



MONASH University

The Worlds of Popular Fiction: Genres, Texts, Reading Communities

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Abstract

The genre novels of modern popular fiction are a highly successful form of narrative writing. They are increasingly seen as a valid mode of cultural production and a discrete field of narrative writing with distinctive properties governed by their own rules, practices and participants. There are several reasons why the study of these genre novels is important. First, more people read these novels than any other form of fiction. Second, the genre novels of popular fiction attract very loyal readers who feel they have established a connection to the author and to other like-minded readers and this emotional bond of loyalty can continue throughout the years with the readers returning often to their favorite novels. The final reason for the study of these novels is that while there have been studies undertaken that focus on specific genres and on the field of popular fiction as a whole, less attention has been given to the distinctive relationship developed between the reader and the text in popular fiction. This thesis aims to take a step towards addressing this gap. Through three case studies, each one focusing on a different genre of popular fiction (romance genre, science fiction genre and fantasy genre), this thesis examines the relationship between genres, the novels and the reading communities who support them, claiming that popular fiction is both a social and a textual phenomenon. It argues that in popular fiction, the success of the individual novelists and their series is best explained by a methodology of three different but interrelated perspectives, of genre analysis, textual analysis and reception analysis. The case studies show how these novels draw an emotional response from their readers who find that the textual world not only offers them comfort and inclusion but also a place to share their knowledge, insights and research of these texts with other readers. Academic research in the fields of cultural, communication and media studies often refers to the readers of popular fiction and their reading communities but neglects the individual nature of popular fiction as a separate form of social communication or does not take into account the hundreds of reading communities online where readers develop dialogues lasting over many years. This thesis contributes to an emerging field of research on the reading communities of genre fiction.

Key terms:

Genre: popular fiction: reading communities: loyal readers: cultural fields: textual worlds: social phenomenon: textual phenomenon: genre analysis: textual analysis: reception analysis:

romance genre: science fiction genre: fantasy genre: Georgette Heyer: Anne McCaffrey: J.K.
Rowling: social themes: sociotextual activity:

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

In our society, popular fiction is story after story told around urban campfires, stories which point out that life is not a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury and signifying nothing. There is more to life than defeat and despair. Life is full of possibilities. Victory is one of them. Joy is another. And that's why people read popular fiction. To be reminded that life is worth the pain. Anne Maxwell (2002)¹

The genre novels of modern popular fiction are a highly successful form of narrative writing. Since the latter part of the twentieth century there has been an expansion in the critical interest in these novels,² which are increasingly accorded their own legitimacy as a mode of cultural production and a discrete field of narrative writing. In this thesis I will argue that popular fiction is both a social and a textual phenomenon and I take the work of theorist Pierre Bourdieu as a starting point for my analysis.

The separation of popular fiction from other forms of narrative writing appeared in the social theories of Bourdieu.³ Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production separates different genres, for example the society novel or the popular novel, into discrete fields. Each field has its own 'distinctive properties', by which it can be situated 'relative to other positions', and each field depends on its distribution of specific properties, such as its own rules, practices and participants, to ensure its success:

The science of the literary field is a form of *analysis situs* which establishes that each position - e.g. the one which corresponds to a genre such as the novel, or within this, to a subcategory such as the society novel or the popular novel - is subjectively defined by the system of distinctive properties by which it can be situated relative to other positions (Bourdieu 1993, p.30).

Bourdieu's theory of separate *cultural fields* opens a space for studying popular fiction as a significant sociotextual process. Each of the various cultural institutions within society, such

¹ Anne Maxwell is a well-published writer of popular fiction. Since 1975 she has written over fifty novels in genres such as science fiction, romance and crime fiction. She uses several pseudonyms but her most well-known is 'Elizabeth Lowell'. This quote is taken from an article on her *Homepage*, 'Popular Fiction: Why We Read It, Why We Write It' (Maxwell 2002, n.p.).

² The following two authors demonstrate the new critical interest in the genre novels popular fiction. The first, Janice Radway, focuses on the genre of popular fiction traditionally associated with women readers: a genre that has been ignored (Radway 1984). The second, Ken Gelder, offers an example of the new critical interest in the whole field of popular fiction (Gelder 2004).

³ Bourdieu's perception of fields is that, 'Fields may be thought of as structured spaces that organize around specific types of capitals or combinations of capital... . The concept of field stands as an alternative analytical tool to institutions, organizations, markets, individuals and groups... . Field analysis brings these separate units into a broader perspective that stresses their relational properties rather than their intrinsic features and therefore the multiplicity of forces shaping the behavior of each' (Swartz 2016, n.p.).

as literature, art, and theatre, are autonomous social structures or *fields* each with its own rules and practices (Bourdieu, 1983). Each *field* is a discrete social domain in which people compete for power and resources. For example Bourdieu argues that the popular novel is a separate category defined by the distinctive properties which establish its individual and unique character and which differentiates it from other forms of writing such as Literature.

However, these fields are not static. Media theorist David Hesmondhalgh (2006) points out that Bourdieu believes there is a certain amount of fluidity within each field, as agents and institutions that are involved in the production and distribution of the field's products compete and redefine existing positions and power structures:

Fields of cultural production (literary, artistic, etc.) are also structured by sets of possible positions within them. In fact, fields are, to a large extent, according to Bourdieu's scheme, constituted precisely by struggles over these positions, which often take the form of a battle between established producers, institution and styles, and heretical newcomers. (Hesmondhalgh 2006, p.215)

An important response to Bourdieu's theory of separate cultural fields is Ken Gelder's (2004) critical perception of both popular fiction and Literature. His work, based on Bourdieu's theories of 'the field of cultural production', distinguishes Literature and popular fiction as belonging to two separate but equal fields of writing. He states that 'Literature deploys a set of logics and practices that are different in kind to those deployed in the field of popular fiction' (Gelder 2004, p. 12).⁴ Gelder shows how popular fiction includes features of 'low culture' as defined in Bourdieu's concept of 'heteronomous fields':

By contrast, a form of low cultural production such as soap opera [or popular fiction] is described by Bourdieu as 'heteronomous': open to mass audiences and necessarily caught up in the logic of the marketplace, which means it remains *conscious* of its viewers/readers, and is determined to please them. It usually doesn't draw on the language of art to define itself; more commonly, it uses the language of industry and production instead, engaging positively and enthusiastically with 'worldly or commercial success'. (Gelder 2004, p.13, emphasis in original)

Significantly, Gelder notes how readers of popular fiction often move between both methods of discourse, Literature and popular fiction, quite aware that each requires a different form of critical awareness:

⁴There are many studies that reflect Bourdieu's approach to cultural fields but in relation to popular fiction the following is a small sample demonstrating how Bourdieu's theory has influenced ongoing scholarship: *Pierre Bourdieu and Culture Theory: Critical Investigation* (Fowler 1997); *Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction* (McCracken 1998); 'Creating Fiction: Bourdieu's Theory and Writing Practice' (Gonsalves and Chan 2008); *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature: Habits of Whiteness* (Young 2015); and *Novelists Against Social Change: Conservative Popular Fiction 1920-1960* (Macdonald 2015).

Readers, of course, may very well move from one to the other, since reading interests can at times be flexible and adaptable. But in doing so, these different logics and practices are surely registered, which means that Literature and popular fiction will *necessarily* not be read or ‘processed’ in the same way. (Gelder 2004, p.12, emphasis in original)

Andrew Milner (2015) offers a different interpretation, also directly related to popular fiction, of Bourdieu’s cultural fields. Milner, writing about science fiction, claims that rather than Literature and popular fiction occupying separate cultural fields, each individual genre, (including both Literature and popular fiction) forms its own cultural field. So what is seen as the genre of science fiction, ‘incorporate[s] both ‘genre’ and ‘mainstream’ writers (Milner 2012, p.66). In the field of science fiction the small amount of work:

currently incorporated into contemporary versions of the literary canon – and pulp SF are different subtypes of the same genre, occupying different locations in the same literary field, distinguished from each other primarily by their respective technologies of production and attendant modes of distribution and reception. (Milner 2012, p.58)

Therefore both Literature and popular fiction ‘are merely points on a map, organized horizontally, rather than positions in a hierarchy, organized vertically, but will nonetheless generate invidious comparisons within the SF field’ (Milner 2012, p. 54). Unfortunately this positioning of popular fiction in the heteronomous end of the field, as Milner (2012, p.54) notes, opens it to a possible dismissive critical reception as it appeals not to the academy but to an uncritical ‘most bourgeois audience’.

On the other hand Gelder (2004), applying Bourdieu’s theory of cultural fields, offers a new perception of both Literature and popular fiction as clearly separate to each other as individual methods of writing. He clearly shows that they are autonomous practices that form separate cultural fields governed by their own practices, rules and goals. However, both Gelder and Milner offer a perception of genre hierarchy, arguing that authors who were originally considered as writing popular fiction can be redefined as moving up to become serious authors but nothing is mentioned of authors moving in the opposite direction. Both studies note that such movement is usually very small and that authors in both fields tend to remain independent of each other. The way Bourdieu and Gelder define popular fiction as an independent cultural field is seen as offering a far more positive and productive approach to understanding the reception of popular fiction than previous literary criticism. In addition to the more productive view of popular fiction offered by Gelder, in this thesis I argue that popular fiction needs to be seen independent of other forms of writing so that its strengths, particularly its social qualities, can be properly appreciated.

The perception of popular fiction as an independent field has also found support in the new academic discipline of cultural studies, as Roberta Pearson (2007, p.100) notes in her study of popular media series: ‘we do undeniably inhabit a historical moment in which the distribution of high-cultural capital has declined due to the very leveling of cultural hierarchies celebrated by cultural studies’. As a result there is less emphasis on the hierarchical paradigm that places Literature as being ‘above’ or better than popular fiction.

I believe that the study of genre novels of popular fiction is important for several reasons. First, these are novels that capture the attention of more readers than literary fiction. For example, in America, the annual total sales for just one genre, romance novels, in 2013 was US\$1.08 billion with a 34% share of the total market.⁵ Second, genre novels not only capture the attention of a great many readers worldwide, they also inspire very strong bonds of loyalty between the author and the reader that may continue over many years as the reader constantly returns to their favourite novels. Finally, while there have been studies that focus on particular genres and popular fiction as a whole,⁶ they do not pay particular attention to the distinctive relationship between the reader and the text in the field of popular fiction. This thesis aims to address this gap.

The argument

Through a series of case studies focusing on three of the main genres of popular fiction (romance, science fiction and fantasy),⁷ I have examined of the interplay between genres, texts and reading communities, considering popular fiction as both a social and a textual phenomenon. This approach identifies the particular elements of these texts that belong to

⁵ These statistics are from *The Romance Writers of America* website which covers all aspects of romance writing and also provides a range of statistical information about romance genre sales. Romance Writers of America is one of the largest trade associations related to genre fiction with a membership of over 10,000 romance authors, readers and industry professionals (www.rwa.org/li/in/).

⁶ For example, J. Radway, 1984, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Culture*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, London is a reader-response approach to the romance genre and K. Gelder, 2004, *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field* Routledge, New York is a study of the field of popular fiction.

⁷ It must be noted that the three authors are all women. The choice was not made to exclude male writers, but some of most successful novels in these genres are by women. On the other hand the third genre, Science Fiction, has not historically been dominated by female authors. Anne McCaffrey was chosen as she brought a new direction to the previously male-dominated field of science fiction.

textual analysis, but it also recognises that the texts include a social component in the interactions and interrelations they generate among readers, particularly in online reading communities as well as among authors and readers. The social dimension of these novels is particular to the cultural field of popular fiction. Recognising the importance of the social dimension, through the interrelation between the three dimensions of genre, text and reading community, demonstrates that popular fiction is best theorised as not purely a textual, but a socio-textual practice.

In order to apply the theory of socio-textual analysis, this thesis explores three case studies using a multidimensional analysis which consists of a combination of genre analysis, textual analysis and reception analysis. The combination of these approaches not only shows by the readers' own voices what draws them into the world of the novel, but also identifies the topics, themes and features that most interest readers in the forums of reading communities.

I will aim to demonstrate how the genre novels of popular fiction are a blend of textual and social features. The social character of the novels is particularly evident in the voices of the readers in the various reading communities as they explore, criticise and discuss their chosen author and novel. Often a feature of these discussions is the genre conventions associated with a particular novel. These genre conventions are part of the social nature of these novels as they form a connection between the readers and the author which in turn encourages the reader to enter into the world of the text.

In this thesis I will argue that the sustained success of any of the genre novels of popular fiction occurs through the author's use of the generic conventions associated with the genre. The conventions form a shared bond between the author and the reader which in turn encourages the reader to participate in the world of the novel. Many readers develop an empathetic connection to world of the novel and often to the author as well. This motivates them to explore the world of the novel in great detail, sharing their knowledge with other readers in reading communities. It is the readers' continuing interactions in the reading communities that not only keeps the novel alive and popular, but also is an important influence that encourages new readers to join them.

The three case studies

This thesis develops its argument through a detailed examination of three case studies from three different genres of popular fiction: romance (the drawing room romances of Georgette Heyer); science fiction (the Pern novels of Anne McCaffrey); and fantasy (the Harry Potter novels of J.K. Rowling). Each of the three authors has created an intriguing world in which readers feel a sense of participation.

Georgette Heyer (1902–1974) is best known for her historical romance novels set in the Regency period (1811 to 1820) out of which she created a new sub-genre, the ‘Drawing Room romance’. Heyer’s first historical romance novel was published in 1921 and most of her subsequent forty-four historical romance novels, including the Drawing Room romances, are still in print, and are also now available as eBooks.

Anne McCaffrey (1926–2011) is a multiple award-winning author of science fiction whose innovative approach to science fiction and fantasy gave a previously male-dominated genre a new direction. McCaffrey’s most well-known series, the Dragonriders of Pern, began in 1968 with *Dragonflight* and at the time of her death was still being developed, with over twenty-six novels to date. She assured the continuation of the series by co-authoring some of the new *Dragonrider* novels with her son, Todd McCaffrey, whom she named as heir to the Pern series.

J.K. Rowling (1965–) is the creator the Harry Potter series, a complex fantasy world that seamlessly blends with the modern world of contemporary, everyday English life. Rowling’s first book *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* was published in 1997 with the seventh and last book *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* published in 2007. In the intervening ten years Rowling has become a publishing phenomenon and one of the most successful authors of modern times with the film adaptations of the series making this series a transmedia phenomenon.

Each of these authors has her own distinct style and, while each author represents a different genre, they share within their narratives many of the same social themes. These themes include for example, the perspective of women in society, marriage, family responsibility, the role of the ‘other’ or the outsider, ideological perspectives of power and influence, the contest between good and evil, what constitutes qualities such as courage or bravery, friendship and loyalty, how to deal with death, isolation, and despair, and the importance of feelings such as

hope and joy. Each of these authors creates a distinctive and detailed world that engages readers in the reading communities which form around these novels.

The analytical approach

Each of the three case studies includes an examination of how the reader is drawn into the world of the text and why it engages the reader. The methodology used in each of the case studies offers three different but related perspectives of each novel: genre analysis, textual analysis, and reception analysis.

The genre analysis is both a vertical and a horizontal approach to the text. Vertically it places the narrative within a genre or subgenre, showing how the features expected by the readers have been developed over the history of the genre. Considering the novel within its historical genre development also highlights how the author has taken established genre features and developed them in relation to their own aims and the social expectations of the readers. Genre analysis also provides a horizontal approach, analysing the role popular fiction genres have in reaching out to readers; giving them a sense of involvement in the world of the novel, and often providing a safe place for readers to examine their response to some difficult social dilemmas.

By examining the reader communities, this thesis illustrates that readers know that each genre has its range of specialised features that need to be woven into the narrative in order for that novel to be considered as belonging to the genre. Readers therefore select the particular genre and world that interests them. Readers also may select novels from a range of genres, confident in the knowledge that they will find something with which they can relate in each genre. These features provide a basic, known framework for development of the unknown narrative; in effect they are, as Rabinowitz notes, the ‘keys’ that unlock the world of the novel and draw the reader into the text.

[Reading a book] requires us to make a choice about what key to use to unlock it, and that choice must often be based on an intuitive mix of experience and faith, knowledge and hunch (Rabinowitz 1985, p. 418.)

The textual analysis of these novels focuses on the world of the text and how that world is constructed, including its characters and setting. Most genre novels, particularly the ones that endure, offer their readers a detailed and internally plausible society. It is important to note

that while the society must be believable it need not be realistic. The worlds of popular fiction are places where the reader feels a sense of familiarity and welcome. While they are important as the framework of the developing narrative, they are also places in their own right;⁸ complex societies in which the reader and the characters share experiences. The textual analysis details how particular themes are developed and places these in the context of the critical reception of the novels.

Thirdly, the reception analysis focuses on the reading communities that have formed around these novels. Novels of popular fiction draw readers together in forums such as book clubs, through participating in newsletters and by meeting like-minded readers at book fairs and conferences. Historically, direct social engagement between readers was problematic. However, with the development of the Internet, readers have found an easy way to connect with each other. The analysis of these online reading communities identifies the functions popular fiction texts have for readers, and the issues and debates that most engage them. Through an analysis of the most popular threads in the online discussions, this thesis explores the extent to which reader communities engage with, or diverge from, the features identified through the textual analysis. This reception analysis enables a much greater insight into the social, as well as textual, dimensions of the field of popular fiction.

The structure of this thesis

Following this Introduction, Chapter Two ('A Socio-textual approach to popular fiction') considers the connection between genres, texts and readers as an important relationship distinctive to the field of popular fiction. With the new perception of the genre novels of popular fiction there is also a new assessment of them, considering them as social texts where readers are drawn to the world created by the author. The literature cited in this review focuses on the developing academic interest in the collaborative relationship between the genre, the readers and the text, and establishes the nature of popular fiction as a cultural field.

Chapter Three ('An Analytical Approach to the Three Case Studies') introduces the multidimensional approach taken in the case studies. It identifies the three different but related methods of genre analysis, textual analysis and reception analysis that will form the

basis of the analysis of these novels. It includes a number of questions that will be asked of each of the novels that identify features such as character, plot and establishing the elements of the fictional world that appeal to readers.

The next three chapters present the three case studies.

Chapter Four ('A Lady of Infinite Quality') focuses on the Drawing Room romances of Georgette Heyer. The aim of this chapter is to show how the innovative use of genre, the construction of an engaging textual world and the ongoing relationship between the author/text/readers, contributes to the success of these novels. Throughout her career Heyer continued to write a number of historical romance novels set in a variety of historical periods but her contribution to the distinctive sub-genre of Regency romance is probably the category in which she is most recognised. While many booksellers and catalogues place all her Regency romances under the one category she actually developed within that category a separate and distinctive sub-genre, the Drawing Room romance. These novels are stories about the morals and the manners of a unique and intricately created society and include issues such as the depiction of marriage, women's place in society and family responsibility and relationships. These are issues that readers recognise as pertinent in today's society as much as they are in Heyer's Regency novels. This study demonstrates that Georgette Heyer's romance novels retain their popularity today not only because they are innovative and creative examples of the historical romance, but because of the interest and enthusiasm in these novels that has been maintained by the reading communities who over the years have remained devoted to Heyer's writing.

Chapter Five ('Here there be dragons') introduces the second case study, the Pern novels of Anne McCaffrey. McCaffrey succeeded in what was previously a male-dominated genre, science fiction. The chapter shows how she took recognisable features of fantasy and repositioned them within a scientific discourse. The Pern series thus exemplifies an innovative use of genre through its blending of science fiction and fantasy. Beginning with her first novel in the Pern series in 1968, McCaffrey included many issues that were being debated at the time, including reproduction, marriage, motherhood and social responsibility versus independence. A theme that constantly recurs throughout her novels is the dangers to a society of excluding not only those seen as alien and outside the social norms, but also those groups within society who are ideologically denied access to power and appreciation. The

study examines the way reading communities attribute value to these novels, participate in their imagined world, and incorporate their reading practices into their everyday lives.

Chapter Six ('A Portmanteau of Genres') examines the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling. Continuing interest in the Harry Potter series has seen the story move into other media such as films, video games, and web sites. The Harry Potter novels sit within the genre of fantasy. They have strong links to J.R.R. Tolkien, and writers such as C.S. Lewis, who initiated a new subgenre in fantasy, epic fantasy, moving away from the Victorian traditions of fairy tales and earlier Gothic horror stories. However, Rowling also incorporates a wide range of other genres within her fantasy text, including *bildungsroman*, the adventure story, the quest narrative, the fairy story and the school-days story, effectively adopting a 'portmanteau' approach to the use of genre. The reading communities coalescing around the series engage with both the published novels and the film versions of the narrative, demonstrating a complex engagement in the textual world across different genres and mediums.

Chapter Seven ('Conclusion') draws together the insights from all three case studies, outlining how they shed light on the distinctive relationship between genres, texts and reading communities, thereby providing an original framework in which to understand the functions and significance of popular fiction as a cultural field.

The following chapter will situate this thesis in the context of the critical and theoretical literature informing the study of popular fiction.

Chapter 2. A Socio-textual Approach to Popular Fiction

The aim of this chapter is to identify the main elements that form the socio-textual approach to popular fiction as presented in this thesis. The academic study of the genre novels of popular fiction has evolved from a number of disciplines, including Literature, Linguistics, Philosophy, and Cultural and Media Studies. As it is not possible here to consider every influence from all of these distinct disciplines I have selected the developments which have particularly contributed to the socio-textual perspective offered in this thesis. The chapter begins by examining arguments from a range of cultural theorists which provide a way of theorising the status of popular fiction as a cultural field. It goes on to present and justify the key principles underpinning a socio-textual approach to popular fiction. Having established the general development of a socio-textual approach, the chapter then reviews the more specific features that characterise the field of popular fiction, including genre classification and redefinition, the creation of detailed and vividly imagined textual worlds, and the formation of participatory reading communities.

1. The social/communicative dimension of texts

The arguments offered by this thesis draw on a social semiotic approach to language and communication. This position, when applied to popular fiction, contends that a defining characteristic of these novels is that they are a form of communication and social meaning making. This understanding of popular fiction is based in a functional approach to language which has evolved from scholars in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology, and cultural studies. One of the first studies of language to consider that meaning is produced through cultural association and social perception, rather than a collection of innate features, is by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, (1857–1913). Saussure was reported to view language as ‘a social fact’ (Halliday 1978, p.1) that is, language is a form of communication that evolves through a system of arbitrary relationships that have been determined by the shared worldview of the society or particular group who use it. This means that the association between an object and its meaning is based on a subjective relationship that arises from the shared culture of the language users and not the object itself, so that ‘meaning is relational rather than substantive’ (Schirato & Yell 1996, p.24).

Linguist, Michael Halliday extended Saussure's concept of the interdependency between language and society in his book *Language as Social Semiotic* (1978). Halliday argued that language is a social semiotic which is comprised of systems of social meanings that are transmitted through social contexts and that '[t]he social structure is not just an ornamental background to linguistic interaction... It is an essential element in the evolution of meaning systems and semantic processes' (Halliday 1978, p.114). Halliday maintained that meaning encoded through language is based on a complex system of relationships that form the social contexts shared by the language users. These relationships also reflect the cultural ideology and the value systems expected by the language users. Halliday contended that the words which constitute a language 'get their meaning from the activities in which they are embedded, what again are social activities with social agencies and goals' (Halliday & Hasan, 1985, p. 5). This thesis explores the social activity, shared by many language users, of reading popular fiction. Reading popular fiction is a social activity performed by social agents (readers and reading communities) with their own goals.

In this thesis, I adopt the view that narrative fiction, particularly popular fiction, is best viewed as a form of social discourse that facilitates communication between language users. In making this argument, I draw on the work of Roger Fowler (1981), who was influenced by the social semiotic approach pioneered in the 1960s and 1970s by Halliday, as well as Ferdinand de Saussure's Structuralism, the semiologist Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov's essays on narrative structure and Noam Chomsky's psychology of language. These are just some of the many scholars Fowler cites as influencing his perception of Literature as a social semiotic, an approach involving 'the application of theoretical ideas and analytic techniques drawn from linguistics to the study of literary texts' (Fowler 1981, p.11). Fowler's approach to Literature focuses on its social character and how it reflects the interactions and communication between people within society.

Literature is, like all languages, interaction between people and between institutions and people. To regard it as social discourse is to stress its interpersonal and institutional dimensions, concentrating on those parts of textual structure which reflect and which influence relations within society. (Fowler 1981, p.7)

Fowler (1981, p. 80) further claims that fictional narratives create an interactional dimension between language users where the text is an action or process:

To treat literature as discourse is to see the text as mediating relationships between language-users: not only relationships of speech, but also of consciousness, ideology, role and class. The text ceases to be an object and becomes an action or process.

While Fowler only refers to literary narratives and notes this is ‘an unusual perspective’, when, as in this thesis, his ‘interactional dimension between language users’ is applied to the genre novels of popular fiction it signals an important shift in the way a narrative text can be analysed. Fowler refers to Halliday’s three functions of language: the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual that are present within the language context (Fowler, 1981, p.82) and proposes that these features offer a new critical paradigm for Literature. However, these features and the multidimensional, social approach to a text they provide also create a method of analysis that focuses on the socio-textual features that are particular to popular fiction.

Part of the interaction mediated by the textual process is that it draws the worldview of the readers into the discourse. In analysing the texts of popular fiction the initial element that should be taken into account is the structure of the worldview. As Fowler claims, this is ‘the structuring of experience’ (Fowler 1981, p. 82). The worldview includes discerning how the society and culture in the text are created. These are elements that encourage the reader to ‘step into’ the world of the narrative. Fowler refers to the interpersonal, social nature of these texts as ‘communicative intercourse, the establishment and maintenance of personal and group relationships:’ (Fowler 1981, p.82). An example investigated in this thesis is the way many readers form emotional bonds with characters and in some cases write their own narratives (fan fiction), featuring their favourite characters. The final element is the shape of the text as a complete entity. Fowler, after Halliday, identifies this as ‘the completeness and shape of the communicative unit, a text or utterance, within its context of situation’ (Fowler 1981, p.82). In applying this to the novels of popular fiction, this includes the form of the narrative and how the world of the text and the characters are introduced to the reader and how the reader is positioned in relation to the narrative. The importance of these features, the worldview, the establishment of interpersonal relationships and the development of consistency and continuity also are important for the development of one of popular fiction’s distinctive features, found across all genres, the development of one or more sequels.

The social, communicative nature of popular fiction continues to interest scholars across a variety of disciplines such as literature, media studies, linguistics, and cultural studies. It is now applied to electronic media as well as the print-based popular fiction. For example, in his socio-textual approach to television, Hartley (1992, p.15) argues that texts are forms of communication which are ‘social not individual, and textual not behavioural’. Hartley’s description applies to popular fiction as effectively as it does to the electronic media. In this

thesis I argue that as a form of communication, the texts of popular fiction are discourses that take on meaning and value in the context of their relation with their readers, and their relation to socially established genre conventions.

2. Genre: classification, redefinition and negotiation

The term 'genre' requires examination, given the close association between 'genre fiction' and 'popular fiction'. Ken Gelder discusses this connection between genre and popular fiction, and the importance of this relationship to the readers of these narratives, in *The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field* (2004):

Popular fiction often enjoys a particular kind of reader loyalty, one that can build itself around not just a writer and his or her body of work (which certainly happens) but the entire genre and the culture that imbues it. (Gelder 2004, p.81)

Genre is theorised in this thesis both in relation to the classification of texts according to formal textual characteristics, and to the social organisation of readers and markets. It is important to note that genre is a contested term and the various uses of the term need to be distinguished.

The use of genre as a category of literary organisation has long been associated with the field of Literature, where it classifies texts in relation to features such as literary technique, content, length and tone. As Louise M. Rosenblatt observes in *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (1994, p.57), the concept of genre is used by the reader to identify types of poetry and various styles of narrative, 'Each genre, each kind of work (e.g. a sonnet or an ode, a detective novel, a picaresque novel or a psychological novel) makes its own kinds of conventional demands on the reader'. However, as Alastair Fowler (1982) notes in his study of literary genre, rather than exhibiting a list of specific features in the text, genres are more related to shared family resemblances than the repetition of individual technical features.

Since the field of popular fiction intersects with the economic field (the market), as Bourdieu would argue, genre also takes on a function within that field which is distinct to its role in the autonomous field of Literature. Cultural theorist, Jerry Palmer (1991) argues that the concept of genre in the field of popular fiction assists booksellers and publishers to maximise the promotion of their 'product' rather than reflect actual reading practices. The market

recognises that readers, while looking for their favourite genre author, will also be drawn to other authors who write within the same generic framework for as Palmer comments, 'Genre functions as a commercial device. Just as it is used as a labeling device in bookstores, it is available as a guide and a working method to those who create commercial fiction' (Palmer 1991, p.115).

From the perspective of the autonomous field of Literature, the connotations of genre as formulaic and market-driven are negatively evaluated. McKee (1997, p. 87) argues that the evaluative connotations associated with the term 'genre' revolve around its reliance on conventions, such as 'specific settings, roles, events, and values that define individual genres and their subgenres'. While the conventional nature of a genre may draw readers' attention to the text and encourage them to enter the world of the narrative, these same conventions are often viewed by critics as repetitive, formulaic features that compromise the text.

However, within the field of popular fiction, genre works as an implied contract with readers, including expectations of creativity and individuality in the way the generic features are incorporated into the text. As Cunningham et al. (1994, p. 9) argue, in relation to television programmes, 'genres are about the interplay of repetition and difference and their organization and interpretation by producers, audiences and critics'. This perception of genre as both familiar and unfamiliar, and integral to the author/text/reader relation, is equally applicable across the field of popular culture, including with popular fiction.

The important change in the perception of genre is that the concept now takes into account two areas not addressed previously in the critical analysis of popular fiction. The first is that genres, as Fowler (1982) claims, are not simply created from the same characteristics being endlessly repeated, but are crafted from families of texts that share certain attributes from a range of possible characteristics. Second, and perhaps more importantly, as Cunningham, Miller and Rowe (1994) claim, genres are texts that are shaped by and shape the expectations of the reader.

The genre novels of popular fiction rely upon the 'consensual construction of belief' as readers enter into a 'dialectic' with the author (Mendlesohn 2008, p.xiii). Readers might initially select an individual text because of its author but often this also includes generic expectations of the plot development, the characters and the narrative environment. As

Gelder (2004) observes, '*Aficionados* of popular fiction are not only knowledgeable about their genres, they cherish them' (p. 90, emphasis in original). However, readers also expect that the author will use those conventions in a creative and individual way. Fowler (1982, p.169), writing of the development of the literary novel, makes a similar claim: 'literature's true enjoyment must always partly depend on interweaving the strange with the pleurably familiar'. This is particularly relevant for the readers of popular fiction where the 'pleurably familiar' is their knowledge of the generic conventions and 'the strange' is the new and individual ways of realising them. In all of the genres of popular fiction, the conventional and the unconventional features come together in the world constructed through the text creating a context that resonates with readers encouraging them to enter and participate in the unfolding narrative.

The development of the genres of popular fiction as an area of research has a complex history. For example, the genres of the three case studies in this thesis have quite different ancestries. Beginning with the development of romance fiction, one of the oldest and most extensive genres of popular fiction, this genre has been traced from its Greek roots and its medieval focus on the hero to the present day novels (Radford, 1986). Then there is the genre of fantasy which evolved as a literary form in response to the Enlightenment in eighteenth century England (Mendlesohn & James 2009). Mendlesohn & James (2009) also trace the development of the various 'branches' (subgenres) of fantasy in modern popular fiction showing the wide range of influences from folk tales, myth, Icelandic sagas, Arthurian legend and medieval romance. The *Short History of Fantasy* also includes a detailed 'Chronology of Important Works and People' (pp.219 –1246) that lists influential contributions to the genre of fantasy ranging from 1300BC to 2010AD. Finally, within the genre of science fiction, which has a problematic history, there is a continuing dispute within the academic community as to its origins. Some critics believe it originated in early utopian fantasies. For example, Brian Stableford (2003) in the introduction to 'The origins of science fiction' states that 'One genre hospitable to sf speculation was that of utopian fantasy, whose usual narrative form was the imaginary voyage' (Stableford 2003, p. 15).⁹ Other scholars trace its origins back to the seventeenth century alongside the development of the scientific way of understanding the world. However, the scientific worldview did not translate into literature,

⁹ For a further extended analysis of the origins of science fiction, particularly its links to early utopian fantasies, please see Chapter 5: 'Here here be dragons: The novels of Anne McCaffrey' p.112.

as Nicholls (1993) claims, until much later, ‘the scientific outlook’ did not ‘percolate into society at large until the nineteenth century’ (Nicholls 1993, pp. 567-8).

Similar to romance, fantasy and science fiction as genres of popular fiction have an extensive range of literature associated with their development and their past and present social and cultural identity. While all the different genres provide their readers with pleasure and recreation the number of different genres in the field of popular fiction covers a large, rather nebulous area of narrative fiction. This has proven difficult to cover comprehensively as ‘[t]he field of popular fiction is so immense that even those commentators who try to account for the whole of it inevitably reveal only the tip of the iceberg’ (Gelder 2004, p.3), and many academics choose instead to concentrate on individual genres.

The literature associated with the popular fiction genres of romance, science fiction and fantasy will be reviewed and discussed in the three case studies outlined in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this thesis. These case studies will demonstrate how each of the authors use genre as a dynamic structure in which to develop new approaches to the familiar characteristics expected by their readers.

The following section addresses the creation of densely imagined textual worlds as a feature of the genres of popular fiction.

3. The density of textual worlds in popular fiction

Studies of popular fiction have identified that one of its significant features is the influence and importance of the worlds created by these texts. For example, Alan Palmer (2004) notes that readers create a sense of a complete world from the information within the narrative. The unity or sense of completeness of the created world in turn adds to the characters’ sense of authenticity for the reader. As Palmer (2004. p. 33) claims, these worlds are identifiable to the reader as they are ‘worlds that are created through the performative force that is granted by cultural convention’.

Another example of the importance of the world of the text is in Mendlesohn and James (2009), study of fantasy. They note how author J.R.R. Tolkien, in his epic fantasy *The Lord*

of the Rings, creates a 'full fantasy' world. They describe the world in *The Lord of the Rings* as a world that has a sense of 'reality' which draws the reader into the text:

For many readers the main attraction of *The Lord of the Rings* has precisely the feeling that Middle Earth has depth. If you turn a corner in Middle Earth, you know that there will be more world. (Mendlesohn & James 2009, p.44)

It took Tolkien about twenty years to create Middle Earth, including its economic and cultural dimensions. This thesis will argue that Georgette Heyer's 'Regency world', Anne McCaffrey's 'world of Pern', and J. K. Rowling's 'world of magic' in the *Harry Potter* novels offer readers the same sense of reality. In some cases authors create these worlds before they create the narrative, giving the narrative a stage or a framework in which to function. For example in *Tolkien's Legendarium: Essays on the History of Middle Earth* (2004) David Bratman sets out a table that demonstrates how Tolkien, between 1920 and 1925, created the various myths and legends that over the next thirty years were transformed into the fully realised Middle Earth found in the three volume set of *The Lord of the Rings* first published in 1954-55.

The relationship between the text and the reader is mediated through the created textual world:

The relations between texts and readers ... are always profoundly mediated by the discursive and inter-textual determinations which, operating on both, structure the domain of their encounter so as to produce, always, in specific and variable forms, texts and readers as the mutual supports of one another. (Bennett & Woollacott 1990, p. 442)

Readers spend a few moments or a few hours roaming an interesting and inviting environment, journeying through the world of the novel as they follow the development of the plot, meet the characters and become caught up in the many facets of the singular community created by the author. Many readers feel comfortable in these worlds as they may mirror contemporary issues from the readers' own world. As readers recognize problematic social practices from their own world being carried out within the world of the novel it provides them with a safe space to consider their response, as Palmer (1991) claims:

This identification [of challenging social practices] is part of a more general social process whereby members of a society recognize various categories of activity and occasion, and adjust their understanding of what is going on accordingly. (Palmer 1991, p. 113)

The textual worlds are dynamic creations which provide 'multidimensional spaces' offering a variety of readings framed by the shared generic expectations of the writers and readers (Palmer 1991, after Barthes 1967). Finally, for the reader, these worlds are safe places in

which the real world's social issues can be confronted through the narrative's themes and interactions (Hughes 1993; Eco 1983). For example, John Timmerman (1983) describes how the genre of fantasy in popular fiction includes an element of social relevance within the world of the text. This enables it to be a safe place in which the reader might step back from the real world in order to understand it better and even see it with more clarity:

The goal of fantasy is not to convince us that there are ogres or elves in another world, but to lead us through the struggles of this other world to a better understanding of our own. Fantasy bestows upon us an experience of spirit which reveals to us certain truths with which to encounter our real world. (Timmerman 1983, p.55)

Henry Jenkins, a prolific and influential academic in the area of popular culture, fan culture and the media, demonstrates how active involvement in the world of the narrative is apparent in all popular media (1992). In his extended definition of fans in the opening chapter of *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (1992) he claims that the personal connection to the world of text and its characters affects many fans of popular media, including the readers of popular fiction. Fans feel as if they are part of the author's created world and that world is a real place that they can explore as the characters have a life beyond that which is represented in the narrative (Jenkins 1992). Jenkins goes even further to claim that fans, mostly of popular film and television drama, have a sense of ownership of the text allowing them to use the characters in their own creative endeavours, which he terms 'cultural poaching'. In his words, 'Fans are poachers who get to keep what they take and use their plundered goods as foundations for the construction of an alternative cultural community' (Jenkins 1992, p.223).

4. Co-creation of the textual world

One of the influences that have led to attention being given to the created textual world comes out of Reader Response Theory in the 1960s. While most reader response theories focus on how each reader forms an individual and unique response to a text, in 1974 German literary scholar, Wolfgang Iser, presented an important approach to the reader's response to the text. Iser claimed that each individual reader's response to the text is created when the reader completes the implied meaning or *blank* sections of the text from his/her own critical knowledge. Iser (1974) believed that the reader and the text exist in a cooperative, collaborative relationship and, as that relationship develops, the 'borderline between fiction and reality becomes increasingly hazy' (p.113) until the reader believes in the reality of the world of the text. This thesis argues that in popular fiction, readers not only embrace the

world and all its features as created by the author but quite often in discussions in the reading communities act as co-creators, adding extensions and outcomes not articulated by the author.

Reader Response Theory queried the conventional concept of the reader as a *passive* recipient of a written text. Rosenblatt (1978, revised 1994, p.4), an early advocate for the 'active' reader, noted that:

As we survey the field of literary theory, then, the reader is often mentioned, but is not given the center of the stage. The reason is simple; the reader is usually cast as a passive recipient, whether for good or ill, of the impact of the work. He [sic] is still, in a sense, invisible, even when he[sic] is treated as a member of something referred to under such collective rubrics as 'the audience' or 'the reading public'.

Rosenblatt also claimed that texts had within them multiple messages to which readers actively responded depending on their social circumstance. So there is not only a collaborative response between the text and its readers but also each text contains within it possible multiple meanings to facilitate the reader's active involvement,

Not even the total text represents an absolute set of guides: multiple and equally valid possibilities are often inherent in the same text in its transactions with different readers under different conditions. (Rosenblatt 1978, revised 1994, p.75)

In his research into media fans, some thirty years after Iser's research, Jenkins (2006) continues to explore the importance of the fan's sense of involvement in the text. He claims that one of the features that add to the popularity of a novel, a film or television programme is that the participants in the fan communities often refer to the world of the text as if it is a real place. The fans approach the world of the text as an actual location that can be explored and feel that the characters have lives that continue on past the pages of the book or screen (Jenkins 2006, pp.18, 115).

In their study on television genres, Cunningham and Miller (1994) explicitly explore the idea of popular narratives as a process-driven creation rather than acts of individual imagination. As part of their study they look at the genres of television, highlighting the distance between the viewers or fans and the actual writers of television programs. While they consider 'repetition and difference' as positive features which keep audiences' attention, they argue that the 'organization and interpretation by producers, audiences and critics' highlights both the numerous hands through which a media text passes and the many opportunities present to alter the writer's original creation (Cunningham & Miller 1994, p.9). In contrast to the compound creative responsibility involved in a media text, which can work to distance the

viewer, this thesis argues that the reader's sense of connection to the textual world extends to a sense of connection with the author as the creator of that world.

While both the readers of popular fiction and media fans participate in the texts of popular culture there are several differences that affect their participation. The main difference is that readers have the opportunity to interact with their favourite author and that the author is an actual person. On the other hand media fans do not have an individual person directly responsible for the program with which they are interested. They can contact directors, film studios and writers (who are often anonymous), or the actors who portray their favourite characters, but none of these persons exercise the same individual ownership of the text as do authors. While it might be argued that some well-known media writers are identified by fans they are still separated from their text by the production and technical processes that affect the writer's individual original creation and so are seen as part of the process rather than the singular creator of the narrative.

Farah Mendlesohn (2008), in analysing the language and rhetoric of fantasy genre, considers this close bond between the author and the reader as a 'dialectic' connection, one which develops from a consensual relationship between the author and the reader. She writes:

I believe that the fantastic is an area of literature that is heavily dependent on the dialectic between author and reader for the construction of a sense of wonder, that it is a fiction of consensual construction of belief. (Mendlesohn 2008, p.xiii)

By drawing readers into an act of imaginative construction, the text is a site where a social partnership forms between author and reader, which is external to the narrative while being dependent on it.

By offering a number of isolated clues, authors enable readers to participate in the world of the narrative and to create their perception of the textual world and its characters. In *Fictional Minds* (2004, p. 176) Palmer notes '[t]he reader strategy is to join up the dots'. He believes readers create 'a continuing consciousness' (Palmer 2004, p.15) especially when they identify with the characters that share their particular worldview. Characters take on a sense of reality that includes 'various perceptual and conceptual viewpoints, ideological worldviews and plans for the future' (Palmer 2004, p.15) to which readers relate often at a psychological, cultural or emotional level. Readers feel that they share the same worldview with the characters and that the characters act as they, the reader, would. In discussing the reader's

sense of belonging to the textual world, Palmer does not distinguish between Popular Fiction and Literature. However, this thesis draws on research on fandom and popular fiction to explore this distinction further.

James Harold (2010) explores the relationship of the reader to the fictional worlds of popular fiction in relation to *The Lord of the Rings*. He claims that readers or fans often become so immersed in the world of the narrative that they see the fictional world as ‘having an independent existence’ (Harold 2010 p.4). In fact, no matter how detailed the fictional world might be, readers will still find a way to make it their own; ‘[a] world rich with detail, scientific, religious, cultural, historical, or technical, can never be so rich that it prevents audience [readers] from expanding that world further’ (Harold 2010 p. 5). Harold argues that fans [readers] are quite prepared to assume responsibility for the development of the fictional world if they decide that the author has not realised its full potential:

Fans [readers] tend to defer to the original authors of fictional works with regard to the prescriptions that define the fan worlds, but the views of the authors are not absolute, and fans may agree to set aside an author’s prescriptions in favour of a set of prescriptions that they think is more consistent or more exciting. (Harold 2010, p.8)

Harold’s depiction of readers as assuming control of the fictional world is similar to that of Jenkins, who describes fans of popular media [including readers] as ‘textual poachers’. Jenkins (1992, p. 3) contends that fans form a ‘subculture that exists in the “borderlands” between mass culture and everyday life and that construct its own identity and artefacts from resources borrowed from already circulating texts’. This thesis argues that this intense feeling of connecting to the fictional world is also one of the features that generate a sense of loyalty in the readers of popular fiction. An example of this, in relation to the novels in this thesis, can be seen in the popularity of the Pern series of Anne McCaffrey that continued over twenty individual novels.

The social and emotional bond between texts, authors and readers is connected to the novels’ function as ‘social texts’ and the role they play in readers’ lives. Cecilia Konchar Farr (2009), in an examination of the role of popular culture in women’s lives, argues that early academic studies of the novel overlooked the qualities often found in women’s writing, particularly romance novels, that first engaged the interest of readers. Farr argues that, in an attempt to legitimise the study of the novel, critics and scholars made a distinction between what was seen as ‘women’s writing’ and other popular fiction which was mainly written by men. She

explains that the critics ‘reduced a diverse and democratic genre [the popular novel] to a few monumental texts, all by “serious literary artists” who tended to resemble the white male academics who studied them’ (Farr 2009 p.207). In doing so, critics missed some of the qualities that still today make popular fiction popular. These qualities include the sympathetic and emotional connections encouraged between author and readers and the ability ‘to invite passionate identification with characters who come alive for readers’ (Farr 2009, p.207). Farr claims that perhaps the most important qualities of these novels written by women is that they are social texts which inspire ‘readers to talk to one another and to pass books along to encourage new conversations and more sharing of ideas’ (Farr 2009, p.207).

The social act of sharing the novels also highlights the communal nature of these texts. Donald Topping (1992) argues that the communal practice of sharing narratives between readers has cultural associations that reach back to preliterate societies. These communal practices reflect a time where myths and legends were communicated in a communal setting through the oral traditions of ‘stories told to living audiences’ and the great epics that defined the people who heard them were ‘preserved and transmitted by popular demand’ (Topping 1992, p.29).

5. The formation of reading communities

With the expansion of the Internet as a communication tool, the growth of online reading communities may seem to be a late-twentieth or early twenty-first century phenomenon. This is not the case. Reading communities have a long history that predates modern communicative methods and provides a basis for the current social involvement with the novels of popular fiction. The following section provides an account of the historical development of reading communities, in order to contextualise the contemporary popular fiction reading communities examined in this thesis.

5.1 The history of reading communities

English scholar, Edmund G.C. King, notes in his work ‘Reading Communities: Connecting the Past and the Present’ (2017) that shared, communal reading has been documented in texts dating back to the Roman Empire. He cites an example where the philosopher Pliny the Younger (61–113AD) describes a seventy-eight year old retired senator who spends most of his days reading and, when visitors join him, they all discuss the book he has been reading.

King contends that '[s]hared reading experiences in this milieu are a means of fostering a sense of group belonging' (King 2017, n.p.), which could also apply to the sense of community within the popular fiction reading communities.

While a comprehensive account of the historical development of reading communities is outside the bounds of this thesis, the following brief summary demonstrates that reading communities have been a part of the social fabric of western society for millennia.¹⁰ Throughout history, interest in books has drawn people together to read, to listen to someone reading and to discuss what the book's content. In the introduction to her history of reading communities, Rehberg-Sedo (2011, p.1, emphasis in original) claims 'a common thread runs through all these chapters: the assumption that shared reading is both a *social process* and a *social formation*'. Rehberg-Sedo's history of reading communities begins in the Middle Ages, where, even though illiteracy was common, the communal nature of reading is seen in how groups of people gathered around 'travelling entertainers and troubadours [who] roamed the countryside reading out loud to those who wanted to hear' (Rehberg-Sedo 2011 p. 3).

Moving forward to the eighteenth century, society had greatly changed and along with it so had the concept of reading communities. No longer divided into the feudal realms of the Middle Ages and, with the continuing rise of a merchant/middle class together with the spread of education literacy, was widespread across most sections of society. Together with the development of technology, books were now more available to individual readers and people gathered in book societies, book clubs and literary societies to discuss printed books that were readily available. However, the ownership of books was still a marker of social status, particularly in the rising middle class. An early example of the social influence of novels is Samuel Richardson's Epistolary novel *Pamela*. It was published in 1740 and had sold 20,000 copies by the end of 1741 (Keymer & Sabor 2005 p.20). It created great public interest and was the focus of discussion, not only in the literary societies and book clubs, but in the newspapers, from the pulpit and as part of everyday conversation, not unlike the *Harry Potter* novels of J.K. Rowling, discussed in this thesis. People not only read popular books such as *Pamela* but they socialised together in reading societies and also facilitated an extended distribution of these novels, with the members of small book societies acting 'as a

¹⁰ For a detailed account covering three centuries of the history of reading communities see DeNel Rehberg-Sedo's 2011, *Reading Communities from Salons to Cyberspace*.

lending and circulating library' (Rehberg-Sedo 2011, p.3). However, in spite of advanced printing technology, education and a middle class with the money to purchase novels, one attribute of reading societies remained: they were usually the domain of men.¹¹

This male-dominance of reading communities changed in the early 1800s. Rehberg-Sedo (2011, p. 3) notes that it was in 'the early 1800s that women started forming literary societies in great numbers for the purpose of discussing books'. Middle class women, with increasing leisure time and greater education, but lacking access to academies and public institutions, formed these early reading communities. As Rehberg-Sedo (2011, p.3) notes, the first of these women's reading communities focused on religion:

As more middle-class women gained leisure time as a result of the changes brought on by the Industrial Revolution, they gathered to practice religion, gradually gaining access to the public spaces that were traditionally open to men.

Pamela Burger (2015), in her article charting the development of women's book clubs in America, claims that by the nineteenth century women's involvement in reading communities was for self-improvement and education. She contends that the predecessors of the modern book clubs in America 'comprised of white women from the middle and upper-middle-classes' (Burger 2015, n.p.) who met 'to discuss literature, history, and the fine arts' (Burger 2015, n.p.). These groups formed connections across England, America, Canada, and Australia and demonstrated the social nature of reading communities as they 'were spaces in which women's wisdom, and knowledge could be articulated, validated and appreciated' (Rehberg-Sedo 2011, p. 5).

Reading communities continued to flourish through the twentieth century and involve an ever increasing number of participants. These book clubs, reading societies and literary societies were face-to-face groups where members shared geography, gender and social position. Some groups, 'created their own reading lists and interpretive practices to fit their specific needs, while still maintaining the ideology of education and socialization through prescribed reading and dialogue' (Rehberg-Sedo 2011 p.6). By the late twentieth century, developments in communications and electronic technology not only changed how readers interacted with each other but also changed the type of books that readers wished to explore within the

¹¹ Before the nineteenth century there were some exceptions to the male domination of early reading communities, some of which are described in N. Humble 2012 'The Reader of Popular Fiction' in David Glover & Scott McCracken (eds), *The Cambridge Companion of Popular Fiction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 87, 88).

reading communities. The advent of television, particularly day-time television whose audience was mainly women, saw book clubs expanded to wider audiences. For example in the 1990s the very popular American ‘Oprah Winfrey Show’ included a segment ‘Oprah’s Book Club’. Oprah would choose a ‘serious book’ which usually was ‘not primarily academic, but aimed, instead, at self-help and healing’ (Burger 2015, n.p.). Her choices reflected the older ‘self help’ model of women’s book clubs but with an emotional emphasis and a distinct social perspective. ‘Oprah’s discussions often include references to issues of race, class, and gender, though the language remains loyal to the self-help ethos’ (Burger, 2015, n.p.). One outcome of Oprah’s Book Club was that any text that was chosen became an overnight best seller. However, even though this raised the profile of reading communities and authors, encouraging discussion, interaction and debate, not all authors and academics embraced it. Burger (2015) records an example of the negative reaction to Oprah’s Book Club, by an author who was unhappy that his novel was chosen.¹² The author, Jonathan Franzen claimed, ‘The idea of women gathering to discuss their emotional responses to a work of fiction is an affront to academic ideals of rigorous literary interpretation’ (Burger 2015, n.p.).

Around the same time that ‘Oprah’s Book Club’ was encouraging ‘serious’ reading aimed at ‘self-help and healing’ (Burger 2015, n.p.), a change had been taking place as academics and researchers turned their attention to the many reading groups who were interested in discussing the genre novels of popular fiction. One of the first studies to provide a positive image of these groups is Janice A. Radway’s *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984). Radway analyses a reading group that met to discuss popular romance fiction in the 1970s. These communities, like the one described by Radway, met in person and members shared similar social and cultural backgrounds. Despite the popularity of the novels of genre fiction, these groups were usually small and somewhat hidden. These communities are, nevertheless, important as they are the first of the popular fiction reading communities. However, while these communities still exist in the original face-to-face model, with the development of the world wide web, online reading communities that are devoted to individual authors and the novels of all the genres of popular fiction have flourished. As Rehberg-Sedo (2011, p.8) claims:

¹² The author was Jonathan Franzen whose novel *The Corrections* was selected by Oprah’s Book Club in 2001. Burger notes that Franzen did not want to be associated with the book club as he thought previous selections were ‘schmaltzy’ and ‘one dimensional’ (Burger 2015).

So while the world wide web provides a new and radical medium for the production and distribution of texts and thus acts as a disruptive force upon traditional processes of literary creation, production, distribution and reception, it also provides opportunities for many (though certainly not all) readers to connect with one another regardless of factors such as cultural or socio-economic background, gender, reading level or geography.

These are the online reading communities referred to in this thesis. They demonstrate how popular fiction is both a textual and a social phenomenon as readers enter into their chosen online community and share their interest with other like-minded participants.

5.2 Some theoretical concepts relevant to reading communities

There are many different theoretical concepts of what constitutes a community. The concept of the ‘imagined community’ is pertinent to an understanding of reading communities. The ‘imagined community’ is a term coined by Benedict Anderson (1983) to describe the sense of unity and communalism incorporated in the modern nation-state. Anderson argued that an imagined community is experienced through the shared communal texts of the participants. Developments in technology and an increase in mass literacy give all members of the community access to newspapers and novels and, as readers, they imagine they share their lives with the other members of the community through the ‘ritual’ of reading, even though they may never meet.

[The community] is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (Anderson 1983, p.6)

Yet within popular fiction the concept of community is much more tangible as many readers not only read the same novels they, unlike Anderson’s imagined community, actively form relationships with other readers who take part in discussions, criticism, and have a strong sense of participation.

To better understand the concept of popular fiction reading communities Stanley Fish’s (1983) model of the ‘interpretive community’ offers a more focused approach. Fish based his concept of a reading community on his interaction with the students in his literature classes. He believed that what drew them together as an interpretive community was their shared social, cultural and educational backgrounds, which formed the basis for their interpretive strategies. His model of an interpretive community is formed around a text or texts which have been assigned by a third party (the course convener), and the readers approach these texts sharing the same education which has taught them similar cultural knowledge and

critical practices. The reading communities of popular fiction are also interpretive communities but, unlike Fish's students, the participants include a much more divergent range of geographical, educational, social and cultural backgrounds because what draws them together is their individual interest and engagement with a specific author or narrative.

A model that is relevant to the reading communities of popular fiction is that of Swales' Discourse Community (1990). Swales developed the Discourse Community model to explain the language and social practices found in everyday social situations. He demonstrates how people change their patterns of communication, both in language and behaviour, as they move between social contexts (Swales 1990, p.26). The knowledge of how the participants within a social context relate to each other and, more importantly, how they understand the expected methods of participation, sharing information and providing feedback are elements that bond the participants within that situation into a discourse community (Swales 1990, p.26). The Discourse Community model shows how people who share similar social and cultural knowledge are able to select specific aspects of that knowledge to accommodate communication within transient social contexts. One way this is demonstrated is by how their language choices change as they move from one social context to another, for example a solicitor meeting a judge and a group of barristers in the judge's chambers might address the judge formally as 'Your Honour'. Yet if the same two people met with a different group of people, in a different social context, for instance, on a golf course the solicitor might address the judge informally as 'Mary'. Swales also states that Discourse Communities are not static entities. While Discourse Communities provide a sense of social continuity, by highlighting the fact that most of these social situations exist over time within a culture, they also constantly change and transform in concert with the developing worldview of the wider community (Swales 1980 p. 27).

Like the model of the Discourse Community the online communities related to popular fiction also have a sense of both continuity and change. The reading communities of popular fiction are established, social contexts and yet their membership is quite transient as members may only stay in the community for relatively short periods of time, or they may leave and then re-enter it many times. Also, like most discourse communities, the reading communities of popular fiction include transition and change as new members join and older members leave, passing on their expertise to the incoming group who may modify the goals and aims of the community as the latest information is added to the community's knowledge.

However, unlike most Discourse Communities in the real world, the members of the online reading communities only know each other online, often by a pseudonym, and do not actually meet so their shared interest in the novel is of particular importance as it is the nucleus that binds them together as a community.

While none of the models of community described above completely captures the online reading communities of popular fiction, each contributes to the model of the reading community contained in this thesis. Anderson's imagined community shows how sharing the same novel creates a sense of shared purpose, even if those who read the novel never communicate with each other. There are many readers of the genre novels of popular fiction who share an interest in the same novel or novels and, while they may not become involved with the discussions of the online reading communities, they create a 'a deep horizontal comradeship' (Anderson 1983, p.7), which is demonstrated by the market as the novel and its sequels continue to be best sellers, often over weeks and months and sometimes years. The readers in Fish's interpretive community show how members of a reading community bring their education, social and cultural knowledge to the interpretation of the text so that all the members begin their discussions and debates from a shared background. This does not mean they all have to agree with each other, but that their shared social and cultural knowledge provides a framework in which they can communicate. The readers in the online reading communities bring to the community a great amount of knowledge about the particular narrative that is the focus of the community. They may not share the same educational, social or cultural background but they share a dedication to the novel which provides the framework for their social interaction.

Finally, Swales' Discourse Community model offers the most insight into the online reading communities. Swales' Discourse Community is a stable environment whereas its members are in constant motion as they enter and leave to enter again at an unspecified later time. The social focus of the community is not so much the educational, social or cultural background of the individual members but their ability to know what is expected of them in language and behaviour while they are in the context of the community. This model shows that what influences a socially diverse range of people into forming a reading community can be quite a narrow interest such as the singular focus on the work of one specific author. However, the range of information exchanged about the author and his or her novels is extremely wide ranging including everything from the readers' response to the world of the text to their sense

of empathy with particular characters. Some of the readers' comments included in the case studies demonstrate how extensive their commitment is to everything related to the novel of their choice.

There is one other reading community associated with popular fiction that has created critical interest. This is the group previously referred to as 'textual poachers' (Jenkins, 1992). These communities of fanfiction writers are outside the scope of this thesis because as Francesca Coppa's definition in the Preface to *The Fanfiction Reader: Folk Tales for the Digital Age* (2017) demonstrates, fanfiction writers appropriate the narratives of popular fiction and remodel them rather than connecting with existing narratives and embracing the world of the text, as do the readers in the online reading communities.

6. The scholarship on readers of popular fiction

In this section I discuss scholarship and research that focuses on the readers of popular fiction. The focus of this section relates to research that has considered the role of the reader, and the formation of popular fiction reading communities. Some of the texts listed here indicate important and innovative new directions taken in the research, while other texts illustrate a range of research issues that have arisen out of these new areas of study.

One of the first texts that highlighted the role of the reader in the genres of popular fiction is Radway's study of the romance genre. In her study of romance novels bought by a group of women in 'Smithton' she found that contrary to the popular definition of romance novels as being 'escapist' the women saw them as 'a declaration of independence' (Radway 1984, p.11). The women used the novels as a way of 'securing privacy' from the demands made of them by their families and 'at the same time providing companionship and conversation' as they shared their reading experiences with 'Dot' who sold them the novels (Radway 1984, p.11). While Radway acknowledges that perhaps this was a different form of 'escape' her research demonstrates the social nature of these novels. Radway notes the positive emotional reaction the women experienced as romance readers, they claimed that 'romance reading creates a feeling of hope, provides emotional substance, and produces a fully visceral sense of well being' (Radway 1984, p.12). The social relationships established between the readers and worlds of the texts and between groups of readers became the focus of studies of reading

communities of popular fiction whose participants, like the ‘Smithton’ women, also engage in companionship and conversation.

One quite early study, *Yesterday's faces* by Robert Sampson (1983), acknowledges the importance of the reader in the history of pulp fiction magazines, the predecessors of many of the genres of popular fiction. Sampson (1983) demonstrates that there is evidence that authors created a bond with their readers by being aware of the social, political and ideological interests of their readers. This provided a sense of empathy and security within the worlds of the narratives, no matter how strange or extraordinary those worlds might be.

Since the magazines depended on mass sales, and were inordinately sensitive to readers' volatile enthusiasms, the fiction is an intimate record of the past. In it you can trace what the reader admired, what fads gripped his [sic] furtive fancy, what social and political views heated his [sic] view of the world. It is all there in the fiction, clearly visible to literary geologists tunneling the old pages. (Sampson 1983, p.11)

The authors of popular fiction, like those of the early pulp fiction magazines, are aware of their readers' enthusiasms and interests and include them in the worlds they create. While this creates a bond between the author and the reader it also necessitates different ways of reading. In fact, as Jenkins (1992) claims in terms of his own experience with popular media, for those readers whose reading experience has been focused on traditional literary criticism this new way of reading can be quite enjoyable:

I have found approaching popular culture as a fan gives me new insights into the media by releasing me from the narrowly circumscribed categories and assumptions of academic criticism and allowing me to play with textual materials. (Jenkins 1992, p.5)

The communal nature of these texts is a feature that keeps recurring in research in the field of popular fiction. For example, in the work of academic Rehberg-Sedo (2011, p.11), the distinctly social nature of the online groups is shown in the fact that they are now described as communities rather than clubs or societies:

Using the term ‘community’ gets to the heart of the notion that social formations can shape themselves around a text. It helps us to recognize the factors at play as community members search for meaning within a text, sort out power structures, and, ultimately, gain the knowledge that comes from exposure to, and discussion of, new and unfamiliar concepts.

In another study, *The Reader of Popular Fiction* (2012) Nicola Humble shows how the online reading communities of popular fiction empower some readers to continue stories or to change aspects of stories with which they are unhappy. As Humble (2010, p. 97) articulates,

‘[o]ne of the generative energies behind the writing of fan fiction is a desire for more: for what comes next, for a fuller or a better ending’. In the online reading communities, while not all participants ‘take over’ the text, many of the discussions (as demonstrated in the case studies later in this thesis) develop around the possible extension to situations, relationships and plot development in the novels. The online communities are positive places that provide cooperative and encouraging forums for all topics and interests that readers wish to pursue in relation to their favourite novel.

In a study of online communities ‘Tune in Tomorrow’ Nancy Baym (2003) considers the composition, motivation, and nature of online communities. Her study is centred on a genre-based community on the USENET r.a.t.s. [recreation, arts, television, soap operas] for viewers who follow TV soap operas. Although television-based, the interests and the viewers’ involvement in the community is very similar to the later reading communities of genre-based popular fiction. Baym describes how these communities form an emotional environment that is welcoming and supportive, quite different to other online projects that are based solely around information sharing.

The topic of soaps brings with it a purpose – interpreting – and because soaps are emotional, relational, and talk oriented, the fulfillment of this purpose ideally needs a particular type of environment, one that is welcoming, is supportive, and allows for self disclosure. (Baym 2003 p. 237)

Baym notes that at the time her study was undertaken online communities, particularly those based on popular fiction subjects such as TV soap operas, had a negative image. Yet the theme that permeates throughout her study is that these online communities can play a positive role in the lives of the participants and that this can be transferred to the everyday lives of the participants:

It [the online community] is fun. It offers refuge from the shame of viewing soaps so prevalent offline. People offer genuine support and care for others that they might never meet face-to-face. The group has an affective quality and value system that many of our geographical communities could use. (Baym 2003 p. 243)

This sense of community as a welcoming, positive space for readers of popular fiction to share their experiences of the novels and their world in a non-judgmental environment is fundamental to the online reading communities.

7. The participatory nature of popular fiction

A basic premise of this thesis is that the readers of popular fiction are active readers, that they have a sense of participating in the interpretation of the text. Jenkins (1992, p. 24) describes this feeling of involvement in the text in relation to media fans as ‘fans cease to be simply an audience for popular texts; instead they become active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings’. This active association between the readers and the texts is demonstrated in the upcoming case studies, particularly in the voices of the readers involved in the online reading communities. This section considers how the theoretical understanding of reading communities of popular fiction is informed by much of the current scholarship on media audiences and fandom and demonstrates that these communities encourage readers to be active participants in the interpretation of the text.

The theoretical perception of audiences, even active audiences, is in a constant state of change in response to the changing nature of both written and electronic media: ‘The nature of audiences is always therefore being redefined in accordance with new situations of engagement’ (Nightingale 2003 p. 2). Research in media audience reception and fan studies show that new technologies have enabled audiences to take a more participatory role in the texts with which they are engaged, meaning that ‘[n]ew tools and technologies enable consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content’ (Nightingale 2003 p.280).

The research into audience reception showed that audiences, who had historically been assumed to be fairly static ‘consumers’ of popular culture, actually took an active part in the way in which meaning was developed. At the same time, these ‘active audiences’ were influenced by their individual social and cultural environment. Audience Reception studies, particularly in relation to the audiences of mass media, continued to develop during the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century with a combination of critical and cultural research into why specific groups experience particular interpretive and affective experiences. This led the researchers to consider the influence exerted by the social relationships and the cultural expectations that the audience members brought to the media presentation. On this, Baym states:

Being a member of an audience community is not just about reading a text in a particular way; rather, it is as about having a group of friends, a set of activities one does with friends, and a world of relationships and feelings that grow from those friendships. (Baym 2003 p.246)

Baym is commenting on media audiences and how they have a sense of community which influences their interpretive experience. This sense of community also applies to the popular fiction online reading communities.

Another body of scholarship within audience research has focused on the category of the 'fan'. While not all audience members and readers are 'fans', popular mass media texts (including popular print media, television and films, genre novels, comics, graphic novels and manga), attract followings of people. These people, who might be considered 'fans', not only enjoy a particular text, but demonstrate an interest (sometimes verging on the obsessive) in someone or something connected to that text. Jenkins (1992) distinguishes fans from other audience members by three criteria. The first is that fans are 'active producers and manipulators of meanings' (Jenkins 1992, p. 24). This criterion focuses on how fans go beyond actively engaging with the text, and deliberately manipulate it to produce their own meanings. Secondly, fans are 'readers who appropriate popular texts and reread them in a fashion that serves different interests', effectively using popular texts to 'articulate to themselves and others unrealized possibilities with the original works' (Jenkins 1992 p. 23). This appropriation means that fans may feel that they know more about the text than the author. Finally, Jenkins believes that fans 'transform the experience of watching television into a rich and complex participatory culture' (Jenkins 1992 p.23). For example, Jenkins describes how fans who feel that their great amount of knowledge of all aspects of the programme allow them to hold the programme's producers to account if they are not happy with the direction taken they have taken:

This 'moral right' to criticize the program's producers reflects the strength that comes from expressing not simply an individual opinion (though fans would insist on their individual rights to complain) but the consensus of the fan community, a consensus forged through ongoing debates about the significance and merits of individual episodes and about the psychology and motivation of particular characters. (Jenkins 1992, p.88)

While Jenkins relates his definition to television audiences, the definition might also apply to readers of popular fiction, particularly in relation to the debates in the online reading communities about characters' psychology and motivation.

Much of the research into fans and fan culture has concentrated on the mass media, particularly focusing on the oppositional nature of fandom. For example Jenkins claims that if fans are unhappy with the development of the narrative 'they respond with hostility and anger

against those who have the power to “retool” their narratives into something radically different from that which the audience desires’ (Jenkins 1992 p. 24). One possible reason for a higher level of aggression in fan communities is that they blame producers or directors for what they see as breaches of integrity. Fans communicating within their communities are often highly critical but also highly knowledgeable of the content of the programme they follow and so their comments about and interactions with producers can be quite acrimonious especially when they believe that writers or producers have ‘betrayed’ them:

Fandom typically lacks the deference to the artist and text that characterizes the bourgeois habitus. So soap opera fans often feel that they could write better story lines than the scriptwriters and know the characters better. (Fiske 1992, p.40)

The nature of the media is that the realisation of the author’s intent is mediated through an intermediary production level whereas readers have a more direct connection to the author as most popular fiction authors have dedicated Internet pages, which encourage responses from readers. On these pages, authors often explain why they have developed the narrative in a particular way which means readers are made to feel included, as opposed to media fans who feel excluded. While Jenkins emphasises the condemnatory, critical approach taken by media fans, readers of popular fiction seem to be more inclined to work with the author, asking authors for explanations of anything they do not like. Examples of the readers’ sense of being equal to and collaborating with the author are seen in some of the discussions in the online communities in the case studies.

Researchers in the fields of fandom and audience studies have drawn attention to the importance of participation in a community of viewers or readers. One type of group interaction, that draws fans together and encourages participation, is the exchange of information about their selected media programmes. This is also relevant in the study of online reading communities. Readers are drawn together, not just by their interest in the narrative, but by their wish to share information about the novel, its world and its possibilities that they see beyond the frame of the narrative. Jenkins suggests that sharing this type of information within the fan community has the same effect as gossip. Like gossip, it provides a way for fans to talk about themselves while exchanging information related to the common interests of the group:

Gossip builds common ground between its participants, as those who exchange information assure one another of what they share. Gossip is finally a way of talking about yourself through evoking the actions and values of others. The same can be said of the function of television talk within the fan community. In an increasingly atomistic

age, the ready-made characters of popular culture provide a shared set of references for discussing common experiences and feelings with others with whom one may never have enjoyed face-to-face contact. (Jenkins 1992 p. 81)

Lisa Lewis (1992, p. 213) notes, '[w]hat fandom offers is a community not defined by traditional terms ... but rather a community of consumers defined through their common relationship with shared texts'. The 'common relationship' extends beyond sharing a text; it includes participating in a reading community (particularly the popular online reading communities), that encourages the participants to engage in the world of the novel and to share their experiences in discussions, debates, extended readings and speculation about every possible aspect of the text with other readers. There are examples given of this close involvement between readers in the case studies.

In this often highly charged context between fans and the media object of their admiration, readers, who are now often characterised as fans of popular fiction, tend to be lost. While academic attention focuses on the new media, television and film, readers of popular fiction were, and still are, participating in fan communities, interacting with each other and with their favourite author. However, they do not attract the same interest in research unless they are participating in the more extreme 'fan' practices, for example, slash fiction.¹³ As interest in cultural studies grew in the latter part of the twentieth century readers who enjoyed popular fiction and were previously ignored because of their reading preferences, now found that they were no longer ignored but more likely to be incorporated as one aspect of the fan community. This thesis claims that readers of the genres of popular fiction might have much in common with the fans of electronic media but they are a distinctive social group and their practices and interests need to be considered separately.

The historical development of fan studies shows how the perception of audiences has changed through a social and cultural understanding of not only how audiences relate to the meanings they are given, but also how they, in turn, bring specific meanings to the texts with which they interact. Fan studies also developed the understanding of audiences as not large homogenous groups of consumers of popular media, but rather as groups of individuals, each seeing content through an individual social and cultural worldview. Fan studies has shown

¹³ For a comprehensive study of this practice see Hellekson, K & Busse, K (eds.) 2006, *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, McFarland, Jefferson, N.C.

how these individuals move beyond being individual consumers and interact with other fans in dedicated fan communities. Jenkins (2012) describes these fans as:

Individuals who maintain a passionate connection to popular media, assert their identity through their engagement with and mastery over its contents and experience social affiliation around shared tastes and preferences. (Jenkins 2012 n.p.)

Finally, a sense of ownership of their favourite text gives many fans the feeling that they can participate to the point of rewriting any aspect of the text that does not please them. ‘Fandom here becomes a participatory culture which transforms the experience of media consumption into the production of new texts, indeed of a new culture and a new community’ (Jenkins 1992, p.46).

While much of the literature shown here focuses on fan studies that relate to the electronic media, such as film and television, the insight these studies offer also applies, in most cases, to the print media and the readers of popular fiction and their online reading communities. These studies offer an extended perception of readers as active, involved and supportive of each other which is explored in the three case studies. This perception of readers is an important feature in considering the novels of popular fiction as both a textual and socio-textual phenomenon.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn on a range of academic literature on popular culture, popular fiction and theories of community to argue that the genres of popular fiction have both a social and a textual character. The combined research from these scholars offers the view of a collaborative relationship between the author, the text and the readers. Beginning with the social dimension of reading popular fiction I argue that this is not only an individual pastime but also a social activity where readers, in the reading communities they construct, share their interests and knowledge in relation to their favourite novel. These online reading communities have aims and goals that reflect the interests of the participants. For many of the participants in the reading communities, one of the most important features of the novels of popular fiction they share is their generic identity. Genre is one of the first features that capture the attention of the readers. While in the past, genre has been negatively associated with formulaic writing and the commercialisation of fiction, later studies show that genres encourage readers to enter into the world of the text by combining both a familiar and an unfamiliar realisation of generic features. They offer a blend of repetition and difference,

which not only appeals to the readers, but also forms the basis for many of the discussions within the reading communities. While the most important aspect of any of the genre novels is the unfolding narrative and the characters with which many readers feel a strong affinity, the world of the novel is also significant. These complex, constructed worlds are not only intriguing but have an emotional appeal to readers that extends beyond the narrative. They include social and cultural dimensions that resonate with readers, drawing them into the world of the text.

One of the social features of these novels is the sense that many readers have of feeling they have a bond with the author. Most authors of popular fiction have web pages which encourage interaction with readers and, as shown in the case studies, readers offer creative criticism, ask for explanations and comment on the development of the narrative in a sense of collaboration with the author. Readers also discuss with other readers these encounters with the author so in the reading communities these interactions form a social connection between the author, the reader and the reading community.

Finally, the reading communities of genre fiction, which feature in each of the case studies, are social spaces online in which readers can enter at will and find encouragement, support and cooperation. These communities reflect the social nature of popular fiction itself, which is inclusive and welcoming to all readers. The worlds of popular fiction are also socially relevant as in some way they reflect the reader's world back to them. In doing so, these novels can be socially progressive and transformative as they often include observations of serious social problems that are part of the readers own world providing safe spaces in which a reader might reflect on these difficult socio-cultural challenges.

The following chapter introduces the three case studies of the novels of three well-known authors of popular fiction, Georgette Heyer, Anne McCaffrey and J. K. Rowling, as well as the multidimensional analysis that will be applied to their texts to argue that these novels are, like all popular fiction, both social and textual phenomena.

Chapter 3. Analytical Approach to the three case studies

The following three case studies demonstrate the social nature of the texts of the genre novels of popular fiction. Each of these examples of popular fiction novels creates a world in the text that encourages readers to enter and participate. This thesis will argue that many readers feel drawn into the narrative world through an emotional response to specific characters. They then may share their feelings about and knowledge of the world of the text with other readers in online reading communities that are dedicated to particular authors and novels. This is the basis for the argument in this thesis: that all the popular fiction genre novels are *more* than popular stories. That is, through the bond that is formed between the reader and the narrative in the world of the text, they are social texts. This social perspective provides a range of information about the continuing popularity and appeal of these novels to a large variety of readers from diverse educational, social and economic backgrounds. One of the difficulties in providing any evaluative insight into the properties of these novels has been the size and diversity of the field of popular fiction. Popular fiction incorporates a range of genres and subjects, and thus similarities are often not immediately detectable. Traditionally, as noted in Chapter Two, ‘A socio-textual approach to popular fiction’, the features seen as shared by these novels are their generic properties and so they are seen as being formulaic and mass-produced. This thesis will argue that, while the formulaic character of these novels is a feature that initially engages readers, it is the author’s innovative adaption of generic formulas that sustains the reader’s attachment to the novels and their creative world, and promotes the formation of reading communities.

Therefore, taking into account the social nature of these texts, this thesis adopts a methodology that might be applied to any of the genre novels of popular fiction. The method of approaching the text is through a multidimensional analysis that consists of three separate but interrelated areas of analysis: the development of the genre; the world of the text; and the reader, including the readers involved in the online reading communities. This thesis also offers some suggestions as to what questions might be asked of a text in order to more fully understand its social and textual appeal. This multidimensional approach acknowledges the distinctive nature of each genre while the shared features show that each text is simultaneously a textual and a social phenomenon. The diagram in Figure 3.1 sets out the

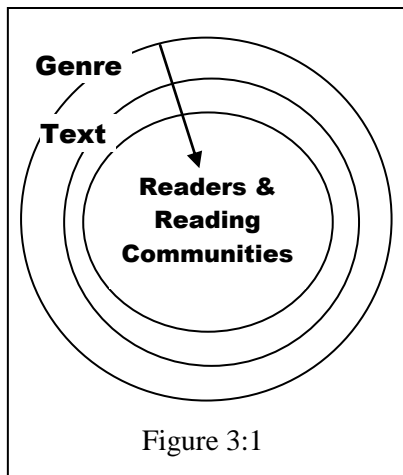


Figure 3:1

relationship between the three parts that form the analysis of any of the genre novels of popular fiction.

The first dimension is the genre. This identifies the overall category of the text. Readers of popular fiction are often drawn to specific genres, and often specific authors within feature for the marketing of the text as customers look for the genres they enjoy when purchasing a new book. Genres also have a social character – most readers seem to feel

reassured knowing an expected range of characteristics will be included in the text. Having established the genre of the text, the next level is the text itself. This is where the reader's expectations can be validated. While readers cannot know the way in which the narrative will develop they expect that the development will include a number of genre-specific features. One of the main reasons for a novel's popularity is the author's individual and creative use of the genre features within the world of the text. Readers and particularly the readers in the online reading communities may feel drawn to a number of elements within the textual world such as characters, plot and the narrative world itself. Many readers experience an emotional connection to specific characters, often speculating in the reading communities how those characters' lives continue past the narrative. Also many readers see a reflection of their own world in the world of the text: in the social and cultural issues that form part of the narrative. This sense of familiarity can draw the reader into the world of the novel by giving them a feeling of participation in the text. The readers and their sense of involvement in the world of the text form the central element in the success and longevity of a novel. Hence the reader is at the core of this model.

The following chapters take a case study approach, concentrating on the Regency romance novels of Georgette Heyer, the science fiction Pern series by Anne McCaffrey, and the fantasy *Harry Potter* novels by J.K. Rowling. The three case studies focus on the relationship between the reader and the text, and offer an explanation as to why many of the genre novels of popular fiction continue to remain popular long after their original publication (and even the author's death). Each case study approaches the novel in three ways. First there is an analysis of the genre, showing something of its development and the features that appeal to many of its readers. Then there is a textual analysis that considers how the world of the text has been created, including a study of the main themes. The textual analysis also includes a

discussion of any hybridity or use of secondary features within the overall genre that emerge from a close reading of the text and available secondary criticism. Finally there is the reception analysis, which focuses on the voices of individual readers, examining the ways in which they respond to the narrative and exploring the topics and features they discuss in the reading communities.

1. Genre analysis

The following three case studies are from three different genres of popular fiction. While the concept of genre is usually associated with assigning a text a specific classification, when applied to the novels of popular fiction the term can also be used to explain the shared, communal nature of these novels. Genres, as relatively predictable text types, enable groups of readers with common expectations to form around a text. Cunningham, Miller and Rowe (1994, p. 11) describe the sense of predictability inherent in all genres, seeing genre not as a prescriptive set of rules but as a wider collection of known features that create 'horizons of expectation' between the author and the readers. While Cunningham, Miller and Rowe are theorising genre in relation to Australian television, their approach is also applicable to the genre novels of popular fiction. Entering a text that is shared between the author and the readers creates a bond that allows the individual author to 'organize[s] space and time' (Cunningham, Miller & Rowe 1994, p.12) in a way that is unique to them, but still encourages the reader to feel they are welcome in the world of the text.

Popular fiction novels reach out to readers initially through their recognisable generic character, then, through the development of characters, plot, and setting, they encourage the reader to feel they are part of the world of the text. This sense of genre being a text that is shared between the author and readers occurs because the text reflects some recognisable aspects of the readers' social, ideological and/or cultural environment. The genre analysis for each case study will identify the genre features which enable this to occur. Popular fiction genres, as a form of communication, change in relation to the changing social needs of their users, and as authors blend the expected formula with their own social perceptions and understanding. It must be acknowledged that neither authors nor readers need to know the history of their favourite genre in order to write successful novels or enjoy reading them. However, analysing the way in which a genre has developed and its connection to changing

social mores, provides insights into how a particular genre continues to engage large and varied groups of readers.

Therefore the genre analysis of these texts will examine:

- What genre/s and generic conventions can be identified in relation to the text?
- Has the author explored the established conventions of this genre or created a distinctive sub-genre?
- What are the main generic features of the narrative discussed by the reading groups?
- What information about the social nature of the narrative can be found in the history of the genre?

2. Textual analysis: the world of the text

While genre novels are often seen as being plot-driven, the development of characters and settings are also important features within the world of the text. Therefore understanding the textual world of the novel is an important consideration as it is the space through which the narrative progresses, and must also function to draw the reader into the text. This section identifies some of the ways in which readers can connect with the world of the text. This is an important element in understanding why some genre novels are successful, while others might initially be successful but quickly fade from sight.

The fictional worlds of genre novels range from the familiar to the completely bizarre, yet within each of these worlds there are one or more recognisable features that might draw the reader into the world. For example, Helen Hughes, in describing the use of the past as a popular device in romance fiction genre, notes how within the world of the text there is usually a connection to the reader's own world.

The past setting may in such texts appear to add to the pleasure of the book because it can be presented as more colourful and exciting than [sic] than the everyday life of the reader; but it may also be seen as the amniotic fluid in which the seeds of the present float. Tendencies can be isolated in a historic period, which, however, alien that time may seem, none the less prefigure characteristics of the contemporary world. (Hughes 1993, p. 4)

I argue that the common features, such as those referred to by Hughes, assist readers to form a social and sometimes emotional connection with the text. Whether it is in the way in which the characters act in particular situations, the structure of the novel's society or the way in which the author deals with more abstract social qualities such as heroism, love and

friendship, readers can recognise and relate in some way to these characteristics. It is important to note that readers do not have to agree with the author's approach to these social situations, but simply recognise them. This shared social knowledge also provides a stabilising element in the development of narrative genres.

For the committed genre reader, the world found within the genre novel must be both distinctive and believable. It is a world that blends the characteristics of the genre and the author's creative modification of those characteristics in a way that enhances the reader's sense of realism in the plot and the characters. Readers immerse themselves in the world of the text to the extent that they feel they might turn a corner and find the world continuing to the horizon. Henry Jenkins (1992, p.115) identifies this same sense of reality in relation to media fans:

[The] fan, while recognizing the story's constructedness, treat it as if its narrative world were a real place that can be inhabited and explored and as if the characters maintained a life beyond what was represented on the screen; fans draw close to that world in order to enjoy more fully the pleasures it offers them.

It is also important to note that no matter how strange or bizarre this world and its inhabitants might appear, it is also a world in which the society created by the author resonates in some way with the reader's social environment. It might be in the way different levels of society relate to each other, or how the social interactions of the characters are negotiated, or the types of issues and themes explored through the narrative. Creating a world in which the reader feels at ease enables readers, if they wish, to use the world of the text as a safe space in which to explore any confronting personal and/or social issues which might be included in the narrative.

Another significant aspect of the world of the text is that it is a place where the reader might be made aware of social issues that exist out in the 'real' world. If these issues offer the reader a new social perspective then the impression of safety and acceptance in the fictional world could be threatened. However, even with social issues that challenge the reader, the fictional world is still a safe environment in which to explore new, if confronting, ideas. There are many socially challenging elements that might be explored as part of a textual analysis. For example, how characters deal with issues of social dysfunction in the fictional world, or how the author approaches questions which cause tension in the real world such as racism, sexism, and perceptions of 'other', or the role of narrator. Identifying the

characteristics that form the fictional world of the novel is an important part of understanding the attraction genre novels of popular fiction may have to a specific group of readers. Therefore, as well as identifying significant elements of characterisation, setting and plot development, an important focus of the textual analysis will be to consider how these elements draw the reader into the world of the narrative. Finally this section will also identify aspects of these texts that have been discussed by critics. These features will be compared with the readers' interests in the reception analysis section.

The following three sets of questions focus on the world of the text:

1: Elements of the setting that can draw the reader into the world of the text.

- What type of social structure is formed by the society in the narrative and how might it draw the reader into the world of the text?
- What social issues are explored within the world of the narrative?

2: Features of characterisation.

- Who are the major characters and what are their individual strengths and weaknesses?
- How do the characters reflect the social issues that exist within the reader's world?
- How does the author elicit the reader's sympathy or censure of a character?
- How is the reader drawn into the interpersonal situations between characters?

3: Elements of plot development.

- Is the reader given information not known to the characters or does she/he see the plot from the same perspective as the characters?
- Is the narrator reliable?
- How does the plot development reflect the reader's generic expectations?

3. Reception analysis: the online reading communities of the genre novels of popular fiction

Each case study will examine the reading communities that have sprung up around the particular novels and genres that have been selected. Readers in these communities are what Joke Hermes (2002, p.282) would classify as 'active' readers. Although mainly referring to

television, Hermes identifies the way in which the media, or in this case the novels of popular fiction, emotionally enfold their readers in the world of the text, noting, ‘our media can make us feel part of real or virtual communities: as readers of a particular genre’ (Hermes 2002, p.291). These communities are an expression of the participatory nature that is an important element of these novels.

With the development of the Internet, the reading communities related to the genre novels of popular fiction have grown in number. The Internet has made it much easier for readers to share their enthusiasm and experience of the text with other readers, to engage in debates and discussions and, on some websites, even to interact with the author. The record of these debates and discussions created by these online reading communities can be accessed and analysed. This thesis therefore adopts an approach similar to the reception analysis of media audiences (Seiter 1999; Taylor & Willis 1999). Reception analysis pays attention to the specificity of the audience’s (or readers’) responses to the text, using qualitative methods to explore their interpretation and use of texts in their everyday lives.

The task for this thesis was to find a methodology which takes into account the interpretive practices of the participants in the online communities. Traditional qualitative research tends to depend on small group, interactive interviews and observations in order to obtain comprehensive information about participants. However, when dealing with online communities such methods are not always possible. Many of the participants in these communities are only identified by pseudonyms and, even when biographical data is provided, it cannot be relied upon. However, for the purpose of this thesis, the focus is on the responses rather than the readers. This means that whether the personal information provided by participants in online reading communities is true or false, is irrelevant. Rather than employ methods such as questionnaires or interviews, this research has been conducted observing the activity of readers through the online forums associated with these texts. The areas under discussion are the range of issues and opinions that are shared, the way in which the topics are developed and the way in which the participants interact.

The online forums are a rich resource: providing a public record that illustrates the popularity of the opinions, discussions and debates carried out in the reading communities. Without directly accessing the participants it is possible to determine their interest in the topic under debate as each topic or thread shows how many members have offered a contribution and

also how many times the discussion has been viewed. Given the ease of access the Internet provides, some of the popular topics are viewed hundreds of times. Therefore the analysis of the discussions and debates is based on information gathered from both qualitative (the opinions, motivations and interests of the readers) and quantitative (the number of readers who have shared the topic in the reading community) sources. The combination of both the comments and the number of participants who share that interest, provides a great deal of information about the popularity of a novel and how the world it creates resonates with the participants in these online reading communities.

While there are numerous reading communities and fan sites on the Internet, for the purposes of this thesis I selected a sample of over fifty sites, including many with multiple discussion threads in their forums. These sites included long-standing 'official' websites and more single-issue, ephemeral sites. The 'official' websites are those sites either developed by the authors or by dedicated readers, often with the approval of the author. These fan websites are often the largest and most enduring websites, many of which continue to flourish long after an author has died. While these websites contain a range of features from quizzes to providing a platform for fan fiction, for this thesis I was interested only in the discussion forums. Discussion threads can sometimes be traced back over decades, for example on the official Georgette Heyer and Anne McCaffrey websites.

As well as these official websites I also looked at some of the more ephemeral sites. These include single issue web pages that exist for a short time, or questions that are raised about a single issue on more general websites; for example, a reader posting a question about Georgette Heyer on a romance website. These single issue web pages have the effect of creating an instantaneous reading community as interested participants join the site to not only answer the original question, but also to open the discussion to include other, related issues. For example, on the science fiction website 'Whatever', in 2011 science fiction author John Scalzi posted an obituary for Anne McCaffrey. His comments generated 256 replies which included discussions about dragons, debates over which was McCaffrey's best Pern story and reflections on what the Pern series meant to the individual reader. While the site only dealt with the single issue of McCaffrey's passing, all those who participated formed a community during the time they were involved in visiting the site, posting comments, or just reading comments left by others. The communal nature of these single sites models Swales Discourse Community (see chapter 2). Interested participants enter a specific context (the

web site) that focuses on a particular issue, communicate with other contributors, then leave. While they are participating, they all contribute to the discussion and share their ideas and comments with each other, creating a sense of community for that short time. The difference between these sites and the official websites is that the discussions are often more critical of both the author and the text and they focus on a single issue.

Having identified both official sites and single issue sites for each of the case studies, I then identified discussion threads, where readers had discussed the topics and themes related to the issues raised in the textual and genre analysis. I analysed the themes discussed in these threads, comparing these with the perceptions and arguments regarding these genre novels both by critics and as a result of my own primary textual and genre analyses. This analysis showed how the discourse of the reading communities related to the world of the text, and either correlated with, or diverged from, critical reception of these texts, demonstrating what the online reading communities value about these novels and their own reading practices.

Questions that will be asked regarding the reading communities of the novels of popular fiction:

- What aspects of the world of the text do members of the online reading communities discuss in relation to their own world?
- What themes or issues from the novel/s create the most discussion amongst members of the online reading communities?
- How does the community deal with alternative or dissenting opinions?
- What literary, critical and other discourses are drawn on by the reading community?
- What social functions do reading these texts and participating in these online communities have for readers?

The following case studies, which examine the Drawing Room romances by Georgette Heyer, the Pern novels by Anne McCaffrey, and the *Harry Potter* novels by J.K. Rowling, demonstrate how the three aspects of the genre novels of popular fiction, genre analysis, textual analysis and reception analysis, provide a more detailed understanding of these novels. These features highlight the social nature of the novels, and also suggest why they are not only commercially successful but continue to attract new generations of readers. This demonstrates that their previous definition as simple, escapist, once-read-then-forgotten

stories is no longer applicable. On the contrary, they are valued novels, reread with pleasure and often passionately discussed amongst like-minded readers.

Chapter 4. A Lady of Infinite Quality: The Novels of Georgette Heyer

There is always a thought of marriage between a single female and a personable gentleman, if not in his mind, quite certainly in hers.

Georgette Heyer, *Regency Buck*, 1935

The aim of this chapter is to show how the innovative use of genre, the construction of an engaging textual world, and the ongoing relationship between the author/text/readers, contributes to the success of Georgette Heyer's popular fiction. This study demonstrates how these features not only offer an explanation for the continuing popularity of the Regency romance novels of Georgette Heyer,¹⁴ but in addition show how she developed the sub-genre of historical romance with both her Regency romances and her innovative Drawing Room romances. Drawing Room romances are still one of the most popular forms of historical romance novels for both readers and authors. This chapter uses genre analysis, textual analysis and reception analysis to demonstrate why Heyer's novels, some written over eighty years ago, are still being reprinted and attract both new and already dedicated readers.

romance genre is one of the oldest genres of popular fiction. While it has changed both its content and its readership over the years, with each new adaptation leaving an imprint on the development of the genre's subsequent manifestations, it has always formed a connection to its readers. The chapter begins with a brief literary history of the development of the romance genre and its readers, demonstrating how it evolved from two major sources: the first stretching back to early Greek literature and the second found in medieval tales of chivalry and heroic quests. However, by the early twentieth century a change had taken place. Most romance genres in general, and historical romance genres in particular, were now clearly categorised with the label of 'women's writing'. In the words of Helen Hughes (1993, p. 3) 'after this decade [the 1930s] historical romance became predominantly a woman's genre, which it had certainly never been before' (see also Wallace 2003, p.76).

The historical romance narrative lost its male readership but it did not lose its popularity as, even before the twentieth century, the romance novel had become increasingly associated with what many women believed to be the only socially acceptable choices in relation to family, marriage and society. While novels such as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)

¹⁴ Georgette Heyer (1902–1974) is usually classified as a Romance author in the specific genre of Historical Romance, with her particular narrative focus being the Regency period.

and Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers* (1857) are now classified as English Literature they were the popular fiction of their day and they changed the way the representation of women, family, and marriage were portrayed. They included features that have become part of modern romance genre such as strong, self-confident female characters and marriage for love or as Pamela Regis notes, they changed how the social practices of courtship, home and family were portrayed, 'The romance novel steps forward [in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century] as a dominant genre in English letters at a time of changing values and practices concerning courtship and marriage.' (Regis 2003, p.55).

However, as the romance genre advanced into the twentieth century it developed two distinct forms: the shorter generic love story and the romance novel. The first form is the mass-marketed, paperback love stories. These stories are usually shorter than full-length novels and often written by amateur authors who, while they may write many novels during their writing career, are hardly recognised outside this particular version of romance. Their novels are popular, often best-sellers for a short time, but are quite quickly superseded by either a new work from the same author or the next author to be published. These mass-market romance novels (such as the popular Mills and Boons series) offer very visible evidence of the formulaic nature of romance novels and have been responsible for the much of the continuing negative criticism of the romance genres.

This thesis focuses on the second form of romance genre. These are novels that, while they reflect many of the generic features found in the Mills and Boon type formula, they also include a wide range of multifaceted themes and social issues. In contrast to the mass market romances, these are full length romance novels by professional authors such as Georgette Heyer, Catherine Cookson, Victoria Holt and others¹⁵ whose novels, while highlighting the developing relationship between the hero and heroine, also contain a range of social issues, complex themes and often references to other genres. Most importantly, these are novels that offer the reader an interesting and sometimes challenging world to explore, while following the adventures of the major characters. Finally, they allow for a varied range of interpretation that reflect the wide range of interests, social expectations and experiences of each reader.

¹⁵ Other examples of popular romance authors are: Barbara Taylor Bradford (1933-), Jackie Collins (1937-2015), and Susan Elizabeth Phillips (1948-).

When Heyer began writing in the romance tradition, in the 1920s, it was one of the oldest genres of modern popular fiction but its association with formulaic writing, such as that found in the mass-market paperback romances, meant most critics condemned it. Regis (2003, p. 23), writing on the modern reception of romance novels, traces the development of the negative connotations associated with these novels and the term ‘formula’ as something that ‘implies hack-work, subliterate, and imagination reduced to a mechanism for creating “product”’.¹⁶

By the early twentieth century two established genres, romance genre and Historical genre had merged into a new sub-genre, historical romance. Historical romance remains one of the most popular sub-genres of romance genre with both authors and readers, due in no small part to Georgette Heyer. Historical romance traces its antecedents to adventure fiction and historical fiction as well as romance genre. It is the sub-genre in which Heyer’s first romance novels were written and, while she continued to write historical romance novels throughout her career, she also became associated with a distinct period of historical romance, the Regency romance.

When Heyer began writing historical romances in the early twenties readers expected a virtuous heroine and, throughout her career, Heyer maintained that approach in all her novels. At the same time as Heyer was finding her way in historical romance other women authors were also writing in both the popular historical romance genre and also in historical novels. When Heyer’s first novel was published in 1921, it joined an already strong tradition of historical fiction, including both historical adventures and also historical romances. Women writers, both literary and popular, seemed to ‘find’ the historical novel, or more accurately, rediscover it (Wallace 2003, p. 76).

Heyer was interested in the historical accuracy that comes from the detailed research on which the literary historical novel relies. The creation of her Regency world and the details she provided of events such as the battle of Waterloo are examples of how she combined both methods – romance conventions and historical research – within her popular historical romances. This attention to detail gave her Regency world a sense of authenticity and added a new depth to the historical romance sub-genre, distinguishing her Regency romances from

¹⁶ For a detailed account of the modern day negative reception of Romance novels see Pamela Regis 2003, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Chapter 1.

other historical romances. For example her novel, *An Infamous Army* (1937) was undoubtedly a popular historical romance yet her comprehensive research led to detailed and accurate descriptions of aspects of the battle of Waterloo and its aftermath. Descriptions of the assorted uniforms, the various regiments engaged, the weapons and the strategies of the combatants fill nearly the whole second half of the novel. Heyer's research was so accurate that over the years there have been claims, possibly apocryphal, in a number of articles that her meticulous description of the battle of Waterloo, was used in several military colleges as historical reference.¹⁷ However, whether this is factual or not is not the point here; what is important is that Heyer's commitment to the quality and the accuracy of her research makes this claim seem credible to her readers and critics.

Heyer's historical romances seem far removed from the social changes that were occurring in her own time, especially in the 1930s and 1940s. Women were now more directly involved in wars and conflicts, the rise of women's suffrage gave women a voice in the wider society, and traditional attitudes to class and gender were increasingly being debated across society (Wallace 2003, p. 78). In this unsettled social environment Heyer's stable, safe Regency setting, where everything has a place and everyone is quite happy in their own situation, offers a world where, as shown previously, the reader might pause for a moment to reflect on the changes in their everyday life in the twentieth or twenty-first century.

Heyer's heroines presented a new perspective of women who demanded they be allowed to control their lives. These intelligent, assertive characters thrive throughout her Regency romances, for example the eponymous *Arabella*, (1949), *Venetia* (1958) and *Frederica* (1965). While Heyer was no crusader for women's rights, she touches on some of the views that were being debated about women's role in society at the time she was writing. She rejected the traditional generic portrayal of women, not only in historical romances but in most romances. Despite influences from feminist public debate and social change, such portrayals were still alive and well throughout romance genre, with Leedy noting in 1985 that:

A woman, in romantic novels, is to behave in a 'set way'. When a man enters a room, she is to melt into the background. She does not voice opinions, or challenge him in any way. A woman is intuitive, indecisive, non-rational, flighty and emotional. (Leedy 1985, p. 63)

¹⁷ For example Mari Ness, on her blog '[A Recreation of War: Georgette Heyer's An Infamous Army](#)' claims that parts of the novel had been recommended reading in military colleges. Unfortunately she does not provide any evidence of her claim of [An Infamous Army's] 'last ten chapters becoming recommended reading at some British military colleges, as a way for students learn about the battle of Waterloo' (Ness 2013, n.p.).

While Leedy refers primarily to the mass-market romance novel, similar conventions could also be found in the historical romance. Heyer's repeated portrayal of her heroines' belief in themselves as they overcame entrenched patriarchy helped change the perception of women in romance novels to one where they were seen as women who deserved respect as individuals. In the Regency romances, especially, Heyer portrayed a civil society where men and women, irrespective of their class or rank, respect each other's social participation and responsibilities.

Although Heyer created her own version of Regency society and used it as the social framework for the majority of her historical novels it is based on an actual historical period. The Regency was a short period in English history. From 1811 to 1820, when George III was unable to rule so his son, the Prince Regent (later George IV), ruled in his place. Historically it was a time when there was a great deal of social unrest, the most prominent event being the Peninsular War with Napoleon culminating in the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. During this period there was also social unrest in England with Luddite uprisings and a number of riots and strikes, such as the Glasgow weavers' riot and the cotton spinners' strike. In contrast, Heyer's Regency world excludes many instances of social unrest but what she did include, for example, the Battle of Waterloo, was historically accurate. She would probably have dismissed the social problems as affecting 'common people', as Aiken Hodge (1984, p. 91) observes:

Reading her books, one remembers with surprise that the post-Waterloo years in which many of them are set were ones of appalling depression and poverty in England, with ex-servicemen begging in the streets and a very real danger of revolution.

Readers are still captivated by the world of Heyer's Regency novels, decades after they were written, as the number of active online reader forums attests. The most distinctive feature of the novels is, as the name suggests, the historical time in which the narratives are set. Heyer's encyclopaedic knowledge of the social structures and traditions in this era of English history, together with her own highly selective and innovative reconstruction of the period, ensures their continued popularity. However, what draws readers to Heyer's Regency world is that these novels do more than highlight a distinct era of history as the background for a number of romance narratives: they are stories about the morals and manners of several societies, the society that existed in the Regency period and Heyer's own society. Heyer's fictional world was clearly structured along class divisions but produced a society of harmony, civility and social stability. When Heyer began writing in the 1920s, readers were living through

challenging times facing industrial unrest, general strikes, and the Great Depression, so Heyer's portrayal of the Regency world offered an attractive alternative to the social disharmony that was evident in their own society (Aiken Hodge 1984, p.52).

The next section will explore the antecedents to Heyer's development of the romance genre, as well as identifying her particular adaptation and innovations within this generic tradition, in ways that resonate with readers. The chapter will then examine how, in the created world of the text, Heyer blends nineteenth and twentieth century social attitudes to provide an ironic commentary on the reader's own society, and provide a world which offers readers a respite from the daily troubles and tensions of their lives. Finally, the chapter supports and extends this analysis through reference to the online reading communities formed around Heyer's novels. The chapter explores how these communities in turn create a discourse community which articulates the features of these texts they value, and the functions these texts play in their own lives.

Genre Analysis: Historical Romance, Regency Romance and Drawing Room Romance

Genre analysis explores the connections between Heyer and both the social and narrative expectations of romance genre. It identifies the generic conventions Heyer used and highlights how writing in historical romance genre, she further refined and adapted the Regency romance to produce a distinctive form – Drawing Room romance. Heyer's novels include a blend of expected and original genre features together with her particular response to some of the changes that were happening in her own society. As Anthea Todd (1998) claims, the influence of feminism in the 1920s and 1930s on both women writers and readers, led to an increased interest in the historical novel: '[feminism] created a demand for information about the lives of women in history, and a need to understand how they lived' (Todd 1998, p. 110). This coincides with the time Heyer began writing historical romance in the 1930s, and her representation of women reflected a new approach to the historical romance novel. Women were interested in discovering their own history, instead than being appended to a traditional, patriarchal view of the past and the historical novel provided a means for this. While on the one hand the historical novel provided social and cultural information, on the other, the Historical romance novel offered the reader enjoyment while also including a new perception of women and their role in society.

The historical romance genre might be seen as offering women an escape from reality but writers such as Heyer also used it to portray a new social perception of women and their role in society, as reflected in many of her strong female characters. An analysis of the genre also demonstrates that while its generic features have evolved over the years to meet the changing social perceptions of readers, the Drawing Room romances still form one of the most popular sub-genres of romance writing.

This section begins with a short literary history of the development of the historical romance novel, showing how Heyer understood the genre's features and the expectations of her readers while offering a creative application of romance genre's historical elements.¹⁸ Early romances were constructed around themes of courtly love, and included exciting adventures incorporating '[a]bductions, escapes, rescues, disguises and unknown identities' (Hughes 1993, p.3). These novels focused on the themes that might inspire young aristocratic men, who might otherwise find themselves diverted by antisocial activities, to instead decide to work towards the creation of a stable and strong society. While written for a male audience, both men and women read the stories. However, their intended readers were the male aristocratic class who exercised considerable influence over their society's constancy and continuance.

While there are major differences between these early romances, and the genre that subsequently developed, the early stories are nevertheless the source of many of the main themes in modern historical romances such as courtship, adventure, and reconciliation between the hero and heroine. One of the major differences to modern historical romance is that the early romances were influenced by the medieval concept of courtly love. This version of romance is male-oriented and centres on the ennobling effect of a seemingly impossible quest that has been initiated by the beauty of a high-born, yet unattainable lady (Milech 1987, n.p.).

¹⁸ The purpose of this short literary history is to demonstrate that while Heyer's Regency Romance developed from within the overall historical Romance genre, it is an original addition to the diversity that constitutes the genre of Romance novels. However, there are other texts that chart the development of both the Romance novel and the historical romance novel in far greater detail than is possible here. See, for example: Pamela Regis, (2003) *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; Helen Hughes (1993) *The Historical Romance*, London and New York: Routledge; and Lori Humphrey Newcomb (2002) *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England*, New York: Columbia University Press.

As the earlier *chansons de geste*, or epics, were replaced in popularity by chivalric romance, the social focus on the subject matter shifted from the warrior proving himself in battle to the social position of the hero as he established his place and function in society. This coincided with the rise of a new society where the major social focus centred on the city and the court, and included an increasingly literate public with more leisure time for larger numbers of people. As Ramsay (1983, p. 5) notes, 'Thus the rise of a new society, a society of cities and courts, goes hand in hand with the rise of romance'. In historical romances the traits of the warrior – courage, steadfastness and battle skills – are required to ensure a successful outcome for the inevitable heroic rescue that is a feature of the genre. On the other hand, the qualities of the courtier, ensuring a just and stable society, fulfilling social obligations of rank, and protecting the poor and the weak, guarantee social acceptance and a stable future for the main characters in the chivalric romance, who are nearly always a newly married couple (Ramsay 1983, p. 4). Readers still find attributes from these two sides of the hero in the nature of the male protagonist in many modern day romances, including those of Georgette Heyer.

One major difference to later romance genre is that the early writing, like its medieval counterpart, focuses predominantly on the male hero. However, it still, like the twentieth century romance genre, reflects the society in which it was written. The heroine's role, while obviously part of the plot, is the passive recipient of the hero's desire; she does not have to initiate or even participate in any of the action. While this reflects the social conventions of the time, including the compliant and passive role played by women, this feature of the New Comedies was still included in many of the romance novels of the twentieth century. However, both social expectations and the readership had changed by this time and the perceived passivity of the female protagonist became one of the elements that ensured a negative reaction in the critical approach to romance genre.¹⁹

As shown previously, the early romances were written primarily for male readers, but they were often read by both sexes. Although the date when this changed is not unanimously

¹⁹ Accusations of women's passivity as the controlling force within the Romance novel by critics such as Kay Mussell, 1984, *Fantasy and Reconciliation: Contemporary Formulas of Women's Romance Fiction*, Greenwood Press, Westport CT. Jan Cohn 1988, *Romance and the Erotics of Property: Mass-Market Fiction for Women*, Durham, N.C, Duke University Press, Jeanne Dubino 1989, 'The Cinderella Complex: Romance Fiction, Patriarchy and Capitalism', *Journal of Popular Culture* No. 27, pp.103-118, Anne Cranny Francis 1990, *Feminist uses of Generic Fiction*, New York, St. Martin's Press. and Tania Modleski 1992, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (2nd edition), Routledge, New York & London are very ably countered by Pamela Regis (2003) 'Part 1: Critics and the Romance Novel', *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.

agreed upon, romance genre in all its diverse forms remained popular continually attracting a large group of readers. This was so even after the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century when the perception of romance changed and it was considered exclusively 'women's literature':

It is only recently that romance has been aimed so exclusively at women. It was written and read by aristocrats of both sexes until the eighteenth century; only then did it begin to be mocked as a feminine preoccupation. (Jones 1986, p.198)

By the early twentieth century the change both in the central focus of narrative and in the readership was permanent. Over time, as the key focus had shifted to the heroine, her relationship to the hero and to her society, the genre had lost its 'universal' (or in reality, mainly masculine) readership. It became identified by the negative endorsement 'women's writing':

After this decade [the 1930s] historical romance became predominantly a woman's genre, which it had certainly never been before. (Hughes 1993, p. 3)²⁰

By the early twentieth century most sub-genres of romance genre, and in particular historical romance sub-genre, were clearly categorised with the label of women's writing. However, even though historical romance had lost its male readership it did not lose its popularity. This is because even before the twentieth century, the concept of 'romance' had changed from chivalric adventures found in the form of knightly quests, to the romantic interests of its increasingly female readership. These interests, focussed around marriage, family and society, are still seen as some of the most popular features of romance novels in general and of Georgette Heyer's Regency romances in particular. As Helen Hughes (1993, p.39) notes, Heyer was instrumental in the development of the sub-genre of historical romance:

What seems to have happened is that historical fiction of the Heyer type was gradually subsumed into the general field of women's romance. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that Heyer became influential in creating a definitive formula for women's romance in general as it was produced from the 1920s onward.

For example, Heyer's self-confident, individual and intelligent heroines may not be a true representation of the social roles women played in the real Regency period, but in Heyer's Regency novels the confident young women are one of the features which still attract many readers to these narratives.

²⁰ See also Diana Wallace, 2003, 'History to the Defeated: Women Writers and the Historical Novel in the Thirties', *Critical Survey*, vol. 15, issue 2, p. 76.

One of the social changes that had occurred in romance genre by the early twentieth century was a change in its place in literary society. Once it became associated with women authors and readers it ceased to be considered 'literature' and became categorised as 'modern popular fiction'. It still remains as one of the most successful of the genres of popular fiction. It also expanded, as the twentieth century progressed, to include a range of individual sub-genres, all of which came to be classed as romance novels.²¹ In spite of the diversity of sub-genres it is the use of romance conventions in each novel (rather than the setting, intricacies of each individual plot, or character development), that provide the links with the genre's roots in ancient Greek writing. These themes are now identified as generic features, in particular: the older, authoritative male figure is changed by his relationship to the heroine; there is a need for the couple, particularly the woman, to overcome some type of social censure thereby ensuring social harmony with their society; and most importantly, there must be a happy ending. While social perceptions may have changed over the years, in many romance novels, particularly in the historical romance sub-genre, the traditional happy ending still includes marriage. In contemporary romance novels, this might not be marriage but it is still shown as some form of committed relationship. Yet in spite of changes made due to changing social mores, all these easily recognisable 'modern' themes have their origins in the literature of ancient Greece.

The amount and the variety of romance literature continued to grow, and as different features were identified as being repeated, these identifiable patterns of romance writing became the individual sub-genres that are still being developed today.²² This chapter explores one of the most popular romance sub-genres – historical romance and Georgette Heyer's important influence in its development and its continuing popularity.

²¹ The sub-genres of Romance genre are often disputed between authors and reading groups. The classification depends on what aspect of the romance the publisher and book-seller choose to highlight. However, there are some categories such as Regency romance, Fantasy romance or Contemporary romance that are quite clearly established. Other less well-known categories include, Inspirational romance, Paranormal romance, and Futuristic romance. For an extended list of possible categories and discussion as to their content see the Romance Writers of America www.rwa.org/p/cm/ and Writing-World.com/romance/. These are just two of many websites that offer different categories of Romance novels.

²² Some of these sub-genres are exceedingly complex for example Mystery romance draws on other genres of popular fiction such as Crime Fiction, Psychological Thrillers, Paranormal and even Gothic horror genres while still keeping the Romance genre conventions as the central focus of the narrative.

By the middle of the twentieth century historical romance had become one of the most popular sub-genres of romance. In recognition of its popularity with authors and readers, as well as a marketing ploy, 'historical romance' was divided into historical periods. Readers seemed to like particular historical periods, for example, medieval romance, Restoration romance and (with Heyer's influence, one of the most popular periods), Regency romance. Over the years different historical periods may be more conspicuous than others because of the popularity of one or more authors associated with that particular age.²³ However, no matter in which historical period any of the many authors of historical romance place their narrative, the setting itself takes second place to the basic romance genre convention: the developing relationship between the hero and heroine which leads to a happy marriage. As well as using a historical framework, historical romance authors also reference social and cultural traditions within a particular period. This varies greatly in application, with some stories very evidently anchored in the author's own time dressed up with some random historical references, while other authors take great care to try and recreate a genuine sense of a particular historical time.

The historical period most associated with Georgette Heyer's writing is the Regency and she takes great care in the creation of her historical setting. The development of her Regency world is more than a background that frames the narrative, it is a comprehensive world that gives the reader the feeling that it continues past the pages of the narrative. Heyer fills her Regency with believable historical figures who interact with her fictional characters creating a society that seems to have a life of its own. Heyer's setting, this thesis argues, is almost as important as her characters and the plot. Heyer's unique Regency world, complete with its social rules, elaborate physical settings and aristocratic characters, became the model for all Regency romance novels. The popularity of her Regency romances and her Regency world led to Regency romance being given the status of a separate sub-genre of historical romance. Arguably it should be classed as one of the many historical periods included in historical romance but its continued popularity has led to both critical references and market placement

²³ For example Baroness Orczy's *Scarlet Pimpernel* series of historical romance novels are set during the French Revolution and have remained popular since their publication in 1905. Another example is Kathleen Windsor's Restoration romance, *Forever Amber*, published in 1944, although it became well-known more for being banned due to its explicit sexuality than its historical setting. However, from their beginning Historical Romances have remained one of the most popular genres of popular fiction and over the years authors have used every imaginable historical age from Jean M. Auel (1980) prehistoric romance series *The Clan of the Cave Bear* to Margaret Leroy's (2011) World War 2 romance *The Soldier's Wife*.

designating all novels set in this period as a separate sub-genre. As Pamela Regis (2003, p.125) notes, 'Her influence is felt in every historical romance novel written since 1921, particularly in the Regency romance novel. Heyer is the mother of this kind of Romance'.

One of the characteristics that came to be particularly associated with Heyer's Regency romance novels was the exciting adventure that formed the background to the love story. While the hero's and heroine's escapades are not the central focus of the narrative, as in adventure genre, they provide the reason for the developing relationship between the hero and heroine. Heyer makes good use of exciting adventures including abductions, duels, and plots with murderous intent and they feature prominently in her Regency romances. However, all these various exploits exist to provide a background to the heroine's most difficult battle: that of changing the hero from his previous 'villainous' self into the reformed character at the end. Of course there are many iterations of 'villains' in romance genre terms. The villains can range from cold, insensitive and unsympathetic to arrogantly dismissive. These gentlemen, who feature so prominently in both Heyer's historical romances and her Regency romances, have found their way into many of the other romance genres. Modern romance readers and viewers of romance films and television dramas still expect the ultimate focus of the adventure to be the reclamation of the hero.²⁴

In her first historical romance, *The Black Moth* (1921), written before she developed her distinctive Regency world, Heyer shows that she understood how the use of action to support the developing relationship between hero and heroine is an intrinsic feature of historical romance. In her subsequent historical romances she creatively utilises various versions of the 'cloak-and dagger' plot including features such as swashbuckling heroes, evil villains, disguises, abductions, hair-raising escapes and impossible rescues. These particular characteristics, which can trace their origins to early Greek romances, were some of the generic features expected by readers of historical romance genre. Historical romances, by their nature, are set in 'another time', often one when there is some particular social danger,

²⁴ Romance author Doreen Owen Malek (1992) describes the discussion at a Romance Writers of America Conference in 1986 of a romance novel by Karol Ann Hoeffner that had been written for television:

The story had all the elements [of Romance writing], but what brought us special joy was the ending of the film, which as I have already pointed out is so critical to the romance ... [at the end] She dumps the boyfriend, climbs onto the horse with gorgeous, and rides off over the dunes. Every romance reader watching this has just shouted "Yes!" and thrown a victory salute into the air. Why is this ending so satisfying? Not only because love has triumphed, but because he has capitulated and she has *won*. (Malek 1992, p. 77)

such as rebellions, social unrest, dangers caused by highway men, pirates or wars. These historical periods also usually include quite different social structures and customs to that of the readers' daily life. However, Heyer's historical romances show that she understood that the author could use these expected features to create a distinctive, individual world in the novel. This world does not have to bear any great resemblance to the real historical conditions that existed in the past, apart from some recognisable historical or geographical features; just enough to anchor the narrative to its historical frame. While in her early novels Heyer wrote of exciting adventures in pre-revolutionary France and post Jacobite rebellion in England, she was also beginning to create a complex and unique Regency world.

However, the use of the historical past is more than just escapism; 'Romance writers use the past as an exotic setting to add to the 'escape' value of their stories; but it also functions as a mirror of the present' (Hughes 1993, p.5). Heyer's comprehensive Regency society highlights one of the positive aspects of the historical romance, which is that many of these novels accommodate different readings. Readers can enjoy entering the 'novel and glamorous world' and the characters and the plot can be seen to exist solely for their own sake 'with no overt link to the present' (Hughes 1993, p.5). On the other hand, the historical romance author in general, and Heyer in particular, often include parallels to present day society. This allows the reader to reflect on contemporary society without losing the pleasure offered by the narrative.

Features of present-day society may be presented for criticism if they are shown, appropriately modified (in embryo, perhaps) embedded in a historical context. The effect is to defamiliarize them, encouraging a stricter scrutiny. (Hughes 1993, p. 5)

For example, many of Heyer's young, independent heroines demand that they be allowed to marry for love and expect to be respected as an equal by their husbands, which raises issues of changing perceptions of women's place within society and also changing dynamics within families that were present at the time of Heyer's authorship from the 1920s onwards, more so than a reflection of social issues from the Regency period.

Heyer's Regency romances and her young, confident heroines reflected the change that had occurred in historical romance genre as it developed, particularly in the nineteenth century. By the late nineteenth century the action in historical romance focussed more on the heroine's adventures and became more dangerous and exciting.²⁵ The idealistic quest found in the

²⁵ While historical romance provided exciting adventures and exotic settings as part of the genre, the most extreme and fantastic settings and plots were reserved for a different Romance genre, that of the Gothic romance.

chivalric romances had all but disappeared and was replaced by hazardous exploits that tested both the hero's and heroine's strength, commitment and resourcefulness to make sure the happy ending was achieved. However, while the settings continued to be exotic and the plots focussed on the exciting and the perilous, the past world encompassed by the novel often presented the social and political world of the author at the time of writing. Hughes argues that:

These [links to current social and political attitudes] embody – sometimes to challenge, more often to confirm – many of the most important power relationships of the society in which the stories had their origin, and, to a lesser extent, of those in which they remain widely read. (Hughes 1993, p. 12)

Apart from the distinctive feature of being set in an identifiable historical period one of the generic elements associated with historical romance that Heyer employed is that they emphasise the 'purity' of the heroine, particularly no sex before marriage. This faint and slightly convoluted echo of the genre's roots in the original narratives and poems of courtly love is a consistent feature of other historical romances and it still meets with approval of many of Heyer's readers. For example, in a forum where readers discuss the differences between 'bodice rippers' and Georgette Heyer's Regency romances one reader commented:

I like the fact that sexual activity is not at the forefront of G[eorgette] H[eyer] novels. She demonstrates that love, romance, and sexual attraction can be conveyed in a clever phrase and needs not to be explicit. It leaves so much to one's own imagination! (Susan from Perthshire 2016, post 39)

While many contemporary romance sub-genres include more sexually explicit material, this is a much later development in the historical romance genre. Yet even in the later historical romance novels that include a franker approach to sex the older generic influence still persists and sexual relationships usually occur in the context of a permanent relationship between the

However, while Gothic romance may share its outward trappings with Historical romance, particularly being an adventure set in the past, it developed in a very different way. Daphne Watson, 1995, in her detailed analysis of this genre, suggests that while it might include that sense of 'another world' separating the reader from everyday society, it has very different aims and outcomes. While it is linked to the early romances with their male-oriented focus, it is more associated with the simplistic black and white world of the fairy tale. This is most apparent in the treatment of the heroine, where she passively awaits her rescue by the hero.

It [the Gothic romance] is concerned with sensationalism rather than sensibility, and has borrowed from the fairy tale in a simplistic manner. It is concerned with a world that is black or white; it is not concerned with individuation'. (Watson 1995, p. 5)

Tania Modleski, also writing on the Gothic romance, suggests that the extremes of plot and character in this genre offers women an outlet for their feelings of hostility and anger, particularly against men, while at the same time allowing them to deny that such feelings might be negative or socially unacceptable:

Gothics, like Harlequins, perform the function of giving expression to women's hostility toward men while simultaneously allowing them to repudiate it. Because the male appears to be the outrageous persecutor, the reader can allow herself a measure of anger against him; yet at the same time she can identify with the heroine who is entirely without malice and innocent of any wrongdoing'. (Modleski 1982, p. 58)

hero and heroine. As Kay Mussell notes, the social rules applied to women quite clearly sanction chaste heroines in most historic romance novels' worlds. 'In these books [historical romance], the rules are certain – women must behave properly or be doomed – but in the contemporary world, the rules are less certain and therefore more problematic' (Mussell 1984, p.79).

While Heyer was constructing her Regency world England was experiencing social challenges similar to those undergone by the actual Regency society: mass unemployment in working class districts, poor housing and social unrest. John Benson (1989, p. 64) describes the social problems of Britain in the 1930s with the closure of mines and mills as affecting the working class, particularly in the north of the country:

Although the number of working people living in primary (unavoidable) poverty was always relatively small, the number living in secondary poverty was probably as large again; while those living with the fear of poverty was far larger still. The fear of poverty, like the enjoyment of prosperity, proved of the greatest significance.

Benson's point that the 'fear of poverty' was a common social phenomenon is one of the possible reasons why Heyer's glittering, safe and quite affluent society was so attractive to readers when they were first published in the 1930s. Her world welcomed her readers and offered them, for a little while, a place where the current social problems did not exist and everyone was quite happy in their respective station. Victoria Olsen (2011) agrees with this escapist function of romance fiction, arguing that readers turned to romance novels during the difficult social times of the thirties, forties and fifties.

The Regency period, apart from the social unrest and Peninsula War, was a period of great artistic and scientific endeavour; John Constable began painting the *Hay Wain*,²⁶ the first steam locomotive ran on rails²⁷ and gas lighting was introduced in London streets.²⁸ In

²⁶ Constable completed the *Hay Wain* in the late 1820s and exhibited it in the Royal Academy in 1821. For a complete description of the work and its history see *The Victoria and Albert Museum* webpage www.vam.ac.uk/articles/s/constables-studies-for-the-hay-wain/ (viewed 12/05/2017).

²⁷ Richard Trevithick, (1771-1833) built the first primitive 'Penydarren tram road engine' to run on railway lines. In 1804 his engine hauled 10 tons of iron and 70 men ten miles at 5 miles-per-hour predating the more famous Stephenson's 'Rocket' by 20 years. For more information about the development of the steam engine throughout the Regency period see *Historic UK* www.history-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/steam-trains-railways/ (viewed 12/05/2017).

²⁸ The webpage *A History of Lighting* notes that the first gas street light was demonstrated by 'William Murdock who, for the first time in 1802, lit the outside of the Soho Foundry in a public presentation with a gas light fuelled with coal gas. After that, in 1807, London got its first gas lit street.' For a more information see <http://www.historyoflighting.net/electric-lighting-history/history-of-street-lighting/> (viewed 12/05/2017).

literature, a new poetry was being created by the 'Romantic' poets, namely Shelley, Byron and Wordsworth, and documented by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* (1815). In fiction, Jane Austen published *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Mary Shelley published *Frankenstein* (1818) and Sir Walter Scott published *Ivanhoe* (1820). These three are all important novels in various genres of the romance tradition.

The Regency was a very short historical period but one filled with change, revolution and new beginnings, hardly any of which, except for the Napoleonic wars, find their way into the Regency romances of Georgette Heyer. Ken Gelder claims that a possible reason for the absence of the Regency era's tumultuousness in Heyer's work is that Austen was the 'source and inspiration' for all Regency romances when Heyer began writing her Regency period. Following Austen, the period was shown with 'its chaste but witty and determined heroines, civilized good manners and idealization of the aristocracy' (Gelder 2004, p.46). This suits Heyer's readers who are content to enter her world of Regency and find a place of stability and social acceptance. Comfort, good manners, social responsibility and an admiration for the aristocracy as a class that inherently acts with social conscientiousness towards all people characterise a society in which everyone not only knows their place but is quite happy within it. An example of Heyer's playful use of historical characters, and focus on the idealised aristocracy of the Regency period is that of the Prince Regent. The Prince Regent features as a character in several of Heyer's Regency romances and he portrayed as a person who encapsulates the tone of hedonistic indulgence for those with wealth and position in the Regency period. Her portrayal of him aligns with historical documentation, which shows him as an impulsive character, given to extravagance and excess. A visual example of these excesses is the lavish Brighton Pavilion (Short History of the Pavilion n.d.).

In 1935 Heyer extended her Regency world to include a new subgenre, The Drawing Room romance. Drawing Room romance, still firmly situated in the Regency, has remained as popular with historical romance authors and readers today as when Heyer first created it. Writers and critics by no means unanimously agree upon the classification of these novels as Drawing Room romances. Pamela Regis (2003, p. 125) has only one classification and calls all Heyer's novels historical romance novels. Diana Wallace (2003, p. 81), noting Heyer's distinctive contribution to the Historical Fiction genre, rather than historical romance genre, sees these novels as an innovative addition to the historical novel because of their persistent targeting of female readers:

Her work in the 1930s initiates a new third phase of historical novels aimed predominantly at a female audience and using 'history' to explore the restriction and injustices, past and present, of women's lives.

Despite disagreements over classifications, this thesis argues for the Drawing Room romance as a new and distinctive sub-genre of historical romance. Heyer first introduced her readers to the Drawing Room romance in the novel *Regency Buck* (1935). For readers already familiar with her Regency romance novels, her new Drawing Room romance stories gave them a different perspective of the Regency. The plot focuses on the hero and the heroine and their developing relationship. Each story ends in a marriage or promise of marriage, clearly identifying them as romance novels. Like the Regency romances the world of the Drawing Room romance has all the social features of the Regency period which form an important part of the fabric of the novel. They include detailed descriptions of fashion, food and social activities which are drawn with the same detailed care as the psychological and social motivations of the characters.

However, closer analysis reveals that these historical features are a secondary consideration; these novels have as their major focus, social manners, traditions and practices. While they contain many of the recognisable features that are expected in Regency romances, they are played out in a very staid world where civilised behaviour or 'good *ton*', is more important than deeds of 'daring-do'. In the Drawing Room romances the intricacy of relationships, particularly between the aristocratic members of society, is the prime focus of the narrative. These novels also include humour as well as irony as they explore the effect of social expectations on the lives and prospects of the characters. These novels are far closer to Austen's Regency than the exciting adventures filled with sword fighting, kidnapping, reckless gambling and every kind of social excess that fills the earlier versions of historical romance, shown in earlier Heyer works such as *These Old Shades* (1926).

As Gelder argues, Jane Austen is strongly identified with Regency romances, and her novels provided the template for later Regency romances. Kay Mussell (1984, p.57) argues that Heyer uses similar conventions to the social satire of Austen in the creation of her plots and characters:

Both Heyer and Austen use similar conventions and employ social satire to construct their plots. For Austen, of course, those materials were the stuff of everyday life. For Heyer, they remain historical conveniences.

The comparison highlights Heyer's creative achievement in developing her Regency world. As previously stated, Mussell points out that Austen was writing about the actual Regency world she knew while Heyer is writing about a Regency world which has the same sense of authenticity but was a world she created:

Her [Austen's] provincial settings – the country side, small villages, Bath and Lyme Regis – differ from the fashionable world of Regency romances, for when Heyer uses the same settings she does so with numerous references to the glamorous world of London. Austen does not mention the Prince Regent in her work, while modern Regency writers refer to him as a symbol of the titillating corruption of the age. (Mussell 1984, p. 58)

Many of Heyer's readers compare Heyer to Austen, highlighting the feeling of reality Heyer generates in her Regency world which they believe has the same sense of authenticity as Austen's 'real' Regency society. However, while Austen's Regency world remains unchanged throughout all her novels, Heyer, on the other hand, was developing a new version that would exist in harmony alongside her original creation. (This point will be discussed further in the reception analysis section that includes the voices of the readers and the reading communities).

The important difference between the Regency romances and the Drawing Room romances is not the expected ending in the marriage between the hero and heroine, but how they reach that state. In the Regency romances the marriage of the hero and heroine is often the culmination of an exciting adventure as the hero rescues the heroine from some dire predicament. However, in the Drawing Room romance, marriage between the hero and heroine occurs as a resolution of some disruption to harmony and the social order. These are novels that explore the fine line between individuality and social conformity as characters, usually the heroine, disrupt social harmony with their independent attitude. Harmony is restored when both hero and heroine gain a new respect for each other and marriage restores the social balance as well as providing the expected generic ending.

Heyer continually experimented with her Regency world incorporating within it other genres such as Suspense genre, Espionage genre and social criticism. Critics, even those that acknowledge her unique Regency world or her innovative juxtaposition of present day attitudes with historical characters, usually see her as another writer of popular historical romances. However, many readers recognise her innovative extension of Regency romances and note Jane Austen's influence. While they do not necessarily name these as 'Drawing Room romances', they see that these novels have a new focus on the characters and their

society within the Regency world. As Michelle posted on the *Goodreads* website in a discussion about Heyer's Regency:

I've always agreed with those who hinted that GH had to be Austen's love child; she's got Austen's wit with a smidge of a modern sensibility. In fact, I would much rather get to know Arabella than Fanny, while Sophy is far more interesting than Emma. (Michelle 2011, n.p.)²⁹

Textual Analysis: The World of the Text

Genre novels are usually plot driven, so the development of the society and its characters and the locations in which they exist play an important part in providing a sense of substance to the world in which the action takes place. The world of the narrative must be both distinctive and believable, drawing the reader in to explore its possibilities. This section will look at the defining characteristics of Heyer's Regency world showing how they entice the reader into the text. Also it will analyse the characters that inhabit this world and the relationships they form and consider the society presented by the novel. These features, the textual world, all play an important part in keeping the readers interested in Heyer's novels and are the basis for many of the discussions in the reading communities' forums. The textual analysis demonstrates some of the features that readers enjoy in Heyer's novels, including: strong female characters; the flawed hero; the inclusion of creatively adapted period detail in the setting; a stable social order; humour and witty dialogue; Heyer's creation of idiomatic Regency language; and the social commentary.

As discussed in the previous section, Heyer began writing historical romances in the 1920s and 30s, which was a time that was socially challenging for many of the women who read her novels. As one of her biographers notes, Heyer would not have described herself as a feminist.

While Georgette Heyer was never a feminist in ideology, she was in many ways a feminist by temperament: a strong woman who never questioned her ability or her right to succeed in a patriarchal world – a modern woman in an Edwardian shell. (Kloester 2013, p.134)

²⁹ This is a very popular, very large site. It encourages readers to share their favorite books and their thoughts about the author and the novel. Most discussion threads have over 100 posts and at least 200-300 views. While it has links to Amazon and other booksellers it is still driven by readers who form reading communities to share their responses to individual authors. It is, at the time of writing, very popular with readers of the genre novels of popular fiction. On this particular *Goodreads* discussion there are over 1,000 posts. Michelle is number 104.

Heyer had such traditional, conservative social attitudes that she was accused of being a snob.³⁰ However, she included in her romances strong, independent women, albeit of aristocratic status, showing how they made a constructive contribution to their society. From her first novel published in 1921, a historical romance, Heyer demonstrates that she is well aware of the generic expectations of her readers but gave her characters a sense of individuality beyond the standard genre-specific models of wicked villain, dashing hero and persecuted heroine.

Her first novel, *The Black Moth* (1921) is a typical historical romance. It is a colourful swashbuckling adventure, full of hair-raising escapades, highwaymen and closely-fought duels: all familiar generic features readers would expect. The hero, the wrongly dishonoured son of an aristocrat, turns highwayman and has a number of adventures, including rescuing the heroine from the clutches of a wicked Duke, the 'Black Moth' of the title. A short review in *The Times Literary Supplement* from 1921, notes that 'This stages the eighteenth century with the usual stage business and scenery – highwaymen, duelling, gaming: and high society in London, Bath and Sussex' (cited in Fahnestock-Thomas 2001, p.57).³¹ While acknowledging the novel to be a fairly standard historical romance, the reviewer also has high praise for the character of the hero and the development of the plot, 'he [Jack Carstares] makes a fascinating hero of romance; and it is a well-filled story which keeps the reader pleased' (cited in Fahnestock-Thomas 2001, p.57). Another review, this time from *The Saturday Review* (London) also praises the novel: 'Seriously, the author has made quite a respectable story of these old properties, far more life-like than could have been expected'³² (cited in Fahnestock-Thomas 2001, p.57). These are complimentary reviews for a new author,

³⁰ Another biographer, Jane Aiken Hodge 1984, *The Private World of Georgette Heyer*, The Bodley Head, London, claims that Heyer had a dislike for people from cultures other than English and social positions she saw as different to her own. However, rather than simply accusing her of being a snob, even 'a nice one' as claimed by her son, it seems more likely that Heyer felt comfortable in an ordered universe that remained stable and recognisable while all else was in a constant state of change and challenge. Heyer's world, in reality and in her novels, was one of order and responsibility within a strong moral framework. In the Regency world this seems to equate class with worth; but for Heyer the higher the class, the greater the moral and social responsibility.

³¹ The reviews listed here are reprinted in Mary Fahnestock-Thomas' *Georgette Heyer: A Critical Retrospective*. Published in 2001, it not only reprints many of Heyer's reviews between 1921 and 1997 but also includes six short published articles by Heyer written between 1922 and 1954.

³² It is not clear as to what the review mean by 'expected', One possibility might be the critic's expectations of the skills of a new author to create life-like characters. However, many historical novelists took pains to frame their narrative with references to real historical periods and persons, giving their work a sense of realism. Perhaps Heyer's ability to use these 'old properties', i.e. the generic features of historical romances, surprised the critic.

and show that Heyer, writing in the genre of historical romance, had not only selected a firmly established genre that was very popular at the time³³ but that she fully understood its limitations and the expectations of readers. While *The Black Moth* was moderately successful it was her historical romance five years later, *These Old Shades* (1926) that firmly established her as a talented women's author within the genre of historical romance, as Hughes (2001, p. 514) notes, *These Old Shades* 'became a best seller. Thereafter, Heyer's reputation was assured but it was as a writer for a female readership'.

These Old Shades makes good use of the conventional features of historical romance and adventure. For example, the story begins with a character somewhat recycled from *The Black Moth*, and one whose features had already been established by earlier writers in the genre, such as Baroness Orczy. Heyer wrote initially for British readers and exploited the national prejudice of her readers by suggesting at the beginning of the novel that her main character, His Grace of Avon is 'un-British'. He is first described as a French, foppish and almost feminine, aristocrat:

He walked mincingly, for the red heels of his shoes were very high. A long purple cloak, rose-lined, hung from his shoulders and was allowed to fall back carelessly back from his dress, revealing a full-skirted coat of purple satin, heavily laced with gold. (*These Old Shades*, p.5)

In the description of his elaborate 'French' dress which continues for nearly the whole first paragraph Heyer exploits the strong cultural prejudice of many of her English readers. The description of Avon's exaggerated style of dress suggests that not only do his clothes lack the proper appearance of masculinity, but his actions also suggest a lack of good, honest English manliness. Hughes (1993, p. 88) note that "France" is here connected with an excessive interest in fashion which leads the fop to abrogate his 'natural' masculinity'. To further emphasise the Duke of Avon's Frenchified nature, already established by his clothes and the story's location, his actions suggest weakness and vulnerability. He is described as strolling 'mincingly' and 'languidly', and is quite incapable of defending himself as his light dress sword is 'lost' in the fold of his cloak. The disapproving authorial voice points out that he is

³³ Popular historical adventure authors, for example Rafael Sabatini who was already a well-received writer of historical fiction, published *Scaramouche* in the same year that *The Black Moth* appeared. Jeffrey Farnol, also was an established writer of historical fiction, has been linked with Heyer by some critics as the founder of the Regency novel. His early novel *The Broad Highway*, (1910) is set around the Regency period and has been seen 'as a new development in historical fiction' (Cockburn 1972, p.98). Baroness Orczy's *Scarlet Pimpernel* series of historical romance novels have been popular since their publication in 1905 and even earlier historical adventure novels, for example Alexandre Dumas' novels *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers* were still popular even though they were first published in the 1840s.

not only physically ineffectual but foolish as well, with his decision to walk alone late at night described as ‘the height of foolhardiness’ and ‘recklessness’ (*These Old Shades*, p.5). However, when he is suddenly attacked by ‘a body – shot like a cannon-ball from a dark alley’ (*These Old Shades*, p.5) he immediately demonstrates that the preceding impression is a masquerade, a mask that conceals a quite a different nature, one that is powerful, manly and intelligent. He instantly takes command of the situation, his actions in direct contrast to those previous characteristics assigned to him. Instead of being ‘ineffectual’ and ‘foolish’ he is described as ‘gripping his assailant’s wrists’, ‘bearing them downwards’ and showing ‘merciless strength’. According to Hughes (1993, p. 89) these masculine traits are those of the ‘genuine Englishman’. This blend of English ‘masculinity’ and French ‘femininity’, ‘are thus presented as coming together to form a well-balanced personality’ and establish the Duke of Avon as the ideal hero (Hughes 1993, p.89). The opening first forewarns the reader that while the hero may seem to be unheroic: ‘The Duke, he is not human. Some call him Satan [sic], and *mon Dieu*, they have reason!’ (*These Old Shades*, p.32). Generic expectations assure the readers that by the end of the story he will be the ideal hero.

As the story progresses the Duke, through his relationship with the heroine Leonie, slowly evolves from the cynical rake who amuses himself by buying a young, innocent ‘boy’ (Leonie disguised as a boy), for his entertainment, to becoming a suitable hero by the end of the novel. This change is shown not only by his actions in rescuing Leonie from public scandal, humiliation and exile, but also because he is willing, even though he loves her, to stand aside and not marry her so she will not be contaminated by his sordid past.

Child, you do not know me. You have created a mythical being in my likeness whom you have set up as a god. It is not I... My reputation is damaged beyond repair, child I come of vicious stock, and I have brought no honour to the name I bear...To no women have I been faithful, behind me lies scandal upon sordid scandal. I have wealth, but I squandered one fortune in my youth, and won my present fortune at play. You have seen perhaps the best of me; you have not seen the worst...I would give you a boy who might come to you with a clean heart, not one who was bred up in vice from his cradle. (*These Old Shades*, p. 304)

His language is an interesting mixture of almost paternal concern (‘Child, you do not know me’), cold, social comment (‘My reputation is damaged beyond repair’) and emotional concern (‘I would give you a boy’).

After such an emotionally charged declaration the reader knows there is only one outcome. Leonie, (and the reader) know that his previous life has been left in the past and he is a true

romance heroine, intelligent, assertive and individual. Leonie convinces the Duke that it is only him she wants:

One large tear glistened on the end of her lashes. "Ah, Monseigneur, [the Duke] you need not have told me this! I know – I have always known, and still I love you. I do not want a boy. I want only – Monseigneur." (*These Old Shades*, p.304)

Accepting her choice, the Duke immediately marries Leonie and returns to Paris with her, establishing her in her rightful place in society. 'Love' in Heyer's books is a complete acceptance of the other person and a delight in their personal qualities' (Hughes 1993, p.123). Everything ends very satisfactorily in accordance with the expectations of the genre, demonstrating that, according to '[t]he moral fantasy of the romance ... love triumphant and permanent, overcomes all obstacles and difficulties' (Cawelti 1976, pp. 41-42).

These Old Shades demonstrates Heyer's development of a key feature of the romance genre: the flawed romantic hero. The Duke of Avon was not her first romantic hero. As mentioned previously, he is a development of the characters that had appeared in earlier novels, beginning in 1921 with *The Black Moth*. However, *The Black Moth* had a far more standard, if honourable and heroic, protagonist. The reader has no doubt about him from the beginning of the story. The main character, Jack Carstares, might shock his English lawyer with his effeminate French mannerisms and dress but the reader knows he has acted honourably, taking the blame for his brother's cowardly act of cheating at cards. His French 'foppishness' is 'a mask which can be easily be discarded' (Hughes 1993, p.89). In another Heyer early historical romance, *Powder and Patch* (1923),³⁴ the hero is too 'English' for the heroine and so is sent to Paris to acquire 'French' style. However, after he becomes an 'exquisite', the heroine decides that she really prefers the original 'English' pre-transformation version. As Hughes (1993, p. 138) notes, '[t]he hero of Heyer's *Powder and Patch* may seem foppishly Frenchified, but underneath his silks and makeup beats a steadfast English heart'.

By the time the Duke of Avon appears 'mincing' along 'a side street in Paris' in *These Old Shades*, Heyer has made an interesting transformation in narrative approach. The model for the hero is not Jack Carstares from *The Black Moth*, but its villain, Tracy 'Devil' Andover.

³⁴ In 1923 this novel was called *The Transformation of Phillip Jettan* but the name was changed to *Powder and Patch* in 1930 when it was reprinted by Heinemann. However, Heyer changed the ending, giving it a more English emphasis. As Aiken Hodge states, 'Phillip Jettan has transformed himself into a Frenchified fop to please the woman he loves. In the first version, he wins her and takes her to Paris, to become exquisites together. In the second, they will retire to Sussex and become a country gentleman and his wife, very much like the Rougiers [Heyer's married name]' (Aiken Hodge 1984, p. 25).

Critics such as Hughes claim that Heyer simply switched characters, that 'she attempted to develop her work by writing a kind of sequel to *The Black Moth*: a novel that used the same characters, but with changed names and a changed situation' (Hughes 1999, p.514). While there are significant similarities between both characters, the Duke of Avon's character is more than a new name. While he might be arrogant, cynical and cold, and his only passion that of revenge, from the beginning Heyer suggests that much of the Duke's relationship to the world is a mask brought about by circumstances. He changes as his relationship with Leonie progresses. For example, he learns to trust his younger brother, Lord Rupert. The motive for his pursuit of the villain, the Comte de Saint-Vire (begun only for personal revenge) changes from humiliating the Comte to ensuring Leonie, the daughter Saint-Vire switched at birth, is restored to her rightful place in society. Hughes (1999) ascribes the transformation to Leonie. She 'transforms' the Duke by her 'essential innocence' combined with a 'worldly wisdom' into becoming a reformed character by the end of the novel. This does seem the case, as the character Hugh Davenant tells the Duke, 'You have learned to love another better than yourself at last, and I believe that you will make your Duchess a good husband' (*These Old Shades*, p.311).

The character of the Duke of Avon is illustrative of Heyer creating her own version of the romantic hero, one that played an important role in her fictional universe.³⁵ Heyer's fictional world is aristocratic and elegant; its inhabitants rich and witty and, as her biographer points out, it is a world that is quite exclusive. In *These Old Shades*, for example, 'If Leonie had been the bastard everyone thinks her, it would doubtless have been the Seine for her not marriage' (Aiken Hodge 1984, p.25). However, while Heyer's Regency world might be an exclusive domain, her readers are drawn into it through their sympathy with the major characters. Both the Duke of Avon and Leonie show that they react to situations in ways the reader would approve, for example repairs a significant social injustice by restoring Leonie to her rightful place in society and Leonie demonstrates social values such as loyalty and determination.

³⁵ Hughes claims that Heyer's creation of the cynical, aristocratic hero of *These Old Shades* was not only an instant success but reached beyond Historical Romance, creating a hero-type that still endures, 'Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that Heyer became influential in creating a definitive formula for women's romance in general as it was produced from the 1920s onwards' (Hughes 1993, p.39). It is encouraging to read a positive perspective of Heyer, her talent and even her readers than the misreading of some earlier critics, for example. A.S. Byatt, (1969) believed Heyer to be 'playing with her reader's sexual fantasies' (Byatt 1969, p.272) and that the Duke of Avon provided a 'coldly 'wicked' father-figure' (Byatt 1969, p.272) who 'provides the faint *frisson* of danger which appeals to female masochism and the appeal of achieving the impossible which (psychoanalysts would say) satisfies the Oedipal desires' (Byatt 1969, p.272).

Before society and civil order is restored, like the Duke, Leonie also has to undergo a series of transformations. She enters the story as a ‘boy’ from the underside of Paris society and is first transformed into the Duke’s page and then into his ward, finally taking her rightful place beside him as a Duchess. With each transformation the relationship between Leonie and the Duke changes as he relinquishes some of his scepticism and cynicism and she learns to accept the place in society that has been denied her. However, in terms of historical romance, the greatest change between *The Black Moth* and *These Old Shades* is change from a rollicking historical adventure, where the action and the hero take centre stage, to a historical romance where the actions, no matter how exciting, function as a background for the developing relationship between the hero and heroine. Whether describing the various exchanges between the Duke and Leonie or the exciting escapes and action this is a story that appealed to readers with its exuberant, almost operatic approach. As Aiken Hodge (1984, p. 27) states, ‘the secret of the book’s instant and lasting success lies in its sheer romantic gusto’.

Heyer continued to write historical romances throughout her career. She did not restrict herself to any particular historical period but set her narratives from 1066 in England with *The Conqueror* (1931), through the escape of Charles II and the Commonwealth *The Royal Escape* (1938), to the Napoleonic Wars in *An Infamous Army* (1937) and *The Spanish Bride* (1940). Readers seem to enjoy this range of historical periods to choose from. For example, in a large reading community forum with the topic ‘What’s your favourite Georgette Heyer?’ within the 880 posts that mostly ranged through the various Regency romances some readers also focussed on her historical romances. ‘Meg’ (2009, post 11 n.p.) commented,

There is also ‘The Spanish Bride’ which is historical fiction of hers, the emphasis here is on the history of the Spanish campaign against Napoleon in the early 1800s. If your taste runs to the medieval, I would recommend “Simon Coldheart” another excellent history of hers which also contains a strong element of romance.

However, the period in which the majority of her novels are set is the Regency (1811–1820). Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, Heyer’s Regency bears only a superficial resemblance to the real Regency. It is a place entirely of her own creation. It is a world that draws readers in as they appreciate every meticulously created detail from food and fashion to the aristocratic characters that populate the grand houses in fashionable places like London and Bath. Heyer creates the texture of everyday life within her Regency world so much so that readers feel they are experiencing it for themselves. The inclusion of period detail, which has been adapted to create a distinctive and engaging fictional world, constitutes another feature

that contributes to the popularity of Heyer's novels. Heyer's readers all experience a sense of authenticity through her meticulous research into everything from the superficial paraphernalia of the period to the historical characters that fill the pages.³⁶ As her biographer Aiken Hodge (1984, p.xiv), notes, 'she had an impressive collection of her own research material' which was filled with notebooks full of details of the clothes, the locations, the customs, even the colours and the material used in this period.

Identifying Heyer's use of historical features, particularly of the Regency period, has long been an area of interest for many of her readers and critics. An example of this is Jennifer Kloester's study *Georgette Heyer's Regency World* (2005). This is a very thorough collection of information about the social classes and how women and men were treated, food, fashion, travel, sport, business and military interests together with a large biographical section of prominent people from Regency society. It offers an interesting perspective as it completely integrates Heyer's Regency into the historical detail, as if the features of Heyer's Regency world are part of actual history. For example, under a drawing of an actual pocket pistol Kloester notes, 'A pocket pistol of the type used by Sophy on her visit to the moneylender, Mr Goldhanger, in *The Grand Sophy*' (Kloester 2005, p.276). This, and works like it, demonstrate how readers are drawn into the Regency world through Heyer's conscientious historical research which she incorporated into the created world of the novels.

A number of readers and critics have detailed the differences between Heyer's Regency and the historical Regency, although Heyer herself was never under any illusion that she was writing about historically accurate social conditions. Because she was aware of how she was selectively using historical details, '[c]riticism of her private world always infuriated her ... Her Regency world is a very carefully selected, highly artificial one'(Aiken Hodge 1984, p.91). However, for Heyer's readers what is important is the way the era is brought to life, rather than historical accuracy. As a reader on the official Heyer Fan club site writes:

I have rediscovered GH's books and I still love her ability to describe that bygone era so vividly. Her writing places me in a 'virtual' museum – and the dialogue is so refreshingly witty. ('Makereta' *The Pump Room*, 22 May 2011, n.p.)

³⁶ Heyer took a great deal of trouble over the authenticity of the social details in her novels and was upset if she made a mistake:

When *Frederica* began to come out in the *Woman's Journal* a reader pointed out a rare error. Researching Felix's beloved engineering works at the London Library, Georgette Heyer has been misled by a reference to an iron foundry in Soho and placed it in London instead of Birmingham. She minded this very much (Aiken Hodge 1984, p. 166).

Another important feature of Heyer's Regency novels is the portrayal of a stable, well ordered society in which 'civilised' behaviour is a blend of socially acceptable morals and manners. All emotional excesses are seen as detrimental to both personal and social relationships. For example, at the personal level, Heyer made a very firm distinction between love and sex:

[S]ex is something that happens off-stage and is kept in its place. It is important, never all-important. It is the marriage of two minds that matter most to Georgette Heyer... In her private world, manners and morals were almost the same thing, and equally important. (Aiken Hodge 1984, p.49)

Heyer's world in her novels is one of order and responsibility within a strong moral framework. In the Regency world this seems to equate class with worth; but for Heyer the higher the class, the greater the moral and social responsibility. This is most evident in her heroes, who are always aristocratic men who hold the power within society; however, with that power always comes responsibility. These heroes are often introduced to the readers as being arrogant, cold, heedless of their responsibilities, and unfeeling. However, the readers know that they will be brought to see the error of their ways by the individuality and tenderness of spirit in the heroine. In a forum dedicated to Heyer's heroes 'Janeite Deb' (2010, n.p.) explains that she likes the Mark I type hero.³⁷

[T]he Mark I type, the 'brusque, savage sort with a foul temper' ... always grabs me [as I know] that the love of a good woman will redeem him... Lord Alverstoke in *Frederica*, so bored and bad tempered, Lord Damerel in *Venetia* ... Miles Caverleigh in *Black Sheep*, Lord Rotherham in *Bath Tangle*, etc – I love all these fellows ... when one thinks of *Real Life*, I don't want one of those Mark I sorts.

Heyer created an interesting irony when she managed to make her bad-tempered, arrogant, cold heroes (before they were 'saved' by the heroine) so appealing that readers who found themselves caught up in the Regency world thought them attractive while at the same time realising that they would not like them at all in real life.

³⁷ Heyer had two distinct types of hero which she labelled Mark I and Mark II (Aiken Hodge 1984, p.59). As Aiken Hodge notes, "Mr Rochester is, of course, the original of the Heyer hero Mark I" (1984, p.110). The Mark I hero might have an affinity to Mr Rochester but he first appeared as the villain, Tracy Belmanour, Duke of Andover in *The Black Moth*. He was then resurrected as the hero, Justin, Duke of Avon in *These Old Shades* and finally found his way into the Regency in many of the Drawing Room romances beginning with *Regency Buck*. Mark I heroes are dangerous men, usually proud, rich and titled, they are powerful and secure in their social position. They also have a worldly cynicism which finally must be tempered by the heroine in order for the happy ending to take place. The second version, the Mark II hero, comes from an established origin of very British heroes found in many adventure romance novels. One of the archetypes is Sir Percy Blakeney in Baroness Orczy's *The Scarlet Pimpernel* novels. Tall, handsome and aristocratic, he is a blue-eyed very English hero. He is a proficient amateur sportsman, with highly developed senses of honour and adventure and a humorous disposition. He usually spends a lot of time protecting the heroine, often rescuing her from some form of danger. This hero usually immediately falls in love with the heroine. However, it takes some time for her to realise his true worth and, because she is an individual, spirited and courageous lady, it is only after she falls in love with him will she allow him to protect her by agreeing to marry him.

While readers recognise the negative aspects of some of Heyer's male heroes, they have a great deal of sympathy for Heyer's female characters. Her heroines may feel trapped by the limitations of society but in the end they accept the male-imposed restrictions on their behaviour as being part of the moral framework it is their duty to uphold. Heyer might question the rightness or naturalness of this, but her solution was always a private one; the hero and heroine would end up respecting each other's individuality while seeming to conform to the outward conventions of society. As Helen Hughes (1993, p. 116) suggests, this allowed Heyer's readers, who were mainly female, to feel safe and secure in at time of change and uncertainty:

The readers of Heyer's novels were aware of changes in women's position and in sexual behaviour but did not necessarily like them. The historical setting allowed a return in imagination to a time when sexual morality was strict and gender roles clearly defined; if the actualities of Regency society were different, Heyer invented a society which seemed to be like this.

One of the features of Heyer's style that draws readers into the world of the text is her use of humour. Her use of humour is particularly noticeable in the Drawing Room romances. In these novels the dialogue between the characters is one of the important features of the novels. Not only does the dialogue form a structural part of the narrative process, it also expands the readers' knowledge of this particular world. The blend of historic detail, contemporary perception and a carefully crafted social environment is what makes Heyer's Regency world both unique and accessible to the readers and this is most clearly evident in the often witty dialogue shared between the characters. The dialogue between characters allows Heyer's heroines to be shown as intelligent, witty and above all undaunted by the hero no matter how exalted his power or position. An example of this is in *The Grand Sophy* (1950). In the following interaction between Charles and Sophy, Heyer effortlessly blends twentieth-century individuality with Regency social decorum:

This put him [Charles Rivenhall] in mind of a complaint *he could with justice make*. He said stiffly: 'Since you have brought up Miss Wraxton's name, I shall be much obliged to you, cousin, if you will refrain from telling my sisters that she has a face like a horse!' 'But, Charles, no blame attaches to Miss Wraxton! She cannot help it, and that I *assure* you I have always pointed out to your sisters!' 'I consider Miss Wraxton's countenance particularly well-bred!' 'Yes, indeed, but you have quite misunderstood the matter! I *meant* a particularly well-bred horse!' You meant, as I am perfectly aware, to belittle Miss Wraxton!' 'No, no! I am very fond of horses!' Sophy said earnestly. (*The Grand Sophy*, p.157, emphasis in original)

The humour in the example cleverly demonstrates how Heyer's heroine rejects both the historical model and to some extent, the romance model of an obedient and passive female. Readers appreciate these humorous exchanges that clearly demonstrate that this type of hero needs re-socialisation, particularly by the heroine. In this particular example it also implies that Charles really does not stand a chance against this high-spirited heroine.

In *The Grand Sophy*, the relationship that develops between the hero, Charles Rivenhall, and Sophy Stanton-Lacy, a guest of his mother, is one where the seamless blend of historic detail and contemporary characterisation provides the context for a humorous exchange which is carried out within the strict social conventions of Heyer's own Regency world. Charles speaks as the reader might expect a well-born, wealthy young man from the Regency to speak to younger female relative. However, Sophy does not respond in a historically expected manner. Her dialogue is compliant, polite and even deferential but it is also contemporary in the way in which she wittily circumvents Charles' authority and ends up proving Heyer's point to the reader: Charles needs to be rescued from himself. Quite a number of readers appreciate the humour in *The Grand Sophy*. For example, on a discussion forum where the topic was 'What are Heyer's funniest novels?' of the 76 posts the readers choose this novel along with a number of her historical and Regency novels as the funniest. While there was no final decision as to which novel is the funniest all agreed that Heyer's humour was one of the elements that kept them reading her novels:

I have read all of her historical romances and for me the funniest ones are *Frederica*, *Arabella* and, of course, *The Grand Sophy*. There are so many others that can make me smile but these are the ones that still make me chuckle most and even occasionally [sic] make me laugh out loud. (*Booklovinglady* 2012)

In Heyer's Regency world, interactions between characters, particularly the heroine and hero, often include the use of intelligence and humour to defuse situations, which in many romance novels would be seen as melodramatic, exaggerated or overly sentimental occasions. Heyer's witty social comment is a constant element of her writing. For example, in *Venetia* (1958) the culmination of the plot occurs when Venetia returns from London to marry the 'wicked Baron' Lord Damerel. He believes he had to renounce her because of his unsavoury reputation. When Venetia finally discovers the truth about their separation she returns to York to confront Damerel. Their meeting, while contextually a generically clichéd romance situation takes on a new character as Heyer handles it with humour. The scene opens as Venetia returns to The Priory to find Damerel drunk:

He stared uncomprehendingly at her, and then, startling her, lifted his hand to his eyes, to shut her from his sight, ejaculating in a thickened voice of repulsion: 'Oh God! No!'(Venetia, p. 302.)

His dramatic language suggests that this is going to be a highly emotional reunion, a well-tried feature of romance genre, which initially gives the scene its melodramatic quality. So much so that at this point, Aiken Hodge (1984, p. 129) claims, 'Jane Eyre would have turned and fled, but Venetia stands her ground'.

She exclaimed: 'Oh, Damerel, *must* you be foxed just at this moment? How *odious* you are, dear friend!' (Venetia, p.30, emphasis in original)

Venetia deflects Damerel's excessive emotion with a witty but sympathetic appraisal of the situation. In her determination to marry Damerel, in spite of her relatives' and friends' disapproval, Venetia shows herself to be a very twentieth-century heroine. Not only do readers appreciate Venetia's independence but they are also drawn to Heyer's use of dialogue between Venetia and Damerel particularly because she dispenses with melodramatic exchanges that often feature in romance narratives. She replaces them with humorous, friendly or compassionate discussions that readers find far more believable. 'Margaret' (2011), a participant in a discussion forum on the novel *Venetia* demonstrates how this makes the story more enjoyable for her:

This [*Venetia*] remains one of my favourite Heyers. On the surface, these are some of her stock characters - a beautiful, witty heroine, and a brooding alpha male rake. Here, though, they become convincing friends before they're in love, and because Heyer gives their relationship more of a chance to develop, it feels more convincing and lasting. I also love that Venetia takes her fate into her own hands and doesn't just wait around for Damerel to come after her.

As shown in the previous examples Heyer's Regency romances feature witty dialogue that blends genre expectation, traditional social positioning and contemporary role representation. It is one aspect of her writing that is often copied by other Regency writers but usually not extended or enhanced and in many cases, even understood these authors. The language of the Regency remains as Heyer's own unchallenged creation and it is one of the characteristics of the Drawing Room romances that reaches out to the reader and invites them to participate in the Regency world. Its patterns, terminology and the worldview it encodes is a consistent foundation of all the Drawing Room romances, 'for devotees, the language, enhances the illusion of being admitted to a secret and special world' (Mussell 1984 cited in Fahnestock-Thomas 2001, p.413). As mentioned previously, Heyer was particularly proud of her Regency language and she would not tolerate any criticism of it (Aiken Hodge 1984, p.118). The language gives life to her characters and provides a wealth of information, directing the focus

of the reader and, in the longer passages, creates a sympathetic bridge between the narrator and the reader encouraging them to feel part of the world of the text.

Intrinsic to the texture of the created world within the novels is Heyer's invention of vernacular phrases and idioms that create a distinctive Regency world. She often uses this language to clearly identify the 'other' classes, demonstrating their exclusion from her favoured socially superior aristocratic class. The exception is the sporting cant used by the gentlemen of the Regency. The idiomatic language in the Regency romances identifies many of the lesser characters such as Bow street runners, climbing boys, and stable hands. Heyer makes all the dialogue sound authentic by first establishing a phonetic identity through graphological innovation in spelling and punctuation. This is extended by grammatical patterning clearly identifiable as different to the expected language of her 'refined' characters, and finally includes a range of colourful, if hardly understood, catch phrases. The language gains its realism through being recognisably different not recognisably genuine. The following is an example of a Bow street runner's dialogue. It not only includes a range of slang terms but Heyer has tried to give it a phonetic identity as well, with the following expressions, 'ain't' 'reckernize', 'cove', 'Lor'! and 'werry'.

Maybe you ain't never heard tell on a cove by the name o'Yarde: likewise you wouldn't reckernize a set o'sparklers if you was to see one. Lor'! if I had a brace of meggs for every green-looking young chubb like you which I've took up – ah, and shut up in the Whit just as snug as you please! – I'd be a werry rich man, so I would. (*The Corinthian*, p.184)

Characters often have their own idiolect or simply share the general dialect of their class, but no matter how they speak their interactions impart a sense of reality 'Her characters may talk in a language never heard on land or sea, but they behave like real people' (Aiken Hodge 1984, p.202).

Another key feature of these novels relates to the hierarchical nature of the society. The societies portrayed in Heyer's historical romance and Drawing Room romance novels have their own rules of behaviour, forms of dress and separate expectations for each gender and class. These characteristics are brought together through the setting of the Drawing Room. First and foremost the drawing room is a social meeting space, but one that is of particular significance to ladies. It is where ladies receive guests; where tea is taken and social 'rules' are strictly observed. Only those acceptable within society are invited into the drawing room. It is also a place where well-brought up ladies may receive visits from male friends, admirers

and potential husbands, all under the watchful eyes of mothers, chaperones and male family members. The drawing room also relates to the aristocratic nature of the characters and the settings in the romances. The wealthy and wellborn had drawing rooms and the leisure to sit and take tea in them, the less fortunate, who hardly rate a mention in this very specific world, had parlours. Finally, the image of the drawing room is one of an interior, enclosed space. These stories may include some journeys, chases, duels and other features of adventure and romance genres but primarily they are set in contained spaces that add to their social significance. For example, Almack's Assembly Room, balls in stately homes, social encounters in the drawing rooms and supper parties in the houses of the rich and aristocratic in London, Bath and Brighton are settings that are all used to emphasise the class and social status of the characters who inhabit them.

Heyer often uses her novels to comment on social issues that occur within the reader's own world, for example, the conflict between individuality and the accepted social codes of behaviour within society. These issues are most prominent in the Drawing Room romances as they are novels of manners that reflect the contemporary society of the author, and the social comment has a direct correlation to the real world. Therefore the relationships between the various characters, seen in their manners, social behaviour and understanding of the human condition, has as much relevance to the readers' world as it does to the world of the novel. While Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* can be described as a novel of manners, because she was writing about the time and society in which she lived, Heyer creates her own fictional Regency society and, while it is set in a previous time, she uses it to comment on some of the social issues of her own time.

The first impression readers have of the Regency world in the initial Drawing Room romance, *Regency Buck* is that it is a place of propriety, of good manners and acknowledged social customs. In many ways it is a quieter, more regulated world than the worlds created in the historical romance novels. The world of Miss Judith Taverner is a very ordinary, everyday world. There is no drama, no exciting confrontation, no need for daring deeds. It is the ordered world of the Drawing Room romance. The opening of the novel depicts a contained society in the commonplace journey from Yorkshire to London being made by a brother and sister in a post-chaise-and-four. The language is descriptive, offering a detailed psychological, social and physical description of Judith. This includes her present marital status, her social intentions and her character, all of which will be challenged and possibly changed over the

course of the story as she learns to adapt to the often-unfair rules and regulations of polite society. (Interestingly at this point in the story there is no sign of the hero.)³⁸ First the reader is given a detailed physical description; she is ‘a fine young woman’, of ‘above average height’, who has ‘gold curls ... dark brows and lashes ... and startlingly blue eyes’ (*Regency Buck*). Importantly she is not conceited: ‘she could not however, admire her own beauty, which was of a type she was inclined to despise’ (*Regency Buck*.) This shows her to have the modest and unassuming manners expected of aristocratic ladies in Heyer’s world.

At the same time Heyer’s heroines, like Judith Taverner, also display some social attitudes that would have been atypical in the historical Regency era, for example, that women should value themselves as more than pretty faces. As Regis (2003, p. 127) argues, ‘the “givens” of the twentieth-century heroines (affective individualism, property, and companionate marriage) are present in these novels written in the twentieth century about the nineteenth’. While all of Heyer’s Regency heroines have some of these more ‘modern’ social expectations, especially in relation to their perception of their own self-worth, they are particularly evident in the Drawing Room romances, beginning with *Regency Buck* (1935). In these novels there is more focus on the social environment that frames the narrative. An important element in the plot is how the heroine both accepts and exploits the rules and conventions that establish social order and harmony. As Kay Mussell (1984, p. 78) notes, ‘The reader can identify with a protagonist who sees the arbitrary and capricious nature of social requirements and follows just enough of the rules, while behaving in accordance with values held by modern readers’.

In the opening of *Regency Buck* Heyer stresses that Judith is more than ‘a wax doll’ as she has ‘intelligence’ in her eyes and ‘an air of resolution in the curve of her mouth’. Her style of dress is described as neatly dressed but not in the first style of fashion suggests that she is as yet outside of London society. While her brother, Perry, grumbles about having to make the journey, Judith sits quietly watching the landscape pass by or reads the *Traveller’s Guide*. Judith is in many ways a very twentieth century young lady; she is independent, strong willed, and used to having her own way, as her brother states: ‘It was you who would go to London’ Also while she is travelling with her younger brother, she has no older female companion, which would probably have been expected of women of her social standing in the actual Regency. The description of Judith shows that she has a ‘naturalness’ and independence that

³⁸ All quotes made in relation to the opening sequence of *Regency Buck* have been taken from the first page of the novel, p.5.

is likely to get her into trouble once she reaches socially constricted London. And of course it does.

Not only is the context that encloses the world of the Drawing Room romance quite different from that of the historical romance but also the characters, particularly those of the hero and heroine, are drawn differently to those in the historical romances. Judith from the opening of the novel shows that beneath her impeccable manners she is strong-willed and independent. She constantly challenges the social constraints placed upon her in an attempt to develop her understanding and knowledge. For example, she drives a high-perch phaeton in the park, and she carries her own snuff box with her own brand of snuff, both of which can be seen as challenges to the existing social rules for young women in the Regency period. However, while Judith tries to develop her own natural personality, she must learn to do so within society's rules. While she is wealthy she might expect a certain leniency within society, but she must not go outside the strictly prescribed rules or she will be excluded from society. Hughes (1993, p. 120) observes that 'Judith is fascinated by the rules, annoyed by the constraints they impose, and eager both to learn and to challenge them'. Finally, in participating in a curricule race to Brighton, Judith oversteps those rules and comes to understand that any real individuality and independence is only fantasy.

In the Drawing Room romance adhering to the social rules is seen as civilised behaviour and is central to earning a place within Heyer's Regency world. It is a world where men set the boundaries and women must agree to accept those boundaries. Judith accepts Worth's criticism, not questioning his right to censure her conduct, 'I am aware – have been aware almost from the start – that I ought not to have driven myself from London as I did' (*Regency Buck*, p. 276). Through Judith, Heyer comments on how as women gain more independence they have less ability to enjoy it. In Heyer's world, exhibitionism (such as the race to Brighton) and immorality go hand-in-hand, as women are expected to behave with propriety. This is not a world of extremes but of manners and civility. Women may be eccentric, and somewhat independent, but they must not be vulgar or common, 'Manners, of course imply class, which has always been a preoccupation of [Heyer's]' (Aiken Hodge 1984, p.49).

However, while the Drawing Room romance heroines are constrained by the patriarchal rules of polite society they are also much freer than the real women of the Regency, a feature endorsed by many of her readers. For example, women in these novels can manage their own

individual wealth and property. When she comes of age, Judith will be free to manage her own fortune and, because of the independence this gives her, she can also expect to marry for love. All Heyer's heroines believe that it is their right to marry for love, a belief shared by others within her world:

[Worth speaking to Perry] 'I have some shocking news to break to you: I have just become engaged to your sister.'

'– What's that you say? Engaged to my sister? Oh, lord, I was afraid that would happen!'

'Peregrine!' said Judith,

'Well, I was,' he insisted. 'Harriet said she was sure you were in love with him all the time. I hoped it would be Charles, but she said there was no question of that. I'm sure I wish you very happy.' (*Regency Buck*, p. 318)

Beneath the detailed trappings of the Regency period that draw the readers into novel, Heyer's romance novels, no matter which sub-genre, are social adventures as they relate to the reader's world as well as the Regency world in which they are created. This is perhaps more easily seen in the Drawing Room romances, such as *Regency Buck* (1935). Here instead of dramatic action, the struggle is fashioned around the continual battle of wills between Worth and Judith. In the end each sees the other as an individual and although within the wider society Judith might not share Worth's social status, she is still free to enter a relationship where she will be valued for herself, not a commodity for sale.

The world of the Drawing Room romance is finely drawn from a mixture of physically accurate period details and twentieth century attitudes to relationships and social customs in which '[Heyer] gives unconscious evidence of attitudes, [which] are so taken for granted that they seem to be the natural way of things and not a socially constructed picture of the world' (Hughes 1993, p.1). This mixture of Heyer's Regency, as well as her creation of any of the historical periods in which she set her historical romances, and her characters that reflect both their historical time and the readers' society, not only draw the reader into the narrative but keep the novels relevant for many present day readers just as they did when the novels were first published. The following section will examine in more detail the extent to which online reading communities single out for appreciation features found in Heyer's Regency world, including: strong female characters, the flawed hero redeemed by the heroine's love, the carefully crafted 'Regency' setting, the stable and hierarchical social order, humour, wit and idiomatic language, and social commentary.

Reception Analysis: the online reading communities

This section focuses on the participatory nature of the reading practices for these novels, examining readers' discussions, comments and criticism of Heyer's novels in various reading communities on the Internet. These interest-based online reading communities express in readers' own words what interests the readers and keeps them reading these novels. The one constant element in all the reading communities, whether they exist over a considerable time or are transient and only focus on a single issue, is that they provide a space in which readers (and sometimes authors) can come together. All of the reading communities are socially diverse and encourage participation from all who visit them, as described in Chapter 2. These characteristics will be discussed further in this section. For the genre novels of popular fiction these reading groups play an important role in a novel's longevity. This section will map the main themes in these online reader forums, identifying where they single out and comment on the distinctive textual features of Heyer's work discussed above, and where they raise the social functions that reading these novels have for them in ways not revealed by textual analysis alone.

The many reading communities that focus on Georgette Heyer's novels are in themselves a demonstration of her significant place in romance genre. What makes these communities even more remarkable is that Heyer had died before any of these forums came into existence. While many present day popular fiction authors create their own websites that reach out to readers the moment their novel is in print, only a limited number of earlier popular fiction authors whose work has stood the test of time still have a large number of active reading communities that continue to discuss their work.³⁹

One of the largest of these sites is the official Georgette Heyer website *The Pump Room*. *The Pump Room*, has been maintained for fifteen years by Sally Houghton, a Heyer reader who encourages readers to visit the site and offers a wide range of activities including discussion of Heyer's works. At the time of writing, this site has had over a million hits. It attracts readers from all over the world, from both English speaking and non-English speaking countries and is the official source of information about anything to do with Georgette Heyer and her novels. Comments on this site resemble a very long and peripatetic discussion.

³⁹ Authors like J.R.R. Tolkien (1892-1973), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) and Sir Arthur C. Clarke (1917-2008) still have active reading communities. While later popular fiction authors such as Terry Pratchett (1948-2015), Ruth Rendell (1930-2015), P.D. James (1920-2014) all have online reading communities, which developed during their lifetime and have been continued after their death as their work is still popular with readers.

Readers' interests are not divided into topics or themes but are posted as they are received so one topic may be picked up by several other readers and developed, and then a new topic will be introduced. With over 866 posts it covers a very wide range of themes and interests.

Beside this stable, ongoing website, at the time of writing there were nearly two hundred discussion sites all inviting participation, comment and criticism of Heyer's writing. Apart from the large sites such as *The Pump Room* and *Goodreads* I selected eleven of the smaller, usually single issue, discussion sites to demonstrate readers' interests. These smaller sites, as defined in Chapter 3, vary in size and can include criticism as well as admiration for many of the different aspects of Heyer's work. Readers' comments in many of the unofficial reading communities are usually more focussed on one particular topic or theme. Most of the large sites such as the *Goodreads* site offer a number of Georgette Heyer forums with the topics ranging from 'What is Georgette Heyer's funniest novel?' to readers' reviews of individual novels. The discussion threads can have over 70 participants and, although anonymous, they offer a wide range of contemporary opinion of Heyer's work. Another common basis for discussion of Heyer's work are individual blogs. These usually begin with an article relating to Heyer's work and then include readers' responses posted as comments. These sites cover a diverse range of issues from Heyer's use of 'Regency' language to comments about individual characters. The comments usually include both positive and negative responses to her work and often relate social features in Heyer's Regency with present day perceptions.

As argued in Chapter 3, these small, transient, individual sites, including those that appear as part of larger, more general sites are still reading communities. An example of these single issue reading communities on apparently unrelated sites, is shown by the thread that appeared on the website *SFF Chronicles, Science Fiction and Fantasy Community*. It is described on the home page as 'a community of fans, aspiring authors and published novelists, we are the World's largest – and friendliest! – science fiction and fantasy forum.' (www.sffchronicles.com/threads/549668/). The website began in 2002 and, at the time of research for this thesis (2016) was not only still functioning, but increasing in size and categories. To demonstrate the size of this site, in 2016 the Book/Film review section had 59 pages with 6,466 topics to date. One of the smallest categories, 'Historical Fiction' only began in 2014 but two years later already had eight pages with 158 topics and over 300 replies. Apart from appearing in these general categories Georgette Heyer is listed as an individual author and had five pages covering 92 Topics and over 1500 separate posts at the time of research.

One of the participants in the Heyer thread on the SFF Chronicles site, ‘Goblin Princess’, is identified as Teresa Edgerton, a staff member on the website who not only welcomed the discussion of romance fiction but was happy to participate as well. This demonstrates how many readers of the genres of popular fiction not only have diverse reading interests but also enjoy moving between various reading communities. This website illustrates the sense of cooperation, support and encouragement that exists amongst the participants in the diverse reading communities of popular fiction. This is one of the interesting features of the online reading communities, especially where many readers are anonymous and could be more antagonistic, but on this and most sites, when a participant posts a critical comment the subsequent discussions remain friendly and civil.

Georgette Heyer’s heroines are often the topic of discussion on reader forums. One of the smaller, single-issue sites, *Jane Austen in Vermont*, posted an article by Janeite Lynne titled ‘Some thoughts on Georgette Heyer’s Heroines’. Lynne selected a number of heroines from the Regency novels praising Heyer’s creation of young, individual, independent women who are determined to marry for love and who demand respect from prospective husbands. The article received nine replies from readers who all agreed with Lynne and stated that what they admire in Heyer’s heroines is that they refuse to accept social conventions that restrict women of their class. This site is typical of many of the smaller, single-issue sites that begin with a fairly comprehensive argument about some aspect of Heyer’s novels and then invite responses.

Some of the larger sites often have a more reader-directed discussion. For example, *Goodreads*, posted a forum with the topic, ‘Favourite Heroine from a Heyer Novel and Why’ and invited contributions from reader participants. The discussion encouraged readers not only to post their comments but also to reply to previous comments. The readers’ involvement generated a sustained discussion that was more inclusive than the individual comments on many smaller sites. It had a sense of authenticity from the way readers contributed to the ongoing dialogue. Some participants spent a lot of time interacting with other readers, asking for more information, questioning choices, rejecting opinions or agreeing with a number of particular points. All the participants interacted with each other as well as addressing the topic, some continued to post replies and new comments while others left then returned to offer further involvement. The thread resembled a group of people involved in an informal but highly focussed discussion and as this particular topic generated 136 posts there was enough

material to sustain a lively discussion. Most participants stated that in selecting their favourite heroine, her most important characteristic is her independence and individuality. Many readers not only admire these women but some such as ‘Teresa’ (2013, n.p.) feels a sense of affinity with them.

I think that with most of them they are people I would actually like to know. There is a kindness and a generosity (I don’t just mean in the material sense) about so many of them. Their circumstances may be limiting, at least for the heroines, but they aren’t small-minded or petty.

Readers often comment on the way Heyer developed her young, individual and very twentieth-century thinking heroines but still made them seem quite at home in her nineteenth-century Regency world. Many of Heyer’s heroines, particularly those in the Drawing Room romances, are practical, sensible young women who are also quite beautiful and fairly spirited. These characters appeal to many of the readers who appreciate their matter-of-fact approach to the situations within the novel. The following example demonstrates that Heyer’s rational heroines are one of the sympathetic elements that draw the reader into the world of the novels. Generally level-headedness is not a character trait associated with romance heroines, particularly in historical romance, and yet Heyer creates these ladies in a way that does not seem to be in any way inappropriate for the time or period: ‘I’ve just read Frederica again and realised all over again how much I love GH’s “sensible” heroines,’ (Nicola Slade 2008, n.p.).

Other readers agreed with this perhaps not realising that much of the ‘sensibleness’ that attracts them to these heroines comes from twentieth-century social expectations in areas such as love, family and marriage that Heyer has blended seamlessly into her nineteenth-century narrative. Most readers do not see these women as exhibiting contemporary social responses but simply identify their distinctive behaviour as being practical or reasonable, ‘I also agree with a previous poster who enjoys the more practical heroines—they are among my favorites, [sic] as well!’ (Melissa Owens 2008, n.p.). The following comment by a reader on *The Pump Room* site demonstrates how readers feel an affinity for Heyer’s heroines, ‘I read (and re-read) G. Heyer and, if i close my eyes, i’m one of her heroines’ (Titti 2006,n.p. language as in original).While being clearly part of Heyer’s Regency world, they also have an emphatic connection for modern readers.

Readers are also captivated by the male characters, especially the heroes who usually belong to the higher levels of Regency society. They are never the ‘fops, dandies, reckless ‘bucks’,

profligate gamblers and imperious guardians' (Regis 2003, p.127) for which the period is renowned. In fact both the hero and the heroine in Heyer novels exhibit very twentieth-century attitudes particularly in demanding 'companionate marriage', respect for each other's individuality, and respect from the society in which they interact. These gentlemen need to be aware of the social obligations associated with their wealth and position but they often have forgotten the responsibilities of rank until the heroines remind them. This is an additional benefit of their new appreciation for the ladies who, they discover, have the right to be respected as individuals. While many readers are drawn to the various heroes some prefer the male secondary characters, for example the comment from 'Judith' (2007, n.p.) on the secondary character, Venetia's brother Aubrey in *Venetia* (1958):

[They are] characters I would have loved to 'hang out' with. I love the character of Aubrey, and I think I fell in love with Jasper Damerall!! ... [They were] certainly ... written with more depth than [sic] I have seen before, in the romance genre.

Heyer gave her secondary characters, male and female, interesting and individual qualities that attract many of her readers. As shown previously, one such secondary character is Aubrey, Venetia's young brother from *Venetia* (1958). Reader, Maeri's (2009, n.p.) comment that 'I also wish that Heyer had written a story about Aubrey, because I really like him and I wish I could know what happened to him' demonstrates that Heyer's world is filled with characters that create a feeling that they exist beyond the confines of the narrative. Many other readers share Maeri's interest in Aubrey and he is one of the favourite secondary characters often mentioned in discussion forums. Also there are several 'fanfiction' writers on various fanfiction sites devoted to Georgette Heyer's characters who have made him the focus of their stories.⁴⁰ While the proliferation of Heyer fan fiction sites on the web is outside the scope of this thesis, their continuing popularity is further evidence of readers' interest in Heyer's Regency world and all those who inhabit it.

Interest in the historical details that form Heyer's Regency world generates a feeling in many readers that this is a place they are happy to return to many times as they follow the lives and adventures of various characters. The following post is an example of the sense that many

⁴⁰ An example of the fan fiction is 'Preparation for Flight'(2016) chapter one, by turrfer, posted on *Archives of Our Own* a webpage devoted to Heyer fan fiction. This particular story features Aubrey Layton as one of the characters. This page has 24 fan novels at present. The example, 'Preparation for Flight' chapter one is 1377 words, and has 9 comments, 41 Kudos and 292 hits. It is common practice on these fanfiction sites for fans to submit their stories a chapter at a time so they can get feedback and they often change features in the coming chapters to reflect the comments made by readers. Most readers are very supportive and offer constructive criticism and encouragement to the writers.

readers have, that Heyer's Regency is a place in which they can share and even explore; giving the impression that it exists beyond just a setting for her characters:

[Heyer]made the regency days come alive ... you could just see them - smart horse drawn carriages, handsome young lords & earls in tight pantaloons & waistcoats, pretty delicate ladies in lace trimmed muslin dresses & matching bonnets taking the air ... smelling salts and all! (Jeanne 2012, n.p.)

It is not unusual on the various forums for readers to comment on Heyer's intricately formed world, and appreciate the historical research she draws on to recreate the Regency era in her novels, 'Methinks that she must've done a very thorough job of researching those eras and immersing herself in the customs, lingo etc.' (The Bluestocking 2014, n.p.).

Along with her ability with language, readers also appreciate her use of subtlety and humour:

Is there anyone else who loves *A Civil Contract* as much as I do? Lydia, Mr Chawleigh, the Dowager ... such wonderful, comical characters! Every time I reread it (probably 20 plus times) I smile at them while being touched all over again by the delicate growth of Adam's regard for Jenny and her loving care for his comfort -the macaroons! (Diana W. 2009, n.p.)

There are some scenes (like Pel and his friends trying to recover Horatia's brooch) [characters in *The Convenient Marriage*] that make me laugh no matter how many times I've read them. (Edgerton as Goblin Princess 2014, n.p.)

After reading a number of trashy regency novels, I discovered Georgette Heyer's extraordinary talent for the nuanced. She can be incredibly funny and yet make you totally empathize with her characters. (Patti D 2011, n.p.)

I love Heyer's attention to detail and wit. (Nicole 2009, n.p.)

Many readers, like those in the previous examples, appreciate Heyer's wit not only in the way she presents her characters' interactions but as a comedy of manners. She reflects the life and social values of her aristocratic characters in a way that not only humorously questions their priorities but by an implied association with the reader's own society creates a plausible and affective amusing situation.

Oh, I absolutely LOVE **Arabella** and **These Old Shades**. Regency/Georgian comedy of manners/romances at their best! Georgette Heyer writes some of the finest witty dialogue I've ever read. (The Bluestocking 2014, n.p. emphasis in original)

There is repeated praise in the reading communities for Heyer's witty use of dialogue. Like many of the features of her world, the clever and often humorous interactions between characters are an important element that appeals to the reader, drawing them into Heyer's world, 'And the language - the humour, the wit, the sarcasm! She is the best!' (Jeanne 2012).

Another feature that both readers and critics appreciate is Heyer's use of idiomatic language to create the sound of her Regency setting, and to develop her characters. As noted in the previous section, even though the language of many of the secondary characters is her own creation it gives authenticity to all her characters. An example of the type of comments readers make is shown on a discussion site dedicated to the novel *Frederica* (1965), 'She does a lovely job of creating and describing characters. I also enjoy the Heyer Regency slang' (Lynne 2009). Another reader, Mona (2014), admires the authenticity of her language:

While *The Grand Sophy* is certainly a romance, it is more palatable to readers looking for fine writing and hearty, but not dirty, amusement. Where more conventional romances set historically may stray into purple prose or inaccurate, anachronistic language, Heyer manages to write in period-appropriate tones without being annoying.

The following post on Heyer's official website, *The Pump Room* also focuses on Heyer's ability to create her own language:

She is one of the few authors I know who can run words around and make them do whatever she wants them to. I personally think this is what gives her such a wide appeal. (ReNae Bristline 2009, n.p.)

Another reader, Kate, writes, 'But does anyone else have the problem I have, in that when I've been immersed in GH I find I start using some of her expressions???' (Kate 2009, n.p.). This reader, like many others, feels drawn into Heyer's Regency world to the extent that she has internalised some of her idiosyncratic Regency language. Some readers replied to 'Kate' that they also found some of Heyer's expressions crept into their language after feeling drawn to particular stories and characters.

While Heyer's Regency world is shown to be a safe, well ordered and comfortable society, quite unlike the real Regency which was full of social upheaval and unrest, some social commentary does appear in the novels and this is recognised in the reading communities. For example, Heyer's social commentary is recognised in a blog, 'Georgette Heyer: Biting wit, Social Commentary, a Bit of Romance and Better than Austen' posted on *Beyond the Pale* in 2009 by Miss Nightingale'. Nightingale (2009) comments that 'The Grand Sophy. It's just a masterpiece of farce combined with acute observations on family, life and – overall – of society'. She received six comments from readers and all agree with her assessment. On the large *Goodreads* site in a discussion of Heyer's *Arabella* (1949) 'Kathleen', who awarded the novel 4.5 stars out of 5, also notes that Heyer has included social commentary in the romantic story: 'Really enjoyed it. Light and heartwarming, with somewhat serious reflections on vanity, injustice, and London society, mainly' (Kathleen 2012, n.p.). Her comments also

received ten ‘likes’ in agreement. While social commentary of the Regency world is certainly not the first priority of most readers, many, like the examples above, appreciate Heyer’s inclusion of a restrained form of social comment.

Analysis of these reader forums also reveals that readers value Heyer’s novels for a range of reasons that extend beyond the textual features mentioned by Heyer’s critics. Readers often comment on the number of times they re-read Heyer’s novels. Re-reading has been identified by Henry Jenkins (1992)⁴¹ as one of the key practices of fan behaviour, and it is also evident in popular fiction reading communities. Re-reading allows readers to explore the world of the text in great detail, establishing and reinforcing their connection with it. For many readers Heyer’s Regency world has been a part of their life for many years. The following posts from *The Pump Room* are representative of many readers’ devotion to Heyer.

I have been reading her novels since the last 25 years over and over again. Can’t seem to get enough of her. (Manisha Suri 2012, n.p.)

I have been reading Heyer’s books since I was a teenager in the 70’s. I have kept everyone I have ever read, and have read them so many times that they are starting to fall apart. I am constantly on the search for replacement (and additional) copies. (Michelle 2012, n.p.)

I loved her characters from the first pages and have been hooked for almost 30 years. (Treva 2009, n.p.)

I have been a devoted reader of Ms. Heyer’s romances for over 43 years. They have gotten me through some ghastly times in my life, for which I am very grateful. (Tina H. 2009, n.p.)

Another feature that stands out is the way in which readers not only appreciate Heyer’s deft touch in creating her Regency world but that they remember their favourite novels/characters/scenes and also enjoy rereading them, ‘There is a particular scene in *Arabella* that I have read so many times that I’ve lost count’ (Edgerton as Goblin Princess 2014, emphasis in original).

Re-reading is connected to a sense of loyalty that readers feel towards these novels. One of the reasons that Heyer’s readers play such an important role in keeping interest in her novels alive is that the novels are often not just enjoyed by individual readers but are passed on to new readers, friends and family, who then are also drawn into her Regency world. The

⁴¹ Henry Jenkins 1992, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*, Routledge, New York defends the re-reading practices of the fans of the film *Star Wars* ‘repeat viewers play with rough spots of the text – its narrative gaps, its excessive details, its loose ends and contradictions – in order to find openings for the fans’ elaborations of its world and speculations about its characters’ (Jenkins 1992, p.74).

following post demonstrates this sense of legacy. The reader describes how her sister first introduced her to Heyer and how that now she feels part of a community of ‘those who inhabit the world of Heyer along with me’.

My older sister introduced me to the world of Georgette Heyer as a teenager. I loved her characters from the first pages and have been hooked for almost 30 years. I’ve found paperback copies of almost all the titles and am working on a hardcover collection. It’s silly, but I’ve saved one book, totally unread, because I can’t bear to think that there are no more wonderful, unknown stories awaiting me. I think that this is the year I read ‘An Infamous Army’. Hello to all those who inhabit the ‘world of Heyer’ along with me - read on! (Treva 2009, n.p.)

Her emotional commitment to Heyer’s Regency is so compelling that it prompted her to save one book unread so that she still has something to look forward to after Heyer’s death. It is this sense being part of not only Heyer’s world but also a community of readers that keeps the reading communities expanding and the novels in print.

The claim of finding pleasure or comfort in Heyer’s narrative world is one made by many of her readers. These same claims appear on various websites including examples from *The Pump Room*.

Whenever life gets me down I turn to GH! Frederica remains my favourite - the characters are so well rounded and the situations they get themselves into so deliciously entertaining. (Kate 2013, n.p.)

I can always rely on Georgette Heyer to entertain and divert me, however, many times I’ve read the story previously. On a recent night when sleep eluded me, I fished out *The Corinthian*. When drunken Sir Richard said to Pen, disguised as a boy, ‘We are now wholly committed to a life of adventure,’ I was happily joining them. Magic! and so funny. (Sarigelin 2016, n.p.)

Heyer has long been one of my favorite writers –someone whose books I read and re-read when I’m in need of some comfort reading. I stick pretty much to the witty Regency and Georgian comedy of manners/romances (which I do find much better than almost all the rest), because I’ve found the others disappointing. (Edgerton as Goblin Princess 2014, n.p.)

The interesting term here is ‘comfort’ reading. This claim suggests some similarity to Radway’s research findings of why women read romance novels. Radway’s Smithton readers claimed that reading romance novels ‘creates a feeling of hope, provides emotional sustenance, and produces a fully visceral sense of well-being’ (Radway 1984, p.12). Kate, Sarigelin and Goblin Princess demonstrate the same reaction.

The preceding analysis in this section has focused on Heyer’s many loyal readers and their reading communities, examining how their response to Heyer’s novels in the various sub-

genres of historical romance genre have played a major role in the continuing popularity of these novels. One important aspect of this study has been to identify what attracts readers to these novels and also what keeps them interested. Through the readers' comments it is evident that Heyer has created believable characters, socially and emotionally, that resonate with the readers in the various situations as the narrative develops. This is one of the significant features that draw readers into her Regency world. Once engaged, these readers want to feel they are a part of Heyer's intricately developed Regency world, being amused or intrigued or most importantly, having their sympathies aroused.

While many of Heyer's readers appreciate her safe, civilised Regency world they also recognise that she is able, when needed, to elicit a strong emotional response by portraying characters' emotional reactions in a way that resonates with readers. As the reader 'Sophie' (2016, n.p.) states, this is remarkable as Heyer accomplished this from at a very young age:

I absolutely agree with you about wondering who inspired her characters. I've never forgotten the fight in *The Black Moth* between tortured Richard and the flighty wife he expects to leave him, when he confesses that he cheated at cards. 'She fought on, wanting to be defeated.' Heyer was what? seventeen? when she wrote that. How did she KNOW?

Heyer creates characters that encourage readers to form an emotional bond. In her comment below, Louisa writes of the characters as if they are individual people and she feels when she finishes reading the last *Alastair* novel she will lose her relationship with them. Her message has a sense of sadness for the finality that the last chapter will initiate. However, as Louisa intends to read all of Heyer's novels before reading the last chapter of *An Infamous Army* there is every probability that she will discover new characters that will also capture her interest.

Also, this might sound a little weird, but I have decided I will not read the last chapter of AIA [*An Infamous Army*] until I have read all of GH's books. This is because I am not willing to let my favourite characters (all the Alastairs, Lord and Lady Worth, the Taverners, Charles Audley, Lady Bab) go until I have found suitable people to replace them. It probably is very stupid but it is too sad for me to finish the Alastair trilogy: (That is how attached I am to them) (Louisa 2009, n.p.)

While Louisa feels she will not be able to continue to read Heyer after she has completed the last chapter, many other readers find that this same emotional connection to their favourite characters is what brings them back time and again to the novels.

By allowing readers to see through the eyes of the characters, it encourages them to feel part of the world of the novel. Heyer does not have to tell the reader how to respond but leaves a

‘space’ for them to react according to their individual feelings. In the following example a reader recognises this in the scene from *An Infamous Army* before the battle of Waterloo:

It is the morning of the battle of Waterloo. Some men, sleeping out in the cold and wet, have died in the night and everyone is sodden: old soldiers became busy drying their clothes and cleaning their arms; young soldiers stared over the dense mist in the valley to the ridge where the French were beginning to show themselves. Read it aloud, as I did. In two paragraphs she gets all the terror of the impending battle, the imminence of death, the fear of the raw recruits, the numbness of those who have been here before. And I realised exactly what makes her such a brilliant writer for so many different sorts of readers. It’s in the things she doesn’t say. (Haddon 2015, n.p.)

Of the nineteen readers who discussed various aspects of this claim, all appreciated being treated as intelligent readers by the author, for example, ‘It’s what makes great writers great, Jenny. They treat their readers as intelligent people who can fill in those spaces for themselves’ (Jones 2015, n.p.).

These readers provide a positive alternative to the long-held critical perception of romance genre authors and readers. Both these groups have had to combat a long history of negative associations related to the formulaic nature of popular fiction. For example, Regis in her *Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003, p. 5) notes that, in the opinion of academic and critic Jeanne Dubino, romance readers use these novels as a way of compensating for their sense of worthlessness and the emptiness in their lives. However, others reject this claim. Janice Radway (1984, p. 7), for example, found that in her study of the Smithton women as romance readers, the women saw the novels as ‘a declaration of independence’. Apart from the pleasure afforded them by their favourite authors, the practice of reading the novels had a positive social outcome, ‘romance reading was seen by the women as a way of participating in a large, exclusively female community’ (Radway 1984, p.11).

Readers have always been aware that there is a wide range of options available to them in any of the genres of popular fiction including the romance genre. For example, as the following post observes, there is a vast difference between the more sexually explicit Mills and Boon novels and those that feature virtuous heroines such as the many Barbara Cartland novels:

Heyer isn’t about kissing and snogging, bfrog [anonymous designation of the previous post]. She’s about classy writing, fun plots, a real feeling for the period, bits and bobs of sly humour, some sweet romance which can be peripheral to the plot if necessary. You’ve spotted one of the things which makes Heyer good yourself - she doesn’t go for the icky stereotypes, and her characters are fresh and people you can identify with. Some of them, sure, edge close to stereotype [sic], but Heyer’s merry style of writing makes that as nothing. Heyer wasn’t writing Mills & Boon, she was writing actual books. If you want erotic Frenching, don’t read any more Heyers. (Emily G. 2005, n.p.)

Ken Gelder (2004) suggests that the later Regency writers, such as Stephanie Laurens, author of *Tangled Reins* (1992) published by Mills and Boon, offer a better approach to romance writing because of their 'progressive, even revolutionary' attitudes (p. 48). As an example, he describes one series of Regency romances by Mary Baloghas 'about six feisty, passionate and reckless aristocrats' whose 'witty, independent heroines often enjoyed explicit sex scenes' (Gelder 2004, p.48). Gelder sees writing romance fiction is primarily about breaking the rules of the genre while at the same time acknowledging and conforming to those same rules, 'disobedience and obedience jostling with each other in the same narrative' (Gelder 2004,p.49).⁴²

Contrary to Gelder's opinion, readers see romance fiction in far more emotional terms, often expressing a feeling of connection to the text, for example one reader sees Heyer's novels as 'old friends', 'My Georgette Heyer books are old friends, I read them often whenever I need a smile' (Donna Gnann 2011, n.p.). Finally, readers like Anjali Bhatia (2008, n.p.) would disagree with Gelder that 'progressive, even revolutionary' romances are so much better than Heyer as she describes her emotive response to Heyer's romances, 'they leave me breathless [sic] with their limitless romance'. Another reader appreciates the subtlety of Heyer's portrayal of romantic relationships, 'What I love is how Heyer captures the nuances and drama of courtship so well without resorting to bodice-ripping' (The Bluestocking 2014, n.p.). This comment, like Goblin Princess's first reply also draws a distinction between Heyer's novels and the more sensational forms of the genre such as Harlequin romances, which were strictly formulaic, attracting readers by their inclusion of violent sexual scenes between the hero and heroine, hence the name 'bodice rippers'.⁴³ The reader comments that Heyer does not resort to the sensational. Overall it is Heyer's readers, not the critics, who recognised from her first novels that she was instrumental in moving historical romance in the form of Regency romance, away from cheap, sensational historical romances.

⁴² While Gelder offers this positive appreciation of the later developments of Regency Romance, 'he acknowledges' that without Heyer setting the 'rules' in her innovative Regency novels there would be little for later writers to 'feistily react against' (Gelder 2004, p.49).

⁴³ The term 'bodice rippers' first appeared in the *New York Times*, in 28 December 1980, p.7 in an article about Harlequin Romance novels. It relates to the formulaic nature of these novels that no matter the time or place include a vulnerable heroine, a rich and powerful hero whom the heroine does not like but after been sexually assaulted by him comes to love him ending the narrative with the traditional Romance genre marriage scene. (Partridge 2006, p.211) While being one dimensional in their approach to the narrative they were and probably still are, very popular.

Many of Heyer's readers are aware of the charge of 'triviality' that is often made of popular fiction including historical romances. For example, Tania Modleski in the introduction to her book on mass produced women's novels acknowledges that the concept of women's novels, such as romance novels, as trivial still persists, 'The double standard according to which 'women's entertainment [including romance novels] is judged to be trivial compared to men's pursuits continues to prevail' (Modleski 1990, p. xxvi). This post addresses that accusation directly:

My wife says they are light & trivial. I said that they can't be that bad or else why you have so many? I've pinched *These Old Shades* and I'll form my own opinion. (Ray McCarthy 2014, n.p.)

This post is unusual as it is from a male reader. While there is no reason why men should not read historical romance or any romance genre, they rarely seem to and they are much underrepresented in the reading communities. First, that the reader has taken the trouble to find a discussion forum related to Georgette Heyer suggests he is interested in the novels and is willing to approach them with an open mind. What is interesting is that his wife seems to be trying to dissuade him from reading Heyer. She tells him they are 'light and trivial' yet she owns a large number of Heyer's novels. The wife's reaction to her husband reading 'her' romance novels is possibly a defensive one, the opposite to the reactions of the Smithton women in Radway's study who felt they had to defend and justify their romance reading to their husbands, so they claimed that these books 'contain accurate information about the real world' (Radway 1984, p.109). Therefore the husbands, who had no interest in reading the novels felt that the purchases were justified. However, unlike the men in Radway's study, Ray is willing to engage in this reading community, and *Goblin Princess* encourages him to continue reading Heyer.

There is actually nothing wrong with light and trivial. However, there is a feather-light touch satire to Heyer's books that makes them a little more. She also wrote delightful characters, and knew the period so well that her characters behave with the sensibilities of their time, rather than act like twentieth century people in fancy dress (which is the problem with far too many 'historical' romances). (Edgerton as *Goblin Princess* 2014, n.p.)

Later he returns to the discussion and although he has some criticisms of Heyer he finishes by giving it a mark 'But for a wonderful romp and fun to read 10 out of 10' (Ray McCarthy 2014).

Conclusion

The aim of this case study has been to demonstrate how Heyer's contribution to the romance genre, particularly in a number of the sub-genres of historical romance, has been an important factor in its continuing popularity with readers. A multidimensional analysis of genre, text and reception has illustrated how readers have responded to Heyer and ensured her continuing popularity. In addition, this chapter demonstrates how the various reading communities recognise Heyer's development and extension of the sub-genres of historical romance. Her extension of the sub-genre gave Regency romance a new sophisticated and amusing quality and initiated an expansion of the sub-genre into the Drawing Room romance, which is still a popular choice for authors and readers interested in Regency romances. The textual analysis presented in this chapter demonstrates how Heyer meets the expectations of her readers as she offers them individual and creative narratives that draw them into her Regency world. Her Drawing Room romances, which are novels of manners, form a connection between her Regency world and her contemporary society giving readers a sense of sympathetic involvement with her characters and their situations.

The reception analysis in the last section of this chapter includes various examples of readers' voices in a number of reading communities that demonstrate where her readers diverge from the critics in their appreciation of her novels. While critics might disagree about her importance as a historical romance author, her loyal readers understand and enjoy the Regency world she created. They see and discuss the connections between her world and present day society and appreciate her wit, humour and charm. Readers take pleasure in feeling they are part of the glittering Regency world of London, Bath and Brighton and become attached to many of her characters, sympathetic of their difficulties and happy in the final resolution where civility, good *ton*, and social harmony are once more restored.

Her readers demonstrate that they are also very aware of the differences that set Heyer apart, not only from many of her contemporaries, but later from more explicit authors who use sex as a universal panacea to poorly constructed characters and plots. On the many forums devoted to Georgette Heyer the topics are varied but one feature remains consistent across all: that is the readers' emotional connection to the characters. Readers discuss their favourite characters as if they knew them personally, often attributing actions and decisions to them outside of the story. Another feature that is obvious from these discussions is that the novels are re-read with enthusiasm. While many readers enjoy finding new insights in the stories

many also comment on how re-reading gives them comfort, often at times of stress and that they write about the novels as if they are old, dependable friends.

Discussions on the websites of dedicated Heyer reading communities welcome new readers and encourage them to add to the discussions. Like the Drawing Rooms of the Regency world in Heyer's novels, the participants are friendly and welcoming with most readers happy to be involved in sharing their perception of their favourite author and offering suggestions to new Heyer readers of the 'best' stories to begin their introduction to all things 'Heyer'. Even though Heyer died in 1974 her readers both new and old continue to explore her Regency world and its inhabitants and share their interests and appreciation in the many reading communities, and in doing so keep Georgette Heyer one of the most popular historical romance authors in modern popular fiction.

Chapter 5. ‘Here there be dragons!’: The Novels of Anne McCaffrey

We build the worlds we wouldn't mind living in. They contain scary things, problems, but also a sense of rightness that makes us want to live there.

—Anne McCaffrey (n.d.)

The aim of this thesis is to show how it is the interplay between the textual and the social aspects of popular fiction which best accounts for their value and longevity. The novels discussed in this chapter, are written by Anne McCaffrey, belong to the genre of science fiction and are primarily social texts.⁴⁴ Their categorisation as social texts is seen in the way that many readers consider that McCaffrey not only creates a compelling, innovative narrative but encourages them to share in the world of the text. Many of these novels are highly valued by their readers who often participate in online reading communities dedicated to McCaffrey and/or a particular sequence of her novels.⁴⁵ McCaffrey's Pern series includes over twenty-nine novels set on the planet Pern. The Pern series began in 1968, but the story is not complete; her son, Todd McCaffrey, has continued to write it after her death. Her official website, A Meeting of Minds, is an active reading community with 1038 discussion threads and 28,746 views, the latest at the time of writing, posted 23 May 2017.

Anne McCaffrey's readers who engage in reading communities not only enjoy participating in discussions, arguments and critiques via online forums, but also frequently return to the texts over time rereading them and passing them on to new readers. As I will show in the reception analysis section the readers' discussions involve detailed knowledge of the plot and characters and the location of the narrative. In spite of being located on a fictional planet, the world of the novel is a place where these readers feel comfortable, a place they discuss as if it exists beyond the pages of the novel. Like all the novels of popular fiction that attract these readers and reading communities, the communities and the novels often survive for many years, in many cases after the death of the author

The feeling of involvement in the world of the text also includes the author's use of familiar themes and topics that relate to the everyday world of the reader. Popular fiction draws

⁴⁴ While McCaffrey has been chosen as the case study author for this thesis, many other Science Fiction series and authors also have dedicated online reading communities.

⁴⁵ McCaffrey (1926–2011) wrote over sixty science fiction novels during her forty-six year writing career. She also published over ten collections of short stories and novellas and has co-authored many of other novels with a range of well-known science fiction authors including her son who has continued the Pern series after her death.

together two disparate elements, the known and the unknown, to involve the reader. The first, the 'known', is the familiarity readers find in the genre characteristics used by the author. These characteristics provide a recognisable frame that readers expect. However, within this frame the second element, the 'unknown' include unexpected features of the narrative, to intrigue and often surprise the reader, making the world of the text a place to explore and to share with other readers. The readers' sense of sharing the world of the text is not only an essential feature in a novel's continuing success but one of the characteristics that give popular fiction its unique social nature.

When Anne McCaffrey began publishing her novels and short stories it was the late sixties and a time of wide ranging political, social and ideological change. In America, and around the world, 1968 was a defining year of social unrest with student protests, general strikes, the public expression of the Black Power movement in America, and numerous anti-Vietnam war protests particularly in America and Australia. In western countries the women's liberation movement had become increasingly vocal in raising issues of equality in the workplace and women's identity within society. In America Betty Friedan and the newly formed NOW (National Organization for Women) were tackling issues of equality in employment, politics and women's identity. It was in this tumultuous context that American McCaffrey first published her novels and short stories.

During this time, recognition of women's contribution to the arts and literature was also changing, perhaps not as markedly as in the political arena but still with significant consequences. An example of this change occurred in the field of popular fiction in 1968 when, for the first time, a woman won two of the most prestigious awards in the hitherto male dominated genre of science fiction writing.⁴⁶ That woman was Anne McCaffrey. These two awards include a Hugo award in the novella category for *Weyr Search* (1967),⁴⁷ and the

⁴⁶ Mike Ashley 2007, 'The Golden Age of Pulp Fiction' an essay published on *The Pulp Magazine Project*, www.pulpmags.org/history_page describes how in the growing popularity of paperback fiction, science fiction was beginning to emerge from the pulp magazines in the sixties as the genre expanded into anthologies, individual novels, both paperback and hard back. Pulp magazines or pulp fiction were inexpensive fiction magazines usually written by enthusiastic amateur authors with a fairly limited distribution. They were published from 1896 through the 1960s. The typical pulp magazine was seven inches wide by ten inches high, a half an inch thick and 128 pages long. 'The early fifties saw the Golden Age of the science-fiction magazines with probably the greatest concentration of talent and quality that the field had seen' (Ashley 2007, p.vii). Many writers whose short stories or novellas were first published in these magazines went on to more universal recognition in their published novels.

⁴⁷ The World Science Fiction Society's annual Hugo Awards are given for the best [science fiction](#) or [fantasy](#) works of the previous year. The Hugo Awards are named for Hugo Gernsback. He founded the *Amazing Stories*

peer-voted Nebula award, again in the novella category, for *Dragon Rider* (1967).⁴⁸ Both these short stories formed the basis of the novel *Dragonflight* (1968), which is the first full-length novel in the *Dragonriders of Pern* series.

As a female author in the previously male-dominated genre of science fiction, McCaffrey made an important contribution to the development of this genre with *Dragonflight* (1968). Her entry into science fiction signals an important breakthrough in the development of this popular fiction genre, including that she awakened interest in the genre of a previously indifferent group of readers and also authors. Before McCaffrey's entry into science fiction its readership, like its authorship, was predominantly male but as she became known, particularly for her early Pern novels, her readers were increasingly female. Her Pern novels opened new possibilities for the genre; they would encourage more women to participate both as authors and readers:

The Pern novels ... serve as a bridge between the male-dominated science fiction of the time and the new feminist speculative fiction that followed. Although strong female protagonists break the bonds of traditional social structures and gender roles, they also seek romantic love and are not afraid to nurture those they love in relationships that are equal partnerships. (Sharp 2006, p.1001)

Anne McCaffrey's career spanned over forty-six years with more than sixty novels, most of them science fiction.⁴⁹ As mentioned previously, even after her death in November 2011 at age eighty-five her novels are still extremely popular, with new readers constantly joining the already large number of committed readers. McCaffrey's novels have sold more than 12 million copies and been translated in 14 languages. 'The popularity and reach of her novels is demonstrative of her inroads into science fiction as a female author, who focused on female protagonists and women's issues – child rearing, for example – at a time when strong women were largely absent from the genre' (Roberts 2007, p. 8). To keep her readers engaged and also continually interest new readers is quite an achievement for any genre writer of modern popular fiction but even more so for a female author who 'invaded' what was considered

magazine in 1926. The Hugo is given annually at the World Science Fiction Convention by the fans. Anne McCaffrey received the 1968 Hugo at the 76th World Science Fiction Convention in Berkeley, California.

⁴⁸ The Nebula Award is an important award within the genre as it is presented by the writer's peers. Only members of the Science Fiction Writers Association who are published authors can vote.

⁴⁹ While this chapter focuses on the narratives that are set on the alternative world of Pern they are by no means the complete output of McCaffrey's work in this genre. Complete lists of her publications, as a single author, and in collaboration with others are available online.

almost a closed gender-based genre. In spite of changing attitudes and the acceptance of female science fiction authors in the genre the old mind-set is still occasionally visible.

An obituary for McCaffrey in 2011 by fellow science fiction writer, Christopher Priest provides an example of the persistent perception being a woman might make a science fiction writer somehow lesser. In describing her most popular novels, the Pern series, Priest (2011, n.p.) notes,

The books and stories were written unpretentiously and lyrically, with a refreshing taste for heroism and adventure as well as, perhaps surprisingly, an imaginative knowledge of biochemistry that made the dragons seem at least scientifically plausible.

Priest begins positively by identifying the features that McCaffrey brought to science fiction but his surprise that an author of science fiction would have knowledge of biochemistry seems odd. Would he have made the same comment in relation to Arthur C. Clarke's technical knowledge of maths and physics? He continues this limited 'praise' of McCaffrey's writing describing it as science fiction that appeals to children, teenagers, young adults and women. He selects some of McCaffrey's innovative features, for example her use of 'emotional dilemmas' and her 'energetic' portrayals of 'strong female characters', but sees these as characteristics of women's novels.

Because of their accessible and down-to-earth prose, McCaffrey's books appealed in particular to children. Teenagers and young adults also relished them because of their realistic and often moving depictions of emotional dilemmas, and there was a constant appeal to women readers of all ages, because of the energetic drawing of strong female characters as uncompromising but compassionate human beings. (Priest, 2011, n.p.)

It seems as if McCaffrey could be likened to a science fiction cuckoo, slipping emotional, female-focused romance novels into the exclusive male nest of 'real' science fiction. The irony of Priest's argument is that the features he selects as 'appealing to women' are the features that gave science fiction a new direction not only for women, teenagers and young adult readers but also for the traditional male authors and readers.

It is not possible to include all of the twenty-three Pern novels here, so this case study focuses on the four basic narratives that define the whole Pern story, *Dragonflight* (1968), *Dragonquest* (1971), *The White Dragon* (1978), and *All the Weyrs of Pern* (1991), with references made to the other novels in the Pern series when necessary. The novels that focus on the story of Pern have been selected as they cover McCaffrey's whole writing career. They

have remained so popular that she authorised her son, Todd McCaffrey, to continue the story as age and ill-health took effect.

This case study is divided into three parts. The first, genre analysis, shows how McCaffrey's creation of the world of Pern is situated as part of the modern popular fiction genre of science fiction. While McCaffrey always maintained that she wrote science fiction her readers recognised that she often gave a 'scientific' dimension to what was previously considered fantasy. Some of the features that McCaffrey included in her science fiction are creatures such as dragons, societies with a distinctive medieval identity, and conflict involving the struggle between good and evil. These are generic features well known to readers of fantasy genre. However, McCaffrey removed the magic, an expected element in fantasy genre, from the text and substituted in its place, science, giving the 'fantasy' features a new sense of orientation and focus. Although McCaffrey would not agree, she created in the Pern novels a new sub-genre of science fiction, 'science fantasy' and in doing so drew a whole new group of readers into the genre. The second section is a textual analysis of the world of the text, which focuses on the main Pern novels. The analysis not only identifies some of the science fiction features that appeal to her readers, but also shows how McCaffrey drew on other popular fiction genres such as romance genre. Her inclusion of other genres sometimes has initiated controversy, although more so for critics than her readers. Finally the reception analysis section focuses on the online reading communities, their interests, discussions and comments and how their continuing support for these novels has ensured their enduring popularity.

Genre Analysis: Science Fiction genre, Fantasy genre and other popular genres such as Romance genre.

The textual worlds found in science fiction usually include, like all genre fiction, a blend of the known (the expected genre characteristics) and the unknown (the author's innovative utilisation of the genre). In science fiction the unknown is often the first element to capture the reader's attention as it includes descriptions of futuristic societies or distant planets and their technological marvels. These are features that provide a framework for the narrative's unique characters and inventive plots. However, no matter how strange or exotic the world of the novel, it usually includes some human characteristics with which readers can identify. These are often the social features found in the interactions between characters that enable

communication and contact, define friendships or distinguish groups such as families. Also many of the characters that inhabit these worlds exhibit human emotions such as love, courage, anger, happiness and sadness. So while the ‘unknown’ captures the readers’ attention and draws them into the world of the narrative, the often subtle application of ‘known’ features found in social interactions or explored as issues and themes, encourages readers to feel they belong. This is particularly relevant to the Pern novels as will be demonstrated in the multidimensional analysis of the text in this section as well as the voices of the readers in the reception analysis.

Science fiction is one of the most complex genres in modern popular fiction. Unlike many of the other genres, science fiction has a place in both fields of narrative, that is, the field of Literature and of popular fiction. There is some controversy as to the history of science fiction. Some academics identify very early examples in seventeenth century utopian fantasies that included imaginary voyages as being the precursors of science fiction, while others claim that Edgar Allen Poe’s poem ‘Sonnet to Science’ written in the early 1820s is the first example of the ‘science-fictional’ method (Stableford 2003, p.17). However, in most early texts that might be considered science fiction the imaginary or miraculous devices possibly associated with some aspect of science, are secondary to other concerns of the authors. *New Atlantis* (1627) by Francis Bacon and Francis Godwin’s *The Man in the Moone* [sic] (1638) are examples of these early texts, as described by Brian Stableford.⁵⁰ These early texts usually had political, religious or social themes as their main motivation:

The identification of a point of origin for science fiction is as fiercely contested a business as defining the form. Different critics have their own favorite jumping-off points: some go back no further than a hundred years, to H.G. Wells and Jules Verne, giving SF as a genre a youthfulness to fit its supposedly juvenile, forward-fixated profile. Others insist on searching out ‘fantastic’ or ‘science fictional’ elements in literature as ancient as literature is itself. (Roberts 2000, p.47)

Many current critics, for example, Roberts (2000) quoted above, agree with the science fiction critic, Peter Nicholls who believes that real science fiction requires an awareness of the scientific way of looking at the world. He claims:

SF proper requires a consciousness of the scientific outlook ... a cognitive, scientific way of looking at the world did not emerge until the 17th century, and did not percolate into society at large until the 19th. (Nicholls 1993, pp.567–8)

⁵⁰ For a comprehensive account of the various theories of the beginnings of science fiction see Stableford, B 2003, ‘Science fiction before the genre’ in E James & F Mendlesohn (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 15-32.

While speculative fiction continued to develop in Europe, in America the popular genre of science fiction had its beginnings in the pulp magazines from the late nineteenth century. Previously many of the early science fiction stories reflected their European heritage of earnest speculative fiction by negotiating the difficulties of moving through time and space not by reference to science but by revealing at the conclusion, it was all a dream. Stableford (2003, p. 29) notes that Edgar Fawcett's novels, *Solarion* (1889) and *The Ghost of Guy Thyrle* (1895) are two of the early examples of authors who were 'handicapped by the lack of convincing narrative frames'. However, with the launch of pulp magazines and the influence of Jules Verne's attempts to incorporate a vestige of scientific truth in his adventure stories, for example, *De la terre á la luna* (*From the Earth to the Moon*, 1865), science fiction set off in a new direction (Stableford 2003, p.20).

This change of direction saw science fiction authors focusing on the development of science and technology. Stories of young inventors became popular with the publishers of pulp magazines and dime novels alongside other popular genres such as westerns and detective stories. The pulp magazines dedicated to science fiction with their mixture of adventure, melodrama and futuristic devices were advertised to their readers as containing 'uninhibited extraterrestrial adventure stories' (Stableford 2003, p.28). This occurred in the interwar period, at the same time as public interest in the development of science and new technology increased, and this became the focus of novels and short stories but also was found in the new media offerings of film, radio narratives and later television dramas.

Into this mixture of European speculative fiction and the colourful, exotic pulp fiction, Hugo Gernsbeck founded the first science fiction magazine, *Amazing Stories*, in 1926. Gernsbeck coined the term 'scientifiction' which he used to promote interest in new technologies. In 1929 Hugo Gernsbeck launched a new magazine *Science Wonder Stories*. In the beginning Gernsbeck wanted his magazine to teach his readers about the wonders of the new science and technology, especially the radio sets he imported and sold. In the editorial of the inaugural issue he not only coined the term 'science fiction' but also claimed that his stories were both educational and moral tales:

Science fiction is a tremendous force in America. They are stories that are discussed by inventors, scientists, and in the classroom. Teachers insist that pupils read them, because they widen the young man's horizon, as nothing can. Wise parents, too, let their children read this type of story because they know that it keeps them abreast of the times, educates them, and supplants the vicious and debasing sex story. SCIENCE

WONDER STORIES are clean, CLEAN from beginning to end. They stimulate only one thing – IMAGINATION. (Cheng 2012, p.18, emphasis in original)

Gernsbeck is important because he not only encouraged authors to contribute to his magazines he was also aware of his readers and the need to draw them into the environment of the magazine and his particular science fiction universe. Readers were encouraged to submit letters to the editor where they might discuss any of the stories but also topics from the broader areas of science and technology. Not only could readers interact with the editors but also with each other. Early science fiction reading communities were thus established in the ‘backyards’, (the term used by editors to describe the place in the magazine where the letters columns were set).

The distribution of interwar pulp magazines and fiction – their social technology – required their readers to collect and connect specific issues and serial stories, and in the process it fostered a greater distribution and circulation of culture as readers connected, often playfully, their individual circumstances to those of others. For an emergent science fiction genre whose public proclaimed participation, the pages of pulp backyards became spaces for this reading, this interplay. (Cheng 2012, pp. 77-78)

The great change that these science fiction magazines made was that they established the social nature of the genre. Readers were no longer only separate, individual consumers of the magazine or novel but, like the readers in the present-day online reading communities, they were part of a community of like-minded people who could interact with each other through the ‘backyard’ spaces in the magazines:

The social technology, in the broad sense of the term, of the pulps changed how they were read and revealed the material and collective character of reading, or more specifically the practice of reading. (Cheng 2012, p.53)

These beginnings demonstrate the extent to which science fiction has long been a social genre, encouraging readers to participate in its development particularly through the reading communities that still encourage readers to share their experience of their favourite author, novel, film, or TV drama. However, it had one flaw: it was primarily male oriented, both in terms of authors and readers. In the early days of the pulps there were some female authors but they had to assume a male name in order to gain the attention of the editors and the readers.⁵¹

⁵¹ One of the most well-known examples of women using male names is the author, James Tiptree Jr. (1915-1987) who was in fact Alice Sheldon. It was not until 1977 that Tiptree’s gender was publically established. So sure were critics that Tiptree was male that the critic Edward James quotes an earlier critic Robert Silverberg’s conviction that Tiptree had to be a male author. ‘It has been suggested that Tiptree is female, a theory I find

McCaffrey changed the social dynamics of science fiction when she first entered the genre by challenging its portrayal of women. In her first published novel, *Restoree* (1967) McCaffrey parodied the accepted representation of women in the genre. She describes her intention of doing this in a Question and Answer session on the official McCaffrey website, Pernhome:

Restoree was a once-off jab at the way women were portrayed in science-fiction. Don't forget that book was published in 1967... [I]t served its purpose of an intelligent, survivor-type woman as the protagonist of a S-F story. (McCaffrey Pernhome, n.d.)

McCaffrey's entry into this male dominated genre in the sixties as a female author with her emphasis on a female heroine meant that the novel was immediately classified as fantasy. This began a debate, which continues even after her death, as to whether her novels belong in the genre of science fiction or fantasy. McCaffrey never retreated from her position that she wrote science fiction, rejecting the categorisation of her work as fantasy: 'I write science-fiction, (s-f for short). Fantasy usually contains some form of magic. I stick to Newtonian logic' (McCaffrey Pernhome n.d.). However, as she incorporated many features into her created worlds that readers already recognised as part of fantasy genre, the debate continues even after her death. What McCaffrey did with many of the features that both critics and readers associated with fantasy genre was to give them a new identity by removing any sense of magic or supernatural, and demonstrate their origin as the outcome of scientific research. One of the best examples of this is her creation of the dragons of Pern. Pern, is described as the third planet in the Rukbat system, and it is her first and best-known alien world. On Pern, human dragon riders and dragons form bonds of interdependence and respect as they fight the incursion of Thread, the mycorrhizoid spores that threaten the planet. As Roberts (1996, p.35) states, 'What makes *Dragonriders* so unique and compelling is McCaffrey's clever and original depiction of dragons not as mythical beasts, but as creatures bred and handled by humans'.

In spite of including dragons and other mythical beasts McCaffrey demonstrates Pern's science fiction character by depicting it as a society in the midst of change and growth. Most science fiction readers would expect the world of the novel to be in the process of change, which is usually due to advanced technological and/or scientific developments. Instead, McCaffrey begins the first novel by describing Pern as a society that has lost all of the human

absurd, for there is to me something ineluctably masculine about Tiptree's writing' (Edward James quoted in Roberts 2000, p. 98).

technology and science that accompanied the first settlers and has for centuries been an agrarian planet. The change and growth readers find in Pern society is within the social and cultural development of the people. While these people have no memory of their affiliation with Earth, readers on the other hand, recognise many human characteristics, both good and bad, in the characters that form Pernese society.

McCaffrey offers readers a different appreciation of the genre's connection to science and technology by showing how the Pernese develop their own unique technology that ensures their survival in this alien environment. One of the most observable examples is the dragons that not only provide one of the features that draw readers into the world of the novel but provide McCaffrey with the opportunity to demonstrate how science can seem like magic but more importantly it is the outcome of creative human endeavour.⁵² In the introduction to *Dragonflight*, McCaffrey is emphatic that the dragons are the outcome of human ingenuity through a breeding program and genetic modification. So there is never any doubt that the dragons are a collaboration between humans and nature on Pern:

To forestall the incursions of the dreadful Threads, the Pernese, with the ingenuity of their forgotten Terran forebears, developed as highly specialized variety of a life-form indigenous to their adopted planet. (*Dragonflight*, p.xii)

While McCaffrey felt she had made a conclusive case for the Pern novels to be identified as science fiction genre, she had in fact created a controversy that is still unresolved by readers regarding the status of these novels as either science fiction genre or fantasy:

Dragon-loving fans categorize her Pern stories as fantasy because of the dragons and the quasi-feudal societal influences, in spite of McCaffrey's insistence that these stories are science fiction because her dragons are scientifically bioengineered and all scientific references are meticulously researched and verified by experts. (Sharp 2006, p. 996)

McCaffrey created Pern as a complex, feudal society incorporating elements such as its agrarian foundation, the absolute autonomy and power of the landowners, the highly stratified nature of social positions and its reliance on oral communication. Throughout the series, change on Pern is shown through a range of social challenges as established customs are questioned and new social conventions are explored. Because of McCaffrey's focus on the social relationships that play out within Pern society some critics classify her as a fantasy

⁵² Five years before the publication of *Dragonflight* (1968) the science fiction author, Arthur C. Clarke in an essay 'Hazards of Prophecy: The Failure of the Imagination' in *Profiles of the Future: An Enquiry into the Limits of the Possible*, Hachette, Australia, had also noted the close connection in the perception of science and magic 'Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic' (1962, reprinted 2001 p.2).

author or even in some cases a romance author who uses fantasy settings or even claim that the novels are Science Fantasy. As observed previously, McCaffrey rejected these classifications, stating in an interview:

People have freaked out when I tell them that my dragons are scientifically based... what else can you call a genetically engineered life form? But I must say I get a kick out of cutting them short when they call me a 'fantasy' writer. (Jamneck 1999, n.p.)

Perhaps if McCaffrey had not decided to create her own version of dragons then her relationship with science fiction might have been less contested. However, while this was an important issue of genre affiliation for McCaffrey, it reflects as much about how these novels are marketed as it does about readers' perception of their genre. It does seem that from McCaffrey's continuing emphasis on the scientific basis of not only her Pern novels but her other science fiction series as well, that she was particularly committed to distancing her work from association with the genre of Science Fantasy, which at the time of the first Pern novel in 1968 was experiencing a minor renaissance.⁵³

⁵³ The genre of Science Fantasy has had a problematic history since its beginning as an alternative genre to both the Victorian literary genres of Science Fiction and Fantasy. Robert Scholes (1987) traces its origins as an alternative classification of the science fiction novels of authors such as H.G. Wells, and the fantasy worlds such as those created by George MacDonald. Scholes shows that from its inception Science Fantasy was created from a blend of science fiction and fantasy, 'the genre we have learned to call science fiction has been entangled with its other, its anti-genre, fantasy, from the beginning' (Scholes 1987, p.17). Scholes sees this is a positive combination of the seemingly opposites of scientific positivism founded in observation and experimentation and the theological position of the eternal contest of faith between good and evil:

This term, suggests that we might at last be sufficiently beyond positivism and beyond medieval religion to be confronted, finally, by a new form, that has positioned itself beyond both the truth/fiction opposition of science and the good/evil opposition of religion. (Scholes 1987, p. 18)

However, the hybrid Science Fantasy genre did not gain the same level of recognition as its two antecedent genres. It experienced a resurgence in early to mid-twentieth century with the development of the American pulp fiction magazines such as *Startling Stories*. Mick Ashley (2000) in his history of the American science fiction pulp magazines shows that as both the readership and the number of authors contributing to the magazines expanded authors extended their scope beyond the confines of hard science into more fantastic plots. Readers enjoyed what Hugo Gernsback, the editor of the original science fiction magazine *Amazing Stories*, called 'fairy tales and not true science fiction' (Ashley 2000, p.138) as the genre of Science Fantasy increased in popularity:

The fantastic would soon become an essential part of *Starling's* appeal. It was a sign that whilst some devotees wanted the hard science of *Astounding* [*Astounding Stories of Super Science*] published by William Clayton, first appeared 1929] others wanted their science fiction a little less technical and a lot more fun.

By the middle of the twentieth century science fiction had increased in popularity 'it was not until the 1960s... that the genre became a genuinely mass, popular phenomenon (Roberts 2000, p. 80). This was roughly the same time J.R.R. Tolkien published the three volumes of his epic fantasy, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954/5) 'a book that set the benchmark for all fantasy novels to come' (Floresiensis 2016, n.p.). As both genres gathered new enthusiasts Science Fantasy as a genre diminished. It was not until the end of the twentieth century that interest once again focused on Science Fantasy but this time recognition was prompted by the cinema before being recaptured by the print media. An important shift in interest was generated by the films of the *Star Wars* series. Director George Lucas is quoted as saying about *Star Wars*: 'I knew from the beginning that I was not doing science fiction. I was doing a space opera, a fantasy film' (by Phantom42 scfi.stackexchange.com, 2013). The genre of Science Fantasy remains an established genre of popular fiction albeit a problematic one as critics, authors and readers continue to argue over the inclusion of titles. An example of the difference in popularity between all three genres can be seen on the world's largest internet book retail site, Amazon.com /Book

The world of Pern reveals how McCaffrey has taken readers' expectations of the science fiction genre and used them to create her own interpretation of society. McCaffrey demonstrates how scientific development and social progress are co-dependent for the survival of Pern as a cohesive, progressive society and while many readers appreciate that this is quite different to their world, as their voices show in the reception analysis, it is a world on which they would like to live.

Readers of both science fiction and fantasy usually expect to find some form of polarisation between the forces of good and evil to be played out within the narrative;⁵⁴ the difference usually being in science fiction both the conflict and resolution depend on the use of advanced technology, while in fantasy the conflict and the resolution usually involve some form of magic. McCaffrey offers a third option, producing a perpetual conflict with a science-based entity, the mycorrhizoid spores or Thread. Overcoming this danger involves all the Pernese people without exception and this allows McCaffrey to employ it in all the novels no matter the period or which characters are featured. While the reader can identify many social parallels between Pern and medieval Europe, large-scale warfare is not one of them. On the other hand most medieval nations on Earth have long histories of conflict, as the historian Maurice Keen (1999, pp. 2–3) notes:

wars between protagonists at every level of domination ... in competition for land and inheritances, and between rival cities; and between protagonists at different levels of dominance, of leagues of barons against kings ... of leagues of cities against their overlords ... and endless individual baronial rebellions against overlords who they claimed had oppressed them or had infringed their rights. The resort to violence was a ready one in the middle ages, at every level of authority.

McCaffrey chooses not to include instances of full scale global warfare, in spite of generic expectations. On one of the online fan sites she makes it clear that 'War is not a word in the Pernese vocabulary. It's one reason so many people would like to live there. Including me' (McCaffrey *Dragon Riders Club*, 2000). In spite of this assertion, there is, on Pern, quite a lot of conflict at all levels of society. However, these conflicts, when they occur, are dealt

depository/ where a quick search of the category Science Fantasy yields 296,158 titles easily eclipsed by Science Fiction's 338,777 titles and Fantasy's 307,413 titles.

⁵⁴ One of the prominent themes in both science fiction and fantasy novels is that of conflict between good and evil using various models of warfare. This is a large and diverse theme, sometimes shown as the struggle between the good army and the evil hordes as in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954) J. R.R. Tolkien. Another more pragmatic example is the struggle between invaders and defenders, as in a very early example in 1898, H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*. The conflict, no matter how it is structured, often finds resolution in momentous battles that produce heroes from everyday people who are caught up in historic events.

with as aberrations, unacceptable behaviour that must be rectified as they arise from the anti-social actions of individuals. For example in *Dragonflight* the tyrannical actions of Lord Fax in acquiring seven Holds⁵⁵ might have been described in war-like terms such as ‘conquering’ or ‘overthrowing’ but it is quite clear that rather than imperialism, his actions are entirely motivated by personal greed. Greed, especially greed conducted at a community level is an important theme in the novels, as Roberts (1996, p. 26) notes, ‘[t]he novel’s plot emphasises the importance of sharing your wealth and good for the benefit of all. Greed creates an unequal and unbalanced society that becomes problematic for all classes’.

While the official categorisation of science fiction versus fantasy may seem unimportant to many readers it does have implications for the author, in how she crafted her invented world. McCaffrey took great care in creating a very believable society on Pern. It is not a fantasy world of elves, wizards and magic but a society, like that on earth, which is constantly evolving and growing. Her readers are immersed not only in a well-developed social structure but one that has a history that has evolved over many hundreds of years, giving the reader a sense of its own reality. Popular fiction author Connie J. Jaspersen (2015, n.p.) writes on her blog about McCaffrey’s ability to create a believable world:

Anne McCaffrey was the grand mistress of worldbuilding... She gave us a real planet, in Pern – and our minds built around her framework believing the world of Pern to be as real as our own earth.

Pern is a world that is constantly developing as various sections of its society transform over time in much the same manner as this world has changed throughout history. This makes it very different from fantasy worlds where social change results from the struggle for dominance between good and evil. The society represented in these fantasy worlds is usually quite static; once the conflict is resolved the inhabitants resume the same lives as they had previously. The struggle offers the perception of change but actually it is an aberration. On the other hand in the worlds of science fiction the struggle or warfare usually leads to a new emerging society. McCaffrey offers her readers access to various historic periods in Pern’s development giving them a sense of how the planet and its people have developed as a society over the years since settlement.

⁵⁵ Holds are large tracts of land, rather like medieval kingdoms. The majority of the Pernese people live in these Holds. Each Hold is ruled by a Lord Holder who has absolute authority over all who live in the Hold. The concept is discussed later in the chapter as part of the social fabric of Pern.

McCaffrey's interest in the social development of her world still sees the novels being classed as fantasy by more traditional science fiction readers, authors and critics. For example, the article 'Anne McCaffrey' by John Clute (2017, n.p.) in the online *SFE: Science Fiction Encyclopaedia*⁵⁶ notes:

most of her output was sf [science fiction], though tinged with the tone and instruments of fantasy: much of her main work, the enormous Pern sequence of Planetary Romance adventures is normally experienced as fantasy.

While the more uncompromising science fiction readers have difficulty in accepting that McCaffrey wrote science fiction, her supporters, as will be discussed further in the section on reception analysis, appreciate the attention she gave to both developing distinctive characters and their society and her singular approach to science and technology. Most readers categorise the Pern novels as belonging to the genre of science fiction and in the reading communities include a number of interesting discussions about the way in which science and technology is utilised on the world of Pern. McCaffrey believed that the genre should highlight innovation, determination and courage; the human characteristics that drive the development of science and technology. This is in keeping with the view that science fiction functions not only as entertainment but has an important social role. This argument is demonstrated by Helen Klus, a physicist, who in an article 'Why Society Needs Science Fiction' (2012, n.p.) explained:

As well as considering the effects of current and developing technologies, science fiction can help address long-term problems, such as global warming. It can help with the development of space exploration, and prepare us for problems we may not anticipate. One day, time travel, teleportation, or the genetic engineering of humans may happen, we might communicate with aliens, invent simulated realities, or build intelligent robots, and we will be better prepared to deal with these, and other potential dilemmas, if we have already thought about them.

McCaffrey's novels, particularly the Pern series, reflect much of Klus's claim. Rather than placing the development of science and technology as the central focus of the story, McCaffrey includes it as one of the many processes that are developed by the characters in order to survive in an often-hostile environment. New developments in science and technology are then explored through the developing social themes and communal interactions that form her complex society.

⁵⁶ *SFE: The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction* is an online free encyclopaedia with 5,669 registered followers. John Clute is an established Canadian author, editor, and critic of science fiction, as well as a Hugo award winner.

Textual Analysis: The world of the text.

From the publication of McCaffrey's earliest work, readers have appreciated the social dimension her novels have brought to the traditional science fiction genre. Throughout her novels she explores themes not previously associated with the genre such as: portrayal of strong, independent women; the importance of the outsider to society; the utilisation of the Arts (particularly music) for the benefit of society; the development of science and technology as a social practice; the need for cooperation and respect; and the recognition of innovation and flexibility as the basis for an active, cohesive and unified society. Readers find these themes incorporated into some of the expected generic features of a science fiction narrative. For example one of the main features of science fiction is the alien world developed by the author. McCaffrey has created not only a distinctive, believable alien world but a clearly defined, continually evolving society with its own detailed history and unique social structures that is a consistent presence throughout all the novels. In this textual analysis I demonstrate that the world created by McCaffrey draws readers into it by offering them a society in which they would like to participate. It is not a physically safe world but it has within its social structures the recognition of the individual and the possibility that anyone is capable of making a difference. I show that while the narrative offers readers a new form of science fiction, it is the social themes of cohesion, recognition and involvement that draw the readers into the world of Pern.

The world of Pern has a clearly defined social structure with three major social divisions of Weyr, Hall and Hold. When the story begins the reader is introduced to an agrarian society with these social subdivisions forming a quasi-medieval structure. Although this is a different social structure to that familiar to the reader, each division has recognisable features, for example the Holds are large tracts of land ruled by Lord Holders, each one having the same autonomous sovereignty as a medieval prince. Many readers are drawn to the Craft Holds, which resemble medieval guilds in the way they govern the practices of all the different crafts from miners to musicians. Living in a world where technology has usurped the sense of individual contribution in a vast array of what used to be craft-based occupations, most readers appreciate the individuality and social dignity the various crafts have within Pern society. Finally one of McCaffrey's most positive examples of science and nature working together is the Weyrs, home to the dragonriders and their dragons who are charged with keeping Pern safe from the incursion of Thread. All the various features of the dragons and

their riders form one of the most explored topics within the reading communities. It is an aspect of these stories that continually draws the readers back to the novels, as will be demonstrated in the reception analysis section.

As previously discussed, one innovation McCaffrey made to the genre of science fiction was to place science and technology within a human dimension. Her focus in the individual stories that create the world of Pern is always how science and technology has affected the lives of the characters and their society, for example the bioengineered dragons are shown to be partners with their human riders in the fight against Thread. The individual stories of the main characters such as Lessa, Menolly and F'lar emphasise human ingenuity assisted by technology as the people of Pern create a society in concert with the natural world of the planet. It is in this environment that McCaffrey includes many of the themes such as cooperation between all the sections of society, the need for innovation and flexibility, respect for the contribution of each of the sections of society and the acceptance for change as a fundamental element of growth.

Another unique aspect of McCaffrey's science fiction is how she created the danger to the planet from a powerful enemy. One of the generic features of science fiction is a powerful yet destructive enemy force created by the superior alien use of science and technology. McCaffrey, instead of including human/alien warfare, constructed a mindlessly destructive mycorrhizoid organism that threatens the whole planet every two hundred years. It is a scientifically based organism rather than a form of alien-being and the need to overcome its destructive effect brings the whole society of Pern together.

One theme constant throughout her writing is the portrayal of strong, independent women. When McCaffrey began publishing in 1967 many of the more traditional examples of science fiction revolved around the innovative possibilities in science and technology, and these developments were always associated with male characters. The female characters existed almost as an afterthought as beautiful but helpless victims or beautiful but evil villains.⁵⁷ This

⁵⁷ The marginalisation of women in popular science fiction novels and magazines changed in the 1960s and 1970s as women became interested in participating in the genre and feminist authors challenged the traditional image of female characters. As well as Anne McCaffrey's *Restoree* (1967) works such as Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975) encouraged many women such as Marion Zimmer Bradley, Cele Goldsmith, Kate Wilhelm, Madeleine L'Engle, Jody Scott, and Cherry Wilde to give the female characters a new image. For a comprehensive coverage of women science fiction authors from

marginalisation was not lost on the small cohort of female readers, as Roberts (2000, p. 93) argues:

From the dawn of SF through to the end of the 1950s the female audience of SF was tiny, and those women who were interested in reading it did so with a sense of themselves as alienated or at least sidelined spectators.

McCaffrey used her portrayal of strong female characters to explore a number of social themes such as the concept of courage, often expressed through an individual doing what they believe to be right, even if it means going against authority. An example of this is when Lessa goes back in time to bring the lost weyrs forward risking herself and her dragon on such a dangerous mission. Taking an individual stand for what is right against authority, friends or family is a feature in many popular fiction novels, for example as explored in a variety of situations in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series.

Throughout her career McCaffrey has continued to include many women's issues in her novels. Her writing includes issues to do with reproduction, marriage, motherhood, and social responsibility versus independence (Roberts 1996). She often uses her focus on women to introduce other themes. For example in the Pern series, beginning with the characters of Lessa and Menolly, she includes the theme of the relationship of the *outsider* or the *other* to the wider society. Through Lessa's story McCaffrey shows the dangers to a society of excluding not only those seen as alien and outside the social norms, but those groups within society who are ideologically denied access to power and appreciation, 'McCaffrey warns of the dangers of dismissing even a lowly drudge [servant] because she may turn out to be like Lessa [heroine of *Dragonflight*] and have wonderful and important gifts to offer her society' (Roberts 1996, pp.30–1). In Menolly's struggle to become a harper,⁵⁸ McCaffrey demonstrates how prejudice, in this case prejudice against women, forces a talented musician become an outsider because she challenges archaic social traditions.

As *Dragonflight* begins, the reader finds Lessa, a lowly drudge [servant] in one of the holds governed by the tyrannical Lord Holder Fax, waking cold and frightened with a prescient

1950s to the present day see *SFC: The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction* at [www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/women sf writers](http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/women_sf_writers).

⁵⁸ Within the Pern series the story of Menolly, a girl who becomes a harper is part of the Harper Hall trilogy, *Dragonsong* (1976), *Dragonsinger* (1977) and *Dragondrums* (1979).

sense of danger in the early morning.⁵⁹ This immediately engages both the reader's sympathy and their curiosity. The story then unfolds in two directions, first looking backwards and establishing how Lessa got to this point and second, continuing the action of the moment. An important feature of this opening is the establishment of Lessa's place in Pern society at that moment. She is an outsider, a powerless, lowly drudge. However, readers soon see that while she might belong to a class considered to have no importance, she has all the necessary characteristics of a strong and resourceful heroine. Not only is she resilient, having survived for ten years after the massacre of her family when she was just a child; she is resourceful and courageous as she subtly carries out a type of one-woman insurgency against the cruel and ruthless Lord Holder Fax. After the death of Fax, the Weyrleader F'lar finally sees beyond the drudge and recognises in Lessa the Weyrwoman for whom he has been searching:

Now he realized some measure of her indomitable character. She could not have been above ten Turns [years] of age herself when Fax murdered her family. Yet somehow, so young, she had set herself a goal and managed to survive both brutality and detection long enough to secure the usurper's death. What a Weyrwoman she would be! (*Dragonflight*, p.58)

F'lar's recognition of Lessa matches the readers' knowledge that she has the qualities needed to become one of the most important people on Pern. As well as a turning point in the novel, such a focus on the strength and resilience of a female character was a turning point for science fiction in 1968. For the character of Lessa it is the beginning of her narrative journey as she changes from the defenceless outsider to becoming one of the most important people on Pern. McCaffrey's development of Lessa's character is one of the prominent topics in the online reading communities. Many of the readers identify with Lessa's struggles and admire her resilience and independence and her character is one of the features that draws the readers into the world of Pern and also encourages them to return.

Change is also at the centre of other themes important to McCaffrey. These are themes that include different types of social change, innovation, flexibility and the necessity to challenge the mindless acceptance of tradition. 'Throughout *The Dragonriders of Pern*, McCaffrey demonstrates the importance and value of innovation and flexibility, in both individuals and society' (Roberts 1996, p.47). These themes also feature in the novels of both of the other case study authors in this thesis. In romance genre, many of Georgette Heyer's young, self-

⁵⁹ Introducing the reader immediately into the middle of the action is a narrative strategy often used by McCaffrey. It draws the reader into the narrative by depicting a character such as Lessa in some intense situation that arouses the reader's sympathy. McCaffrey's biographer states '*Dragonflight* begins as many of McCaffrey's novels do, *in medias res* (in the middle of the story)' (Roberts 1996, p. 22).

reliant heroines overcome the rigid and restrictive social rules of Regency society by their innovative approach to their problems. While in fantasy genre, J.K. Rowling shows how a society that is inflexible in selecting whom it deems deserving of membership, paves the way for socially divisive figures like Lord Voldemort. McCaffrey includes the themes of inflexibility, innovation and the problems of mindless tradition in the lives of two of her heroines, Lessa the Weyrwoman and Menolly the Harper, as well as in the development of Pernese society as a whole. As readers become familiar with the society on Pern they see that Lessa's social transformation from drudge to Weyrwoman in many ways mirrors the transformation that changes Pern society from a collection of ineffective isolationist groups to collection of strong, committed communities working together to save the planet. On the other hand, Menolly introduces change and innovation to the previously male dominated position of Harper, giving it a new social inclusiveness.

Throughout the Pern novels McCaffrey frames science and technology as a social practice. She shows that from the time of the first colonists at Landing the use of these skills has guided a range of processes to be developed to assist the people of Pern in their survival in an often hostile environment. For example, when the developing colony is devastated by the first pass of the Red Star they turn to biological science to find a solution and develop the dragons by enhancing the properties of the native fire lizards. This is also an example of a theme very important to McCaffrey: cooperation between human and nature. She shows that while science and technology are important, they are the tools used with innovation and in cooperation with the natural world. On Pern, the pursuit of science and the development of technology require both the courage and the insight of many people whose task it is to ensure a better, safer environment for all. This is where a multidimensional analysis of the novel offers a number of practices that shows how McCaffrey differs from many other science fiction authors. The genre section shows her innovation within the established genre of science fiction while the textual analysis not only reveals an original and exciting world but one that draws readers to it by offering them a society in which the individual is valued for their participation. Finally the readers' voices within the reading communities reveals how they appreciate that she focuses on the characters and the society as they develop. Her model of science fiction contrasts with the more traditional science fiction authors and critics tend to elevate the depiction of new and advanced forms of 'science' over the development of characters and their complex social relationships. In McCaffrey's world of Pern it is not the science that helps the people overcome serious problems but the innovative thinking of

people and their ability to develop what is needed in each situation and then apply their knowledge of science and technology to find a solution. McCaffrey focuses on how human and scientific cooperation rather than human and scientific exploitation guarantees a better society for all.

On Pern, the type of developments in science and technology that would be familiar to a reader of science fiction occur in the planet's past when the original colonists responded to a range of specific dangers, the mycorrhizoid spore, Thread, in particular. This was when the dragons that feature throughout all the Pern novels, were bio-engineered to fight Thread. By the time of the first book, *Dragonflight*, the dragons have long been an accepted part of the natural environment. The dragons belong to the Weyrs, the third social group on Pern. The Weyrs consist of the dragons, their riders and weyrfolk, those who facilitate the day-to-day running of the Weyr. Throughout the series the dragonriders and the dragons are the planet's only defence against the incursion of the Thread. However, they are also an example of McCaffrey's concept of the collaborative nature of science. The dragons are neither mindless machines nor conquered alien creatures, but sentient, intelligent creatures who act in concert with their riders to fight Thread. The scientific nature of the development of dragons is emphasised from the beginning of the novel and relies on 'our own society's belief in science' (Roberts 1996, p.54). McCaffrey's constant emphasis on the 'human', collaborative character of science, particularly in relation to the dragons, is one of the features that draw readers to the world of Pern. However, it not only plays an important part in the creation of a detailed textual world but also opens a new narrative dimension within the genre.

In the opening of each novel McCaffrey reminds readers what the characters have forgotten, that these creatures were created by advanced technology and human ingenuity in cooperation with the natural world of Pern:

To forestall the incursions of the dreadful Threads, the Pernese, with the ingenuity of their forgotten Terran forebears, developed a highly specialized variety of a life-form indigenous to their adopted planet. (*Dragonflight*, p.12)

By emphasising their scientific basis McCaffrey removes the dragons from the world of fantasy where, as one of the first female science fiction authors Andre Norton told her, 'dragons had a bad rap' (Sharp 2006, p.998). Readers are introduced to the dragons as individuals. They have names and personalities and are willing companions who bond with the human riders. By depicting them in this way McCaffrey gives what were once portrayed

as fierce, mythical creatures bent on destroying humans a new sense of personality and purpose. Each dragon, exhibiting an individual, positive human-like identity, exemplifies McCaffrey's humanisation of science.

While McCaffrey offers readers a more human-centred scientific vision as mentioned earlier she also shows that science is not the only important component needed to form a successfully integrated society. Readers recognise that alongside the scientific discoveries that ensure Pern's survival, 'one source of creativity and salvation for Pern turns out to be various forms of art' (Roberts 1996 p.31). Throughout the novels Pern is shown as a highly structured, complex world where aspects of culture such as science, music, and art, that would be recognisable to the readers, have complex relations with one another. The constant emphasis on not only the human face of Pern but also the individual's importance to social cohesion and development shows that this is an expansion and a new direction, of science fiction genre.⁶⁰

Through the social use of music, McCaffrey draws together two themes that are important to her. First that the arts and crafts are essential for the development of each person's individuality just as their talent is important for the benefit of the whole society, and second that performers are often seen as outsiders, but as outsiders they can be the source of growth and change. The character of Menolly in *Dragonsinger* embodies these themes:

McCaffrey is showing the reader that through Menolly the importance of letting people be themselves and do what they must do, and the tragic or potentially tragic consequences if people are stopped from fulfilling their potential. (Wytenbroek, 1992, p.213)

As *Dragonflight* opens, a long interval, approximately four hundred turns [years], has occurred since the last Threadfall and many people have let the use of teaching songs fall into neglect, dismissing the harpers' historical and cultural knowledge as either fiction or lies told to secure their power. In the opening McCaffrey raises the issue of how tradition is integrated into social perception by posing a number of questions:

⁶⁰ McCaffrey highlights the importance of music and art as part of the social fabric that continues to hold society together, and this theme reverberates throughout the story of Pern. This theme is drawn from important aspects of McCaffrey's own life. Music was always important to her and she drew on her background as a performer and a director in theatre and opera to argue that those gifts that them apart should be encouraged for their contribution and artists should not be made to feel alien or different, 'McCaffrey has also been a singer, an actress, and a stage director, all of these activities having fed her love of and ability to create imaginative worlds' (Sharp 2006, p.993). On Pern McCaffrey often demonstrates how participation in the arts is integral to education, social cohesion and communication.

When is a legend legend? Why is a myth a myth? How old and disused must a fact be for it to be relegated to the category 'Fairy-Tale'? And why do certain facts remain incontrovertible while others lose their validity to assume a shabby, unstable character? (*Dragonflight*, p.xi)

As the social use of music has been lost, so too has the sense of social cohesion atrophied, and the Holds, the Craft Halls and the remaining Weyr now see themselves as isolated bodies viewing all others with suspicion. McCaffrey shows that this isolation has caused the whole of Pern society to stagnate as civilised order and social cooperation slowly dissipate. An important theme of the novel is that both change and flexibility are important for a society to grow and develop. These themes emerge in the lives of individual characters and in their relation to society. An example is Lessa, who is flexible enough to embrace change and develop as a person, from drudge to Weyrwoman.

On Pern the social use of music provides the historical and traditional knowledge from which positive change can occur that benefits all members of society. In order to grow, a society must be flexible enough to maintain the delicate balance between the traditions that must be maintained and the practices which need to be changed in order to have a healthy, developing society. McCaffrey demonstrates her belief in the social character of music with the traditional teaching ballads that remind the riders and their dragons of their traditional role as protectors of the planet. However, in accepting that role, the riders and especially the Weyrleaders need to be flexible enough to understand that their traditional role now includes a number of new duties that will benefit everyone. For example, the dragonriders are constantly challenged to find better ways of overcoming their traditional enemy, Thread. At the same time they have to be flexible enough to take on an expanded role, which includes exploring almost forgotten areas of the planet, and relearning forgotten skills in order to journey into space to finally destroy Thread. This demonstrates one of the features that make this created world so appealing to many readers; it depicts a society constantly evolving and learning. In this it contrasts with many science fiction worlds where the technology might be seen as innovative and creative but the society itself remains static.

One of the important issues in these novels that many readers comment on in the reading communities is the Pernese sense of obligation to tradition. McCaffrey explores the social consequences of both aspects of tradition. While F'lar and the dragonriders challenge what have become empty traditions the Masterharper plays an important role in assisting all three

social groups to look at new opportunities for growth and progress without sacrificing the traditions that give the people a sense of identity and unity. This is particularly important when in *All the Weyrs of Pern* (set approximately twenty years after *Dragonflight*), one of the original space ships is discovered and its computer activated. Many people within Pernese society are challenged by the new information the computer, Aivas, reveals. There is a very vocal group that believes many of the new skills, such as advanced medical techniques, contradict traditional practices and threaten the social stability of all people. Masterharper Robinton and the harpers play an important part in reassuring the people that these discoveries will benefit everyone and that embracing the innovations Aivas has to teach them will not destabilise society and their traditional way of life. In particular the groups of Hold, Craft and Weyr will flourish even more efficiently because of the new information that is available to them. The tension between tradition and innovation creates conflict that needs to be resolved so all the social groups can continue to grow and evolve over the course of the narrative. It is one of the features that gives readers a sense of authenticity in this detailed, textual world. In some of the discussions in the reception analysis, there are topics that relate to ways in which Pern, as a society that faces serious challenges, and has within it the ability to grow and develop.

McCaffrey demonstrates the importance of tradition in that it reminds each generation of its social responsibilities but also that tradition has to be relevant and not mindlessly imposed on society. Therefore, tradition must encourage the respect of both individuals and groups for their contribution to society. While each group operates as a cohesive social structure they must also be aware of their obligations to participate in the overall social stability of society:

By and large, Hold, Hall and Weyr have regulated their own members with few grievances spilling over. Everyone knows what is expected of them, what rights, privileges and responsibilities are due or required. (*All the Weyrs of Pern*, p. 419)

Unfortunately as Lessa's story begins, all sense of equality and with it mutual respect, has been lost and the Holds are now the most powerful group on the planet. This is shown in the way Fax has been able to run rampant because Holds have become isolated from each other. Mutual cooperation between Holds has shrunk to a minimum and Holders now are more worried about interfering outside their own Hold than cooperating or assisting a neighbour. At one point in *Dragonflight* Lord Holder Larad of Telgar is persuaded by Meron, Lord of

Nabol, to raise an army to confront the Weyr, demanding it give up its right to Search⁶¹ and to exact tithes from the Holds. Due to the isolation and lack of communication between the Holds it is quite easy for Meron to convince him that the Weyr is now superfluous and interfering in legitimate Hold business:

[Larad speaking] But the dragonmen had overstepped the border of grateful generosity. First, this archaic Search foolishness ... And killing Fax! Albeit the man had been dangerously ambitious, he was of the Blood. And the Weyr has not been asked to meddle in the affairs of the High Reaches. (*Dragonflight*, p. 172)

An important feature of Larad's speech is his portrayal of Fax. The reader knows Fax was a ruthless, ambitious, tyrant, a violent and cruel invader: yet isolation, an inward focus and lack of communication between the Holds and Halls allowed him to flourish. In spite of this, Larad censures F'lar for killing Fax, representing F'lar's actions as 'meddling' even though Fax's brutal land acquisition was destroying Pern society. McCaffrey constantly returns to this concept; that the communication of the traditions as set out in the Charter established healthy social relationships for the benefit of all and knowledge of them is essential for the continuing growth of a dynamic society.

Until each group can return to respecting each other and communicating and cooperating, society on Pern cannot be healed. The reader sees that not only does each group exist in isolation but their attitude towards each other is fuelled by hostility, suspicion and distrust. So when the Threads begin to fall again the lack of social cohesion is the first problem F'lar has to overcome. As the only Weyrleader he calls a Council meeting that brings together, for the first time in many years, representatives of all three groups. His arrangement of the seating at the meeting reflects the deep feelings of distrust and suspicion that have created the disunity of the present:

F'lar had given thought to the seating arrangements in the Council Room, carefully interspersing brown and bronze dragonriders with Holders and Craftsmen. There was now barely room to move in the generously proportioned cavern, but there was also no room in which to draw daggers if tempers got hot. (*Dragonflight*, p. 273)

The Pern series include themes of cooperation and respect and of change and flexibility giving this alien environment a human dimension. Allowing a reader to discover the human dimension of Pern is one of the strengths of the series. Pern offers the reader an interesting,

⁶¹ When the queen dragon's eggs are nearly ready to hatch dragonriders search the Holds and Crafts for likely candidates to Impress. The dragons who go on Search are able to recognise prospective candidates, although being chosen does not mean that the boy or girl will be successful, only that it is a possibility. The newly hatched dragons are the only ones who decide whom they will Impress.

and in many ways appealing, society. While being divided into quite clearly defined social groups, each with its own rigid hierarchical structure and laws, it is also shown to be a place that encourages and rewards individual endeavour at all levels of society. All people are expected to be involved in every aspect of society, as seen for example in a much more immediate and personal involvement in civil order:

At one time there had been trained legists on Pern, but the need for such persons had waned. Most arguments were settled by negotiated compromise or, when all negotiation efforts failed, by hand-to-hand combat. (*Red Star Rising*, p. 262)

Apart from civil disputes, Pern also has individuals who act in anti-social or criminal ways but overall there is no need for a police force. Criminals are tried by a jury of the accused's peers presided over by the Lord Holder, Craftmaster or Weyrleader depending on where the crime was committed. In *Red Star Rising* a situation occurs where the thuggish guards of a corrupt Holder have been caught after they raped a number of women who, with their families, were being unjustly ejected from Bitra Hold. The guards are rounded up and brought to Telgar Weyr to be tried for their crimes. The guards feel that they are safe from prosecution because usually it is the Lord Holder's place to decide what happens in each autonomous Hold. However, the Weyrleaders affirm that the Charter is quite clear about ensuring that justice is done no matter what affiliations the criminals might have:

He'd [K'vin, Telgar's Weyrleader] been surprised at how detailed the Charter was; his recollections of its content was entirely too hazy. In this particular instance, they were also dealing with another Holder's employees for a matter that had come up within that Hold, not an incident in Telgar Weyr, or within the jurisdiction of Telgar Hold. 'But the men are Bitran. Are *we* allowed to?' 'Indeed we're within our rights,' Zulaya answered firmly. 'Justice can be administered anywhere, provided the circumstances warrant. As the victims are currently in this Weyr and so are their attackers, we may legally hold trial here. However, we'll make sure to invite representatives of other Holds and Weyrs to oversee that justice is done'. (*Red Star Rising*, p. 260)

The trial is held almost immediately and the guilty summarily punished before being sent back, by their request, to their Hold. Everyone present agrees that 'justice had been served' (*Red Star Rising*, p.266). The whole event is described in terms of cooperation and negotiation that encompasses all who are present, exemplified by the instantaneous jury selection, 'The twelve men and women, picked at random by a straw from those who had come to observe' (*Red Star Rising*, p. 264). The day ends communally with all involved, except the guilty, joining together as a community for a 'substantial meal' (*Red Star Rising*, p. 266).

Pern does not experience warfare in the conventional sense but it still is a dangerous place for all who make it their home, no matter who they are or their status within the Pernese social structure. Pern's fate depends not on the conquests of armies or the might of individual countries but on the selfless, innovative and often heroic behaviour of individuals who are prepared to risk everything for the benefit of society as a whole. This is consistent with McCaffrey's claim that she does not offer any 'deep philosophical messages' in the novels but prefers to explore 'examples of what people can do when pushed to perform at their limits' (Gale 2006, p.713).

Pern is a world that offers readers a complex society, both familiar to them through the diversity of human relationships it contains and at the same time unknown, strange and full of exotic inhabitants and ever present dangers. Many of the themes McCaffrey includes, particularly those associated with the individuality and independence of women, resonate in the discussions in the reading communities as readers declare their emotional support for particular characters and their decisions. This is a world which readers feel exists beyond the pages of the novel and they demonstrate this in their discussions of many features that are not relevant to the plot or characters. For example, there are a number of discussion threads that share possible recipes for the meatrolls eaten by the dragonriders.⁶² Readers' sense of involvement in every aspect of Pern and its inhabitants is an important element in the continuing success of these novels. The following section explores some of the issues discussed in the online reading communities and, using readers' own voices, illustrates their involvement in the world of Pern, especially their interest in its remarkable dragons.

Reception Analysis: the online reading communities.

This section will focus on readers responses to some of the distinctive themes in the novels as well as some of the topics outside the narrative, that have raised a lot of interest. This is only a sample of the numerous topics that interest readers and that are discussed by reading communities. The multidimensional analysis approach in this section focuses on how the readers have approached some of the themes, as well as the ways in which readers understand the text differently to the critics. Readers come to these discussions usually with a sense of

⁶² This is a topic that interests many of the readers. On Anne McCaffrey's forum *A Meeting of Minds: An Anne McCaffrey Discussion Forum* in 2005 Dragonbear posted a topic 'Food of Pern.' The post received 153 replies. In 2007 P'ter posted a topic 'Pernese Cooking and Recipes' it received 71 replies with 5,413 views and in 2016 Chrisfrostick posted a topic 'Pernese cooking with pictures' it received 65 replies with 10,514 views.

emotional involvement in the world of the text and its characters. They rarely discuss the more theoretical concepts of themes or subjects; for example, McCaffrey's portrayal of women is identified in the textual analysis as a theme throughout the series, but an analysis of the readers' responses show that they focus on their individual, emotional response to particular characters, such as Lessa. In a discussion about *Dragonflight* on website *FableCroft*, Leonie (2015, n.p.) simply maintains, 'I remember loving her [Lessa]; and for me, it [*Dragonflight*] was about Lessa', and Pamela Freeman (2015, n.p.) adds how '[s]exism was challenged again and again by Lessa'. The affirmative features that they identify in Lessa's character show they have understood McCaffrey's concept but see it through the lens of an individual character.

Many readers have a sense of involvement in the world of the Pern as if it was a real place, and their sense of participation is shown through their comments. They offer topics for discussion about concepts that are not mentioned in the text but still generate a great deal of interest amongst other readers. According to some of the comments, this sense of Pern as a place that can be explored encourages them to reread the novels. Readers also discuss how these novels have affected them in ways which are not apparent from a textual analysis of the novels. For example, readers claim that the novels have encouraged them to write their own narratives. Another of the most popular areas for discussion in the reading communities is the diverse range of features relating to Pern's society that are not part of the narrative, for example, 'What it would be like living on Pern?', 'How are weddings conducted?', or 'Can weyrwomen give up their position if they so desire?'. This indicates their sense that the world of Pern continues to exist outside the confines of the novel.

The reading communities can be found on a number of websites dedicated to Anne McCaffrey. These are official websites, well established and always happy to welcome new members. McCaffrey's relationship to her readers is interesting because it covers two different periods. The first period is when McCaffrey was a popular science fiction author before the proliferation of the Internet. She began by contacting readers on an online Bulletin Board, *The Kitchen Table Bulletin Board* which was closed in 2004 due to costs (Fanlore, 2016: fanlore.org/The Kitchen Table). This was her first official site and resembled a fan magazine format. It was built around a dialogue between herself and her readers. On her next official site, *The Worlds of Anne McCaffrey*, Pernhome McCaffrey answered readers' questions, posted information about forthcoming publications and conferences, and posted

pictures and letters from readers. It was open from August 2004 to April 2014. It is still available for readers to access and contains a lot of detailed information about how McCaffrey felt about the world she created. While it contains a dialogue between McCaffrey and many of her readers there is no sense of readers being involved in discussions with each other. The later reading communities that involve readers in discussion forums evolved from the second period of Internet activity which began when in 2004 *The Worlds of Anne McCaffrey* website advised their readers that there were new websites that ‘offered some very attractive alternatives to the original *Kitchen Table* communities’ (www.Pernhome.com). These later websites, for example *The New Kitchen Table* and *A Meeting of Minds: An Anne McCaffrey Discussion Forum* are large on-going websites that offer a wide range of information about McCaffrey; for example, all her publications, a variety of conferences, and an introduction to fan fiction. However, the largest threads are the discussions by readers about every possible aspect of the world of Pern.

The reading communities fall into two distinct categories. The first group includes the official websites that are officially sanctioned by McCaffrey and still continue with the approval of her son Todd. These are usually very large, stable sites, for example *The New Kitchen Table*, which incorporates some of the original *Kitchen Table* material. To date the Pern section has 18,391 threads (topics) with 668,406 views and 3065 active members. This site can also be accessed through *Anne McCaffrey Fans Forum*. Another popular site is *A Meeting of Minds: an Anne McCaffrey Discussion Forum*. This site is still open and at the time of writing has twenty-six pages of topics related to the Pern saga with approximately forty-three topics per page, which is approximately a total of 1118 Threads with 29,068 replies and 6,252,688 views.

The discussion threads are not only examples of the readers’ interests they are also examples of the social nature of these forums. The participants engage in interaction with the person who has posted the topic but also with other respondents as well. Discussions are often quite lively as each participant not only wants to share their views but frequently reveals an emotional response to the topic. Henry Jenkins (1992) describes how online communities encourage collaboration and a sense of community between media fans. This same sense of collective involvement is apparent in the discussions in the online reading communities;

The computer net only intensified this process [building a sense of community], letting fans compare notes, allowing theories to become progressively more elaborated

and complex through collaboration with other contributors. All of the participants saw the group as involved in a communal enterprise. (Jenkins 1992, p. 79)

The topics that interest readers are as diverse as there are readers but some generate more responses than others. For example the topic of whether the Pern series should be made into a film has engaged readers on both the official and unofficial websites, with a particular interest in who should play the various parts. On the official website, *The New Kitchen Table* there are several pages dedicated to 'Pern the Movie' with 2,826 discussion threads and 33,992 views. Other topics on McCaffrey discussion forums demonstrate how readers feel an emotional involvement in the world of Pern. The following very small number of examples from the popular website mentioned previously, *A Meeting of Minds: an Anne McCaffrey Discussion Forum* demonstrates the eclectic nature of readers' interests: 'Thread: a tasty snack or flaming nuisance' 203 posts, 14,284 views; 'Klah, to drink or not to drink.' 109 posts, 8,885 views; 'Dragon eggs and hatching size', 98 posts, 13,159 views; and 'Meat Rolls' 64 posts, 8,054 views. This last topic demonstrates not only the readers' sense of engagement in the world of the text but also the social nature of these novels. The reader asks if any readers had a recipe for the food eaten by dragonriders, adding to the sense of realism generated by the topic. Several recipes were offered; adding to that sense of realism.⁶³ While there is no suggestion that the readers are not aware that they are engaged with a fictional environment, their choice to approach that environment with a sense of participation and emotional commitment is a major influence in these novels' continuing popularity. Through the various discussions, arguments and opinions readers respond to the world of text and its inhabitants as a place in which they can participate, explore and feel welcome.

As well as the official sites shown here there are many other places where reading communities form, such as smaller single interest sites where readers can discuss any topic that interests them. Then there are reading communities formed around single topics posted on large general sites, for example science fiction sites, or the *Goodreads* site; and finally reading communities formed in response to individual blogs about the novels. One of the differences between these sites and the official home pages is that the language of the debate is often more robust on these unofficial sites. The tone of the posts is often quite emotional and self-referential as readers on these sites (particularly the critical posts), focus more on

⁶³ Interest in the food of Pern is a feature that readers return to in many of the reading communities. (see footnote 19). It adds to the sense of reality in that the sharing of recipes is a recognisable act in the social interaction in the readers' real world.

how the stories have affected them. An example of a single-issue style of reading community is found in the Community section of the *Goodreads* site. A discussion of the reissue in 2005 of the novel *Dragonflight* (first published in 1968) was initiated by a reader who began by defending the novel while acknowledging that there were those who did not like it. The post, like many of the replies, offers a personal, emotional response to the novel. The reader offers the post as the beginning of a shared discussion that includes opposing opinions.

I understand that this book (and series) has a lot of haters. Their complaints are valid, but I still regard this as one of the best sci-fi fantasies I've ever read? [sic] (Khanh the Grinch 2016, n.p.)

The discussion of the novel has 3000 posts. A sample of the first forty-six posts illustrates the emotional character of these discussions. Of the forty-six replies nineteen readers agreed with Khanh the Grinch saying they loved the story or they felt an affinity to particular characters, particularly the dragons. The major focus of these posts was how some aspect of the novel had affected each reader, either positively or negatively. Even though it is a very large site the willingness of the participants to share their personal responses and to engage with other readers gives it a sense of a collaborative community.

When *Dragonflight* was first published in 1968, the online reading communities that currently play an important part in the continuing popularity of these novels were over thirty years away. However, there are still many readers who participate in the discussions in the reading communities who were introduced to McCaffrey's approach to science fiction in the sixties and seventies and are still her enthusiastic supporters. For example on the website *Goodreads*⁶⁴ in a discussion activated by the reissue of *Dragonflight* in 2005 Karen Kerr (2016, n.p.) notes that she first read the novel over twenty years ago and still is inspired by McCaffrey's portrayal of Lessa:

And Lessa! How can anyone not see how fully developed a character Lessa is? For the year it came out, she was a milestone in the strength of women. She inspired, and continues to inspire.

Even later as the *Pern* novels are transposed into new technological platforms, many readers are still attracted to them because they remember them from earlier days. For example in 2014 when Amazon published an ebook version of *Dragonflight* one reader, Booklover130 remarked that he/she first read the story 'quite a few years ago' and 'I found I still enjoyed the book immensely today'. They continued, explaining that one of the reasons that

⁶⁴ On *Goodreads*, the large reader review/discussion for popular fiction, *Dragonflight* has 2169 reviews with new reviews still being added.

Dragonflight is so enjoyable is that 'the heroine Lessa is a strong and determined woman who overcomes some very challenging experiences, and very much stands on her own two feet' (Booklover130 2014, n.p.).

As discussed in the textual analysis section, McCaffrey used her strong female characters like Lessa and Menolly to explore themes such as individual courage. Courage is a popular theme in the forums of the reading communities. An example of the readers' response is shown in a discussion of Lessa in *Dragonflight* on the discussion site *stainless steel droppings*, a reading community formed between 2012 and 2013 with ninety-five participants. However, rather than discussing courage as an abstract quality, readers discuss how Lessa exemplifies this. For example Lynn not only admires Lessa's courage in surviving the years at Ruatha Hold but also the way she challenges many of the social expectations of her role as Weyr woman:

Lessa, I liked from the start and yet she has a bit of snide to her. Like talking down to people and being a bit showy. Again, I sort of don't mind this because she's in a very male dominated world and she's not going to get anywhere by acting like a shrinking violet - except trodden underfoot. (Lynn 2013, n.p.)

Carl. V in the same discussion Thread also admired Lessa for her courage and perseverance to do what she believes to be right:

She's willing to go the extra mile to get what she wants, fights back for what she believes should be done, digs until she finds the answers to her questions, and is not afraid to use her powers to achieve all of the above. Lessa is no doormat. (Carl V. Anderson 2013, n.p.)

In identifying Lessa's assertive behaviour, readers' show that they understand it springs from her determination and courage not to be intimidated by social pressure, male authority or outmoded tradition, rather than any flaw in her character.

In readers' discussions about Lessa they note how in the beginning she struggles to remain independent as her belief in herself and her willingness to act on her own judgment constantly comes under threat:

Lessa is one of my fictional heroes. She stands on her own two feet, and pushes forward while the others try to either leave her out or push her aside/make her into a pet weyrleader, and there she goes, charging off with a screw you to everyone. (Marisol 2015, n.p.)

Readers also appreciate how McCaffrey uses the abrasive side of Lessa's character to offer an alternative view of science fiction heroines, creating complex characters and females who

do not follow the expected romance genre ending of accepting a traditional role of wife and mother:

Lessa is a very complex character and I do like how throughout the books she remains pretty bitchy and I don't think her mothering skills were much either. (DarthPahl 2011, n.p.)

In spite of her lack of mothering skills DarthPahl remains an admirer of *Dragonflight* and Lessa in particular.

The character of Lessa also illustrates another of McCaffrey's themes: the role of the outsider. As Roberts (2013, n.p.) notes, readers understand that changing from being an outsider has both social and personal consequences:

Readers identify with Lessa's outsider plight and follow with intensity her growing assimilation into the world of dragons and dragonmen. Lessa learning to love and be loved proves a compelling narrative.

This theme underlies a number of discussions in the reading communities. For example on *A Meeting of Minds* website in a discussion about the importance of an outsider, reader Edith's perception of outsiders is the same as McCaffrey's: that they can bring change and growth. She speculates that it is because of their position as 'other' that Lessa and F'lar were able to save Pern:

F'lar and Lessa are both outsiders to mainstream Pern society; would they have been able to save Pern from the return of Thread if this hadn't been the case? (Edith 2005, n.p.)

Readers in the many of the reading communities often exhibit a sense of involvement in the novels in as much as they like to speculate about alternative outcomes in various situations. An example of this can be seen in relation to the theme of the outsider. In a discussion thread, 'A New Discussion' on *A Meeting of Minds* readers speculate how events might have been different if Fax had not invaded Ruatha Hold. At the beginning a reader P'ter asks if Lessa had not been made an outsider (that is had a 'normal' upbringing), would she have been able to save Pern?

So: if Fax had not given Lessa and her family such a terrible awakening, would she have been able to do what she did (travel to bring forward the old timers) if her upbringing had been 'normal'? (P'ter 2011, n.p.)

D.M. Domini's reply to this post reflects most readers' contention that Lessa was able to accomplish all she did because she was forced to be an outsider which removed her from the traditional life of a daughter of a Holder: 'I think she would be intelligent and capable, but not

fully given all the resources she needed to fully develop herself, because she had older brothers' (D.M. Domini 2011, n.p.).

Returning to the theme of the outsider, McCaffrey not only demonstrated her belief in the positive effect an outsider might bring to society through the characters of Lessa and F'lar, but also in the Harper Hall books, particularly in reference to the character of the Harper Menolly. While not shown to be as assertive or abrasive as Lessa, Menolly nevertheless is another strong, independent female character. Menolly exhibits a quiet courage and a determination not to be bound by the empty conventions followed by her family and her peers. She, like Lessa, becomes an outsider, as they try and force her to renounce her musical gifts by socially excluding her from their society. Readers in the reading communities demonstrate that they understand Menolly's sense of being an outsider as she struggles to find a place where she is valued for her music and herself. This is raised in a discussion about Menolly's struggle to find somewhere she could belong on website *Library Thing* about *Dragonsong* (1976). One reader recognises the difficulty Menolly has as an outsider and a talented musician who has been denied a chance to learn and perform:

I loved reading about Menolly's efforts to try to make a life for herself and her fire lizards outside the Sea Hold, but it was her reentry into civilization that really brought a smile to my face. It was lovely to see her finally get to be around people who didn't constantly dismiss her and tell her that her dreams were both worthless and actively harmful to the people around her. (Jean Sexton 2016, n.p.)

In the reading communities many female readers are attracted to the character of Harper Menolly, preferring her to that of the more forceful character of Weyrwoman Lessa. In the forums many readers reveal an emotional connection with Menolly's story for, like Lessa, she is introduced as a young person and an outsider. Also like Lessa she must fight against an empty tradition that denies her, her true vocation as a harper. In a long discussion between two readers, Tehani and Marisol, on the *Fablecroft* website Tehani (2015, n.p.) describes her emotional response to Menolly's character:

McCaffrey is so damn good at characters. then[sic]oh my gosh, when the Masterharper and Oharan trick her [Menolly] into singing at Benden when she's found, it's just brought on floods of tears – it's so lovely!

Readers react empathetically to the character of Menolly, finding her easy to identify with, especially as she challenges unfair social conventions which are reinforced by her mother who takes the extreme action of damaging Menolly's hand in order to force her to conform.

For example on the *Goodreads* page dedicated to *Dragonson* reader Vivian describes how as a young person she identified with Menolly's story:

For a preteen growing up on a small island Menolly's fate was so easy to identify with and I wished for my own dragonets. The story is magical And [sic] I love it still. (Vivian 2016, n.p.)

Readers often engage in discussions that include situations and relationships based around the themes of cooperation and respect. These are two of the most easily recognisable themes that traverse the whole series. These concepts apply to various individuals and their relationships, such as Lessa and F'lar, but also they are a source of energy that drives social cohesion. For example in the beginning of *Dragonflight*, Pern was shown to be a society in chaos, the essential cooperation and respect between the Holds, Craft Halls and Weyr had been subsumed by individual greed for land and power by Holders such as Fax. F'lar not only has to prepare his Weyr for the coming Threadfall he has to reinstate cooperation and respect across all sections of Pern society. The situation gives readers a clear example of the social importance of the themes of cooperation and respect, for unless all groups change their interactions and perceptions of each other they will all perish.

One of the characteristics that readers admire in F'lar is his ability able to bring all three groups (Holds, Crafts and Weyrs) together around the council table and for the first time in many years the leaders of each group listens and acknowledges the worth and contribution of the others. In an emotionally charged council meeting at the Weyr, F'lar re-establishes not only cooperation between the various social groups but begins to reinstate their respect each for the other and their cooperation to fight the coming Threadfall. Thread has begun to fall again and it is obvious that neither the Craft Halls nor the Holders are going to be able to deal with it individually. After an involved and heated discussion of how each group can contribute to both fighting Thread and helping each other ready what defences they have, F'lar is able to send them back to their groups with a new spirit of cooperation and respect. Demonstrating the spirit of cooperation he offers the Weyr's assistance to the three Holds next to be affected by Thread:

My Lords, there is much to be done. Now that you understand what we all face, I leave it in your hands as leaders in your separate Holds and crafts how best to organize your own people ...Nerat, Keroon, and Igen, I am at your disposal to help destroy any burrow on your lands. While we have the Masterminer here, tell him of your needs. (*Dragonflight*, p.230)

When *A Meeting of Minds* asked readers to nominate their favourite scenes of F'lar a number of the forty readers who replied referred to this as their favourite scene. Reader 'Lady Maelin' (2009, n.p.) picked this scene, describing it in some detail culminating in F'lar:

[S]tanding at the head of Weyr's council table, surrounded by all the Craft leaders and Lords of Pern...while he proposes his innovative ideas to help saved the planet Pern.

In discussions, readers often focus on the social process of cooperation. For example in a discussion thread on *The New Kitchen Table*, Aurelia (2014, n.p.) posted a question asking why weyrwomen are transferred. It received 33 replies and 279 views. Most replies showed that this is a form of social cooperation between weyrs in order to provide not only genetic diversity for the dragons, but a way of spreading good leaders throughout society. For example, Brenda's (2014, n.p.) answer to Aurelia noted, '[i]t's definitely the most effective way to improve genetic diversity' but went on to explain that this also ensures that all people had the best leadership especially in times of danger. Kath (2014) agreed with this, noting that for example in times of plague 'they lost a lot of good people, and would have wanted to consolidate, making sure the best people still alive took on the leadership'.

The theme of respect also underlies many discussion threads on both the official reading communities' web sites and the many single issue web sites. For example Laurana (n.d.), on Pern dedicated website *Laurana's Weyr*, notes that there are no wars on Pern due to each social group within society respecting the contributions of the other groups, and so '[r]arely, people will be involved in one-on-one combat, but for the most part everyone respects each other, and life is good'. The social benefits of mutual respect amongst members of Pern's society are also shown in a discussion on the thread, 'Pernese Life,' posted by Larra Dragonrider on *A Meeting of Minds*. The discussion covered twenty-nine posts with 2,213 views. One reader, Orangerider (2005, n.p.), claimed that on Pern people are free to find their own place in society and, if they attempt to find a better life, their search will be respected:

And they're so happy because everyone has his or her place in Pernese society. If you don't fit in where you were born, you can always try and make your life better and people will respect you for it.

Except for a few aberrant periods like at the beginning of *Dragonflight*, readers are shown a cooperative and civil society with all groups contained within it working together in general accord. Concepts such as cooperation, cohesion and respect abound amongst the citizens making it a place that appeals to many readers.

While mutual respect between the rider and the dragon is evident in their partnership, it is the deep psychological and emotional bond only broken by the death of either the rider or the dragon that captures the readers' imagination. Todd McCaffrey (2015, n.p.) in his tribute to mother, Anne McCaffrey, after her death described the strength of the bond as being almost unobtainable by people:

Because of their telepathic bond, dragons and their riders can share complete openness and intimacy and provide a model for the kind of ideal, mutually supportive relationship that humans have difficulty achieving.

Libby, a reader on the *Goodreads*⁶⁵ site for *Dragonflight*, like many readers involved in this discussion, is drawn to the unique sense of completeness this relationship offers riders and dragons. She notes admiringly that 'Once a dragon Impresses a rider they are forever two parts of one whole. The relationship is unique and moving' (Libby 2009, n.p.).

Readers are given an example of the strength of the bond between the riders and their dragons as they form an earth-like air force to vanquish Thread.

The dragons became the biologically renewable air force, and their riders 'the few' who, like the RAF pilots in World War Two, fought against incredible odds day in, day out - and won. (Liptak 2014, n.p.)

In the fight against Thread the dragons are partners with their human riders. As one reader notes the dragons are treated with respect as individual characters not subservient creatures ruled by their riders but as intelligent equals to their riders:

Treating dragons as serious characters complete with dimension, background and motivation is no small feat and McCaffrey's ability to explore mythical creatures in complex and intelligent ways is impressive. It is here where McCaffrey accomplishes the merging of both solid science fiction and epic fantasy at once. (anonymous2015, n.p.)

Other readers, captivated by the symbiotic relationship between the riders and the dragons, wish to experience it for themselves. For example Ann Norland (2014, n.p.), while commenting about the possibility of a film version of the Pern story, adds that she wants to share in the whole experience of flying dragons and searing Thread:

I so wanted to find a way to Pern and We want to live on Pern and fly on a dragon, telepathically sharing with it our deepest longings and desires. And we want to see those dragons heroically "searing Thread" in the skies of Pern in partnership with the brave men and women who ride them.

McCaffrey's dragons capture the imagination of readers. This is shown in the frequency with which discussions in the reading communities include the reader's desire to share in the life

⁶⁵ The *Goodreads* discussion of *Dragonflight* has a total of 2,234 reviews of the book and 96,544 star ratings without text. Libby's comment attracted 26 likes.

of the dragons on Pern. In a short tribute by John Scalzi (2011, n.p.) to McCaffrey on popular fiction discussion site *Whatever*, the 256 replies included not just praise for her work, but many readers reflected on how on reading *Dragonflight* they wanted to find their way to Pern to ‘be chosen to ride a dragon’ (Bailey, 2011, n.p.). Readers also frequently express a wish that they could visit Pern. One reader, Christy, also noted that McCaffrey had developed Pern with such a sense of reality that in spite of filling it with dragons, fire lizards and deadly Thread it was still a place she wanted to visit.

This book, it was a revelation. I had no idea that authors could build actual worlds that were so complete that you could feel like you could actually go there – or actually want to. (Christy 2011, n.p.)

Another aspect of readers’ fascination with the dragons of Pern can be seen on the large, official websites where there are many topics relating to dragons. Every possible aspect of dragon lore intrigues the readers on these large websites. Readers on the single issue sites, as well as the official sites, reveal not only respect for these creatures and their riders but a sense of emotional involvement with them as well. The following are examples of topics that generate discussion and debate: ‘What is the clutch sizes of dragon eggs?’ (46 posts with 4,900 views); ‘Feeding your dragon’ (only generated six posts but elicited 2,184 views); ‘How much do dragons weigh?’ (20 posts but 4,265 views); and an even smaller discussion, ‘The effect of aging on dragons’ (26 posts but generated 366 views). This indicates that while there might only be a small number of readers who feel confident to post on these topics, there is a reader appetite for learning more about Pern dragons, as indicated by the high number of views.

There is also evidence in the reading communities that readers engage with these novels within a broad ‘science and technology’ framework. For example, the discussion of dragon egg clutch sizes demonstrates the depths of many readers’ fascination with the dragons as fully formed bio-engineered creatures that exist alongside the human characters. On one thread, readers discussed the average size of a dragon clutch. Once again there is a social aspect to this discussion seen in how the readers feel connected to the world of Pern, as the discussion ranges beyond the written narrative. It begins with ‘semantre’ posing a question:

What is the ‘average’ size of a dragon clutch, during a Pass, during the 10-or-so Turns pre-Pass, and mid-Interval? And how often should the golds be rising in each of these periods? (semantre 2010, n.p.)

This sparked detailed discussion involving how often the Queens should rise, which led the readers to consider the problem of overpopulation between Passes. Throughout this discussion although readers have a range of different opinions, they all refer to Pern as a place in which they feel a sense of involvement and even control. For example Kath questions McCaffrey's original decision to have all the queen dragons rise every six months and have large batches of eggs. Kath (2010, n.p.) is concerned it will lead to overpopulation:

Queens shouldn't rise any more frequently than every six months (the 'twice a turn' comment in Dragonflight), but I personally think that's a little excessive. Rising every 9 months to a year at the top end is more bearable if you want to avoid excessive overpopulation.

Anarath (2010, n.p.) then suggests that the dragon population is linked to the mortality rate during Passes and the accidents during training. However, this does not satisfy Kath (2010, n.p.) who is still worried about overpopulation:

But yeah, unless you want a population explosion, you need to make sure the clutches aren't excessively often or excessively large. Regular 35+ clutches require some serious losses either in Weyrlinghood or in Threadfall.

At this point 'Hans Master Archivist' enters the discussion and offers to share his personal spreadsheets of dragon population development, showing not only that other reading groups are interested in this question but how much effort readers will expend on developing a sense of participation in the world of Pern:

I have a spreadsheet with all known clutches 'through the ages', with for the Ninth Pass also the extrapolated ones. If anybody is interested in that I could put it up on [The Pern Museum & Archives](#). (Hans Master Archivist 2010, n.p.)

'Hans Master Archivist' is encouraged to post his information and 'semantre' explains how it will be a great help as she/he is trying to find out how many riders die from old age in each Turn:

That would be very helpful, Hans. I'm trying to estimate how many riders would logically be dying from old age each Turn, based on what the clutch sizes would have been during the Interval, with an average lifespan of 60 Turns, just to give myself a baseline to calculate the ages of a group of riders headed into a Pass. (semantre 2010, n.p.)

The seriousness with which the readers engage in these types of detailed discussions about the unusual natural features on Pern is consistent with McCaffrey's own approach to science fiction; that is, that all the unexplained phenomena are not elements of fantasy but observable components of the physical world and as such merit study. These detailed discussions and the topics on which they are based demonstrate the readers' involvement in the fictional world. Readers also show by their systematic approach to the topics, such as speculating about the

size of populations and creating charts or calculating average life spans, that they acknowledge that the scientific method and law can be applied to the world of Pern.

Alongside their admiration of the dragonmen, readers also relate supportively to the harpers. Harpers as they move about Pern bring a sense of social inclusion interacting with Weyr, Craft Hall and Hold. They are shown as serving the community by bringing information, education and a sense of social cohesion to an often broken society. As discussed previously for some readers this is affirmative, comfort reading as they particularly relate to features such as the positive elements in the character of Menolly: 'I love Menolly's stories! Whenever I'm sick or down, I read all three and instantly feel better.' (XidTrebor 2011, n.p.).

Rereading is a feature of most of the reading communities. Readers often discuss their favourite books within the Pern saga, commenting on how they have returned to the books often over long periods of time. For example on the *Goodreads* page dedicated to *The Harper Hall of Pern Omnibus*⁶⁶ which has 89 posts and 5,393 views, Jenny (2011, n.p.) writes, 'This is my all time favorite fantasy book! I read it as a youth and I've probably read it 100 times...my book has fallen apart'. A more recent comment from Teresa Okesonprater (2015, n.p.) shows the same enthusiasm 'Oh my I have read and re-read these books so many times over the years. Old friends'.

'Comfort reading' is one of the distinctive features of most novels of popular fiction. For example Stacie (2009, n.p.) identifies this as motivation for her re-reading of the Pern series:

This is one of my 'comfort reads'; I come back to it and it's[sic] sequel "Dragonsinger" every couple of years. There's something wonderful about Pern and it's[sic] society; it's very inviting and well thought out.

The world of Pern offers readers the same sense of welcome and familiarity as Georgette Heyer's Regency world offers the reading communities dedicated to her novels and J.K. Rowling's readers find in the *Harry Potter* series. The concept of comfort reading is described on website *Dear Author* as offering readers new and enriching experiences through both the action of rereading and their sense of familiarity of the world of the text:

⁶⁶ *The Harper Hall of Pern Omnibus* (1984) includes all three Harper Hall novels and has been reprinted in twelve editions since the original publication including an audio version. The Harper Hall novels also continue to be reprinted separately.

However, comfort reading doest [sic] [doesn't] have to be about the easy. A story with which a reader has formed a strong emotional, intellectual and/or psychological bond can allow for different experiences, and a deepening of experience, upon multiple rereads. Further, as the reader changes, so may her experience of and with the same text. Even if the desire in rereading is to return to something (a 'simpler time,' a familiar feeling, a previous moment), that does not mean that the experience of rereading is not progressively enriching in other ways. (Janet 2014, n.p.)

It is through 'rereading' and 'comfort reading' that many readers have furthered their interest in the social application of music on Pern. On Pern, music is shown to be the most prominent of the arts because it is a teaching tool as well a means of bringing pleasure to a Gather [a community festival]. McCaffrey encouraged involvement in the music of Pern beyond the narrative as she requested musicians Tania Opland and Mike Freeman to compose a songbook that added music to many of the song lyrics found in the stories. This project was extremely popular with readers and the first songbook, *The Masterharper of Pern Songbook*, was released in 1996. Since then the music has featured on a CD and on *YouTube*. One of the most important songs that features through the first book is 'The Question Song'. This song should have been sung in all Holds and Craft Halls during the long 'Interval' to remind the Pernese of the return of Thread and their reliance on the Weyrs to save them. To demonstrate readers' continuing interest in the music, since being uploaded to *You Tube* 'The Question Song' and the other songs from the songbook to date have had 24,802 views, as well as fifty-one comments from listeners/readers. As 'The Question Song' is the one of the most important songs in the first novels it also features prominently in the fifty-one comments. In the narrative, Masterharper Robinton is described as introducing the song with a dissonant chord so it will remain in the hearers' memories:

He [Robinton] plucked a chord, a dissonance, F'lar wondered if the instrument was out of tune ... But Robinton repeated the odd discord, then modulating to a weird minor that was somehow more disturbing than the first notes.
'I told you it was an uneasy song'. (*Dragonflight*, p. 233)

The 'uneasy song' has been realised by the composers as a dirge-like minor key composition; a choice which has ensured it a mixed reception by listeners/readers on youtube. One reader enthusiastically commented 'excellent video. These books are so real to me. Thanks for the awesome youtube contribution!' (jeserah 2009, n.p.), while another appreciated the difficulty in matching the music to McCaffrey's concept, 'This is done wonderfully with all the respect it requires. I admire all the effort that went into this, it sure shows in such a wonderful rendition' (kalepherion 2014, n.p.). However, other readers are

not as convinced, ‘This is not how the song should be. It’s too slow, too much a dirge. It doesn’t at all work with the lyrics’ (Meg M. 2014, n.p.). The music, like the narrative, evokes some strong reactions in the readers/listeners and as always their reactions often stem from their sense of participation in the world of Pern. For example both Jeserah and Meg M. have approached the music from the same position, that ‘these books are so real to me’. The only difference is one reader has a positive reaction and one a negative reaction, which demonstrates the extent to which readers ‘co-create’ the world of Pern through their readings and interpretations of the novels.

As often noted in this chapter, many readers form an emotional connection to the world of Pern. For example, younger readers, or those who remember being young, identify emotionally with Menolly’s journey as it resonates in their lives beyond the narrative. Henry Jenkins (1992, p.107) makes a similar point in relation to how fans of television soap operas use an emotional connection to the characters and situations to make sense of their lives:

What counts as ‘plausible’ in such a story is a general conformity to the ideological norms by which the viewer makes sense of everyday life. Such a conception of the series allows fans to draw upon their own personal backgrounds as one means of extrapolating beyond the information explicitly found within the aired episodes.

An example of this is seen in the following message posted on Todd McCaffrey’s website *Pernhome*:

I wanted to share with you that on October 7th, my husband and I welcomed our second child into the world. A little girl that we named Menolly. That is the true impact the Pern Universe has had on me, and I can only hope she grows up to be as great a person as her namesake. (Kirsty 2015, n.p.)

Not only is the readers’ decision to name her child Menolly an example of the bond readers can form with the world of Pern, but Todd McCaffrey’s (2015) reply is also an example of how both Anne and Todd understand and respect that bond:

Dear Kristy,
Wow, that’s awesome!
I hope that Menolly is healthy and sleeps through the night. (I wonder if humming to her will make her sleep better, given her name!)
Again, wow! Mum would be thrilled.
Cheers,
Todd
P.S.: I’ll drop you an email so you can send pictures!

His response exhibits genuine pleasure that the reader has decided to name her daughter after Menolly and also notes how Anne McCaffrey would have been ‘thrilled’. His emotional response and his delight is obvious as he asks for photos of the new ‘Menolly’,

which Kristy sent and Todd then posted on *Pernhome*. This web-based exchange is a good example of the feeling of community and inclusion that the worlds of popular fiction can engender in readers. It also demonstrates the willingness of many authors of popular fiction not only to connect with their readers but to do so in a manner that reinforces a sense of empathy. Jenkins (1992, p. 18) notes that fans of popular media often blur the boundaries between fact and fiction. Kirsty as a reader, while perhaps not as immersed in the world of Pern to blur the boundaries as Jenkins describes, still shows a deep sense of affection and attachment to the fictional world particularly in the way she writes of the character Menolly.

Notwithstanding their individual interests, anything from music to dragons, what draws all readers together is McCaffrey's ability to create a believable, inviting world that many readers feel relates to them personally. Through the various reading communities readers demonstrate a wide range of interests in the Pern series. Whether on the official web sites or the individual issue discussions, blogs or reviews it seems that the world of Pern has continued to intrigue readers over the years. It does not matter if readers are interested in F'lar and Lessa's fight with Thread in the ninth Pass or if they prefer to become engaged in the developing history of the planet from the initial Landing or even take up the story with Todd McCaffrey after the discovery of the original spaceships and computer, Aivas – the one element that binds all the readers together is the world of Pern itself.

McCaffrey creates a world that offers readers a complex society where they feel they are witnessing a living community where not only does people's status, occupation and involvement change over the years, but also they are perceived differently by the various groups with whom they come in contact. The reader is not only able to visit the community at various times in its history but, by discovering the nature and motives of the characters in different historical contexts, they can see how the continuing development of Pern society has been affected. There is also a sense of continuity as each novel adds more information about the way in which the society is developing and readers are able to witness characters evolving and meeting new challenges along their journey. One young reader summed up the sense of continuity that this offers saying that she 'liked how you meet a character from one book in another one' (Vandergrift 1990, p.3).

For a number of readers, their sense of involvement in the world of Pern extends beyond discussing topics in the online reading communities. In online reading communities, on

blogs, in articles and interviews readers discuss the influence Pern has had on their own development as writers and creators. An example of how the world of Pern has influenced a reader in this way can be seen in a discussion of Anne McCaffrey in 'In the Realm of Fantasy' by Connie J. Jaspersen, (2015, n.p.) who began by claiming:

Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonriders of Pern* series directly motivated me to become a writer. No other series of books has had a more profound effect on me as both a reader, and as an author.

This one reader in one discussion group is by no means a lone voice, rather it is an example of the way the novels stimulate readers to become creators themselves. Another author who was influenced by McCaffrey describes how McCaffrey's creation of the world of Pern as a place which intrigued readers so they wanted to continually return, inspired her to become a writer:

The other thing that I really loved about her writing is how she continually built on the world/universe the stories were taking place in. She would mention other places in passing and eventually visit them, tying everything in the world together. She also constantly would talk about people and we would meet them later or in other stories, making everything that much more real. Anne McCaffrey is the reason I am a writer today. (Plested 2015, n.p.)

Conclusion

McCaffrey's novels continue to delight readers, inspire new authors and motivate artists, crafters and musicians as they participate in every aspect of the world of Pern. In particular, this complex world with its own culture and history and its unique dragons encourages readers to discuss their particular interests in the online reading communities that range from small single issue pages to large, long-standing, official fan websites. The voices of the readers in this section have shown how they have responded, in the online reading communities, to major themes presented in the novels. Some of the themes, identified in the textual analysis section, that have informed readers' responses are the portrayal of women, the need for change, innovation, and flexibility in a healthy society, the perception of science and technology as social practices, respect for the environment and the social importance of the arts.

However, McCaffrey's readers' interests stretch far beyond the confines of the plot and characters to include every possible aspect of the world and its inhabitants, particularly in relation to the dragons. For example they discuss every possible facet of the physical

characteristics of dragons such as from their eye colours, to their dung, to a dragon's size relative to the size of their weyr, and how much and how often dragons feed. Other readers try and define the concept of 'between'⁶⁷ more substantively or speculate on the possible lives of characters outside the confines of the plot. This eclectic range of topics and the large number of replies or views to these topic discussions suggest that diverse and often obscure knowledge about Pern heightens the readers' sense of participation and involvement in the world. One theory, offered by Maertens (1998, p.183), suggests that readers' fascination with everything that is Pern occurs because popular fiction has a mythic quality which makes the worlds of these narratives so emotionally compelling:

Modern Western minds have woven an imaginative space, a 'mythic field' from scientific factuality and reason. This field of imagination goes beyond mere facts to fulfill the deep desires of human imagining. Popular fiction now occupies the zone of myth, expressing all our hopes and fears. Genres such as science fiction, fantasy, detective fiction, and techno thrillers are our modern myths.

This perception of popular fiction as modern day myth may appeal to academics but it is not where the reading communities focus their attention. What is obvious in the reading communities is that their comprehensive discussions create a sense of community through the dialogues between readers on forums. These relationships can continue sometimes for months or years with participants forming friendships as they continue to share topics. On all the web sites there is one feature that is continually discussed by readers. This is the way in which they return many times to their favourite text as well as the complete Pern saga. Like many novels of popular fiction these novels are positive 'comfort' reading, as they provide readers with a familiar place of welcome that encourages their engagement in the world of the text while at the same time providing new and enriching experiences in a complex and interesting environment.

Readers' enthusiasm for everything about Pern has not waned in spite of Anne McCaffrey's death. Her readers continue to offer new topics for discussion in the reading communities and their interest and passion plays an important part in the novels being reprinted which, of course, draws even more readers into the ever-increasing world of Pern.

⁶⁷ As well as flying, 'Between' is how dragons can cross great distances. They enter a dimension of 'nothingness' for a few seconds and reappear in a desired location. However if they do not have a clear mental image of where they should appear they are lost and die. McCaffrey also described 'between' as an entrance to a place of rest. In a discussion of *Moreta Dragonlady of Pern* with Lynne Jamneck (2004, n.p.) she stated 'God is everywhere so there should be no question in any mind that he is also on Pern. Thus, there is a heaven to which worthy souls go. So, without mentioning any denomination of organized religion, I figured that both Moreta and Leri deserved respite after their trials... and that's where "Beyond Between" is.' (2004, n.p.).

Chapter 6. A Portmanteau of Genres: The Novels of J.K. Rowling

There's always room for a story that can transport people to another place.

— J.K. Rowling (n.d.)

Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?

— J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 2007.

This chapter applies the multidimensional analysis developed in this thesis to J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels, in order to demonstrate how the interplay between the genre, the world of the text, and the relation with readers accounts for the novels' continuing popularity. These novels, which have become a publishing phenomenon, are situated in one of the most popular of popular fiction genres: fantasy genre. The genre analysis section demonstrates how many of the themes that frame the actions and the interactions in the world of Harry Potter are well-established in the history of the genre and how they are now part of the readers' expectations of the text. In the textual analysis section it will show how Rowling has introduced both generically expected and unexpected themes which add to these novels' unique character. Finally, the reception analysis focuses on the voices of the readers to demonstrate the social, participatory nature of these novels. The readers' responses to the topics in the online forums and their subsequent discussions reveals what draws them into the world of the novel so that as Jenkins notes, the readers 'cease to be simply an audience for popular texts; instead, they become active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings' (Jenkins1992, p.24). Determining the interests, motivations and opinions of the readers in the online forums reveals that they engage in personal and emotional interpretive practices which facilitates the continuing popularity of these novels.

As outlined in Chapter 2, fantasy genre, from its beginning as a reaction to eighteenth century Enlightenment, to its place in contemporary popular fiction, has drawn readers into distinctive and intriguing worlds which often incorporate other popular genres that increase the readers' sense of familiarity. The language with which the imaginary world is created plays an important part in forming a social bond or 'consensual construction' (Mendlesohn 2008, p.xiii) between the authors and the readers. Many readers feel that they share the world of the novel with the author in what Iser calls 'a cooperative, collaborative relationship' (Iser 1974, p.113). Readers are introduced to worlds which have a well-defined sense of reality so

that as Mendlesohn & James claim, ‘If you turn a corner, ... You know that there will be more world’ (Mendlesohn & James 2009, p.44). These worlds have their own histories, culture, social affiliations, religions, technologies and detailed geography. Also these textual worlds and the feeling of realism they produce not only gives a sense of authenticity to the characters, but for many readers offers them a safe place in which they might test their understanding of their own real world.

In the field of popular genre fiction, success is often equated with marketing and profit and the following publishing data would seem to validate this view. However, through a multidimensional analysis I show that while not denying the commercial success of these novels, their longevity is not their marketing but the readers’ sense of being able to, as Jenkins’ claims, be active participants in ‘the construction and circulation of textual meaning’ particularly as they engage in the online reading communities and discuss every aspect of the world of the text. The following brief summary of the novels’ marketing history demonstrates how the readers’ interests have been realized not only in the longevity of these novels but also in terms of profitability.

In 2016 *Publisher’s Weekly* listed the combined sales of all seven Harry Potter novels as 160 million copies sold in America and 450 million copies sold world-wide (Maughan, 2016, n.p.). In a June 2017 article to commemorate the forthcoming twentieth anniversary of the first publication of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, Bloomsbury Publishing Company (2017) also noted that there have been 450 million copies of the books sold world-wide and that to date they have been translated into seventy-nine languages. As well as the printed novels, each of the separate books has also been transformed into audio books, and are also available as eBooks. In addition to the number of books sold, the books have received a total of thirty-four awards including British Book Awards Children’s Book of the Year in 1997 and 1998, the Hugo Award in 2001 and the Carnegie Medal in 2008. Rowling has also been recognised as an author having been awarded over 160 awards and honours as listed on the website (*Always Rowling*, n.d.).⁶⁸

This chapter begins with a short history of the popular genre of fantasy. The genre characteristics are part of what draws readers into the world of the fantasy novel, and magic

⁶⁸ A complete description of these awards is listed on Rowling’s publisher’s website (Bloomsbury Publishing Company, 2014, n.p.). See also Appendix A of this thesis.

is a key component of fantasy. The seven novels of the Harry Potter story contains a number of features that were celebrated in J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (1954) and credited as introducing readers to what has become one of the leading sub-genres of fantasy genre, epic fantasy. Readers' recognise strong links to this popular sub-genre in the Harry Potter novels and film adaptations. In the textual analysis section some of the shared features between epic fantasy and the Harry Potter novels will be identified to demonstrate the ways in which Rowling has used these generic characterisations throughout the series. For example, giving the hero a difficult life journey is an established feature of epic fantasy, Rowling employs this with the series' hero, Harry Potter, evoking the reader's sense of empathy as well as their admiration for his resolute determination to overcome the danger that Lord Voldemort (the series' villain) represents to his society as well as himself. This leads to another generic feature, that the outcome of Harry's battle with Lord Voldemort will restore harmony and justice to the wizarding world.

Identification of the range of genres that have been incorporated into the Harry Potter narratives is a continuing source of debate among the online reading communities and critics. In the genre analysis section I argue that the manner in which these genres are accumulated throughout the narrative creates a distinctive sub-genre of Portmanteau fantasy. These varied genres woven into the magical world of the stories creates a complexity that appeals to readers as it initiates the diversity found in the multifaceted nature of everyday life. Readers, through shared social knowledge obtained from other popular fiction novels, film and television as well as lived experience, recognise the stifling middle class conformity of the town where Harry's is raised, Little Whinging, and the unusual yet recognisable British Boarding School found at Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry. As the readers reveal in their debates and discussions in the online reading communities (discussed in the reception analysis section of this chapter) it is these, and many other features, that demonstrate the affinity of the magical world in the Harry Potter stories to their own worldview and has helped capture their imagination and made them feel part of the world of the text. One of the elements that continues to draw readers into the world of *Harry Potter* is the suggestion that it is still possible for an ordinary person to not only be part of a unique, shared community but also to rise above their everyday humdrum routine and be a hero.

Genre analysis: Fantasy genre

Genre analysis is the first level in multidimensional analysis of a popular fiction narrative. A genre analysis focuses on the relationship of the individual narrative to the genre. It shows how the author has positioned the text within the expected established generic framework and what they have added to its continuing development. The choice of genre in turn sets up the possibilities for constructing the world of the text, and both these dimensions then enable reading communities to engage with the text in particular ways, to be discussed below.

The meta-genre of fantasy⁶⁹ as a modern genre of popular fiction includes a wide range of sub-genres with the origins of the original genre stretching back into antiquity. As a genre of Literature its reception has, over the ages, ranged from appreciation and praise to disapproval and censure. The following brief history of fantasy touches only lightly on its connection to Literature to establish its antecedents and focuses instead on its place as ‘the biggest genre in publishing’ (Chadbourn, 2008). Chadbourn (2008, n. p.) implies that its popularity is because it offers readers an antidote in the form of imagination to the cold reality of ‘super science’:

Today we’re in the middle of an unprecedented fantasy boom. Sales continue to rise year on year and it is now the biggest genre in publishing, dwarfing its former powerhouse cousin, science fiction, and the once-ubiquitous romance. The more rational the world gets, with super-science all around us, the more we demand the irrational in our fiction.

Chadbourn goes on to emphasise the sense of vulnerability and loss of control that some people feel as science and technology seem to isolate them from their communities. Colin N. Manlove (1992) although not attributing the reason for fantasy’s popularity as directly as Chadbourn, also notes how modern fantasies return power and control to individuals. In describing modern fantasy he notes ‘modern fantasy depicts situations in which acts of individual characters determine the safety or otherwise of whole worlds’ (Manlove 1992, p.18). As an extension of this in the worlds of fantasy novels, ordinary people often bring communities together as they fulfil quests or save the world. These are the everyday heroes who find both courage and purpose when it is needed. Mary Pharr (2002, p.54) identifies these characteristics in Harry Potter, that an ordinary, orphan boy was able to bring the magical community together and save the world:

⁶⁹ In modern popular fiction Fantasy genre narratives are usually situated on an imaginary world that contains any number of magical or mythical characters and creatures. Some fantasies also include characters, events or places from the real world. While there are many different expressions of Fantasy, they all involve magic or supernatural elements within the plot, the themes or the settings.

He [Harry Potter] is as well a magical figure growing up within the perimeters of a specific fictional universe that clearly needs new heroes – a need that also speaks to the fears and longings of his millennial-era readers.

One of the features of the fantasy genre is the world created by the author, which draws the readers into the narrative giving them the sense of being participants in the unfolding plot. This is one of the features present in fantasy since its beginnings. Also it is not by accident that these fantasy worlds are often vividly drawn so that they acquire a sense of reality in spite of their obvious unreality. The original meaning of the word *fantasy* can be traced back to the Greek word *phantasia*, which ‘literally meant making visible’ (Sandner 2004, p.172). The challenge for the fantasy author is to create a world that no matter how illusory it might be it still has a sense of authenticity for the reader:

If a fantasy is powerfully presented or realized it can produce an imprint on our imaginations deep enough to give it a measure of truth or reality, however, much of that truth is unverifiable. (Sandner 2004, p.158)

Over the years many authors and critics have produced a variety of definitions of fantasy but in spite of most including reference to magic there is no consensus of opinion from authors, critics or readers as to which features should be included in the generic definition, which indicates just how broad a category it has become.⁷⁰ What links most definitions is the inclusion of magic, and visionary and other worldly features whether these are exciting, frightening or just strange. Ruth Nadelman Lynn, writing on the current expansion of fantasy literature into the children and young adult market, demonstrates the wide and often diverse range of features associated with this genre:

Fantasy has been variously described as imaginative, fanciful, visionary, strange, otherworldly, supernatural, mysterious, frightening, magical, inexplicable, wondrous, dreamlike, and paradoxically, realistic. It has been termed an awareness of the inexplicable existence of ‘magic’ in the everyday world, a yearning for a sudden glimpse of something strange and wonderful, and a different and perhaps truer version of reality. (Nadelman Lynn 1995, p.xxv)

Like the romance and science fiction genres, the range of features attributed to fantasy genre means that it is a meta-genre that includes a large range of sub-genres under its general umbrella. However, whether reading an epic fantasy such as J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* (1954) that deals with the fate of a whole world, or solving the everyday problems for one family in Edwardian England in P.L. Travers’ urban fantasy *Mary Poppins* (1934),

⁷⁰ For an example of the numerous Fantasy definitions by a range of prominent names in Fantasy see Nadelman Lynn, R 1995, *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults: An Annotated Bibliography* R.R. Bowker, New Providence NJ.

fantasy offers the reader access to new adventures in a cohesively structured world that is colourful, compelling and offers new ways of seeing. As Waggoner (1978, p. 4) describes it:

Fantasy places the material in a fictional framework within which it is treated as empirical data, the common stuff of ordinary reality. A fantasy world is a secondary reality whose metaphysical premises are different from those of the real world, but whose inhabitants are men and women like ourselves, who live their reality just as we do in ours.

In spite of offering readers access to exciting ‘strange and mysterious’ worlds that will provide a contrast to their predictable, known world, the critical reception of fantasy as a genre has not always been as positive as it is at the present time. It predates the concept of ‘Literature’ and over the years has endured both fear and favour in how it has been perceived. Perhaps more than any other genre the concept of fantasy reflects the cultural and social attitudes of the different periods in which it was created. The earliest fantasies relate back to the myths and legends that introduced many of the characters that still find their way into the fantasy novels of today. The concept of an epic hero has a long literary history that stretches back to ancient Greece. While some features have changed since the original (for example their exploits are now usually found in prose rather than poetry), many of the elements have remained intact while other parts have been extended or added to reflect current social perceptions. Early epics such as *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey* and the epic poem *Beowulf* celebrated the lives of heroes and gods teaching people how to live and providing explanations for difficult social concepts such as why humans die and why wars must be fought:

The earliest forms of written fiction that we have from the ancient world are works that we might understand as fantasy and which have influenced many modern fantasy writers: stories about gods and heroes. (Mendlesohn & James 2009, p.8)

By the end of the Middle Ages there was a new dimension to the fantasy stories of monsters and battles as stories began to include the realm of Faerie. In the early tales monsters, such as dragons, were introduced into the various myths as if they existed within the known world; creatures that existed on uncharted islands or lived in deep caves in impenetrable mountains. The world was filled with impossible wonders that might be discovered by intrepid travellers. These fantasies underwent a change as they found their way into the early forms of the romance genre, particularly the collection of tales relating to King Arthur and his knights. Early Arthurian myths focused on more social and moral tales:

The earlier Arthurian stories can be seen as part of the wider tradition of chivalric literature and revolve around love and adultery: later, under the influence of the Church,

the stories bring in more Christian themes, codified as the quest for the Holy Grail.
(Mendlesohn & James 2009, p.10)

However, as these romances developed they drew together such disparate sources as Celtic folk tales with Norman French and English chivalric literature. From these sources, fantasy evolved a new assembly of characters; beings from an alternate reality, the land of Faerie. These supernatural beings had powers that could influence the course of events within the known world. The shadowy figure of the wizard Merlin and the mysterious Lady of the Lake who gave Arthur his enchanted sword, Excalibur, are examples of the advent of Faerie into myth. Fantasy easily absorbed this new element and by the late sixteenth century Faerie was well established, for example in Edmund Spenser's epic poem *The Faerie Queen* (c.1590–96). In the poem *Red Crosse Knight*, a young inexperienced knight is taught heroic virtues in Faerieland enabling him to fulfil his quest by defeating the dragon and restoring Una's⁷¹ parents to their rightful kingdom. As Janice Prewitt (2006, p. 26) explains, 'Red Crosse's victory demonstrates the completeness and successfulness of his heroic education in Faerieland'. The new element of Faerieland as place of aid and assistance in Epic Fantasies was a positive addition to the social perception of fantasy as a concept.

However, by the Victorian era, Fantasies went beyond offering the reader strange and enchanting 'other' worlds; the world they offered usually had a distinctive didactic focus. Popular themes of these Fantasies included both Christian-inspired morality tales and reflections of Arthurian romance, examples that can be seen in the authors George MacDonald (1824-1905) and Charles Kingsley (1819-1875).⁷² These worlds also introduced readers to a new feature in the sub-genre, the portal fantasy. Portal fantasies provided a means by which characters can be separated from the natural world, the world of reality, and enter into the world of Faerie. The protagonist is drawn into the Faerie world through a magical portal that connects the 'real' world to the fantasy world. For example in an early George MacDonald fantasy, *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women* (1858), the main character, Anodos, is drawn through a doorway into fairyland. There he has many

⁷¹ Book 1 of Edmund Spenser's epic poem *The Faerie Queen* is an allegory to the virtue of holiness. Una is the daughter of the King and Queen of the West, representing Adam and Eve. She personifies both Truth and the Church. Her companion, the Red Crosse Knight, representing everyman, does not always heed her good advice and almost loses her by being bewitched by Duessa who represents Falsehood. However, after overcoming a dragon (Error) he restores Una's parents to their kingdom and is betrothed to her.

⁷² An example of the morality tale and Arthurian romance is Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby* (1863). It has a Christian moral base and uses three fairies whose names underline the story's moral message, for example, Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby.

adventures before dying in a noble and heroic action, which returns him to the real world. J.K. Rowling uses the same stylistic feature in the first Harry Potter story, *The Philosopher's Stone* (1997). Hagrid takes Harry to buy his books and school equipment on the way to Hogwarts, accessing that world through the Leaky Caldron a 'tiny grubby-looking pub' into the courtyard:

Hagrid, meanwhile, was counting bricks in the wall above the dustbin.
 'Three up ... two across ...' he muttered. 'Right, stand back, Harry' He tapped the wall three times with the point of his umbrella. The brick he had touched quivered – it wriggled – in the middle, a small hole appeared – it grew wider and wider – a second later they were facing an archway large enough even for Hagrid, an archway onto a cobbled street which twisted and turned out of sight.
 'Welcome,' said Hagrid, 'to Diagon Alley'.
 He grinned at Harry's amazement.
 They stepped through the archway. (*The Philosopher's Stone*, p.56)

This is Harry's first experience of the magical world and the portal. The portal both connects and separates the worlds but it also highlights their closeness. An important difference between Rowling's magical world and its predecessors is that those who enter Rowling's portal do so voluntarily. 'They stepped through the archway' is quite a neutral description of Harry entering this alternate world voluntarily, beside Hagrid. Although Diagon Alley (the street on the magical side of the portal) surprises Harry, there is no suggestion that he is forced to enter it. This contrasts with other Portal Fantasies where the participant is often coerced or compelled by the faerie inhabitants. For example, in the MacDonald story the main character, Anodos, is bewitched by the faerie who comes to compel him to go to Fairy Land the next day. Once she has enthralled him, she vanishes.

Whether the Faerie world is a place of delight or darkness, or a mixture of both, it is a world that captures the imagination. Rowling's writing not only has links to the positive, earlier examples of fantasy genre, for example the inclusion of a range of fairy-folk, the use of magic and creating a sense of wonder and surprise, but it also includes some dark passages that include cruelty and suffering. However, most of all it embraces the generic character of the modern sub-genre, epic fantasy.

Epic fantasy is a sub-genre of fantasy usually associated with J.R.R. Tolkien. However, it also has cultural links to the myths and legends of the past. Epic fantasy includes features such as distinctive worlds created by the author, elements of magic, characters who must complete quests vital to the survival of the world, confrontation between good and evil and

the emergence of a hero. Finally, while all of these characteristics usually occur on a grand scale, they also must be human enough for the reader to feel empathy with the characters and their created world. However, despite these common elements, this is a large and varied sub-genre, as demonstrated by the responses of some well-known epic fantasy authors when asked by author Jeremy L.C. Jones for their perceptions of epic fantasy:

It's about a character discovering a world along with the reader. Epic Fantasy is all about the sense of wonder that comes from exploring. Epic Fantasy is a world not bound by earthly limitations, and characters trying to keep themselves and their loved ones safe within it. (Jones 2011, n.p.)

An element of magic without the story fails to work. (Terry Brooks, cited in Jones 2011, n.p.)

The ancient stories that have so enthralled people since they were first told—the Sundiata Cycle, *Gilgamesh*, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, *The Ramayana*... Every culture has these tales in some form, and the need to hear them is embedded in our species, I think. So naturally, even though we now write them down and have folded and spindled the epic forms into a new structure, we still crave the old thrill. (N.K. Jemisin, cited in Jones 2011, n.p.)

Bigness. Whether it be[the] size of the world, the length of the tale or the number of books—or combinations of these. But not ideas. A book can have big ideas, but not be 'epic' fantasy. (Trudi Canavan, cited in Jones 2011, n.p.)

Fantasy can serve as a kind of hyper-reality, a social allegory. It is uniquely capable of compressing the scope of human experience into a narrative—and I think that's what can make it epic, or give it that epic feel. It can illuminate good and bad, motive and desire. (Elizabeth Bear, cited in Jones 2011, n.p.)

These definitions identify some of the characteristics associated with the sub-genre of epic fantasy. However, the readers, who may recognise many of these features, instead prioritise the social contract that can be found in all the genres of modern popular fiction. They want to be drawn into the world of the novel; to form a social contract that encourages a sense of engagement between the reader, author and novel. The reception analysis section will show how a great many readers empathetically identify with many of the genre elements and feel a sense of ownership of the novel, monitoring its generic expectations and identifying an author's innovations and originality.

In spite of its eclectic lineage and many sub-genres there have been attempts to provide a theoretical approach to the genre of fantasy. Tzvetan Todorov (1973) was one of the first theorists to consider how a world of fantasy might be constructed, rather than defining it by the use of magic and any number of bizarre inhabitants, Todorov claims that fantasy depends on the author's ability to produce an effect of strangeness which cannot be explained simply

by alluding to unfamiliar events or supernatural phenomena; it must be a world where what happens is outside the laws of nature that occur in the reader's world. Rowling's magical world is an example of such a world. It is made all the more unusual because it is constantly being contrasted with the familiar, everyday world of the Muggles (non-magical humans) and cannot be explained by reference to the physical laws of the readers' world:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. (Todorov 1973, p.25)

Later critics argued that in focusing only on the unexplained occurrences that occur within the known world Todorov's theory had limited his concept of fantasy by excluding the many extraordinary fantasy worlds that have no connection to the reader's world:

Because the Todorovian fantastic is subject to the real, or perhaps a violation of the real, fantasy that creates its own, independent world, has no place with Todorov's framework. (Northrup 2004, p.815)

The work of critics such as Clyde B. Northrup expanded the concept of the genre of fantasy to include a more socially oriented approach. The socially focused approach claims that while fantasy worlds are created quite separately to the reader's world, these worlds still include the influences of psychological, political and ideological issues from the reader's world, as discussed in Chapter 2. For example, in an article on the importance of fantasy in children's literature, Victoria Flanagan argues that the worlds created in fantasy genre reflect back the reader's own world but that the distance between the worlds allows the reader to see their own world with new eyes. As Flanagan (2014, n. p.) observes, the 'most obvious benefits of fantasy is that it allows readers to experiment with different ways of seeing the world'. She also claims that the use of metaphor in fantasy encourages readers to experience a distancing so as to safely encourage 'different readings and meanings':

This allows fantasy to explore quite complex social issues in ways that are less confrontational than realism because it takes place in a world that is distanced from social reality. (Flanagan, 2014)

Many of these elements are included in Rowling's world of Harry Potter, creating the social structures that give authenticity to both the 'normal' Muggle world of the town Little Whinging and the world of magic most often set at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

However, while Todorov's definition of fantasy does not include the independent, all encompassing 'secondary world', such as those first created by authors such as Tolkien and

Lewis, he did acknowledge the importance of the detail in the world of the text in holding the reader's attention causing her/him to momentarily suspend disbelief:

[T]he text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. (Todorov1973, p.33)

Rowling's Muggle and magical worlds are both meticulously detailed so that readers experience a feeling of reality in either world due to their sense of continuity, social order and harmony. They resemble Todorov's well-structured fantasy where the suspension of disbelief occurs because the created world of the novel appears to have its own sense of reality produced by an internal balance, a sense of continuity or harmony and order so that the reader believes in the creation for its own sake.

Having identified some of both the historic and contemporary features that distinguish the modern popular fiction genre of fantasy, the question arises as to where in the meta-genre the Harry Potter series belongs. While readers and critics alike mostly agree it is fantasy genre, there is a continuing controversy as to which particular aspect of fantasy genre is represented by these stories. Some readers claim that rather than fantasy, Harry Potter belongs to other genres such as Gothic horror that simply use the world of magic as a frame for the narrative. However, many critics and readers are quite content with a general classification of the novels as fantasy because of the magical elements the books contain:

Rowling's novels can be described as belonging to the fantasy genre since her characters inhabit a world where magic is real and the fantastic is an everyday occurrence. (Borah 2002, p.348)

While written before the series was finished, Borah's comment, drawn from her ethnographic study of Harry Potter fan communities offers a clear example of the general description of the novels that has persisted even after the publication of all seven novels. In assigning them to fantasy genre this comment goes no further than indicating that as the books contain magical elements they must belong to the fantasy genre. While this offers a reasonable classification there are readers who persistently disagree and offer a wide range of possible genres ranging from quest genres to folk tales. The number of possible genres reflects the complexity of the world of Harry Potter and how it accommodates many different readers' interests.

The number of possible genres that readers identify as reflected in Rowling's fantasy genre is part of the bond that draws these readers into the world of the text. Some of the genres

selected for inclusion in fantasy genre, like the British Boarding School genre or epic fantasy genre, are familiar to most readers and they play an important role in establishing the expectations of readers as to how the community in the world of the text is formed. Other genres are more problematic. Identifying which specific genres have been woven into the developing plot remains a contentious issue often depending on the features a reader identifies with in the developing story. The effect of using multiple layers of genres is that the reader is situated within a familiar space at the same time as being confronted by unfamiliar narrative development. Familiar generic features make readers comfortable within the textual world which in turn makes them more receptive to the strange and surprising events they encounter.

Most of the genres found in the Harry Potter narratives offer a positive image of the fantasy world. They show it as a place with many social features with which the reader can identify, families, homes, schools, all in communities that support their residents. While these may not be quite the same as those known to the reader, they are recognisable, interesting and in many instances, inviting places to inhabit. This positive perception of the world of the text encourages readers to frequently return to it. Popular fiction genres such as the British Boarding School genre, the *Bildungsroman* or Coming Of Age genre, mystery genre, adventure genre, quest genre, folk tale genre, Young Adult genre, romance genre, sports genre, drama genre, even psychological thriller genre have been identified within the Harry Potter novels. As well as these genres, the narrative also contains reference to Horror genre which Rowling initially uses to add a feeling of strangeness to Harry's first encounter with Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and then later, uses Gothic horror in a more serious context to portray the return of the Dark Lord. Some genres, such as the British Boarding School genre, and the *Bildungsroman* or Coming of Age genre, feature prominently in a number of the books while other genres are highlighted by particular books, specific points in the plot and/or the interaction between characters. For example Julia Boll claims that in the fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000) Harry has now become part of an adventure quest. Like an Arthurian romance adventure Harry faces great danger, intense physical action and a much stronger, evil opponent to overcome in order to fulfil the quest of the Triwizard Tournament:

A Period of clue-searching and device-assembling precedes each adventure, but it is in the *Goblet of Fire* that Harry has to go through trials most closely resembling those of a romance quest: during the Triwizard Tournament, he has to defeat a dragon, solve a case of abduction and approach the innermost cave through a maze. (Boll 2016, p.97)

In the *Goblet of Fire* Harry's schooldays take second place as the focus changes to both the quest genre and adventure genre. Central to both genres are 'the search' and the 'dangerous journey'. Harry becomes involved in a difficult and dangerous quest that involves a secret journey with Dumbledore to a hidden cave that has one of the horcruxes.⁷³ During their journey Harry has to overcome great physical and mental difficulties, for example he has to fight deadly magical creatures to bring himself and a wounded Dumbledore to safety. Also against his better nature, he has had to force Dumbledore to drink a dangerous potion so that they can retrieve the horcrux. The two genres place Harry in a very different, darker, dangerous and more volatile environment than that of the relative safety of Hogwarts School.

Genres such as the folk tale genre, Young Adult (YA) romance genre and Psychological Thriller blend in with the developing plot, for example features of YA romance genre can be seen in Harry's schoolboy crush on Cho Chang and later his developing relationship with Ginny Weasley. Genre is even used as a negative description by one reader who was not sympathetic to Harry's introduction to 'snogging'. Journalist Spencer Roth-Rose decided the novel was not fantasy but the lesser genre of Soap Opera, 'Any book [*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*] that spends this many pages describing teenagers falling in lust and immediately snogging the shit out of each other cannot possibly be any other genre' (Roth-Rose, 2016).

In the last book, the *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007) readers are told the meaning of the Deathly Hallows through the genre of a folk tale. The folk tale with its fixed characters and a strong didactic focus is part of a book of children's stories given to Hermione by Dumbledore. As a children's story it contains a warning, clearly defined in the description of the right and wrong consequences for anyone attempting to use the Deathly Hallows to overcome Death. It also forewarns of Voldemort's fate, which Harry sees in his meeting with Dumbledore in the ghostly otherworld King's Cross Station. Harry's connection to the mind of Voldemort in the fifth book, *Harry Potter and The Order of the Phoenix* (2003) has elements of a psychological thriller. This is shown as an important part of the plot focuses on dreams, mindreading and mind control as Voldemort tries to manipulate Harry

⁷³ Harry's search for the horcruxes is the central focus of the later novels. The horcruxes are a number of receptacles that contain pieces of Lord Voldemort's soul. Voldemort believes that by splitting his soul into seven pieces he cannot be killed. Harry and his friends have to find and destroy these hidden horcruxes before Harry can overcome Voldemort.

into finding the prophecy in the Ministry of Magic. Academic Julia Boll (2016, p. 97) notes, ‘Harry reaches his psychological inmost cave in the *Order of the Phoenix*, where he battles his inner demons and subconscious fears and learns the prophecy about his destiny’.

Throughout the Harry Potter series readers enter into the world of the narrative through a range of genres that introduce them to cultural, philosophical and psychological issues and social perceptions with which they would be familiar. The dual societies, the magical and the Muggle, in Harry Potter include recognisable features that readers might find existing in their own everyday society. When readers enter into the world of the text at first they find it contains a commonplace, everyday social context that seems far distant to the universal generic feature of fantasy genre, magic. This is because the magic that takes place in Harry Potter is at first hidden from the reader in the same manner as it is from the characters. As the various genres are integrated into the plot, the readers experience, along with Harry, more aspects of the magical world.

Although most readers agree that the Harry Potter series belong to fantasy genre (as I will show in the reception analysis section), the debate as to its genre continues. However, over the last ten years, fantasy has become one of the most prominent genres in modern popular fiction due in no small measure to readers being drawn into the world of magic in the Harry Potter story. The readers’ introduction to a secret magical world that exists within the framework of their recognisable, ordinary, everyday world exemplifies the contemporary expectations of fantasy as a narrative that includes reference to magic in some form or other. While it also includes Todorov’s insistence that the fantasy world have a sense of reality, balance and harmony, the more easily identifiable feature, the inclusion of magic, is the element most readers seem to agree is the defining feature of the genre. Academic Kim Selling (2008, p. 17) illustrates some of the difficulties in finding an exact definition of fantasy:

Fantasy criticism has directed its efforts towards trying to isolate features that distinguish fantasy from other types of fiction through content and structural analysis: for example, fantasy is unique because it contains magic and dragons, it has fairy-tale structure, produces the affect of wonder and so forth.⁷⁴

⁷⁴Although Fantasy includes reference to the world of faerie these stories are not fairy tales. In western culture fairy tales have a long history that stretches back to the oral and folk narratives of many countries. While they are superficially recognisable by the inclusion of magic in some form they also deal with many of the same issues as the modern popular fiction sub-genre of Epic Fantasy. However, unlike the novels of Epic Fantasy that are created by identifiable, individual authors, fairy tales are anonymous and over the years incorporate many variations which reflect the changing societies in which they are told. In spite of their differences both Epic

Many readers in the reading communities discuss the Harry Potter series through one or more generic positions, the most popular being the British Boarding School story, noting that it has been set in a fantasy context. Patti Houghton (2000) claims that with most of the action taking place at Hogwarts School the series is not only part of the School Story genre but more accurately the English [British] School Story genre:

What are the basic elements of the English school story? The setting is a school for boys or girls, modeled on the great public schools, Rugby, Harrow, and Eton. The hero or heroine is usually a new student who feels like an outsider at school ... Sometimes the new student is an orphan or comes from an unhappy home. (Houghton 2000, n.p.)

Houghton provides a detailed analysis of the features of English school stories and a short history of the development of this genre with a list of other novels that are part of the genre. She believes that Hogwarts is ‘a school at which Tom Brown [schoolboy character from 1857 British school novel] would feel at home’ (Houghton 2000, n.p.). On the other hand, Susanne Gruss feels that even though most readers see the stories through a British Boarding School lens, Rowling departs from this genre in at least one book, setting it as a Gothic story: ‘Rowling’s novel *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* can easily be positioned as a Gothic tale’ (Gruss 2016, p.42). Gruss argues that not only the settings, particularly that of Hogwarts School, have Gothic features, but that the treatment of Harry by his uncle and aunt and later his continuing battle with Voldemort capture all the elements of a Gothic novel. Yet other critics see them as a Coming of Age story that focuses on Harry’s physical, intellectual and psychological growth.

The formal identification of the different genres in the Harry Potter series might be of more interest to critics than readers, but it is still an important feature of these novels. Critics like Lana Whited (2002, p. 50) note that while Rowling is not original in using the features of other genres she ‘has recombined these elements in a non-traditional way’. One critic who identified a number of different genres believes the novels are like a box of chocolates that readers might dip into and take what they fancy:

Fantasy and fairy tales share quite a number of structural features, most particularly the struggle between good and evil. Quite often both focus on the growth, both physically and psychologically, of children who are the main protagonists. Also, in many instances both are narratives of transformation, of overcoming difficulties and finding independence and maturity. As Davidson & Chaudhri claim:

[Fairy tales] are about growing up, finding independence and success in society. They are important instruments in ‘the civilizing process’ because they are entertaining, variable, yet instructive. They give messages of hope, encouragement to effort, and express the ultimate goodness of life. (Davidson & Chaudhri 2003, p.33)

For a comprehensive analysis of the historical and cultural development of the fairy tale see Davidson, Hilda Ellis & Chaudhri, Anna (eds.) 2003, *A Companion to the Fairy Story*, Rochester, New York.

The success of the *Harry Potter* novels relies on its 'box of chocolates' kind of charm – author J.K. Rowling's genius of giving the reader a taste of everything literary, from fantasy to myth and even the classic school story to mention a few of the numerous genres she draws on. (O'Brien 2009, p.1)

This is a good analogy as it focuses on the number of different genres that appear in the novels, ranging from framing large sections of the narrative such as the British Boarding School story to shorter inclusions such as Mystery genre as Harry solves puzzles, faces danger and overcomes a deadly enemy as he uncovers the secret of the Philosopher's Stone. However, while the metaphor of the box of chocolates draws attention to the range of genres Rowling includes it has a problem with agency. It suggests that as readers are offered a number of genres, all are equal so they can choose the one they like. While this is a possibility, as readers are free to interpret the story as they please, it does not take into account Rowling's subtle direction of readers' attention through the use of various genres. Rowling places different genres in different places throughout the text, and because she is using identifiable elements from these genres she is directing the readers' perception of the events in the story. Therefore I argue that what Rowling is actually presenting readers with is a Portmanteau fantasy.⁷⁵

In the Harry Potter stories Rowling uses fantasy genre as a portmanteau to hold all the genres that by their identifiable features will strengthen the bond between the readers and the world of the text. The portmanteau effect highlights the fantasy genre, which offers readers a world that incorporates magic together with a sense of reality and substance. However, the fantasy world then becomes a receptacle for the many other generic references all of which are introduced at particular times to subtly shape the reader's response to the narrative world, its inhabitants and the plot. Once a genre has offered the reader a specific perspective it is 'put away' in the portmanteau and another takes its place. For example, the world of the British Boarding School moves into the world of Gothic horror and then into epic fantasy quite seamlessly as the reader is directed to particular aspects of the plot. The inclusion of these genres develops the readers' sense of familiarity in the world of the text and this in turn, encourages their participation in the fantasy world. In the next section, 'The World of the Text', the way in which these different genres shape the meaning of the narrative will be

⁷⁵ *Portmanteau* is a term associated with Linguistics which describes a word which incorporates or 'carries' two different words to form a third meaning, for example 'motel' being formed from 'motor' and 'hotel' and describes a hotel specifically for motor car travellers. Rowling's use of Fantasy genre has the same portmanteau effect; the genre carries a range of other genres that provide a specific focus to the development of meaning.

considered along with some of the themes and issues that these genres accommodate throughout the narrative.

Textual analysis: the world of the text.

One of the most important features of modern fantasy is the way the world of the text is created. Considering this through a multidimensional analysis first establishes how the particular author has positioned the narrative within the genre. Then the textual analysis examines what features of the genre the author has included and how they have been developed to create a unique world that encourages the reader to enter and explore its landscape, its characters and feel that they participate in the unfolding plot.

Fantasy creates worlds which include complex social histories, their own mythology and culture and are populated by a large number of individual characters that range from heroic to cowardly and everything in between. These worlds are framed by a distinct geography with their own internal continuity and relevance. As Manlove (1992, p. 17) states, ‘Modern fantasy frequently delights in the making of alternative worlds that we can treat as “realities” while we read’. The creation of a unique world that seems to have its own identity and sense of ‘reality’ is not restricted to fantasy genre for it is one of the features that draw readers back to the authors of popular fiction. Each of the three authors in this study, Georgette Heyer, Anne McCaffrey and J.K. Rowling, write in different genres yet in a broad sense all their novels offer the reader narratives set in alternative worlds that seem, while the reader is caught up by the narrative, to be as real and substantial as the one in which he/she actually exists. In the case of fantasy:

[Its] power does not derive from its separation from reality, but from its simplicity and self-limitation, its rules of procedure, and its internal logic ... Once the reader accepts the basic premises of the new world, everything in it follows organically and realistically from them. (Waggoner 1978, p.27)

Readers entering into the world of Harry Potter find themselves in a recognisable context in contemporary, middle class England. This context seems to be based in reality, but it is still a fantasy world, one that has its roots in a number of unflattering but comic caricatures of what constitutes a picture of a British middle class life style.⁷⁶ It does not matter that this world is

⁷⁶ The characters in the Dursley family and their home and life style in Little Whinging echo the comic caricature of life in middle class suburbia made famous in the popular television program *Keeping Up Appearances*, a British sitcom created by Roy Clarke. The light-hearted story makes fun of its central character

not real; it does matter that the reader recognises it. The everyday world of Little Whinging (where Harry first lives) begins with the introduction of Mr and Mrs Dursley at ‘number four, Privet Drive’ (*The Philosopher’s Stone*, p.7). It continues with a description of Mr Dursley’s work and life at home with the tantrums of young son, Dudley, all quite recognisable and unremarkable features. Into this commonplace suburban environment the reader slowly finds the intrusion of a number of curious features; a cat that seems to be reading a map, an older man in an emerald green cloak, and finally an old man wearing a violet cloak who gives Mr Dursley a big hug. These anomalies suggest there might be more to this world than the reader first observes.

After the rather dull everyday world in the opening of *The Philosopher’s Stone* (1997) the reader is introduced to two separate but joined worlds that illustrate one of Rowling’s repeated social themes, that the unusual and unconventional are life-affirming qualities. By making the community of Little Whinging easily identifiable as a community that could exist in the reader’s world Rowling suggests that to welcome the unfamiliar is as important for both the individual and society in the readers’ world as it is in the narrative. As Roni Natov claims, ‘Harry will provide a resistance to normality which, Rowling suggests, is necessary for inclusiveness, for the individual and the community to prosper’ (Natov 2002, p.126).

The first novel, *The Philosopher’s Stone*, has a fairly simple social focus that is both appropriate for the British Boarding School genre in which it is placed and the age of the expected readers (9–12 years). The events in the story cover a number of exciting adventures where finally good triumphs over evil and all the morally worthy characters prevail. The social concerns of the narrative form a number of themes found throughout the series, for example, being loyal to friends, trust, acting for the good of others and showing bravery in dangerous situations. The features from the British Boarding School genre in the early novels provide an easily identifiable context especially for young readers and within that context these themes are first presented in an uncomplicated manner. An example of how Rowling uses this genre to illustrate these social themes can be seen at the end of the first novel. As part of the narrative, Harry, who has managed to keep the Philosopher’s Stone from

a middle-aged, social climbing, housewife, Mrs Hyacinth Bucket (pronounced Bouquet). The wide spread social perceptions of programs such as this is shown in an article about the popularity of *Keeping Up Appearances* in *The Independent* newspaper (18 February, 2017). Rowling draws on the same social stereotypes but adds a darker, more astringent depth to the characters.

Voldemort and also defeated Professor Quirrell, is recuperating in the school's infirmary when his friends Ron and Hermione come to visit him and learn what happened.

'The whole school's talking about it,' said Ron. 'What *really* happened?'

It was one of those rare occasions when the true story is even more strange and exciting than the wild rumours. Harry told them everything: Quirrell; the mirror; the Stone and Voldemort. Ron and Hermione were a good audience; they gasped in all the right places and when Harry told them what was under Quirrell's turban, Hermione screamed out loud. (*The Philosopher's Stone*, p. 218, emphasis in original)

The importance of trust and loyalty can be seen in Ron's and Hermione's reactions. These qualities, especially amongst friends, are part of the British Boarding School genre. However, what is not as easily identified by the reader is that this scene also foreshadows the importance of relationships based on truth, trust and friendship as these relationships will play a significant part in Harry's growth and his final triumph over evil in the manner of an epic hero.

Although fantasy novels often incorporate features from other genres to provide a specific focus at a particular moment in the plot, or to give the world of the text a particular character, the difference for the readers of Harry Potter is that rather than just selecting some generic features to highlight a particular situation, Rowling seamlessly transports her readers into some easily recognisable genres. This not only helps in creating a familiar place, but through familiarisation gives readers a sense of participation in the world:

Rowling [like her readers] need not have experienced boarding schools nor even researched them to portray one in the Harry Potter series. In fact, rather than pointing to real boarding schools as the foundation for Hogwarts, it is more accurate to say that Hogwarts and Harry's experiences there are based on British popular culture conceptions of boarding school experiences, particularly as manifested in the long tradition of what is known as 'public school stories'. (Steege 2002, p.141)

Once readers are situated within the British Boarding School category, Rowling then adds another related genre to the textual world. This is the *Bildungsroman*⁷⁷ or the Coming of Age genre as described by Anne Alton (2009, p. 208):

This genre [*bildungsroman*] focuses on the physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual development of the protagonist from childhood to adulthood, charting various situations and crises that lead to the protagonist's maturity and recognition of his/her identity and place in the world.

⁷⁷ The use of *Bildungsroman* as a generic feature is not restricted to Fantasy genre. Often seen as a genre in its own right it has a long literary history dating back to the end of the eighteenth century with the publication *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* by *Johann Wolfgang Goethe* in 1795–96 seen as a foundation text. However, it certainly has found a home in many modern popular fantasy novels, for example, Salvatore, R A 1990-9, *The Dark Elf Trilogy*, TSR Inc, USA; Hobb, R 1995-97 *The Farseer Trilogy* Harper Collins, Australia; and Tepper, S S 1983-84, *The True Game* Ace/Penguin, USA.

Harry, firmly established at Hogwarts, begins a journey that will encompass all seven novels as the narrative details his physical, psychological and social journey from childhood to young adult. The *Bildungsroman* genre found in all seven novels also provides a sense of continuity as Harry progresses from an immature child to an accomplished young wizard, growing intellectually as well as physically, through a series of adventures as he learns the truth about his family.

Readers follow Harry and his friends through a number of changes, particularly in social power and involvement, as they learn to negotiate with each other and their society over the course of the novels. Harry and his friends grow through these interactions with each other and particularly with the adult characters over the seven years of the narrative. Quite possibly some readers understand Harry's journey because it is similar to the journey they also have traversed. Many readers were children when the first novel was published and have, like Harry, grown up with each subsequent addition thus making it easy for them to enter the world of the novel in relation to their own life journey. As Katherine M. Grimes (2002, p. 90) states:

Young children read or listen to the [*Harry Potter*] books as though they were fairy tales. Young adolescents see in the series some means of coming to terms with the real world. Adults use them as windows on the world of younger people, but also as modern myths to help us understand eternal mysteries.

However, this is still a fantasy world and like many earlier Fantasies, which also contain complex, mysterious, and powerful qualities, it has a dark side associated with themes of danger, the quest for power, and ways to overcome death. Traditionally the magic world could be a dark, dangerous place and its inhabitants like Puck from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1605) are anything from tricksters to malicious, evil characters. The lighter aspect of the dark side of fantasy in Harry Potter is the puckish trickster of Peeves the school poltergeist. Although Peeves strives to be a menacing character he is more annoying than intimidating and in the second book Harry is able to use his mischief to his advantage to save himself from caretaker Argus Filch's fury:

Peeves was the school poltergeist, a grinning, airborne menace who lived to cause havoc and distress. Harry didn't much like Peeves, but couldn't help feeling grateful for his timing. Hopefully whatever Peeves had done (and it sounded as though he'd wrecked something very big this time) would distract Filch from Harry. (*The Chamber of Secrets*, p.91)

On the other hand, readers find much of the darkness in Harry Potter is not amusing but challenging and powerful, especially in the last novels. By the last novels the British Boarding School genre has been replaced by the quest genre, expressed through the battle between good and evil. Harry undertakes the good quest to destroy the horcruxes created by Lord Voldemort, while Lord Voldemort pursues the dual evil quests of attaining absolute power and escaping death. The possibility for darkness inherent in fantasy genre is seen in Voldemort's use of murder to create the horcruxes, which he believes will divide his soul into separate pieces and allow him to escape death:

‘Well,’ said Slughorn uncomfortably, ‘you must understand that the soul is supposed to remain intact and whole. Splitting it is an act of violation, it is against nature.’
[Riddle] ‘But how do you do it?’
‘By an act of evil – the supreme act of evil. By committing murder. Killing rips the soul apart.’ (*The Half-Blood Prince*, p.465)

To give the novels a sense of darkness Rowling weaves in language and images associated with elements from the genre of Gothic horror.⁷⁸ Reference to this genre appears throughout all the books, particularly in the darker sections. However, Rowling's first reference to this genre is witty rather than shocking. It begins in the first book, *The Philosopher's Stone* (1997), where Rowling uses elements from Gothic horror to enhance the feelings of excitement and trepidation felt by the first year students as they see Hogwarts for the first time. Harry's first sight of Hogwarts is described using terms of darkness, danger and silence as students stumble down the slippery ‘steep, narrow path’ to the ‘black lake’. Once on the lake they are overawed by sight of the ‘vast castle’ ‘perched atop a high mountain’ so much so that ‘everyone was silent, staring up at the great castle overhead’. The castle seems more menacing than welcoming: ‘It towered over them as they sailed nearer and nearer to the cliff on which it stood’ (*The Philosopher's Stone*, p. 83). Of course readers find that it is not the terrifying castle from horror stories but a welcoming school community in spite of housing ghosts, wizards, witches and any number of strange creatures.

⁷⁸ The genre of Gothic horror was first seen in the eighteenth century novel *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole (1764) who was the first author to include most of the features that are still recognisable today, not only in novels but in short stories, films, and television stories. Many Gothic horror stories are set in gloomy castles full of secret passages and dark rooms that are haunted by terrifying spirits. The weather is often extreme; cold and stormy with skies full of thunder and lightning. The plot includes characters who are constantly feeling threatened and angry. These novels also include supernatural elements, horrifying creatures and ancient prophecies. The narrative is often highly sentimental with characters frequently overcome by extreme emotions of anger, sorrow, surprise and usually terror.

Rowling's use of Gothic horror genre takes a different turn in the fourth book, *The Goblet of Fire* (2000), where readers are thrust into a real Gothic horror story. In the chapter 'Flesh, Blood and Bone' which deals with the death of Cedric Diggory and the restoration of Voldemort, the elements of Gothic horror deepen the sense of danger and evil. When Harry and Cedric first arrive at an unknown destination via the portkey they find they are in a 'dark, overgrown' graveyard. A menacing figure 'wearing a hooded cloak' comes towards them. Harry hears a sneering 'a high, cold voice' ordering Cedric's death: 'kill the spare' (p.553). Voldemort is described as 'something ugly, slimy and blind – but worse, a hundred times worse' (p.555). The extreme image of Voldemort before his restoration is 'hairless and scaly looking, a dark, raw, reddish black', its face was 'flat and snake-like, with gleaming red eyes' (p. 556). Voldemort's accomplice, Wormtail's, preparation of the cauldron to restore Voldemort includes taking Harry's blood, cutting off his own hand and taking a bone from a grave (pp.556–7). As Voldemort rises from the cauldron Harry feels the horror that is often associated with the Gothic horror genre as 'an icy surge of terror' (p.558). Finally the description of Voldemort uses terms of intense colour to increase the feeling of horror in his appearance, 'Whiter than a skull, with wide livid scarlet eyes, and a nose that was as flat as a snake's, with slits for nostrils...Lord Voldemort had risen again' (p. 558).

In spite of a progressively darkening undertone in the world of the text Rowling maintains a clear moral stance in relation to violence. Readers find that she often chooses to make her point by using a humorous situation, which includes the moral message. Georgette Heyer employs a similar strategy with the use of humour to provide a social message. In Harry Potter, many of the themes in the narrative including humour are related to the possible age and interests of the readers, as they progress through the series. For example, in first part of the fourth book, *The Goblet of Fire*, the British Boarding School genre still frames the narrative and the theme of bullying is introduced. In a scene where Harry and Malfoy trade insults and Harry starts to walk away as Malfoy begins to cast a spell on him but Professor Moody, who has just appeared, turns Malfoy into a white ferret:

Moody, pointing his wand at the ferret again – if flew ten feet into the air, fell with a smack to the floor, and then bounced upwards once more.
 'I don't like people who attack when their opponent's backs are turned', growled Moody, as the ferret bounced higher and higher, squealing in pain. 'Stinking, cowardly, scummy thing to do...'. (*Goblet of Fire*, p.181)

The scene of delighted students is interrupted by Professor McGonagall who is horrified to find that the ferret is a student and that student is being bullied by a teacher, "Moody, is that

a student?’” shrieked Professor McGonagall’ (*Goblet of Fire*, p.181). She releases Malfoy and turns on Moody,

‘Moody, we *never* use Transfiguration as a punishment!’ said Professor McGonagall weakly. ‘Surely Professor Dumbledore told you that?’

‘He might’ve mentioned it, yeah,’ said Moody. (*Goblet of Fire*, p.182, emphasis in original)

Many of Rowling’s readers are either school age or young adults when they read this scene showing Malfoy’s cowardly attack being justly rewarded in a way that initially seems amusing. Yet Rowling is also making a point about a more serious issue, that of bullying. Malfoy is clearly wrong but Moody, an adult with far more power and magical knowledge, also acts inappropriately. Morally, Moody should have stopped Malfoy but instead he takes the opportunity to inflict far more pain and humiliation than was present in the original situation. In making her reader laugh Rowling substitutes fantasy’s often dramatic moral message with a more subtle one, and one that is directly relevant to her readers.

One of the successful elements of the Harry Potter novels is that they capture the readers’ empathy and interest through the social themes included as part of the nature and situation of many characters. Readers find well-rounded characters who are not only involved in the developing action but are active contributors to the society of the novel. Often the characters and their interactions within specific social situations highlight current social issues and themes. For example the critic Christopher Routledge (2001, p. 206) argues that the Harry Potter novels include issues such as social change, education and conservatism:

The books may be read as a critique of British society in the 1990s, during which an old aristocratic hierarchy gave way, theoretically at least, to a more meritocratic social structure. For example, in Britain a debate is currently raging over what proportion of the population should be allowed to have access to a university education, and over the quality of state-funded education in general.

The addition of strong social themes such as a critique of conservatism, the condemnation of racism and the importance of education, can be seen throughout the books. For example Rowling introduces readers to the social damage caused by racism in the constant reference to some in the wizarding community who think that ‘pure blood’ wizards are superior. This, like the racist doctrine of white supremacy in the reader’s own world, is a debate with a long history. In the novel it stretches back in time to the beginning of Hogwarts School, when one of the founders, Salazar Slytherin, tried to place restrictions on which students were eligible to attend:

He [Slytherin] believed that magical learning should be kept within all-magic families. He disliked taking students of Muggle parentage, believing them to be untrustworthy. After a while, there was a serious argument on the subject between Syltherin and Gryffindor, and Slytherin left the school. (*Chamber of Secrets*, p.114)

The theme of bravery or courage is a constant theme throughout the novels and sits easily in many of the genres, from the British Boarding School genre to the epic fantasy genre. Readers are asked to consider that there might be different kinds of courage. The first challenge as to what defines courage is seen in Neville Longbottom, an often over-looked character. Neville shows it is possible to find courage in the difficult decisions made by ordinary people. In *The Philosopher's Stone*, knowing that he was out numbered and out manoeuvred Neville still tries to stop Harry, Ron and Hermione from leaving the common room to find the Philosopher's Stone. 'You can't go out,' said Neville, 'you'll be caught again and Gryffindor will be in even more trouble' (*The Philosopher's Stone*, p.198). Later at the end of year feast when the house cup is being awarded, Dumbledore awards some late points to Gryffindor which changes the winner from Slytherin to Gryffindor. The final points he awards are for courage:

Dumbledore raised his hand. The room fell silent. 'There are all kinds of courage,' said Dumbledore, smiling. 'It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends. I therefore award ten points to Mr. Neville Longbottom'. (*The Philosopher's Stone*, p.221)

As the narrative moves away from the British Boarding School genre in the last books it turns to the genre of epic fantasy. Rowling incorporates many of its features to elevate the personal story of the battle between Harry and Voldemort to a serious struggle between good and evil that affects the whole of society in the world of the novel. Harry's connection to Tolkien and epic fantasy genre in general, can be seen in a number of ways. Harry shares several attributes with Frodo (the main character in *The Lord of the Rings*). He is a type of 'everyman' character. He grows from a bullied, nondescript eleven year-old into a courageous and self-aware hero who is willing to sacrifice himself for the good of others. The final confrontation in Harry Potter, like that in *The Lord of the Rings*, takes place in the natural world. Frodo has to brave the dangers of Mount Doom in order to destroy the power of Sauron while Harry must find the courage to walk alone into the Forbidden Forest to face Voldemort, knowing that he will die in the encounter. Both narratives have a final battle between the forces of good and evil as the definitive action. Finally, just as Frodo has help from friends along the way, especially from the always-loyal Sam, so too Harry has help

from his fellow students, most particularly Hermione and Ron, without whom he would have faltered.

Harry as the ‘ordinary’ hero reflects Tolkien’s use of distinctly non-heroic, ordinary characters who learn to rise above their limitations and do great deeds. Tolkien gave fantasy a new model for a hero, one who demonstrates that ordinary people, such as the readers, are capable of extraordinary things. The characters of Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit* and later his nephew, Frodo Baggins, in *The Lord of the Rings*, a more tragic character, suggest that every day, ordinary people are just as capable of great deeds as the kings, princes and knights of earlier fantasies. The identification of the hero/es as common, everyday, members of society clearly applies to the characters of Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter books. Also, to further emphasise the connection to epic fantasy Harry follows a long line of youthful heroes from King Arthur to Luke Skywalker (from the film series *Star Wars*), by being an orphan.⁷⁹ In the words of the critic A.O. Scott (2002, n.p.),

They [the central characters in *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*] are following a convention so deep it seems to be encoded in the human storytelling genre, orphans, summoned out of obscurity to undertake a journey into the heart of evil that will also be a journey of self-discovery.

Some critics argue that the popularity of characters such as Frodo Baggins and Harry Potter ‘suggest the public’s need to believe in heroes’ (Prewitt 2006, p.29). The vulnerable and defenceless hero reminds readers that in today’s cultural environment where isolation and marginalisation seem such pervasive influences, ‘if such a person can succeed against such odds, perhaps I can too’ (Prewitt 2006, p.29). Rowling makes the same point in the *Deathly Hallows* (2007) when Neville Longbottom explains to Harry, Ron and Hermione that Hogwarts has changed under the supervision of the Carrows, a sadistic pair of Death Eaters. Any departure from their rules is punished by torture, ‘They don’t want to spill too much pure blood so they’ll torture us a bit if we’re mouthy but they won’t actually kill us’ (*Deathly Hallows*, p.462). When Ron suggests that Neville should be more careful he replies: ‘The

⁷⁹ The figure of the orphaned boy who becomes a hero has long been part of the genre of fantasy in western literature. For example, in an early precursor to modern fantasy genre, the Arthurian stories, Arthur is one of the best known ‘heroic orphans’, the outcast boy, who finding the sword in the stone, eventually becomes King. This element in fantasy has been identified by a number of critics and it also has formed part of the critical reception of the Harry Potter narrative. One theory is that Rowling created Harry as an orphan to emphasise the task ahead of him in his journey towards heroism, ‘The orphan archetype embodies the childhood task of learning to deal with an unfair world’ (Grimes 2002, p.126). While at the same time it also adds to the empathy young readers might have with Harry Potter for:

[I]f Harry, the orphan with bad hair and glasses, can make friends, win at Quidditch, be a favourite of the headmaster, overcome the school bully, and be the hero not just of his own life but of wildly successful books, there is hope for every young reader. (Grimes 2002, p.105)

thing is, it helps when people stand up to them, it gives everyone hope. I used to notice that when you did it, Harry' (*Deathly Hallows*, p.462).

Harry Potter's motivation and his unswerving intention to do what is right in the battle between good and evil gives these novels a solid connection to epic fantasy. Rowling's fantasy is not the same as Tolkien's world-wide grand scale epic; instead she provides a smaller-scale setting, the Forbidden Forest and Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Her more restricted location still includes some of epic's most recognisable characteristics such as the traditional portrayal of the hero to establish the spirit and courage of her characters. Throughout the novels she continually challenges the stereotype of the 'action figure' hero and through the decisions made by Harry, Ron and Hermione offers a detailed examination of the philosophical and psychological nature of the true modern hero:

The hero is the culmination of human potential, and Ron, Harry, and Hermione have come to represent the modern day hero to audiences all over the world. Harry, Ron, and Hermione prove over and over that magic does not make a hero, but knowledge, loyalty, courage, selflessness, and love is what makes a modern day hero. (Bailey 2008, n.p.)

Themes of truth and trust recur throughout the narrative and while Harry does not always tell the truth, especially to the characters he believes are evil (and on occasions he even deceives and misinforms those who support him), he clearly shows his motivation is guided by a moral integrity that encourages others to trust him and his purpose:

Harry isn't always a moral exemplar, but he is learning as he goes, and he clearly exhibits a sort of character and integrity distinctly different from the villains. Harry, for one thing, cares about other people. He often acts to save a friend, and sometimes even an enemy...Harry is willing to risk his life in order to prevent an innocent person from suffering. And none of his moral motivation is to be found in the villains. Harry is what he constantly does, Aristotle would remind us: his occasional failures don't define him. (Baggett 2004, p.242)

One of the most difficult lessons Harry has to learn if he is finally to be a real hero is shown in the death of his Godfather, Sirius Black in *Order of the Phoenix* (2003). This is an important milestone in Harry's development and exposes Harry to one of the hardest lessons he has to learn – that not all his decisions will have satisfactory outcomes. While Harry waits in Dumbledore's study after the battle at the Ministry he not only questions his actions but also his concept of a hero itself:

It was his fault Sirius had died: it was all his fault. If he, Harry, had not been so convinced that what he had seen in his dream was real, if he had only opened his mind to the possibility that Voldemort was, as Hermione had said, banking on Harry's *love of playing the hero*. (*Order of the Phoenix*, p.723, emphasis in original)

As shown in the previous case studies, one of the ways in which authors of popular fiction draw the readers into the world of the novel is to endeavour to create a sense of empathy with the reader. In this passage Rowling reveals a vulnerability in Harry as he struggles through his powerful feelings of guilt with his previous self-confidence is shaken, 'If he, Harry, had not been so convinced' and 'if he had only opened his mind'. The passage ends with Harry re-evaluating his actions by recalling Hermione's observation that Harry tends to *act* rather than *think* through the situation. The readers have already viewed the earlier events through Harry's eyes and seen that in many of the earlier encounters with Voldemort and his Death Eaters, Harry acts from a conviction that what he is doing is right. The successful outcome of these earlier encounters encourages readers to accept Harry's certainty, even if his friends express their reservations. In this he is a traditional hero, courageous and convinced of the righteousness of his decisions. While his previous confidence suggests to readers that evil can be overcome by anyone if they believe in what they are doing, this new sense of self-doubt creates a sympathetic bond with the readers who may also have to deal with complex issues where the decisions are not easy or simple. Readers see that in Harry's world vulnerability does not mean hopelessness and it is possible to learn and change. As Natov (2002, p. 126) maintains 'Harry, like his great Victorian predecessors, is a kind of Everychild, vulnerable in his powerlessness, but as he discovers his strengths, he releases a new source of vitality into the world'.

However, before the events that culminate in Sirius's death and Harry's realisation that there is more to being a hero than charging about fighting against evil, an important perceptual change has already begun. It occurs in the fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, (2000). By the end of this book the British Boarding School genre has been replaced by the epic fantasy genre in order to facilitate Harry's growth and his exploration of what it means to be a true hero:

Part of growing up is taking seriously the importance of seeing clearly, of recognizing good and evil for what they are, and trying to act for the good against the evil. Just like humans in real life. (Deavel & Deavel 2004, p.146)

In the next, and subsequent books, Harry grows from a child to a young adult. During that time he also transforms from the traditional action-adventure hero who 'acts for justice, fights the good cause, and is willing to risk his life (but not other's lives) for the sake of that good cause' (DeYoung 2007, n.p.) to what Rowling believes to be a real hero, someone who like

Harry ‘knows what must be done and chooses to do it – not because it will make him a hero or because it will benefit him ... but because it is the right thing to do.’ (Patterson 2004, p.124). By the end of the final book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007) the reader sees that the true hero encompasses more than an enthusiasm to fight the good fight, but someone who is willing to sacrifice self for the common good. In addition the reader discovers along with Harry that being a genuine⁸⁰ hero includes learning that sometimes there are social consequences which are not always positive, indeed which can be tragic.

The Harry Potter stories chronicle the process of the child’s movement from the initial consciousness of himself as the central character in his story, a singular preoccupation with self, to a sense of his own power and responsibility to a larger community. (Natov 2002, p.126)

The culmination of Harry’s transition into a genuine hero occurs not in the heat of the final Battle for Hogwarts, but in silence and isolation when Harry is alone in Dumbledore’s study. After Harry, Ron and Hermione witness Snape’s death, Harry recovers Snape’s memories, which he examines in Dumbledore’s study. He discovers that Dumbledore always knew that he [Harry] had to die in order for Voldemort to be defeated:

Harry seemed to be watching the two men from one end of a long tunnel. They were so far away from him, their voices echoing strangely in his ears.
 ‘So the boy ... the boy must die?’ asked Snape, quite calmly.
 [Dumbledore] ‘And Voldemort himself must do it, Severus. That is essential.’ (*Deathly Hallows*, pp.550–1)

⁸⁰ All terms to define ‘heroic’ are inherently subjective, depending on social, cultural and historical perceptions. However, it is apparent that Rowling has a specific model in mind as she moves Harry towards the climax of the story. So the term ‘genuine’ hero is based on the paradigm set up by the unfolding narrative over the seven books. It is not meant to suggest that other readings of Harry’s heroic actions should be discounted. This theme of what is a real hero is the subject of many critical articles which approach the definition from a variety of social, historical and philosophical positions. The following is a small sample that demonstrates the diversity of this concept in relation to Rowling’s narrative.

For a philosophical definition of a hero, David Baggett, Shawn E Klein, (eds.) *Harry Potter and Philosophy: If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, Carus Publishing Company, Illinois, USA, investigate the meaning of heroic by comparing Snape and Harry and arguing that Snape may be the greater hero.

Schanoes, Veronica, L 2003, ‘Cruel Heroes and Treacherous Texts: Educating the Reader in Moral Complexity and Critical Reading in J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter Books’ in Giselle Liza Anatol (ed.) *Reading Harry Potter: Critical Essays*, Praeger, Westport CT. looks at a Christian definition based on moral philosophy, particularly that of Thomas Aquinas, as does DeYoung, Rebecca Konyndyk 2007, ‘Love Bears All Things: Thomas Aquinas, Harry Potter and the Virtue of Courage’, University of Notre Dame, www.calvin.edu/academic/phil. Pharr, Mary 2002, ‘*In Medias Res* Harry Potter as Hero-in-Progress’ in Lana A Whited (ed.) *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia MO reviews Harry’s heroic biological heritage, and finally Prewitt, Janice C2006, ‘Heroic Matriculation: The Academies of Spenser, Lewis and Rowling’ in *West Virginia University Philological Papers*, describes the vulnerable hero as a modern interpretation of ‘hero’. Of course, what all interpretations, including those mentioned above, of Rowling’s concept of a hero do is to attest to the wide range of possibilities residing in the text, possibilities created from the subtlety and complexity of her writing.

As many readers form an emotional connection to Harry they see the world of the text through his eyes and consequently do not realise that they are not privy to a lot of information. The reader has a single point of view; Harry's point of view. The establishment of this way of seeing then deflects attention away from the fact that Rowling, in Harry Potter, has created an unreliable narrator:

Nothing is what it seems in the Harry Potter [books]. Rowling uses narrative misdirection to brilliant effect. We see the world through Harry's eyes but he often gets it wrong. In every book there is a character who is not as they appear, whose identity is hidden. (Culleton, n.d.)

Rowling uses the constant misdirection to heighten the sense of mystery by creating an underlying ambiguity that culminates in a surprising revelation in each of the novels as the truth is finally uncovered. As both Harry and the reader are misdirected, the relationship this establishes between the unknown reader and Harry is an empathetic one which makes it easy for the reader to feel they are participating in world of the novel. Some of the surprises for the readers which are the outcome of misdirection are: learning that a tattered diary turns out to be a portion of Voldemort's soul; the successful spells in Harry's borrowed portions handbook were written by Snape; and the Dark Arts teacher, Mad Eye Moody, is actually the Death Eater, Barty Crouch Jnr. Apart from these and other misdirections both Harry and the reader are drawn into the most important misdirection which is sustained until the very last book, that Severus Snape, the cold, unfeeling murderer of Dumbledore is a hero, motivated by passionate emotions and a desire as strong as Dumbledore's to defeat Voldemort. Throughout the series the reader is used to seeing Snape, as well as many other characters, only as Harry sees them which strengthens the *Bildungsroman* character of Harry's growth through the seven books and in doing so it also reinforces the continuity between each novel.

Rowling's use of the Coming of Age sub-genre assists many readers in relating to the events in the narrative. The use of this sub-genre creates a bond with readers that not only draws them into the world of the text, but also heightens the reader's sense of empathy with Harry. The reader has seen Harry grow from a child to a young adult, watched as he has made ever more difficult choices and now, in a sense, stands with Harry as he makes his final choice to face Voldemort physically alone. This is a powerful example of how fantasy genre not only draws readers into the strange world of the narrative, but also provides a space where they might reflect on some ideological, social or psychological issue from their own world. It also reflects the social character of popular fiction. Issues such as the consequences of individual

decisions, particularly difficult decisions, are part of everyday life. While the circumstances at this point of the story are dramatic as fits the genre they are anchored in common social experiences such as friendship, betrayal, loss and grief. These are issues that are discussed in the online reading communities. The ways in which the readers interpret and share these issues will be shown in more detail in the reception analysis.

At this point of the story Rowling has separated Harry from every form of social and psychological support. His friends, Ron and Hermione, who are usually at his side, are with the Weasleys in the Great Hall grieving for Ron's brother Fred who died in the battle. The depiction of Dumbledore's betrayal in Snape's memories has isolated Harry from any comfort he may have found in his mentor or his friends. As Scott (2002, n.p.) observes, 'ultimately, whatever fellowship he may have found along the way, the hero's quest is solitary'. In Dumbledore's study as Harry learns his fate, the reader is confronted by what it means to be a real hero. It begins with Harry's bleak choice, 'Harry understood at last that he was not supposed to survive. His job was to walk calmly into Death's welcoming arms' (*Deathly Hallows*, p.554). Having to make such a terrible choice (between sacrificing himself or letting the conflict continue) almost seems as if Harry is being punished, separated from any comfort and strength he might be offered. But Rowling needs Harry to be totally isolated from his previous experiences so he can become a genuine hero:

All those times he had thought that it was about to happen and escaped, he had never really thought of the thing itself: his will to live had always been so much stronger than his fear of death. (*Deathly Hallows*, p.554)

This scene is the beginning of Rowling's final interpretation of the theme of courage.

The concept of courage, although not exclusive to fantasy genre, is a familiar feature in many fantasy storylines. It is often highlighted in the battle between good and evil, an expected element of this genre and realised in physical conflict. However, Rowling, throughout the *Harry Potter* novels, explores the concept of courage in a variety of ways. In the first books courage is seen as doing what is right, making society a better place, helping friends and usually being involved in action and adventure. By the time the scene depicted above occurs, Rowling has offered the readers a deeper, more complex concept. Courage is still doing what is right but the choices are no longer easy and the consequences often tragic. Courage is not so much social affirmation but an individual, moral choice involving not only bravery but also sacrifice and in some cases, death. While the concept of courage is a theme in all three of

the authors in this thesis, Rowling asks the most of her readers in exploring its complex social and personal consequences. Some examples of readers' continuing interest in this topic are given in the reception analysis section.

The final theme, Death, is found throughout all seven novels. Rowling has claimed in many interviews that for her Harry Potter is about Death. The author Los Fraser (2008, p.32) agrees, stating 'Harry Potter is fundamentally about death – the most existential theme of all'. Death remains in the background while the actions that lead to the deaths and their consequences claim most of the readers' attention. The theme begins in the first book, *The Philosopher's Stone* (1997) when readers discover that both of Harry's parents have died, in fact, they were murdered. The theme continues throughout the novels as Harry and his friends constantly escape death while many of the bad characters, usually adults, die. In the fourth novel, *The Goblet of Fire* (2000) death comes closer to Harry and his friends when Lord Voldemort murders one of their classmates, Cedric Diggory. As the novels become darker the death toll rises as Harry loses those who are near to him, his Godfather, Sirius Black in *Order of the Phoenix* (2003), his friend and mentor Professor Dumbledore in *Half-Blood Prince* (2005), and Dobby the house elf and his friend, Fred Weasley in *Deathly Hallows* (2007). In the first novels, the young Harry is seen heroically saving the day and righting the world, and so in the later novels as his friends die and he cannot save them, he often blames himself. This is what motivates him to accept Voldemort's challenge to go to the Forbidden Forest: that no one else will have to die, 'Dumbledore knew, as Voldemort knew, that Harry would not let anyone else die for him now that he had discovered it was in his power to stop it' (*Deathly Hallows*, p.555).

As a counterpoint to the sadness and separation of the many deaths throughout the novels, Dumbledore teaches Harry that death, while permanent, is not as frightening as it seems. He tells Harry that Death itself is nothing to fear. When Harry tells Dumbledore he is worried that destroying the Philosopher's Stone means that Nicholas Flamel will die, Dumbledore tells him that 'after-all, to the well-organised mind, death is but the next great adventure' (*The Philosopher's Stone*, p.215). Then in the *Half-Blood Prince* (the sixth book) he tells Harry, 'It's the unknown we fear when we look upon death and darkness, nothing more' (p.529). Although the reader does not know it at the time, this is also preparation for Dumbledore's death at the end of that novel. Previously, in the *Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999)

when Harry is upset that his father did not come back to save him from the Dementors, Dumbledore tells him that those we love never die, they remain with us, alive in our hearts:

You think the dead we loved ever truly leave us? You think we don't recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble? Your father is alive in you, Harry, and shows himself most plainly when you have need of him ... You know, Harry, in a way, you did see your father last night ... You found him inside yourself". (*Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 312)

In the *Goblet of Fire*, after the death of Cedric, Dumbledore tells Harry that death is beyond magic: 'No spell can reawaken the dead' (p.605). However, throughout the novels Dumbledore has constantly taught Harry that death is not to be feared and he also tells him that there are worse things than death, betrayal, leading a life of remorse, and like Voldemort, letting the fear of death be the motivation for murder. By the final book, the *Deathly Hallows*, although he does not want to die, Harry is able to find the courage to face what he believes will be his death in the Forbidden Forest. Harry's acceptance rather than fear of death is one of the important features that separate him from Voldemort. Harry, while doing everything he can to stay alive, accepts that death is part of life while Voldemort who fears death has used multiple murders to cheat death and achieve immortality. Harry faces death with courage, surrounded by the physical memories⁸¹ of those who have loved him, his parents, Sirius Black and Remus Lupin while Voldemort faces his mortality in the final battle with arrogance and the mistaken belief that he can avoid his final fate.

Rowling offers readers a range of images of death throughout the series. On the one hand she takes the realistic position that people die, good people and bad people. This gives the world of the text a sense of reality for it includes the same distressing emotions the readers would know: sadness, loss and grief. However, it also includes all the positive attributes of human endeavour such as courage, bravery and hope. Rowling presents readers with a philosophical debate of the nature of death. As discussed, her representative, Dumbledore, offers readers a number of less confrontational images of death: describing it as an adventure, or simply a step into the unknown. Rowling, who has said she was influenced by the death of her mother,⁸² shows that while death is a physical separation from our loved ones, yet within us,

⁸¹ This is Rowling's term for the images of Sirius Black, Remus Lupin and James and Lilly Potter when they appear to Harry in the Forbidden Forest.

⁸² In an interview with Meredith Vieira on NBC's *Dateline* program on 30/07/2007 Rowling made the following comment about the inclusion of Death as a theme in the Harry Potter books:

their spirit does not die (see the *Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 312, above). The extended theme of Death is unique to the Harry Potter novels and not shared by the other authors in this thesis. It connects Rowling's readers to the world of the novel also by depicting characters dealing with complex moral problems and life challenges that they themselves may have to face, such as coming to terms with the death of those they love. Rowling enhances the impression that the magical characters are 'real' people, just like them.

Throughout the novels Rowling introduces a number of themes many of which are also introduced by the other two authors considered in this thesis. One of the themes prominent in the work of all three authors is that of the strong, independent female character. Rowling includes a strong female character into Harry's circle of friends in Hermione Granger but also into the adult characters with Professor McGonagall and Mrs Weasley. Other themes that are found throughout the seven novels are the social as well as the individual effects of racism, and the misuse of power and bullying. On the other hand the more positive themes of heroism, trust, loyalty, courage and that 'choices have consequences' are also explored. Readers' sense of involvement in the world of the novel, as well as in Harry's story, are important factors in the continuing success of these novels. For the reader, who has entered the magical world, to paraphrase Professor Dumbledore's quote that began this chapter – just because it all happens inside a book, why on earth should that mean it is not real?

The following section introduces the readers' own voices and some of the issues that draw them into the world of Harry Potter. In their discussions in the online reading communities readers demonstrate a sense of commitment and involvement to Rowling's creation as they discuss all things magical in this world.

Reception analysis: The online reading communities

As the last part of the multidimensional analysis this section focuses on the readers and their perceptions of the text. In popular genre fiction the relationship between the author and the world of the text and the readers, who feel they participate in that world, plays an important part in the narrative's continuing popularity. Readers often establish emotional bonds with

Six months in my mother died and I simply (couldn't kill off the fictional) mother. That callously. Not-- it wasn't callous, but it's-- it wasn't what it became ... And I really think from that moment on, death became a central, if not the central, theme of the seven books. (Vieira 2007, n.p.)

the world of the text and its characters and share their affection and knowledge with other like-minded readers in the online reading communities. This section features some of the readers' voices in the various online reading communities dedicated to the Harry Potter series of novels. The readers participating in these forums feel drawn to the world of the text and discuss, argue and criticise every possible aspect of the narratives. These readers exhibit a sense of participation in the textual world, offering advice, questioning decisions and most particularly, extending the information beyond that which appears on the pages of the text. Rowling, like many of the popular fiction authors, encourages their comments and interest through a dedicated website, *Pottermore*, and by many interviews and public appearances. However, the readers' main form of interaction is with each other in the various online reading communities where through the forums, blogs, articles and criticisms they share their particular interests in every possible aspect of the world of the text.

Before considering the readers' perceptions of the Harry Potter story there is one aspect of these stories that complicates the analysis of the readers' comments and makes them different from the debates in the reading communities of the previous case studies: the release of highly popular film versions of these novels creates an overlapping audience of readers and viewers. While the films help keep a great deal of lively public interest in the Harry Potter novels the continuing release of the printed series generated enormous interest in the films. Readers in the online reading communities take up the questions of the relationship between the books and the films, and debate which of the two is the superior form of storytelling.

At the time of writing, nearly twenty years after the publication of the first novel, there are still many online reading communities dedicated to the Harry Potter novels (and also the films) and their membership increases almost daily. Because of the number of individual web pages dedicated to Harry Potter now listed online, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to include reference to every one of the official and unofficial websites. Also, it is a very flexible cohort as many of these sites are in a constant state of change with new ones emerging and older sites, while still available to read, no longer active.⁸³

⁸³ In visiting a number of reader-based web pages it is evident that there has been some social change in how the information they contain is circulated. By their structure and content it is apparent that many readers are now more inclined to offer longer, more complex commentary than previously seen on sites dedicated to earlier authors, for example, those examined in this thesis, Georgette Heyer and Anne McCaffrey.

The following statistics in Table 6.1 demonstrate the number and range of listed sites searchable via Google.⁸⁴ However, it is not evident which of these sites, except for the official sites, include readers' comments, essays, blogs and interaction between readers.

Table 6.1: List of Harry Potter fan websites⁸⁵

Website Category	No. of pages
Official websites (created with Rowling's permission)	16
Role playing games developed by readers/fans	29
Reader created (unofficial) websites in English	42
Podcasts (5 active, 10 inactive)	15

Appendix B lists some of the websites that include reference to both the books and the films, and a table of the *Goodreads* website which demonstrates the large numbers of ratings and reviews generated by the individual books. These websites were chosen to demonstrate not only the amount of reader involvement in these forums but also something of the diversity of interests that readers share. They are only a very small representation of what is available. It is often claimed that the Harry Potter books and films are a modern popular fiction phenomenon and these statistics offer evidence of this point. For example in the introduction to a collection of critical essays on Harry Potter the editor claims that 'The Potter series could become some of this generation's most formative narratives' (Anatol 2003, p.xv). In 2003 Butler (p.64) stated that 'the Harry Potter phenomenon is currently part of popular culture around the world'. Even readers who frequently disagree with critics concur on this point. On the website *Books Tell You Why* eight years after the books were published and four years after the last film was released Katie Behrens (2015) writes '[t]he publication of the Harry Potter books has unquestionably changed children's literature and arguably the world'.

⁸⁴ The number of possible reading community sites, with only a fraction of what is available shown here, makes any definitive analysis of readers' current interests and topics problematic. It is not possible in the scope of this thesis to explore every reading community site to accurately determine what the majority of readers are discussing. The sites here are selected to illustrate readers' responses to issues raised in the 'World of the Text' section and also to demonstrate some of the reader interests outside the boundaries of the text.

⁸⁵ Source: harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki. Claims the site has 14,773 pages is probably correct but it cannot be verified it does however, include verifiable web addresses for the features in this table.

While the films have made the Harry Potter series a cross-media phenomenon, debates over the rival merits of books versus films rage in the online forums. For example on the website *Quora* a reader posted the question asking ‘Which are better the books or the films?’ There are twenty-two answers all voting that the books are better. Reader Danielle Maurer was quite definite that the books are superior because of the amount of detail available:

The books! Hands down, easily. The books are a lot more cohesive because the whole story is there, instead of just what can be fit into a two and a half hour movie. The character development is better, and we actually get to see inside characters’ heads, especially Harry. (Daniella Maurer 2010,n.p. emphasis in original)

Maurer so far has received 16,500 views that agree with her opinion (classed as ‘upvotes’). Another criticism made by reader Mathew Haynes, on the same thread, regards the way important story lines are changed in the films, especially when they are reassigned to different characters. This is a criticism made by many readers who are not happy with the way in which the films portray the novels:

Due to a lack of consistent direction, the fact that many of the directors neglected to read the books, the cutting of many important plot points that come back to us later, and the reassigning of particular scenes to different characters (Ron has a particularly bad time of this, as does Dobby), the movies are what I like to refer to as a hot mess. (Mathew Haynes 2015, n.p.)

Haynes has received 5,500 ‘upvotes’ or readers who like his comment.

One of the topics in this debate that readers feel strongly about is not just as Haynes states, ‘the reassigning of particular scenes to different characters’, but the way in which the character Hermione is changed in the film version. Typical of this topic is a thread on the *Pottermore forums* which asked ‘Book Hermione versus Movie Hermione?’. Of the twenty-nine replies most were disappointed with the changes made by the director:

I think the real shame of it was the writer was dead on when talking about how Hermione was changed in the films to cater towards girls, but when people consciously make decisions for that reason they seem to unconsciously (and I am being generous to these morons because I don't really think it is always unconscious) degrade women and girls. (Bucko 2016, n.p.)

This is an ongoing discussion and will probably engage more readers as time goes on.⁸⁶ Even though both the films and books have been available now for some years, this topic is still being hotly contested in the reading communities with neither side willing to concede their position.

⁸⁶ Most of the debates on this site have been posted in 2015 and 2016, which shows that at the time of writing it was still a debate which interested readers.

One of the reasons that topics such as, ‘Which is better the books or the films?’, produces so much passionate debate is that readers feel an emotional involvement in the world of the novels and in some cases, the films. Readers feel they are participating in the events of the story along with Harry. They are more than observers; they feel emotionally drawn into the magical world and share Harry’s experiences. This is facilitated by the fact that in all the books the narrative unfolds through Harry’s eyes so the readers share what he sees and when he sees it. The following posts are part of a forum, *Odysseyonline*, that discusses the topic ‘7 Reasons Why I Love Harry Potter’. Amanda Grable, who posted the topic originally, writes of Harry Potter and his world as if they both had a physical presence. She claims that readers choose not only to be drawn into the world of the text but to totally surrender to it because of the positive emotional relationship it offers them:

For every Harry Potter fan, there are multiple reasons why we chose to get lost in the magical world. There are so many lessons to be learned and magical moments to experience every time someone opens the book...Unlike friends and family who come and go in your life, Harry Potter will always be there to comfort you. It has made great memories and has created numerous friends and bonds. It's a special community we'll always be a part of. (Amanda Grable, 2016, n.p.)

The topic received over seventy replies most of them agreeing with Grable. One participant, Samantha Awad, writes of how comfortable and welcoming the world of the text makes her feel. It offers her a moving and emotionally shared experience of community:

It was the magic and the hope that these stories gave us. The longing we felt for a place like Hogwarts, a place that felt like home. A place where there was always friends, family, love, hope, passion, excitement and magic... We will continue to be a part of his life, carrying our own wands and fighting our own battles just like those in the magical world... and eventually come out alive on the other side stronger than ever. (Samantha Awad 2016)

There are many other single issue reading communities like *Odysseyonline* in which readers share their sense of connection to the world of Harry Potter but in the larger forums that cover many issues and topics related to Harry Potter the same thread permeates nearly all of the discussions; the sense of emotional involvement in the world of the text. The *Goodreads* site is one of the largest reading communities and on their page for discussion of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* there are many emotional, expressive and moving discussions about the final book in the series.⁸⁷ One comment posted by Gabrielle in 2013 concisely encapsulates the sense of involvement readers’ feel they share with the world of the text and the characters

⁸⁷ This particular site focuses on readers’ comments about *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. It recorded 1,791,697 ratings (where readers offer a number of stars out of 5 but do not necessarily record a written comment) and 50,588 reviews (readers comments).

who inhabit it. Gabrielle (2013) simply wrote, ‘Thank you JK for giving me a home away from home’.

A topic that is often raised amongst the reading communities is the different genres that have been included in the stories, other than fantasy. While readers argue, persuasively, for the genre they have identified it demonstrates more about the complexity at all levels within the world of the novel rather than a categorical generic association. For example as discussed above, reader and academic Susanne Gruss (2016) argues that they should be classed as Gothic genre. Gruss’s interpretation of the genre is not unique as many reading communities focus on the Gothic elements in the Harry Potter stories. For example Elizabeth Murray on the reading community site, *The Leaky Cauldron* argues that these books are Gothic novels as Rowling evokes a feeling of darkness and menace in many of the locations throughout the novels:

In the Harry Potter books, Hogwarts, the Forbidden Forest, the Riddle House, the graveyard, Grimmauld Place, and the labyrinth from the Triwizard Tournament all evoke the feeling of menace and darkness common to Gothic novels. (Murray 2006, n.p.)

‘Warrior Princess’ posted this same topic on official web site, the Harry Potter *Forums* in 2013. She asks readers if they have ever considered the books as Gothic novels. Her post has 25 replies with 359 views. Some readers offer lengthy arguments listing locations, characters, usually Voldemort, and the menacing features of Hogwarts School. In one post the reader Samovila claims that the relationship of Harry and Voldemort is a Gothic feature:

More significantly, [as characteristic of a Gothic novel] Harry and Voldemort are closely linked through an entwined fate and the parasitic relationship between the fragment of Voldemort’s soul with that of Harry. This theme is, of course, echoed in GoF [Goblet of Fire], when Voldemort *physically* ‘feeds’ off Harry by using the boy’s blood to rebuild his (Voldemort’s) body. (Samovila 2013, n.p., emphasis in original)

Another claim is that these novels belong to the Coming of Age or Adolescent genres. On a blog *The Prodigal* Dave Loveless argues that the stories are both Coming of Age and Adolescent genre:

I have always firmly believed that *Harry Potter* falls into the realm of Adolescent Literature. Many books in this [Adolescent] genre show power struggles between an authority figure (often a teacher, parent, leader, or psychological problem) and the character. Harry’s relationship with Snape is a classic example as is his relation with Sirius. These two relations define the broader spectrum of the Coming of Age story. (Loveless 2007, n.p.)

Loveless argues that the continual focus on the relationships between the characters and the physical and psychological development of Harry Potter throughout the story and the way in

which it is described establishes the Coming of Age and Adolescent genres. On a *Goodreads* reading community for *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* Darth J goes further and suggests that the Harry Potter books are a Coming of Age story for the millennial generation:

I grew up with Harry Potter. Not *just* the books, but we kinda aged *with him* (or thereabouts). It's a coming of age story for our whole generation, whether or not we received our Hogwarts letters. (Darth J 2013, n.p. emphasis in original)

This is a large discussion site and Darth J's comment received 158 likes from other readers as well as ten responses, all of which agreed with him. On the other hand, both readers and critics often identify the novels as belonging to either the Boarding School genre or more precisely, the British Boarding School genre. An example of the depth of detail offered by critics was shown earlier by Patti L. Houghton who, in an article that identifies the features of Hogwarts school as an English boarding school, also includes a short history of the development of this genre plus a list of other novels that are part of the genre (Houghton 2000, n.p.).

Another popular genre allocation for the Harry Potter series is to see it as a quest genre. This also has a strong link to fantasy genre with its historic links to the Arthurian romance. However, within this genre there are several sub-genres, particularly the quest narrative in which the character undertakes a journey to fulfil a spiritual quest through which the character gains self-knowledge along with the readers. English scholar John Algeo, in an article on the *Katinka Hesselink.Net* website, argues that the Harry Potter stories are Spiritual quest genre. He defines the spiritual quest as a quest story 'in which the protagonist faces a series of trials, the passing of which results in the discovery of a great treasure – in Harry's case, self-knowledge' (Algeo 2002). He also notes that one of the elements of the genre is that the readers as well as the character learn important life lessons:

The ultimate quest in the Harry Potter books is that of self-discovery. In that respect, these books share a common theme with the great spiritual guidebooks of humanity ... Harry learns a good many lessons, as do the readers with him. Although this is fantastic fiction, its messages are realistic fact. (Algeo 2002, n.p.)

Harry's quest is also part of a discussion by the online reading community on the *Goodreads* site for *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*. The readers see the quest narrative in relation to the plot – the action that will lead to Voldemort's downfall – so their focus is on what Harry needs, not what he learns, if he is to succeed in his quest. As reader Julia notes (2005), 'After all, the knowledge about the Horcruxes is essential to Harry's quest in destroying Voldemort'.

Finally some readers also see the Harry Potter series as part of folk tale genre. Like the quest genre this also has links to the beginning of fantasy genre as it grew from the myths and legends of antiquity. Critic and reader Richard A. Spencer (2015) traces the link between the Harry Potter series and some of the features that identify folk tales, for example the ‘common person’ who faces extraordinary trials often involving fantastic beasts or overwhelming odds which teach others (readers) about bravery, character and intellect.

The Harry Potter stories belong to the types of traditional material known as ‘folk tales’. Stories about the adventures of a person who represents the common people, but whose ingenuity and daring in the face of extraordinary trials – often involving fantastic beasts or enormous odds – makes his stories worthy to be passed along to teach others about bravery, character and intellect. (Spencer 2015, p.20)

Readers in the Harry Potter *Forums* also discuss fairytale and folk tale elements in the novels. They show a great deal of interest in these features, for example in a discussion initiated by Sagittarius in a post ‘Fairytale elements in Harry Potter’ he asks, ‘What do you think, are there a fairytale elements, who are they, can we compare anything from fairytales?’ (Sagittarius 2013, n.p.). There are twenty-one replies all with various examples of folk tales or fairy tales, for example Samovila replied, ‘I’ve referenced some Greek mythology/folklore because they also provided inspiration for aspects of the HP [Harry Potter] series’ (Samovila 2013, n.p.). Readers in both large forums as well as the smaller individual sites are all interested in the folktale and fairytale elements in the stories. On a website that explores unexplained mysteries, ‘Still Waters’ began a discussion topic of the myths and folktales behind Harry Potter. She notes how Rowling mixes creatures from myth and folk tales with her own creations and adds ‘folklore staples (bowtruckles, erklings), alongside her own inventions (dementors)’ (Still Waters, 2016). Topics such as this are popular with reading communities as they encourage readers to become experts as they explore and speculate about every aspect of the novel and its world.

The themes of heroism and courage are topics that interest many of the readers in the various online forums. The readers do not discuss them as generic themes but features of the novels about which they have a strong emotional connection. Readers describe Harry’s courage from a number of different perspectives. For example in a blog on the *Bustle* website in celebration of the sixteenth anniversary of the Battle for Hogwarts, Samantha Rullo lists twenty-one instances when Harry acted with ‘true courage’:

In honor of the Battle of Hogwarts’ anniversary, here’s all the times that Harry Potter taught us what true courage is. (Rullo 2014, n.p.)

She lists experiences such as ‘Not caring about what others think,’ ‘Facing your own insecurities and fears,’ ‘Fighting evil with joy,’ ‘Being there for someone until the end’, and ‘putting friends first’ (Rullo 2014, n.p.). In many ways her categories are examples that show Harry changing from a simple action hero in the first books to the more psychologically complex hero of the *Deathly Hallows* where the focus is on Harry’s inner struggle as he chooses to sacrifice his life in the forest. This is an example of how themes such as heroism and courage not only draw readers into the world of the text but ensure the continuing success of the novels. There are other instances, where readers approach the concept of courage through the idea of a classic hero. Joe Bunting on the website *The Write Practice* claims that Harry is an example of the classic hero:

Harry is a representation of all the best qualities in our society: courage, intelligence, athleticism, and loyalty. He is the standard Classic Hero, the best of the best, the cream of the crop. The guy everyone knows will succeed. (Joe Bunting 2015, n.p.)

Of the fifty-six replies most agree and some also mention that Neville Longbottom’s heroic qualities. Many of the participants go on to list their favourite literary hero, many comparing him (it’s always a male) to Harry Potter. From the ensuing discussion many of the readers see the connection between the hero Harry Potter becomes by the end of the *Deathly Hallows*, and Tolkien’s Frodo Baggins. For most of these participants the concept of the hero being willing to sacrifice himself is more important than being able to defeat an enemy by action.

Another facet of the hero theme discussed in many reading communities is the concept of the ‘ordinary’ hero. Harry, like Bilbo Baggins and Frodo, is a hero but he is also quite commonplace as noted by the critics (see textual analysis section). Readers and critics discuss how Harry, apart from being a wizard, is shown to be quite an ordinary person and that an ordinary person can become a genuine hero. Pharr a critic, explains how Harry offers readers an example of this:

Harry is the representative of many ‘real-time’ child’s wishful dream and many adult’s private yearning for *someone* to help an imperilled world. For the sake of his readers’ emotional and psychological well-being, Harry must continue on into his heroism. (Pharr 2002, p.54, emphasis in original)

Readers within the reading communities have expressed the similar sentiments to Pharr but they tend to offer a more individually focussed personal response as demonstrated by Red Cap a participant on the Harry Potter reading community forum, *Snitch Seeker.com*. Red Cap responded to the question ‘Why do you like in the world of Harry Potter?’ (which received 451 replies from readers between 2014 and 2017):

I love the world of Harry Potter because it takes me away from reality to this magical place where things can be fixed and you don't have to feel completely alone and helpless all the time. It changes and shapes your life when you read the books. (Red Cap 2014, n.p.)

The same applies to discussions of Neville Longbottom as a hero. While this is a less prominent discussion topic readers consider him in relation to his place in the overall narrative as well a representative of the themes of bravery and courage. Neville has quite a strong following on the *Potter Forum* website where there is a 'Neville Longbottom Appreciation' thread with seventy-one posts. The following post sums up the opinion of the reading community:

at first when u read about neville u feel he should be in Hufflepuff for being just & loyal. but then u see he is a truly courageous & brave person, who does stand up to his beliefs. he just needs a bit of prompting & encouragement is all 😊. (maihi li 2011, n.p.)

Another feature of the novels is its setting: Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. An opinion commonly expressed on the various online reading communities is that readers simply would like to attend Hogwarts. It is one of the features that draw the readers into the world of text and many refer to it as if it were a real place; one reader on the *Harry Potter Fan Fiction* site claims:

Hogwarts is the premier magic school in the world. I believe Hogwarts is the one school in the world that focuses entirely on magic and almost nothing else, with History and Muggle Studies being the exceptions. (lordgeryon 2016, n.p.)

This is the beginning of a discussion with fifty-six posts. There are some very detailed explanations given with most supporting the proposition. However, some readers disagree:

Honestly, Hogwarts seems pretty bad. They have mentally unstable teachers like Snape and Trelawney and incompetent ones like Hagrid. The DADA position is cursed and the DADA teachers are usually psychos (Hello, Lockhart, Quirrell, Umbridge, Barty!). There are also a lot of dangerous things in the school like basilisks and three-headed dogs. If this is the best magical school in the world, I would rather be educated at home. (ThatGreekLady 2016, n.p.)

One reading group made a detailed examination of the magical features of Hogwarts and compared them to actual schools, 'Why does Hogwarts have things like trick stairs, moving staircases, etc?' (wordhammer 2015, n.p.). In the initial topic the reader asks questions such as, 'Why would parents think it the best magical school when it is a danger to the students?' and 'Why don't muggle parents demand more equal rights?' The reader then states, 'Not only are they harming themselves, but they are harming the next generation, too if they don't demand more/equal rights and things like Hogwarts being fixed'. This led to quite an extended discussion with fifty-eight comprehensive replies. For example, some readers

thought that things like moving staircases reminded the students of their magical nature, while others explored a whole range of issues, from the abilities of the teachers, to how the school kept young witches and wizards safe while they were learning to control their magic. One reader even set out a detailed justification for the selection of the location of Hogwarts as a safe place for underage witches and warlocks:

During these formative years, accidental magic becomes more likely and more dangerous, so moving them out to an isolated location was key. The castle is meant to absorb the excess impulse-based magic, leading to all sorts of unintended side-effects, like moving staircases, benign intelligent Giant squids and a personification of pre-adolescent chaos know as 'Peeves'. The castle is still considered a 'safe' proving ground because the challenges presented by the castle give young wizards and witches reasons to use and leverage their magic. (wordhammer 2015, n.p.)

Like many of the worlds created in the novels of popular fiction readers feel drawn into the world so they feel they can participate in it, beyond any of the events in the narrative. The range of issues explored in relation to Hogwarts School, which readers can identify as part of the British Boarding School genre, are an example of mechanisms used to draw readers into the world of the text. The important point about this discussion and the many, many more like it on the reading communities' websites, is that the readers feel comfortable in the world of the text and this encourages them to explore many features of the magical world apart from Harry Potter and his exploits. In the previous example 'wordhammer' presents the case for the location of Hogwarts as if this is a real issue, 'so moving them out to an isolated location was key'. In offering an explanation for the founders' reasons for the location of Hogwarts the reader offers a view of the novel-world as a place with history and a working society with events that occur outside the narrative which demonstrates the novels' internal consistency throughout its created world.

The prominent theme of strong, independent and intelligent women is also found in, but not unique to, fantasy genre. It is a common theme across the three case studies in this thesis. For the readers on the Harry Potter *Forum* this topic is often discussed in relation to the character of Hermione Granger. Beginning by acknowledging how intelligent she is, readers expand this to topics such as why she chose Gryffindor House, whether she was 'a bit overboard' in her punishment of Rita Skeeter and 'Which is better the film or the book version of Hermione?'. While these topics reflect the interests of individual readers they generate a lot of interest, for example the topic asking how intelligent Hermione is generated eighty-three posts and 709 views.

Another popular strong female character that attracts a lot of reader response is the character Ginny Weasley. On the same website, *Harry Potter Forums* in 2007, ‘Blibbering Humdinger’ posted a topic ‘Open discussion of Ginny Weasley’. This generated 851 replies and 25,586 views and is still attracting comments in 2017. Like the discussion about Hermione Granger many of the replies focused on the personal characteristics that the reader liked and also how they would have liked Ginny to have a larger part in the story. For example ‘Stefanvh’, who saw Ginny as a strong character, felt she might have been given a larger part in the Battle for Hogwarts, noting ‘I would have liked very much to have more of a look at her actions during the Battle of Hogwarts as one of the leaders of Dumbledore’s Army’ (Stefanvh 2017, n.p.).

Not all the *Harry Potter* characters provoke such agreement amongst the readers. One of the important characters, Severus Snape, is a controversial figure not just among critics (as discussed above in the textual analysis section) but also among readers. Snape is one of the very few characters that the readers, the film fans and the critics agree was expertly portrayed in the films by Alan Rickman. However, agreement is not always the same between critics and readers about practically everything else concerning Professor Snape. Both groups approach Snape from quite different perspectives. Critics are interested in Snape’s purpose and portrayal in the story while readers, who see the textual world through Harry’s eyes, take a more personal and emotional approach. Literature academic Lisa Hopkins believes that Snape’s character provides a learning experience for Harry and his friends:

One of the things Harry and his peers must evidently learn is tolerance of difference...Indeed, one wonders whether he [Harry] will, in the end, even have to accept the heroism of Professor Snape. (Hopkins 2003, p.32)

This was published before the publication of *The Deathly Hallows* so Hopkins could not have known that she was correct about Snape’s heroism. In contrast, academics Katrim Berndt and Lena Steveker argue that Rowling uses Snape’s character as a way of diverting the reader’s attention from other characters:

Every time Harry – and the readers – becomes sure beyond doubt that Snape runs evil errands, it turns out that Snape is in fact on the right side. (Berndt & Steveker 2016, p.196)

The most interesting analysis of Snape comes from academic Jenny McDougal. McDougal argues that Snape is a complex character who demonstrates Rowling’s ability to create complicated, multidimensional characters who, like the readers, are motivated by many different human influences and circumstances.

We understand at the end of *Deathly Hallows*, finally that Professor Severus Snape's hatred of Harry is not because he is evil or working with Voldemort, but because Snape is motivated by his profound and lasting love for Lilly, Harry's mother...If this is all true, that Rowling's characters can be more than they appear, that they can operate in more than one mode of being... Heroes worthy of our loyalty should be complex and conflicted – they should be human. (McDougal 2015, pp.161-2)

Those in the reading communities express a more personal view of Professor Snape. Almost from the first books most of the websites have had numerous discussions about Snape and his role in the continuing story. For example one website, *thehpn.net/the forums* has a section devoted to Professor Snape, and has 670 posts. The following is a good representation of many readers' interest in this character. Rather than seeing Snape through a human perspective this reader sees him as the romantic image of a Byronic hero.⁸⁸ As part of the discussion, 'The Development of Snape's Character through the Deathly Hallows' the reader known as 'subtle science' posted:

The story of Snape's reformation is probably the strongest draw for me...It's the irresistible draw of the true Gothic hero--the romance of the fall from grace, the remorse and redemption, and the return to grace. I cannot for the life of me understand how/why anyone could NOT find that story compelling. (subtle science 2012, n.p.)

Readers pursue a very wide range of issues connected with Professor Snape. They often excuse his treatment of Harry. Sylvia on the *Harry Potter Forums* comes close to agreeing with the critics that it is the complexities that have shaped his life that have made his choices difficult. This, she believes, makes him more realistic:

My point is, Snape isn't a good man. But he isn't evil either. The reason why he is my favorite is exactly because he is so complicated. In my opinion, he is one of the most realistic characters in the series. (Sylvia 2017, n.p.)

Sylvia had 111 replies to her comment and 602 views. Most readers agreed with her and state that Snape is the most complex and interesting character in the novels. As to him being cast as an evil character one reader quoted Rowling's⁸⁹ view that 'Snape deserves both admiration and disapprobation, like most of us' and concluded 'Therefore Snape was not evil' (Wilken, 2015, n.p.). The other point often raised by readers is Snape's death scene. As reader, 'The Bacon Machine', wrote of Snape's death:

⁸⁸ This term is associated with the Romantic poet, Lord Byron who himself was thought to be a dangerous person, 'mad, bad and dangerous to know' (the term was coined by Lady Caroline Lamb to describe Lord Byron). The term, especially in Romance genre, identifies a hero as rebellious, antisocial, arrogant and yet still enigmatically and enticingly romantic.

⁸⁹ This quote attributed to Rowling is continually reported in interviews, articles and discussions. There is no definite date or source of the quote. The example cited is recorded on the website *Hypable* as part of a discussion 'J.K. Rowling Twitter Debate' (Wilken 2015, n.p.).

I have to admit that when he first was killed, I wasn't very upset because I thought he was absolutely evil. But then we took a look in his memories, and I swear I was crying. By far the most emotional moment in the entire series for me. (The Bacon Machine 2017, n.p.)

Whether readers feel that they identify with Hermione or Ginny or that they understand the motives that determine Snape's actions, their responses are framed by their emotional involvement in the world of the novel. In the examples above the readers feel that they have to defend their favourite character, often looking at possible features that they believe exist beyond the covers of the text.

Finally in considering what interests the reading communities the last theme to be considered here is one that permeates throughout the whole narrative. It is also a theme that interests critics but also that generates a number of discussions in the reading communities: the theme of Death. As shown in the textual analysis section it becomes more prominent in the last novels and especially in the scene of Harry's death in the forest and his meeting with Professor Dumbledore on the otherworld 'King's Cross Station'. Some of the issues raised by readers in relation to this scene are where is this place where Dumbledore and Harry meet and where would Harry go, if as Dumbledore tells him, he can choose to go 'on'.

One reading community, at *scifi.stackexchange.com* (2014) discussed the question, 'What was Harry's Choice at the end of the Deathly Hallows?' They began the discussion with Rowling's explanation, as she set out in an interview. Rowling was asked, 'In the chapter of King's Cross, are they behind the veil or in some world between the real world and the veil?' her answer was, 'You can make up your own mind on this, but I think that Harry entered a kind of limbo between life and death' (Anelli 2014, n.p.). Readers in the *scifi.stackexchange* community were not only interested in the fact that the scene indicated that there is some form of afterlife available to Harry but also in that he had a real choice. As one reader replied, 'in this limbo state, Harry is presented a choice, and it's implied that he really can choose either option' (Mynamite 2014, n.p.).

In spite of Harry being involved with the dead Dumbledore on the otherworld King's Cross Station the *Harry Potter* stories create a believable living world which plays a large part in ensuring the longevity of these novels. The world in Harry Potter is a place where readers can feel empathy with the inhabitants. Readers recognise social issues, such as racism, social injustice, prejudice and discrimination that disrupt the harmony of their own society and see

how they might have a positive resolution. For example a topic posted by Theremin (2010) titled, ‘Why I believe Harry Potter is unintentionally racist?’ attracted 106 posts with a range of arguments from agreeing with the reader to pointing out that the magical world is just like the non-magical one. One post by FeitoComFruta compared the treatment of ‘squibs’ in the magical community to the treatment of the deaf in the non-magical community, showing how each group is invisible in their community.

The term I’d use is ‘benevolent paternalism’. It’s the belief that I know your needs better than you do, so I will provide them so you don’t have to think about them. This belief is best used to describe the Deaf community and the Hearing community. (FeitoComFruta 2010,n.p.)

Readers have a sense that the world and its society continues on past the pages of the novel and they encourage each other in the reading communities to speculate as to where and how it develops. Like the worlds created in the two previous case studies of Heyer and McCaffrey, this is a place that induces readers to return to it many times not only to share their knowledge of its people, its society and its secrets but as a place of comfort and acceptance. In the reading communities readers post about re-reading the novels and entering the world of the text with enthusiasm and interest. Readers are drawn to the world of Harry Potter for it offers them a very positive place in spite of many of the darker moments. On the official Harry Potter website, *Pottermore*, Rowling describes the world of Harry Potter: ‘It’s comforting, like an old friend’ (Rowling, n.d.). This is a friend that will always be there:

It doesn’t matter that we’ve retraced these steps hundreds of times before, it’s the knowledge that whatever is going on in our lives, if we’re stressed or upset or just in need of five minutes peace, the Harry Potter stories will always be there for us, just waiting on the page. (Rowling 2017, n.p.)

Rowling here seems to be identifying a feature of the online reading communities that has been discussed in previous chapters – the practice of ‘comfort reading’ where readers return to and re-read their favourite texts for emotional support at difficult times.

The reader’s enthusiasm and detailed knowledge of the world of Harry Potter offers a very different picture of the novels to that of the critics. Readers approach these texts, like they do many of the genre novels of popular fiction; from a position of emotional involvement rather than critical analysis. Readers continue to return to these novels and in many cases the films also, because the world of the text resonates with them and makes them feel welcome.

Conclusion

In this chapter the multidimensional analysis of the Harry Potter novels first focuses on a genre analysis to show that many of the social themes Rowling includes such as friendship, courage, loyalty and heroism are expected elements of fantasy Genre. These are elements that have been part of this genre since before the Middle Ages and still play an important part in its current development, as they do in Rowling's imaginary, magical world. The textual level of the multidimensional analysis not only shows which generic themes Rowling has adapted but also the themes she included that are outside the expected generic framework and that the combination of the world of the text, the narrative development and her use of expected and unexpected themes gives these novels their unique character. Finally the multidimensional analysis includes the voices of the readers, who are ultimately responsible for the novels' continuing popularity. It shows how the readers respond not only to the developing narrative and its genres and themes but also how they feel connected to the textual world, which encourages them to explore and participate in it.

The Harry Potter novels are an innovative expression of the genre of fantasy as they draw their readers into the world of the text by situating them in a sequence of well-known popular fiction genres without losing sight of the basic character of fantasy genre and particularly its reliance on the inclusion of magic. This gives these novels a distinct character. Fantasy genre has been used as a receptacle, a portmanteau, that carries a range of established genres to readers. Themes and characteristics from these genres give the narrative world a distinctive quality and their recognisable features also reinforce the sense of authenticity in the world of the text. For example, readers move seamlessly between such diverse genres as British Boarding School, Gothic horror, and epic fantasy which provide a range of contexts through which the main characters of Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley move as they to grow from children to young adults throughout the seven years covered by the narrative.

By the last novel, *The Deathly Hallows*, the genre has changed and so have the themes that originally seemed unproblematic. In a combination of epic fantasy genre and Coming of Age genre Harry has matured into a different kind of hero. Courage is now presented as his willingness to sacrifice himself for others. The concept of heroism is shown to be far more complex both in its application of doing what is right and the limitations of a hero. The theme

of death and the Gothic horror genre framework is more pronounced as Harry is reminded that his actions, heroic and well-meaning as they might be, can have tragic consequences especially in relation to Sirius Black and Professor Dumbledore. Like all Epic Fantasies, the Harry Potter series has a crucial final battle, The Battle for Hogwarts, where Harry makes the truly heroic decision to sacrifice himself in order that Voldemort can be overcome. The deliberate inclusion of epic fantasy features, such as the complex magical world, the battle between good and evil played out in the struggle with a powerful, evil enemy and the themes of sacrifice, individual courage and compassion all give the Battle for Hogwarts and Harry's decision to sacrifice himself a deeper significance and extended social substance which makes the world of the text both persuasive and believable to readers.

Other genres such as quest genre also help establish the different ages of Harry, Hermione and Ron as they mature across the seven novels. In the first books the quests are usually associated with straight forward action, finding the Philosopher's Stone, saving Hagrid from Azkaban, and finding and destroying the basilisk. This does not mean that the tasks are easy but that they do not have the physical and psychological consequences of the later quests. The later quests include elements of tragedy and great danger alongside the triumph of completing the quest. This also helps show that in the later novels the themes of heroism, courage and death take on more complex meanings as the quests become more difficult.

While none of these genres are original, they are part of the world of the narrative, creating the intersecting worlds of Muggles and Magic, producing a singular example of fantasy genre, the Portmanteau fantasy. As the different genres blend into the world of the text they demonstrate one of the reasons for these novels' continuing popularity. They provide a way, through their recognisable features, to assist readers to develop a sense of empathy with the characters in the world of Harry Potter.

Another aspect to these novels is the inclusion of a number of social issues, such as racism, bullying, and discrimination, which are explored in the narrative but are also relevant to the everyday world of the readers heightening their sense of connection to the world of the text. Readers are encouraged to enter the world of the text by the genres and themes with which they can easily identify. Interest in every possible element in the novels is confirmed in the reading communities by the topics discussed, that not only demonstrate their knowledge and expertise in the world of Harry Potter, but go beyond what is in the novels to give the world a

sense of realism. The alternative world of Hogwarts and magic might be built on phenomena that cannot be explained by the laws of nature but readers are happy to accept its existence while they linger in the pages of the novels. As a Portmanteau fantasy genre, the Harry Potter stories create a strong bond with readers by the identifiable genres that fill the world of the text. Because the world is so accommodating readers not only return to it but, in the reading communities, discuss every possible detail, often beyond what is found in the novels, increasing the popularity and longevity of the novels by their involvement and interest.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

The genre novels of popular fiction extend a tradition of social communication that has its beginnings in the tales told around the communal campfires in ancient times. Just as those storytellers enthralled their audiences with the myths, legends, and heroic sagas modern technology makes it possible for the contemporary equivalent of those storytellers, the genre fiction writers, to capture the imagination of even larger groups of readers. The genre novels of modern popular fiction are a loosely-related collection of novels that delight thousands of readers every day. However, these narratives are more than a collection of appealing stories; they are simultaneously a textual and social phenomenon. Each of these novels encourages a sense of participation between the text and the reader through the world of the novel. The readers, like the novels, are a large loosely-related group within society, drawn together solely by their interest in an author or a novel rather than by membership in a particular social group.

As the multidimensional analysis of these novels demonstrates, from the first level of access (the genre), the authors have a double task; first the author must acknowledge the genre characteristics anticipated by the readers, for this is what has attracted them to the novel. However, at the same time the author must also offer the readers an innovative use of these features that will not only entice them into the world of the novel but have them return to it numerous times. This tacit connection between the author and readers is an important component of the social nature of these novels. The next level of analysis is through the world of the text. Through the text the author acknowledges the readers' expectations and this encourages the readers to feel they are participating in the world of the narrative. The reader of popular fiction is not a detached and objective critic, but rather a willing participant in the unfolding drama of the plot, emotionally engaged in the fortunes of the characters and the eventual outcome of the story. These are novels that are of the moment as they connect in some way to the present worldview of the reader, offering them a world that is both known and unknown. However, many of these novels also last long beyond their first publication and go through many reprintings as they give pleasure to new groups of readers. As the third level of the multidimensional analysis reveals an important feature of these novels' longevity arises from the way the world of the novel creates a continuing social bond with their readers.

To illustrate the social character of the novels of popular fiction this thesis focuses on the fictional worlds created by three very different popular fiction authors. These are the Drawing Room romance novels by Georgette Heyer, the series of novels set on the world of Pern by Anne McCaffrey and the world of magic in the Harry Potter novels by J.K. Rowling. These novels represent three of the most successful genres of popular fiction: romance genre, science fiction genre, and fantasy genre. These genres were chosen because of their enduring popularity, demonstrated in the online reading communities, many of which have been active for many years. While these authors have made important contributions towards the continuing development of their chosen genre, they are by no means the only possible authors and novels that offer a social perspective through the world of the text which connects them to the reader.

The multidimensional analysis is applied in the three cases highlights the participatory qualities as well as the social nature of these novels. Through genre analysis, textual analysis and reception analysis the case studies show how readers are drawn into the worlds of the novels and how this give the readers a sense of being part of those worlds. The genre analysis shows how the generic features expected by the readers are created over time and how they reflect the current social expectations of the readers. The textual analysis focuses on how the world of the text has been formed and how the author has created a detailed and plausible society in which the reader will feel comfortable and welcome. Finally the reception analysis focuses on the readers and their reading communities showing what interests readers, how they feel a connection to the world of the text and how they contribute to the debates and forums with other like-minded readers.

The active and participatory readers in the online reading communities are well versed in the generic features of a range of different popular fiction genres, as is demonstrated by the analysis of the discussions in the online forums. They are able to recognise and appreciate the genre blending and hybridity that is a feature of the novels of all three chosen authors. Authors use these recognisable generic features as a way of directing the attention of the readers and also of making the readers feel comfortable in the initially unknown world of the text. Readers often share their wider generic knowledge within the reading communities as a way of explaining particular or problematic features such as social relationships or as explanations for the specific actions assigned to characters within the novel's world.

While genre specific studies tend to highlight the distinguishing features of that genre, the multidimensional analysis used in this thesis reveals that in spite of their differences and because genres are social texts, many different genres share the same social themes. These themes can cross genre because they are relevant to and connect with the readers' social and emotional environment. While romance, science fiction and fantasy novels may approach these themes in their own genre's way, the reception analysis in each of the case studies demonstrates that readers in the online reading communities connect with these themes, both through their individual social experience as well as their shared cultural knowledge.

One connective feature in the three case studies in this thesis is that all three authors offer readers examples of strong, independent women characters who overcome the restrictions placed on them by their society. Georgette Heyer's heroines are young, self-reliant women who overcome the narrow social dictates of Regency society that maintains that females need to be directed and controlled by men. Heyer champions women who choose to marry for love and shows that society is the better for this. Anne McCaffrey also highlights strong, independent women showing that instead of being seen as unimportant or an 'outsider' they can bring important skills and knowledge to benefit society. McCaffrey, like Heyer, often shows the social effects of an individual's choices through the treatment of women in the world of the text. J.K. Rowling also includes a number of strong, independent and intelligent female characters, particularly that of Hermione Granger.

The three case study authors also explore themes of courage, family, discrimination and the use of power. These are examined through concepts such as good versus evil, racism, discrimination and social change. These are all complex features that exist within the readers' society and are issues that in the novels are debated in a variety of situations. As Liesbet Van Zoonen found in her study of different cultural responses to television soap operas, viewers knew that the events depicted in them were unrealistic but they responded to the 'emotional realism' they saw in the characters relationships and interactions: 'they recognized the emotional predicament of the characters, and found the tragic sequence of rows, intrigues, happiness and misery 'realistic' (Van Zoonen 1994, p.118). In the same way the social themes in the world of the genre novels give the worlds of these novels the same sense of emotional reality for the members of online reading communities, and they also offer these readers a chance to consider them in a safe framework. They also demonstrate that these novels are social texts, linked to the world of the reader.

In Georgette Heyer's Regency world, which forms part of the Regency romance genre, many readers discuss in the online reading communities how they admire the elegant, aristocratic world of Heyer's Drawing Room romances. Those who discuss features of Heyer's Regency society comment on the fact that it is a world defined by class: at the upper end it is an inherited social hierarchy but it is also a world where all classes are content with their social allocation and live in harmony with each other. These readers do not see an exploitive hierarchy but a comfortable and safe world where respect for all members of society is an important social commitment. They admire the beautiful clothes and great houses and like the clever, independent young women who teach the handsome men who wish to marry them that women are more than decoration. Many readers appreciate Heyer's humour and her attention to detail and are aware of the social themes of respect and responsibility woven into the generic expectations of love and marriage. Readers still enjoy entering into this glittering world many years after Heyer's death and new readers constantly join the online reading communities, which are as enthusiastic as they were when the world of the Drawing Room romance was first created.

Members of the online reading communities dedicated to Anne McCaffrey's novels like to explore many of the different aspects of the world of Pern with its long, involved history and culture. While McCaffrey actually set out the preferred sequence of reading these novels, readers constantly rearrange them to highlight their different interests. McCaffrey brought a new social focus to the previously male-dominated genre of science fiction and she takes a great deal of care to make the case to her readers and critics that these novels are science fiction not fantasy. However, most readers do not question the genre because what captures their interest and draws them into the world of Pern is the unique, intelligent dragons that bond with their riders as they save the world from the incursion of Thread. A great deal of time is spent by many participants in the reading communities discussing every possible aspect of these creatures far beyond any information supplied in the text. Readers find a world where the social features of cohesion, respect, and cooperation between all sections of society are fundamental features. This supportive society, as well as the dragons, encourages the readers to wish that they too might live in a Weyr and Impress a dragon.

One of the features that distinguishes fantasy genre is its use of magic and Rowling's world offers readers an abundance of it. Rowling offers her readers a dual world, the magical world

exemplified by Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and the ordinary, everyday world of the middle class English suburb of Little Whinging. But it is the magical world of Hogwarts that draws readers into the world of the novels. Readers see this magical world through Harry Potter's eyes, which gives them a sympathetic view of his struggles, his triumphs, and his eventual victory over the evil Voldemort. A great many readers in the online reading communities reveal a sense of participation in this world as they discuss the motives, actions and choices made by the various characters. A feature of these novels is the way in which the three main characters of Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley grow from children to young adults over the seven novels. Many in the online reading communities appreciate that the world changes during this maturing process and becomes more complex and its dangers more formidable. They are also aware of social themes such as courage, honesty, good versus evil and the value of friendship being explored through the interactions of the characters. In the reading communities readers like to speculate the fate of various characters outside of the narrative, demonstrating a feeling of involvement in all aspects of the world of the novel. The three case studies, even though they cover three quite different genres all demonstrate the readers' sense of commitment to the various worlds created in these genre novels of popular fiction.

The three case studies show that readers in the online reading communities approach these novels with a sense of expectation based on the generic features they include. The studies counter the assumption that these features are merely formulaic, restricting an author from developing a narrative as they would wish. Rather than being restrictions they are important interpretive strategies that situate the reader into the world of the text and encourage a sense of connection with the author. The case studies also demonstrate a novel's capacity to generate enduring social networks. Initially each story might be read individually but then many readers join reading communities dedicated to the world of that novel and share their ideas, criticisms, loves and hates with other readers. This creates a continuing dialogue sometimes lasting over years as readers maintain their connection within the community.

The case studies also show how these novels create an emotional response from most of the readers whether it is through following the development of a particular character or having a sense that they are part of the textual world readers find comfort, acceptance and inclusion in the worlds of the novel. The reception analysis shows that through the discussions in the reading communities it is evident that readers reread these novels many times often finding

something new that they share in the reading communities. Many readers in these communities claim that the worlds created by these novels offers them a positive experience through the feeling of inclusion and acceptance they find within these worlds, an experience that extends to their bonds with others in the reading communities. This sense of connection is one of the affirmative social outcomes readers experience by participating in communities formed around the novels of popular fiction.

The three case studies also demonstrate how these readers and their reading communities are influential in determining a novel's popularity and longevity. Readers pass novels to other readers, often between generations as they encourage new readers to join the reading communities. Another aspect of these reading communities that the case studies show is how readers are very supportive of authors. They offer topics in the reading community forums that explain problematic features of a novel, supporting rather than condemning an author for some feature that might be unpopular. These reading communities generate a sense of inclusion: the knowledge shared, the recurrent contact in the forums, the involvement in discussions. These features all give those involved a sense connection and this extends, often as an aspect of generic knowledge, as a form of a social bond between the author and the readers. The multidimensional analysis in this thesis includes the voices of the readers in the reading communities in order to demonstrate their sense of participation and cooperation with the author in the world of the text.

The case studies demonstrate that there is still a great deal of research possible in relation to the connection between the readers, the reading communities and the novels of popular fiction. They show that there are hundreds of flourishing reading communities online where readers participate in reading communities developing dialogues that can last over years. This thesis has made a start in researching reading communities, but so much more needs to be known about these communities such as the topics they discuss, the sense they have of participating in the worlds of the text, and their reactions to developments in the genre as well as the narrative. To conduct detailed research into the readers and reading communities of popular fiction new methodologies need to be developed. These could extend earlier studies, such as Janice Radway's (1984) study of romance novels, which used a qualitative approach in reader-response criticism, as does Henry Jenkins' (1992) study of the fans and the participatory culture they develop in relation to television and film narratives.

The social and technological context of the Internet plays an important part in this thesis. The development of digital media has brought people together who previously would not have had the opportunity to actively interact with each other. This is evident in the online reading communities where the participants indicate that they represent a range of countries and cultures. This raises more questions about multifaceted contexts of reception of these novels especially given their social nature. At the time of writing the participants in the online reading communities interact very much like Swale's (1990) discourse community. The readers enter into the online community and it is the online community and its focus on the author as well as the novels that are controlling factors. However, with the Internet facilitating access to an increasingly large and diverse audience, the social issues explored in the complex worlds of the novel may become problematic for readers who do not share the same worldview with others. On the one hand an increased international membership of these online communities allows a more democratic platform for discussion and sharing. On the other hand the capacity for conflict, as readers from different backgrounds and cultures encounter each other, creates new challenges for reader communities. How the social phenomenon that is the online communities moves into the future and how they decide on their forms of participation is an area that needs more research. This thesis has made a contribution upon which such research could be built.

Appendix A

The following list shows the awards for the individual novels in the *Harry Potter* series and it also illustrates some of Rowling's individual awards and honours, including some unusual ones.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone. (Won a total of nine awards) including:

- British Book Awards 1997 Children's Book of the Year.
- Sheffield Children's Book Award 1998.
- Was voted nation's favourite children's book in Reading charity Booktrust's 100 best books for children, (2013).

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. (Won a total of eight awards) including:

- British Book Awards 1998 Children's Book of the Year.
- The Bookseller Association/The Bookseller Author of the Year 1998.
- Whitaker's Platinum Book Award 2001.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban. (Won a total of eight awards) including:

- North East Scotland Book Award 1998.
- Scottish Arts Council Children's Book Award 1999.
- Whitaker's Platinum Book Award 2001.

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire. (Won a total of three awards) including:

- Scottish Arts Council Book Award 2001.
- Children's Book Award in 9-11 Category 2001.
- Winner of the Hugo Award 2001.

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix. (Won a total of two awards) including:

- WH Smith People's Choice Book Awards, Fiction Category, 2003.
- British Book Awards Book of the Year (shortlist) 2003.

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince. (Won a total of two awards) including:

- Winner of the British Book Awards, WH Smith Book of the Year, 2006.
- Royal Mail Awards for Scottish Children's Book (Best book for readers 8-12 years) 2006.

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. (Won a total of two awards) including:

- Booksellers Association Independent Booksellers' Book Prize (shortlist) 2008.
- Carnegie Medal 2008.

Rowling's awards

2000:

Rowling was named 'Best Author' by The British Book Awards. Also in the same year Rowling was made an officer of the Order of the British Empire and the University of Exeter awarded her with a Doctors of Letters (DLitt) degree.

2003:

The Oxford Dictionary added the word '*Muggle*' to their dictionary.

2004:

Edinburgh University awarded Rowling an honorary degree.

2006:

The asteroid (43844) was named Rowling in her honour and the newly discovered Pachycephalosaurid dinosaur was named *Dracorexhogwartsia* in Rowling's honour.

2007:

Rowling won an 'Outstanding Contribution to Children's Literature Award' at the Writer's Guild Awards and *Deathly Hallows* was described as the fastest selling book of all time.

2008:

Rowling was awarded the James Joyce Award from the Literary and Historical Society at University College Dublin and she also received an honorary degree from Harvard University.

2009:

Rowling received the 'Legion of Honour award' from French President, Nicolas Sarkozy.

2010:

Rowling received The Hans Christian Andersen Literature Prize. Also at the 1st annual 'Canada's Teen Read Awards' Lord Voldemort was nominated for the 'Best Villain' award.

2011:

The cast, crew and Rowling were awarded 'Outstanding British Contribution to Cinema for the Harry Potter film series' by The British Academy Film Awards (BAFTAS).

2012:

Rowling received 'The Freedom of the City of London' honour.

Appendix B

Not all sites shown here are interactive reading communities but all are currently active and if not reading communities contain readers' comments, blogs, criticisms and a wide range of 'Potter' information to be shared. The topics on these sites are a mixture of novels and films with readers often seamlessly moving between both media during a discussion. However, the inclusion of a single focus on the films is more dependent on the choice of topic, for example, in the topic listed below, 'Severus Snape: A Character Analysis' many of the posts refer to Alan Rickman's portrayal of the character while others focus on the character and the novel.

- On *Google* under the topic Harry Potter 14 pages of websites with many listing further multiple addresses.
- On the official site, Harry Potter @ Scholastic, 44 pages of topics with approximately 27 topics per page. On one page of 27 topics there are 1106 replies, and 18,804 views.
- On the *Harry Potter and Chamber of Secrets* website:
One topic, 'Severus Snape: A Character Analysis' has 75 pages of posts which equal 1,558 posts and 32,278 views.
- On the *Pottermore-fan-forum* website there are 6,282 topics listed, 322,876 posts and 7,129 active members listed as of February 2017.
- On the *Harry Potter Forums* website at the time of writing there are 30,958 topics, 1, 309,354 posts and 16, 582 active members. This website is constructed and maintained by readers.

An example of a website that focuses on the novels is the *Goodreads* webpage. The following table sets out the number of ratings and reviews for each of the novels listed on this website. While this site is dedicated to debate of the novels, in some of the responses by readers the films are mentioned, but the main focus is on the novels.

This is an open site as readers are still able to add a review or comment if they wish.

Book title and date of first publication	Ratings ⁹⁰	Reviews ⁹¹
Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone	4,498,515	69,648
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	1,812,063	31,660
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	1,874,208	33,666
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	1,779,178	28,947
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	1,769,787	26,834
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	1,706,428	25,869
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows	1,763,119	49,972

⁹⁰ Readers can simply leave a star rating without comment if they wish.

⁹¹ Reviews are the comments left by readers as well as their rating. As well as placing a comment on the website readers are also able to offer responses to other comments, thus forming a separate discussion thread. Some of these threads can have forty or fifty responses.

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Primary Sources

The primary sources for each case study are divided into two sections. First, the novels of each of the three authors in the case studies are listed separately and set out chronologically under the date of their first publication. Second, the sources cited from the online reading communities associated with that particular author are listed. Many of the participants are only identified by a pseudonym. This is a common practice on many websites; even for those who use a name there is no guarantee that this is the participant's real identity.

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