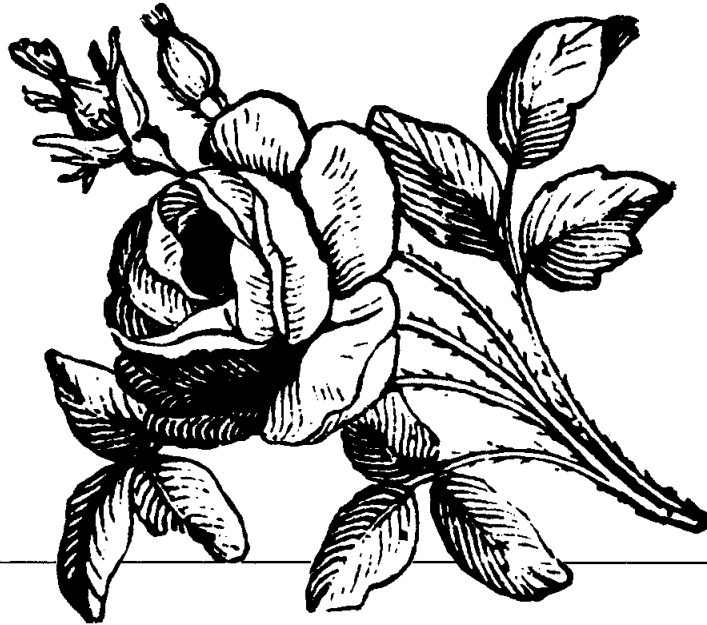


F O U R

The Ideal Romance *The Promise of Patriarchy*



In examining the Smithton readers' conscious beliefs about the benefits of romance reading, we have seen that an intensely felt but insufficiently met need for emotional nurturance drives these women to repeated encounters with romance fiction. Although Dot and her customers cannot formally identify the particular features of the romantic fantasy that are the source of its therapeutic value to them, they are certain, nonetheless, that the activity of romance reading is pleasurable and restorative as well. We have seen that their resulting emotional dependence on romantic fiction is at least partially a function of their ability to restrict their reading to novels that focus only on a particular kind of interaction between heroine and hero. This ability, itself a function of their reliance on Dot's advice, guarantees the Smithton readers a vicarious experience that leaves them feeling hopeful, happy, and content. In order to understand just how these books actually provide this much-needed replenishment, it is now necessary to look with some care at those they judge particularly successful. Such an examination should enable us to pinpoint the characteristics that are the essence of the romance's power and attraction for these readers. By locating the source of both, we should be able to explain why women turn specifically to romances in their quest for vicarious pleasure.

Although the interpretation of the romantic fantasy that follows will be

grounded in close textual analysis, more specifically, in a Proppian analysis of the romantic plot, it is essential to observe that even this more standard form of literary interpretation begins here in reader perceptions.¹ Instead of attempting to assemble an “objective,” “representative” sample of the romance, I have relied on the Smithton readers’ tendencies to separate their books into the categories of the “good” and the “bad.” I have therefore departed from the usual procedure of focusing attention on a particular publisher’s line or on a narrative subgenre, because virtually all of the Smithton women read more than one kind of romance in an effort to find the best books. I have also done so because I wanted to avoid uncritical acceptance of those assumptions discussed in the introduction that usually lie hidden within such an operation.

What the disparate texts in this sample have in common is that they have been identified by Dot and her customers as “excellent” or “favorite” examples of the genre. The women believe that they are perfect expressions of the romantic fantasy. Assuming, therefore, that an analysis of these twenty quintessentially romantic books would reveal the crucial generative matrix of the genre *as the readers understand it*, I attempted to determine whether the same sequence of narrative functions can be found in each of the texts.² In fact, a sequence of thirteen narrative functions does recur in the Smithton readers’ favorite books. Consequently, I have used this set to probe into the psychological significance of the genre for its readers and to infer further unconscious needs that underpin and reinforce the more conscious motives investigated earlier that prompt them to seek out the romantic fantasy.

I should also point out here that I agree with Will Wright’s argument, articulated in his critique of Propp, that a genre is never defined solely by its constitutive set of functions, but by interaction between characters and by their development as individuals.³ As a result, I have assumed further that the romantic genre is additionally defined for the women by a set of characters whose personalities and behaviors can be “coded” or summarized through the course of the reading process in specific ways. Thus actual reader perceptions have also been used in this analysis to “name” or “code” the behaviors and personalities of the principal characters in the novels.⁴ By pursuing similarities in the behaviors of these characters and by attempting to understand what those behaviors signify to these readers, I have sought to avoid summarizing them according to my own beliefs about and standards for gender behavior.

In assembling the sample for this chapter, I began with the Smithton readers’ responses to an open-ended request that they list their three favorite romances and romance writers. Although an astonishing diversity characterized their responses, one shared preference clearly emerged. De-

spite the fact that fifty-five different titles and thirty-nine writers were cited by the Smithton readers, a Kathleen Woodiwiss novel was listed as the first, second, or third most-loved romance thirty-eight times. Indeed, her first romance, *The Flame and the Flower*, was the favorite book of ten of the Smithton women and was listed by six in second or third place. Only Celeste De Blasis's *The Proud Breed* and Laurie McBain's *Moonstruck Madness* came anywhere near Woodiwiss's work in the frequency with which it was cited. All of the other titles were mentioned much less often. The frequencies are summarized below:

First ranking:	<i>The Flame and the Flower</i> (Woodiwiss)	10
	<i>Shanna</i> (Woodiwiss)	8
	<i>The Wolf and the Dove</i> (Woodiwiss)	3
	<i>The Proud Breed</i> (De Blasis)	2
	(16 other titles received one vote each)	
Second ranking:	<i>Ashes in the Wind</i> (Woodiwiss)	4
	<i>The Flame and the Flower</i> (Woodiwiss)	3
	<i>Moonstruck Madness</i> (McBain)	3
	<i>The Proud Breed</i> (De Blasis)	3
	<i>Ride the Thunder</i> (Dailey)	2
	<i>Gone with the Wind</i> (Mitchell)	2
	<i>Visions of the Damned</i> (Marten)	2
	(17 other titles received one vote each)	
Third ranking:	<i>Shanna</i> (Woodiwiss)	5
	<i>The Flame and the Flower</i> (Woodiwiss)	3
	<i>Ashes in the Wind</i> (Woodiwiss)	2
	<i>Fires of Winter</i> (Lindsey)	2
	<i>Blades of Passion</i> (Williams)	2
	(23 other titles received one vote each)	

The Smithton group's response to the request for their favorite authors confirmed that Woodiwiss is the writer they hold in highest esteem. Indeed, of the thirty-nine women who listed a favorite author, seventeen gave that honor to Woodiwiss. The only other writers whose citations rivaled Woodiwiss's total of twenty-eight were Janet Dailey, with a total of thirteen, and Johanna Lindsey and Laurie McBain, each with six. Once again, frequency totals are summarized below:

First ranking:	Kathleen Woodiwiss	17
	Janet Dailey	6
	Elizabeth Peters	3
	(10 other authors received less than 3 votes each)	

Second ranking:	Kathleen Woodiwiss	8
	Janet Dailey	4
	Laurie McBain	3
	(22 other authors received less than 3 votes each)	
Third ranking:	Johanna Lindsey	5
	Kathleen Woodiwiss	3
	Janet Dailey	3
	(21 other authors received less than 3 votes each)	

To take account of the Smithton group's preferences, I have included all four Woodiwiss novels in the sample of texts to be analyzed in addition to *The Proud Breed* by Celeste De Blasis, *Moonstruck Madness* by Laurie McBain, *Visions of the Damned* by Jacqueline Marten, and *Fires of Winter* by Johanna Lindsey. I also added Janet Dailey's *Ride the Thunder* and *Nightway* and Elizabeth Peters's *Summer of the Dragon*. The rest of the sample was drawn up by relying on the frequency of citations in the interviews and on particularly enthusiastic newsletter reviews by Dot. Because Jude Deveraux's *The Black Lion*, La Vyrle Spencer's *The Fulfillment*, and Elsie Lee's *The Diplomatic Lover* were each cited more than five times during oral interviewing, they were added to the list. Then, Dot's five-star recommendation insured the inclusion of the following: *Green Lady* by Leigh Ellis, *Dreamtide* by Katherine Kent, *Made for Each Other* by Parris Afton Bonds, *Miss Hungerford's Handsome Hero* by Noël Vreeland Carter (one of two five-star romances to which Dot gave a *gold* five-star rating), *The Sea Treasure* by Elisabeth Barr, and *Moonlight Variations* by Florence Stevenson.

When these twenty novels are compared with the "failed" romances discussed in Chapter 5 or a more random sample of the genre, essential differences emerge. Indeed, the most striking characteristic of the ideal romance—its resolute focus on a single, developing relationship between heroine and hero—is noticeably absent from those judged to be failures by the Smithton women. Although all romances eventually resolve the differences between two principal characters, as the ideal romances do, some also devote considerable attention to interim relationships between hero or heroine and rival individuals. Indeed, character foils are such a standard element in the genre that they have received much analytic attention. Margaret Jensen found that 98 percent of her sample of Harlequins, for instance, included either a male or female rival.⁵

Although the Smithton group's favorite romances also characteristically include such rival figures, few devote more than passing attention to them. Most simply introduce the foil figures as *suspected* rather than actual rivals by noting that the hero or heroine misunderstands the character's relation to the other partner. Never do they permit the reader to share the

heroine's or hero's mistaken belief. Because the reader always knows that the principal in question is not attracted to the rival, that rival functions for her as a true foil, as a point of comparison and contrast for hero or heroine.

The lack of triangular relationships in ideal romances should not come as a surprise if we recall the Smithton readers' preference for novels about "one woman—one man" and their interest in the evolution of love. In fact, it is this preoccupation with the *gradual* removal of emotional barriers between two people who recognize their connection early in the story that sets the novels apart from other run-of-the-mill romances. Seven of the twenty marry hero and heroine within the first quarter of the book, while the rest establish an exclusive and intense, though less formal, relationship between them.⁶ This structural device insures that the heroine and hero function as the single, dynamic center of the novels and facilitates a particularly intense identification between reader and heroine. Because her attention need never wander to take account of other characters' actions, the reader is permitted to live the heroine's relationship to the hero without distraction.

An examination of the actual portrayal of the principal characters in the ideal romances clearly reveals why this process of identification is so enjoyable for the reader. To begin with, the ideal heroine is differentiated from her more ordinary counterparts in other romance novels by unusual intelligence or by an extraordinarily fiery disposition. Occasionally, she even exhibits special abilities in an unusual occupation. Although the "spirited" heroine is a cliché in romantic fiction, these ideal women are distinguished by the particularly exaggerated quality of their early rebelliousness against parental strictures. The heroine of *Fires of Winter*, for instance, is first introduced to the reader as a young boy. Brenna affects Viking dress and style not simply because her father wanted her to be a boy, but also because she finds her woman's body "cumbersome" (p. 12) and all symbols of her inferior womanhood hateful. She deliberately hides her hair (p. 12) and refuses to do needlework because "she [cannot] abide any skill which [is] solely a woman's" (p. 21). Kathleen Woodiwiss's more typical heroine in *The Flame and the Flower* does not indulge in such egregiously antifeminine behavior, but her sensibility is, nonetheless, differentiated from other women's by the fact of her education and her "high-handed notions" (p. 10).

I do not want to suggest here that the romances most valued by the Smithton women deliberately challenge male and female stereotypes. Like all romances, these novels eventually recommend the usual sexual division of labor that dictates that women take charge of the domestic and purely personal spheres of human endeavor. These novels do, however, begin by expressing ambivalent feelings about female gender by associating the

heroine's personality or activities with traits and behavior usually identified with men. Although it is tempting to interpret this distaste for women as evidence of female masochism and of a desire to see feminist tendencies succumb to the power of love, it can be explained more fully by connecting it with the heroine's and the reader's impulse toward individuation and autonomy, a step that must be taken, at least within patriarchy, *against* the mother, that is, *against women*. Before attempting an account of the ideal heroine's journey toward female selfhood as a chronicle of her efforts to both reject and regain her mother, I think it best to develop a more complete picture of the ideal heroine and the man she "tames" and to summarize the manner in which they are coded by readers at the beginning of the tale. We will return shortly, however, to this vision of the romance as a quest for motherly nurturance.

Although the ideal heroine's aberrant personality is tempered and undercut by her extraordinary beauty, the fact of her initial rejection of feminine ways is so essential to the plot that it is worth examining the manner of her deviation in greater detail. Several writers establish their heroine's refusal to be restricted by expectations about female gender behavior by assigning them unusual jobs. Elizabeth Peters, for example, writes about Deanna Abbott's work as an anthropologist, while Florence Stevenson preoccupies herself in the early pages of *Moonlight Variations* with Lora's abilities as a virtuoso pianist. Noël Carter's Charlotte Hungerford is a writer "with a goodly quantity of successful novels to her credit," a fact that makes her "independent financially" and endows her with "a name . . . known in its own right," which means that "she [needs] no man's title to give her place" (p. 21). True, she is a writer of romantic novels on Regency England, but Carter makes it clear through Charlotte's unladylike profanity (p. 15) and her penchant for argument with men that she feels competitive with them and that they find her daunting. As her nephew confesses, "she's too damned smart by half. . . . She makes a feller feel a fool. They *look* at her and fall head over heels. They *talk* with her, and it's like a cold bucket of ice water smack in the face" (p. 21). Just as Charlotte refuses to be demure and *silent* in the presence of men, so do Aislinn (*The Wolf and the Dove*), Julie (*Made for Each Other*), Brenna (*Fires of Winter*), Nanny (*The Diplomatic Lover*), and Tessa (*The Proud Breed*) exert their superiority by manipulating language.

Nearly all of the heroines in these female-sponsored fantasies, in fact, explicitly refuse to be silenced by the male desire to control women through the eradication of their individual voices. Susan Griffin has recently identified this desire as the central motivating theme in male pornography.⁷ In order to make women into objects, Griffin tells us, male pornographers give their female victims voices through which to express their wills, only in order to silence those voices and to erase the will, a feat

that effectively denies their status as human subjects. The constant emphasis in these particular romances, then, on the heroine's stubborn insistence that she be free to voice her will and desire is convincing evidence that an impulse toward individuation and realization of an intentional self initially sets the romantic story in motion. Given this emphasis on her tomboyish defiance and her verbal facility, it is not hard to understand why the Smithton readers describe their favorite heroines as "intelligent," "spunky," and "independent."

If there is any doubt that the desire to separate from childhood attachments by identifying with characteristically male behavior governs the romance's early development, consider these events that take place within the first fifty pages of two of the novels. As Tessa swims alone on her sixteenth birthday in an isolated mountain spring, she is attacked by the hero of *The Proud Breed*. Unlike many romantic heroines, she does not succumb to his strength but stabs him and then *pushes* him to the ground. In reply to his question about why she did not say "no" to his advances, she observes that she had no way of knowing whether he was reasonable and she wonders whether he would have done the same thing in her place. When he admits he would have, he confirms their essential similarity (p. 21).

In the opening pages of *Fires of Winter*, a beautiful woman is raped by a soldier. Because of the way these two characters are described, the reader assumes she is witnessing the first battle between the heroine and the hero. Her assumption is shattered, however, when a young boy appears, "crosse[s] the room with purposeful strides, and raise[s] sword, then skillfully cut[s] into the stranger's behind" (p. 5). Before the reader can recover to sort things out, she is told that the boy is actually "the Lady Brenna," the true heroine of the tale! As if this is not enough to establish Brenna's deviation from the usual standards of femininity, the reader is later treated to a picture of Brenna seated "in the center of her large bed polishing her sword with the care given a prized possession, which indeed her sword was" (p. 31) since it was a gift from her father on her tenth birthday. Although I doubt very much that the Smithton readers know how to read this psychoanalytically as a symbol of a desire for the power associated with the penis, such skill is not necessary, for Lindsey translates her symbolic language almost immediately. Not only does she write that "Brenna cherished this sword more than any of her possessions . . . because it was a symbol of her father's pride in her achievements," but she adds in the next paragraph that Brenna also worries about whether "her female body [will] imprison her in her husband's land" (p. 31). In completing Brenna's thoughts, Lindsey makes it clear that at this stage in her life the heroine sees no value in being a woman. She wonders: "Would she ever be able to wield this sword again, to fight for what was her own as

any man would? Or would she be expected to act the wife in every way, never to use her skills again, to be a woman and do only what a woman should?" (p. 31).

The presence of another feature shared by ideal heroines seems to confirm their existence as symbolic representations of the immature female psyche. Although the women are unusually defiant in that they are capable of successfully opposing men, they are also characterized by childlike innocence and inexperience. Most of the heroines, in fact, are seventeen to twenty, yet only one of them has ever had any contact with a member of the opposite sex before her confrontation with the hero. Moreover, these heroines are completely unaware that they are capable of passionate sexual urges. Shanna Trahern, for example, has earned a reputation as "the ice queen, the unattainable prize," because of her refusal to reciprocate the advances of her many suitors (p. 21). Heather, of *The Flame and the Flower*, is so ignorant that she has no idea when she has been deposited in a brothel. Similarly, the heroine in *The Sea Treasure* informs the reader that she wants no man's attention "because a woman, at best, is a man's chattel, and if *she* has fires, she learns to dowse them" (p. 76).

The Smithton readers all approve of the romantic heroine's inexperience and code it as "true innocence." They believe that her lack of knowledge is entirely plausible not to mention desirable as well. They approve of her virginity, however, less on the basis of its status as an abstract moral principle than in accordance with their belief that a woman must protect herself from the many men who desire only her body and care little for her needs. According to these readers, female sexual response is something to be exchanged for love and used only in its service.

Despite a continuing refusal to acknowledge the significance and potential consequences inherent in her rapidly maturing body, the ideal romantic heroine is considered by everyone else, including the hero, to be an extraordinary example of full-blooming womanhood. Although not all romantic heroines are beautiful, those in the romances favored most by the Smithton women are characterized by an especially alluring appearance.⁸ Invariably, they are unaware of their beauty and its effect on others. As a consequence, they are never vain, nor do they preen in an effort to attract a man. They always have "glorious tresses" and "sparkling" or "smoldering" eyes, inevitably "fringed by sooty lashes," that undermine their determination to remain detached from the opposite sex. In fact, it is her beauty that undoes the ideal heroine because it is always the cause of the hero's inability to master his desire for her once she is near him. When he forces his attentions upon her, she is inevitably "awakened" by his "probes," and overcome by her own bodily response which she cannot control. Female beauty is, therefore, inextricably linked with sexuality in the romance. It is a sign both to the hero and to the reader that the

heroine is sensual and capable of carnal passion despite her immature repression of those urges.

The ideal heroine's thinly disguised sexuality and more explicitly developed rebelliousness do not threaten the reader, in large part because the fact of her true femininity is never left in doubt. No matter how much emphasis is placed on her initial desire to appear a man's equal, she is always portrayed as unusually compassionate, kind, and understanding. Typically, some minor disaster occurs in the early stages of the story that proves the perfect occasion for her to display her extraordinary capacity for empathetic nurturance and tender care. Alaina McGaren, for instance, the heroine of Woodiwiss's fourth book, *Ashes in the Wind*, spends almost the entire first half of the story (a good two hundred pages) disguised as a filthy, wisecracking boy. Not only does she save the hero's life but she works closely with him in a Civil War hospital where he is a doctor. When she works as an orderly, however, she demonstrates her female superiority by the proficiency of her cleaning skills and the particular compassion of her care for the wounded soldiers. Woodiwiss's description clearly establishes that Alaina is naturally feminine despite her disguise.

Some soldiers struggled to retain some humor in this dismal place. With these Al exchanged light banter. Others were dismayed at their wounds and disappointed with the pain and effort of life. To these Alaina gave a challenge, a dare to live. To those who were deeply injured, she grudgingly gave pity and sympathy and an odd sort of bittersweet tenderness. She ran errands for those who couldn't go for themselves, sometimes purchasing a comb, a shaving brush, or a bottle of lilac water for a girl back home. . . . The dull gray silence of the wards had yielded to a youthful and oftentimes rebellious grin. The musty, cloying odor of molding debris became the pungent scent of lye soap and pine oil. The moans of pain were now more often hidden beneath the muffled chuckle of laughter or the low-voiced murmur of shared experiences. (p. 55)

This characteristic, early demonstration of the romantic heroine's ability to transmute the sick into the healthy reassures the reader that the heroine is, in reality, a "true" woman, one who possesses all the nurturing skills associated by patriarchal culture with the feminine character. At the same time, her success as a nurse foreshadows for the knowing reader her eventual success at transforming the hero's emotional indifference and sexual promiscuity into expressions of love, constant displays of affection, and the promise of marital fidelity. It is, in fact, the combination of her womanly sensuality and mothering capacities that will magically remake a man incapable of expressing emotions or of admitting dependence. As a result of her effort, he will be transformed into an ideal figure possessing both

masculine power and prestige and the more “effeminate” ability to discern her needs and to attend to their fulfillment in a tender, solicitous way. Ironically, then, at the same time that the romantic fantasy proclaims a woman’s power to re-create a man in a mold she has fashioned, it also covertly establishes her guilt or responsibility for those who remain unchanged. The romance blames not men’s indifference, competitiveness, or ambition for their rigid indifference and their mistreatment of women but rather women’s own insufficiency as perfect wife-mothers. While the romance creates its utopia by fantasizing about a new kind of male-female relationship where a man cares for a woman as she cares for him, it fails to explain convincingly exactly why and how each individual heroine is able to translate male reticence and cruelty into tenderness and devotion.

The typical romantic narrative need not provide a logical explanation for the personality transformation it observes so carefully, because it is prepared for by the hero’s first introduction. The hero of the romantic fantasy is always characterized by spectacular masculinity. Indeed, it is insufficient for the author to remark in passing that the romantic hero has a muscular physique. The reader must be told, instead, that every aspect of his being, whether his body, his face, or his general demeanor, is informed by the purity of his maleness. Almost everything about him is hard, angular, and dark. It is, however, essential to add the qualifying “almost” here because, in descriptions of the ideal romantic hero, the terrorizing effect of his exemplary masculinity is always tempered by the presence of a small feature that introduces an important element of softness into the overall picture.

This anomalous, inexplicable aberration in his otherwise consistently harsh behavior and appearance is, of course, understood by the experienced reader, and occasionally by the heroine herself, as an indication that behind his protective exterior hides an affectionate and tender soul. Just as Dominic Pengallion’s “fierce” demeanor is relieved by his occasional ability to be “generous, compassionate and full of humor” (*The Sea Treasure*, p. 11), so Hannibal Cheng’s “romantically grim” visage is softened by “wide, melting Oriental eyes” (*Miss Hungerford’s Handsome Hero*, pp. 37–38). Nicholas Raffer, who “gently” tries to determine whether the heroine has been injured in a car accident, has a “hard cut . . . jaw and sharply squared chin” that are nevertheless balanced by his “generous lips” which have a “sensual curve to them” (*Made for Each Other*, pp. 10, 19).

Few of these initial descriptions explore the reasons for the hero’s warring tendencies in as much detail as Jude Deveraux provides in the following passage from *The Black Lion*. However, all of them eventually reveal that the hero’s wariness, like Ranulf’s, can be traced to a previous hurt by another woman and to his justifiable distrust of all females. The reader is assured by this detail that the tenderness she thinks she detects behind the

facade of his masculinity cannot help but reveal itself when he learns to trust and love a truly good woman:

The Earl of Malvoisin's eyes reminded her of a dog she had seen once. The dog had been caught in a trap, his leg nearly cut in half, and the pain had made him almost mad. It had taken a long time for Lyonene to soothe the animal and gain its trust so that she could release the iron jaws of the trap, and all the while the dog had looked at her with just such an expression of wariness, pain and near-dead hope as did the man who stood before her now. . . . Her gaze fell on his lips, which were well-shaped but held too rigid. Lucy had been correct; he was a handsome man. She smiled, timidly at first and then with more warmth. She looked behind the lips that did not smile and saw a . . . yes, a sweetness there, the same gentleness that her mother had seen. (pp. 7–8)

The Smithton readers' favorite romances may stress the importance of such tenderness in men, but because they indicate that their reserved and cruel heroes are, in truth, compassionate and kind individuals from the start, they only pretend to explore creatively the way to ideal male-female relationships. The romantic heroine simply brings to the surface traits and propensities that are part of the hero's most basic nature. Consequently, the romance can say nothing about the more difficult problem of how to teach men to be gentle who have developed within a set of family relationships that systematically represses the boy's capacity to nurture and, then, in an act of overdetermination, reinforces that destruction by branding tenderness in a man a sign of weakness. The romance expresses women's dissatisfaction with the current asymmetry in male-female relationships but, at the same time, by virtue of its early presentation of the hero, represents the desired and necessary transformation as an already accomplished fact.

Still, these romances are able to convince their readers that a real transformation occurs because they repeatedly stress the hero's reserve, indifference, and even cruelty when he is first confronted by the heroine. The heroes in these ideal romances exhibit considerably less physical violence and brutality toward the heroines than do heroes in failed romances, but they are not above emotional blackmail and brusque indifference.⁹ Although the reader never has to endure more than one or two short scenes where the hero actually hurts the heroine, his power to wound her emotionally by toying with her affections is demonstrated in vignette after vignette. The combination of this self-protective aggressiveness and the fleeting revelation of his underlying capacity for gentleness is responsible, then, for the Smithton readers' tendency to describe the ideal hero in paired terms. When asked in the interviews to provide an account of the

perfect romantic hero, Dot and her customers replied with such phrases as "strong but gentle," "masculine but caring," "protective of her and tender," "a he-man but a lover-boy, too."

In addition to mentioning these features that they know are unusual if not improbable in combination, the Smithton readers volunteered the information that an ideal hero must be "a man among men," as one of Dot's customers explained. When asked to gloss her encomium, this woman added that he must be a "leader," able "to command respect from everyone around him." In fact, her observations accurately describe the social status shared by the heroes of these twenty romances. Not only are they wealthy, indeed, often aristocratic, but they are also active and successful participants in some major public endeavor. Whether it be in war (*The Wolf and the Dove*, *Fires of Winter*, *The Black Lion*, *Ashes in the Wind*), the founding of some great commercial enterprise (*The Flame and the Flower*, *The Proud Breed*, *The Fulfillment*, *Shanna*), or in some social crusade (*The Sea Treasure*, *Made for Each Other*), these men prove the tenacity of their commitment to a transcendental public purpose by refusing to benefit personally from their success. While they are themselves morally pure, they also set an example so compelling that they are able to demand and receive the loyalty and commitment of other men as well. They are, of course, also extraordinarily competent and inevitably triumph over those who would attempt to deny their preeminence. In a fictional world that accords respect to men in general because of their strength, power, and ability to operate in the public realm, the romantic hero stands out as that world's most able representative and the essence of all that it values.

The Smithton readers are aware of the fact that even an ideal romantic hero has had sexual experiences before his encounters with the heroine. In fact, in these romances, the heroine's innocence is often contrasted explicitly with the hero's previous promiscuity, behavior that is made tolerable to both the heroine and the reader because it is always attributed to his lack of love for his sexual partners. His exclusive preoccupation with them as tools for achieving sexual release is never blamed on his callousness or lack of respect for women, but rather on his virility and his fear of emotional involvement with calculating women. This rationalization conveniently transforms his sexual promiscuity from an arrogant proclamation of his adherence to the double standard to a sign representing an absence, that is, the nonpresence of love. Perversely, it testifies, then, to his inescapable and intense need for the heroine. Once she can provide that love by persuading him to trust her, his promiscuous impulses are curbed. Sexual fidelity in the ideal romance is understood to be the natural partner of "true love."

Before summarizing these essential characteristics of the romantic hero-

ine and hero, it should be pointed out that the meaning of their personalities is underscored for the reader by the presence of the secondary characters mentioned earlier. More specifically, the significance of heroine and hero as ideal feminine and masculine types is established by the existence of two abstract foils who embody those features of the female and male personalities that must be eradicated if women and men are to continue to love each other and fill one another's needs. The simple binary oppositions that are the basis for character differentiation in the romance are, therefore, a useful clue to the things women most fear as potential threats to heterosexual love and traditional marriage. Because their fears are embodied in the ideal romance in characters whose misbehavior is always explained away by their later destruction, the readers are encouraged to see those fears as unwarranted.

With its secondary characters, then, the ideal romance sketches a faint picture of male-female relationships characterized by suspicion and distrust in order to set off more effectively its later, finished portrait of the perfect union. In the act of substituting the one for the other by showing that the early hero/heroine relationship, although appearing as the former was, in reality, the latter, the romance ingeniously suggests to the reader that any evidence of worrisome traits and tendencies she finds in her own motives or those of her spouse can be reinterpreted in the most favorable light.

It can be seen from Table 4.1 that the heroine's sexual innocence, unself-conscious beauty, and desire for love are contrasted in the ideal romance with the female foil's self-interested pursuit of a comfortable social position. Because she views men as little more than tools for her own aggrandizement, the female foil is perfectly willing to manipulate them by flaunting her sexual availability. Incapable of caring for anyone other than herself, she makes demands upon the men she desires while promising nothing in return. This rival woman is the perfect incarnation of the calculating female whom the hero detests and thinks he sees hidden behind the heroine's beguiling facade. The heroine, of course, is never sure of the hero's true motives and often fears that he either loves the female foil or is taken in by her wiles.

Male rivals, on the other hand, are very shadowy figures in the ideal romance. While they do appear, they are described rather sparingly and almost never prove even momentarily attractive to the heroine. These foils are invariably of two types in the romances preferred by the Smithton women. Some, like Braeger Darvey in *Ashes in the Wind*, are sensitive, expressive, and overtly appreciative of the heroine's extraordinary qualities. Men like these are used to highlight the hero's surly reserve and his obstinate refusal to be persuaded that the heroine is not a femme fatale.

TABLE 4.1
Binary Oppositions in Character Portrayal at Beginning of the Romantic Narrative

Oppositional Pair	Heroine	Female Foil	Hero	Male Foil	Oppositional Pair	Villain
Virginal Experienced	+ -	- +	- +	Uncoded	Virginal Promiscuous	- +
Desires love Desires wealth and position	+ - -	- + -	- + +	+ - -	Desires love Desires sexual pleasure	- + +
Unself-conscious Vain	+ -	- +	+ -	+ -	Unself-conscious Vain	- +
Beautiful Plain	+ -	+ -	+ -	+ -	Handsome Ugly	- +
Nurturant Demanding	+ -	- +	- +	+ -	Tender Indifferent	- +
Independent Dependent	+ -	- +	+ -	Uncoded	Honest Corrupt	- +
Intelligent Confused (gullible)	+ -	Uncoded	+ -	- +	Courageous Cowardly	- +
Fears men Desires men	+ -	- +	+ -	- +	Emotionally reserved Emotionally expressive	- +

They are usually found lacking, however, because they are insufficiently aggressive, protective, and strong. The story suggests, in effect, that they are insufficiently masculine.

Ideal romances also employ another kind of foil, a true villain, who actually attempts to abduct the heroine from the arms of her hero. These figures are inevitably ugly, morally corrupt, and interested only in the heroine's sexual favors. They pose the constant threat of vicious rape and thus permit the author to differentiate the hero's "love-crazed" taking of the heroine from a truly malicious wish to use her for carnal pleasure. Although the heroine initially sees no difference between these individuals and the hero, their constant brutality and crude insinuations inform the reader that the hero is not cruel at all, only unskilled in the art of tender care for a woman. The presence of rival figures like Jacques Du Bonne in *Ashes in the Wind*, Thomas Hint in *The Flame and the Flower*, Louis in *The Proud Breed*, and Sir Morell in *The Black Lion* is a constant reminder to the reader that a woman's sexuality contains the potential to do her great harm by virtue of its capacity to activate male lust and hatred of women. However, because the frequency and duration of the villains' attacks on the heroine are very carefully controlled by the authors of "ideal" romances, the suggestion that some men see women as sexual objects is made only fleetingly in order to teach the heroine the true worth of the hero. The fear is then banished effectively by the hero because he is finally portrayed as excited by the heroine's sexuality *and* respectful of her identity as an individual. His behavior informs the reader that what she most fears from men is really only a minor threat that can be eradicated permanently by the protective care of the man who truly loves her.

We will see in Chapter 5 that it is frequently this particular threat that is not controlled effectively in "failed" romances. In fact, villain figures run wild in these books. Moreover, they are not differentiated adequately from the hero. The happy union, then, at the romance's end is incapable of erasing the threat of violence and the fear it induces. It therefore fails to convince the reader that traditional sexual arrangements are benign.

Given the origination of this sample in actual reader selections from a large number of subgenres and publishing lines, it should not be surprising to note in turning from character to narrative that these ideal romances exhibit wide variation in superficial plot development. Nonetheless, when Vladimir Propp's method for determining the essential narrative structure of folktales is applied to these particular novels, it becomes clear that despite individual and isolated preoccupation with such things as reincarnation, adultery, amnesia, and mistaken identity, these stories are all built upon a shared narrative structure. Assuming first, as Will Wright does, that all narratives are composed of three essential stages—an initial situation, a final transformation of that situation, and an

intermediary intervention that causes and explains the change—I then proceeded by trying to identify the common opening and conclusion of the romances in question. Once these had been isolated, I then looked for the most basic structure of embedded actions that could account coherently for the gradual transformation of the former into the latter. The result, a list of thirteen logically related functions, explains the heroine's transformation from an isolated, asexual, insecure adolescent who is unsure of her own identity, into a mature, sensual, and very married woman who has realized her full potential and identity as the partner of a man and as the implied mother of a child. The narrative structure of the ideal romance is summarized below:

1. The heroine's social identity is destroyed.
2. The heroine reacts antagonistically to an aristocratic male.
3. The aristocratic male responds ambiguously to the heroine.
4. The heroine interprets the hero's behavior as evidence of a purely sexual interest in her.
5. The heroine responds to the hero's behavior with anger or coldness.
6. The hero retaliates by punishing the heroine.
7. The heroine and hero are physically and/or emotionally separated.
8. The hero treats the heroine tenderly.
9. The heroine responds warmly to the hero's act of tenderness.
10. The heroine reinterprets the hero's ambiguous behavior as the product of previous hurt.
11. The hero proposes/openly declares his love for/demonstrates his unwavering commitment to the heroine with a supreme act of tenderness.
12. The heroine responds sexually and emotionally.
13. The heroine's identity is restored.

As the initial function indicates, the ideal romance begins with its heroine's removal from a familiar, comfortable realm usually associated with her childhood and family. Heather Simmons, for example, is taken away from her guardian by an evil uncle who intends to establish her in a whorehouse; Julie Dever is hurt in a car accident in an isolated mountain pass while away on vacation; Charlotte Hungerford leaves the privacy and protection of her writer's study to go to Brighton where her single status becomes the topic of disapproving gossip; Alaina McGaren is forced to flee her family's nearly destroyed plantation during the Civil War; and Deanna Abbott goes to a ranch in Arizona to escape her parents' efforts to mold her in their own image.¹⁰ The details are different, but in each case the move terrifies the heroine because it strips her of her familiar supports and her sense of herself as someone with a particular place and a fixed

identity. The mood of the romance's opening pages, then, is nearly always set by the heroine's emotional isolation and her profound sense of loss.

Keeping in mind what the *Smithton* women have said about their emotional state when they turn to romance reading, it seems possible that part of the attraction of the romance might be traced to the fact that this loss and the resulting emptiness it creates within the heroine continues and confirms a similar sense of depletion in the reader. The reader's sense of emptiness creates the initial desire for the romance's tale of a progressing relationship because the experience of being ignored by others is an emotional state both alien to women and difficult for them to bear. Because their family histories have created in them what Nancy Chodorow has identified as a "complex, relational self," romance readers need to avoid such feelings of emptiness by integrating important intimates into their psychic structures who will reciprocate their interest.¹¹ This profound need, which Chodorow maintains is rarely filled adequately by men because they have developed asymmetrically into individuals who do not define themselves in relation, is confirmed obligingly and addressed vicariously, then, by this story that relates another woman's successful journey from isolation and its threat of annihilation to connection and the promise of a mature, fulfilled female identity.

The complexities of Chodorow's theories are considerable and therefore cannot be reviewed in any depth here. Still, the remarkable similarity between her account of female personality development and the history of the ideal romantic heroine suggests that a broad outline of her argument's main points might be helpful in trying to explain the appeal of the romance. Essentially, Chodorow's thesis is that the characteristic sexual and familial division of labor in the patriarchal family, which accords mothering to women, results in an asymmetrical personality development in women and men that prompts them to reproduce this same division of labor. Her argument is grounded in object-relations theory and its primary insight that a child's social-relational experience from earliest infancy determines its later growth. This occurs because the child's early social relations with its primary caretaker(s) are internalized as its most basic model of itself as a self-in-relation. Thus the affective tone and residue of the intense mother-infant relationship in the patriarchal family continues to control the way the child encounters people and relies upon them to fulfill its adult needs. Chodorow maintains that the consequences of this relationship are different for male and female children when both relate most consistently to a female parent.

Early and exclusive mothering of a female child, for instance, tends to cement a daughter's identification with her mother, a state that later produces difficulties in the daughter's individuation. Chodorow explains that

the early symbiotic union between mother and daughter is especially intense because the mother tends to experience her daughter as an extension of herself and because the father is rarely present continuously to act as a countering love-object. The lack of sexual difference, then, leads to a prolonged pre-oedipal state in the girl's development that tends to continue her dependency, ego-boundary confusion, and affective ambivalence about her mother. Because the daughter also experiences her mother as an extension of herself, she encounters considerable difficulties in recognizing herself as a separate person. The end result of this process, according to Chodorow, is an internalized portrait of the female self as a self-in-relation, which is later generalized as a view of the self as an extension or continuation of the world and others.

Chodorow argues further that the pre-oedipal mother-daughter bond is so strong that it even persists during the oedipal period when a girl turns her attention to her father. Differing, here, with Freud and his disciples, Chodorow maintains that the girl's turn is not motivated by a desire for the intrinsic properties of the penis but rather by a recognition of its value as a symbol of all that is not-mother. The oedipal move is partially initiated, then, by a daughter's desire to escape her intense symbiotic union with her mother. Her first real attempt at individuation is thus often expressed as identification with and desire for the father and all that is male. Chodorow adds, however, that the young girl also turns to her father because she "comes to realize that her common genital arrangement with her mother does not work to her advantage in forming a bond with her" (p. 125). More specifically, when she finds out that her mother prefers people like her father who have penises, she desires one for herself in order to secure her mother's love. Penis envy, identification with the father, and admiration of the male, therefore, are simultaneous expressions of a wish to assert her independence and of her love for and desire to win back the mother she has begun to relinquish.

Because the daughter's pre-oedipal ties to her mother persist throughout the oedipal period, her external and internal object worlds become triadic. This is to say that although her genital and erotic desires are focused on her father, she continues to maintain an intense emotional commitment to her mother and all that is female. The final result of this complex set of relationships for the girl, Chodorow maintains, is an "incomplete oedipal resolution." The girl becomes erotically heterosexual but at the same time carries an internal emotional triangle into adulthood, a triangle that is completed by her continuing need and desire for her mother. This finally produces in women a continuing wish to regress into infancy to reconstruct the lost intensity of the original mother-daughter bond.¹²

Although this is only a sketch of Chodorow's theory, it does enable us

to provide a useful summary of her account of the typical female personality produced by the patriarchal family. Chodorow argues, first, that as a result of the difficulties of trying to separate from a parent of the same sex, girls tend to experience themselves as less differentiated than boys. They also feel themselves to be continuous with and related to the external object world and thus possess quite permeable ego-boundaries. As a result, they tend to experience an ongoing need for nurturance and attachment well into their adult lives. Their adult internal psychic world, moreover, is a complex relational constellation that continuously demands the balance and completion provided by other individuals. If this need is not adequately addressed by a relationship with an adult male, Chodorow reasons, a woman may turn to mothering as a way of establishing that necessary relationality. By identifying with the child she mothers, she imaginatively regresses to that state where all her needs were anticipated and satisfied without any exertion on her part.

Chodorow argues that women often resort to mothering as a source of vicarious nurturance precisely because men are emotionally constituted by female mothering in such a way that they find provision of this nurturance impossible. While there is no need to detail Chodorow's account of male development here, it is worth noting that the process tends to result in a negative definition of masculinity as all that is *not* female. This occurs in part because the pre-oedipal boy's attempt to separate from his mother is often bound up with gender-identity issues as a result of the fact that his mother could not help but sexualize their relationship. Because he thus becomes aware of his sexual difference from his mother, he often feels the need to suppress his feelings of dependence and his sense of having been merged with her in order to experience himself as fully differentiated from his mother. Later, in the oedipal period, when he must repress his oedipal attachment to her to avoid the competitive wrath of his father, he further denies his connection with anything womanly. Chodorow concludes that the final result of the boy's oedipal resolution is a personality structure defined by autonomy and independence, by a denial of rationality, and often by a corresponding devaluation of women.¹³ The male endo-psychic world, moreover, "tends to be fixed and simpler" than that of the female, a fact that finally establishes the basic asymmetry in male and female personality development which explains a woman's desire and need to mother a child.

Although Chodorow emphasizes the effectiveness and success of mothering as an activity that compensates for the male inability to nurture, many women have also testified to the hidden costs of such a route to fulfillment. The activity of nurturing a child may indeed help to satisfy the female need for a self-in-relation and provide vicarious regression and affection, but it also makes tremendous demands on a woman to focus on

the infant rather than on herself. Because she must at least delay and sometimes deny her own needs to provide her infant with all it requires, the very act of reinforcing her female identity and sense of self also draws on that self and may even seem to deplete it or negate it entirely. A woman is, therefore, likely to experience a sense of feeling empty of the self at the very time when she most desires to feel completed, petted, and fulfilled.

Within this context, the possibility that there may be a correlation between *some* romance reading and the social roles of wife and mother seems less than surprising. Given the nature of the female personality as a self-in-relation, the inability of men to function as completely adequate relational partners, and the reciprocal demands made upon women by the very children they rely on to satisfy their unmet needs, it is understandable that many women derive pleasure and encouragement from repetitive indulgence in romantic fantasies. On one level, then, the romance is an account of a woman's journey to female personhood *as that particular psychic configuration is constructed and realized within patriarchal culture*. It functions as a symbolic display and explanation of a process commonly experienced by many women. At the same time, because the ideal romance symbolically represents real female needs within the story and then depicts their successful satisfaction, it ratifies or confirms the inevitability and desirability of the entire institutional structure within which those needs are created and addressed.

In returning to the narrative structure of the romance, it should now be clear that the initial function dictating the heroine's loss of connections and identity is more deeply resonant in a psychoanalytic sense than it is overtly topical. When she is plucked from her earlier relationships and thrust out into a public world, the heroine's consequent terror and feeling of emptiness most likely evokes for the reader distant memories of her initial separation from her mother and her later ambivalent attempts to establish an individual identity. At the same time, it symbolically represents in a more general sense what it feels like for a woman to be alone without the necessary relation to another. As a consequence, the romance's opening exaggerates the very feeling of emptiness and desire that sent the reader to the book in the first place. The boyish independence of the typical heroine can be reinterpreted in this context as a symbolic representation of the initial step of a young girl's journey toward individuation and subsequent connection. The heroine, in effect, employs the usual method of individuating from the mother by turning to the next most proximate individual, her father. By identifying with him specifically or more generally with traits and achievements associated with men, the heroine simultaneously justifies her impulse to separate by degrading the feminine *and* accomplishes the actual rejection itself. She is free to embark finally on her quest for a new self and new connections. In rejecting her

mother, the heroine immediately locates the reader's sense of loss and emptiness within a developmental pattern that holds out the promise of its later eradication in a future, perfect union with another.

Throughout the rest of the romantic narrative, then, two initially distinct stories are progressively intertwined. In fact, the heroine's search for her identity dovetails rather quickly with the tale of her developing relationship to the hero. Chodorow's theories are especially useful in explaining the psychological import of the stories' confluence. What the heroine successfully establishes by the end of the ideal narrative is the now-familiar female self, the self-in-relation. Because she manages this relation with a man who is not only masculine but redundantly so, the romance also manages to consider the possibilities and difficulties of establishing a connection with a man who is initially incapable of satisfying a woman. Thus the romance is concerned not simply with the fact of heterosexual marriage but with the perhaps more essential issues for women—how to realize a mature self and how to achieve emotional fulfillment in a culture in which such goals must be achieved in the company of an individual whose principal preoccupation is always *elsewhere* in the public world.

The problems posed for women by characteristically masculine behavior are highlighted early in the romantic narrative by function 2 and the frightened, antagonistic response of the heroine to the mere presence of an ambiguous man. Because the hero's hard physical exterior is complemented by his imperious, distant manner, the heroine automatically assumes that he finds her uninteresting or, in some cases, intends to harm her. Still, she is troubled by that contradictory evidence of his hidden, gentle nature and she therefore feels unsure of his motives. Because she cannot seem to avoid contact with him despite her dislike, the heroine's principal activity throughout the rest of the story consists of the mental process of trying to assign particular signifieds to his overt acts. In effect, what she is trying to do in discovering the significance of his behavior by uncovering his motives is to understand what the fact of male presence and attention means for her, a woman.

It should be clear by now that romance authors raise this issue of the import of male motives for sound material and psychological reasons. In a culture that circumscribes female work within the domestic sphere by denying women full entry into the public realm, any woman who cannot attach herself to a member of the culture who is permitted to work runs the risk of poverty, if not outright annihilation.¹⁴ At the same time, because men are parented within the culture solely by women, they tend to individuate and define themselves in explicit opposition to anything female. If this does not always result in misogyny or in its expression by violence against women, it does end at least in the repression of traits and emotional tendencies typically identified with them. Therefore, even men

who are not brutal tend to relate to women on a relatively superficial emotional level just as they define them principally as sexual creatures because their physiological characteristics are the most obvious mark of their difference from men. Given the fact that a woman and any future children she might have are economically dependent on such men, it becomes absolutely essential that she learn to distinguish those who want her sexually from that special individual who is willing to pledge commitment and care in return for her sexual favor.

Male reserve and indifference also become issues in the romance because, if left untempered, they can hinder a woman from satisfying her most basic needs for relationality and emotional nurturance. Because women move out of their oedipal conflict with a triangular psychic structure intact, not only do they need to connect themselves with a member of the opposite sex, but they also continue to require an intense emotional bond with someone who is reciprocally nurturant and protective in a maternal way. The homophobic nature of the culture effectively denies them the opportunity to receive this from the hands of someone who resembles the woman responsible for their memory of it. Therefore, because direct regression through an intense relationship with an individual resembling her mother is denied a woman (as it is not denied to a man), she must learn to suppress the need entirely, to satisfy it through her relationship with a man, or to seek its fulfillment in other activities. Although the ideal romance initially admits the difficulty of relying on men for gentleness and affective intensity, thus confirming the reader's own likely experience, it also reassures her that such satisfaction is possible because men really do know how to attend to a woman's needs.

This peculiar double perspective on male behavior is achieved by a narrative structure that allows the reader greater knowledge of the hero than the heroine herself possesses. Because she is given access to his true feelings and intentions by an omniscient narration that reveals something about his past that justifies his present behavior, the reader can reinterpret the action in functions 4, 5, and 6. For example, where the heroine believes the hero's behavior is merely ambiguous (function 3), the reader knows that his unreadable actions are the product of emotional turmoil prompted by his feelings for the heroine. Similarly, when the hero appears to punish the heroine (function 6), the reader can tell herself that such punishment is the result of hurt and disappointment at the heroine's supposed infidelity or lack of interest in him. It is, then, a sign of his love for her, not of his distaste. The double perspective on the hero's behavior thus allows the reader to have it both ways. She can identify with the heroine's point of view and therefore with her anger and fear. The act of reading, in that case, provides her with an imaginative space to express her reservations and negative feelings about men. On the other hand, she can rely on

the greater knowledge accorded to her by the narration and enjoy the reassurance it provides that, in fact, men do not threaten women or function as obstacles to their fulfillment. In the safe realm of the imaginary, then, the romance reader is allowed to indulge in the expression of very real fears that she is permitted to control simultaneously by overruling them with the voice of her greater knowledge.

The importance of this dual perspective is made especially clear by the ideal romance's peculiar treatment of rape. Although rape does not figure in all twenty of the books in this sample, when it does, it occurs as function 6 in the narrative. Remember that in the discussion of the Smithton group's taste in romantic fiction in Chapter 3, it was noted that while they do not like stories that dwell on violent rapes, Dot and her customers will tolerate and rationalize rape if it occurs under certain circumstances. The portrayal of violence in general and rape in particular in their favorite romances bears out their claim. When rape is included, authors of ideal romances always make a clear distinction between men who rape as an act of aggression against women and those who, like their heroes, do so because they misinterpret a woman's actions or find her irresistible. *The Proud Breed*, for instance, includes a violent rape of the heroine by a squatter, but the incident is integrated into the narrative for two larger purposes. On the one hand, it permits the author to "educate" her readers about the real consequences of rape: Tessa does not secretly love it but is physically and emotionally scarred by the experience. Indeed, she thinks of it as "[t]he final threat, not just an invasion of the land, but of herself, her body, and her soul" (p. 373). De Blasis uses the rape to extend her characterization of Tessa's husband as an extraordinary individual. Gavin does not indulge in the familiar practice of blaming his wife for what has been done to her nor does he find her less desirable after she has been "used" by another man. Instead, he responds to her overwhelming need for tenderness by comforting her and by making no sexual demands until she indicates that she is ready.

In a now-famous essay that first appeared in *MS* magazine in 1976, Molly Haskell suggested that female fantasies about violence and rape are exploration fantasies born out of anxiety and fear rather than wish-fulfillment fantasies originating in sexual desire.¹⁵ Rape, she argued, is not their "end point and goal" but their "beginning and given."¹⁶ A woman who fantasizes about rape often does so, Haskell maintained, because she knows violence against women is prevalent in her culture and because she fears it deeply. By imagining it occurring to her, she makes projections about how she would react or whether she would survive. In effect, through her imagination she controls an occurrence that is widespread in her culture which she can neither predict nor prevent. Although not all rape fantasies serve this function, as Haskell herself noted, it seems very

clear that De Blasis's presentation in *The Proud Breed* projects a utopian conclusion to an event that she and her readers have good reason to fear. Nonetheless, while her portrayal may be applauded for its willingness to admit that rape is intrinsically horrible and should be blamed on men, as well as for its suggestion that some women are capable of repulsing the violence directed at them, its optimistic conclusion runs the risk of undercutting her original intent because it perpetuates, albeit inadvertently, the illusion that rape is not really a serious threat to female integrity.

If this tendency to minimize a serious problem out of a profound need to believe that it can be controlled characterizes De Blasis's relatively honest description of rape, it is even more characteristic of the other, typical violations that occur in *The Flame and the Flower*, *The Black Lyon*, and *Ashes in the Wind*. In each, the rape comes about in large part because the hero believes the heroine is a prostitute or at least sexually promiscuous. In the course of violating her, the hero always discovers that the heroine is a virgin and responds to her in a way he has "never responded to a woman before." His subsequent remorse and acknowledgment that the heroine is somehow different seem to excuse and justify his behavior to the narrator and to the Smithton readers, although, I should add, not before provoking in them a good deal of indignation and anger about his "stupidity" and "pig-headedness."¹⁷ Like the heroine herself, the Smithton readers are outraged by the hero's behavior. The narrative's double perspective gives them an additional advantage, however, because it informs them that the hero would never have mistreated the heroine if he had known she was a truly good woman.

In questioning Dot and her customers about their angry response to romantic rape, it became clear that they did not blame the hero for violating a woman but rather for lacking the perception to see that the heroine was not a prostitute. They seem to accept the axiom common in their sexist and patriarchal culture that all women must control their sexuality if they do not wish to be raped. The Smithton readers believe that if a woman fails to disguise her sensuality properly, she will run the risk of exciting the uncontrollable male "sex-drive," which will then demand to be released. Although Dot and her customers claim they do not believe in the double standard, they continue to hold women responsible for applying the brakes to sexual passion just as they persist in "understanding" men who take advantage of "loose women." Their anger is directed not at men's lack of respect for female integrity but at their inability to discriminate between innocent women and bad.

It might also be said about rapes in the ideal romance that because the hero initiates the sexual contact that the heroine later enjoys, it is ulti-

mately he who is held responsible for activating her sexuality. She is free, then, to enjoy the pleasures of her sexual nature without having to accept the blame and guilt for it usually assigned to women by men. Rape in the ideal romance thus helps to perpetuate the distinction between “those who do and those who don’t,” just as it continues to justify and make possible the repression of female sexuality. This is especially ironic because, as we shall see shortly, subsequent developments in the ideal romantic narrative attempt to demonstrate that once awakened by a man, a woman can respond passionately to him unhampered by her previous repression. Female sexuality, in fact, is not banned in the ideal romance. It is, however, always circumscribed by the novel’s assumption that patriarchy, heterosexuality, and male personality are givens that are absolutely beyond challenge. The narrative action demonstrates that in order to secure the nurturance and security that they need for themselves, women must confine their sexual desire to the marriage bed and avoid threatening men with a too-active or demanding sexuality.

This is made especially clear by the ideal heroine’s typical response to her rape by the hero. Although she usually experiences twinges of pleasure after the initial shock of penetration, no heroine in the twenty books in the sample responds completely to the initial violation. More often than not, she is both bewildered by her reaction and appalled that she cannot control her body as successfully as she can control her mind. She continues to hate the hero for his mistreatment of her although it is quite clear to the reader that what the heroine takes to be hatred is, in fact, disappointment that the man she has fallen in love with has not treated her as the precious beloved she would like to be. It is only after the hero demonstrates in a moment of crisis or unusual spontaneity that he can be gentle with her that the ideal heroine feels free enough to respond and eventually to enjoy herself.

Woodiwiss’s treatment of this issue in *The Flame and the Flower* is worth looking at here because it shows how the typical ideal romance ignores the fact that a rape has occurred by stressing the hero’s remorse and by demonstrating his potential to make adequate reparation in the future. Of the actual rape, Woodiwiss writes:

A half gasp, half shriek escaped her and a burning pain seemed to spread through her loins. Brandon started back in astonishment and stared down at her. She lay limp against the pillows, rolling her head back and forth upon them. He touched her cheek tenderly and murmured something low and inaudible, but she had her eyes closed and wouldn’t look at him. He moved against her gently, kissing her hair and brow and caressing her body with his hands. She lay unrespon-

sive, yet his long starved passions grew and soon he thrust deeply within her, no longer able to contain himself. It seemed with each movement now she would split asunder and tears came to her eyes.

The storm at its end, a long quiet moment slipped past as he relaxed against her, once more gentle. But when he finally withdrew, she turned to the wall and lay softly sobbing with the corner of the blanket pulled over her head and her now used body left bare to his gaze. (p. 34)

Brandon slowly regenerates himself in the reader's eyes first and then in the heroine's by treating her with increasing tenderness. Although he continues to believe Heather is an opportunist and she herself remains angry with him over the rape (function 7), their emotional separation does not stop him from surprising her with especially thoughtful gifts (function 8). For example, he manages to get a bathtub for her on board their ship and has long underwear made to keep her warm on the winter voyage. Both presents prompt Heather to wonder whether Brandon is as cold as he seems. She further doubts his detachment when she recovers from a long delirium and fever to discover that he has nursed her himself without the assistance of others.

Woodiwiss continues to increase the frequency of tender incidents like these, demonstrating ever more insistently *to the reader* that her hero does cherish the heroine despite his stubborn pride and that he is supremely capable of caring for her in an unusually nurturant way. Although Heather continues to accord more importance to his lingering reticence and refusal to acknowledge his love verbally, his gentle behavior gradually crumbles her defenses until she wants to respond passionately to his sexual advances. Just when she is about to admit that she wants him, however, a small insensitivity on his part prompts an angry meditation that indicates very clearly what she expects to get from her husband: "What thinks he that he may come in here while the house is overflowing with his friends and among them that blond bitch [his former fiancée] and command me to spread my thighs for him? Does he think there need not be words spoken of love nor soft caresses to soothe my body? Am I truly then to him a possession and not a wife, a whore who's met his fancy?" (p. 349). Clearly, she wants to be petted and fussed over as intensely and repetitively as a child might be by its mother. She also wishes to receive constant verbal assurances of love that will obviate the need to interpret the covert meanings of her husband's typically distant behavior. In thus giving form to her desires, she and all of the other heroines in these ideal romances openly deny what several analysts have said of romantic heroines and of the women who identify with them, which is that they masochistically enjoy being brutalized, terrorized, and hurt by men.¹⁸ What all of the

heroines want is tenderness and nurturance. Because their stories are utopian fantasies, they receive both; in accepting them, they finally respond freely to a man and learn that they are mature women with sexual desires and tastes that can lead to very personal pleasure.

Parris Afton Bonds's description of Julie's first "perfect" coupling with Nick in *Made for Each Other* is typical of those in the other nineteen ideal romances that stress the hero's tenderness and the heroine's subsequent assistance and participation in the sexual act. It is significant that this occurs immediately after Nick has given Julie an especially meaningful Christmas gift:

With deliberate leisureliness, she unbuttoned Nick's shirt. Nick's brows raised questioningly, as though to ask her if she understood the implications of what she was doing.

Her hand reached for the snap of his slacks, her fingers deftly loosening the catch. Still, Nick did not move. His eyes scorched her face. Julie's fingers halted at the zipper, and she stood on tiptoe, her hands splaying against his chest for balance, and kissed the carved lines of his lips before playfully teasing them with her tongue. . . .

The realization slowly dawned on Julie that no longer was she the seducer. Nick had swiftly turned the tables, and it was she who lay trembling, waiting for him to make her complete. He came to her then, gently, tenderly, patiently. And when it was over, she buried her head in the hollow of his shoulder, so he would not see the ecstasy, the love, that she felt surely must shine in her eyes. (pp. 159–60)

Despite her initiation of sexual contact, Julie is transformed in the course of this passage into a passive, expectant, trembling creature who feels incomplete without the attentions of the hero. While one might say that she simply has adopted the typical stance prescribed for women in patriarchal culture, it should also be noted that she has become infantile in the sense that she is all passive, incomplete desire, yearning for the life-giving nurturance of a tender and gentle but all-powerful individual. A description like this quite obviously expresses a desire for a heterosexual partner but, at the same time, it also seems to mask a covert and unconscious wish to regress to the state of infancy in order to experience again, but this time completely and without the slight withholding born of homophobia, that primary love the infant received at the breast and hands of her mother. The very particular manner in which the crucial love scene is described in the ideal romance suggests that the heroine's often expressed desire to be the hero's formally recognized wife in fact camouflages an equally insistent wish to be his child.¹⁹

Elisabeth Barr's *The Sea Treasure* is especially interesting to consider in this context because she converts what are usually only covert hints into

the explicit theme of her book. Her heroine, Leonora, is more than physically cut off from her family and earlier identity. The victim of a shipwreck, she suffers from severe amnesia. When she is rescued by the hero, she possesses only two distant memories—one of a loving woman, the other of a terrifying man. Because she fears all men as a consequence, she refuses to respond to Dominic who falls in love with her almost immediately. Barr's subsequent treatment of his efforts to prove his love makes the regressive impulse at the heart of the romance unusually explicit. Consider this passage detailing the way he comforts her after a nightmare:

He went across to her, and held the shaking body close to his, stroking her hair. . . .

He lay on the coverlet, putting his arm around her and cradling her head against his shoulders. Leonora sighed once, deeply, and her lids fluttered over her eyes. In a little while she slept. . . .

In the fireplace, the dying coals fell with a soft crash, making Leonora start and tremble in her sleep, until he soothed her with the touch of his fingers on her cheek, and she slept again. (pp. 86–87)

Barr here embodies an ideal hero's love for his heroine in the image of a mother who stays with her child through a storm to soothe away its fears. In fact, she later writes that Leonora recalls that night with "a clear picture of [a] man, one who had stayed with her through the long night, holding her as carefully as though she had been a sick child. *That* memory warmed her, put soft color in her cheeks" (p. 89). This romantic heroine is not excited by brutality but sensuously aroused by the promise of being nurtured as a child is by its mother. Barr's descriptions make it unusually clear that the fantasy that generates the romance originates in the oedipal desire to love and be loved by an individual of the opposite sex *and* in the continuing pre-oedipal wish that is part of a woman's inner-object configuration, the wish to regain the love of the mother and all that it implies—erotic pleasure, symbiotic completion, and identity confirmation.

Barr renders this most obvious in the final pages of *The Sea Treasure* when she has Leonora explicitly connect her love for her mother with her newfound love for Dominic. At the moment when she confronts sure death, Leonora thinks of "her mother, who had loved her so selflessly, and whom she had loved deeply in return." The sentence continues, however, with a "but" that indicates that a new love has replaced that primordial one. Barr continues, "but the realization of her great love for Dominic Pengallion was a new and frightening thing" and adds later that now Leonora "realized how much she loved the man who had brought her from death to life" (p. 191).

In finally rescuing Leonora from danger, Dominic once again tenderly carries her against his chest, calls her his "Sea Treasure," and insists, de-

spite her returning memory, that she will always be Leonora (a name he gave her) to him. But even as he demands that she relinquish her old identity, he also restores it to her by reuniting her with her real mother. It is only then, when she has regained her mother both actually and symbolically, that Leonora finally declares her love for Dominic. He is the ideal male partner who is capable of fulfilling both object roles in this woman's triangular inner-object configuration. His spectacular masculinity underscores his status as her heterosexual lover and confirms the completeness of her rejection of her childlike self. At the same time, his extraordinary tenderness and capacity for gentle nurturance means she does not have to give up the physical part of her mother's attentions because his "soft" sexual attention allows her to return to the passive state of infancy where all of her needs were satisfied and her fears were erased at her mother's breast. The symbolic recovery of primary love and the total security and identity confirmation it implies finally enable her to embrace her new identity as a mature woman.

Thus the romance originates in the female push toward individuation and actualization of the self, but because it is written by women who have been engendered within a patriarchal family characterized by exclusively female "mothering," that drive is embodied within the language and forms created and prescribed by patriarchy. Consequently, to achieve *female* selfhood in the romance, which is an expression of patriarchal culture, is to realize an identity in relation not merely to one but to two important others. The romance does deny the worth of complete autonomy. In doing so, however, it is not obliterating the female self completely. Rather, it is constructing a particular kind of female self, the self-in-relation demanded by patriarchal parenting arrangements.

It is obvious, then, why the romance must also concern itself with the nature of masculinity and its implications for women. The stories are written from a perspective that is well aware of the difficulties posed by male autonomy and reticence and, as a result, they are exercises in the imaginative transformation of masculinity to conform with female standards. This is precisely what occurs when the emotional standoff between hero and heroine is partially broken in the ideal romance by the hero's act of tenderness (function 8). What makes this so interesting, however, is not the fact that it occurs. This is, after all, a woman's fantasy and, as such, it fulfills desires and satisfies wishes that are basic to her psychological construction. Function 8 of the ideal romance is intriguing precisely because it is *not structurally explained* by the narrative *at the time that it occurs*. No action on the part of the hero or, for that matter, on the part of any other character can be said to cause or explain the magic transformation of his cruelty and indifference into tender care. The abrupt transformation simply takes place.

Although the hero's punishment of the heroine results in his separation from her, the separation is never connected explicitly *at this point in the story* with his ensuing act of kindness. Because the hero does not indicate overtly either in his thoughts or in conversation that this separation causes him to recognize his dependence upon the heroine, function 7 is not presented as the effective agent in the transformation of function 6 into function 8. The separation simply occurs and then the hero demonstrates miraculously that he can be tender with the heroine. Of course, the fact that this transformation has been prepared for surreptitiously by earlier descriptions of the hero, which contain a clue to the underlying softness hiding behind his impassive facade, makes the shift palatable to the reader. But in relying on the reader's greater knowledge, the romance author avoids having the hero openly declare his dependence on a woman. He continues to be seen as a supreme example of unchallenged, autonomous masculinity. Later in the text when hero and heroine are finally united, he confesses that it was the prospect of losing her that frightened him and prompted his decision to woo her with tenderness. In falling back on this kind of retroactive interpretation, however, the romance avoids considering the problem of the contradiction between admission of dependency and relationality and the usual definition of masculinity as total autonomy. The hero is permitted simply to graft tenderness onto his unaltered male character. The addition of the one, the romance implies, need not transform the other. Consequently, the genre fails to show that if the emotional repression and independence that characterize men are actually to be reversed, the entire notion of what it is to be male will have to be changed.

The romance inadvertently tells its reader, then, that she will receive the kind of care she desires only if she can find a man who is *already* tender and nurturant. This hole in the romance's explanatory logic is precisely the point at which a potential argument for change is transformed into a representation and recommendation of the status quo. The reader is not shown how to find a nurturant man nor how to hold a distant one responsible for altering his lack of emotional availability. Neither is she encouraged to believe that male indifference and independence really can be altered. What she is encouraged to do is to latch on to whatever expressions of thoughtfulness he might display, no matter how few, and to consider them, rather than his more obvious and frequent disinterest, as evidence of his true character. In learning *how to read* a man properly, the romance tells its reader, she will reinforce his better instincts, break down his reserve, and lead him to respond to her as she wishes. Once she has set the process in motion by responding warmly to his rare demonstrations of affection (function 9), she will further see that his previous impassivity was the result of a former hurt (function 10). If she can recognize that, she will understand, as the romantic heroine always does, that her man really

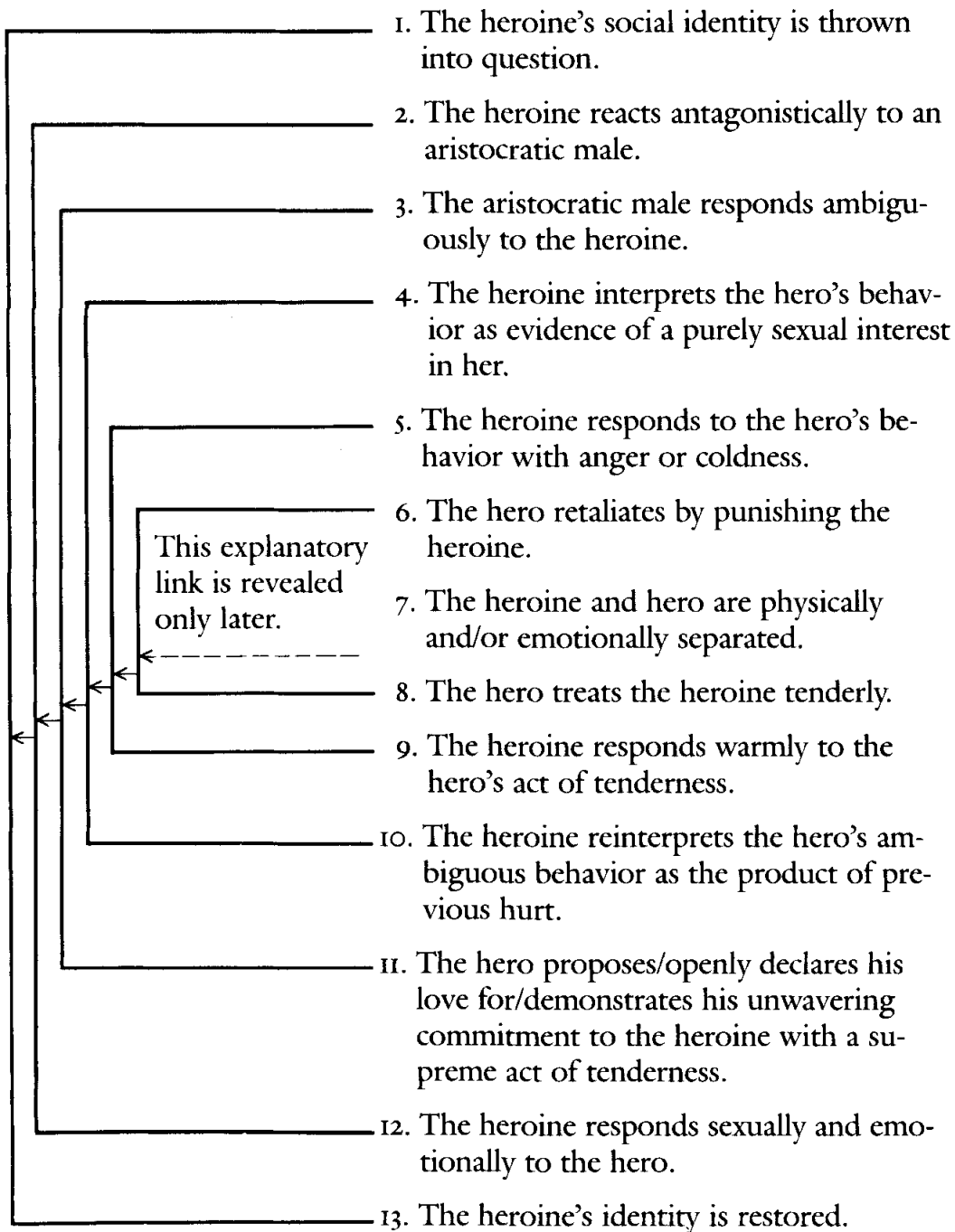
loves her and that he is dependent on her even if neither of them wishes to admit it openly.

The romantic narrative demonstrates that a woman must learn to trust her man and to believe that he loves her deeply even in the face of massive evidence to the contrary. The fantasy's conclusion suggests that when she manages such trust, he will reciprocate with declarations of his commitment to her (function 11). That commitment, the romance further insists, which also implies his need for her, is the condition for her free and uninhibited response (function 12). Once she responds to his passion with her own, she will feel as the heroine does, both emotionally complete and sexually satisfied. In short, she will have established successfully an external connection with a man whose behavior she now knows how to read correctly. The romance's conclusion promises her that if she learns to read male behavior successfully, she will find that her needs for fatherly protection, motherly care, and passionate adult love will be satisfied perfectly. The explanatory structure of this argument is represented in Table 4.2.

Clifford Geertz has observed that in attending a cockfight, the young Balinese receives from this essential art form of his culture "a kind of sentimental education."²⁰ "What he learns there," Geertz writes, "is what his culture's ethos and his private sensibility . . . look like when spelled out externally in a collective text."²¹ The experience of reading the romance is little different for Dot and her customers. In effect, they are instructed about the nature of patriarchy and its meaning for them as women, that is, as individuals who do not possess power in a society dominated by men. Not only does the romantic drama evoke the material consequences of refusal to mold oneself in the image of femininity prescribed by the culture but it also displays the remarkable benefits of conformity.

Equally significant, however, the romance also provides a symbolic portrait of the womanly sensibility that is created and required by patriarchal marriage and its sexual division of labor. By showing that the heroine finds someone who is intensely and exclusively interested in her and in her needs, the romance confirms the validity of the reader's desire for tender nurture and legitimizes her pre-oedipal wish to recover the primary love of her initial caretaker. Simultaneously, by witnessing her connection with an autonomous and powerful male, it also confirms her longing to be protected, provided for, and sexually desired. The romance legitimizes her own heterosexuality and decision to marry by providing the heroine with a spectacularly masculine partner and a perfect marriage. In thus symbolically reproducing the triangular object configuration that characterizes female personality development through the heroine's relationships, the romance underscores and shores up the very psychological structure that guarantees women's continuing commitment to marriage and motherhood. It manages to do so, finally, because it also includes a set of very

TABLE 4.2

The Narrative Logic of the Romance

usable instructions which guarantee that *she* will not reject her current partner or hold out for the precise combination of tenderness and power that the heroine discovers in the hero. Because the romance provides its reader with the strategy and ability to reinterpret her own relationship, it insures patriarchal culture against the possibility that she might demand

to have both her need for nurturance and adult heterosexual love met by a single individual.

The romance thematizes the activity of interpretation and reinterpretation for a very good reason, then. In suggesting that the cruelty and indifference that the hero exhibits toward the heroine in the early part of the novel are really of no consequence because they *actually* originated in love and affection, the romance effectively asserts that there are other signs for these two emotions than the traditional ones of physical caresses, oral professions of commitment, and thoughtful care. When the heroine retroactively reinterprets the hero's offensive behavior as equivalent expressions of his basic feeling for her, the reader is encouraged to engage in the same rereading process in order to understand properly what she is offered daily in her own relationship. The romance perpetuates the illusion that, like water into wine, brusque indifference can be transformed into unwavering devotion. Its value derives from its offer of a set of procedures that will accomplish the transformation. In learning how to read male behavior from the romance, a woman insulates herself from the need to demand that such behavior change. As Geertz has said of quartets, still lifes, and cockfights, the romance is not merely the analogical representation of a preexisting sensibility but a positive agent in its creation and perpetuation.²²

As a coda to the argument presented in this chapter that some romance fiction is as much about recovering motherly nurturance and affection as it is about the need to be found desirable by men, I would like to point out that romances vary considerably in the explicitness with which they acknowledge and represent this persistent desire to merge with a wholly attentive, gentle other. Kathleen Woodiwiss, for instance, places heavy emphasis on the nurturing abilities of her heroes but does not concern herself overtly with the heroine/mother relationship. Elisabeth Barr, on the other hand, parallels her love story with another tale about the heroine's efforts to recover her lost identity and her real mother. Despite such internal variation within the genre, however, all popular romantic fiction originates in the failure of patriarchal culture to satisfy its female members. Consequently, the romance functions always as a utopian wish-fulfillment fantasy through which women try to imagine themselves as they often are not in day-to-day existence, that is, as happy and content. Some writers are simply more successful than others at refusing the language of desire and satisfaction offered to them by their culture. A few have managed to retain a semblance of a more independent voice in order to say that it is not hardness, indifference, and emotional cruelty that women want but an exclusive and intense emotional relationship with a tender, life-giving individual. This longing, born of relational poverty, is implicit in all romantic fiction; only occasionally does it manage to forge for itself

a language of forms capable of giving it fuller expression. This has occurred, however, in one of the novels in the sample selected for this chapter. I would like to close, then, by looking at *Green Lady* by Leigh Ellis to show what can happen when the desire that inhabits all romances refuses to be contained completely within patriarchal forms.

Green Lady (1981) was written by the mother-and-daughter team of Anne and Louisa Rudeen. Educated at the University of Kansas (Anne) and at Yale (Louisa), they are much more conscious of literary history and generic conventions than most typical authors of romances. Their literary consciousness in part explains their ability to see that the romance is an alterable set of generic conventions rather than a natural and immutable organic form. Although their book has been published by Avon as a romance complete with the standard cover and blurbs, in fact it takes important liberties with the genre's conventions. The novel employs many standard characters and events, but its plot structure does not conform to the usual pattern. Its deviations are significant because, in altering the romantic plot, the Rudeens have made more explicit the romance's usually submerged concern with the mother-daughter relationship. I should add that Dot awarded the book five stars, reviewed it enthusiastically as a "unique" offering, and featured a short biography of the authors in her May 1981 newsletter. She also urged her customers to read it and reported that the many who did agreed that it was a very good book.

Green Lady opens conventionally enough with the heroine's entrance into a London disco. It differs almost immediately from the typical romance, however, because Dorinda Westerly is accompanied by her actress-mother whom she very obviously admires (p. 11). It soon becomes clear that the story will focus on both women. As soon as they enter the nightclub, Dorinda and Emma encounter a man they knew long ago in Newport. In conversing with Emma, this friend makes it immediately clear to the reader that all three witnessed a murder some years ago. When Emma and Bill agree to meet the next day, it is obvious that the mystery will also figure centrally in the narrative.

The second chapter returns to the usual concerns of the romance as it describes the first encounter of the two women with the men who become their suitors. While waiting for her mother to audition for a play, Dorinda is transfixed by another waiting actor, Paul Innowell, who is typically handsome and sexually attractive. She thinks to herself, in fact, that "[n]ever in her life had she felt so powerful an urge just to pounce on a strange man and start kissing him" (p. 24). She does not have to wait long, for on the next page, after asking her permission, he kisses her passionately. As in most romances, it is obvious to the reader that they have fallen in love instantly. Her encounter with Paul is paralleled by her mother's introduction to Trevor York. His "adventurous" appearance im-

mediately distinguishes him from her former husband who was “more an ardent fan than a dashing lover” (p. 23).

Despite the complication provided by the mystery, the love plots remain central to the novel for several chapters. Dorinda’s involvement in particular deepens rapidly; when she and Paul make love after their first date, it becomes even clearer that *Green Lady* is different from other ideal romances. The one feature it shares with the others is its emphasis on the hero’s tenderness in sex and on the feeling of complete union the heroine achieves with him. Nonetheless, when the following description, which evokes the climactic passage usually found on the final pages of a four-hundred page historical, appears on page 43, the reader cannot help but wonder what kind of misunderstanding could possibly separate them. At this early stage in the novel, the heroine achieves the kind of oceanic merging with a nurturant, heterosexual lover that is the final goal of every other romance:

[H]e bent over her and started to kiss her, beginning at her throat and working downward, evoking delicious sensations that again quickly became so intense that she held onto his shoulders with both hands and felt pleasure spiraling through her body until even her perception of herself was swept away and she felt boundless and pulsing, helpless to stop the tide of feeling that swept over her and left her only after an ecstatic moment that went on unendurably, past all boundaries shattering in its impact. (p. 43)

What is even more astonishing than their early lovemaking is that nothing occurs to distance the lovers from each other. Their mutual attachment continues to grow because they are both open and honest. As a result, there is no need for the usual romantic skill of reinterpretation. The relationship between Dorinda and Paul simply develops as an ideal romantic passion. The fact that there are still 150 pages to be read suggests, even if only implicitly, that this idyllic union is still somehow incomplete.

In the meantime, Emma’s connection with Trevor York stalls because she soon becomes convinced that the Mafia is murdering all witnesses to the killing in Newport. She is terrified because she knows Dorinda was known to have been in the club at the time. When she feels certain her daughter is being stalked, she formulates a plan to protect her; Emma proposes to fake her own death in order to guard her daughter surreptitiously.

There is no need to recount the rather complicated story that ensues, but one incident is crucial here. When Emma’s death is successfully staged on the island of Ibiza, Dorinda returns to England with Paul while looking everywhere for her mother who promised her she would never be far from her though she would be disguised. At one point, Dorinda goes to

a nightclub thinking she might draw her mother into the open. When she sees a familiar-looking woman, she is convinced she has found her mother. Dorinda approaches her and offers her a drink. Taken aback, the woman agrees, telling her she looks like “a little girl who’s lost her mother” (p. 116). Of course, Dorinda takes this as a sign that the woman is indeed Emma. She accepts an invitation to go to her apartment thinking that then they will be reunited. Later, exasperated that her mother does not reveal her identity, she exclaims, “Mother, honestly, what is this?” She is shocked when the woman kisses her and tells her that she is not old enough to be her mother, but “will be, if that’s what you’d like” (p. 120). Realizing that the woman is a lesbian, Dorinda runs out thinking to herself, “The countess hadn’t anything to do with Mother!” (p. 120).

It should be clear by now that *Green Lady* is preoccupied explicitly with the search for the lost mother. Although I think it unfair to attribute deliberate intent to the writers here, it is obvious that this scene has been included as a kind of red herring. Subliminally aware that longing for reunion with the mother overrides taboos on homosexuality, the authors have included the scene to demonstrate otherwise, to assert, in effect, that mother has nothing to do with lesbianism! Having assured themselves of that, the Rudeens are free to imagine otherwise unimaginable possibilities.

The first half of the book ends at this point with Dorinda’s vow to return to America. The second half chronicles her efforts to find out the truth about the Mafia killing in the hope that she will learn enough to tell the police. In the course of the narrative she gets involved with an attractive but cruel man whose brutal sexual attentions she merely endures. She eventually stumbles across the real killer, of course, tries to bait him, and is wounded seriously for her efforts. When she passes out only a few pages from the end of the book, the unsuspecting reader is left almost totally at sea. Then, in a surprising third section, the reader learns that the Dorinda of Part 2 was, in fact, Emma. In order to protect her daughter, she decided to *become* her daughter. She had plastic surgery to change her facial features and then set out to draw the murderers out into the open before they found her real daughter.

The final scene of the novel takes place in Emma’s hospital room. Now mirror images of each other, mother and daughter are reunited. Emma’s delirious memories are interspersed with the crooning of a nurse who calls her “baby” and tries to get her to eat. Then, suddenly, she hears a voice call, “Mother.” Her subsequent thoughts are especially revealing. Although she recalls that she is a mother, what she really wants is to *have* a mother: “It was the voice of a young girl; almost her own voice. Had she spoken? But she would never call, ‘Mother.’ The idea of having a mother—she had been a mother, but she had never really *had* a mother,

not since so long ago when she had been ordered to leave home" (p. 206). Again, I hesitate to attribute conscious intent here, but the passage is a remarkable illustration of Chodorow's argument that behind a woman's desire to mother a child hides her own wish to be mothered. Emma's longing to be taken care of is granted, but not before she establishes with her daughter the fact that they are safe. As she regains consciousness, Emma tries to recall what she has done to protect her daughter: "The man who had frightened her for so long was gone," she wondered, "[w]asn't he?" (p. 207). When Dorinda responds that he is dead, she adds, "We're safe. You did what you wanted to do—you saved us both."

In a book written, marketed, and read as a romance, it is indeed curious that mother and daughter are restored to each other *only* when the male threat has been eradicated. Not only has Emma killed the man who wanted to take her daughter from her, but Paul is not permitted to witness their reunion. Free of all male presence, then, mother and daughter reverse roles as Dorinda reassures Emma that she will be fine by tenderly pressing her mother's hand to her cheek. When Emma protests that she will have to have the plastic surgery reversed, Dorinda answers that although Trevor might prefer it *she* likes Emma's face the way it is. In this utopian female fantasy, male wishes are ultimately ignored. Mother and daughter, who are now actually one person, lose themselves in each other's gaze. The final two lines of *Green Lady* describe the real merging, which is the deepest desire of the ideal romantic heroine who usually must rest content with a symbolic satisfaction of that desire through union with a nurturant hero. Here, mother and daughter merge into each other without the disruptive, intermediary presence of a man: "Emma's dark eyes widened as she gazed into her daughter's. Together, they laughed" (p. 207).

Although *Green Lady* is obviously different from most other romances, it need be considered aberrant only if one assumes, as so many students of the genre have, that the romance originates in female masochism, in the desire to obliterate the self, or in the wish to be taken brutally by a man. Investigation of romances highly valued by their readers reveals, however, that the fairy-tale union of the hero and heroine is in reality the symbolic fulfillment of a woman's desire to realize her most basic female self *in relation* with another. What she desires in this imaginary relationship is both the autonomy and sense of difference guaranteed by connection with someone experienced as "other" and the erasure of boundaries and loss of singular consciousness achieved through union with an individual indistinguishable from the self. Romances vary in the emphasis they place on the one, usually achieved through the spectacularly masculine hero, or the other, granted by his nurturant, essentially "effeminate" attention. *Green Lady* differs only in that it finds the perfect union with this nurturant male

still unsatisfying. The desire to recover the life-giving care of the primary caretaker is so strong here that it can be fulfilled only through a literal recovery of the lost mother. What the ideal romance usually grants the heroine covertly in the person of a strong but tender man is here given Dorinda overtly in an unmediated union with her mother who is, in fact, indistinguishable from her. *Green Lady* closes with the reestablishment of that original, blissful symbiotic union between mother and child that is the goal of all romances despite their apparent preoccupation with heterosexual love and marriage.