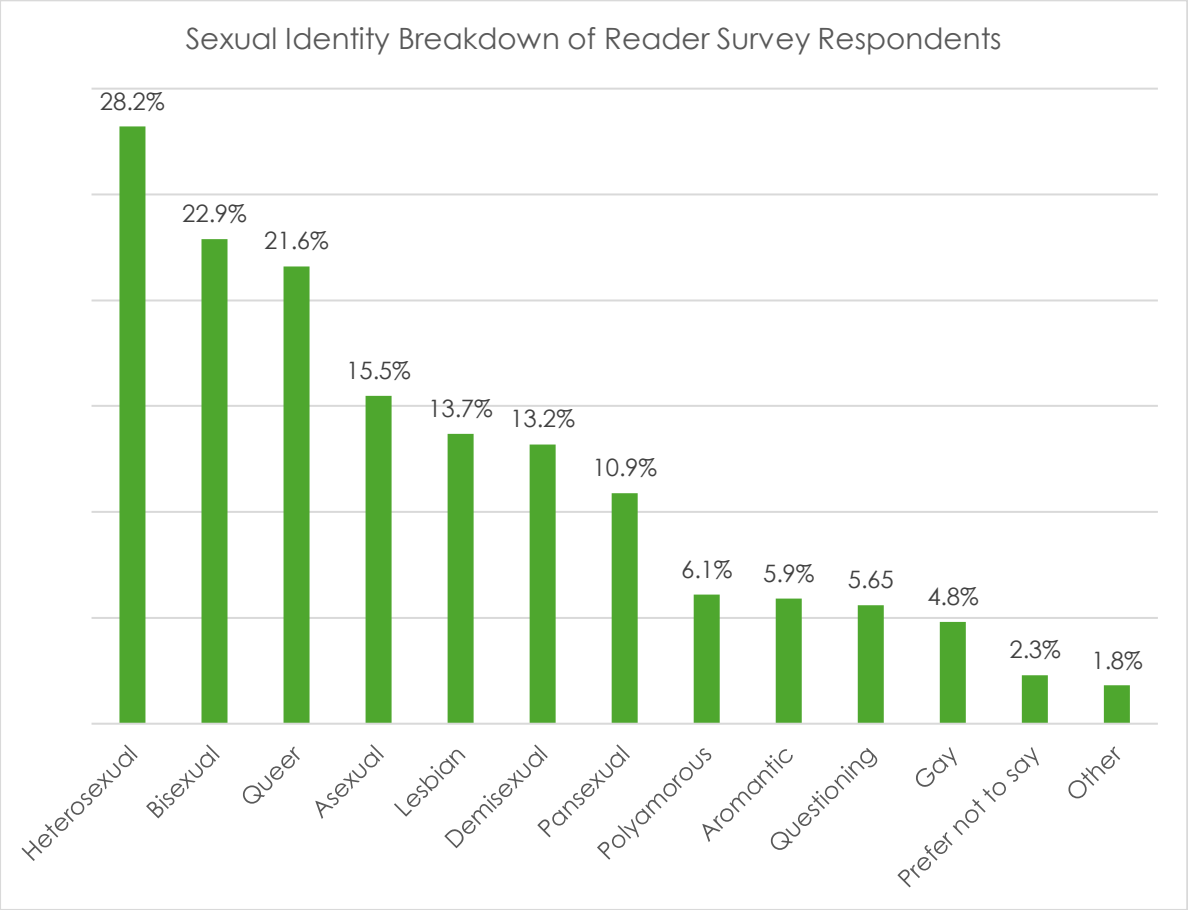
Figure 4 Bar Chart showing the Gender Identity Breakdown of Reader Survey Respondents



The question on gender identity was deliberately designed to give the most variety to potential respondents. Often in quantitative data collection methods, like surveys, respondents are given a limited range of options that are built on cisgender assumptions.[128] In contrast, my question gave participants a variety of gender options and an 'Other' option that gave them a free-write box to describe their gender expression. The 'Other' option was used by 10 respondents. Additionally, the term cisgender was deliberately used alongside transgender and other gender identities so as not to privilege the terms man and woman as the 'norm'. It is hoped that this will challenge 'cis/heteronormative administrative practices that recognize some identities… but not others' and provide more diverse and representative information about the people reading queer romances.[129]

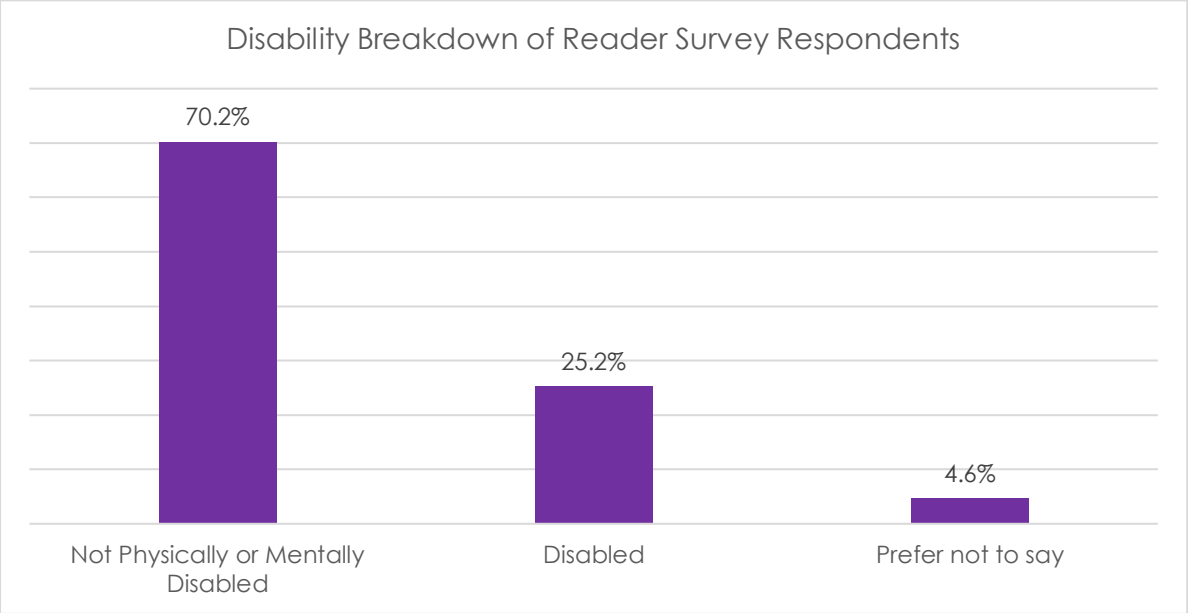
[128] Guyan, *Queer Data: Using Gender, Sex and Sexuality Data for Action*, p. 46.
[129] Guyan, *Queer Data: Using Gender, Sex and Sexuality Data for Action*, pp. 134–35.

Figure 5 Bar Chart showing the Sexual Identity Breakdown of Reader Survey Respondents



The reasoning behind the sexual identity question is similar to that for the gender identity question; I didn't want to limit respondents to a single choice and instead allowed them to keep multiple options that best reflected their sexual identity. I also wanted to give respondents a wide range of sexual identities to choose from and gave them the option of an 'Other' option, with a free-write box to describe their sexual identity in their own terms, which was used by 7 respondents.

Figure 6 Bar Chart showing the Disability Breakdown of Reader Survey Respondents



Disability information on participants was collected to prevent the skewing of data, particularly regarding the type of diversity that needs further representation within the queer romance genre. For this reason, it was not important to determine the specific disability, just whether they considered themselves disabled. The 25.2% is higher than the global average, which the World Health Organization put at 16% of the global population in 2023.[130]

Writers' Survey

The second survey created was for writers of queer romance novels. The writer survey contained twenty-seven questions, including three logistical and seven demographic questions.[131] The remaining nineteen questions in the queer

[130] 'Disability', *World Health Organization*, 2023 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health> [accessed 22 May 2024].
[131] The logistical questions includes the inclusion criteria question plus 'How did you hear about this survey?' and 'If you would be willing to participate in a focus group with other queer romance writers, expanding on some of the topics covered in this survey, please submit your email address below. It will only be used to contact you about the focus group and will not be shared with any third parties' questions

romance writers survey could be grouped into three broad categories: writing habits (10 questions), community engagement (2 questions) and genre analysis questions (4 questions).

The ten questions on writing habits were designed to establish how many queer romances novels the respondents had written, if they predominantly wrote queer romance novels, what sub-genres of queer romance they were writing, if they gravitated towards any particular publishers, and which genders and sexualities were featured in their queer romance novels. This information was important because it established the experience level of the writers who responded to the survey. The most popular answer to the question 'how many queer romance novels have you written?' was 1 – 5 with 39.5%. This means most writers who took the survey had written 6+ queer romance novels (60.5%) and in fact 22.1% of them had written more than 16.[132] These responses demonstrate that the authors surveyed had a good level of experience.

I also included four questions on their writing habits, I wanted to see if the participants exclusively wrote queer romances or if they wrote a mixture of queer and heterosexual romances. If they did write both, the questions were designed so that a correlation could be found between the frequency and length of time they had been writing heterosexual and queer romances. This is important because it allowed me to track the writers' journey, for example, did they start writing heterosexual romances before transitioning to queer

The demographic information shall be expanded on below but respondents were asked the following demographic questions: 'What is your racial or ethnic identity?', 'What is your nationality?', 'What is your age?', 'What is your gender identity?', 'What is your sexual identity? (Tick all that apply)', 'If applicable, please specify your religion' and 'Have you been diagnosed with any disability or impairment?'.

[132] Lucy Hargrave, 'Writers of Queer Romance Novels Survey Responses', 2020.

romances? Or have they always written queer romances? All the questions mentioned above were designed with multiple choice answers, although some questions, like the one about publishers, had an 'Other' box, which 34/86 respondents used.

The next group of questions looked at their community engagement with other authors of queer romance novels. These questions were designed to establish how writers engaged with other writers of queer romances and whether they felt they belonged to a community of queer romance authors. Perhaps not surprisingly, given that the writer survey was largely promoted through Twitter, most writers felt they engaged with other novelists through Twitter (77.9%).[133] Finally, the third category of questions ask respondents their opinion on the queer romance genre, I wanted to discover what writers of queer romances thought of the genre outside of their own writing. If they considered the queer romance genre diverse, what sort of diversity did they think was most needed, if they wrote queer romances that represented real-life LGBTQ+ milestones. By asking writers and readers the same questions I will be able to compare their answers to see the similarities and differences between the two groups.

Like the reader survey, the writer survey was also distributed through my social media channels, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, and the University of Birmingham's English department website. As mentioned above the vast majority of respondents found the survey through Twitter. Additionally, the link was shared by respondents of the survey in a variety of places, primarily writer

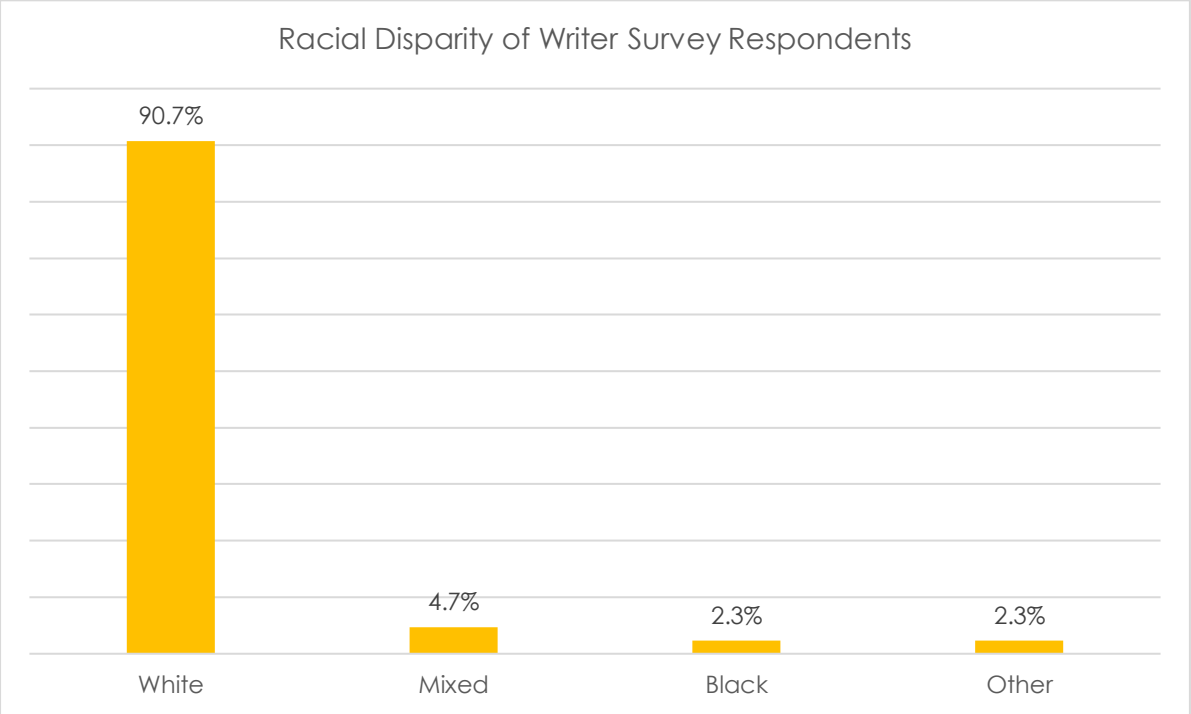
[133] Hargrave, 'Writers of Queer Romance Novels Survey Responses'.

groups on Facebook. As per the reader survey, as I planned to find participants for the focus groups from the survey respondent, the decision was made to advertise the writer survey online because of the need to gather respondents from a variety of countries, particularly Australia, the US, and the UK. I also contacted the Romantic Novelists' Association (RNA) and asked them to share the link with their Rainbow chapter.[134] It is, however, worth noting that some of the writers found the link through reader spaces – for example, the Australian Romance Reader Association's newsletter and other queer romance author's Facebook groups.[135] This provides further evidence that writers of queer romance novels are typically also readers of queer romance novels.

I asked respondents for demographic data relating to race, nationality, age, gender, sexuality (multiple choices allowed), religion and whether they consider themselves to have a disability/impairment. The following graphs detail the demographics of the writer survey respondents across those categories.

[134] The Rainbow Chapter is a group within RNA for members who identify as LGBTQ+, write novels featuring LGBTQ+ characters or are interested and wish to learn more about romantic fiction featuring LGBTQ+ characters.
[135] The Facebook Pages/Groups mentioned were for the following authors: KJ Charles, Harper Bliss, KA Merikan & Renae Kaye

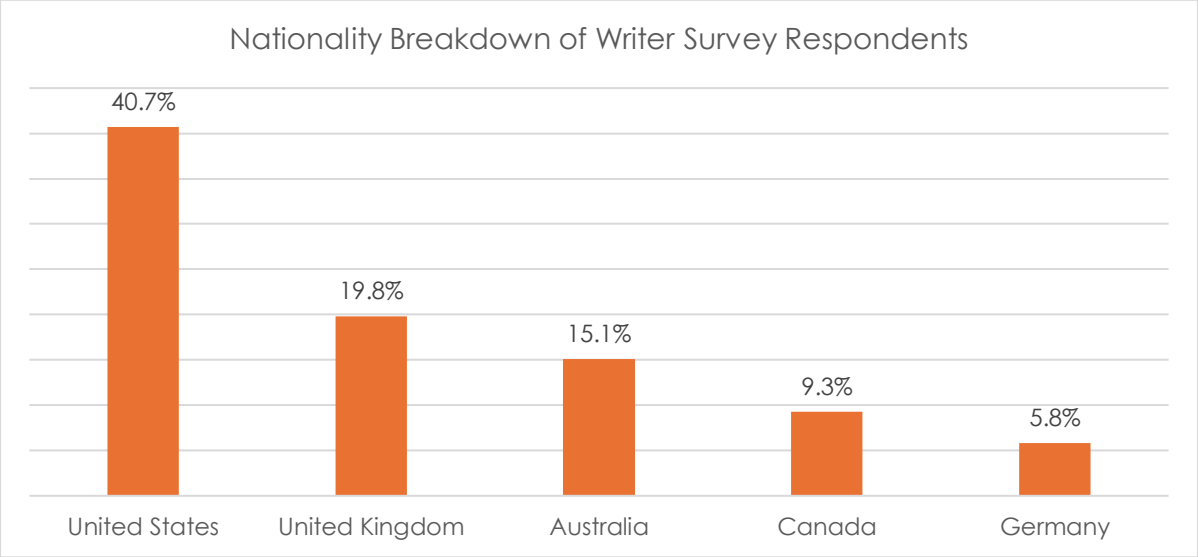
Figure 7 Bar Chart Showing the Racial Disparity of Writer Survey Respondents



This demographic information shows that 90.7% of writer survey respondents identified as white, Caucasian, Pakeha or Anglo, all of which have been grouped into the 'white' category. This could therefore have impacted answers to some of the questions, especially the diversity and publisher questions. Attempts were made during the writer's survey distribution process to gather respondents from a variety of racial backgrounds, for example, directly contacting authors via social media or emails. However, despite these efforts, the survey respondents are largely homogenous in their racial background. Hammonds pointed out the historic misuse by researchers towards the Black and queer communities concerning data collection, which has generated mistrust towards researchers from queer Black communities. This could have contributed to the low response rate from ethnic minority

backgrounds.[136] In addition, systemic racism within the publishing industry means that authors from ethnic minorities have fewer opportunities to publish and earn a living from writing, resulting in fewer authors from these backgrounds.[137] The systemic racism, combined with the smaller market for queer romances, means that authors from ethnic minorities who write queer romance novels struggle to make a living through their craft.[138] As such the number of authors from ethnic minorities writing queer romance novels is smaller than the number of white authors, again likely contributing to the low number of respondents.

Figure 8 Nationality Breakdown of Writer Survey Respondents

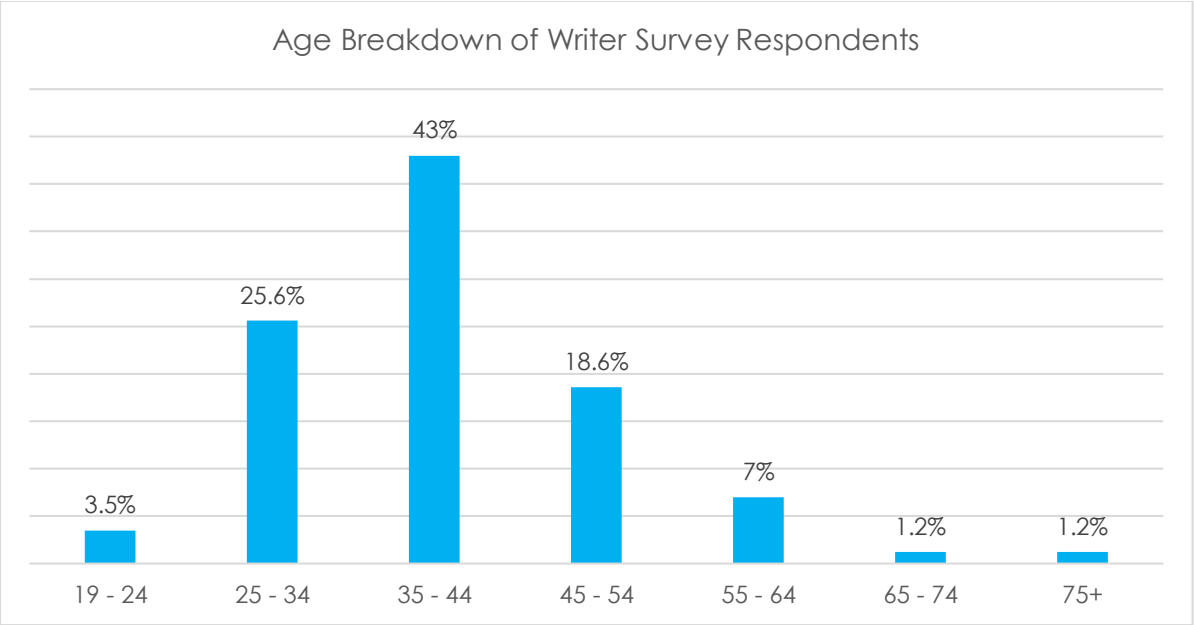


Like the reader survey, the respondents to the writer's survey were given a drop-down box listing the 195 countries recognised by the United Nations. With 40.7% of the respondents choosing the US there is again an American bias

[136] Hammonds, 'Black (W)Holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality'.
[137] Nankervis Madison, 'Diversity in Romance Novels: Race, Sexuality, Neurodivergence, Disability, and Fat Representation', *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 38 (2022), pp. 349–63, doi:doi:10.1007/s12109-022-09881-6; Jenkins, *Juneteenth Book Fest - Black Love: Writing Black Romance*, Juneteenth Book Fest (2020), loc. 0:9:34-0:10:14 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hd35oBcd-G4&list=LL&index=384&t=72s> [accessed 3 February 2024].
[138] Weatherspoon, *Black Love: Writing Black Romance*, loc. 0:19:17-0:24:33.

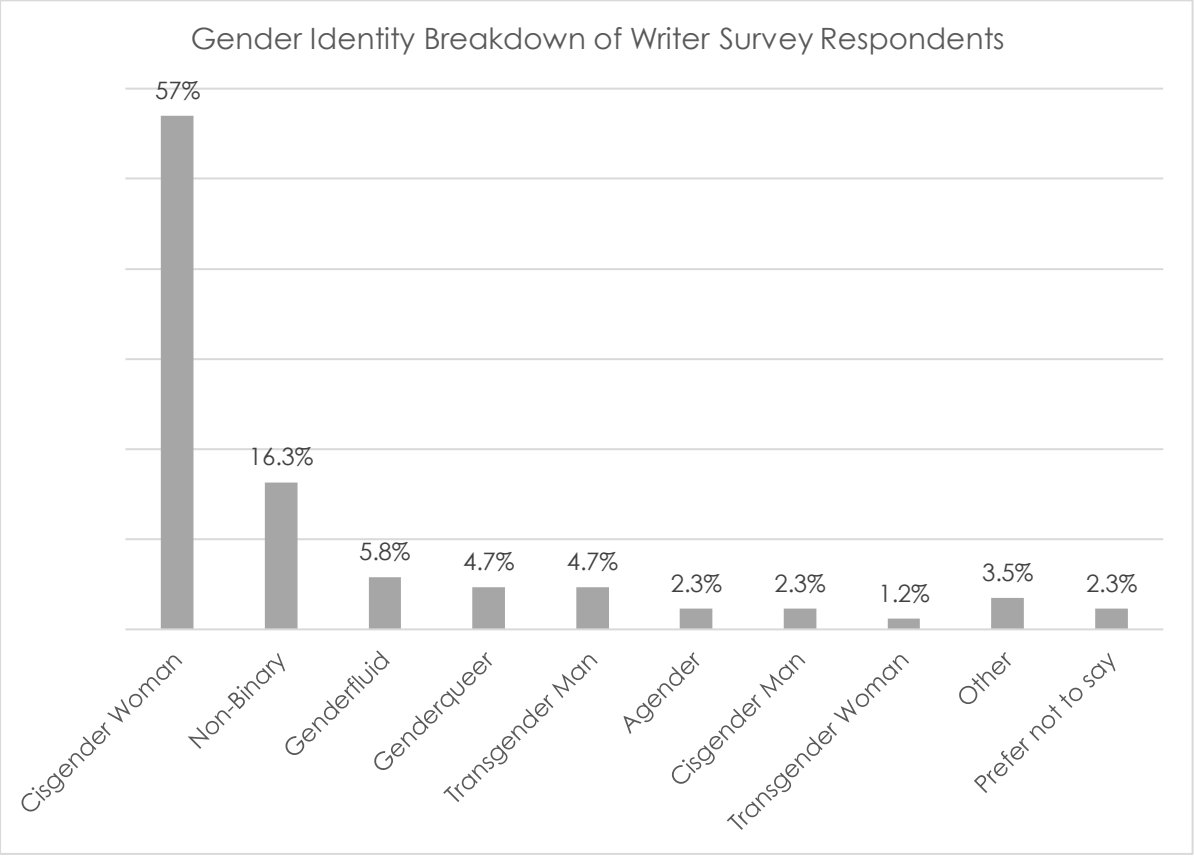
in the writer survey, however, it is less than in the reader survey. Again the US, the UK, and Australia are the top three countries.

Figure 9 Bar Chart showing the Age Breakdown of Writer Survey Respondents



The biggest category for the age question was 35 – 44, (43%), the second biggest category was 25 – 34, (25.6%). That means that 72.1% of the respondents were under 44 in 2020/2021 when the surveys were conducted. This means that when queer romance publishing saw its modern explosion in 2007 the majority of authors who responded to the survey would have been 30 years old or younger. It is therefore worth keeping in mind that the majority of respondents to the writer survey have likely been writing and operating in the modern romance publishing ecosystem, one where eBooks, online reader/writer communities and self-publishing are normalised.

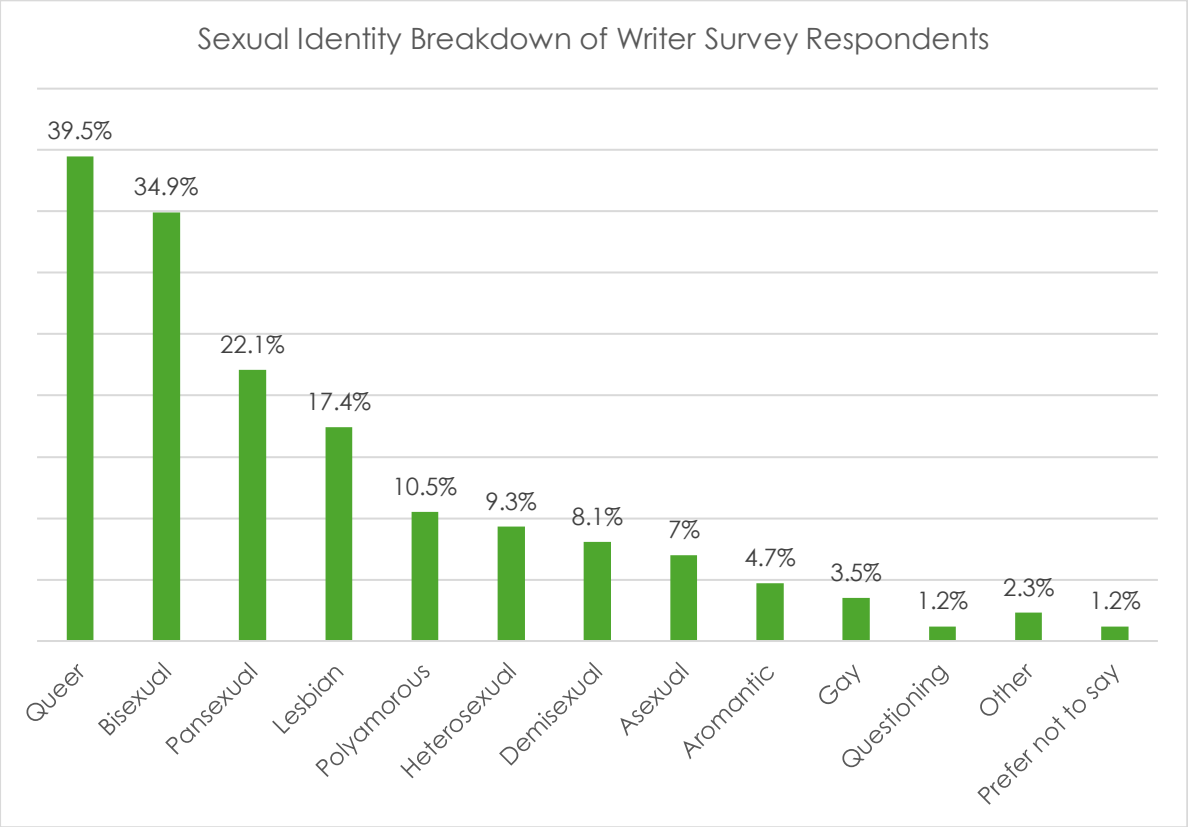
Figure 10 Bar Chart showing the Gender Identity Breakdown of Writer Survey Respondents



The reasoning behind the phrasing of the gender question for the writer survey is the same as for the reader survey. Although the biggest individual category by a long way is 'Cisgender Woman', with 57% of respondents selecting this option, it is interesting to note that 37.3% of respondents chose another gender. This suggests a greater level of writer gender diversity than is often assumed for queer romance novels.[139]

[139] Sunny Moraine, 'If You're a Straight Cisgender Woman Writing m/m Romance, Sorry, You Are Not Striking a Blow for Equality', *A Trick of Light*, 2014 <https://sunnymoraine.com/2014/08/11/if-youre-a-straight-cisgender-woman-writing-mm-romance-sorry-you-are-not-striking-a-blow-for-equality/>; Brooks, Buben, and Lauture, 'M/M Romance'.

Figure 11 Bar Chart showing the Sexual Identity Breakdown of Writer Survey Respondents

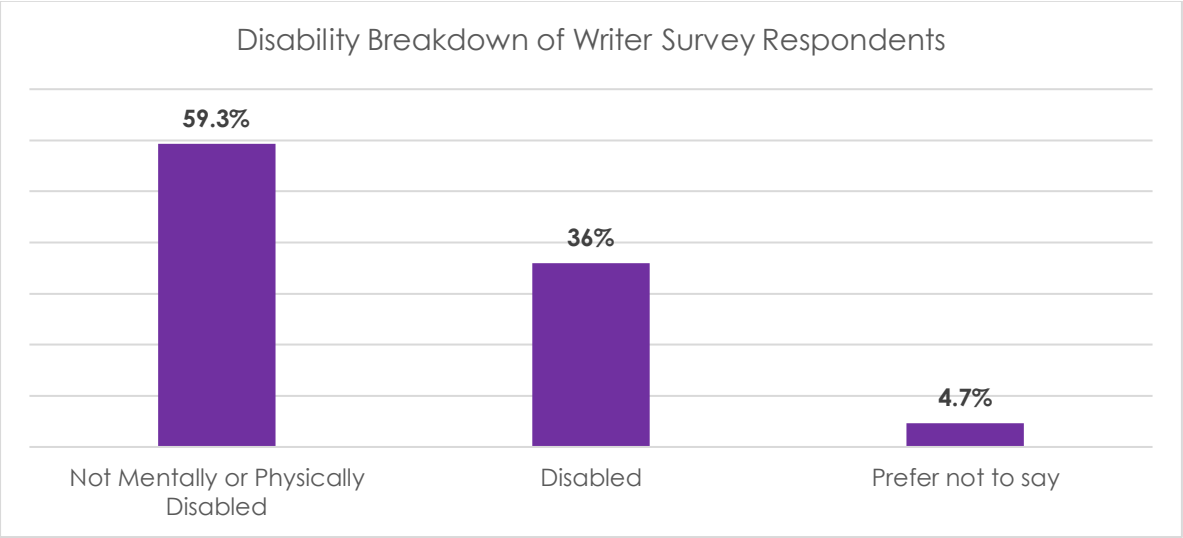


As with the reader survey, the question asking about sexuality was carefully designed to give respondents the freedom and nuance to answer in a way that was authentic towards their identity. This freedom of choice is validated by the fact that 'Queer' was selected by 39.5% of the respondents, despite this option typically being excluded in most forms of data collection. It is also interesting to note that despite claims that queer romances, in particular M/M Romances, are predominantly written by heterosexual women, only 9.3% of the writers surveyed chose heterosexual, refuting the validity of this claim.[140]

[140] Jeff Erno, 'Do I Really Belong in the M/M Genre', *Jeff Erno*, 2017 <http://www.jefferno.com/jeffs_blog/do-i-really-belong-in-the-m-m-genre> [accessed 12 February 2020]; Jamie Fessenden, 'My Take on Women Writing MM Romance', *Jamie Fessenden's Blog*, 2014 <https://jamiefessenden.com/2014/06/28/my-take-on-women-writing-mm-romance/> [accessed 28 May 2021]; Hans M Hirschi, '#MondayBlogs: Gay Fiction vs Gay Romance and How These Shit Storms Hurt Us All #LGBT #amreading #asmsg', *Author Hans M Hirschi*, 2017 <http://www.hirschi.se/blog/lgbt-fiction-2/> [accessed 12 February 2020].

This topic shall be explored in greater detail in Chapter 1: The History of Queer Romance.

Figure 12 Bar Chart showing the Disability Breakdown of Writer Survey Respondents



For the same reasons as stated previously with the reader survey, I collected information on the writers' survey respondent's disability status. The percentage of writers who identified as disabled was 36%, higher than both the global average and the reader survey respondents.

Reader Focus Groups

I wanted to include focus groups as part of my research method to gain an in-depth understanding of how readers and writers feel about, and perceive, queer romances. As previously mentioned, the triangulation data method recommends gathering both quantitative and qualitative data to overcome the limitations of a single approach. I chose to use focus groups as my main source of qualitative data, because of the personal and in-depth analysis they facilitate. The participants for the six focus groups were sourced through the reader and writer survey respondents. I decided to conduct six focus groups,

one each for readers and writers from Australia, the UK and the US. The reader focus groups each had four participants whereas the writer focus groups were smaller in size, going from one author (US) to two authors (AUS) and three authors (UK).[141] All the focus groups were conducted on Zoom, taking place in July or August 2021, and lasted for roughly ninety minutes. Each session was recorded via the Zoom platform with an auto-generated transcript which was then manually checked and corrected for errors. The respective focus group transcripts were shared with the participants after the editing stage was completed. At this stage each participant was allowed to make any changes to their sections of the transcript; they were not allowed to change other people's sections. This allowed participants to exclude anything they regretted sharing and also to check the spelling of any books and/or authors they had mentioned. Two of the eighteen individuals made changes; one of the participants from the US romance reader focus group asked for a section to be removed for personal reasons and one of the participants from the UK romance reader focus group corrected the spelling for books, authors, and movies they had mentioned and made a few grammatical changes. These changes were both respected and are reflected in the final transcripts.

Discussion in the three reader focus groups was guided by a set of consistent questions:

1. When did you start reading queer romances and why do you continue to read them?
2. What do you look for in a queer romance novel?

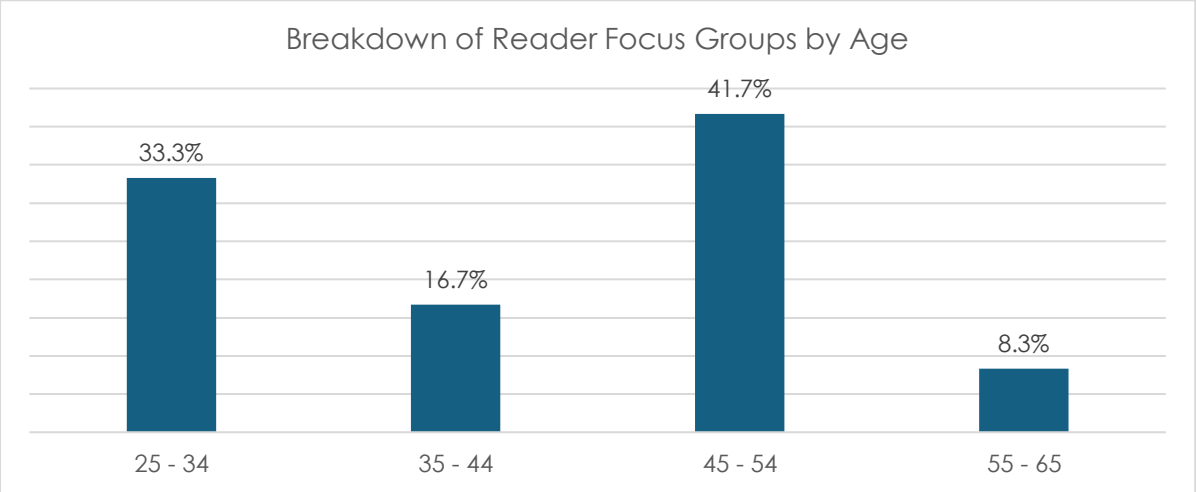
[141] The small size of the US focus group was due to last-minute cancellations; it was intended to have more than a single participant.

3. What do you think of the portrayal of bodies in queer romance novels?
4. How do you feel about the portrayal of trans, non-binary and/or intersex main characters in queer romance novels?
5. What do you consider a 'Happily Ever After' in a queer romance novel?
6. What role do you think family plays in queer romance novels?
7. Do you think the importance of friendship and found family is a common theme in queer romance novels?
8. Do you feel queer romance novels engage with issues LGBTQ+ people face in the world? Do you want them to?

These questions were chosen to prompt discussion on how people first found the genre, the portrayal of bodies, the construction of the HEA, and the connection between the novels and the development of LGBTQ+ rights. During the discussions, other topics came up. For example, both the Australian and British focus groups mentioned the dominance of American books, authors, and publishers. I therefore chose to ask the American focus group whether they gravitated towards, or were conscious of, reading American authors and/or stories set in America. A discussion on the representation, or lack of representation, of marginalised sexualities happened in all three focus groups as a result of the questions about marginalised bodies. Finally, fanfiction was brought up unprompted by both the American and Australian readers, but not the British readers.

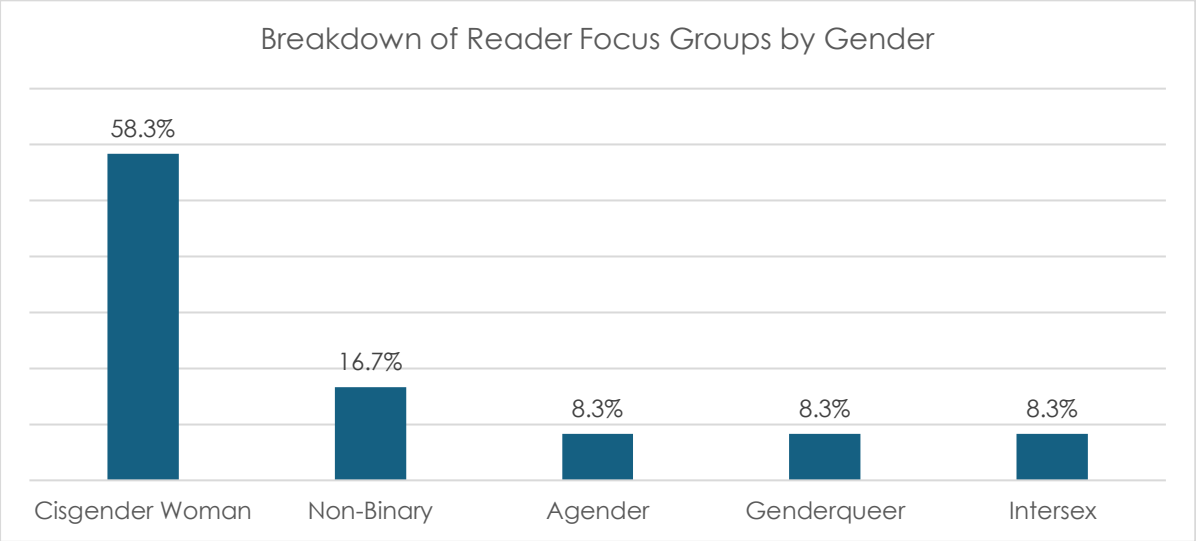
I collected demographic information on the focus group participants' race, nationality, age, sexuality, and gender. This information is useful because it gives me insight into the collective background of the participants. For example, if a focus group is made up primarily of participants who identify as LGBTQ+, that would offer a different perspective to non-LGBTQ+ readers of queer romance. The graphs below show the demographic spread of these categories for the three focus groups.

Figure 13 Bar Chart showing the Breakdown of Reader Focus Groups by Age



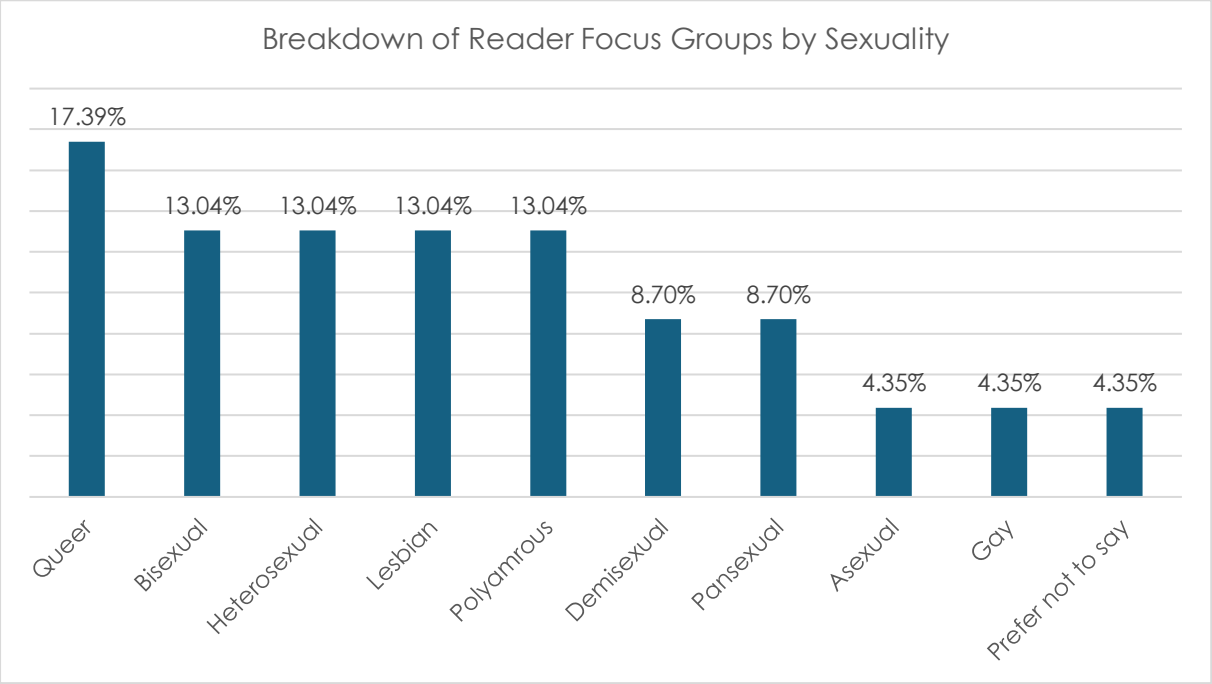
There was a decent age range among the reader focus group participants, although the average age bracket did skew older than the average age bracket of the reader survey respondents.

Figure 14 Bar Chart showing the Breakdown of Reader Focus Groups by Gender



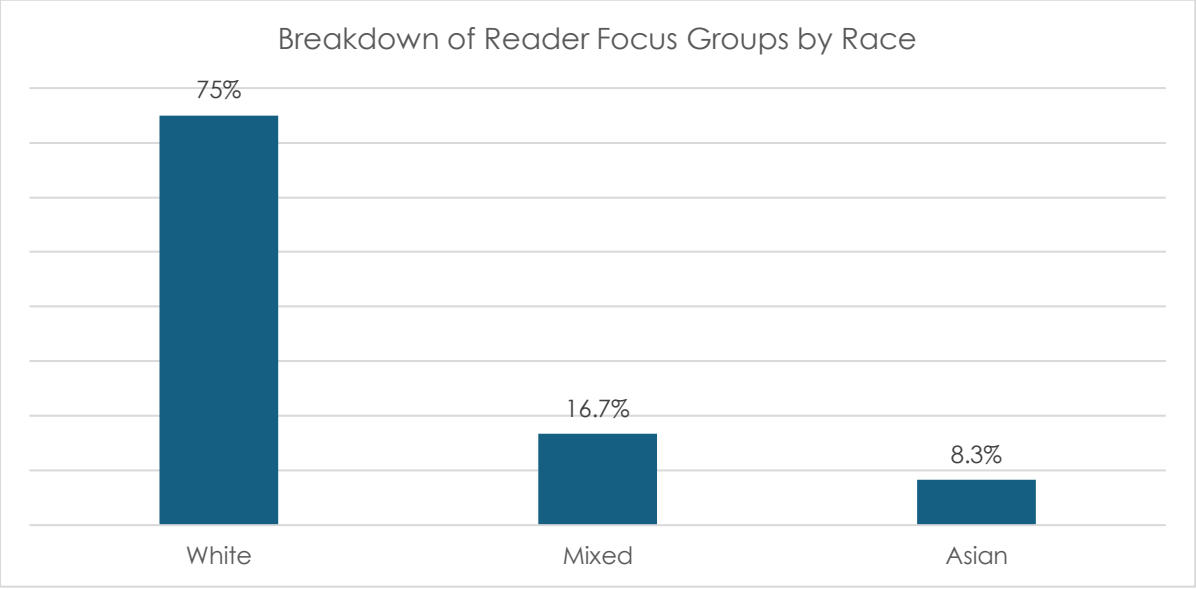
At 58.3% the majority of reader focus group participants identified as cisgender women; however, other genders were represented in every focus group. This is useful because the focus groups were asked about transgender bodies and it felt important to have members of that community as part of the conversation.

Figure 15 Bar Chart showing the Breakdown of Reader Focus Groups by Sexuality



Similar to the reader survey results, a wide range of sexualities were present within the reader focus group participants. To fully allow for the nuanced and complex fluidity of human sexuality the participants were able to select multiple opportunities in answer to the sexuality question. The reader focus group participants were overwhelmly members of the LGBTQ+ community in terms of their sexual identities, it is therefore worth analysing the focus group transcripts with this demographic in mind. This was primarily a collection of LGBTQ+ individuals talking about a genre that represented, in some ways, their community.

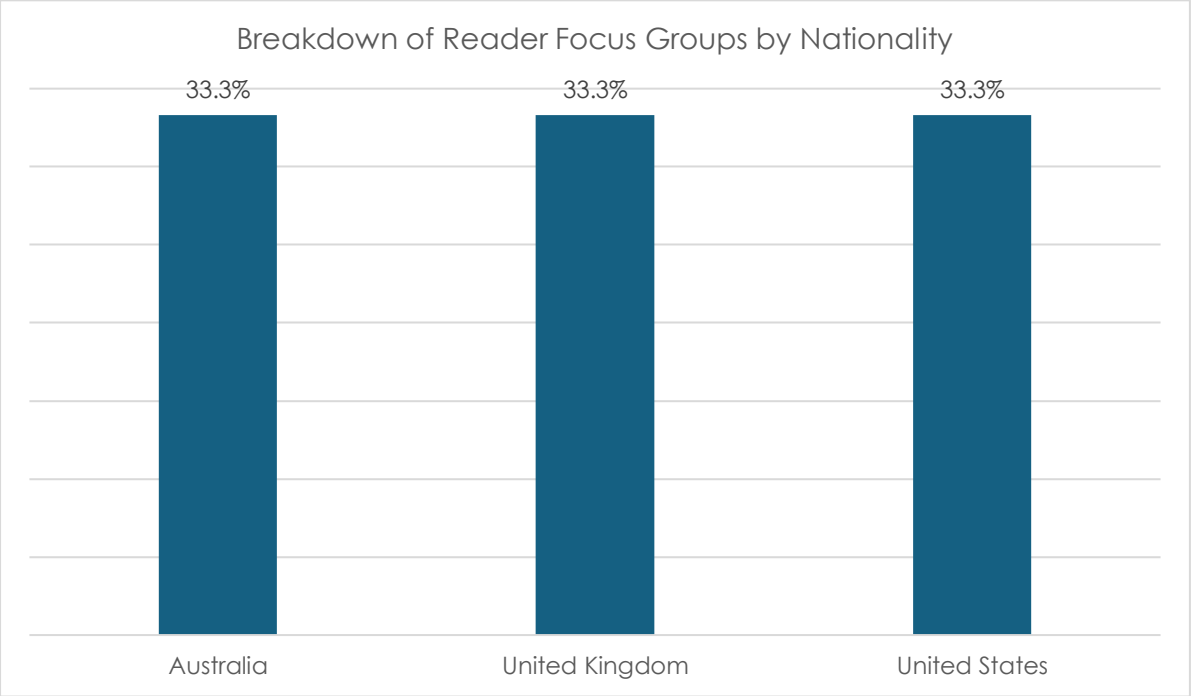
Figure 16 Bar Chart showing the Breakdown of Reader Focus Groups by Race



75% of the focus group participants self-identified as white when asked about their race, making them the majority.[142] This could therefore have impacted discussions around racial diversity within the focus groups. However, it is worth noting that each focus group did contain at least one individual from an ethnic minority background.

[142] Or another word synonymous with white, such as Caucasian, Anglo-Saxon or Pakeha

Figure 17 Bar Chart showing the Breakdown of Reader Focus Groups by Nationality



The reader focus groups were divided by nationality – Australian, British and American – and had an equal number of participants. This is reflected in the nationality breakdown graph above.

Writer Focus Groups

The questions between the reader and writer focus groups were kept as similar as possible, to maintain consistency across the topics discussed. The writer focus groups were guided by the following questions:

1. What got you into writing queer romance novels and why do you continue to write them?
2. Do you try to incorporate/engage with issues LGBTQ+ people face in reality?
3. What do you primarily consider when planning/writing a queer romance novel?

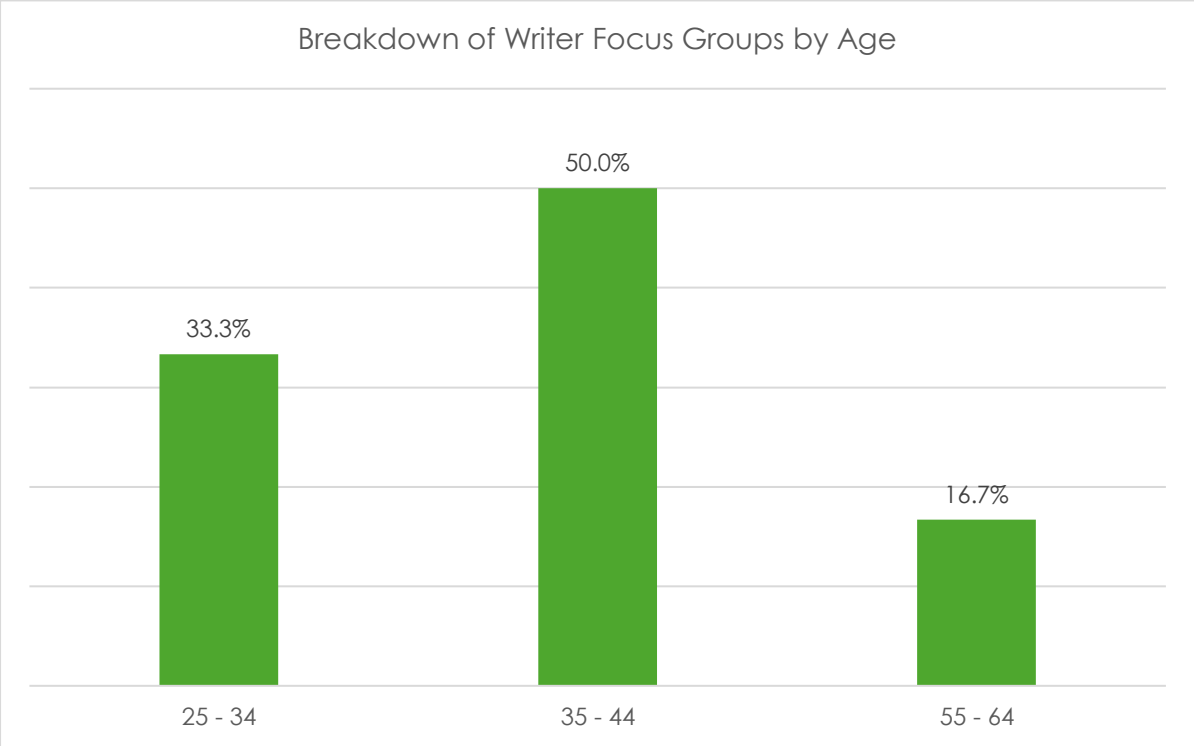
    a. Do you start with a certain sub-genre or plot line?
    b. Are you motivated by representing certain sexualities or identities?
    c. Do you consider the audience and selling ability of the novel?
4. Do consider if your LGBTQ+ main characters' bodies conform to or challenge societal expectations?
5. How do you feel about the portrayal of trans, non-binary and/or intersex main characters in queer romances?
    a. Have you written any trans, non-binary and/or intersex characters?
6. What role does family play in your queer romance novels?
7. Do you consider the importance of friends and 'found family' when writing your queer romance novels?
8. What do you consider a 'Happily Ever After' in one of your queer romance novels?

These questions were designed and chosen to prompt discussions on the same topics as the reader focus groups, how they got into the genre, the portrayal of bodies, the construction of the HEA, and the connection between the novels and the development of LGBTQ+ rights. Interestingly, the Australian authors were most concerned, or at least conscious of an international audience, whereas the American and British authors typically brushed over this discussion point. Again fanfiction was brought up organically by the authors from Australia and the UK, fanfiction was mentioned in four out of the six focus

groups as a route into the genre. The discussions from the focus groups are explored and analysed in the Queer Romance Today chapter.

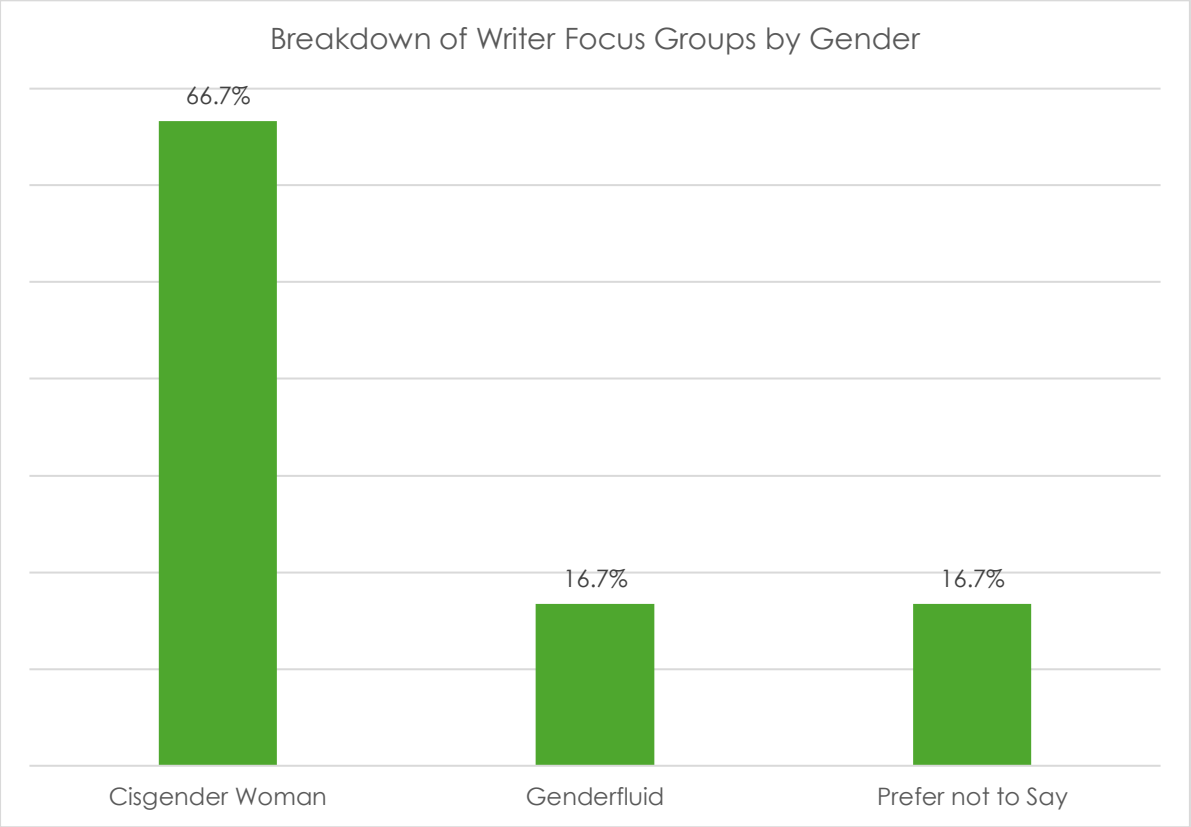
The below graphs show the demographics of the writer focus group participants:

Figure 18 Bar Chart showing the Breakdown of Writer Focus Groups by Age



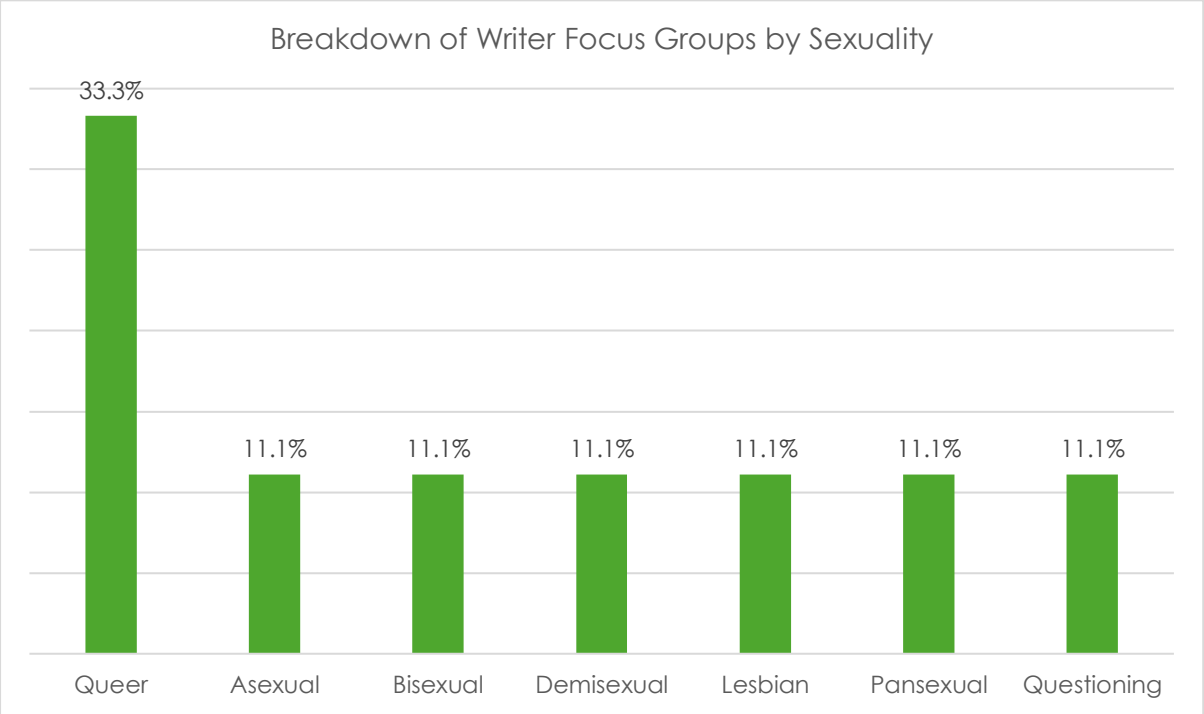
The participants for the writer focus groups skewed a little younger than the reader participants. This could reflect the newness of the queer romance genre and its feasibility as an income source.

Figure 19 Bar Chart showing the Breakdown of Writer Focus Groups by Gender



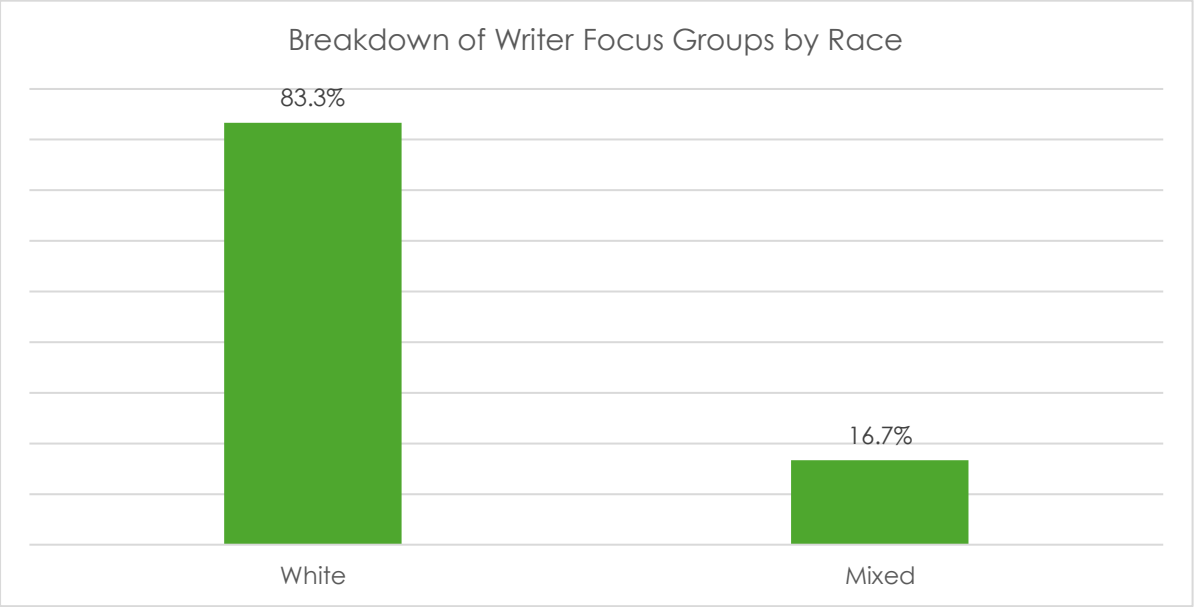
The majority of the participants from the writer focus groups identified as cisgender women and there is not as much gender diversity as was found in the respondents to the writer surveys. Gender, and discussions of gender in queer romance novels were however discussed in detail in all three focus groups, with a variety of different viewpoints. One participant was married to a non-binary partner and therefore felt passionately about how gender non-conforming individuals should be portrayed. Two participants from the Australian and British focus groups mentioned how writing queer romance novels, particularly queer male characters, helped them to explore their sense of gender identity and relationship with masculinity and femininity.

Figure 20 Bar Chart showing Breakdown of Writer Focus Groups by Sexuality



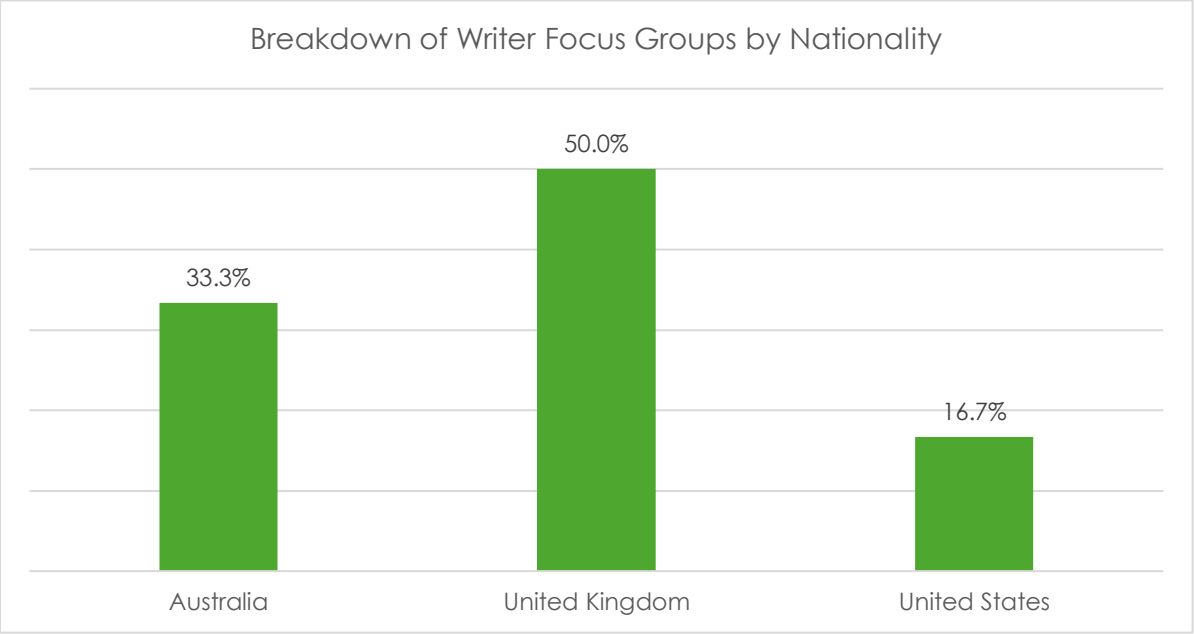
There was a wide range of sexualities in the writer focus groups and all of them identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community. These writer focus groups were a collection of individuals discussing a genre that represented their community, although that does not necessarily mean the author wrote #OwnVoices characters or that they exclusively wrote queer romance novels.

Figure 21 Bar Chart showing the Breakdown of Writer Focus Groups by Race



83.3% of the writers who participated in the focus groups self-identified as white. The high number of white participants is not surprising given the focus group participants were sourced through the writer surveys, where 90.7% of the respondents self-identified as white.[143]

Figure 22 Bar Chart showing Breakdown of Writer Focus Groups by Nationality



The focus groups were divided by the writers' nationalities, despite there not being an equal number of participants from each country. This meant some of the focus groups had more participants than others, however, all of them were given the same amount of time and were conducted using the same process regardless of participant numbers. This means the data gathered was balanced, despite the differing number of participants.

Information from the writer focus groups will be primarily analysed and explored in Chapter 4: Queer Romance Today, alongside the reader focus groups. In addition, the qualitative data from these focus groups is

[143] Hargrave, 'Writers of Queer Romance Novels Survey Responses'.

incorporated throughout the thesis, particularly looking at the writer's and the reader's opinions about the portrayal of the body and the HEA in queer romance novels.

Publishing Data

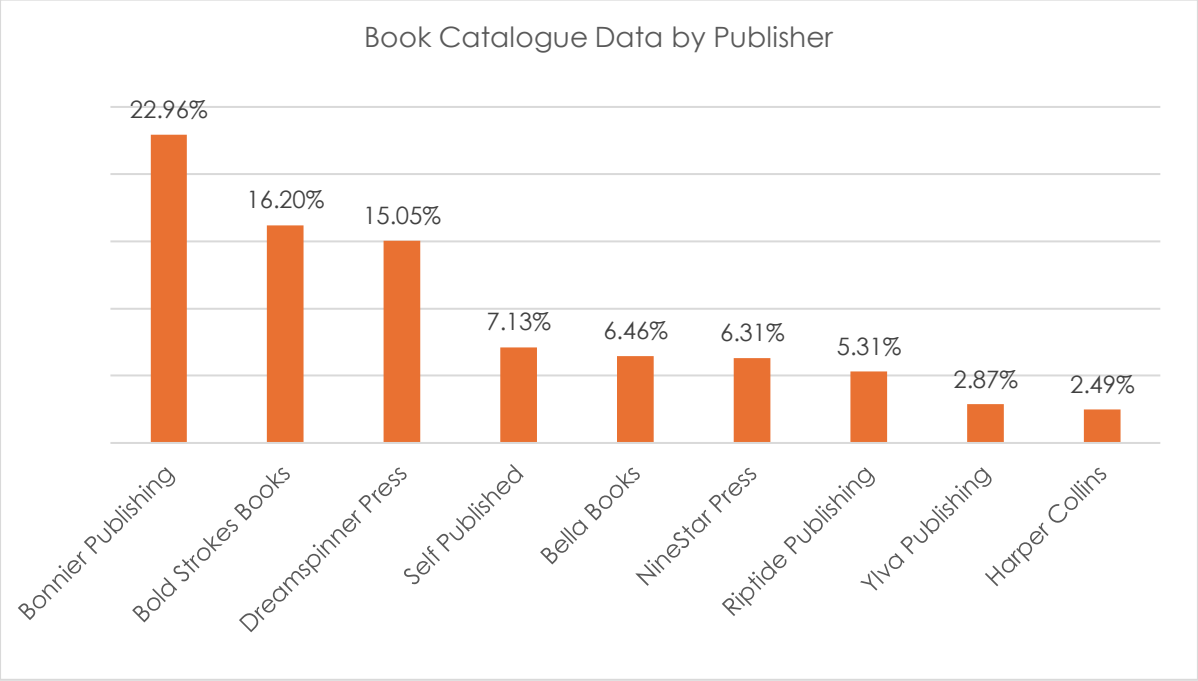
I catalogued and recorded data on 3,493 queer romance books in the following categories: book title, author(s), publisher (original), year published (original), the main characters' LGBTQ+ identities, the main characters' nationalities (where known), the main characters' racial identity (where known) and the book's sub-genre and queer romance type. This information was collected to allow me to assess if more or fewer books were being published each year, what type and sub-genre of queer romances were being published, who was publishing queer romances and what sexualities, genders, nationalities, and races were being represented in the novels published. Crucially tracking all this information over ten years allowed me to see if there were any significant developments or trends. The results from my publishing data are analysed in detail in the History of Queer Romance chapter.

Nineteen publishers were directly contacted by email in 2020 asking if they would be willing to share a list of the queer romance novels they had published. Of the nineteen publishers contacted only Avon (an imprint of Harper Collins) and Bold Strokes Books responded with lists of their queer romance novels. The other data were gathered from publisher websites and back-catalogues, Lambda nominees and prize winners during the 2010s, and best-seller lists for Australia, the UK, and the US. If a book had been published

multiple times throughout the decade – a common occurrence for queer romance novels due to publishers closing and authors moving between self-published and traditional publishing, it has only been recorded once with the date and original publisher of the book.

Only books that met the criteria of a queer romance novel as defined earlier were included in my data. In total the catalogue contains books from 54 publishers; some publishers on the list had various imprints producing queer romance novels in the 2010s, but they were counted as one publisher. For example, HarperCollins is only counted as a single publisher despite having 3 imprints (Avon, Balzer + Bray and Carina Press) publishing queer romance novels in the catalogue. In total 79 individual imprints, presses, and publishing houses are accounted for in my data.[144]

Figure 23 Bar Chart showing the Book Catalogue Data by Publisher



[144] As I have mainly considered publishers based in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, there are publishers of queer romance from other countries not accounted for in my data.

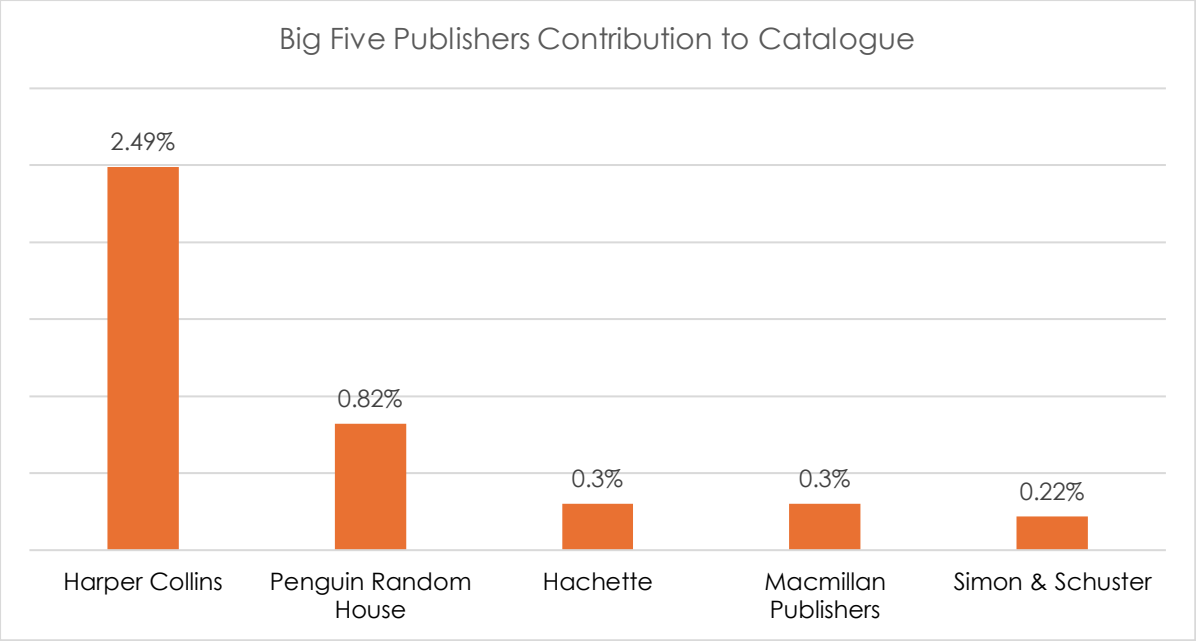
The above graph shows the percentage breakdown of the top nine publishers who contributed the most books to the catalogue.[145] 22.96% of my data consists of books published by Bonnier Publishing, who acquired the Totally Entwined Group in 2015, 'including its flagship erotic romance publishing house Totally Bound Publishing [and] Pride Publishing (GLBTQI fiction)' among others.[146] This acquisition accounts for Bonnier Publishing's place as the main contributor of books in the catalogue, despite not being known for publishing queer romance novels. Pride Publishing is known for publishing a range of queer (primarily M/M) romance novels. The second biggest publisher in the catalogue is Bold Strokes Books (16.20%), who mainly publish Lesbian Romances and the third biggest is Dreamspinner Press (15.05%), who mostly publish M/M Romances. The remaining 46 publishers, who are not represented in the above graph, all individually contributed less than 2% of books to my data.[147]

The 7.13% of self-published books included in my data were found through the 54 publisher catalogues. Because I only counted the original

[145] For the purpose of sourcing where the books have originated from, self-published has been considered a publisher alongside the other publishing houses.
[146] 'Totally Entwined Group Acquired', *Bonnier*, 2015 <https://www.bonnier.com/en/news/totally-entwined-group-acquired/> [accessed 7 February 2024].
[147] Sapphire Books (1.94%), Flashpoint Publications (1.62%), Chicago Review Press (1.52%), Samhain Publishing (1.2%), Brisk Press (0.9%), Desert Palm Press (0.9%), Manifold Press (0.87%), Kensington Books (0.6%), Loose Id (0.6%), Bywater Books (0.4%), Blind Eye Books (0.35%), Bedazzled Ink (0.3%), Less Than Three Press (0.3%), Siren Publishing (0.27%), Resplendence Publishing (0.22%), Silver Publishing (0.22%), Ellora's Cave (0.2%), Swoon Reads (0.12%), Affinity eBook Press (0.1), Amber Quill (0.07%), Launch Point Press (0.07%), MLR Press (0.07%), SkyHorse Publishing (0.07%), Torquere Press (0.07%), Wilde City Press (0.07%), Blue Feather Books (0.05%), Prizm Books (0.05%), Ravenous Romance (0.05%), Alyson Books (0.02%), Bristlecone Pine Press (0.02%), Carnation Books (0.02%), Etopia Press (0.02%), Lethe Press (0.02%), Liquid Silver Publishing (0.02%), Love Africa Press (0.02%), Love You Divine (0.02%), Monster books (0.02%), Outlines Press (0.02%), Queen of Swords Press (0.02%), Sourcebooks (0.02%), Spinsters Ink (0.02%) and Wayward Ink Publishing (0.02%).

publishing date and method of a book it revealed several self-published books that had been subsequently sold by the author to a traditional publisher. I decided to include these self-published books as they reflect the high portion of self-published novels within the queer romance genre without changing the collection method established for the majority of the books. In this way they were still sourced from the list of publishers but in a more circuitous manner. The split of publishers suggests that smaller, more specialist publishers were publishing far more queer romance novels than the bigger, more established, publishers. The graphs below show how much the 'Big Five' publishers contributed to my data:

Figure 24 Bar Chart showing the Big Five Publishers Contribution to Book Catalogue

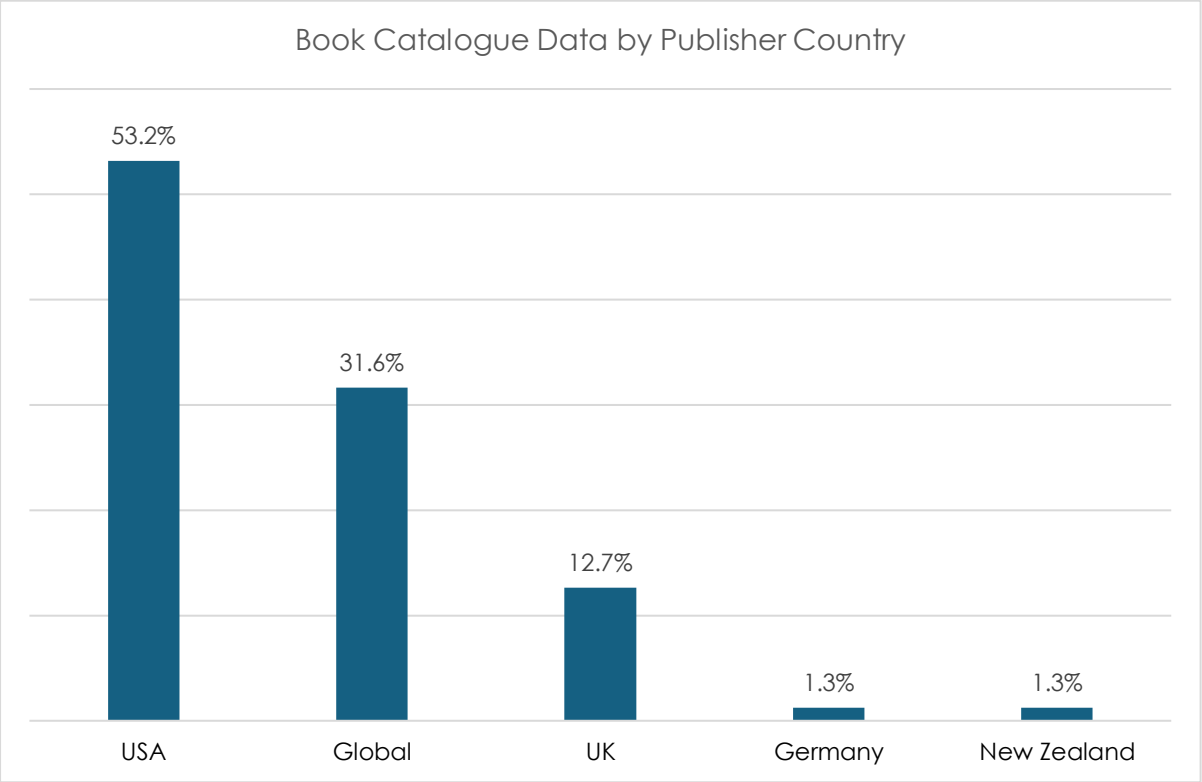


The global 'Big Five' accounted for only 4.15% of the 3,493 books in my data; collectively they only published 166 queer romance novels – 100 of which were published by HarperCollins.

It is worth noting that as only English-language queer romance novels were considered, most publishers came from English-speaking countries. The

graph below shows a breakdown of the publishers by country of origin, based on the company's registered address. However, publishing is an international industry and as such a 'Global' category was introduced for publishers who had grown to a size that meant they eclipsed their country of origin in terms of reach and publishing power.

Figure 25 Bar Chart showing the Book Catalogue Data by Publisher Country



The highest number of publishers were American, with Global publishers like HarperCollins and Penguin Random House being the second highest category. The large population size of the US compared to Australia and the UK could partly explain the larger number of publishers.[148] This bias towards American publishers could account for the high number of American characters and authors in my data.

[148] At the time of writing (2024) Australia had an approximate population of 26 million, the United Kingdom had an approximate population of 67 million and the United States had an approximate population of 341 million.

In addition to the information collected on the books, the following publicly available information was collected on the authors: nationality, whether the author was publicly LGBTQ+, and the author's gender. If this information wasn't publicly available it was put as 'unknown' for gender and nationality and 'No' for publicly LGBTQ+. The decision to track publicly LGBTQ+ individuals was made to avoid making assumptions about the authors, while also enabling some form of data to be collected to determine if the majority of queer romance novels were written by those who identified as LGBTQ+. By publicly available, I mean that the author has described themselves as an LGBTQ+ individual on social media, in interviews, or via author websites, whether through identifying as a specific identity or by generally calling themselves queer or mentioning a same-sex partner, etc. Any statistics drawn from that particular field of data should therefore be treated as an indication; the true number of LGBTQ+ authors could likely be higher than recorded. In total 1,030 authors were included in my data.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is composed of four chapters, with each chapter tackling a different element of the queer romance genre. With my research, I seek to answer four key questions:

1. How has LGBTQ+ publishing and romance publishing affected the development of the queer romance genre?
2. How are bodies portrayed in the queer romance genre?
3. How homonormative is the HEA in queer romance novels?

4. How do queer romances, and the people who read and write them, engage with LGBTQ+ activism?

Given the breadth of the queer romance genre, I took a case study approach for Chapter 2, 'The Queer Body' and chapter 3, 'The Queer Happily Ever After', as this allowed for in-depth critical literary analysis of particular texts that highlighted certain interesting features of the genre.

The History of Queer Romance chapter starts by defining key terms and concepts surrounding the queer romance genre that will be used throughout this thesis. This chapter then outlines the history of queer romances in the Western world from the classical Greeks to the development of the queer romance genre in the twenty-first century. It employs a mixed method approach, combining a historical perspective that considered the social and historical events affecting LGBTQ+ individuals alongside an analysis of the statistical data from the reader and writer surveys and the 2010 – 2019 publishing data. These methods were used to provide a comprehensive analysis of the queer romance genre's development from the early 1900s to the present day and how this development impacted the novels. With this chapter I establish queer popular romance's status as a significant publishing trend in popular fiction, one with a wide and varied audience that is worthy of study. Crucially, I challenge the widespread misconception that queer romance is a 'new' phenomenon that emerged in the twenty-first century by demonstrating its long-standing literary history and evolution over the past one hundred and sixty years.

Chapter 2: The Queer Body contains a case study analysis of four novels - *Captive Prince* (2013) by C.S. Pacat, *One Last Stop* (2021) by Casey McQuiston, *Peter Darling* (2017) by Austin Chant and *A Lady for a Duke* (2022) by Alexis Hall - to explore how the male body, the female body, and the trans Female-to-Male (FTM) body and the Male-to-Female (MTF) body is being portrayed in queer romance novels. It examines how the body is presented in queer romance novels and questions whether queer romance heroes/heroines uphold or challenge hegemonic ideals of the masculine and feminine body.

Chapter 3: Queering the Happily Ever After explores the Happily Ever After (HEA), which although a defining feature of the romance genre has undergone drastic changes since Regis defined it as a marriage between the hero and heroine. This chapter explores how the heteronormative happy-ever-after is transformed within a queer context by analysing two key aspects of the HEA: marriage and monogamy. It examines how queer romance novelists campaigned for and engaged with the legalisation of same-sex marriage. In addition, it discusses how marriage is portrayed and utilised as part of the HEA in queer romances through a close literary analysis of *D'Vaughn and Kris Plan a Wedding* (2022) by Chencia C. Higgins, an F/F contemporary romance novel. For monogamy, it will explore the rise of polyamorous and non-traditional relationships formations in queer romance novels in the twenty-first century and the challenge they can present to the traditional HEA through a close reading of *Where We Left Off* (2016) by Roan Parrish, an M/M contemporary romance. In doing so this chapter foregrounds queer popular

romance's capacity to enhance understanding of queer communities and emphasises the value and potential of queer lives and relationships.

Chapter 4: Queer Romance Today focuses on analysing the reader and writer focus groups to find out what the readers and writers of queer romance novels think about the genre today. It takes a thematic approach to explore three central questions: how did readers and writers discover the genre and why do they keep engaging with it? What do they think about the dominance American authors and publishers have on the genre? What do they think about queer romance novels engaging with real-life politics for LGBTQ+ people? The central argument incorporates the opinions of readers and writers from Australia, the US, and the UK to analyse and dissect any differences or similarities between the various countries and groups to build a more complete picture of how queer romances today are perceived by its community. This chapter highlights queer popular romance's ability to normalise LGBTQ+ individuals and lives through empathy and kinship among readers and writers. It is also showcases the tensions between authors and readers' investment in queer presentation and the pressures of commercial viability in popular romance publishing.

This thesis provides a clear scholarly foundation to the popular queer romance genre, that has historically been seen by contemporary critics as genre written and read by voyeuristic straight women.[149] I challenge this

[149] Jonathan A Allan, *Men, Masculinities, and Popular Romance* (Routledge, 2019), p. 92; Stephanie Burley, 'What's a Nice Girl like You Doing in a Book like This?: Homoerotic Reading and Popular Romance', in *Doubled Plots: Romance and History*, ed. by Susan Strehle and Mary Paniccia Carden (University Press of Mississippi, 2003), p. 143; Ann Herendeen, 'Having It Both Ways; or, Writing from the Third Perspective: The Revolutionary M/M/F Ménage Romance Novel', in *Romance Fiction and American Culture: Love as the Practice of*

viewpoint and argue that queer romance novels are being produced, consumed, and distributed by a wide variety of individuals, many of whom belong to the queer community. Crucially, this thesis recognises that the popular queer romance genre has a dual literary heritage of queer literature and the romance genre. Therefore, it is time to stop considering queer romance novels solely as books produced for the straight gaze and to start considering them as queer novels for a queer community.

Freedom?, ed. by William A. Gleason and Eric Murphy Selinger (Routledge, 2016), pp. 405–19 (p. 408).

HISTORY OF QUEER ROMANCE

One hundred and eighteen years ago the first proto-queer-romance *Imre: A Memorandum* (1906) by Edward Prime-Stevenson was published in Italy. A mere four years ago Mills & Boon, one of the most recognisable romance publishers in the twenty-first century, published its first queer romance *The Secret of You and Me* (2020) by Melissa Lenhardt. In this chapter I establish and measure how the queer romance genre has evolved from the late nineteenth-century to the queer romance genre today. Regis in her influential text, *The Natural History of the Romance Genre* (2003), traced the emergence of the popular romance genre from *Pamela* by Samuel Johnson in 1740 to Nora Roberts' romance novels in the twenty-first century. She did this in response to previous prominent studies of the romance genre that only 'focus[ed] on one narrow segment of the twentieth-century market'.[150] By tracing the genre from its origins she improved the popular romance genre's legitimacy and to begin establishing a romance 'canon'. By tracing the genre's development from the proto-queer-romances of the early 1900s to the present day, I aim, like Regis, to increase the legitimacy of the popular queer romance genre. In addition, this chapter addresses the lack of historical perspective in existing queer romance scholarship by situating the queer romance genre within its literary, political and cultural origins. I argue that queer romances evolve from and are influenced by LGBTQ+ fiction and the popular romance genre, combining a

[150] Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 6.

literary and socio-political approach to trace the genre's history from the early 1900s to the present day. This chapter shows how queer romance novels developed in parallel with the world around them, often responding to political and social changes for LGBTQ+ people. It demonstrates how, more recently, they have been influenced by the heterosexual popular romance genre, leading to distinct types of queer romances existing in the current moment.

When tracing the history of heterosexual romance novels, Regis identified *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë as proto-romances because she considered them the origins of the modern romance genre even if they didn't contain all the modern-day elements. This chapter borrows from Regis to coin the term 'proto-queer-romance' to denote a novel containing many of the elements that would later be associated with the queer romance genre. These proto-queer-romances can mainly be found in the later nineteenth century and early twentieth century as this was when queer romances started to emerge. A proto-queer-romance focuses on an LGBTQ+ relationship and hints at or promises a happy ending for that relationship. However, these texts won't necessarily use language familiar to the twenty-first century to describe sexuality or gender and might not contain tropes and themes commonly associated with queer romances today. Instead, in these novels it is possible to see the beginning of the core characteristics that later define the genre in the twenty-first century.

This chapter will track the evolution of queer romances to 'yield a moving picture of the concerns of the genre itself as it develops and changes

through time'.[151] My research primarily deals with the anglophone queer romance genre – focusing on Australia, the UK, and the US. These countries have been chosen because they have some of the biggest romance publishing ecosystems while maintaining distinct national differences. The term ecosystem, in this context, is used 'to describe the networks of roles, institutions and technologies that comprise the publishing field'.[152] Canada arguably has a more established romance publishing ecosystem than Australia, largely due to Harlequin who started publishing romance novels in the 1950s when Mary Bonnycastle 'focused on the vast untapped market of female readers in Canada' and remains one of the biggest romance publishers.[153] However, in the twenty-first century, Canada shares many of the same authors, markets, and characteristics as America; Harlequin, the pioneering romance publisher in Canada, and later North America, was purchased by American publishing house HarperCollins in 2014.[154]

In contrast, Australia holds a unique position within romance publishing that makes it an interesting country to consider when analysing queer romance novels. For example, despite a dramatic increase in Australian-authored romance novels, which increased from 'less than two hundred titles per year in 2000 – 01 to just under nine hundred in 2015 – 16' it is 'highly

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[151] Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 55.
[152] Beth Driscoll and others, 'The Publishing Ecosystems of Contemporary Australian Genre Fiction', *Creative Industries Journal*, 11.2 (2018), pp. 203–21 (p. 205), doi:10.1080/17510694.2018.1480851.
[153] 'Harlequin Company Info', *Harlequin* <https://corporate.harlequin.com> [accessed 15 February 2024].
[154] Jeremy Greenfield, 'Three Reasons News Corp Bought Harlequin, World's Biggest Romance Book Publisher', *Forbes*, 2014 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeremygreenfield/2014/05/02/news-corp-buys-harlequin-worlds-biggest-romance-book-publisher-three-reasons/> [accessed 15 February 2024].

dependent on foreign publishers and markets'.[155] The UK is the birthplace of the popular romance genre and remains one of the biggest producers of romance novels in the world.[156] Culturally it is still central to the romance publishing industry, as demonstrated by the high number of romance novels still being set in the UK, regardless of the author's nationality – this is particularly true of historical romance novels.[157] The differences between the UK and the US publishing industries are partly flattened by 'digital technologies [which] increase the capacity and reach of medium, small and self-publishers', resulting in a more global, interconnected publishing environment.[158] Australia's publishing ecosystem is considered a peripheral economic region. While the UK (London) and the US (New York) are the economic centres of the global publishing industry, Australia, despite having strong cultural ties with the two other countries, has developed economically on the margins due to its geographic location.[159] This study will be the first to bring together these three countries, thus extending the Australian focus of the original genre worlds. By tracing the evolution of the queer romance genre, focusing on Australia, the

[155] Fletcher, Driscoll, and Wilkins, 'Genre Worlds and Popular Fiction: The Case of Twenty-First-Century Australian Romance', pp. 1001, 1000.
[156] Amy Burge, *Representing Difference in the Medieval and Modern Orientalist Romance*, The New Middle Ages (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 28; Roach, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*, p. 6.
[157] Laura Vivanco, 'Historical Accuracy, Racism, Courtney Milan, and The Duke Who Didn't Conform to Genre Norms', *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, 11 (2022) <https://www.jprstudies.org/2022/06/historical-accuracy-racism-courtney-milan-and-the-duke-who-didnt-conform-to-genre-norms/>.
[158] Driscoll and others, 'The Publishing Ecosystems of Contemporary Australian Genre Fiction', p. 204.
[159] C. Clayton Childress, 'Regionalism and the Publishing Class: Conflicted Isomorphism and Negotiated Identity in a Nested Field of American Publishing', *Cultural Sociology*, 9.3 (2015), pp. 364–81, doi:10.1177/1749975515580858; Thomas Franssen and Kuipers Giselinde, 'Sociology of Literature and Publishing in the Early 21st Century: Away from the Centre', *Cultural Sociology*, 9.3 (2015), pp. 382–400, doi:10.1177/1749975515594467; Driscoll and others, 'The Publishing Ecosystems of Contemporary Australian Genre Fiction', p. 205.

UK and the US, I show that this genre has a dual literary heritage of queer fiction and the popular romance genre.

Covert Queerness (1900 – 1929)

During these decades, and the preceding decades, queer individuals, and subsequently queer fiction, were criminalised. Some of the laws that affected LGTBQ+ individuals during this period are the Labouchere Amendment, otherwise known as Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, which made 'gross indecency' between men a crime punishable with at least two years imprisonment in the UK.[160] At a similar time Sir Samuel Griffith drafted the 1899 Criminal Code of the Australian colony of Queensland, which came into force in 1901 and criminalised both partners who engaged in male same-sex activity.[161] In addition, the United States had inherited several laws that criminalised same-sex activity, particularly same-sex acts between two men.[162] As a result of these laws, and others, queer representation was often implicit and hidden from the general public for fear of legal repercussions. This section will outline the literary and socio-political environment of the early proto-queer-romances and highlight some of the key moments that influenced them.

When proto-romance novels like *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë were achieving commercial and critical

[160] 'A History of LGBT Criminalisation: Over 500 Years of Outlawing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People.', *Human Dignity Trust*, 2024, sec. The Labouchere Amendment <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/a-history-of-criminalisation/> [accessed 14 November 2024].
[161] 'A History of LGBT Criminalisation: Over 500 Years of Outlawing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People.', sec. Queensland Criminal Code.
[162] William N. Eskridge, *Gaylaw: Challenging the Apartheid of the Closet* (Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 161.

success it would have been unimaginable to write and publish a proto-queer-romance novel. Laws like the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act (UK) made it legally dangerous for authors to publicly write explicitly queer characters. Characters coded with queerness did exist, most notably in nineteenth-century Gothic novels; 'it is no mere coincidence that the cult of gothic fiction reached its apex at the very moment when gender and sexuality were beginning to be codified'.[163] The Gothic allowed writers to play with 'unauthorized genders and sexualities' resulting in 'transgressive social-sexual relations' being 'the most basic common denominator of gothic writing'.[164] However, the contrast between the commercial success of proto-heterosexual-romances and the unhappy, often killed, queer characters in these Gothic stories is stark. The queer-coded characters found in the Gothic is also interesting because the Gothic has a literary connection with romance fiction; as Paige states, 'the first gothic [writers] were the stepchildren of the Romantic writers' and since their infancy, these two genres have inspired and borrowed from each other.[165] Novels like *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew Lewis and *The Fatal Revenge* (1807) by Charles Maturin both have a male protagonist falling in love with a man who is later revealed to be a woman. The Gothic novella *Carmilla* (1872) by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu never explicitly depicts lesbian acts, yet the title character Carmilla is often seen as the prototype lesbian vampire. Her relationship with narrator, Laura, although written in a way that made it appropriate for the time, can be read as a relationship based on lesbian desire

[163] George E. Haggerty, *Queer Gothic* (University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 2.
[164] Haggerty, *Queer Gothic*, p. 2.
[165] Lori A. Paige, *The Gothic Romance Wave: A Critical History of the Mass Market Novels, 1960 - 1993* (McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2018), p. 14.

and attraction. As expected, Carmilla is the novel's villain and is ultimately killed. Melville South wrote two novels *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847) in which some critics have read 'cannibalism as a stand-in for same-sex desire, which perhaps explains why they seem likely to have been read in late-century homosexual underworlds'.[166] In contrast, Jane Austen is often credited with writing 'the only 18th-century gothic that is still read for pleasure today Northanger Abbey', which ends happily for the romantic leads and was, and continues to be, commercially successful.[167] Yet these early novels arguably laid the groundwork for publication of the proto-queer-romances towards the end of the nineteenth century; with authors like Wilde becoming more overt in their depiction of queer characters.

In Oscar Wilde's only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), the titular character, Dorian, is one of the earliest literary figures who can be read as bisexual. Similarly to the novels mentioned above it does not have a happy ending for its queer protagonist, who dies in a fit of rage while destroying the painting that had kept him alive, young, and beautiful. During Wilde's 1895 criminal libel trial against Marquess Queensberry, the homoerotic themes of Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was used as evidence against Wilde.[168] The Gothic's queer-coded characters were likely a source of

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[166] Travis Foster, 'Nineteenth-Century Queer Literature', in *American Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. by Scott Herring, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 89–102 (pp. 97–98).

[167] Paige, *The Gothic Romance Wave: A Critical History of the Mass Market Novels, 1960 - 1993*, p. 33.

[168] Despite revisions by the publishers before it was first printed the novel still received criticism from the British press, with some arguing it violated public morality laws. In 1895, Oscar Wilde took Marquess Queensberry to trial for criminal libel after the Marquess left a calling card inscribed 'for Oscar Wilde, posing sodomite'. During this trial the defence questioned Wilde on *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, arguing that Wilde had used the novel's homoerotic themes to seduce Lord Alfred (the Marquess' son). The criminal libel trial was a disaster for Wilde and

inspiration for the early writers of proto-queer-romances and it would perhaps be reasonable to assume that the first proto-queer-romance might be inspired by this literary history. However, despite the Gothic's literary connection to both queerness and romance fiction, the first proto-queer-romance *Imre: A Memorandum* by Edward Prime-Stevenson was not, as might be expected, a gothic novel.[169] This is partly due to the time Prime-Stevenson was writing; 'the origins of Gothic, which clustered around a specific, but small, groups of writers, thinks and painters' working broadly from 1750 – 1820 had passed.[170] Although its influence could still be felt in much later works, like Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, it was not the pre-eminent literary movement of the early 1900s. Instead, Modernism was the pre-eminent literary form at the time Prime-Stevenson was writing, which can be understood as a style of writing that 'expresses a degree of dissatisfaction with prevalent inherited literary conventions and attempts to extend, challenge, or destroy them'.[171] It is within this tradition that *Imre: A Memorandum* can be best understood.

Prime-Stevenson's novel tells the story of Imre and Oswald who meet in Budapest, Hungary and form a friendship that cautiously evolves into love. The prefatory of the novel makes clear that Prime-Stevenson's motivation for writing the novel was 'to produce an easily consumable text for the first time…

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resulted in his warrant for sodomy and gross indecency – eventually leading to a highly public gross indecency trial and two years of hard labour.

[169] As a reminder: a proto-queer-romance focuses on an LGBTQ+ relationship and hints at or promises a happy ending for that relationship; however, these texts won't necessarily use language familiar in the twenty-first century to describe sexuality or gender and might not contain tropes and themes commonly associated with queer romances today

[170] Lucie Armitt, *History of the Gothic: Twentieth-Century Gothic* (University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 2.

[171] Andrzej Gasiorek, *A History of Modernist Literature* (John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2015), p. 3.

with an absolutely positive example for gay men' in a society that refused to accept them.[172] However, considering the time it was written it is hardly surprising that *Imre: A Memorandum* is as much about the struggle 'to represent non-normative gender and sexual desires and identities, in this case, male homosexual desire and male homosexuality' during the early twentieth century as it is a core romance.[173] Although it depicts a gay relationship, the language used throughout the novel and its discussion of sexuality would be largely unfamiliar to a modern romance audience. Although Prime-Stevenson was an American by birth he wrote *Imre: A Memorandum* in Europe and self-financed its private publication, under a pseudonym, through A. Rispoli of Napoli who printed 500 copies. Self-publication can be seen throughout the history of queer romances and remains a popular method for authors of queer romance novels today. This suggests that self-publishing was, and still is, a way to circumnavigate mainstream publishing methods for queer romance writers.

A more famous contemporary to Imre: *A Memorandum* is *Maurice* by E.M. Forster, written in 1913 but only published posthumously in 1971. Forster chose not to publish the novel, mainly due to the public and legal attitudes toward homosexuality in his lifetime, as demonstrated by a note on the manuscript made by Forster that reads 'publishable, but worth it?'.[174] *Maurice,* like *Imre: A Memorandum* depicts a same-sex relationship that ends happily for its central protagonists. It is another proto-queer-romance, however, the

[172] Zsolt Bojti, 'Slum or Arcadia? Hungary as "Other Space" in Imre by Edward Prime-Stevenson', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 25.1 (2019), pp. 67–83 (p. 71).
[173] Breen, 'Homosexual Identity, Translation, and Prime-Stevenson's Imre and The Intersexes', p. 8.
[174] E.M. Forster, *Maurice*, 1st Edition (Hodder Arnold, 1971), p. 236.

fact that Forster refused to publish the novel in his lifetime highlights the covert and hidden nature of queer characters and queer happiness during this period.

While there is no known Lesbian Romance equivalent of *Imre: A Memorandum*, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) by Radclyffe Hall is often claimed as the first lesbian novel and it focuses on the romantic encounters of the novel's protagonist, Stephen. It also significantly influenced lesbian fiction and the depiction of lesbian romantic relationships.[175] In contrast to Prime-Stevenson's novel, which largely existed under the radar, *The Well of Loneliness* was a more public release and was the subject of two major obscenity trials in Great Britain (November 1928) and the US (December 1928 – April 1929).[176] Written after WWI, *The Well of Loneliness* reflects its time in its portrayal of masculinity, femininity, and queerness. As Connell stated, WWI (and WWII) 'shook up gender ideology and accelerated the making of homosexual communities', largely because of the trauma men suffered in the trenches during WWI leading to a crisis of masculinity.[177] *The Well of Loneliness* responds to this 'epidemic of male hysteria' by creating a main character who refuses to act in a manner befitting a high-class lady.[178] Instead, she is presented as the 'masculine' counterpart to her more 'feminine' female lover Mary who more closely aligned with the acceptable form of femininity for 1920s society.

[175] Its influence is still felt today, as shown by one of the more prolific and well-known lesbian romance writers today uses the pseudonym Radclyffe.
[176] Leslie A. Taylor, '"I Made Up My Mind to Get It": The American Trial of The Well of Loneliness, New York City, 1928 - 1929', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 10.2 (2001), pp. 250–86 (p. 250).
[177] Connell, *Masculinities*, p. 84.
[178] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830 - 1980* (Pantheon Books, 1985), pp. 194–97.

It is interesting to note that critics have read Stephen as transgender, an interpretation that has gained traction in recent years.[179] Stephen can be read as both an early example of queer romance heroine (or hero) and a reflection of early 1920s society that was struggling with gender norms. The relationship between Stephen and Mary, which both defied gender norms and replicated them, set a template that is seen repeatedly in lesbian romantic relationships – that of the butch/femme pairing, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Although proto-queer-romance novels started to emerge in this period, the books were covert, often existing in the literary margins or being publicly censored and criticised. Those that were in the public eye like *The Well of Loneliness* were forced to undergo obscenity trials that typically required an unhappy fate for the queer characters to 'prove that *The Well* was not obscene… [and] could not corrupt' its readers.[180] In addition, there is no collective genre that can be identified; although the Gothic and Modernism influenced these early proto-queer-romance, the authors weren't working together to create a new genre of queer romance. Instead, the authors wrote in isolation, with only the focus on queer romantic relationships connecting them. Most of these novels were written by authors who are now considered members of the LGBTQ+ community, whose desire to write novels focusing on

[179] Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*, p. 169; Jack Halberstam, 'A Writer of Misfits: John Radclyffe Hall and the Discourse of Inversion', in *Female Masculinity* (Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 75–110 (p. 85); Eva Spišiaková, '"We've Called Her Stephen": Czech Translations of The Well of Loneliness and Their Transgender Readings', *Target: International Journal of Translation Studies*, 32.1 (2020), pp. 143–61.
[180] Taylor, '"I Made Up My Mind to Get It": The American Trial of The Well of Loneliness, New York City, 1928 - 1929', p. 272.

same-sex relationships derives from their personal experiences as queer people. It is understandable that one of the novels' defining similarities is that they all depict stories set in the contemporary world of their authors, even though this wasn't the original reason I grouped them together. The continued use of the contemporary setting for queer romances will be explored in later sections.

Pulps and Romance (1930s – 1968)

In 1939 Robert de Graff launched Pocket Books, a company that would transform the book landscape of the US. Mills & Boon, founded in 1908, also revolutionised romance publishing but they did not publish a queer romance until 2020. De Graff did not change how books were produced; instead, he changed the distribution method by selling books to places other than bookshops. Looking beyond the 2,800 bookstores in the US, de Graff was able to target 'more than seven thousand newsstands, eighteen thousand cigar stores, fifty-eight thousand drugstores, and sixty-two thousand lunch counters – not to mention train and bus stations'.[181] Many other publishers replicated the model de Graff pioneered, including Mills & Boon, and by the 1950s the paperback era was in full swing. Mass-produced paperback novels from this period became broadly known as 'pulp fiction' and these small, brightly

[181] Louis Menand, 'Pulp's Big Moment: How Emily Brontë Met Mickey Spillane', *The New Yorker*, 29 December 2014, A Critic At Large edition <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/01/05/pulps-big-moment> [accessed 16 April 2020].

coloured books were sold nearly everywhere.[182] Competition between publishers was rife in the US, so some publishers 'took a more underground approach and printed a wide range of erotic materials' to appeal to an alternative market.[183] It was these underground paperbacks, which were largely sold 'via personal subscription', that 'essentially formed the template' for 'LGBTQ pulp fiction' post-WWII.[184]

Lesbian and gay pulps came to prominence in the early 1950s and these novels are now largely remembered for their 'exaggerated, highly dramatized' covers that were 'illuminated with vibrant colours' rather than their lesbian and gay-themed content.[185] Publishers were still wary of censorship laws at this time, particularly before the mid-1960s when the US Post Office lost a series of court cases regarding its right to interdict books containing queer themes.[186] As a result, publishers in the 1950s tried not to publish books that overtly supported or endorsed a 'deviant' queer lifestyle. *The Price of Salt* (1954) by Patricia Highsmith is often cited as an early Lesbian Romance and is an example of a lesbian pulp. In contrast to *The Well of Loneliness*, Highsmith's novel technically ends with a happily-ever-after, an essential element of the popular romance genre. However, it 'still suggests that a happy ending for a queer couple comes at a high price', because even though Carol and Therese end up

[182] Michael Bronski, 'Gay Male and Lesbian Pulp Fiction and Mass Culture', in *Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. by E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, The Cambridge History Of (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 667–94 (p. 677).
[183] Bronski, 'Gay Male and Lesbian Pulp Fiction and Mass Culture', p. 679.
[184] Bronski, 'Gay Male and Lesbian Pulp Fiction and Mass Culture', p. 679.
[185] Bronski, 'Gay Male and Lesbian Pulp Fiction and Mass Culture', p. 677.
[186] Jennifer Elaine Steele, 'A History of Censorship in the United States', *Journal of Intellectual Freedom and Privacy*, 5.1 (2020) <https://journals.ala.org/index.php/jifp/article/view/7208/10293>.

together, Carol has had to concede full custody of her child Rindy.[187] Carol and Therese achieve romantic happiness but it comes at the price of happiness in other aspects of their lives. With this ending Carol and Therese's love has not fully removed or overcome the barrier of society, one of the eight essential elements of a romance novel, as defined by Regis.[188] *The Price of Salt* is an example of the ways pulps with queer themes did not endorse a 'deviant' lifestyle by limiting the happiness of their queer characters.

For the first time, queer fiction was readily available to the masses. Although lesbian and gay pulps equated to only a small portion of the overall pulp market, their impact on queer romance is significant. Pulps, particularly lesbian and gay pulps, were not as severely censored as more traditionally published books due to their different distribution method, giving authors the freedom to write more explicitly queer characters and storylines. Lesbian pulps, which were far more commercially successful than gay pulps, were written by heterosexual men and women, as well as queer women. Numerous critics make a literary distinction between female-authored and male-authored lesbian pulps, arguing that the men writing lesbian pulps 'had their own lurid ideas about what a lesbian looked like in the 1950s and 60s'.[189] The criticism about male-authored lesbian pulps is interesting because it reverses the arguments made in the twenty-first century centred on female-authored M/M romances fetishising the gay male community for the female gaze. This topic

[187] Barot, 'Queer Romance in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century America: Snapshots of a Revolution', p. 391.
[188] Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 3.
[189] Matelski, '"I'm Not the Only Lesbian Who Wears a Skirt": Lesbian Romance Fiction and Identity in Post-World War II America', p. 79.

shall be explored in greater detail in the section: Commercial Queer Love (2007 – 2014) but this similarity is noteworthy as it demonstrates a long-standing uneasiness between LGBTQ+ individuals and straight individuals concerning queer fiction. Despite this criticism it is undeniable that lesbian pulps were wildly more successful than their gay counterparts as 'between 1940 and 1969, fewer than 300 pulps were published by mainstream presses that featured substantial gay male characters, plots or themes'.[190] Meanwhile lesbian pulps 'flourished between 1950 and 1965, resulting in more than five hundred books' being produced.[191] Lesbian pulps were the last big success of a declining American pulp industry, whose widespread success helped to 'create the largest generation of lesbians ever', a generation of women who would be instrumental in supporting and creating the lesbian publishing revolution of the 1970s.[192] Bronski has suggested that the gay pulps were less popular because gay male novels 'had little crossover appeal for a substantial heterosexual readership'.[193] The commercial success of the lesbian pulps, in contrast to gay pulps, supports Bronski's theory because it suggests that these novels weren't just being read by queer women, who were often in danger of outing themselves by buying one.[194]

Without question, the commercial success of lesbian pulps affected how lesbian sexuality and society were portrayed in the novels. Unfortunately these

[190] Jamie Scot, 'Behind the Black Curtain: The Secret Past of Gay Pulp Fiction', *HuffPost*, 6 December 2017 <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/behind-the-black-curtain-the-secret-past-of-gay-pulp-fiction_b_3734410> [accessed 2 February 2022].
[191] Keller, '"Was It Right to Love Her Brother's Wife So Passionately?": Lesbian Pulp Novels and U.S. Lesbian Identity, 1950 - 1965', p. 388.
[192] Keller, '"Was It Right to Love Her Brother's Wife So Passionately?": Lesbian Pulp Novels and U.S. Lesbian Identity, 1950 - 1965', p. 407.
[193] Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Beacon Press, 2011), p. 4.
[194] Hermes, 'Sexuality in Lesbian Romance Fiction', p. 49.

novels also promoted damaging stereotypes about lesbians. Butch presenting characters, in particular, were often portrayed as predatory individuals who would target young single heterosexual women. In these stories the lesbian characters would often be shown indulging in other supposedly scandalous behaviour, including witchcraft, bondage, and voyeurism. It was also not uncommon for the lesbian characters, particularly the traditionally feminine ones, to return to a heterosexual relationship by the end of the story. For example, in *Women's Barracks* (1950) by Tereska Torrès Claude and Ursula are romantically and sexually involved until Ursula realises her love for Claude is not as 'real' as her love for a man. Although today these characters would be read as bisexual, in the 1950s and 60s bisexuality was still largely unknown, with activism around bisexuality only starting in the US in the 1970s.[195] This type of ending was a common trope, showing the lesbian characters rejecting the 'deviant' lifestyle and returning to the safety of heterosexual society. This return to heterosexual society by a bisexual-coded character also echoes the ending of Stephen and Mary's story in *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall.

For many queer women in the US, these stories were their only source of knowledge about lesbianism and even if they presented a warped view of lesbian existence they provided these women with proof that they were not alone.[196] Matelski has argued that these paperbacks did not 'simply reveal lesbian life' but that 'the authors helped create lesbian identity' in post-WII

[195] Elise C. J. van Alphen, 'Erasing Bisexual Identity: The Visibility and Invisibility of Bisexuality as a Sexual Identity in the Dutch Homosexual Movement, 1946 - 1972', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 64.2 (2017), pp. 273–88 (p. 273), doi:10.1080/00918369.2016.1179032.
[196] Forrest, *Lesbian Pulp Fiction: The Sexually Intrepid World of Lesbian Paperback Novels 1950 - 1965*, p. 440.

America, and certainly many of the tropes and motifs that appear in the Lesbian Romances of the 1970s and 80s find their origins in lesbian pulp fiction.[197] In particular, Matelski highlights the importance of the female-authored lesbian pulps in offering their readers an alternative view of sexuality, beauty, and body image. The femme characters would often worry about their unaccepted sexuality and a lack of body confidence resulting from the negative stereotype that all lesbians were uniformly masculine presenting. In contrast, the butch lesbian characters could more easily accept their sexuality because their outward appearance matched the accepted view of the lesbian body. Yet Matelski goes further and argues that lesbian characters in female-authored pulps challenged 'contemporary ideas about the rigidity of butch/femme culture' in the 1950s and 60s because they showed that although the labels were important, in working-class bar culture they 'had less importance in private spaces or the bedroom'.[198] Often the lesbian characters would swap between a butch or femme identity depending on their current partner, thereby challenging the rigid butch/femme binary. The butch/femme dynamic continues to influence the portrayal of the female body in queer romance novels.[199]

Australia had a thriving publishing industry pulps, in part due to the Australian government's 1938 ban on the importation of foreign print publications, which left a void for Australian publishers to fill. Before this ban,

[197] Matelski, '"I'm Not the Only Lesbian Who Wears a Skirt": Lesbian Romance Fiction and Identity in Post-World War II America', p. 78.
[198] Matelski, '"I'm Not the Only Lesbian Who Wears a Skirt": Lesbian Romance Fiction and Identity in Post-World War II America', p. 83.
[199] I will explore this idea further in Chapter 2: The Queer Body.

imported American, and to a lesser extent British, fiction dominated the Australian book industry. American comic books and crime fiction were particularly popular and this fed into Australian pulps. It was not uncommon for Australian publishers to ask their 'local authors to produce 'American' crime fiction' to fill the gap the ban had created.[200] Therefore, although the Australian pulp was unique in many ways it retained strong ties to what was happening in American and British pulps, albeit through a more conservative lens. In contrast to the American pulps, there is little surviving evidence of lesbian and gay pulps being written and published in Australia. This does not mean they did not exist but the lack of evidence suggests they did not reach the popularity of their American counterparts. The Australian pulps 'often relied on stereotypes surrounding both gender and race: hypermasculine American men, damsels in distress, femme fatales'.[201] While American pulps pushed the boundaries of censorship laws with lesbian and gay pulps, the Australian pulps played it safe. Interestingly, however, Kells argues that Australian pulps 'speak to Australia's cultural connections to the US of America and the UK', a literary connection that is still felt by contemporary queer romance writers in Australia.[202]

Like Australia and the US, the UK also had a thriving pulp novel industry, although it was most prominent in the 1930s, right after the launch of Penguin,

[200] Stuart Kells, *Australian Pulps 1939 - 1959: You Go High, We Go Low* (La Trobe University, 2021), p. 27.
[201] Anika Burgess, 'Cheap Thrills, Private Dicks, and Desperate Dames from the Heyday of Pulp Fiction', *Atlas Obscura*, 6 June 2017 <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/pulp-magazines-books-detective-fiction> [accessed 2 February 2022].
[202] Kells, *Australian Pulps 1939 - 1959: You Go High, We Go Low*, p. 53. The American influence on current queer romance writers in Australia is addressed in Chapter 4: Queer Romance Today.

placing it in a pre-WWII context.[203] It is difficult to find evidence of queer-themed stories in British pulps in the 1920s and 30s, likely due to the prevailing attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people. Moving into the post-WWII period, the lack of evidence of lesbian and gay pulps in the 1950s and 60s, like in Australia, implies that Britain was also playing it safe when it came to producing fiction with queer themes and characters. However, this is not supported by the laws being passed in Britain at that time. In fact, during this period Britain was legally becoming more accepting of LGBTQ+ acts, most famously by passing the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, which legalised sexual acts in private between two men over the age of 21. Although this act was passed in 1967 it was based on the 1957 Wolfenden Report that stated, 'homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be considered a criminal offence'.[204] The report caused much debate and public outcry when it was published, with some members of the committee like James Adair publicly distancing himself from the recommendations after the fact. However, the changes the report recommended – most famously the forming of the Homosexual Law Reform Society in 1958 – would be key to lobbying Parliament over the next decade. Therefore, despite there being no evidence of lesbian and gay pulps being produced in large numbers in Britain, during the 1950s and 60s there was a legal public discourse happening around the rights of

[203] These early pulps by Penguin Books were mass-produced paperback runs of novels by popular authors like Agatha Christie, Ernest Hemmingway and Andre Marois.
[204] Sir John Wolfenden, 'Wolfenden Report, 1957', *British Library Collection Items*, 1957 <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/wolfenden-report-conclusion> [accessed 15 March 2022].

LGBTQ+ individuals. These legal changes would pave the way for the cultural revolution of queer fiction in the 1970s.

Returning to the American gay and lesbian pulps, although the queer representation is 'voyeuristic and titillating' and they 'typically feature[e] moralistic endings', their importance for LGBTQ+ fiction and representation is unquestionable.[205] The gay and lesbian pulps paved the way for more positive depictions of queer identities and relationships in fiction because they gave a voice to a previously marginalised group. They gave LGBTQ+ individuals around the world, although largely in the US, easily available, mass-produced representation. Despite being rejected by queer people following the Stonewall Riots because of their 'pessimistic, self-hating… and negative images' the pulps are an important step in the history of queer literary fiction.[206] The pulps, which often focused on the romantic relationships of their lesbian and gay characters, gave the queer-focused publishing houses of the 1970s and 80s literary tropes about queer characters to build upon – for example, the butch/femme dynamic. More broadly, the distribution method, particularly the subscription lists that allowed lesbian and gay pulps to flourish, was vital to the success of lesbian and gay publishers in the 1970s/80s. The pulps were a crucial stepping stone in the development of queer romance; they brought LGBTQ+ fiction to the mainstream and their portrayal of same-sex relationships would influence lesbian and gay romances in the following decades.

[205] Jennifer Dentel, 'Midwestern Farmer's Daughters: Heartland Values and Cloaked Resistance in the Novels of Valerie Taylor', in *Queer Between the Covers: Histories of Queer Publishing and Publishing Queer Voices*, ed. by Leila Kassir and Richard Espley (University of London Press, 2021), pp. 77–89 (p. 77).
[206] Bronski, 'Gay Male and Lesbian Pulp Fiction and Mass Culture', p. 693.

A Queer Revolution (1969 – 1989)

The Stonewall Riots in June 1969 sparked a more militant and radical gay and lesbian movement in the US, which would set the tone for queer rights activism in the Western world in the 1970s.[207] It also led to the creation of specialist independent lesbian and gay publishers that would be crucial for the development of queer romance novels.

Following the riots, lesbians soon broke away from organisations like the Gay Liberation Front, initially formed to champion gay and lesbian rights in America, due to a lack of gay men's understanding of the institutionalised sexism that was forced on lesbians. The lesbian movement of the 1970s was heavily influenced by feminist ideology and set out to create a philosophy of lesbianism that challenged heterosexuality and mainstream feminism. They created lesbian-only institutions and spaces so that a lesbian culture and community could flourish. This was partly done through magazines, newspapers, publishing companies and bookstores focusing on lesbian representation and news. The growth of the Lesbian Romance is arguably part of this activism, with publishers like Naiad (1973), providing its readers with representation and affirmation of their identity. However, lesbian feminists have also found the genre problematic because it implies 'that in order to be a lesbian you have to be in a romantic and sexual relationship and that the

[207] Michael Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, '50 Years after Stonewall: The Legacies and Memory-Making of the 1969 Riots: Conference Report on the "Stonewall At50 and Beyond: Interrogating the Legacy and Memory of the 1969 Riots" Symposium, Paris-Est Créteil University, June 3 - 5, 2019', *Transatlantica: Revue d'études Américaines*, Online, 2019, pp. 5, 7, doi:10.4000/transatlantica.14493.

fundamental goal of all lesbians is long-term domestic coupledom'.[208] Lesbian feminists in the 1970s found Lesbian Romances problematic because they saw them as enforcing heteronormative ideals such as monogamy onto lesbians. Rather than challenging these ideals and creating a new romantic model for lesbians, Lesbian Romances reinforced the 'socially generated, concepts of romance have been fed to us in order to make… society's type of marriage palatable'.[209] Homonormativity, and how it impacts the structures and motifs of the romance genre will be discussed further in Chapter 3: The Queer HEA. For now, it is interesting to note that despite criticism from lesbian feminists the Lesbian Romance genre flourished during the 1970s and 80s, gaining a loyal readership.

In contrast, the gay-focused presses were less concerned with genre and instead wanted to document and explore the reality that gay men faced in a society that victimised and oppressed them due to their sexuality. Rather than aiming to depict positive portrayals of queer men's existence gay fiction instead developed a darker, grittier tone exploring themes like the AIDS epidemic, anti-gay prejudice, self-loathing, suicide, coming out and other issues the queer male community faced. Gay fiction, the broad phrase used to describe this type of literature, was popular with its community as it served to validate their experiences of same-sex attraction without sugarcoating the reality of being gay in society. This is the ecosystem that Gay Romances

[208] Lynne Harne, 'From Beyond Sex and Romance? Lesbian Relationships in Contemporary Fiction (1998)', in *Women and Romance: A Reader*, ed. by Susan Ostov Weisser (New York University Press, 2001), pp. 177–80 (p. 177).
[209] Carol Anne Douglas, 'Lesbian-Feminism Love & Struggle', *Off Our Backs: A Women's Newsjournal*, 30 November 1976, 16 (p. 16), ProQuest.

developed from, one that was more concerned with realism than conforming to romance genre guidelines. In contrast to Lesbian Romances which flourished despite the criticism, Gay Romances were not widely written and published, suggesting less of an audience for them among the queer male community. It did result in an interesting parallel with both gay fiction and Lesbian Romances during this period favouring the contemporary setting, although for different reasons. Lesbian Romances provided a positive portrayal of contemporary lesbian life, whereas gay fiction during this time was more concerned with presenting realistic contemporary gay life regardless of happy endings. For example, *The Front Runner* (1974) by Patricia Nell Warren is a novel which tells the love story of Billy and Harlan and has been described as 'one of the first gay romance novels to achieve mainstream success,'.[210] Yet *The Front Runner* ends in tragedy when Billy is shot by an anti-gay protestor, it therefore does not conform to the romance genre definition of a Gay Romance but is part of the gay fiction tradition. It is interesting that even during the emergence of Gay Romance, one of the most famous and critically acclaimed books is written by a woman – the trend of women writing male-focused queer romances to commercial success continues into the present day.

The most famous lesbian publishing house producing romances from this time is Naiad Press which was cofounded in 1973 by two couples – Barbara Grier and Donna McBride, and Anyda Marchant and Muriel Crawford. Naiad Press, and other lesbian publishers, set out to 'publish work that was affirmation

[210] Daryl Bruce, '10 Gay Novels You Should Read', *Medium*, 8 April 2019 <https://medium.com/daryl-bruce-blog/10-gay-novels-you-should-read-4ef079235299> [accessed 20 March 2020].

of [lesbian] life and [lesbian] love'.[211] Like the lesbian and gay pulps of the 1950s and 60s, these lesbian publishers sold and marketed their books through carefully curated mailing lists, rather than relying on large marketing campaigns that could have drawn unwanted attention.[212] This was particularly important as the readers would not necessarily have been publicly out as lesbians, even to close friends and family. Knowledge of the presses was therefore spread through word of mouth and selective advertising in targeted queer spaces. Although they used the format of the romance novel outlined by Regis, due to the alternative publishing environment these lesbian presses evolved in, these novels did not necessarily correspond to mainstream heterosexual romance trends. As already mentioned, Lesbian Romances of the 1970s were almost always set in a contemporary setting, whereas in contrast, heterosexual romance during this time favoured the long historical romance that gained popularity after the publication of *The Flame and The Flower* in 1972.

In contrast one of the most famous Gay Romance novels from the latter half of the twentieth century is *Gaywyck* (1980) by Vincent Virga, a gothic historical romance that was inspired by DuMaurier's *Rebecca*. Set in America during the reign of Edward VII, *Gaywyck* tells the story of Robert Whyte who is sent to work on the Gaywyck estate and falls in love with the mysterious and brooding master of the house, Donough Gaylord. Crucially this is a novel that ends with Robert and Donough together and in love, marking it as Gay

[211] Jaime Cantrell, 'Lesbis Sustineo! Naiad Press Authors Remember Barbara Grier', *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 18.4 (2014), pp. 333–45 (p. 340), doi:10.1080/10894160.2014.901844.
[212] Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (Seal Press, 2007), p. 182.

Romance in the romance genre tradition. It is also one of the earliest examples of queer historical fiction.

The mid-1980s also saw the rise of the Black Gay Romance novel, partly as a response to the increasingly white gay rights agenda that sought to exclude Black gay men from the discussion. The majority of the queer romances being published and written during this time, particularly in the 1970s, contained white protagonists, with very few Black novelists writing queer romances finding commercial and/or critical success. Marlon has convincedly shown that the romance genre was one of the few avenues available to Black gay men that could legitimise and normalise Black man-on-man love.[213] Black gay novelists like Larry Duplechan, James Earl Hardy and E. Lynn Harris rooted their work in African American culture, although to different degrees. For example in *Eight Days a Week* (1985), Larry Duplechan explores the intersectionality between being gay and being African American in the US through the romance of a Black gay pop singer and a white banker. This novel showed the romantic potential of interracial relations at a time when only white gay relationships were being given a public platform and voice. However, Duplechan has been criticised for eroticising the Black gay figure for the white gay gaze and representing a Black hero who 'identifies solely with the gay ghetto'.[214] In contrast, Hardy and Harris were more radical in their representation of gay Black love than Duplechan by more firmly rooting their characters and plots within African American communities with very few white

[213] Ross, '"What's Love but a Second Hand Emotion": Man-on-Man Passion in the Contemporary Black Gay Romance Novel', p. 676.
[214] Ross, '"What's Love but a Second Hand Emotion": Man-on-Man Passion in the Contemporary Black Gay Romance Novel', p. 679.

characters. Harris, in particular, filled his romance novels with the ideology of the Civil Rights movement and in his *Invisible Life* trilogy (1991 – 1999), bisexuality is the most represented orientation because it aligns most closely with traditional African American beliefs about the fluidity of desire and the lack of a binary between gay and straight. So although the work of writers like Larry Duplechan, James Earl Hardy and E. Lynn Harris did 'not explicitly challenge the romance formulae upon which both the heterosexual and more recently homonormative genre is anchored' they created a space 'for black men in love with other men'.[215] Thereby, echoing what the lesbian pulps achieved for lesbian and queer women in the 1950s and 60s. The novels by Duplechan, Hardy and Harris laid the foundation of a formula that subsequent Black Gay Romance writers would follow, giving voice to a community that had been denied one for so long. For these writers, representation of Black queer protagonists shifted the discourse of stereotypes around queerness.

Of course, it is impossible to map the history and evolution of queer romances without touching upon the AIDS crisis and its impact on queer people and queer fiction. The AIDs epidemic came to public consciousness in the United States in the 1980s after five men were diagnosed with an unknown auto-immune disease in Los Angeles. This epidemic caused social panic, led to increased homophobia, and resulted in thousands of, predominantly, gay, and bisexual men dying. During the early years of the crisis, the American government refused to acknowledge the problem, relegating it to a 'gay disease' which led to increased stigmatization for an already marginalized

[215] Ross, '"What's Love but a Second Hand Emotion": Man-on-Man Passion in the Contemporary Black Gay Romance Novel', p. 683.

community. This time for gay men, where 'virtually an entire generation was struck down – felt like a war zone… and even gay men who remained uninfected were deeply scarred'.[216] It also spawned a new genre of queer fiction: AIDS literature, which focused on the psychological, social, and political impact of the AIDS crisis and the effect HIV had and continues to have on the queer, particularly gay male, community. Given the level of death that the AIDS crisis caused for the queer community, it is unsurprising that AIDS literature is often seen as having more in common with war literature than other queer fiction. Certainly, there are very few queer romance novels, even today, that feature AIDS, characters with HIV or even other sexual diseases. In many ways, it is still seen as a taboo topic in queer romances, one that is too real, too depressing to be part of a romance narrative. That does not mean, however, that the AIDS crisis didn't impact the genre at all. Before the crisis, the archetypal queer male body was slim, with a flat stomach and overall thin appearance. However, this changed due to the AIDS crisis and instead 'there was a perceived fear in the late 80s [of] thinness… in the gay male body'.[217] The queer male body will be examined in detail in Chapter Two: The Queer Body, but for now, it is worth noting that the archetypal body for queer men in romances today is one of strength and athleticism. It is hard not to see this change as a result of the AIDS crisis. As Drummond further explains, 'being a thin gay man heightened the possibility of being stigmatised as 'contagious'' and so the 'healthy' or 'desirable' queer male body post-AIDS developed in

[216] Tim Dean and Steven Ruszczycky, 'AIDS Literatures', in *Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. by E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, The Cambridge History Of (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 712–32 (p. 712).
[217] Allan, 'The Purity of His Maleness: Masculinity in Popular Romance Novels', p. 34.

opposition to thinness.[218] The lack of queer protagonists with any sexual diseases, the representation of the queer male bodies and the tendency to portray monogamous, sexually exclusive relationships, demonstrates how this crisis impacted the emerging queer romance genre.

The 1970s and 80s saw the emergence of distinct publishing ecosystems for Lesbian and Gay Romance separate from the mainstream (heterosexual) romance publishing spaces. Lesbian Romances were more prolific than their gay counterparts, due to a culture of lesbians focusing on the means of production by establishing and running dedicated publishing houses in the early 1970s like The Feminist Press (1970), Naiad Press and Calyx (1976). In contrast, Gay Romances were being pioneered by a few individual authors and therefore didn't have the same reach and community around them.

Technological Revolution & Political Conservatism (1990 – 2010)

During the 1990s the number of queer romances being published went into sharp decline as the gay and lesbian publishing houses that emerged in the 1970s struggled to survive. Expensive publishing costs, political and cultural conservatism and competition from more accessible queer – or queer-coded – representation on TV via shows like *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Will & Grace* and *Buffy* (1997 – 2001) to name a few, made it a difficult decade for these niche publishing houses. In addition, many of the more established romance publishers like Mills & Boon, Kensington and Avon remained unwilling to publish

[218] M Drummond, 'Reflections on the Archetypal Heterosexual Male Body', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 26 (2011), pp. 103–17 (p. 104).

romance novels featuring queer heroes/heroines. Expensive upfront costs, a perceived lack of a large, easily marketable audience and a culturally and politically hostile environment for LGBTQ+ individuals in all three countries made it a hard time for queer romance.

By 1998 self-publishing was theoretically an option for authors due to the development of a payment mechanism for digital books being invented, but readers were still mistrustful. Stephen King most famously tried to sell his unfinished serialised novel *The Plant* directly to readers back in 2000 using new eBook technology. The project received much media attention, particularly as in the introduction to *The Plant* King challenged traditional publishing stating, 'my friends, we have the chance to become Big Publishing's worst nightmare'.[219] Unfortunately for King and eBook publishing in general, the project was unsuccessful and 'by part four, only 46 percent of the people who downloaded the book paid for it' resulting in the project ending after six chapters.[220] With Stephen King's very public failed attempt to sell directly to readers via eBooks, it would hardly have been seen as a viable route for smaller or debut authors of queer romance.

In Britain, this reduction in visibility can also be accredited to the passing of Section 28 by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. Section 28 was the name given to a series of laws across Britain that prohibited the 'promotion of homosexuality' by local authorities and was in place from 1988

[219] *Arvind Dilawar, 'Stephen King's Experiment with Online Self-Publishing Was 20 Years Before Its Time', Electric Lit, 2020 <https://electricliterature.com/stephen-kings-experiment-with-online-self-publishing-was-20-years-before-its-time/> [accessed 21 December 2021].*
[220] Anon, 'Stephen King's "Plant" Uprooted', *Wired*, 28 November 2000 <https://www.wired.com/2000/11/stephen-kings-plant-uprooted/> [accessed 21 December 2021].

to 2003. These laws had far-reaching repercussions for LGBTQ+ people in Britain. They empowered people with homophobic views and embedded structural homophobia in the legal system resulting in a higher number of LGBTQ+ people being bullied, discriminated against, and attacked.[221] This period under 'Thatcher's barbaric Section 28' caused an environment of shame for the queer community because 'Section 28 blighted the public's view against LGBTQ+ people'.[222] A similar environment existed in Australia due to the Howard Government, which was in power between 1996 – 2007. During this time Australia's Prime Minister John Howard publicly disapproved of gay marriage and his government frequently reduced, or attempted to reduce, the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals in Australia. In this cultural and political environment, it was hard for the gay and lesbian presses that had pioneered LGBTQ+ romance fiction to survive, let alone thrive.

Of course, queer romances did not disappear completely, and the early 2000s saw a new type of queer romance emerge: The M/M Romance. M/M Romances and Gay Romances are often lumped together, or the terms are used interchangeably to denote, I would argue, two distinct queer romance types. M/M Romance is a relatively young type, one whose origins are routed in fandom and heterosexual romances. The community that surrounds M/M Romances is largely female - whether heterosexual or queer – in its authorship

[221] Paul Baker, *Outrageous!: The Story of Section 28 and Britain's Battle for LGBT Education* (Reaktion Books, 2022), p. 190.
[222] Dan Glass, *United Queerdom: From the Legends of the Gay Liberation Front to the Queers of Tomorrow* (Zed Books, 2020), p. 33; Jonathan Wheeler, '"It Was State-Sponsored Homophobia": The Impact of Section 28 on the Legal Profession', *The Law Society*, 2023 <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/lgbt-lawyers/the-impact-of-section-28-on-the-legal-profession> [accessed 31 May 2024].

and readership. In contrast, Gay Romances can be traced to the early 1900s and have evolved from LGBTQ+ fiction. They are more concerned with the representation of queer men, by queer men than following romance genre traditions. This distinction is evident in the term M/M, which comes from fandom, where 'the slash, denoting a romantic and/or sexual relationship… became shorthand for homoerotic content', this usage later spread 'to the romance publishing industry'.[223] The birth of fanfiction is often traced to the *Star Trek* (1966 -) fan communities of the 1960s, whose fanzines often contained original stories set in the *Star Trek* universe.[224] With the commercialisation of the internet in the 1990s, fanfiction moved online to forums and sites dedicated solely to fanfiction, like FanFiction.Net (1998). The Internet is also credited with 'expand[ing] the audience for m/m romances', although as I shall argue later it was the Kindle, rather than the Internet that truly expanded the M/M Romance genre.[225]

Yet the early 2000s arguably saw fandom influence romance publishing, both heterosexual and queer.[226] Ellora's Cave (2000) used a slash to denote the pairings of their erotica; with its M/F/M titles 'sometimes serving as a gateway to [M/M] romance' for readers.[227] While this was happening, The

[223] Duvezin-Caubet, 'Gaily Ever After: Neo-Victorian M/M Genre Romance for the Twenty-First Century', p. 246.
[224] Joan Marie Verba, *Boldly Writing: A Trekker Fan and Zine History 1967 - 1987*, 2nd edn (FTL Publications, 2003), pp. 1–9 <https://web.archive.org/web/20160910042451/http://www.ftlpublications.com/bwebook.pdf> [accessed 3 June 2024].
[225] John Makert, 'M/M (Male/Male) Romances', in *Encyclopedia of Romance Fiction*, ed. by Kristin Ramsdell (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), pp. 196–201 (p. 196).
[226] The continued connection between fanfiction communities and the queer romance genre shall be explored in Chapter 4: Queer Romance Today.
[227] Duvezin-Caubet, 'Gaily Ever After: Neo-Victorian M/M Genre Romance for the Twenty-First Century', p. 246.

Millivres-Prowler Group, a leading publisher within the gay and lesbian sphere and one of the few to survive into the 2000s, published *Fatal Shadows* (2000), an M/M Romance written by female author Josh Lanyon. At this time the Millivres-Prowler Group were not the only ones publishing queer romances that would later be considered M/M Romances. Accent Press, an independent UK publisher founded in 2003 by Hazel Cushion released *The Boy I Love* (2005) by Marion Husband, and Torquere Press, which is still publishing queer romances today, published *Bareback* (2003) and *Natural Disaster* (2007) by Chris Owen. These novels by Lanyon, Husband, Owen and others like them, are narratively and structurally more similar to the heterosexual romance genre than the Gay Romances of the 1970s and 80s. In addition, they are not necessarily written by queer men, even though many of the female writers use male or gender-neutral pseudonyms. This is one of the first times in the history of queer romances that we see women consistently writing popular romance novels about queer men; an interesting gender reversal from the 1950s and 60s that saw heterosexual men writing lesbian pulps. However, these early M/M Romances were few and far between and it was not until 2007 that they would gain widespread popularity and infamy.

In 2007 Amazon released a device that would revolutionise the publishing industry and drastically change the queer romance genre – the Kindle. Although digital publishing had been possible before this release it wasn't until the invention of Amazon's Kindle that eReaders and digital books entered the publishing mainstream. This was due to Amazon being in the unique position of 'controlling both the hardware and the distribution of

content' through their online bookstore, allowing them 'to avoid the problems that had doomed the previous generation of e-readers'.[228] The first Kindle became an overnight success, selling out a mere five hours after being launched. With the rise of eBooks and the distribution possibilities of online sites like Amazon, it became possible for smaller presses, and even independent authors, to begin publishing consistently again. The queer romance genre undoubtedly benefitted from this, particularly M/M Romances whose popularity markedly increased after 2007.

Commercialised Queer Love (2010 - 2024)

Where then does this leave the queer romance genre today? The genre worlds approach, as established by Fletcher, Driscoll and Wilkins for Australian romance will be used, to provide a holistic image of the queer romance genre over the last fifteen years. Through an exploration of quantitative data, a close analysis of the publishing industry, and considering these novels in their social and political context I aim to establish the current queer romance ecosystem.[229] To answer this question, I utilise data gathered from the 3,493 queer romances I catalogued and the readers and writers' surveys I conducted.[230]

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[228] Jon Bath and Scott Schofield, 'The Digital Book', in *The Cambridge Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. by Leslie Howsam, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 181–96 (p. 185) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781139152242.013>.

[229] Fletcher, Driscoll, and Wilkins, 'Genre Worlds and Popular Fiction: The Case of Twenty-First-Century Australian Romance'.

[230] A full list of the publisher imprints can be found in appendix 1, the survey questions for the reader survey can be found in appendix 3 and writer survey questions can be found in appendix 4s

By 2013, renowned M/F romance authors began writing M/M, showing how popular this queer romance type had become in the wider romance genre ecosystem. Perhaps most famously J.R. Ward wrote *Lover at Last*, an M/M paranormal romance published by Signet in March 2013 as book number 11 in her *Black Dagger Brotherhood* series. Set in an alternative version of Caldwell, New York the novel tells the story of Blay and Qhuinn, childhood best friends and vampire soldiers whose friends-to-lovers romance was eagerly demanded by some fans of the Black Dagger Brotherhood series. Originally the book was announced as a digital-only novella that 'those who don't wish to read about that particular kind of relationship can choose to skip', a decision made 'as a compromise that [Ward] reached with her publisher'.[231] The fact it was originally planned to be a digital novella rather than a physical novel like all the other books in the series demonstrates how wary mainstream publishers continued to be about publishing M/M Romances – even for well-established series with a loyal readership. The book was eventually published as a full-length novel (over 600 pages) in both digital and physical format, but two years after its original announcement. To date, Blay and Qhuinn remain the only queer couple to have a book in the *Black Dagger Brotherhood* universe.[232] *Lover at Last* by J.R. Ward demonstrates M/M Romances' increased visibility and commercialisation, but also the uneasy place they occupied within the romance publishing ecosystem. It was not only the

[231] Reads K, 'Qhuinn and Blay - BDB', *Read This Book...*, 2011 <http://www.soireadthisbook.com/2011/04/qhuinn-and-blay-bdb.html> [accessed 15 February 2024].
[232] *J.R. Ward wrote a second novel about Qhuinn and Blay called A Warm Heart in Winter in 2020*

romance publishing industry that struggled with M/M Romances' newfound popularity; the gay fiction sphere also struggled with the increased visibility and commercialisation of M/M Romances.

The mainstream commercialisation of M/M Romances resulted in several queer male authors like Jeff Erno, Marshall Thorton and Jamie Fessenden who had been writing 'gay fiction with a romantic, sexy edge certainly [but] for men' becoming known to the romance community.[233] The authors found their books being labelled, marketed, and reviewed as M/M Romances – a genre of books with a largely female following. Their books were now known to a higher number of potential readers and having access to such a large audience raised the profile of their work as the romance genre was, and continues to be, more commercially successful than queer fiction. Some of these authors embraced the M/M Romance genre, with Lloyd Meeker saying 'I don't think anyone disputes that women can write great romance stories featuring gay male characters'.[234] Throughout his blog post, Meeker uses 'we' when discussing M/M Romances and concludes with an optimistic hope that M/M Romances will become more progressive and diverse because of the variety of voices writing them. Others, however, were keen to differentiate their work from the M/M Romance label with Marshall writing a blog post in 2011 on the difference between M/M and gay fiction. He argues that 'the distinction between gay fiction and M/M is vitally important', primarily because the

[233] *Thorton Marshall, 'M/M Romance and Gay Fiction Duke It Out', Marshall Thorton Author, 2011 <https://marshallthorntonauthor.com/thoughts-and-ideas/mm-romance-and-gay-fiction-duke-it-out/> [accessed 23 December 2021].*
[234] Lloyd A. Meeker, 'About Who Writes MM Romance', *Lloyd A Meeker*, 2014 <https://www.lloydmeeker.com/articles/writers-mm-gay-romance/>.

purpose of the two genres is widely different.[235] Therefore, when the terms are used interchangeably it often results in gay fiction novels receiving harsh reviews from vocal romance readers who want a certain narrative structure and ending – one that gay fiction, even Gay Romance, does not necessarily conform to.

Another issue with the merging of these two communities was the undeniable fact that female M/M writers tended to be more commercially successful than their queer male counterparts. Jeff Erno, a gay fiction author stated 'there are a handful of male success stories in the genre. But they have tailored their stories to appeal specifically to the female audience'.[236] The female M/M Romance authors would often, although not exclusively, write stories that followed the conventions of heterosexual romances; they utilised tropes and a narrative structure that romance readers were acquainted with. An example of this would be *One Small Thing* (2012) by M.J. O'Shea and Piper Vaughn, which is an opposites-attract, unexpected-baby, gay-for-you romance between party-boy, Rue, and his geeky reclusive neighbour, Erik. The fact it is a romance about two men is almost inconsequential, as Erik monologues at one point, 'I honestly [don't] think my attraction to Rue had anything to do with his gender… I loved him because he was Rue. Nothing else mattered'.[237] Its use of popular tropes and a narrative style that conforms to the Romance genre expectations make it easy and familiar reading for popular romance genre fans. This genre familiarity arguably made it easier for

[235] Marshall, 'M/M Romance and Gay Fiction Duke It Out'.
[236] Erno, 'Do I Really Belong in the M/M Genre'.
[237] M.J. O'Shea and Piper Vaughn, *One Small Thing* (Dreamspinner Press, 2012), locs. 2996–2997.

female authored M/M romances to sell more novels and receive better reviews.[238]

This tension bubbled under the surface for a few years, as an increasing number of authors who considered themselves to write gay fiction were being discovered by M/M Romance readers resulting in mixed reviews. However, this tension came to a head in 2014 when well-known female M/M Romance writers Z. A. Maxfield, Mary Calmes, Amy Lane, Anne Tenino and Josephine Myles discussed the M/M sub-genre in an interview with *All About Romance*, an organisation created in 1996 to offer 'unbiased book reviews, author interviews and industry commentary' on the romance genre.[239] Amy Lane, a prominent and long-standing M/M author stated that 'if any group needs the redemptive qualities of love, it's gay men' and Josephine Myles went as far as saying 'in many ways, I feel like a man'.[240] The criticism of this interview was swift and widespread.

Blog posts on the topic sprang up from romance writers, readers and reviewers with some writers, like Erno, outright refusing to be associated with the M/M Romance genre declaring: 'I am a gay man, and I write gay fiction'.[241] M/M writer Sunny Moraine, in response to the interview, wrote a post stating their work had been marketed as M/M even though 'I'm not cisgender,

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[238] For example, *Cut & Run* (2008) by Madeleine Urban and Abigail Roux was published in by Dreamspinner Press and in 2024 has over 25,000 ratings on Goodreads. In contrast *Hot Head* (2011) by Damon Suede was also published by Dreamspinner Press and in 2024 has just over 19,000 ratings on Goodreads.
[239] Dabney Grinnan, 'Welcome to All About Romance', *Al About Romance*, 2024 <https://allaboutromance.com/about-aar/> [accessed 31 May 2024].
[240] Pat Henshaw, 'Women Writing M/M Romance', *All About Romance*, 2014 <https://allaboutromance.com/women-writing-gay-romance-fiction/> [accessed 28 May 2021].
[241] Erno, 'Do I Really Belong in the M/M Genre'.

nor am I straight'.[242] They go on to say ''redeeming' gay romantic relationships is patronizing' and that 'focusing on cisgender male erotic relationships to the exclusion of other queer identities… is erasure… [and] fetishizing'.[243] This is a clear denouncement of M/M Romances and the female authors quoted in the *All About Love* interview. However, not all responses to the interview were like Erno's and Moraine's. Queer male author Jamie Fessenden responded to the interview by pointing out that ''gay men' [aren't] really a unified group of people' and highlighting how 'M/M Romance publishers provided another avenue for gay male authors—a lot of gay male authors' to get their work published.[244] There are also queer men and non-binary people who continue to identify with the M/M label: Alexis Hall, Jay Northcote, and Anna Zabo to name a few. This is a nuanced, complex issue with no clear-cut solution and is one that continues to be discussed by readers, writers, and academics of gay or M/M Romances today.[245] However, as shall be examined later in this chapter the popularity of M/M Romance and its impact certainly changed the queer romance genre.

The 2010s also saw the emergence of F/F Romances, which Hannah McCann defined as 'stories focusing on lesbian female characters' even though the women in F/F Romances could be any sexuality, as long as the

[242] Moraine, 'If You're a Straight Cisgender Woman Writing m/m Romance, Sorry, You Are Not Striking a Blow for Equality'.
[243] Moraine, 'If You're a Straight Cisgender Woman Writing m/m Romance, Sorry, You Are Not Striking a Blow for Equality'.
[244] Erno.
[245] Hirschi, '#MondayBlogs: Gay Fiction vs Gay Romance and How These Shit Storms Hurt Us All #LGBT #amreading #asmsg'; Hans M Hirschi, '#Ownvoices: A Particularly Challenging Subject in Gay Literature #LGBT #ASMSG #PRIDE', *Author Hans M Hirschi*, 2018 <http://www.hirschi.se/blog/ownvoices/> [accessed 12 February 2020]; Herendeen, 'Having It Both Ways; or, Writing from the Third Perspective: The Revolutionary M/M/F Ménage Romance Novel'; Erno, 'Do I Really Belong in the M/M Genre'.

romance plot was between two women. This fluidity of sexuality distinguishes F/F Romances from the Lesbian Romances that grew out of the lesbian publishing houses of the 1970s. Lesbian Romances, even in the 2010s, would predominantly focus on the lesbian experience and if female bisexual characters were included they would often experience biphobia. For example, in *Stuck Landing* (2015) by Lauren Gallagher Anna's biphobia is one of the major obstacles in her relationship with bisexual Natalya. In addition, F/F Romances tended to be published by romance publishers who had found previous success with M/M Romances, like Avon Impulse, rather than by Lesbian Romance publishers. All of the above, combined with the narrative similarities between F/F and M/M Romances, demonstrates F/F Romances' evolution from the popularity of M/M Romances. Like M/M Romances, F/F Romances also benefited from the growth of digital publishing, with self-publishing being particularly 'important for this genre, especially for UK writers with no lesbian or bisexual fiction publishing houses' based in the UK.[246] The majority of F/F Romances were exclusively released in digital form, regardless of whether they were self-published or traditionally published; Carina Press published two F/F science-fiction romances by Cathy Pegeau – *Rulebreaker* (2011) and *Deep Deception* (2013) that only received a digital release. Interestingly, Cathy Pegeau's M/F science-fiction romance *Caught in Amber* (2013) was given a paperback release, highlighting how queer romance and heterosexual romances were treated differently, even when written and

[246] Clare Ashton, 'Clare Ashton: Romance between Women Who Love Women', *Romantic Novelists' Association*, 2018 <https://romanticnovelistsassociation.org/2018/10/clare-ashton-romance-between-women-who-love-women/> [accessed 20 February 2020].

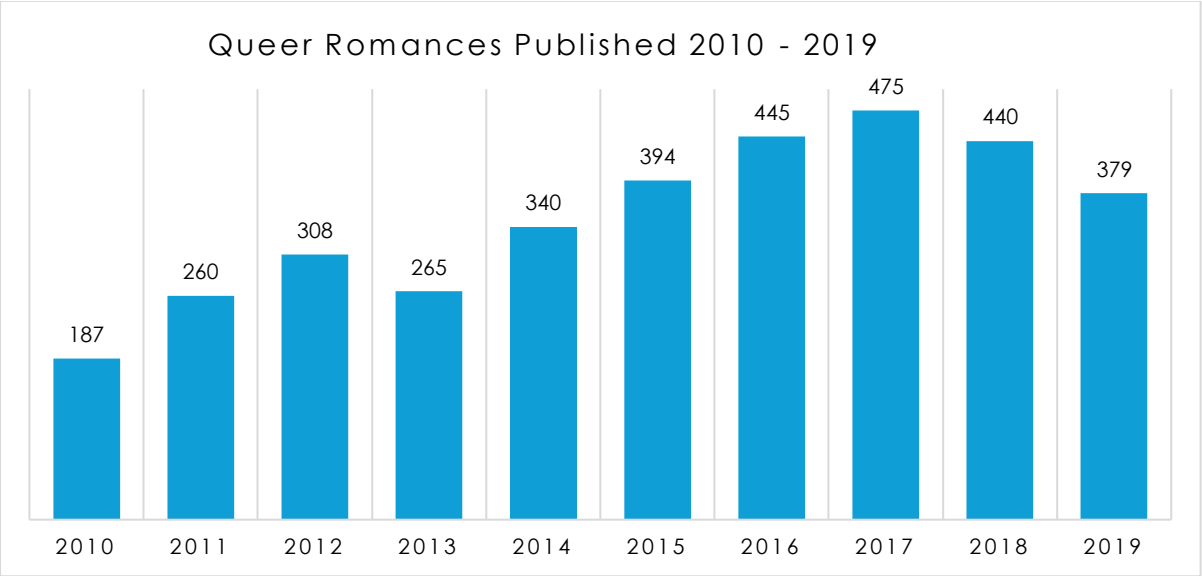
published by the same people. Some F/F Romances were published in both physical and digital formats upon publication, for example, *Everything Leads to You* (2014) by Nina LaCour is a stand-alone F/F Young Adult romance published by Dutton Books that was originally released physically and digitally. However, part of this novel's success and the publisher's decision to originally publish it physically and digitally was also driven by the book's intended young adult audience. Towards the end of the 2010s Avon Impulse became to incorporate F/F Romance novels into their commercially popular M/M and F/M series.[247] However, few exclusively F/F Romance series were being published in paperback by any mainstream publishers. This suggests that publishers were still hesitant to financially commit to F/F Romances, despite the popularity and commercial viability of M/M Romances.

In 2018 20th Century Fox released the theatrical version of *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015) as *Love, Simon* marking the first major film studio to release a gay teenage romance film. Since then queer romances, as mentioned previously, like *Red, White & Royal Blue* and *Heartstopper* have been bought by major streaming services. As stated at the beginning of this chapter queer romance books are booming, with a 740% increase in the number of queer romance books sold in traditional retail outlets in the US in 2021. This increase in popularity is also reflected in the data I collected on 3493 queer romance books that were published between 2010 and 2019. [see

[247] *Once Ghosted, Twice Shy* (2019) by Alyssa Cole is an F/F Romance and book 2.5 in her M/F Reluctant Royals series and *A Little Light Mischief* (2019) by Cat Sebastian is an F/F Romance and book 3.5 in her M/M The Turners series.

Figure 26]. Analysing my data by queer romances published yearly shows a steady increase from 187 in 2010 to 379 by 2019.

Figure 26: Bar Chart showing the number of queer romances published yearly between 2010 - 2019



This would suggest that queer romances have consistently become more popular throughout the decade, however, a closer look at my data reveals a more nuanced picture. Perhaps the most important conclusion that can be drawn from my data is that the late 2010s was a turbulent time for the queer romance industry as it saw an increase of 79.25% of queer romances published between 2013 – 2017, followed by a decrease of 20.21% of the number of queer romances published between 2017 – 2019. In addition the number of queer romances published in 2013 unexpectedly dips and the number of queer romances published appears to be on a downward trend by the end of the decade with both 2018 and 2019 seeing a reduction in the number of queer romances published.

The dip in 2013 can largely be accredited to two publishers whose books were catalogued by this data – Dreamspinner and Totally Entwined.[248] As my catalogue only accounts for the first instance a novel was published, it results in several entries being logged under the Dreamspinner publishing house.[249] Despite not being directly surveyed it was one of the main contributors, alongside Bold Stroke Books, Bella Books and Totally Entwined [See Figure 27].

Figure 27: Line Graph showing the annual books published by Bella Books, Bold Stroke Books, Dreamspinner Press and Totally Entwined

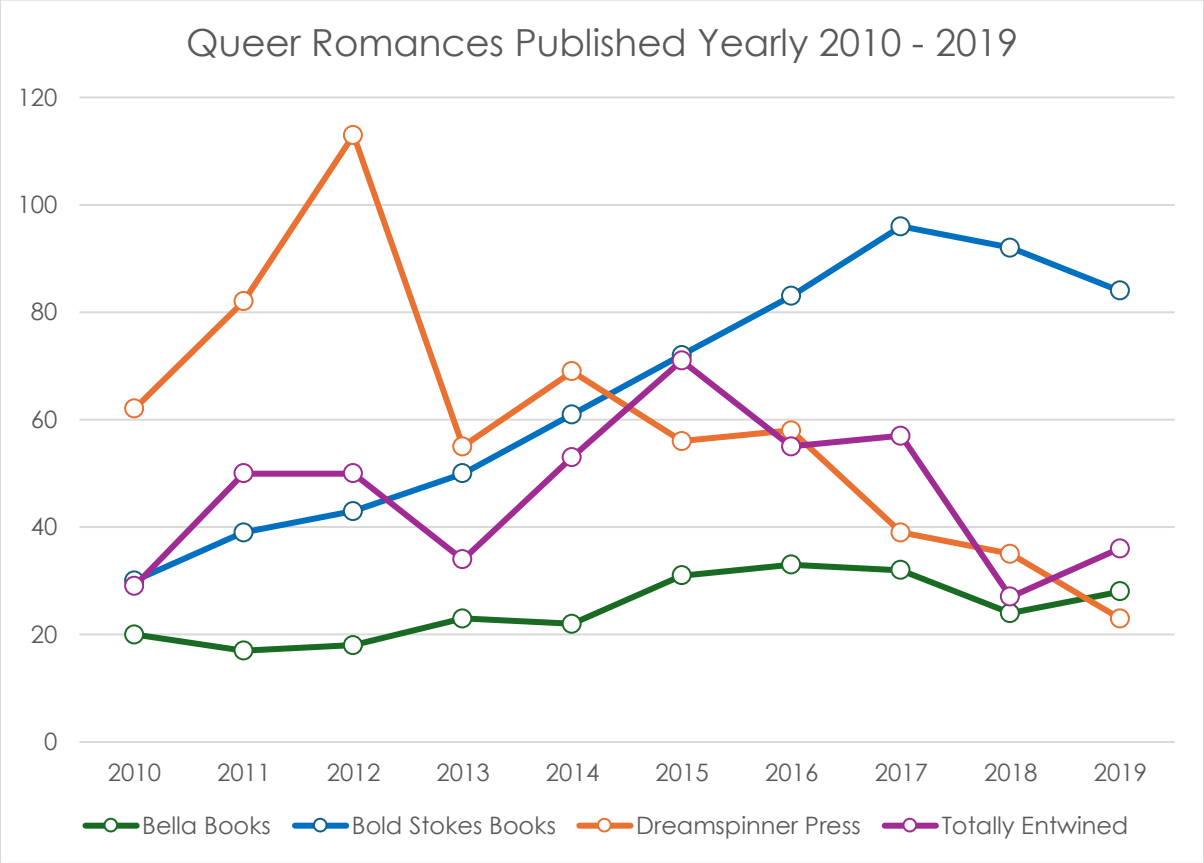


Figure 27 clearly shows a stark drop in the number of books being published by both Dreamspinner Press and Totally Entwined in 2013. Dreamspinner Press'

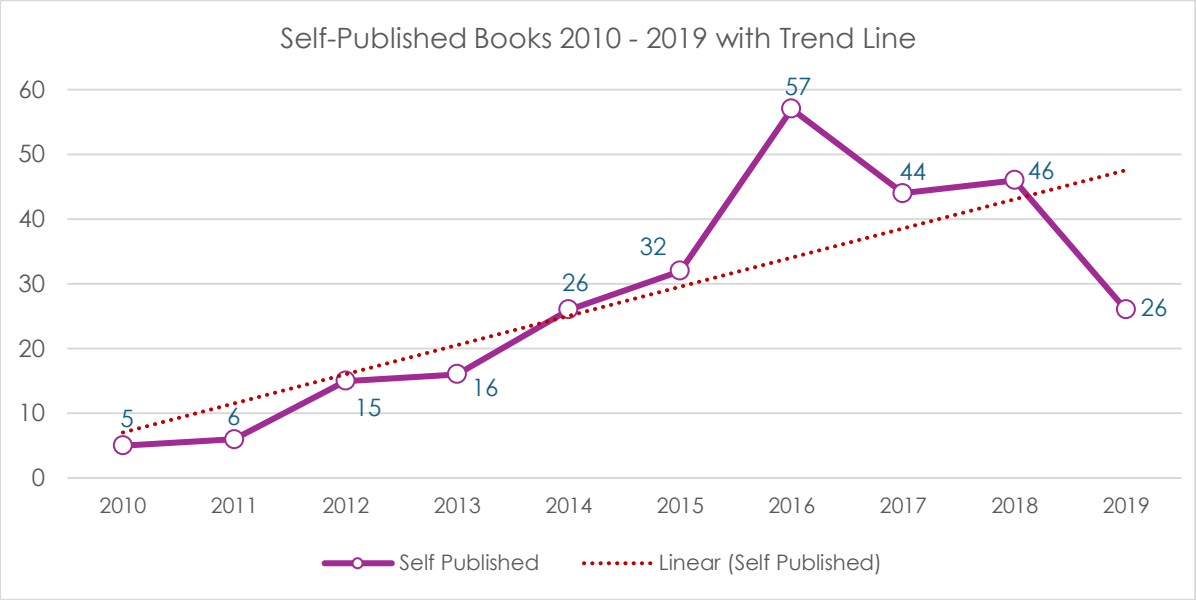
[248] Totally Entwined includes the queer romance imprint - Pride Publishing
[249] Dreamspinner would appear because they were the original publishers for numerous queer romance novels whose rights were subsequently resold and republished to other publishing houses a few years later in the decade.

decline could be explained by their launch of a new line – Harmony Ink (2012) that focused on Young Adult and New Adult LGBTQ+ romances – splitting the focus of the publisher. As the catalogues of publishers like Totally Entwined, Bold Stroke Books and Bella Books didn't include a lot of Young and New Adult queer romances, fewer authors who originally published with the Harmony Ink line would have republished with them at a later date.

With the decline in queer romances being published in 2013 potentially being accounted for, what does the reduction in queer romances between 2018 and 2019 in my data suggest? Firstly, the 2014 scandal resulted in several prominent M/M Romance authors leaving the queer romance genre due to the backlash. Given the nature of traditional publishing, which often works many months, if not years in advance when securing book contracts, it is understandable why a decline is not seen until 2017. Secondly, my data did not directly include self-published queer romance authors or books, a route that has become more viable and popular in recent years. Figure 28 demonstrates how self-published queer romances continued to increase despite my data only counting queer romances that were originally self-published and then subsequently published by a traditional publisher.[250] This provides further evidence that self-publishing became an increasingly popular route to market for queer romance authors.

[250] The reduction of self-published books in 2019 can be explained by the progress that self-published books were added to my data.

Figure 28: Line Graph showing the number of self-published books in my data between 2010 - 2019



Thirdly, several queer-focused romance publishing houses closed during the decade, notably: Samhain (2005 – 2016), Loose Id (2004 – 2018), Less Than Three Press (2009 – 2019) and ManLoveRomance (MLR) (2007 – 2020). In several closing statements the founders of these publishing houses cited financial struggles and Amazon fees as their reasons for closing. Christinia Brashear, a publisher of Samhain Publishing said, 'we cannot sustain our business' and that 'attempts to renegotiate terms with Amazon… [had] been met with Silence'.[251] Others, like MLR, never officially announced they had closed but starkly reduced the number of books they published throughout the decade before the website disappeared from the internet around 2020.[252] The closing of these, and other publishing houses that focused on LGBTQ+ literature, resulted in

[251] Calvin Reid, 'Samhain Publishing to Shut Down Operations', *Publishers Weekly*, 2016 <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/digital/content-and-e-books/article/69517-samhain-publishing-to-shut-down-operations.html> [accessed 3 June 2024].
[252] 'ManLoveRomance Press X Page', *X* <https://x.com/MLRPress> [accessed 3 June 2024].

fewer options for authors to publish through traditional means. It likely led to the reduction of queer romances in my data due to my collection method.

Since 2015 the rights of LGBTQ+ people 'have made significant progress… especially in the realm of marriage equality'.[253] In 2016 the US legalised same-sex marriage, a hotly debated topic in the country. Same-sex marriage was legalised by the Australian government under the 2017 Marriage Act and legalised respectively in England, Scotland, and Wales in 2014 and Northern Ireland in 2020.

The passing of same-sex marriage laws is indicative of wider cultural shifts for LGBTQ+ people in Australia, the UK and the US - a stark contrast to the 1980s and 90s when governments passed laws that empowered and embedded individual and institutional homophobia. Representation of queer people has increased across popular media formats as the world has become increasingly accepting of LGBTQ+ identities. From a business perspective this cultural shift revealed a new and substantial audience for queer romances that made publishers more willing to produce and promote them. This cultural shift was reaffirmed by the large number of people self-publishing queer romances, some of whom developed a strong and vigorous community of readers. KJ Charles, for example, primarily self publishes their M/M Romances and at time of writing their *A Charm of Magpies* series has over 56,000 ratings on Goodreads.[254] Alessandra Hazard is another author of M/M Romance but

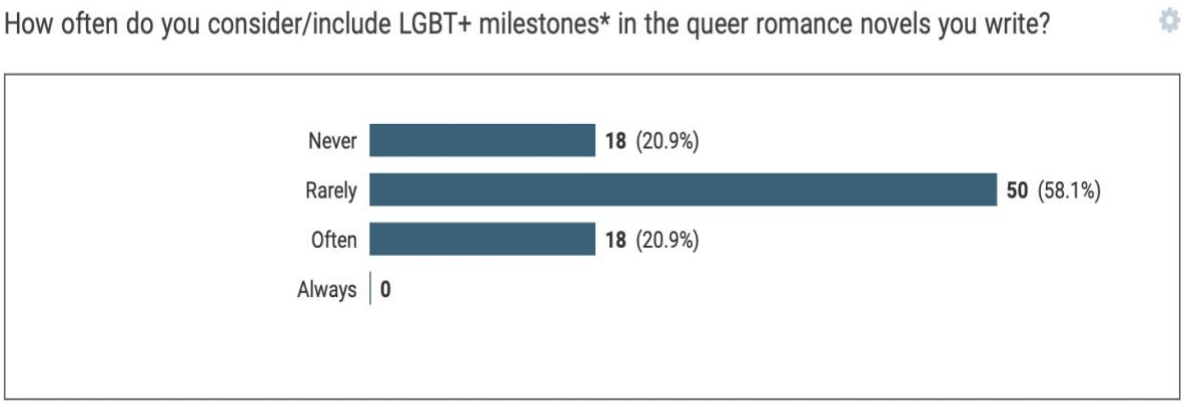
[253] Paul J. Angelo and Dominic Bocci, 'The Changing Landscape of Global LGBTQ+ Rights', *Council on Foreign Relations*, Renewing America, 2021 <https://www.cfr.org/article/changing-landscape-global-lgbtq-rights> [accessed 17 February 2022].
[254] 'A Charm of Magpies Series by KJ Charles', *Goodreads* <https://www.goodreads.com/series/105370-a-charm-of-magpies> [accessed 3 June 2024].

unlike Charles, Hazard has only ever self-published her M/M Romance books and her popular Straight Guy series has over 157,000 ratings on Goodreads.[255] These are just two examples that demonstrated to traditional publishers the popularity of queer romance, particularly M/M romance.

This connection between politics and queer romances is further supported by the opinions expressed by the American romance readers I interviewed. One of the American participants, Jamie, said that contemporary queer romances 'can't ignore [politics] because it's either going to come off as a straight person writing what they don't know or it's going to come off as just a fantasy that's ridiculous'.[256] This led to a discussion about the role of politics in queer romances more generally, which will be explored in further detail in the final chapter. Jamie's quote demonstrates that some romance readers want, and even need, their romances to engage with the political developments of the day. However, 58.1% of the writers of queer romance novels surveyed answered 'rarely' when asked if they included LGBTQ+ milestones in their novels [Figure 29], suggesting a disconnect between readers and authors on this topic.

[255] 'Straight Guy Series by Alessandra Hazard', *Goodreads* <https://www.goodreads.com/series/140499-straight-guys> [accessed 3 June 2024].
[256] Jamie Eliza and others, American Romance Readers Focus Group, 2021.

Figure 29: Bar Chart showing writer survey respondents to the question 'How often do you consider/include LGBT+ milestones in the queer romance novels you write?'



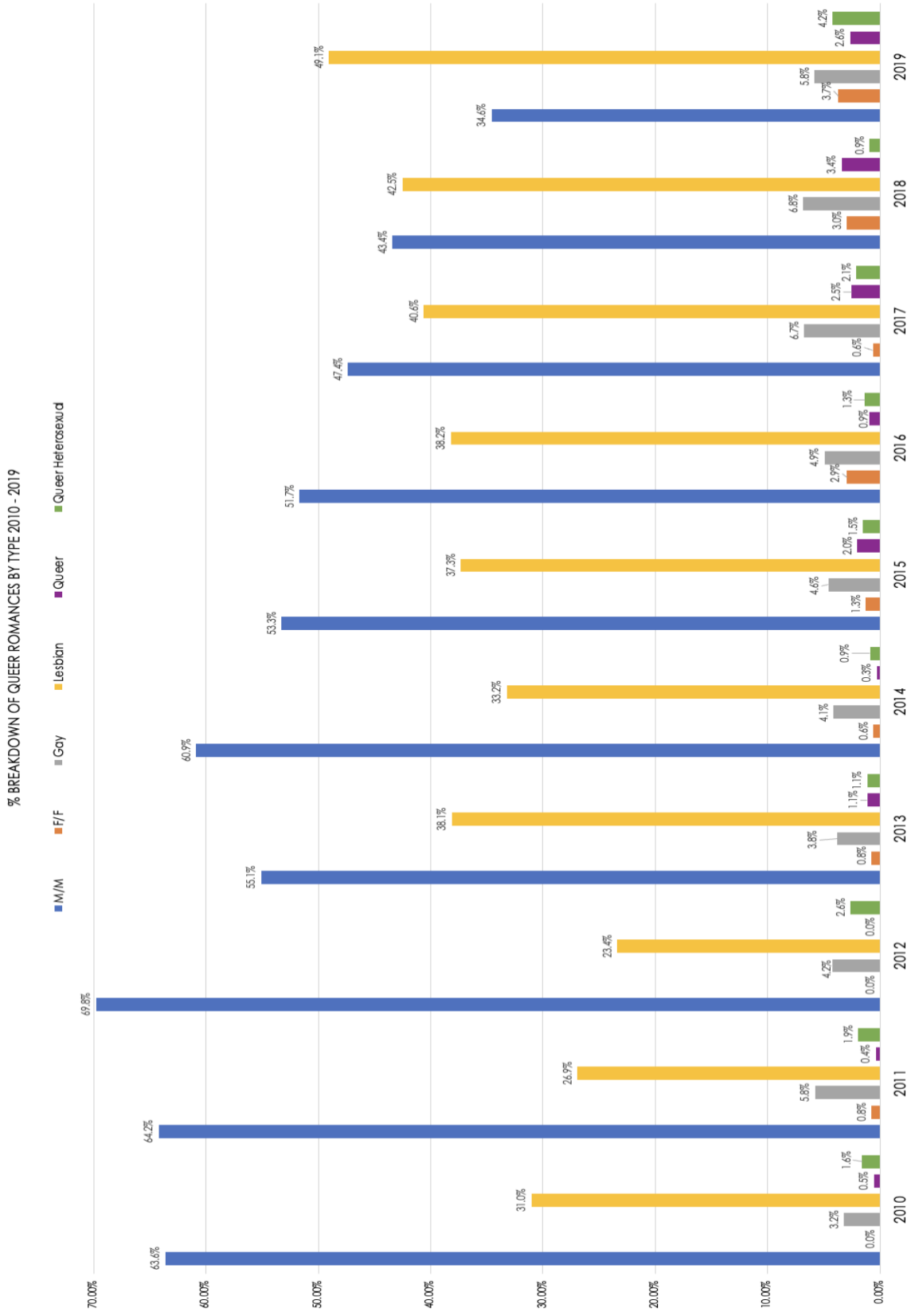
The reason for the rapid increase in books being published between 2013 – 2017 followed by a decrease is likely a combination of the factors discussed above. However, merely looking at the number of queer romances being published in the second half of the 2010s divulges very little about how the genre is evolving. Instead I argue that during this time the queer romance genre was transitioning from the M/M heyday previously discussed to a queer romance genre that included a variety of different types of queer romances. As previously mentioned, my data revealed six 'types' of queer romances commonly being published during this time:

- **F/F** (1) and **M/M Romance** (2) focus on same-sex pairings but otherwise adhere to heterosexual romance genre conventions. This is because they evolved from the heterosexual romance publishing industry.
- **Lesbian** (3) and **Gay Romance** (4) have evolved from a queer fiction publishing background, which typically focuses more on representation and individual identity, yet still contains a core romance plot.

- **Queered Heterosexual Romance** (5) are M/F romances with one or more LGBTQ+ love interests. They are marketed and widely perceived as part of the heterosexual romance genre and ecosystem.
- **Queered Romance** (6) features one or more gender-nonconforming love interest or some other queer element not accounted for in the above categories. They can evolve from either the queer fiction or heterosexual romance publishing ecosystem.

Analysing my data through these six categories reveals that M/M Romances consistently declined after the 2014 scandal, going from a high of 69.8% of all queer romances published in 2012 to 34.6% by 2019 – a drop of 35.2% in seven years. In contrast Lesbian Romances, the second biggest category, grew from 23.4% of all queer romances published in 2012 to 49.1% in 2019 – an increase of 25.7% in seven years [Figure 30].

Figure 30: Bar Chart showing the yearly % breakdown of queer romances published between 2010 - 2019 by queer romance type



All the other types, apart from M/M Romance, increased in my data (see Figure 30):

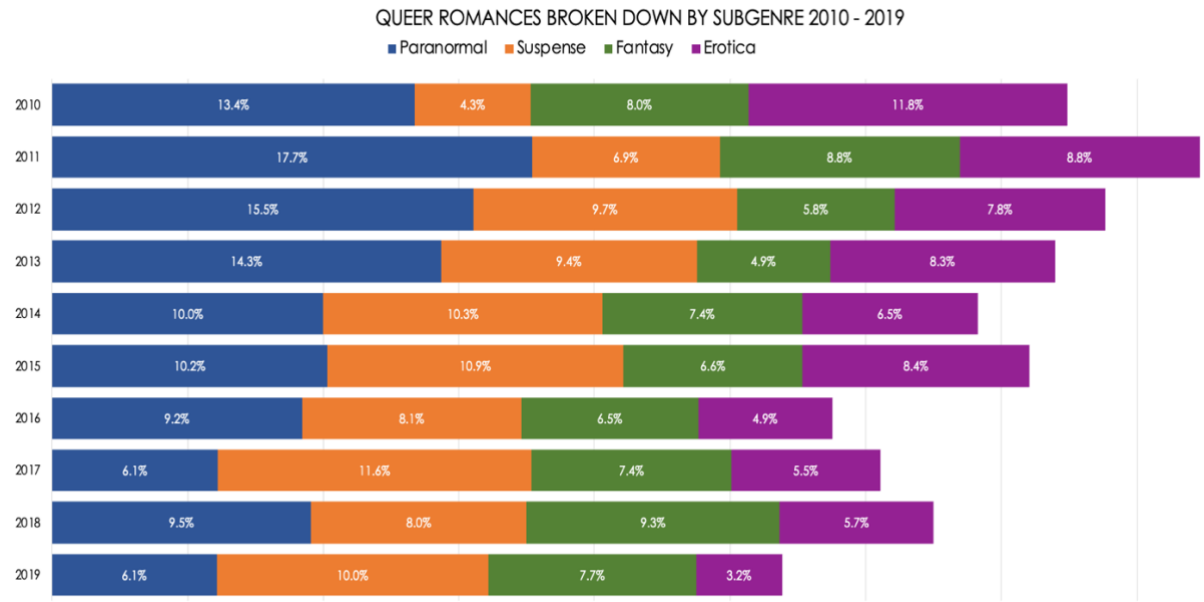
- Lesbian Romance went from 23.4% (2012) to 49.1% (2019)
- F/F Romance went from 0% (2010) to 3.7% (2019)
- Gay Romance went from 3.2% (2010) to 6.8% (2018)
- Queered Romance went from 0.5% (2010) to 3.4% (2018)
- Queered Heterosexual Romance went from 1.6% (2010) to 4.2% (2019).

Despite the overall number of queer romances decreasing, the type of queer romances being published is diversifying. The increase in all but M/M Romances could suggest that queer men and women, alongside non-binary authors, are being given more opportunities to publish their novels. It could also reflect a change in the queer romance community since the 2014 scandal; readers are more conscious of who is writing the books they read and the representation those books offer. Certainly the growth in Lesbian and F/F Romances suggests a shift in the queer romance genre from novels mainly about queer male relationships to featuring more novels about queer female relationships.

If the type of queer romance being published is changing, can the same be said for romance sub-genres? The four most popular sub-genres across the decade are paranormal, suspense, fantasy and erotic. Of them, erotic romances see the greatest change, decreasing from 11.8% in 2010 to just 3.2% by 2019, however, a range of 8.6% is hardly large considering it takes place over ten years. Paranormal sees the biggest reduction, as it steadily decreases

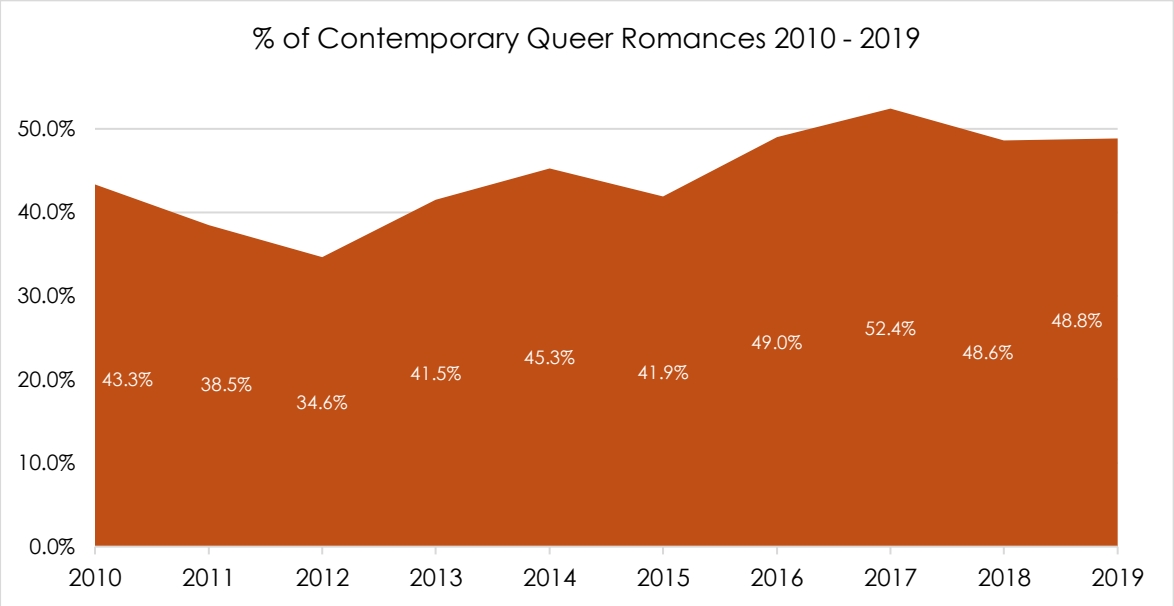
after 2011, going from 17.7% to 6.1% in 2019 – a reduction of 11.6%. This waning of paranormal reflects wider popular romance trends, which also saw a decline in paranormal romances during the 2010s. Fantasy remains consistent throughout the decade, with only a 4.4% difference in its most (9.3% in 2018) and least (4.9% in 2013) popular years. Suspense initially grew in popularity between 2010 and 2012, before stabilising with a mean of 9.76% for the remainder of the decade [Figure 31].

Figure 31: Stacked Bar Chart showing Queer Romances Broken Down by Subgenre



Since the 1900s there has existed a strong preference in queer romances for the contemporary sub-genre. My data clearly shows that contemporary remains the most popular sub-genre and even increased its share of all queer romances published from 43.3% in 2010 to 48.8%, an increase of 5.5%, in the ten years. In 2017 it accounted for 52.4% of all queer romances catalogued [Figure 32].

Figure 32: Line Graph showing the % of Contemporary Queer Romances published 2010 - 2019



This is not surprising given queer romances' long tradition with the contemporary setting – from early queer romances like *Imre: A Memorandum* to the Lesbian Romances of the 1970s, queer romances have consistently been set in the contemporary world of the author. This contrasts with heterosexual romance novels, which have gone through several sub-genre trends in the last fifty years and have not consistently prioritised the contemporary sub-genre. However, it should be noted that just because a contemporary setting is used, it does not mean the author accurately reflects reality. *Red, White & Royal Blue* by Casey McQuiston is an example of this; although McQuiston sets this in modern-day America it is an alternative reality where the Democrats won the 2016 election and, as a result, a Mexican American woman is president rather than Donald Trump. Often queer romances will take the contemporary setting but make it more progressive, accepting, and inclusive than the reality of the time – as McQuiston did – providing readers with both an idyllic fantasy and a familiar reality. Queer romances providing an idyllic version of reality is

reminiscent of the 1970s Lesbian Romances that wanted to present a safer and more positive reality for lesbians than was perhaps realistic.

The enduring appeal of the contemporary setting for queer romance writers and readers is clear, yet why it remains popular is a little trickier to answer. Representation is possibly the most obvious answer; when people read a queer romance they are often looking for representation and diversity, perhaps even the vision of a better world. The need for a better world came up during my focus group with readers and will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4: Queer Romance Today. Certainly locating stories in a modern, rather than a historical setting, makes it easier to provide diverse representation – at least in terms of language and terminology. Many of the words used by the LGBTQ+ community did not exist historically or have undergone drastic changes in meaning. In addition, historical words used by the LGBTQ+ community are no longer well-known or have completely different meanings to a contemporary audience. Having a shared, easily accessible language between the author and readers makes it easier to convincingly write, for example, a non-binary asexual protagonist in a contemporary setting. Whereas, writing these characters in a historically accurate way can be hard without a shared period appropriate language.

Consider *Unmasked by the Marquess* (2018) by Cat Sebastian, which features non-binary protagonist Robert Selby/Charity Church or Robin as she is known for most of the novel (Robin uses she/her pronouns as a non-binary person). Within the novel the conflict Robin feels about her gender identity is explored but never fully realised. This language did not exist in the Regency for

Sebastian to draw on as an author. It can therefore be read as a novel using the cross-dressing heroine trope, which is popular in historical romances. The novel itself is arguably inconsistent in how it approaches Robin's gender identity – an identity that is mainly defined by their dislike of wearing dresses. One trans non-binary reviewer noted this conflict saying, 'Robin's non-binary identity didn't seem connected to embodiment, sexual needs, or experience… [instead offering] a shallow understanding of non-binary identity that reduced it to gender expression through clothing'.[257] Part of this is due to a lack of understanding of what non-binary people deal with when in a relationship, although it is important to note that Cat Sebastian did have non-binary secondary readers. Robin's identity is made more difficult to define and explain (to both the reader and other characters in the book) because of a lack of vocabulary that couldn't be included due to historical accuracy. It is worth mentioning that the historical romance genre has a 'complicated relationship' with accuracy and 'historical periods and settings are often reflected through popular cultural understandings and expectations of those periods'.[258] Instead, historical romances draw on 'shared motifs and stereotypes' that work to create 'an imagined construction of the period [which then] becomes the concrete reality' for the romance community of that time.[259] *Unmasked by the Marquess,* as a regency romance, has a

[257] Corey Alexander, 'Review of Unmasked by the Marquess', *Corey's Book Corner*, 2018 <https://coreysbookcorner.wordpress.com/2018/06/10/review-of-unmasked-by-the-marquess/> [accessed 16 February 2022].
[258] Sarah H. Ficke, 'The Historical Romance', in *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction*, ed. by Jayashree Kamblé, Eric Murphy Selinger, and Hsu-Ming Teo (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), pp. 118–40 (p. 125).
[259] Ficke, 'The Historical Romance', p. 125.

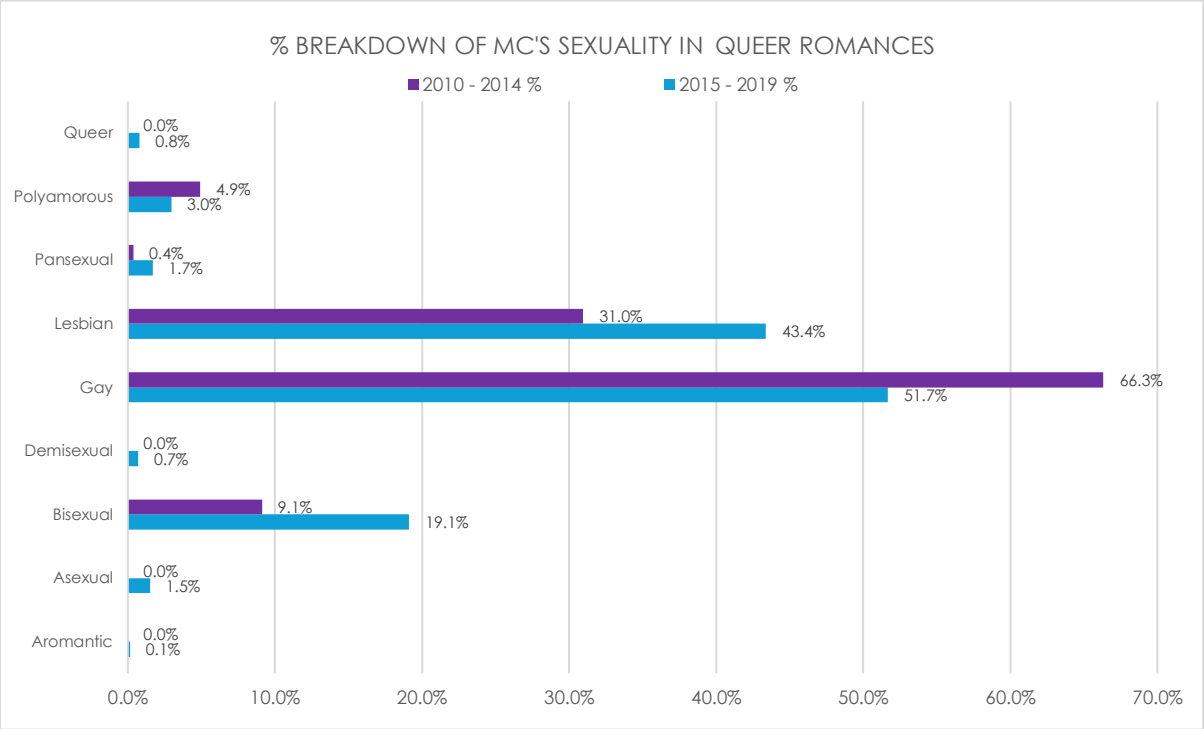
historical setting that currently lacks established motifs or a shared consciousness regarding genderfluid and/or gender non-conforming identities. Although it was marketed as a non-binary romance, with author Cat Sebastian being vocal in clarifying Robin's identity as a non-binary individual who uses she/her pronouns, the non-binary representation is muddled because of the time the book is set. The contemporary setting inherently avoids these pitfalls and naturally gives authors greater flexibility in the LGBTQ+ identities they can easily represent. Of course, as shall be shown the contemporary setting does not guarantee greater diversity.

Comparing the beginning of the decade with the end of the decade reveals how the queer romance genre has progressed in the 2010s. Before 2015 the most popular sexuality found in queer romance novels was gay, with a massive 66.3% of all protagonists in the 3,493 queer romances I catalogued having this identity [Figure 33]. In part, this can be explained due to the sheer popularity of M/M Romances, but it does show there was little diversity in the sexualities of the male M/M queer romance heroes. In general, very little diversity was seen in the sexualities in the period 2010 – 2014, with gay and lesbian identities being present in 97.3% of the queer romances published. The next biggest sexuality in period was bisexual at 9.1%, however, it is worth noting that in many M/M Romances written before 2015, bisexual 'male heroes may not understand themselves as 'really' gay and may be portrayed as heterosexual men whose beloved simply happens to be another man'.[260] This was called the Gay-For-You or Bi-For-You trope and it was incredibly popular

[260] Roach, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*, p. 180.

when M/M Romances first came to prominence.[261] In contrast, after 2015 a larger proportion of LGBTQ+ sexualities are represented in queer romances.

Figure 33: Bar Chart showing the % Breakdown of Main Character's Sexuality in Queer Romances published between 2010 - 2019



Although gay remained the most common sexuality after 2015 it is interesting that the number of books featuring lesbian protagonists increased from 31% to 43.4% whereas books featuring gay protagonists decreased from 66.3% to 51.7%. This suggests that queer romances featuring female protagonists became more common in the latter half of the decade, a theory that is corroborated by Lesbian Romances becoming the most prevalent type of queer romance by 2019. Although gay and lesbian identities still dominate queer romance novels, with 95.1% of all queer romances featuring one of these sexualities, a far greater cross-section of sexualities are represented after 2015.

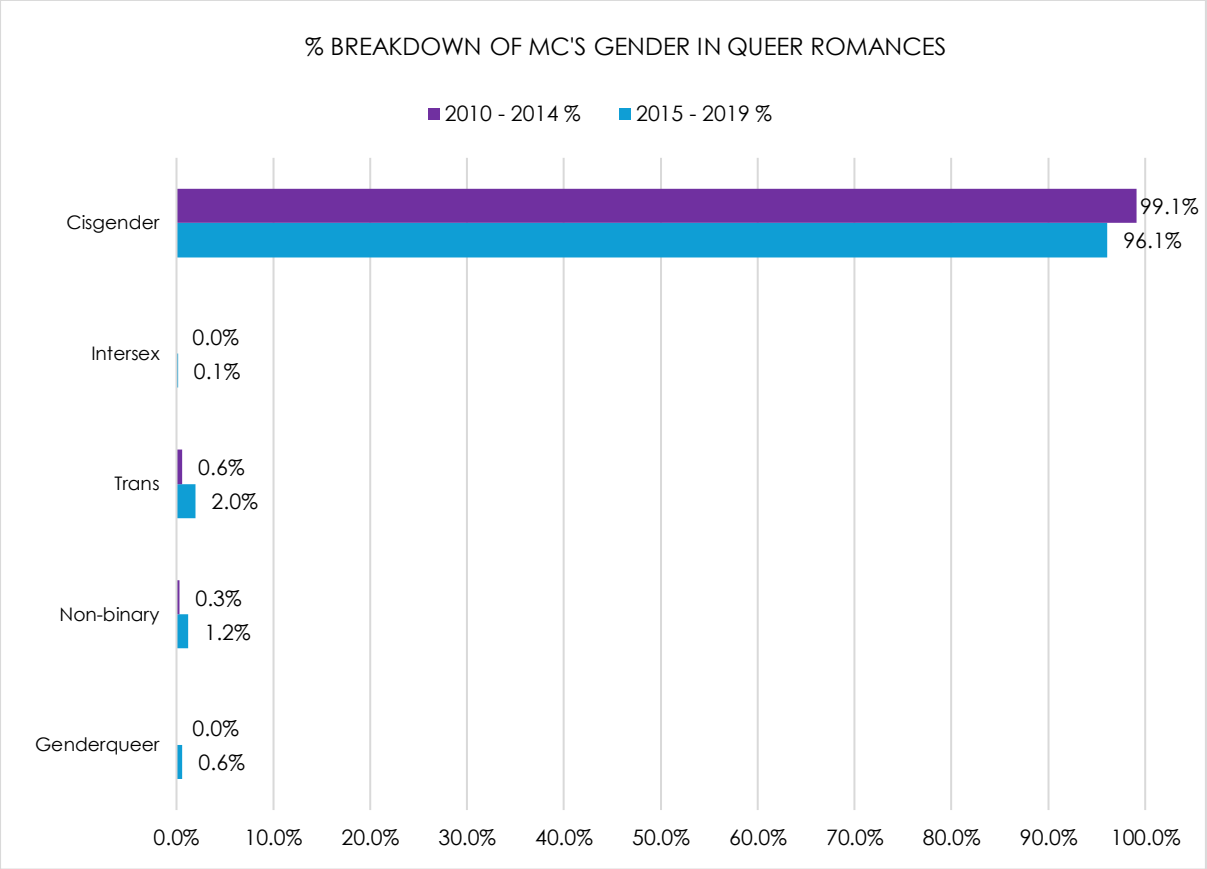
[261] 'Best Gay For You Romance', *Goodreads*, 2009 <https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/2546.Best_Gay_For_You_Romance> [accessed 3 June 2024].

Several sexual identities appear in my database for the first time after 2015 - aromantic (0.1%), asexual (1.5%), demisexual (0.7%) and queer (0.8%); in addition, bisexual and pansexual protagonists featured more frequently appearing in 19.1% (previously 9.1%) and 1.7% (previously 0.4%) of the books published. Interestingly polyamorous identities are the only ones that decrease after 2015, going from 4.9% to 3.0%.[262] This data does suggest that the queer romance community is writing, producing, and reading books with greater sexual diversity. This prompted me to question if the same finding could be discovered regarding the gender of the main characters.

Before 2015, 99.1% of queer romances featured cisgender protagonists which decreased to 96.1% by 2019. A lack of gender diversity is still an issue within queer romances but a 3% increase in the number of non-cisgender main characters does suggest movement in the right direction.

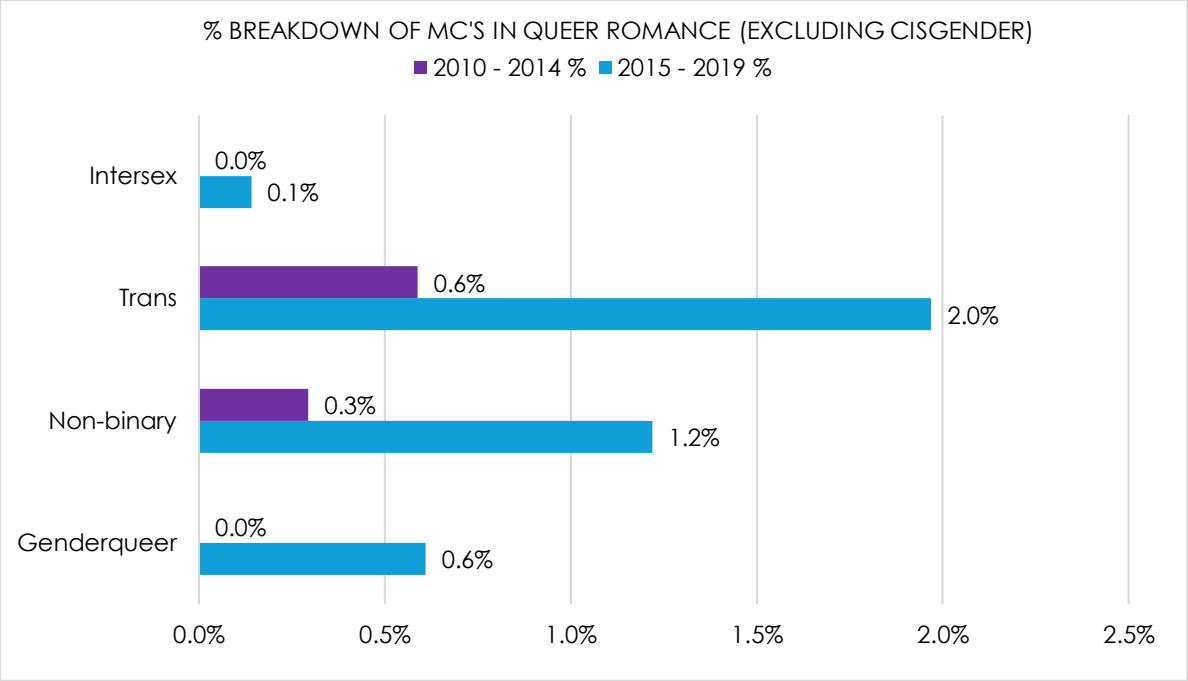
[262] Polyamorous romances and the impact they can have on the HEA will be examined in Chapter 3: The Queer HEA.

Figure 34: Bar Chart showing the disparity in Main Character's gender identities in queer romances published between 2010 - 2019



The number of transgender main characters increased from 0.6% to 2% and non-binary main characters increased from 0.3% to 1.2%. In addition, the range of genders being represented increased during this time with genderqueer and intersex main characters only appearing after 2015.

Figure 35: Bar Chart showing Main Character's gender identities (excluding cisgender main characters) in queer romances published between 2010 - 2019[263]

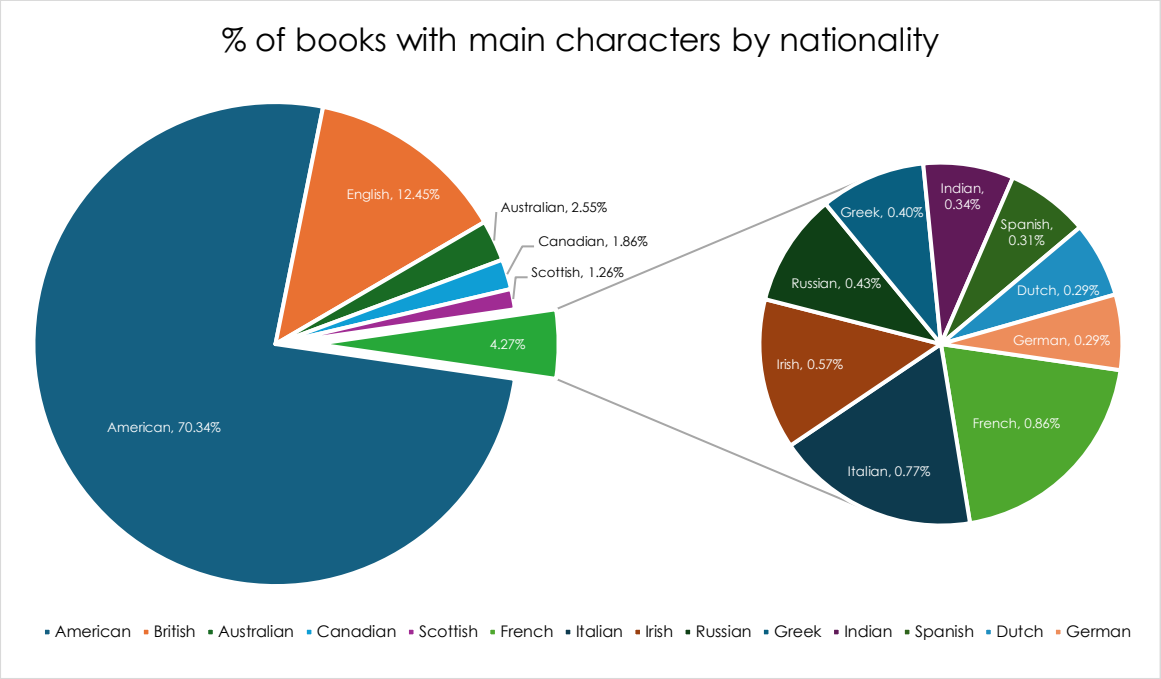


It is important not to overestimate the increase from the 2010 – 2014 figures as these are still tiny numbers accounting for less than 4% of all queer romances published between 2015 – 2019, however, it certainly suggests a shift towards greater gender diversity within the queer romance genre.

Data was also collected on the main character's nationality to determine if some nationalities were more frequently represented than others; when this information was unknown N/A was used instead.[264] Starting with nationalities it quickly became apparent that 'American' was the most popular nationality at 70.3%.

[263] N/A was logged for 481 books or 13.77% of the books but these results have been excluded from the charts below for ease of comprehension.
[264] The N/A entry was also used for books with settings that didn't reflect real-life identities

Figure 36: Pie Chart showing the % breakdown of main character's nationalities in queer romance published between 2010 - 2019



This was followed by English[265] at 12.45%, Australian at 2.55%, Canadian at 1.86%, Scottish at 1.26% and fifty six other nationalities that appeared in less than 1% of the queer romance novels catalogued.[266] Only queer romance novels published in English were included in my data and this will certainly have contributed to the top five countries in the catalogue all being territories that have English as the primary language. However, the overwhelming number of American protagonists does suggest that heroes/heroines from these countries

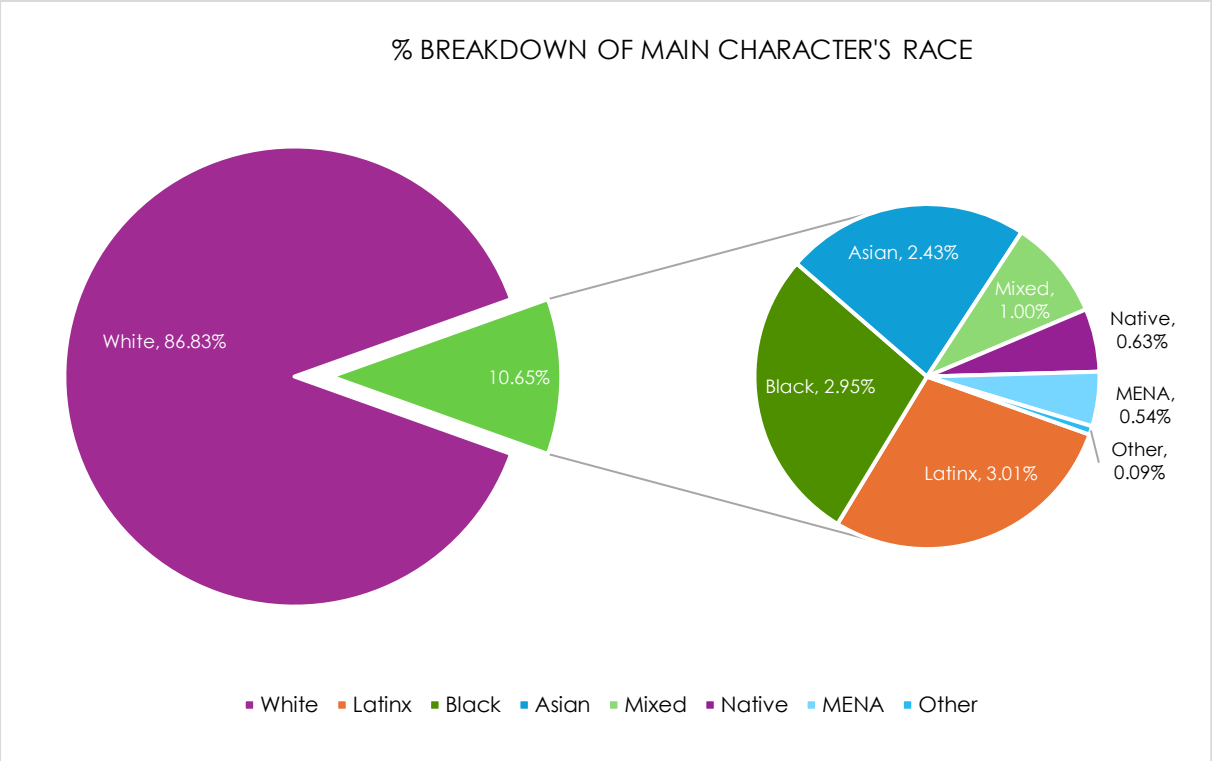
[265] English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish identities were catalogued, rather than using 'British'. If it was unclear what nationality within the UK the main character identified as 'English' was used.

[266] In addition 47 other nationalities were catalogued: Japanese (0.26%), Mexican (0.26%), Korean (0.23%), Welsh (0.23%), Chinese (0.14%), Egyptian (0.14%), Belgian (0.11%), Cuban (0.11%), Hong Kongese (0.11%), New Zealander (0.11%), Portuguese (0.11%), Brazilian (0.09%), Swedish (0.09%), Bosnian (0.06%), Dominican (0.06%), Filipino (0.06%), Jamaican (0.06%), Nigerian (0.06%), Nepalis (0.06%), Norwegian 0.06%), Puerto Rican (0.06%), Romanian (0.06%), Singaporean (0.06%), South African (0.06%), Thai (0.06%), Armenian (0.03%), Austrian (0.03%) Croatian (0.03%), Haitian (0.03%), Indonesian (0.03%), Iranian (0.03%), Iraqi (0.03%), Israeli (0.03%), Liberian (0.03%), Libyan (0.03%), Liechtensteiner (0.03%), Maltese (0.03%), Monégasque (0.03%), Mongolian (0.03%), Peruvian (0.03%), Polish (0.03%), Samoan (0.03%), Taiwanese (0.03%), Trinidadian (0.03%), Turkish (0.03%), Ukrainian (0.03%), Vietnamese (0.03%)

appear in the majority of queer romance novels. It could also reflect the higher number of American publishing houses within the queer romance ecosystem, in my catalogue 39/54 publishers were based in America. The role of America in the queer romance ecosystem, and how it is perceived by readers and writers, will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Four: Queer Romance Today.

I also looked at the race of the main character to assess which races are most frequent in queer romance novels. When looking at the main characters' race the N/A entry was again used in a situation where the race of a protagonist was unclear. An overwhelming 86.8% of the queer romance novels accounted for in my data feature a white protagonist.

Figure 37: Pie Chart showing the % Breakdown of Main Characters by Race in Queer Romances published between 2010 - 2019[267]



[267] There was also 398 or 11.39% N/A entries not shown on this pie chart.

The second biggest category was Latinx protagonists at 3.01% and the third biggest was Black protagonists at 2.95%. It is clear from these numbers that white protagonists are by far the most frequently represented in queer romance novels as only 10.65% of the queer romance novels catalogued (excluding N/A entries) featured at least one main character who wasn't white. Although queer romances are getting more diverse in their sexual representation these figures show they still have a long way to go in terms of racial diversity. This suggests that the majority of queer romance novels are not representing intersectional identities and instead still largely portray queer protagonists from white American backgrounds. There are authors who are writing diverse protagonists, like Alyssa Cole whose books frequently have Black main characters including *That Could Be Enough* (2018) and *Once Ghosted, Twice Shy* (2019), two queer romances featuring Black lesbian and bisexual main characters. Similarly, Remmy Duchene, a less well-known author, has published numerous novels including *Osaki* (2015) and *The Smell of Camellias* (2017) that feature Black and Asian queer male characters. However, the above data does suggest that writers like Alyssa Cole and Remmy Duchene are the outliers.

With my data I am able to bring a holistic view of the queer romance ecosystem in the 2010s by looking at readers, writers and main characters. The reader analysis of queer romances was harder to contextualise in previous periods due to the ephemeral nature of the publishing houses, authors wishing to remain anonymous and the often covert readership they sold/marketed towards. Yet due to my data and the online nature of the contemporary queer

romance ecosystem it is possible to assess who is reading these queer romances. The last few years have seen more people questioning and exploring their identities with social media sites like TikTok exploding in popularity and gaining a reputation as a safe space for 'people questioning their gender identities and sexualities to explore and connect with one another'.[268] In the UK 'an estimated 1.4 million people aged 16 and over… identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) in 2019 - a statistically significant increase from 1.2 million in 2018' and a similar pattern can be seen in America and Australia.[269] Arguably queer romance novels offer a similar place for people to question, explore and learn about their own and others' gender and sexual identities but is this reflected in who is writing these romances?

From the eighty seven writers of queer romances surveyed by this project only 9.3% identify as straight [Figure 38] and 58.6% identify as cisgender [Figure 39], a vastly different picture than that painted by critics of the genre during the 2014 scandal. Although only a small sample, this data suggests that many queer romance writers are members of the LGBTQ+ community, even if they are not writing exclusively about their identities.

[268] Rebecca Jennings, 'How TitkTok Became a Haven for Queer and Questioning Kids', *Vox*, 3 August 2021 <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/22606245/tiktok-queer-fluid-bisexuality-nonbinary-filter>.
[269] Penelope McClure, Sexual Orientation, UK: 2019 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2019> [accessed 17 February 2022].

Figure 38: Bar Chart showing Writer Survey respondents' answer to the question 'What is your sexual identity?'

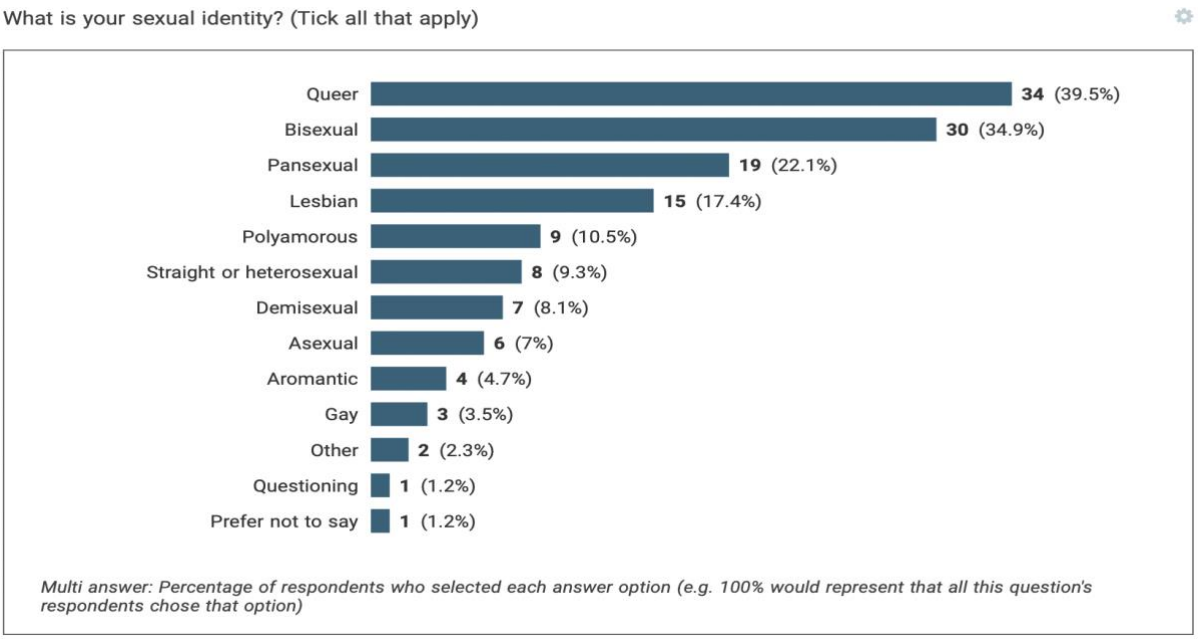
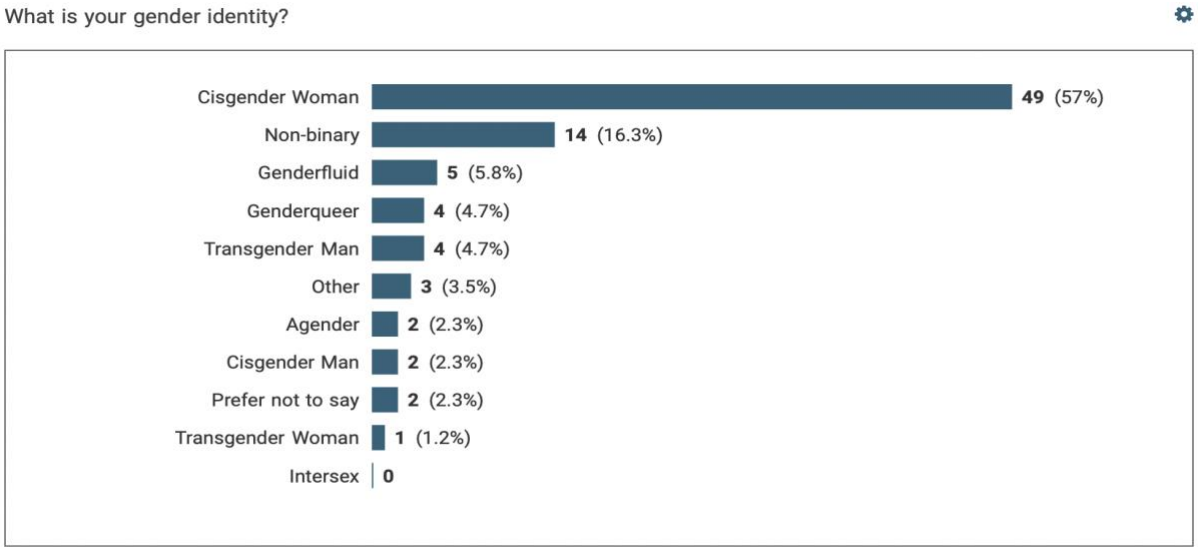


Figure 39: Bar Chart showing Writer Survey respondents' answer to the question 'What is your gender identity?'



How does this compare to the readers of queer romances? Of the 395 romance readers surveyed only 28.2% identified as straight [Figure 40] – again supporting the argument that most people reading queer romances self-identify as a member of the LBGTQ+ community. 78.2% of readers surveyed identified as cisgender, [Figure 41] a larger number than found in the writers but a smaller number than the main characters catalogued within the novels.

This suggests that the representation of trans and gender non-conforming main characters in queer romances is lower than in the people reading and writing them. However, more data is needed before such a statement can be concretely made.

Figure 40: Bar Chart showing Reader Survey Respondents' answer to the question 'What is your sexual identity?'

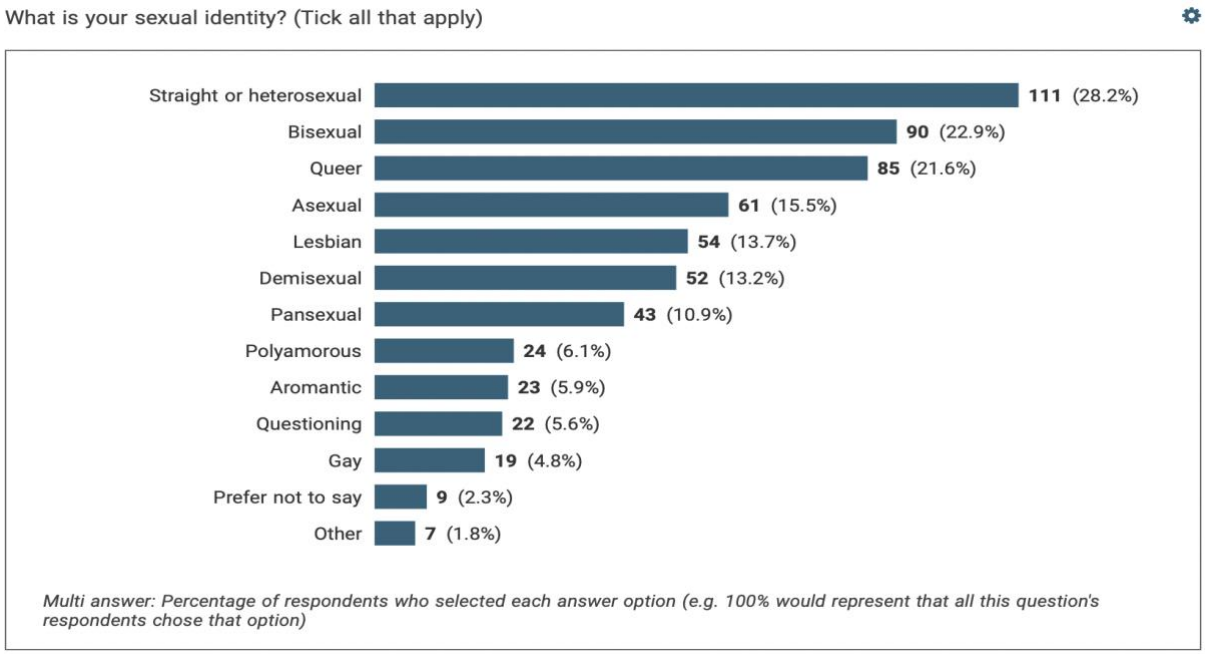
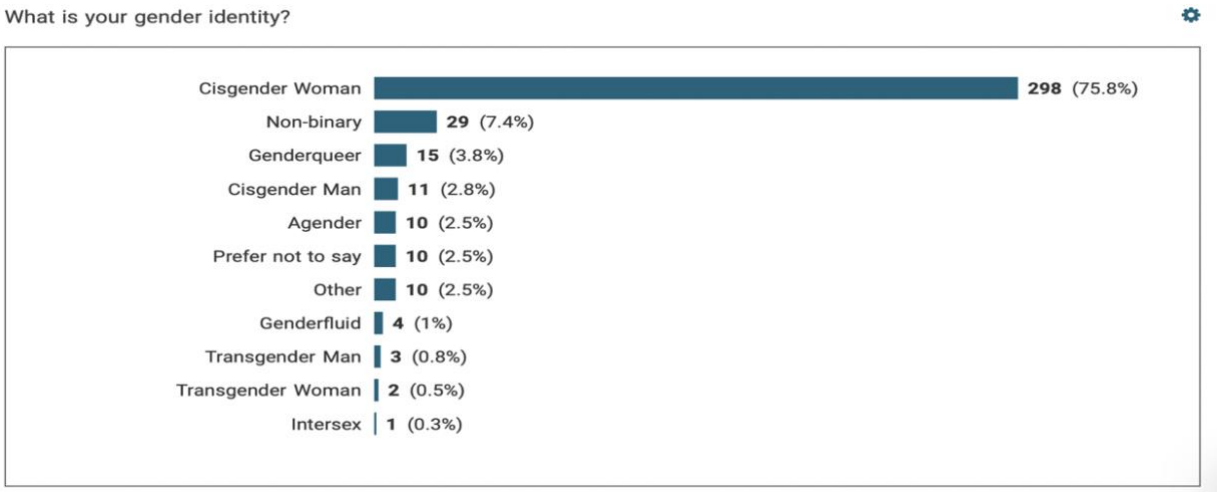


Figure 41: Bar Chart showing Reader Survey respondents' answer to the question 'What is your gender identity?'



In addition, 82.6% of writers and 85.5% of readers felt like they belonged to a community of people writing or reading LGBTQ+ romance novels. This data

provides evidence for queer romance novels, and the community that surrounds them, being perceived as a place for queer people to explore, connect and express their identities.[270]

Conclusion

My research has ultimately shown that queer romances have a dual literary heritage that borrows from, and is inspired by, both queer literature and the romance genre. In this chapter I have traced, for the first time, how queer romances evolved in the twentieth and twenty-first century and how their evolution was influenced by LGBTQ+ fiction, the romance genre, their social and political environments, and Western cultural ideas. Tracing this history highlights how these factors came together to create the queer romance genre that exists today. Prior to my research there was no existing history of the queer romance genre – although Regis had created one for heterosexual romance novels. Through my research I have demonstrated the historical nature of the genre, whose roots can be traced to the early 1900s, and how each period built upon the previous ones in terms of LGBTQ+ content and publishing ecosystem.

My data invalidates the preconception that the queer romance genre is largely written by straight women who are fetishising the male/male relationship. This is a genre in constant flux, one that is evolving and reacting to the publishing ecosystem it exists in. In the last five years more diverse sexualities and gender are being represented across the queer romance

[270] This idea is explored further in the Queer Romance Today chapter.

ecosystem. Yet it is still a genre that overwhelmingly portrays the white queer experience, with a focus on the American perspective. There are, of course, outliers to this like James Earl Hardy and E. Lynn Harris who wrote Black Gay Romances in the 1980s and contemporary authors like Remmy Duchene and Alyssa Cole (to name a few) who are writing racially diverse protagonists.

For this research, however, the next logical step is to analyse how queer romance protagonists are being represented. What is being borrowed from heterosexual romances? Do the novels incorporate or reflect the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ communities to look and act a certain way? To begin answering these questions the next chapter will focus on the queer body and how it is being represented within queer romance novels.

THE BODY IN QUEER ROMANCES

Introduction

When considering the body in queer romance novels, what romance tropes or expectations about the heroes and heroine's bodies do they invoke, or perhaps transform? That is the question that most concerns this chapter, but to answer it, first some thought must be given to the concept of gender and how it interacts with the body. Butler, building on previous scholarship, proposed that gender is 'performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results' and positioned the gendered body as 'always a doing' thing which is defined by its actions.[271] Amy Burge argued that 'gender difference is essential in romance'.[272] If this is true, how are queer bodies being constructed and performed in a genre that typically upholds and reinforces binary gender identities to facilitate narrative tensions?

Romance novels have historically presented readers with heroes and heroines who are white, athletic, able-bodied and heterosexual figures. This figure was arguably brought to life by romance novel cover model Fabio Lanzoni who found fame during his career as *the* romance cover hero of the 1980s and 1990s. He set the template for what the 'ideal 'hero'' should be, a template that 'hasn't changed much since Fabio's time – still outrageously masculine, white, heterosexual, non-disabled, neurotypical'.[273] Romance

[271] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge), p. 33.
[272] Burge, *Representing Difference in the Medieval and Modern Orientalist Romance*, p. 8.
[273] Isabelle Popp, 'Fabio Romance Novel Covers: By The Numbers', *Book Riot*, 2021 <https://bookriot.com/fabio-romance-novel-covers/>.

cover models like Fabio are known for 'gripping a comely woman against [their] glossy hairless chest[s] in a pose known as clinch'.[274] These covers, with their muscular, tall, handsome heroes embracing (or physically supporting) small, slender and beautiful heroines provided fuel to some of the earliest critiques of the genre.

In the 1970s, Greer described the romance genre as 'an enslaver of women', which put its female 'reader in bondage' and found no redeeming or original qualities in the genre.[275] She argued that the romance genre fed its readers a patriarchal, heteronormative view of relationships, bodies, and gender dynamics. In subsequent decades, scholars argued that romance novels merely served 'to recuperate women's subversive fantasies into structures of patriarchal power', or that romance novels just reflected the 'heterosexist family ideology of our culture'.[276] For these early scholars, romance novels merely copied and reinforced damaging attitudes around sex and gender, and presented their predominantly female readership with a narrow view of life that failed to create 'elaborate mature and triumphant models for female life beyond marriage, motherhood and femininity'.[277] These scholars implied that romance novels were a tool to keep women blissfully contained in a male-dominated world; a dynamic physically embodied

[274] Popp, 'Fabio Romance Novel Covers: By The Numbers'.
[275] Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (MacGibbon & Kee, 1970); Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 4.
[276] Leslie W. Rabine, *Reading the Romantic Heroine: Text, History, Ideology* (University of Michigan Press, 1985), p. 188; Keya Ganguly, 'Alien(Ated) Readers: Harlequin Romances and the Politics of Popular Culture', *Communication*, 12.2 (1991), pp. 129–50 (p. 144).
[277] Mussell, *Fantasy and Reconciliation: Contemporary Formulas of Women's Romance Fiction*, p. 189.

through the appearance of the heroes and heroines on some of the romance genre's covers.

These arguments are now a little dated, partly due to the way society, the romance genre and romance scholarship have evolved since the 1970s. In addition, these early critics rarely offered a close reading of individual novels and had little to say directly on the portrayal of the body – be it male or female – beyond determining whether it followed heteronormative and socially accepted conventions of beauty. Now critics generally agree that 'popular fiction does not simply confirm or authorize already existing assumptions and attitudes' but instead 'take part in a wider process of continual confirmation, and authorization of cultural norms'.[278] This is reflected in romance scholarship which now explores the body of the hero and heroine through a variety of lenses. Researchers Carole V. Bell, Sami Schalk and Pauline Suwanban, to name but a few, have written articles on race and non-white heroes and heroines in romance novels.[279] Allan, Ria Cheyne, Nankervis Madison and Sandra Schwab have researched representations of disabled bodies in romance novels.[280] Finally, academics Allan, Sonya Brown, Yanisa

[278] Lisa Fletcher, *Historical Romance Fiction: Heterosexuality and Performativity* (Ashgate, 2008), p. 57.
[279] Carole V. Bell, 'I'm Rooting for Everybody Black: Black Solidarity, Black World-Building, and Black Love', in *Black Love Matters: Real Talk on Romance, Being Seen, and Happily Ever After*, ed. by Jessica P. Pryde (Berkley, 2022), pp. 29–64; Sami Schalk, 'Happily Ever After for Whom? Blackness and Disability in Romance Narratives', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 49.6 (2016), pp. 1241–60, doi:doi:10.1111/jpcu.12491; Pauline Suwanban, 'From Exhalation to Transformation: The Female Body in the Orientalist Romance', *Dandelion: Postgraduate Arts Journal & Research Network*, 9.1 (2018), doi:10.16995/ddl.686.
[280] Jonathan A Allan, '"A Most Unlikely Hero": Disability, Masculinity, and Sexuality in Harlequin Superromance Novels', in *The Male Body in Representation: Returning to Matter*, ed. by Carmen Dexl and Silvia Gerlsbeck (Palgrave MacMillan, 2022), pp. 215–35; Ria Cheyne, *Disability, Literature, Genre: Representation and Affect in Contemporary Fiction* (Liverpool University Press, 2019); Madison, 'Diversity in Romance Novels: Race, Sexuality, Neurodivergence, Disability, and Fat Representation'; Sandra Schwab, '"It Is Only with One's Heart That One Can See Clearly": The Loss of Sight in Teresa Medeiros's The Bride and The

Khumwongdee and Shana McDavis-Conway have written on the portrayal of fat heroes and heroines in the romance genre.[281] These are all important areas of research and indicate the prominence of romance bodies research in the field. However, this chapter analyses the queer romance body – an area that has received little academic attention.

To understand and analyse bodies in queer romances, it is important to first establish, beyond just the legacy of Fabio, the 'standard' body for heroes and heroines in heterosexual romances. I start with an analysis of the queer male body, focusing on the *Captive Prince* trilogy (2008 – 2016) by C.S. Pacat to show how M/M Romances work within the boundaries of the heterosexual romance's gender dynamics. My close reading of *One Last Stop* (2021) by Casey McQuiston builds upon this argument by showing that in F/F Romances the physicality of the heroine's queerness is still kept within the boundaries of the heterosexual romance genre. Finally, I analyse *Peter Darling* (2017) by Austin Chant for the female-to-male trans* body and *A Lady for a Duke* (2022) by Alexis Hall for the male-to-female trans* body. Due to a lack of research on the trans* body in romance, I build upon broader scholarship about the trans* body and incorporate discussions from my focus group with queer romance readers in Australia, the UK and the US. I argue that *Peter Darling* and *A Lady*

Beast and Yours Until Dawn', *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 6.3 (2012), pp. 275–89.

[281] Jonathan A. Allan, 'One Sexy Daddy: Desirable Dad "Bods" and the Popular Romance Novel', in *Fashionable Masculinities: Queers, Pimp Daddies, and Lumbersexuals*, ed. by Vicki Karaminas, Adam Geczy, and Pamela Church Gibson (Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 2022), pp. 83–95; Sonya C. Brown, 'Does This Book Make Me Look Fat?', *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, 1.2 (2011); Yanisa Khumwongdee, 'Reading and Rewriting Fat Romance: A Study of Twenty-First Century Thai and US Fat Romance Novels' (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of York, 2021) <https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/29778/>; Shana McDavis-Conway, 'Self-Conscious, Unapologetic, and Straight: Fat Protagonists in Romantic Fiction', *Fat Studies*, ONLINE FIRST (2022), doi:doi:10.1080/21604851.2022.2047337.

for a Duke showcase the greatest potential for queer romances to break away from the gendered bodies and behaviours of heterosexual romance heroes and heroines.

The Male 'Romance Body'

Throughout the romance genre's history, the fascination with the hero's body is apparent. One only needs to look at the historical and continued popularity of characters like Mr Darcy from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the Sheik from E.M. Hull's *The Sheik* and Christian Grey from E.L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* to see that romance genre heroes are visible and objectified within society. These three and other romance heroes arguably respond to contemporary anxieties about masculinity, if not the male body itself. For example, the character of the Sheik was written in the context of the 'Crisis of masculinity' of WWI and its aftermath and helped develop 'the myth of the male possessed with extraordinary physical powers and talismanic potency'.[282] He is physically strong and virile, but also exotic and feminine, his masculinity designed to entice the book's female readers. *The Sheik* helped establish 'a new model of masculinity that transgressed normative American models' and is one of the most notable early examples of the female gaze shaping and creating the male body and masculinity.[283] In romance novels, which *The Sheik*

[282] Billie Melman, *Women and The Popular Imagination in The Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (Macmillan, 1988), p. 90.
[283] Gaylyn Studlar, 'The Perils of Pleasure? Fan Magazine Discourse as Women's Commodified Culture in the 1920s'', in *Silent Film*, ed. by Richard Abel (Rutgers University Press, 1996), pp. 163–98 (p. 287).

is an early example of, the male body, and by extension, the dominant form of masculinity has largely been created by women.

In the first close reading of romance in 1984, Radway identifies the 'spectacular masculinity' of the popular romance hero – a now often quoted phrase in romance scholarship due to the genre's continued fascination with the male body.[284] Radway stated that 'every aspect of [the hero's] being, whether [by] his body, his face, or his general demeanour, is informed by the purity of his maleness'.[285] Radway went on to explain that everything about the romance hero is 'hard, angular and dark', except for a small but 'important element of softness'.[286] She argued that it was only through this hint of softness, often brought out in the heroes' actions rather than any aspect of his physical appearance that made him truly desirable to both the heroine of the novel and its female readers. The harsher aspects of masculinity, those considered most undesirable by the female gaze, are tamed, transformed or removed by the heroine at the end of the novel.[287] Masculinity is not a fixed ideal, but one that shifts and transforms over time. However, within heterosexual romances, the role of the heroine and the female reader in constructing the hero's masculinity is constant. Of course, how the female gaze impacts the hero's masculinity will vary depending on the society of the time.[288] Some broad generalisations, however, can be made.

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[284] Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 128.
[285] Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 128.
[286] Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 128.
[287] Sarah S.G. Frantz, '"I've Tried My Entire Life to Be a Good Man": Suzanne Brockmann's Sam Starrett, Ideal Romance Hero', in *Women Constructing Men: Female Novelists and Their Male Characters, 1750 - 2000*, ed. by Sarah S.G. Frantz and Katharina Rennhak (Lexington Books, 2009), pp. 227–47 (p. 244).
[288] The Regency genre, for example, has rigid expectations for the hero and these are often transplanted directly into the M/M Regency novels.

As outlined in the introduction, Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity is useful in determining how the construction of masculinity impacts the body.[289] The romance hero is typically white, financially successful, cisgender, heterosexual, older, authoritative, athletic and self-sufficient.[290] This describes the hegemonic masculinity that is embodied in the traditional or 'alpha' romance hero. Physically the traditional hero will be described as tall, firm, muscular, powerful and dominant. He will hold a position of power in his society – be he a Duke in a Regency romance, a rebel leader in a science-fiction romance or a business owner in a contemporary romance. The hero's physical appearance is part of his power – it reinforces his hegemonic masculinity but also upholds the masculine ideal in society. The traditional hero, at the start of the novel, often presents a front of emotional unavailability. As the novel progresses, the heroine will draw out the softer elements of the hero's personality, which had only been briefly glimpsed by the reader and the heroine at the beginning of the novel.[291] Yet this type of hero, who dominated romance novels from the 1970s to the 1990s, would be joined in the twenty-first century by another – the 'beta' hero.

The beta hero challenges the hegemonic masculinity found in heterosexual romance novels because he 'possesses character traits more often associated with femininity' and 'never transforms into an authoritative, patriarchal figure'.[292] In contrast to his predecessor, he can more openly show

[289] Connell, *Masculinities*; Connell and Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept'.
[290] Allan, 'The Purity of His Maleness: Masculinity in Popular Romance Novels', p. 29.
[291] Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 128.
[292] Laura Vivanco and Kyra Kramer, 'There Are Six Bodies in This Relationship: An Anthropological Approach to the Romance Genre', *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, 1.1

his 'softness' by being patient, kind, laid back and less financially successful.[293] Rather than being a leader in both his personal and professional life, he is positioned as a partner who will support the heroine in her dreams. However, despite these personality differences, the physicality of the beta hero is largely the same as the heroes who came before him. Physically, these new heroes 'should 'look' like a conventional man' and as a result, they often retain the physical appearance of the traditional hero.[294] Although referring to them as the 'dangerous hero' and the 'sentimental hero', Regis briefly discusses these two differing romance heroes, arguing that despite other behavioural differences they are both 'still strong, virile, manly'.[295] The beta hero will still be tall, strong, brawny, broad-shouldered, masculine, and striking – to list just a few. As Kamblé argues beta heroes are still 'good-looking… strong, protective' but are more laidback about their heterosexuality and do not need to be a sexual aggressor or playboy to re-affirm their straightness.[296] Regardless of the type of hero, whether alpha or beta, 'it is rather unlikely to encounter a hero' in a heterosexual romance who possesses 'an average body shape or form' because 'muscularity goes hand in hand with sexual allure'.[297] The male body in heterosexual romances, throughout the decades, has retained its athletic, muscular casing. In this sense, it has evolved alongside the body types of Western society, where images in mainstream media outlets show 'declines in

(2010) <http://jprstudies.org/2010/08/there-are-six-bodies-in-this-relationship-an-anthropological-approach-to-the-romance-genre-by-laura-vivanco-and-kyra-kramer/> [accessed 9 March 2020].

[293] The beta hero is often the charming guy next door or the patient single dad rather than a leader of society like the alpha hero.

[294] Zidle, 'From Bodice-Ripper to Baby-Sitter: The New Hero in Mass-Market Romance', p. 25.

[295] Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 113.

[296] Kamblé, *Making Meaning in Popular Romance Fiction: An Epistemology*, p. 110.

[297] Arvanitaki, *Masculinities in Post-Millennial Popular Romance*, p. 56.

female body fat and increases in male muscularity'.[298] As Brown states, the romance genre positions 'the hero as [a] trophy' and a fat hero does not align with this viewpoint.[299] In her words 'sex with a fat man is as unrepresentable as a fat female body' because the body of the male hero is a fantasy created by, and for, its largely female audience.[300] How then does the male body in queer romance fit into these genre expectations? Through a close reading of the *Captive Prince* trilogy, I argue that the queer male body is informed by the heterosexual romance genre and the expectations placed on the bodies of gay men in Western society.

Queer Male Bodies in the *Captive Prince* Trilogy by C.S. Pacat

The *Captive Prince* trilogy was written by Pacat, an Australian author who publicly identifies as queer and genderqueer, using both he/him and she/her pronouns.[301] The M/M fantasy romance trilogy consists of three novels: *Captive Prince* (2013), *Prince's Gambit* (2015) and *Kings Rising* (2016).[302] The novels tell the story of Damen, former heir to Akielos, who has been forced into slavery by his half-brother, and compelled to serve the crown prince of his enemy Prince Laurent of Vere. For most of the trilogy, the reader follows Damen, with a single chapter dedicated to Laurent's viewpoint. Damen is both a prince born to rule

[298] D. Frederick, D. Fessler, and M. Haselton, 'Do Representations of Male Muscularity Differ in Men's and Women's Magazines?', *Body Image*, 2 (2005), pp. 81–86 (p. 84).
[299] Brown, 'Does This Book Make Me Look Fat?'
[300] Brown, 'Does This Book Make Me Look Fat?'
[301] C.S. Pacat, 'C.S. Pacat on Twitter: "Heya All, I'm out as Queer, and Genderqueer. I've Been out for Almost Twenty Years (since the 90s!)." / Twitter' <https://twitter.com/cspacat/status/926729376690995200> [accessed 30 June 2020].
[302] *Captive Prince* started as a piece of original fanfiction available on LiveJournal for free between 2008 - 2012. It was then self-published by Pacat in 2012 before the rights to the trilogy were brought by Penguin Random. Penguin re-released *Captive Prince* in 2013, which was followed by *Prince's Gambit* and *Kings Rising*.

and a slave in the first novel. He is thrown into a court where Laurent should be powerful as the heir apparent but is controlled by his corrupt uncle, the Regent.

The *Captive Prince* trilogy has been praised as 'one of the tipping points for th[e] rise of queer-normative fantasy universes'.[303] Although the fantasy/science-fiction genre has been used to explore queer identities for centuries, it is only since the early 2000s that explicitly queer characters have found a foothold in the fantasy genre.[304] Pacat's trilogy 'was revolutionary' because the 'gay male romance at its centre… was questioned in just about every way except on the basis of it being gay'.[305] While the *Captive Prince* trilogy does not revolve around the sexuality of its main characters, it is debatable whether it presents a queer-normative portrayal of its heroes' bodies.[306] Certainly, Laurent's and Damen's masculinities are informed by the political worlds they inhabit and their different cultural backgrounds, as well as the romance genre and Western society. Allan argues that M/M Romance novels have an 'underlying commitment to and belief in hegemonic masculinity that does not disappear once the clothing is removed'.[307] For Allan, even when M/M Romances try to shift away from hegemonic masculinity, they continue to reinforce the complementary gendered physicality of the

[303] Mikaella Clements, '"Why Would I Close the Door to a Queer Person?" LGBTQ Fantasy Comes of Age', *The Guardian*, 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jan/14/lgbtq-sex-fantasy-fiction-books> [accessed 23 July 2020].
[304] Early examples of fantasy/science-fiction stories with queer characters are *Camilla* (1872) by Le Fanu and *Orlando* (1928) by Virginia Woolf, to name just a few.
[305] Clements, '"Why Would I Close the Door to a Queer Person?" LGBTQ Fantasy Comes of Age'.
[306] The term queer-normative refers to a world where queer theories and values are the assumed normal. It was first coined in Jason Orne, *Boystown: Sex and Community in Chicago* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), p.215.
[307] Allan, *Men, Masculinities, and Popular Romance*, p. 93.

heterosexual romance hero and heroine. The assumption is that heterosexual romances are 'ordered by heteronormative gender binaries' where heroines' bodies are constructed and performed on the hypothesis that 'desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire'.[308] Romance heroines are often described as physically weaker than their male heroes, be that through their height, slighter bodies and/or lack of physical pursuits. This idea of complementary, gendered characteristics between the hero and heroine will be useful in my analysis of Damen and Laurent. I argue that with the depiction of Damen and Laurent's bodies, the *Captive Prince* trilogy conforms to romance genre expectations but is also influenced by Western society's expectations for gay men.

Damen is a Prince of Akielos, a kingdom inspired by the Empires of Ancient Greece and Rome, which serves as a clear reference point for gay masculinity.[309] Akielos society values athleticism, physical prowess and honour – where 'among the Akielon nobility, dominance is a sign of status'.[310] Both same-sex and opposite-sex pairings are normal, although there are expectations that the higher-ranking individual will be the dominant partner regardless of gender. As the Prince and future King, Damen is shown to epitomise the 'powerfully muscled and physically imposing' hero, despite having just been captured.[311] The reader is told that 'the force of his body

[308] Burge, *Representing Difference in the Medieval and Modern Orientalist Romance*, p. 78; Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 30.
[309] C.S. Pacat, 'C.S. Pacat on Twitter: "I'm a Proud Wog, Though the Australian Minority-Ethnic Identity 'Wog' Can Be Difficult to Explain to Non-Australians Https://T.Co/ZgpiC5uSVg" / Twitter' <https://twitter.com/cspacat/status/770149563193708544> [accessed 30 June 2020].
[310] C. S. Pacat, *Captive Prince*, Captive Prince Trilogy, 1 (Berkley Books, 2015), p. 35.
[311] Pacat, *Captive Prince*, p. 2.

looked only barely contained' and that 'the sheer power of his body was barely held in check'.[312] It is interesting to note that all these descriptions take place on a single page, the similarity and repetition of these phrases placing the emphasis firmly on the muscularity and strength of Damen's body. The reader is introduced to Damen during a moment of weakness when he has been captured and sent into slavery. Yet, what is stressed by Pacat is the power and strength of Damen's body. This remains a theme throughout the trilogy when it comes to the descriptions of Damen's body, particularly in the first novel *Captive Prince*. Although Damen is a slave with little to no actual power he is consistently described as 'a really powerful male' with body 'proportions suited to battle'.[313] He also describes himself and is described by others as a 'barbarian' seventeen times throughout the trilogy. When Veretian guards are looking for him and Laurent in *Prince's Gambit,* Damen is described as 'a barbarian soldier, a giant animal'.[314] By *Kings Rising,* Damen is even willing to play into this description, particularly when interacting with Veretians, thinking 'he knew what Veretian eyes saw when they looked at him: a barbarian in savage splendour. He did nothing to lessen the impression'.[315] The words used to describe Damen – powerful, forceful, barbarian, muscular – all play into the image of the traditional hero found in heterosexual romances and the type of masculinity praised by his Akielon culture. He is tall, dark and handsome, and his body conveys power and dominance. Despite Damen being bisexual and having sexual thoughts about both men and women

[312] Pacat, *Captive Prince*, p. 2; Pacat, *Captive Prince*, p. 2.
[313] Pacat, *Captive Prince*, p. 92; Pacat, *Captive Prince*, p. 127.
[314] C. S. Pacat, *Prince's Gambit*, Captive Prince Trilogy, 2 (Berkley Books, 2015), p. 96.
[315] C. S. Pacat, *Kings Rising*, Captive Prince Trilogy, 3 (Berkley Books, 2016), p. 181.

throughout the trilogy, the way his body is portrayed perpetuates a heteronormative performance. Physically he is perceived as the dominant male, who has been brought down temporarily by circumstance. This ideology is reinforced by the fact the *Captive Prince* trilogy is told almost solely from Damen's perspective; he is the hero that the reader follows. He is presented as a heroic, honourable man who has been brought down by corruption and greed; it is his journey from enslavement to ruler of Akielos that drives the plot.

Another way to read Damen's body is through the expectations placed on gay men in Western society. Damen's body is physically muscular, powerful and athletic – a description that aligns with the move in mainstream media 'towards a highly masculine construction of gay celebrities' who have 'muscular physique[s] and masculine mannerism[s]'.[316] Damen's 'queerness', his bisexuality, is packaged and contained in a safe, socially acceptable form of masculinity that is often equated with straightness. Allan argued a similar point in 2016 when he stated that in romance novels 'the male body must be constructed by what it is not - feminine, queer, and homosexual'.[317] Although Allan was talking about the construction of the male body in heterosexual romances, his argument can also be applied to M/M Romances like the *Captive Prince* trilogy. Damen is explicitly bisexual in his actions, having sex with both men and women throughout the trilogy. Yet his queerness is contained in a straight-performing package for the readers. With Damen, Pacat has 'worked carefully to construct a male body that is desirable to heterosexual

[316] Zheng Zhu, '"Straight" Acting: Changing Image of Queer-Masculinity in Media Representation', *Journal of Arts & Humanities*, 5.9 (2016), pp. 23–35 (p. 25); Zhu, '"Straight" Acting: Changing Image of Queer-Masculinity in Media Representation', p. 28.
[317] Allan, 'The Purity of His Maleness: Masculinity in Popular Romance Novels', p. 35.

women… including in novels that are ostensibly about men' and male desire.[318] Damen's body aligns with the alpha romance hero described above - he is a safe, hegemonic male for the, primarily, female readership of the *Captive Prince* trilogy to root for, lust after and experience the world through.

In contrast, the second hero of the trilogy, Laurent, has a more complex relationship with masculinity. Damen's masculinity is secured largely through the physicality of his body, which embodies the type of hegemonic masculinity most prized in romance novels. However, Laurent's masculinity less easily aligns with the hegemonic romance hero ideal because his body and physicality are most similar to the 'pets' of the Veretian court. Vere is a Kingdom of ornamentation, excess, decadence and treachery; for Damen, it is a 'country of honeyed poison'.[319] In Vere, same-sex pairings are normal outside of marriage, although within marriage opposite-sex pairings are still expected, and as such most high-ranking Veretians will have pets. The Veretian pets are young, attractive 'exotic creatures in brightly coloured silks… beautiful faces daubed with paint' and covered with jewels.[320] This dynamic takes inspiration from the Ancient Greek practice of pederasty where an older man and a younger man would be in a socially acknowledged romantic relationship outside of marriage. Like the master/pet relationship depicted in *The Captive Prince* trilogy at the Veretian court, the pederasty relationships came with a complex social-sexual etiquette and were an important social institution for the

[318] Allan, 'The Purity of His Maleness: Masculinity in Popular Romance Novels', p. 36.
[319] Pacat, *Captive Prince*, p. 32.
[320] Pacat, *Captive Prince*, p. 31.

upper classes.[321] The world-building of Vere also borrows from Orientalism, which Edward Said redefined as the Western artistic and academic tradition of interpreting the Eastern world through the lens of European imperialism. As a result 'the essential relationship, on political, cultural, and even religious grounds, was seen… to be one between a strong and weak partner', with the Eastern world taking the position of the weak.[322] This relationship between a strong and weak partner is reflected in the Veretian court's master/pet system. Youth, beauty and sensuality are prized among the male pets but the masters are often older and austere, with broad heavy shoulders.[323] The world-building of Vere draws upon 'the Western fantasy of a sequestered, sexualised domain' of the Oriental harem. This connection is reinforced in the opening sentence of the trilogy where Lady Jokaste states 'we hear that your Prince… keeps his own harem'.[324] Aside from being a site of eroticism and sexuality, the 'harem [also] served to ensure imperial power through managing access to the secluded body of the sultan'.[325] In the same manner, the pets/master system of Vere serves to limit access to the Regent and other powerful men, who have their choice of pets and can control others through the system. This exoticising approach to characters' bodies, is comparable to effects in heterosexual romance, as discussed in scholarship on Orientalism in *The Sheikh*.[326] It is

[321] John Pollini, 'The Warren Cup: Homoerotic Love and Symposial Rhetoric in Silver', *Art Bulletin*, 81.1 (1999), pp. 21–52.
[322] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage, 1978), p. 61.
[323] Pacat, *Captive Prince*, p. 22.
[324] Reina Lewis, 'The Harem: Gendering Orientalism', in *Orientalism and Literature*, ed. by Geoffrey P. Nash (Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 166–84 (p. 166); Pacat, *Captive Prince*, p. 1.
[325] Lewis, 'The Harem: Gendering Orientalism', p. 166.
[326] Amy Burge, 'Introduction to the Special Issue on The Sheik', *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, 9.Special Issue Introduction 2 (2020), pp. 1–5; Teo Hsu-Ming, 'Orientalism and Mass Market Romance Novels in the Twentieth Century', in *Edward Said: The Legacy of a Public*

between these two versions of masculinity, that of the youthful, beautiful pets and the older, austere masters, that Laurent is trapped.

Physically, Laurent more closely resembles the submissive and sensual pets with his 'astonishingly lovely face', 'skin as fair as a young girl's, smooth and unmarked' and a body of graceful lines and delicate bones.[327] These descriptions of Laurent, with their emphasis on youth, position Laurent in the Ancient Greek practice of pederasty as the younger, less experienced male. The connotations of a submissive engendered form of masculinity also invoke Orientalism.[328] Words like 'lovely', 'elegant', 'graceful' and 'delicate' imply a certain femininity to Laurent's appearance. In the Veretian court, his appearance aligns him with the pets who hold little power and are treated as sexual ornaments by their masters.[329] It is worth noting that Laurent's slender and effeminate body echoes the ideal gay body that was often seen in pre-AIDS queer fiction, whereas Damen's body exemplifies the desirable post-AIDS body that emphasised health and muscularity. Here Laurent's slender body is shown to be a problem, continuing the legacy of gay fiction in the post-AIDs world preferring muscular, 'healthy' bodies. Even Damen, who is not familiar with Veretian culture, is aware that Laurent's appearance is problematic when he thinks to himself that ''Laurent's pretty face wasn't doing him any favours'

Intellectual, ed. by Ned Curthoys and Debjani Ganguly (Melbourne University Press, 2007), pp. 241–62; Francesca Pierini, 'Olive Skin, Chocolate Eyes: The Legacy of The Sheik on Descriptive Patterns of the Italian Romantic Hero in Harlequin Short Contemporaries', *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, 9.Special Issue 2 (2020), pp. 1–19.

[327] Pacat, *Captive Prince*, p. 13; Pacat, *Captive Prince*, p. 56; Pacat, *Captive Prince*, p. 222.

[328] Said, *Orientalism*; Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and Expert Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (Pantheon Books, 1981); Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (Duke University Press, 1995).

[329] The pet/master system references the Oriental harem as discussed earlier.

when Laurent is tasked with leading a military encampment.[330] Due to his slighter frame and slender, more feminine features, Laurent often has to work to gain the respect of those around him, particularly in military situations. One of the ways he does this is through his clothing. For the majority of the trilogy, Laurent's body is hidden from the reader and Damen by clothing.

Through his choice of clothing, Laurent is constantly trying to reassert his masculinity by dressing similarly to his uncle, the Regent. The Regent is the leader of Veretian society, he is 'a commanding man in his forties, bulky, with heavy shoulders. His hair and beard were dark' and Damen notes 'there was no physical resemblance between the Regent and his nephew' Laurent.[331] The Regent physically embodies the accepted form of masculinity for masters and leaders in Vere society. Laurent's clothing is described as 'dark blue', 'severe, hard-laced', 'no jewellery, not even rings' and 'repressively covering him from toe to neck'.[332] Even Damen notes Laurent's clothing in comparison to 'the pets [who] had dressed differently, offering ease of access'.[333] Laurent is carefully choosing his clothing to construct a certain image and counteract his more natural feminine appearance. By dressing so severely, and keeping himself covered up and concealed, Laurent is distancing himself from the pets that he is physically more similar to. As McAlister noted in her analysis of the heroine Kit from *Untamed* by Anna Cowan, clothing can be used 'as a way of

[330] Pacat, *Prince's Gambit*, p. 17.
[331] Pacat, *Captive Prince*, p. 23.
[332] Pacat, *Captive Prince*, pp. 20, 14, 14, 20.
[333] Pacat, *Captive Prince*, pp. 34, 43.

claiming the status and agency that is afforded to men in her society'.[334] Laurent does this because his androgynous features and slighter frame are not typically associated with the version of masculinity that is required of a master, a leader, in Vere society. The performativity of this is revealed when Laurent believes he is alone in the privacy of his chambers, where he wears 'only pants and a white shirt, the material so fine it did not require embroidery'.[335] This simple, unadorned clothing is a stark contrast to the tightly layered, and rigid outfits he wears around the court. For Laurent, his clothing choices are a deliberate act of gender performativity and a way for him to claim the form of masculinity that Damen and Regent embody. In doing so he hopes to gain the status and respect that is afforded the Regent and Veretian councillors. When in 'public' Laurent deliberately uses clothing that will align him physically with the masters and Councillors of Vere, in an attempt to conceal and overcome his slighter frame and more feminine features.

At times, Laurent's more feminine physical features are shown to be an asset for his and Damen's plans. During *Prince's Gambit* and *Kings Rising,* comparisons are frequently made between Laurent and Lady Jokaste, a former lover of Damen's. In one scene, Laurent disguises himself as Lady Jokaste, with the duped guard telling Damen that 'the stories of Lady Jokaste's beauty are not exaggerated'.[336] It is only afterwards that the reader and Damen learn that it was Laurent and not Lady Jokaste that the guard spoke

[334] Jodi McAlister, '"You and I Are Humans, and There Is Something Complicated between Us": Untamed and Queering the Heterosexual Historical Romance', *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, 5.2 (2016), pp. 1–21 (p. 11).
[335] Pacat, *Captive Prince*, p. 166.
[336] Pacat, *Kings Rising*, p. 232.

to. Not only does this reinforce the similarities between Lady Jokaste and Laurent, but it also emphasises the femininity of Laurent's features. This type of disguise would not be an option for Damen, yet Laurent is easily able to pass as a well-known beauty in Akielos society. This scene also queers the long-established romance trope of the heroine masquerading as a boy, often 'as a symbolic way of laying claim to agency' without a true desire to 'pass as a man' on a full time basis.[337] The same is arguably true of Laurent in this scene because he uses his androgynous appearance and physical similarity with Lady Jokaste to aid himself and Damen in their quest to bring down his uncle; he does not truly wish to be a woman. This femininity is a performance for Laurent: one he uses for his own gains, but it is only possible because Laurent does not conform to the physical ideal of the romance hero. This scene is an example of Laurent using his appearance to his advantage, however, for most of the trilogy, Laurent's more feminine features work against him.

Laurent's ability to perform gender, whether it be masculine or feminine, makes it hard for the reader and Damen to truly know Laurent's body. This perhaps explains why when Laurent's body is revealed to Damen, and by extension the reader, Damen expresses surprise that Laurent has the 'proportioned musculature of a young man' with 'straight shoulders that taper to a narrow waist'.[338] This feeling of surprise is repeated in the *Prince's Gambit* when Damen sees Laurent naked and notes that Laurent 'looked like what he was: a young man' with 'the upper body musculature of a swordsman'.[339] The

[337] McAlister, '"You and I Are Humans, and There Is Something Complicated between Us": Untamed and Queering the Heterosexual Historical Romance', p. 7.
[338] Pacat, *Captive Prince*, p. 56; Pacat, *Prince's Gambit*, p. 130.
[339] Pacat, *Prince's Gambit*, p. 293.

surprise that Damen expresses reinforces the performativity of Laurent's appearance: a performance that is often working to overcome the femininity of Laurent's facial features. When this performance is stripped away, it reveals a body that is athletic and has a surprising muscularity given his slight frame. These descriptions, when combined with Laurent's 'astonishingly lovely face' and his 'smooth and unmarked' skin, give an androgyny to Laurent's physical appearance.[340] Laurent shares characteristics with the romance heroine through his grace, slighter frame and unblemished skin. Even Damen acknowledges that 'Laurent's dangerous grace lent him an almost androgynous quality'.[341] The scenes where Laurent's body is described as muscular are rare, and in general Laurent's body is rarely directly described without an allusion to clothing, or some other activity. This again aligns him with the romance heroine, whose body is rarely an object of fascination, and as shall be expanded upon later, is partly epitomised through a vagueness of description.

Even when Laurent and Damen have sex, Laurent's body is not described at length – the reader is told in passing about 'his hard pinked nipples', the 'taut muscles of his stomach', 'the scar on his shoulder' and 'the curve in his back'.[342] The part of him that is most vividly described is his anus, which 'was pinked, small, and tight, the curl of a calyx, impenetrable'.[343] There are certain hints of femininity in these brief descriptions, the word 'curve' and the 'curl of a calyx' referencing the imagery of a flower but largely Laurent's

[340] Pacat, *Captive Prince*, pp. 13, 56.
[341] Pacat, *Prince's Gambit*, p. 293.
[342] Pacat, *Kings Rising*, pp. 206, 206, 207, 207, 207.
[343] Pacat, *Kings Rising*, p. 208.

body when stripped of its artificial coverings, his clothing, is barely described at all. The emphasis during the scene is instead placed on the dynamic between Laurent and Damen, on the fact that Laurent is 'ceding power to Damen'.[344] This is reinforced by the fact that the only body part of Laurent's that is described in detail during this scene is his anus because it symbolises Damen's claiming of Laurent, who 'opened for it [with] a single, perfect slide'.[345] This scene is written with Laurent as the sexual submissive and Damen as the sexual aggressor. Here we can draw upon Butler's concept of 'intelligible genders' because the dynamic between Damen and Laurent mimics the heterosexual romance hero and heroine.[346] In this sex scene, Laurent and Damen 'institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity' regarding sex in heterosexual romances, with Laurent inhabiting the role of the romance heroine.[347] Like the romance heroine, Laurent is shown throughout the trilogy to be less strong and less physically capable than his romance hero Damen. When Laurent and Damen fight, Damen thinks 'Laurent was throwing everything at him,.. And he was still unable to hold ground' and later Laurent tells Damen 'I could never have beaten you', admitting that even while Damen was a pet he was still physically stronger than Laurent.[348] Whereas Damen is depicted as a natural warrior, one who revels in athletic pursuits, 'for Laurent, physical pursuits were not instinctive… Laurent had been bookish as a

[344] Maria Alberto, 'Slash, Romance and Pacat's Captive Prince', in *New Frontiers in Popular Romance: Essays on the Genre in the 21st Century*, ed. by Susan Fanetti (McFarland & Company, 2022), pp. 216–32 (p. 229).
[345] Pacat, *Kings Rising*, p. 210.
[346] Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, pp. 22–23.
[347] Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 23.
[348] Pacat, *Kings Rising*, pp. 134, 136.

boy, before he had reformed himself'.[349] This thought again shows that for Laurent the type of masculinity that is expected of him is more of a conscious performance and not one he innately embodies. Laurent's body is never shown to be stronger or more 'masculine' than Damen's, further replicating the physical dynamic between the hero and heroine in heterosexual romances.

In summary, the *Captive Prince* trilogy replicates the gender dynamic of the hero and heroine in heterosexual romances through the characters of Damen and Laurent. Damen personifies the hegemonic masculinity of a heterosexual romance hero – he is athletic, tall, physically imposing, a capable fighter and sexually experienced. He is also informed by the expectations placed on gay men in Western society, which demands 'a highly masculine construction'.[350] Damen's queerness is contained and made socially acceptable through his body's adherence to the heterosexual standard of the romance hero. In contrast, Laurent does not easily conform to the hegemonic ideal of the heterosexual romance hero. Throughout the trilogy, particularly in the first book *Captive Prince*, Laurent uses clothing to counteract his more feminine features and align himself with the stark and austere type of masculinity that the masters in Vere embody. Laurent's performativity is required because his facial features and slighter frame align him more closely with the pets of Vere society. They also align him with the heterosexual romance heroine. Like the romance heroine, Laurent is described as having a

[349] Pacat, *Kings Rising*, p. 151.
[350] Zhu, '"Straight" Acting: Changing Image of Queer-Masculinity in Media Representation', p. 28.

lovely face, unblemished skin, his frame is slight and his body is only briefly described. In addition, Laurent is sexually inexperienced and prefers to mentally outsmart a problem rather than use physical prowess – characteristics typically associated with romance heroines. The frequent allusions throughout the trilogy between Laurent and femininity help create the illusion of a gender binary between the couple. Although Laurent potentially offers a subversive portrayal of a gay romance hero through his leaner and less overtly masculine body, the fact that he can never physically overpower Damen limits this subversion. Instead, I argue that the *Captive Prince* trilogy reinforces and transposes the male and female bodies found in heterosexual romance into a queer context: Damen embodies the typical heterosexual romance hero and Laurent is positioned as the replacement figure for the heterosexual romance heroine.

The Female 'Romance Body'

The female body and femininity in romance scholarship are woefully undertheorized in comparison to the male body.[351] Mimi Schippers, in her article 'Recovering the Feminine Other', establishes a framework for identifying dominant femininities in given communities. She suggests answering three questions to determine what the dominant or most socially desirable type of femininity is in a given society – 'what characteristics or practices are understood as manly?[...] What characteristics or practices are womanly?'

[351] Connell and Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept'; Mimi Schippers, 'Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculininty, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony', *Theory and Society*, 36.1 (2007), pp. 85–102 (p. 85).

and finally 'of those practices and characteristics, which situate femininity as complementary and inferior to masculinity?'[352] The physical characteristics and embodied gendered behaviour of the heroes are defined above, but what are the physical characteristics and gendered behaviours of the romance heroines?

Romance scholarship has mirrored the novels by prioritising the male body and the concept of masculinity over the female body and femininity. It is difficult to find a clear definition of the standard body for the romance heroine. This is a sharp contrast to the numerous articles that seek to define, analyse and even disrupt definitions of the male body or more broadly masculinity in romance novels. Most articles that do approach the topic of the female body in the romance genre are largely concerned with the 'alternative' female body: be that the fat heroine or the non-white heroine.[353] It is interesting to note that most of these articles only briefly establish what the 'normal' female body is before positioning their chosen 'alternative' bodies against this norm. There appears to be an assumption made by academics that the standard female body in the romance genre is already a known entity without it having been defined.

Explorations of the heroine have often focused on her characteristics and actions rather than the portrayal of her body – this trend has emerged since Radway and Regis' work which, both in respective ways, re-ignited

[352] Schippers, 'Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculininty, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony', p. 101.
[353] McDavis-Conway, 'Self-Conscious, Unapologetic, and Straight: Fat Protagonists in Romantic Fiction'; Brown, 'Does This Book Make Me Look Fat?'; Suwanban, 'From Exhalation to Transformation: The Female Body in the Orientalist Romance'.

academic interest in the genre. Radway briefly discusses how in historical romances, the female body is often problematised at the beginning of the novel. In her analysis of the opening scene of *Fires of Winter* (1980), she showcases how Lindsey quickly 'establish[es] Brenna's deviation from the usual standards of femininity' and the fact that Brenna 'sees no value in being a woman'.[354] The heroine is positioned as different from the rest of her gender through her pursuit of typically masculine activities – in Brenna's case, her passion for and knowledge of using a sword. However, the 'true femininity' of Brenna 'is never left in doubt' due to her 'extraordinary capacity for empathetic nurturance and tender care'; Brenna's actions overwrite and reaffirm her 'true gender' much more than any physical descriptions of her body, at least according to Radway.[355] Regis, despite being the first to position the romance novel as being about 'women's freedom' and arguing that the genre maintains its popularity because it 'conveys the pain, uplift, and joy that freedom brings', had little to say on the physical portrayal of the female heroine.[356] Although she saw the romance genre as one that put the heroine first, her analysis focused on the heroine's narrative journey.

I posit, however, that the main reason for a lack of scholarship on the female body is because of how the female protagonist is described in the books themselves. Brown noticed that one-way authors avoided backlash from readers for writing plus-size heroines was 'by refusing to mention the exact size of a character' leaving the 'readers to imagine whatever they wish to

[354] Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 126.
[355] Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 127.
[356] Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. xiii.

about the heroine'.[357] This idea of vagueness when it comes to the description of the heroine's physical appearance is repeated in a few different places throughout Brown's article and while she positions it firmly within the context of the plus-size heroine, it has further reaching applications. In a review of *The Love Hypothesis* by Ali Hazelwood, a reader states that one of her problems with the book was 'we don't really know what Olive looks like… I guess she has brown hair based on the cover' but she 'couldn't picture Olive' beyond what the cover showed her.[358] Romance covers, when they contain a depiction of the heroes/heroines, are an important element in setting the readers' expectations of the masculinity and femininity of the main characters. Previously, this chapter explained how Fabio set the expectation of a topless, often hairless, muscular romance hero for a decade of romance books/readers – one that is arguably still in play today. Although these covers are famous for their heroes, they still feature the heroine, however, it is rare to see a romance cover that depicts a heroine without either having her head out of frame, facing away from the reader, or being shown in the abstract with few physical features. This contrast between how the romance heroines and heroes are depicted on the cover is interesting because it continues into the texts themselves.

In the majority of romance novels, the heroine's physical appearance is described far less than the hero's. Often the heroine is only physically described at the start of the novel and at the moment when the hero realises he loves

[357] Brown, 'Does This Book Make Me Look Fat?'
[358] Elena, 'Elena's Review of The Love Hypothesis', *Goodreads*, 2022 <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/56732449-the-love-hypothesis> [accessed 16 February 2023].

the heroine. Even then, the heroine's appearance at the start is often described in vague, emotionally detached language that will typically define her place in society.[359] For example, in a Regency romance, the wallflower heroine will be described as plain, too slender, or too bookish in comparison to society's diamonds. Because the heroine's body is described vaguely, the reader can fit herself into the role, making it easier for them to identify with her. It is only through the hero's eyes that the heroine is described as an object of desire, and often this will come at the moment of realisation where the emphasis will be placed on a particular physical feature or characteristic of the heroine – her eyes or sharp-wit for example – and how she makes the hero feel. Of course, it is important to clarify that not all romance heroines are plain, but the point is that they are not defined by their looks. Their physical appearance is rarely portrayed as the primary appeal for the hero, or the reader, within a heterosexual romance novel, so it is focused on less. The lack of description of romance heroines could also be due to narrative necessity, as for much of the genre's history, they were the sole protagonists and acted as the readers 'eyes'. Either way, the romance heroine's lack of description

[359] For example in *The Lady's Tutor* (Kensington, 2009) by Robin Schone the heroine Elizabeth is described on page 4 as having 'very white skin', 'not young' with 'faint lines radiat[ing] outward from the corners of pale hazel eyes', she has a face that is 'more round than oval', a 'nose more pug than aquiline' and 'her lips were too thin'. This description establishes her as an older woman, who is not the society definition of beautiful with her too thin lips and pug-like nose, which makes sense as at the start of novel she seeks Ramiel out because her politician husband has a mistress – she is not supposed to be a figure of desire at this point. She is also contrasted against the half-Arab hero Ramiel with the mention of her 'very white skin' that would be 'prized white' for an 'Arabian auction block'. Again in *Some to Trust* (Piatkus, 2018) by Mary Balogh, the heroine Elizabeth is described by the hero Colin as 'fair haired and trim of figure' with 'a face that was amiable more than it was obviously lovely', and although Colin considers her 'beautiful' he has learnt 'to look deeper than surface appearances to discover beauty' (Balogh, loc 191). This description quickly shows the reader that Colin already greatly admires Elizabeth, appropriate for a friends-to-lovers romance, but also that Elizabeth would not be considered a 'great beauty' by wider society, per Colin's own description.

provides a stark contrast to the genre's continued fascination with the male body.

In truth, it is harder to find common characteristics between romance heroines mainly because of the vagueness discussed above, but that does not mean none can be found. Romance heroines are typically young, often in their early 20s and they are nearly always younger than their male heroes. The heroines are often described as slender or slim but not shapeless, they have long hair and pretty eyes, they are nearly always shorter than the hero and have glowing skin free from blemishes. However, these female bodies are not created in a vacuum and in the romance genre in particular it is 'the construction of complementary and antithetical gender roles' that 'facilitates the romantic relationship'.[360] Although romance heroines are often slim they are rarely described as athletic and if they are it is no match for the romance hero's strength and physical prowess. The origins of the hero's and heroine's physical prowess disparity is in the heterosexual romances of the 1970s, which often feature the male hero raping or sexually coercing the female heroine.[361] Another relic from the long historicals of the 1970s is the age gap between the hero and heroine, an age gap that will often position the heroine as the more innocent and virginal party. Again, this power imbalance comes from a time when female characters could not be seen to enjoy sex or have any sexual desires.[362] However, it is telling that traces of this still exist in romance novels

[360] Burge, *Representing Difference in the Medieval and Modern Orientalist Romance*, p. 71.
[361] Angela R. Toscano, 'A Paraody of Love: The Narrative Uses of Rape in Popular Romance', *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, 2.2 (2012) <https://www.jprstudies.org/2012/04/a-parody-of-love-the-narrative-uses-of-rape-in-popular-romance-by-angela-toscano/>.
[362] Zidle, 'From Bodice-Ripper to Baby-Sitter: The New Hero in Mass-Market Romance', p. 25.

written today – romance heroines are on average still younger than their heroes and they will typically be less sexually experienced.[363] Using Schippers framework as a guide it seems that the dominant femininity for heroines in heterosexual romances is young, slender and sexually inexperienced – an almost direct contrast to the muscular, virile male hero. It is worth noting that the female body does not feel as clearly defined or definable as the male body in heterosexual romances and perhaps that itself, more than anything else, is the most defining characteristic of the heroine's body in heterosexual romances. So, how does this vagueness of femininity translate into a queer context?

Queer Female Bodies in *One Last Stop* by Casey McQuiston

To answer this question and explore how queer romances are portraying queer female bodies, I will analyse *One Last Stop* by Casey McQuiston as a case study for an F/F Romance novel. McQuiston is an American, New York Times-bestselling author who first found success with their debut novel *Red, White & Royal Blue*. *One Last Stop*, published in 2021, has quickly become one of the most popular F/F Romance novels. It came third in the romance novel category in Goodreads Choice Awards 2021 and was placed sixth in BookPage's top ten romance novels of 2021, demonstrating its popularity

[363] John Markert, *Publishing Romance: The History of an Industry, 1940s to the Present* (McFarland & Company, 2016), p. 68; Sandra A. Barletta, 'Cougars, Grannies, Evil Stepmothers, and Menopausal Hot Flashers: Roles, Representations of Age, and the Non-Traditional Romance Heroine' (unpublished PhD, Queensland University of Technology2014), p. 50 <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/72686/3/Sandra_Barletta_Thesis.pdf>.

within the romance community.[364] *One Last Stop* is a contemporary novel set in New York City, with elements of magical realism; it tells the story of August Landry and Biyu 'Jane' Su. The two fall in love as August figures out the mystery of Jane, who has been stuck on the Q line of the New York subway system since 1977. Although Jane is from the 1970s, her body, apart from a few references to clothing that will be discussed later, is largely treated and perceived within a 2020s context. In *One Last Stop,* Jane arguably fulfils the narrative role of the romance hero. I analyse the bodies of Jane and August against the heterosexual romance hero and heroine to show how *One Last Stop* works within the existing heterosexual romance framework but is influenced by queer female identity.

August is the protagonist of *One Last Stop,* and the story is told solely from her perspective. Two notable aspects emerge when analysing *One Last Stop* with a focus on the portrayal of the female bodies of August and Jane. Firstly, August's body is never fully described and in fact, physical descriptions of her are rarely provided in the story. Secondly, when she is described, she adheres to the heterosexual romance heroine's conventional form of femininity.

Considering the vagueness of August's physical appearance first, it is telling that in a novel with 417 pages only 27 of them contain any type of physical description of August. In other words, only 6% of pages contain any type of physical description of the main protagonist. When she is described, it

[364] 'Best Romance 2021 - Goodreads Choice Awards', *Goodreads* <https://www.goodreads.com/choiceawards/best-romance-books-2021> [accessed 20 February 2023]; 'Best Romance of 2021', *BookPage*, 2021 <https://www.bookpage.com/features/best-romance-of-2021/> [accessed 20 February 2023].

is brief, barely more than a few words and often relates her appearance to another character. The first physical description of August describes her in comparison with her mother: August notes 'their shared mousy-brown hair… the same round face and big green bush baby eyes… the same angular hands' while FaceTiming her mum.[365] The next description of her appearance does not occur for another 100 pages and again compares her looks with her mother's. This time August 'remembers her mother's hair, how the coppery brown would glow under the summer sun… She always liked how it was the same as hers'.[366] The next description is made by Jane while she is trying to remember a previous romantic partner, Jane states that the woman 'had long hair, like yours'[367]. It is not until page 149 that August describes herself, free from a comparison with another person. Once again the physical description focuses on August's hair, with August narrating the removal of a 'pencil from her hair, where it's been holding a frizzy, half-assed updo in place'[368]. Nearly half of the way through the novel, the reader only knows three things about August's physical appearance – she has frizzy, long brown hair like her mother, green eyes and a round face.

Throughout the whole novel, there is no description of her body – is she short, tall, slim, athletic, fat or something in between? Does she have fair, tanned or dark skin? The cover depicts both August and Jane, but it has a cartoon style that shows few details in its depictions of the main characters

[365] Casey McQuiston, *One Last Stop* (Macmillan, 2022), p. 7.
[366] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, pp. 113–14.
[367] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 138.
[368] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 149.

[Figure 42]. Despite the cartoon style, though, it is interesting how many aspects of August's appearance can be gathered from it.

Figure 42 One Last Stop by Casey McQuiston 2021 cover

This cover gives the reader the broad strokes of August's appearance but none of the details.[369] It teases at what she looks like but leaves enough unknown that the reader is left to fill in the gaps. Some of the elements from the cover can be found in the text itself, but the vagueness remains. There are only a handful of sentences that directly describe August's body. The first is when Jane is 'poking gently into the soft part below [August's] thigh'.[370] Later in the novel, when Jane and August have sex for the first time, August notes the way Jane's fingers 'dig into her soft fat' and how 'her own hips are wider and her stomach softer' than Jane's.[371] During that scene, she also briefly lists some of her physical attributes - 'the shape of her waist, the dimples of her thighs, the fullness of her chest' – in the context of places she is afraid to be touched[372]. The next time she is described is in comparison with her housemate Wes, with

[369] From the cover, the reader learns that August is an average-sized woman with pale skin, and long, voluminous reddish, brown hair. She wears a mid-thigh black dress, over the top of a white t-shirt, with a gold necklace and black ankle boots and is carrying a cup of coffee. She's carrying a brown bag (either a backpack or a tote bag) and her hair is partly up, tied together at the end with a red ribbon. Thin black glasses can also be seen on her face.
[370] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 164.
[371] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, pp. 219, 222.
[372] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 222.

August thinking 'she's wider in the hips and not half as graceful'.[373] The final time August is described is when Jane declares her love, saying she fell for this girl with 'soft lips and green eyes and a body that wouldn't quit… hair like you wouldn't believe'.[374] August's body is 'wider' than those around her, she is described as having a 'fullness'; the word soft, or softer, appears in four out of the six descriptions of August's body. All of these imply a body that is bigger than average but August's physical appearance remains elusive.

The most common attribute of hers that is repeatedly described in any detail is her hair – over half of the descriptions of August's physical appearance throughout the novel involve her hair. This is interesting because hair has 'immense social significance' with 'head hair' forming a 'part of the cultural definition of femininity'.[375] For centuries, women's long hair has been a sign of beauty and sex appeal, particularly in Western countries where long hair is considered 'irrefutably feminine'.[376] By focusing on August's long hair, McQuiston is tapping into a centuries-long symbolism that associates long, feminine hair with beauty and desirability. Other aspects of August's appearance are less described, the fact she wears glasses is only mentioned for the first time on page 93 when August notes 'she should probably get the prescription on her glasses updated'.[377] It is only confirmed that she wears them on at least a semi-regular basis on page 138 when she 'takes off her glasses'.[378]

[373] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 348.
[374] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 373.
[375] Anthony Synnott, 'Shame and Glory: A Sociology of Hair', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 38.3 (1987), pp. 381–413 (p. 384).
[376] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theoy of the Leisure Class* (The Modern Library, 1934), p. 171.
[377] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 93.
[378] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 138.

Interestingly, August wears glasses on the cover despite this not being confirmed in the book until page 138, showcasing how little detail the reader is given about her. August, the protagonist of *One Last Stop* is never physically pinned down as a character, a trait she shares with the heroines of heterosexual romance novels. Even on the cover of the novel, August's face is turned away from the reader, with her attention focused on Jane. The viewer's eyes are then also drawn to Jane, who becomes the focal point of the cover and denotes Jane as a person of interest for both the viewer and August. It also means that August's face is never truly shown to the reader, leaving the appearance of her face deliberately obscured in both the cover and text. It is interesting how little of the heroine's appearance in *One Last Stop* is confirmed, and even created by the book's cover, which has stayed largely consistent across its different publications around the world.[379]

The second thing worth noting about August's body is when her appearance is described, she adheres to socially accepted expressions of her gender. This gender expression is largely seen in August's clothing, which forms a core part of August's 'gendered imagery'.[380] Kamblé, in her analysis of the romance heroine's gender, argues that clothing, among other things, is 'a collection of nonverbal behaviours that enact and simultaneously construct gender'.[381] Through clothing, August, and other romance heroines, perform gender. Throughout the novel, the other characters comment on August's

[379] The cover of the Serbian edition (ISBN: 9788660359805) depicts a visually different August, who is slimmer, has a different fashion sense and long blonde hair. Interestingly Jane remains consistent with her short black hair and leather jacket on this cover.
[380] Judith Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender* (Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 30–31.
[381] Jayashree Kamblé, *Creating Identity: The Popular Romance Heroine's Journey to Selfhood and Self-Presentation* (Indiana University Press, 2023), p. 56.

lipstick, which August, at the beginning of the novel, states 'she doesn't usually wear' in response to Jane commenting that it is 'very red'.[382] After that interaction, lipstick, particularly red lipstick, becomes a feature of August's appearance. This is even acknowledged by the novel itself when Myla, one of August's friends and housemates, points out that August is 'wearing that red lipstick for [Jane]'[383]. In addition, when August is getting ready to have sex with Jane for the first time she deliberately chooses 'a lipstick that won't smudge'.[384] Lipstick, particularly red lipstick, has long been associated with femininity. This is not the only way that August operates within the 'normative' expressions of the female gender: her clothing is also crucial. When her clothing is described she is nearly always wearing skirts or other traditionally feminine items. When she first meets Jane, her outfit is shown in glimpses, 'the heel of her boot skids' and her 'tights ripping open', implying August is wearing a skirt, and in another scene, her 'skirt has fanned out behind her' while she sits with Jane.[385] Perhaps the most interesting and telling scene is when August gets ready to have sex with Jane, she wears 'a button-down tucked into a skirt, a pair gray thigh-high socks… [and] ankle boots with heels'.[386] It is the only scene where her outfit is described in detail and August deliberately chooses her outfit to attract Jane's attention, after all, as she tells the reader, she bought the thigh-highs recently. This outfit, which is carefully constructed to attract Jane's attention,

[382] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 40.
[383] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 117.
[384] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 210.
[385] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 17; McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 240.
[386] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 210.

emphasises August's femininity, as implied by the front cover. Therefore, one way to read August is as a femme lesbian.

The term femme has historically 'been used to refer to cisgender, feminine appearing lesbians', although in recent years it has broadened to include those 'who challenge or 'fail' to reproduce patriarchal feminine norms'.[387] Academically, the femme lesbian is often understood in relation to the butch lesbian. When the femme lesbian is considered outside of the butch/femme dynamic, their 'femme' appearance has been seen as a way for them to conceal their queerness.[388] August's long brown hair, her lipstick, the skirts and the ankle boots are all 'elements associated with 'normative' femininity' and as McCann would argue are crucial to 'intimately forming the femme assemblage'.[389] In her appearance, August adheres to traditional or 'normative' femininity, but it is not implied to be an attempt to appeal to the male gaze or to be 'straight passing'. August's femininity is queer because she emphasises her femininity to appeal to Jane, to attract Jane's attention romantically and sexually. She starts wearing red lipstick after Jane comments on it and she wears thigh-highs because Jane likes them. It would be easy to dismiss August's feminine appearance as a reinforcement of the gender roles

[387] Audrey Gunn, Rhea Ashley Hoskin, and Karen L. Blair, 'The New Lesbian Aesthetic? Exploring Gender Style among Femme, Butch and Androgynous Sexual Minority Women', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 88 (2021), pp. 1–13 (p. 2), doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2021.102504.
[388] Karen L. Blair and Rhea Ashley Hoskin, 'Contemporary Understandings of Femme Identities and Related Experiences of Discrimination', *Psychology & Sexuality*, 7.2 (2016), pp. 101–15, doi:10.1080/19419899.2015.1053824; Heidi M. Levitt, Elisabeth A. Gerrish, and Katherine R. Hiestand, 'The Misunderstood Gender: A Model of Modern Femme Identity', *Sex Roles*, 48 (2003), pp. 99–113; Heidi M. Levitt and Katherine R. Hiestand, 'Gender Within Lesbian Sexuality: Butch and Femme Perspectives', *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 18 (2005), pp. 39–51, doi:10.1080/10720530590523062.
[389] Hannah McCann, 'Beyond the Visible: Rethinking Femininity through Femme Assemblage', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 25.3 (2018), pp. 278–92 (p. 287), doi:10.1177/1350506818767479.

she grew up with, as she does adhere to an accepted form of femininity. However, to do so would undermine August's agency and choice in her own sexuality because it implies that being butch, adopting styles traditionally perceived as masculine, is the only way to appear 'queer'. What August therefore represents is a form of queer femininity that does not entirely reject the 'feminine styles of the body' which are usually seen to '*perpetuate* and *maintain*… an oppressive gender system'.[390] Her femininity is never shown as a negative and it would therefore be wrong to read her femininity with this paranoid reading. Instead, her femininity forms part of a long history of femme lesbians, or queer women more broadly, who worked within the confines of their society's gender boundaries.

Jane, the love interest in *One Last Stop*, is a Chinese American woman born in the 1950s who gets stuck on the Q Line of the New York Metro system in 1977 and becomes frozen in time. As the novel is told solely from August's perspective, there are many more descriptions of Jane's physical appearance – her body, what she wears and how she carries herself.[391] In this sense, she fulfils the traditional narrative role of the hero and like the hero, in heterosexual romances, Jane's physical appearance is reinforced and redescribed throughout the novel by August. When August first sees Jane on the subway, she describes her as 'older, all devastating cheekbones and jawline and golden-brown skin. Her black hair short and swoopy'; Jane is the 'hottest girl

[390] Hannah McCann, *Queering Femininity: Sexuality, Feminism and the Politics of Presentation* (Routledge, 2019), EBOOK, p. 1.
[391] August provides the reader with their viewpoint into the world of *One Last Stop*, we see Jane through August's eyes. This is the traditional dynamic for the romance genre, which until the late 20th century was nearly always told from perspective of the heroine, with the heroes as objects of fascination and desire.

August has ever seen… a tall butch subway angel'.[392] There are a few interesting things to note in these initial descriptions – firstly Jane is described as both older and taller than August. This comparison between them superficially mimics the heroine/hero dynamic seen in heterosexual romances that often position the male hero as older and physically larger or more athletic than their female heroine. Yet there is a softness to these descriptions as well; Jane's hair is 'swoopy', and she's described as an 'angel'.[393] This contradiction of softness and strength is a running theme throughout the descriptions of Jane and further associates her with the romance hero who is often described similarly to make them more appealing to the heroine and their female readers. August notices how '[Jane's] eyes are so bright, and her knuckles are square and sturdy', she notes Jane's 'shoulders [are] narrow but sturdy', how 'her jaw is set, her gaze steady and dark'; Jane is 'steady and beautiful', her 'mouth is soft but insistent' and her thighs are 'strong and firm, sturdier than they look'.[394] August herself comments on this contradiction, thinking to herself that Jane's 'got this ability to move between pretty and handsome from moment to moment'.[395] There is a deliberate fluidity to the description of Jane: she is neither fully masculine nor feminine in how her body expresses itself. Jane is firmly described as a woman and a lesbian several times throughout the novel,

[392] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 18; McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 19.
[393] Since the 19th century the figure of the 'angel' has been associated with womanhood in literature. See *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture: Reassessing the Angel in the House* ed. Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock (Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), Dorice Williams Elliot, *The Angel out of the House: Philanthropy and Gender in Nineteenth-Century England* (University Press of Virginia, 2002) and Nancy LaGreca, *Rewriting Womanhood: Feminism, Subjectivity, and the Angel of the House in the Latin American Novel, 1887 – 1903*, (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009) for further research.
[394] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, pp. 34, 67, 109, 142, 143, 151.
[395] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 165.

both by herself and those around her. This contradiction in the description is not to imply any type of genderfluidity for Jane's character – rather it is being used by the author as a way to signal Jane's identity as a butch lesbian.

Originating in the American bar-culture of the 1950s, the term butch has continued to be used, despite no 'unified definition of what the term 'butch' means' historically or today.[396] The most widely accepted definition for the term butch is for gender preferences that reside on a spectrum of masculinity, often expressed through fashion, haircuts, hobbies, careers and behaviours typically associated with men.[397] The word butch is used in the very first description of Jane by August, as shown above, it is also used a further three times in the chapter openings of the novel.[398] The one for chapter five is a classified, titled 'butch on the Q Train' and then provides a physical description of a 'short-haired Asian woman, 20 – 30' who 'wear[s] a black leather jacket'.[399] Although Jane's name is not mentioned, the reader knows from the brief description and the context of the Q train that this is a classified about Jane. These chapter openings make Jane the only character whose physical appearance is described outside of August's perspective and often serve to emphasise Jane's desirability in society. Explicitly and implicitly, Jane is repeatedly defined as a butch lesbian, she is given 'distinct butch identity

[396] Finn Mackay, 'Always Endangered, Never Extinct: Exploring Contemporary Butch Lesbian Identity in the UK', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 75 (2019), pp. 1–9 (p. 3), doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2019.102241.
[397] Alison Eves, 'Queer Theory, Butch/Femme Identities and Lesbian Space', *Sexualities*, 7.4 (2004), pp. 480–96 (p. 483), doi:10.1177/1363460704047064; Mackay, 'Always Endangered, Never Extinct: Exploring Contemporary Butch Lesbian Identity in the UK', p. 4.
[398] The chapter openings of the novel are a collection of social media posts, newspaper clippings or advertisements from the world and most of them are used to provide the reader with an insight into the impact Jane has had on the world since being stuck on the Q line.
[399] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 84.

marks' that are partly created through 'her appropriation of the masculine image'.[400] The appropriation of the masculine can be seen in how Jane's body is described as 'steady', 'strong', 'firm' and 'sturdy' to name but a few. Another way that Jane's butch identity is formed is through her dynamic with August where she is the sexual aggressor and the more sexually experienced partner. Here Jane's masculine-coded behaviour borrows from the masculinity found in heterosexual romance novels, in particular how her body is described during her interactions with August.

From early on in the novel, Jane is positioned as sexually experienced with a string of previous romantic partners, despite having been trapped on a train for nearly fifty years. This is expressed both verbally through Jane's recounting her previous relationships to August, who bitterly keeps count listing 'Jenny (tally mark eleven)' and thinks when they kiss to help Jane recover her memories that 'Jane is kissing Jenny, Molly, April, Niama, Maria, Beth, Mary Frances, Mingxia' and not truly August.[401] Jane's experience with other women is a reoccurring concern for August, who as a virgin with little to no experience with either gender, feels lacking in comparison. The dynamic between Jane and August mimics the experienced, virile male and inexperienced virginal female seen in older heterosexual romances. It is a dynamic that is also reinforced during Jane and August's sexual encounters. In one scene where Jane and August are kissing, Jane 'grinning' tells August ''kiss me slow''.[402] Jane is the leader in their sexual encounters, often directing or guiding August

[400] Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis*, p. 95.
[401] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, pp. 144, 153.
[402] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 153.

through the process. Most important to this chapter though is how Jane uses her body in these scenes to assert her dominance over August. In one scene, Jane and August are recreating another one of Jane's memories, and it describes how 'Jane's leaning in, taking advantage of her height to bracket August in, burning so hot'.[403] Here Jane's height is being explicitly used to cage August in, to make August feel smaller, there is a power dynamic being played out through Jane's use of her body – one that turns August on. Here Jane is adapting the masculinity of the traditional or 'alpha' romance hero whose larger size is arguably part of their appeal to the romance heroine. Jane's body is encoded with sexual desire: she is an object of this desire and can use it to gain power over August. This also provides a stark contrast to how August perceives her own body, which is never viewed as an object of desire. Again, this trait reinforces the connection between Jane and the role typically performed by the hero in heterosexual romances. Yet, like August's body, which superficially mimics the femininity of the heterosexual romance heroine, there is a queerness to Jane's body in how it mixes masculine and feminine traits that is not found in heterosexual romance heroes.

It is not completely surprising that the female bodies of August and Jane mimic the bodies of heterosexual heroes and heroines in the romance genre. *One Last Stop* does not exist in a vacuum and borrows tropes and expectations from its heterosexual romance counterparts. The femme/butch pairing or 'some variation of the butch/femme dyad [is] common in lesbian literature' and is a dynamic that *One Last Stop* draws upon with its depictions of Jane

[403] McQuiston, *One Last Stop*, p. 142.

and August.[404] The butch/femme dyad can be seen throughout the history of female-focused queer romances, emerging in the lesbian pulps of the 1950s and 60s.[405] In addition, queer women in society are constantly being forced to navigate a world that privileges 'normative' femininity and bodies that adhere to the male gaze. This can be seen in Jane's status as a butch lesbian because both in fiction and in reality, butch women adopt and adapt traits traditionally considered masculine to form their own sense of gender expression. More recently, McCann has explored how the femme lesbian is adopting and adapting 'normative' ideals of femininity for a queer purpose.[406] This adoption of femininity for a queer purpose can be seen in the character of August. Both characters also follow traditional romance genre expectations – Jane is bigger, stronger, and sturdier providing a contrast to August's softness. In addition, August's appearance is left deliberately vague, a common trait for heterosexual romance heroines. In this sense, Jane and August, and the dynamic between them, conforms to the heterosexual romance genre expectations even if they are influenced by Western society's ideas about queer femininity.

The Trans* 'Romance Body'

Romances featuring trans* protagonists account for a tiny percentage of the queer romance novels published, but this number is increasing and they are

[404] Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis*, p. 15.
[405] The butch/femme dynamic and its history within queer romance is discussed in Chapter 1: The History of Queer Romance.
[406] McCann, 'Beyond the Visible: Rethinking Femininity through Femme Assemblage'; McCann, *Queering Femininity: Sexuality, Feminism and the Politics of Presentation*, EBOOK, p. 7.

without question becoming more visible. This can be seen in the success of novels like *A Lady for a Duke* by Alexis Hall, a historical romance published by Forever, an imprint of Hachette, which featured trans* heroine Viola Carroll. By April 2023, it had been rated 13,258 times and reviewed 3,478 times on Goodreads with an overall rating of 4.08 stars; it was also named Publishers Weekly Best Romance and listed as one of New York Public Library's Best Books of 2022.[407] A hugely popular Young Adult romance featuring a transgender protagonist is *Felix Ever After* (2020) by Kacen Callender, which was nominated for the Stonewall Book Award for Children's and Young Adult Literature (2021) and the Goodreads Choice Award for Young Adult Fiction (2020), and has received over 60,000 ratings and 11,000 reviews on Goodreads.[408] This increased 'visibility of transgender [characters] must be seen as part of a larger shift in habits and customs around classification, naming, and inhabiting of the human body'.[409] Given the lack of scholarship on the portrayal of trans* bodies in romance novels, this section instead builds on scholarship about the trans* body. I have also incorporated some discussions that took place in my three reader focus groups because the participants raised interesting and noteworthy ideas about the representation of trans* bodies in queer

[407] 'A Lady for a Duke by Alexis Hall', *Goodreads* <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/57007967-a-lady-for-a-duke?ac=1&from_search=true&qid=dX8Nqc6RdJ&rank=1> [accessed 17 April 2023]; 'Publishers Weekly Best Books 2022', *Publishers Weekly* <https://best-books.publishersweekly.com/pw/best-books/2022/romance#book/book-3> [accessed 9 March 2024]; 'Best Books for Adults 2022', *New York Public Library* <https://www.nypl.org/books-more/recommendations/best-books/adults?year=2022> [accessed 9 March 2024].
[408] 'Felix Ever After by Kacen Callendar', *Goodreads* <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/51931067-felix-ever-after> [accessed 9 March 2024].
[409] Halberstam, *Trans**, pp. 17–18.

romance.[410] With this section, I explore how trans* bodies are portrayed in queer romance novels; in particular, whether romance novels featuring trans* protagonists adhere to the conventions and expectations placed on cisgender heroes and heroines' bodies or if they challenge these conventions.

Despite initial hesitation to discuss trans* bodies in the reader focus groups, a few interesting comments were made about the portrayal of trans* bodies. Delores, a reader from Australia, noted that *Peter Darling* by Austin Chant 'didn't focus incredibly hard on the physical aspect of the body' for either of the main characters.[411] Jamie from the US also expressed disappointment that transgender bodies, particularly trans women's bodies, 'in almost everything [they'd] read are very desexualized, as in canonically asexual'.[412] Unknowingly, Delores and Jamie have noticed two connected traits or trends in the portrayal of the trans* body that can be seen in both romance novels and mainstream media. The vagueness of the description and the desexualisation of the trans* body are reactions to a shared history, one that is rooted in the othering of the trans* body. Historically, trans* individuals have been subjected to 'medical frameworks [that] produce rather than treat, diagnose rather than observe'.[413] The trans* body was viewed as a disease, a problem that needed solving, and the solution was a nearly complete transition through extensive, and often expensive, surgeries to conform to the

[410] Although the cisgender male and female bodies were also discussed in the focus groups it was not to the same extent and the participants did not seemed as engaged as during discussions surrounding the representation of trans* bodies. For this reason I have included information from the focus groups for trans* bodies but not for the cisgender male or female bodies.
[411] Rita and others, Australian Romance Readers Focus Group, 2021, p. 12.
[412] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 5.
[413] Halberstam, *Trans**, p. 32; Latham, 'Trans Men's Sexual Narrative-Practices: Introducing STS to Trans and Sexuality Studies'.

binary ideal of male or female. As Wilchins states, 'if the model and the body disagree, it is the body that must give way'[414]. The gendered binary between male and female is the model and to adhere to this model trans* people were expected, if not required, to transition to the fullest extent available to them to achieve a semblance of representation within society. This adherence to the gender binary is seen in 'the voyeuristic attention directed in mass culture at the… genitalia of trans people' where trans* people are often asked if they have or are intending to undergo bottom surgery.[415] This is an act of power wielded by cisgender individuals against trans* individuals because the question assumes that trans* bodies will eventually conform to a system that they will never fully be accepted within 'by creating notions of realness and dividing bodies along a binary of real/false'.[416] The more a trans* person medically and surgically transitions, the more they can 'pass' in society and the more 'accepted' they will become by that society. In doing so, a hierarchy of 'transness' is created, one that privileges and adheres to the status quo of the male/female binary. This voyeuristic culture led to an environment where the validity of the trans* body is determined by how much the individual has chosen to physically transition. For a long time, this was reflected in the stories told about trans* people, which often placed a focus on the moment of medical transition – for example, the *Danish Girl* (2015) film reaches its narrative climax with Lili Elbe's medical transition. It is notable that in response to this history and counter to mainstream discourse about trans* bodies, romance

[414] Wilchins, 'A Certain Kind of Freedom: Power and the Truth of Bodies', p. 41.
[415] Halberstam, *Trans**, p. 33.
[416] Wilchins, 'A Certain Kind of Freedom: Power and the Truth of Bodies', p. 41.

authors writing trans* main characters have taken the focus away from the body.

This history could also partly explain the canonical asexuality that Jamie noticed, particularly among female transgender characters. By removing sex from the equation, authors are more easily able to dodge or avoid writing about the body in a genre that typically showcases the body of its characters through sex scenes. Part of this canonical asexuality could be authors trying to reflect the reality that roughly 4% of trans* people surveyed in the US in 2011 identified as asexual.[417] However, the prevalence of asexualised depictions of trans* characters in romance is significantly higher than the 4% identified in the study. More interesting is the long-standing relationship between trans* individuals and asexuality, which again is rooted in the medical industry's transphobia. According to Gupta, 'the term asexual was first used by clinicians working with trans* clients' and until more recently 'the term was applied by psychiatrists almost exclusively to trans* patients'.[418] For a long time, asexuality was used by doctors as a way of gatekeeping trans* individuals from transitioning. If trans* patients admitted to experiencing sexual desire for the opposite sex prior to transition it was used as evidence that they were 'comfortable' in their biological sex, and if they expressed an existing desire for the same sex, it would be interpreted as homosexuality and used as a reason to prevent the surgery. It was therefore 'safest for people seeking SRS (sex-

[417] JM Grant, LA Mottet, and J Tanis, *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011).
[418] Gupta, 'Gendering Asexuality and Asexualizing Gender: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Intersections between Gender and Asexuality', p. 1201.

reassignment surgeries) to describe themselves as somewhat asexual prior to and during transition and to express the expectation that they would experience heterosexual desire post-transition'.[419] Asexuality was therefore adopted by many trans* people as a form of protection, a guise required by the medical field.[420] Scholars Simmons and White have suggested that even if the medical industry no longer requires asexuality from trans* people, the reality is that many trans* people still experience low levels of sexual desire due to the effects of surgery and/or hormones, or feelings of gender dysmorphia both before and after transitioning.[421] It is hard to say whether the canonical asexuality that Jamie noticed is a deliberate, or perhaps subconscious, reflection of the above reality for trans* people.[422]

Taking two romance novels with trans* characters as case studies - *Peter Darling* (2017) by Austin Chant and *A Lady for a Duke* (2022) by Alexis Hall – I will explore the extent to which the texts adhere to these two observations made by Delores and Jamie: a vagueness in physical description and a lack of sexual desire. Through a close reading of the trans* protagonists in these two romance novels, I will explore how trans* bodies are portrayed.[423] I seek to answer if trans* bodies are being desexualised in romance novels through an

[419] Gupta, 'Gendering Asexuality and Asexualizing Gender: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Intersections between Gender and Asexuality', p. 1201.
[420] Ekins and King, *The Transgender Phenomenon*; Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*; Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*.
[421] Simmons and White, 'Our Many Selves', p. 367.
[422] Perhaps one way to establish this would be to analyse whether authors who identify as part of the trans* community more frequently write trans* characters in sexual situations than authors who do not identify as a member of the trans* community – however – that is beyond the scope of this thesis.
[423] This thesis is focusing on how queer bodies in romance novels disrupt or conform to the ideal body of the romantic hero and heroine and for that reason will only be looking at trans* bodies that still, to some extent adhere to the binary of male and female. For that reason, it will not be looking at non-binary or genderfluid bodies.

exploration of how trans* bodies are portrayed during the sex scene. I also look more broadly at the physical portrayal of the trans* characters in these novels to determine if there is a physical vagueness, or whether they were merely not defined by their physical characteristics like their cisgender counterparts.

Trans* Bodies in *Peter Darling* by Austin Chant

Peter Darling (2017) by Austin Chant, who identifies as a queer trans* author, is a re-imagining of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. It takes place after Barrie's original story and explores what would happen if Peter returned to Neverland after years spent away. In this queer fantasy romance re-telling, Wendy Darling and Peter Pan are the same person, with Neverland granting Pre-Neverland Peter the power to transition physically into Neverland Peter.[424] The majority of the analysis will focus on Peter's body during his magical transition and seeks to answer the following questions; how is Peter's body portrayed by Chant? What romance tropes or expectations about the body does it invoke, or perhaps, transform?

In the novel, Neverland Peter returns to Neverland to recapture the freedom he found as a child, but instead is confronted with a changed Neverland, where only Captain Hook acts familiarly. The two fall in love while learning to confront the realities they had run away from in England and find happiness together. *Peter Darling* is one of the most well-read romances

[424] There are three versions of Peter's body during the course of the story, to help clarify which version of Peter's body is being discussed going forward they shall be referred to as Pre-Neverland Peter for the version of Peter who exists before visiting Neverland, Neverland Peter for the version that exists in Neverland and Post-Neverland Peter who exists after visiting Neverland and returning to reality with Hook.

featuring a trans* protagonist with 8,997 ratings and 2,110 reviews on Goodreads resulting in a rating of 4.07/5.00 as of April 2023.[425] The novel was also praised by critics and other romance authors alike, with K.J. Charles calling it 'a thoroughly intelligent, ingenious take on Peter Pan… a very thought-provoking work about growing up and fantasy and loss and identity'.[426] The text was mentioned, unprompted, in the Australian romance readers focus-group by Delores – one of the few romances to be directly referenced across all the reader focus-groups. This shows the impact and good-standing *Peter Darling* has as a romance featuring a trans* main character and it therefore felt important to include it in this discussion.

Peter Darling has two timelines: one in the present with Neverland Peter and Hook reunited in Neverland; and a second, showing Pre-Neverland Peter's life after his return to the real world, and the moments that led to him choosing to fly back to Neverland. The reader is thus given two versions of Peter: one before and one during his magical transition into Neverland Peter.

The first time the reader meets Neverland Peter in *Peter Darling* is through the eyes of Captain Hook who does not recognise Neverland Peter but instead notes that 'the young man wore shapeless clothes, the trousers well cuffed and the overlarge sleeves torn away at the elbows'.[427] The focus on clothing in this description is not surprising given that the character of Hook is interested in fashion and spends the majority of the novel talking about or thinking about

[425] 'Peter Darling by Austin Chant | Goodreads', *Goodreads* <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/58170822-peter-darling> [accessed 5 April 2023].
[426] K.J. Charles, 'K.J. Charles's Review of Peter Darling by Austin Chant', *Goodreads*, 2017 <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1908066671>.
[427] Austin Chant, *Peter Darling*, 2nd edn (Austin Chant, 2021), p. 5.

clothing as a form of self-expression. Yet the description of 'shapeless' and 'overlarge' clothes feels significant because it prevents the reader from forming any image of Neverland Peter's body but implies he is small because his clothes do not fit. Shortly afterwards, Hook admits that 'the stranger was handsome, in a lanky sort of way – his face bony and keen, his limbs long and narrow'.[428] The description of Neverland Peter, who at this point is still unknown to Hook, evokes boyish adolescence: he is 'lanky', 'bony' and 'narrow' with 'long limbs'. This perception is confirmed by later descriptions of Neverland Peter, with Hook calling him 'the youth' with a 'boyish grin'. Neverland Peter is 'slighter' than Hook and is irritated to discover that Ernest (the new leader of the Lost Boys) stands 'almost a head taller than him'.[429] Neverland Peter himself notes when a branch 'failed to dip beneath his weight' as he reunites with the Lost Boys for the first time since returning to Neverland.[430] The descriptions of Peter build an image of a slight figure with a boyish frame and shorter than average height. Neverland Peter's body does not conform to the masculine ideal, or Radway's 'spectacular' masculinity, that is expected by society and the romance genre.

What is most interesting, however, about Neverland Peter's body differing from this ideal masculine stereotype is that Peter seemingly perceives this difference through his lack of physical strength compared to others. When Ernest and Neverland Peter reach a mountain they must climb, Peter quickly flies to the top but is 'reluctantly impressed by the strength of [Ernest's] arms as

[428] Chant, *Peter Darling*, p. 5.
[429] Chant, *Peter Darling*, pp. 6, 8, 7, 16.
[430] Chant, *Peter Darling*, p. 15.

he hauled himself up hand over hand' and when fighting with Hook, Neverland Peter is dismayed to 'feel the strength in his arms giving out'.[431] At the beginning of the novel, Neverland Peter values his body and his masculinity for its strength, its athletic prowess and his ability to fight: he 'was taller now, stronger and bigger', 'stronger and braver… than the other boys'.[432] Most tellingly, Neverland Peter expresses that just 'the thought of battle made him feel like his body was coming back into alignment'.[433] Neverland Peter is trying to mimic the hegemonic, 'spectacular' masculinity, where the male body is valued for its ability to fight, its strength and its athletic prowess.

Crucially in *Peter Darling,* the reader is taken on Peter's journey of 'navigating the web of gender normativity while negotiating [his] own gendered and sexual identities' and Peter's relationship with masculinity and his body is crucial to that journey.[434] Neverland Peter's desire for violence and his need to prove himself in physical combat is contrasted with moments of body dysmorphia. When looking at his reflection, Neverland Peter feels 'for a second [that] his own face looked unfamiliar' and when taking his shirt off, he initially admires his 'flat and smooth' chest before a 'nagging, uncomfortable awareness that this had not always been true' seeps into the moment.[435] Later in the story, when talking to the fairy queen, Neverland Peter feels as if 'his skin didn't belong to him, that he was a puppeteer moving a stranger's body' and in a quiet moment at the Lost Boys camp he reflects that 'every time he caught

[431] Chant, *Peter Darling*, pp. 26, 41.
[432] Chant, *Peter Darling*, pp. 82, 97.
[433] Chant, *Peter Darling*, p. 70.
[434] Rooke, 'Telling Trans Stories', p. 75.
[435] Chant, *Peter Darling*, pp. 30, 31.

a glimpse of his reflection, something in him flinched'.[436] These moments of uncomfortableness with his body cause Neverland Peter to act more rashly, often provoking him to violence as a way to reinforce his masculinity and re-establish the maleness of his body. Neverland Peter values his body for how it can advance his place in Neverland and his 'power garnered from aggression and violence… sustains [rather than] subverts a patriarchal gender order' from which he benefits.[437]

Neverland Peter is extremely conscious of how his body is perceived by those around him, as seen by his constant need to be the best, the strongest, the bravest and most powerful on the island – in doing so he upholds hegemonic masculinity. He struggles to understand Ernest's lack of desire for violence and mocks his wish to live in peace with Hook and the pirates of Neverland. He feels disconnected from the Lost Boys, who once worshipped him as their fearless leader, but who now prefer the quiet, more mellow life that Ernest has given them. This is not a type of masculinity that Neverland Peter can initially accept, because of how sharply it contrasts with the swash-buckling, pirate-killing heroic fantasy of masculinity that Neverland Peter most treasures. He cannot envision a masculinity that values being a protector more than being a warrior, as exemplified in Ernest whose main desire is to keep the Lost Boys safe. He also struggles to accept that Captain Hook, the villainous pirate, loves flamboyant clothing and showmanship as much as fighting.

[436] Chant, *Peter Darling*, pp. 58, 63.
[437] Justin Charlebois, *Gender and the Construction of Dominant, Hegemonic, and Oppositional Femininities* (Lexington Books, 2011), p. 40.

Thus, even before Peter himself realises, Chant shows the readers how fragile and unstable Neverland Peter's ideal masculinity actually is through the gender dysmorphia and the damaging consequences Neverland Peter's adherence to 'traditional' masculinity has for those around him. Neverland Peter's need to constantly prove himself leads to one of the Lost Boys being killed by Hook's pirates and results in the other Lost Boys turning on Peter in order to restore the peace treaty with Hook. At the beginning of the novel Neverland Peter constantly tries to embody the 'visual regimes of gender normativity' through his strict adherence to a specific type of masculinity yet, ultimately, this is proven to be a broken method that damages both Peter and those around him.[438] Returning to Delores's point, that *Peter Darling* does not focus on the physical appearance of its main characters, the statement feels only partly true. Neverland Peter is clearly described by Hook at the start of the novel, yet the focus during the first half of the novel is on how Neverland Peter uses his body to reinforce and re-establish his masculinity in hegemonic ways. This changes, however, once Peter begins to accept that there is more than one way to be masculine. Crucially, as the novel progresses, he understands that masculinity is not defined solely by your appetite for, or an aversion to, violence.

Like most romance novels, *Peter Darling* includes a sex scene between Peter and Hook, the two love interests. The scene, like the majority of sex scenes found in romance novels, is used by Chant to further the emotional connection and level of trust between Hook and Peter. However, the scene is less explicit

[438] Rooke, 'Telling Trans Stories', p. 77.

than a standard heterosexual sex scene, with less attention paid to the physicality of the two individuals. The act itself is experienced from Neverland Peter's point of view and is described in euphemistic terms, for example, 'Hook reached inside his trousers and ran rough, calloused fingers over the tenderest part of him'.[439] The choice to keep Peter's genitalia undefined, even in his fantastical transitioned Neverland Peter body, feels like a deliberate choice on Chant's part to break away from the voyeuristic history that trans* bodies have and continue to be subjected to by society without portraying Peter as asexual. By leaving the physical aspects of the sex scene vague and undefined, the focus is instead placed on how the act makes Neverland Peter feel, how it connects him and unmoors him from the body he has created for himself in Neverland. Neverland Peter is not an asexual character and therefore does not perpetuate the asexualisation that has often been put onto trans* bodies but he is unsure and self-conscious of his inexperience, shown by his 'faintly' telling Hook ''No,' […] I – I've never –'' and ''I don't know what this makes me''.[440] Sexual desire and physical attraction are positioned as new sensations to Peter, ones that unsettle and intrigue him in equal measure.[441] Peter's inexperience is not surprising to the reader, given the glimpses of his life before Neverland that show him growing up in a traditional Edwardian

[439] Chant, *Peter Darling*, p. 222.
[440] Chant, *Peter Darling*, p. 219.
[441] This moment also brings to mind, and perhaps unintentionally references the virginal romance heroine, which is much studied in romance scholarship. However, the virginal romance heroine is not the focus of this analysis. For research on the virgin romance heroine see *The Consummate Virgin* (2020) by Jodi McAlister, 'I Wil Cut Myself and Smear Blood on the Sheet': Testing Virginity in Medieval and Modern Orientalist Romance' (2016) by Amy Burge in *Virgin Envy: The Cultural Insignificance of the Hymen* and Out of Wedlock: The Consummation and Consumption of Marriage in Contemporary Romance Fiction (2009) by Jade McKay and Elizabeth Parson in *Genders,* 50.

household that allowed little space for young people, particularly those perceived as female, to date. Yet it also reflects the reality for some trans* people, who may only engage in sex and physical intimacy post-transition.

Crucially, while having sex, Hook and Peter give and take with equal measure. Although Hook is the more experienced, Peter, towards the end, admits 'it was different when he took the lead', explicitly showing that Peter is an active participant in the scene.[442] In the scene, Chant places the emphasis on the emotions and connection between Hook and Peter. It is also interesting that after orgasming for the first time, Neverland Peter experiences a sense of true belonging with his body. Neverland Peter immediately post-orgasm thinks 'he had never felt more filthy, never inhabited his own skin so fully': sexual desire brings Peter closer to his body in a way that fighting and violence had been unable to do.[443] Sexual prowess is an important aspect of masculinity, with male bodies being both symbols of desire for the female gaze and men also being perceived as the sexual aggressors, but here Neverland Peter is neither. His experience of sexual desire is only with another man, Hook, which seems to both surprise and confuse Neverland Peter who exclaims 'I don't know what this makes me'.[444] It inverts the established associations between sexual prowess and masculinity that are often found in romance heroes. Instead, this symbolises the break away from the traditional type of masculinity that Neverland Peter was trying so hard to emulate and that resulted in toxic behaviour. It is not through violence and physical strength that Peter can feel

[442] Chant, *Peter Darling*, p. 226.
[443] Chant, *Peter Darling*, p. 223.
[444] Chant, *Peter Darling*, p. 219.

a sense of belonging and connection with his body but rather through love, desire and his relationship with Hook. This is the beginning of Peter starting to form his own ideas of masculinity and what it means to exist in a male body.

The ending of the novel further emphasises the importance of forming your own definition of masculinity and what it means to be male. The fantasy that Neverland represents is an escape from reality, a fantasy that is ultimately shown to be damaging, and true happiness for Hook and Peter can only be found by returning to the real world having accepted themselves. Hook and Peter return to reality together and find themselves in Hook's house. For Post Neverland Peter, this means a return to his pre-transition body, as shown by the simple sentence 'Peter turned around, folding his arms over his chest self-consciously'.[445] Again, Chant does not use explicit language to describe Post Neverland Peter's body, instead, it is hinted at, continuing the vagueness that has been ever-present in Chant's descriptions of Peter's body. Crucially what is different for Post Neverland Peter, having returned from Neverland a second time, is his acceptance of his own body and gender. Looking in the mirror, Post Neverland Peter examines his old body with fresh eyes and concludes by thinking, 'he had let his family make him believe that the only way he would ever be a boy was to be born in a different shape, leave everything of his body and history behind'.[446] Returning to Neverland a second time exposed the fallacy of this thinking to both Peter and the reader. Chant ends the novel with Peter returning to reality with a new confidence in his maleness that is no longer based on physical markers. Interestingly this takes away the importance of the

[445] Chant, *Peter Darling*, p. 283.
[446] Chant, *Peter Darling*, p. 290.

physical body entirely, a stark contrast to the majority of cisgender male heroes who are still largely defined by their physical appearance.

There are a few ways to see this ending. Some could argue it is regressive because the trans* hero is denied a physical body, a complete inversion of the idea that trans* people are 'trapped in the wrong body'.[447] The wrong-body model 'involves a misalignment between gender identity and the body' where 'through genital reconstruction surgery [one], *becomes* a woman or man in proper alignment with an innate gender identity'.[448] This model supports the gender binary because it assumes all trans* individuals will eventually conform to either man or woman as defined by society. As a result, 'those who can pass are most highly valued, as are those whose surgery makes them legally male or female', thereby reinforcing the gender binary and privileging those within the community who can mimic it.[449] Instead, Chant in the ending of *Peter Darling* completely disregards the gender binary defined by society and rejects the 'wrong body' narrative. Peter ends the novel liberated from society's expectations of maleness. He is secure in his maleness, which is now defined by his inner thoughts, his actions, and his feelings. He is male despite his physical body.

Trans* Bodies in *A Lady for a Duke* by Alexis Hall

[447] Henry Rubin, *Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment among Transsexual Men* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2003), pp. 150–51.
[448] Talia Mae Bettcher, 'Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Rethinking Trans Oppression and Resistance', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 39.2 (2014), pp. 383–406 (p. 383).
[449] Wilchins, 'A Certain Kind of Freedom: Power and the Truth of Bodies', p. 61.

A Lady for a Duke (2022) by Alexis Hall is a queer Regency romance that tells the story of Miss Viola Carroll and her childhood best friend the Duke of Gracewood. Miss Viola Carroll grew up as the aristocratic Lord Marleigh before finding the freedom to live as her authentic self when everyone thought she died during the Battle of Waterloo. This second-chance romance is set three years after the battle when circumstances bring the two former best friends back into each other lives. Alexis Hall is a respected and popular writer in the queer romance sphere, particularly after the success of Hall's contemporary M/M Romance *Boyfriend Material* (2020). *A Lady for a Duke* is their first foray into the queer historical space. On Goodreads, it has 9,675 ratings, 2,653 reviews and an average rating of 4.13/5.00, making it one of the more commercially popular romances to feature a trans* heroine.[450] Reviewers have described it as 'a groundbreaking and excellent queer historical romance', which just happens to feature a transgender heroine.[451] Hall themself states in the afterword of the novel that they wished 'to write a historical romance with a transgender heroine in which the fact that the heroine is transgender is not the main source of conflict or narrative tension'.[452] This provides a contrast to the majority of stories with trans* main characters, whose storylines still largely focus on transition and the consequences of the character's transition for them and those around them, such as *The Danish Girl* (2000). In addition, *A Lady for a Duke*'s commercial and critical success make it an ideal novel to use as an

[450] 'A Lady for a Duke by Alexis Hall'.
[451] 'A Lady for A Duke by Alexis Hall Review', *Kirkus*, 2022 <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/alexis-hall/a-lady-for-a-duke/> [accessed 15 April 2023].
[452] Alexis Hall, *A Lady for a Duke* (Piatkus, 2022), p. 455.

example of a queer romance featuring a trans* heroine. The fact that the novel is a Regency romance also adds another interesting dynamic because this subgenre comes with a rigid set of expectations from publishers and readers.[453] The romance in a traditional Regency is an intellectual meeting of the minds long before it is a meeting of the bodies. In such a rigidly defined sub-genre, then, how is the body of the trans* heroine portrayed?

A Lady for a Duke is told from the dual perspective of Viola and Gracewood, but the reader is not given a physical description of Viola until she reunites with Gracewood in the fourth chapter. In a drunken stupor, Gracewood notices 'the shape of a woman, tall and slender, dark haired and dark eyed', with 'rough-smooth [hair], like the wrong side of silk', with a 'mouth […] made for laughing. And the darkness of her eyes was as restless as the sea at midnight. And down the side of her neck trailed a comet's tail of freckles'.[454] The language used to describe Viola's appearance is poetic and wild with its references to the sea and the night's sky – both of which have long literary connotations with womanhood and femininity. Even her hair is not merely soft but silk-like. This first description gives Viola's appearance an almost mythical quality through all the references to nature. This poetic, metaphorical language continues to be used throughout *A Lady for a Duke* when Gracewood describes Viola. The duke notes the brightness of her eyes: they

[453] These expectations are largely based on the example set by the novels of Georgette Heyer, a writer from the early twentieth century whose novels are still being read by a contemporary audience. The setting of her regency romances were influenced by Jane Austen where polite society informs, frames, and provides a backdrop for the central love story – manners, ways of dressing and the activities the hero and heroine take part in all inform the world of the regency romance.
[454] Hall, *A Lady for a Duke*, pp. 26, 30, 28.

'shine like dark mirrors' and she has a 'treasure-path of freckles running beneath her necklace' with 'wicked, winged brows'; he compares 'her skin to starlight' and 'her mouth to some velvet flower'.[455] Gracewood's descriptions of Viola largely concern her face, skin and hair with a focus on a few key features; for example, Viola's freckles are described on a further eight occasions. Hall does not shy away from describing Viola's appearance but there is a lack of attention paid to Viola's body. Apart from in their initial meeting, the only other time Gracewood directly describes Viola's body is when he thinks, 'she was tall for a woman, her figure too spare to be as fashion preferred, but there was natural elegance to her'.[456] There is an acknowledgement here that Viola does not necessarily fit the feminine ideal of the society she exists in, but it is tempered by Gracewood's admiration. Although Viola is deemed unfashionable for having a spare figure, none of the language used by Gracewood suggests a lack of admiration – she is still desirable to him despite not entirely fitting the feminine ideal of her society.

In contrast, when Viola comments on her own appearance, it typically focuses on the negative: what she finds lacking about her appearance or what she wishes was different about it. She describes her hand as 'square-palmed and knotty-knuckled' with 'old scars and fading powder burns'.[457] She wishes her jaw to have 'more softness' and considers it 'too-hard' with 'too-bold lines' and 'blunt angles'.[458] When not commenting on her face, she keeps the descriptions brief. For example, when discussing her height, she merely

[455] Hall, *A Lady for a Duke*, pp. 80, 109,123, 222, 282, 282.
[456] Hall, *A Lady for a Duke*, p. 80.
[457] Hall, *A Lady for a Duke*, p. 47.
[458] Hall, *A Lady for a Duke*, pp. 154, 205, 205, 304.

mentions that she and Gracewood 'were of a height'. The exception to this is the appreciation she has for her legs: 'she had always liked her legs, how strong they were, how fast and sure they made her'.[459] But it is worth mentioning that Viola admires her legs for their strength, not their physical appearance. The lack of attention Viola gives to her own body arguably mimics the lack of physical descriptions given by August about her physical appearance in *One Last Stop* by Casey McQuiston. Yet, the stark contrast between Gracewood and Viola's descriptions of Viola's body is interesting: Gracewood focuses on Viola's femininity, whereas Viola mostly focuses on, or emphasises, her lack of femininity. In her descriptions, she uses the words 'blunt', 'strong' and 'hard', words more typically assigned to masculinity. Her appearance is presented to the reader as one of contradictions – poetically beautiful to Gracewood yet 'hard' and 'blunt' to herself. The contrast between Gracewood and Viola's descriptions 'reveal sites of contradiction on the gender-variant body' because it relies on perception, Gracewood reads Viola's body as typically feminine whereas Viola struggles to view herself as feminine.[460] Crucially, the visual frame that Hall has chosen to capture this difference – the contrast between Gracewood and Viola's viewpoints - breaks away from the damaging tradition of emphasising trans* bodies 'otherness' 'through nakedness… which risks sensationalising such bodies or through other kinds of exposure, violent, intrusive, or otherwise'.[461] There is a subtlety to Hall's approach, one that while noticeable through a close reading could arguably

[459] Hall, *A Lady for a Duke*, pp. 44, 345.
[460] Halberstam, *Trans**, p. 89.
[461] Halberstam, *Trans**, p. 89.

be overlooked by the more casual reader. Viola's body and her physical appearance are not the focal point in *A Lady for a Duke,* it does not tell the story of Viola's transition and her trans* identity is not the driving force of the narrative.

The most notable thing about Viola's body is how she is presented as a physical equal to Gracewood, with them being a similar height. Typically the romance heroine will be shorter than the hero. This physical equality is also seen in Viola's actions throughout the novel – she is the better horse rider, can wield a sword against the novel's villain when Gracewood is unable, and when the couple have sex it is Viola who penetrates Gracewood. None of these behaviours make Viola less of a woman. When Viola and Gracewood have sex, it is carefully navigated, with Viola asking Gracewood questions before they have sex, such as 'have you… ever lain with a woman like me?' and 'What if you don't like it?', and saying 'I worry you will only be able to see the ways I am… I am like you'.[462] The couple talk through these questions and concerns until Viola is comfortable enough to proceed, proclaiming 'I am done being afraid of myself… I am who I am, and my body is what it is'.[463] Part of this navigation is also shown with Viola taking the penetrative role, one traditionally reserved for the male body, which is compared to a previous sexual encounter Gracewood had with a lady of the night who 'preferred to serve clients with a leather phallus', a preference that made neither Gracewood nor the woman feel any less masculine nor feminine.[464]

[462] Hall, *A Lady for a Duke*, pp. 336, 337, 338.
[463] Hall, *A Lady for a Duke*, p. 339.
[464] Hall, *A Lady for a Duke*, p. 347.

This conversation between Gracewood and Viola is crucial and continues throughout the scene; when Gracewood kisses Viola's nipples, he senses Viola's uncertainty and the couple pauses. Viola explains 'I.. I like it… But I don't know. I think I expected to more than like it. Is there something wrong with me?' to which Gracewood responds, 'not in the slightest. We are all sensitive in different ways'.[465] This conversation between them, the reassurance from Gracewood, liberates Viola from the heteronormative boundaries of sex but also changes the readers' expectations of the text and genre. In Gracewood and Viola's society, monogamous, vanilla, heterosexual sex is privileged over all other forms of sex with the result being that heterosexual individuals with cisgender bodies are privileged.[466] It would be easy to apply a transphobic, homoerotic reading of the sex scene between Gracewood and Viola as one that mimics gay sex and invalidates Viola's womanhood. But Hall has reframed the sex scenes and the act performed by Gracewood and Viola as a meeting of individuals whose gender is not determined by how they enjoy or engage in sex.

Viola is not made less of a woman through the act and Gracewood is not made less of a man. If anything, the sex connects Viola further with her body, as she finally allows herself to feel desire, to fully feel everything she has long denied herself. This echoes the sex scene between Peter and Hook analysed earlier in *Peter Darling*, as Peter also feels more connected with his body through sex. During the sex scene in *A Lady for a Duke,* Viola tells Gracewood that her body 'deserves any carnal acts I want to indulge with it.

[465] Hall, *A Lady for a Duke*, p. 343.
[466] Gayle Rubin, *Deviations* (Duke University Press, 2011), p. 149.

And if you want to find it beautiful, Gracewood, I will let you'.[467] Viola is empowered by the sex and by Gracewood's appreciation of her body and crucially it tells the reader that Viola's womanhood, her status as a heroine, is not defined by her body. Her body is not less feminine because of its inability to engage in sex in a cisgender manner and she is still capable of giving and experiencing pleasure, still capable of being beautiful. Viola is no asexual heroine. Having sex allows Viola to reclaim, or perhaps claim for the first time, her sexuality and sexual agency. Both Peter and Viola are experiencing sexual desire for the first time, perhaps because they are finally in bodies that feel right. This rightness gives them freedom to experience pleasure, to be 'unafraid and unashamed of their sexuality'.[468] It could also tie into the romance novel tradition of compulsory demisexuality that McAlister first proposed, which argues that sexual pleasure is only possible for the heroine and hero when combined with true love.[469]

Viola in *A Lady for a Duke* is a desirable individual whose body is capable of giving and receiving pleasure. She is admired, desired and loved by Gracewood as a woman regardless of her own view of her physical appearance. Although Viola struggles to appreciate her body, these anxieties are never shared by Gracewood and Viola is empowered by having sex with Gracewood. As is expected in a Regency romance, the love between Gracewood and Viola is firstly a meeting of minds, one that transcends the

[467] Hall, *A Lady for a Duke*, p. 339.
[468] Roach, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*, p. 100.
[469] McAlister, '"That Complete Fusion of Spirit as Well as Body": Heroines, Heroes, Desire and Compulsory Demisexuality in the Harlequin Mills & Boon Romance Novel', p. 304. This idea shall be developed further in the next chapter, The Queer Happily Ever After.

physical body. Viola's body, her physical appearance and her identity as a trans* woman are not the defining aspects of her character and when it is brought to the forefront due to narrative circumstance, Hall breaks away from damaging heteronormative expectations and celebrates what Viola's body can do, rather than focusing on what it cannot.

Conclusion

With this chapter, I have shown how the tropes and expectations around the bodies of the heterosexual romance hero and heroine are transformed and replicated within queer romance novels. My analysis of the *Captive Prince* trilogy and *One Last Stop* demonstrates how M/M and F/F Romances mimic and reinforce the heterosexual gender binaries of the romance novel whereas queer romances featuring trans* protagonists demonstrate more queer potential.

Damen in *The Captive Prince* trilogy does conform to the body ideals of the heterosexual romance hero: he is strong, a natural warrior, with broad shoulders and easily commands the respect of other men. Yet in contrast, Laurent, the other hero of the trilogy, struggles to embody this masculine ideal. His body is slender but still muscled, and his facial features are androgynous, allowing him to pass as a woman in a time of need. Crucially, Laurent's body is weaker than Damen's, he is less physically powerful and not a natural athlete. Damen and Laurent's bodies, and their gendered behaviours, mimic the heterosexual romance hero and heroine dynamic. Jane and August also mimic this dynamic in *One Last* Stop. Jane's body is the object of desire and

sexual attraction throughout the novel, with her appearance being vividly described and realised. In contrast, August's appearance is vague, left up to interpretation and therefore aligns more closely with the femininity of the heterosexual romance heroine.

Yet both the *Captive Prince* trilogy and *One Last Stop* also reflect contemporary ideals about queer bodies. Damen embodies the muscular, almost hyper-masculine figure of the gay male celebrity and August and Jane draw upon the butch/femme dyad in their physical appearances and relationship dynamic.

Viola from *A Lady for a Duke* and Peter from *Peter Darling* offer the biggest deviations from the body expectations seen in heterosexual romances. In their respective novels, the focus is taken away from the body, a vagueness is employed, particularly by Chant, in the descriptions of the trans* body. Yet, crucially both novels use sex with the love interest to reconnect their trans* protagonists with their bodies. It is through sex and sexual desire that Peter and Viola feel most connected with their bodies. This presents a stark contrast to the asexual depiction of the trans* bodies that is often assumed or seen in mainstream media. Neither Viola nor Peter are defined by their physical bodies and their gender is not tied to their physical appearances by the end of the novels.

I found that M/M and F/F Romances still largely reflect the gender binary of heterosexual romance novels with gender distinctions still being made between the two same-sex couples of the *Captive Prince* trilogy and *One Last*

Stop. Whereas, romances featuring trans* characters are more likely to break away from this binary by taking the focus away from the body.

THE QUEER HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Introduction

The romance genre is perhaps most well-known for its happy endings, which have been both a source of joy for readers of the genre and a source of scorn for its critics. It is therefore not surprising that Regis considers 'the happy ending [as] the one formal feature of the romance novel that virtually everyone can identify' and critics like Roach suggest that the romance genre 'is defined by what insiders commonly refer to as the HEA'.[470] It is hard to argue against this when the HEA (Happily Ever After), or the HFN (Happy For Now), is one of the key features that distinguishes a romance novel like *Red, White & Royal Blue* by Casey McQuiston from a novel like *Call Me by Your Name* (2007) by André Aciman, that contains a romantic plot. While both novels focus on a developing relationship, only *Red, White & Royal Blue* ends happily for the primary romantic couple.

A 'traditional' HEA typically includes marriage and often involves a monogamous relationship – the romance genre upholds heteronormativity through its adherence to these concepts. Do queer romances merely present a homonormative version of the HEA, or do they offer something different? How important are the concepts of monogamy and marriage to the queer HEA? These are the questions this chapter seeks to answer by analysing the queer HEA through the lens of homonormativity. To begin answering these questions it must first be established what exactly is meant by the terms HEA

[470] Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 9; Roach, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*, p. 165.

and HFN. I will analyse how two queer romances rework the HEA through the lens of homonormativity: *D'Vaughn and Kris Plan a Wedding* (*Plan a Wedding)* by Chencia C. Higgins (2022) and *Where We Left Off* by Roan Parrish (2016). In *Plan a Wedding* I will explore the topic of marriage and in *Where We Left Off* I will explore monogamy. I also incorporate my focus group data to bring in wider reader and writer views on marriage and monogamy in queer romances.

Defining the HEA

If the HEA is so crucial to the romance genre, what exactly is meant by the phrase HEA? Academics seeking to answer this question often reference the Romance Writers of America's (RWA) website, which lists an 'emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending' as one of the 'basic elements that comprise every romance novel'.[471] This definition of a HEA feels broad and vague, perhaps because it encompasses a vast range of novels that fall under the romance genre. This definition doesn't actually define what elements are needed by readers, and writers, to achieve an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending. Roach argues that the ending of a romance novel is about 'an eschaton of love, healing, commitment, completion, happiness, generational continuity, maturity and hope'.[472] In some ways this echoes the sentiment of the RWA definition because the focus is placed on the emotions of the ending – for both the readers and the characters – rather than the

[471] 'About the Romance Genre'.
[472] Roach, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*, p. 173.

relationship reaching any particular milestone. For Roach, the HEA is about emotional healing and the trust and love that the central couple has achieved. Roach also argues that because the HEA is primarily about the power of love – or erotic faith – 'gay romance maintains the status quo' of the genre.[473] By viewing the HEA through the idea of erotic faith and the healing power of love, the queer HEA, for Roach, can be aligned with the heterosexual HEA as they both 'gay and otherwise – offer a woman-centred fantasy of the end of patriarchy'.[474] This viewpoint is an oversimplification of the queer HEA, reading it purely through a homonormative lens that seeks to assimilate rather than highlight any differences. It is important, instead, to examine the HEA from a variety of approaches. For example, while the above cultural studies reading of the HEA views it as an embodiment of emotional healing, the literary analysis approach, that this chapter takes, will examine the use of genre, language, and narrative form in its analysis of the HEA.

Schell and Larsen begin to do this as they define the HEA as 'the implication of some sort of continuance – characters will continue, relationships will continue'.[475] For them, the HEA is a promise between the author and readers that these characters, this relationship, will remain happy for a long-time. The HEA therefore requires some form of stability, a promise of forever. Allan places the HEA within the conventions of the genre, saying that romance novel endings speak to 'profoundly bourgeois values… love,

[473] Roach, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*, p. 175.
[474] Roach, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*, p. 176.
[475] Heather Schell and Katherine Larsen, 'How the Story Ends: Gender, Sexuality, and Nation in the Happy Ending', *Writing From Below*, 2019 <https://writingfrombelow.org/happiness/how-the-story-ends-schell-larsen/> [accessed 16 May 2023].

marriage, monogamy, and family'.[476] It is certainly true for most of the genre's history the romance novel ended in marriage, or at least an engagement between the hero and heroine. Until the end of the twentieth century, marriage was arguably a requirement as in most cultures it would have been unseemly for a man and woman to live together or date long-term without being married. It was also the easiest way to show the reader that these two individuals would be together for the rest of their lives. Yet marriage alone wasn't enough to ensure a HEA, and loveless marriages were often what early romance heroines like Elizabeth Bennet were desperately trying to avoid. The inclusion of marriage into the HEA is only desirable if the heroine can marry the man she loves, the hero. These heroes had to be capable of financially providing for the heroine, or, in other words, they needed to be men of means capable of supporting a wife, and any future children. Economic security is still an aspect of the HEA today; it is rare for a romance focusing on two or more individuals with financial struggles to maintain money as an issue by the end of the novel. Kamblé claims this need for economic stability is so great, that the romance genre presents consumer capitalism as 'the prerequisite for happiness', through the 'popular model for the romantic hero [as] one possessing a *capitalist* identity'.[477] The hero is not only wealthy but an embodiment of the capitalist economic system. Of course, in the majority of modern romances, the heroine is no longer financially reliant on the hero for economic stability; however, it is still unusual for a romance novel to feature a financially insecure hero. As a result, modern romances tend to feature two or

[476] Allan, *Men, Masculinities, and Popular Romance*, p. 84.
[477] Kamblé, *Making Meaning in Popular Romance Fiction: An Epistemology*, pp. 33, 32.

more individuals who have independent economic security. Both economic and emotional stability are, therefore, key aspects of the HEA. The reader needs to believe that the couple have a long-term, financially and emotionally secure, future together.

Heteronormativity and Homonormativity

How then does the HEA interact with, or perhaps even uphold, heteronormative ideals? The phrase heteronormative was popularized by Warner in his 1991 work *The Fear of a Queer Planet* where he outlined how heteronormativity creates and upholds a social hierarchy on the concept of heterosexuality being the societal norm. As Michael Warner states 'so much of heterosexual privilege lies in heterosexual culture's exclusive ability to interpret itself as society… heteronormativity has a totalizing tendency'.[478] Warner was building on previous academics, such as Adrienne Rich, who argues that 'heterosexuality, like motherhood, needs to be recognized and studied as a *political institution'*, which (among other things) convinces women 'that marriage, and sexual orientation toward men, are inevitable… components of their lives'.[479] Rich, in turn, builds upon the work of Gayle Rubin who contends that mainstream society created a hierarchy of sex that privileged married, heterosexual sex above all other kinds of intercourse. Rubin argued that individuals whose behaviour adhered to heterosexuality were 'reward[ed] with certified mental health, respectability, legality, social and physical mobility,

[478] Michael Warner, 'Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet', *Social Text*, 29 (1991), pp. 3–17 (p. 8).
[479] Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 5.4 (1980), pp. 631–60 (pp. 637, 640).

institutional support, and material benefits'.[480] Heteronormativity, for Warner, is something that all queer individuals – be their queerness based on sexuality and/or gender – must contend with because 'the logic of the sexual order is so deeply embedded by now in an indescribably wide range of social institutions'.[481] Heteronormativity is the method through which certain institutions like marriage and the nuclear family are created, privileged, and upheld in society because it assumes that heterosexuality is the definition of normal sexual behaviour. In doing so it codifies male-female differences and gender roles as natural and immutable essentials in human relations.

Homonormativity builds on the concept of heteronormativity and was first coined by Lisa Duggan, who defined it as 'a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them'.[482] According to Duggan, homonormativity began as a political strategy that was designed to appeal to LGBTQ+ voters as it offered them a semblance of acceptance in the form of equality – largely through same-sex marriage equality. Although the fight for marriage equality is often seen as a progressive step forward for LGBTQ+ individuals, some critics have argued that broadening the concept of marriage to include same-sex couples actually 'constitutes a substantial preservation of the social, political and economic status quo', rather than a radical step forward.[483] This inclusion in a previously heterosexual institution assimilates LGBTQ+ individuals and creates a hierarchy

[480] Rubin, *Deviations*, p. 149.
[481] Warner, 'Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet', p. 6.
[482] Duggan, 'The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism', p. 179.
[483] Francesca Romana Ammaturo, 'The Right to a Privilege? Homonormativity and the Recognition of Same-Sex Couples in Europe', *Social & Legal Studies*, 23.2 (2014), pp. 175–94 (p. 176).

of acceptance that privileges those who are willing to adhere to and conform to heteronormative standards.

Duggan suggests that it was homonormativity as a political movement that led to marriage equality suddenly becoming a key debate in LGBTQ+ rights, along with the desire for the nuclear family among queer people, whereas previously it had been one of many issues that LGBTQ+ activists campaigned for. As Michael Lovelock states, 'the mythic qualities of equality, acceptance and success propagated by homonormative worldviews… [are] secured by… doing particular things (marrying, working, consuming)'.[484] Duggan also argues that the term equality under the politics of homonormativity in reality 'becomes [a] narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions'.[485] Homonormativity has arguably become one of the dominant thought processes underpinning LGBTQ+ representation, with an emphasis on the similarities between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ individuals. As Marlon states when analysing Black Gay Romance novels 'in the homonorm, queer love follows a heteroromance script' with any differences being 'deemed wholly inconsequential somatically, psychologically, politically, morally and ethnically'.[486] Rather than focusing on what makes LGBTQ+ individuals different from the societal norm, the focus is on what makes them the same, and this is largely done through the desire for a happy, stable and healthy relationship which will culminate in marriage and children.

[484] Michael Lovelock, 'Gay and Happy: (Proto-)Homonormativity, Emotion and Popular Culture', *Sexualities*, 22.4 (2019), pp. 549–65 (p. 552).
[485] Duggan, 'The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism', p. 190.
[486] Ross, '"What's Love but a Second Hand Emotion": Man-on-Man Passion in the Contemporary Black Gay Romance Novel', p. 670.

Does this homonormative reading of the HEA align with what readers, and writers, expect from the ending of queer romance novels? As Michelson states, 'romance readers approach a text with specific expectations for what a romance novel should be'.[487] Do readers allow for any, or even expect, changes to these 'rules' when approaching a queer romance novel? When romance readers from the three focus groups were asked what they believed was needed for a HEA in a queer romance novel, two thought patterns emerged. Some, like Delores, an Australian romance reader, said they look for 'a lifetime commitment' where the lovers are 'able to live out their lives undisturbed, with a family or with loved ones', a statement with which both Rita and Leona agreed.[488] Melissa, an American reader, when asked to define the HEA said they needed the characters to 'have settled into any kind of stable happy place together', a statement that the other three participants of the American focus group agreed with, with Eliza repeating the exact same phrase for her answer to the question.[489] None of these four readers mentioned marriage in their answer but instead focused on long-term stability. Rose, a British reader, was more explicit in her answer saying she doesn't 'look for a traditional HEA, but [she does] look for a happy ending [where]… marriage or not, children or not, they end up together and they're alive together'.[490] This answer suggests that for Rose a 'traditional' HEA would include marriage and children and this isn't something she necessarily looks for in a queer romance

[487] Anna Michelson, 'The Politics of Happily-Ever-after: Romance Genre Fiction as Aesthetic Public Sphere', *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 9 (2021), pp. 177–210 (p. 180), doi:10.1057/s41290-020-00126-7.
[488] 'Australian Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 15.
[489] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 6.
[490] Loretta and others, United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group, 2021, p. 14.

novel. Yet it is important to note that her answer suggests an indifference to the role marriage and children could play in a queer romance novel's HEA rather than outright rejection. Across all three reader focus groups, this indifference concerning the traditional markers of heterosexual romantic success was the dominant attitude from the readers when asked what they considered necessary for a queer HEA.

The readers from the UK focus group were the only ones who felt, in contrast to the above opinions, that it was more important to see queer romance novels ending with marriage or the adoption of children. Chris argued that 'you need to be able to see that's an end goal, that you can do it, and [the HEA is] a celebration' because previously queer individuals could not do those things.[491] The power of the queer HEA, for readers like Chris, comes from LGBTQ+ individuals being able to participate in systems that had previously been denied to them. Rose, in response to Chris' statement, said 'I think we all agree a lot with what Chris said in that the traditional HEA in some ways is a lot more important' in queer romance novels.[492] Rose isn't necessarily agreeing with Chris, but she is acknowledging the different weight these institutions could hold for queer individuals. It was also interesting that Loretta built upon Chris and Rose's points saying that queer romances that end in marriage 'subverts the traditional. The traditional becomes subversive'.[493] It is unclear in Loretta's statement if the 'tradition' that is being subverted is marriage or the romance HEA – it could conceivably be both. Loretta's logic

[491] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 13.
[492] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 14.
[493] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 14.

is that by allowing queer individuals entry into a historically heteronormative institution,[494] the institution itself is reformed and made queer. It is hard to interpret this type of argument without thinking of homonormativity; Chris and Rose are both assigning the queer HEA greater importance because it aligns LGBTQ+ characters with the 'traditional' HEA. Loretta's statement is similar in its thought progress to that expressed by people who argue marriage equality was a radical step forward for the LGBTQ+ community, which appears to be Loretta's logic. The ability for LGBTQ+ protagonists to get married and have children allows them to mimic heteronormative markers for romantic success: this is the process of homonormativity I've been discussing. For these readers being able to see queer characters engage with institutions they have historically been denied is liberating for Chris, of political importance for Rose, and has potentially radical tendencies for Loretta.

When the romance writers were asked the same question in their focus groups it became apparent that writers are acutely aware that they need to provide their readers with a HEA, or at least an HFN. An HFN can invoke and maintain many of the same ideas, concepts and promises as a HEA; however, it is generally used by readers of the romance genre to denote a more ambiguous ending. It is typically seen as a less successful ending than a HEA because it highlights to other readers that the relationship ends with an element of uncertainty or at least without the guarantee of a long-term commitment. As Karen Reid, an Associate Editor for Harlequin, stated when deciding whether to end a romance with a HEA or HFN, 'it all depends on what

[494] Whether that institution is marriage or the romance HEA

is right for [the] story… Wedding bells and rides into the sunset aren't the best ending for every book'.[495] In her statement, Reid aligns the HEA ending with the marriage proposal, with anything less than that being considered an HFN ending. This is certainly the traditional and most easily defined distinction between the HFN and HEA labels but how does the HFN fit into a queer context where marriage isn't always an option? The focus group with British writers was the only one to mention HFNs, with both Grace and Blake referencing them. Grace says, 'you get more HFN in queer romance' than heterosexual ones and Blake claims, 'there's not as many weddings, so a lot more HFN, but definitely people want a happy ending'.[496] Blake's comment echoes the distinction made by Reid in her statement about HFN and HEA endings, suggesting that this is still a commonly held differential between queer and heterosexual romance.

The UK publishing environment, which often has romantic fiction included within the romance umbrella, could be the reason why only the British writers mentioned HFNs.[497] It suggests that the romance genre in the UK is less clearly defined than in the American and Australian markets. The UK writer focus group was also the only one to discuss how the HEA, partly in queer romances, is constantly evolving and transforming with Ruby explaining how she 'think[s] things have changed… When [she] first started writing you didn't

[495] Karen Reid, 'Romantic Endings: Happy for Now or Happily Ever After?', *Write For Harlequin*, 2015 <https://www.writeforharlequin.com/romantic-endings-happy-for-now-or-happily-ever-after/>.
[496] Catherine Lister, Ruby, and Blake, United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group, 2021, p. 19; Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 17.
[497] Romantic Fiction is a term used in British publishing for a books that contain a romantic plot but don't have a HEA or HFN for the central relationship. The romance will also not typically be the primary focus of the novel.

get a HEA' and then in her first story the HEA was 'they got together, but then [she's] noticed a move towards getting married' and in her current novel 'they're in the process of adopting children'.[498] Ruby, who has been a reader of queer romance novels since the 1980s and a writer since the early 2000s, has experienced how 'things have moved on in terms of what you can give a HEA'.[499] The connection between the HEA in queer romance novels and the fight for LGBTQ+ rights will be explored in greater detail later in the chapter, but for now, it is interesting that it was only the UK romance writers who discussed this evolution. Even Grace, who has only been writing for a few years, felt that readers of queer romances spent 'so long with Bury Your Gays' that now they 'want happy, fluffy stories', which makes the HEA even more important.[500]

Another interesting response to the question of what constituted a HEA in queer romance novels came from Jeannelle, an American writer who primarily writes historical F/F Romances, who said they also want to provide the readers with a HEA because 'without it, it's not a romance, it's literary fiction' but admitted they had 'been hanged in reviews… for not following the heterosexual romance arc'.[501] Jeannelle doesn't expand on this comment, and despite searching, it was hard to find these reviews to get further clarification from the source.[502] Therefore only assumptions can be made about what exactly she means by the 'heterosexual romance arc'. Yet despite

[498] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 17.
[499] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 17.
[500] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 19.
[501] Jeannelle M Ferreira, American Romance Writer Interview, 2021, p. 12.
[502] Jeannelle's book listings on Goodreads, Amazon and StoryGraph were searched for these reviews, alongside multiple google searches for reviews of her books on book blogs. Some of her older work is no longer listed on Amazon, so it possible it was these books that received these reviews.

this, she still believes in and tries to provide her readers with a HEA, often by ending her novels in a relationship that mimics a marriage as closely as possible given the historical setting.[503] In contrast, the Australian romance authors didn't mention marriage at all when discussing the HEA. Instead, they emphasised stability and the relationship being viewed with a long-term mentality – echoing the sentiment of the romance readers from all three countries.

When speaking to writers and readers, two concepts emerged repeatedly as essential to queer HEA and HFN: the institution of marriage for queer people and stability for the central couple. Therefore, I shall analyse marriage and stability through the lens of homonormativity to see how these concepts are reworked and portrayed in queer romances.

Marriage and the Romance Genre

Historically, the culmination of the romance narrative would be a marriage, or at least the promise of marriage in the form of a betrothal between the central love interests. This trend in romance to always end with marriage was a serious issue for early critics of the genre like Mussell. In her research, Mussell claimed that romance novels failed 'to elaborate mature and triumphant models for female life beyond marriage'.[504] Critics like Mussell viewed the romance genre as inherently anti-feminist because they focused solely on the marriage narrative as a reinforcement of the patriarchy and the institutions that continued to uphold it. It wasn't until critics like Radway, Snitow and later Regis

[503] Ferreira, 'American Romance Writer Interview', p. 11.
[504] Mussell, *Fantasy and Reconciliation: Contemporary Formulas of Women's Romance Fiction*, p. 189.

that a more nuanced approach was applied to the romance narrative. Rather than reading the romance narrative as one that enslaved women, Regis argued that the genre championed women because its heroines had 'the freedom [they] need[ed] to pursue [their] own ends… [including] a right to companionate marriage'.[505] However, there are two main weaknesses to this argument. One is the importance it places on marriage in the happy ending, with Regis considering an 'ending in marriage (or in betrothal, the promise of marriage) [as] a formal feature of every romance novel'.[506] The other is the exclusively heteronormative reading of the romance genre that the research takes: a weakness that Regis herself has admitted is a problem in later work. As a result, Regis' reading of the romance genre does little to challenge the role marriage plays in the HEA and instead entrenches marriage as a central structural characteristic of the romance genre. This decision by Regis is understandable as she took a structuralist approach to the genre and was researching the topic in the early 2000s when marriage was still a prominent and commonplace end to a romance novel.[507]

If marriage is such a central aspect of the HEA, how does it work within a queer context? To answer this question, the history of same-sex marriage must be considered because although people have been writing queer romances since the early 1900s, it wasn't until April 2001 when the Netherlands legalised same-sex marriage that a queer romance set in the contemporary period could end in marriage without requiring the readers to suspend

[505] Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, pp. 110–11.
[506] Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 7.
[507] Michelson, 'The Politics of Happily-Ever-after: Romance Genre Fiction as Aesthetic Public Sphere', pp. 186–87.

disbelief. Before then, same-sex marriage had been illegal in every country in the world; even in 2024, it is only legal in 37 of 193 United Nations countries. Of these 37, the UK legalised same-sex marriage in July 2013 for England and Wales, in December 2014 for Scotland, and January 2020 for Northern Ireland. The US recognised same-sex marriage for all fifty states in June 2015 and Australia made same-sex marriage legal in December 2017. Yet, despite the fairly rapid passing of marriage equality acts in the 2010s by the three main countries that concern this thesis, it would be wrong to assume that all LGBTQ+ individuals welcomed marriage equality.

As previously discussed, marriage equality became a key metric of LGBTQ+ rights following a political shift that sought to include and assimilate queer individuals into the heteronormative mainstream. This shift happened, in part, because allowing members of the LGBTQ+ community access to 'the social institution of marriage… [further] stabilize[d] a heteronormative social order' that wanted to cement 'marriage and parenthood as milestone[s] definitive of a normative life cycle'.[508] The fight for marriage equality went from being just one of several issues that LGBTQ+ organisations and activists fought for, to the defining issue for the LGBTQ+ community in the latter half of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty-first century. Charitable organisations, such as Freedom to Marry, were established to solely campaign for the cause of marriage equality. Similarly, the cause became the primary focus of large organisations like the Human Rights Charity, who themselves proudly claim that 'marriage equality was at the forefront of HRC's work for

[508] Charlebois, *Gender and the Construction of Dominant, Hegemonic, and Oppositional Femininities*, pp. 102, 111.

years'.[509] Those like John D'Emilio, who has won multiple awards for his research in the area of LGBT+ studies, including the Brudner Prize, considered this single-pronged approach detrimental to the overall progress of LGBTQ+ rights.[510] He called the campaign for marriage equality in America 'an unmitigated disaster' whose only achievement was the 'creat[ion of] a vast body of new antigay law'.[511] Marriage equality indeed became such a big fight, particularly in countries like the US, that it pushed other LGBTQ+ causes to the wayside. As Yasmin Nair put it, 'the history of gay marriage is now used to overwrite all of queer history', leaving little space, time or money for other queer causes or for LGBTQ+ individuals who don't desire marriage equality.[512]

Another issue some critics from within the LGBTQ+ community had concerning marriage equality was with marriage as an institution. They viewed marriage as 'a primary structure of a capitalist economy' and would rather see LGBTQ+ money and resources put into the 'abolishment of State sanctioned coupling in either the hetero or homo incarnation'.[513] Critics like Stanley advocated for the dismantling of marriage altogether and therefore had little interest in the marriage equality movement that sought to align LGBTQ+ individuals with, in their eyes, an already broken system. One of the most

[509] 'The Journey to Marriage Equality in the United States' <https://www.hrc.org/our-work/stories/the-journey-to-marriage-equality-in-the-united-states>.
[510] 'James Robert Brudner '83 Memorial Prize and Lectures', *Yale University: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Studies* <https://lgbts.yale.edu/brudner> [accessed 21 March 2024].
[511] John D'Emilio, 'The Marriage Fight Is Setting Us Back', *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, November-December (2006), pp. 10–11 (pp. 10, 10).
[512] Yasmin Nair, 'Against Equality, Against Marriage: An Introduction', in *Against Equality: Queer Revolution Not Mere Inclusion*, ed. by Ryan Conrad (AK Press, 2014), pp. 15–21 (p. 18).
[513] Eric A. Stanley, 'Marriage Is Murder: On the Discursive Limits of Matrimony', in *Against Equality: Queer Revolution Not Mere Inclusion*, ed. by Ryan Conrad (AK Press, 2014), pp. 27–30 (pp. 27, 28).

frequently repeated arguments from LGBTQ+ individuals regarding the marriage equality campaign was the way it sought to assimilate LGBTQ+ people into the heteronormative mainstream. When arguing against marriage equality, queer thinkers, Kate and Deeg stated, 'we do not want the crumbs from [heteronormative] society's table, and we are not fighting for a place at it. We want to overturn the fucking table'.[514] Taking this argument a step further than the view expressed by Stanley, Kate and Deeg called out what they termed the 'assimilationist gays' for asking that 'the heterosexuals share some of their privilege with queers who want to be like them'.[515] To Kate and Deeg, the push towards marriage equality felt like a cleaning up of the LGTBQ+ movement's revolutionary history and the uniquely queer culture it had created, one that honoured a variety of relationships, 'not just the ones that mimic straight capitalist society'.[516] It is important to note that, despite these concerns, very few of these individuals actively fought against the fight for marriage equality; they merely wished to highlight the problems inherent with the institution and the space the campaign had taken up in queer rhetoric. These critics' objections to same-sex marriage were largely concerned with the homonormative potential of same-sex marriage and the political campaigns that fought for it.

Given the romance genre's long history with marriage, as discussed previously, did any of these queer debates enter the queer romance ecosystem? In romance scholarship, the role of marriage and the HEA has

[514] Kate and Deeg, 'Marriage Is Still the Opiate of the Queers', in *Against Equality: Queer Revolution Not Mere Inclusion* (AK Press, 2014), pp. 45–49 (p. 47).
[515] 'Marriage Is Still the Opiate of the Queers', p. 47.
[516] 'Marriage Is Still the Opiate of the Queers', p. 48.

rarely been challenged, although the unquestioned entrenchment of marriage was noted by Allan, who has written on the depiction of masculinity within the romance genre. He states that the romance genre does little 'in terms of critiquing many of the institutions – marriage, love, commitment, monogamy – that are themselves sites of oppression and normativity', proposing this as an area of further research for other scholars.[517] Betz, one of the few critics to focus solely on Lesbian Romances, even agreed that the 'outcome in Lesbian Romance stories remains the same' as their heterosexual counterparts.[518] However, she argues that a new meaning can be 'seen when [lesbian] lovers appropriate the social institution of marriage' because it frames 'a picture of the lesbian… [as] safe by placing her within recognizable contexts'.[519] This homonormative reading of marriage within Lesbian Romances fails to account for the complex relationship the queer community had and continues to have, with the institution of marriage. It is also interesting that this argument was made before same-sex marriage was legalised in large parts of the world – including the US, the setting for the books Betz analysed.

Books like the ones Betz analysed are part of a trend of queer romances promoting the cause of marriage equality by ending their novels with same-sex marriage, or engagements before it was legal. This connection between romance novels and the campaign for same-sex marriage was made explicit by Suzanne Brockmann who donated all the earnings from her novella *All Through the Night* (2007) to MassEquality, a charity dedicated to equal

[517] Allan, 'The Purity of His Maleness: Masculinity in Popular Romance Novels', p. 38.
[518] Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis*, p. 75.
[519] Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis*, pp. 76, 82.

marriage rights in Massachusetts. The novella itself revolves around the marriage of two men and Brockmann made a 'deliberate decision to write such a romance for purposes of celebrating and increasing mainstream acceptance of gay couples'.[520] Australian author Renae Kaye similarly promoted the cause of same-sex marriage in her series *Loving You* (2014 – 2018), with all four books referencing the fight for marriage equality in Australia. The final book in the series *Knowing Me, Knowing You* (2018) ends with all the couples from the three previous books getting married or engaged as it is announced that 61.6% of Australians answered, 'Yes' to the question 'Should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry?' in the Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey.[521] Given the romance genre's long tradition of ending with a marriage, it is not surprising that many authors chose this narrative plot device as a way of supporting the marriage equality campaigns for their country/state. It does, however, imply that all LGBTQ+ people were in favour of marriage equality with the narratives rarely showcasing the nuanced debates that took place within the LGBTQ+ community surrounding the topic.

Now that Australia, the UK, and the US have all legalised same-sex marriage, how has that affected the role marriage plays in the HEA of queer romances? Are queer romances still championing same-sex marriage as they did prior to it being legalised? Do queer romances conform to or challenge homonormative expectations surrounding marriage? These questions will be explored through a close reading of *Plan a Wedding* by Chencia C. Higgins.

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[520] Roach, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*, p. 174.
[521] Renae Kaye, *Knowing Me, Knowing You* (Dreamspinner Press, 2018), loc. 3649; '1800.0 Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey 2017', *Australian Bureau of Statistics*, 2017 <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1800.0> [accessed 19 August 2023].

Marriage in *D'Vaughn and Kris Plan a Wedding* by Chencia C. Higgins

Plan a Wedding by Chencia C. Higgins is a contemporary F/F Romance novel whose premise is inspired by reality dating shows like *The Bachelor/Bachelorette, Love is Blind* and *Married at First Sight*. The novel was published in 2022 by Carina Adores, the 'trope-driven LGBTQ+ contemporary romance line' by Harlequin.[522] It is an example of how mainstream publishing companies, like Harlequin, are increasingly trying to incorporate and increase their LGBTQ+ romance offerings. In the novel D'Vaughn and Kris are both participants on a reality show called *Instant I Do*, where they have six weeks to plan a wedding and convince both their families that they are getting married for real despite having only just met. If they make it to the altar, they'll win $100,000 and be the first LGBTQ+ couple to win the competition. D'Vaughn is a Black, fat, femme, closeted-lesbian due to her religious mother and Kris is a butch, Afro-Latina who has built a following online as an athletic lesbian. The reality TV show premise makes this book an interesting case study for exploring the role of marriage in the queer HEA.

Romance novels set in the world of reality TV have been growing in popularity in the last few years, with readers like Natalie saying, 'I love this newer genre… it's a lot of fun and gives us another glimpse of what shooting

[522] 'Introducing Carina Adores', *Harlequin Ever After*, 2020 <https://blog.harlequin.com/2020/06/introducing-carina-adores/> [accessed 28 March 2024].

those shows are actually like'.[523] Silvana Reyes Lopez, a Mexican book blogger echoes this sentiment saying 'when I read these books, I found out a bit more about what goes behind the cameras and spotlights… It's always fascinating'.[524] Part of the appeal of this setting is the insight it offers readers into the 'reality' behind the camera of reality TV shows. However, the vast majority of reality TV shows that revolve around couples and romance exclude LGBTQ+ individuals. As recently as 2021, in an interview with Radio Times, ITV commissioner Amanda Stavri stated that although they 'want to encourage greater inclusivity and diversity' in *Love Island* 'there's a sort of logistical difficulty'.[525] A similar message was repeated by the executive producer of *Love Island*, Richard Cowles who said that 'there is a logistical element which makes it difficult' to have LGBTQ+ contestants on the show.[526] Although there are reality TV shows that feature LGBTQ+ individuals, many of the mainstream romance-focused shows like *Love Island* still have a heteronormative format that often divides contestants on binary gender lines. By setting her queer romance in the reality dating show environment, Higgins and authors like her give readers a form of representation that they are denied on TV. It allows them to envision what LGBTQ+ inclusive dating shows could be, similar to how the pulps of the 1950s/60s allowed queer women to envision life outside the heterosexual mainstream. In *Plan a Wedding* D'Vaughn and Kris are

[523] Natalie, 'Best Reality Show Romance Novels: Our Newest Guilty Pleasure', *Pen & Lady*, 2020 <https://penandlady.com/reality-show-romance-novels/> [accessed 12 October 2023].
[524] Silvana Reyes Lopez, 'Romance Novels to Read Based on Your Favourite Reality TV Show', *Book Riot*, 2018 <https://bookriot.com/romance-novels-to-read-based-on-your-favorite-reality-tv-show/> [accessed 12 October 2023].
[525] Hannah J Davies, 'Love Island Makers Say LGBT Contestants Bring "Logistical Difficulties"', *The Guardian*, 3 June 2021, Online edition <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2021/jun/03/love-island-makers-say-lgbt-contestants-bring-logistical-difficulties>.
[526] Davies, 'Love Island Makers Say LGBT Contestants Bring "Logistical Difficulties"'.

competing in *Instant I Do,* a competition where contestants are paired up and given six weeks to plan a wedding. Each week they are given a different challenge to face, with a couple being eliminated by the producers depending on how they fared during that week's challenge. By using the reality TV format as the setting of the novel, Higgins turns weddings and marriage into a game aimed at entertaining both the reader of the novel and the imaginary viewers of *Instant I Do*. However, given the commercialisation of the setting, where marriage is positioned as a form of entertainment, what does Higgin's novel say about marriage and its place in the queer HEA?

The novel quickly establishes that the current series of *Instant I Do* is the first one to feature a full LGBTQ+ cast with all the contestants falling somewhere under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. Both D'Vaughn and Kris have signed up for the show for reasons other than the money; D'Vaughn wants to finally come out to her religious mother and Kris wants to find true love. When Kris announces this to the other contestants she is instantly shut down, with fellow contestant Margo telling Kris 'It's a marriage show' and another contestant called Nicolas supporting Margo's statement by saying 'love and marriage are not mutually inclusive'.[527] This short interaction has a few implications. Firstly it implies that Kris' goal of finding true love on a show like *Instant I Do* is unrealistic while simultaneously painting Kris as a romantic to the reader. Yet it also speaks to the reputation of the show, which had previously only featured heterosexual couples. It suggests that *Instant I Do* isn't a show about finding love but a competition that uses the institution of marriage to create drama and intrigue.

[527] Chencia C. Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding* (Carina Press, 2022), p. 23.

This is a show where although marriage is the goal, love is not. This idea is reinforced when the reader is told that the previous two 'season[s] had at least one couple that made it all the way, yet they all chose the money instead of marriage'.[528] These previous, unnamed heterosexual couples, are positioned as just playing a clever game, rather than embracing the true spirit of the show. Kevin, the executive producer of *Instant I Do* claims that the show's real purpose is to prove 'that real love doesn't always need years of cultivating in order to grow'.[529] Throughout *Plan a Wedding* the institution of marriage in a heterosexual context is criticised and shown to have a problematic history. I argue that heterosexual marriages, not same-sex marriages, are primarily critiqued and commercialised in Higgin's novel.

There are two ways this criticism of heterosexual marriage manifests throughout the course of the novel. Firstly, the criticism of heterosexual marriage as a symbol of love can be seen in the reactions of D'Vaughn and Kris' families to the sudden wedding announcement. When D'Vaughn is introduced to Kris' family for the first time, Kris' mother notices the ring D'Vaughn is wearing, leading her to ask, 'what *kind of ring, Kris?'*.[530] Kris is forced to admit that D'Vaughn is her fiancé and upon further questioning that they wish to get married in six weeks, to which someone exclaims ''Six weeks?! … 'Are you pregnant too, bitch?''.[531] Given that D'Vaughn and Kris are two women this statement seems vaguely ridiculous given the context; however, Kris' mother expresses the same sentiment only moments later saying 'you

[528] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, p. 33.
[529] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, p. 301.
[530] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, p. 88.
[531] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, l. 1173.

spring a fiancée on us and then say you're getting married in less than two months. Why else would you be doing this so quickly?'.[532] Despite the short length of this interaction, it raises some interesting points for further discussion.

Firstly, Kris and D'Vaughn's relationship is immediately equated to heteronormative concerns and the fears that often accompany opposite-sex relationships. Secondly, it implies that the primary reason two people would marry so quickly is because they *have to*, not due to any romantic desire. This whole scene indirectly references the tradition of 'shot-gun weddings' despite D'Vaughn and Kris both being women. Before WWII, love was not the primary reason people got married; instead marriage was about 'being religious, industrious, and healthy, and sex [was] for the purpose of procreation only'.[533] As such, one reason for getting married was a women becoming pregnant out of wedlock. These marriages were colloquially known in the U.S. as 'shot-gun weddings', a term that sprung from the idea that the father of the bride-to-be would force the reluctant groom down the aisle with the aid of a shotgun. This type of wedding occurred to avoid bringing shame onto the pregnant bride-to-be; it was a particularly popular practice in America during the eighteen and nineteen hundreds, where great stigma was attached to unwed mothers.[534] This stigma was arguably in part fuelled by the way 'Western cultures generally consider sex to be a dangerous, destructive, negative

[532] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, l. 1177.
[533] Francesca M. Cancian, *Love in America: Gender and Self-Development* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 29.
[534] Pascal Tréguer, 'Origin and Meanings of "Shotgun Wedding" or "Shotgun Marriage"', *World Histories*, 2019 <https://wordhistories.net/2019/01/30/shotgun-wedding-origin/> [accessed 10 June 2024]; Christina Gibson-Davis, Elizabeth O. Ananat, and Anna Gassman-Pines, 'Midpregnancy Marriage and Divorce: Why the Death of Shotgun Marriage Has Been Greatly Exaggerated', *Demography*, 53.6 (2016), pp. 1693–1715 (p. 1695).

force', one that could be 'redeemed if performed within marriage for procreative purposes'.[535] An unwed pregnant woman or single mother is a visible sign that sex has occurred outside of this socially permissible standard. The shame and stigma attached to unwed mothers could sometimes be so great it would 'taint' the whole family with scandal among the local community. Kris' family's reaction to the news that D'Vaughn and Kris wish to get married so quickly, clearly references this tradition with the pregnancy comment providing a cultural echo back to the shot-gun wedding. The stigma of pregnancy out of wedlock was even greater, potentially dangerous, for non-white unwed mothers as they had fewer legal protections and economic options than their white counterparts. Yet these fears are uniquely heteronormative in their formation; a same-sex couple will never have the fear of an unexpected pregnancy from having sex. As a result, they do not need to 'rush' a wedding and the cultural fears that prompted these questions have no application in a queer context. It therefore comes across to the reader as absurd and out of touch, a viewpoint reinforced by D'Vaughn's jokingly asking Kris 'do they think my eggs swam out of my uterus, jumped into your vagina, and somehow fertilized *your* eggs?'.[536] This scene pokes fun at heterosexual marriage because it reveals the reality of the institution, which has historically existed for many reasons other than love.

The second major criticism of heterosexual marriage is much more explicit, as it is a direct riposte to the patriarchal nature of heterosexual marriage. Seeing another woman flirting with D'Vaughn prompts D'Vaughn's

[535] Rubin, *Deviations*, p. 148.
[536] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, p. 91.

Mama, as she is known throughout the book, to say 'you should've told her to stop looking at you! It was completely disrespectful to Kris!'.[537] Not only does Mama blame D'Vaughn for how she handled the other women flirting with her, but she also perceives the slight as against Kris who wasn't even present during the interaction. Mama's behaviour is immediately challenged within the novel when D'Vaughn's sister Niesha says 'you gotta let that patriarchal mess go Mama' in response to Mama's statement.[538] Niesha explains how Mama placing the blame of the interaction on D'Vaughn is 'all about a sense of ownership… Patriarchy says that wives are the property of their husbands'.[539] By blaming D'Vaughn for not stopping the interaction and laying the slight against Kris, Mama is indirectly feeding into the idea that '[wives] belong to th[eir husband's]… completely disregarding the woman as her own person who is worthy of respect'.[540] This tirade made by Niesha is fairly extreme in its interpretation of marriage; after all, she's taken a single sentence from the mother and extrapolated it into an outburst about wives being the property of their husbands.

This viewpoint of marriage is arguably influenced by first and second-wave feminism that considered 'marriage… a political institution' that needed to be 'taken apart, critiqued, and modernized'.[541] The Victorian feminists from Mary Wollstonecraft (1790s) to Mona Caird (1880s) had vastly differing ideas

[537] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, p. 210.
[538] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, p. 211.
[539] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, p. 211.
[540] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, p. 211.
[541] Doreen Thierauf, 'Forever After: Desire in the 21st-Century Romance Blockbuster', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 3, 2016, pp. 604–26 (p. 605), doi:10.1111/jpcu.12423.

about how to challenge society's 'matrimonial ideologies'.[542] Radical Victorian feminists like Harriet Taylor attacked the idea that women were inherently subordinate to men in her article arguing for women's right to a career saying 'women are wives and mothers only because there is no other career open to them'.[543] Moving into the twenty-first century, feminists 'emphasized that the goal of the woman's movement was not (as was often charged) to discredit, but to redeem marriage'.[544] More recent critics, such as Gary Lee, suggest that viewing marriage 'as a means of subjugating women to men' is a view held by 'some people… but not many'.[545] Even those who argue that feminist ideology (particularly socialist second-wave feminism) is still useful in challenging marriage as an institution, like Nicola Barker, agree that 'feminist voices… have been absent from… marriage debates' and 'are seen as *no longer relevant* to contemporary marriage'.[546] Barker blames this on the 'myth of equality' in 'neoliberal and post-feminist discourses of freedom of choice' which blame the individual women rather than woman as a whole 'being structurally disadvantaged by the institution'.[547] It is therefore interesting that Higgins uses the ideology of the first and second wave feminists to combat Mama's comment rather than drawing on more contemporary feminist arguments against marriage. By drawing on the earlier feminist movements

[542] Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890 - 1970: The Maternal Dilemma* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p. 9.
[543] Harriet Taylor, 'The Enfranchisement of Women', *Westminster Review*, LV (1851), p. 310.
[544] Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890 - 1970: The Maternal Dilemma*, p. 49.
[545] Gary R. Lee, *The Limits of Marriage: Why Getting Everyone Married Won't Solve All Our Problems* (Lexington Books, 2015), p. 7.
[546] Nicola Barker, *Not the Marrying Kind: A Feminist Critique of Same-Sex Marriage* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), p. 4.
[547] Barker, *Not the Marrying Kind: A Feminist Critique of Same-Sex Marriage*, p. 4.

Niesha places the problems of marriage in an almost entirely heterosexual context where men's greater power in our patriarchal society is the problem. Although the comment made by Mama does contain some of these sentiments, the tirade by Niesha doesn't feel fully reflective of these comments considering the couple in question are two women. This interaction therefore only serves to highlight and criticise the patriarchal origins of heterosexual marriage, something that is irrelevant to D'Vaughn and Kris, who as two women, are unlikely to encounter systemic gender imbalances within their same-sex marriage.

The issues raised about marriage by those surrounding the two main characters in *Plan a Wedding* are contextualised as solely heterosexual problems. They are circumstances that can only happen in a marriage (or wedding) between a man and a woman. The nonsensical assumptions made by Kris and D'Vaughn's families are partly highlighted by D'Vaughn's reaction to both interactions – she laughs at the idea of her and Kris having a shot-gun wedding and completely dismisses her mother's comment as 'so insignificant that it didn't even warrant a line on [her] to-do list'.[548] The implication is that these aren't things D'Vaughn needs to worry about given she is entering into a same-sex marriage.

It is interesting to note that while *Plan a Wedding* criticises heterosexual marriage it simultaneously idolises the institution of marriage for queer people, almost implying that same-sex marriage is more 'pure', and more 'loving' than it's heterosexual counterpart. The idolisation of queer marriage begins with the

[548] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, p. 210.

characterisation of Kris, who from the beginning of the novel is shown to be strange for wanting to come on a reality TV show about marriage to actually find a wife. Previously it was established that Kris' desire to find love and an actual long-term partner on *Instant I Do* was mocked by the other contestants. Kris' desire to find a wife is again reaffirmed to the reader when Kris declares in a behind-the-scenes clip for *Instant I Do* that she 'want[s] to be a contestant on *Instant I Do* because I'm looking for a wife… This single shit is for the birds and I'm ready to start a family'.[549] Interestingly, this rhetoric is reminiscent of the shotgun wedding arguments, where children were a key reason for getting married. In contrast, Vaughn is portrayed as more cynical, or possibly more pragmatic, about the reality of finding love and a long-term partner from a reality TV show, as demonstrated when she tells Kris, 'the ring comes off and you're free to find whatever you're looking for without me hindering you'.[550] However, even though D'Vaughn is portrayed as the more cynical of the pair, she is still clearly pro-marriage as only a few chapters later she tells her friend 'I've always wanted to get married…. Being somebody's wife has been on my vision board for the past ten years'.[551] There is never any doubt in either Kris or D'Vaughn's minds that marriage is something they want, even if they disagree on whether they will find it through a reality TV show. Marriage, as shown above, is a heteronormative institution, but one that both Kris and D'Vaughn wish to participate in. The fact that D'Vaughn and Kris want to get married isn't questioned, even if their reasons for getting married so quickly are sources of

[549] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, p. 286.
[550] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, pp. 171–72.
[551] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, p. 215.

concern for their families. It is this 'uncritical endorsement of marriage equality', seen in *Plan a Wedding,* that 'risks leaving the status quo unchallenged and unquestioned'; the role of marriage for a same-sex couple and it's place in their happy ending is never challenged – the families merely express concern at the speed it is happening.[552] The question of whether a same-sex couple even needs to be married to achieve a HEA is left unchallenged by the characters and the text itself.

This celebration of marriage equality is further reinforced in D'Vaughn's application video where she proudly states 'Guess what? The gays can marry legally, now. Put us in, Coach!'.[553] D'Vaughn jokingly demanding to be included in a show that had previously only been available to those seeking a heterosexual marriage epitomizes the homonormative mentality that drove the marriage equality movement, one which scholars like Rob Cover argues sought to 'repackage sexuality and relationships on the model of heteronormativity, and thus unwittingly further justify the heterosexual matrix'.[554] Higgin's novel demonstrates little of the nuanced debates, discussed above, that circulated within the LGBTQ+ community during the long struggle for marriage equality in the US. All of the significant queer characters in the novel are shown to be supporters of same-sex marriage; even the male producer of *Instant I Do* reveals that the sound engineer for the show, is 'my husband. We've been together for almost twenty years and married for ten' in

[552] Ammaturo, 'The Right to a Privilege? Homonormativity and the Recognition of Same-Sex Couples in Europe', p. 191.
[553] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, p. 271.
[554] Rob Cover, 'Object(Ive)s of Desire: Romantic Coupledom versus Promiscuity, Subjectivity and Sexual Identity', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 24.2 (2010), pp. 251–63 (p. 254), doi:10.1080/10304310903548647.

one of the final chapters.[555] The decade this couple were together prior to getting married, was likely included to demonstrate the recent legal change in the US. Couples who had been together for a long time could finally get married, resulting in same-sex queer couples often having different relationship timelines than heterosexual couples. However, this decade of coupledom prior to getting married highlights the stability of the producer and the sound engineer, a stability that didn't require marriage. Despite featuring a large number of secondary characters who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community, none are used in the novel to showcase any other viewpoints or attitudes towards marriage equality. Instead, Higgins' novel continues the trend of romance authors like Brockmann and Kaye, who used their novels to advocate and campaign for marriage equality by presenting same-sex marriage as the ultimate ending for a queer romance novel. In doing so, same-sex marriage is firmly entrenched into the queer HEA.

The end of the novel puts Kris and D'Vaughn's love to the ultimate test as they reach the finale of the show and are at the altar getting married. When the truth of Kris and D'Vaughn's relationship is revealed at the altar to their friends and families, the show gives them the choice to get married, all expenses paid, or each take a cheque for $100,000. D'Vaughn quickly asks Kris 'would you please, if you are so inclined, finish what you started and marry me for real?', to which Kris replies 'I want to be your wife, and I want you to be mine in return'.[556] When given the choice both women instantly choose love without hesitation, something that none of the previous heterosexual couples

[555] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, p. 258.
[556] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, pp. 298–99, 299.

had done despite reaching the same point on the show. This ending is a celebration of queer marriage as not only do Kris and D'Vaughn beat the odds by getting married on a reality TV show, but they are also rewarded 'for being the first couple from *Instant I Do* to turn down the money for the marriage' with a cheque for 'two hundred fifty thousand dollars'.[557] This scene is important because it presents Kris and D'Vaughn as special; it positions their love as superior and more powerful than any of the previous, heterosexual, couples who have made it to the final of *Instant I Do.* By choosing love, they gain an all-expenses paid wedding and financial security at the start of their married life. It also means that *Plan a Wedding* ends with a marriage that is financially secure, which Regis argues is a feature that 'ends every romance novel'.[558] *Kris and D'Vaughn Plan a Wedding,* therefore, conforms to the accepted, heteronormative HEA expected from the romance genre.

Stability, Monogamy and Polyamory

Stability is a crucial aspect of the genre's HEA, with the majority of readers expecting to read a romance that ends with the protagonists in a happy stable place. Yet stability can be interpreted in many different ways. One is the financial stability discussed previously, while another is stability in the relationship – it is a promise from the author to the reader that the relationship they have just finished reading about can last beyond the final page. This is often demonstrated through a happy ending that 'consists of the

[557] Higgins, *D'Vaungh & Kris Plan a Wedding*, p. 300.
[558] Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 9.

establishment of a long-term, committed, monogamous relationship'.[559] In Western society, monogamy 'remains highly salient as a marker of commitment and stability in contemporary constructions of heterosexual partnerships', so it is hardly surprising to see this reflected in the romance genre.[560] Heterosexual relationships, and by extension wider society's attitudes towards relationships, are largely 'structured by compulsory monogamy, which is the coercive and (mostly) invisible idea that monogamy is the sole legitimate form of relationship', enforced and embedded through social norms, customs and institutions.[561] Feminist scholars, like Victoria Robinson critiqued the unequal expectations of monogamy for women and men, while others like Dilno and Rosa explored the underlying heterosexual assumptions of monogamy.[562] Scholars like Annie Murray explored the connection between compulsory monogamy and women's economic vulnerability, as women could 'protect both [their bodies] and reputation[s] by attaching [themselves] to one man'.[563] Emens explored monogamy, in particular compulsory

[559] McAlister, '"That Complete Fusion of Spirit as Well as Body": Heroines, Heroes, Desire and Compulsory Demisexuality in the Harlequin Mills & Boon Romance Novel', p. 301.
[560] Brian Heaphy, Catherine Donovan, and Jeffrey Weeks, 'A Different Affair? Openness and Nonmonogamy in Same Sex Relationships', in *The State of Affairs: Explorations in Infidelity and Commitment*, ed. by Jean Duncombe and others (Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), pp. 167–86 (p. 167).
[561] Elizabeth Sheff, 'Polyamory Is Deviant - But Not for the Reasons You Think', *Deviant Behavior*, 41.7 (2020), pp. 882–92 (p. 884), doi:10.1080/01639625.2020.1737353.
[562] Victoria Robinson, 'My Baby Just Cares for Me: Feminism, Heterosexuality and Non-Monogamy', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 6.2 (1997), pp. 143–57; Angela Willey, 'Constituting Compulsory Monogamy: Normative Femininity at the Limits of Imagination', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 24.6 (2015), pp. 621–33 (p. 621), doi:10.1080/09589236.2014.889600; J Dilno, 'Monogamy and Alternate Life-Styles', in *Our Right to Love: A Lesbian Resource Book*, ed. by Ginny Vida (Englewood Cliffs, 1978), pp. 56–63; B. Rosa, 'Anti-Monogamy: A Radical Challenge to Compulsory Heterosexuality', in *Stirring It: Challenges for Feminism*, ed. by C Griffin (Taylor and Francis, 1994), pp. 107–20.
[563] Annie S. Murray, 'Forsaking All Others: A Bifeminist Discussion of Compulsory Monogamy', in *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries, and Visions*, ed. by Naomi S Tucker, eBook (Routledge, 2014), p. 12 (p. 296).Annie S. Murray, 'Forsaking All Others: A Bifeminist Discussion of Compulsory Monogamy', in *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries, and Visions*, ed. by Naomi S Tucker, eBook (Routledge, 2014), p. 12 (p. 296).

monogamy, as one of the main pillars of contemporary culture. In 'Compulsory Monogamy and Polyamorous Existence' she expresses how the fantasy of monogamy blinds society to its reality. Romance novels arguably contribute towards this blinding through their depiction of *supermonogamy*, which is 'the idea that only one 'right' partner exists for each person' and that 'the search for one's soulmate – not merely for exclusive but for eternal love – is monogamy's most potent fantasy'.[564]

Despite this, monogamy is a surprisingly fragile concept, one that constantly needs to be reinforced and upheld. This is partly done by showcasing the limitations of other types of relationships. For example, 'non-monogamy has been commonly associated with adultery or infidelity', seen as sexually deviant and ultimately deemed an unsustainable long-term relationship model.[565] Another way is through jealousy which is an emotion that in any other circumstance would be considered a negative one, but which in the context of love becomes 'a virtue, even an emblem of true love', and arguably 'jealousy may be understood to define romantic love' because 'lovers must possess one another' in the monogamous relationship model.[566] For this reason, infidelity becomes the enemy of the fantasy of monogamy; whether it be emotional or sexual, in a committed relationship, cheating is seen as one of the biggest betrayals a partner can commit against another.

It is therefore not surprising that cheating is the antithesis of the romance genre; Georgina, an Australian romance author, said 'even if it happens in real

[564] Emens, 'Compulsory Monogamy and Polyamorous Existence', pp. 262–63.
[565] Quinn and Stoll, 'An Exploration of Sexting as a Form of Infidelity in Consensually Non-Monogamous Relationships'.
[566] Emens, 'Compulsory Monogamy and Polyamorous Existence', pp. 261, 262.

life… readers, I think as a whole are very certain they don't want any sort of cheating element'.[567] Georgina acknowledges in her comment the unrealistic expectations that are placed on monogamy in romance; heroes and heroines must be completely faithful to their partners – emotionally, mentally, and physically – as anything else is unacceptable to (most) romance readers. This aligns with the *supermonogamy* fantasy that romance novels typically promote, where cheating in any form is undesirable – to the extent that the romance heroes and heroines are required to adhere to compulsory demisexuality once they've met 'the one'. McAlister was the first to analyse the romance genre through the lens of compulsory demisexuality, which she defined as 'the idea that sex and love are, and should be, tied together', with romance protagonists only capable of true sexual pleasure with their one true love.[568] McAlister argued that 'in the romance novel [demisexuality] is institutionalized', making it compulsory demisexuality, a 'gendered paradigm' where the romance heroine initiates the romance hero into a world where love and sex are 'inextricably intertwined'.[569] It is hard not to see a connection between the author's fear of writing a romance that readers will perceive as containing elements of cheating, and a drive toward compulsory demisexuality in heroes and heroines. Cheating, one of the biggest challenges to the stability of monogamous relationships, is removed as a possibility by writing heroes (and heroines) that by the end of the novel are depicted as

[567] Robin Moray and Georgina, Australian Romance Writers Focus Group, 2021, p. 12.
[568] McAlister, '"That Complete Fusion of Spirit as Well as Body": Heroines, Heroes, Desire and Compulsory Demisexuality in the Harlequin Mills & Boon Romance Novel', p. 300.
[569] McAlister, '"That Complete Fusion of Spirit as Well as Body": Heroines, Heroes, Desire and Compulsory Demisexuality in the Harlequin Mills & Boon Romance Novel', p. 300.

incapable of feeling attraction towards or enjoying physical pleasure, with anyone but their heroine (or hero). This further reinforces the *supermonogamy* fantasy.

In a heteronormative framework, stability is still strongly linked with monogamy and the need to 'possess' your soulmate or true love; this is still the relationship structure that the majority of heterosexual romance novels adhere to. However, despite this desire for stability, there is no singular definition of cheating and it is still largely determined by individual belief systems.[570] Cheating can encompass a range of behaviours but sexual intercourse with someone other than your partner is often considered the most egregious act.[571] Interestingly, when the readers were asked about stability and monogamy in the context of the queer HEA, many of them responded by referencing polyamorous romances and expressing an openness to other relationship models. For example, Melissa, a reader from the US, stated that 'I still want something stable… If it's an open relationship that might be stability between the core relationship… Or if it's a triad I want the triad to be establish[ed] and clearly settled'.[572] Loretta, a British reader, said, 'with polyamorous romances, I go in expecting a happy ending for the throuple or whatever community they've set up'.[573] Both of these answers, from different focus groups, extend the idea of stability to polyamorous relationships and the

[570] Quinn and Stoll, 'An Exploration of Sexting as a Form of Infidelity in Consensually Non-Monogamous Relationships'.
[571] Naomi P. Moller and Andreas Vossler, 'Defining Infidelity in Research and Couple Counselling: A Qualitative Study', *Journal of Sex & Martial Therapy*, 41.5 (2014), pp. 487–97 (p. 494).
[572] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 7.
[573] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 14.

variety of relationship models the term encompasses. For these readers, the stability they desire in the polyamorous romances is founded on trust and communication between the various partners. This produces an interesting contrast to the various definitions for cheating whose underlying themes emphasise a breakdown of trust between partners and a threat to the established relationship bond.[574] It suggests that even with polyamorous romances the readers - or at least readers of queer romance novels – desire characteristics that safe-guard the relationship from cheating. Crucially though, these readers do not need monogamy to achieve emotional stability and have instead extended the HEA beyond the traditional belief that monogamy is the only relationship model capable of providing long-term emotional stability.

These readers, both of whom self-identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community, could be reflecting how 'monogamy and extra-dyadic sex (or casual sex)... differ significantly between heterosexual and homosexual relationships in terms of occurrence and acceptance'.[575] Some critics like Adam, Giddens and Stacey have highlighted the different ways queer people, with a focus on gay men, have constructed alternative relationship models while existing in a heteronormative society that has historically (and in many countries still does) exclude same-sex relationships from the institutions that are

[574] {Citation}Angelina Mao and Ahalya Raguram, 'Online Infidelity: The New Challenge to Marriage', *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 51.4 (2009), p. 302 (p. 302), doi:10.4103/0019-5545.58299.
[575] Kristofff Bonello and Malcolm C. Cross, 'Gay Monogamy: I Love You But I Can't Have Sex With Only You', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 57.1 (2009), pp. 117–39 (p. 118), doi:10.1080/00918360903445962.

typically seen to legitimatise relationships.[576] Critics who have researched polyamory practices within LGBTQ+ communities argue these communities are more likely to question the compulsory monogamy relationship framework pushed by Western society in mainstream media.[577] In contrast to their heterosexual counterparts, research suggests that in queer communities the emphasis is placed on 'sexual freedom' and there has been an intentional effort to 'separate sex from the conventional meanings it is afforded in heterosexual relationships'.[578] This is a generalisation, and a lot of queer people follow a homonormative approach towards sex and relationships. However, this research demonstrates the different mentality queer people can have towards relationships compared with their heterosexual counterparts. But how is this different mentality explored or expressed in the HEAs of queer romance novel's? To what extent do queer romance novels challenge the heteronormative framework of compulsory monogamy? I shall explore these questions through a close reading of *Where We Left Off* by Roan Parrish.

Monogamy in *Where We Left Off* by Roan Parrish

[576] Barry D. Adam, 'Relationship Innovation in Male Couples', *Sexualities*, 9.1 (2006), pp. 5–26; Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford University Press, 1992); Judith Stacey, *Unhitched: Love, Marriage and Family Values from West Hollywood to Western China* (New York University Press, 2011).
[577] Christian Klesse and others, 'Introduction: Parenting, Polyamory and Consensual Non-Monogamy. Critical and Queer Perspectives', *Sexualities*, 27.4 Special Issue: Parenting and Polyamory (2024), pp. 761–72, doi:10.1177/13634607221114466; Emily Pain, 'Queer Polyfamily Performativity: Family Practices and Adaptive Strategies Among LGBTQ+ Polyamorists', *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 16.3 (2020), pp. 277–92, doi:10.1080/1550428X.2019.1596858; Laura Portwood-Stacer, *Lifestyle Politics and Radical Activism* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), pp. 105–30; Anahi Russo Garrido, 'Between Same-Sex Marriage, Convivencia, and Polyamory: A New Cartography of Queer Relationships in Mexico City', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 46.1 (2020), pp. 127–49, doi:0097-9740/2020/4601-0006$10.00.
[578] Heaphy, Donovan, and Weeks, 'A Different Affair? Openness and Nonmonogamy in Same Sex Relationships', p. 167.

Where We Left Off by Roan Parrish is a contemporary male/male romance set in New York City; it was first published in 2016 and is the third book in Parrish's *Middle of Nowhere* trilogy. The novel is written in the first-person from the perspective of Leo, who has recently moved to New York as a university student. The romance is between Leo and Will, a slightly older man in his mid-twenties who comes from the same small town as Leo. The couple's romantic obstacle, and the primary cause of friction between them, is their different expectations and approaches to romantic relationships – Leo is a hopeless romantic looking for his 'soulmate', whereas Will is a cynic with little interest in a monogamous relationship. The novel is interesting because it focuses on relationship models, monogamy, and non-monogamous relationships. Even though queer communities and scholars have critiqued compulsory monogamy, the majority of queer romance novels are less keen to do so. *Where We Left Off* is an interesting exception as it does explicitly challenge the compulsory monogamy format of the romance genre. There are three interesting aspects that demonstrate this romance novel's unusual relationship with monogamy: the readers' reactions; its critique of the romance fantasy; and the novel's approach to sex.

The novels refusal to conform to compulsory monogamy or compulsory demisexuality with the hero of Will was a point of contention for its readers. *Where We Left Off* was markedly less well-received than the previous two novels in the series, as demonstrated through its rating of 3.92 stars on Goodreads, a noticeable drop compared to the 4.17 stars granted the first novel, *In the Middle of Somewhere,* and the 4.26 stars received by the second

novel, *Out of Nowhere*.[579] It was also reviewed less, only receiving 3,098 ratings in comparison to the 10,028 ratings received for the first book and the 5,905 ratings received for the second book. This drop could be partly attributed to it being the last in the series, as readership will typically fall the longer a series continues.[580] However, I argue that, combined with the drop in ratings, it indicates a reader backlash against this story. Reading through the reviews reveals that the majority of the readers had an issue with Will, with one reviewer saying, 'I honestly spent 90% of the story actively wanting Leo to get with someone other than Will'.[581] Another reviewer claimed this novel 'took my romantic heart out of my chest, stomped on it, and then threw it against the wall… because of Will'.[582] There appears to be one primary reason for the readers' intense dislike of Will - his unwillingness to enter into a monogamous relationship with Leo. As one reviewer put it, 'towards the end I was starting to like Will but he still won't fully commit… [or] promise monogamy'.[583] Another reviewer sardonically states 'Gee, Will, that's big of ya. Try not to strain anything with all that exertion' in response to Will's promise to try and remain sexually

[579] 'Where We Left Off by Roan Parrish', *Goodreads* <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/49894829-where-we-left-off?ac=1&from_search=true&qid=Se5GxWJCFx&rank=2> [accessed 19 July 2023].
[580] You only need to look at the number of ratings on Amazon (June 2024) to see that the longer a series goes on the less engagement it has from readers – *The Duke and I* by Julia Quinn (book 1 in the Bridgerton series) has over 59,000 ratings whereas *On The Way to the Wedding* by Julia Quinn (book 8 in the Bridgerton series) has just over 23,000. The Reluctant Royals series by Alyssa Cole paints a similar picture – book 1 *A Princess in Theory* has over 1,600 rating whereas book 3 *A Prince on Paper* has just under 800. For Nalini Singh's popular paranormal romance Psy-Changeling Trinity series, book 1 *Silver Silence* has nearly 6,000 rating whereas book 7 *Resonance Surge* has just over 2,600.
[581] BTW, 'BWT's Review of Where We Left Off by Roan Parrish', *Goodreads* <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1717044560> [accessed 19 July 2023].
[582] Ele, 'Ele's Review of Where We Left Off by Roan Parrish', *Goodreads* <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1716908140> [accessed 19 July 2023].
[583] Judith, 'Judith's Review of Where We Left Off by Roan Parrish', *Goodreads* <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1748472091> [accessed 19 July 2023].

faithful to Leo.[584] The readers' anger at Will is because he refuses to conform to the compulsory demisexuality they have come to expect from romance heroes. One reviewer, Adam, who had 'read and enjoyed many romance books in which the couple agree to an open or polyamorous relationship' had a more nuanced response to *Where We Left Off,* stating they primarily had an issue with the novel because 'Leo and Will are two very different people… In very different stages of their lives'.[585] Apart from the few reviewers like Adam, the majority of the people who reviewed this novel demonstrate a lack of sympathy for Will and his desire to have an 'unconventional' relationship model that doesn't mimic the heteronormative or homonormative monogamous model that is popular in Western society. In writing a hero like Will, Parrish has broken the implicit agreement that romance protagonists won't be tempted by others once they meet their 'true love'. It is impossible to discern the reading habits of these reviewers but, the ones who had issues with Will, based on their reactions, seem unlikely to have previously read and enjoyed polyamorous romances, or any romance that deviated from the typical *supermonogamy* template.

The readers' intense reaction to Will's polyamorous approach to dating partly explains why the authors from the three focus groups felt more nervous about writing them. As Georgina put it, 'monogamy is a little bit of a grey area because I don't believe that you have to be monogamous… [but] I haven't

[584] Katrina Passick Lumsden, 'Katrina's Review of Where We Left Off by Roan Parrish', *Goodreads* <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1769888044> [accessed 19 July 2023].
[585] Adam, 'Adam's Review of Where We Left Off by Roan Parrish', *Goodreads* <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1743739124> [accessed 19 July 2023].

really bought any sort of polyamorous stuff into… my writing' largely due to fear of reader response.[586] In contrast, the readers from the three focus groups were open to reading polyamorous romances. However, a large portion of them were members of the queer community, where non-monogamy is more common, and some even identified as polyamorous.[587] The difference between the reviews and the focus groups' approaches to polyamory could also reflect a change in reader expectations for the HEA in queer romance between 2016 (when most of these reviews were written) and 2021(when the focus groups took place). However, the intense reader reaction showcases that *Where We Left Off* is an outlier in its approach to an HEA and monogamy, further indicating that most queer romances follow a monogamous, homonormative, approach to relationships. The reader response to *Where We Left Off* is important because it reveals how even in a queer romance novel, at least at the time of being released, there was still an expectation from the majority of readers that the novel would follow a homonormative relationship model and give them the 'traditional' monogamous HEA.

This raises the question of how exactly *Where We Left Off* deviates from the monogamous, homonormative relationship model that the majority of queer romances follow. The same reviews that hated Will often expressed a love for Leo, frequently rooting for him to get a happy ending. This is interesting because, at the beginning of *Where We Left Off,* Leo is a hopeless romantic who has largely learnt what romance and relationships should look like from

[586] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 12.
[587] Angela Willey, 'Rethinking Monogamy's Nature: From the Truth of Non-Monogamy to a Dkye Ethics of "Antimonogamy"', *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 22.2 (2018), pp. 235–53 (p. 236), doi:10.1080/10894160.2017.1340006.

movies and books. I would argue that in the beginning, Leo reflects the reader's expectations for a romance novel with his overly romantic and idealistic view of love. When Leo first moves to New York he arrives hoping that he and Will are going to immediately fall into a relationship, despite the fact they barely know each other, with Leo telling the reader 'did I mention yet that my feelings for Will were pretty… intense? I knew that I didn't *super* know him, but I also knew I wasn't wrong about the connection we had'.[588] Leo fully admits to not truly knowing Will, having spent only brief moments with him prior to the start of the novel yet he has already imagined an entire fantasy of what will happen between them when he arrives in New York.

The word fantasy, or variations of it, appears twenty-three times in the novel, most often in the context of Leo's fantasies about Will and the relationship they could have together. Upon arriving in New York, Leo feels 'every fantasy I'd had of Will being part of my life was stirring again' and admits 'I had a fantasy of this moment. The one where I saw Will for the first time'.[589] When Will refuses to live up to the fantasy Leo has constructed in his head about their reunion, Leo becomes angry saying 'I found myself suddenly furious with Will, not just for not wanting me, but for, with one sentence, wrenching away the fantasies'.[590] Even after Will makes it clear that he doesn't want a relationship with anyone, Leo struggles to accept that mentality, thinking 'but, not *wanting* a relationship? Like, weren't relationships kind of the whole point? The eventual goal?'[591] Leo is unable to let go of the romantic fantasy that he

[588] Roan Parrish, *Where We Left Off* (Dreamspinner Press, 2016), loc. 309.
[589] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, locs. 371, 204.
[590] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 384.
[591] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 429.

has imagined for them for nearly two years. Even after Leo has gotten to know Will better, he still views their 'friends with benefits' situation through the lens of his internal fantasies, telling the reader 'I couldn't get this fantasy out of my head. The fantasy where Will came totally undone… Gave himself over to me and showed me something vulnerable. Something real'.[592] Due to necessity, Leo temporarily moves into Will's apartment, with Leo sleeping on the couch. When Leo can return to his college dorm he feels upset because it is 'the end of my time in the fantasy that Will and I lived here together' and he becomes filled with 'the desperate desire to shore up the fantasy'.[593] Despite telling Will otherwise, Leo is unable, or unwilling, to completely detach the reality of their situation from the fantasy Leo has spent so many years constructing, and it ultimately leads to a breakdown in not only their romantic relationship but also their friendship. Leo embodies the romantic fantasy of *supermonogamy;* he spends the majority of the novel wishing for Will to see how great they could be together and give up the other men he dates. Crucially, Leo can only imagine a fantasy where he and Will are in a monogamous relationship – despite Will telling him clearly 'I'm not interested in monogamy'.[594]

Ultimately, *Where We Left Off* critiques Leo's romantic fantasies about Will and monogamous relationships. One of the first on-page interactions between Will and Leo occurs in a café, with Will ranting that people are so distracted by his looks that 'they just want to stare at me and have me shut up and smile… Like I'm a fucking prop in some fantasy'.[595] Will's anger is visceral

[592] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 2169.
[593] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, locs. 2434, 2436.
[594] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 2455.
[595] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 727.

and arguably a warning to Leo – and the reader – that he won't fulfil the fantasy that the world expects of him. Will isn't the romantic hero that Leo has been waiting for; this message is reiterated at the very end of the novel when Will accuses Leo of leaving him, saying 'you promised that when you found out I wasn't the… the fantasy you wanted that I wouldn't lose my best friend. But I did'.[596] Leo's romantic fantasies are positioned as harmful in this scene, and one of the reasons that Will and Leo, by that point in the story, have been unable to reach their HEA. Rather than idolising Leo's romantic fantasies, the novel shows how these are damaging to his relationship with Will and causing them both to be unhappy.

The importance of separating the reality of relationships from the fantasy of romance that movies and books often depict is further reinforced by Leo's interactions with his friends. One of the most important conversations in the novel occurs between Leo and his boss, Layne. She challenges Leo's preconceptions about relationships, asking him, 'if monogamy is what you want, do you want it because it's the only thing you've considered, or because it's normal… Do you want it because monogamy is something you actively desire or value?'[597] In this scene, Parrish, through Layne, is directly challenging compulsory monogamy, forcing both the reader and Leo to rethink what they believe about relationships. The novel again challenges Leo's tendency to romanticise relationships and, in particular, questions whether the 'perfect' relationship he has imagined himself and Will having is even what he truly wants. This conversation positions Leo's romantic ideals as something that must

[596] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 4311.
[597] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 2648.

be overcome for him to achieve happiness; Layne tells him, 'you seem like a romantic… it's maybe harder [for you] to acknowledge data that doesn't fit with the fantasy view you have, even if that fantasy's just hope'.[598] Leo's idolisation of Will and the type of relationship he dreamt of having with Will are positioned as dangerous, or at least damaging, to Leo because it is stopping him from accepting the reality of the situation. His romantic ideals, his fantasy of romance and relationships, are dangerous because they aren't based in reality. The conversation also further reinforces that Leo needs to unpick the fantasy he has built around Will, because as Layne later tells Leo 'it's really hard to see people as they are,… [because] we have a lot invested in seeing them in relation to ourselves'.[599] This conversation with Layne is crucial to Leo's development because it educates him about non-monogamous relationships from someone other than Will and it shows Leo that Will isn't the only person with these attitudes. The conversation ends with Layne saying, 'in my community, among my friends and lovers, nonmonogamy is the norm', which again tells Leo, and the reader, that monogamy isn't the default for everyone and that it is possible to have successful non-monogamous relationships.[600] Rather than idolising the monogamous couple, *Where We Left Off* critiques the idea that 'coupled relationships [are] the natural outcome of human sexuality' through the journey that Leo takes to unlearn the compulsory monogamy he has grown up surrounded by.[601]

[598] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 2657.
[599] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 2677.
[600] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 2680.
[601] Cover, 'Object(Ive)s of Desire: Romantic Coupledom versus Promiscuity, Subjectivity and Sexual Identity', p. 254.

In addition to the direct criticism of Leo's romantic fantasy, the novel also shows Leo's journey to unlearn compulsory monogamy through its treatment of sex. As previously discussed, romance novels often end up depicting heroes and heroines who adhere to compulsory demisexuality by the end of the novel. The idea that 'sex and love are and should be tied together' was originally proposed by McAlister within the context of heterosexual category romance novels, but it can also be seen in queer romances. Betz, for instance, argues that in Lesbian Romances 'sex represents the point at which the couple takes deliberate action to establish the relationship'.[602] Roach, talking about both heterosexual and queer romances, argues that in the romance genre 'sex isn't fully meaningful without love'.[603] For these critics, although the sex being depicted in queer romances might be different to that in heterosexual romances, it similarly underscores the connection between the two love interests. Ultimately, by the end of the novel, the love interests of queer romance conform to the compulsory demisexuality seen in the heterosexual category romances first analysed by McAlister. For critics like Betz and Roach, sex in queer romances upholds a homonormative model of the HEA through the linking of love and sex. Allan is one of the few critics to argue that sex in queer romance can 'challenge how we think about sex in the popular romance novel', although he largely considers it from the context of the male/male romance genre and its unrealistic depiction of gay male sex 'in the age of PrEP'.[604] I argue that *Where We Left Off* challenges the homonormative

[602] Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis*, p. 125.
[603] Roach, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*, p. 175.
[604] Allan, *Men, Masculinities, and Popular Romance*, pp. 90, 89. PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, is a medicine that reduces the risk of getting HIV.

HEA because it breaks the connection between love and sex that is so central to the monogamous romance fantasy.

The most obvious way it does this is by showing both Will and Leo experiencing and enjoying sexual acts with other men. After Will rejects him, Leo gets tipsy and exchanges hand jobs with Milton, a guy from his college, who 'felt comfortable. Welcoming. Like someone actually appreciated me for once. Wanted me'.[605] Crucially, this isn't a 'fade to black' scene where the sexual acts between Leo and Milton are left to the readers' imagination. Instead, the hand jobs are shown to be messy and slightly awkward, with Leo at one point 'almost falling on [his] face because of the tangle Milton had made of [his] pants', but also caring and loving, with Leo thinking 'I wanted to make him feel as good as he was making me feel'.[606] Parrish gives this encounter the same space and importance on the page as the sex Leo will later have with Will; it isn't rushed through, or dismissed as a mere physical urge, but instead is shown as a moment of connection between two people – even if it isn't a romantic one. This message is underlined by the final sentence of the scene, where Milton tells Leo, ''We're going to be friends''.[607] It is rare for a romance novel to show sexual acts in a positive light when it isn't between the main love interests; most of the time, if the sexual acts aren't between the two protagonists 'sexual pleasure is not possible' or it is shown to be less enjoyable than with the other protagonist.[608] In the first few chapters, *Where We Left Off*

[605] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 495.
[606] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, locs. 507, 518.
[607] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 526.
[608] McAlister, '"That Complete Fusion of Spirit as Well as Body": Heroines, Heroes, Desire and Compulsory Demisexuality in the Harlequin Mills & Boon Romance Novel', p. 304.

shows that sex can be fun, even without love, marking a dramatic shift from the usual monogamous relationship model.

But Leo's response to having sex with Milton shows that he isn't yet ready to separate love and sex. Firstly, he messages Will saying, 'I'm lying in bed with another guy's come all over me', even though 'it was a lie', in a deliberate attempt to make Will jealous.[609] Leo is trying to make Will jealous because at this moment Leo believes that Will's jealousy would be a sign that Will has romantic feelings for him. This belief is not surprising given that Emens identifies jealousy as the defining characteristic of romantic love: 'jealousy is treated as evidence of love… [it] may be understood to define romantic love [because] lovers must possess one another'.[610] Jealousy is one of the fundamentals of monogamous relationships and predictably Leo attempts to make Will jealous at the start of the novel. However, Leo's attempt is unsuccessful as Will merely replies 'that's exactly what you should be doing in college. Play safe'.[611] This is an interesting interaction because it highlights the different approaches Leo and Will have towards sex at the start of the novel. Will views sex as something fun and has no issue with Leo learning and experimenting; the word 'play' is used multiple times throughout the novel by Will in reference to sex.

By contrast, Leo wants to make Will jealous and still views sex as an act that must be charged with emotion. This is further reinforced when he blurts to Milton a few days later 'that was amazing, but I can't be your boyfriend because my heart belongs to another', to which Milton quickly responds, 'I

[609] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, locs. 528, 531.
[610] Emens, 'Compulsory Monogamy and Polyamorous Existence', pp. 261–62.
[611] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 536.

don't want to be your boyfriend, I was just horny as fuck and wanted to jerk off with you on a roof under the stars'.[612] Leo still struggles to understand this mentality of sex without love, needing Milton to reaffirm it a few times, but it's an important step in Leo, and the reader's, journey because it shows that sex doesn't need to involve romantic feelings to be enjoyable. It isn't until after the relationship between Leo and Will has broken down that this message is truly internalised for Leo. He has sex with a lab partner, Russell, who is 'nice. Comfortable. Sweet'.[613] Having casual, spontaneous sex with Russell is an important step in Leo's journey because it finally allows him to understand 'what [Will] said about having sex with other people not having any bearing on what [Will] felt about [Leo]'.[614] Leo, through having sex with another person whom he doesn't feel a romantic connection with, is finally able to understand Will's perspective. He can finally accept that sexual fidelity is not the most important criterion for a successful long-term relationship because he's now experienced casual sex with another man and it hasn't changed how he feels about Will. All the theoretical conversations and thinking that Leo had about non-monogamy and differing relationship models are finally put into practice. It is only by experiencing casual sex that Leo can truly understand Will.

This separation of sex and love is further shown through Will, who frequently engages in casual sex while maintaining and growing an emotional bond with Leo. As the novel is told from the perspective of Leo, the reader doesn't experience Will having sex with other men, like the scene between Leo

[612] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 579.
[613] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 3064.
[614] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 3452.

and Milton, but the reader is consistently reminded of the fact that Will sleeps with other men. For example, Leo tells the reader that when Will is asked what he's been up to and replies, ''Oh, you know, not much,'… [it's] Will code for 'I hooked up with someone''.[615] During Thanksgiving, Will sends Leo a picture of himself at a gay bar with the message 'Gonna be giving thanks pretty soon myself *leer*'.[616] When Leo and Will run into Tariq, whose 'smile was flirtatious. Filthy. There wasn't a doubt in [Leo's] mind it was a smile that broadcast *We have had sex*'.[617] In addition, when Leo first challenges Will on his lack of interest in a relationship, Will replies by saying ''I sleep with people when I want to'… his tone dared me to find fault with what he'd said'.[618] *Where We Left Off* doesn't shame Will for his attitude towards sex and it doesn't shy away from making it clear to Leo, and the reader, that he enjoys having sex with people who aren't Leo.

However, the one time that Leo explicitly sees Will having sex with another man causes 'the point of ritual death' for Leo and Will's relationship, so called because it marks the moment when the couple seem incapable of overcoming the obstacles to their relationship.[619] When Leo lets himself into Will's apartment, he hears 'another groan. This one decidedly not Will' and moving towards the door he sees 'Will, on the bed, groaning as a man kissed him, bit his neck, pulled his hair back, hips grinding together'.[620] Faced with the reality of Will sleeping with other people, rather than just the theoretical

[615] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 1146.
[616] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 1381.
[617] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 2617.
[618] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 336.
[619] Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 30.
[620] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, locs. 2754, 2763.

knowledge, Leo is unable to cope. When Will chases after Leo, who attempts to flee the apartment, Leo thinks 'I couldn't stand to look at him, couldn't stand the idea that he'd touch me'; he begins 'cataloguing the places [he'd] seen the man touch [Will] like I was dusting him for fingerprints, each touch standing out, a black spot on his pale skin'.[621] Leo's reaction is comparable to a boyfriend/husband who has found their partner cheating on them. He is simultaneously repulsed by Will and desperate to physically reclaim him – wiping away the other man's touch. This is the point of ritual death for Leo and Will because it highlights an inconsolable difference between them – Leo's desire for a monogamous relationship and Will's polyamorous nature. Will tries to explain to Leo that 'I never promised you anything', 'you agreed that it was okay', and that his sleeping with other men 'has nothing to do with [Leo]'.[622] But for Leo, this moment shatters the fantasy he was able to maintain about his and Will's relationship; seeing Will with another man has made it impossible for Leo to ignore the reality of Will's polyamorous nature. Before this scene the narrative sustains the illusion of demisexuality for both Will and Leo, at least since they began sleeping together. Leo can fool both himself and the reader that he is the only character having sex with Will but, in this scene, that illusion and the romantic fantasy it maintains is broken for both the reader and Leo. This causes the point of ritual death with the scene ending with Leo telling Will ''I'm done… I can't do this anymore. It hurts too much''.[623] It is the narrative

[621] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, locs. 2772, 2780.
[622] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, locs. 2795, 2796, 2790.
[623] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 2815.

moment that the novel has been building towards because it vividly highlights Will and Leo's differing romantic orientations – monogamous vs polyamorous.

However, even in this moment, and multiple other moments, *Where We Left Off* showcases that Will's feelings for Leo are different and completely separate from his feelings for those he has sex with. In the scene, Will tells Leo, 'It has nothing to do with you. I – other people – it's just sex, it doesn't matter' in response to Leo asking why Will would do this to him, to them.[624] He even tells Leo 'I like you so much. Of *course* I do', a stark contrast to Will's dismissal of the man he'd just been having sex with who leaves the apartment without Will 'even look[ing] at him'.[625] Throughout the novel, Will is dismissive about the men he sleeps with. He 'complain[s] about what an idiot the guy he'd hooked up with' is, describes them collectively as 'those fuckheads' and is even accused by Leo of only wanting to sleep with 'guys [he] kinda hate[s]', an accusation he doesn't dispute.[626] In Will's own words, 'it was just sex. It was nothing' with all those men; they aren't important to him on an emotional level, even if he enjoys having sex with them.[627] This is a stark contrast to the genuine emotional connection he has with Leo, who is Will's 'best friend… [his] best fucking friend', as Will announces in an interesting play on words.[628] Leo is shown to be more important to Will through his actions, a fact Leo realises towards the end of the novel when he reflects on their dynamic. He realises Will is 'someone who hung out with [him], had sex with [him], hugged [him], joked with [him], ate with

[624] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 2790.
[625] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, locs. 2782, 2786.
[626] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, locs. 1150, 1152, 1895.
[627] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 4161.
[628] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 4161.

[him], slept with [him], and told [him] about his day… Someone who acted like [they] were together'.[629] Will's attitude is arguably reflective of a type of polyamory which prioritises a 'dyadic emotional commitment rather than sexual exclusivity' and where the importance is placed on 'protecting the primary relationship… through a process of emotional avoidance in casual sex'.[630] Sex is ultimately devalued in *Where We Left Off;* rather than being used as proof of Leo and Will's connection, it is shown to be something they can enjoy together and with others, but it isn't some grand signifier of true love. Therefore, their version of HEA doesn't require sexual exclusivity; it doesn't adhere to the rules of monogamy, or *supermonogamy* that most romances follow.

Interestingly, the novel arguably ends on an HFN note with Will and Leo having declared their love for each other and agreeing to an exclusive relationship for the time being – as Will says 'I reserve the right to find other people desirable. And to, like, renegotiate shit down the line' with Leo agreeing and saying, 'we both just have to trust that we know what we want right now and that what we want might change'.[631] This ending, at least on paper, adheres to the monogamous HFN that is expected from romance novels. But although they are in a monogamous relationship, the ending crucially shows that this might not always be the case. The focus is placed on their need to communicate their desires and allows space for the nature of the relationship to grow in the future. In that sense, the ending contains many of

[629] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 4215.
[630] Bonello and Cross, 'Gay Monogamy: I Love You But I Can't Have Sex With Only You', pp. 135, 136.
[631] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, locs. 4282, 4285.

the characteristics essential for ethical non-monogamy – a lack of jealousy and healthy communication. It is also arguably reflective of 'the most common story of nonexclusive relationships' in queer circles, where the couple agree to be 'emotionally monogamous, but often sexually open'.[632] This is emphasised and reinforced by the novels closing scene, where Will declares his love for Leo in a public place, calling Leo 'his sun and his moon and his damn starlit sky'.[633] The stability of the HFN ending is secured by Leo and Will's emotional commitment to each other, rather than an agreement to be sexually faithful long-term.

Where We Left Off was a controversial book for readers when it was first released, largely because of its approach to monogamy and the way it doesn't make Will transform completely. By the end of the novel Will has undergone an emotional transformation due to his love for Leo, but he hasn't fully transformed into the compulsory demisexual hero who is required for the *supermonogamy* formula of the romance genre. Instead, it is Leo who has transformed his thinking and unlearned the compulsory monogamy of society by accepting Will for who he is and the possibility of an open relationship in the future. This novel critiques the romance fantasy, challenges the concept of monogamy, and diminishes the importance of sexual exclusivity in a committed relationship. The reader response suggests this was an outlier, and it received mixed reviews because it didn't rigidly follow the homonormative template expected from a male/male romance novel. *Where We Left Off*

[632] Heaphy, Donovan, and Weeks, 'A Different Affair? Openness and Nonmonogamy in Same Sex Relationships', p. 174.
[633] Parrish, *Where We Left Off*, loc. 4466.

challenges the need for monogamy in the HEA and showcases one way that queer romances can break away from the homonormative HEA template, even if most of them continue to largely mirror their heterosexual counterparts.

Conclusion

This chapter explored how two of the key formal features of the romance genre's HEA – the institution of marriage and monogamy - have been reworked or re-conceptualised within a queer context. These novels are just two examples of how the queer romance genre can conform to or transform the 'traditional' or heterosexual HEA. They do not represent the whole of the queer romance genre, but they do show some of the ways that romance authors are adapting the HEA within a queer context.

Plan a Wedding by Chencia C. Higgins arguably continued the long tradition of romance novels ending in marriage – one based on love – that also provided the couple with financial security. It is a good example of how queer romances still follow the heteronormative structure outlined by Regis regarding marriage and the HEA. In Higgins' novel heterosexual marriage is shown to be problematic – with patriarchal origins of ownership. In contrast, same-sex marriage is idolised and seen as the romantic goal for both Kris and D'Vaughn. Rather than challenging the status quo of the heterosexual HEA the novel instead celebrates the inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals into an institution that had previously excluded them. This novel is a homonormative reworking of the traditional HEA that was started by romance authors during their campaign for marriage equality. Rather than challenging the institution of marriage as a 'site

of oppression and normativity' Higgins celebrates the inclusion of queer individuals into this previously exclusive institution.[634] Marriage equality is portrayed as a unanimous win for the LGBTQ+ community in Higgins' novels through its unchallenged acceptance of marriage as a core part of D'Vaughn and Kris' HEA.

In contrast, Parrish's novel *Where We Left Off* breaks away from the heteronormative template often seen in romance novels through its rejection of compulsory monogamy. Parrish's novel received mixed reviews upon its release, highlighting how the novel's challenge of monogamous relationships was unusual even within the queer romance genre. It challenged the idea that sex and love must be intimately entwined within the romance genre and instead actively worked to separate the ideas of love, monogamy, and sex. By challenging the idea that monogamy is a core aspect of the HEA it broke away from the homonormative template that *Plan a Wedding* embodied. The fact that *Where We Left Off* is an outlier demonstrates how the majority of queer romance novels still use monogamy and the assumed stability it provides as a framework for their HEA.

Despite the different themes of these novels – marriage and ethnical non-monogamy – one of the connections between them is their criticism of heteronormative institutions: Higgins' novel through its critique of heterosexual marriage and Parrish's novel through its rejection of the monogamous relationship model. Although the critique is stronger in Parrish's novel, it is also present in Higgins' despite the novel's overall celebration of the

[634] Allan, 'The Purity of His Maleness: Masculinity in Popular Romance Novels', p. 38.

homonormative institution of same-sex marriage. Considering there is no academically accepted definition of what constitutes a queer HEA – separate from a heterosexual HEA - it is interesting that both novels actively work to separate themselves from the heterosexual institutions of marriage and monogamy. I question whether there is a need for a completely separate definition of a HEA for queer romance novels, but there certainly needs to be greater recognition in romance scholarship of the different expectations that readers, writers and publishing professionals are working towards when considering the HEA of queer romance novels. Marriage, despite becoming more common in contemporary romances is different in a queer context, as same-sex marriage has a different history and a variety of implications/importance for the LGBTQ+ community. Similarly, whereas the majority of heterosexual romances must still conform and uphold compulsory monogamy, there is more fluidity and space for authors to explore alternate relationship models in queer romances. A queer HEA does not necessarily need to conform to the heteronormative institutions of monogamy and marriage but it must still demonstrate that the relationship readers have spent the novel reading about is a stable one with the potential to last. These novels therefore show that queer romances do have the potential to disrupt and dismantle the heteronormative institutions associated with the HEA. However, based on the reception of *Where We Left Off* and my conversations with queer romance authors, deviating too much from the accepted characteristics of the Heterosexual HEA – like the desire for monogamy - can present a commercial challenge, thereby limiting the queer potential for queer romance novels.

QUEER ROMANCES TODAY

This chapter is an analysis of six focus groups with readers and writers of queer romance from Australia, the UK and the US that took place between July and August 2021.[635] From these six focus groups three key themes emerged: the readers' and writers' discovery of and continued engagement with the genre, the globalisation of queer romances and the genre's relationship with LGBTQ+ activism. This chapter argues that readers and writers come to the queer romance genre to reject heteronormativity, educate themselves on LGBTQ+ topics, and explore and discover their own LGBTQ+ identities. I spoke with readers and writers to gain an understanding of what the queer romance community thinks of the genre in the current moment. I found that America dominates the global genre, and for both readers and writers, the activism of these novels is rooted in their representation of minority groups. This snapshot into the queer romance ecosystem is critical as it expands on Radway's research in *Reading the Romance* by including the queer romance genre and by considering authors' perspectives.[636]

In the first section, I discuss how people discover queer romance novels, and more importantly, why they continue to read them. These are basic questions, but in truth, few romance scholars have addressed them and they reveal a lot about the appeal of the genre to its wide and diverse audience.

[635] As a reminder from the thesis introduction, the focus groups consisted of straight and LGBTQ+ women and non-binary people from America, Australia and the UK and therefore does not consider any male readers or writers of queer romance novels.
[636] Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*.

In contrast to previously held assumptions, most queer romance readers are members of the LGBTQ+ community, although still largely female-identifying.[637] The most popular type of queer romance remains M/M or male-focused queer romances, leading me to question what a largely queer female audience gains from male-focused queer romances. I felt it was important to ask my focus groups, both readers and writers, about the types of queer romances they read, what they enjoy about reading them and why they first started reading them. From these questions, three core ideas emerged: a rejection of the heteronormative, discovery and validation of their own identities and queer romances as a form of support and education.

In the second section, I explore how readers and writers of queer romance perceive the queer romance genre as an international industry. The global big five publishing houses – HarperCollins, Hachette, Macmillan, Simon and Schuster and Penguin Random House – produce romance novels, often through imprints like Mills & Boon or Avon. These big five publishers take a seemingly international approach to publishing romance, as seen by Harlequin, an imprint of HarperCollins who publish '110 romance titles a month… in over 30 countries and 150 languages' and have more than 1,500 authors worldwide.[638] There are also several established small to medium-sized publishers and self-published authors all over the globe writing romance. There is certainly a convincing narrative that the romance genre is global and

[637] This was shown and discussed in the final section of the 'History of Queer Romance' chapter.
[638] Jayashree Kamblé, Eric Murphy Selinger, and Hsu-Ming Teo, 'Introduction', in *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction* (Routledge, 2021), pp. 1–24 (p. 1).

interconnected. But, if romance is a global genre in the twenty-first century, is queer romance perceived the same way across the three publishing ecosystems of Australia, the UK and the US? After examining my data on queer romances I noticed that the majority of authors, publishing houses and main characters were American.[639] This prompted me to organise focus groups across the three countries to discover how readers and writers of queer romance from Australia, the US and the UK perceive the genre. This section of the chapter is primarily concerned with two key questions: how has globalisation impacted queer romances; and are writers and readers of queer romance conscious of this American bias?

In the final section, I explore how readers and writers perceive the relationship between the queer romance genre and LGBTQ+ activism. It draws on scholarship about romance readership, which can be broadly split into two concepts: scholars like Radway, Betz and Thumala Olave who suggest that romance offers an escape from real life for its readers, and scholars like Kamblé, Hsu-Ming Teo and Laura Vivanco who have explored the genre in connection with modern politics and ideology.[640] Across the six focus groups, three ideas were identified in the discussions of whether readers and writers wanted queer romances to engage with real-world LGBTQ+ politics. First were those who used queer romances to escape from day-to-day realities; second,

[639] The details of these findings shall be discussed and shown in the introduction of this section
[640] Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*; Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis*; M.A. Thumala Olave, 'Reading Matters: Towards a Cultural Sociology of Reading', *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 6.3 (2018), pp. 417–54; Kamblé, *Making Meaning in Popular Romance Fiction: An Epistemology*; Hsu-Ming Teo, 'The Romance of White Nations: Imperialism, Popular Culture and National Histories', in *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation*, ed. by Antoinette Burton (Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 279–92; Laura Vivanco, *Pursuing Happiness: Reading American Romance as Political Fiction* (Humanities E-Books, 2016).

those who felt the representation queer romance provided served as political engagement; and finally, those who felt that queer romances needed to be more political. The majority of readers felt that the positive representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in queer romances was a political statement, whereas the writers often did not view their books as political.

The Journey to Queer Romance

One of the earliest scholars to address the question of why people read queer romance novels was Juhasz. She proposed that 'the continuing power of lesbian romances' were as 'narrative works' that '[satisfied] the need of [lesbian] readers… to see [them]selves in representation form'.[641] This argument was a radical break from that of lesbian feminists who dismissed Lesbian Romances as a mere imitation 'of heterosexual literature' which 'presented images of lesbian intimate relationships' as either 'highly romanticised… [or] pornographic and objectifying'.[642] Instead Juhasz argues that Lesbian Romances provided a crucial form of representation for a minority that had long been denied any kind of narrative reflection in wider society. These early Lesbian Romances gave its readers a template for being queer women in relationships in a heterosexual society.[643] It is this element, Juhasz argues, that made them popular with female lesbian readers. Similarly, Regis, in 2003, argues that 'the romance genre [was] the most female of popular

[641] Juhasz, 'Lesbian Romance Fiction and the Plotting of Desire: Narrative Theory, Lesbian Identity, and Reading Practice (1998)', p. 279.
[642] Harne, 'From Beyond Sex and Romance? Lesbian Relationships in Contemporary Fiction (1998)', p. 177.
[643] Matelski, '"I'm Not the Only Lesbian Who Wears a Skirt": Lesbian Romance Fiction and Identity in Post-World War II America'.

genres' and was 'popular because it convey[ed] the pain, uplift, and joy that freedom brings' for its largely female audience.[644] Like Juhasz, Regis focuses on the female nature of romance readers but from the perspective of the heterosexual reader. Regis' statement is of its time, largely because it does not consider romance novels without a female heroine.[645]

Although the popular romance genre remains a genre primarily written and read by women, an increasing number of bestselling queer romance novels feature two male characters. *Red, White & Royal Blue* crossed over into the mainstream when Amazon bought the film rights to McQuiston's novel, being both new and long-term romance readers to queer romances. What then is the appeal of M/M or male-focused queer romances for queer female readers? Allan argues that M/M Romances are popular with readers because they present 'an alternative universe in which men are free to love one another, and the eroticism therein titillates readers'.[646] In doing so M/M Romances provide readers with a form of masculinity that 'at first glance appear[s] quite progressive' but in truth 'remains committed to… conservative ideals'.[647] Roach also states that 'romance fiction *is* pornography' but takes a more positive approach than Allan by arguing that 'romance authors are opening up restrictive sexual taboos in ways that have real potential to lessen social injustice for women, for sexual minorities and for men'.[648] Roach argues

[644] Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. xiii.
[645] Despite later changing her terminology to protagonists, Regis' analysis of the genre still focuses on the heroine's journey and narrative struggle.
[646] Allan, *Men, Masculinities, and Popular Romance*, p. 76.
[647] Allan, *Men, Masculinities, and Popular Romance*, p. 83.
[648] Roach, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*, p. 84; Roach, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*, pp. 88–89.

that romance novels remain popular because they give readers a vision of a better world, one were love and humanity can triumph over social injustice. What is missing from the arguments of Juhasz, Regis, Allan and Roach is interactions with readers and writers. They have all based their arguments on sociological assumptions with no first-hand data from the community about why writers and readers continue to engage with these novels. In fact, Radway is one of the few scholars to collect first-hand accounts from readers and her findings conclude that 'women [read romances] because the experience itself is different from [their] ordinary existence'.[649] However, her data is nearly forty years old and focuses on a small group of heterosexual women who primarily read historical romances popular in the 1970s and 80s. Building upon Radway's research I also spoke to queer romance novel authors to gain a more holistic understanding of the queer romance ecosystem.

During the six focus groups – three with readers and three with writers of queer romances – two main methods of discovering queer romances emerged. The first was through fanfiction, often queer, and the second was through reading heterosexual romances before transitioning into queer romances.

Fanfiction and Heteronormative Expectations

The connection between fanfiction and queer romances, particularly M/M Romances, is well-researched by scholars interested in LGBTQ+ writing,

[649] Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 61.

fanfiction and/or queer romances.[650] Some scholars argue the origins of M/M Romances can be traced to the Kirk/Spock slash fiction of the 1970s. Certainly, fandom influenced the emerging M/M Romance genre, as explored in Chapter 1.[651] Therefore, it is not surprising that a good portion of readers in the focus groups cited fanfiction as their first foray into queer romances. During the focus group with readers from the US, Lila, who primarily reads Lesbian Romances, stated they 'got into queer romance because of the old Xena Warrior Princess fanfiction'.[652] This statement was enthusiastically reiterated by Eliza. Similarly, in the Australian romance reader focus group, Delores said she had been reading 'queer fanfiction since [she] was probably 21, [she's] 45 now'.[653] In addition, Delores went on to claim that the reason she started reading queer romances was because 'a few of the writers of the fanfiction, came across and started publishing professionally'.[654] Later, an organic discussion occurred about the length of novels and their relationship with fanfiction. Leona, who did not claim to have read any fanfiction, still seemed aware of this connection, saying that 'people who've gone from fanfic… write shorter books – and I like longer books'.[655] Interestingly, the topic of fanfiction never came up in the focus group with British readers, possibly showing a

[650] Foster, 'What To Do If Your Inner Tomboy Is a Homo: Straight Women, Bisexuality, and Pleasure in M/M Gay Romance Fictions', p. 510; Fessenden, 'My Take on Women Writing MM Romance'; Jenna Sinclair, 'A Short History of Early K/S or How The First Slash Fandom Came To Be', *Beyond Dreams Press*, 2002 <https://web.archive.org/web/20110707231116/http://beyonddreamspress.com/history.htm> [accessed 23 June 2021]; C.E. Hammock, 'The Romance Genre, Gay Fiction and M/M Romance', *C.E. Hammock*, 2017 <https://ceh3167.wordpress.com/2017/10/06/the-romance-genre-gay-fiction-and-m-m-romance/> [accessed 12 February 2020].
[651] Sinclair, 'A Short History of Early K/S or How The First Slash Fandom Came To Be'.
[652] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 1.
[653] 'Australian Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 1.
[654] 'Australian Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 1.
[655] 'Australian Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 3.

difference between British readers and Australian and American readers. However, this could merely be due to the four individuals in that focus group not being fanfiction readers and therefore no larger conclusions should be drawn about British readers and fanfiction.

Some of the writers in the focus groups for Australia and the UK also brought up the topic of fanfiction without prompting. Robin Moray, an Australian writer, explained that they 'write queer romances because [they] started out in fandom, so [they were] writing fanfiction' and from there went 'into fiction… both reading and writing it'.[656] For Robin, and others like them, fanfiction offered a place to explore their queerness without the pressure of heteronormativity at a time when romances were still largely heterosexual.[657] In fanfiction, without the constraints of traditional publishing, Robin could rework and transfer common romance tropes 'to queer romance and found a lot of ways [they] could make the same tropes work' without feeling 'deeply uncomfortable'.[658] Ruby, who started reading queer fiction in the 1980s and is now a successful M/M author, happily admitted they had written 'a lot of fanfictions… a million words of fanfiction'.[659]

Fanfiction as a site of queer identity exploration was also mentioned by a British writer, Blake. When asked why they started writing queer romance Blake stated, 'I've been writing it since I was 17… Mainly because I've been in

[656] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 1.
[657] Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen, *Fandom At The Crossroads: Celebration, Shame and Fan/Producer Relationship* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), p. 64; Sirpa Leppänen, 'Cybergirls in Trouble? Fan Fiction as a Discursive Space for Interrogating Gender and Sexuality', in *Identity Trouble: Critical Discourse and Contested Identities* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 156–79 (p. 170).
[658] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 1.
[659] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 3.

various different fandom circles since I was 17 and it was a huge part of identity formation for me'.[660] For both Robin and Blake fanfiction was a site of personal and creative exploration – a theme also seen by the readers who first discovered queer romances through fanfiction. Catherine Lister, another author from the UK writer focus group, said, 'I started writing slash fanfic at about 13… But all of those notebooks are long gone, burned, gone forever'.[661] This prompted Blake to share that they 'deleted [their] online writing account from when [they were] younger for probably similar reasons'.[662] The burning of notebooks and deletion of accounts are acts that suggest shame: a wish to distance themselves from these earlier fanfictions. Of course, it is unclear whether this shame comes from writing fanfiction in particular or from a broader desire people may have to distance themselves from earlier creative projects. Fanfiction, despite its enduring popularity, is continuously stigmatised by society.[663] As one journalist wrote, 'my eagerness to write fan fiction and my shame for it were born of the same thing: a large amount of fan fiction is centric on female desire'.[664] It is this exploration of desire, queerness and gender that drew Robin, Blake, Catherine and Ruby to writing fanfiction and then queer romances.

Not all the authors I spoke with started in fandom. Australian writer Georgina 'came from heterosexual romances or straight romances' and

[660] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 1.
[661] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 1.
[662] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 1.
[663] Zubernis and Larsen, *Fandom At The Crossroads: Celebration, Shame and Fan/Producer Relationship*; Joli Jenson, 'Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization', in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. by Lisa Lewis (Routledge, 1992), pp. 9–29.
[664] Emma Lord, 'Why Fan Fiction Shaming Is A Feminist Issue', *Bustle*, 2017 <https://www.bustle.com/p/why-fan-fiction-shaming-is-a-feminist-issue-36594>.

started writing M/M Romances after becoming disillusioned with the female characters in heterosexual romances.[665] Georgina expresses a similar desire to those who came from fanfiction, but rather than explicitly looking for LGBTQ+ fiction, Georgina was looking for a place where she could escape the constraints of womanhood and found this in M/M Romances. Georgina felt that, in the late 2000s and early 2010s, every romance heroine's story 'revolved around her uterus and whether she was going to have a baby'.[666] Even heroines originally positioned as desiring a child-free life would be happily married with a baby on the way after finding the right person (the hero). It frustrated Georgina as that was not what she was interested in reading. She 'wanted to take the uterus out of the equation' and turned to M/M Romances where she 'fell in love with this power structure between the men that were really equal'.[667] This eventually led to her writing M/M Romances. Although on paper Robin and Georgina's stories appear different, they share a common theme: a desire to escape the heteronormative restrictions placed on women (and men) by heterosexual romance novels.

Why Queer Romances?

The question of why people continue to read and write queer romance novels is often asked within popular journalism but rarely answered satisfactorily. Instead, the question functions as a springboard for the writers' ideas and arguments. Numerous articles have been written on the genre which start by

[665] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 1.
[666] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 1.
[667] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 1.

questioning why women write queer romances, particularly M/M romances, often in an incredulous tone.[668] In fact, the question of *why* 'straight' women were writing M/M Romances was one of the central debates of the M/M 2014 romance scandal explored more fully in the first chapter. Given this, it is surprising that no academics have fully explored the topic of why 'straight' women continue to read and write queer romance novels. Some academics, like Mussell and Helen Taylor, have considered why women read romance novels.[669] Others, like Georgina Encanto, Ashleigh Taylor Sullivan, and Maria Kraxenberger, Christine A. Knoop and Winfried Menninghaus, have explored this question with a focus on specific communities, sub-genres and novels.[670] Yet these studies have been few and far between, with only a handful of projects over forty years and none looking at queer romance novels in particular. Asking the readers and writers in my focus groups why they continue to engage with queer romance novels sought to address this oversight.

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[668] Henshaw, 'Women Writing M/M Romance'; Claire Rudy Foster, 'Why Are So Many Gay Romance Novels Written by Straight Women?', *Electric Lit*, 2018 <https://electricliterature.com/why-are-so-many-gay-romance-novels-written-by-straight-women/> [accessed 12 February 2020]; Hirschi, '#MondayBlogs: Gay Fiction vs Gay Romance and How These Shit Storms Hurt Us All #LGBT #amreading #asmsg'.

[669] Kay J. Mussell, '"But Why Do They Read Those Things?": The Female Audience and the Gothic Novel', in *The Female Gothic*, ed. by Juliann E. Fleenor (Eden Press, 1983), pp. 57–68; Helen Taylor, *Why Women Read Fiction: The Stories of Our Lives* (Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 105–26.

[670] Maria Kraxenberger, Christine A Knoop, and Winfried Menninghaus, 'Who Reads Contemporary Erotic Novels and Why?', *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8 (2021), doi:https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-021-00764-3; Georgina R. Encanto, 'Savoring Romance Pinoy Style in Foreign Climes: Why Women Migrants Love Reading Tagalog Romance Novels', *Review of Women's Studies*, 18.1 (2008), pp. 27–52; Laura Bell Wright, 'The Appeal of Vampire Romance: Why Do Readers Like These Stories?' (unpublished Masters, University of North Carolina, 2003) <https://doi.org/10.17615/dmsw-b230>; Ashleigh Taylor Sullivan, 'From Darcy to Dickheads: Why Do Women Love the Bad Boy?', in *New Frontiers in Popular Romance: Essays on the Genre in the 21st Century*, ed. by Susan Fanetti (McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2022), pp. 31–44.

During my research, it became clear that regardless of how people first discovered the queer romance genre, they continued reading and writing novels in the genre for three primary reasons: to reject heteronormativity; to validate the self; and as a form of support. Both readers and writers mentioned how the novels' rejection of heteronormativity and the escape they provide from heteronormative society were key factors in why they continue to engage with the genre. For others, their motivation is linked to a validation of the self, a confirmation that their identity is valid and could lead to a happy and fulfilled life. This seemed particularly true for readers who discovered queer romance novels while learning about and accepting their own sexuality or gender. Finally, several readers discussed how reading these novels was a form of advocacy and support for minority communities. Reading queer romances allowed them to help and learn about communities they do not belong to. For these individuals, buying and reading queer romance acts as a form of support – whether it is prompted by a close family member being part of the queer community or a broader desire to support marginalised communities.

The following section will expand on the answers given by participants in the focus groups and fully explore these three primary reasons given for why they continue to read and write queer romance novels.

Rejection of Heteronormativity

One of the main criticisms of the popular romance genre is its reinforcement, indeed celebration, of heteronormative relationship structures. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this was one of the core arguments made by lesbian feminists

against the emerging Lesbian Romance of the 1970s. More recently, in an exploration of LGBT-themed literature, Mollie V. Blackburn, Caroline T. Clark and Emily A. Nemeth began with the premise that 'LGBT-inclusive discourses often reinforce heteronormativity'.[671] My research into the queer HEA in Chapter 3 found that homonormative institutions like same-sex marriage and monogamy are still reinforced and celebrated. It is therefore interesting that a rejection of the heteronormative was one of the core reasons that emerged from the reader and writer focus groups for why individuals enjoyed queer romances.

Delores, a reader of queer romance novels from Australia, said 'the heterosexual point of view is so pushed, in well everything, we see and read. It's nice to just read something else'.[672] Similarly, Jeannelle, an American writer of queer romances, when asked about her novels said, 'most important actually is creating characters that are not going to follow the traditional heterosexual romance structure'.[673] Another writer, from the UK, explained that in queer romance, 'we approach things slightly differently in queer relationships and the challenges that you face are slightly different, so the conflict tends to be a bit different'.[674] These are only a handful of examples from the focus groups that discuss, directly or indirectly, the escape queer romances provide its writers and readers from the heterosexual structures that

[671] Mollie V Blackburn, Caroline T Clark, and Emily A Nemeth, 'Examining Queer Elements and Ideologies in LGBT-Themed Literature: What Queer Literature Can Offer Young Adult Readers', *Journal of Literacy Research*, 47.1 (2015), pp. 11–48 (p. 12), doi:10.1177/1086296X15568930.
[672] 'Australian Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 1.
[673] Ferreira, 'American Romance Writer Interview', p. 5.
[674] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 1.

otherwise dominate society. As Loretta, a British reader, put it, 'often queer romances break away from that heteronormative gaze' and are one of the few spaces in popular culture that consistently provides a safe space for LGBTQ+ individuals.[675] Taking it a step further, Melissa, a reader from America, said part of the reason they enjoy reading queer romances is because they 'like the idea of we're changing the world, we're not going to fit ourselves in… Most queer romance tends to be that way'.[676] This implies that not only do queer romances reject heteronormative society, but they also protest against it. Melissa's statement implies that reading queer romance novels holds an almost activist element for the reader. They provide an escape from the realities of the world for queer people, particularly LGBTQ+ Americans during Trump's presidency.

Interestingly, queer romance also offers something to its heterosexual readers. For Emma, heterosexual romances 'made [her] relationship seem inadequate, even though it really wasn't because [they were] so far from the norm… It was all so idealized'.[677] This was not the case when she read queer romances because reading about queer relationships provided a separation from her relationship. In a similar vein, Rita, a reader in Australia, spoke about having to deal with heteronormativity in her daily life; as such, queer romances provided her with 'a different bubble of world… [and] that's one of the reasons I enjoy these books, because it's not part of my normal world'.[678] Although articulated differently, Emma and Rita seem to access a similar experience

[675] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 8.
[676] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 2.
[677] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 1.
[678] 'Australian Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 1.

through reading queer romance novels. It gives them both an escape from the pressures of heteronormativity or the idealisation of heteronormative life. Eliza, a reader from the US who identified as straight, stated that '[i]n same sex queer romance novels, you're more likely to have equality and… on page exploration of what everybody's role is going to be' suggesting that equality between partners and the exploration of equality in a relationship is missing from heterosexual romance novels.[679]

This returns us to the previous point mentioned by Georgina, the Australian romance writer, who was drawn to writing M/M Romances because the heroines in heterosexual romances always became pregnant. Like Georgina, Leona, a reader from Australia, was also drawn to reading M/M Romances because 'people can't get pregnant… [when] two men are having sex'.[680] This point again returns to the idea of equality. In a relationship between two cisgender men, their bodies are automatically more equal in the eyes of society, according to this reader, than in a relationship between a cisgender man and woman. Of course, as another Australian reader mentioned, MPreg fiction does exist.[681] It is also becoming more economically viable and legally easier for LGBTQ+ couples and individuals in Western society to have children, which is reflected in the publication of more queer romances featuring children.

The responses of individuals from the focus groups, both writers and readers, suggests that part of the reason people continue to engage with

[679] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 2.
[680] 'Australian Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 2.
[681] MPreg is the shortened term for male pregnancy, it originated in fandom communities as a tag to denote a work of fiction that contained male pregnancy.

popular queer romance novels is because it offers them an alternative reality to the heteronormative society many felt confined by.

Validation of Self

It is not surprising that several participants from the reader focus groups provided the validation of their LGBTQ+ identities as the reason they continue to engage with queer romance novels. Lila, from the American reader focus group, said in answer to the question of why she reads queer romance novels: 'it's definitely about validation of who I am and how I fit into the world'.[682] She goes on to explain that, due to her upbringing in a religious household and male-dominated work environment, queer romances, in particular F/F Romances, are one of the few places she finds validation of her identity. This sentiment was echoed by Chris in the UK reader focus group. Chris stated that they 'came out at 28… [and] just finding F/F and reading F/F books actually helped me gain an insight into the world of being gay and sort of what that meant'.[683] As with Lila, queer romances, in particular F/F Romances, helped Chris embrace their identity. These novels provided Chris with a way to explore their newly discovered sexuality. Chris, who identifies as a non-binary lesbian, went on to say that F/F Romances 'helped [them] come out because it gave [them] that confidence to see that side of [themselves]'.[684] Melissa, another reader from America, also read queer romance novels because 'I'm also queer and I'm definitely looking for reflections of myself and the relationships

[682] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 2.
[683] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 3.
[684] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 4.

that I want to have'.[685] This comment suggests that, for Melissa, queer romances did not form part of their self-acceptance journey but are instead something they continue to read and engage with as a fully-out queer person looking for representation in a largely straight, cisgender society.

Interestingly, Melissa incorporates relationships into the conversation; this, combined with Lila and Chris first discovering queer romances and F/F Romances as part of their coming out process, suggests that readers like Lila, Chris and Melissa turn to female-centric queer romances because, as Betz writes, 'the consistent iteration [these novels present is] that two women have the same right to the happy ending as the straight couple'.[686] Juhasz also emphasises the importance of 'mutual recognition' that lesbian readers access by reading lesbian romances, as the very act of reading about lesbian desire validates their own desires.[687] Although Betz and Juhasz were looking specifically at Lesbian Romance novels and the lesbians who read them, the ideas they present can be transferred to wider women-focused queer romances. For readers, these novels not only give a sense of validation for their identity but also reinforce that happiness and love as a queer person is possible. This goes beyond seeing a reflection of themselves on the page and extends into seeing a happy, loved, romantically fulfilled image – one they can hope to find and emulate in real life. It certainly supports the argument Betz goes on to make that 'the ultimate fantasy the lesbian reader discovers in her

[685] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 2.
[686] Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis*, p. 181.
[687] Suzanne Juhasz, *Reading from the Heart: Women, Literature, and the Search for True Love* (Penguin, 1994), p. 209.

romance reading illustrates that love between women is possible'.[688] The extent to which these novels present a fantasy of queer life shall be explored fully later in this chapter, but what is clear is that some readers are turning to these novels to affirm that they can find love and happiness as queer people. These novels and the stories they tell provide them with a validation of themselves and their queerness.

Writers also cited validation of self as one of the core reasons why they write queer romance novels. The role of the writer in romance novels is a largely underdeveloped field, with most sociological projects focusing on the role of the readers. Yet over the years, authorship has received attention from a handful of academics, most recently Joanna Gregson and Jennifer Lois, who themselves acknowledge that 'social science has virtually ignored the people who produce this work'.[689] One facet of their latest project explored 'how writers' careers unfold and how writing romances shapes [authors'] identities'.[690] However, their project focused on the professional aspect of writing as a vocational and often financially unstable career rather than the personal validation and sense of identity writing could provide authors. McAlister, Claire Parnell and Andrea Anne Trinidad explored the role of writing communities and intimate public through an examination of the Filipino writing community #RomanceClass, who require their members to 'involve the

[688] Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis*, p. 196.
[689] Joanna Gregson and Jennifer Lois, 'Social Science Reads Romance', in *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction*, ed. by Jayashree Kamblé, Eric Murphy Selinger, and Hsu-Ming Teo (Routledge, 2021), pp. 335–51 (p. 345).
[690] Gregson and Lois, 'Social Science Reads Romance', p. 346.

community at some point in the publishing process'.[691] Like myself, McAlister et al. also used the genre worlds approach developed by Fletcher et al.,[692] finding through their research that 'there [was] a direct link between the texts that #RomanceClass produce[d] and the way the community functions as an intimate public'.[693] The #RomanceClass members consider themselves a found family and 'having this familial support… allowed some community members to feel more comfortable about their preferences outside the community'.[694] #RomanceClass is a unique community of writers, one whose model is not easily replicated: none of the authors I spoke with mentioned being involved in a community like #RomanceClass. Yet writing as a form of self-validation and re-affirmation of identity came up independently in all of the writer focus groups.

American historical romance author Jeannelle M. Ferreira stated she 'started writing queer romance specifically because there's 37 dozen cheesy step back cover heterosexual romances and I just don't like reading about dick. I want to see myself'.[695] For Jeannelle, writing queer romances, with a focus on women and non-binary individuals, was partly born from the desire to see herself reflected within the genre. As she proudly went on to state, all her writing, whether it is a historical piece or a romance story, has 'lesbian content

[691] Jodi McAlister, Claire Parnell, and Andrea Anne Trinidad, '#RomanceClass: Genre World, Intimate Public, Found Family', *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 36 (2020), pp. 403–17 (p. 415), doi:10.1007/s12109-020-09733-1.
[692] Fletcher, Driscoll, and Wilkins, 'Genre Worlds and Popular Fiction: The Case of Twenty-First-Century Australian Romance'.
[693] Fletcher, Driscoll, and Wilkins, 'Genre Worlds and Popular Fiction: The Case of Twenty-First-Century Australian Romance'; McAlister, Parnell, and Trinidad, '#RomanceClass: Genre World, Intimate Public, Found Family', p. 416.
[694] McAlister, Parnell, and Trinidad, '#RomanceClass: Genre World, Intimate Public, Found Family', p. 413.
[695] Ferreira, 'American Romance Writer Interview', p. 1.

because [she] doesn't write non-queer stories'.[696] It seems clear that Jeannelle, and writers like her, are writing from a place of self: they are writing for their communities, for the individuals like them who are struggling to find themselves represented in romance novels.[697] This idea of writing as a form of self-validation and acceptance of queerness also came up in the writer focus groups for Australia and the UK. As Australian writer Robin Moray said, 'as I made my way through both reading and writing [queer romances], I realized I was also queer' or 'full disclosure… bisexual and a little non-binary'.[698] In a similar vein, British writer Blake, when asked what type of queer romances they primarily wrote, answered by saying 'I'm gender fluid, so I think there is this really interesting engagement with masculinity and masculine relationships that I get from writing M/M'.[699] In contrast to Jeannelle and writers like her who get a sense of validation from writing romances for their communities and by uncovering lost histories or stories, for Robin and Blake there is a more personal aspect. In writing queer romance, or in Robin and Blake's cases, M/M Romances, they can explore and discover the less feminine aspects of their identities in the safety of a fictional character. As Blake succinctly put, 'I definitely think there's some gender stuff with writing M/M', suggesting that writing cisgender male characters gives them an outlet to explore their own gender and/or gender expression.[700] The idea of writing queer romances as a

[696] Ferreira, 'American Romance Writer Interview', p. 2.
[697] This idea of writing as a form of representation shall be explored later in Politically Engage or Fantastical Escapism? section of this chapter
[698] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 1; Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 8.
[699] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 2.
[700] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 2.

form of personal discovery and exploration of the self, where authors gain self-validation and even self-acceptance from their writing, was an unexpected discovery during these focus groups. Authors are not writing solely to make money, or to appeal to readers. Instead, these authors are also sometimes writing for personal expressions of self and to work through their own identities.

Form of Support

The importance of support for individuals who belong to marginalised communities is vital as 'acceptance by others was reported to… be one of the most powerful and protective forms of social support'.[701] This is particularly true for LGBTQ+ adults, with various studies finding that support is 'a significant protective factor for psychological well-being'.[702] It is therefore interesting, and encouraging, that numerous readers from all three focus groups discussed reading queer romances as a form of support and advocacy for marginalised communities. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to establish the true impact reading queer romance has as a form of support, but it is certainly a key consideration for some readers in how and why they continue to engage with queer romance novels.

[701] Emmie Matsuno and Tania Israel, 'Psychological Interventions Promoting Resilience Among Transgender Individuals: Transgender Resilience Intervention Model (TRIM)', *The Counseling Psychologist*, 46.5 (2018), pp. 632–55 (p. 638), doi:10.1177/0011000018787261.
[702] Lance S Weinhardt and others, 'The Role of Family Friend, and Significant Other Support in Well-Being Among Transgender and Non-Binary Youth', *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 15.4 (2019), pp. 311–25, doi:10.1080/1550428X.2018.1522606; C. Munoz-Plaza, S. C. Quinn, and K. A. Rounds, 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Students: Perceived Social Support in the High School Environment', *The High School Journal*, 85.4 (2002), pp. 52–63; R. L. Jr Sheets and J. J. Nohr, 'Perceived Social Support from Friends and Family and Psychosocial Functioning in Bisexual Young Adult College Students', *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56.1 (2009), pp. 152–63; G Shilo and R. Savaya, 'Effects of Family and Friend Support on LGB Youths' Mental Health and Sexual Orientation Milestones', *Family Relations*, 60.3, pp. 318–30.

Some readers even stated that part of the reason they enjoy reading queer romances is because it allows them to engage with minority communities they do not belong to. Rose, a reader from the UK, is a BIPOC woman and explained that she liked to read queer romances because 'people like me, are not the only people in the world and if we don't read other stories from other perspectives, it makes me feel that I'm only interested in myself, and people like me'.[703] For Rose, reading queer romances, in particular those written by LGBT+ people, is a form of education and advocacy. Being a strong advocate for BIPOC voices, Rose 'wanted to make sure that [she was] also advocating for other [minorities]'; queer romances and the communities surrounding them give her the ability to do so.[704] As part of the same conversation, Loretta agreed that when she buys queer romance novels 'it's a conscious decision to support queer writers… or whatever marginalized identity that I haven't read enough of' at that time.[705] Both Rose and Loretta also mentioned being members of online liberal book communities. Rose is an avid watcher of BookTube,[706] which has provided her with diverse reading recommendations and education on phrases like 'non-binary and genderqueer…. Terms such as queer being used for a spectrum of different sexualities and gender norms'.[707] Loretta admitted that she discovers the majority of her reading recommendations through Twitter and the individuals

[703] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 2.
[704] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 3.
[705] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 4.
[706] BookTube is the name given to the community of YouTubers who discuss books on the YouTube platform
[707] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 3.

she follows who are part of 'that queer corner of Romancelandia'.[708] There is an implication that choosing to read diversely, even within the queer romance genre, is enabled by being part of an online community of diverse readers. By making these purchasing decisions, Loretta and Rose are financially supporting trans* writers, neurodivergent writers and other marginalised communities. For them, and others like them, reading and buying queer romances is not just about personal representation but is also a form of advocacy. It gives readers like Loretta and Rose an avenue to listen, support and educate themselves about communities that are not typically given a voice in mainstream media.

Another aspect of reading diversely that emerged during the focus groups was from parents of LGBTQ+ children who read these novels as a form of education and advocacy for their child(ren). Leona, a reader from Australia, reads LGBTQ+ literature and LGTBQ+ historical non-fiction alongside queer romance novels and even admitted: 'I probably know more than my gay son does. I [tell him], 'you've got to know what people went through, a lot more than you do''.[709] This admission was prompted by a discussion of Keira Andrews' *Forbidden Rumspringa* series, which focuses on a fictional gay couple from the Amish community in America, suggesting that queer romance novels are part of Leona's education. They are, perhaps, one of the ways she can learn about the LGBTQ+ community and connect with her gay son. The fact that Leona talks to her son about LGBTQ+ history, partly learnt through queer romances, makes her reading of queer romance novels a form of support and the novels a form of education. Of course, it is worth pointing out

[708] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 11.
[709] 'Australian Romance Readers Focus Group', pp. 2–3.

that Leona did not clarify whether her interest in LGBTQ+ history and literature came before or after her finding out her son was gay. Leona was not the only parent in the focus groups to reference an LGBTQ+ child when asked why they read queer romance novels. Eliza, from the American reader focus group, when answering why they read queer romance novels, said 'I'm always looking for trans masc[uline] characters, because I want to know that my kid's going to get a happy ending. I need to see that on page'.[710] By actively searching out trans masculine characters, Eliza is turning to queer romances as both a form of support for her child and also a way to reassure herself that a happy ending is possible for him. Eliza's reading choices are a direct result of her looking to support and understand her son. As she said in the same conversation, 'there's a lot I don't know', suggesting that she is turning to queer romance novels, in particular ones written by trans* writers or featuring trans* characters as a form of education.[711] Again, like Leona, it is a way for her to connect with her child who is now part of a marginalized community. By reading queer romance novels, Eliza, and readers like her, can connect with their children by educating themselves and supporting the wider LGBTQ+ community.

America or Bust?

As previously stated, the data I gathered on queer romances published between 2010 – 2019 showed a strong preference for American authors,

[710] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 3.
[711] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 3.

publishers and main characters. Yet, the Publishing Director for Harlequin Australia, Sue Brockhoff, stated in 2014 that the emphasis for each national office had been on 'developing their own local publishing program'.[712] This statement would imply that Harlequin, at least, is attempting to promote national differences while remaining under a single global umbrella – presumably because they want to utilise the international reputation Harlequin has among romance readers and writers. However, the very fact that Harlequin had to consciously encourage the creation of 'local publishing programs' for each national office suggests this was not happening organically. The initiative reads like a reaction to globalisation: one meant to combat the homogeneity of their existing romance offering.

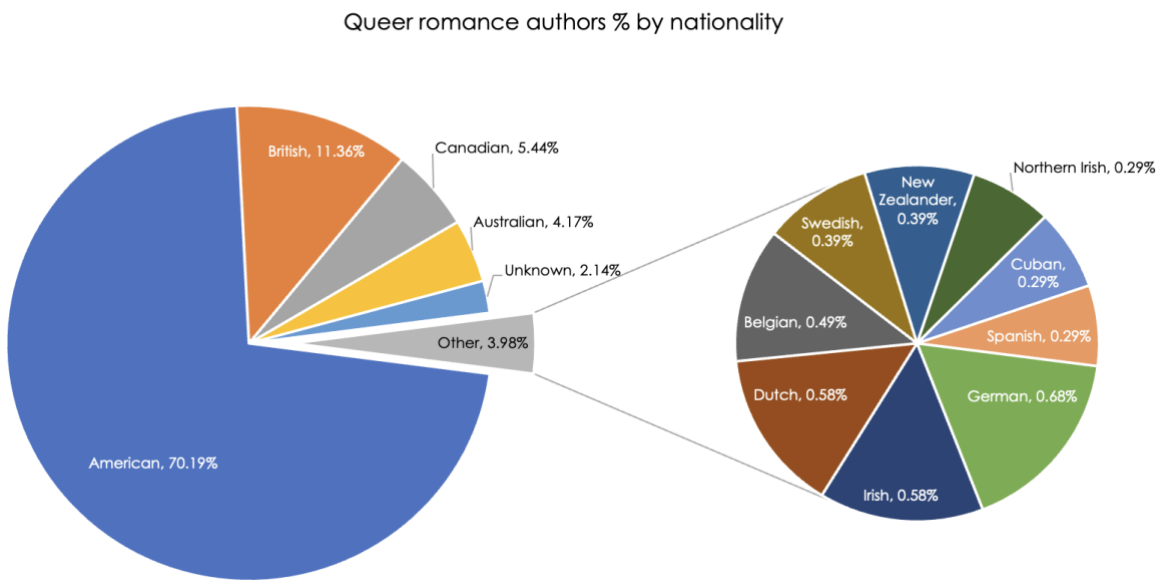
Romance scholarship is often justified due to the financial success of the genre. Scholars cite sales figures, such as the romance genre generating 1 billion dollars annually and accounting for 23% of the overall US fiction market in 2016 found throughout romance scholarship.[713] Romance writers and readers are seemingly aware of the financial power of this genre, with authors Celeste Bradley and Susan Donovan stating, 'we pay the bills… for all of fiction, all of popular fiction' and 'we're the ones that keep the lights on'.[714] The financial success of the genre has certainly been helped by the development of eBooks, with 'romance publishing by multinationals increas[ing] by 135%

[712] Driscoll and others, 'The Publishing Ecosystems of Contemporary Australian Genre Fiction', p. 211.
[713] 'About the Romance Genre'.
[714] *Love Between the Covers*, dir. by Laurie Kahn (Blueberry Hill Productions, 2015), sc. 0:02:59-0:03:45 <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/lovebetweenthecovers>.

between 2010–11 and 2015–16, largely due to dedicated eBook imprints'.[715] The rise of eBooks and the possibilities they created at all levels of publishing have propelled the romance genre, and queer romances in particular, into a new age of globalisation.[716] However, the majority of these figures and opinions are about the American romance market and do not distinguish between heterosexual and queer romance. The data I gathered on queer romances offers a more accurate picture of the state of queer romances because I did not restrict my data to queer romances published in the US. In total, I compiled 54 Publishers, 72.2% of which were based in the US, 11.1% in the UK and 9.3% with a global presence; Australian, Canadian, German and New Zealand publishers also accounted for 1.9% each. Among the 1,030 authors catalogued, 35 nationalities were represented, with 70.2% of them being American authors, followed in much smaller numbers by British[717] (11.4%), Canadian (5.4%) and Australian (4.2%) authors – suggesting a strong preference by publishing houses for American authors.[718] This was true for both American publishers and those based outside of the US, like Totally Entwined, which is a UK publisher.

[715] Driscoll and others, 'The Publishing Ecosystems of Contemporary Australian Genre Fiction', p. 208.
[716] The relationship between eBooks and Queer Romances was discussed in Chapter 1: The History of Queer Romances.
[717] British has been used to denote authors and characters and as an umbrella term for any authors or character from the United Kingdom where a more nuanced identity was not available. When a more nuanced identity was available i.e. Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish, it was used instead. I found authors would rarely use 'English' as an identifier for themselves, although it was sometimes implied. It was used more explicitly for characters.
[718] Lucy Hargrave, 'English Language Queer Romance Novels Published between 1st January 2010 and 31st December 2019', 2024.

Figure 43: Pie Chart showing the % breakdown of Authors by Nationality for Queer Romances Published between 2010 - 2019



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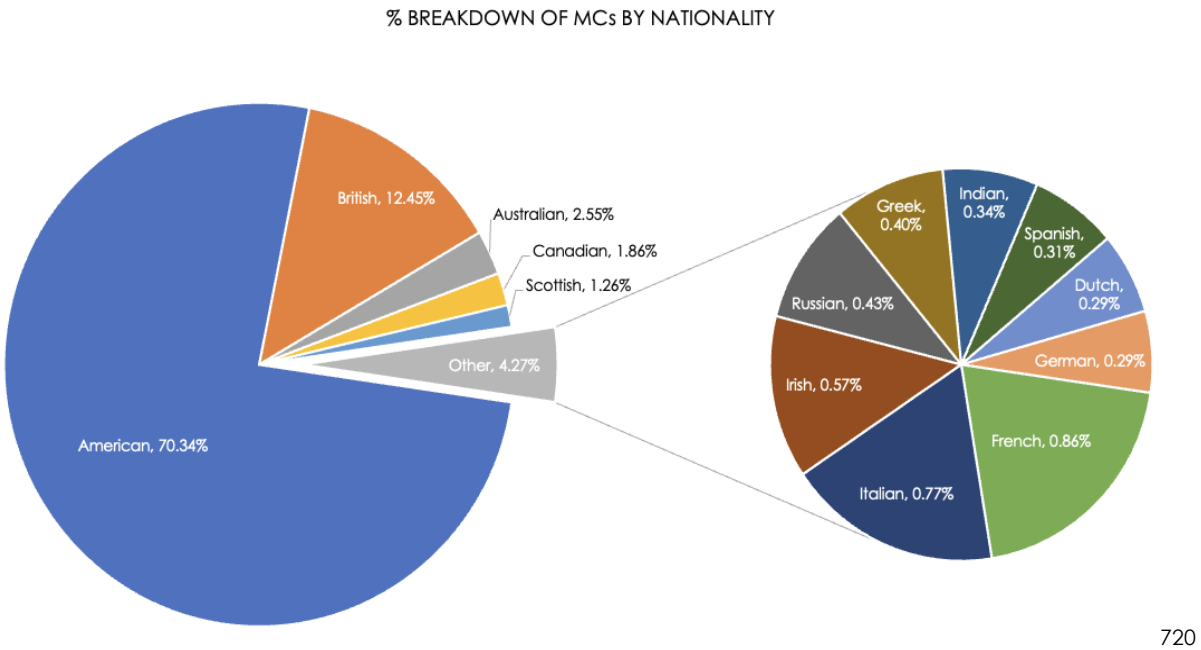
I chose to track the nationality of the main characters to see if the American bias in terms of authors was also reflected in the characters represented within queer romance novels. When analysing the main character's nationalities from the 3,493 romance novels written by those same 1,030 authors, I found 61 nationalities; this is a 69% increase in nationalities represented from authors to main characters. The four most popular main character nationalities were American (70.3%), British (12.5%), Australian (2.6%) and Canadian (1.9%), mirroring the four most common nationalities for authors. The comparable percentage for American authors (70.2%) and American

[719] Hargrave, 'English Language Queer Romance Novels Published between 1st January 2010 and 31st December 2019'. Not shown on the graph are author nationalities that individually represented less than 0.20% of the database: Filipino (0.19%), French (0.19%), Brazilian (0.19%), South African (0.19%), Finnish (0.19%), Nigerian (0.10%), German-Canadian (0.10%), Mexican (0.10%), Grenadian (0.10%), Czech (0.10%), Puerto Rico (0.10%), Dominican (0.10%), Portuguese (0.10%), Italian (0.10%), Virgin Islander (0.10%), Jamaican (0.10%), Korean (0.10%), Taiwanese (0.10%), Austrian (0.10%), Armenian (0.10%), Israeli (0.10%), Indian (0.10%) and Greek (0.10%).

characters (70.3%) seems to suggest that American authors typically write American characters. Main characters with other nationalities collectively comprise less than 5%, with many of the nationalities only appearing in a small handful of books. These figures certainly suggest that American characters, and the cultural association with queerness that America has, dominate the traditional queer romance publishing landscape.

Figure 44: Pie Chart showing the % Breakdown of Main Characters by Nationality in Queer Romances published between 2010 - 2019



720

However, the significant difference in number between author nationalities (35) and main character nationalities (61) makes clear that some

720 Hargrave, 'English Language Queer Romance Novels Published between 1st January 2010 and 31st December 2019'. Not featured on the graph is an 47 countries whose contribution individually accounted for less than 0.29% of the data: Japanese (0.26%), Mexican (0.26%), Korean (0.23%), Welsh (0.23%), Chinese (0.14%), Egyptian (0.14%), Belgian (0.11), Cuban (0.11%), Hong Kongese (0.11%), New Zealander (0.11%), Portuguese (0.11%), Brazilian (0.09%), Swedish (0.09%), Bosnian (0.09%), Dominican (0.06%), Jamaican (0.06%), Nepalis (0.06%), Nigerian (0.06%), Norwegian (0.06%), Filipino (0.06%), Puerto Rican (0.06%), Romanian (0.06%), Singaporean (0.06%), South African (0.06%), Thai (0.06%), Armenian (0.03%), Austrian (0.03%), Croatian (0.03%), Haitian (0.03%), Indonesian (0.03%), Iranian (0.03%), Iraqi (0.03%), Israeli (0.03%), Liberian (0.03%), Libyan (0.03%), Liechtensteiner (0.03%), Maltese (0.03%), Monégasque (0.03%), Peruvian (0.03%), Polish (0.03%), Samoan (0.03%), Taiwanese (0.03%), Trinidadian (0.03%), Turkish (0.03%), Ukrainian (0.03%), Vietnamese (0.03%).

authors are writing characters with nationalities different from their own. Of the 61 nationalities represented by the main characters, 31 do not appear on the author nationalities list. It is also worth noting that 5 of the author nationalities do not appear as main character nationalities: Czech, Finnish, Grenadian, Northern Irish and Virgin Islander. Although the four most-represented countries remained the same, some interesting patterns emerged. For example, 11.7% of authors were British, yet 12.5% of the books featured at least one British protagonist: if you include the Welsh and Scottish protagonists this increases to 13.9%. This suggests that non-British authors are writing British main characters. On the other hand, despite 5.44% of authors identifying as Canadian, only 1.86% of the 3,493 books featured a main character from Canada. This implies that Canadian authors are more likely to write characters with a nationality different to their own. In my data, of the 127 books written by Canadian authors, 55.9% featured American main characters, whereas only 26% featured Canadian main characters – again suggesting a strong American preference.[721] With 70.34% of the 3,493 queer romance books featuring an American main character, these findings certainly suggest that traditionally published queer romance novels published between 2010 – 2019 are dominated by American authors and characters. If the queer romance genre is a global one, it at least statistically appears to be heavily influenced by America – perhaps to the exclusion of other cultures and countries.

[721] In my data Canadian authored-books featured main characters from America (55.9%), Canada (26%), N/A (11.8%), The UK (4.7%), France (1.6%), Australia (0.8%), China (0.8%), Russia (0.8%), Taiwan (0.8%) Greece (0.8%), Jamaica (0.8%), Spain (0.8%), Italy (0.8%) and Romania (0.8%).

These findings indicate how important it is to explore the American dominance within the queer romance ecosystem. How conscious are the readers and writers of queer romances of this American bias? Do readers actively seek queer romances written or set in countries other than America? Do writers of queer romances feel the need to set their romances in America? The following section addresses these questions to determine if readers from Australia, the UK and the US deliberately seek out queer romances written in countries other than their own and if the writers from the three countries are conscious of the American bias in the queer romance publishing ecosystem.

Reader Perspectives

The participants in the reader focus groups were asked if they cared about the nationality of a book's author and if they sought out books written by authors from countries other than their own. Rose, a reader from the UK, replied by saying 'I find, in general, that the vast majority of what I read is American. Simply because the romance market [in the UK] is a completely different kettle of fish'.[722] Loretta interrupted to say that 'even the RNA, the Romantic Novelists Association [UK author organisation]… [you] have people in the industry going 'oh romance just needs rebranding… not all romances have to have a Happy Ever After''.[723] This discussion led to Emma revealing that at a romance book event in Birmingham she 'actually asked some of the English authors… why they set [their books] in America, because [she] didn't twig, they were English,

[722] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 6.
[723] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 6.

and they said it's because that's where the romance market is'.[724] This discussion between Loretta, Emma and Rose shows that British romance readers are fully aware of the lack of a dedicated queer romance publishing ecosystem in the UK, with Rose saying, 'I think the only [publisher], what I would call true romance, that is widely recognised in the UK as being romance is Mills & Boon'.[725] Although Mills & Boon is a well-recognised romance publisher in the UK, it only started publishing queer romance novels in 2021, after my focus groups took place. Manifold Press and Totally Entwined are two British publishing houses that have consistently published queer romances. Manifold Press was a small publishing house focused on LGBTQ+ stories that published between 2 – 6 queer romances a year during the 2010s. It announced its closure in 2020. Totally Entwined is the publishing house behind the imprints Totally Bound[726] and Pride Publishing; Pride Publishing was launched in 2015 to 'separate out our gay fiction from Totally Bound… and allow Pride Publishing to develop gay fiction more fully'.[727] In June 2015, UK-based Bonnier Publishing bought Totally Entwined.[728] It was then purchased back from Bonnier Publishing by Totally Entwined's original co-founders in 2019.[729] Despite this upheaval, Totally Entwined continued to publish queer romances and remained one of the highest-volume producers of queer romances amongst UK publishers in the

[724] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 7.
[725] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 6.
[726] Totally Bound predominantly publishes heterosexual erotic romances
[727] 'Totally Bound Announce a New Publishing House: PRIDE PUBLISHING', *Because Two Men Are Better Than One*, 2015 <https://becausetwomenarebetterthanone.com/2015/02/02/totally-bound-announce-a-new-publishing-house-pride-publishing/> [accessed 7 April 2024].
[728] 'Totally Entwined Group Acquired'.
[729] 'Bonnier Sale of Totally Entwined Group', *Payne Hicks Beach*, 2019 <https://www.phb.co.uk/article/bonnier-sale-of-totally-entwined-group/> [accessed 7 April 2024].

2010s, averaging around 51 queer romances published annually. This, however, is not a particularly high number when considering that 38.7% of respondents to my reader survey read 51+ queer romances a year.[730] It is therefore not surprising that UK readers looking for romance novels featuring LGBTQ+ characters are turning to American authors.

Interestingly, British readers expressed a dislike of writers who were not British trying to write British main characters. Loretta stated that the 'British hero ends up becoming a trope, as much as the [American] cowboy does' and Rose complained that she 'hate[s] the international perception that everybody in Britain sounds like the Royals or Hugh Grant'.[731] Emma added, 'it's worse when you've got an American writer trying to base something in England… It's all mate, mate, mate'.[732] It is noteworthy that the question asking readers if they look for books written by non-British authors led to a discussion on the lack of British writers in the queer romance genre and the tropes and stereotypes that are often employed by international authors who set their books in Britain. This suggests several things. Firstly, it reinforces the argument made earlier that British readers like Rose, Loretta and Emma are aware of the lack of British authors writing queer romances. As Rose herself states, when '[she] occasionally do[es] come across a British author and it is romance, [she] love[s] it', making clear that some British readers are very excited by and responsive to queer romances written by British authors.[733] Secondly, the only country mentioned by these readers apart from Britain was America, again

[730] Hargrave, 'Readers of Queer Romance Novels Survey Responses'.
[731] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 6.
[732] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 7.
[733] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 6.

supporting the idea that American publishers and authors dominate the queer romance market – at least for British readers. Thirdly, none of the focus group participants mentioned Pride Publishing or Totally Bound, UK-based imprints that have consistently published queer romances by British authors for over a decade. This suggests that despite their consistency and longevity, Totally Entwined does not have a strong presence in the queer romance publishing landscape – even among British readers. Finally, the only author to be mentioned by name during this entire discussion was Talia Hibbert, a British author of colour who originally self-published before being signed by Avon, a New York based imprint of HarperCollins. Overall, the response and subsequent discussion with British readers to the question of whether they deliberately sought out international books showcased instead that British readers are not actively seeking British authors, publishers or books set in Britain. They largely read and expect to read international, often American, queer romances, but they are conscious of when authors write characters that perpetuate British stereotypes.

Another response focus group participants had to this question was to focus on the setting of the novels, rather than the location of the publishing house and/or the nationality of either the authors or main characters. Chris made the point that at least with the romances they'd read, 'queer authors do write books [set] in other countries than their own' but caveated this by saying they 'don't know if that's a commonality or a common theme'.[734] Chris changed the focus of the discussion to the setting of the novels, suggesting

[734] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 7.

that queer authors are consciously writing stories set in a variety of countries, which may or may not reflect their nationalities. It is also worth noting that Chris made a distinction between authors who identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community and authors who did not, by suggesting that LGBTQ+ authors wrote queer romances with more international settings. The author Chris directly references when making this point is Harper Bliss, whose nationality is unknown but who currently lives in Belgium.[735] One reader and one author are not indicative of a pattern that queer authors write more internationally than their heterosexual counterparts; however, the fact that Chris holds this perception is interesting. It taps into the idea of queer tourism and 'the transnationalization of queer lifestyles, culture, and activism', an idea that often 'promote[s] queer travel as… integral to queer people's own liberation'.[736] By writing stories set in a variety of different countries, Bliss, and other queer authors like her, tap into this queer travel phenomenon because it allows her readers to experience queer travel without travelling. The international nature of modern queerness views travel as a way for queer people to experiment, express or affirm their identity, discover their communities and undertake specific queer experiences

[735] Harper Bliss, 'About Harper Bliss', *Harper Bliss* <https://www.harperbliss.com/about/> [accessed 25 October 2022].
[736] Olimpia Burchiellaro, 'The Homocapitalist Politics of Queer Tourism: Global LGBTQ+ Activism, Queer Travel and Other Queer Mobilities in Buenos Aires, Argentina', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 2024, doi:10.1080/14616742.2024.2301963; Daniel Conway, 'Whose Lifestyle Matters at Johannesburg Pride? The Lifestylisation of LGBTQ+ Identities and the Gentrification of Activism', *Sociology*, 56.1 (2022), pp. 148–65, doi:10.1177/00380385211024072.; Kevin Markwell, 'Mardi Gras Tourism and the Construction of Sydney as an International Gay and Lesbian City', *GLQ*, 8.1/2 (2002), pp. 81–99, doi:10.1215/10642684-8-1-2-81.; Burchiellaro, 'The Homocapitalist Politics of Queer Tourism: Global LGBTQ+ Activism, Queer Travel and Other Queer Mobilities in Buenos Aires, Argentina'.

not available at home.[737] These desires are similar to those expressed by readers of queer romance who use the novels to explore their identity, find a community or explore queerness in a way they cannot in their day-to-day lives. It is therefore not surprising that Chris drew a connection between queer authors and international settings – they tap into similar desires.

A similar question was posed to the participants of the Australian reader focus group, who were asked if they try and support Australian authors or if they view queer romance as a global industry. In response, all three of the participants initially said they read authors from around the world, with Rita saying she read novels from 'all over', and Leona saying 'if it's got a gay theme, [she'll] give it a go'.[738] Delores went into more detail saying '[she] noticed some gaps in [her] reading and… [she's] started trying to read more… Asian and African, Black authors, but [she'll] read anybody really'.[739] When pushed a little on the topic, a wider discussion resulted about representation and the need for authors to authentically represent their identities, with Rita saying, 'representation's important… especially in this industry, that the authors are representing accurately as who they are'.[740] The Australian readers seemed more concerned than the British and American readers, that authors claiming to be from a minority – be it one based on sexuality, gender, or race – were being authentic about their background and lived experiences. The only time that deliberately seeking out Australian authors came up in

[737] Girish Prayag, Clifford Lewis, and Pour Shah, 'Travel in My Life: Queer Identity, Travel Motivation, Resilience, Life-Satisfaction and Wellbeing', *Current Issues in Tourism*, 27.2 (2024), pp. 323–40 (pp. 323–24), doi:10.1080/13683500.2023.2189092.
[738] 'Australian Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 4.
[739] 'Australian Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 4.
[740] 'Australian Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 5.

conversation was as part of a discussion on the HEA in queer romances. Leona claimed it was 'interesting to read in Australia, because [she] reads Australian authors so you've got the [earlier books] where you can't get married' whereas now it's become legal and that is being represented in the newer books.[741]

However, it is noteworthy that across all three focus groups, Leona was the only one to consistently flag or mention the nationality of the authors she read, particularly if, like herself, they were Australian. During the 90-minute conversation, Leona mentioned four Australian authors writing queer romances or queer literature: Renae Kaye, Sean Kennedy, Sarah Krasnostein and Craig Silvey. This implies that Leona, in contrast to the majority of readers, is paying attention to the nationality of the authors she reads and is looking in particular for Australian authors who write Australian-set queer romances. It could also suggest that Leona notices when she reads a queer romance written by an Australian author because there are not many of them. In my data, only 2.6% or 91 of the queer romances were written by Australian authors, but 52.7% of these Australian-authored queer romances featured Australian main characters, suggesting a stronger tendency among Australian authors to write Australian characters than, for example, Canadian authors.[742] Leona is clearly more conscious of, and perhaps more connected to, Australia-based queer romances than those written by non-Australian authors and set in other countries. Despite this, the other Australian readers were largely unconcerned

[741] 'Australian Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 17.
[742] Main characters in the Australian authored queer romances in my data were Australian (52.7%), American (38.5%), British (8.8%), French (1.1%), German (1.1%), Irish (1.1%), Italian (1.1%), Indian (1.1%), New Zealander (1.1%), Samoan (1.1%0 and N/A (13.2%).

about the nationality of the authors they read, focusing on no country in particular but instead turning the conversation into a discussion about author authenticity within the queer romance genre. This is a stark contrast to the response from the British readers and is likely a consequence of the different positions the UK and Australia occupy in the queer romance publishing ecosystem.

Furthermore, the Australian readers were the only ones to emphasise how reading queer romances set in other countries and written by non-Australian authors can be educational. As Rita stated, 'the education you get from cultures is interesting in Gay Romance'; for example, 'in the US there's obviously a whole lot of cultural things that Australians don't necessarily understand or get'.[743] This idea was supported by Delores, who shared that *Glitterland* (2013) by British author Alexis Hall gave her an insight into the role class can still play in British society.[744] As Delores put it 'she's not saying class difference does not matter so much [in Australia], because it does – but class difference really came to the fore in that book' giving her an insight into how British culture, class and queerness intersect.[745] Viewing queer romance novels as a source of knowledge and a form of education aligns with the reasons given by parents of LGBTQ+ children for why they read queer romance, discussed earlier in this chapter. Queer Romance novels, as a form of popular culture, are giving readers, whether consciously or subconsciously, an insight into communities and countries other than their own. The fact that queer

[743] 'Australian Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 27.
[744] *Glitterland* is set in London and Essex and tell the romance of pretentious London-based Ash and Essex born and raised Darian.
[745] 'Australian Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 28.

romance's educational value as a source of knowledge about the queer community was mentioned in various contexts in all three focus groups shows that this is an important consideration for a lot of readers of these novels. Reading queer romances from other countries allows readers to learn more about the global, transnational queer community because it takes them beyond their own country's context for queerness.

Finally, readers in the American reader focus group were asked if they felt more drawn to America-based queer romances or if they tried to read non-American queer romances. Lila started the discussion by saying, 'that's what's commonly available [so] that's mostly what I read', but quickly followed this by saying they 'do read a few authors who are from other places [Germany and Australia] … but mostly just Americans'.[746] Eliza stated they had recently 'been on a New Zealand and Australia kick [and] always like to see characters that are not just two white middle-income guys'.[747] Jamie and Melissa both agreed that they mainly read British and American authors, however, Jamie pointed out that it was 'mostly because I am reading in English' and Melissa agreed that 'there's not a ton of translations in the romance genre'.[748] The concept of translation and the English-language aspect of the queer romance ecosystem was not mentioned in any of the other reader focus groups, and this is indicative of a linguistic difference for American readers. The English language is not the official national language for the US – although it is the official

[746] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 3.
[747] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 4.
[748] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 4; 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 4.

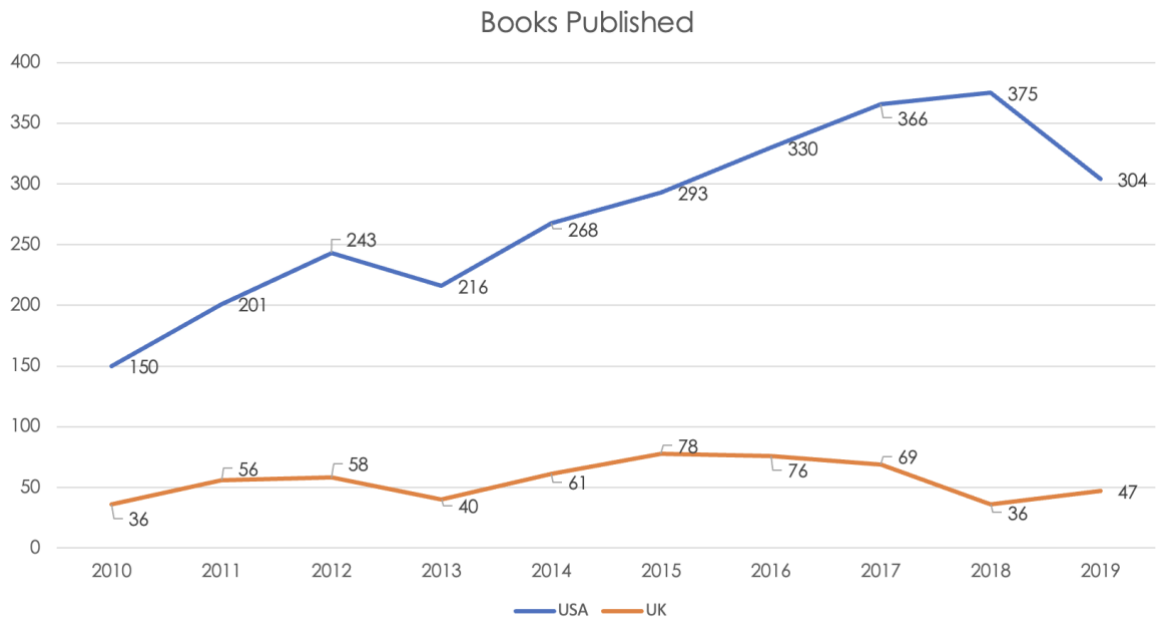
language for 31 states.[749] The English language, and its usage, is a current political issue within the US in a way it is not for the UK and Australia – that is not to say those countries do not have their own political histories or conflicts with languages, but they are not as politically charged as the current position of the English language in America. As recently as 2019, the 116th US Congress introduced a bill to the House that would establish English as the official language of the US and propose the inclusion of English language testing during the naturalization process for citizenship in the US.[750] Although the bill has yet to be passed, its existence, along with the Official English movement, are just two signifiers that demonstrate how the English language has been used by racist, anti-immigration political groups and politicians to promote racist ideology – particularly against Asian and Latinx communities.[751] This different political background provides context for why the lack of romance novels translated into English and why reading in English was only mentioned by American readers. In the focus group, participants signalled their social and political liberalness by acknowledging the unofficial dominance of the English language in America and the lack of translated novels within the queer romance ecosystem. In doing so, they differentiated themselves socially and politically from the more right-wing anti-immigrant aspects of American society, even if they primarily read American authors. It made the American

[749] Harmeet Kaur, 'FYI: English Isn't the Official Language of the US', *CNN*, 2018 <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/05/20/us/english-us-official-language-trnd/index.html> [accessed 22 October 2022].
[750] Representative Steve King, *English Language United Act of 2019*, 2019 <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/997/text> [accessed 22 October 2022].
[751] Deborah J. Schildkraut, *Press One for English: Language Policy, Public Opinion, and American Identity* (Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 3.

readers' lack of international reading a systemic, national fault, rather than one based on individual choices.

Another noteworthy aspect of the American readers' response to my asking if they read or sought out novels written by non-American authors was their general lack of interest in discussing the topic. Whereas this question led to a discussion of national stereotypes for the British readers and resulted in a discussion of author authenticity among Australian readers, the American readers had little to add beyond the quotes mentioned above. Apart from Eliza, none mentioned actively seeking out authors from different countries, apart from Britain, which Lila, Jamie and Melissa all acknowledged were 'commonly available'. The US, according to my data [see Figure 47], publishes more queer romances annually than any other country. This could explain why the American readers' response was so lacklustre.

Figure 45: Line Graph showing the difference in queer romances published between 2010 - 2019 in the United States and the United Kingdom



Even at its lowest point of 150 queer romances published in 2010, the US still published 100 more books than the 36 queer romances published in the UK in the same year. The gap between American-published and British-published queer romance has only increased throughout the decade. By 2019, US-based publishers released 304 queer romances to a mere 47 queer romances produced by UK-based publishers. Not only have American publishers consistently published more queer romances than the UK, but they actually increased their market share of all queer romances published in my data during the 2010s. Given the higher number of queer romances released by American publishers each year, and the easy availability of them to American readers in both print and digital formats, their lack of active exploration beyond the national book industry is understandable.

Although there were overlaps between the three reader focus groups in their responses to the question of seeking out books from specific countries,

there are significant national differences, highlighting how readers from the UK, Australia and the US perceive the globalisation of the queer romance ecosystem from varying perspectives. This prompted me to find out if the same national differences and awareness levels would be found in the Australian, British and American author focus groups.

Writer Perspectives

When discussing the globalisation of queer romances, authors unsurprisingly focused more on publishers, their audiences and writing through a commercial lens. This was most evident in the discussion with the Australian authors, although Robin and Georgina reacted to the globalisation of the romance market in completely different ways. Robin deliberately chose not to set their books in Australia but rather 'in the US, or space, or a fantasy world where it doesn't matter' because according to them 'Australians have a lot of cultural cringe, I think, around Australia being a bit naff'.[752] This is not to say that the decision is not without creative challenges: Robin admits that it can sometimes be difficult writing books set in America, a country they have never visited because they 'really just wanted to set it locally… everything I wanted to write about should have been in the Barossa' when discussing their latest book.[753] This desire to set books in the US is also driven by commercial demand. As Robin explains, they 'have this idea that US audiences, which makes up such a huge market for sales [for them]… won't be interested in an Australian story'.[754] This

[752] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 4.
[753] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 4. Barossa Valley is a wine-producing region in South Australia located northeast of Adelaide.
[754] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 4.

is an interesting contrast to the American reader group, who described an indifference to reading America-set romances and their enjoyment of reading queer romances from Australia and New Zealand. There is a disconnect here between what Australian authors like Robin *believe* US readers will read and what American readers *say* they will read.

For Robin and other Australian authors like them, the 'cringe' they feel writing about Australian culture and the perceived need to set books in other countries, like America, appears to be a site of internal conflict. Although Robin repeated the fact that they did not want to set their novels in Australia throughout the discussion, they also expressed frustration with writing books set in other places and the need to write in American English rather than Australian English. Yet simultaneously, Robin loves the Australianisms they found in Australian queer romance author Lisa Henry's novels, explaining 'they're these Australian emergency services books. They're fantastic! *Lights and Sirens,* one of the characters he's an Ambo[755], they go to Maccas[756], and the kids are on the beach drinking UDLs[757], and I went 'I feel so happy and seen!''.[758] There is a clear conflict here between Robin's reluctance to write Australian-based romances and the joy they get out of reading romances based in Australia. This reveals the more commercially-minded reason for Robin setting their novels in America – it is where they perceive the largest readership to reside. Despite Robin initially positioning their decision to set their novels in the US as 'a choice [they] made for no reason', the rest of the discussion and Robin's

[755] Ambulance driver
[756] McDonald's fast-food restaurant
[757] UDL is a range of flavoured vodka cans
[758] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 5.

frustration with writing non-Australia set romances heavily implies that not only is there a reason behind this choice, but that the decision is largely a commercial one.[759]

In recent years, Australian scholars like Driscoll have argued that Australian romance is not 'a subset or satellite of American romance' but instead has unique characteristics that distinguish it from romance written or published elsewhere.[760] Lauren O'Mahony has traced the origins of these characteristics 'back to Australia's early romance stories published in the mid-1850s' which 'used romance to reflect on life in early settler Australia'.[761] Robin, and other Australian authors like them who are accustomed to setting their novels in America to appeal to the larger American audience, are being forced by the commercial realities of authorship to omit these Australian characteristics. This is clearly not an easy decision and the conflict it has created for Robin, and authors like them explains the disconnect between Robin's choice to set their novels in America and their obvious joy at reading romances with distinctive Australian elements.

In contrast, Georgina only writes romances set in Australia, explaining how in *Tiger and Devils* (2009) by Sean Kennedy[762], 'the characters acted the way that I wanted, and I love[d] that. So when I write I like to write Australian'.[763]

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[759] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 4.
[760] Beth Driscoll, Lisa Fletcher, and Kim Wilkins, 'Women, Akubras and Ereaders: Romance Fiction and Australian Publishing', in *The Return of Print? Contemporary Australian Publishing*, ed. by Aaron Mannion and Emmett Stinson (Monash University Publishing, 2017), p. 68.
[761] Lauren O'Mahony, 'Australian Romance Fiction', in *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction*, ed. by Jayashree Kamblé, Eric Murphy Selinger, and Hsu-Ming Teo (Routledge, 2021), pp. 72–96 (p. 74).
[762] *Tiger and Devils* is a Gay Romance based in Melbourne between a closeted Australian Rules Footballer and an out and proud artist. Australian Rules Football is a large part of the book's setting and narrative.
[763] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 4.

This book and the comfort it brought Georgina inspired her to write romances set in Australia with Australian characters. Doing so brings a feeling of home and belonging to the writing process for Georgina, with her using phrases and words like 'slipping on a comfortable old slipper' and 'comfortable' to describe her writing books in Australia.[764] She even admitted that at times she 'go[es] for the Australianisms' while writing and will 'actually play Australianisms up' despite knowing she has a largely foreign readership.[765] It is clear that Georgina knows that the majority of her readership will be based in America. In her own words, she says she 'knew that the American market was huge' and is 'very, very conscious that the audience is mostly… foreign'.[766] There is a sense here that Georgina, and other Australian authors like her, are breaking away from the expectation that they should set their novels in America by writing distinctly Australian romances. The large American audience has informed both Robin and Georgina's writing – Robin through capitulation to the American setting and Georgina through an outright rejection of it. The American market, and the power and size of the American readership, is an ever-present spectre in these discussions: intangible and fleetingly mentioned but always felt and impossible to ignore.

A similar divide emerged during the British writer focus group, with some authors choosing to set their novels in the US and others choosing to set them in the UK. When asked if they were conscious of the American market and its presence in the romance publishing industry, Blake said 'absolutely… nearly

[764] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', pp. 4–5.
[765] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 5.
[766] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 4.

everything I write is set in America'.[767] Blake went on to explain that for them, 'America is part of the fantasy because I'm not in America… it's that distance, that disconnect in order to explore the characters'.[768] Blake, who describes their novels as gothic/horror romances, views and uses America as a site of fantasy because it is disconnected from their real life. This reflects the popular idea in romance scholarship, explored in the works of Juhasz, Betz, Hermes, Brooks, Buben and Fender, that romance novels are a site of fantasy and escapism.[769] It is interesting to see an author think of their writing process and choice of setting this way; for Blake, the setting of America is 'one aspect of the romance novel's creation of fantasy'.[770] It is interesting that at no point do Blake, or any of the British authors, mention the commercial benefits of setting their books in America – this suggests it is not as concerning to the British writers as it is to the Australian authors. Indeed, Blake is the only British author to acknowledge the cultural and economic importance America plays in the romance publishing industry. Yet the reason for setting their novels in America was not attributed to appealing to a wider readership; instead, the decision was framed as part of the writing process. The setting is influenced by their needs as a creative, not as a commercial, author.

In contrast, Ruby and Grace have, at least so far, chosen to set all their novels in the UK and, in Grace's case, London. The role of Europe – particularly

[767] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 5.
[768] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 6.
[769] Juhasz, 'Lesbian Romance Fiction and the Plotting of Desire: Narrative Theory, Lesbian Identity, and Reading Practice (1998)'; Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis*; Hermes, 'Sexuality in Lesbian Romance Fiction'; Brooks, Buben, and Lauture, 'M/M Romance'.
[770] Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis*, p. 87.

Anglo-centric Europe - as a setting for fantasy and idealisation has been explored by scholars like Vandana Saxena, Gabriele Linke, Teo, Inmaculada Pérez Casal and Jennifer Hallock, who demonstrate how Europe, in particular Britain, is viewed with romantic, postcolonial nostalgia in (among others) the American psyche.[771] As Pérez Casal puts it, the historical romance genre is evidence of 'the American attraction to all things British', especially 'the history, landscape and cultural mannerisms of England'.[772] Although the majority of these scholars are looking primarily at historical and heterosexual romance novels, their argument is supported by my data, where Britain remains the most popular setting and nationality for the historical and Regency romance sub-genres in queer romances. It was also reinforced by American author Jeannelle M. Ferreira, who stated, 'I write in Britain when I write Regency… well technically Georgians because that's where they were'.[773] All these factors make it easier for authors to sell British-set romances to American publishing houses because the British setting is already expected for certain

[771] Vandana Saxena, 'Afterlives of Colonialism: Nostalgia, Reader;s Response and the Case of Noel Barber's Tanamera', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 0.0 (2021), doi:10.1177/0021989420971331; Gabriele Linke, 'Contemporary Mass Market Romances as National and International Culture: A Comparative Study of Mills & Boon and Harlequin Romances', *Studies in World Literary Genres*, 3.1–2 (1997), pp. 195–213; Teo, 'The Romance of White Nations: Imperialism, Popular Culture and National Histories'; Inmaculada Pérez Casal, ''There's Something Charming about a Man with an Accent, Isn't There?': The Representation of Otherness in Three Novels by Lisa Kleypas', in *Love, Language, Place, and Identity in Popular Culture: Romancing the Other*, ed. by María T Ramos-García and Laura Vivanco (Lexington Books, 2020), pp. 145–56; Inmaculada Pérez Casal, 'Business-like Lords and Gentlemanly Businessmen: The Romance Hero in Lisa Kleypas's Wallflower Series', in *Love Across the Atlantic: US-UK Romance in Popular Culture*, ed. by Barbara Jane Brickman, Deborah Jermyn, and Theodore Louis Trost (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), pp. 194–208; Jennifer Hallock, 'History Ever After: Fabricated Historical Chronotopes in Romance Genre Fiction', *Jennifer Hallock*, 2018 <http://www.jenniferhallock.com/2018/06/27/history-ever-after-iaspr-2018/> [accessed 28 October 2022].

[772] Pérez Casal, 'Business-like Lords and Gentlemanly Businessmen: The Romance Hero in Lisa Kleypas's Wallflower Series', p. 194.

[773] Ferreira, 'American Romance Writer Interview', p. 9.

genres. This could explain why the British authors did not mention, or show an awareness of, the American market like the Australian authors did.

The majority of the British authors had little desire or compulsion to set their books in America and had no qualms about setting their books in Britain. As Ruby says, she has 'never set a story in America' and Grace agreed, adding that 'for all my novels it's the UK, it's London actually'.[774] Neither author mentions a need to appeal to a certain readership or expresses frustration or concern about appealing to a foreign audience, as seen in the discussion with Australian authors Robin and Georgina. Even Blake, the British author who does set their books in America, framed the location as a source of escapism and as a way to distance themselves from their reality – rather than a way to appeal to a wider audience. This is perhaps due to certain genres naturally lending themselves more to a British environment; historical romances – particularly Regency ones - are typically set in the UK. It is therefore more common to have romances set in the UK than in Australia, which are still to an extent seen as unusual or different due to the Australian setting.

Politically engaged or fantastical fluff?

The precise role that the romance genre and the act of reading romance novels play in the eyes of readers is something that romance scholars have sought an answer to since Radway's reader study in the late 1970s. Radway, after talking to readers, all of whom largely read historical romances, argued that reading romances allowed the women to 'escape from the heavy

[774] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', pp. 5, 6.

responsibilities and duties of the roles of wife and mother, which they admit they do out of emotional need and necessity'.[775] For Radway, the act of reading romance was a form of escape for these women. More recently, Stephanie Burley has argued that when women read romances they go 'against the heteronormative grain… [because] romance reading is a sexual-textual practice whereby adult women attain fulfilment at their own hands'.[776] Reading romances, in Burley's view, is a homoerotic act between the readers and writers (who are largely women) that allows readers to safely explore their sexual desires. Betz frames the reading of Lesbian Romances for its readers as 'the ultimate fantasy… [which] illustrates that love between women is possible'.[777] Like Radway, whose readers used the long historical romance to escape their daily life, Betz argues that readers of Lesbian Romances seek out these novels with their 'idealized descriptions of sex and relationships' as a 'temporary escape from the homophobia of mainstream society'.[778] This aligns with Olave's argument that 'rather than an escape from life, reading fiction is a support to it' as fiction, particularly genre fiction, gives its reader a break from socio-political realities.[779] All these scholars frame the act of reading romance, whether heterosexual or queer, as an escape from lived reality and immersion into an idealised or fantasy version of reality for its readers.

[775] Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 92.
[776] Burley, 'What's a Nice Girl like You Doing in a Book like This?: Homoerotic Reading and Popular Romance', p. 137.
[777] Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis*, p. 193.
[778] Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis*, p. 196.
[779] Thumala Olave, 'Reading Matters: Towards a Cultural Sociology of Reading', p. 418.

Yet, in contrast, others have argued that romance is deeply engaged with socio-political realities.[780] Scholars like Kamblé, Roach and Vivanco have looked at the relationship between the romance genre and war, politics and capitalism, and others like Teo and Amira Jarmakani have explored these themes in relation to sheikh romances.[781] Linda Garber, in particular, has explored how the writing of the historical Lesbian Romance is a political act in itself because it rewrites, and rebuffs, a mainstream, heteronormative view of history.[782] Romance authors like Jen Prokop, Sarah MacLean, Alyssa Cole and Adriana Herrera, have used their novels to highlight contemporary socio-political issues and have spoken out about the importance of politics in the romance genre.[783] Cole stated that her novel *How To Catch A Queen,* which

[780] David Canfield, 'Romance as Resistance: How the Happily-Ever-after Genre Is Taking on Trump', *Entertainment Weekly*, 3 November 2017 <https://ew.com/books/2017/11/03/romance-novelists-resistance-trump/> [accessed 2 November 2022]; Maggie Boyd, 'Politics in Romance: An Often Uneasy Blend', *All About Romance*, 2015 <https://allaboutromance.com/politics-in-romance-an-uneasy-blend/> [accessed 2 November 2022]; Emma Barry, 'Politics and the Romance Novel', *Emma Barry*, 2013 <https://authoremmabarry.com/2013/05/28/politics-and-the-romance-novel/> [accessed 2 November 2022]; Joanna Scutts, 'Literary Novels Are Using Romance to Talk About Politics', *Medium*, 24 April 2019 <https://gen.medium.com/literary-novels-are-using-romance-to-talk-about-politics-8365570b5298> [accessed 2 November 2022].

[781] Kamblé, *Making Meaning in Popular Romance Fiction: An Epistemology*; Roach, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*; Vivanco, *Pursuing Happiness: Reading American Romance as Political Fiction*; Teo, 'The Romance of White Nations: Imperialism, Popular Culture and National Histories'; Amira Jarmakani, *An Imperialist Love Story: Desert Romances and the War on Terror* (NYU Press, 2015).

[782] Linda Garber, 'Claiming Lesbian History: The Romance Between Fact and Fiction', *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 19.1 (2015), pp. 129–49, doi:10.1080/10894160.2015.974381.

[783] J. Prokop, 'Sports Related Head Injuries? Romance Fiction Is Leagues Ahead of Other Genres in Treatments of Them', *Kirkus Reviews*, 2019 <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/news-and-features/articles/sports-related-head-injuries-romance-fiction-leagu/> [accessed 2 November 2022]; S. MacLean, 'How Trump Killed Off My Romantic Lead', *The Washington Post Online*, 2017 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/how-trump-killed-off-my-romantic-lead/2017/08/08/8e3e40dc-7305-11e7-8839-ec48ec4cae25_story.html> [accessed 2 November 2022]; Alyssa Cole, 'I'm a Romance Novelist Who Writes About Politics - And I Won't "Stay in My Lane"', *Oprah Daily*, 17 December 2020 <https://www.oprahdaily.com/entertainment/a34995007/romance-novels-politics-alyssa-cole/> [accessed 2 November 2022]; A. Herrera, 'Why Immigrant Stories In Romance Novels Are So Important — And Revolutionary', *Bustle*, 6 November 2019 <https://www.bustle.com/p/immigrant-stories-in-romance-novels-are-revolutionary-we-need-more-of-them-19300979> [accessed 2 November 2022].

was written 'in the wake of the 2016 Presidential Election, the 2018 Gubernatorial Election, and during the lead up to the 2020 [American] Presidential Election… ended up being a meditation on the ways the world treats competent women who actively seek power', among other things.[784] For Cole, it is a novel steeped in politics and the socio-political contexts of the world around her. Based on this existing scholarship, I felt it was important to ask readers and writers how queer romances engaged with LGBTQ+ activism. Three perspectives emerged surrounding the queer romance genre's relationship with politics. The first is as fantastical fluff: readers and writers of queer romance want to use the genre to escape from day-to-day politics. The second is that representation is political: readers and writers believe because these books are about LGBTQ+ individuals they are innately political. The third is that politics is essential: queer romances need to be political, and perhaps even more political than they currently are.

The first category, fantastical fluff, covers the readers and writers who felt that queer romance does not and/or should not engage with socio-political issues at all. In the British reader focus group, Chris, when answering the question of whether queer romance novels engage with contemporary LGBTQ+ politics, said 'I don't think they jump into conversation… they wait for the conversation to happen'.[785] This response is interesting partly because of Chris' tone, which conveyed disappointment and frustration that authors of queer romance are not starting these conversations. There is a sense that queer romances could be improved if the authors in their novels did start

[784] Cole, 'I'm a Romance Novelist Who Writes About Politics - And I Won't "Stay in My Lane"'.
[785] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 15.

conversations surrounding the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals. Chris went onto say they would like to see authors be 'a bit braver and start pushing these conversations to create awareness around particular issues'.[786] For Chris, and readers like them, romance authors are not doing enough to engage with the political realities of LGBTQ+ people in their novels and are instead maintaining the status quo. This was particularly highlighted when Chris revealed they were born intersex and found it interesting that they had never read or heard of a romance featuring an intersex main character. Loretta knew of three romances starring intersex characters but agreed 'it has yet to take a spotlight… most of the intersex romances [she'd] read or heard about are speculative romance'.[787] The fact that Loretta comments on the type of sub-genres where intersex characters can be found is worth noting. It shows that speculative romances – by which Loretta means fantasy or science-fiction romances – are more progressive in their representation of LGBTQ+ identities. In addition, Loretta, discussing the presence of intersex characters, holds up contemporary queer romances as the gold standard, the seal of acceptance within the genre. This is not particularly surprising, given the dominance contemporary romance has as a sub-genre of queer romance, but it does imply something about the way identities – be they gender or sexuality – progress through different sub-genres of queer romance before reaching the queer romance 'mainstream' that is the contemporary sub-genre. What the discussion around the lack of intersex characters in queer romance highlights for Chris, however, is how romance authors wait for the conversation to

[786] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 15.
[787] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 11.

happen rather than taking the lead and making a political stand. This makes it difficult for Chris to consider queer romances political because for them, and readers like them, these novels only portray LGBTQ+ identities that are already familiar in society. They do not see queer romances helping to educate or provide representation for less immediately recognisable LGBTQ+ identities.

Not all readers view the lack of LGBTQ+ activism in queer romances as a negative. During the American reader focus group, Melissa and Eliza explained how they preferred queer romances that were not political. As Eliza put it, 'everybody deserves a gauzy, romanticised version' of love and Melissa said, 'it's nice to read something that doesn't engage with the politics of the day because the politics of the day is just too hard'.[788] This corresponds with the previously discussed ideas of Radway, Burley and Betz, who argue that romance is a form escape and a site of fantasy for readers. For Radway, reading heterosexual romance gave the Smithton women an 'escape from… [being] wi[ves] and mother[s]'.[789] Looking in particular at Lesbian Romances, Betz argued that they gave queer female readers 'the ultimate fantasy[790]. Melissa and Eliza are turning to queer romances for the fantasy of queer happiness and love – a fantasy that is not always possible in real life.

This idea was affirmed by some of the writers in the Australian and British writer focus groups. Robin, from Australia, deliberately writes novels that present a more idealized version of contemporary life for queer people. As they put it, 'my books tend to be fairly light-hearted… and the world that they

[788] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 9; 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 10.
[789] Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 92.
[790] Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis*, p. 193.

[are] in being fairly kind'.[791] Robin does not want their character's queer identity to be an obstacle within the world of the novel. Blake, a British writer, expressed a similar thought, saying, 'perhaps their sexuality adds to the [character's] identity… [but] I don't engage with contemporary queer politics'.[792] Grace agreed, saying that for their writing they made a 'conscious [decision], especially with the contemporary ones that I didn't want them to be issue-based novels… I try not to make [queerness] a big issue'.[793] Both Grace and Blake identify as LGBTQ+ and have decided as authors not to engage with the issues LGBTQ+ individuals face in the UK or US (the settings of their respective novels). Listening to Grace and Blake discuss the topic, it is clear that they are tired of stories where queer characters can only be concerned with their queerness. Both Grace and Blake showed fatigue with the coming out narrative that is frequently depicted in mainstream media when an LGBTQ+ character is introduced. Blake said, 'I actually think plot points focused on things like coming out or a sexuality crisis are just boring', at which point Grace interrupted to say that in a lot of coming out stories, particularly those written by heterosexual people, 'there is a myth about [the] coming out process that doesn't recognize the fact that it is a continuous process'.[794] They share a desire to break away from this narrative and write characters whose queerness is merely a part of their identity rather than its entirety. This resulted in both authors being reluctant to write novels that

[791] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 6.
[792] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', pp. 7–8.
[793] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 7.
[794] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', pp. 7, 8.

actively engage with queer politics: as Blake put it, 'someone else can write about that, not me'.[795]

Yet, in contrast to Grace and Blake, who want to break away from narratives that see queer characters being defined solely by their queerness, Robin, from Australia, expresses concern about not doing justice to some of the issues facing LGBTQ+ people today. Robin discusses an unfinished story they are writing about an Indigenous Australian ice hockey player coming out, but they admitted it was unfinished because 'I'm not sure how to treat it with the gravity, it needs to be treated with… I just don't feel equipped to approach it adequately if that makes sense'.[796] Their reservations about writing a queer character who is also an Indigenous Australian has caused them to put the project on hold. It is clear that Robin is not alone in these concerns as Georgina immediately agreed, saying, 'sometimes you just don't even want to go near that subject because you cannot give it the respect it needs'.[797] These concerns relate to what Chris said about queer romance authors wishing for the issues to be fully discussed or resolved before they engage with them in their novels and the #OwnVoices discussion from earlier in the chapter. There is a sense that these authors are worried about tackling the issue in the wrong way and upsetting the communities they are trying to represent. As a result, the easier option is to write, in Robin and Georgina's case, contemporary romances that present a more wishful and fantastical version of reality. In Georgina's case in particular, this echoes some of the concerns she expressed

[795] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 8.
[796] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 6.
[797] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 6.

about writing non-Australian stories and Robin's views on writing American-focused romances.

The second common idea that emerged from the focus groups was that the representation of LGBTQ+ people in queer romances was political enough. This view was also held by readers who preferred queer romances that distanced their storylines and settings from the discrimination LGBTQ+ people face. As Eliza from America put it, 'saying everybody deserves love, because of the world we live in, is a political statement'.[798] Melissa, another reader from the American focus group, agreed, saying, 'there is something political in writing a queer romance just by itself, but I don't think all of them need to be political beyond that'.[799] For both Melissa and Eliza, the representation that queer romances bring, particularly the positive representation where love conquers obstacles, is enough of a political statement. Loretta, a reader from the UK, expanded on this idea, saying, 'it can be incredibly political to take marginalized identities, whether that's LGBTQIA+, BIPOC, disabled etc and model Happily Ever Afters for people who don't necessarily get to see themselves' in mainstream media.[800] All these readers, when asked whether queer romances engaged with or addressed the issues LGBTQ+ people face, answered by focusing on representation, and, crucially, the political power of representation for marginalised communities. Rose, another reader from the UK, answered similarly but made a distinction between #OwnVoice authors and authors who were not #OwnVoices, claiming, 'I do think that whoever the

[798] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 11.
[799] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 10.
[800] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 15.

author is, will dictate very strongly how much they actually lean into those side of things'.[801] Rita, a reader from Australia, also distinguished between queer authors and non-queer authors in their answer, saying, 'a lot of the authors… are part of the queer community and they're helping with representation in the current world'.[802]

Although a seemingly simple idea – that the further visibility of marginalized groups is good – the method of representation and its impact on LGBTQ+ people is heavily debated. Scholars like Jennifer Reed point out that increased visibility of queer people is nearly always seen as positive, an advancement towards further social awareness and understanding.[803] Yet greater representation does not always equal positive representation that is beneficial to LGBTQ+ people; as Erin B. Waggoner points out, 'representation even when present, is still full of heteronormativity', and the perpetuation of 'harmful tropes… [which] are still used more frequently than should be' send the message that LGTBQ+ people 'may find happiness, but it is short-lived'.[804] This is perhaps why some of the readers highlighted the importance of #OwnVoices representation and reading queer romances written by LGTBQ+ authors. There is an assumption made by the readers here that queer romances written by #OwnVoices authors offer better, more positive representation.

[801] 'United Kingdom Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 15.
[802] 'Australian Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 26.
[803] Jennifer Reed, 'Lesbian Television Personalities - A Queer New Subject', *The Journal of American Culture*, 32.4 (2009), pp. 307–17 (p. 308).
[804] Erin B. Waggoner, 'Bury Your Gays and Social Media Fan Response: Television, LGBTQ Representation, and Communitarian Ethics', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 65.13 (2018), pp. 1877–91 (p. 1879), doi:10.1080/00918369.2017.1391015.

Lila was one of the few readers to mention sub-genre, saying, 'queer romance novels that posit an alternative future are inherently political because what you're saying is this is how I think the world should be'.[805] This is not a new concept – the idea that science-fiction novels are political because they imagine what society could look like has existed since John B Michel's 1937 speech 'Mutation or Death!'.[806] Regis, when discussing science-fiction romances herself, states that 'the power of science fiction to postulate alternate kinds of reality is harnessed to the romance novel to create, quite simply, a new kind of love'.[807] Nowhere is the harnessing of reality to create a new kind of love more possible than in queer science-fiction romance novels.[808] Science fiction as a genre 'notoriously reflects contemporary realities back to us', even if it is 'through the lens of a particular type of imagination'.[809] Lila is looking for a political statement from queer romances set in futuristic places – there is an expectation that they will reflect a world that is more diverse and accepting of LGBTQ+ identities. As Lila herself says, these novels and the authors writing them are 'making a larger point about what life should be'.[810] For Lila, and readers like her, there is something innately political in re-imagining a universe – whether it be pro- or against-LGBTQ+ individuals.

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[805] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 10.
[806] Andreya S. Seiffert, 'Flirting with Technocracy: The Evolution of John B. Michel's Views in Science Fiction and Politics', *Foundation*, 52.144 (2023), pp. 48–60 (p. 48).
[807] Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p. 180.
[808] Andrea Wood, 'His Baby Daddy Is An Alien?!: Mpreg Fantasies and Queer Reproductive Intimacies in Contemporary M/M Science Fiction Romance', in *Imagining 'We' in the Age of 'I': Romance and Social Bonding in Contemporary Culture*, ed. by Mary Harrod, Suzanne Leonard, and Diane Negra, 1st edn (Routledge, 2021), pp. 191–207 (p. 195).
[809] Wendy Gay Pearson, Veronica Hollinger, and Joan Gordon, 'Introduction', in *Queer Universes*, ed. by Wendy Gay Pearson, Veronica Hollinger, and Joan Gordon (Liverpool University Press, 2011), p. 3 <https://doi-org.bham-ezproxy.idm.oclc.org/10.5949/UPO9781846313882>.
[810] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 10.

The fact that representation was mentioned, unprompted, by readers across the three focus groups when asked if queer romances engage with real-world politics highlights the close connection between politics and representation for marginalized communities. This close connection supports an idea raised by Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick that 'representations are a resource people draw on – arguably, indeed, are compelled to draw on'.[811] It is perhaps understandable that people are drawn to queer romances as they offer an easily accessible form of LGBTQ+ representation with a guaranteed happy ending for the central couple – something that cannot always be assumed in other forms of media and other genres. There is certainly a crossover between readers and writers who do not look for politics or engagement with LGBTQ+ rights efforts in their novels and those who view representation as political. Interestingly, none of the authors reflected this idea of representation being a form of engagement with LGBTQ+ rights; it was instead the readers who made the connection between political engagement and representation. This suggests that queer romance authors do not necessarily view their work as political just because they write about marginalized individuals.

The final idea identified was that some readers and writers felt an engagement with LGBTQ+ rights and politics was crucial for queer romance. As American reader Jamie stated, 'I think you can write a fluffy fantasy, but if you want it to sustain a lot of plot or books then you can't escape [politics]

[811] Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick, *Language and Sexuality* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 12.

really'.[812] For Jamie, an engagement with politics, and LGBTQ+ individuals' lived realities, is crucial to their enjoyment when reading queer romances. For them, queer romances – particularly contemporary queer romances written after Trump's inauguration in 2017 – that do not engage with politics or at least comment on the worsening situation for LGBTQ+ individuals come across as ignorant. As they explained, 'you can't ignore [the reality for LGBTQ+ people] because it's either going to come off as a straight person writing what they do not know or it's going to come off as just a fantasy that's ridiculous'.[813] There is an anger here when Jamie is talking – a sense that authors who do choose to present a more idealised 'fantasy' version of reality are betraying the LGBTQ+ community. The mention of straight people also draws on the points raised by Rita and Rose, who both highlighted the importance of representation written by #OwnVoices authors or queer authors. It is also worth noting that Jamie holds these expectations of the contemporary and historical romance sub-genres in particular. For them, it is crucial that these sub-genres, when they do feature a queer love story, engage with the contemporary and historical realities of LGBTQ+ individuals. Yet, Jamie does not appear to put the same expectations on other sub-genres. This contradicts the point made earlier by Lila, who 'expect[s] [queerness] to just be normal and completely accepted' in the science-fiction and fantasy queer romances they read.[814] Melissa agrees with Lila's point, saying that when they read 'a fantasy with [queer] romance in it… I'll be startled when there's homophobia'.[815] Melissa and Lila have

[812] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 10.
[813] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 10.
[814] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 8.
[815] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 8.

expectations of queer romance set in a fantastical or alternative reality that they do not necessarily have for romances set in our reality (regardless of period). Interestingly, they do not necessarily frame this as a political need in the same way Jamie does for contemporary and historical queer romances. Instead, it appears again to be about escapism and the hope that the future or another reality will be better than the one they are living in. Although this has political undertones, it is not a desire for authors to overtly engage with LGBTQ+ rights and politics.

Jeannelle, an American writer of F/F historical romances, mirrors what Jamie discusses as she actively approaches her novels by seeking to 'to redress wrongs and… deal with issues in previous romances' that have been made against queer women and non-binary people.[816] Jeannelle's novels are rooted in their historical settings, and in talking to her, it was clear that part of her passion for writing comes from her desire to depict queer women and non-binary people in a historically accurate way while still delivering a happily ever after. In Jeannelle's own words, her novels mainly engage with LGBTQ+ issues through a socio-economic lens, as wealth 'is a social lubricant. For example, if you are wearing really good tailoring no one may notice that you were not assigned male at birth'.[817] Jeanelle meticulously researches the historical settings of her novels – for example, the Regency setting of her novel *The Covert Captain* (2018) – to accurately as possible reflect the realities of life for LGBTQ+ people in that period. Garber, looking at the historical Lesbian Romance, argues that these novels 'serve more serious political ends' as the

[816] Ferreira, 'American Romance Writer Interview', p. 4.
[817] Ferreira, 'American Romance Writer Interview', p. 4.

authors and readers of them want 'to participate in the creation of histories that can have meaning for those women who today identify as lesbians, bisexuals, queers, or otherwise'.[818] For Garber, the act of creating these novels and the act of reading them is political because they seek to imagine or even create a history for queer women and non-binary people beyond the accepted heteronormative historical mainstream. Jeannelle follows this tradition that began 'as early as 1933, [when] novelists began to project clearly identifiable lesbian imagery into the past'.[819] For Jeannelle, and authors like her, the act of writing these novels is a political act.[820] It is a way of saying that queer people, people who do not fit the white, male, cisgender, heterosexual model have always existed.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the current landscape of queer romance publishing from the perspective of readers and writers from Australia, the UK and the US. From this research, three primary findings emerged. The first is that queer romances are read and written for far more personal and more considered reasons than academics have previously assumed. The second finding was that readers' and writers' perceptions of the genre's globalisation vary, but Australian writers are most conscious of the American market. Finally, the third finding of this chapter was that, for the majority of readers, the positive

[818] Garber, 'Claiming Lesbian History: The Romance Between Fact and Fiction', p. 131; Garber, 'Claiming Lesbian History: The Romance Between Fact and Fiction', p. 134.
[819] Garber, 'Claiming Lesbian History: The Romance Between Fact and Fiction', p. 130.
[820] Jeannelle directly references Heather Rose Jones as an author writing similar novels to her own and also mentions Pembroke Park by Michelle Martin as an inspiration

representation of LGBTQ+ individuals found in queer romances is perceived as a form of activism.

Previously, academics have assumed that readers of queer romances are straight women who exclusively read M/M romance for voyeuristic titillation.[821] My research disproves this assumption on several grounds. Firstly, my data shows that the majority of queer romance readers are queer women; secondly, by speaking to readers and authors about why they read these novels, three far more complex and nuanced reasons were presented. Some readers and writers, like Georgina and Rita, come to the queer romance genre to escape the heteronormative pressure put on romance heroines to have children. This desire to escape or reject heteronormative expectations was mentioned unprompted in reader and writer focus groups, particularly by participants who did not identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community. Rather than coming to the genre for voyeuristic reasons, as has previously been proposed by academics, these individuals are coming to queer romances because it offers them something that the heterosexual romance genre cannot. For others, the act of reading and writing queer romances validated their identity and allowed them to explore their queerness. This idea had previously been explored for readers of queer romances, particularly Lesbian Romances, but was a new finding for the writers of queer romance. Several writers, like Blake and Robin, use their writing to explore and discover their own LGBTQ+ identities in a safe, fictional environment. Others, like Jeanelle,

[821] Allan, *Men, Masculinities, and Popular Romance*, p. 92; Burley, 'What's a Nice Girl like You Doing in a Book like This?: Homoerotic Reading and Popular Romance', p. 143; Herendeen, 'Having It Both Ways; or, Writing from the Third Perspective: The Revolutionary M/M/F Ménage Romance Novel', p. 408.

expressed that writing queer romances about characters who shared their identity validated their sense of self. Finally, some readers of queer romances read these novels as a form of support for the LGBTQ+ community – largely, although not exclusively, readers who did not themselves identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Two parents expressed that they read these novels to better understand and support their LGBTQ+ children. The Australian readers said that reading queer romances written by authors from other countries teaches them about LGBTQ+ lives outside of their own country. Finally, two of the British readers, stated that they deliberately buy books from minorities they do not belong to as a form of financial support and as educational resources. All of these reasons for reading and writing queer romance show far greater depth and nuance than the often-espoused idea that queer romances are largely read by straight women as a form of voyeuristic, erotic titillation. Instead, this study has shown that queer romances are read for a variety of reasons that are more personal and more considered than previously assumed by academics.

My second finding is that the readers and writers of queer romance from the three countries had different perceptions of America's domination in the global queer romance genre. From talking with the Australian writers, it quickly became apparent that the commercial power of the US was a constant presence. British writers also seemed to be aware of the larger American audience but did not feel the same pressure to engage or outright reject America as a setting as their Australian counterparts. In contrast, British readers felt that nearly all queer romances were American but also expressed

frustration when non-British authors wrote British books. They also did not mention actively seeking out British writers of queer romances – even if they enjoyed them when they did read them. The Australian readers, in comparison, largely emphasised the importance of authenticity from authors of queer romances but expressed apparent indifference regarding the nationality of the authors they read. The fact that neither American focus group spoke at length on this topic is further evidence of America's cultural and commercial prominence within queer romance. Those at the top of the hierarchy are often less aware of it than those at the bottom.

The final finding is that for readers, the LGBTQ+ representation in queer romances is the genre's primary form of activism. The importance of representation for LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly within a genre that guarantees a happy ending, came up in nearly every focus group. Some readers expressed a preference for queer romances that did not engage with LGBTQ+ issues, while others wanted queer romances to be more proactive with their activism, but the majority of readers emphasised the representation these novels provided when asked about the genre's engagement with LGBTQ+ activism. This finding is interesting given that the authors mostly did not position their writing as a form of political activism during the focus group discussions. Indeed, some of the authors even expressed anxiety about doing justice to queer issues, especially when writing queer experiences that did not reflect their own lived experiences. This anxiety made them hesitant to write about more niche LGBTQ+ issues, identities or experiences they did not have a personal relationship with. However, not all authors felt this way, and some, like

Jeannelle from America, did meticulous research to write romances that reflect the socio-economic realities of queer women and non-binary individuals throughout history. But overall, there is a disconnect between how readers and writers view queer romances in relation to LGBTQ+ activism. This disconnect again reflects the genre's dual literary heritage, as it showcases how the ecosystem around queer romances is constantly juggling the desire for LGBTQ+ activism with the commercial viability that comes from the popular romance formula.

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to explore many aspects of the queer romance genre, namely the publishing ecosystem, the portrayal of bodies, the homonormative nature of the HEA, and how authors and readers perceive the genre's engagement with LGBTQ+ activism. I used a sociological literary approach combining close literary analysis of the novels with surveys, data gathering of publishing metrics, and focus groups of readers and writers of queer romance novels. I found that the queer romance genre is more diverse and more complex in how it balances heteronormative and queer tendencies than previous academics have assumed.[822]

The Queer Romance Market: Publishing Ecosystem

My research has used quantitative and qualitative data to establish that the queer popular romance genre is a significant publishing trend in popular fiction with a wide and varied audience. Rather than just being considered as an extension and evolution of the popular romance genre, I argue that the queer popular romance is a unique genre of popular fiction worthy of study in its own right. When considering the queer romance genre and its publishing ecosystem I found three primary findings: 1) queer romance has a dual literary heritage of queer literature and the romance genre 2) self-publishing has, and

[822] Makert, 'M/M (Male/Male) Romances'; Hannah McCann, 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) Romance', in *Encyclopedia of Romance Fiction*, ed. by Kristin Ramsdell (Greenwood, 2018), pp. 168–73; Roach, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*.

continues to, serve an important role and 3) America dominates the traditional queer romance ecosystem.

During my research, it became increasingly clear that queer romances have a dual literary heritage, borrowing, and being inspired by both queer literature and the romance genre. Before this thesis, there was, I believe, no research that explored the literary evolution of the queer romance genre. Regis had mapped out the literary evolution of the heterosexual romance genre, but not queer romances.[823] Through my research I identified six types of queer romance that evolved in the last one-hundred and twenty-five years: Gay, Lesbian, M/M, F/F, Queered Heterosexual and Queer.

The roots of the queer romance genre start in the early 1900s with authors like Prime-Stevenson, E.M. Forster and Hall who wrote queer literature that reflected and expressed their own feelings and desires as LGBTQ+ individuals.[824] Some of these novels ended happily for the central couple, such as *Imre: A Memorandum* and *Maurice* but not all. These authors were often writing in secret, like Prime-Stevenson and Forster, or they deliberately set out to make a political statement with their work, like Hall.[825]

Between the 1930s and the 1960s in Australia, the UK and the US the paperback revolution occurred and censorship laws relaxed. This allowed lesbian and gay pulps to flourish in the 1950s and 60s, particularly in America. These pulps were the first mass-produced fiction to feature LGBTQ+

[823] Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*.
[824] Breen, 'Homosexual Identity, Translation, and Prime-Stevenson's Imre and The Intersexes', p. 8.
[825] Taylor, '"I Made Up My Mind to Get It": The American Trial of The Well of Loneliness, New York City, 1928 - 1929'.

characters.[826] Their depictions of lesbian and gay characters is now often seen as harmful and problematic but it was vital for a generation of lesbian and gay individuals.[827] They gave people a unified language and vocabulary to express their identities and helped create the image of what it meant to be queer. Although these pulps did not typically end happily for their LGBTQ+ characters, they were an important and influential step in the queer literature journey.

The 1970s and 80s saw a new generation of LGBTQ+ activism, with organisations being established to protest for LGBTQ+ rights. Part of this new radical LGBTQ+ activism was the growth of independently owned, small, publishing houses that were often run by LGBTQ+ people producing literature that reflected and expressed LGBTQ+ life. Lesbians, like Barbara Grier, established Naiad Press with the aim of producing fiction that gave lesbian readers a positive portrayal of female-centric desire and relationships.[828] These romances did not necessarily follow the narrative structures, tropes and sub-genres of the heterosexual romance genre but they often end happily for the central lesbian couple.

The technological revolution of the 1990s and 2000s, combined with political conservatism meant the Lesbian and Gay publishing houses that flourished in the 1970s and 80s struggled.[829] This inadvertently left a void in queer literature, which would be filled by M/M Romance and later still F/F

[826] Bronski, 'Gay Male and Lesbian Pulp Fiction and Mass Culture'; Barot, 'Queer Romance in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century America: Snapshots of a Revolution', p. 391.
[827] Matelski, '"I'm Not the Only Lesbian Who Wears a Skirt": Lesbian Romance Fiction and Identity in Post-World War II America', p. 79.
[828] Cantrell, 'Lesbis Sustineo! Naiad Press Authors Remember Barbara Grier'; Passet, 'Barbara Grier and the World She Built'.
[829] Baker, *Outrageous!: The Story of Section 28 and Britain's Battle for LGBT Education*; Glass, *United Queerdom: From the Legends of the Gay Liberation Front to the Queers of Tomorrow*.

Romance. These new types of queer romance evolved from fanfiction and the heterosexual romance genre. Rather than being written and produced by LGBTQ+ as a form of activism, and representation for LGBTQ+ individuals, the M/M and F/F romances followed the narrative structure and tropes of the heterosexual romances. They focused on the HEA and the central couples' journey to romantic happiness; they were about LGBTQ+ characters but were not necessarily intended to be written and read by LGBTQ+ individuals. This decade saw the development of the Kindle, which made it easier and commercially viable for people to self-publish.[830] The 2010s to the present saw the commercialisation of queer romances, starting with the M/M Romance genre that exploded in popularity in the first few years of the decade. This dynamic introduced new reader expectations that some writers of Gay Romances refused or struggled to conform to.[831] Although Gay and Lesbian Romances were still being written and published, it was the M/M and F/F Romances that typically achieved bigger sales and the commerciality demanded by publishers like Penguin Random House. After 2015, the queer romance genre saw an increase in sexual and gender diversity, with more queer romances featuring trans*, bisexual, pansexual and asexual characters, to name a few. These novels are largely being written by #OwnVoices authors who want to see themselves represented within the queer romance genre, like Prime-Stevenson and Hall in the early 1900s. My research challenges the widespread misconception that queer romance is a 'new' phenomenon that

[830] Bath and Schofield, 'The Digital Book', p. 185.
[831] Marshall, 'M/M Romance and Gay Fiction Duke It Out'; Meeker, 'About Who Writes MM Romance'.

emerged in the 2010s. Instead my research demonstrates that queer romance has a long-standing literary history and shows how the genre has evolved over the past 160 years. Ultimately the duality of the queer romance genre is one constantly in flux as it balances its queer literature roots with the popular romance genre's commercial viability.

The second finding I discovered was the important role self-publishing has and continues to play in queer romance. One of the oldest known queer romances *Imre: A Memorandum* by Prime-Stevenson was self-published in 1906, probably because it would have struggled to be published otherwise. Self-publishing gave LGBTQ+ writers more creative freedom but it came at a financial cost. When Amazon invented the Kindle in 2007 it made self-publishing a more viable option for authors who did not, or could not, publish their novels through traditional publishing means. Today a large proportion of queer romances are self-published, including *The Captive Prince* trilogy which started as a piece of original M/M fanfiction, was then self-published and finally bought and distributed globally by Penguin Random House. This trilogy is just one example of how queer romance authors often straddle the line between traditionally published and self-published. Although I did not focus on self-published novels in my data collection, some were captured due to the fluid approach taken by authors, as exemplified by C.S. Pacat. The small selection demonstrated that the number of self-published queer romances increased steadily throughout the 2010s. A key finding is therefore that self-publishing is a vital and historic method of publishing for the queer romance genre.

The final finding of the queer romance publishing ecosystem was that America currently dominates the market. My data on queer romances published between 2010 – 2019 revealed that American authors, publishing houses and characters dominated. Of the 3,493 queer romances catalogued, 2,746 of them were published by American publishing houses and 2,457 catalogued novels featured at least one American main character.[832] Out of the 1,030 catalogued authors, 723 were American and 43 of the 80 publishing houses included within my data were based in America (excluding the global publishing houses that have headquarters in multiple countries).[833] Additionally, American characters are found in 70.3% of the 3,493 queer romances catalogued, makes a case for American ideas about queerness culturally dominating the queer romance publishing ecosystem.[834] American respondents vastly outnumbered all other countries for my reader and writer surveys, which again reflects the large population size of the country and the high number of American queer romance readers and writers. The data catalogued on authors, publishers and main characters paints a clear picture of American cultural and commercial dominance within the queer romance publishing ecosystem.

This finding is further supported by talking to the writers and readers of queer romance novels from Australia, the UK, and the US. Australian author Robin Moray was particularly conscious of appealing to the American market

[832] Hargrave, 'English Language Queer Romance Novels Published between 1st January 2010 and 31st December 2019'.
[833] Hargrave, 'English Language Queer Romance Novels Published between 1st January 2010 and 31st December 2019'.
[834] This idea is outlined in 'Queer Romance Today' chapter, in the 'America or Bust?' section.

saying, 'all of my books are set in the US, or space' because they 'have this idea that US audience, which makes up such a huge market… won't be interested in an Australian story'.[835] Robin clearly wanted to set their novels in Australia but felt it necessary to appeal to the American market for commercial viability. Georgina, the other Australian writer, showed a similar awareness saying, 'I knew that the American market was a huge market'.[836] Despite this, Georgina set all her novels in Australia in defiance of the American market. The British writers also seemed aware of the American market but felt less pressured to deliberately write with that audience in mind. Of the three British writers interviewed, only one of them set their novels in America, and this decision was determined by creative expression, not market viability.[837] The other two were aware of the American market but did not feel commercially driven to appeal to it. The dichotomy between British and Australian writers is not surprising, as Britain is the second biggest producer of queer romance novels and popular sub-genres like the Regency are traditionally set in Britain. Interestingly, Totally Entwined, a British publisher, is one of the most prolific producers of queer romances outside of America but was not mentioned by the British queer romance readers.[838] This suggests that within the UK, readers are largely unaware of British queer romance publishers. All of this evidence, from my data, the reader and writer focus groups, and the survey responses, supports my finding that the queer romance publishing ecosystem is dominated by American publishers, authors, characters and readers, allowing

[835] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 4.
[836] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 4.
[837] Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 6.
[838] See 'Queer Romance Today chapter', section 'America or Bust?'.

American attitudes about queerness to dominate and shape the queer romance genre.

Queer Romance Novels: Homonormative Constraints

My thesis demonstrates how the readers and authors are often torn between the desire for queer representation and the pressures of commercial viability that is demanded of the popular romance genre. Through an exploration of the texts, alongside discussion with the authors and the readers, I have shown how the differing communities that surround this genre navigate this tension, with varying success. In my thesis I offer a clear account of the limitations imposed by pressures to accommodate a large readership whose expectations are still inflected by heteronormative society and genre convention. I found three key findings that reflect this tension and the homonormative constraints of the genre. 1) cisgender bodies largely conform to heteronormative romance hero and heroine expectations but trans* bodies showcase more queer potential 2) the romance genre historically has, and continues to, celebrate same-sex marriage in its HEA and 3) romance readers' expectations limit the queer potential of the HEA.

Through my research I found that cisgender heroes and heroines adhered to heteronormative expectations of the romance genre. This can be seen in the queer male bodies of Damien and Laurent in *The Captive Prince* trilogy by C.S. Pacat. The figure of Damien embodies the 'spectacular masculinity' of the male romance hero,[839] descriptions of Damien emphasise

[839] Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, p. 128.

his muscularity, strength, and sexual prowess; attributes found in heterosexual romance heroes.[840] He is the physical embodiment of the male romance hero, where 'muscularity goes hand in hand with sexual allure'.[841] Even Laurent, the other hero, whose masculinity is troubled due to his androgynous, feminine-coded facial features, is shown to have muscles and a surprisingly athletic stature despite his smaller size.[842] Laurent has to actively perform masculinity to earn the respect of those around him, including Damien, due to his 'pretty face'.[843] Laurent is never able to defeat or overpower Damien, despite being Damien's 'Master' for the majority of the trilogy.[844] Damien's body is the one that triumphs in *The Captive Prince* trilogy and the dynamic between the two heroes mimics the hero and heroine dynamic of the heterosexual romance. I therefore argue that *The Captive Prince* trilogy reinforces and reasserts the hegemonic masculinity of the heterosexual romance novel.

There is less research on the romance heroine's body than on the hero's body. In my analysis of *One Last Stop* by Casey McQuiston, I built on the research of Schippers to establish the characteristics of the dominate body for a romance heroine female.[845] Using Schippers method for 'Recovering the Female Other' I argued that a dominant characteristic of the female heroine is her lack of definite description. This aligned with the research Brown had done into the fat female heroine, where 'readers [are left] to imagine

[840] Allan, 'The Purity of His Maleness: Masculinity in Popular Romance Novels', p. 29; Zidle, 'From Bodice-Ripper to Baby-Sitter: The New Hero in Mass-Market Romance', p. 25; Arvanitaki, *Masculinities in Post-Millennial Popular Romance*, p. 56.
[841] Arvanitaki, *Masculinities in Post-Millennial Popular Romance*, p. 56.
[842] Pacat, *Captive Prince*, p. 130.
[843] Pacat, *Prince's Gambit*, p. 17.
[844] Pacat, *Kings Rising*, pp. 134, 136.
[845] Schippers, 'Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculininty, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony'.

whatever they wish to about the heroine'.[846] In addition, I noticed that *One Last Stop* utilised the long-established butch-femme dynamic between the two heroines Jane and August.[847] Applying all these ideas to my analysis of *One Last* Stop, I found that Jane and August's bodies mimics the gender dynamic seen in heterosexual romances between the hero and heroine.[848] Jane, the butch one, is the object of desire with her body being vividly described. In contrast, August's appearance is largely left to the reader's imagination with few concrete details in the text itself. This vagueness is a key feature of the romance heroine in heterosexual romance novels and therefore aligns August physically with the heteronormative gender ideals of the romance heroine.

Queer romances that showed the biggest deviation from the expected body for romance heroes and heroines was the ones featuring trans* protagonists: *Peter Darling* by Austin Chant and *A Lady for a Duke* by Alexis Hall. Both Chant and Hall question the importance of the physical body aligning with the gender of their trans* protagonists. This attitude contrasts to typical narratives for trans* bodies, where trans* people are expected societally to transition and adhere to the gender binary.[849] By not focusing on gendered body parts in their descriptions of Viola and Peter, Chant and Hall do not feed the 'voyeuristic attention direct in mass culture' to the 'genitalia of trans people'.[850] Instead Peter and Viola are freed from the need to fully

[846] Brown, 'Does This Book Make Me Look Fat?'
[847] McCann, 'Beyond the Visible: Rethinking Femininity through Femme Assemblage', p. 287; Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis*, p. 95.
[848] Brown, 'Does This Book Make Me Look Fat?'; Schippers, 'Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculininty, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony'.
[849] Wilchins, 'A Certain Kind of Freedom: Power and the Truth of Bodies', p. 41.
[850] Halberstam, *Trans**, p. 33.

transition, or from the reader needing to know whether they have or not. The readers of these novels are instead shown two trans* protagonists who find love, self-acceptance of their bodies and a sense of gender euphoria not tied to their physical appearances. In doing this, they break away from the heterosexual romance genre's expectation because they don't conform to the gender binary. In addition, both novels use sex to reconnect Peter and Viola to their bodies, a stark contrast to the asexual depiction of trans* bodies that is often assumed or seen in mainstream media.[851] Instead, for Peter in *Peter Darling,* having sex with Hook, and the sexual desire that it ignites, makes Peter feel more closely connected to his body.[852] It also allows him to start challenging his toxic ideas about masculinity. Similarly in *A Lady for a Duke,* having sex with Gracewood empowers Viola and lets her see her body as beautiful.[853] With these novels, Hall and Chant, break away from the constraints placed on the bodies of heterosexual romance heroes and heroines. Therefore, a key finding of my thesis was that cisgender bodies in the queer romance genre largely conform to heteronormative romance hero and heroine expectations but trans* bodies showcase more queer potential.

A second finding regarding queer romance novels was that they generally support marriage equality and the homonormative institution of same-sex marriage. Marriage has been the narrative culmination of the

[851] Gupta, 'Gendering Asexuality and Asexualizing Gender: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Intersections between Gender and Asexuality', p. 1201; Grant, Mottet, and Tanis, *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*; Ekins and King, *The Transgender Phenomenon*; Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*.
[852] Chant, *Peter Darling*, p. 223.
[853] Hall, *A Lady for a Duke*, p. 339.

romance plot since proto-romances like *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. Regis argued that a romance 'ending in marriage' was 'a formal feature of every romance novel', highlighting how important marriage is to the narrative structure of the genre. It is therefore hardly surprising that in the 2000s romance authors starting using the romance genre's narrative structure, ending in a marriage, to campaign for marriage equality. An early example of this was when Suzanne Brockmann's donated all the earnings from her M/M Romance novella *All Through the Night* to MassEquality. Other authors, like Australian Renae Kaye championed the cause of same-sex marriage in her series *Loving You,* whose final novel *Knowing Me, Knowing You* ended with all the couples in the series getting engaged or married after Australia voted to allow same-sex marriage. None of these authors included the nuanced debates happening within the LGBTQ+ community about marriage equality in their romances.[854] In the queer romance ecosystem there is seemingly an uncriticised endorsement of the homonormative institution of same-sex marriage, one that hardly reflects the nuanced and complex opinions of the LGBTQ+ community. Queer romance authors' continued alignment with homonormative institution of marriage is also seen in *D'Vaughn and Kris Plan a Wedding* by Chencia C. Higgins as it celebrate same-sex marriage and the romance plot culminates in D'Vaughn and Kris getting married. Higgins's celebration of same-sex marriage is the natural progression from authors like Brockmann and Kaye. *D'Vaughn and Kris Plan a Wedding* does little to critique

[854] D'Emilio, 'The Marriage Fight Is Setting Us Back'; Stanley, 'Marriage Is Murder: On the Discursive Limits of Matrimony'; 'Marriage Is Still the Opiate of the Queers'; Nair, 'Against Equality, Against Marriage: An Introduction'.

marriage as a homonormative institution and presents it as more loving and pure than traditional heterosexual marriages. Higgins' novel is one example of how the queer romance genre and its authors have used their novels to campaign for, celebrate and endorse marriage equality and same-sex marriage.

These two findings led me to conclude that the queer romance genre still conforms to heteronormative and homonormative romance genre expectations. This adherence to the homonormative was particularly prominent when I started analysing *Where We Left Off* by Roan Parrish, as it is an M/M Romance that pushes against the heteronormative belief that emotional stability is only possible in monogamist relationships.[855] This belief isn't necessarily one held by the queer community, particularly the queer male community, as research by Bonello and Cross, Duncan, Prestage and Grierson, and Heaphy, Donovan and Weeks has shown.[856] *Where We Left Off* by Parrish critiques the idea that sex and love must be intimately entwined, arguably a defining feature of the genre, where compulsory demisexuality is crucial to a HEA.[857] Parrish's novel challenges the heteronormative template by rejecting compulsory monogamy as a necessity for the HEA. This novel deviated furthest from the heteronormative expectation of supermonogamy that romance

[855] Emens, 'Compulsory Monogamy and Polyamorous Existence'; Murray, 'Forsaking All Others: A Bifeminist Discussion of Compulsory Monogamy'; K. York, 'Why Monogamy Is Morally Permissible: A Defense of Some Common Justifications for Monogamy', *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 54.4 (2020), pp. 539–52.
[856] Bonello and Cross, 'Gay Monogamy: I Love You But I Can't Have Sex With Only You'; Duane Duncan, Garrett Prestage, and Jeffrey Grierson, '"I'd Much Rather Have Sexual Intimacy as Opposed to Sex": Young Australian Gay Men, Sex, Relationships and Monogamy', *Sexualities*, 18.7 (2015), pp. 798–816; Heaphy, Donovan, and Weeks, 'A Different Affair? Openness and Nonmonogamy in Same Sex Relationships'.
[857] McAlister, '"That Complete Fusion of Spirit as Well as Body": Heroines, Heroes, Desire and Compulsory Demisexuality in the Harlequin Mills & Boon Romance Novel'.

novels often depict[858]. Instead *Where We Left Off* challenges the necessity for queer romance HEA's to end with a monogamist relationship. Even though the novel technically ends with a monogamous relationship, that could become polyamorous in the future, it faced criticism from readers. Readers had a problem with Will's polyamorous lifestyle, with one review saying by the end of the novel 'we get [Will's] begrudging admission that he'll *try* to be faithful to Leo'.[859] These comments criticise his polyamorous lifestyle and unwillingness to form an exclusive sexual relationship with Leo by associating it with infidelity. Infidelity is a hard-line for most romance readers and one that queer romance writers are very wary of, even if polyamory and cheating are not the same thing.[860] Other novels have been criticised for deviating from the homonormative standard expected from queer romance novels. This suggests that there is less desire for queer romances that push the genre's heteronormative boundaries. Readers seem to prefer queer romances that portray a homonormative version of queerness that borrows from and transforms existing heteronormative romance genre structures and conventions.

Queer Romance Identity: Audience and Activism

In my thesis I wanted to discover if, and how the queer romance genre engaged with political activism for the LGBTQ+ community. In doing so, I discovered that queer romance had the potential to enhance readers' and

[858] See The Queer Happily Ever After chapter.
[859] Lumsden, 'Katrina's Review of Where We Left Off by Roan Parrish'.
[860] Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 12.

authors' understanding of queer communities, an aspect of the genre that had largely been ignored by previous academics. Through my research, I found that these novels, and the communities that surrounds them, emphasise the value and potential of queer lives and relationships through a sense of empathy and kinship. Queer relationships and queer lives are normalised and even celebrated, in a way that is often not found in other genres or formats. Three key findings emerged: 1) the writers and readers of queer romance represent a diverse array of sexualities and gender, 2) queer romance writers used their novels to discover, explore and validate their own LGBTQ+ identities and 3) the political power of queer romances comes from their positive representation of LGBTQ+ individuals.

It is commonly stated, not primarily by academics, that queer romances are largely written and read by straight women, however, my research revealed a different picture. [861] Studies about the writers of the popular romance genre do exist, but none of them focus specifically on writers of queer romance novels.[862] As the first comprehensive study to consider specifically the authors of queer romances I was able to disprove some previously held assumptions about who is writing these novels. The survey I conducted of queer romance authors revealed that only 9.3% identified as 'straight or

[861] Foster, 'What To Do If Your Inner Tomboy Is a Homo: Straight Women, Bisexuality, and Pleasure in M/M Gay Romance Fictions'; Foster, 'Why Are So Many Gay Romance Novels Written by Straight Women?'; Christopher Pullen, *Straight Girls and Queer Guys: The Hetero Media Gaze in Film and Television* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016).
[862] McAlister, Parnell, and Trinidad, '#RomanceClass: Genre World, Intimate Public, Found Family'; Jodi McAlister, Claire Parnell, and Andrea Anne Trinidad, *Publishing Romance Fiction in the Philippines*, Elements in Publishing and Book Culture (Cambridge University Press, 2023); Christine Larson, *Love in the Time of Self-Publishing: How Romance Writers Changed the Rules of Writing and Success* (Princeton University Press, 2024), pp. 9–22.

heterosexual'.[863] Among the writer survey respondents the top three sexualities were Queer (39.5%), Bisexual (34.9%) and Pansexual (22.1%). This range of sexualities was further supported by my publishing data, in my author cataloguing I found that 44.6% of the authors publicly identified as a member of the LGBTQ+ community.[864] In total 19 different sexualities and gender identities were found among the 1,030 authors catalogued with Queer* (15.0%), Lesbian (11.6%), Gay (7.5%), Non-Binary (4.8%) and Bisexual (4.3%) being the most highly represented LGBTQ+ identities.[865] Despite non-binary being the fourth highest category, in general, the number of sexualities was greater and saw higher levels of representation than gender identities. This was again true with the writer survey, with 57% of the writer survey respondents identifying as cisgender women.[866] It is true that the majority of these authors (both those surveyed and those catalogued) are women, but the idea that it is primarily straight women writing queer romances, is clearly unfounded. In fact writers of queer romances embody a vast array of sexualities and genders, with nearly half identifying in some capacity as LGBTQ+.

The assumption held by academics, and the publishing community is that the majority of people reading queer romances are straight women. However, 71.8% of my reader survey respondents, didn't identify as 'straight'. When asked about their gender identity, 75.8% of the respondents selected

[863] Hargrave, 'Writers of Queer Romance Novels Survey Responses'.
[864] Hargrave, 'English Language Queer Romance Novels Published between 1st January 2010 and 31st December 2019'.
[865] Although Queer* (15%) is the biggest individual category it was used as umbrella category for individuals who expressed they were queer but different provide details of a particular identity. It is also an identity in its own right, but the 15% is likely inflated due to its use as an umbrella category both by this thesis and by the LGBTQ+ community in general.
[866] Hargrave, 'Writers of Queer Romance Novels Survey Responses'.

'cisgender woman', with the next highest category being 'non-binary' at 7.4%.[867] These figures are interesting because it shows that although the majority of queer romance readers are women, they primarily identify as LGBTQ+ individuals. This is, to my knowledge, the first research into the readership of queer romance novels that provides statistical data on who is reading these novels today. Among the reader survey respondents there was a vast array of sexualities represented: aromantic (5.9%), asexual (15.5%), bisexual (22.9%), demisexual (13.2%), gay (4.8%), lesbian (13.7%), pansexual (10.9%), queer (21.6%), questioning (5.6%) and heterosexual (28.2%).[868] Although heterosexual was the biggest single category, the result of this survey reveals that queer romance readers span a diverse spectrum. Prior to my research there was no in-depth, quantitative research into the readership for queer romance novels. It was therefore assumed by academics, and critics of the genre, that the majority of people reading queer romance novels were straight women, based on historic research into the heterosexual romance novel.[869] I disproved this previously held assumption and found that the readership for queer romance novels is primarily, although not exclusively, made up of LGBTQ+ women.

My second finding in relation to identity is that authors experienced feelings of validation, exploration and self-discovery of their identities through writing queer romances. This idea arose, unprompted, during the focus groups

[867] Hargrave, 'Readers of Queer Romance Novels Survey Responses'.
[868] Hargrave, 'Readers of Queer Romance Novels Survey Responses'.
[869] Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women*, p. 34; Deborah Philips, *Women's Fiction 1945 - 2005: Writing Romance* (Continuum, 2007), pp. 8–9; Janice A Radway, 'Readers and Their Romance', in *Reception Study: From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies*, ed. by James L Machor and Philp Goldstein (Routledge, 2001), pp. 213–45.

with Australian writers, in answer to why they wrote queer romances. These feelings of validation, exploration and discovery came up in all three writer focus groups.[870] With writer Jeannelle Ferreira (American focus group) saying 'I want to see myself', Robin Moray (Australian focus group) saying through 'writing I realized I was also queer' and Blake (British focus group) saying 'I'm gender fluid [and]… there is this really interesting engagement with masculinity… that I get from writing M/M'.[871]

The idea that lesbian readers gain a sense of identity and validation from reading Lesbian Romances was explored by Juhasz and Betz. Juhasz suggests that through the 'mutual recognition' of the lesbian reader and the lesbian writer, Lesbian identities and desires are validated.[872] Betz builds on Juhasz's theory, stating that in the Lesbian Romance 'the fantasy of happy endings' teaches the lesbian reader that 'two women have the same right to the happy ending' as heterosexual couples.[873] In contrast, the idea that writers of queer romances gain a similar sense of validation, exploration and discovery from their writing has received little academic attention until now.

On the whole, the idea of queer fiction creating a sense of community and identity for LGBTQ+ individuals has received academic attention. Matelski argues that 'lesbian pulps became a resource for women searching for an identity' in Post-WWII America, with the 'female-authored lesbian pulps…

[870] See 'Queer Romance Today' chapter, 'Journey to Queer Romance: Validation of Self' section.
[871] Ferreira, 'American Romance Writer Interview', p. 1; Moray, 'Australian Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 1; Lister, 'United Kingdom Romance Writers Focus Group', p. 2.
[872] Juhasz, *Reading from the Heart: Women, Literature, and the Search for True Love*, p. 209.
[873] Betz, *Lesbian Romance Novels: A History and Critical Analysis*, p. 181.

offer[ing] a gateway into the internal musing of lesbians'[874] This idea was explored again by Ross in his research into the Black Gay Romance novels of the 1980s, where he argued that authors like Duplechan, Hardy and Harris wrote 'to reclaim black man-on-man passion' while 'stay[ing] true to Black social reality'.[875] Community and validation of self was also touched upon in McAlister et al. research into the #RomanceClass writing community.[876] My finding builds upon this previous research and is further supported by the history of queer romance novels, particularly when considering the impact LGBTQ+ literature has had on the genre. The early lesbian and gay fiction presses of the 1970s were in part established to foster a sense of community and provide validation for LGBTQ+ people.[877] Going back even further, the authors of the Lesbian pulps that flourished in 1950s America have been credited with helping to '*create lesbian identity*'.[878] Writers like Jeannelle, Robin and Blake are therefore tapping into a long history of LGBTQ+ individuals using writing to form queer communities who can explore, discover and validate their own identities. My finding expands upon existing research into what queer writing does for writers and readers through its focus on the queer romance genre. I have shown that both writers and readers of queer romances are turning to these novels to explore, discover and validate their own LGBTQ+ identities.

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[874] Matelski, '"I'm Not the Only Lesbian Who Wears a Skirt": Lesbian Romance Fiction and Identity in Post-World War II America', pp. 75, 79–80.
[875] Ross, '"What's Love but a Second Hand Emotion": Man-on-Man Passion in the Contemporary Black Gay Romance Novel', pp. 675, 678.
[876] McAlister, Parnell, and Trinidad, '#RomanceClass: Genre World, Intimate Public, Found Family', p. 413.
[877] Jed Samer, *Lesbian Potentiality and Feminist Media in the 1970s* (Duke University Press, 2022); David Van Leer, *The Queening of America: Gay Culture in Straight Society* (Routledge, 1995), pp. 13–70.
[878] Matelski, '"I'm Not the Only Lesbian Who Wears a Skirt": Lesbian Romance Fiction and Identity in Post-World War II America', p. 78. Italics taken from the original.

The final finding that can be attributed to identity and queer romance novels is the political power of representation these novels provide. Previous academic scholarship on readership can be split into two broad groups, those who argue these novels provide readers with an escape from reality and those who say that romance novels are political. I argue that queer romance novels are both. Building on research by Betz, Juhasz and Radway I spoke with readers of queer romances from Australia, the UK and the US to gain further insight into why they read these novels. When I asked the three reader focus groups whether they felt queer romances engaged with real-life LGBTQ+ developments, the answers largely focused on representation. Most readers, although not all, felt that the representation these novels provided, where everyone is worthy of love 'is a political statement'.[879] Even readers who didn't identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community conveyed the power of seeing two, or more, LGBTQ+ individuals fall in love and be happy.[880]

This emphasis on representation and the power of seeing LGBTQ+ individuals happy and in love isn't new to the twenty-first century. For example, the Lesbian Romance novels published by Naiad had a similar sentiment as they set out to 'publish work that was affirmation of [lesbian] life and [lesbian] love'.[881] Readers seeking out positive, joyful representation from queer romance novels is one of the main strains that runs through the history of queer romance novels. I found that queer romance novels are, and have always been, important to their readers because they tell positive, emotionally

[879] 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 11.
[880] 'Australian Romance Readers Focus Group', pp. 2–3; 'American Romance Readers Focus Group', p. 3.
[881] Cantrell, 'Lesbis Sustineo! Naiad Press Authors Remember Barbara Grier', p. 340.

satisfying stories about LGBTQ+ individuals. Writers were aware of the political power novels could provide by showcasing queer possibilities; the writers of queer romance have, for example, used their texts to campaign for marriage equality.[882] Some queer romance novels offer readers a fantastical escape, a world without prejudices, although the political nature of queer imagined realities should be noted.[883] Some queer romances engage with LGBTQ+ struggles and some showcase LGBTQ+ individuals happy and in love without direct political references. There is no-one-size fits-all answer, however, what all queer romances offer is a representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in emotionally affirming, loving relationships. Therefore a key finding of this thesis is the importance of representation for the community that surrounds queer romance novels, both in the twentieth and twenty-first century.

Moving forward I hope to expand on some of the research within this project looking at the different sub-genres within queer romance and the differing expectations readers and writers place on them. I would be interested to explore whether some sub-genres, like science-fiction, hold more queer potential than others. This was touched upon throughout my thesis and is certainly an avenue for future research. Another area of interest is exploring how queer romance novels are marketed and sold, by incorporating and expanding on research gathered during this project. Finally, I would wish to expand my research of polyamorous romance novels, which was started with

[882] See 'The Queer Happily Ever After' chapter, 'Marriage and the Romance Genre' section.
[883] Angela Jones, *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*, Palgrave Macmillan's Critical Studies in Gender, Sexuality and Culture (Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

my analysis of monogamy, stability and the HEA in *Where We Left off* by Roan Parrish, to include a wider corpus of novels.

This thesis focused on three countries with the largest, distinct queer romance publishing ecosystems, which led to a focus on English language novels. However, the queer romance genre is a global one, as shown by the research into the #RomanceClass writing community of the Philippines, which did include a brief analysis of its queer members and their work.[884] It would be interesting to examine queer romances written and published in countries with different cultural and social expectations to see what impact this has on the construction, production and reception of queer romances. Moving forward I would wish to take my research further by incorporating a detailed analysis of queer romances from countries other than Australia, the UK and the US.

Finally, due to the scope of my thesis I was unable to fully explore self-published queer romance novels, making this another area for future research. Self-publishing has been a part of the production of queer romances for over 100 years expanding exponentially after the invention of the Kindle.[885] The vast number of self-published queer romances are harder to track than traditionally published queer romances, making research in this area both exciting and challenging. But the quantity of books involved makes it an important avenue of future research.

[884] McAlister, Parnell, and Trinidad, '#RomanceClass: Genre World, Intimate Public, Found Family'.
[885] Chapter 1, 'The History of Queer Romance' explored the historical and contemporary connections between queer romance and self-publishing.

In little more than 120 years queer romance has evolved from sporadic, self-published novels funded by a few individuals[886] to being prominently displayed in mainstream bookshops with film adaptations being produced by major film and TV companies.[887] With this thesis I have sought to combine and consider the totality of the queer romance genre through a socio-literary approach that considers the genre's queer history, the romance genre's influence, and its modern publishing ecosystem. Ultimately, this thesis argues that we need to stop viewing queer romances, in all its definitions, as extensions of the popular romance genre which 'merely' pander to the straight gaze in their portrayal of queerness. Queer romance is a complex and unique genre of popular literature that continues to balance the romance genre's heteronormative influence and commercial success with its queer fiction legacy of representation and activism for LGBTQ+ individuals.

[886] Here I am referencing *Imre: A Memorandum* by Prime-Stevenson, arguably the first proto-queer romance that was self-published on a small scale in Italy in 1906.
[887] For example, the film adaptation of *Red, White & Royal Blue* by Casey McQuiston was brought by Amazon and became one of the most popular films on the site. A fact reinforced by the announcement of a sequel to the first film in May 2024.

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APPENDIX 1: PUBLISHER IMPRINT LIST

1. Affinity eBook Press
2. Amber Quill
3. Bedazzled Ink
4. Bella Books
5. Blind Eye Books
6. Blue Feather Books
7. Bold Strokes Books
8. Pride Publishing
9. Totally Bound
10. Brisk Press
11. Bristlecone Pine Press
12. Bywater books
13. Carnation Books
14. Duet Books
15. Interlude Press
16. Desert Palm Press
17. Dreamspinner Press
18. Harmony Ink
19. Ellora's Cave
20. Etopia Press
21. eXtasy Books
22. Flashpoint Publications
23. Bookouture
24. Forever Yours
25. Piatkus
26. Avon
27. Balzer + Bray
28. Carina Press
29. Harper Collins
30. Kensington
31. Lyrical Press
32. Launch Point Press
33. Less Than Three Press
34. Lethe Press
35. Liquid Silver Publishing
36. Loose Id
37. Love Africa Press
38. Love You Divine
39. Entangled Publishing
40. Farrar, Straus and Giroux
41. Feiwel & Friends
42. Flatiron Books
43. St. Martin's Press
44. Tor Publishing
45. Manifold Press
46. MLR Press

47. Monster Books
48. NineStar Press
49. P.D. Publishing
50. Berkley Australia
51. Brava
52. Dutton Books
53. G. P. Putnam's Sons
54. InterMix
55. Loveswept
56. New American Library
57. Penguin eBooks
58. Queen of Swords Press
59. Rainbow Ninja Press
60. Ravenous Romance
61. Alyson Books
62. Resplendence Publishing
63. Riptide Publishing
64. Samhain Publishing Ltd.
65. Sapphire Books Publishing
66. Silver Publishing
67. Crimson Romance
68. Margaret K. McElderry Books
69. Pocket Star
70. Simon & Schuster
71. Siren Publishing
72. Sky Pony Press
73. Sourcebooks
74. Swoon Reads
75. Prizm Books
76. Torquere Press
77. Wayward Ink Publishing
78. Wilde City Press
79. Ylva Publishing

APPENDIX 2: QUEER ROMANCES 2010 - 2019

Title	Author(s)	Publisher (Original)	Place Published	Year Published
Betrayed	Aile, Rhianne	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Forever Broken	Anderson, Evangeline	Ellora's Cave	USA	2010
Knight of Pleasure	Anderson, Simone	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Ethan's Freedom	Archer, Jade	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Simple Men	Arvin, Eric	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
In a Family Way	Badger, Karen D.	Blue Feather Books	USA	2010
Something for Nothing	Bailey, Connie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Revenant	Bailey, Connie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Missing Lynx	Baldwin, Kim and Alexiou, Xenia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Starting From Scratch	Beers, Georgia	Brisk Press	USA	2010
Relationships 201	Bekins, Alix	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Indelible	Belle, Jove	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Breaking Limits	Bennett, Nicki and Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Exploring Limits	Bennett, Nicki and Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
No Limits	Bennett, Nicki and Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Refining Limits	Bennett, Nicki and Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Stretching Limits	Bennett, Nicki and Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Transcending Limits	Bennett, Nicki and Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
All for One	Bennett, Nicki and Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Beached Hearts	Blackwell, Scarlet	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
A Game of Chances	Blue, T.C.	Totally Bound	UK	2010
A Game of Skills	Blue, T.C.	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Frontier Men	Bowie, J.P.	MLR Press	USA	2010
Something Shattered	Bradford, Bailey	Loose Id	USA	2010
Relentless	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Rescued	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2010
When the Dead Speak	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Shadow Point	Briant, Amy	Bella Books	USA	2010
Fierce Overture	Brooke, Gun	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Truths	Buck, Rebecca S.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
House of Cards	Burns, Nat	Bella Books	USA	2010
Two Weeks in August	Burns, Nat	Bella Books	USA	2010
Final Encore	Cade, Scotty	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
End of the Rope	Calhoun, Jackie	Bella Books	USA	2010
The Guardian	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Timing	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Trusted Bond	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Descent	Cannon, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Wishing for a Home	Chase, T.A.	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2010
Out of Light into Darkness	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Match Maker	Chin, Alan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Butterfly's Child	Chin, Alan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Solstice	Christie, Kate	Bella Books	USA	2010
Special Delivery	Cullinan, Heidi	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
River Walker	Culpepper, Cate	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
American Love Songs	Kane, Ashlyn	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Jukebox	Daggett, Gina Noelle	Bella Books	USA	2010
More Than Make-Believe	Dalton, Tymber	Self Published	USA	2010
Cameron's Pride	Dare, Kim	Resplendence Publishing	USA	2010
Duck!	Dare, Kim	Resplendence Publishing	USA	2010
Ellery's Duty	Dare, Kim	Resplendence Publishing	USA	2010
Marrick's Promise	Dare, Kim	Resplendence Publishing	USA	2010
Ryland's Sacrifice	Dare, Kim	Resplendence Publishing	USA	2010
The Mark of an Alpha	Dare, Kim	Totally Bound	UK	2010
The Strength of a Gamma	Dare, Kim	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Frederica and the Viscountess	Davies, Barbara	Bedazzled Ink	USA	2010
Seducing Stephen	Devon, Summer and Dee, Bonnie	Loose Id	USA	2010
Circus	Dragon, J.M.	Affinity Books Press	New Zealand	2010
A Perfect Match	Dutton, Erin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Trust Me	Erno, Jeff	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Dear Mister President	Fitzroy, Adam	Manifold Press	UK	2010
Wolfsbane Winter	Fletcher, Jane	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Gathering Storm	Gala, Lyn	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Witness	Gilbert, L.A.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
The Pleasure Set	Girolami, Lisa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Nightshade	Godfrey, Shea	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
A Shared Range	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
A Taste of Love	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
An Unexpected Vintage	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Love Means… Freedom	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Love Means… No Boundaries	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Love Means… No Fear	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Counterpoint	Haimowitz, Rachel	Self Published	USA	2010
Lord of the White Hell, Book 1	Hale, Ginn	Blind Eye Books	USA	2010
Lord of the White Hell, Book 2	Hale, Ginn	Blind Eye Books	USA	2010
Two Hearts Two Spirits	Halfhill, Michael	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Lily of the Tower	Hart, Elizabeth	Bella Books	USA	2010
Magic of the Heart	Harte, C.J.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Devil's Rock	Hill, Gerri	Bella Books	USA	2010
Love Waits	Hill, Gerri	Bella Books	USA	2010
Always Faithful	Isabella	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2010
Wildfire	James, Lynn	Bella Books	USA	2010
Home	Johnson, Dawn Kimberly	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Above Temptation	Kallmaker, Karin	Bella Books	USA	2010
Love's Fortress	Kane, Samantha	Ellora's Cave	USA	2010

Filth	King, M.	Love You Divine	UK	2010
Our Sacred Balance	Labbe, Margueritte	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Bewitched by Bella's Brother	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Keeping Promise Rock	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Making Promises	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Talker	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Hammer & Air	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Truth in the Dark	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Rampant	Lane, Amy	Self Published	USA	2010
Capturing Perfection	Lane, Trina	Totally Bound	UK	2010
His Perfect Partner	Lane, Trina	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Taking the Chance	Lane, Trina	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Fair Game	Lanyon, Josh	Carina Press	USA	2010
Long Shot	Leigh, D. Jackson	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Tainted Blood	Leonhard, Sam C.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Head Trip	Line, D. L.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Vagabond Heart	Llewellyn, A.J.	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Firehouse Heat	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Making the Grade	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Neil's Guardian Angel	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Recipe for Love	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2010
To Service and Protect	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Seducing the Sheik	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2010
To Bed a King	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Liquid Crimson	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Anarchy in Blood	Lynne, Carol and Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Dracul's Blood	Lynne, Carol and Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Mother Load	MacGregor, K.G.	Bella Books	USA	2010
Photographs of Claudia	MacGregor, K.G.	Bella Books	USA	2010
Schism	Manly, D.J.	Totally Bound	UK	2010
House of Phineas	Manly, D.J.	Totally Bound	UK	2010
House of Simeon	Manly, D.J.	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Wind and Bones	Marra, Kristin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Diego	Martinez, Angel	Red Rose Publishing	USA	2010
A Promise of Tomorrow	McAllister, Rowan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Heaven	McBride, Belinda	Self Published	UK	2010
Not Every River	McCoy, Robbi	Bella Books	USA	2010
Something to Believe	McCoy, Robbi	Bella Books	USA	2010
Songs Without Words	McCoy, Robbi	Bella Books	USA	2010
Ambereye	McKnight, Gill	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Jericho	McMan, Ann	Bedazzled Ink	USA	2010
High Risk	Meyer, J Lee	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Conway's Curse	Michael, Patric	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Three Wishes	Michael, Sean	Torquere Press	USA	2010
Duty & Devotion	Michaels, Tere	Loose Id	USA	2010
Love, Grant	Miles, A.K.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Too Keen	Miles, A.K.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2010
Home	Neale, William	MLR Press	USA	2010
The Emperor's Wolf	Owens, J.C.	Loose Id	USA	2010
I Can See Right Through You	Owens, Zahra	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Likes Pizza and Beer	Parker, Elle	Lyrical Press	USA	2010
Come Back to Me	Paynter, Chris	Self Published	UK	2010
Witch Wolf	Pennington, Winter	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Sterling Road Blues	Perkinson, Ruth	Bella Books	USA	2010
Fever	Powell, VK	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
1049 Club	Pritekel, Kim	P.D. Publishing	USA	2010
Sea Change	Quinton, Chris	Manifold Press	UK	2010
Aloes	Quinton, Chris	Manifold Press	UK	2010
Fool's Errand	Quinton, Chris	Manifold Press	UK	2010
The Midnight Hunt	Raand, L.L.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Desire by Starlight	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Trauma Alert	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
One Wild Wish	Rhodes, Devon	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Chulito	Rice-González, Charles	Alyson Books	USA	2010
Beacon of Love	Roberts, Ann	Bella Books	USA	2010
Ivory	Rocci, J	Torquere Press	USA	2010
Vapor	Rose, Larkin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Home is the Sailor	Rowan, Lee	Bristlecone Pine Press	USA	2010
Collision Course	Rowlands, C.P.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Between Boyfriends	Salvatore, Michael	Kensington	USA	2010
Lost and Found	Sebastian, Gwenna	Lyrical Press	USA	2010
A to Z	Sexton, Marie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Promises	Sexton, Marie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Strawberries for Dessert	Sexton, Marie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Condor and Falcon	Simpson, John	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Jack and Dave	Simpson, John	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Out of the Gilded Cage	Simpson, John	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Wolf's Head Inn	Simpson, John	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Counterpoint Dylan's Story	Sims, Ruth	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Dress Up	Skelton, Joel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Mongrel	Snow, K. Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
The Long Way Home	Spangler, Rachel	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Art Criticism	Spettro, Celeste	Self Published	USA	2010
Nevermore	Stark, Nell and Tam, Trinity	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Awakening to Sunlight	Stone, Lindsey	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Promises and Lies	Sudbury, Rowena	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Seducing C.C.	Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
The Matelot	Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Perilous Partnership	Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Why Nileas Loved the Sea	Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Her Two Dads	Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Do Not Disturb	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Soul of the Mummy	Thomas, B.G.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010

File Gumbo	Tortuga, BA	Torquere Press	USA	2010
From This Moment On	Trebelhorn, PJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
In Medias Res	Wallace, Yolanda	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Rum Spring	Wallace, Yolanda	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2010
Body Language	White, Kenna	Bella Books	USA	2010
The Year Without Summer	Wiley, G.S.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2010
Blind Bet	Richardson, Tracey	Bella Books	USA	2010
No Remedy	D'Abo, Christine	Ellora's Cave	USA	2010
No Quarter	D'Abo, Christine	Riptide Publishing	USA	2010
Dance With Me	Cullinan, Heidi	Loose Id	USA	2011
Nowhere Ranch	Cullinan, Heidi	Loose Id	USA	2011
The Wedding Party	Richardson, Tracey	Bella Books	USA	2011
Fix This, Sir	Samms, Jaime	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Scarlet Masquerade	Abbott, Jett	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2011
Rearranging Stars	Adams, Diane	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2011
The Other Mrs. Champion	Adcock, Brenda	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2011
To Love Again	Anderson, Simone	Totally Bound	UK	2011
InSight of the Seer	Andersson, Linda and Marx, Sara	Bella Books	USA	2011
Blue Notes	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
The Dream of a Thousand Nights	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Sandpiper's Secrets	Archer, Jade	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Devon's Revenge	Archer, Jade	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Sharing Paul	Archer, Jade	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Become You	Grubb, Michelle	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Emily's Art and Soul	Argento, Joy	Self Published	USA	2011
Woke Up in a Strange Place	Arvin, Eric	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
The Raw Prawn	Bailey, Connie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Moonlight Tiger and Smoke	Bailey, Connie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
High Impact	Baldwin, Kim	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Dying to Live	Baldwin, Kim and Alexiou, Xenia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
A Deadly Kind of Love	Banis, Victor J.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Swimming to Chicago	Barnes, David-Mathew	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Sex & Skateboards	Bartlett, Ashley	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
The Vanguard's Gift	Beaumont, Eon De	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Wayward Grace	Beaumont, Eon De	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
By Honor Betrayed	Beecroft, Alex	Carina Press	USA	2011
96 Hours	Beers, Georgia	Bywater Books	USA	2011
Finding Forgiveness	Bell, Dana Marie	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2011
Under the Skin	Bennett, Nicki and Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Something about Harry	Bennett, Nicki and Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Conquest	Black, Ronica	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Marathon Cowboys	Black, Sarah	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Bollywood Dreams	Blackwell, Scarlet	Totally Bound	UK	2011
The Captain' Beloved	Blackwell, Scarlet	Totally Bound	UK	2011
He Ain't Heavy	Bowie, J.P.	MLR Press	USA	2011
Lucius and Callistus	Bowie, J.P.	MLR Press	USA	2011
Damian and Demetrios	Bowie, J.P.	MLR Press	USA	2011
Blood Lure	Bowie, J.P.	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Nowhere to Hide	Bowie, J.P.	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Trip of a Lifetime	Bowie, J.P.	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Rory's Last Chance	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2011
A Bit of Me	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2011
A Bit of You	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Aftermath	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Bend	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Ex's and O's	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Miles to Go	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Reckless	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Rendered	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2011
What Matters Most	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Waiting in the Wings	Brayden, Melissa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Pirate's Fortune	Brooke, Gun	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Yakuza Pride	Brues, H.J.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Ghosts of Winter	Buck, Rebecca S.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Cowboy Way	Sutherland, Cindy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Foundation of Love	Cade, Scott and Marshall, Z.B.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Bounty of Love	Cade, Scotty	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Treasure of Love	Cade, Scotty	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Wings of Love	Cade, Scotty	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Looking for Julie	Calhoun, Jackie	Bella Books	USA	2011
After the Sunset	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Bulletproof	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Honored Vow	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
The Servant	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Breaker's Passion	Cannon, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Rescue Me	Cannon, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Voice For The Silent	Chase, T.A.	Amber Quill	USA	2011
Borderline	Chase, T.A.	Loose Id	USA	2011
War	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Pestilence	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Solemn Contract	Chesire, Morgan	Manifold Press	UK	2011
Simple Treasures	Chin, Alan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Beautiful Game	Christie, Kate	Bella Books	USA	2011
Leaving L.A.	Christie, Kate	Bella Books	USA	2011
Elena Undone	Conn, Nicole	Bella Books	USA	2011
Some Kind of Magic	Cooper, R.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Before He Cheats	Dare, Kim	Totally Bound	UK	2011
The Duty of a Beta	Dare, Kim	Totally Bound	UK	2011
The Love of a Mate	Dare, Kim	Totally Bound	UK	2011
While Under the Influence	Dare, Kim	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Possession	Davies, Jessica Skye	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Playing Passion's Game	Davis, Lesley	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Gambling on Love	Davitt, Jane	Ellora's Cave	USA	2011

Room at the Top	Davitt, Jane and Snow, Alexa	Loose Id	USA	2011
Redemption	DeJay	Bella Books	USA	2011
The Dark Wife	Diemer, Sarah	Self Published	USA	2011
The Fix-It Girl	Dragon, J.M.	Affinity Books Press	New Zealand	2011
Reluctant Hope	Dutton, Erin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Fire and Ash	Evans, Gabrielle	Siren Publishing	USA	2011
Flux	Fielding, Kim	Self Published	USA	2011
Ghost Station	Fitzroy, Adam	Manifold Press	UK	2011
Stage Whispers	Fitzroy, Adam	Manifold Press	UK	2011
Squeak and a Roar	Flynn, Joyee	Siren Publishing	USA	2011
The Road Home	Ford, Michael Thomas	Kensington	USA	2011
Dirty Kiss	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
The Vampire Grinch	Frye, Lacey-Anne	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
The Ghost on My Couch	Gilbert, L.A.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Jane Doe	Girolami, Lisa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Scales and A Tail	Glenn, Stormy	Siren Publishing	USA	2011
Storm Surge II	Good, Melissa	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2011
Games Frat Boys Play	Gregory, Todd	Kensington	USA	2011
A Serving of Love	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
A Troubled Range	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Artistic Appeal	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Legal Artistry	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Love Means… Family	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Seven Days	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Accompanied by a Waltz	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Dutch Treat	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Unbroken Circle	Griggs, Mary	Bella Books	USA	2011
Ink	Rowan, Isabelle	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Master Class	Haimowitz, Rachel	Riptide Publishing	USA	2011
Crescendo	Haimowitz, Rachel	Self Published	USA	2011
The Shattered Gates	Hale, Ginn	Blind Eye Books	USA	2011
Love Another Day	Hanel, Regina	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2011
Treacherous Sun	Archer, Jade	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Hell's Highway	Hill, Gerri	Bella Books	USA	2011
Storms	Hill, Gerri	Bella Books	USA	2011
Snowbound	Hunter, Cari	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Broken Shield	Isabella	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2011
Roller Coaster	Kallmaker, Karin	Bella Books	USA	2011
Return to Sender	Kane, Ashlyn and James, Morgan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Love's Surrender	Kane, Samantha	Ellora's Cave	USA	2011
Prisoner of Love	Kane, Samantha	Ellora's Cave	USA	2011
The Devil's Garden	Kindred, Jane	Carina Press	USA	2011
Light and Water	King, M.	MLR Press	USA	2011
Bear, Otter, and the Kid	Klune, T.J.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Don't Tell	Kron, K.A.	Lethe Press	USA	2011
All Bets Are Off	Labbe, Margueritte	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Like Lovers Do	Lake, Lori L.	Launch Point Press	USA	2011
Clear Water	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Living Promises	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
The Locker Room	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
A Solid Core of Alpha	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Waiting	Lane, Amy	Torquere Press	USA	2011
Yearning	Lane, Amy	Torquere Press	USA	2011
Simply Perfection	Lane, Trina	Totally Bound	UK	2011
The Perfect Balance	Lane, Trina	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Call Me Softly	Leigh, D. Jackson	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Tainted Soul	Leonhard, Sam C.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Snowdrop	Li, Augusta	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Boots for the Gentleman	Li, Augusta and Beaumont, Eon De	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
About You	Llewellyn, A.J.	eXtasy Books	Canada	2011
Abiding Heart	Llewellyn, A.J.	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Gypsy Heart	Llewellyn, A.J.	Totally Bound	UK	2011
The Blancmange	Llewellyn, A.J. and Yates, Serena	Totally Bound	UK	2011
The Cake	Llewellyn, A.J. and Yates, Serena	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Burnt Offerings	Love, Pearl	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Rarer than Rubies	Lynley, EM	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Adel's Purr	Lynn, Sui	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
A Lesson Learned	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Confessions	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Shooting Star	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Spring	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Hawk's Landing	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Blood Trinity	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2011
The Haunting of St Xavier	Lynne, Carol and Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Good Luck	Mahoney, K.M.	Amber Quill	USA	2011
Odd Man in	Mahoney, K.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Vlad the Paler	Malthea	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
House of Nicolaus	Manly, D.J.	Totally Bound	UK	2011
His Client	March, Ava	Loose Id	USA	2011
Three Days	Marie, L.T.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Loving Liz	Marolt, Bobbi	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
78 Keys	Marra, Kristin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Boots	Martinez, Angel	Amber Quill	USA	2011
Decoded	Marx, Sara	Bella Books	USA	2011
A Devil's Own Luck	McAllister, Rowan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Everything that you are	McCoy, Nikki	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Master of Wrath	McCoy, Nikki	Totally Bound	UK	2011
My Forever	McCoy, Nikki	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Son of Death	McCoy, Nikki	Totally Bound	UK	2011
For Me and My Gal	McCoy, Robbi	Bella Books	USA	2011
Two on the Aisle	McCoy, Robbi	Bella Books	USA	2011
Cool Side of the Pillow	McKnight, Gill	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Indigo Moon	McKnight, Gill	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Blind Items	McMurray, Kate	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011

The Boy Next Door	McMurray, Kate	Loose Id	USA	2011
Smooth Sailing	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2011
Three More Wishes	Michael, Sean	Torquere Press	USA	2011
Crystal's Heart	Miller, BL and Foster, Verda	Bedazzled Ink	USA	2011
Bad Boyfriend	Mitchell, K.A.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2011
Bad Company	Mitchell, K.A.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2011
Parties in Congress	Moody, Colette	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
L.A. Metro	Nolan, RJ	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2011
Wild	O'Brien, Meghan	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
The Thirteenth Pillar	O'Faolain, J.L.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
The Thirteenth Child	O'Faolain, J.L.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Clouds and Rain	Owens, Zahra	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Earth and Sky	Owens, Zahra	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Ravages	Padmos, R.A.	Manifold Press	UK	2011
Heart's Home	Pattskyn, H.B.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Two For the Show	Paynter, Chris	Self Published	UK	2011
Rulebreaker	Pegau, Cathy	Carina Press	USA	2011
Justifiable Risk	Powell, VK	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Hostage Moon	Quinn, AJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Game On, Game Over	Quinton, Chris	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2011
Fool's Oath	Quinton, Chris	Manifold Press	UK	2011
Blood Hunt	Raand, L.L.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Firestorm	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Sheltering Dunes	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
The Evolution of Ethan Poe	Reardon, Robin	Kensington	USA	2011
One More Wish	Rhodes, Devon	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Petra's Canvas	Roberts, Ann	Bella Books	USA	2011
Open Water	Robinson, Pol	Bella Books	USA	2011
Kiss the Rain	Rose, Larkin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
According to Hoyle	Roux, Abigail	Riptide Publishing	USA	2011
Tribute	Henry, Lisa	Loose Id	USA	2011
Blood Howl	Saxon, Robin and Kidwell, Alex	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
The Vampire's Quest	Serbu, Damian	Self Published	USA	2011
Blind Space	Sexton, Marie	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2011
Second You Sin	Sherman, Scott	Kensington	USA	2011
Condor and the Crown	Simpson, John	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Permanent	Slayer, Megan	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Abercrombie Zombie	Snow, K. Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
The Zero Knot	Snow, K. Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Visible Friend	Snow, K. Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Between Two Promises	Somerset, Shelter	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Between Two Worlds	Somerset, Shelter	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Kindred Hearts	Speedwell, Rowan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Angel Voices	Speedwell, Rowan	Riptide Publishing	USA	2011
Nightrise	Stark, Nell and Tam, Trinity	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Wolf Moon	Stone, Ethan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Signed & Sealed	Stretke, B. A.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Hot Head	Suede, Damon	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Grown Men	Suede, Damon	Riptide Publishing	USA	2011
Rainbow Inn	Summers, J.	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2011
The Gladitator's Master	Sutherland, Fae and Labbe, Marguerite	Carina Press	USA	2011
Kaminishi	Suzukawa, Jan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Stolen Moments	Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Once in a Lifetime	Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Overdrive	Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Reluctant Partnerships	Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
The Inventor's Companion	Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Nothing But the Truth	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
The Best Defense	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
The Male Room	Topol, Carolyn Levine	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
His Soul to Take	Torrens, C.M.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Pulled from All Sides	Tortuga, BA	Torquere Press	USA	2011
True Confessions	Trebelhorn, PJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Don't Let Me Go	Trumble, J.H.	Kensington	USA	2011
Balance of Forces	Vali, Ali	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Lucky Loser	Wallace, Yolanda	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Harmony	Walsh, Karis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Sauntering Vaguely Downward	Warin, Nessa L.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
The Stars are Brightly Shining	Warin, Nessa L.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Wrong number, Right Guy	Watts, Mia	Amber Quill	USA	2011
Better Off Red	Weatherspoon, Rebekah	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Taken by Surprise	White, Kenna	Bella Books	USA	2011
Forbidden Passions	Williamz, MJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Static	Witt, L.A.	Amber Quill	USA	2011
Crimson Vengeance	Wohl, Sheri Lewis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2011
Jack's Way	Woods, Em	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Surviving the Change	Z, Cari	Totally Bound	UK	2011
Cop Out	Burn, KC	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
The Eye of Heaven	Soper-Cook, JoAnne	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
No Master	D'Abo, Christine	Ellora's Cave	USA	2011
Doc	Mason, Jude	Totally Bound	UK	2011
The Handler	Seabourne, Stefan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2011
Second Hand	Cullinan, Heidi and Sexton, Marie	Riptide Publishing	USA	2012
Not His Kiss to Take	Marlowe, Finn	Self Published	Canada	2012
The Campaign	Richardson, Tracey	Bella Books	USA	2012
Lace	Samms, Jaime	Totally Bound	UK	2012
What He Wants	Aaron, Kate	Self Published	UK	2012
Fragmentary Blue	Abbott, Erica	Bella Books	USA	2012
Shattered Glass	Alexander, Dani	Self Published	USA	2012
Aria	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
The Melody Thief	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
The Trust	Anthony, Shira and Keyes, Venona	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Raven's Mark	Archer, Jade	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Galley Proof	Arvin, Eric	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012

Pathfinder	Ashlin, Faith	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2012
Fifteen Shades of Gay (For Pay)	Baggins, T.	Self Published	USA	2012
Human After All	Bailey, Connie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Demons are Forever	Baldwin, Kim and Alexiou, Xenia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
The Jetsetters	Barnes, David-Mathew	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Written in the Stars	Bekins, Alix	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Turtle Season	Black, Miriam	Self Published	USA	2012
The Midnight Room	Black, Ronica	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Wholehearted	Black, Ronica	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Marlowe's Ghost	Black, Sarah	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
The Legend of the Apache Kid	Black, Sarah	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
911	Blackwell, Scarlet	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2012
Don't Judge the book	Blackwell, Scarlet	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2012
Just a Casual Thing	Blackwell, Scarlet	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Protecting Kayden	Blackwell, Scarlet	Totally Bound	UK	2012
A Game of Hearts	Blue, T.C.	Totally Bound	UK	2012
A Game of Schemes	Blue, T.C.	Totally Bound	UK	2012
The Nothingness of Ben	Boney, Brad	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Murder By Proxy	Bowie, J.P.	MLR Press	USA	2012
Blood Lust	Bowie, J.P.	Totally Bound	UK	2012
A Ghost Story	Bowie, J.P.	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Esau	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Gilbert	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2012
In My Arms Tonight	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Isaiah	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Levi	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Oscar	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Resilience	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Reverence	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Sullivan	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Where There's A Will	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Timothy	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Ladyfish	Bramhall, Andrea	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Heart Block	Brayden, Melissa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Romeo Fails	Briant, Amy	Bella Books	USA	2012
Speed Demons	Brooke, Gun	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Between Heaven & Hell	Brown, L.M.	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2012
The Locket and the Flintlock	Buck, Rebecca S.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Man Enough	Burnett, Beth	Self Published	USA	2012
Identity	Burns, Nat	Bella Books	USA	2012
The Book of Eleanor	Burns, Nat	Bella Books	USA	2012
The Quality of Blue	Burns, Nat	Bella Books	USA	2012
An Unconventional Courtship	Cade, Scotty	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
The Mystery of Ruby Lode	Cade, Scotty	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2012
Awakenings	Calhoun, Jackie	Bella Books	USA	2012
Acrobat	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
But for You	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Frog	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Mine	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Steamroller	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Crucible of Fate	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Lies & Seduction	Cassatta, Allison	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Sin & Seduction	Cassatta, Allison	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Two for One	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2012
From Slavery to Freedom	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Gypsies	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Tramps	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Famine	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Death	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Daddy's Money	Chin, Alan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Gay Pride and Prejudice	Christie, Kate	Bella Books	USA	2012
Gives Light	Christo, Rose	Self Published	USA	2012
The Actor and the Earl	Cohen, Rebecca	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Duanta Beads	Cordd, Jackson	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Fate Lends a Leg	Cordoba, Jax	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Amazonia	Croft, Sky	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2012
A Question of Ghosts	Culpepper, Cate	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Clandestine	Curry, Cheyne	Blue Feather Books	USA	2012
A Younger Man	Dane, Cameron	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2012
Magpie	Dare, Kim	Resplendence Publishing	USA	2012
Dark Wings Descending	Davis, Lesley	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Room at the Edge	Davitt, Jane and Snow, Alexa	Loose Id	USA	2012
The Square Peg	Davitt, Jane and Snow, Alexa	Loose Id	USA	2012
The Psychic and the Sleuth	Devon, Summer and Dee, Bonnie	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2012
Slow Burn	Douglas, Dawn	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Another Dumb Jock	Erno, Jeff	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Appearances Matter	Erno, Jeff	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Choosing America's next Superstar	Erno, Jeff	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
We Danced	Erno, Jeff	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Winter Howl	Evans, Aurelia T.	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Emerald Idol	Fielder, Hank	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Good Bones	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Brute	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Equipoise	Fielding, Kim	Self Published	USA	2012
Falling Into Place	Fielding, Tia	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Make Do and Mend	Fitzroy, Adam	Manifold Press	UK	2012
3	Flores, Jacob Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Suck and Lick	Flynn, Joyee	Siren Publishing	USA	2012
The Last Concubine	Ford, Catt	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Dirty Secret	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Sinner's Gin	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
The Battle for Jericho	Gant, Gene	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012

Primal Desire	Garneau, Lupa	Self Published	UK	2012
Wild Beauty	Garneau, Lupa	Self Published	UK	2012
Red + Blue	Gayle, A.B.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
The Coil	Gilbert, L.A.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Fugitives of Love	Girolami, Lisa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Alike As Two Bees	Gregory, Elin	Etopia Press	USA	2012
A Foreign Range	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
A Slice of Love	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
An Isolated Range	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
An Unsettled Range	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Legal Tender	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Love Comes Silently	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Love Means… Renewal	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
The Good Fight	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Unconditional Love	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Artistic Pursuits	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
A Helping of Love	Grey, Andrew	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Crash Stop	Griggs, Mary	Bella Books	USA	2012
Bossy and the Brat	Harris, Daisy	Siren Publishing	USA	2012
College Boys	Harris, Daisy	Siren Publishing	USA	2012
Diva and the Frat Boy	Harris, Daisy	Siren Publishing	USA	2012
Genius and the Jock	Harris, Daisy	Siren Publishing	USA	2012
My Fair Dork	Harris, Daisy	Siren Publishing	USA	2012
Player and the Prude	Harris, Daisy	Siren Publishing	USA	2012
Townie and the Twink	Harris, Daisy	Siren Publishing	USA	2012
Sometime Yesterday	Heidt, Yvonne	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Keepers of the Cave	Hill, Gerri	Bella Books	USA	2012
Snow Falls	Hill, Gerri	Bella Books	USA	2012
The British Devil	Hogben, Greg	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Moving On	Holt, H.J.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
A Hard Winter Rain	Inman, John	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Shy	Inman, John	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
American Yakuza	Isabella	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2012
Something in the Wine	Jae	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2012
Free Falling	Jakes, SE	Self Published	USA	2012
Avenger	Jones, Jambrea Jo	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Hair of the Dog	Kane, Ashlyn and James, Morgan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
My Roommate's a Jock? Well Crap!	Kelly, Wade	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Yin and Yang	Kendrick, Edward	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2012
Beggars and Choosers	Kerick, Mia	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Passing Shadows	King, M.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Falling for Rain	Laine, Susan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Sounds of Love	Laine, Susan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
The Wolfing Way	Laine, Susan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Genie's Wish	Laine, Susan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Chase in Shadow	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Dex in Blue	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Gambling Men	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Mourning Heaven	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Sidecar	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Under the Rushes	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
The Sound of Salvation	Lane, Trina	Totally Bound	UK	2012
The Taste of Devotion	Lane, Trina	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Runaway	Laughlin, Anne	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Andy Squared	Lavoie, Jennifer	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Touch Me Gently	Leigh, D. Jackson	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Crow and Firefly	Leonhard, Sam C.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
A Grimoire for the Baron	Li, Augusta and Beaumont, Eon De	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Avenging Heart	Llewellyn, A.J.	Totally Bound	UK	2012
The Mudpie	Llewellyn, A.J. and Yates, Serena	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Ethan, Who Loved Carter	Loveless, Ryan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Hostile Takeover	Lynley, EM	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Italian Ice	Lynley, EM	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
A Royal Bind	Lynn, Sui	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2012
The Pauper Prince	Lynn, Sui	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2012
Nico's Fire	Lynn, Sui	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2012
Locky in Love	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Second Chances	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2012
The Injustice of Being	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Winter	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Playing with Fuego	MacGregor, K.G.	Bella Books	USA	2012
Rhapsody	MacGregor, K.G.	Bella Books	USA	2012
Defying Gravity	Magill, Barrett	Affinity Books Press	New Zealand	2012
The Lonely Heart	Mahoney, K.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Fortune Hunter	March, Ava	Carina Press	USA	2012
Rogues	March, Ava	Carina Press	USA	2012
Thief	March, Ava	Carina Press	USA	2012
One Touch	Marie, L.T.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Tattoos & Teacups	Martin, Anna	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Wild Rose, Silent Snow	Martinez, Angel	Amber Quill	USA	2012
Gravitational Attraction	Martinez, Angel	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2012
Mina Borsalino Flips Out	Marx, Sara	Bella Books	USA	2012
Frat House Troopers	Mayne, Xavier	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Crimson Mate	McCoy, Nikki	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2012
Shattered Heart	McCoy, Nikki	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2012
Keepers of the Night	McCoy, Nikki	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Spring Tide	McCoy, Robbi	Bella Books	USA	2012
Silver Collar	McKnight, Gill	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Hearts, Dead and Alive	McLachlan, Kate	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2012
Aftermath	McMan, Ann	Bedazzled Ink	USA	2012
Four Corners	McMurray, Kate	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Out in the Field	McMurray, Kate	Loose Id	USA	2012
Almost Heaven	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2012
How to Wrangle a Woman	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2012

Lifeline	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2012
Monogamy	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2012
Pressure Head	Merrow, J.L.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2012
Middle Game	Michael, Sean	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Opening Moves	Michael, Sean	Totally Bound	UK	2012
As Long As You're Mine	Michaels, Brien	Loose Id	USA	2012
Not Like the Movies	Michaels, Brien	Loose Id	USA	2012
Amply Rewarded	Moon, Destiny	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Dreaming of Her	Morton, Maggie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Tailor Made	Myles, Josephine	Amber Quill	USA	2012
The Duke and the Deadbeat	Norris, Gregory L	Ravenous Romance	USA	2012
The Night Off	O'Brien, Meghan	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Push comes to Shove	O'Faolain, J.L.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
The Thirteenth Sigil	O'Faolain, J.L.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Animal Instinct	Osborne, Stephen	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Wrestling with Jesus	Osborne, Stephen	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Worth the Coming Home	Owens, Lisa M.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Floods and Drought	Owens, Zahra	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
The Hand-me-down	Owens, Zahra	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Sixty Five Hours	Walker, N.R.	Self Published	Australia	2012
Captive Prince	Pacat, C.S.	Self Published	Australia	2012
Unspoken	Padmos, R.A.	Manifold Press	UK	2012
The Walled Garden	Parkinson, F.M.	Manifold Press	UK	2012
Bound Forget Me Knot	Pattskyn, H.B.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
me@you.com	Payne, KE	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Survived by her Longtime Companion	Paynter, Chris	Self Published	UK	2012
Loathing Leo	Penn, Ash	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Bloody Claws	Pennington, Winter	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Once Upon a Twilight	Pennington, Winter	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Summoning Shadows	Pennington, Winter	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Pup	Peterson, S.J.D.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Haunting Whispers	Powell, VK	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Fox Hunt	Quinton, Chris	Manifold Press	UK	2012
Night Hunt	Raand, L.L.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Crossroads	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Oath of Honor	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
The Writing on the Wall	Rae, Jenna	Bella Books	USA	2012
Chaser	Reed, Rick R.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Mission of Desire	Richards, Terri	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Hidden Hearts	Roberts, Ann	Bella Books	USA	2012
Master of Sin	Robinson, Maggie	Brava	Global	2012
A Gentleman's Agreement	Roman, J.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Stars & Stripes	Roux, Abigail	Riptide Publishing	USA	2012
The Gravedigger's Brawl	Roux, Abigail	Riptide Publishing	USA	2012
Jacob's War	Rowlands, C.P.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Until Thanksgiving	Rupured, Michael	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
When One Door Opens	Ruskin, JD	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Truth and Beauty	Ryan, Cassidy	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe	Sáenz, Alire Benjamin	Simon & Schuster	USA	2012
From the Ashes	Sanders, Xen	Entangled Publishing	USA	2012
Blood in the Sand	Saxon, Robin and Kidwell, Alex	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea	Sexton, Marie	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Third You Die	Sherman, Scott	Kensington	USA	2012
Alex & Clayton	Simpson, John	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Reliance	Skelton, Joel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Spice and Smoke	Snyder, Suleikha	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2012
Alaska Hunt	Somerset, Shelter	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
On the Trail to Moonlight Gulch	Somerset, Shelter	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
The Rule of Sebastian	Somerset, Shelter	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
The Portrait	Somerton, L.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2012
LoveLife	Spangler, Rachel	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Spanish Heart	Spangler, Rachel	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
The Florentine Treasure	Speedwell, Rowan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Sunfall	Stark, Nell and Tam, Trinity	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
The King's Heart	Sudbury, Rowena	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Time Gone By	Suzukawa, Jan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Everything Pales in Comparison	Swartz, Rebecca	Bella Books	USA	2012
Chase the Stars	Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Fallout	Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Inherit the Sky	Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Château D'Eternité	Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Beyond Innocence	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Slingshot	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Frat Boy and Toppy	Tenino, Anne	Riptide Publishing	USA	2012
Love, Hypothetically	Tenino, Anne	Riptide Publishing	USA	2012
All Alone in a Sea of Romance	Thomas, B.G.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
It Had to Be You	Thomas, B.G.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Cupcake Boys	Thompson, Melanie	Ravenous Romance	USA	2012
The Storm	Thrasher, Shelley	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
What she wants	Tortuga, BA	Torquere Press	USA	2012
Missing	Trebelhorn, PJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Where You Are	Trumble, J.H.	Kensington	USA	2012
Mechanical Magic	Ulrich, Lorraine	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
The Dragon Tree Legacy	Vali, Ali	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
One Small Thing	Vaughn, Piper	Less Than Three Press	USA	2012
One True Thing	Vaughn, Piper and O'Shea, M.J	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
The Party Boy's Guide to Dating a Geek	Vaughn, Piper and Xanakas, Xara X.	Less Than Three Press	USA	2012
Incursion	Voinov, Aleksandr	Riptide Publishing	USA	2012
Prince's Gambit	Pacat, C.S.	Self Published	Australia	2012
Month of Sundays	Wallace, Yolanda	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Worth the Risk	Walsh, Karis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Stamp of Fate	Warin, Nessa L.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
To Dream, Perchance to Live	Warin, Nessa L.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
The Fling	Weatherspoon, Rebekah	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012

Second Chances	Webb, T. A.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Michael & Sean	Wells, K.C.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Assassin's Heart	Whitney, PF	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Initiation by Desire	Williamz, MJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Burgundy Betrayal	Wohl, Sheri Lewis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Only Sam	Woods, Em	Totally Bound	UK	2012
A Christmas Carol	Woods, Em	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Flying High	Woods, Em	Totally Bound	UK	2012
The Pyramid Waltz	Wright, Barbara Ann	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2012
Pavarus	Wright, Jennifer	Totally Bound	UK	2012
A Private Gentleman	Cullinan, Heidi	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2012
Cover Up	Burn, KC	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Beyond the Spanish Road	Kaye, Annie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Jazz	Mason, Jude	Totally Bound	UK	2012
Angel Elegy	Samms, Jaime	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Renegade	Samms, Jaime	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2012
Pen Name - Doctor Chicken	Burn, KC	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
A Little Night Murder	Cook, J.S.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
But Not For Me	Cook, J.S.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Dirty Laundry	Cullinan, Heidi	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Love Lessons	Cullinan, Heidi	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2013
Family Man	Cullinan, Heidi and Sexton, Marie	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2013
Last Salute	Richardson, Tracey	Bella Books	USA	2013
Face to Face	Samms, Jaime	Totally Bound	UK	2013
One Fine Day	Abbott, Erica	Bella Books	USA	2013
Awaiting my Assignment	Adaire, AJ	Desert Palm Press	USA	2013
Sunset Island	Adaire, AJ	Desert Palm Press	USA	2013
Picking up the Pieces	Adcock, Brenda	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2013
Heir to the Throne	Albert, Maria	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Prelude to War	Albert, Maria	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
The Coming of the King	Albert, Maria	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
The Current Between Us	Alexander, Kindle	Self Published	USA	2013
The Great Wall	Allora, Z.	MLR Press	USA	2013
Social Skills	Alva, Sara	Self Published	USA	2013
Encore	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Stealing the Wind	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Prelude	Anthony, Shira and Keyes, Venona	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Azrael and the Light Bringer	Arvin, Eric	Wilde City Press	USA	2013
The Mingled Destines of Crocodiles and Men	Arvin, Eric	Wilde City Press	USA	2013
What You See Isn't Always What You Get	Ashlin, Faith	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2013
Knights and Butterscotch	Ashlin, Faith	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Jasper and the Dead	Astruc, R J	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Following Grandpa Jess	Baer, T.J.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Serendipity Kit	Bailey, Connie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Until It's Time To Go	Bailey, Connie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Island House	Baker, Bru	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
The Gemini Deception	Baldwin, Kim and Alexiou, Xenia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Balefire	Barrett	Bedazzled Ink	USA	2013
The Rarest Rose	Beacham, I.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Rum & Ginger	Beaumont, Eon De	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Snow Globe	Beers, Georgia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Snow Globe	Beers, Georgia	Brisk Press	USA	2013
Love and Devotion	Belle, Jove	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Crossing	Benefiel, Stacey Wallace	Self Published	USA	2013
The General and the Elephant Clock of Al-Jazari	Black, Sarah	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
The General and the Horse-Lord	Black, Sarah	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Like Jazz	Blackmore, Heather	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Training Season	Blake, Leta	Self Published	USA	2013
Summer's End	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2013
Long the Mile	Blue, Ally	Riptide Publishing	USA	2013
The Return	Boney, Brad	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
A Christmas Portrait	Bowie, J.P.	MLR Press	USA	2013
Highland Vampire Vengeance	Bowie, J.P.	MLR Press	USA	2013
Cliff	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Wesley	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Nischal	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Sabin	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Chaps and Hope	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Fences and Freedom	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Justice	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Revolution	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Ropes and Dreams	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Saddles and Memories	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Revenge	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Clean Slate	Bramhall, Andrea	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
How Sweet It Is	Brayden, Melissa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Between Good & Evil	Brown, L.M.	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2013
My Boyfriend's an Alien	Brown, L.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Andy's Song	Burnett, Beth	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2013
Poison Flowers	Burns, Nat	Bella Books	USA	2013
The Good Boy	Henry, Lisa	Loose Id	USA	2013
An Unconventional Union	Cade, Scotty	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Angel's Touch	Caldwell, Siri	Bella Books	USA	2013
Earth Angel	Caldwell, Siri	Bella Books	USA	2013
Parting Shot	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
I Remember	Cannon, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Siempre	Cárdenas, Tessa	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Three Little Words	Cassatta, Allison	Amber Quill	USA	2013
Beguiled	Chambers, Joanna	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2013
Provoked	Chambers, Joanna	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2013
The Magpie Lord	Charles, K.J.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2013
Pickup Men	Chase, L.C.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2013
Threadbare Gypsy Souls	Chase, T.A.	Amber Quill	USA	2013
They Walk Among Us	Chase, T.A.	Amber Quill	USA	2013

Hearts on the Line	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Home Sweet Home	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Leaving Home	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Always With Us	Chesire, Morgan	Manifold Press	UK	2013
Flight	Christie, Kate	Bella Books	USA	2013
The Truth About Riley	Clarke, Henrietta	Self Published	UK	2013
Wicked Lies	Cooper, Karina	Avon	Global	2013
Lavender Skies	Cordd, Jackson	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Leather + Lace	Gayle, A.B.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Mountain Rescue: The Ascent	Croft, Sky	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2013
The Tropic of Hunter	Curry, Cheyne	Blue Feather Books	USA	2013
Temporary Mark	Dare, Kim	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Pale Wings Protecting	Davis, Lesley	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
The Broken Triangle	Davitt, Jane and Snow, Alexa	Loose Id	USA	2013
Dancer's Heart	Denman, D.P.	Self Published	USA	2013
The Gentleman's Madness	Devon, Summer and Dee, Bonnie	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2013
Date with Destiny	Dixon, Mason	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Distance Learning	Dowland, Lyn	Bella Books	USA	2013
In Name Only	Dragon, J.M.	Affinity Books Press	New Zealand	2013
Secret Lies	Dunne, Amy	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
More Than Friends	Dutton, Erin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Blame It on the Mistletoe	Easton, Eli	Self Published	USA	2013
The Lion and the Crow	Easton, Eli	Self Published	USA	2013
Travis	Edwards, Nicole	Self Published	USA	2013
Dumb Jock the Musical	Erno, Jeff	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
The Left-Hand Path	Erno, Jeff	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Bone Rider	Fally, J.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
The Left Hand of Justice	Faraday, Jess	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
When we Picked Apples Last Autumn	Fielder, Hank	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Buried Bones	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Night Shift	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
The Tin Box	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Venetian Masks	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Between Now and Then	Fitzroy, Adam	Manifold Press	UK	2013
The Gifted One	Flores, Jacob Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
When Love Gets Hairy	Flores, Jacob Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
When Love Takes Over	Flores, Jacob Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
This Little Whatever	Forcine, Nicole	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Bullheaded	Ford, Catt	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Bully for You	Ford, Catt	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Healing Hearts	Ford, Donna K.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Fish and Ghosts	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Dirty Laundry	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Whiskey and Wry	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
O Captain, My Captain	Forrest, Katherine V	Bywater Books	USA	2013
Mountain Prey	Gala, Lyn	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
The Very Thought of You	Gardner, S. Anne	Affinity Books Press	New Zealand	2013
The Billabong	Byrne, Jack	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Cut to the Chase	Girolami, Lisa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
The Second Mango	Glassman, Shira	Prizm Books	USA	2013
Moving Target	Good, Melissa	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2013
First Down	Greene, JJ	Bella Books	USA	2013
Half a Million Dead Cannibals	Gregg, Kari	Loose Id	USA	2013
Glitterland	Hall, Alexis	Riptide Publishing	USA	2013
From the Ashes	Harris, Daisy	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2013
Laughter in the Wind	Harris, SL	Bella Books	USA	2013
Collide	Hart, Riley	Self Published	USA	2013
First Love	Harte, C.J.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Be My Alien	Hayes, Julie Lynn and Church, M.A.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Better Than Good	Hayes, Lane	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
The Awakening	Heidt, Yvonne	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Untamed	Cowan, Anna	Penguin eBooks	Australia	2013
Desolation Point	Hunter, Cari	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Laughing Down the Moon	Indigo, Eva	Bella Books	USA	2013
The Lies that Bind	Isabella	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2013
Dark Enchantment	Jade, Imari	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Catch A Ghost	Jakes, SE	Riptide Publishing	USA	2013
Long Time Gone	Jakes, SE	Riptide Publishing	USA	2013
Love By the Numbers	Kallmaker, Karin	Bella Books	USA	2013
Scarred for Life	Kassidy, S.L.	Desert Palm Press	USA	2013
Ómorphi	Kennedy, C.	Harmony Ink Press	USA	2013
Tell Me It's Real	Klune, T.J.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Forsaking All Others	Knowles, Kathleen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
The Mormon and the Dom	Knox, Nix	Self Published	USA	2013
The Beast Within	Laurent, Terra	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Every Second Counts	Leigh, D. Jackson	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Hold Me Forever	Leigh, D. Jackson	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
The First Robin of Spring	London, Natalie	Bella Books	USA	2013
Lighting the Way Home	Lynley, EM and Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Etched in Shadows	MacGregor, K.G.	Bella Books	USA	2013
West of Nowhere	MacGregor, K.G.	Bella Books	USA	2013
Mind Fields	Madrid, Dylan	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Takeover	Manly, D.J.	Totally Bound	UK	2013
All In with the Duke	March, Ava	Carina Press	USA	2013
Secrets and Shadows	Marie, L.T.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Jurassic Heart	Martin, Anna	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Semper Fae	Martinez, Angel	Self Published	USA	2013
My Cowboy Heart	Maxfield, Z.A	InterMix	USA	2013
Slave to Chaos	McCoy, Nikki	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Melt	McCoy, Robbi	Bella Books	USA	2013
His Roommate's Pleasure	McGregor, Lana	Carina Press	USA	2013
Murder and the Hurdy Gurdy Girl	McLachlan, Kate	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2013
Hoosier Daddy	McMan, Ann and West, Salem	Bedazzled Ink	USA	2013
Blue Blood's Trifecta	Meadows, Cheyenne	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2013

Triad	Meadows, Cheyenne	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2013
Turbulent Rain	Meadows, Cheyenne	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2013
Nurture	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2013
The Reunion	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2013
The Crush	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2013
En Prise	Michael, Sean	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Helpmate	Michael, Sean	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Bad Attitude	Mitchell, K.A.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2013
A Vampire for Christmas	Morrigan, Tuesday	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Junk	Myles, Josephine	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2013
Family Connection	Nielsen, N.J	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2013
Wind and Dreams	North, Linda	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2013
Swans & Klons	Olsen, Nora	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Saving Morgan	Panichi, MB	Bella Books	USA	2013
The Road to Her	Payne, KE	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
And a Time To Dance	Paynter, Chris	Self Published	UK	2013
Deep Deception	Pegau, Cathy	Carina Press	USA	2013
End of the Line	Penn, Ash	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Plan B	Peterson, S.J.D.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Exit Wounds	Powell, VK	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Connection	Pritekel, Kim	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2013
Shadow Box	Pritekel, Kim	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2013
Show of Force	Quinn, A.J	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Fool's Rush	Quinton, Chris	Manifold Press	UK	2013
The Lone Hunt	Raand, L.L.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Code of Honor	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Homestead	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Turning on the Tide	Rae, Jenna	Bella Books	USA	2013
Broken Trails	Redhawk, D Jordan	Bella Books	USA	2013
Hungry for Love	Reed, Rick R.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Raining Men	Reed, Rick R.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
The Eagle's Wing	Ross, Cimorene	Manifold Press	UK	2013
Shock & Awe	Roux, Abigail	Riptide Publishing	USA	2013
Touch & Geaux	Roux, Abigail	Riptide Publishing	USA	2013
The Artist's Touch	Russell, E.J.	Entangled Publishing	USA	2013
Kiss of the White Wolf	Ryan, Cassidy	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Right Out of Nowhere	Salzler, Laurie	Blue Feather Books	USA	2013
Bloodlines	Saxon, Robin and Kidwell, Alex	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
The Vampire's Witch	Serbu, Damian	Self Published	USA	2013
Never a Hero	Sexton, Marie	Riptide Publishing	USA	2013
Silver Lining	Simmonds, Diana	Bella Books	USA	2013
Puppy Love	Smith, L.T.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2013
See Right Through Me	Smith, L.T.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2013
You Can't Run From Love	Snowdon, Kate	Bella Books	USA	2013
Dancing on the Edge	Somerton, L.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Living on the Edge	Somerton, L.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Reaching the Edge	Somerton, L.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Stroke Rate	Somerton, L.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Does She Love You?	Spangler, Rachel	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Illumination	Speedwell, Rowan	Riptide Publishing	USA	2013
The Princess Affair	Stark, Nell	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Bad Itch	Suede, Damon	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
A Brewing Storm	Sutter, EJ	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Battle Axe	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Rush	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Good Boy	Tenino, Anne	Riptide Publishing	USA	2013
Sweet Young Thang	Tenino, Anne	Riptide Publishing	USA	2013
Too Stupid to Live	Tenino, Anne	Riptide Publishing	USA	2013
The Chase	Thoma, Jesse J.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Now You See Me	Thompson, S.Y.	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2013
Back to Back	Tortuga, BA	Torquere Press	USA	2013
Trusting Tomorrow	Trebelhorn, P.J	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Just Between Us	Trumble, J.H.	Kensington	USA	2013
The Devil's Orchard	Vali, Ali	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Battle of Forces	Vali, Ali	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Revenge of the Parson's Daughter Or The Lass that Loved a Pirate	Victor, Jo	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Murphy's Law	Wallace, Yolanda	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Improvisation	Walsh, Karis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Mounting Danger	Walsh, Karis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Sea Glass Inn	Walsh, Karis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Lover at Last	Ward, J.R.	New American Library	USA	2013
In His Command	Warren, Rie	Forever Yours	USA	2013
Back to Blue	Watson, Dillon	Bella Books	USA	2013
At Her Feet	Weatherspoon, Rebekah	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Blacker Than Blue	Weatherspoon, Rebekah	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Neither Present Time	Werlinger, Caren J.	Self Published	USA	2013
Simple Pleasures	White, Kenna	Bella Books	USA	2013
Finding Master Right	Witt, L.A.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2013
Scarlet Revenge	Wohl, Sheri Lewis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Web of Obsessions	Wood, Diane	Bella Books	USA	2013
For Want of a Fiend	Wright, Barbara Ann	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Airos	Wright, Jennifer	Totally Bound	UK	2013
Morvea	Wright, Jennifer	Totally Bound	UK	2013
The Gravity Between Us	Zimmer, Kristen	Bookouture	Global	2013
Come to Dust	Cook, J.S.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Sixteen Songs About Regret	Cook, J.S.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Where the Lovelight Gleams	Andrews, Keira	Loose Id	USA	2013
Light	Burgoine, 'Nathan	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
Cast Off	Burn, KC	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2013
Walking the Labyrinth	Hart, Lois Cloarec	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2013
Wallflower	Belleau, Heidi	Riptide Publishing	USA	2013
Apple Polisher	Belleau, Heidi	Riptide Publishing	USA	2013
The Artist's Muse	Palmer, Alyssa Linn	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2013
A Forbidden Rumspringa	Andrews, Keira	Self Published	Canada	2014

Semper Fi	Andrews, Keira	Self Published	Canada	2014
Rainbow Blues	Burn, KC	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Famous Last Words	Cook, J.S.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Everything Changes	Hale, Samantha	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
The Purveyor	Stetz-Waters, Kareila	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2014
Acquainted with the Night	Abbott, Erica	Bella Books	USA	2014
Anything Your Heart Desires	Adaire, A.J	Desert Palm Press	USA	2014
It's Complicated	Adaire, A.J	Desert Palm Press	USA	2014
One Day Longer Than Forever	Adaire, A.J	Desert Palm Press	USA	2014
The Game of Denial	Adcock, Brenda	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2014
The Final Battle	Albert, Maria	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Illusions & Dreams	Allora, Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
The Devil Lancer	Amara, Astrid	Blind Eye Books	USA	2014
Not in it For the Love	Andrews, RP	Totally Bound	UK	2014
All's Fair in Mate Bonds and Publishing	Ankh, Alana	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Beyond the Rift	Ankh, Alana	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Electrify His Heart	Ankh, Alana	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Soul of a Merman	Ankh, Alana	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Dissonance	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Blood and Rain	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Into the Wind	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
A Slow Process Of Understanding	Ashlin, Faith	Totally Bound	UK	2014
(Watch Me) Body You	Ashton, Avril	Self Published	USA	2014
The Blue Feather	Badger, Karen D.	Self Published	USA	2014
Playing House	Baker, Bru	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Finding Home	Baker, Bru	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Taken by Storm	Baldwin, Kim	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
One Man Guy	Barakiva, Michael	Farrar, Straus and Giroux	USA	2014
The Reluctant Berserker	Beecroft, Alex	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2014
The Job	Belle, Jove	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
The Bucket List	Black, Douglas	Loose Id	USA	2014
The Bucket List	Black, Douglas	Loose Id	USA	2014
Accepting the Alpha	Black, JJ	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Our Omega	Black, JJ	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Ask the Oracle	Black, JJ	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Never Too Late	Blair, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
At the Water's Edge	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2014
Trouble and the Wallflower	Boehme, Kade	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Death gets a Boyfriend	Bonaste, Sophie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
The Eskimo Slugger	Boney, Brad	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Dumping Las Vegas	Bowie, J.P.	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Paris Connection	Bowie, J.P.	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Hide	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Home	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Broncs and Bullies	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Dark Nights & Headlights	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Hunt	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Off Course	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Reluctance	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Riding and Regrets	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Texas and Tarantulas	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Unexpected Moments	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Nightingale	Bramhall, Andrea	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Kiss the Girl	Brayden, Melissa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
The Blush Factor	Brooke, Gun	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Advance	Brooke, Gun	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
The Beginning of Us	Brooks, Sarah	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Forbidden Waters	Brown, L.M.	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2014
I Can't Dance Alone	Brown, Maggie	Bella Books	USA	2014
Yakuza Courage	Brues, H.J.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Jolt	Bryant, Kris	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Dark Side of the Sun	Burke, Belinda	Totally Bound	UK	2014
The Circle Unbroken	Burke, Belinda	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Platonic	Paddington, Kate	Interlude Press	USA	2014
Mark Cooper versus America	Henry, Lisa	Loose Id	USA	2014
Blue Mountain	C., Cardeno	Self Published	USA	2014
A Lethal Mistake	Cade, Scotty	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Acting Out	Cade, Scotty	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Chasing the Horizon	Cade, Scotty	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Sunrise Over Savannah	Cade, Scotty	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
The Royal Street Heist	Cade, Scotty	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Hollywood Gothic	Caine, Sawyer	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
The Black Orchid	Caine, Sawyer	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Serendipity	Calhoun, Jackie	Bella Books	USA	2014
All Kinds of Tied Down	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Floodgates	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Because of You	Cannon, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Smoke and Fire	Cannon, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Mi Familia	Cárdenas, Tessa	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Dream 'Til Monday	Cassatta, Allison	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
The Final Seduction	Cassatta, Allison	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Man Candy	Cayto, Samantha	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Enlightened	Chambers, Joanna	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2014
Think of England	Charles, K.J.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2014
A Case of Possession	Charles, K.J.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2014
Flight of Magpies	Charles, K.J.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2014
Chef's Table	Charles, Lynn	Interlude Press	USA	2014
Let It Ride	Chase, L.C.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Pulling Leather	Chase, L.C.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Anywhere Tequila Flows	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Barefoot Dancing	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Close the Distance	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Following His Footsteps	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Walking in the Rain	Chase, T.A.	Totally Bound	UK	2014

A Majestic Affair	Clark, Sharon G.	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2014
Monster	Clarke, Erik	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Night	Clarke, Erik	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Wonder	Clarke, Erik	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Sweet, Sweet Wine	Clevenger, Jaime	Bella Books	USA	2014
Blood & Thunder	Cochet, Charlie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Hell & High Water	Cochet, Charlie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Rack & Ruin	Cochet, Charlie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Awfully Glad	Cochrane, Charlie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Second Helpings	Cochrane, Charlie	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
The Best Corpse for the Job	Cochrane, Charlie	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Raven Feathers	Cordd, Jackson	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Amazonia: An Impossible Choice	Croft, Sky	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2014
Mountain Rescue: On the Edge	Croft, Sky	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2014
Escape from Conica	Cummings, Robert	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Under a New Star	d'Entremont, Leo	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Making Nice	Davis, Elizah J.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Lucky Strike	Davitt, Jane	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Rush	Dawn, Nyrae	Forever Yours	USA	2014
Sisters	DeJay	Bella Books	USA	2014
If Two of Them Are Dead	Denardo, Jana	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
By The Numbers	Dennis, Nicole	Totally Bound	UK	2014
On the Green	Dennis, Nicole	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Rules of the Chef	Dennis, Nicole	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Forever Man	DeWall, AJ	Interlude Press	USA	2014
Charm City	Dixon, Mason	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Hearsay	Donovan, Taylor V.	Self Published	USA	2014
Playing Hard to Forget	Doone, Piper	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Ciro	Duchene, Remmy	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Editing Life	Dugger, Sandy	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2014
Season's Meetings	Dunne, Amy	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Ethan	Edwards, Nicole	Self Published	USA	2014
Two Dumb Jocks	Erno, Jeff	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Cry Wolf	Evans, Aurelia T.	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Trusting Love	Evans, Mari	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Indigo Footsteps, Spatters of Red	Fally, J.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Bone Dry	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Motel. Pool.	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
The Pillar	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Pilgrimage	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
The Border	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Sotto Voce	Finnegan, Erin	Interlude Press	USA	2014
The Bridge on the River Wye	Fitzroy, Adam	Manifold Press	UK	2014
Being True	Flores, Jacob Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
When Love Comes to Town	Flores, Jacob Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
No Boundaries	Ford. Donna K.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Duck Duck Ghost	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Dirty Deeds	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Tequila Mockingbird	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Clockwork Tangerine	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Favorite Son	Freshwater, Will	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Stick McLaughlin	Frizzell, CF	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Razor Wire	Gallagher, Lauren	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Jess	George, Pauline	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2014
199 Steps to Love	George, Pauline	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2014
The Heat of Angels	Girolami, Lisa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Blackstone	Godfrey, Shea	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
151 Days	Goode, John	Harmony Ink Press	USA	2014
A Minor Inconvenience	Granger, Sarah	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2014
Bleeding Heart	Graves, Melissa	Interlude Press	USA	2014
Now and Yesterday	Greco, Stephen	Kensington	USA	2014
Running Back	Greene, JJ	Bella Books	USA	2014
The Circus of the Damned	Grey, Cornelia	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Tricks and Bids	Grey, Jacqueline	Resplendence Publishing	USA	2014
Champion of the Scarlet Wolf, Book One	Hale, Ginn	Blind Eye Books	USA	2014
Champion of the Scarlet Wolf, Book Two	Hale, Ginn	Blind Eye Books	USA	2014
Moro's Price	Hana, M. Crane	Loose Id	USA	2014
White Dragon	Hanel, Regina	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2014
Blue Water Dreams	Hankins, Dena	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
After the Rain	Harris, Daisy	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2014
David's Selfie	Harris, Daisy	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2014
Nothing but Smoke	Harris, Daisy	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2014
November Rain	Harris, Daisy	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2014
Making Time	Harte, C.J.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Be My Human	Hayes, Julie Lynn and Church, M.A.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Just a Bit Obsessed	Hazard, Alessandra	Self Published	USA	2014
Just a Bit Twisted	Hazard, Alessandra	Self Published	USA	2014
The Quickening	Heidt, Yvonne	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Dingo Run	Byrne, Jack	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
The Midnight Moon	Hill, Gerri	Bella Books	USA	2014
The Man Who Was Not	Hoppen, Jane	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Tumbledown	Hunter, Cari	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Gabriel's City	Hunter, Laylah	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Highfell Grimoires	Hyde, Langley	Blind Eye Books	USA	2014
Scarlet Assassin	Isabella	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2014
Surviving Reagan	Isabella	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2014
Departure from the Script	Jae	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2014
Under a Falling Star	Jae	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2014
Daylight Again	Jakes, SE	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Running Wild	Jakes, SE	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Dirty Deeds	Jakes, SE	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Hard Feelings	Kane, Ashlyn and James, Morgan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Fight for Love	Kane, Samantha	Ellora's Cave	USA	2014
Please Baby	Kassidy, S.L.	Desert Palm Press	USA	2014

Walkabout	Byrne, Jack	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Loving Jay	Kaye, Renae	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
The Hit Man Cometh	Kendrick, Edward	Totally Bound	UK	2014
All Fired Up	Knight, Morticia	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Everything Leads to You	LaCour, Nina	Dutton Books	USA	2014
Business or Pleasure	Ladd, Ashley	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Canning the Center	Lain, Tara	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Outing the Quarterback	Lain, Tara	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Behind the Curtain	Lane, Amy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Fair Play	Lanyon, Josh	Carina Press	USA	2014
Tristant and Elijah	Lavoie, Jennifer	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Keeping the Cookies	Lawrence, Briana	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Judge Me Not	Layer, RJ	Bella Books	USA	2014
The Real Story	Layer, RJ	Bella Books	USA	2014
Revenge	Logan, M.E.	Bella Books	USA	2014
London Calling	Lydon, Clare	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2014
Jagged Little Scar	Lynn, Michaela	Bella Books	USA	2014
Solo	Lynne, Carol	Self Published	USA	2014
Professor Sandwich	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Coming Clean	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Fighter	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Snake Charmer	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Freeing Stella	Lynne, Zoe	Harmony Ink Press	USA	2014
Anyone But You	MacGregor, K.G.	Bella Books	USA	2014
Life After Love	MacGregor, K.G.	Bella Books	USA	2014
The Common Thread	Maddox, Jaime	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Backstrokes	Madrid, Dylan	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Dispatched with Cause	Magill, Barrett	Bedazzled Ink	USA	2014
Learning to Love Cats	Mahoney, K.M.	Amber Quill	USA	2014
Cody's Dragon	Mahoney, K.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Dating Sarah Cooper	Maley, Siera	Self Published	USA	2014
Finding the Grain	Malone, Wynn	Bywater Books	USA	2014
Sharp Love	March, Ava	Carina Press	USA	2014
Second to None	Marie, L.T.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
No Fae is an Island	Martinez, Angel	MLR Press	USA	2014
Click	Marx, Sara	Bella Books	USA	2014
Safe in His Arms	Kaye, Renae	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
My Cowboy Homecoming	Maxfield, Z.A	InterMix	USA	2014
My Heartache Cowboy	Maxfield, Z.A	InterMix	USA	2014
The Farmer's Daughter	McCoy, Robbi	Bella Books	USA	2014
Checking Him Out	McGowan, Debbie	Self Published	UK	2014
Gremlin's Last Run	McKenna, Jaye	Self Published	USA	2014
Christmas Crush	McLachlan, Kate	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2014
Inside Out	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2014
Out of Whack	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2014
Paradigm	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2014
Quandary	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2014
Caught!	Merrow, J.L.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
It's All Geek To Me	Merrow, J.L.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Raising the Rent	Merrow, J.L.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2014
Relief Valve	Merrow, J.L.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2014
Enough	Metzger, Matthew J.	Self Published	UK	2014
End Game	Michael, Sean	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Malting	Michael, Sean	Totally Bound	UK	2014
The Piercer's Game	Michael, Sean	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Call Me, Maybe	Michaels, Brien	Loose Id	USA	2014
Venus in Love	Michele, Tina	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Sporting Chance	Milne, Alexa	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Bad Behavior	Mitchell, K.A.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2014
Bad Influence	Mitchell, K.A.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2014
Bound to Be a Groom	Mulry, Megan	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Sharpshooter	Murray, Leslie	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2014
How to Train Your Dom in Five Easy Steps	Myles, Josephine	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2014
Stuff	Myles, Josephine	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2014
Junior Willis	Natale, Richard	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
In a Heartbeat	Nolan, RJ	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2014
The Lonely Drop	North, Vanessa	Self Published	USA	2014
Not Just Friends	Northcote, Jay	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Don't Touch	Oliver, Lisa	Self Published	UK	2014
Topping the Dom	Oliver, Lisa	Self Published	UK	2014
Frenemy of the People	Olsen, Nora	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Barbacoa	Orrantia, Erik	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Designs on You	Pack, Carrie	Interlude Press	USA	2014
Hiding	Masters, Sarah	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Beauty and the Bookworm	Pageant, Nick	Self Published	USA	2014
Here For You	Paige, TK	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Because of Her	Payne, KE	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Once the Clouds Have Gone	Payne, KE	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
To Love Free	Paynter, Chris	Self Published	UK	2014
Moving On	Penn, Ash	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Edge of Awareness	Popovich, C.A.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
About Face	Powell, VK	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Jace's Justice	Presley, Sydney	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Wild	Pritekel, Kim and Ross, Alex	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2014
Rules of Revenge	Quinn, AJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Undercover Blues	Quinton, Chris	Manifold Press	UK	2014
The Magic Hunt	Raand, L.L.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Against Doctor's Orders	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Taking Fire	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Lichii Ba'Cho	Redhawk, D Jordan	Bella Books	USA	2014
Legally Wed	Reed, Rick R.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Barring Complications	Rippon, Blythe	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2014
Visions	Rose, Larkin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Ball & Chain	Roux, Abigail	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014

The Bone Orchard	Roux, Abigail	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Positive Lightning	Salzler, Laurie	Bedazzled Ink	USA	2014
Conservative Affairs	Scott, Riley	Bella Books	USA	2014
Small Town Secrets	Scott, Riley	Bella Books	USA	2014
Searching for Forever	Smith, Emily	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Still Life	Smith, L.T.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2014
Rasputin's Kiss	Somerton, L.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2014
A Double Edged Sword	Somerton, L.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Evil's Embrace	Somerton, L.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2014
Timeless	Spangler, Rachel	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
All In	Stark, Nell	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
The Bones of You	Stone, Laura	Interlude Press	USA	2014
Rock	Sunday, Anyta	Self Published	Germany	2014
Pivot and Slip	Suzanne, Lilah	Interlude Press	USA	2014
Courtship	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Switchblade	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Bonded	Tarr, Rosalie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Billionaire with Benefits	Tenino, Anne	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Poster Boy	Tenino, Anne	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Horny	Tenino, Anne	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Seneca Falls	Thoma, Jesse J.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
First Tango in Paris	Thrasher, Shelley	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Desperate Measures	Trebelhorn, PJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Out in the Open	Truman, A.J.	Self Published	USA	2014
The Romance Vote	Vali, Ali	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
The Worst Best Luck	Vance, Brad	Self Published	USA	2014
Take Only Pictures	Villeneuve, Laina	Bella Books	USA	2014
No Thru Road	Vogt, Linda	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2014
If It Drives	Voinov, Aleksandr and Witt, L.A.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Sacred Fire	Walker, Tanai	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
The War Within	Wallace, Yolanda	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Blue Hydrangeas	Wallingford, JJ	Bella Books	USA	2014
Blindsided	Walsh, Karis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Wingspan	Walsh, Karis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Hypnotizing Chickens	Watts, Julia	Bella Books	USA	2014
Treasure	Weatherspoon, Rebekah	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Making it Personal	Wells, K.C.	Self Published	USA	2014
Damian's Discipline	Wells, K.C. and Williams, Parker	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Someone to Keep Me	Wells, K.C. and Williams, Parker	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Out of CTRL	Welsh, SA	Totally Bound	UK	2014
She Sings of Old, Unhappy, Far-Off Things	Werlinger, Caren J.	Self Published	USA	2014
Hitting Black Ice	West, Heloise	Loose Id	USA	2014
Game On	White, Olley	Self Published	UK	2014
Shaking the Sugar Tree	Wilgus, Nick	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Escapades	Williamz, MJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Speakeasy	Williamz, MJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Then the Stars Fall	Witt, Brandon	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Starstruck	Witt, L.A.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
The Fortune Teller's Daughter	Wood, Diane	Bella Books	USA	2014
The Balance	Wooten, Neal	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
A Kingdom Lost	Wright, Barbara Ann	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Takeover	Zabo, Anna	InterMix	USA	2014
Desire at Dawn	Zedde, Fiona	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2014
Cold War	Andrews, Keira	Loose Id	USA	2014
Straight Shooter	Belleau, Heidi	Riptide Publishing	USA	2014
Bitter Fruit	Hart, Lois Cloarec	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2014
The Lovely Beast	Cook, J.S.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2014
Kick at the Darkness	Andrews, Keira	Self Published	Canada	2015
Reading the Signs	Andrews, Keira	Self Published	Canada	2015
The Burnt Toast B&B	Belleau, Heidi	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Wonderland	Browatzke, Rob	Lyrical Press	USA	2015
Skid Row Serenade	Cook, J.S.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Stranger at the Door	Cook, J.S.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Master Key	Crow, Anah and Fox, Dianne	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Lodestones	MacKenzie, Naomi	Duet Books	USA	2015
Betting on Love	Palmer, Alyssa Linn	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Midnight at the Orpheus	Palmer, Alyssa Linn	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
The Song in my Heart	Richardson, Tracey	Bella Books	USA	2015
Bound to Fall	Samms, Jaime	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Something True	Stetz-Waters, Kareila	Forever Yours	USA	2015
Desert Places	Abbott, Erica	Bella Books	USA	2015
I Love My Life	Adaire, AJ	Desert Palm Press	USA	2015
Journey to You	Adaire, AJ	Desert Palm Press	USA	2015
Sweet	Adams, Nene	Bella Books	USA	2015
In the Midnight Hour	Adcock, Brenda	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2015
Champagne Kisses	Aicher, Lynda	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Status Update	Albert, Annabeth	Carina Press	USA	2015
Baked Fresh	Albert, Annabeth	Lyrical Press	USA	2015
Delivered Fast	Albert, Annabeth	Lyrical Press	USA	2015
Served Hot	Albert, Annabeth	Lyrical Press	USA	2015
Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda	Albertalli, Becky	Balzer + Bray	Global	2015
Times of Our Lives	Waterton, Jane	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2015
A Boy Called Cin	Wilde, Cecil	Less Than Three Press	USA	2015
Song of the Navigator	Amara, Astrid	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2015
The Time Slip Girl	Andre, Elizabeth	self Published	USA	2015
Fractured Souls	Ankh, Alana	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Short-Circuit His Soul	Ankh, Alana	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Blood and Ghosts	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Running with the Wind	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
A Solitary Man	Anthony, Shira and Mancy, Aisling	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Finding My Way	Applewater, Mavis	Self Published	USA	2015
Before Now	Argento, Joy	Self Published	USA	2015
The Truth As He Knows It	Arthur, A.M.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2015
The World As He Sees It	Arthur, A.M.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2015

The Sidhe	Ashe, Charlotte	Interlude Press	USA	2015
To Stand Close	Ashlin, Faith	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
All By Myself	Bachtold, Ken	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
King of the Kitchen	Baker, Bru	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
One Last Thing	Baldwin, Kim and Alexiou, Xenia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Time for Terri	Bane, Roslyn	Liquid Silver Publishing	USA	2015
Brothers	Bardsley, Ralph Josiah	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Fifty Yards and Holding	Barnes, David-Mathew	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Carefully everywhere descending	Bedford, L.B.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Blue Steel Chain	Beecroft, Alex	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
A Little Bit of Spice	Beers, Georgia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Zero Visibility	Beers, Georgia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
A Little Bit of Spice	Beers, Georgia	Brisk Press	USA	2015
Zero Visibility	Beers, Georgia	Brisk Press	USA	2015
Right Here Waiting	Belledonne, K.E.	Interlude Press	USA	2015
Defying Convention	Wilde, Cecil	Less Than Three Press	USA	2015
Snow Angel	Black, Ronica	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Making a Comeback	Blair, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Once in a Lifetime	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2015
Release the Stars	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2015
Spirit of the Dance	Alexander, Mardi	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Him	Bowen, Sarina and Kennedy, Elle	Self Published	USA	2015
Murder in the Desert	Bowie, J.P.	MLR Press	USA	2015
All I'll Ever Need	Bowie, J.P.	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
The Vampire and the P.I.	Bowie, J.P.	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Hay and Heartbreak	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
My Heart to Keep	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Retrograde	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Vaqueros and Vigliance	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Don't Drink the Holy Water	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Don't Stake My Life on it	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Sunshine is Overrated	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Heart	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Destined Prey	Bradford, Bailey	Rainbow Ninja Press	Australia	2015
Belt Buckles & Cowboy Boots	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2015
In from the Cold	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Renounced	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Exodus	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2015
My Life without Garlic	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Run with the Moon	Bradford, Bailey	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Swordfish	Bramhall, Andrea	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
The Chameleon's Tale	Bramhall, Andrea	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Just Three Words	Brayden, Melissa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Ready or Not	Brayden, Melissa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
The Rules of Ever After	Brewer, Killian B	Duet Books	USA	2015
Soul Unique	Brooke, Gun	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Pathfinder	Brooke, Gun	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Between Life & Death	Brown, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Tempestuous Tides	Brown, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Mackenzie's Beat	Brown, Maggie	Bella Books	USA	2015
Piping Her Tune	Brown, Maggie	Bella Books	USA	2015
Emergency Contact	Brownlee, Elle	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Force Play	Brownlee, Elle	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Bulldust	Brumb, D.J.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
The Burning Season	Burke, Belinda	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Wolf of the West	Burke, Belinda	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Nether Regions	Burns, Nat	Bella Books	USA	2015
Something Like a Love Song	Burton, Becca	Interlude Press	USA	2015
Twice Lucky	Alexander, Mardi	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
All the Little Moments	Benson, G	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2015
After the Final Encore	Cade, Scotty	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Veiled Loyalties	Cade, Scotty	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
New York Nights	Caine, Sawyer	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Fit to be Tied	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Forging the Future	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Countdown	Cannon, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
The Captain's Pet	Cayto, Samantha	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Struck! A Titanic Love Story	Chacon, Tonie	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2015
Unnatural	Chambers, Joanna	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2015
A Fashionable Indulgence	Charles, K.J.	Loveswept	USA	2015
A Seditious Affair	Charles, K.J.	Loveswept	USA	2015
Jackdaw	Charles, K.J.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2015
A Fortunate Blizzard	Chase, L.C.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Climbing the Savage Mountain	Chase, T.A.	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Snap Decision	Chase, T.A.	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Cold Truth	Chase, T.A.	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
In The Company of Women	Christie, Kate	Bella Books	USA	2015
To Love Again	Clark, BL	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2015
Chaos Beneath The Moonbeams	Clark, Sharon G.	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2015
Waiting for a Love Song	Clevenger, Jaime	Bella Books	USA	2015
Against the Grain	Cochet, Charlie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Rise & Fall	Cochet, Charlie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Don't Kiss the Vicar	Cochrane, Charlie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Play On	Cockburn, Avery	Self Published	USA	2015
Playing for Keeps	Cockburn, Avery	Self Published	USA	2015
Playing to Win	Cockburn, Avery	Self Published	USA	2015
Into the Arena	Coldwell, Elizabeth	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Taming the Lion	Coldwell, Elizabeth	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
The Pride of Amsterdam	Coldwell, Elizabeth	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Vintage Pride	Coldwell, Elizabeth	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Signal Boost	Cole, Alyssa	Self Published	USA	2015
A Dark Horse	Cooper, Blayne	Bella Books	USA	2015
The Revelation of Beatrice Darby	Copeland, Jean	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Across the Pond	Crystal, Cheri	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2015

Totally Worth It	Cummings, Maggie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Infiltration	D, Jackie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Imposter in Zebra-Striped Briefs	Dado, C.C.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Say it with Ink	Dado, C.C.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Coming Back	Dane, Lauren	Forever Yours	USA	2015
Axel's Pup	Dare, Kim	Self Published	UK	2015
Playing in Shadow	Davis, Lesley	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Closing the Loop	Davitt, Jane	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Life under New Management	Davitt, Jane	Totally Bound	UK	2015
The Empty Box	Davitt, Jane and Snow, Alexa	Loose Id	USA	2015
Love Me Tomorrow	Day, Ethan	Wilde City Press	USA	2015
When in Bloom	Dennis, Nicole	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Following the Law	Dennis, Nicole	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
The Gentleman and the Lamplighter	Devon, Summer	St. Martin's Press	USA	2015
Constellations	Diane, Meghan	Bella Books	USA	2015
Something to Die For	Doone, Piper	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Saints Save a Sinner	Douglas, Dawn	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Osaki	Duchene, Remmy	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Future Promises	Dugger, Sandy	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2015
The Renegade	Dunne, Amy	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
For the Love of Cake	Dutton, Erin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Officer Down	Dutton, Erin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
How to Howl at the Moon	Easton, Eli	Self Published	USA	2015
How to Walk Like a Man	Easton, Eli	Self Published	USA	2015
Bad Magic	Elliott, Evelyn	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Anywhere You Go	Ellis, Keelan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
I'll Still Be There	Ellis, Keelan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Focus on Me	Erickson, Megan	InterMix	USA	2015
Trust the Focus	Erickson, Megan	InterMix	USA	2015
My Dumb Jock	Erno, Jeff	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Rattlesnake	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Astounding!	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Love Starved	Fierro, Kate	Interlude Press	USA	2015
In Deep	Fitzroy, Adam	Manifold Press	UK	2015
Falling	Fleet, Suki	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Please Remember Me	Flores, Jacob Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Blood Tied	Flores, Jacob Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Soul Struck	Flores, Jacob Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Spell Bound	Flores, Jacob Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Shaken Up	Forcine, Nicole	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
The Cage	Ford, Catt	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Fish Stick Fridays	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Murder and Mayhem	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Sloe Ride	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Down and Dirty	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
First Fall	Fortin, Genevieve	Bella Books	USA	2015
A Royal Romance	Frame, Jenny	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
The Diplomat	French, Sophia	Bella Books	USA	2015
Petticoats and Promises	Friday, Penelope	Bella Books	USA	2015
Lead Me Not	Gallagher, Ann	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Stuck Landing	Gallagher, Lauren	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Lucky Linus	Gant, Gene	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Load the Dice	Gemel, Moriah	Interlude Press	USA	2015
The 45th Parallel	Girolami, Lisa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Winds of Change	Good, Melissa	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2015
Winds of Change II	Good, Melissa	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2015
Tainted Heart	Graves, Melissa	Interlude Press	USA	2015
Limits and Stakes	Grey, Jacqueline	Resplendence Publishing	USA	2015
Shoot the Moon	Grey, Jacqueline	Resplendence Publishing	USA	2015
Ace	Byrne, Jack	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Taniwha Dreaming	Byrne, Jack	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
100 Days	Hale, Mimsy	Interlude Press	USA	2015
For Real	Hall, Alexis	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Waiting for the Flood	Hall, Alexis	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
A Deeper Blue	Hanel, Regina	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2015
Heart of the Liliko'i	Hankins, Dena	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Daddy	Harbon, Jack	Self Published	USA	2015
I Will Meet You There	Harding, S. M.	Bella Books	USA	2015
City Slicker at the Horny Goat Ranch	Harris, Daisy	Self Published	USA	2015
Crossroads	Hart, Riley	Self Published	USA	2015
Just a Bit Unhealthy	Hazard, Alessandra	Self Published	USA	2015
Just a Bit Confusing	Hazard, Alessandra	Self Published	USA	2015
Just a Bit Wrong	Hazard, Alessandra	Self Published	USA	2015
Two Hearts One Voice	Heart, Valentina	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
The Deadening	Heidt, Yvonne	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Chasing a Brighter Blue	Hill, Gerri	Bella Books	USA	2015
Pelican's Landing	Hill, Gerri	Bella Books	USA	2015
Popcorn Love	Hughes, KL	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2015
Base Instincts	Ione, Larissa	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Forever Faithful	Isabella	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2015
Damange Control	Jae	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2015
Just Physical	Jae	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2015
Always Remember	Judge, Denise	Self Published	USA	2015
Winging It	Kane, Ashlyn and James, Morgan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
New Cuts, Old Wounds	Kassidy, S.L.	Desert Palm Press	USA	2015
Hard to be Good	Kaye, Laura	Avon	Global	2015
No Big Deal	Keane, Danni	Harmony Ink Press	USA	2015
No! Jocks Don't Date Guys	Kelly, Wade	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Reaper	Kendrick, Edward	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Love Spell	Kerick, Mia	NineStar Press	USA	2015
Drawing the Devil	Keys, Jon	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2015
La Vie En Bleu	Klaire, Jody	Bedazzled Ink	USA	2015
How to Be a Normal Person	Klune, T.J.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
The Lighting Struck Heart	Klune, T.J.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015

Building Bonds	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Negotiating Love	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Safe Limits	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Held Hostage	Knight, Morticia	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Justice Prevails	Knight, Morticia	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Warm November	Knowles, Kathleen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
The Set Piece	Lane, Catherine	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2015
Turkish Delights	Lane, Trina	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Melbourne Heat	Lapthorne, Elizabeth	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Hard Case	Lapthorne, Elizabeth	Totally Bound	UK	2015
The First Twenty	Lavoie, Jennifer	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
His Soldier	Lee, Anna	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Seven Tears at High Tide	Lee, C.B.	Duet Books	USA	2015
Misfits	Leigh, Garrett	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Yours All Along	Loren, Roni	InterMix	USA	2015
Hurricane Days	Lukas, Renee J.	Bella Books	USA	2015
The Comfortable Shoe Diaries	Lukas, Renee J.	Bella Books	USA	2015
Small Wonders	Lux, Courtney	Interlude Press	USA	2015
All I Want For Christmas	Lydon, Clare	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2015
This London Love	Lydon, Clare	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2015
Big Man on Campus	Lynne, Carol	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
It was a Thursday	Lynne, Carol	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Journey to Lobster Cove	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Welcome to Lobster Cove	Lynne, Carol	Totally Bound	UK	2015
T-Minus Two	MacGregor, K.G.	Bella Books	USA	2015
The Touch of a Woman	MacGregor, K.G.	Bella Books	USA	2015
Depths of Blue	MacTague, Lise	Bella Books	USA	2015
Heights of Green	MacTague, Lise	Bella Books	USA	2015
Bouncing	Maddox, Jaime	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Deadly Medicine	Maddox, Jaime	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
All the Pretty Things	Magdon, Rae D. and Magly, Michelle	Desert Palm Press	USA	2015
Deliver Us From Evil	Magill, Barrett	Bedazzled Ink	USA	2015
Nyx's Pixie	Mahoney, K.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Viscount's Wager	March, Ava	Carina Press	USA	2015
Beyond the Ridge	Marie, L.T.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
The Bureau of Holiday Affairs	Marquette, Andi	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2015
The Secret of Sleepy Hollow	Marquette, Andi	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2015
Signs	Martin, Anna	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
My Cowboy Promises	Maxfield, Z.A	InterMix	USA	2015
Golddigger	McCollum, Hilary	Bella Books	USA	2015
Darkness Entwined	McCoy, Nikki	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Goslyn County	McKnight, A.M.	Self Published	USA	2015
If I Die Before I Wake	McMullen, Liz	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2015
The Luckiest	McWarren, Mila	Interlude Press	USA	2015
Melting Point	Meader, Kate	Pocket Star	USA	2015
Homecoming	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2015
Renewal	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2015
Synchronicity	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2015
The Right Time	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2015
Played!	Merrow, J.L.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2015
Heat Trap	Merrow, J.L.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2015
Brewing	Michael, Sean	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Love Matters	Michael, Sean	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Mashing	Michael, Sean	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Milling	Michael, Sean	Totally Bound	UK	2015
True as an Arrow	Michael, Sean	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Forsaken	Michaels, Laydin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
In Every Cloud	Michele, Tina	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Bound with Honor	Mulry, Megan	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Bound with Love	Mulry, Megan	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Bound with Passion	Mulry, Megan	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Scrap	Myles, Josephine	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2015
Sanctuary	Norris, Lynne	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2015
Rough Road	North, Vanessa	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Helping Hand	Northcote, Jay	Self Published	UK	2015
Like a Lover	Northcote, Jay	Self Published	UK	2015
What Happens at Christmas	Northcote, Jay	Self Published	UK	2015
L'Wren, Hawk and the Doves	Nostromo, Faberge	Self Published	UK	2015
Keep Hold	Grubb, Michelle	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
A Story of Now	O'Beirne, Emily	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2015
The Muse	O'Brien, Meghan	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Breathe Deep	Okati, Willa	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Give Chase	Okati, Willa	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Take Heart	Okati, Willa	Totally Bound	UK	2015
In the Privacy of their Home	Padmos, R.A.	Manifold Press	UK	2015
In the Middle of Somewhere	Parrish, Roan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Good Water	Peck, Kayt	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2015
The Ladies' Room	Peck, Kayt	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2015
Electra's Complex	Perez, Emma	Bella Books	USA	2015
Innocence to the Max	Peterson, S.J.D.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Essence of the Challenge	Peterson, S.J.D.	Self Published	USA	2015
Conjoined at the Soul	Piner, Huston	Prizm Books	USA	2015
The Courage to Try	Popovich, C.A.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Side Effects	Powell, VK	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Dillon's Decisions	Presley, Sydney	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Vann's Victory	Presley, Sydney	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Steel Eyes	Price, Melissa	Bella Books	USA	2015
Shadow Hunt	Raand, L.L.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Prescription for Love	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Price of Honor	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Stumbling on the Sand	Rae, Jenna	Bella Books	USA	2015
A Gentleman in the Street	Rai, Alisha	Self Published	USA	2015
Alchemy Ever After	Raine and O'Tierney, Siôn	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Definitely, Maybe, Yours	Reed, Lissa	Interlude Press	USA	2015

Sculpting Anna	Reising, Venus	Bella Books	USA	2015
Winter's Harbor	Rey, Aurora	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
New Beginnings	Richardson, KC	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Go Your Own Way	Riley, Zane	Interlude Press	USA	2015
Getting Back	Rizzo, Cindy	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2015
Renovation	Robins, Lane	Blind Eye Books	USA	2015
Crash & Burn	Roux, Abigail	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Part & Parcel	Roux, Abigail	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Hardwired	Rowlands, C.P.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
The Second Sons	Sabine, Elle Q	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
In the Stillness of Dawn	Salzler, Laurie	Bedazzled Ink	USA	2015
Reflections of Fate	Schramm, Patty	Self Published	USA	2015
Prayer of the Handmaiden	Shannon, Merry	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Hush	Sierra, Jude	Interlude Press	USA	2015
A New Man	Singer, P.D.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Home to Cedarwood	Slayer, Megan	Loose Id	USA	2015
Rainbows over Cedarwood	Slayer, Megan	Loose Id	USA	2015
Constant	Slayer, Megan	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Same Time Next Week	Smith, Emily	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Play it Forward	Smith, Frederick	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Found at the Library	Snow, Christi	Self Published	USA	2015
Scorched Edges	Somerton, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Tarot's Touch	Somerton, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Rough Around the Edges	Somerton, L.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Testing Lysander	Somerton, L.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Heart of the Game	Spangler, Rachel	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
The Princess and the Prix	Stark, Nell	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Moment of Impact	Stivali, Karen	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Scenes from Adelaide Road	Stone, Helena	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Bitter Springs	Stone, Laura	Interlude Press	USA	2015
Songs Unfinished	Stratimore, Holly	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Broken Records	Suzanne, Lilah	Interlude Press	USA	2015
Spice	Suzanne, Lilah	Interlude Press	USA	2015
Dance Off	Tachna, Ariel and Warin, Nessa L.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Lay Down the Law	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Reasonable Doubt	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Pedal to the Metal	Thoma, Jesse J.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Autumn Spring	Thrasher, Shelley	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Up the Ante	Trebelhorn, PJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
All Things Rise	Vaun, Missouri	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
The Ground Beneath	Vaun, Missouri	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
The Time Before Now	Vaun, Missouri	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Romance By The Book	Victor, Jo	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Such Happiness as This	Villeneuve, Laina	Bella Books	USA	2015
The Right Thing Easy	Villeneuve, Laina	Bella Books	USA	2015
Rise of the Gorgon	Walker, Tanai	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Love's Bounty	Wallace, Yolanda	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Break Point	Wallace, Yolanda	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Mounting Evidence	Walsh, Karis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
My Best Friend's Girl	Warren, Blythe H.	Bella Books	USA	2015
Under His Guard	Warren, Rie	Forever Yours	USA	2015
The Sum of These Things	O'Beirne, Emily	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2015
Faking Perfection	Watts, Mia	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
So Sweet	Weatherspoon, Rebekah	Self Published	USA	2015
Dom of Ages	Wells, K.C. and Williams, Parker	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2015
Protecting his asset	Welsh, SA	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Purrfect Protector	Welsh, SA	Totally Bound	UK	2015
Deception by Design	Wentz, Tara	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2015
Cast Me Gently	Werlinger, Caren J.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2015
These Two Hearts	White, Kenna	Bella Books	USA	2015
Getting Lost	Grubb, Michelle	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Never-Tied Nora	Blue, Cheyenne	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2015
Defiant Loyalties	Wilde, Elizabeth	NineStar Press	USA	2015
Sheltered Love	Williamz, MJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Summer Passion	Williamz, MJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Rain Shadow	Witt, L.A.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Not Safe For Work	Witt, L.A.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2015
What He Left Behind	Witt, L.A.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2015
The Fiend Queen	Wright, Barbara Ann	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
Thrall: Beyond Gold and Glory	Wright, Barbara Ann	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2015
A this Dey	Wright, Jennifer	Pride Publishing	UK	2015
Where There's Fire	Z, Cari	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Where There's Smoke	Z, Cari	Riptide Publishing	USA	2015
Just Business	Zabo, Anna	InterMix	USA	2015
Chaos Station	Burke, Jenn and Jensen, Kelly	Carina Press	USA	2015
Fight the Tide	Andrews, Keira	Self Published	Canada	2016
Plaid Versus Paisley	Burn, KC	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Tartan Candy	Burn, KC	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
My Man Walter	Cook, J.S.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Grind	Davies, E	Self Published	UK	2016
Fragile	Francis, Eve	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
By Mutual Consent	Richardson, Tracey	Bella Books	USA	2016
Neat Trick	Samms, Jaime	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
For Good	Stetz-Waters, Kareila	Forever Yours	USA	2016
Beyond the Sea	Andrews, Keira	Self Published	Canada	2016
Mr. March Names the Stars	Aarons-Hughes, Rivka	Less Than Three Press	USA	2016
Taken at the Flood	Adams, Nene	Bella Books	USA	2016
Untouchable	Adcock, Brenda	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2016
Out on Good Behavior	Adler, Dahlia	Self Published	USA	2016
Beta Test	Albert, Annabeth	Carina Press	USA	2016
Connection Error	Albert, Annabeth	Carina Press	USA	2016
Knit Tight	Albert, Annabeth	Lyrical Press	USA	2016
Wrapped Together	Albert, Annabeth	Lyrical Press	USA	2016
Lock and Key	Allora, Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016

Hotline	Anderson, Quinn	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
First Comes Marriage	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Take Two	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Say It Right	Arthur, A.M.	Carina Press	USA	2016
Come What May	Arthur, A.M.	Carina Press	USA	2016
Steady Stroke	Arthur, A.M.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
The Heart As He Hears It	Arthur, A.M.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2016
Body Rocks	Arthur, A.M.	Self Published	USA	2016
The King and the Criminal	Ashe, Charlotte	Interlude Press	USA	2016
Poppy Jenkins	Ashton, Clare	Self Published	UK	2016
Mood Indigo	Bachtold, Ken	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Finding Family	Bailey, Connie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
More Than Okay	Baker, Bru	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
The Photographer's Truth	Bardsley, Ralph Josiah	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Gideon	Barker, Ashe	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Salvation	Beacham, I.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Rescued Heart	Beers, Georgia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Run to You	Beers, Georgia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Dare to Stay	Beers, Georgia	Brisk Press	USA	2016
Rescued Heart	Beers, Georgia	Brisk Press	USA	2016
Run to You	Beers, Georgia	Brisk Press	USA	2016
Bad Judgment	Bell, Sidney	Carina Press	USA	2016
Daniel & Erik's Super Fab Ultimate Wedding Checklist	Belledonne, K.E.	Interlude Press	USA	2016
The Cattle Baron's Bogus Boyfriend	Bennett, Nicki	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Stronghold	Bennett, Nicki and Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Rewriting the Ending	Tune, HP	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
Psychic Says	Black, JJ	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
For Money or Love	Blackmore, Heather	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
A Touch of Temptation	Blair, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Far from the World We Know	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2016
In the Distance There is Light	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2016
The Road to You	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2016
Beneath the Surface	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2016
No Strings Attached	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2016
Seasons of Love	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2016
No Small Parts	Blue, Ally	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
The Secret of Hunter's Bog	Blue, Ally	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Not-So-Straight Sue	Blue, Cheyenne	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
Spencer Cohen	Walker, N.R.	Self Published	Australia	2016
Us	Bowen, Sarina and Kennedy, Elle	Self Published	USA	2016
Winter Kills	Bowie, J.P.	MLR Press	USA	2016
Every Breath I Take	Bowie, J.P.	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Highland Hearts	Bowie, J.P.	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
The Vampire and the G.I.	Bowie, J.P.	Totally Bound	UK	2016
Bearly There	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Blue Moon Rising	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Dragon Dreams & Fairy Wings	Bradford, Bailey	Rainbow Ninja Press	Australia	2016
Just My Luck	Bramhall, Andrea	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
Firework	Brayden, Melissa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
First Position	Brayden, Melissa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Change of Address	Brock, Jordan S.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
A Reluctant Enterprise	Brooke, Gun	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Dangerous Waves	Brown, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Falling into Darkness	Brown, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Take Me Home	Brown, Lorelie	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Far From Home	Brown, Lorelie	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
The Flesh Trade	Brown, Maggie	Bella Books	USA	2016
Drawn	Brownlee, Elle	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Whirlwind Romance	Bryant, Kris	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Taste	Bryant, Kris	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Fragile Wings	Buck, Rebecca S.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Match Point	Burgess, RL	Bella Books	USA	2016
Deathless	Burke, Belinda	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
The Shadow Road	Burke, Belinda	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Lights of the Heart	Burns, Nat	Bella Books	USA	2016
Knobs	Cade, Scotty	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Losing Faith	Cade, Scotty	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Tied Up In Knots	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
When the Dust Settles	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Chevalier	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Romanus	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Style	Cameron, Chelsea M	Self Published	USA	2016
Capsized	Cannon, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Match Point	Carman, Leigh	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Romancing the Inventor	Carriger, Gail	Self Published	USA	2016
One	Carter, E.S.	Self Published	UK	2016
The Captive Pet	Cayto, Samantha	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
The Inconvenient Pet	Cayto, Samantha	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
The Rebellious Pet	Cayto, Samantha	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
The Untamed Pet	Cayto, Samantha	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
A Gentleman's Position	Charles, K.J.	Loveswept	USA	2016
Rag and Bone	Charles, K.J.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2016
Black Dust	Charles, Lynn	Interlude Press	USA	2016
Some Assembly Required	Chase, Lex and Baker, Bru	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Fall into My Kiss	Chase, T.A.	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Peace	Chase, T.A.	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Merge Ahead	Chris, Tanya	Self Published	USA	2016
Game Time	Christie, Kate	Bella Books	USA	2016
Training Ground	Christie, Kate	Bella Books	USA	2016
The Man on Top of the World	Clark, Vanessa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Moonstone	Clevenger, Jaime	Bella Books	USA	2016
Catch a Tiger by the Tail	Cochet, Charlie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Playing With Fire	Cockburn, Avery	Self Published	USA	2016
Pride Under Fire	Coldwell, Elizabeth	Pride Publishing	UK	2016

Animal Passions	Coldwell, Elizabeth	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Closer by Morning	Collins, Thom	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Sweet	Constantine, Alysia	Interlude Press	USA	2016
Blind Side of the Moon	Cooper, Blayne	Bella Books	USA	2016
The Second Wave	Copeland, Jean	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
David, Renewed	Copland, Diana	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Into the Blue	Henson, Pene	Interlude Press	USA	2016
Of Fire and Stars	Coulthurst, Audrey	Balzer + Bray	Global	2016
Lone Star on a Cowboy Heart	Crosswell, Marie S	Less Than Three Press	USA	2016
Lands End	D, Jackie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Starstruck	Davis, Lesley	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Poker Face	Dees, Cindy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Dead Man's Hand	Dees, Cindy	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
According to Design	Dennis, Nicole	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
The Private Secretary	Devon, Summer	Self Published	USA	2016
21 Questions	Dixon, Mason	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Blind Date	Doherty, Kay	NineStar Press	USA	2016
Escapade	Dolce	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Forced Impressions	Doone, Piper	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
One in the Hand	Drake, Caitlin	Bella Books	USA	2016
So into You	Duchene, Remmy	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Faded into You	Duchene, Remmy	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Tempted to Touch	Duchene, Remmy	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Koi	Duchene, Remmy	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Matthias	Duran, Alexis	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Capturing Forever	Dutton, Erin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Black Snow	EAB	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
A Second Harvest	Easton, Eli	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
The Stolen Suitor	Easton, Eli	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
How to Wish Upon a Star	Easton, Eli	Self Published	USA	2016
Feather Fall	Elliott, Evelyn	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
The Red Thread	Ellis, Bryan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Misinformation	Ellis, Keelan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Tied to Trouble	Erickson, Megan	Entangled Publishing	USA	2016
Out of Frame	Erickson, Megan	InterMix	USA	2016
Overexposed	Erickson, Megan	InterMix	USA	2016
Fast Connection	Erickson, Megan and Hassell, Santino	Self Published	USA	2016
Strong Signal	Erickson, Megan and Hassell, Santino	Self Published	USA	2016
Heart and Home	Etta, CL	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Heartache and Hope	Etta, CL	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
No Holding Back	Evangelista, Kate	Swoon Reads	USA	2016
Make Someone Happy	Fielder, Hank	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Love Can't Conquer	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Staged	Fielding, Kim	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Running Blind	Fielding, Kim and Keyes, Venona	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
The Shewstone	Fletcher, Jane	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Suddenly Yours	Flores, Jacob Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Flinging It	Benson, G	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
Settling Down	Forcine, Nicole	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Bulldozed	Ford, Catt	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Love's Redemption	Ford, Donna K.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Hanging the Stars	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Dirty Heart	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Two Kinds of Elizabeth	Fortin, Genevieve	Bella Books	USA	2016
Courting the Countess	Frame, Jenny	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Heart of the Pack	Frame, Jenny	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Aced	Frank, Ella & Blaine, Brooke	Self Published	USA	2016
Locked	Frank, Ella & Blaine, Brooke	Self Published	USA	2016
Fruit of the Golden Vine	French, Sophia	Bella Books	USA	2016
The Copper Egg	Friend, Catherine	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Exchange	Frizzell, CF	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Incident at Elder Creek	Furtado, Anna	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2016
All the Wrong Places	Gallagher, Ann	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Bender	Gant, Gene	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Best Laid Plans	Gayle, Jan	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Live and Love Again	Gayle, Jan	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Céilí	Gemel, Moriah	Interlude Press	USA	2016
My Year Zero	Gold, Rachel	Bella Books	USA	2016
Clouded Hell	Gray, J.R.	Self Published	USA	2016
A Palette for Love	Greene, Charlotte	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
A Return To Arms	Greer. Sheree L	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Eleventh Hour	Gregory, Elin	Manifold Press	UK	2016
Bitter Heart	Griggs, Mary	Bella Books	USA	2016
Fenced-In Felix	Blue, Cheyenne	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
The Long Season	Gurley, Michael Vance	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Broken	Haken, Nicola	Self Published	UK	2016
Maze-Born Trouble	Hale, Ginn	Blind Eye Books	USA	2016
Swift and the Black Dog	Hale, Ginn	Blind Eye Books	USA	2016
Looking for Group	Hall, Alexis	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Murder Once Seen	Hall, J.T.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Been Here All Along	Hall, Sandy	Swoon Reads	USA	2016
Lysistrata Cove	Hankins, Dena	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Capturing Jessica	Hardee, Jane	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
A Woman of Strong Purpose	Harding, S. M.	Bella Books	USA	2016
Tangled Mark	Harmon, Becky	Bella Books	USA	2016
The Lavender List	Harrington, Meg	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
Investigating Julius Drake	Harris, Daisy	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
The Oath	Harris, Shannon M.	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2016
Too Much Heart to Run	Harris, SL	Bella Books	USA	2016
Hexmaker	Hawk, Jordan L.	Self Published	USA	2016
A Class Act	Hayes, T.L.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Just a Bit Ruthless	Hazard, Alessandra	Self Published	USA	2016
Just a Bit Wicked	Hazard, Alessandra	Self Published	USA	2016
Don't Twunk with My Heart	Kaye, Renae	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016

Wet Heat	Hero, R.D.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
The Roundabout	Hill, Gerri	Bella Books	USA	2016
Souls for Sale	Idonea, Asta	Wayward Ink Publishing	USA	2016
Speakeasy	Ingold, Suzey	Interlude Press	USA	2016
Heart Trouble	Jae	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
Tokyo Love	Jean, Diana	Crimson Romance	USA	2016
Vegas Sin	Jones, Jambrea Jo	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Captain of Industry	Kallmaker, Karin	Bella Books	USA	2016
Scissor Link	Kaplan, Georgette	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
Safe in His Heart	Kaye, Renae	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
The Straight Boyfriend	Kaye, Renae	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Where the Light Plays	Fonseca, C.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
Back Off! That's My Jock	Kelly, Wade	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Perfect Strangers	Kendrick, Edward	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Thárros	Kennedy, C.	Harmony Ink Press	USA	2016
The Art of Hero Worship	Kerick, Mia	Self Published	USA	2016
Thorns and Fangs	Kevern, Gillian St.	NineStar Press	USA	2016
Uprooted	Kevern, Gillian St.	NineStar Press	USA	2016
Magically Delicious	Kimberling, Nicole	Blind Eye Books	USA	2016
Can't Hide From Me	Kingsbridge, Cordelia	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
The Queen and the Homo Jock	Klune, T.J.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Bondage Rescue	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Grand Opening	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Slave for Two	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Smoldering Desires	Knipes, C.E.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Two Souls	Knowles, Kathleen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Tackling the Tight End	Lain, Tara	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Death Dancer	Lain, Tara	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Out of the Woods	Land, T.J.	NineStar Press	USA	2016
Heartwood	Lane, Catherine	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
Love's Changes	Laquette	Self Published	USA	2016
Swelter	Leigh, D. Jackson	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Rented Heart	Leigh, Garrett	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Hold	Leigh, Rachel Davidson	Duet Books	USA	2016
Blank Spaces	Lennox, Cass	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Embracing the Dawn	Levig, Jeannie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Strokes on a Canvas	Lewis-Foster, H	Self Published	UK	2016
Building a Home	Linden, Megan	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Leading Me Home	Linden, Megan	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Under Leaden Skies	Lindsey, Sandra	Manifold Press	UK	2016
The Pirate Fairy	Llewellyn, A.J.	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Southern Girl	Lukas, Renee J.	Bella Books	USA	2016
All I Want for Autumn	Lydon, Clare	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
All I Want for Spring	Lydon, Clare	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
All I Want for Summer	Lydon, Clare	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
All I Want For Valentine's	Lydon, Clare	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
Nothing to Lose	Lydon, Clare	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
At All Costs	Lynn, Micheala	Bella Books	USA	2016
Joie De Vivre	Lynn, Micheala	Bella Books	USA	2016
We Awaken	Lynne, Calista	Harmony Ink Press	USA	2016
Karma	Lynne, Carol	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
By the Dark of Her Eyes	MacElvee, Cameron	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Trial by Fury	MacGregor, K.G.	Bella Books	USA	2016
Bitter Legacy	Maclean, Dal	Blind Eye Books	USA	2016
Hooked	Maddox, Jaime	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Personal Foul	Madison, Lucy J.	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2016
Tengoku	Magdon, Rae D.	Desert Palm Press	USA	2016
Snare	Maltese, Racheline and Mcrae, Erin	Self Published	USA	2016
If Looks Could Kill	Marquette, Andi	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
My Cowboy Freedom	Maxfield, Z.A	InterMix	USA	2016
The Other Megan	McCoy, Robbi	Bella Books	USA	2016
Alias Mrs. Jones	McLachlan, Kate	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2016
Actual Stop	McLeod, Kara A.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Unspoken	McMullen, Liz	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2016
Chef's Special	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2016
Summer of Love	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2016
Trust	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2016
Lovers Leap	Merrow, J.L.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Blow Down	Merrow, J.L.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2016
Out!	Merrow, J.L.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2016
Fermenting	Michael, Sean	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Tasting	Michael, Sean	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Bitter Root	Michaels, Laydin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Stealing Sunshine	Michele, Tina	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Her Every Wish	Milan, Courtney	Self Published	USA	2016
Hold Me	Milan, Courtney	Self Published	USA	2016
Choosing Home	Milne, Alexa	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Returning Home	Milne, Alexa	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Staying Home	Milne, Alexa	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Comfort Zone	Milne, Alexa	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Lost Treasures	Mitchell, Jazzy	Desert Palm Press	USA	2016
Getting Him Back	Mitchell, K.A.	Carina Press	USA	2016
Boyfriend Material	Mitchell, K.A.	Carina Press	USA	2016
Love on the Red Rocks	Moreau, Lisa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Basic Training of the Heart	Morrison, Jaycie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Believing in Blue	Morton, Maggie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Submerge	Musgrove, Eleanor	Manifold Press	UK	2016
Custom Fit	Myles, Josephine	Self Published	UK	2016
Dare to Hope	Nash, Kara and Ricci, Caitlin	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Dare to Risk	Nash, Kara and Ricci, Caitlin	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Love on the Jersey Shore	Natale, Richard	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Keeping Her Secret	Nicolas, Sarah	Entangled Publishing	USA	2016
Beautiful Goodbyes	Nielsen, NJ	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
The Real You	Nielsen, NJ	Pride Publishing	UK	2016

Sweet Tooth	Nightshade, Jasmine	Crimson Romance	USA	2016
Wounded Souls	Nolan, RJ	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
To Lose His Heart	Nortan, Alec	NineStar Press	USA	2016
To Steal His Heart	Nortan, Alec	NineStar Press	USA	2016
Roller Girl	North, Vanessa	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Practice Makes Perfect	Northcote, Jay	Self Published	UK	2016
The Law of Attraction	Northcote, Jay	Self Published	UK	2016
This Song is (Not) For You	Nowlin, Laura	Sourcebooks	USA	2016
Never Enough	Nyx, Robyn	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Camp Rewind	O'Brien, Meghan	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Sing Me Home	O'Brien, Shannon	Bella Books	USA	2016
Acceptable Lies	Corett, CM	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
His Royal Favorite	Pace, Lilah	InterMix	USA	2016
His Royal Secret	Pace, Lilah	InterMix	USA	2016
Like People	Padmos, R.A.	Manifold Press	UK	2016
Jared's Salvation	Paige, TK	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Out of Nowhere	Parrish, Roan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Where We Left Off	Parrish, Roan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Before	Payne, KE	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
When I Knew You	Payne, KE	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
From Third to Home	Paynter, Chris	Self Published	UK	2016
The Viscount and the Artist	Pearce, Alyson	Self Published	UK	2016
To the Left of Your North Star	Peart, Michelle	Manifold Press	UK	2016
Prairie Fire	Peck, Kayt	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2016
Hurricane Season	Phillips, BJ	Desert Palm Press	USA	2016
In Shining Armor	Phillips, E. L.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Imperfect Truth	Popovich, C.A.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Deception	Powell, VK	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Lone Ranger	Powell, VK	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Blinded	Pritekel, Kim	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2016
Zero Ward	Pritekel, Kim	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2016
Just Enough Light	Quinn, AJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Counting to Zero	Quinn, AJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Carlyle's Crossing	Quinton, Chris	Manifold Press	UK	2016
Caravaggio's Angel	Quinton, Chris	Manifold Press	UK	2016
Love on Call	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Wild Shores	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
The Color of Love	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Flight SQA016	Radley, A.E.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
But First Must Come the Storm	Radley, Brooke	NineStar Press	USA	2016
Just Juliet	Reagan, Charlotte	Self Published	USA	2016
Alaskan Bride	Redhawk, D Jordan	Bella Books	USA	2016
Certainly, Possibly, Yours	Reed, Lissa	Interlude Press	USA	2016
Big Love	Reed, Rick R.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Ruthless	Reising, Venus	Bella Books	USA	2016
Built to Last	Rey, Aurora	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Naughty by Night	Rhodes, Devon	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Safe Haven	Ricci, Caitlin	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Gravity	Rich, Juliann	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Courageous Love	Richardson, KC	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Must Like Spinach	Riley, Con	Self Published	UK	2016
Miss Match	Riley, Fiona	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Again	Riley, Sierra	Self Published	USA	2016
Comfort Food	Riley, Sierra	Self Published	USA	2016
Delicious	Riley, Sierra	Self Published	USA	2016
Falling	Riley, Sierra	Self Published	USA	2016
Promise	Riley, Sierra	Self Published	USA	2016
Someday	Riley, Sierra	Self Published	USA	2016
Wrecked	Riley, Sierra	Self Published	USA	2016
With or Without You	Riley, Zane	Interlude Press	USA	2016
Gays Of Our Lives	Ripper, Kris	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Stowe Away	Rippon, Blythe	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
Pleasure of the Chase	Roberts, Ann	Bella Books	USA	2016
Beyond the Screen Door	Robertson, Julia Diana	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2016
Long Haul	Rose, Bruce	Self Published	USA	2016
Stumptown Spirits	Russell, E.J.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Wolf's Clothing	Russell, E.J.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
If I Was Your Girl	Russo, Meredith	Flatiron Books	USA	2016
A Kiss Before Dawn	Salzler, Laurie	Bedazzled Ink	USA	2016
Shatterproof	Sanders, Xen	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Rank	Sater, Richard Compson	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Rock N Soul	Sattersby, Lauren	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Backstage Pass	Scott, Riley	Bella Books	USA	2016
The Soldier's Scoundrel	Sebastian, Cat	Avon	Global	2016
Trailer Trash	Sexton, Marie	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Damned If You Do	Sexton, Marie	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2016
Flying Without a Net	Shaul, E.M. Ben	Interlude Press	USA	2016
What It Takes	Sierra, Jude	Interlude Press	USA	2016
Idlewild	Sierra, Jude	Interlude Press	USA	2016
Wild Card	Slayer, Megan	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
After the Fire	Smith, Emily	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Driving Me Mad	Smith, L.T.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
Chemical Bonds	Somerton, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Elemental Love	Somerton, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Driven to the Edge	Somerton, L.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2016
Perfect Pairing	Spangler, Rachel	Bywater Books	USA	2016
Set Me Free	Stephens, Kitty	Duet Books	USA	2016
Sideshow	Stilgenbauer, Amy	Interlude Press	USA	2016
In The Twist	Stockman, L.A.	NineStar Press	USA	2016
Arrested Hearts	Stratimore, Holly	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Leo Loves Aries	Sunday, Anyta	Self Published	Germany	2016
Burning Tracks	Suzanne, Lilah	Interlude Press	USA	2016
Above the Law	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Without Justice	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016

The Love Pill	Tape, Arizona	Self Published	UK	2016
Reclaiming Hope	Taylor, Shell	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
The Way Things Are	Thomas, A.J.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
A Reunion to Remember	Thomas, TJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Coke's Clown	Tortuga, BA	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Taking a Gamble	Trebelhorn, PJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
The Fifth Gospel	Grubb, Michelle	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Fortunate Sum	Ullrich, M.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Beneath the Waves	Vali, Ali	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Dark & Dazzling	Varlet, Elizabeth	Carina Press	USA	2016
Fierce & Fabulous	Varlet, Elizabeth	Carina Press	USA	2016
Patchwork Paradise	Vaughn, Indra	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Whiskey Sunrise	Vaun, Missouri	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Valley of Fire	Vaun, Missouri	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Witches of London	Voinov, Aleksandr	Self Published	UK	2016
Kings Rising	Pacat, C.S.	Berkley Books	Global	2016
24/7	Wallace, Yolanda	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Love on Tap	Walsh, Karis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
The Secret Unknown	Watson, Dillon	Bella Books	USA	2016
Soul to Keep	Weatherspoon, Rebekah	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
So For Real	Weatherspoon, Rebekah	Self Published	USA	2016
So Right	Weatherspoon, Rebekah	Self Published	USA	2016
Endings and Beginnings	Wells, K.C. and Williams, Parker	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2016
Guarding His Mark	Welsh, SA	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
The Plus One	West, Natasha	Self Published	UK	2016
Virgin Territory	White, Kenna	Bella Books	USA	2016
Blurred Lines	Williamson, KD	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
Crossing Lines	Williamson, KD	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
Love on Liberty	Williamz, MJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
A Taste of Honey	Wilson, Kai Ashante	Tor.com	USA	2016
Single Player	Winters, Elia	Pocket Star	USA	2016
No Fallen Angel	Winters, Sadie	Bella Books	USA	2016
Just Drive	Witt, L.A.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Hiatus	Witt, L.A.	Samhain Publishing Ltd.	USA	2016
Necromantia	Wohl, Sheri Lewis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Twisted Screams	Wohl, Sheri Lewis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Coils	Wright, Barbara Ann	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
Don't Let Go	Wright, Sheryl	Bella Books	USA	2016
Starting New	Wynne, S.C.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Bunny Finds a Friend	Yeats, Hazel	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
Perilous	Z, Cari	NineStar Press	USA	2016
Where There's A Will	Z, Cari	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Shadows and Light	Z, Cari	Pride Publishing	UK	2016
Due Diligence	Zabo, Anna	InterMix	USA	2016
Cross Purposes	Dartt, Gina L.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2016
The Better to Kiss You With	Osgood, Michelle	Interlude Press	USA	2016
Until September	Scully, Chris	Riptide Publishing	USA	2016
Rescue Me	Teichman, Michelle L.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2016
Sea Lover	Pendragon, J.K.	Less Than Three Press	USA	2016
The Cybernetic Tea Shop	Katz, Meredith	Less Than Three Press	USA	2016
Just Add Argyle	Burn, KC	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Heartsick	Richardson, Tracey	Bella Books	USA	2017
Three Player Game	Samms, Jaime	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Home Fires	Sherwood, Kate	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Arrows Through Archer	Summers, Nash	Self Published	Canada	2017
Team Phison	Verity, Chace	Self Published	Canada	2017
Repercussions	Webb, Jessica L.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Delay of Game	Richardson, Tracey	Bella Books	USA	2017
Kidnapped by the Pirate	Andrews, Keira	Self Published	Canada	2017
Don't Forget	Adaire, AJ	Desert Palm Press	USA	2017
The Heart of the Mountain	Adcock, Brenda	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2017
Adrift	Adler, Isabelle	NineStar Press	USA	2017
At Attention	Albert, Annabeth	Carina Press	USA	2017
Off Base	Albert, Annabeth	Carina Press	USA	2017
On Point	Albert, Annabeth	Carina Press	USA	2017
Wheels Up	Albert, Annabeth	Carina Press	USA	2017
Danced Close	Albert, Annabeth	Lyrical Press	USA	2017
The Glamour Thieves	Allmon, Don	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Secured and Free	Allora, Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
The Craving	Allora, Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Action	Anderson, Quinn	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
All of the Above	Anderson, Quinn	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
On Solid Ground	Anderson, Quinn	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
The Other Five Percent	Anderson, Quinn	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Forgotten Paradise	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Finder's Keeper	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
The Dragon's Devotion	Aquilante, Antonia	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Past the Breakers	Archer, Lucie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
As I Am	Arthur, A.M.	Carina Press	USA	2017
Wild Trail	Arthur, A.M.	Carina Press	USA	2017
Hot Licks	Arthur, A.M.	Self Published	USA	2017
Through My Own Lens	Ashling, Mickie B	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Third Son	Ashling, Mickie B	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Echoes	Ashton, L.A.	Self Published	USA	2017
The Fletcher	Aten, K.	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2017
Strictly Need to Know	Austin, MB	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Table for One	Bailey, Connie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Camp H.O.W.L	Baker, Bru	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Tall, Dark, and Deported	Baker, Bru	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
A Careful Heart	Bardsley, Ralph Josiah	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
On Duty	Barley, A.R.	Carina Press	USA	2017
Soul Survivor	Beacham, I.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Foxglove Copse	Beecroft, Alex	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Dare to Stay	Beers, Georgia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017

Right Here, Right Now	Beers, Georgia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
What Matters Most	Beers, Georgia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
What Matters Most	Beers, Georgia	Brisk Press	USA	2017
Just Beyond the Shining River	Beers, Lynnette	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2017
Loose Cannon	Bell, Sidney	Carina Press	USA	2017
Who'd Have Thought	Benson, G	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Hiding Out	Bigelow, Kay	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Dating Ryan Alback	Birk, J.E.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Fishy Riot	Black, Lindsey	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Freedom to Love	Black, Ronica	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
The Practitioner	Black, Ronica	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Under Her Wing	Black, Ronica	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Unchained Memories	Blake, Dena	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Where the Light Glows	Blake, Dena	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Everything Between Us	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2017
No Other Love	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2017
Water Under Bridges	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2017
This Foreign Affair	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2017
Irresistible	Lowe, Sandy	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Empathy for a Killer	Masters, Sarah	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Swift for the Sun	Bovenmyer, Karen	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
The Vampire and the M.D.	Bowie, J.P.	MLR Press	USA	2017
Trust Me	Bowie, J.P.	MLR Press	USA	2017
Breaking the Habit	Bowie, J.P.	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Evan Sent	Bowie, J.P.	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
From Upstairs to Downstairs	Bowie, J.P.	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
And The Stars Danced	Bradford, Bailey	Rainbow Ninja Press	Australia	2017
Rock and a Hard Place	Bramhall, Andrea	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Eyes Like Those	Brayden, Melissa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Strawberry Summer	Brayden, Melissa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Underwater Vibes	Brent, Mickey	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Lunch with the Do-Nothings at the Tammy Dinette	Brewer, Killian B	Interlude Press	USA	2017
Rogue Magic	Brisby, Kit	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Thorns of the Past	Brooke, Gun	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Arrival	Brooke, Gun	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Escape	Brooke, Gun	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Fortitude Smashed	Brooke, Taylor	Interlude Press	USA	2017
Dark Horse	Brooks, A.L.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Miles Apart	Brooks, A.L.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Shifting Currents	Brown, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Her Hometown Girl	Brown, Lorelie	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
In the Company of Crocodiles	Brown, Maggie	Bella Books	USA	2017
Two For Trust	Brownlee, Elle	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Forget Me Not	Bryant, Kris	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
A Harvest of Dreams & Embers	Burke, Belinda	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Admissible Behavior	Byrnes, Jenna	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
A Day Makes	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Late in the Day	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
You Never Know	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Take Me There	Cannon, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Wishing on a Dream	Cannon, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Fair Catch	Carman, Leigh	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Two-Man Advantage	Carman, Leigh	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Homecoming	Castro, Celeste	Bella Books	USA	2017
The Undercover Pet	Cayto, Samantha	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
A Gathering Storm	Chambers, Joanna	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Peter Darling	Chant, Austin	Less Than Three Press	USA	2017
Caroline's Heart	Chant, Austin	Self Published	USA	2017
An Unsuitable Heir	Charles, K.J.	Loveswept	USA	2017
An Unnatural Vice	Charles, K.J.	Loveswept	USA	2017
An Unseen Attraction	Charles, K.J.	Loveswept	USA	2017
Wanted, A Gentleman	Charles, K.J.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Spectred Isle	Charles, K.J.	Self Published	UK	2017
Beneath the Stars	Charles, Lynn	Interlude Press	USA	2017
A Time to Keep	Chesire, Morgan	Manifold Press	UK	2017
Aftercare	Chris, Tanya	Self Published	USA	2017
Speakeasy, Speak Love	Clark, Sharon G.	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2017
My Fairy Godmother is a Drag Queen	Clawson, David	Sky Pony Press	USA	2017
Broke Deep	Cochrane, Charlie	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Count the Shells	Cochrane, Charlie	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Shadow's Seduction	Cole, Kresley	Self Published	USA	2017
Anthem of the Sea	Collins, Thom	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Summer Fling	Copeland, Jean	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Michael, Reinvented	Copland, Diana	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
New Beginnings	Cosentino, Joe	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Stepping Out	Cosentino, Joe	NineStar Press	USA	2017
A Boy Worth Knowing	Cosgrove, Jennifer	NineStar Press	USA	2017
His Convenient Husband	Covington, Robin	Entangled Publishing	USA	2017
You're Fired	Crabtree, Shaya	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Lucy's Chance	D, Jackie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
The Lure of Port Stephen	Blackburn, Sydney	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Banded Together	Burn, KC	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
The Spires of Turris	Danse, Christine	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Time	Darry, Eden	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Raging at the Stars	Davis, Lesley	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
The Charlatan's Conquest	Dean, Vivien	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Fallen for You	Dee, Jules	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Miranda	DeLisle, R. D.	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2017
Like Father, Like Son	Masters, Sarah	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Only You	Doherty, Kay	NineStar Press	USA	2017
The Winder Path	Dowland, Lyn	Bella Books	USA	2017
Lost in You	Duchene, Remmy	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
The Smell of Camellias	Duchene, Remmy	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Fallen into You	Duchene, Remmy	Pride Publishing	UK	2017

Honey and Heat	Durant, Rian	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Planning for Love	Dutton, Erin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
How to Save a Life	Easton, Eli	Self Published	USA	2017
Almost-Married Moni	Blue, Cheyenne	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Everything I Have	Ellis, Keelan	NineStar Press	USA	2017
The One Thing I Know	Ellis, Keelan	NineStar Press	USA	2017
The Seafarer's Kiss	Ember, Julia	Duet Books	USA	2017
Hard Wired	Erickson, Megan and Hassell, Santino	Self Published	USA	2017
Mature Content	Erickson, Megan and Hassell, Santino	Self Published	USA	2017
Slim Chance	Erno, Jeff	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Thief of Hearts	Essex, Bridget	Self Published	USA	2017
Hound and Harmony	Etta, CL	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Love is Heartless	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Ante Up	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Blood Drop	Flores, Jacob Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Spell Fall	Flores, Jacob Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Cross my Heart	Ford, Catt	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Unbroken	Ford, Donna K.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Lovesick	Ford, Marina	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Rebel	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
There's This Guy	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Tramps and Thieves	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Dim Sum Asylum	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Water's Edge	Fortin, Genevieve	Bella Books	USA	2017
Wolf in King's Clothing	Foye, Parker	Carina Press	USA	2017
Unexpected	Frame, Jenny	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Royal Rebel	Frame, Jenny	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Riding with Brighton	Francis, Haven	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Love Plus One	Friday, P.A.	NineStar Press	USA	2017
One Plus One	Friday, P.A.	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Spark	Friend, Catherine	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Nantucket Rose	Frizzell, CF	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Night Voice	Frizzell, CF	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Cemeteries by Moonlight	Frost, Hunter	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Tremble and Burn	Furtado, Anna	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2017
Heart of the Steal	Gale, Avon	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Let the Wrong Light In	Gale, Avon	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
The Love Song of Sawyer Bell	Gale, Avon and Parrish, Roan	Self Published	USA	2017
Off the Ice	Gale, Avon and Vaughn, Piper	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Permanent Ink	Gale, Avon and Vaughn, Piper	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Having Her Back	Gallagher, Ann	Self Published	USA	2017
New Life	Gayle, Jan	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
The Actress and the Scrapyard Girl	George, Pauline	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2017
King of Thieves	Godfrey, Shea	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Southern Stars	Good, Melissa	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2017
Canvas for Love	Greene, Charlotte	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Love in Disaster	Greene, Charlotte	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Calon Lân	Gregory, Elin	Manifold Press	UK	2017
The Bones of Our Fathers	Gregory, Elin	Manifold Press	UK	2017
Where Do I Start?	Hackett, Chase Taylor	Lyrical Press	USA	2017
Echo Point	Hale, Virginia	Bella Books	USA	2017
How to Bang a Billionaire	Hall, Alexis	Forever Yours	USA	2017
How to Blow it with a Billionaire	Hall, Alexis	Forever Yours	USA	2017
Forest of Thorns and Claws	Hall, J.T.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Fraud Twice Felt	Hall, J.T.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Pieces of Me	Hansen, Melanie	NineStar Press	USA	2017
See My Words	Hansen, Melanie	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Speak in Winter Code	Harding, S. M.	Bella Books	USA	2017
Chasing Ghosts	Hardy, M.K.	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Illegal Contact	Harmon, Becky	Bella Books	USA	2017
New Additions	Harmon, Becky	Bella Books	USA	2017
An Unexpected Beginning	Harris, Shannon M.	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2017
Phoenix Rising	Harwell, Rebecca	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
No More Pretending	Hawkins, Bette	Bella Books	USA	2017
Sweet Boy and Wild One	Hayes, T.L.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Just a Bit Shameless	Hazard, Alessandra	Self Published	USA	2017
That Alien Feeling	Hazard, Alessandra	Self Published	USA	2017
Taking a Chance	Haze, Emjay	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Fairies at the Bottom of the Garden	Headford, Cheryl	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Meet Me in the Middle	Heidt, Yvonne	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2017
To Be Determined	Eichler, Laurie and Alexander, Mardi	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
At Seventeen	Hill, Gerri	Bella Books	USA	2017
The Secret Pond	Hill, Gerri	Bella Books	USA	2017
The Art of Us	Hughes, KL	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
The Gate	Isabella	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2017
From Scratch	Jackson, Katrina	Self Published	USA	2017
Falling Hard	Jae	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Perfect Rhythm	Jae	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Whitecott Manor	Jane, Emma	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Space Mac	Jane, Emma	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Something Like Love	Jones, Christina C.	Self Published	USA	2017
A Fish out of Water	Kallmaker, Karin	Self Published	USA	2017
Nate's Last Tango	Klehr, Kevin	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Elpida	Kennedy, C.	Harmony Ink Press	USA	2017
Scarred	Kerick, Mia	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Crossfire	Keys, Jon	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Tackling the Subject	Keys, Jon	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Off Pitch	Kientiz, Brianna	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Kill Game	Kingsbridge, Cordelia	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
PeopleFish	Kingston, Medella	NineStar Press	USA	2017
The Brutal Truth	Winter, Lee	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Cutting Cords	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Facing Fears	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Finding Sanctuary	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2017

Gaining Trust	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Cherished by Two	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Hiding From Two	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Surrendering for Two	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Taking Sides	Knowles, Kathleen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Tread Lightly	Lane, Catherine	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Shards in the Sun	Lane, Trina	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Kings and Butterflies	Langley, Lina	Self Published	USA	2017
Fair Chance	Lanyon, Josh	Carina Press	USA	2017
Highland Fling	Larner, Anna	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Autoboyography	Lauren, Christina	Simon & Schuster	USA	2017
Dreams Unspoken	Layer, RJ	Bella Books	USA	2017
The Gentleman's Guide to Vice and Virtue	Lee, Mackenzi	Harper Collins	USA	2017
My Forever Hero	Legasy, Karen	Bella Books	USA	2017
House of Cards	Leigh, Garrett	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Junkyard Heart	Leigh, Garrett	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Stray	Leigh, Garrett	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Growing Pains	Lennox, Cass	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
The Wrong Woman	Lennox, Cass	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Finding Your Feet	Lennox, Cass	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
All or Nothing	Lerner, Rose	Self Published	USA	2017
Into Thin Air	Levig, Jeannie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Consequences	Libero, Sarah	Bella Books	USA	2017
Coming Back Home	Linden, Megan	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Redefining home	Linden, Megan	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Love and Other Hot Beverages	Loft, Laurie	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Mai Tais and Murder	Long, J.C.	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Tiki Torches and Treasure	Long, J.C.	NineStar Press	USA	2017
A Matter of Courage	Long, J.C.	NineStar Press	USA	2017
A Matter of Duty	Long, J.C.	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Pushing Phillip	Lorenz, Lynn	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Party Wall	Blue, Cheyenne	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
In Her Eyes	Lukas, Renee J.	Bella Books	USA	2017
Twice in a Lifetime	Lydon, Clare	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
A Girl Called London	Lydon, Clare	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
All I Want Forever	Lydon, Clare	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Fire Dancer	Lynn, Micheala	Bella Books	USA	2017
Moment of Weakness	MacGregor, K.G.	Bella Books	USA	2017
Five Moons Rising	MacTague, Lise	Bella Books	USA	2017
The Scholarship	Maddox, Jaime	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
In the Direction of the Sun	Madison, Lucy J.	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2017
No One But You	Maiorisi, Catherine	Bella Books	USA	2017
Feral Dust Bunnies	Martinez, Angel	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Jackalopes & Woofen-Poofs	Martinez, Angel	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Skim Blood and Savage Verse	Martinez, Angel	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Storm Season	Henson, Pene	Interlude Press	USA	2017
Yes, Professor	Kaye, Renae	Self Published	Australia	2017
Ginger and the Wolf	McBoyd, Kerry	Self Published	USA	2017
Autumn	McCade, Cole	Self Published	USA	2017
Erased	McCoy, Robbi	Bella Books	USA	2017
Spritzer	McDonald, Jon	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Where Love Leads	McKenzie, Erin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Worthy of Trust and Confidence	McLeod, Kara A.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Goldenrod	McMan, Ann	Bywater Books	USA	2017
An Unexpected Truth	Meade, SA	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Single Male Vampire	Meadows, Cheyenne	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Fame	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2017
Vacationland	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2017
United	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2017
Cinderella Boy	Meister, Kristina	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Stealing Home	Mendicino, Tom	Lyrical Press	USA	2017
Spring Flowering	Mendlesohn, Farah	Manifold Press	UK	2017
Spun!	Merrow, J.L.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Wake Up Call	Merrow, J.L.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Walking on Water	Metzger, Matthew J.	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Bringing Nicky Home	Michael, Sean	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Three New Wishes	Michael, Sean	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Captured Soul	Michaels, Laydin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
While You See a Chance	Milne, Alexa	Manifold Press	UK	2017
My Highland Cowboy	Milne, Alexa	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Relationship Status	Mitchell, K.A.	Carina Press	USA	2017
Trapped	Moone, Ruby	Self Published	UK	2017
Picture Perfect	Moreau, Lisa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
The Butterfly Whisperer	Moreau, Lisa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Heart's Orders	Morrison, Jaycie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Rule Breaker	Morton, Lily	Self Published	UK	2017
Golden	Mosswood, R.L.	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Eight-One Days	Mullins, Zoe	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Sum of the Whole	Murphy, Brenda	NineStar Press	USA	2017
One	Murphy, Brenda	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Frame by Frame	Murphy, CJ	Desert Palm Press	USA	2017
Falling for Him	Mustafic, CL	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Loving Sarajevo	Mustafic, CL	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Sunlight in the Shadows	Newman, Gail	Desert Palm Press	USA	2017
All That Shimmer	Nielsen, NJ	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
The Light of Day	Norris, Lynne	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2017
The Gaia Protocol	Nortan, Alec	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Midlife Crisis	North, Audra	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Starting from Scratch	Northcote, Jay	Self Published	UK	2017
Watching and Wanting	Northcote, Jay	Self Published	UK	2017
Ask, Tell	Noyes, E. J.	Bella Books	USA	2017
Turbulence	Noyes, E. J.	Bella Books	USA	2017
Change in Time	Nyx, Robyn	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Escape in Time	Nyx, Robyn	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017

All the Ways to Here	O'Beirne, Emily	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Future Leaders of Nowhere	O'Beirne, Emily	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Her Best Friend's Sister	O'Brien, Meghan	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Coming In	Ogilvy, Michelle	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Tea or Consequences	Burn, KC	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
The Doctor's Discretion	Ottoman, E.E.	Self Published	USA	2017
Choosing Love	Panichi, MB	Bella Books	USA	2017
Small Change	Parrish, Roan	Self Published	USA	2017
Linchpin	Payne, Jodi	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
More Than A Song	Paynter, Chris	Self Published	UK	2017
Rent Mate	Penn, Ash	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Snowbird Season	Phillips, BJ	Desert Palm Press	USA	2017
Like Water	Podos, Rebecca	Balzer + Bray	Global	2017
Finding Fire	Powell, Shelia and McMullen, Liz	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2017
Captain's Choice	Powell, VK	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
A Wolf in PI's Clothing	Presley, Sydney	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Dead Wolf Waking	Presley, Sydney	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
No Matter What	Presley, Sydney	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
No More Pocket Change	Presley, Sydney	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
The Running Fields	Presley, Sydney	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Skin in the Game	Price, Melissa	Bella Books	USA	2017
Worth Waiting For	Qualls, Wendy	Lyrical Press	USA	2017
Coins Not Accepted	Quinton, Chris	Manifold Press	UK	2017
Heart Stop	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Love After Hours	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Secret Hearts	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Grounded	Radley, A.E.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Absolutely, Almost, Perfect	Reed, Lissa	Interlude Press	USA	2017
The Perils of Intimacy	Reed, Rick R.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Crescent City Confidential	Rey, Aurora	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Summer's Cove	Rey, Aurora	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Barrel Proof	Reyne, Layla	Carina Press	USA	2017
Cask Strength	Reyne, Layla	Carina Press	USA	2017
Single Malt	Reyne, Layla	Carina Press	USA	2017
Faking It	D'Abo, Christine	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Making It	D'Abo, Christine	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Strike a Match	Riley, Fiona	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Unlikely Match	Riley, Fiona	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Benched	Rippon, Blythe	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Vagabond Heart	Roberts, Ann	Bella Books	USA	2017
Saved	Roman, Karrie	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Working It	D'Abo, Christine	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Bad Boy's Bard	Russell, E.J.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Cutie and the Beast	Russell, E.J.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
The Druid Next Door	Russell, E.J.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Back to You	Scully, Chris	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
The Sniper's Kiss	Saracen, Justine	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Shadow Haven	Schippers, AJ	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
A Time to Speak	Scott, Riley	Bella Books	USA	2017
Troop 18	Webb, Jessica L.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
It Takes Two to Tumble	Sebastian, Cat	Avon	Global	2017
The Lawrence Browne Affair	Sebastian, Cat	Avon	Global	2017
The Ruin of a Rake	Sebastian, Cat	Avon	Global	2017
Lightning Chasers	Sellars, Cass	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Lightning Strikes	Sellars, Cass	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
One Man's Trash	Sexton, Marie	Self Published	USA	2017
Visiting Hours	Shepard, Tagan	Bella Books	USA	2017
In His Majesty's Service	Silver, Elizabeth and Urban, Jenny	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
The Lily and the Crown	Sinclair, Roslyn	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Making the Play	Slayer, Megan	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
We Belong Together	Slayer, Megan	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
A Work in Progress	Smith, L.T.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Steel Trap	Somerton, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Elemental Hope	Somerton, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Binding the Edges	Somerton, L.M.	Totally Bound	UK	2017
His Quiet Agent	Soto, Maria Ada	Self Published	USA	2017
Tactical Submission	Soto, Maria Ada	Self Published	USA	2017
Getting Serious	Spangler, Rachel	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Close to Home	Spangler, Rachel	Bywater Books	USA	2017
Edge of Glory	Spangler, Rachel	Bywater Books	USA	2017
Love All	Spangler, Rachel	Bywater Books	USA	2017
Forget Her Not	Spencer, Elle	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Casting Lacey	Spencer, Elle	Self Published	USA	2017
Thaw	Springer, Elyse	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Changing Tides	Standish, Alex	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
King of the Fire Dancers	Sterlings, S.T.	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Long-Distance Coffee	Sterner-Radley, Emma	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
The Shape of You	Stevens, Felice	Self Published	USA	2017
Saving Julian	Stokes, Mason	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Renewal	Stone, Helena	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Equality	Stone, Helena	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Patience	Stone, Helena	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
And It Came to Pass	Stone, Laura	Interlude Press	USA	2017
The Schuyler House	Strong, Cade Haddock	Bella Books	USA	2017
Wehr Wolff Castle	Summers, B. Bentley	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Gemini Keeps Capricorn	Sunday, Anyta	Self Published	Germany	2017
Scorpio Hates Virgo	Sunday, Anyta	Self Published	Germany	2017
Blended Notes	Suzanne, Lilah	Interlude Press	USA	2017
A More Perfect Union	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Letter of the Law	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Sidebar	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Defensive Mindset	Temple, Wendy	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Dawn's New Day	Thomas, TJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
The Road to Wings	Tizard, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017

In His Corner	Tomlinson, Christa	Self Published	USA	2017
The Wounded Warrior	Tortuga, BA	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
The Right Kind of Wrong	Trebelhorn, PJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
The Alpha's Claim	Trent, Holley	Carina Press	USA	2017
Curses, Foiled Again	Trevor, Sera	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Fake It Till You Make It	Ullrich, M.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Time Will Tell	Ullrich, M.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Beauty and the Boss	Vali, Ali	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
The Devil's Due	Vali, Ali	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Brave & Beautiful	Varlet, Elizabeth	Carina Press	USA	2017
Crossing the Wide Forever	Vaun, Missouri	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Birthright	Vaun, Missouri	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Lace-Covered Compromise	Violet, Silvia	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Divided Nation, United Hearts	Wallace, Yolanda	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Tailor-Made	Wallace, Yolanda	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
True Colors	Wallace, Yolanda	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Amounting to Nothing	Walsh, Karis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Risk Factor	Walsh, Karis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Set the Stage	Walsh, Karis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
You Make Me Tremble	Walsh, Karis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Bait and Switch	Warren, Blythe H.	Bella Books	USA	2017
An Unlocked Mind	Wells, K.C. and Williams, Parker	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Before You Break	Wells, K.C. and Williams, Parker	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2017
Won't Feel A Thing	White, CF	Loose Id	USA	2017
Hard Time	White, CF	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Misdemeanor	White, CF	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Reformed	White, CF	Pride Publishing	UK	2017
Dark Water	White, K.L.	Carina Press	USA	2017
Between the Lines	Williamson, KD	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2017
Complications	Williamz, MJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Hookin' Up	Williamz, MJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Lessons in Desire	Williamz, MJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Love Down Under	Williamz, MJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Fury's Bridge	Willows, Brey	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Fury's Choice	Willows, Brey	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
The Love Interest	Dietrich, Cale	Feiwel & Friends	USA	2017
Afraid to Fly	Witt, L.A.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Chief's Mess	Witt, L.A.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Get a Grip	Witt, L.A.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Rank & File	Witt, L.A.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Reckless Behavior	Witt, L.A. and Z, Cari	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Risky Behavior	Witt, L.A. and Z, Cari	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Suspicious Behavior	Witt, L.A. and Z, Cari	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
She Wolf	Wohl, Sheri Lewis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Walking Through Shadows	Wohl, Sheri Lewis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
One Bullet	Wolfe, Casey	NineStar Press	USA	2017
House of Fate	Wright, Barbara Ann	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Stay with Me	Wright, Sheryl	Bella Books	USA	2017
Necessary Medicine	York, M.K.	Carina Press	USA	2017
Soothsayer	Z, Cari	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Daily Grind	Zabo, Anna	InterMix	USA	2017
Outside the Lines	Zabo, Anna	Riptide Publishing	USA	2017
Falling Into Her	Zak, Erin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2017
Huntsmen	Osgood, Michelle	Interlude Press	USA	2017
Run in the Blood	Ross, A.E.	NineStar Press	USA	2017
Set Ablaze	Burn, KC	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
All the Dogs are Dancing	Goguen, J.M.	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Inside Darkness	Lin, Hudson	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
A Summer Soundtrack for Falling in Love	Powell, Arden	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
I'm Gonna Make You Love Me	Richardson, Tracey	Bella Books	USA	2018
Safe and Sound	Samms, Jaime	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Worth the Wait	Stetz-Waters, Kareila	Forever Yours	USA	2018
The Pick Up	Temple, Allison	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
The Island Angel	Slorra, Alex	NineStar Press	USA	2018
In Vino Veritas	Blackburn, Sydney	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Losing It	D'Abo, Christine	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Moon Illusion	Osgood, Michelle	Interlude Press	USA	2018
Wheels and Heels	Samms, Jaime	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Shadowboxer	Webb, Jessica L.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Match Me	Adaire, AJ	Desert Palm Press	USA	2018
A Touch of Magic	Adler, Isabelle	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Squared Away	Albert, Annabeth	Carina Press	USA	2018
Tight Quarters	Albert, Annabeth	Carina Press	USA	2018
Level Up	Albert, Annabeth	Self Published	USA	2018
Leah on the Offbeat	Albertalli, Becky	Balzer + Bray	Global	2018
Across a Crowded Room	Alden, Jane	Desert Palm Press	USA	2018
Apocalypse Alley	Allmon, Don	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
The Burning Magus	Allmon, Don	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
The Temple of Heaven	Allora, Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
A Hidden Hope	Ambrose, Laura	Self Published	USA	2018
Cam Boy	Anderson, Quinn	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Fourteen Summers	Anderson, Quinn	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
New Heights	Anderson, Quinn	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
The Academy	Anderson, Quinn	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
The Long Way Around	Anderson, Quinn	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Swann's Revenge	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Blood and Eternity	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
A Dance of Water and Air	Aquilante, Antonia	NineStar Press	USA	2018
The Merchant's Love	Aquilante, Antonia	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Roped In	Arthur, A.M.	Carina Press	USA	2018
Saddle Up	Arthur, A.M.	Carina Press	USA	2018
A Tangled Legacy	Ashling, Mickie B	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Rules of the Road	Aten, K.	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2018
The Archer	Aten, K.	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2018

The Sagittarius	Aten, K.	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2018
Running Off Radar	Austin, MB	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Chasing Thunderbird	Bailey, J. Leigh	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
The Night Owl and the Insomniac	Bailey, J. Leigh	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Hiding in Plain Sight	Baker, Bru	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Under a Blue Moon	Baker, Bru	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Broken Protocol	Barley, A.R.	Carina Press	USA	2018
Shift's End	Barley, A.R.	Carina Press	USA	2018
Escaping Solitude	Bauer, Sara Dobie	NineStar Press	USA	2018
In the Name of Magic	Bedell, Chris	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Contraband Hearts	Beecroft, Alex	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Blend	Beers, Georgia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Calendar Girl	Beers, Georgia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
The Shape of You	Beers, Georgia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Song and Key	Bekins, Alix and Bailey, Connie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Sentinel	Roman, Karrie	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Hard Line	Bell, Sidney	Carina Press	USA	2018
Rough Trade	Bell, Sidney	Carina Press	USA	2018
Bad to the Bone	Bennett, Nicki	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Out of Bounds	Bennett, Nicki and Tachna, Ariel	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Cold Like Snow	Bethel, Sita	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Saved by Grace	Bethel, Sita	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Killer Spring	Bigelow, Kay	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
Dark Euphoria	Black, Ronica	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Private Passion	Black, Ronica	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
It's Not a Date	Blackmore, Heather	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
A Country Girl's Heart	Blake, Dena	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Friends Without Benefits	Blake, Dena	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Racing Hearts	Blake, Dena	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Crazy for You	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2018
Love without Limits	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2018
More than Words	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2018
Trusted	Roman, Karrie	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Lucky Cowboy	Borino, Liz	NineStar Press	USA	2018
The Vampire and the S.A.	Bowie, J.P.	MLR Press	USA	2018
Mr December	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Mr February	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Mr January	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Mr November	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Mr October	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Across the Tides	Bradford, Bailey	Self Published	USA	2018
Bowen's Battle	Bradford, Bailey	Self Published	USA	2018
Sin Shift One: No Sanctuary	Bradford, Bailey	Self Published	USA	2018
Lost for Words	Bramhall, Andrea	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
Hearts Like Hers	Brayden, Melissa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Love Like This	Brayden, Melissa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Sparks Like Ours	Brayden, Melissa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Broad Awakening	Brent, Mickey	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Wayworn Lovers	Brooke, Gun	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Curved Horizon	Brooke, Taylor	Interlude Press	USA	2018
One Way or Another	Brooks, A.L.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
Up on the Roof	Brooks, A.L.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
Cameron's Rules	Brown, Baxter	Bella Books	USA	2018
The Burning of Arbor	Brown, J.L.	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Hidden Depths	Brown, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Playing the Spy	Brown, Maggie	Bella Books	USA	2018
Staggered Cove Station	Brownlee, Elle	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Stay a Little Longer	Bryant, Jess	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Breakthrough	Bryant, Kris	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Touch	Bryant, Kris	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Coming Around Again	Burnett, Beth	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
Compass Rose	Burnke, Anna	Bywater Books	USA	2018
The Liaison	Burns, Nat	Bella Books	USA	2018
Medusa's Touch	Byrne, Emily L.	Queen of Swords Press	USA	2018
From a Jack to a King	Cade, Scotty	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
This is Kind of an Epic Love Story	Callender, Kacen	Balzer + Bray	Global	2018
His Consort	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Twisted and Tied	Calmes, Mary	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Daughter of the Sun	Calvin, Effie	NineStar Press	USA	2018
The Queen of Ieflaria	Calvin, Effie	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Fore Play	Cannon, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Blood Dance	Cayto, Samantha	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Dangerous Dance	Cayto, Samantha	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Slave Dance	Cayto, Samantha	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Tribute Act	Chambers, Joanna	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Band Sinister	Charles, K.J.	Self Published	UK	2018
Unfit to Print	Charles, K.J.	Self Published	UK	2018
The Henchman of Zenda	Charles, K.J.	Self Published	UK	2018
Aftershock	Chris, Tanya	Self Published	USA	2018
A Theory of Love	Christie, Kate	Bella Books	USA	2018
Three Reasons to Say Yes	Clevenger, Jaime	Bella Books	USA	2018
Two Feet Under	Cochrane, Charlie	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Playing in the Dark	Cockburn, Avery	Self Published	USA	2018
That Could Be Enough	Cole, Alyssa	Self Published	USA	2018
Wanting the Wolfman	Collins, Louise	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Anthem of Survival	Collins, Thom	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Anthem of the Dark	Collins, Thom	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Tale of a Dragon Princess	Colt, Lizzie	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Teaching Ben	Connor, Shae	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Death Days	Cooper, Lia	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Jericho Candelario's Gay Debut	Cooper, R.	Self Published	USA	2018
The Brightsiders	Wilde, Jen	Swoon Reads	USA	2018
Under Your Skin	Winter, Lee	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
Skating Through	Cosgrove, Jennifer	NineStar Press	USA	2018

The Captain and the Cavalry Trooper	Curzon, Catherine and Harkstead, Eleanor	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
The Captain and the Cricketer	Curzon, Catherine and Harkstead, Eleanor	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
The Rise of the Resistance	D, Jackie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Denying Fate	Dado, C.C.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Embracing Fate	Dado, C.C.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Fearing Fate	Dado, C.C.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Let Me In	David, Luna	Self Published	USA	2018
A Gentleman Revealed	Davis, Cooper	InterMix	USA	2018
White Wings Weeping	Davis, Lesley	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Survival Instincts	Dawney, May	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
Waking Oisin	Delaney, Grace Killian	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Colette	DeLisle, R. D.	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
Phoenix	Digby, Mildred Gail	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2018
Hers to Protect	Disney, Nicole	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Secrets On the Clock	Disney, Nicole	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Daddy Issues	Dorn, Lynn Van	Self Published	USA	2018
Landing Zone	Dutton, Erin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Rage to Live	Edwards, Shirley Anne	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Shipped	Roman, Karrie	NineStar Press	USA	2018
The Navigator's Touch	Ember, Julia	Duet Books	USA	2018
To Have and to Hold	Eradani, Tamryn	NineStar Press	USA	2018
To Seek and to Find	Eradani, Tamryn	NineStar Press	USA	2018
The Universe Between Us	Esther, Jane C.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Transcending Phoenix	Etta, CL	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Cutie Pies	Bell, Barbara	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
A Full Plate	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
The Spy's Love Song	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Blyd and Pearce	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Isle of Broken Years	Fletcher, Jane	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Code of Conduct	Blue, Cheyenne	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
Captive	Ford, Donna K.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Once Upon a Wolf	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Savior	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Sin and Tonic	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Dingo's Recovery	Fortin, Genevieve	Bella Books	USA	2018
Mage of Inconvenience	Foye, Parker	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Red Between the Lines	Foyes, Parker	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Soul of the Pack	Frame, Jenny	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Charming the Vicar	Frame, Jenny	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Hunger for You	Frame, Jenny	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Julien	Frank, Ella & Blaine, Brooke	Self Published	USA	2018
Priest	Frank, Ella & Blaine, Brooke	Self Published	USA	2018
Robbie	Frank, Ella & Blaine, Brooke	Self Published	USA	2018
The Bibliophile	Frayne, Drew Marvin	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Three's the Charm	Friday, P.A.	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Crossing the Line	Frizzell, CF	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
King Geordi the Great	Gant, Gene	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Amending Plans	Corett, CM	NineStar Press	USA	2018
King Consort	Gray, J.R.	Self Published	USA	2018
Pride and Porters	Greene, Charlotte	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Twice in a Lifetime	Griffin, Jodie	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Somewhere Over Lorain Road	Gundy, Bud	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
And The Next Thing You Know…	Hackett, Chase Taylor	Lyrical Press	USA	2018
Where There's A Will	Hale, Virginia	Bella Books	USA	2018
Undiscovered Affinity	Hardee, Jane	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Listen to Your Heart	Harmon, Becky	Bella Books	USA	2018
A Treason of Truths	Harper, Ada	Carina Press	USA	2018
Add Romance and Mix	Harris, Shannon M.	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
The Four Seasons	Harrison, Heidi	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
Shadow of the Phoenix	Harwell, Rebecca	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Like a Book	Hawkins, Bette	Bella Books	USA	2018
A Fighting Chance	Hayes, T.L.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Where Death Meets the Devil	Hayward, L.J.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Just a Bit Gay	Hazard, Alessandra	Self Published	USA	2018
That Irresistible Poison	Hazard, Alessandra	Self Published	USA	2018
After Hours	Haze, Emjay	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Paradigm	Heidt, Yvonne	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
Faith	Hellshire, Archie	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Detour	Herberth, Reesa and Moore, Michelle	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
The Neighbor	Hill, Gerri	Bella Books	USA	2018
Death of a Bachelor	Hinkle, M.A.	NineStar Press	USA	2018
The Northwoods	Hoppen, Jane	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Love Blooms	Hoyt, Stephanie	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Twisted Deception	Isabella	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
Pink Slip	Jackson, Katrina	Self Published	USA	2018
Just for Show	Jae	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
Paper Love	Jae	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
Running Blind	Jakes, SE	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
More Perfect	Janaka, Daniel	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Building Forever	Jensen, Kelly	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Chasing Forever	Jensen, Kelly	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Renewing Forever	Jensen, Kelly	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
To See the Sun	Jensen, Kelly	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
McCall	Jordan, Patricia Evans	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
London	Jordan, Patricia Evans	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
My Lady Lipstick	Kallmaker, Karin	Bella Books	USA	2018
Let's Talk About Love	Kann, Claire	Swoon Reads	USA	2018
Face It	Kaplan, Georgette	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
Precipice of Doubt	Eichler, Laurie and Alexander, Mardi	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
The Music and the Mirror	Keeley, Lola	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
My Crunchy Life	Kerick, Mia	Harmony Ink Press	USA	2018
Sound of Silence	Kerick, Mia and O'Tierney, Raine	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Dead Wrong	Kevern, Gillian St.	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Life After Humanity	Kevern, Gillian St.	NineStar Press	USA	2018

Construction	Keys, Jon	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Wrestling with Destiny	Keys, Jon	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Aerie	Keys, Jon	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Cracking Love	King, Emily	Bella Books	USA	2018
Cash Plays	Kingsbridge, Cordelia	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
One-Eyed Royals	Kingsbridge, Cordelia	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Trick Roller	Kingsbridge, Cordelia	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
In Fashion	Klaire, Jody	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
A New Beginning for Angelo	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Rocked Hard	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Switching Places	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Fighting for All	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Kink Aware	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
The Last Time I Saw Her	Knowles, Kathleen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
A Chance in Time	Lance, Naomi	Bella Books	USA	2018
Romancing the Kicker	Lane, Catherine	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
Murder Takes the High Road	Lanyon, Josh	Carina Press	USA	2018
Mercy	Larkin, Michelle	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Unexpected Partners	Larkin, Michelle	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Find Another You	Layer, RJ	Bella Books	USA	2018
Kindling for the Heart	Legasy, Karen	Bella Books	USA	2018
Take a Chance	Leigh, D. Jackson	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Seer and the Shield	Leigh, D. Jackson	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Soul to Keep	Leigh, Garrett	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
A Heart to Call Home	Levig, Jeannie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
A Wish Upon A Star	Levig, Jeannie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
The Power to Choose	Libero, Sarah	Bella Books	USA	2018
Rocky Road of Love… In Heels	Livings, Liam	NineStar Press	USA	2018
The Journalist and the Dancer	Livings, Liam	NineStar Press	USA	2018
A Matter of Justice	Long, J.C.	NineStar Press	USA	2018
On Andross Station	Long, J.C.	NineStar Press	USA	2018
How We Sell Our Souls	Lucadamo, Emilie	NineStar Press	USA	2018
London, Actually	Lydon, Clare	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
The London of Us	Lydon, Clare	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
A Proper Cuppa Tea	MacGregor, K.G.	Bella Books	USA	2018
Object of Desire	Maclean, Dal	Blind Eye Books	USA	2018
A Recipe for Love	Madison, Lucy J.	Self Published	USA	2018
Highland Dew	Magill, Barrett	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
Between the Lines	Malcolm, Sally	Carina Press	USA	2018
Perfect Day	Malcolm, Sally	Carina Press	USA	2018
After the Glitter Fades	Marina, Diane	Self Published	USA	2018
How Still My Love	Marina, Diane	Self Published	USA	2018
Reclaiming Yancy	Marsden, JB	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
The Travels of Charlie	Marsden, JB	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
All the World's an Undead Stage	Martinez, Angel	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Hearts Inn	Mason, Lily R.	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
A Lady's Desire	Maxton, Lily	Self Published	USA	2018
A Scot's Surrender	Maxton, Lily	Self Published	USA	2018
His Cocky Valet	McCade, Cole	Self Published	USA	2018
Love Eternal	McCoy, Nikki	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Taking Chances	McKenzie, Erin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Beowulf for Cretins	McMan, Ann	Bywater Books	USA	2018
Frozen Dreams	McMullen, Liz	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
Undone by You	Meader, Kate	Pocket Star	USA	2018
Vengeance	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2018
Wait for Me	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2018
Lock Nut	Merrow, J.L.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Love at First Hate	Merrow, J.L.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
One Under	Merrow, J.L.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Big Man	Metzger, Matthew J.	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Life Underwater	Metzger, Matthew J.	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Between Sand and Stardust	Michele, Tina	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
The Pursuit Of…	Milan, Courtney	Self Published	USA	2018
Bad Habit	Mitchell, K.A.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Lovebirds	Moreau, Lisa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Oz	Morton, Lily	Self Published	UK	2018
Risk Taker	Morton, Lily	Self Published	UK	2018
Falling into Place	Munir, Sheryn	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
Knotted Legacy	Murphy, Brenda	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Both Ends of the Whip	Murphy, Brenda	NineStar Press	USA	2018
The Bucket List	Murphy, CJ	Desert Palm Press	USA	2018
Bad Moon Arising	Mustafic, CL	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Trouble's on the Way	Mustafic, CL	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Calling the Ball	Mustafic, CL	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Ghost's Dilemma	Navarre, Morwen	NineStar Press	USA	2018
The Calling	Neu, M.D.	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Second Chance	Northcote, Jay	Self Published	UK	2018
Pretty in Pink	Northcote, Jay	Self Published	UK	2018
Safe Place	Northcote, Jay	Self Published	UK	2018
Ask Me Again	Noyes, E. J.	Bella Books	USA	2018
Gold	Noyes, E. J.	Bella Books	USA	2018
The Sex Therapist Next Door	O'Brien, Meghan	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
The Craft of Love	Ottoman, E.E.	Self Published	USA	2018
Natural Enemies	Parrish, Roan	Monster Books	UK	2018
Rend	Parrish, Roan	Loveswept	USA	2018
Riven	Parrish, Roan	Loveswept	USA	2018
The Pyramid and the Painting	Peck, Kayt	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
When Katie Met Cassidy	Perri, Camille	Piatkus	Global	2018
Irresistible	Peters, Andrew J	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Changing Seasons	Phillips, BJ	Desert Palm Press	USA	2018
The Breaths We Take	Piner, Huston	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Lunav	Polish, Jenn	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Love Came Calling	Popovich, C.A.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Second In Command	Powell, VK	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018

Take Your Time	Powell, VK	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Damaged	Pritekel, Kim	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
The Gift	Pritekel, Kim	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2018
Worth Searching For	Qualls, Wendy	Lyrical Press	USA	2018
Dangerous Waters	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Passionate Rivals	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Darkling	Ray, Brooklyn	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Bigger Love	Reed, Rick R.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Sky Full of Mysteries	Reed, Rick R.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Game Changer	Reid, Rachel	Carina Press	USA	2018
Autumn's Light	Rey, Aurora	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Spring's Wake	Rey, Aurora	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Craft Brew	Reyne, Layla	Carina Press	USA	2018
Imperial Stout	Reyne, Layla	Carina Press	USA	2018
A Call Away	Richardson, KC	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Media Darling	Riley, Fiona	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Room Service	Riley, Fiona	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
When It's Time	Riley, Zane	Interlude Press	USA	2018
Sweethearts	Gilmore, Gemma	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Knowing Me, Knowing You	Kaye, Renae	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
Food for Love	Fonseca, C.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
Epicurean Delights	Roman, Renee	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Stroke of Fate	Roman, Renee	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Breaking the Rules	Rose, Larkin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Jacob's Grace	Rowlands, C.P.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Blood Echo	Royal, L.E.	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Vampire with Benefits	Russell, E.J.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Single White Incubus	Russell, E.J.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Tested in Fire	Russell, E.J.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Surreal Estate	Ryan, Jesi Lea	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Berlin Hungers	Saracen, Justine	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Soul's Rescue	Schramm, Patty	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2018
Better Together	Schramm, Patty	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2018
Because of Kate	Schramm, Patty	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2018
Breaking Even	Schreiber, E.A.	Bella Books	USA	2018
Unmasked by the Marquess	Sebastian, Cat	Avon	Global	2018
A Gentleman Never Keeps Score	Sebastian, Cat	Avon	Global	2018
Terms of Service	Sexton, Marie	Self Published	USA	2018
Bird on a Wire	Shepard, Tagan	Bella Books	USA	2018
A Tiny Piece of Something Greater	Sierra, Jude	Interlude Press	USA	2018
Finding Michael	Slayer, Megan	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
All of Me	Smith, Emily	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Owned by the Sea	Somerton, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
Serving Him	Somerton, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2018
The Summer of Jordi Perez	Spalding, Amy	Sky Pony Press	USA	2018
In Development	Spangler, Rachel	Brisk Press	USA	2018
Unforgettable	Spencer, Elle	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
The Princess Deception	Stark, Nell	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Coffee and Conclusions	Sterner-Radley, Emma	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
Heart of the Dragon	Sullivan, Jamie	Less Than Three Press	USA	2018
Pisces Hooks Taurus	Sunday, Anyta	Self Published	Germany	2018
The Dangerous Art of Blending In	Surmelis, Angelo	Balzer + Bray	Global	2018
Jilted	Suzanne, Lilah	Interlude Press	USA	2018
Love's Verdict	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Outside the Law	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Pursuit of Happiness	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Concerto in Chroma Major	Tajedler, Naomi	Interlude Press	USA	2018
First Sight	Taylor, Jordan	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Data Capture	Thoma, Jesse J.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
On the Fly	Trebelhorn, PJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Twice in a Lifetime	Trebelhorn, PJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
The Coyote's Comfort	Trent, Holley	Self Published	USA	2018
Love at Last Call	Ullrich, M.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Force of Fire	Vali, Ali	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Heart of the Devil	Vali, Ali	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Diver Blues	Valletto, Barbara	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2018
Limbo	Valletto, Barbara	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2018
Mad & Marvelous	Varlet, Elizabeth	Carina Press	USA	2018
Love at Cooper's Creek	Vaun, Missouri	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Take My Hand	Vaun, Missouri	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Proxima Five	Vaun, Missouri	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
A Cook's Tale	Veerkamp, J. Alan	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Priest & Pariahs	Veerkamp, J. Alan	NineStar Press	USA	2018
The Luxorian Fugitive	Veerkamp, J. Alan	NineStar Press	USA	2018
On a Summer Night	Vidrine, Gabriel D.	NineStar Press	USA	2018
After the Weekend	Violet, Silvia	Self Published	USA	2018
Demanding Discipline	Violet, Silvia	Self Published	USA	2018
Father of the Groom	Violet, Silvia	Self Published	USA	2018
Painfully Attractive	Violet, Silvia	Self Published	USA	2018
Holding Their Place	Wacker, Kelly	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Sugar and Ice	Wallace, Brooklyn	Self Published	USA	2018
Pleasure Cruise	Wallace, Yolanda	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Seascape	Walsh, Karis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Threepeat	Wells, K.C. and Williams, Parker	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2018
When the Stars Sang	Werlinger, Caren J.	Bella Books	USA	2018
A Fated Bond	West, T.L.	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Surface Tension	Wheeler, Valentine	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Hard Truths	Whitehall, Alex	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Magic Runs Deep	Whitehall, Alex	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
2230: The Perfect Year	Corett, CM	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Dedicated	Wilder, Neve	Self Published	USA	2018
As the Crow Flies	Williams, Karen F.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Drawing the Line	Williamson, KD	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
Broken Vows	Williamz, MJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018

Exposed	Williamz, MJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Score	Williamz, MJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Chosen	Willows, Brey	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Fury's Death	Willows, Brey	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Possibilities	Field, Nicole	Less Than Three Press	USA	2018
Running with Lions	Winters, Julian	Duet Books	USA	2018
Going Overboard	Witt, L.A.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Once Burned	Witt, L.A.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Sink or Swim	Witt, L.A.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Wash Out	Witt, L.A.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
Romantic Behavior	Witt, L.A. and Z, Cari	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
The Talebearer	Wohl, Sheri Lewis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
A Mage's Power	Wolfe, Casey	NineStar Press	USA	2018
The Tattered Lands	Wright, Barbara Ann	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Queen of Hearts	Wright, Sheryl	Bella Books	USA	2018
Hard Bitten	York, M.K.	Carina Press	USA	2018
Out and Proud	Young, Lisa	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2018
Counterpoint	Zabo, Anna	Carina Press	USA	2018
Syncopation	Zabo, Anna	Carina Press	USA	2018
Breaking Down Her Walls	Zak, Erin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
Irregular Heartbeat	Zett, Chris	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2018
Certain Requirements	Zimmerman, Elinor	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2018
A Deceptive Alliance	Blackburn, Sydney	NineStar Press	USA	2018
Smoke Signals	Katz, Meredith	Less Than Three Press	USA	2018
Shelter from the Storm	Sherwood, Kate	Riptide Publishing	USA	2018
The Doctor's Date	Cullinan, Heidi	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
The Doctor's Orders	Cullinan, Heidi	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
Out of the Ashes	James, MJ	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Thursday Afternoons	Richardson, Tracey	Bella Books	USA	2019
The Doctor's Secret	Cullinan, Heidi	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
The Song of the Sea	Alexander, Jenn	Bywater Books	USA	2019
Where We Are	McDonald, Annie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Faux Ho Ho	Burgoine, 'Nathan	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
One Step at a Time	Adcock, Brenda	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2019
Ashore	Adler, Isabelle	NineStar Press	USA	2019
The Wolf and the Sparrow	Adler, Isabelle	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Arctic Sun	Albert, Annabeth	Carina Press	USA	2019
Arctic Wild	Albert, Annabeth	Carina Press	USA	2019
Rough Terrain	Albert, Annabeth	Carina Press	USA	2019
Jobyna's Blues	Alden, Jane	Desert Palm Press	USA	2019
Rocking Thin Ice	Allora, Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
The Longest Night	Allora, Z.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
Locked Down	Anastasi, Jess	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
Take Down	Anastasi, Jess	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
The First Step	Anthony, Shira	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
A Harmony of Fire and Earth	Aquilante, Antonia	NineStar Press	USA	2019
The Spymaster's Secret	Aquilante, Antonia	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Lucky Break	Arthur, A.M.	Carina Press	USA	2019
A Noble Cause	Ashling, Mickie B	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Burn It Down	Aten, K.	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2019
Embracing Forever	Aten, K.	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2019
Running from Forever	Aten, K.	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2019
Double Down	Austin, MB	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Waking Up the Sun	Bailo, Laura	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Stealing His Heart	Baker, Bru	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
A Pocketful of Stardust	Barnaby, JP and Speedwell, Rowan	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
We Still Live	Bauer, Sara Dobie	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Escaping Mortality	Bauer, Sara Dobie	NineStar Press	USA	2019
You, Me, U.S.	Bautista, Brigitte	Self Published	Philippines	2019
Fear of Falling	Beers, Georgia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
One Walk in Winter	Beers, Georgia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
The Do-Over	Beers, Georgia	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Saving Sam	Beers, Lynnette	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2019
Knight and Dai	Bigelow, Kay	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2019
The Shower	Bigelow, Kay	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2019
Killer Autumn	Bigelow, Kay	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2019
Killer Summer	Bigelow, Kay	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2019
One Small Step	Binfield, MA	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
The Last Seduction	Black, Ronica	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Just One Moment	Blake, Dena	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Next in Line for Love	Bliss, Harper	Self Published	Hong Kong	2019
SIO	Blocke, C.A.	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Valor	Roman, Karrie	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Top Secret	Bowen, Sarina and Kennedy, Elle	Self Published	USA	2019
Blood Vigilance	Bowie, J.P.	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Love on the Rocks	Bowie, J.P.	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Murder by Design	Bowie, J.P.	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Vetting the Cowboy	Bowie, J.P.	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Into the West	Bowie, J.P.	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
The Fight for Freedom	Bowie, J.P.	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
What Happens When	Boyette, Samantha	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
The 13th Month	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
The Jasper Soul	Bradford, Bailey	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Back to September	Brayden, Melissa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Beautiful Dreamer	Brayden, Melissa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Insult to Injury	Brooke, Gun	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Lunar Eclipse	Brooke, Gun	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Treason	Brooke, Gun	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
The Long Shot	Brooks, A.L.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
Write Your Own Script	Brooks, A.L.	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
Other Girls	Brooks, Avery	Bywater Books	USA	2019
To Change the Stars	Brown, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Treacherous Seas	Brown, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Reinventing Lindsey	Brown, Maggie	Bella Books	USA	2019

Falling	Bryant, Kris	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Listen	Bryant, Kris	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Tinsel	Bryant, Kris	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Counting on Love	Burgess, RL	Bella Books	USA	2019
Thorn	Burnke, Anna	Bywater Books	USA	2019
On the Subject of Griffons	Byrd, Lindsey	Riptide Publishing	USA	2019
Careful What You Wish For	Calhoun, Jackie	Bella Books	USA	2019
The Empress of Xytae	Calvin, Effie	NineStar Press	USA	2019
The Queen of Rhodia	Calvin, Effie	NineStar Press	USA	2019
For Your Eyes Only	Cannon, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Shut Up and Kiss Me	Cannon, Julie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Spark in the Stars	Cassidy, Foster Bridget	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
Breaking His Spell	Cassidy, Foster Bridget	NineStar Press	USA	2019
The Taking	Castro, Celeste	Bella Books	USA	2019
Mating Dance	Cayto, Samantha	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Healing Dance	Cayto, Samantha	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Smoke Dance	Cayto, Samantha	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Star Dance	Cayto, Samantha	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Any Old Diamonds	Charles, K.J.	Self Published	UK	2019
Gilded Cage	Charles, K.J.	Self Published	UK	2019
Proper English	Charles, K.J.	Self Published	UK	2019
The Rat-Catcher's Daughter	Charles, K.J.	Self Published	UK	2019
Aftermath	Chris, Tanya	Self Published	USA	2019
The Doctor Takes a Detour	Christopher, Bren	Riptide Publishing	USA	2019
Rearview Mirror	Clark, BL	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2019
Always a Love Song	Clarke, Charley	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
Playing Around	Clay, Suzanne	NineStar Press	USA	2019
All the Reasons I Need	Clevenger, Jaime	Bella Books	USA	2019
Kept in the Dark	Cochet, Charlie	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
The Leprechaun Next Door	Coldwell, Elizabeth	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
Once Ghosted, Twice Shy	Cole, Alyssa	Avon	Global	2019
A Prince on Paper	Cole, Alyssa	Avon	Global	2019
Third Time's the Charm	Coles, K. Evan	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Forbidden Bond	Colgin, Lee	NineStar Press	USA	2019
My Summer of Love	Collins, SA	NineStar Press	USA	2019
The Ashford Place	Copeland, Jean	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Of Ice and Shadows	Coulthurst, Audrey	Balzer + Bray	Global	2019
Innis Harbor	Cox, Patricia Evans	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2019
Tight Knit	Crabtree, Shaya	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
Sweet Bitter Honey	Crowe, Liz	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Perfect Partners	Cummings, Maggie	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
The Captain and the Best Man	Curzon, Catherine and Harkstead, Eleanor	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
The Captain and the Theatrical	Curzon, Catherine and Harkstead, Eleanor	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Game Changers	Cuthbertson, Jane	Launch Point Press	USA	2019
Vanished	Darry, Eden	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
The Lamar St. Jon Experience	David, Eliza	Self Published	USA	2019
New Ink on Life	Davids, Jennie	Carina Press	USA	2019
Playing with Fire	Davis, Lesley	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Modified and Sacred	Denardo, Jana	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Perfect Match	Digby, Mildred Gail	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2019
Perfect Match II	Digby, Mildred Gail	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2019
Uncovered	Digby, Mildred Gail	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2019
Hearts of Blood	Doherty, Kay	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Hearts of Fire	Doherty, Kay	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Hearts of Magic	Doherty, Kay	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Miranda in Milan	Duckett, Katharine	Tor.com	USA	2019
Wavering Convictions	Dutton, Erin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
How to Run with the Wolves	Easton, Eli	Self Published	USA	2019
Murder Most Lovely	Edwards, Hank and Wadsworth, Deanna	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
Gallows Humor	Elizabeth, Carolyn	Bella Books	USA	2019
To Love and to Cherish	Eradani, Tamryn	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Uninvited	Esther, Jane C.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
How to Talk to Nice English Girls	Evans, Gretchen	Carnation Books	USA	2019
Men of War	Faulkner, Lou	Manifold Press	UK	2019
Drawing the Prince	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
Redesigning Landry Bishop	Fielding, Kim	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
A Christmas Cabin for Two	Fisher, K.D.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
Love on the Hudson	Fisher, K.D.	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Tennessee Whiskey	Ford, Donna K.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Marry Him	Ford, Marina	Less Than Three Press	USA	2019
Hellion	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
Ramen Assassin	Ford, Rhys	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
Rising Above	Fortin, Genevieve	Bella Books	USA	2019
Blood of the Pack	Frame, Jenny	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Someone to Love	Frame, Jenny	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Wooing the Farmer	Frame, Jenny	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Royal Court	Frame, Jenny	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Peter Cratchitt's Christmas Carol	Frayne, Drew Marvin	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Goalie Interference	Gale, Avon and Vaughn, Piper	Riptide Publishing	USA	2019
Full of Promise	Gavin, Kate	Bella Books	USA	2019
A Bird of Sorrow	Godfrey, Shea	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Jordan vs. All the Boys	Goode, John	Harmony Ink Press	USA	2019
High October	Graf, Elena	Self Published	USA	2019
Legacy	Greene, Charlotte	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Midnight Flit	Gregory, Elin	Manifold Press	UK	2019
No Experience Required	Griffin, Kimberly Cooper	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
The Midnight Twelve	Hairann	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Master of Restless Shadows Book One	Hale, Ginn	Blind Eye Books	USA	2019
The Secret Chord	Hale, Virginia	Bella Books	USA	2019
How to Belong with a Billionaire	Hall, Alexis	Forever Yours	USA	2019
Kitten	Harbon, Jack	Self Published	USA	2019
A Town Called Noelle	Hardy, M.K.	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Brace for Impact	Harmon, Becky	Bella Books	USA	2019
Blueprint for Romance	Harris, Shannon M.	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2019

In My Heart	Hawkins, Bette	Bella Books	USA	2019
Her Royal Highness	Hawkins, Rachel	G.P. Putnam's Sons	USA	2019
Gotta Catch Her	Haworth, Kelly	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Just a Bit Dirty	Hazard, Alessandra	Self Published	USA	2019
Once Upon a Time	Hazard, Alessandra	Self Published	USA	2019
The Midspring Rebellion	Heron, Doreen	NineStar Press	USA	2019
American Fairytale	Herrera, Adriana	Carina Press	USA	2019
American Love Story	Herrera, Adriana	Carina Press	USA	2019
American Dreamer	Herrera, Adriana	Carina Press	USA	2019
That Kind of Guy	Hibbert, Talia	Self Published	UK	2019
After the Summer Rain	Hill, Gerri	Bella Books	USA	2019
Diamond Heart	Hinkle, M.A.	NineStar Press	USA	2019
The Perfect Shine	Hogan, J.K.	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Safe Haven	Hoil, Ellen	Desert Palm Press	USA	2019
In the Palm	Holst, Elna	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Wild Bells	Holst, Elna	NineStar Press	USA	2019
The Wrong McElroy	Hughes, KL	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
Breathe	Hunter, Cari	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Going Off Script	Wilde, Jen	Swoon Reads	USA	2019
Grimmer Intentions	Hutchins, Jodi	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Blood Is Forever	Idonea, Asta	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Cigar Barons	Isabella	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2019
Faithful Valor	Isabella	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2019
Neighborly	Jackson, Katrina	Self Published	USA	2019
Not the Marrying Kind	Jae	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
The Roommate Arrangement	Jae	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
If I Ever	Jakes, SE	Riptide Publishing	USA	2019
Running on Empty	Jakes, SE	Riptide Publishing	USA	2019
Chasing the Dream	James, Ann Marie	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Cranberry Boys	James, Scudder Jr	Harmony Ink Press	USA	2019
Northwest of Normal	Jones, Blue	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Strip Me	Justice, Margay Leah	Pocket Star	USA	2019
Because I Said So	Kallmaker, Karin	Bella Books	USA	2019
The Woman at the Edge of Town	Kaplan, Georgette	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
Brush Strokes	Karlquist, E.S.	Interlude Press	USA	2019
Relationship Material	Keefe, Jenya	Riptide Publishing	USA	2019
The Musician and the Monster	Keefe, Jenya	Riptide Publishing	USA	2019
Major Surgery	Keeley, Lola	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
Slammed	Keeley, Lola	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
Painted Over	Keren, Sofi	Bella Books	USA	2019
The Princess of Baker Street	Kerick, Mia	Harmony Ink Press	USA	2019
The Scarecrow & George C	Kerick, Mia	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Roping in His Heart	Keys, Jon	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Summer Desires	King, Emily	Bella Books	USA	2019
A Chip and a Chair	Kingsbridge, Cordelia	Riptide Publishing	USA	2019
Why We Fight	Klune, T.J.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
Copping an Attitude	Knight, Morticia	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Windows in the Mist	Lane, Trina	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Love's Portrait	Larner, Anna	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
A Heart This Big	Blue, Cheyenne	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
Ordinary is Perfect	Leigh, D. Jackson	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Time Turns	Lewis, C.B.	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Time Taken	Lewis, C.B.	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Searching for Home	Linden, Megan	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Kicking Up My Heels… In Heels	Livings, Liam	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Unlocking the Doctor's Heart	Livings, Liam	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Through the Tears	Lorien, Leigh M	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Made in London	Lydon, Clare	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
You're My Kind	Lydon, Clare	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
The House On Sandstone	MacGregor, K.G.	Bella Books	USA	2019
The Lucky Ones	MacGregor, K.G.	Bella Books	USA	2019
Hunter's Descent	MacTague, Lise	Bella Books	USA	2019
Destiny's Child	Magill, Barrett	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2019
Wounded Martyr	Maguire, Courtney	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Ready for Love	Maiorisi, Catherine	Bella Books	USA	2019
Bobbi and Soul	Marsden, JB	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2019
Prairie Hearts	Marsden, JB	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2019
Kickin' Rocks	Martin, Marianne K.	Bywater Books	USA	2019
Hooked on You	Matthews, Jenn	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
The Words Shimmer	Matthews, Jenn	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
No Good Men	McAlistair, Thea	NineStar Press	USA	2019
See the Light	McMurray, Kate	Carina Press	USA	2019
The Unbinding of Mary Reade	McNamara, Miriam	Sky Pony Press	USA	2019
Red, White & Royal Blue	McQuiston, Casey	St. Martin's Press	USA	2019
The Keeper's Daughter	Meagher, Susan X	Brisk Press	USA	2019
Perfect Match	Meiers, AG	Riptide Publishing	USA	2019
Love Under Glasse	Meister, Kristina	Riptide Publishing	USA	2019
The Story of Us	Meredith, Logan	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Counter Culture	Merrow, J.L.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2019
The Divorce	Metzger, Matthew J.	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
The Other Man	Metzger, Matthew J.	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Best Behaviour	Metzger, Matthew J.	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Coffee	Metzger, Matthew J.	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Tea	Metzger, Matthew J.	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Anyone But You	Michaels, Brien	Riptide Publishing	USA	2019
Fearless	Michele, Tina	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Mrs. Martin's Incomparable Adventure	Milan, Courtney	Self Published	USA	2019
All the Worlds Between Us	Miller, Morgan Lee	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Hammers, Strings, and Beautiful Things	Miller, Morgan Lee	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Two for the Road	Milne, Alexa	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
You Matter	Mitchell, Jazzy	Desert Palm Press	USA	2019
A Moment in Time	Moreau, Lisa	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Milo	Morton, Lily	Self Published	UK	2019

Double Six	Murphy, Brenda	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Complex Dimensions	Murphy, Brenda	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Forever Chance	Murphy, CJ	Desert Palm Press	USA	2019
Gold Star Chance	Murphy, CJ	Desert Palm Press	USA	2019
TAD	Neu, M.D.	NineStar Press	USA	2019
A Girl Like Me	Nichole, J.	Self Published	USA	2019
Pulse of My Heart	Noelle, Jessi	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Through the Inferno	Noelle, Jessi	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Mud & Lace	Northcote, Jay	Self Published	UK	2019
Alone	Noyes, E. J.	Bella Books	USA	2019
If the Shoe Fits	Noyes, E. J.	Bella Books	USA	2019
Music City Dreamers	Nyx, Robyn	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Uncharted	Nyx, Robyn	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Blood and Roses	Panichi, MB	Bella Books	USA	2019
The Sun and Moon Beneath the Stars	Parr, K.	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Raze	Parrish, Roan	Loveswept	USA	2019
Just a Touch Away	Paynter, Chris	Self Published	UK	2019
Me and You Two	Penn, Ash	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Lord of the Last Heartbeat	Peterson, May	Carina Press	USA	2019
The Stars and the Blackness Between Them	Petrus, Junauda	Dutton Books	USA	2019
Savor the Moment	Piccoli, Dana	Bella Books	USA	2019
Incognito	Powell, VK	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Line of Duty	Powell, VK	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Smile Number Seven	Price, Melissa	Bella Books	USA	2019
Ostakis	Primm, Angelica	NineStar Press	USA	2019
The Plan	Pritekel, Kim	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2019
Cost of Honor	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Love to the Rescue	Radclyffe	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Becoming	Reames, Jeanne	Riptide Publishing	USA	2019
Rise	Reames, Jeanne	Riptide Publishing	USA	2019
Blue Umbrella Sky	Reed, Rick R.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
Torn	Reed, Rick R.	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
Heated Rivalry	Reid, Rachel	Carina Press	USA	2019
Lead Counsel	Rey, Aurora	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Recipe for Love	Rey, Aurora	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
The Inn at Netherfield Green	Rey, Aurora	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Dine With Me	Reyne, Layla	Carina Press	USA	2019
Noble Hops	Reyne, Layla	Carina Press	USA	2019
Not Since You	Riley, Fiona	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
The Dragon's Rebel	Rohrbach, Jacqueline	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Parallel Larry	Rohrbach, Jacqueline	NineStar Press	USA	2019
A Curious Woman	Lea, Jess	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
Upside Down	Walker, N.R.	Self Published	Australia	2019
Beyond Identity	Roman, Karrie	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Where the Lies Hide	Roman, Renee	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
All She Wants	Rose, Larkin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Dangerous Curves	Rose, Larkin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Blood Lust	Royal, L.E.	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Never Knew Until You	Royal, L.E.	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Demon on the Down-Low	Russell, E.J.	Riptide Publishing	USA	2019
Sara's Choice	Schramm, Patty	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2019
Hard Fall	Scott, Pascal	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2019
Hard Luck	Scott, Pascal	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2019
A Delicate Deception	Sebastian, Cat	Avon	Global	2019
A Duke in Disguise	Sebastian, Cat	Avon	Global	2019
A Little Light Mischief	Sebastian, Cat	Avon	Global	2019
Finding Sky	Sellars, Cass	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Unexpected Lightning	Sellars, Cass	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Spare the Rod	Sexton, Marie	Self Published	USA	2019
Across the Dark Horizon	Shepard, Tagan	Bella Books	USA	2019
The X Ingredient	Sinclair, Roslyn	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
Rocking Cedarwood	Slayer, Megan	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Scoring in Cedarwood	Slayer, Megan	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
You and Me Again	Slayer, Megan	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Something Like Gravity	Smith, Amber	Margaret K. McElderry Books	USA	2019
Trusting Him	Somerton, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Elemental Faith	Somerton, L.M.	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Spanish Surrender	Spangler, Rachel	Brisk Press	USA	2019
Fire & Ice	Spangler, Rachel	Bywater Books	USA	2019
Full English	Spangler, Rachel	Bywater Books	USA	2019
Abundance	Spark, Emmalynn	NineStar Press	USA	2019
30 Dates in 30 Days	Spencer, Elle	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
The Road to Madison	Spencer, Elle	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Secrets in a Small Town	Stiling, Nicole	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Strings Attached	Stratimore, Holly	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Fare Game	Strong, Cade Haddock	Bella Books	USA	2019
Leading the Witness	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Practice Makes Perfect	Taite, Carsen	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Bound to Liberty	Taye, Kiru	Love Africa Press	UK	2019
He Dreams Magic	Taylor, Emme C	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Without Pretense	Thomas, TJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
My Baby Chased Away the Blues	Thorn, R.A.	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Face Off	Trebelhorn, PJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Writing Her In	Trent, Holley	Carina Press	USA	2019
Laurel Cove	Turtle, Sarah	Sapphire Books Publishing	USA	2019
Pretending in Paradise	Ullrich, M.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Top of Her Game	Ullrich, M.	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Double-Crossed	Vali, Ali	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Stormy Seas	Vali, Ali	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Chasing Sunset	Vaun, Missouri	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Spencer's Cove	Vaun, Missouri	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Aspen in Moonlight	Wacker, Kelly	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019

The Lady's Guide to Celestial Mechanics	Waite, Olivia	Avon	Global	2019
Changing the Script	Winter, Lee	Ylva Publishing	Germany	2019
Heart of a Killer	Wallace, Yolanda	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Comrade Cowgirl	Wallace, Yolanda	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Love on Lavender Lane	Walsh, Karis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Sit. Stay. Love.	Walsh, Karis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Play it Again	Wayne, Aidan	Carina Press	USA	2019
Xeni	Weatherspoon, Rebekah	Self Published	USA	2019
A Chapter on Love	Webber, Laney	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
On the Same Page	Wells, K.C. and Williams, Parker	Dreamspinner Press	USA	2019
Their Troublesome Crush	West, Xan	Self Published	USA	2019
Love and Tea Bags	White, CF	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Won't Be Fooled Again	White, CF	Pride Publishing	UK	2019
Sons of Rome	Roman, Karrie	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Resonance	Wilder, Neve	Self Published	USA	2019
Model Behavior	Williamz, MJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Scene of the Crime	Williamz, MJ	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Changing Course	Willows, Brey	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Spinning Tales	Willows, Brey	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Severed	Husk, Shona	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Drawing Down the Mist	Wohl, Sheri Lewis	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
A Vampire's Redemption	Wolfe, Casey	NineStar Press	USA	2019
The Cursed Heart	Wormsley, Bonnie	Flashpoint Publications	USA	2019
Not Your Average Love Spell	Wright, Barbara Ann	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Cause and Affection	Wright, Sheryl	Bella Books	USA	2019
All or Nothing	Y.T., Riina	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Bend For Me	Yeh, Jessica	Desert Palm Press	USA	2019
Human Enough	YU, E.S.	NineStar Press	USA	2019
Reverb	Zabo, Anna	Carina Press	USA	2019
Beautiful Accidents	Zak, Erin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019
Create a Life to Love	Zak, Erin	Bold Strokes Books	USA	2019

APPENDIX 3: READER SURVEY

1. Have you ever read a queer (LGBTQ+ romance novel?
    a. Yes
    b. No

    NB: If option b) is chosen the questionnaire will end here as they do not meet the participant qualifications (Text show to participants: Thank you for wanting to participate in this research project, unfortunately you do not meet the necessary requirements at this time.)

2. How many queer romance novels do you read a year?
    a. 1 - 10
    b. 11 - 20
    c. 21 - 30
    d. 41 - 50
    e. 51+

3. How many romance novels (including queer romances) do you read a year?
    a. 1 - 10
    b. 11 - 20
    c. 21 - 30
    d. 41 - 50
    e. 51+

4. Have you read queer romance novels featuring the following genders and sexualities (tick all that apply)
    a. Aromantic
        i. Aromantic Woman
        ii. Aromantic Man
        iii. Aromantic Non-binary
    b. Asexual

    i. Asexual Woman
    ii. Asexual Man
    iii. Asexual Non-binary
c. Bisexual
    i. Bisexual Woman
    ii. Bisexual Man
    iii. Bisexual Non-binary
d. Demisexual
    i. Demisexual Woman
    ii. Demisexual Man
    iii. Demisexual Non-binary
e. Gay
    i. Gay Man
    ii. Gay Non-binary
f. Genderfluid
g. Genderqueer
h. Intersex
i. Lesbian
    i. Lesbian Woman
    ii. Lesbian Non-binary
j. Non-binary
k. Pansexual
    i. Pansexual Woman
    ii. Pansexual Man
    iii. Pansexual Non-binary
l. Polyamorous
m. Queer
    i. Queer Woman
    ii. Queer Man
    iii. Queer Non-binary
n. Transgender
    i. Transgender Woman

        ii. Transgender Man
    o. Other:

5. What sub-genres of romance (excluding queer romances) do you read (tick all that apply)
    a. Christian
    b. Contemporary
    c. Erotic
    d. Fantasy
    e. Gothic
    f. Historical
    g. Medical
    h. New Adult
    i. Paranormal
    j. Regency
    k. Science-Fiction
    l. Suspense
    m. Western
    n. Young Adult
    o. None

6. What sub-genres of queer romance do you read (tick all that apply)
    a. Christian
    b. Contemporary
    c. Erotic
    d. Fantasy
    e. Gothic
    f. Historical
    g. Medical
    h. New Adult
    i. Paranormal
    j. Regency

k. Science-Fiction
l. Suspense
m. Western
n. Young Adult

7. Which of the following publishers/imprints have you in past or currently do read queer romance novels from?
    a. Avon Impulse
    b. Balzer + Bray
    c. Bella Books
    d. Berkley
    e. Berkley Australia
    f. Blind Eye Books
    g. Bold Strokes Books
    h. Bywater Books
    i. Carina Adores
    j. Carina Press
    k. Crimson Romance
    l. Dreamspinner Press
    m. Duet Books
    n. Ellora's Cave
    o. Entangled Publishing
    p. Flirt
    q. Forever
    r. Forever Yours
    s. Harlequin
    t. Interlude
    u. InterMix
    v. Kensington
    w. Less Than Three Press
    x. Loose Id
    y. Loveswept

z. Lyrical Press
aa. Manifold Press
bb. NineStar Press
cc. Piatkus
dd. Pocket Books
ee. Riptide Publishing
ff. Samhain Publishing
gg. Self-Published
hh. Swoon Reads
ii. Ylva Publishing
jj. I don't know / I don't notice publishers
kk. Other

8. Please rank the following tropes/themes by how much you like them when they appear in queer romance novels (Love, Like, Neutral, Dislike, Hate)
    a. BDSM/Kink
    b. Chosen family/community
    c. Fake relationship
    d. Finds Love, comes out
    e. First queer relationship
    f. Forbidden love
    g. Friends with Benefits to Lovers
    h. HEA (Happily Ever After)
    i. HFN (Happy for Now)
    j. May/December relationship
    k. Ménage or polyamorous
    l. mPreg
    m. Opposites Attract
    n. Polyamorous
    o. Queer only for you
    p. Same-sex marriage or historical equivalent

9. How long have you been reading romance novels?
    a. 30+ years
    b. 20 – 29 years
    c. 15 – 19 years
    d. 10 – 14 years
    e. 5 – 9 years
    f. 1 – 4 years
    g. Less than a year

10. How long have you been reading queer romance novels?
    a. 30+ years
    b. 20 – 29 years
    c. 15 – 19 years
    d. 10 – 14 years
    e. 5 – 9 years
    f. 1 – 4 years
    g. Less than a year

11. Do you predominantly read romance novels featuring straight cisgender main characters?
    a. Yes
    b. No

12. Do you predominantly read romance novels featuring LGBTQ+ main characters?
    a. Yes
    b. No

13. Do you feel you belong to a community of readers who read queer romance novels?
    a. Yes

b. No
c. NB: if Yes is ticked question 14 will be shown, if not they will skip to question 15

14. How do you engage with other queer romance novel readers? (Tick all that apply)
    a. In person via a reading group
    b. In person via events at the local library or bookstore
    c. In person via national or international reader conferences
    d. Online by listening to podcasts
    e. Online through dedicated queer romance blogs
    f. Online through Facebook
    g. Online through Goodreads
    h. Online through Instagram
    i. Online through Tumblr
    j. Online through Twitter
    k. None of the above
    l. Other:

15. Where do you acquire queer romance novels from?
    a. From the publisher's website
    b. Local independent bookshops
    c. National bookshops (like Waterstones, Barnes & Nobles etc)
    d. Online (from Amazon etc)
    e. Second-hand or charity bookshops
    f. Library
    g. Other

16. In what format do you predominantly consume queer romance novels?
    a. Audio
    b. eBook

c. Hardback
d. Paperback

17. How do you discover new queer romance novels?
    a. Bestseller list
    b. Friend/relative recommendation
    c. From other readers via social media (like Twitter, Goodreads, Instagram etc)
    d. In-store displays or staff recommendations
    e. Online through retailer suggestions (Amazon or Goodreads recommendations)
    f. Online via author's website
    g. Online via book blogs
    h. Online via publisher's website
    i. Through author emails
    j. Through podcasts
    k. Through publisher emails
    l. Through retailer emails
    m. Other

18. How diverse do you feel the protagonists in queer romance novels are?
    a. Not at all diverse
    b. Somewhat diverse
    c. Fairly diverse
    d. Extremely diverse

    NB: If d) is select question 21 will show. If option a) to c) is selected participants will go to question 19

19. What type of diversity is still needed in the queer romance genre? (Tick all that apply)
    a. More age diversity (more middle age etc characters)

b. More disabled diversity (physically and mentally disabled characters)
c. More gender diversity (more transgender, non-binary etc characters)
d. More racial diversity (more Black, Asian etc characters
e. More romantic diversity (more aromantic characters and open relationships etc)
f. More sexual diversity (more pansexual, asexual etc characters)

20. What type of representation is most needed within the queer romance genre as whole? (rank on a scale of 1 -6 with 1 being the most important)
    a. Age diversity
    b. Disabled diversity
    c. Gender diversity
    d. Racial/ethnic diversity
    e. Romantic diversity
    f. Sexual diversity

21. What are your three favourite queer romance novels (title and author)?
    a. Book 1:
    b. Book 2:
    c. Book 3:

22. What are your three favourite authors of queer romance novels?
    a. Author 1:
    b. Author 2:
    c. Author 3:

23. How often do you feel real-life LGBTQ+ milestones are represented in the queer romance novels you read?

a. Never
b. Rarely
c. Often
d. Always

24. How did you hear about this survey?

25. What is your racial or ethnic identity?

26. What is your nationality? (drop down box of countries)

27. What is your age?
    a. 0 – 18
    b. 19 – 24
    c. 25 – 34
    d. 35 – 44
    e. 45 – 54
    f. 55 – 65
    g. 65 – 74
    h. 75+

28. What is your gender identity?
    a. Agender
    b. Cisgender Woman
    c. Cisgender Man
    d. Intersex
    e. Non-binary
    f. Genderfluid
    g. Genderqueer
    h. Transgender Woman
    i. Transgender Man
    j. Prefer not to say
    k. Other

29. What is your sexual identity? (tick all that apply)
    a. Aromantic
    b. Asexual
    c. Bisexual
    d. Demisexual
    e. Gay
    f. Lesbian
    g. Pansexual
    h. Polyamorous
    i. Queer
    j. Questioning
    k. Straight or heterosexual
    l. Prefer not to say
    m. Other

30. If applicable please specify your religion?
    a. Agnostic
    b. Atheist
    c. Buddhism
    d. Christian
    e. Hinduism
    f. Islam
    g. Judaism
    h. Sikh
    i. Spiritual
    j. Wiccan/Pagan
    k. Prefer not to say
    l. Other

31. Have you been diagnosed with any disability or impairment?
    a. Yes

b. No
c. Prefer not to say

32. If you would be willing to participate in a focus group with other queer romance readers, expanding on some of the topics covered in this survey, please submit your email address below. It will only be used to contact you about the focus group and will not be shared with any third parties.

APPENDIX 4: WRITER SURVEY

1. Have you ever written a queer (LGBTQ+) romance novel?
    a. Yes
    b. No

    NB: If option b) is chosen the questionnaire will end here as they do not meet the participant qualifications (Text show to participants: Thank you for wanting to participate in this research project, unfortunately you do not meet the necessary requirements at this time.)

2. How many queer romance novels have you written?
    a. 1 - 5
    b. 6 - 10
    c. 11 - 15
    d. 16+

3. How many romance novels (including queer romances) have you written?
    a. 1 - 5
    b. 6 - 10
    c. 11 - 15
    d. 16+

4. Have you written queer romance novels featuring the following genders and sexualities (tick all that apply)
    a. Aromantic
        i. Aromantic Woman
        ii. Aromantic Man
        iii. Aromantic Non-binary
    b. Asexual
        i. Asexual Woman
        ii. Asexual Man

    iii. Asexual Non-binary
c. Bisexual
    i. Bisexual Woman
    ii. Bisexual Man
    iii. Bisexual Non-binary
d. Demisexual
    i. Demisexual Woman
    ii. Demisexual Man
    iii. Demisexual Non-binary
e. Gay
    i. Gay Man
    ii. Gay Non-binary
f. Genderfluid
g. Genderqueer
h. Intersex
i. Lesbian
    i. Lesbian Woman
    ii. Lesbian Non-binary
j. Non-binary
k. Pansexual
    i. Pansexual Woman
    ii. Pansexual Man
    iii. Pansexual Non-binary
l. Polyamorous
m. Queer
    i. Queer Woman
    ii. Queer Man
    iii. Queer Non-binary
n. Transgender
    i. Transgender Woman
    ii. Transgender Man
o. Other:

5. What sub-genres of romance (excluding queer romances) have you written (tick all that apply)
    a. Christian
    b. Contemporary
    c. Erotic
    d. Fantasy
    e. Gothic
    f. Historical
    g. Medical
    h. New Adult
    i. Paranormal
    j. Regency
    k. Science-Fiction
    l. Suspense
    m. Western
    n. Young Adult
    o. None

6. What sub-genres of queer romance have you written? (tick all that apply)
    a. Christian
    b. Contemporary
    c. Erotic
    d. Fantasy
    e. Gothic
    f. Historical
    g. Medical
    h. New Adult
    i. Paranormal
    j. Regency
    k. Science-Fiction

l. Suspense
m. Western
n. Young Adult

7. Which of the following publishers/imprints have you in past or currently published queer romance novels with?
    a. Avon Impulse
    b. Balzer + Bray
    c. Bella Books
    d. Berkley
    e. Berkley Australia
    f. Blind Eye Books
    g. Bold Strokes Books
    h. Bywater Books
    i. Carina Adores
    j. Carina Press
    k. Crimson Romance
    l. Dreamspinner Press
    m. Duet Books
    n. Ellora's Cave
    o. Entangled Publishing
    p. Flirt
    q. Forever
    r. Forever Yours
    s. Harlequin
    t. Interlude
    u. InterMix
    v. Kensington
    w. Less Than Three Press
    x. Loose Id
    y. Loveswept
    z. Lyrical Press

aa. Manifold Press
bb. NineStar Press
cc. Piatkus
dd. Pocket Books
ee. Riptide Publishing
ff. Samhain Publishing
gg. Self-Published
hh. Swoon Reads
ii. Ylva Publishing
jj. Other

8. Please rank the following tropes/themes by how often they appear in the queer romance novels you write (Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never)
    a. BDSM/Kink
    b. Chosen family/community
    c. Fake relationship
    d. Finds Love, comes out
    e. First queer relationship
    f. Forbidden love
    g. Friends with Benefits to Lovers
    h. HEA (Happily Ever After)
    i. HFN (Happy for Now)
    j. May/December relationship
    k. Ménage or polyamorous
    l. mPreg
    m. Opposites Attract
    n. Polyamorous
    o. Queer only for you
    p. Same-sex marriage or historical equivalent

9. How long have you been writing romance novels?

a. 30+ years
b. 20 – 29 years
c. 15 – 19 years
d. 10 – 14 years
e. 5 – 9 years
f. 1 – 4 years
g. Less than a year

10. How long have you been writing queer romance novels?
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11. Do you predominantly write romance novels featuring straight cisgender main characters?
    a. Yes
    b. No

12. Do you predominantly write romance novels featuring LGBTQ+ main characters?
    a. Yes
    b. No

13. Do you feel you belong to a community of novelists who write queer romance novels?
    a. Yes
    b. No

c. NB: if Yes is ticked question 14 will be shown, if not they will skip to question 15

14. How do you engage with other novelists writing queer romance novel? (Tick all that apply)
    a. In person via a writer's group
    b. In person via events at the local library or bookstore
    c. In person via national or international writer conferences
    d. Online by listening to podcasts
    e. Online through dedicated queer romance writer blogs
    f. Online through dedicated romance writer organisations
    g. Online through Facebook
    h. Online through Goodreads
    i. Online through Instagram
    j. Online through Tumblr
    k. Online through Twitter
    l. None of the above
    m. Other:

15. How diverse do you feel the protagonists in queer romance novels are?
    a. Not at all diverse
    b. Somewhat diverse
    c. Fairly diverse
    d. Extremely diverse

       NB: If d) is select question 21 will show. If option a) to c) is selected participants will go to question 19

16. What type of diversity is still needed in the queer romance genre? (Tick all that apply)
    a. More age diversity (more middle age etc characters)
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c. More gender diversity (more transgender, non-binary etc characters)
d. More racial diversity (more Black, Asian etc characters
e. More romantic diversity (more aromantic characters and open relationships etc)
f. More sexual diversity (more pansexual, asexual etc characters)

17. What type of diversity is most needed within the queer romance genre as whole? (rank on a scale of 1 -6 with 1 being the most important)
    a. Age diversity
    b. Disabled diversity
    c. Gender diversity
    d. Racial/ethnic diversity
    e. Romantic diversity
    f. Sexual diversity

18. How often do you consider/include LGBTQ+ milestones in the queer romance novels you write?
    a. Never
    b. Rarely
    c. Often
    d. Always

19. How did you hear about this survey?

20. What is your racial or ethnic identity?

21. What is your nationality? (drop down box of countries)

22. What is your age?
    a. 0 – 18
    b. 19 – 24

c. 25 – 34
d. 35 – 44
e. 45 – 54
f. 55 – 65
g. 65 – 74
h. 75+

23. What is your gender identity?
    a. Agender
    b. Cisgender Woman
    c. Cisgender Man
    d. Intersex
    e. Non-binary
    f. Genderfluid
    g. Genderqueer
    h. Transgender Woman
    i. Transgender Man
    j. Prefer not to say
    k. Other

24. What is your sexual identity? (tick all that apply)
    a. Aromantic
    b. Asexual
    c. Bisexual
    d. Demisexual
    e. Gay
    f. Lesbian
    g. Pansexual
    h. Polyamorous
    i. Queer
    j. Questioning
    k. Straight or heterosexual

l. Prefer not to say
m. Other

25. If applicable please specify your religion?
    a. Agnostic
    b. Atheist
    c. Buddhism
    d. Christian
    e. Hinduism
    f. Islam
    g. Judaism
    h. Sikh
    i. Spiritual
    j. Wiccan/Pagan
    k. Prefer not to say
    l. Other

26. Have you been diagnosed with any disability or impairment?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Prefer not to say

27. If you would be willing to participate in a focus group with other writers who write queer romances, expanding on some of the topics covered in this survey, please submit your email address below. It will only be used to contact you about the focus group and will not be shared with any third parties.