

SAND, SHEIKHS, AND SEX: ORIENTALISM, AUDIENCE RESPONSE, AND  
EXPRESSIONS OF A VERNACULAR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THROUGH  
DESERT ROMANCE NOVELS

By

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To my family

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ARS	Audience Response Studies
DR	Desert Romance
IR	International Relations
ME	Middle East
U.S.	United States

Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School  
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Scholarship on orientalism thus far focuses solely on the cultural products without analyzing the relationship between orientalist products and audiences. I find this to be a weakness in representational studies (including orientalism) as it is not the representation itself that imbues meaning, but the interaction between audience and text. I argue by including audience analysis scholars will 1) have a more thorough understanding of how orientalist products work, 2) take individuals as agents who are not simply programmed into certain ways of thinking, but have the ability to engage with representations, 3) take women's experiences seriously and as sites of politics, and d) potentially open up space for moving through the dilemma of self/other and the quagmire of orientalism.

In this thesis I will analyze the relationship between orientalism and Audience Response Studies through Desert Romance novels and their readers. Through the texts I demonstrate the orientalist representations in Desert Romances are more complex than scholars have allowed. Through audience engagement I show that people, as individuals with agency, interpret orientalist texts in a variety of ways that at times

contradict an orientalist reading and at times help individuals work through racist and problematic representations of the Middle East towards a more benign engagement.

I recognize these readers are performing a type of international politics. Through their interactions with the novels, they express concerns, fears, and desires about the Middle Eastern Other. In order to better understand what type of politics they are articulating, I believe I need to conduct more interviews with Desert Romances readers as well as possibly interacting with other audiences.

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION: SAND, SHEIKHS AND SEX

It was late. The fireworks were over. Katar rested as Malik drove the limousine back to King Selim's palace where the reception had been hosted. Shafir pulled his wife across the long seat of the limousine into his arms. "Happy?"

She tilted her head up. "Oh, yes."

Tomorrow they would return to Qasr Al-Ward. Shafir planned to take Megan deep into the desert for a few nights of time alone. But tonight they would spend in his city residence.

"I was surprised by how many people congratulated me today." She glanced up at him through her lashes. "There seemed to be a view that you were too wild for any woman to wed."

Shafir started to laugh.

"Several people expressed pity and told me that I'd have to get used to living in the desert. I told them that I came to Dhahrar in search of excitement, adventure and romance."

The laughter faded from his face, and a gleam of concern lit his eyes. "Does that worry you? If it does, we can spend more time in the city."

"That would be like caging a tiger." She paused, examining her husband. "The first time I met you I decided you were untamed. Wild. A man who could never be civilized."

"A savage." His teeth flashed in the dimness.

"My savage. And it's that raw male strength that's exactly what I love. My soul mate. You're everything I ever wanted."

"You are the wife of my desert heart- my *ain*. My only one."

*The Untamed Sheik (2009)* by Tessa Radley is a best-selling Desert Romance (DR) novel, a sub-genre of the romance novel which is the highest grossing and best-

selling genre of books in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Defined primarily by the Arab male hero of the story, DR novels typically feature a white western heroine and an “Arabian” setting (usually a fictitious country). Particularly in the years since 9/11, the subgenre has dramatically increased in popularity in the United States from 32 novels published in the 1990s to 161 in the first decade of the 2000s, a 500% increase.<sup>2</sup> This surge in popularity has occurred in a context in which polling data suggests American attitudes towards Islam/Arabs/the Middle East<sup>3</sup> are overwhelmingly negative or ambivalent.<sup>4</sup> That romance readers choose to read novels about romantic unions with Arab men at a time when the United States is involved in military operations in the Middle East and news about the Middle East is prevalent in the U.S. media, is a paradox that has not gone unnoticed.

In academic and journalist articles (Evelyn Bach 1997, Jessica Taylor 2003, Brian Whitaker 2006, Jarmakani 2010, Jarmakani 2011) authors from Gender Studies, Middle East Studies, Anthropology and Journalism point to the existence of “orientalist” tropes in the narratives. They suggest that DR novels perpetuate static and racist

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<sup>1</sup> According to the *Business of Consumer Book Publishing 2012*, romance was the largest share of the U.S. book sales in 2011 at 14.3% and 1.37 billion dollars in sales. While Desert Romances are only a very small fraction of the number of romances produced (in recent years roughly 20 per year), the increase in production is significant.

<sup>2</sup> Although increases in publication begin around the year 2000, the significant jumps begin in 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Despite the differences in the identifying markers of The Middle East, Arab, and Islam, these terms are often used interchangeably in U.S. popular culture. As I am primarily interested in the views of Americans, in the terms they appropriate, I will use the common discourse of conflating the religion of Islam, the region of the Middle East (also a problematic term set by Area Studies departments), and ethnicity of being Arab, while recognizing that reproducing these stereotypes is problematic. Attempting to detangle these separate, but at times co-existing, identities in analyzing polling data and conversations with readers would miss the meaning these labels have for those I am studying.

<sup>4</sup> For details of the polling data please see Appendix A.

representations and direct a problematic gaze from the reader towards what I will loosely refer to as the Middle East.

As the passage from *The Untamed Sheik* demonstrates, such tropes are not difficult to find. The opulence of the palace and the limousine, the romantic desert, and the “savage” Arab man are all brought together in a page of text. However, despite the presence of these orientalist clichés, I will argue throughout this thesis that in order to better understand what is happening in these texts and more important what is happening when readers read them, we need to move beyond textual analysis to the meaning making that occurs when the reader encounters the novel’s content.

My argument for the importance of reader interaction with the novels for scholarship on orientalism is both a methodological and theoretical one. To arrive at a more thorough analysis of cultural representations and how they interact with people’s understandings, audiences must be included. Adding the audience into analysis of orientalism adds another piece to the puzzle in how representations work. I have purposefully chosen the term work because representations do not just exist, they are active; they are both noun and verb.

Representations do not stand alone in a vacuum. They require a creator, the product, and the audience (Hall 1997).<sup>5</sup> By including audience analysis, new understandings in both how people interpret representations and how they act upon them can emerge. It is not enough to simply state that a body of work is orientalist. The importance of assessing representations- by all scholars who engage in orientalism- is

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<sup>5</sup> Another dimension, the means of bringing the representations to the audiences, the marketing process, could be added to Hall’s diagram. While I do bring in the marketing process for my analysis of DR novels, it is not the focus of my thesis.

ultimately not the product, but what emerges from the human encounter with the product. If the orientalist product did not interact with people and their understanding of Others, the representation would not signify. It is precisely because scholars believe representations and audiences do interact in a meaningful way that they analyze representations. However, with the exception of Jarmakani's recent "Desiring the Big Bad Blade: Racing the Sheikh in Desert Romances" (Jarmakani 2011),<sup>6</sup> scholars of orientalism have not engaged with audiences.

In addition to my argument for including audience interaction as a more thorough way of investigating orientalism, I argue leaving out the voices of the consumers of these texts is indicative of a broader problem I wish to address. To claim representations are dangerous because they effect people and policies out in the "real world," and yet not engage with those people, by either ignoring the audience or assuming the representations manifest themselves in "obvious" or "natural" ways, is problematic. People create representations, people distribute and market representations, and people engage with representations. Ignoring "the people" not only limits our understanding of how representations work, but prioritizing the text to the exclusion of the person denies the agency of individuals.

Feminist scholarship prides itself on taking women's experiences seriously. Yet, even the feminist academics who have studied DR novels (as I discuss further in chapter 2), imply the readers lack agency in their readings by assuming the novels guide readers into certain ways of imagining the East. Taking a feminist reading of the novels and implying they interact with readers' understandings, but ignoring the readers

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<sup>6</sup> I will discuss the limitations of this article in chapter 2.

and their opinions does not make for a feminist project. I will further the DR and orientalism scholarship through a feminist lens by engaging with and taking the readers and their opinions seriously. By doing so, and by accepting these readers as individuals with agency (although I do not claim any person has complete agency), a more nuanced political analysis of these interactions can emerge.

We engage in politics with the tools available to us (hooks, 2000). These tools may include academic articles and books, television sitcoms, newspaper articles, novels, talk radio, conversations with family and co-workers, films, religious and political leaders, travel experiences, and more. I argue popular culture<sup>7</sup> is a widely available tool that everyday people (people outside of academia and political elites) use to help make sense of the world around them. In this thesis I do not prioritize academic or high-brow ways of experiencing international affairs and encounters with Others over every day experiences.

In addition to respecting people's various ways of knowing, Feminist International Relations (IR) scholar Cynthia Enloe (1989) argues for a political understanding of people's experiences. Through her claim the personal is international, she uncovers the political in ignored and presumably apolitical female dominated spaces. She writes:

Power infuses all international relationships...Power, not simply taste, is at work here. Ignoring women on the landscape of international politics perpetuates the notion that certain power relations are merely a matter of taste and culture. Paying serious attention to women can expose how *much* power it takes to maintain the international political system in its present form (2-3).

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<sup>7</sup> I recognize the uses of the term popular culture are problematic and at times so broad as to be rendered meaningless (Storey 2006). However, without an alternative language to convey the products, ideas and actions of a population with wide- or mass commercial-appeal, I will continue to appropriate the term.

I argue engagements with international politics, such as reading DR novels, need to be recognized as a form of *politics*. Ignoring the political implications of these acts does not mean they do not exist or are apolitical, only our understanding of them is more limited, Enloe argues, “By taking women’s experiences of international politics seriously, I think we can acquire a more realistic understanding of how international politics actually works. We may also increase women’s confidence in using their own experiences and knowledge. . .” (4). Middle-class suburban women reading these novels may not be discussing war tactics in the Pentagon or marching in protests, but they are using “their own experience and knowledge” to practice and articulate a type of international politics that I refer to as *Vernacular IR*.

Vernacular refers to the native language or dialect of a population that is distinct (while related) from the dominant language. People who engage in international relations (in a language that is unrecognizable to those who dominate the practice and interpretation of politics) are opening an alternative space of practicing international relations and speaking a vernacular of IR. Although I do not believe the line between elitist/academic discourses and everyday discourses of international relations are completely distinct or separate, I find giving a name to the ways in which everyday people engage in international politics is a useful tool towards taking their experiences and opinions seriously.

My third argument involves the application of academic theorizing on orientalism. The scholarship surrounding orientalism is limited in its uses in thinking about more benign (and perhaps compassionate) interactions with representations of the Middle East and with the Middle Eastern Other. The frameworks set by Said (as well as other

scholars) render nearly all western interactions and representations with the East as problematic. Said provides only one way around this dilemma, the individual ascending to a rare place of alienation and displacement in which the Other can be viewed as part of a common humanity rather than someone set apart from oneself. He writes, “Humanism is centered upon the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition rather than on received ideas and approved authority...humanism is the only, and I would go so far as to say, the final resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history” (xxix). The bar is set high in this formulation of how we can move beyond orientalism. Said’s solution seems to speak to an open, educated, well- travelled person who has experienced alienation as a stranger in a strange land, as the prototype of who can elevate above orientalism.<sup>8</sup> I doubt Said imagined a southern middle-class romance reading woman in his description of transcendence. How then can we think about readers interactions with DR novels? Are there ways for everyday people who are engaging with representations of the Middle East to do so in a way that is not always reproducing negative stereotypes of the Other? Plenty of Americans are interacting with representations of the East and may never experience Said’s alienation. Rather than setting aside people and their experiences as incapable of positive or productive interactions with the Other, I propose, through engaging with audiences, alternative solutions for interaction may emerge. By speaking directly with consumers of orientalist products, other interpretations, understandings and interactions with the text may open up possibilities unimaginable in current scholarship

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<sup>8</sup> He speaks of someone like himself. As a Palestinian refugee in Egypt and then the United States, he discusses the complexities of being both an insider and outsider in both Middle Eastern and western contexts (Said 2002).

of orientalism. To summarize, I am arguing for the inclusion of audience response in scholarship of orientalism in order to add to our understanding of how orientalist texts are used by individuals, to take DR readers as individuals with agency and their opinions as sites of politics, and to potentially open options for improving the dialogue between East and West.

To support my arguments I will examine both the DR novels and the readers of the novels. In Chapter 3, "Contesting Images: Orientalism and Post-Orientalism in Modern Desert Romance Novels", I trace the history and patterns of the romance genre in the United States before honing in on the content of the Desert Romances. After situating the texts within the larger romance industry, I examine the broader patterns that can be found in DR novels, arguing that specific books and passages ultimately give a more complex picture of these cultural productions than has previously been believed. Exoticizing and othering does frequently occur in these novels. I do not deny the presence of orientalist representations. However, I believe the moments of disruption are worth examining.

My analysis breaks from previous academic articles on DR texts that take the Saidian position that these novels perpetuate stereotypes of the Middle East and work to create an exotic and barbaric Other. The authors rarely reference instances of novels straying from this singular mold. I believe part of the reason for this monolithic reading of the novels is the limited methodological approach of the authors: Bach, Taylor, and Jarmakani appear to rely on a subjective sample of DR texts in their readings. These authors reference between 8-11 novels (roughly 3% of the total novels produced since 1919) and do not examine the development of DR novels over time. Moreover, the

methodologies of the authors are not transparent: none of the above authors ever divulges the manner of novel selection or attempts to justify why the titles she scrutinizes are especially important.

In pursuing a more thorough analysis, I analyzed all 275 DR novels that have been published from 1919 to 2012. Through this general overview, I locate several basic patterns which highlight how particular titles fit in with or deviate from these common narrative configurations. To gain a more nuanced understanding of how the genre works, I read thirty DR in their entirety (roughly 10% of the total number of novels produced since 1919). I chose texts spanning from 1919-2012 in order to examine change and continuity in the genre, and I relied upon Harlequin's<sup>9</sup> best-seller's list of novels to create my chosen sample of thirty. The more thorough attention I give to the selection and reading of the novels has resulted in findings that at times contradict and complicate the findings of earlier DR scholarship that relies upon convenience sampling.

Chapter 4, "Reading the *Desert Romance*", combines the scholarship on orientalism and representation with audience response studies by highlighting the role of the readers of DR. Through Amazon.com book reviews and open-ended interviewing, I engage with the readers of these novels to hear in their own words how these texts work in their lives. Rather than assuming a cultural product has a pre-determined meaning to its consumers or results in a specific orientation to the Other, I allow the readers to speak for themselves which complicates the story of orientalism. From doing so, I have found that 1) Readers' interactions with the text are not monolithic and do not take prescribed patterns, but are diverse between readers and at times even

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<sup>9</sup> Primary publisher of category romance novels of which DR novels are a part.

contradictory within their own responses. 2) Readers at times come away with unexpected and complicated interpretations of the text that could not be foreseen solely through textual analysis 3) Readers find through DR ways with which to attenuate prejudice and negative stereotypes of the Middle East rather than simply reaffirming stereotypes as Orientalism scholarship suggests.

In the conclusion, chapter 5, I will review the arguments and findings in this thesis, and make suggestions for how scholars interested in orientalism and representations can benefit from and further my research. The following Appendix offers tables and visuals referenced throughout the thesis and the List of References offer full citations for the resources I drew from in my research.

Before engaging with the novels and their readers, I must first contextualize my arguments through examining the lineage of Orientalism and Audience Response Studies. Chapter 2, “Moving Beyond Orientalism: Creating Space for Audience Response”, begins with Said’s *Orientalism* and the critiques of his work. In particular, I focus on feminist critiques that point to feminine desire of the East and the exasperation by scholars of the Orient who ask, “Where do we go from here? Is there a way to engage with the Other in a way that is not harmful?” I show the importance of Said’s original argument and feminist additions to scholarship on orientalism while expressing concern at the lack of attention by feminist scholars to the role of everyday people’s experiences and expressions of orientalist products.

I then move to the tradition, primarily in literary and cultural studies, of audience response studies. By reviewing the contributions of audience response scholars, again with a focus on feminist works, I argue studies of orientalism can benefit from the lens of

audience response studies. By drawing from the scholarly traditions of orientalism and audience response, through feminist analysis, I offer a contribution to the studies of orientalism.

Studies of orientalism are currently in a paralysis. Scholars are comfortable discussing representations, but in order to work towards “humanism” scholars must move beyond theorizing orientalism to the interactions between people and representations. Once people are engaged and their understandings of the texts surface, new ways of imagining this journey towards a greater degree of compassion and respect of difference may emerge.

## CHAPTER 2 MOVING BEYOND ORIENTALISM: CREATING SPACE FOR AUDIENCE RESPONSE

Before moving into my primary sources- Desert Romance (DR) novels and their readers- I must first situate my argument within the diverse literature of orientalism and Audience Response Studies (ARS). Through reviewing the scholarship of these two areas of inquiry, focusing particularly on the contributions of feminist scholars, I will demonstrate how I use these fields to support my argument for a more complex understanding of orientalist representations through a more holistic reading of the novels and by engaging with readers of “orientalist” texts.

While theories on representation of the Other are vast, I will focus primarily on the works of Edward Said which arguably have framed the debate of orientalist studies, particularly as it applies to the Middle East, since Said’s 1978 publication. I will begin with a review of *Orientalism* and other relevant works on representation (Todorov 1984) before reviewing the conversations surrounding *Orientalism*. I will focus on the critiques and arguments surrounding Said’s work that are most pertinent for my thesis. Next, I will briefly review the lineage of ARS paying particular attention to feminist scholars’ contributions to this field. Through the review of these two distinct literatures and through the supporting evidence of my primary sources, I will argue for the advantageous connection between studies on orientalism and audience response that will allow for a deeper understanding of how representations work and possibly lead toward more humane encounters between East and West.

### **Orientalism and the Other**

Examining the ways in which westerners think about and present the East, particularly the Middle East, began in earnest with the publication of Edward Said’s

*Orientalism* ([1978] 2003). Using the case studies of western writings (Shakespeare, Dante, Napoleon, Balfour, Chaucer, Byron, Henry Kissinger and others) he explores what is presented as the “East” and “West” and the ways in which those representations give meaning to both identities. Said does not believe in a stable category of East or West, he writes, “as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea” which does not exist outside of our social constructions (Said, 5). However, he argues, most writers across all disciplines have accepted an inherent distinction between East and West as the basis for their theories (Said, 2). The East is presented as an exotic, irrational, feminine space while the West is portrayed in rational and masculine terms. This foundational presumption of the Other then itself helps define the West as the superior in this East-West binary (Said, 1). While Said focused his research primarily on European writings about the Orient, he believes the United States has carried on the tradition of western created exhibitions of the East.

Said claims orientalist studies cannot be separated from a long history of western interests and western notions of superiority (Said, 11). Through orientalist logic Europeans were able to make sense of the imperial project their nations were wrapped up in. Not only did orientalist representations encourage imperial economic objectives, but they served the political role of creating and solidifying the modern European identity by contrasting Europe with the backward East (McAlister 2008, 9-10).

Orientalism has not simply been a case of depicting the exotic Other, but has historically provided a means with which to dominate and further imperial western objectives. He writes, “the *guild* of Orientalists has a specific history of complicity with imperial power, which it would be Panglossian to call irrelevant” (Said, 341, italics original).

Said argues while one malicious or exotic representation of the Middle East may not be worthy of attention, the overall representation of the Middle East by the West (through thousands of individual representations) creates a problematic pattern. The repetitious and monolithic portrayals of the Middle East as a knowable- and inferior- place turns what could be an individual representation of the Middle East into an epidemic monopoly on “truth.”

The term orientalism has more widely come to mean any western created exotic and/or racist representation of the East although it can be argued this was not Said’s intent. Since *Orientalism*, an explosion of scholarly work using the tenets of *Orientalism* as the theoretical framework for other case studies continues to grow. Scholarship on orientalism, since Said, tends to fall into three categories.

Most scholarship follows the principles laid out by Said which find representations of the East by the West as tainted. These authors generally take a case study- a specific cultural production-to use in their confirmation that orientalist productions exist in their chosen area of study and imply or explicitly state the representations perpetuate a racist or imperial gaze from the consumer. A few writers in opposition passionately guard western study and representations of the Orient.<sup>1</sup> This scholarship is largely a defensive response to the lasting impact Said’s *Orientalism* has had both inside and outside of academia, in which “orientalist” has become a pejorative word.

The third group is comprised of scholars who agree with much of the arguments of *Orientalism*, but add their own critiques and additions to this vast body of scholarship.

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis (1993), Warraq (2007), Irwin (2006)

This has occurred in several ways. Feminist scholars, for example, have pointed to the lack of attention by Said and other early scholars, to the role of gender in orientalism and the role of women in orientalist/imperialist projects. These revisionists<sup>2</sup> argue women are not only the objects of orientalist productions, but are desiring subjects as well. While this third category of scholars who offered the original revisions gave us a more complex picture when thinking about orientalism, the plethora of subsequent works which simply find another case study to support, in this example, female- driven orientalism, do not add much to the ongoing conversations on orientalism.

While Said's work remains influential in the study of representation, theorists from various disciplinary backgrounds have also analyzed representation of the Other in ways that support Said's claims. Most relevant for my project, Tzvetan Todorov (1984) in, *Conquest of America*, argues any encounter or representation of the Other not based on the recognition of both difference and equality (in Said's terms humanism) is harmful. His argument that even seemingly benign representations are dangerous is an important one to engage for DR novels. DR, unlike more hostile representations of the Middle East, do not present the Middle East as a scary place full of violent people, but as an alluring exotic locale with sensual Arab men. While othering takes place in these novels, it is in less confrontational way. Todorov, however, would find these representations equally, if not more, precarious than overtly racist ones. He argues their seemingly benign nature makes them more insidious.

Todorov is important in this conversation because he more clearly articulates Said's concern about the dangers of *all* representations of the Other and he agrees with

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<sup>2</sup> Melman (1992), McClintock (1995), Lewis (1996).

Said's solution of humanism as the potential means out of this quagmire. In his research, Todorov examines the initial contact between the European colonizers and the Native Americans through the writings of the European conquistadors. He examines how the conquistadors interpreted the Natives in various ways that all manifested in harmful policies and interactions toward the Natives. It is quite easy for "liberal" western subjects today to acknowledge the dangers of viewing the Other as different and inferior as that will likely lead to some form of domination and subjugation of the population in question. This direct form of control and rule (slavery and colonization as examples) is treated as part of western civilizations dark past.<sup>3</sup>

Todorov's contribution to theorizing the Other comes not from his documentation of these overtly harmful and abusive ways of thinking about and interacting with the Other, but in the more subtle guises. Todorov argues even "love" for the Other leads to justifications for historical and present abuses. Colonial policies framed in terms of civilizing the Natives for their own good, religious policies of converting Natives so they might join in eternal salvation, and more current tropes of saving brown women from brown men all fall under this rubric of "loving" and converting the Other into an acceptable version of oneself.

If forcing and loving the Other to be more like oneself is harmful, can greater knowledge of the Other lead to greater understanding and appreciation? Here Todorov also points to historical examples of how conquistadors used in-depth knowledge of the Other, not for coming to a greater understanding or appreciation of the Other's cultures, but as a means to further dominate and assert one's own superiority. In attempting to

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<sup>3</sup> Although current policies and abuses may rival the destruction of earlier forms of domination, less overt forms result in a difference in perception.

come to a more neutral space in which to encounter the Other, Todorov finds difference with inequality (conquest) does not work, sameness with equality (loving them into conversion) does not work, and sameness with inequality (knowledge for subjugation) does not work. What then has the potential to transcend this self/other dilemma?

While Todorov is right to point to the more subtle forms of racism and subjugation obtained through knowledge and love, his typologies do not leave much room for shades of grey and moving past the dilemma of the self and other. He claims we must be able “to experience difference in equality...” in order to move forward (249). But how is one to do this? He claims, “it is the exiled person who today best incarnates. . .” the ability to achieve a neutral position (acceptance of difference and equality at the same time), the person who experiences all places and encounters as equally foreign- a stranger in a strange land (249).

Todorov’s discussion of the Other is important as Said and the DR scholars also assert (although less clearly) that nearly all interactions and representations of the Other are harmful. While we may put this sense of humanism/displacement as the goal for arriving at a neutral point to engage with the Other, the reality is, most people *do* engage on some level with Others and most likely *will not* come to know this alienation Said and Todorov describe. How then can we think about middle-class suburban western DR romance readers and their relationship to the texts they read? Must it only be framed in terms of hierarchy and domination of the Other or is there space for readers to think about difference in ways that may not be liberating or neutral, but also may not be as harmful as Todorov and Said suggest. Might it be possible to turn this notion of alienation on its head and suggest these readers can experience a type of

discontent or alienation of the familiar through their reading about the Other? How do we frame interactions with the Other that cannot be characterized by either orientalism or emancipation from orientalism? I will return to these questions in chapter five after hearing from DR readers.

### **Critiques of Orientalism**

Not long after *Orientalism* made waves in the academic world, critiques emerged. While varied, the critiques converge primarily on the methodologies used by Said, feminist critiques, and the pejorative framing of the term “orientalism”. I will focus on the arguments most pertinent for my project: feminist critiques concerning female participation in Orientalism and desire for the masculine East, and the exasperation displayed by scholars of the Orient.

Responding to Said and Saidists, several scholars (Lewis 1993, Irwin 2006, Warraq 2007) take offense to the proposition that orientalism is a politically charged project and accuse Said of taking an aggressive anti-western stance. They critique the accusation that studies of the Orient are tied to political/economic projects and claim orientalist studies sprung forth from benign curiosity which predates colonial interests rather than more recent history which might be imbued with imperial motives. They argue Said’s more historically recent analysis which coincides with the period of European imperialism distorts the interests and motivations of early orientalists.

These authors fail to acknowledge the ways in which earlier historical periods in the West were also immersed in interests in the Middle East; the Crusades of the European Middle Ages are obvious examples. They also fail to recognize the power differentials and the historical environment in which studies and cultural analysis took

place. The contentious historical and political relationships between western countries and the Middle East did not necessarily occur elsewhere.

While I do not agree with these critiques and believe they fail to situate Said's argument or Middle Eastern studies within a historical context, I do sympathize with the overall frustration expressed by these critics. If western representations of the East are tainted, but interactions and representations between people and cultures will continue to take place, where should western scholars and people interested in the Orient go from here? Must studies or interest in the Other always be a corrupted encounter? Can interactions continue in a more sensitive way? Neither Said nor Todorov offer a satisfying answer. Both scholars hint that somehow individuals can wipe their slate clean and interact with the Other from a place of acceptance and non-judgment. Through alienation from one's own known experiences and through accepting the Other as different and still equal, we can reach an acceptable place with which to interact with and represent, if necessary, the Other (who at this point is no longer an Other, but simply another, a fellow human being). While this may be a safe way to end a theoretical text on representation, it offers little guidance for a scholar of the Orient or someone interacting with the Middle East.

In addition to Lewis, Irwin and Warraq, scholars such as Daniel Martin Varisco (2007), Lisa Lowe (1991) and Christina Klein (2003) critique Said's methodologies. They fault Said for focusing solely on the Arabic Middle East rather than broadening his studies to other areas of the Orient, for focusing on French and British representations while leaving out other western engagements with the East, and for analyzing only

western representations of the East without looking at eastern representations of the West.

Lisa Lowe (1991) focuses her critique on the monolithic representations of both the Orient and the Occident she believes exist in Said's (and subsequent) work. While she acknowledges the persistence of orientalist representations of eastern countries by western countries, she argues orientalisms can take "heterogeneous and contradictory forms" which are "internally complex and unstable" (5).<sup>4</sup> While Lowe's argument oversimplifies some of the complexities of Said's writings, she makes a valid argument that scholars of orientalism must pay attention to the specific sites and the ways in which orientalisms are manifest.

Likewise, In *Cold War Orientalism* (2003), Christina Klein claims many of the postwar representations of Asia do not fit comfortably within Said's orientalism. She uses popular mid-twentieth century texts, such as novels<sup>5</sup> and Broadway musicals,<sup>6</sup> to examine popular representations of Asia from 1945-1961. She argues as the U.S. sought to commit itself to notions of equality, tolerance, and inclusion, while also expanding its power globally, older notions of racial hierarchy, which Klein claims Said relies upon in his definition of orientalism, became outdated. She writes, "middlebrow

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<sup>4</sup> She believes scholars must look at the particular sites where orientalisms take place to find orientalism as a representational device reflective of various national issues which manifest 'otherness' in different ways depending on the relationship between the groups involved (8). She argues France's relationship and representations of the Middle East cannot be conflated with England's relationship and representations of India. She claims Said, on the other hand, argues there is an underlying and persistent logic and pattern to these representations, an "internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient..." (Said 5).

<sup>5</sup> *The Voice of Asia* (1951) and *Hawaii* (1959) by James A. Michener; *The Ugly American* (1958) by William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick; *The Edge of Tomorrow* (1958) and *The Night They Burned the Mountain* (1960) by Thomas A. Dooley.

<sup>6</sup> *South Pacific* (1949), *The King and I* (1951), *Flower Drum Song* (1958) by Rodgers and Hammerstein.

intellectuals eagerly embraced these ideals of tolerance and inclusion. . .” (11).

Although her assertions of a liberated non-racist (even if only in rhetoric) American populace appears naïve, she, and others, effectively make the case for an expanded and more complicated understanding of what is occurring when West represents East. It is possible for these representations to both reify and contest orientalism; to solidify difference while also encouraging understanding and reciprocity. Klein believes the cultural texts of the mid-twentieth century create that opening for moving beyond orientalism.

This focus on context specific analysis is a hallmark of feminist research; I will draw upon these arguments when discussing DR readers. Feminist writers engaging *Orientalism* Billie Melman (1992), Anne McClintock (1995), and Reina Lewis (1996) offer direct feminist critiques by focusing on gender and the role of women as subjects instead of objects of orientalist studies. The scholars investigating DR novels draw from this body of work.

Melman draws upon the intersections of gender and class to show how women’s marginal positions in a dominant culture can offer different ways of engagement with the Other. She writes, “women travelers did not perceive the Oriental woman as...the ultimate ‘other.’ Rather Oriental women became the feminine West’s recognizable image in the mirror” (316). While Melman paints an overly rosy vignette of western and eastern women’s common sisterhood (which has been complicated in feminist theory), she brought the initial attention to women’s encounters with the Other.

Anne McClintock (1995) furthers Melman’s analysis by adding considerations of race to gender and class in assessing imperialism. She notes that men and women did

not have a monolithic experience of imperialism and the repression of women comes not only at the hands of colonizers. She finds Said's analysis lacking when addressing considerations of gender and class which limits our understanding of the power dynamics involved. "Rather, gender dynamics were, from the outset, fundamental to the securing and maintenance of the imperial enterprise" (6-7). As with Lowe, McClintock is interested in complicating the monolithic and binary terms with which the Occident and the Orient, the colonized and the colonizer are presented in scholarship on orientalism.

Reina Lewis focuses her work on women's historical participation in the orientalist project. As this was a neglected subject up until the publication of *Gendering Orientalism* (1996), Lewis made a significant contribution in exposing women's contributions to the orientalist project. In addition, she argues that women's multi-faceted positioning, altered the gaze and discourse on imperialism and orientalism into a more complex and "less absolute" one than was formulated by Said (4). Through analysis of the art work of Henriette Brown and the writings of George Eliot, Lewis argues women's perspectives and fantasies of the East offer new insights into the imperial subject.

### **Desert Romance Scholarship**

Scholarship on DR novels is a continuation of Lewis' work through emphasizing contemporary women's fantasies and expressions of orientalism. Evelyn Bach (1997), Jessica Taylor (2007), and Amira Jarmakani (2010 and 2011), present these novels as perpetuating exotic and racist representations of the Middle East through the narrative tropes of an exotic Middle East, the civilizing of the Arab male by the white western female, and the importation of western values and modernity through the western

heroine. Three of the four articles focus solely on the novels to argue this “orientalism-at-work” position, while the most recently published article (Jarmakani 2011) begins to engage with reader responses in addition to the novels to validate orientalism. While these authors rightly point to instances of racism, exoticism, and orientalism in DR, the articles do not leave room for alternative spaces of understanding between the texts and their readers. Readers become passive submissive receptors of culture and when they do speak or act, it is in compliance with the internalized orientalist messages they have received. Agency is denied.

Evelyn Bach first marked the trend of DR novels in her 1997 article, “Sheikh Fantasies: Orientalism and Feminine Desire in the Desert Romance.” Bach focuses on the orientalist images she found in her ten sample texts. She writes it is a blending of “real” eastern elements with the fantasy “East” that create the feeling of a believable, knowable Middle East. “The Orient of Western imagination has always been a symbiotic amalgam of fantasy and observation, in which observation feeds and validates the fantasy while fantasy inspires ‘authentication’ through observation and research” (14). Bach highlights the citational aspects of DR by claiming the authors of these novels base their writings on popular images of the Middle East rather than experience or research.

Bach and Jessica Taylor (2007) both locate the ways in which women are uniquely involved in orientalism. Taylor writes in her article, “And You Can Be My Sheikh: Gender, Race, and Orientalism in Contemporary Romance Novels,” “there has been a lack of attention to women’s participation in imperialism. This leaves an unfortunate gap, especially considering the existence of texts like sheikh romances.

Bringing these texts into the picture can yield some interesting results about how women have and do participate in Orientalism” (1033). While Taylor agrees the representations are orientalist, she challenges Said’s presentation of the Middle East as the feminized “other.” “Where does this leave female (specifically heterosexual female) desire?” (1035). Discussions on orientalism have generally failed to engage gender concerns. Taylor highlights DR novels as cases in which the Other is presented as masculine while the West is feminized through the white heroine.

In addition to the presentation of an exotic and erotically masculine Middle East, the authors assess the western heroine’s relationship with the Arab hero. Bach notes the transformation process of the Arab hero and argues the complete “otherness” of the Arab male requires a degree of civilizing not found in general romances. Through the unfolding of the story, the Arab man must prove he is not as barbaric as he might first appear. “In the course of the romance, the sheikh demonstrates more and more convincingly that he is innocent of any of these supposedly typical Oriental aberrations” (Bach 1997, 22). Most notably, he must show the heroine (and the reader) that he is clean, well educated, and by the novel’s conclusion, not fully Arab (he generally has some British or French blood). Amira Jarmakani (2010) in her article, “The Sheikh Who Loved Me: Romancing the War on Terror,” continues the theme of the Arab man in need of civilizing. She writes, “Several of the novels seem to use the device of forced abduction or isolation precisely to suggest the potential for the bad Arabian to be corrected through romantic union” (1005).

As with Bach and Jarmakani, Taylor finds the heroine transforms the hero, but more specifically through a union between the male and female in which the West

civilizes the East. “The Oriental Other must unite with the West (in the figure of a white woman). He must become incorporated into the discourse of the white romance and the western (specifically American) cultural empire” (Taylor 2007, 1045). Jarmakani focuses the majority of her 2010 article on the heroine’s (U.S.) ability to bring the hero (Middle East) into western notions of modernization. She writes, “Desert romance novels combine the neoliberal theme of freedom and progress through global (free) trade and investment with the theme of rapprochement between East and West through heterosexual nuclear union” (Jarmakani 2010, 999). Although the novels use traditional orientalist themes, Jarmakani believes they also work within a larger context of current fears and desires with the War on Terror by presenting a possibility of resolution through incorporating “Arabia” into the neoliberal fold (995).

In a more recent article, “Desiring the Big Bad Blade: Racing the Sheikh in Desert Romances,” Jarmakani (2011) focuses on the racial signifiers of Arab men in the novels and how that relates to the racialization of Arabs/Muslims/Middle Easterners<sup>7</sup> in the U.S. She devotes one section of the article to readers’ online comments on review sites. She argues that while readers enjoy the exotic otherness of the hero, his difference must be muted in ways to keep him as a desirable subject. She suggests readers in the 1970s and 1980s were able to more easily accept the Arab hero than readers today. Jarmakani returns time and again to the notion of reality vs. fantasy in the novels and the fine line that must be walked to keep the sheikh as a desirable hero.

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<sup>7</sup> Jarmakani argues the distinctions between Arab ethnicity, Muslim religious identity, and geographic location of living in the Middle East are often conflated as to render the distinctions between them almost meaningless in American popular culture.

While the authors use textual evidence to support their findings, their readings are limited and at times inaccurate. Yes, orientalist tropes do exist, but that is not all that is functioning in the novels. I am interested in discovering where these novels diverge from the standard interpretation and what else they can tell us about readers' (and authors) relationships with these texts. I argue the representations in these novels are more complicated and multi-faceted than is acknowledged. What can we learn from representations that both adhere to and diverge from orientalism?

The four Desert Romance articles focus their attentions on the orientalist aspects of the novels (Bach and Taylor), the civilizing of the Arab male (Bach, Taylor and Jarmakani) and the white woman (aka west) leading the Arab male (aka east) into modernity (Taylor and Jarmarkani). While these are all areas of interest in the novels, I am most interested in how readers read and interpret these novels. Are the attempts to unite the West with the East always a case of exporting neo-liberal American values? What does the transformation of the hero by the heroine tell us about DR specifically? What do these novels say about American romance readers' opinions on the Middle East/Islam? DR analysis to date characterizes the novels as a woman's orientalist approach to the Middle East. Clearly, as the opening novel segment demonstrates, we will find orientalist elements displayed. However, a more careful analysis will show an attempt by readers (and writers) of DR to learn, explore, and reconcile perceived differences between "East" and "West," and between Islamic and Judeo-Christian heritages.

By focusing only on the cultural productions and leaving out the main players, the readers, we are given a partial picture entirely from the long gaze of the ivory tower. By

returning to foundations of feminist projects- everyday women's (and men's) opinions matter, everyday women's (and men's) experiences matter- we can add depth to the scholarship on orientalism and representation.

### **Moving Toward Audience Response Studies and Orientalism**

Melanie McAlister ([2001] 2005), has studied U.S. cultural engagement with the East through historical analysis. In addition to Jarmakani's most recent article, McAlister's scholarship comes the closest to bringing together audience response and representations of the Middle East in American popular culture. I would like to build upon and further this initial step toward audience response and orientalism by engaging directly with contemporary audiences.

In *Epic Encounters* ([2001] 2005), Melani McAlister moves a step closer to audience interaction with orientalism by combining orientalist (or as she would label it, post-orientalist) representations of the Middle East in the United States with historical archival analysis of responses to those cultural phenomenon. McAlister challenges the importation of Said's European orientalism to the U.S. context by arguing the binary logic of orientalism does not always apply in U.S. representations of the East. Said's orientalism rests on the distinction of an Us vs. Them, a feminized East vs. masculine West, and citational representations. Particularly following World War II, the racial diversity present in the U.S. and the ways in which U.S. representations differentiated between Middle Eastern countries, presents cleavages in the notion of a distinct Us and Them. McAlister also finds the East as feminine and West as masculine as too simplistic in capturing the ways the U.S. represents itself and others. She argues the postwar U.S. identity is far from masculine. Women, femininity and the home are central to the projection of U.S. interests. The home represents the U.S. and the necessity to

guard and protect the U.S. In this construction, the outside world becomes the masculine the U.S. must protect itself from (8-12). Just as a masculine West becomes problematic, so does a feminine East. Perceiving the East as feminine leaves little room for western female desire of the East. I would add, it also does not speak to U.S. fear of the East. Framing the East in only feminine terms also strips the East of its constructed masculine power and ambition. A feminine East does not pose a threat to a masculine West.

McAlister finds most scholarship on U.S. representations of the Middle East focuses on surveys to determine whether the representations and U.S. opinion are “positive” or “negative.” The usual result in this approach is to either claim that American interests and representations in the Middle East are rationally decided and acted upon by an informed public or opinions and representations are manipulated through elites to push U.S. policy in a certain direction. In breaking with this approach, McAlister claims we should look for the nuances and intersections between interest, consent, representation and power. This is where the importance of culture and politics emerge. “The politics of culture is important, not because politics is only culture (or because culture is only politics), but because where the two meet, political meanings are often made” (xviii). I use McAlister’s critique of public opinion surveys toward DR audiences by neither claiming the readers are complete agents or complete victims.

In her research, McAlister focuses on particular moments and interactions in U.S. history since World War II which highlight these intersections. For example, in one chapter she covers the popular King Tut exhibit that toured the U.S. from 1977-79. While it is clear the U.S. Tut tour was seen as significant in the highest levels of

government,<sup>8</sup> McAlister devotes most of the chapter to the more subtle ways in which the exhibit expressed U.S. fears and fascination with the Middle East. This exhibition brought in not only art elitists, but found mass appeal in the U.S. Viewers were able to marvel over exotic items discovered half way around the world by a white British archaeologist in the 1920s. McAlister argues the display of the exhibition (encountered as though through the eyes of Howard Carter) allowed viewers to feel they were discovering something both foreign and yet universal. The extraordinary wealth displayed by the gold artifacts also signified a connection between ancient Egypt and the modern Arab Middle East (connections she argues earlier generations of anthropologists tried to sever). At the time of the exhibition, the OPEC oil embargo and U.S. reliance on Middle Eastern oil weighed heavily on people's minds. This period marked the beginning of the cliché image in the U.S. of wealthy, greedy and corrupt oil sheikhs who claimed power over the U.S. McAlister finds American fascination with Egypt's gold artifacts paralleled the interest in the Middle East as producers of the modern day gold, oil.

McAlister analyzes reactions from individuals such as the *New York Times* art critic, Hilton Kramer, and Shirley Du Bois (wife of W.E.B. Du Bois) presented in articles of the time. McAlister allows a few distinguished voices to share their interactions with these exhibitions, but the majority of her analysis remains with the texts (for example,

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<sup>8</sup> In 1974 President Nixon personally requested President Sadat to allow the Tut treasures to tour the U.S. In allowing the tour (as well as allowing one more city and several more displayed items than the 1973 Soviet tour), Egypt made an open display of increasingly friendly U.S.-Egyptian relations. Sadat was not the only one concerned with improving diplomatic relations. When the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) expressed concerns about the responsibility of caring for such priceless artifacts and conveyed second thoughts about the wisdom of the tour, Henry Kissinger personally called the board of the Met and made it known the tour was considered "a vital part of the Middle East peace process" (xx).

*Foreign Policy* articles and Steve Martin's parody of King Tut) and the historical context. Her work, for the most part, does not interact with the opinions of everyday viewers. While I draw insight from McAlister's work, I intend to interact directly with everyday people.

The feminist critiques and reformulations of Orientalism made an important contribution to the feminist theory body. Nevertheless, while feminist scholars debate the need to acknowledge the female gaze and the role of women in the orientalist project, the debate remains in the lofty space of academic theory. The experiences of everyday women and their relationship to orientalist production and consumption have been left unexamined. Other feminist scholars, unaffiliated with orientalism, have explored the relationship between cultural productions and their audiences. These feminist scholars have helped establish and build upon the Reader Response Criticism and British Cultural Studies traditions that gained attention in the 1970s and 1980s. I will now turn to this tradition that I refer to as Audience Response Studies (ARS).<sup>9</sup>

### **Audience Response Studies: Reader Response Criticism and British Cultural Studies**

Audience Response Studies (ARS) gained prominence in the last quarter of the twentieth century in response to the dominant Formalist/New Criticism School of literary analysis. Within New Criticism, scholars focus on close readings of the text while eliminating considerations of historical context, author intent or reader response. Early leading proponents of New Criticism, William K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley (1949) argued against using a reader's reaction or understanding of a literary work as a legitimate means of analyzing literature. "The affective fallacy is a confusion between

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<sup>9</sup> This field of inquiry is given various names such as Reader Response Criticism and Audience Theory.

the poem and its results. . .It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of a poem and ends in impressionism and relativism” (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1949, 31). Proponents of New Criticism treat the text as an independent objective work with the ability to impart meaning outside of a historical and cultural context.

In contrast, Reader Response Criticism (RRC), while not a unified approach, shares the common belief that reader engagement with the texts is an important component of scholarship. Wolfgang Iser (1980) proposed that the text creates meaning for its readers while Stanley Fish (1980) approached literature not as an object a reader studies and makes sense of, but as an experience. Fish re-centers the focus of analysis from the text to primarily the reader. In addition to disagreements on the central unit of analysis, the text or the reader, reader response scholars also differ in how they believe readers engage with texts. Jonathan Culler (1980) proposed that the text does not create meaning in itself for the reader, but a reader must be aware of a system of agreed upon conventions in order to make sense of what he/she is reading. In this case, both the reader and the text are dominated by the concern for uncovering the underlying system of rules readers employ (Tompkins 1980). Other scholars have turned to a psychoanalytic view of reader response in which the reader’s “interpretation is a function of identity” (Tompkins 1980, xix).

Reader response theories have branched out from only analyzing a reader’s relationship with the written word, to encompassing an audience’s response to a number of cultural phenomenon, including film, television, and artwork. The focus on television and media is most readily found in the British Cultural Studies (BCS)

movement occurring at the same time in Britain as Reader Response Criticism was occurring in the U.S. and continental Europe. Responding to the academic focus on high-brow art and literature, pioneers, such as Raymond Williams (1950) and Stuart Hall (1980) at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham insisted on the importance of studying popular culture and rejected abstract grand theory in favor of theory for specific contexts and circumstances (Turner 1990, 4). As with RRC, BCS cannot be easily defined. As primarily a critical field dedicated to exploring the complexities of cultural studies and exposing power dynamics in society, scholars have resisted the establishment of an orthodox approach to Cultural Studies (Turner 1990, 6).

Although beginning with the analysis of popular texts, BCS broadened into engagement with audiences with the publication of David Morley's *The Nationwide Audience* (1980). Morley focused his project on the relationship between audiences' interpretations of the television show and their particular socio-economic position (Turner 1990, 132). He engaged audiences by bringing individuals together to watch a television segment of Morley's choice and then spoke to the audience members afterward.

Feminist scholar, Dorothy Hobson (1982), complicated the relationship between viewer and interpretation by adding an ethnographic approach to her research. She argues, rather than interviewing audiences after having them view a television program, scholars should enter into the natural spaces of the viewers and conduct participant-observation, in addition to open-ended interviewing. Hobson's study of soap opera viewing by women in their homes argued for a complex understanding of how women

appropriate the show into their lives. Her work greatly influenced the future of BCS. Graeme Turner argues this move toward ethnography in BCS is what helped shift the scholarly focus from texts to everyday people and popular culture (Turner 1990, 161).

Feminist BCS scholars have been more attentive to the various elements that constitute an individual's position. Just as Hobson challenged studies that focused on news over soap operas and other traditionally female dominated sites of entertainment, Angela McRobbie (1980) took issue with the overwhelming focus BCS had on public spaces and male sub-culture groups. This male dominated focus relegated women invisible and ignored the rich interactions between women and culture. Many of the feminist scholars call for an integrated approach in analyzing the intersections of class, gender, and race where class-based analysis had been dominant. Further studies by Christine Gledhill (1988) and McRobbie (1984) turned around the traditional analysis of women as the objects of desire in popular culture to women as desiring subjects. This re-direction toward women's desires is essential to examining reader's relationships with romance novels. Janice Radway ([1984] 1991), as part of the American RRC movements, engages directly with readers and their interactions with the texts in her pivotal ethnography of American romance readers.

### **Reading the Romance**

Radway's interest in romance readers emerged from a socio-historic context in which women's enjoyment of romance reading was either dismissed or attacked based upon the content or the covers of the novels without regards to the readers themselves. Romance fiction has been scorned by both by "highbrow" and "middlebrow" literary consumers and feminist scholars and activists. Coinciding with emerging feminist movements in the 1970s, these novels came under intense fire from several key activist

and academic feminists who proclaimed that romance novels upheld patriarchal norms and the subjugation of women. Germaine Greer (1970) characterized romances as the “escapist literature of love and marriage voraciously consumed by housewives” (214). The passive domestic housewife was seen as being held back by literature which reinscribed traditional notions of womanhood which the reader took with her from the pages and into her daily life. “Although romance is essentially vicarious, the potency of the fantasy distorts actual behavior” (Greer, 180). In her provocative article, “Soft-Porn Culture: Punishing the Liberated Woman,” (1980) Ann Douglas attacks Harlequin romances for “specializing in dominance games, fantasies in which women lose and men win.” She writes, “in the soft-porn fantasies of the Harlequins, woman's independence is made horrifically unattractive and unrewarding, her dependence presented as synonymous with excitement” (28). Feminists during the 1970s nearly uniformly labeled romance novels as damaging to women and feminist goals.

Radway states her motivation with *Reading the Romance* was primarily in taking women readers and a woman's popular genre seriously. Rather than relying on over worn arguments of how romance reading oppresses women, Radway sought to speak with women directly and explore more deeply questions of feminism, gender formation, and identity. Her resulting ethnography has complicated the ways in which romance novels are discussed by challenging the paternalistic and condescending manner in which romance readers were addressed by the broader public.

Radway chose an active romance book club as her research site. The women she interacted with participated in both a written survey and extended open-ended interviewing. While Radway initially directed her queries to specific features of the

novels in order to glean how readers interpreted those narrative features, the majority of readers discussed the pleasurable act of reading rather than novel content. Radway claims she abandoned her pre-conceived grand approach of pursuing a specific research enquiry in favor of allowing the readers to express themselves on their own terms. Through this open process, she learned not only about reader preference and interpretation of narrative details, but the psychological and social effects of romance reading for these women.

The romance readers<sup>10</sup> most often cited a desire for personal relaxation and pleasure, a means to escape everyday hassles and worries, as their driving motivation for romance reading (Radway [1984] 1991, 61). By carving out time and space, not in the production of caring for others, or in social engagements and activities, but solely for individual private pleasure, these women were able to find moments of self-enjoyment and rejuvenation, not available to them otherwise. Radway and Nancy Chodorow (1978) argue patriarchal culture does not nurture the emotional needs of the mother. It is the mother/wife who is expected to give emotionally to others without reciprocation. Romance reading, therefore, can potentially serve as a space for women to unwind and enjoy stories in which the heroine is being well cared for. Through finding moments to subvert the demands of domestic work and vicariously experience a woman who is emotionally nurtured by a mate, Radway's investigation into reader response shows cracks in the official story of romance reading as harmful or a waste of time for women, and offers a more complex picture of the relationship between reader and text.

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<sup>10</sup> Primarily middle-aged stay at home married women with children, from middle income households.

That is not to discount completely the messages in the novels. Radway does believe that in turning to romances because of the failures of patriarchy, these women reinforce patriarchal norms by the literature they choose. Even progressive romances tend to limit female desire to monogamous heterosexuality in which marriage, and often children, are the ultimate, and only, route to womanly happiness (Radway [1984] 1991, 11). Radway does not deny the patriarchal messages in the novels, but she finds through engagement with readers, the act of romance reading can be viewed as a woman's resistance to the pressures women face in their daily lives. Only through engagement with readers was Radway able to locate complications and resistance to the dominant presentation of romance novels and their readers. I will likewise draw on readers to complicate the dialogue of orientalism in DR novels.

While ARS studies became a well-known line of academic inquiry in the 1980s and 1990s, it has since fallen out of fashion in most disciplines. Some critics argue ARS offer only inconclusive and messy findings while Toby Miller (2008) argues ARS has a tendency in practice to either claim people are unwittingly being molded by cultural productions or they are completely subverting the system (similar to McAlister's critique of popular opinion polling). Miller tracks two kinds of ways in which ARS stands in for manipulation of the populace. The domestic effects model sees "popular culture as a force that can either direct or pervert the citizen-consumer" (357) and the global effects model which suggests other cultures are seduced by western popular culture (particularly American) to the neglect of their own local traditions and ways of knowing. To avoid these pitfalls, he claims scholars need to situate audiences and texts within

“the conditions under which culture is produced, circulated, received, interpreted, and criticized” (361).

Janice Radway (2008) and Lila Abu-Lughod (2005) have pointed to ethnography and a more complex understanding of the multiple systems in which cultural productions and audiences operate as the best means toward a useful ARS. Abu-Lughod, in her analysis of television viewing in Egypt, finds most studies of popular culture lacking as they fail to offer insight into the “...social, cultural, and political dynamics of particular communities...” (30). She argues more ethnographic and psychoanalytic case studies should be employed for the study of reception. Radway reflects that reception study can be potentially limiting if we want to address the diverse social worlds and activities people are involved in and. She also calls for a more sociological and anthropological study of reception.

In this vein, it is neither my intention to claim DR readers are ignorantly perpetuating a female orientalism, or that they have somehow escaped the legacy of orientalism and are blazing a trail toward humanism through their readings. Neither model allows for the complexities of the intersections of people, cultural productions, and the various other ways of daily life which come together in an individual’s interaction with a text, especially texts that intimately interact with current geo-political situations. As I believe Radway successfully accomplished with her research, it is my intention, through careful attention to the novels, the authors, and the readers to reveal a more complex story about orientalism than is currently told. While scholars should be mindful of the “pitfalls” reception studies can fall into and the limitations of any particular approach to inquiry, an ethnographic approach to studying the interaction of reader

engagement with DR novels has the potential to offer new insights into studies of orientalism, even if these insights cannot be tidily packaged with clear conclusions. Studies of orientalism can benefit from more complexity even at the cost of messiness.

### **Conclusion**

Feminist studies of orientalism and audience response, particularly the work of Radway, will inform my study of DR readers. Combining the feminist orientalist critiques (which give space for female desire and representations of the masculine Other and argue for a multiplicity of positions in the traditional orient/occident binary) along with feminist ARS (which delve into the relationship between audiences and the productions they consume, with particular attention to female audiences and gender studies), will give a richer understanding of how orientalist cultural productions “work” in real lives, not just in academic theory.

To date, only limited analysis of audience response to orientalist texts in American culture has been conducted. And, currently, no one has engaged directly with audiences to see how they use and make sense of the orientalist texts they receive. As scholarship on orientalism has had such a dominating impact on western study of the representation of the East (particularly the Middle East), I am surprised that scholars have not explored how audiences understand and use the texts by speaking with the consumers themselves. It is not enough to simply state that a body of work is orientalist. The natural follow-up question is, “Okay, so what?” What does it mean to have an “orientalist” text experienced by individuals? I do not believe current orientalist scholarship denies a relationship between a text and its audience. Instead, there seems to lay an unexplored assumption that the orientalist text acts as a brainwashing mechanism to promote racist stereotypes of the Other within the consumer.

I believe it is necessary to engage with consumers of orientalist texts, and hear in their own words what these texts mean to them and how they use them to better understand the world in which they live. This approach can perhaps offer new insights, understandings, and complications into current scholarship. Consumers, as individuals with agency, are not merely acted upon by the texts they receive, but also interact and write upon the texts themselves. Including the voices of consumers has the potential to reposition orientalist scholarship from only analyzing representations to the more important examination of the meaning making that lies between the representations and audiences.

If we build upon Said's argument that orientalist representations are not "historically innocent," but have meaning with real consequences attached to them, then it is imperative to explore not only the representations, but the ways in which these orientalist depictions are received and used by people. Without an audience to interpret, what meaning does a text have in of itself? It is precisely because these texts interact with people's understanding of the Middle East that they cannot remain neutral. Public opinion and foreign policy emerge in part from the cultural assumptions citizens and policy makers carry with them. I would not suggest that a direct causal relationship exists between the texts and public opinion of the Middle East, the ways in which humans make meaning of the world is too complicated to explain with one rational, but I do believe an important relationship exists between the messages we receive through popular culture and the manner in which we perceive the world.

Before turning to the readers, I will examine the novels themselves. In order to understand readers' relationships with the novels as well as to understand the context

for previous critiques of Desert Romances, I must first spend time reviewing the novels. I will analyze both the romance genre as a whole and DR within that genre. As DR are not unattached sites of “orientalism” (as previous scholarship implies), but are closely tied to the broader romance genre, I will show the relationship between the romance industry and Desert Romances before delving more deeply into the content of the DR novels.

### CHAPTER 3 CONTESTING IMAGES: ORIENTALISM AND POST-ORIENTALISM IN MODERN DESERT ROMANCE NOVELS

While the focus of my thesis is readers' engagements with texts, I must first address the content of Desert Romance (DR) novels. In order to make sense of readers' interactions with the novels I need to first see what they are interacting with. In addition, scholars describing orientalism- including DR scholars- use cultural productions to support their argument that orientalism is present. To understand the context of this claim I need to engage with the content of their analysis. And, complicating the orientalism argument, which I do, requires engaging with the content of the novels and previous scholars' assessments of the texts. I do not dispute orientalism in the DR novels. Instead, I argue in addition to orientalism, representations counter to orientalism are also present. In this chapter I will acknowledge the exoticizing/racist elements in the novels, but I will spend more time locating where the texts diverge from the typical orientalist assessment of the novels.

My critique of DR critics stems from their inadequate understanding of the relationship between DR romance novels and the broader romance genre, and the partial and limited reading Bach, Taylor and Jarmakani give to content. Many of the described instances of orientalism are not unique to DR, but are indicative of the romance genre as a whole. Richly detailed and exotic setting descriptions, a domineering alpha hero with animal-like comparisons, and a heroine civilizing and taming the wild hero are all evidence authors have used to substantiate the argument of orientalist representations in the novels. What is not adequately acknowledged is that these devices are common to nearly all romances of any romance subgenre.

While certainly common elements and themes in DR (and all romances) exist, so does diversity of form. DR authors give varied presentations of the culture, language, and “feel” of the foreign location and foreign hero. The previous literature on DR does not acknowledge any deviations from their orientalist reading of the texts. These authors also do not concede the significant shifts in presentation from earlier novels to more recently published DR. I believe this deficiency stems from a limited methodological approach. As I discussed in the introduction, Bach, Taylor, and Jarmakani chose a limited number (8-11) of novels to assess, a limited span of years to assess, and they did not divulge their manner of novel selection.

Through intensive online research (blogs, romance websites, and online bookstores such as Amazon.com), I found 275 DR that were published from the original DR, *The Sheik*, in 1919 through the most recently published in 2012.<sup>1</sup> The spreadsheet in Appendix C reflects the data I gathered on the 275 novels I surveyed. I looked for general information I could obtain by reading the back covers and online summaries. I attempted to answer for all the 275 novels the nationality and ethnicity of the author, the publishing date and house, the ethnicity of the hero and heroine, the time period (modern or historic), the location of the setting, and the basic plot. For the novels I could not easily obtain this information I marked unknown. My goal with this data gathering was to understand the broad patterns and commonalities to most DR.

In addition to this expansive overview of the DR subgenre, I read thirty novels in their entirety (roughly 10% of the DR that have been published). Nine of the novels were written prior to 9/11 and twenty-one post 9/11 for the purposes of noting changes in the

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<sup>1</sup> Although I conducted a comprehensive search, I imagine a few DR exist that I have not accounted for. Nonetheless, I have included a substantial number in my survey .

representations over time. Rather than randomly selecting the novels in my dataset (or choosing novels that best fit my argument), I decided to focus on the best-selling novels. Because of the unusual manner category romances are marketed and sold (which I will describe shortly) this information is not public. I contacted Harlequin<sup>2</sup> to request a list of their best-selling DR novels. While Harlequin would not provide me with sales figures or rankings, they did send me a list of their best-sellers (in no particular order). I chose my novels from Harlequin's list selecting the ones that represented the greatest span of years so I could make comparisons and draw conclusions about the DR subgenre over time. The more comprehensive approach I have taken in reviewing DR will result in a more holistic analysis of the DR phenomenon.

I begin this chapter with a brief overview of the history, industry and structure of the romance genre before turning my attention specifically to DR novels. Because DR are intimately tied to the broader genre, the context of romance novels needs to be explored. I will then analyze the earlier, pre 9/11 romances (starting with *The Sheik*) before assessing the ways in which post 9/11 DR conform and deviate from the earlier novels. Through the content of DR novels and interviews with their authors, I will argue that while elements of orientalism certainly exist, the picture is not as fixed as previous scholarship describes. The post 9/11 novels exemplify an altered representation of difference which moves toward "difference with equality." As these novels are written, produced, and read by people, I argue the more nuanced representations in recent novels reflect a changing environment in which readers, writers, and publishers wish to imagine a more empathetic relationship between the U.S. and the Middle East.

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<sup>2</sup> Harlequin is the largest romance publishing house. Harlequin also owns Mills & Boon and Silhouette.

## A Brief History of the Romance Novel Industry

The romance novel is a literary genre that developed primarily in western English-speaking countries. Early examples of romances go back to the mid- eighteenth century,<sup>3</sup> but the genre did not fully take form until the nineteenth century with Jane Austen, who is considered one of the founders and masters of the genre. Her novels, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Emma* (1816), *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), to name a few, became immediate successes. Charlotte Bronte built upon Austen's work with her mid-nineteenth century romance, *Jane Eyre* (1847) (Regis, 85). While we can trace the evolution of the romance novel over the past 250 years, the genre, as we are familiar with it today, was refined in the early twentieth century.

In 1908 Gerald Mills and Charles Boon founded Mills & Boon in the United Kingdom as a general fiction publishing house with romances as only one of the genres offered. Due to the success of the romance line, the company began to concentrate specifically on “category” romances in the 1930s. Meanwhile, Harlequin, a Canadian company, began a re-printing publishing house in 1949. Included in the company’s selections for reprints were romances they had bought from Mills and Boon. The romances were extremely popular in both the U.K. and the U.S. At the urging of Mary Bonneycastle, the wife of Harlequin’s founder, Richard Bonneycastle, Harlequin focused exclusively on romances by the 1950’s (Radway [1984] 1991, 39).

In an attempt to duplicate Mills and Boon's U.K. success in North America, Harlequin improved their distribution and marketing system. Rather than concentrating

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<sup>3</sup> *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, by Samuel Richardson was published in England in 1740. *Pamela* was the first popular novel to be told from the perspective of the heroine and was complete with a happy ending. The book was widely popular, with five editions printed in the first year of release (Regis, 63).

on bookstores they chose to sell their books "where the women were" - supermarkets, corner drug stores and eventually mass market stores such as Wal-Mart. Harlequin also began a reader service, shipping directly to readers who agreed to purchase a set of books each month (Radway [1984] 1991, 40).

Due to their marketing success, in 1971, Harlequin purchased Mills and Boon. Although the former Mills & Boon lines were now owned by a North American company, they did not include an American writer until 1975. Simon and Schuster formed Silhouette Books to take advantage of the untapped American talent. Silhouette soon saw their market share expand, and in 1984, Harlequin bought out Silhouette (Regis 2003, 157). Today, Harlequin/Mills & Boon/Silhouette continues to dominate the market and produces the majority of the romance novels in the U.S. and the U.K.; they are responsible for 88% of the DR published between 1919-2012.<sup>4</sup>

Romance novels are divided into two marketing types, category romances, also known as series romances, and single-title romances. Many authors write only within one of the formats and some readers only read within one format. The majority of romances published are category romances which typically run under 200 pages in length. Regis writes, "When a novel is that brief, the author must pare the story down to its essentials" (160). Secondary characters and plots are generally eliminated. Harlequin/Mills & Boon/Silhouette is by far the largest publisher of category romances and has achieved worldwide distribution. Category novels are published within a specific line/theme and are numbered sequentially within that line. A line might focus on contemporary foreign settings (as with DR), historical settings, paranormal beings

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix B.

(vampires), African-American characters, and other themes. Category romances have a single print run and remain with the retailer for one month. When the next month's titles are released any unsold books from the previous month are removed from the retailer, returned to the publisher and destroyed.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, single-title romances are released by various publishing houses such as Avon and Dell. These novels are generally longer averaging between 350 and 400 pages, and include more complex plots. Authors of single-title romances have more freedom in their writing, although all romance writers will conform to certain conventions (described below). Single-title novels, as with most non-romance books, remain on the booksellers' shelves at the discretion of the individual retailer (Parv 2004, 13). While the single-title romances are the ones that make it to the best-seller's lists, it is the category romances that are the most widely consumed. The vast majority of Desert Romances are category romances published by Harlequin/ Mills and Boon/Silhouette and will therefore be the focus of this chapter.

### **Structure of Romance Novels**

Romance is by far the most popular form of fiction in the United States. One out of every six novels sold in the U.S. is a romance. Romance fiction generated \$1.37 billion in sales in 2011 and was the largest share of the U.S. consumer market in 2011 at 14.3 percent (*Romance Writers of America website*). Romance consistently outsells all other forms of fiction. Despite the genres overwhelming popularity, romance novels remain a dirty secret women hide in oversized purses; myths and stereotypes abound in regards to content. What exactly is a romance novel?

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<sup>5</sup> This is one reason it is difficult to obtain statistics on category romance sales. All category romance novels have a set number of printed regardless of how many people actually purchase them. In order to get an idea of the best sellers among the DR novels, I contacted Harlequin directly and relied upon the list of best sellers Harlequin provided me (lacking ranking or specific sales information).

Romance novels are recognizable by two essential elements: A central love story and a happy ending.<sup>6</sup> A writer may include as many subplots as she wants as long as the love story is the main focus of the novel. The romance genre is distinct from women's fiction and so called "chick lit" because in women's fiction the heroine's relationship with her family, friends, career, etc. may be equally or more important than her relationship with her love interest. Janice Radway's ethnographic research on romance reading found a majority of the women interviewed ranked a happy ending as the most important ingredient in a romance novel (Radway [1984]1991, 67). As for the most important elements *not* to include, women ranked a sad ending second only to rape (Radway [1984]1991, 74). Happy endings are essential because "romances are valued most for their ability to raise the spirits of the reader" (Radway [1984]1991, 66). Anne Kaler, a professor of English writes, "Within the popular genre of romance, craft becomes art when the story unfolds seamlessly, [and] the conclusion ties all loose ends together in a happy ending. . ." (Kaler 1999, 1). Although not a requirement, another common feature is conveying the narrative from the heroine's viewpoint, in either first or third person.

Expanding on the elements of the central love story and happy ending, romance novel historian, Pamela Regis (2003) identifies eight essential ingredients in a romance novel.<sup>7</sup> Although all elements must be included, Regis argues they can occur in any order, certain elements can be diminished or highlighted, one action can cover several

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<sup>6</sup> By this convention, novels such as *Gone With the Wind* (the love story is not the central theme and the ending is not happy) are mislabeled as romance novels.

<sup>7</sup> 1) Society defined (somehow flawed) 2) the meeting between hero and heroine 3) the barrier between them 4) the developing attraction and love 5) the declaration of love 6) the point of ritual death (the point when it appears it will be impossible for the hero and heroine to overcome obstacles) 7) recognition (barrier overcome) 8) and the betrothal.

elements or many actions may converge around one element, and the novels can take place in any setting or time period. Therefore, Regis believes romances contain a diversity of form. “This flexibility is as evident in romance novels, which are all accused of being the same, as it is in any other genre” (31). While these eight conventions of the romance novel hold true for DR as well, Regis would argue against the DR scholarship which treats all DR as one monolithic story.

Traditionally in romances, a detailed description of the setting is essential. Romance authors Cristie Craig and Faye Hughes describe the importance of the details in their romance writers’ advice book, *The Everything Guide to Writing a Romance Novel* (2008).

For many romance authors, the setting of their novel is as important to the success of their plotline as the characters themselves. After all, romance readers, more so than the readers of any other genre, want to experience the novel as though it were happening to them. They want to pretend they are the characters you've written about on the pages of the book. They want to live your story. (34).

But be forewarned: to please a romance reader, you'll need to pay strict attention to the details of your fictional world. That means you'll need to research your setting and write about it convincingly, whether it's small-town America or the Elizabethan court. . . If the setting of the novel doesn't “ring true” — or if the setting's unique components aren't fully utilized — you run the risk of alienating the reader. (163).

As the above advice suggests, romance authors include richly detailed settings in their narratives, particularly if the setting is foreign to the reader (either because of location or time period). While DR novels do fetishize the rolling sand of the desert, the camels, and the colorful cloths, they are not only adhering to notions of the exotic East, but are observing the expected conventions of the genre. Romances will equally give detailed descriptions of the exotic surroundings whether by describing the gowns of a

Regency era lady or the robes of an Arab sheikh. Attention to sensory detail is considered essential for a successful romance.

The central characters in a romance are of course the hero and heroine. The typical romance hero is an alpha male with a striking masculine presence and body. He is a man who is accustomed to power and getting what he wants. He is often wealthy and powerful in his community (at times also royalty or aristocracy). Radway found the ideal hero of any romance must be characterized by both super masculinity and sensitivity. His compassion side will bloom into love and devotion for the heroine by the novel's conclusion. Radway ([1984] 1991) writes that this essential feature of the softening of the hyper male manifests itself in physical descriptions of the hero.

The hero of the romantic fantasy is always characterized by spectacular masculinity. Indeed, it is insufficient for the author to remark in passing that the romantic hero has a muscular physique. The reader must be told, instead, that every aspect of his being, whether his body, his face, or his general demeanor, is informed by the purity of his maleness. Almost everything about him is hard, angular, dark. It is, however, essential to add the qualifying "almost" here because, in descriptions of the ideal romantic hero, the terrorizing effect of his exemplary masculinity is always tempered by the presence of a small feature that introduces an important element of softness into the overall picture. (128).

As for the heroine, she must be feminine, intelligent, witty, and independent to balance the hyper masculine hero (77). She is spunky and adventurous, but her originality is tamed by a traditional view of gender relations. It is the heroine's job to secure her own happily ever after by softening and molding the hero into a strong, yet loving and caring companion who will see to the heroine's physical, financial, and more importantly, emotional needs. In this transformative process, the hero realizes his dependence on the heroine for emotional fulfillment that only she can bring. "While the women want to feel that the heroine will be protected by the hero, they also seem to

want to see her dependency balanced by its opposite, that is, by the hero's dependence on her" (81).

The critiques of the hyper-masculine hero in DR and the civilizing of the Arab hero by the white heroine generally do not take into account the roles of the hero and heroine in romances. Both a British hero and an Arab hero will most likely be described as dark and foreboding with a hawk like nose or a lion's gaze. It is not only the Arab male who is Othered in romances, but all males. The heroine of a DR does civilize the Arab hero, but so does every heroine. The heroine's role in romances is to soften the rough edges of the hero and teach him to love.

Now that I have described the conventions of the romance genre, I will turn to DR novels. Current DR emerges from both the legacy of the romance genre and the historical environment of U.S. (and western) cultural interest in the Middle East. Both of these legacies come together to make the DR phenomenon possible. Before examining the specific content of DR novels, I will address the historical context of representations of the Middle East in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that made novels such as the iconic *The Sheik* ([1919] 1977) both imaginable and extremely popular. As *The Sheik* has had such a lasting influence in the U.S. on both representations of the Middle East and the romance genre I will devote several pages to this famous, or infamous, novel.

### ***The Sheik* and Legacies of Middle East Representations**

While several Arabian themed novels were published in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>8</sup> British author E.M. (Edith Maude) Hull's novel, *The Sheik* (1919) popularized the Desert

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<sup>8</sup> *The Garden Of Allah* (1904), *The Call of the Blood* (1906), *The Will of Allah* (1908), *The Spell of Egypt* (1910).

Romance genre. The novel placed on Publishers Weekly's top ten best sellers in 1921 and 1922 and sold over 1.2 million copies worldwide. In its first year the novel went through thirty-one printings. *The Sheik* is regarded as “one of the most widely read novels of the 1920s” (Fantastic Fiction website) and Hull followed up its success with *The Shadow of the East* (1921) and *Sons of the Sheik* (1925). Cultural critic Jack Shaheen (1984) believes many of today’s misconceptions and representations of the Middle East can be traced back to this popular novel and subsequent film (Shaheen 1984, 13). Current romance writers have also emphasized the legacy of *The Sheik* for romance novels of all genres.<sup>9</sup>

Cultural historian Melani McAlister ([2001] 2005) argues *The Sheik* emerges at a point when U.S. popular curiosity in the Middle East was shifting from a predominantly religious interest in the “Holy Land” to one of consumerism and women’s emerging sexual freedoms. Cultural phenomenon such as publication of *The Sheik*, the film version of the novel (1921), the discovery of the “King Tut” tomb (1922) and the publication of T.E. Lawrence’s (“Lawrence of Arabia”) adventures in the Middle East (1926)<sup>10</sup> acted as catalysts for these changes.

The Orient, long associated with sexuality, luxury, and irrationality fit well with corporate desires to cultivate a mass American consumer culture. Store fronts and

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<sup>9</sup> On the 2001 edition cover of *The Sheik*, best-selling romance author Jayne Ann Krentz is quoted, “This was the first real romance I ever read and it changed my life.” Carol Thurston believes it to be one of a few models for the romance boom in the 1970s (Regis 117).

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence’s autobiography, *Revolt in the Desert*, (abridged version of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*) was published in 1926, selling over 100,000 copies. Lowell Thomas, a journalist of the time, drew large crowds lecturing about his time with Lawrence in the Middle East. Through his “Lawrence” tours he travelled the world speaking to audiences of over 4 million (McAlister 25).

displays called upon Oriental motifs to capture the American consumer, particularly women's attention. Ancient Egyptian influenced clothes, hairstyles, and architecture became popular in the U.S. as well as Europe. Films and novels featuring the adventurous liberated "New Woman" of the 1920s turned the gaze from men's fantasies of the feminine East to women's fantasies of the masculine East. The film version of *The Sheik* (1921) established actor Rudolph Valentino as a Hollywood heartthrob. By filming Valentino partially unclothed, backlit, and in soft focus, (techniques usually reserved for female stars) he became the feminized masculine object of female desire (McAlister [2001] 2005, 25).

Both the novel and film versions of *The Sheik* do take on the overtly orientalist overtones as described by Said. Primarily though the Arab characters, we see orientalism at work. The hero, Sheik Ahmed, is particularly noteworthy in his animal-like and abusive manner toward the leading lady. The heroine, Diana Mayo, is a young, independent and eccentric English lady (The New Woman of the 1920s) who has no interest in marriage. She decides to have a last adventure across the deserts of Algeria before joining her brother in America. On her first day trekking across the desert, her traveling party is attacked by Arab men on horseback. One of the men, Skeikh Ahmed Ben Hassan, grabs Diana, covers her head with a cloth and rides off with her. When they arrive at his encampment she demands to know what is going on.

Why have you brought me here?  
Why have I brought you here? Bon Dieu! Are you not woman enough to know?  
I don't know what you mean.  
I think you do. (57)

The novel plays on the stereotype of the savage sex hungry Arab man who must chase after and force himself upon the white woman. Do these clichés feed off white

western men's fears of women's sexual liberation? McAlister writes white western men were greatly disturbed by their female companion's interest (and at times obsession) with ethnically marked film stars such as Rudolph Valentino.

Through the following chapters it becomes clear that Ahmed has raped Diana. She is both angry and terrified at her predicament, but sees no way of escape. In contradiction to his "savage ways," Ahmed is cultured and well read. He is fluent in Arabic, English, and French, well groomed, and his tent is stocked with academic books. Anne Kaler, a writer on the romance genre writes, "Because it seems strange to think of a rapist as a gentleman, the authors must continually emphasize a well-known convention; their heroes' finer virtues" (Kaler 1999, 96).

Diana begins to venture outside the tent and test the waters for escape. On a horseback ride with Ahmed's loyal right hand man, Diana flees, but is caught later in the day by Ahmed. It is upon her recapture that she discovers her feelings for him have turned to love. "He was a brute, but she loved him, loved him for his very brutality and superb animal strength. And he was an Arab! . . . Aubrey [her brother] would have indiscriminately class him as a 'damned nigger'" (Hull [1919] 1977, 133). Diana falls in love with Ahmed only to be captured by a rival sex-crazed sheikh. Although both kidnapers, Hull is clear in distinguishing Ahmed from the slovenly rival sheikh. Ahmed puts himself in great danger to rescue Diana. The pair returns to their encampment, but Ahmed is seriously wounded. After his recovery Ahmed realizes his true feelings for Diana and decides to let her go out of love. She begs to stay with him, but he resists. It is not until she attempts to kill herself out of despair that they reconcile and live and love the remainder of their days in the desert.

*The Sheik* is one of the first romances to introduce the “rape fantasy.” In part, some romance scholars argue that writers and publishers of the time believed readers wanted passionate stories, but would not accept premarital sex. Therefore, if the virginal heroine was forced into it, she would be absolved of any guilt and maintain her innocence (Thurston 1987, 78). However, the rape fantasy has persisted even after audiences have accepted premarital sex in storylines. In order to justify the hero’s bad behavior of imprisonment and rape authors usually employ either cultural “kidnapping the bride” customs or have the hero use it as a tool of revenge (Kaler 1999, 92). In *The Sheik* we learn Ahmed’s British father mistreated and abandoned his pregnant Spanish mother which has instilled within him a disdain for all things British. Capturing and tormenting Diana becomes a source for revenge wrapped up in a delectable package.

The novel’s portrayal of the exotic East and savage Arab man fall comfortably within Said’s descriptions of orientalist representations. In this novel we have a white western woman writing about a Middle East she has never personally seen or experienced. Hull’s descriptions are citational and reinforce stereotypes of the Middle East. Hull also places the Middle East as inferior to the West in this East West binary. Ahmed’s “good side” is his western influenced side in which he bathes regularly and can recite French poetry. His more primitive harsh side is formed by the Algerian desert. He only becomes a realized mate for the white heroine once the readers learn that he is not really an Arab at all, but a European of noble blood. The only break *The Sheik* makes with Said’s *Orientalism* is the novel’s focus on feminine desire of the East in which the western female ultimately chooses East over West.

McAlister notes the shifts in U.S. interest in the Middle East (from religious to exotic consumer culture in the 1920s) alters once again. From the 1940s onward (following the creation of Israel, the Arab-Israeli wars, and the oil boom), the Middle East was framed (in the media and popular culture venues) primarily by the political tensions between the U.S. and Middle Eastern countries. The representations of the mid to late twentieth century<sup>11</sup> combined elements of the exotic adventuring along with overtly political images of greedy oil tycoons and religious crazed terrorists. The DR novels of this era (1960s to 2001) draw upon both of these representational histories in which “Arabia” is both alluring and terrifying.

### **Pre 9/11 Novels**

In addition to *The Sheik* I read eight other pre 9/11 DR: *The Jewelled Caftan* (1978), *Falcon’s Prey* (1981), *Perfumes of Arabia* (1986), *An Arabian Courtship* (1990), *Lord of the Desert* (1990), *Hostage of the Hawk* (1995), and *The Desert Bride* (1996) and *The Sheik’s Kidnapped Bride* (2000). DR scholarship’s portrayal of DR is more representative of these older pre 9/11 novels in the vein of *The Sheik*. In my analysis, I have found that many of the plot devices in *The Sheik* were carried over into other pre 9/11 novels with the exception of rape. As rape scenes were not included in other DR, but have been included in other early subgenres of romances,<sup>12</sup> I am led to believe rape as a plot device has much more to do with when the novel was published than which subgenre it falls under. When Desert Romance author, Connie Mason, was asked

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<sup>11</sup> See Shaheen (1984 and 2001 and 2008), Terry (1985), Gottschalk and Greenberg (2008), Nacos and Torres (2007).

<sup>12</sup> Such as Kathleen E. Woodiwiss’ popular British-American historical romance, *The Flame and the Flower* (1972).

whether writers in the past enjoyed writing rape scenes or were “forced” into that plot devise, she replied:

I don't believe any author enjoys writing rape, tortures or forced sexual encounters in their books today. I don't know why certain authors wrote them in the early years of romance, but it didn't last long. Heroines today are strong, independent women who are faithful to their one love. The same holds true for heroes. Once they meet the heroine, they remain faithful. Mostly, anyway. (Mason 2000).

The commonalities between *The Sheik* and the seven pre 9/11 novels converge around 1) the ethnicity of the hero, 2) the hero's behavior, 3) the setting location, 4) religion and 5) the degree of cultural sensitivity. The pre 9/11 hero is characterized by his Arab ethnicity, but white (or partially white) racial identity. Novel covers (which usually show the hero and heroine) offer insight in the presentation of the hero. In the pre 9/11 cover the hero is often dressed in “traditional” Arab clothing, but has light skin and western features (in the vein of Lawrence of Arabia). Just as with *The Sheik*, these pre 9/11 romances reveal by the novels conclusion that the hero is not fully Arab. His father might be Arab while his mother is usually British or French. This trend of the hero's presentation may reflect a concern by readers, writers and publishers of the time with miscegenation.

The pre 9/11 sheikh hero is often a hyper- alpha male, such as Ahmed in *The Sheik*. While all alpha males in romances are by design imposing, take charge men, the hyper- alpha hero takes these traits to an extreme. More common of older romances, these heroes can even be physically or emotionally abusive to the heroine prior to their reconciliation (again, as in the case of Ahmed). Just as with the inclusion of rape in early romances, the hyper-alpha males are more indicative of when a novel was written rather than the subgenre.

While fictional locations for the novels are the norm, a higher percentage of the novels prior to 9/11 were set in actual countries, as was the case with *The Sheik* (set in Algeria). Of the eight pre 9/11 novels I read, nearly half were set in non-fictional locations. I believe this reflects the context in which readers consumed these novels. Readers in the 1970s, '80s and '90s perhaps had less awareness and certainly less access to information about the Middle East than readers today. Authors could place a setting in an actual country without as much regard for the political climate or leaders of those countries. The pre-internet reading environment meant it was difficult for readers to fact check information in the novels. Readers today have greater access to information about foreign countries.

The pre 9/11 novels are likely to mention religion and religious differences between the hero and heroine. When religion is mentioned in these older novels, the reader often learns that although Islam is practiced by most people in his country, the hero, for a variety of reasons, is not a Muslim, but a Christian. Just as revealing the hero was not really Arab, revealing he is not really Muslim may have served to assuage fears (whether readers, writers, publishers or all three is unclear) of interfaith marriages.

The pre 9/11 DR I read have a widely diverging range of cultural sensitivity and respect for the culture being described. A few of the novels describe the local culture with respect, a few with veiled disdain (usually through the character of the heroine), and a few with neither malicious nor sensitively constructed representations. Overall, the pre 9/11 novels present the West as superior in comparison to the East. As all of these novels became published, it seems regulating the degree of cultural sensitivity

was not part of the publishing industry's standard routine. The variations in cultural respect more likely stemmed from the individual authors.

The pre 9/11 novels conform in many ways to the orientalist tropes of *The Sheik*. I argue significant differences between the pre 9/11 and post 9/11 novels exist and are worth reviewing.<sup>13</sup> Since 9/11, the sheikh hero (both in terms of racial identity and behavior), the setting, religious references, and the overall level of respect toward the local culture described has altered. I will address these changes momentarily. In addition to substantive differences between pre and post 9/11 novels, the production of DR novels dramatically increased in the 2000s. Of the 275 DR novels I collected information on, 198 (72%) were published after 2001, with a 500% increase from novels published in the 1990s to the 2000s.

Table 1-1. Number of Desert Romances published by decade

Decade	Number DR Published
1960-1969	1
1970-1979	5
1980-1989	12
1990-1999	32
2000-2009	161
2010-2012	40

<sup>13</sup> Although I am placing 9/11 as a marker separating the earlier from the more recently published DR, the time period between these two types of DR is more blurred than a single date will allow. Some changes in the presentation of DR can be seen before 9/11 and older tropes can be seen in DR published after 9/11. However, I find it useful to keep 9/11 as a distinguishing marker as the *overall* trends and changes in the novels do fit this temporal marker.

The significant jump in the popularity of the DR coincides with political developments of the past decade. I suggest the events of 9/11 and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan correlate with the popularity of the genre. It is safe to say that Americans today have a greater exposure to this elusive thing called the Middle East from constant news feeds about the region. Greater exposure does not mean that the awareness is always operating consciously. Katherine Orr, vice president for public relations at Harlequin, stated the jump in DR is simply a coincidence, and has nothing to do with world news (Reardon 2006).

Marilyn Shoemaker, a DR fan in Seattle, said, "I don't think about Iraq and Iran when I'm reading them" (Galloway 2007). Former editor of the "Sheikhs and Desert Love" web site, Erika Wittlieb, does not believe 9/11 has impacted sales of the novels. However, she believes since 9/11, "romance novel sheiks are more often featured on book covers in Western-style clothing or shirtless rather than in their traditional Arab headdress and robes." (Galloway). When I asked DR author Jen Lewis why she believes DR are growing in popularity she responded, "They've been popular as long as I've been reading romance, so I'm not sure that they're actually growing in popularity, but they're certainly maintaining their appeal." While these novels were published prior to 9/11, the leap in production in the early 2000s cannot be discounted. I will return to questions of DR relationship to current events though content analysis of the novels and interviews with readers (chapter four).

### **Post 9/11 Novels**

DR are a white western, and more specifically American and British, phenomena, at least among the writers. Of the known authors, nearly all (97%) are western

Caucasian women.<sup>14</sup> This demographic information on the authors is consistent with pre 9/11 novels as well, except for the recent addition of an Fijian-New Zealand (Nalini Singh) author and African-American author (Brenda Jackson), which break the white, but not western mold of authorship.

### **Changes in the Hero**

Overwhelmingly the novels contain a white western heroine and an Arab man. Of the leading ladies, 90% are white western women (92% if including mixed heritage). The racialization of the heroine has slightly altered in recent years. Prior to 9/11 only three of the heroines were from a non-white or mixed heritage. In more recent years, twenty-two of the heroines are non-white, including an African-American heroine and Asian-American heroine, in addition to twenty Arab heroines since 2002. In her analysis of the Arab women in DR novels Jarmakani (2010) writes:

In the sheikh subgenre, however, these qualities are only expressed through the character of the white heroine, while the specter of the silent and oppressed Arab woman haunts the novel as a compelling absent presence. She serves as a convenient, nonthreatening foil through which the essential qualities of the white heroine can be emphasized. (1003).

While Jarmakani portrays Arab women in these novels only as foils for the white heroine, she fails to locate the growing number of Arab heroines in DR. Just as with the white western heroine, the Arab heroine assumes the conventional romance role of the sassy heroine who brings the hero to his knees.

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<sup>14</sup> Two known men have been involved in writing DR. One husband and wife team write under the pen name Emma Darcy and one man wrote under the pen name Christina Nicholson. For the full chart of information describing these statistics please see Appendix C.

All of the heroes are Arab men<sup>15</sup>. In the pre- 9/11 novels most of the heroes appear as Caucasian men in Arab robes and are exposed by the novels conclusion as not truly “Arab,” but partially or fully “white.” Bach (1997) writes, “The final step in the sheik’s transformation takes place near the end of the books when it is revealed he is not really Arab at all- at least not a pure blood Arab” (33). Jarmakani (2011), writing fourteen years later, agrees that only a submersed racial identity, can make the sheikh palatable for audiences.

On the contrary, though the sheikh character has a long history of commodification in the United States, what makes him consumable for a mainstream white audience in the post-9/11 context is a submersion of overt racial markers. (900).

In contrast, the vast majority of post 9/11 heroes (98%) are fully Arab. The reader does not learn the hero is actually “white” in the course of the novel. He is proudly ethnically and racially Arab and remains so throughout the passages in the novel. However, the post 9/11 novel covers generally show the hero with darker “Mediterranean/Arab” features, but in western clothing, rather than the pre 9/11 novels depicting a white hero in Arab clothing.<sup>16</sup> Do these findings suggest publishers/readers/writers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were more concerned about racial differences between the hero and heroine, but less concerned about ethnic differences than current readers and writers? Perhaps discomfort with miscegenation has lessened as discomfort with ethnically Arab markers (such as robes and kufiyas) has increased. When I asked author, Kate Hardy, what she believed was the appeal of these novels for

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<sup>15</sup> Desert romances, also known as Sheikh Romances, are defined by the Arab hero. Technically, a romance novel is not a DR without an Arab hero (in the older novels while he was not racially Arab, he was still ethnically Arab) . A novel set in the Middle East with a non-Arab hero would just become a romance set in the Middle East, not a DR (Sheikh romance).

<sup>16</sup> Please see Appendix D for examples of novel covers.

readers she responded, “I think it's the exotic location and the flowing robes! (Having said that, my editor asked if I could do one almost without robes, making him a very Westernised Sheikh. . .)” Hardy was specifically requested to diminish his “traditional” Arab dress and highlight his compatibility with western ways.

The DR hero has changed not only in looks, but in temperament. Romance readers today, of all genres, are less willing to read novels with hyper-alpha heroes. Jarmakani (2010) writes of the hero, “It is quite clear that contemporary mass-market romances focusing on the sheikh-hero engage readily with the specter of the terrorist figure, though invocations of the terrorist figure do not in any way preclude authors from invoking the fierce-desert-man and greedy-oil-sheikh incarnations” (998). Her description of the hero appears much more violent and horrific than the heroes I have encountered in post 9/11 novels. Heroes like Ahmed from *The Sheik* do not exist in contemporary DR novels. While the hero may still be a rough around the edges alpha male, it is unlikely a reader will come across an emotionally abusive hero.<sup>17</sup> The contemporary DR hero is in many respects like all other alpha heroes, although the exotic Otherness of the hero is certainly heightened in many DR novels. In describing the appeal of writing an Arab sheikh hero, current DR authors Jen Lewis and Marguerite Kaye shared:

Well, they're tall, dark and handsome. . .do we need more? There's also an element of exoticism in the appeal of the sheikh, dating back to the silent movie with Rudolf Valentino. Dramatic landscapes, striking architecture and rich fabrics, fierce and uncompromising men raised in a harsh and demanding environment, who can only be tamed by that one woman strong enough to rule their heart—is getting hot in here?

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<sup>17</sup> I found one post 9/11 exception, *The Playboy Sheikh's Virgin Stable-Girl* (2009) by Sharon Kendrick.

Once I started writing I realised why Sheiks are so popular as heroes! They're as untamed as they are honourable and well-versed in the arts of love, so they really are the ultimate Alpha male. In short, they're hot!

Lewis and Kaye draw on nearly universal elements of romance heroes as “tall, dark and handsome” as well as “an element of exoticism” that is unique to non-western heroes. Penny Jordan describes the connection she likes to create between the hero and the broader culture and landscape.

I tend to create a background for the hero in particular which will allow me to reflect certain aspects of his character, to which readers can easily relate. The backdrop can be a form of shorthand that communicates immediately with the reader. ie if the blurb says a book has a sheikh hero the reader immediately has a sense of what that hero will be. I tend to create heroes whose family history comes from regions of the world in which historically it has been necessary for the man at the head of a family to be a strong leader in order to protect the interests of his 'people'.

### **Changes in Setting**

Unlike the pre- 9/11 novels where roughly 25% of the novels settings are actual Middle Eastern countries, the vast majority of the post- 9/11 novels (88%) take place in a fictional “Arabian setting.”<sup>18</sup> Authors give several reasons for the appeal of fictional settings. In an online interview, DR author Susan Mallory suggests that the image in the media of the real Middle East is too tumultuous for audiences.

The real world of the Middle East is complex and difficult. There are religious differences and deadly conflicts. My books are about taking people away from the real world. So I created my own countries where my romantic stories can take place. There's no religious issues, no war, no disagreements, except between the hero and heroine. (Shoemaker 2009).

Mallory's focus on the blooming romance and not political or religious tension or personal opinions is echoed by romance writers Cristie Craig and Faye Hughes (2008) in their advice to aspiring romance authors:

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<sup>18</sup>Of the novels that do use real locations, the majority are historical romantic fiction.

Don't get carried away with using your setting as an opportunity to comment on the society's ills as you see them. Most romance readers are looking to be entertained, not to be lectured. Losing sight of the romance in favor of espousing your views on a particular subject would likely result in your book being tossed aside — assuming, that is, it ever got past an editor in the first place.(169).

Today, readers are increasingly aware and/or have easy access to knowledge about real locations in the Middle East. While Morocco may have seen like an unknown distant country before, today it is very easy for people to find out information about any country with the click of the mouse. One of the authors I interviewed, Penny Jordan, chose Kuwait as the setting for her first novel, *Falcon's Prey* (1978) and a fictional country for her more recent, *Possessed by the Sheikh* (2009). As Jordan has been writing romances for over 30 years, she can offer a unique perspective between the different socio-political contexts in which she wrote.

My book set in Kuwait was written before both authors and readers travelled as much as they do today and pre internet. I researched my background via newspaper articles etc and chose Kuwait because it was a Western friendly Arab country. These days I use fictional kingdoms as this works better for keeping the characters free of religious issues - and allows me to blend in a variety of facts and information. However very often my descriptions of weather conditions etc are those I have experienced myself in Dubai.

Also, in using a fictional location, authors are free from worries of inaccurately representing a specific location or offending any real individuals in Arab countries. While Mallory describes the Middle East as a place with “religious differences and deadly conflicts,” author Dana Marton shares a different reason for choosing a fictional location.

Mostly because some plot turns require the freedom of not having a real country. I needed to play with historical events to fit my book, and I can only do that with a fictional country. Also, when I talk about bandits, or villains high in the government, I wouldn't want to offend any real people. Every people are proud of their country. I wouldn't appreciate to read books where the U.S. was put down, and I won't write books that would shine a less than favorable light on another country. I'm currently working on a trilogy about

undercover agents fighting against the drug and gun trade in South America. I chose to use a fictional country there as well.

Chris Doyle of the Council for Arab-British Understanding dismisses the fictional settings of desert romances as, “cheesy, inaccurate rubbish. They are as far removed from the reality of the Middle East as one can imagine. For a long time it has been an urban culture, not a desert culture. . .If one writes a love story set in the United States, there is no fantasy state or city created. By and large readers can glean some idea of American society, which is not the case for the desert romances” (Whitaker 2006).

While his criticism of the fictional settings in the novels is understandable, Doyle does not acknowledge that an American writer setting a novel in America she experiences daily is not comparable to an American writer placing a novel in the a Middle Eastern setting where she (and her readers) are not as familiar with all of the intricate experiences that would make up a setting. One response to this conundrum would be to suggest that writers should not attempt to represent others, but write only within their own background and personal experiences. Not only would this advice be limiting to writers and reader’s ability to experience something Other, but it does not reflect the reality of peoples’ lives. Humans do engage with and represent others and these representations are situated in time and space. We cannot create a tabula rasa in which all knowledge and representations of the Other are wiped clean and we can all face each other as part of a common humanity in which there is no historical legacy of difference and the meaning attached to that difference. The question should not remain in the theoretical realm of whether or not individuals *should* represent Others, but recognize that people do engage in representation and look instead at what those representations are and how they are interpreted.

Doyle's comment also suggests that if DR writers set their novels in actual Middle Eastern countries then readers would have a better understanding of that society. In some respects, keeping the location fictional is more honest than choosing an actual location. Through their fictional countries writers are pronouncing they are writing a piece of fantasy fiction.

Writers have legitimate concerns about using actual locations for their novels. Furthermore, while I would not claim readers gain a historically or culturally accurate picture of the Middle East through these novels, it does not mean they are completely "inaccurate rubbish" either. The authors I interviewed all claimed to include research in their writing process and several had actual travel experiences in the Middle East.<sup>19</sup> While I recognize research and travel does not equate to open-minded assessments, I argue we cannot write off the author's words as imperialist, rubbish, or racist. The writers do take their craft seriously. Authors Jen Lewis and Dana Marton respectively respond:

I love to research and do a lot of research for every book I write. One excellent piece of advice I learned early on regarding foreign settings, is that children's geography books provide just the right amount of information to get you started and not so much that you get overwhelmed by information about gross domestic product. When I was preparing to write "The Desert Prince", I read illustrated children's library books about Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and Yemen, which were helpful to me in forming a picture of the Arabian Gulf region and the differences between the countries and their cultures and dress. Then I went online and researched details I wanted for my book, including the excavation of an ancient Silk Road city. I also explored the geography of coastal Salalah, Oman, which led me to discover the Fog Mountains, the painted fishing dhows in the harbor, etc, which made their way into my book.

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<sup>19</sup> Penny Jordan and Theresa Southwick had travelled in the Middle East, while Dana Marton, Jen Lewis and Kate Hardy had not, but were interested or already planning a trip.

I did a lot of research, read books, even talked to an American friend who lived in the Middle East for years (due to her husband's job). I love history and different cultures, so the research was a pleasure. I collected photographs, cut images from travel magazines and made myself a montage to get me into that frame of mind. I researched desert survival and nomadic cultures. Although the books are a carefully painted fantasy, I did want to make sure that readers feel that the characters are real, and that their love story is something that could really happen.

When I asked Penny Jordan and Kate Hardy if they conducted research before writing their novels they answered respectively:

I've always been interested in Arab culture and geography, right from the time of the Crusaders onwards as I enjoy reading historical fiction and biographies. I try to keep abreast of modern developments in the Arab world - I've visited Dubai several times, and bought there books written about the culture. I particularly recommend books such as *Don't they know it's Friday* and *Mother without a Veil* which give good insights into Arab culture.. I also research the history of Arab and European culture for background for my characters. The French in particular were very well established in the desert at one time.

Yes, I did research language and culture - I wanted to make my fictional country as real as possible. (I've always enjoyed languages, so it was great fun to learn a bit of Arabic.)

In addition to trying to re-create a believable physical and cultural landscape for their novels, the authors found other means of creating a “flavor” of their Middle Eastern country. Hardy was not the only one to study the Arabic language before writing. Roughly one-third of the novels I read included actual Arabic phrases in the text. Unlike some films<sup>20</sup> that use made up gibberish in place of Arabic or news which places the Arabic language only in the context of violence and religious extremism, these novels use Arabic in benign or romantic ways.

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<sup>20</sup> For example the 1985 film *Back to the Future* produced by Steven Spielberg.

## **Changes in Religious References**

Islam is more likely to be mentioned in earlier novels than in recent ones. As mentioned previously, earlier references to religion were primarily made to separate the hero from Islam. In most recent novels religion is not mentioned at all. In the instances where religion is introduced it serves to distinguish between “good Islam” and “bad Islam” (Jarmakani 2010, 1006). In a few of the novels the villain represents religious extremism and violence while the hero represents an honorable and pious Muslim man. In these particular novels the caricature of the Islamic terrorist is certainly reinforced, but at the same time, authors are careful to foil the negative depiction with a positive one through the hero. Dana Marton writes:

Religion is a touchy subject. I think some authors leave it out to make sure not to offend anyone. I include it, but make sure I treat it with respect. I do respect all religions. If I write a sheik hero then he must obey Muslim customs. Otherwise he wouldn't be authentic. I write heroes of all backgrounds and religions, and I write villains of all backgrounds and religions. I think all nations have wonderful individuals and some people who are true villains. It's important to treat everyone with respect and fairness.

## **Changes in Cultural Sensitivity**

Just as post 9/11 DR novels are more careful with the presentation of religion, the more recent novels display a greater sense of cultural sensitivity toward the Middle East. Rather than comparing the “Arabian” setting and the ways it is more opulent and yet more backward than the heroine’s country of origin (as earlier novels tend to do), recent novels show a greater appreciation for differences the setting provides. While the heroine may hold that western notions of women’s rights are superior to the Sheikh’s country, she also notes occasions when the West could learn from the East. This is most apparent in reference to familial relations. While the West is presented as cold

(both literally and metaphorically) and driven by greed, the Middle Eastern country is presented as warm, inviting, loving. Honor and family connections and loyalty are admired by a heroine who believes she has seen too little of these traits in her western home.

### **The Desert Romance Novel**

While shifts in DR between pre and post 9/11 romances are apparent, orientalist narratives are still highly visible in current DR. Through the exotic locale (filled with camels, goat skin tents, souks, and palaces), the strong powerful rich Arab man and the feisty western heroine a distinction between East and West is maintained. If one is looking for orientalist elements in these novels, unsurprisingly, you will find them. However, upon closer examination, more is at work on the pages. These post 9/11 novels present contesting images of both traditional orientalist tropes along with a heightened awareness and respect for the “Arabian” culture. Rather than always presenting the East as inferior to the West, a portion of the post 9/11 novels present difference with equality, a notion both Said and Todorov would welcome. In this section I will turn to passages in the novels to highlight the ways in which the post 9/11 DR conform and disrupt a traditional orientalist reading.

As Pamela Regis suggests, despite conforming standards, variety of form still exists in these novels.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, there are enough commonalities in the novels to discuss them together. Although the outliers (such as the only novel written by and

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<sup>21</sup> 27 of 30 take place in Arabia, while 3 take place almost entirely in the West. 27 of the 30 heroines are western (one of which is African-American and one is Arab-American) while 3 are Arab. Of the heroes, all 30 are Arab (although one of them is an ancient Egyptian/Arab vampire god). 9 of the 30 novels use at least a partial kidnapping or hostage scenario (although very few are overt kidnappings like *The Sheik*). In most of the novels (23 out of 30) the hero and heroine did not know each other prior to the meeting at the start of the novel.

featuring an African-American heroine)<sup>22</sup> would make for interesting lines of inquiry on their own, I will focus on the most commonly reoccurring themes. The novels follow in accordance to Regis' eight elements of a romance. The reader is apprised of both the hero and heroine's environment. The life of both the hero and heroine is somehow lacking. The heroine is often unhappy in her current environment or cannot find any decent western men she wants to date. The hero has his career (and oftentimes kingdom) to occupy him, but he is emotionally scarred and/or unfulfilled. When the hero and heroine meet in DR novels it is often under stressful conditions which cause tension and miscommunication between the two. For example, in several novels, the heroine is kidnapped by bandits and the unknown hero stumbles upon the situation and saves her, but he may have to do so in a way that limits her trust in him (such as pretending to be one of the bad guys). Despite the obstacles to the relationship, both real and emotional, the couple falls in love. While overcoming the barrier to other romance novels may purely be overcoming emotional baggage, in the DR a material reason exists for why the two may not end up together (such as class or cultural difference). The hero is usually an Arab Sheikh/Prince while the heroine is an average middle-class western woman. His duties to his title are initially in conflict with his feelings for the heroine. Eventually they defy the odds, declare their love, and marry (if they are not already married). The epilogue includes a scene of marital bliss with one or two children in tow.

The typical heroine is an attractive western white woman who is either American, British or Australian. She is usually a career woman who comes to the Middle Eastern country on business. As with other sub-genres of romance, she is spunky, independent,

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<sup>22</sup> Brenda Jackson, *Delaney's Desert Sheikh* (2002).

and ready to open up the heart of the hero with her love. The typical hero is an attractive wealthy Arab man who is either the ruling sheikh or connected to the ruling family. He is the quintessential alpha male: dark, serious, commanding, used to getting his way, a match for the heroine in stubbornness and wit. While the heroine allows him to open up and explore his emotions, he introduces the typically virginal heroine to physical pleasure.

In some very real ways, these novels do line up with an orientalist reading. Particularly at the sites of 1) the more earthy/primitive hero, 2) the exoticized environment, and 3) the emphasis on modernity, particularly when influenced by the western heroine, we can see orientalist elements at work in which Arabs become exotic Others and western notions of progress are often seen as the road to success for the emerging Arab country. Examples from the novels do confirm these trends. I have chosen selections from the novels to highlight what I have found as representative of the orientalist aspects of the DR genre.

While the hero may be sophisticated and worldly, he is often described at some point in the novel as primitive or animal-like. Although describing the hero as primitive or animal-like is a hall mark of any genre of romance with an alpha male hero, by comparing the racially and ethnically marked Arabs to white western men a specific Arab othering occurs. In *The Sheik's Kidnapped Bride* (2000), Dora describes Prince Khalil:

She's heard about the passions of men of the desert and watching Khalil, she could believe that he was more close to his animal nature than many Western men. But, she still trusted him. He wouldn't use a woman for sport, which is what Gerald had done. (37).

When Melanie from *The Arabian Love-Child* (2002) meets her former lover, Rafiq, after years of separation, she judges him in essentializing terms. “He was an Arab in every way you wished to look at him. Make an Arab look a fool and you win yourself a life-long enemy” (Reid 7). Later in the story when Melanie decides to go back with Rafiq to his home country, her best friend warns her:

“He will rush you to his desert hideout and lock you away there while he waltzes off with your son! It’s the way they do things over there! Get behind me, woman, and all that!”

“He isn’t like that,” she said agitatedly twisting the ring on her finger.

“All men are like that if they think they can get away with it!”

Of course, it is not only the hero who is exoticized, but the environment as well. In *Possessed by the Sheikh* (2005) by Penny Jordan, heroine and hero, Katrina and Xander discuss the differences between the desert and the rest of the civilized world. The desert becomes a world unto its own where normal legal or social rules no longer apply.

“Buy me! I am a human being and not a possession!” she protested wildly.

Immediately Xander took hold of her arm, giving her a small shake as he did so. “Fine words, but they mean nothing out here.”

“That is barbaric. You are barbaric,” she told him, hurling the words at him as her shocked emotions burst through the frail barriers of self-control.

“This isn’t Europe...and it isn’t Zuran either,” he answered her. “The desert is a harsh master and those who inhabit it live by its harsh law-or die.” (71.)

The environment also becomes marked as exotic and different through less harsh, but equally stereotypical images. In *Stolen by the Sheikh* (2005) by Trish Morey, Sheikh Khaled Al-Ateeq leaves on an overnight trip into the desert to meet with leaders from the desert tribes and insists the heroine, Saphy, come along. The vehicles can

only go so far into the desert before the party must continue the journey on camels. When they stop for the night, Sapphy's tent is lined with carpets, draped with silk curtains, and lit with perfumed candles. "It was every little girl's fantasy" (114). Khaled has exchanged Sapphy's clothing for Arab dress. Her "traditional" outfit is made up of sexy belly dance costume covered up by the conservative abaya, hijab, and burka (118). Khaled is likewise dressed in traditional robes looking like "a real desert king" (119).

Typical of Desert Romances, camels, deserts, tents, lanterns, "traditional clothing," and magical Bedouins play a role. In more than one novel you can find the phrase, "It's like a page of Arabian nights come to life" (Singh 2003, 23). In her analysis of DR, Evelyn Bach suggests these familiar props are used to authenticate the rest of the story. She believes once an audience is comfortable with the familiar tropes they associate with the Middle East, it is easier to believe and follow along with the rest of the novel.

The appeal of the setting for the heroine lies not only in difference, but in opulence. All of the heroes, whether sheikhs or not, are in positions of power and enjoy unusual wealth. Their surroundings are well above anything the heroine is accustomed to and provide a source of intimidation as well as luxury. In *To Kiss a Sheikh* (Southwick 2003), heroine Crystal looks on in awe.

In all her life she'd never seen such luxury as she had since arriving at the palace. Marble floors, grand staircases, a fountain in the foyer, lush gardens. There were sinfully expensive furnishings and gold fixtures everywhere- priceless art, paintings, vases and tapestries, oh my. (19).

The third site at which these novels do confirm stereotypes is the use of the western heroine as a means of bringing the East into modernity. The heroine at times

assists the Arab country particularly in the domain of gender relations. Dora (*The Sheik's Kidnapped Bride* 2000) eventually convinces the King to place greater emphasis and government funds into the education of girls. She argues with him, "Opening colleges is not enough...These women deserve a chance to be their best. Not only for themselves, but for their country" (215). The hero, Khalil, believes that, "She [Dora] saw the possibilities in El Bahar that no one had seen before" (225). Dora even earns the title of "Deputy Minister of Women's Affairs" for El Bahar (219). Jasmine in *Desert Warrior* (Singh 2003) claims she will personally have a law repealed which allows the Sheik more than one wife (111). Sheikh Jamal, from *Delaney's Desert Sheikh* (2002), believes Delany's western views of gender relations will help his country. "There was no doubt in his mind that with her Western views she would be a breath of fresh air" (142). Jarmakani (2010) believes the heroine can offer the possibility of modernizing the East for the sake of peaceful co-existence. "Through romantic fantasy, they present the possibility of resolution between the West (usually Canada, the United States, Britain, or Australia) and the East (characterized abstractly as Arabia)" (995).

While it would be convenient to say that orientalist or racist tropes is all that is operating in these novels, it is simply untrue. As we have seen, the novels often portray a hero who is hyper-masculine when compared to western men, but he is also portrayed as more loyal, honorable, and ultimately desirable than western men. The heroine ultimately always chooses the Arab hero over a western man. Second, the setting of the novel is often exoticized with props such as camels and tents making their way into the novels or essentialized by making sweeping claims about gender relations, modernity, etc. Nonetheless, the physical, social and cultural environment is also

admired by the heroine, and in some ways preferable to her own western home. She usually chooses to live in the Arab country over her own. Third, the heroine often does help the hero and the Arab country “modernize.” However, the country is also modernizing and integrating in to the world system on its own terms. In certain novels, the hero even critiques the western model of modernization and the ways in which the western world has exploited other areas of the globe.

While the hero may be presented as dark, brooding and exotic, he also exhibits admirable qualities that set him apart from other men the heroine has known. Upon meeting, it is the hero’s looks that first capture the heroine’s attention. Crystal’s reaction to meeting the hero in *To Kiss A Sheik* (Southwick 2003) is typical. She finds him not only incredibly attractive and alluring, but different than other men she has met. This difference is centered around his aura, powerful position, and ethnicity.

He was the flesh-and-blood definition of tall dark and wow. He could be the model for the handsome prince in a fairy tale. Smiling politely, he extended his hand. . .Just as Clark Kent was invulnerable to anything but Kryptonite, she was impervious to the charms of your average, ordinary, everyday, run-of-the-mill normal hunk. But Fariq Hassan was so not average, ordinary, everyday or normal. (7-11).

In addition to his looks, the hero is also particularly honorable, loyal, and trustworthy, unlike the disastrous relationships she may have previously had with western men. In many of these novels the tables are turned. Rather than the stereotype of the Arab men mistreating women, the western men are the ones who have either mistreated the heroine or simply did not measure up to the qualities of her sheikh hero. The western man ends up unfaithful, dishonest, or uninteresting while the Arab man, at first may appear domineering, becomes the honorable man worthy of her love. In *Stolen by the Sheikh* (Morey 2005) we learn:

This was a different man. A real leader of his people, who ensured their ongoing existence in the style of life they had been accustomed to since ancient times. He could have forced them to abandon their way of life and move to the cities in the name of progress, simply by not supplying them with modern medicine and education. Yet he was ensuring the continued existence and preservation of their separate and special way of life. And from his reception here he was clearly well loved and respected as their leader. (113)

The heroes' honor is matched only by the honor of the heroine. When Karim and Julia in *Sheik Protector* (Marton 2008) discuss why Julia put herself in danger to help Karim, he responds:

“You did it for honor,” he said. “Because you are a honorable woman, you will do what you must. You dislike me, but you protected me. So you have to understand then why I must protect you.”

“Because you dislike me?” She glanced up.

She didn't need to know just how far that was from the truth. “Because honor demands it.” (92)

The Arab hero's attitude toward gender equality varies widely among the books. On one extreme, in *The Playboy Sheikh's Virgin Stable- Girl* (Kendrick 2009), the hero Kalik is a complete misogynist. On the more progressive end (represented below), these heroes exhibit a commitment to pursuing gender equality in their personal lives and their kingdoms.

In *The Sheik's Kidnapped Bride* (Mallory 2000), the King chastises his son, Khalil, for allowing his wife, Dora, to pressure the king for greater strides in women's rights, Khalil answers. “As a man married to one of the bright articulate women Dora mentioned earlier, in this matter I'm quite comfortable letting my wife speak for both of us.” (216).

Hero Karim tells Lily in *Surrender to the Playboy Sheikh* (Hardy 2009), that the current succession rules dictate the crown be passed onto a male. As Lily's protests the sexism inherent in this law, Karim responds:

"I know, you're Western-born, you have a different take on things, he said, "and I agree with you on this point. One of the things I will change is the succession laws. My father and grandfather have taken a modern approach in that women in Harrat Salma have the right to an education and the freedom to do any job they choose, but they don't have to do it if they don't want to. If they want to stay home and care for their family, then that is an option too. And I don't see why men can't take on that role too, should they choose." She smiled. "Now that's forward thinking- few men do that- even here." (144).

In *The Sheikh's Ransomed Bride* (West 2007), Belle, a marine biologist, reflects on her career and experiences with western men. "Men just weren't attracted by her absorption in her work, her travel, or her independent mindset. She'd come to accept that romance would not never figure predominantly in her life. Or sex." In contrast, the Arab hero Sheikh Fariq encourages her to pursue her career after they marry.

"You don't *mind* the idea of me going back to work?"

He swung round and met her gaze with raised eyebrows. "You're a marine archaeologist, and a dedicated one from what I've discovered. How could I mind?"

"But as your...wife-" she stumbled on the word, "-I thought-"

"That I'd take a medieval view of a woman's role" His lips stretched in that devastating smile that made her insides melt. "Now that would be an interesting option: keeping you secreted in my harem. Seeing no men but me. Awaiting my pleasure...I'm afraid not, little one. Unless you'd like to give up your career and devote yourself entirely to me? . . .No?. . .What a shame. But it's as I expected. My own mother was a qualified paediatrician when my parents wed. She continued to run clinics all through their marriage." (127-128).

Here Rafiq pokes fun at the assumptions made about Arab men. He uses a western time period, the Middle Ages, to describe a backward view of women, rather

than putting this view in a Middle Eastern context. These passages break down essentializing notions of Arab men as x and western men as y. We see eastern cultures in these novels can in some ways be equally or more liberating for the heroine.

The heroine grows to love both the hero and his home country. The landscape, like the hero, speak to the heroine in a way that her western environment does not. In *Bodyguard Confessions* (Young 2007), the country, Taer, is described positively as a traditional and religious country that looks after its poor and needy. The heroine Anna comes to love the landscape. “ ‘It’s beautiful isn’t it?’ The evening wind came in long, cool bursts over the sand dunes, now washed in pink and gold hues from the fading sun” (108). Heroine Sapphy, in *Stolen by the Sheik* (Morey 2005), falls in love with the rugged desert upon arriving in Jebbai:

Sapphy content to gaze out of the windows and drink in the view, finding even the passing dunes and rock formations fascinating, barely able to contain her excitement at the harsh beauty of the landscape...The landscape was like a breath of fresh air.

“What do you think of my country?”

“It’s beautiful, just beautiful.”

“Never take the desert for granted. It’s harsh and dangerous and unforgiving.”

She looked over to him, surprised by his words. “Of course, but isn’t the danger what gives it the edge over, say, a landscape of green hills and valleys? There the land is lush and fertile, beautiful in its own way, yet soft and safe. Whereas this place has colour and drama and magnificence that goes hand in hand with danger. . .” (42.)

In this passage, the heroine uses her description of the geography as a mirror for her feelings about the hero. Just as the land is a little more intense than the safe bet of “green hills,” the hero is a riskier choice of mate, but one that always pays off in the end.

The novels that address religion are careful to portray Islam, as practiced by either the hero or bedouins as honorable and peaceful. Any references to political or religious terrorists are placed in the context of individual extremists. These novels, written and read in the context of nightly news discussing Islam in association with terrorism, offer an alternative to Islam equals terrorism discourse. The majority of references to Islam are benign or positive encounters and are clearly separated from the actions of terrorists.

In *Sheik Protector* (Marton 2008), the villains are religious zealots ready to kill anyone in possession of false idols that existed prior to Islam. These villains are contrasted with the hero who prays to Allah for guidance and help in thwarting the villains. In *Bodyguard Confessions* (Young 2007), the hero Quamar and a secondary character, Farad, are openly religious Muslims. Their honorable religiosity is contrasted against the non-religious villains of the story, terrorists attempting to stage a coup against the current government for monetary gain. In *The Sheikh's Ransomed Bride* (West 2007) Rafiq draws attention to criminals who claim to be traditional and religious but really mask a different agenda.

“They call themselves fundamentalists, fighting for a return to traditional values, but they’re simply opportunists. Criminals seeking power...The terrorists claim they’re committed to bringing back the old ways. They pretend they’re acting with the sanction of revered community elders, but that’s a lie. I met publicly today with several of the most respected community leaders in Shaq’ara, and they made it clear they would never support those who use violence” (78-79).

Earlier I gave examples of ways in which the heroine helps the hero and his country along the western path to modernity. While that is a common narrative device in DR, there are also moments when the hero works toward integrating his country into the

world economy on his own terms. Typically the hero's terms are modernization with respect to tradition and the natural environment.

As the head of tourism, Sheik Shafir in *The Untamed Sheik* (Radley 2009) makes sure Dhahara is integrated into the global system and is seen as a desirable place to visit and conduct business, but he finds ways to do so on Dhahara's terms. In encouraging tourism Shafir invests a great deal of time to make sure his country's natural beauty and resources will not be spoiled by increased traffic (8). Shafir also shares with Megan how Dhahara comes out the winner in trade agreements with the U.S. The U.S. imports and sells Dhahara's artistic products while the products coming from the U.S. to Dhahara are never bought. "My people are used to the best handcrafted goods. The riches of the land are shared by all. The cheap things they [the U.S.] send are never bought" (107). In this statement, Shafir calls into question the desirability of U.S. products, and claims all the people of Dhahara are able to enjoy a higher material quality of life, unlike the U.S. A socialist prince, perhaps?

Hero Xander of *Possessed by the Sheikh* (Jordan 2005), brother to the King, has undergone a mission to promote better understanding and better relations between Middle Eastern and western students. Unlike some novels which offer a model of the eastern sheik learning from the west, here we see an exchange of equals. Many of the novels discuss the hero's efforts to modernize his country with sensitivity to the environment and tradition and looking after the needs of the country's citizens where gain will be shared by all.

Sheikh Karim shares with Lily his strategies for introducing tourism into his country in *Surrender to the Playboy Sheikh* (Hardy 2009):

“Yes. I’ve hand-picked them over the last few months-people whose work I like and whose beliefs fit with mine. People who believe in more than just a profit; people who’ll put something back as well as taking it. I want to use local people, local expertise-engineers and builders and the like-in the designs, and I want local people running the hotels, too...I want our tourism to be as carbon-neutral as possible”

“So you’re going on the Green bandwagon.”

“It’s nothing to do with bandwagons.” His eyes narrowed slightly. “I want to look at harnessing geothermal energy. It’s not a bandwagon, Lily- it’s just common sense and using our gifts wisely. We have a very special landscape, and it deserves conserving. . .” (104-105).

Just as the heroine often helps the hero improve gender equality in his country, the hero offers his talents and experience to help the heroine grow in other ways. He teaches her about his culture and language, provides her with a model of a close-knit family and in some cases even helps her grow spiritually.

In many of the novels the hero helps the heroine learn and understand his country’s unique cultural customs. He also teaches her Arabic in about one-third of the novels. The language is put into a context of love and family relationships among the hero and his family and the heroine takes pride and joy in learning the language.

Several of the novels juxtapose the hero’s spiritual beliefs with the heroine’s lack of religiosity. The hero’s beliefs are represented as a positive attribute to his character and at times he helps the heroine make peace with god and herself. In *Bodyguard Confessions* (Young 2007), Quamar uses his faith to help Anna come to terms with divinity and death. With Quamar’s help, Anna eventually learns to let go of the bitterness and guilt that has prevented her moving on with her emotional and spiritual self.

“So we’re on our own.”

“What makes you say that?” Quamar pointed to the sky. “We always have help.”

“Excuse me if I am not as confident in that kind of help as you are. Remember, I’ve lost two family members waiting for divine intervention.”

“God did not kill Bobby and your grandmother, Anna.” (171)

The greatest gift the hero gives the heroine (besides of course finding true love in each other) is a strong and warm connection to family that is usually lacking in her western environment. The heroine, who may be orphaned or estranged from her own family, delights in the love she receives from the hero’s family. In the hero’s home country, extended family live together under one roof and family of all generations come together regularly. The hero would take on any risk on behalf of his family or his country. The heroine is unaccustomed to this level of loyalty.

In *The Sheik’s Kidnapped Bride* (Mallory 2000) Dora is an orphan who is dumped by her fiancé at the opening of the novel. In contrast, Khalil’s family warmly welcomes Dora into their family. She becomes close, in particular, with Khalil’s grandmother, Fatima, who offers Dora advice and a listening ear throughout the novel. In *Her Desert Family* (McMahon 2005), Bridget’s parents are dead and she rarely sees her only sibling as he is too busy running the family business. Widower Rashid not only has close family connections, but he has a young child. Bridget delights in spending time with Rashid’s son and his grandmother. In *Desert Warrior* (Singh 2009), Jasmine’s own parents and sister betrayed her and ruined her initial relationship with Tariq. When the hero and heroine meet again, years later, and renew their relationship, Jasmine is enveloped in a loving family in which loyalty, not betrayal, is the norm. In *Possessed by the Sheik* (Jordan 2005), Xander puts his life on the line by going undercover to expose those who are trying to overthrow his brother the King. Xander’s own safety becomes secondary to the protection of his family.

The novels offer many more examples of loyal heroes whose family relationships are portrayed as healthier and more desirable to the heroine than her own. The Middle Eastern fictional countries are portrayed as more “traditional” than the heroine’s home country. This greater emphasis on tradition can result in more restrictive gender norms than the heroine is accustomed to, but also represents a system of kin which results in close loving family relationships. These novels portray a way of life that is not necessarily better or worse in the eyes of the heroine, but different. At the novel’s conclusion, the heroine enters a new stage in her life that will be centered around her husband and children (and somehow she will squeeze a brilliant career in the mix as well). As family becomes her top priority, it is not surprising she happily chooses to remain living in the hero’s home country.

#### **A Closer Look at a Post-Orientalist DR Novel**

In this final section I will highlight a DR that I believe disrupts many assumptions about these novels. What this novel does explicitly and on a large scale, other authors do on a smaller and more subtle scale. The overtly political and religious content in this novel offer us a chance to see how the author addresses material that goes beyond the love story. *Undercover Sheik* (2006) by Dana Marton follows Sadie, an American M.D. working with *Doctors Without Borders* at a field hospital in “Beharrain”. The novel opens with her kidnapping by local “bandits” who are holding her for a five million dollar ransom from the U.S. government. As she knows the U.S. government will not negotiate with terrorists, she believes her life is over until a stranger, Nasir, saves her from the bandits. During their long travel back to the capital, Sadie learns that Nasir is brother to Saeed, the King of Beharrain. Their uncle, Majid, is working with bandits/terrorists to cause unrest and take the crown for himself. Nasir has been secretly tracking Majid and

his followers in order to save his family and country. The lives of the royal family and Sadie are in jeopardy multiple times, but in the end they are able to prevail over Majid and his followers. Throughout this plot, the romantic relationship between Nasir and Sadie develops into love as both are able to appreciate one another as individuals and as members of equally rich cultures.

*Undercover Sheik* is the ideal novel to explore the contradictions in Desert Romances. Does it contain many of the orientalist tropes such as kidnapping, wild untamed deserts, traditional Bedouin camps, magical natives, and a traditional alpha hero? Yes, yes, yes, yes, and yes. However we can clearly see an attempt by Marton to present a Middle East that is different (in all these above exotic ways), but an equal. Just as Sadie opens Nasir's heart to love and softens his desire for strict traditions and gender roles, Nasir teaches Sadie the importance of family, honor, loyalty, and trust. In the passage below, Sadie compares the admirable qualities of Nasir, with the not so admirable qualities of people she knows in the U.S.

He had a strong sense of loyalty and honor that seemed almost archaic when compared to the type of people she was normally surrounded with. Not that there weren't any ethical people at the hospital in Chicago, but lately it seemed more and more doctors were concerned only with their fees and their next promotion. (59.)

In regards to development, Nasir offers his version of a post-colonial critique. Early on in the novel he reflects on the legacy of western involvement in the Middle East and clearly separates his devotion to tradition and religion from political or religious fanaticism.

In general, he believed that the fewer foreigners in the country, the better. Most of them came to his part of the world for gain, at the expense of his people. . .He was conservative and proud of it. There was much in his culture he wished to preserve. But he had nothing to do with this new breed of religious devotees who sought to rule by terror, preach purity in the

streets, then engage in the vilest acts of immorality behind their walls. . . Nasir looked up to the ceiling of the tent and swore to Allah he would stop them. As long as there ran blood in his veins, he would protect his people and his family. And beyond them, he would protect all who needed his help. He was Bedu (37).

In another passage Nasir questions Sadie on the superiority of the modern western way of life and explains how some of the country's stability problems have resulted from western interference:

"You have to remember just two or three generations ago, we were mostly nomads. Oil built our cities fast, changed people, but there hasn't been enough time to forget."

"What was it like before?"

"Better," he said on instinct then modified it with a smile. "At least, I like to think. Right was right, the bedu code meant something. People were more honest."

"It was probably quieter," she said. "More peaceful."

"Maybe quieter. As for peaceful, my grandfather had a lot of tales about raids and war. But it was Bedu you know? The foreigners changed everything."

"The money you mean?"

"They brought a lot more than money." He paused. "All through the desert there were tribes, trading, raiding, raising sheep and goats and camels. Running caravans. They fought over wells and territories from time to time, but all in all life was in balance."

She nodded, and he went on.

Then foreigners came and the oil was found. And they said to one tribe, "Look, you have this black stuff under the sand. You can't eat it, your camels can't eat it. You have no use for it. Give it to us and we'll give you more powerful weapons to defeat your enemies."

She was silent, listening.

"Then the killing began. More money came, better weapons. By the time it was over, our people were deeply divided, and the oil rights belonged to foreigners who were practically running the country." He didn't bother to keep the bitterness out of his voice.

“All foreigners are not like that.” She said after a while.

“No. But for a long time, those were the only foreigners we saw here, people who either came to steal or to conquer. The simple people didn’t understand that when unethical corporations contaminated tribal grazing grounds and wells, they weren’t here at the direct order of their governments and with their countries’ full knowledge and approval.”

“But it had nothing to do with me, the rest of us.” She sounded frustrated.

Good, she understood then how he felt. “As I and the rest of my people have nothing to do with the bandits and terrorists. We are more. We have scientists, architects, and poets. We love peace. We want to see our children grow up as much as you do.” (141.)

In this novel, as well as others, we see a mix of traditionally orientalist tropes and, shall we call them, post-orientalist themes that are neither all essentializing or all emancipatory in representing the Middle East. The above passages, and others, show an obvious effort by authors to present a different kind of relationship with the Middle East. Rather than a relationship of pure domination and superiority by the West or a more subtle conversion of making the Middle East into a copied version of the West, some of the DR authors are describing a new relationship between East and West. One in which both cultures have something valuable to offer, both cultures can learn from one another, and both can co-exist in difference and equality.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have placed DR analysis back into the context of the romance genre which I argue has as large of an influence on the narrative features in these novels as orientalist representative traditions. Claims of orientalism in the novels by DR scholars are sometimes simply features indicative of all romances. To draw conclusions on the texts, without placing them within a broader context skews the meanings in the novels. My findings show that orientalist representations cannot be analyzed in a

vacuum. Representations are often multi-faceted and part of broader cultural conversations. By acknowledging the connections between DR novels and the romance genre, I am able to provide a more thorough analysis that can more accurately describe when and how orientalist representations are present.

I have also shown through a broader and more detailed assessment of the novels, the ways in which they adhere to and break away from orientalist representations. While a hero's post-colonial critique of western imperialism is not the norm in DR, I have shown in various small ways how more recent DR novels are distancing themselves from earlier overtly racist representations of the Middle East and are striving toward respectful cultural interactions between East and West through the narration of a love story.

Of more importance than the existence of orientalism in the novels, is the question of how those messages are used by people. Romance author Jayne Ann Krentz (1992) argues that romances are simply fantasies not meant to reflect reality and readers "do not expect the imaginative creations of romance to conform to real life..." (2). She continues saying readers "do not appreciate being treated as if they were children who don't know where one stops and the other begins" (3).

Other scholars find it is over simplistic to draw a clear distinction between fantasy and reality and precarious to deny the effect images have on our daily lives. Writers such as feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2008) have written extensively on how "controlling images" help to construct our notions of reality. These images do not exist in a vacuum of the fantasy world, but permeate everyday discourse in ways that can be

dangerous. Similarly, in regards to the Orient, Edward Said ([1978] 2003) argues, “we cannot be swept clean” from our influences (xviii).

Whether readers separate their fiction reading from reality and how they engage with these texts is not for us to speculate. Ultimately we need to interact with the readers themselves to learn if and how readers understand and use the information contained in the books.

Is the appeal of DR in the exotic hero as author Jen Lewis suggests?

I think that handsome powerful sheikhs are one of the tropes, like cowboys and Greek Tycoons, that readers enjoy and want to experience on an ongoing basis. I think it's fantastic that people are able to see past the disturbing news we tend to hear from that region and enjoy stories with Middle Eastern characters and settings.

Is the appeal the appreciation of difference as author Dana Marton suggests?

I think it's always fun to escape to another world and learn about another culture. Our differences make us interesting to each other. You hear so much about Middle Eastern culture, some things that are pretty far-fetched even. I think people are curious about this world and love to travel there through a well-written book.

Both authors indicate that these novels have the capacity to bring readers away from the “disturbing news” and offer a new and positive perspective on difference and the Middle East. While DR authors do reinforce certain stereotypes about the Middle East in their depictions, they see themselves as transcending racist stereotypes. How do readers express their interpretations of the novels and the Middle East? It is time to turn to the readers themselves and allow them to voice their experiences and opinions about these novels and the Middle East in their own words.

## CHAPTER 4 READING THE DESERT ROMANCE

“The title character is selfish, unpleasant and a general boor and I fail to see why he would be considered such a catch...One page, she is a confident feminist. The next, she is breathless, whimpering and whining, deeply in love with an extremely abusive and domineering man.” (*Gwen Kramer*)

“And don't even get me started on this Ahmed creep. I've rarely hated a fictional character as much as I hate this sheik. There's nothing redeemable about him at all and absolutely no reason why Diana would fall in love with him. He uses and abuses her. Diana needs some serious therapy and Ahmed needs to be thrown to the jackals.” (*A. Woman*)

“The Sheik is both reflects and perpetuates the absurd clichés of its age about Arabs.” (*Jazz It Up Baby*)

The above Amazon.com reviews reference the well-known original Desert Romance (DR), *The Sheik* ([1919] 1977). While this novel is honored as one of the iconic romance novels of all time, the above scathing comments reflect a different view of readers' expectations and desires in their reading choices. This reception of *The Sheik* is not reflected by sales stats or reputation, but requires engaging readers' opinions. The traditional mold for displaying male-female relationships and the overt racism present in early DR novels such as *The Sheik*, are found both problematic and unacceptable by many of today's readers. Through the Amazon reviews of DR and in-depth interviews with several readers of the sub-genre, we begin to see a desire for presenting “Arabia” and East-West relations in a different light.

In this chapter, I will share the voices of DR readers to explore how readers think about these texts and the Middle East (ME). These voices come from reviews of the novels on Amazon.com and open-ended interviews I conducted. I will begin reviewing the generic appeal of the novels in comments from Amazon.com reviews before moving

on to the more Middle East/Arab specific information in both the online reviews and the interviews I conducted.

Through the responses we will see that readers are at times articulating a post-orientalist view that contradicts *Orientalism*. I argue through reading these “orientalist” texts, the readers I engage have created space for experiencing a taste of Said and Todorov’s humanism. In the case of DR, orientalist products have not pushed audiences into stagnant ways of imagining the Middle East, but rather have helped open doors for new ways of imagining relations between East and West.

### **Methodology**

Polling data suggests, albeit in a generalized way, the overall feelings Americans have toward Islam and the Middle East are predominantly negative.<sup>1</sup> However, it would be rash to draw a correlation between “orientalist” productions such as DR novels and general public opinion polls. We can only gain so much information from cultural representations and polling data. In order to explore the intersections and nuances between representations and their audiences, we must interact and listen to the voices of people.

I have engaged with DR readers in two distinct ways. First, I collected the online Amazon.com reviews for the thirty novels I read in my sample. A total of 191 reviews have been published<sup>2</sup> for the thirty novels, several having zero reviews, several having over fifteen reviews, with an average of six to seven reviews per novel. While the Amazon reviews are an important contribution to insights on reader preferences and

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A

<sup>2</sup> As of June 2012

expectations in the novels, they do not provide thorough accounts of the readers' thoughts about the Middle East and the representation of the Middle East in the novels. The Amazon comments are largely, although not entirely, apolitical with the readers focusing mostly on the budding romance between the hero and heroine. It was obvious that I needed to speak directly to readers to gain further insights.

In order to more fully explore readers' experiences, I conducted in-depth interviews with six DR fans. I found these readers primarily through online romance blogs and forums and by connecting with key informants who brought me into contact with other readers. While I imagine the number of DR fans to be quite high (based upon the incredibly increase in publications, blog sites, and DR Amazon page), I found readers reluctant to share their opinions with me about their reading.

In addition to the usual reluctance of some people to give their time to a survey or interview, I have found that romance readers are particularly reluctant to engage with academic or public interest in their reading. For the most part, romance readers feel as though their reading choices and their personal character (because of their reading choices) are under attack. The mainstream media, literary critics and some feminists have all been guilty of criticizing the romance genre and those who participate in romance reading.

DR enthusiasts find themselves under additional scrutiny. In addition to the usual accusations of romance readers participating in lowbrow literature, "soft porn," and sexist/patriarchal literature, DR enthusiasts are also labeled as taking part in racist/neo-colonial/orientalist pop culture. Both academic articles and popular news articles have contributed to this association. *The Guardian* article titled, "Those Sexy Arabs" (2006)

had, I believe, a significant impact on the willingness of DR fans to speak with another person writing on the DR phenomenon.

The two most enthusiastic DR fans I contacted chose not to participate in a survey or interview. One of the fans runs a blog dedicated completely to the DR subgenre. She regularly blogs about DR books that have recently been published and reviews books on Amazon.com as well as other sites. The other enthusiast ran a website that compiled all the DR novels with detailed information about each book. This site was later taken over by Amazon.com and became their DR section titled, "Sheikhs and Desert Love." Both of these women were interviewed in *The Guardian* article. The tone of the article was caustic and neither the portrayal of the subgenre or these two women by association was flattering. Although these women did not mention their previous interviews in declining to participate in my project, I imagine they would be reluctant to talk to another "outsider" about their reading preferences. As both women are readers who write and have connections in the online romance community, it is possible other readers took heed from their *Guardian* experience.

The crux to locating my six informants was in finding a key individual or two who were open to my project and who then vouched for me in the relatively closed (to outsiders) romance reading communities. I located two of the women I interviewed through romance reading forums. One of these readers operates her own romance reading blog and after our initial communication, she put me in contact with others who are also DR fans. Another general romance reader put me in contact with a friend of hers who reads DR. All of the interviews were open-ended conversations guided, but not limited, to my research interests and were conducted by phone (the four who lived in

the U.S.) and email (the two who lived abroad and preferred email communication). I conducted one to three phone or email exchanges with each participant. Each phone interview lasted on average 30 min with a maximum of 2 hours.

### **Who Are Romance Readers?**

The Romance Writers of America (RWA) website includes statistical analysis of U.S. romance novel purchasers.<sup>3</sup> While romances do not make their record breaking sales based on only a niche demographic group, there are a few marked trends among buying readers. Most notably, romances are primarily bought and presumably read by women. Because of the feminized stigma of romance reading, it is difficult to know how many men actually read romances. The RWA results state that 91% of romance buyers are women and 9% men. Roughly half of romance novel purchasers are women aged 31 and 54. The mean reading age for print books is 49 years and for e-books is 42 years.

Romance buyers are more likely to live in the southern (38%) or mid-western (26%) states than the western (19%) or northeastern (17%) states. These regional percentages held true for all adult fiction, not only romance. Slightly over half of romance buyers are married or live with a partner. The greatest percentage of romance book buyers (39%) earn between \$50,000 and \$99,900. Of the readers surveyed, 44% consider themselves frequent readers, 31% avid readers (always reading a romance), and 25% occasional readers. The romance genre also shows longevity in readership. 44% of the polled readers have been reading romance for at least 20 years. To sum up,

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<sup>3</sup> RWA commissioned Bowker Market Research to create, implement and analyze surveys on romance readers for 2011 and 2012. These surveys do not necessarily reflect the demographics of all romance readers (some of whom may only borrow books from the library, borrow from friends and family, or reside outside of the U.S.). I have summarized their findings below. For a more complete look at the results, please see the appendix.

based on these statistics, the largest share of romance novel buyers are middle-age, middle-class women working women who are equally likely to be in a committed relationship as not.

In describing purchasing habits, buyers purchase 25% of all romances through Amazon.com. The next two greatest sources are other online book sellers at 19% and Wal-Mart at 13%. In addition to purchasing paperback books through online sources, readers today are increasingly buying e-books. The sale of romance e-books have doubled from 2011 to 2012 and are the fastest growing e-book genre. One reason for the popularity of e-book is the cover of anonymity it provides the book and reader. As romance readers often feel they are being judged for the reading choices and must hide their books, e-book readers provide the perfect solution. Romance reader and blogger, Sarah Wendell, remarking on the appeal of her e-reader, says romances “are not always something that you are comfortable holding in your hand in public (Bosman 2010)”.

The top deciding factors in readers choosing a book is the storyline at 50% (as described on the back cover or on online reviews and blogs) and secondly the reputation of the author at 19%. Readers describe becoming most aware of new romances through reading an excerpt online or a teaser excerpt in the current book they are reading, through recommendations by friends and family, from a store display, or an author’s website. While a plethora of romance subgenres exist, the polls did not indicate a strong preference for one subgenre over another. Most readers exhibit a willingness to try new subgenres and authors.

## **Who Are Desert Romance Readers?**

My access to demographic information specifically about DR readers varied from next to nothing with the Amazon.com reviewers to detailed information from the interviews. Unfortunately, Amazon.com reviews do not offer any information about the individual reviewer other than a screen name and occasionally a location (that location can as vague as “U.S.A”). The screen name is often feminine which suggests, but does not equate to, a female reviewer. I was not able to contact the reviewers or access further information from readers except to connect to their other book reviews.

In the six interviews I conducted with Desert Romance readers, two of the women describe themselves as white Americans, two as African-Americans, one as a non-white immigrant permanently living in the U.S, and one as a white Englishwoman. Four of the six live in the southern United States and two live outside the U.S. The ages range from mid-twenties to mid-sixties with the average age in the early forties. All six readers describe themselves as middle-class and middle-income earners. One has completed a high school education, four have earned Bachelor’s degrees and one has earned a Master’s degree. Three of the six identify as practicing a religion and three of the six are married. While the RWA survey is more limited than the information I am able to provide from in-depth interviews, the demographics of the readers I interviewed appear to align with the general romance buyers polled by RWA.

## **Observations from Amazon Comments**

In contrast to the largely negative polling data on Americans attitudes toward the Middle East, reviewers of DR overwhelmingly feel positive, albeit usually expressed in non-specific ways, about the novels. These reviewers are individuals who chose to read these novels and comment on Amazon.com, so it is not surprising that someone who

would chose to pick up these books will have more tolerant and/or favorable ideas about romance stories set in the Middle East with Arab men. Nonetheless, their interest in these stories, at this particular post 9/11 historical moment in U.S. relations with Middle Eastern countries it is worthwhile to note.

Of the 191 Amazon comments, 74% commented they liked the book they had read, 16% had mixed feelings, and 10% did not like the book they were reviewing. On Amazon it is required to give a book stars ranked from 1-5, with 5 representing the best possible rating. 55% gave 5 stars, 19% 4 stars, 15% 3 stars, 3% 2 stars and 8% 1 star. The reason these results do not exactly match is due to instances when a reviewer gave a book 4 or 5 stars, but described it as only ok while others gave a book 3 stars, but described the book as excellent. As both results show, most readers give positive feedback about their enjoyment of the novel(s). Their comments are at times expressed in general terms of enjoyment:

I was gripped from start to finish by this truly enjoyable book. I look forward to her next title with great impatience” (*Yvonne Lindsay*).

A truly wonderful read, about honour, protection, and love (*Rebecca Alley*).

I was absolutely in love with the character of Prince Khalil Khan of El Bahar. (“-renee-“).

I loved the heroine, I loved the desert, I especially loved the clueless hero who has to learn to love! Susan Mallery understands the appeal of the sheik romance and creates a special world where men are men and women are witty and everyone gets to win. Can't wait for the others! (*A Customer*)<sup>4</sup>

While the reviewers often use positive words to describe the novel they reviewed, the vast majority of reviewers also express their opinions in generic terms that are not particular to DR, but correlate with responses to the romance genre as a whole.

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<sup>4</sup> *A Customer* is the general name given to a reviewer who has not registered a name on Amazon.com.

Radway's ethnography ([1984] 1991), examines in detail reader's experiences and opinions on the genre.

Radway highlights the ways in which the readers she interviews- the "Smithton" women- describe the appeal of the genre in terms of the hero, the heroine, and what makes for an ideal or failed romance. Though nearly thirty years have passed since *Reading the Romance*, many of the Amazon comments reaffirm Radway's findings.

In discussing the appeal of the hero, Radway found it difficult to pinpoint what exactly the Smithton readers liked to see in the hero. She received general answers of intelligence, humor and strength. The women appeared less interested in the particularities of the heroes as individuals than in the roles they should perform. Radway interprets this as a desire less about the heroine finding a unique life partner than fulfillment of the heroine's desire to be cared for and loved (83). The hero must be a leader among men, capable of protecting the heroine (130). He must be strong and masculine, but gentle and nurturing as well (81). The amazon reviewers often reflect these same desires in the sheikh hero. The combination of strength and vulnerability, appeals to readers:

The hero, Prince Razul was just breathtaking. You can see from the beginning of the story that he is deeply in love with the heroine (Bethany), but very vulnerable due to fear of rejection. (mimi)

We catch the insider's look into the heart of gold that lies hidden behind his all consuming power. (*D. Merrimon Crawford*)

Reading about the "dark sheikh" softening and falling for Julia is very sweet and romantic. (*Marilyn Shoemaker*)

If only there were more men in the world like rafiq gorgeous sensual and virile how happy we would be." (*Mrs. K. Caldicott "Krissy"*)

The Smithton women's feelings about the heroine were uniformly consistent and specific. She must exhibit intelligence, a sense of humor (in order to conduct witty verbal sparring with the hero), and independence (77). These are also qualities required of the hero. The heroine is set apart from other women in the novels because of her unusual intelligence, fiery disposition, and often special talents or career (123). The Amazon reviews again confirm Radway's findings:

One thing is for certain --- Aliyah is no pushover and in a battle of wills, she can give just as much as she gets! (*D. Merrimon Crawford*)

Celia is a strong young woman who knows her own worth and is unwilling to settle for less than she deserves. (*Kelley Hartsell "Kelley"*)

The emphasis on the hero and heroine meeting as intellectual equals (although usually never in physical strength or socio-economic position) is expressed through the love readers have for the verbal sparring often found between the hero and heroine.

The woman whom Olivia Gates brings into his life is someone who is just as stubborn as he when it comes to giving up on a goal, and their scenes are frequently packed with quick-witted comebacks to delight the reader time and again. (A. Richard)

Radway found the mark of an ideal romance is the singularly focus of the developing relationship between the hero and heroine. When too many secondary characters and scenarios are presented that interfere with the romance (such as a love triangle), readers express displeasure (122). A large imbalance of power between the hero and heroine can also disrupt the progression of the love story. DR Amazon reviews most often express displeasure in a novel due to this imbalance.

Radway found while it was acceptable, and even desirable, for the hero to wear a rough exterior, the heroine must be able to reach his true loving self and help him transform "into an emotionally expressive individual" (171). When an author deviates

from this formula and presents the hero as too cruel toward the heroine or if his transformation is not believable, readers reject them as “bad romances”, or in Radway’s terms “failed romances.” The Amazon comments continue to confirm this desire for a tough and macho, but not overly cruel, hero. Of the commenters who gave the novel under review 1 or 2 stars, the majority did so because of the perceived failure of the author to deliver a hero with a compassionate side.

*The Playboy Sheikh’s Virgin Stable-Girl (2009)* by Sharon Kendrick received overwhelmingly scathing reviews from readers due to the overbearing hero, Kaliq.

I was so disgusted by the misogynistic, arrogant, complete jerk of a sheikh Prince Kaliq Al’Farisi. He is overbearing from beginning to end, with no redeeming qualities. (*Nihongoluvr*)

I’m seconding the comments that this is probably the worst lead character I’ve ever encountered... He was an absolute jerk -- physically coercive and verbally abusive -- up until, what, the next-to-the-last page? Totally offensive storyline. (L.Tutor)

So, if you like women who fall in love with irredeemable jerks who call them names, then this book is for you. Since I don’t, this became the first book I’ve ever thrown in the trash. (Ali V.)

Similarly, if the heroine was not spunky enough to match the strength of the hero, the novel could also fail.

I can not stand overbearing men and women who can not stand up for themselves, which she did in the most minimum and insignificant of ways. (*Nihongoluvr*)

The heroine really irritated me. It was frustrating reading about such a doormat! It distracted from what-could-have-been a good, poignant romance. (RomReader).

The pair should be matched in strength as well as interest. A heroine pining over a hero who does not show adequate interest is also a turn off. *Romreader* continues:

What I didn’t like was the one-up, one-down relationship b/w hero & heroine. . .I felt sorry for the heroine to be stuck with a guy, no matter how

attractive or successful, who wasn't sure about her nor did he seem that into her.

The Smithton women and the Amazon reviewers both suggest a desire among readers for a semblance of balance and partnership in the relationships portrayed. This balance is more reflective of romances published in the past twenty years. While a commanding hero is desirable, readers today overwhelmingly do not accept a heroine who is unable to meet the challenge the hero presents. Failed romances overwhelmingly stem from a perceived exaggerated power imbalance. What we see in the above comments from reviewers is that the expectations readers have of DR match their expectations of romance novels more broadly. Readers enjoyment of a romance depends upon a focus of the developing romance between the hero and heroine and a certain portrayal of the leading characters in which balance and happiness are achieved for both.

### **The Amazon Engages the Middle East**

While the majority of the Amazon comments represent opinions readers share across all genres of romance, there are times when the comments diverge from the general patterns discussed by Radway. When readers engage with the particulars of DR it is primarily through discussions of the “Arabian” setting and the union between the eastern hero and western heroine. Through particular Amazon reviews we see readers enjoying and desiring the differences presented by the Middle Eastern setting and characters while at the same time expressing mixed feelings about the actual Middle East and Arabs. Readers celebrate the heroine’s journey into “Arabia” with her ability to appreciate the cultural traditions of the East while also acknowledging her role as an exporter of western neoliberalism.

The novel's Arabian setting becomes a place that is both knowable and fantastical, an exotic location removed from reader's everyday experiences, but one they are interested in exploring. Reviewers often describe an appreciation for the detail authors bring to their settings:

Her attention to detail and rich portrayal of the scenery our characters are experience is something which pervades all of her novels. 'The Desert Bride' is no exception. Graham's description of the palace both inside and the gardens, is especially beautiful, as are the desert scenes. ( *H. Anderson*)

I certainly found her colorful descriptions of the desert locale to be fascinating, and I want to revisit this enchanting setting. (A. Richard)

Until I read this book, I never imagined picnicking in a desert could be so desirable. (Margie)

These comments reflect an appreciation for the exotic landscape as well as the authors' ability to share a glimpse of a Middle Eastern setting. Some Amazon reviewers focus on the fantasy presented in the novels. However, reviewers also share an interest in the descriptions and possible content knowledge gained from the novels. The vivid descriptions allow the reader to experience they describe the importance of experiencing the narrative as a participant:

As for the story, it is told with such visual descriptions, letting the reader also experience each enchanting scene. The lavish traditions of the royal wedding are breathtakingly portrayed with such colorful facts, making all the circumstances surrounding this event seem convincing. THE DESERT KING will pull the reader into every mesmerizing instant of this extraordinary story" (A. Richard).

This book took me away to the desert, with it's beauty and it's dangers" (C. Woolf).

Annie West writes so beautifully, with rich descriptions of events, people, places & things--to the point where one can easily imagine themselves transported to this beautiful place (Dream Emporium Dot-Com "ZenCyn").

A journey into an exotic imaginary kingdom that combines hereditary and merit as entitlement to the throne. Be prepared to be swept into a world all

its own. . . combining traditional ancient culture and passions with modern characters and concerns (D. Merrimon Crawford).

In order to be “transported to this beautiful place,” romance readers (who, to the best of my knowledge, are overwhelmingly heterosexual women) identify with the heroine. Radway’s study, and the interviewed individuals, confirm the reader’s desire to see themselves in the heroine’s shoes. Therefore, it is important that the heroine is someone the reader can, or wants, to identify with.

### **East and West: Moving beyond Difference toward Love**

While all heroes and heroines of romance novels must overcome obstacles in order for love to triumph, the DR novel faces the additional burden of two individuals who must transcend and appreciate religious, ethnic and cultural differences- something the Amazon reviewers celebrate. A longtime desert romance fan with her own desert romance blog <sup>5</sup> and a regular contributor to the Amazon reviews, *Marilyn Shoemaker* writes, “A tale of East and West, two such different cultures and people who find a bond, mutual respect and love!” Similar comments were regularly expressed.

Love knows no boundaries and comes when you least expect it - even with a foreign prince!” (A customer)

Brenda Jackson explores two vastly different cultures with a unique realism of their natives’ behaviors. (The RAWSISTAZ Reviewers)

Through the characters of the western (usually white American) heroine and Arab hero, readers express a desire for moving beyond difference to a place of understanding, appreciation and coexistence. It is through love and empathy that mutual respect and understanding will take place. Readers champion the ability of the hero and heroine to move beyond a “culture clash” (msbooklady), toward a love that

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<sup>5</sup> *Romancing the Desert- Sheikh Books* <http://romancing-the-desert---sheikh-books.blogspot.com/>

transcends boundaries of race, religion, and nationality. One reviewer loved that the hero and heroine:

Had no insecurities about themselves and they expressed that confidence with the acceptance of the other's social values and religious practices...(A customer)

The union of East and West is not without tension and compromise. Both characters must be willing to let go of certain expectations or cultural beliefs in order for the union to take place. *Kenna Bowers* writes, "two people from two total different worlds falling in love and willing to make chances in order to be together. I cried when Jamal was willing to give up becoming king for the woman he loved." As the quote shows, the stakes can be quite high in preserving the union. In this novel,<sup>6</sup> Prince Jamal is offering to give up his position and prestige as the future ruler in order to remain with the woman he loves. While the price for marital union is not always so high, it is usually expected of the Arab hero to be a supporter of western neoliberal policies in his emerging democracy and to favor a western approach to gender relations. *M. Waters "musiclover13"*, describes the difficulties she sees arising from "...two people destined for each other even though she was probably the last type of woman he would have chosen due to her independence and his beliefs as a Sheik in Tahrán." Rather than pursuing someone who might appear more suitable, the sheikh follows through with his love for Delaney and in the process comes to respect and appreciate her independent and forward manner.

In response to an Amazon reviewer critiquing the plausibility of a modern western woman agreeing to an engagement to a traditional Arab sheikh she hardly

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<sup>6</sup> *Delaney and the Desert Sheik (2002)* by Brenda Jackson.

knows, Dream Emporium Dot-Com "ZenCyn" reminds fellow readers of the necessity of the hero and heroine working together to successfully fight terrorism. *In The Sheik's Ransomed Bride* (West 2007), Belle, a marine archaeologist, has been kidnapped by terrorists and rescued by Sheik Rafiq. In order to secure her release, Rafiq hands over the precious jewels which symbolize the legitimacy of his family's rule. Rafiq believes the only way his people will accept his decision to hand over the jewels is on behalf of a higher calling: true love for his soon to be bride. Belle decides to go along with the pretend engagement because of her desire to maintain stability in the country while Rafiq goes after the terrorists. Because of this higher duty, it is acceptable for the heroine to acquiesce to the Sheikh:

It is part of the story to understand that this little arab country is a new democracy with the country's people still believing many years of traditions & firm cultural beliefs; so they would have considered it a sign of political weakness for their prince to give in to the terrorists and relinquish the sacred jewels unless it was to save his beloved, so after experiencing the kind of terror Prince Rafiq's enemy creates first-hand, Belle makes a conscious choice to help the people in this nation by going along with their traditional beliefs until the terrorists are caught; otherwise they would continue their bombing raids. Essentially, Belle is helping Rafiq buy time for finding the terrorists. (Zencyn).

While reviewers find it admirable for the hero and heroine to individually make sacrifices for their union (such as abdicating the throne or going along with a pretend engagement), according to this reviewer, the characters should not stand in the way of thwarting terrorists. In my sample readings that incorporated terrorist plots, the hero and heroine must conquer the terrorists before the story's conclusion. While threats to international stability exist, the union of the hero and heroine cannot be realized.

Readers are in consensus about what they want to have included in a DR: exotic and detailed setting, physical and cultural differences between the hero and heroine, a

modern alpha hero who blends modernization and tradition, a strong independent heroine, and a happy ending that overcomes any challenges to true love. Readers also share what they do not want included in desert romances through their comments on what they perceive as failed romances. The iconic *The Sheik* (Hull [1919] 1977) and *The Playboy Sheikh and the Virgin Stable-Girl* (Kendrick 2009) represent the two failed romances, according to Amazon reviewers, among the novels analyzed. It is through the discussions of unsatisfying romances, usually due to the problematic portrayal of the hero, that Amazon reviewer's comment on issues of race, gender and religion.

Older romances at times portray rough heroes who could be verbally, physically or psychologically abusive to their female counterparts. E.M. Hull's *The Sheik*, certainly falls within this category by including the rape and psychological domination of the heroine by the hero. The hero is presented as a brute who only fully redeems himself at the novel's conclusion when we discover he is actually part European. Several reviewers were shocked with what they saw as orientalist overtones in the novel:

The Sheik is both reflects and perpetuates the absurd clichés of its age about Arabs. 'She was utterly in his power and at his mercy - the mercy of an Arab who was merciless.' 'He was an Arab, to whom the feelings of a woman were non existent.' Asked if he loves anything, the sheikh replies, 'Yes, I do. I love my horses.' 'That he was an Arab with Oriental instincts filled her with continual dread.' 'When an Arab sees a woman that he wants he takes her.' And this, said by the sheikh to Diana: 'We teach our women obedience with a whip.' In addition to these many comments on male-female relations, the novel also contains a smattering of other prejudices typical of its time ('the pungent smell of the native' and the like). (Jazz it Up Baby.

And the racism! The totally unabashed orientalism! That in itself was fascinating. Such a book could not be written today (thank god. . .oh, hell, maybe it almost could, now), and so it was interesting for the historical perspective. . .So bad it's good. (A customer)

As the above quote shows, while most readers note the racist and sexist elements in this novel, that does not necessarily detract from their overall enjoyment of it. Many reviewers still chose to give *The Sheik* 4 or 5 stars (despite largely negative reactions) based on either Hull's effective telling of this story or the individual reader's historical interest in one of the most famous romance novels of all time.

People either love it, hate it, or don't get it. Of course it's dated, incredibly racist, and horribly demeaning to women, but it's also one of the most captivating books I've ever read. The book is so well written that it is hard not to enjoy even while being disgusted... Part of what makes *The Sheik* so fascinating is to watch Diana's painful and rather revolting transformation. *The Sheik* is not realistic or politically correct in any way, but it is a lot of fun. (bibliophile.)

What can I say? I'm a committed feminist, and I've adored and occasionally reread this hotly spiced ridiculous tale for many years. It's a banquet of outrageous events and incredibly un-PC emotions all somehow mixed up with blossoming oases, racism, lust, adoration, great horses, sophisticated cuisine (in the desert!) and piercing through it here and there (as another poster mentioned) one of the most accurate descriptions of post traumatic stress disorder I've ever read. (MS "MSB".)

While readers admit to the racist and sexist elements of *The Sheik*, the historical nature of the novel, both when it was written and the setting described, allow otherwise "feminist" readers to accept the problematic elements of the novel as a reminder of the advancements western society has achieved over the past century in regards to race and gender relations. When similar politically incorrect tropes materialize in contemporary DR, readers are much less forgiving.

In Sharon Kendrick's *The Playboy Sheik's Virgin Stable-Girl* (2009), we find another domineering sheikh, who demeans the heroine throughout the novel. The overwhelming majority of reviewers left contemptuous comments. One reviewer, however, was quick to defend the novel against those who found the text problematic. In response to a reviewer (Y. Stewart "Yanstew") who wrote, "The hero is demeaning,

has lack of respect for females. . . This is not romantic, its near slavery and barbaric,” S.

Fischer responded:

The novel is set in a desert kingdom where the royal family has absolute power and everyone bows to them. He is shown as more open-minded about the expected behavior from 'commoners' than usual (though still extremely arrogant from a western point of view)...Personally, I'm fed up with encountering lots of modern, politically correct romance heroes (American style) in the Middle Ages or the Middle East, to give just two examples.

In a separate scathing review by Jennifer L. Rinehart, in which she writes, “there was a weird submissive slant to the story. . . The heroine was such a doormat and the Sheik was autocratic, selfish and had the emotional maturity of a spoiled teenage boy. . .” S. Fischer responded again:

If you want a half-way realistic book set in a desert country (i. e. the Middle East), then you can't expect a realistic romance with modern and western heroes.” She continues in her own review, “Anyone who thinks about buying this book should first know that it is very far from politically correct... and it doesn't follow the formula that no matter what time or place a romance is set in, the hero is a nice modern man who treats women as equals...He is often unpleasant and arrogant, which becomes very clear since his - often chauvinistic and egoistic - point of view is sometimes used to show how he sees things...This is a really good book with interesting characters, a good story and a well-developed cultural background.

While S. Fischer finds an aristocratic Middle Eastern male character who does not “treat women as equals” realistic and appropriate for novels set in “Arabia,” the vast majority of reviewers do not find this portrayal acceptable. S. Fischer received heated comment for her defense of the novel and of the thirteen reviews this novel the majority gave it one star. Two of the reviewers who gave the novel a rating higher than one did so because it was “hysterically bad” and “so bad it’s good!”

Through the above examples of successful and failed DR novels, most readers have demonstrated that any hero, regardless of background, should play the role of the

virile yet sensitive hero. The hero and heroine must achieve balance in their relationship and work together as equals in order to appeal to most readers. Readers also appreciate rich description of the scenery and setting so they can experience this foreign land vicariously through the heroine. When readers are unable to relate to the heroine (as we will see in several of the interviews below), the enjoyment of the novel is disrupted. While the Amazon comments demonstrate readers have an appreciation for stories set in the Middle East with Arab heroes, the readers rarely allow their comments to stray toward discussions of the Middle East. These reviewers, as with most romance readers, read primarily for the love story and the happy ending, not for political discussions or social commentary. In order to gain more detail from reader's experiences we will turn to conversations with DR readers.

### **Interviews**

In this section I will present the interviews I conducted with six DR readers.<sup>7</sup> Instead of structuring these interviews around topics, I have chosen to give each interviewed reader her own section to express her views. Rather than trying to format an interviewee's words into a framed category, I believe it is more respectful to the readers and more honest to this project, to allow their words to speak for themselves and focus on what they believe is important to communicate. By allowing their conversations to naturally flow rather than trying to discipline their responses, I believe the complexities of these readers' responses are more readily apparent. While every representation of another will only be a partial truth and putting another's words into written form always involves an editing process, by presenting each woman's responses

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<sup>7</sup> I have given each reader a pseudonym to protect her privacy.

in its entirety, I believe I will have done more justice to the readers and to the thesis. I will begin each interview section with a brief background biography the reader provided me. I will save authorial analysis for the end of each interview in addition to a final summation.

### **Interview with Serena**

Serena is a single woman in her 20's without children. She describes herself as a white American living in the U.S. She is a practicing Christian. She has earned a B.A. degree and works full time and considers herself as a lower to middle income earner.

Serena began sneaking romances from her mother's shelf as a teenager and then began checking them out of the library. She also manages her own romance reading blog which she began after graduating from college. She reads more than 10 romances per month and her favorites are DR and historical romances. She primarily likes reading romances for the love stories and happy endings. She periodically keeps up with current events and occasionally discusses news and politics with others.

Serena likes the Arabian settings because "they are more exotic than Europe. It is fun to have a foreign setting in a modern novel. For the same reasons, I would also be interested in a novel set in China, but there aren't hardly any." Serena claims the "Sheikh themed" romances are quite popular on her blog and suggests the appeal of the Arabian setting is ultimately its ability to tell a modern love story with a more traditional backdrop. She finds historical romance novels enjoyable for the similar high in experiencing a different setting.

She believes that the settings depicted seem realistic and explains that while she believes the author should be given "literary license" to create fictional places and scenarios, she also expects the author to do her homework and not present situations

that are illogical. “I got so annoyed at this one Regency historical. One scene actually included a modern indoor shower.”

After reading DR, Serena became interested in traveling to the Middle East to “experience a feel of the region.” She recently returned from visiting Turkey and Israel with her mother and she hopes to return to Turkey as well as continue her Middle East travels to Jordan and Egypt. Her recent travels have reaffirmed her belief that the environments presented in the novels are realistic, albeit a bit idealistic. “The real Middle East is much more complicated than what you find in the novels.”

She also believes the Middle East is portrayed primarily in a favorable light in the novels, but expressed ambivalence about this positive representation. “I’m not sure that is a good thing. Someone should not read this and assume it is ok to travel and wear and say whatever you like without being aware of cultural expectations. They are like us in some ways, but have different expectations. It is not as modern as the books portray.”

Serena likes reading about modern alpha males in a non-historical setting. Serena likes that the sheikh hero is, “a modern day prince, a alpha hero in modern times, a take charge kind of guy with honor and integrity. He is westernized, but still has traditional roots and likes the independence of the heroine, which is why he doesn't go for women of his own country who have been taught to be subservient and walk behind their husbands with the man in charge... Although, this is probably what a real sheikh would want.”

Serena comments that real Arab men would be less desirable than the fictional sheikhs. “In real life Arab men are more traditional and less westernized.” Because she believes Arab men to be less westernized than the fictional ones, she said they would

be incompatible for most western women. The incompatibility has less to do with his foreignness than his religious affiliation with Islam. "From the news it seems a Muslim Arab man would expect to have a traditional Muslim woman as his bride. Even if he was more forward thinking, those around him, and his culture in general, would provide too great of a barrier for the union to succeed." Although Serena offers that, "maybe an American Muslim would be different."

At this point in the conversation Serena shares her only two personal experiences with people who identify as Muslim. In one case, she mentions a friend of her mother who married an Arab Muslim living in the U.S. "While they were in the U.S. the relationship was fine, but when they moved back to his home country, the woman was expected to convert to Islam and follow the local customs. The woman ended up miserable." Serena did not share with me if the couple stayed together, but the net result was the real-life romance was a failure, confirming Serena's views that interreligious relationships are overly complicated.

Serena's other Arab Muslim acquaintance is a westernized young woman brought up in the U.S. "She does not wear the veil. She was living in Miami and now she lives in New York. Her parents are very open-minded. They have a Christmas tree in the winter and you would not know they were not Christian. They do not care if she marries a Muslim or not. At first she said she wanted to marry a Muslim, but now that is not very important to her. She is more of a dominant, take charge personality so it probably wouldn't work for her to marry a Muslim." Although, Serena feels that a Muslim brought up in a western country is perhaps a different situation and romances with westernized women could potentially work out.

While Serena points out religion as a point of contention, she states that the novels generally avoid overt discussion of religion. "Religion is glossed over in novels. Other romances leave this out as well. No one wants to be preached at while enjoying a relaxing novel. It is too controversial to introduce into the story, especially the category romances. Authors work in cultural differences in other ways. The reason for fake countries is to not get into the politics and not to offend anyone. Readers do not want to read about politics and religion too much in the novels."

In the novels, "the hero wants a strong woman to help him modernize his country so the western heroine fits this. The heroine is an average western girl who could become a princess with wealth and luxuries. A regular girl meeting a British prince does not seem plausible, but meeting an Arab prince of a small country seems more realistic." In describing the appeal of the heroine in these novels Serena says, "She is independent and demands respect. She helps bring his country into modernization. She might be the head of a charity for women's rights or something similar. She brings the country into gender relations that would be acceptable to western countries. She gets to be a force of change in the arrogant sheikh's life."

Serena does not believe the hero and heroine's relationship is realistic due to religious, cultural, and class differences. "It is like *The King and I*. The appeal is the characters can move beyond the odds and compromise. I like the angst and drama of seeing if they will work things out- although you already know they will." Despite these misgivings, Serena believes the hero and heroine in these novels have something unique to offer one another. The hero "has exceptionally strong family values because of his background - which I feel translates to lifetime security in his love. He'll be a father

who is active in his home life - perhaps learning to or fulfilling a father role he never had/always wanted to be.” The heroine can aid the hero in advancing his country and she gets to have “a life of luxury, wealth, and much political and social advancement.”

When Serena and I discuss relations between the Middle East and the U.S. she says, “In my travels, the people were positive toward the U.S. and people I traveled with were positive about the people and places we visited, but overall Americans seem neutral or negative about the Middle East.” Although she did not offer own opinion about U.S. military involvement in the Middle East, Serena recalled hearing friends and family say the U.S. should get out of the region, because there is not much the U.S. can do in “this deeply troubled region. People in the West wish they could come in and help the Middle East, but it is very complicated. The Middle East has been fighting since early times, fighting over scarce resources, such as Israel and Jordan fighting over the Jordan River. Three religions are in conflict and many feel their way is the only way. You need a society in which both men and women are highly educated and encouraged to be innovative which will not happen in the Middle East for a long time.” Therefore, the U.S. should give up its attempts to “solve problems” in the Middle East.

Serena states that although many Americans would like to be present in the Middle East to work with Arabs in solving the regional and global problems she believes this is not practical. She believes the U.S. presence in Iraq has the potential of helping Iraq become a more democratic society, but factors beyond the control of the U.S. make change difficult, if not impossible. She admits that despite her interest in the Middle East and her travels there, she knows little about Arabs and bases her opinion on news sources which she claims could be biased.

For Serena, DR are fantasies that are not meant to be read as reality. Despite her strong misgivings about the feasibility of interfaith relationships, she enjoys indulging the fantasy of having a romantic relationship with a wealthy Arab man through her DR reading. In her opinions about the non-fictional Middle East, Serena, in many ways, accepts stereotypes of the Middle East without question. Patriarchal men, subservient women, and a Middle East in need of western democratic influence all appear to be a part of her worldview. However, her admittedly limited and incomplete knowledge about the Middle East and her willingness to encounter and engage with the Other leave her open to new encounters and possibilities of thinking about the Middle East. While I would not argue that knowledge or experience (through books and international travel) necessarily create a more open and broad mind that will result in viewing “difference with equality,” I believe Serena’s willingness to engage with the Middle East, even in a limited sense, shows the potential for tolerance and appreciation of difference. Serena claims her growing interest in the Middle East is a result of her DR reading.

### **Interview with Pamela**

Pamela is a single woman in her 30’s with one child. She describes herself as a Jamaican of Indian descent and a permanent resident of the United States. She is non-religious. She has earned a B.A. and a M.A. degree and works full time and considers herself a middle income earner.

She reads 1-2 romances per month. Her favorites are contemporary category romances with international locations. She likes romances for their happy love stories and the opportunity to escape to a different world. She keeps up with global current events and occasionally discusses news and politics with others.

Pamela enjoys DR because of their ability to transport her to a unique setting that she has not personally experienced. It is not the particulars of the desert or the palaces, but simply a way to experience difference. “I just like the foreign setting. It like a way to visit a foreign land since I can't be there.” She also expresses a desire for accurate representations in fiction. “Part of the appeal for me is that I can learn about the actual country or culture. If the setting is completely fake it wouldn't be as appealing.” For her, the descriptions are enjoyable sites for learning. Learning takes place not only in the novels themselves, but they have inspired Pamela to read about the Middle East more broadly. She rewards intriguing fiction by turning to other fiction set in similar locales as well as non-fiction and film.

Pamela expresses the novels in terms of a modern Cinderella story and claims she cannot identify with heroines from different time periods. “I can't stand the delicate weak females in some others and historicals.” Pamela appreciates the successful modern career- focused women who star in DR. She relates to their life circumstances and ambition. However, she would like to see more diversity in the heroines. “I find it weird that all the heroines are white and mostly American. It's like saying the average white American female could only be with a foreign man if he is super rich and/or royalty. I don't like the whole racial superiority they give the white heroines.”

The appeal of the Arab hero for Pamela is his traditional manners and alpha presence, but also his openness to western ways of life. “The sheikh is more interesting than most heroes because he has the exotic traditional side, but also western, so he is more appealing for a western audience. Exotic, but not too foreign. I like that they show

that even though the hero is from a harsh land that doesn't mean he is not educated or cultured or modern. He has no problems functioning in the western world.”

Patrice does not find the storyline or union realistic, but this does not detract from her enjoyment of what she describes as a female fantasy. “I don't think it would be the norm for the average female (even if a white American) would end up in the same type of circle as a Middle Eastern royal. I think a rich foreign sheikh would want to be with another rich or famous person. But I see this as a fantasy for the average female reader of the books which I guess is ok. We want to live vicariously and maintain that these fantasies can happen. It's just like Cinderella after all. Marry the prince and become a princess. . .yada yada. This is just the same fantasy for the adult woman that we had as little girls.”

In addition to the fantasy of becoming a princess, Pamela comments that one of her favorite trends in DR are the close familial and community ties the Arab hero maintains in the novels. “The heroine is often orphaned or estranged from her family and a sense of community.” Her home of origin in the West is not a place of warmth or comfort for her. In contrast, “the hero has a large family that live nearby or in the palace. They are all close to one another and loyal. It is an inviting scene.”

Pamela relates the novels to actual current events only if the novels themselves make these connections. “I do think about the current events if it is in the setting but if there are no mention of political events I'm ok with that too if the cultural, geographical info is 'correct.’” She does however keep up with world news. Pamela believes the manner in which Arabs and the Middle East is portrayed in the news presents a very negative image to westerners. “All we see is religious extremism or conservatism,

violence, and oppressed women. We don't get to see the positives of the culture." In contrast to "real" news, she appreciates that DR novels focus on positives of the portrayed Middle Eastern culture.

For Pamela, DR are a means to escape her own knowable experiences and fantasize about places and romantic interludes elsewhere in the world where the heroine has few material worries. While she recognizes the novels as fantasy, she also hopes to gain information about a foreign locale through her reading and uses fiction as a springboard to learn more about other cultures through non-fiction sources. Pamela sees the Middle East represented harshly in the U.S. and finds that DR are a nice contrast to the typical negative representations. While neither represent "reality," at least DR provide an alternative view of the Middle East. Rather than equating Arab men with terrorism and misogyny and the Middle East as a place of violence, the novels portray the hero as an honorable man the heroine loves and the landscape as an exciting and beautiful locale where their love can develop.

### **Interview with Brenda**

Brenda is a divorced single woman in her 40's with two grown children. She describes herself as an African-American woman living in the U.S. She is a practicing Christian. She has earned a B.A. degree and works full time and considers herself a middle income earner. She keeps up with current events and regularly discusses the news with others.

Brenda has been reading romances for about 25 years. She was introduced to romances from her mother and began reading as a young adult. She has continued the tradition by introducing her daughter to romances. In addition to the three generations of women who read romance in their family, Brenda said she has also seen her brother- in

recent years- reading their mother's romances. Brenda currently reads 2-3 romances per month. She prefers contemporary category romances with characters of various ethnicities set in either international settings or the U.S. Despite her preferences, she admits she will read whatever is conveniently available from her mother or a friend. In the past year she has read three to four novels with an "Arabian setting" and she estimates she has read over 30 in her lifetime. While she is well read in Desert Romances, Brenda tends to describe DR within the broader context of international romances with foreign men, rather than a unique category by itself.

Brenda says she likes reading romances set in foreign locations because it is an opportunity for learning while also enjoying the love story. While she recognizes situations, characters and places in the novels are often fictional, romance novels can give rich descriptions of cultural customs. "As an American, I may not understand why a Muslim woman would wear a burqa, but by reading a novel about the cultural customs, it puts things into perspective and allows me to appreciate other perspectives and ways of living." Brenda states that she is ignorant about many places in the world and reading gives her a peak into other lifestyles. "I like reading about the palace of the Arab prince. The descriptions of the palace, the servants, the mannerisms, the language is something very different for me and for the heroine." She believes it is important for authors to research the backdrop for their novels. While many parts are fictionalized, authors should still do their best to give a "feel" for the place.

When Brenda reads about locations she is drawn to she will read more novels with similar locations or themes or look up information about the region online. She also

likes to speak with people from that region or who have travelled in that region to get their perspectives on the places she is reading about.

Brenda has mixed feelings about the typical hero and heroine of DR. She describes the hero as always presented as, “dark, rough and unapproachable. There is something in his past or his duties as a prince that make him distant and cold.” In the unfolding of the novel the heroine of course softens the hero and exposes his softer side. Nonetheless, Brenda would like to see a sheikh hero who is not always the typical “alpha male.”

Brenda appreciates that DR present a minority hero who is not the traditional white romance novel hero. The Sheikh is always described as having brown skin and dark hair. While Brenda appreciates the minority status (from an American perspective) of the hero, she is fed up with the racialization of the heroine. “Why does the heroine always have to be a blond haired blue-eyed white do-gooder? Why can’t she be from a minority background? This is not only with the sheikh themed. Most of the heroines are white in all romances. You have to go to specific lines and specific authors to find minorities.” When I asked Brenda if she believed this was reflective of the ethnicity of the author she replied, “No. I think the publishing houses want this. Plot wise there is no reason to have the heroine white. People of all colors and backgrounds today can travel to the Middle East or find themselves in any career or situation.” I then asked Brenda is she believed most romance readers were white. “I don’t think so. I know many African-Americans who read romance.”

Despite her misgivings about the hero and heroine of DR, once she gets past her initial annoyance, she still enjoys reading about the developing romance. She likes that

they bring a new level of understanding and appreciation for each other and each other's cultures, a more compassionate side to each other." When I asked if she believed the relationships depicted in DR seemed realistic she replied that while relationships between people of different cultures can work, "he would have to be a westernized man. An American woman would not be very comfortable living over there with a very traditional man."

When I brought up the political aspects of the novels, she said that while she has read a few that have discussed oil issues or kidnapping, "for the most part it is girl and boy who meet for a variety of random reasons. I do not think about politics and current events while reading romances. I read them for the pleasure of a happy love story, not for worrying about politics. This is one reason I don't like the mystery novels. They usually involve crime and murder. I want to read about more pleasant things."

When we began to talk about representation of the Middle East, Brenda said she believes the Middle East is discussed unfavorably in the United States. "There is propaganda in the U.S. about the Middle East and in the Middle East about the U.S. that is not true." Brenda thinks the novels are more favorable to the region even though they are only fiction. "In the novels there is at least some respect shown for the culture and the Arab characters. They show day to day routines and everyday occurrences of people in the Middle East instead of very isolated worse case situations the news presents."

When I asked her about the relationship she thought the U.S. should have with the Middle East Brenda said the U.S. should not be heavily involved in the Middle East or any other countries. "The U.S. has enough to clean up in its own backyard before

worrying about other places. Yes, there should be some responsibilities and honoring NATO and certain treaties, but we need to focus on problems and corruption in the U.S.”

Like many romance readers, Brenda reads DR novels primarily to escape into a pleasant fantasy in an intriguing locale, not to think about world events. However, she does enjoy gaining general cultural knowledge that she believes DR provide and the opportunities for expanding her understanding of foreign customs. She also enjoys following up on the information presented in the novels through non-fiction sources. Although she is critical of the leading characters, she appreciates the racial presentation of the hero. In these novels, unlike most romances, a non-white man serves as the desirable hero. Brenda reifies certain stereotypes of the Middle East in her responses, particularly when discussing the desirability of the fictional Arab hero compared to real Arab men. However, Brenda sees DR novels as a positive step in representing the Middle East. Unlike most media and cultural portrayals, Brenda sees DR as a positive presentation of Middle Eastern cultures.

### **Interview with Kristen**

Kristen is a married woman in her 40's. She describes herself as a white Englishwoman living in England. She does not affiliate herself with any religion. She has earned a B.A. degree and works full time and considers herself a middle income earner. She regularly reads and discusses current events in the news. She believes the Israeli/Palestinian conflict to be one of the most pressing issues in world politics.

Kristen reads 5-7 romances per month. She began reading romances in the past five years. Her interest in the novels first came from a desire to write a romance of her own. After reading a few romances for research, she became a fan. Her favorite

subgenres are Desert Romances and mystery romances. She enjoys romances mostly for the evolving love story between the hero and heroine.

Kristen describes the appeal of the Middle Eastern settings in comparison to her northern European home, “Living in the UK I find any location that portrays a lifestyle lived outside in the heat and the sun incredibly appealing.” She also expresses the appeal of the unknown and the exotic by evoking *Orientalism*. “To be honest I find an Arabian setting as fantastical a setting as anything in a sci fi novel. I have travelled widely in Europe so Mediterranean destinations are mostly places I know well, but I have never been to the middle east and I suppose there is an element of mystery surrounding somewhere one has never been. This element of mystery absolutely buys into Edward Said’s concept of orientalism.”

I asked Kristen if she believed the novels were Orientalist. She points to the complications in answering this question. “That’s a really tricky question. Certainly the sheikh romance projects a romanticized image of the Middle East. However, that image is almost always a positive one, whereas in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* he argues that the image is negative, thus infusing the West with a sense of superiority toward the Middle East. Obviously this is a complex argument and I can’t possibly do it justice in a few words.” While she is simplifying Said’s argument, Kristen argues that whether the images are “positive” or “negative” can make a difference in how they can be classified. Depictions of Arab terrorists vs. Arab heroes is an important distinction.

When I asked what she believed was the role of the author conducting research and in providing a realistic backdrop to the story, Kristen responded, “Geographically it is important for an author to understand the location. Also if they’re going to use

another language, they should have some knowledge it, too many do not. However, a sheikh romance is primarily a fantasy and anyone with any knowledge of world events understands that the Middle East is politically complicated and women don't read romance novels for the politics." Kristen also added that while she is personally interested in the politics of the Middle East she does seek that knowledge from her fiction reading. "I read newspapers and watch the news for information about the Middle East."

In describing the appeal of the Sheikh hero Kristen writes, "I really like tall dark men despite being married to a tall blonde one. I also like dominant men as fantasy figures." Her feelings about the heroine are mixed. While she enjoys these novels for the romance between the couple, Kristen believes too many of the heroines are "passive and pathetic in the main." She prefers strong heroines to match the alpha male hero. In her own writings she likes to construct "difficult and complicated alpha heroines and tortured and brooding alpha males."

Part of her critique of the heroine stems from the fact that the majority of heroines are American.<sup>8</sup> "I do have problems identifying with American heroines, I find them as mysterious as any sheikh hero. Everything about the American heroines are foreign and mysterious to me, in the same way that everything about America is foreign and mysterious. I find American politics and culture fascinating but as strange and as unfathomable as anything from the Middle East. For example the problems America has with the concept of a National Health Service. I cannot imagine living in a first world

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<sup>8</sup> I have found that DR authors tend to write heroines who are from their same cultural and ethnic background. White British authors tend to write white British heroines. White American authors tend to write white American heroines. The one DR featuring an African-American heroine is written by an African-American author. White American is the most prolific category of authors and heroines for DR.

country where people cannot afford cancer treatment. To me this is as strange as anything that happens in the Middle East.”

Kristen appreciates how the cultural differences between the hero and heroine bring new dimensions to the developing love story. “I like the idea of overcoming cultural barriers, it’s an interesting and more valid internal conflict than many others in romance novels.” When we discussed if the hero and heroine were able to bring anything new to the relationship outside of love, Kristen wrote, “There are authors who are able to persuade me that the hero and heroine have brought a new level of understanding to each other. Sometimes it is possible to see that the hero and heroine have opened their eyes to a different way of seeing and thinking about things.”

I asked Kristen if she believed the romance between the lead couple seemed realistic. She wrote, “No, but then it’s not meant to be, it’s a fantasy. Some are more outrageous than others, and I have been known to throw a book across the room if I find the whole thing too stupid.” I asked her in what ways the union was unrealistic. Was it class barriers, cultural barriers, unrealistic situations...She responded, “It’s none of those things, usually it’s because the heroine is too stupid to live and this alpha male has been turned into a groveling nerd. It’s the characters I have problems with.”

Kristen responded to my query about the more political aspects included in some of the DR novels with, “As I said before these are fantasy novels, I enjoy them for what they are. I consider myself reasonably well informed on the politics of the Middle East and the world, and find it rather patronizing that anyone would think that women who read romance novels are somehow less well informed than women who don’t.”

When we discussed the representation and perception of the Middle East, specifically in Britain in her case, she wrote, "I think people in Britain have a fairly positive view of the ME depending on what is happening there. The British people will always support the underdog. If at any time it appears an ethnic group, within the ME, are being badly treated - you will find both the British media and the British people supporting that group. I have no idea as to the opinion of the U.S. public about the ME, I can only speak from a British perspective." Kristen is particularly concerned with the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. "The perceived uncritical support of Israel by the west is absolutely corrosive in any dialogue western governments wish to have with any other Arab state. The Palestinian people need to have their own state, but no one in the west is prepared to force the issue."

When I brought the dialogue back to the DR novels and what they offer, if anything at all, in terms of a different way of interacting or thinking about the Middle East, Kristen wrote, "It makes no difference what I think about the relationship the west should have with the ME, the world is what it is, mercurial and mercenary and that will never change. I cannot emphasize enough that these novels are fantasy novels, as fantastical in their own way as anything written by Tolkein."

Kristen clearly and consistently argues against a reading of DR as anything other than enjoyable fiction. Despite elements of orientalism- that she admits are tied into the appeal of the novels- Kristen is insistent that women should be free to enjoy their romantic fiction for what it is, romantic fiction, without being labeled as less intelligent, less knowledgeable, or less enlightened than other individuals who do not read romances. She draws a distinction in the DR between negative and positive

representations. While Said and Todorov might not agree, I think Kristen is right to point out the distinction. With low public opinion of the Middle East and its people (at least in the U.S.), stories that portray Arab men as the heroes, rather than terrorists, and Arab locations as alluring, rather than dangerous can potentially be part of the solution for more compassionate interactions.

### **Interview with Cheryl**

Cheryl is a married woman in her early 40's. She describes herself as a white American woman living in the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.). She has earned a B.A. degree and works full time as well as pursuing a romance writing career. She considers herself to be a middle income earner. She describes herself as a non-practicing Christian. She reads the news daily and regularly discusses current events with others.

Cheryl reads about two romances per month. She enjoys reading a variety of romances, particularly historicals. She enjoys romances primarily for their happy endings and the opportunity to learn about different places and time periods. She is currently pursuing writing her own Desert Romance.

In describing the appeal of the hero she responded, "They are true alpha males. They can lead a group of people across a burning desert and keep order until the next oasis. Plus they have those swarthy, exotic good looks on their side." However, alpha heroes of any romance sub-genre are not Cheryl's favorite. "I'm not especially fond of alphas and making mine not a jerk was difficult." She did not divulge why she felt she had to write a hero type she did not particularly like. However, I believe her choice reflects the widespread popularity of the alpha male in all romance subgenres.

Cheryl is less admiring of the heroines in these novels. "To be honest, most of the heroines in the novels I've read have been such unrealistic dipsticks. . . They wander

off into the desert which is a great way to die. They go off with strange men, which is a great way to get yourself raped and then probably dumped into the desert to die. They flout local customs on dressing because they are 'strong, independent women' which is just going to get you ostracized and possibly escorted from the premises, not lauded for your bravery." I asked her if she felt these cultural mistakes would be typical of a foreigner unaccustomed to the local culture. She responded, "I think it goes beyond what any intelligent person would do. Running into the desert without water? At the airport there are signs warning you about appropriate behavior. I was given a leaflet on the plane. And then there was one in my hotel room. Given, I originally arrived during Ramadan, but when in Rome you pay attention to how the Romans behave. Some mistakes do happen though. I only found out cap sleeves were too short by wearing them in public. I also ate in public during my first Ramadan here, but in my defense, someone handed me that chocolate."

However, Cheryl believes cultural misunderstandings do occur and can be tastefully included in a novel. "My heroine is a foreigner. We did put in a scene where she goes to Marina Mall in a sleeve-less blouse and ends up being escorted from the premises and rescued from utter humiliation by the hero. She's a New Yorker so she doesn't see the point of the modesty issue and it bites her."

In describing what she wants the hero and heroine to bring to the relationship she said, "In my book, they brought an awareness of how another culture works. He is used to strong women being manipulative because that's the only avenue they have. She thinks he's bossy until she realizes how much responsibility he carries. Sheikhs are

like rock stars here, and like rock stars they have a whole entourage that depends on them to make all the decisions.”

When discussing the appeal of the Arabian setting, Cheryl said, “I think we are drawn to the Arabian setting because it's different. When I was little and going to horse shows, my sister rode Western, but I was drawn to the Arabians because of the exotic costumes. Later on, taking belly dancing lessons, we used to refer to ourselves as magpies because we were attracted to shiny things.” She also finds the comfort of being cared for by a wealthy alpha male appealing, at least in fantasy. “It could also be a desire to be coddled. Women in these cultures are really sheltered and protected, unfortunately that also means being not allowed to do things, but sometimes being on a pedestal sounds very appealing.”

Cheryl believes it is very important for an author to research the setting of the novel. She does not believe most of the authors deliver an authentic experience of Middle Eastern cultures and wishes more authors would choose actual Middle Eastern countries for the location of their novels. “In this situation, where I'm soaking in the culture all day long, I don't want to see modest, Muslim women roaming around in public with their hair uncovered any more than I want to read about King Henry I eating his dinner with a fork. Now, I will accept an abundance of young, virile sheikhs, but that's about as far as I'll go. (Real sheikhs tend to be on the elderly side these days.). . .Some fantasy is okay, but if I wanted a fantasy novel, I'd read a fantasy novel.” I asked her if these novels represent, or are capable of representing the Middle East. She responded, “They love to hit the stereotypes. Either the Middle East is super dangerous or quaint. Depending on where you are, it's neither.”

When we discussed the instances when DR describe current events such as terrorism, oil, Cheryl said, "Current Middle Eastern events are always a topic of conversation so the novels don't bring them up for me. When that idiot was burning Korans in the US we were all waiting for it to come up in conversation with the locals, but it never did. I don't want to put current events in my books. I don't like to date them and I'm not writing My Name Is Khan (which is a great movie) I'm writing escapist fiction."

In discussing why she chose to write a Desert Romance novel rather than another type of romance Cheryl said, "I chose this setting because I was frustrated by what was available and because I'm in it [the Middle East] so research is no problem." In her own novel, she has chosen the U.A.E. as the setting and will use the actual street names and descriptions of buildings she experiences daily. "I'm trying to be more realistic with my plots. My settings are real settings, other than maybe moving a building. We set a party at the Emirates Palace Hotel and I did my best to make sure it was realistic to the actual hotel and we didn't have a mixed sex party. Men were in one room and woman were in another, just like a real party here would be. That's what I don't like about the current sheikh novels I've read. They're fantasies that have no basis in reality and if I'm going to read something I have to be able to suspend disbelief and just reading a description where the heroine takes off into the desert, off road, with no supplies and no plans, doesn't make me think romance, it makes me think 127 Hours or that kid who wandered into Alaska and died because he didn't have a plan. I don't like to set off for Dubai without a full tank of gas and that's an hour and a half drive on a busy road with a couple of gas stations with convenience stores between here and there."

She shared that living in the Middle East has helped with her writing and her status as an “outsider” can sometimes help with her access to information. “I have more access to local culture than most because I work so closely with locals. My co-teacher last year (Afra) called me her sister. I go to the baby showers and the weddings and even sat mourning this year. The fact that I work with all women gives me a bird’s eye view of what it must have been like to be in a harem. . . I have been having the most interesting conversations with my co-teacher (Klaithem) because I am on the outside and she can talk to me as an outsider about things she can’t let slip around the other Arabic teachers.”

When I asked her about American perceptions of the Middle East Cheryl responded that most Americans, despite strong opinions about Arabs and Islam, are woefully ignorant. “I don’t think Americans have an accurate vision of the Middle East to begin with so no matter what their opinions are, they aren’t coming from an educated place. The ones I’ve talked to tended to have a negative impression. . .” When I asked her where she thought this ignorance/misinformation stems from she responded. “I was just discussing with a friend the fear of the unknown as a survival instinct. Middle Easterners look different. The Emiratis tend to be kind of soft and round, but the Iraqis, Iranians, Syrians and Jordanians run a little more, I guess, severe in their features. There was a guy who worked at the Iranian restaurant in the mall and I was scared to order from him because he just looked angry all the time. He wasn’t angry; it was his face. Stereotypes are reinforced by the news and pop culture because it’s easy. Do you know why they are fighting in Syria? It’s not political. It’s religious. Sunnis vs Shiites. A friend of mine spent the summer in Jordan just across the border. She’s Muslim and

speaks Arabic. Americans don't think of war for religion anymore and the news is not bothering to explain. Arabic also sounds very harsh to English speakers. Phonetically it's a very coarse with glottal fricatives. I don't think it has any sibilants either (though I could be wrong.) We had a National Day pageant at school Thursday and as the kids were singing it struck me how terrifying that would sound to the unfamiliar. The kids are 4; the song was about being proud of being Emirati; but it sounded a little frightening."

Finally, I asked Cheryl what kind of relationship she thought the U.S. should have with the Middle East and if DR offer any kind of model for this relationship. "I believe in cooperation and understanding all around. We're all stronger in our diversity, but we have to listen to one another and not jump to conclusions because someone has dark skin or slanty eyes. I think pop culture, including romance novels, will give people a good inside look at the other side. Once they see the sameness in the difference that survival instinct relaxes."

Cheryl appears less of a fan than a critic of DR. The lack of "authentic" representations in the DR she has read has spurred Cheryl to work on her own novel. She sees the potential in creating a great DR, but is quite critical of the ones she has read thus far. In contrast to Kristen who sees DR novels as purely fictional fantasies that should not be related to real world events, Cheryl believes romances set in the Middle East while escapist fiction, are sites for learning about other cultures as well as opportunities for more open engagement with Others. She points to the ability of popular culture to promote more open and sympathetic engagements with foreign people. She argues these "orientalist" products can be ways of overcome stereotypes rather than reinforcing them.

## **Interview with Dorrine**

Dorrine is a married woman in her 60's with five grown children and several grandchildren. Although she describes herself as an African-American woman living in the United States, she feels racial classification is not very meaningful. She shared with me that one of her grandparents was white and another was a Native American of the Cherokee tribe so, "I am really a melting pot." She is retired and considers her family to be middle- class. She is a practicing Christian. She keeps up with current events and sometimes discusses the news with others.

Dorrine is an avid romance with a 50 year history with the genre. "I saw a romance novel in my local drugstore, around the 1950's and picked up one. I was around ten or twelve; I think they were only \$.15!" She has been hooked ever since. Currently she reads 10 or more romances per month. She enjoys all styles of contemporary category romances and mystery novels. She prefers contemporary stories because, "I can relate to modern stories. The historicals are too far removed from my experiences. I can't relate to them." Dorrine views her reading as primarily a way to relax. "When I am stressed reading calms me down." What she chooses to read depends on her mood. "If I want something light I will read a romance, if I want something more involved I will read a mystery."

Dorrine subscribes to a mail order program in which she receives four murder mystery novels and ten romance novels per month. She supplements her mail orders with additional reading from book stores such as Barnes & Noble or Wal-Mart. I asked her if she also used the library. She responded that with a reading appetite as voracious as hers, the library selections are too limited.

She has passed on her love of reading to her children and grandchildren. “My grandkids tell me I am the reason they love reading. It is because I take them with me to the bookstore. When I go to pick out my books I let them pick out one for themselves. They get Harry Potter or something like that.”

Dorrine said she has read a number of DR as they are sometimes included in her monthly mailings. When we discussed the appeal of the setting she said she likes most reading about, “the palaces and the social hierarchy of the royalty there.” While she recognizes the novels are fiction and the locations and individuals are not real, she feels she gets to have a glimpse of the lifestyles of the royalty in the Middle East. “I like that I get to see the setting from the heroine’s point of view. She is not from a wealthy background so she is able to see things that the prince would take for granted.”

Dorrine believes it is important for authors to conduct research before writing a novel even if the book is set in a fictional location. “I think readers hope to learn a little about the culture when reading a book. I look at the foreign locations as allowing me to travel to a different world I don’t get to experience.” If she likes a certain setting or specific event mentioned, she will look up online to fact check on Wikipedia or a similar site (usually she finds this is accurate) and also just to get a better sense of the real location and cultural environment. “I like to see if they got it right.” She says that at least when specific cultural customs or locations are mentioned, the authors are usually correct in their descriptions.

While she acknowledges that some of the novels she has read discuss current events, she does not think much about current events when reading the novels. “In describing the appeal of the leading characters, Dorrine stated that she liked that he

was from a different ethnic background other than white or African-American and, “I like that the hero is wealthy and handsome and charismatic, but I don’t really like his character until later in the story. He is too arrogant and sure of himself in the beginning. He seems to pursue the heroine initially because she is not encouraging his advances, playing hard to get he thinks. Really she is just from a different background. She is there as a teacher or nanny and does not think of a relationship between the two of them as realistic.”

“The heroine is usually an independent career woman from a humble background, but she is a little too pushy.” While Doreen appreciates the humble background and the independent streak of the heroine, she believes authors create the heroine as too aggressive. “Maybe it’s because I am older, but I like the heroine to be more subtle. Even if you, as a woman, are sitting in the back seat of the car and the man is in the front seat, you can still influence which way the man drives the car.” When I asked her if she believed the more assertive heroines reflect the tastes of younger romance readers she said, “Yes, I think younger readers like the pushy heroine. And, some writers say their characters take on a life of their own. So maybe some situations call for a more pushy heroine.”

Doreen also discusses the racialization of the heroine. “The heroine is usually blond hair and white. I’m not sure why? With the darker man and different locations, it seems it would be better to have some darker women, perhaps Hispanic or African. Maybe it is the opposites attract mentality.” Although she likes diversity, and purposefully seeks out some African-American writers, she still feels she can relate to a white heroine and enjoys reading stories with white heroines. “Some of my friends ask

why I would want to read a romance novel like that [with a white heroine or depicting interracial marriage], and I say, why not? We are all a melting pot and should all be able to read about each other. I do think it is better for an African-American writers to write about African-American heroines and Native American writers about Native American characters. Not that others can't do it, but it would be less authentic."

When we talked about what the hero and heroine bring to the relationship Doreen suggested that love was the great class equalizer. "They are able to strip away titles, money and just love and accept each other for who they are. He is wealthy and used to people wanting him for just his money, but she loves him for himself. She would not expect someone with money and power to love her, but he does."

Dorrine enjoys both the fantasy elements of the novels as well as the ability to learn about experiences beyond her own. She uses the circumstances in the novels as a catalyst for researching more about locations she enjoys. As with Brenda, she sees the hero as an appealing alternative to white heroes. Focusing primarily on class and race in the novels, she appreciates the ability of DR to strip away the characters material circumstances; the hero and heroine learn to appreciate one another as another individual worthy of love.

### **Interview Analysis**

As the above interviews convey, the readers show diversity in their opinions of the novels, their reasons for reading, how they think about the novels, and how they think about geo-politics. Just as the Orient and Occident are not monolithic places with a stable, knowable reality, neither are audiences a monolithic knowable subject. The interviewed readers express their interest for reading DR in various ways. Kristen finds the warm desert climate setting appealing while Dorrine enjoys the description of the

Sheikh's opulent lifestyle. Serena and Pamela both describe the appeal of DR in its ability to combine old-fashioned traditions (primarily expressed through the hero) in modern times. The notion of a timeless quality to the Middle East that Pamela and Serena enjoy does play into orientalist notions of a static Middle East. Cheryl is quite critical of the DR she has read, but sees the appeal and the potential for novels set in the Middle East featuring a sheikh hero. While varied, the comments for the appeal of DR novels center on the setting and the hero. Not surprisingly, these are the features that make DR stand out from other romance novels. Through the setting and the hero, the readers express a desire for enticing difference tempered by enough familiarity to remain desirable.

In discussing the appeal of the sheikh hero in more detail, several of the readers commented upon his race and color. Interestingly, the racial descriptions of both the hero and the heroine were commented upon primarily by the three non-white readers I interviewed. The readers who identified as white did remark upon the "tall, dark, and handsome" appeal of the sheikh. His darker ethnically marked looks were appreciated in a way that, once again, marks him as different yet familiar. The whiteness of the heroine was not mentioned by Serena, Kristen, and Cheryl.

However, the readers who did not identify as white analyzed in more detail the ways in which race plays out in many of the novels. In the sheikh hero, Brenda and Dorrine found an appealing alternative to the typical white hero. While the hero in some ways may reify stereotypes of Arab men, Brenda and Dorrine note how the brown-skinned sheikh hero expands the notion of male desirability to include dark-toned men. In this instance, analysis of the sheikh hero in the novel, without speaking with readers,

would not impart the full meaning of what he signifies. Only through engaging with readers can we see the hero as not just reifying stereotypes, but also breaking them down for some readers. A brown man playing the desirable romantic lead (a rarity in romance novels not catering specifically to African-Americans) is enough for woman of color to find in him a transgressive figure. Having a non- white hero is refreshing and breaks boundaries by including minority characters; however, Pamela, Brenda and Dorrine do not have similar feelings for the leading lady. All three women were perturbed by the automatic whiteness of the heroine and what her racial makeup suggested. These three readers took the heroines' re-occurring whiteness as a silent statement that while white women could find themselves traveling the world and falling in love with foreign princes, women of color could not.

The interviewed readers discussed to what extent they viewed DR as fantasy fiction or sites for learning about the Middle East. Most of the responses suggest a mixture of both. Serena, Pamela, Brenda and Dorrine believe the novels are ultimately fantasy fiction and the authors should have the freedom to create fictional situations, but a reader should be able to glean a "feel" for a place through the author's setting, language, and cultural customs. Cheryl, while writing her own DR from the U.A.E., is adamant that authors should always create realistic settings and situations in fictional novels. For Cheryl, fiction should not include writing situations that could not conceivably take place in the particular country the story is set. Kristen, on the other hand, is equally adamant that romance novels are fantasy fiction having little to do with the real world. For her, these novels should not have to conform to real life situations any more than a science fiction novel. Furthermore, she argues no one should assume

a romance reader believes she is reading anything other than escapist fiction. While Kristen clearly articulates her position, not all readers agree with her strict separation of fantasy and reality. Even through this sample of six readers, diversity among their expectations of the novels and how they relate and integrate the novels into their worldview is present.

Most of the interviewed readers (with the exception of Kristen) stated DR novels are not only spaces for amusement, but for learning as well. This learning is not confined to the pages of the book, but spills over into other aspects of life. Pamela uses her interest in the fictional setting of a novel to continue taking in other fictional and non-fictional experiences that are derived from the DR. Dorrine enjoys looking up online places and events she has read about in DR. Brenda also likes to learn more through online searches and by speaking with people she has met from the region described in the romance. Serena's love of DR novels inspired her to travel to the Middle East last year with plans of returning. I am not suggesting that interest or knowledge automatically promotes tolerance or respect. As Todorov has pointed out, these tools can be used in the game of domination. In many ways Serena's responses about the "actual" Middle East are the least tolerant of the readers I interviewed (even though she is only one of two who has travelled in the Middle East). However, I believe Serena's willingness to engage with the Arab Other, meet the Arab Other, fantasize about the Arab Other (all of which she claims stems from her DR reading), possibly puts her in a more open and receptive position than conservative westerners whose engagement with Arab Others does not extend even that far.

The interviewed readers discuss what both the hero and heroine are able to bring to one another. Brenda, Kristen, and Cheryl said they believe the novels should, and sometimes do offer a level of new cultural appreciation and understanding between the hero and heroine. Dorrine suggests the hero and heroine show the possibility for love to act as the great class equalizer. Despite extreme differences in material circumstances, it is possible for love to conquer all.

Serena and Pamela remark upon how the heroine helps guide the hero's country into the modern era, particularly concerning women's rights. The leading lady is aided in part by the hero who is already considered modern for an Arab sheikh. The appeal of the exotic hero must be tempered with familiarity in order for the reader to understand and accept him as a recognizable and worthy subject.

Change is not purely one-sided; the heroine must also be willing to grow. She will come to love the Middle Eastern landscape and cultural customs, which she will call home by the novel's conclusion. In particular, Serena and Pamela comment on the warm and friendly relationships among the hero's family which will offer the heroine the love she never experienced in her western home. Because many of the desert romance settings take place in the royal palace, cross-generational extended family (cousins, grandparents, siblings, etc.) live together under the same roof. This provides the heroine with the opportunity to experience the love, warmth and loyalty of family and friends she does not experience within her own culture. The cold individualistic West in its pursuit of modernization has lost touch with the more important things in life: relationships with family and friends and a sense of community. The hero learns modernization from the West and the heroine traditional family values from the East.

When we discussed the “real” Middle East rather than only the fictional Middle East presented in the novels, the reactions were more varied and overall less open than their view of the fictional Middle East. In particular, Serena finds the Middle East and Arab men less appealing than the novels present. Brenda also believes in reality it would be difficult for a western woman to marry an Arab man. However, Pamela and Brenda, like that the novels show the Middle East in a favorable light. They believe this is in stark contrast to the negative images of the Middle East the media focuses upon. All of the interviewed American women believe Americans should be better informed with a more balanced view of the Middle East and the challenges it faces in its relationships with the U.S. Kristen, the only non-American interviewed, sticks to her original point that the international politics and these novels have nothing to do with one another. She also believes that British public opinion is much more favorable toward the Middle East and suggests issues that arise are more of a U.S. /Mid East problem rather than a West/Mid East one.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have brought in the readers of DR novels to hear in their words how they interpret the novels and practice everyday politics through their reading choices, conversations, and actions. Through the Amazon reviews readers express appreciation for the representations of the hero, heroine and setting in terms similar to Radway’s findings in her ethnography. First and foremost, readers seek a sense of equality and balance between the hero and heroine of the novel. Readers gave poor ratings primarily because the novel failed to deliver an equal partnership. Reviewers today are clear in their denouncement of hyper-alpha heroes in the vein of Ahmed from *The Sheik*. In conversation with Middle East content, the reviewers celebrate the

settings and the cultural, racial, and class differences between the hero and the heroine; reviewers appreciate the hero and heroine overcoming any objections to their unlikely union in the name of love.

Through the six interviews, the readers demonstrate a varied rather than a monolithic reading of the novels. Each of these women express different views in regard to the characters, the settings, the research role of the author, politics, and intersections of gender, class and race. The interviewed readers also reveal how new and unimagined readings can take place. I doubt the DR scholars critiquing the Arab hero conceived of readers finding in the sheikh hero a progressive character breaking down racial boundaries through his desirable non-white status. While in an orientalist reading of the text he is labeled as an dangerous stereotype, in the interaction of reader and text, several of the interviewed women found the wealthy brown hero a welcomed change from the typical white hero of most romance novels. Also, while the critics of DR consistently point to the heroine providing the hero with modernity, they do not acknowledge how readings can show what the hero brings to the heroine. The interviewed readers point to the importance of family, loyalty and honor in the hero and his homeland which they read as the opportunity for West to learn from East. The relationship between East and West, through the characters of the hero and heroine, in these novels is perceived as one of give and take.

Through the readings of the DR, conversations, and actions readers take because of the novels (meeting foreigners, traveling, reading other works about the Middle East, etc.) these DR readers are practicing a Vernacular IR. Through their choices of what to read and how they think, talk and act upon the readings, these

women are articulating a position about international politics. While acknowledging the variation in responses, I argue the readers' comments offer DR novels, as a means of moving toward Said's humanism and Todorov's difference with equality. Rather than "orientalist" representations serving as binds to keep people from emancipation, these readers are in some ways harnessing their interest in DR novels to work toward greater equality in interactions between the western self and Middle Eastern other. They point to the distinctions between the positive portrayals of the Middle East in the novels compared to the overall negative representations of the Middle East in other mediums they encounter. While these "positive" representations may not appear progressive or nuanced to an academic scholar of orientalism, for people encountering everyday experiences of the Middle Eastern Other, these readers are making a political choice to engage with more positive "orientalist" images. While theoretical questions of representations in academia may focus on whether or not individuals *should* represent Others, I think it is important to recognize that people *are* engaging with representations. Rather than writing off their experiences as orientalist, we can look instead at their experiences and their ensuing choices. The readers interactions do not stop with the novels; the DR serve as a facilitator for readers to explore other avenues of encounters with the Middle East whether through travel, other novels, non-fictional research, or talking with people from the Middle East. Through their readings and further explorations, these audiences have the opportunity to create new ways of imaging and cultivating different relationships between the U.S. and the Middle East.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION: EXPRESSIONS OF A VERNACULAR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

“An examination of texts such as these can give us an insight into women’s participation in imperialist discourses such as Orientalism, perhaps even changing our perceptions of these discourses themselves” (Taylor 1047).

“Finally, there are fantasies: the fantasy of a desert that we can know like the back of our hand without ever having set foot on a sand dune or oasis; the fantasy of escape; the fantasy of perfect heterosexual love; the fantasies of heroines, readers, novelists and publishers” (Bach 11).

As the above quotes suggest, Desert Romance (DR) scholarship has focused almost exclusively on the content of DR while implying that through the readings of the novels we can gain “insight into women’s participation in imperialist discourses.” I argue we cannot assume that texts work in certain ways in people’s lives without interacting with the individuals themselves. Every day people’s voices, including the voices of female DR readers, matter. In this thesis I have analyzed the relationship between orientalism and Audience Response Studies (ARS) through DR novels and their readers. By including readers’ interactions with the texts, I have demonstrated that ARS is an important component for the analysis of representations. This approach gives scholars a more thorough understanding of how representations work. By locating the various ways audiences interpret and act upon a text, we learn about the important meaning making between text and audience. My approach also recognizes the agency of individuals and the political site of DR novels and their readers. Current theories about DR novels and their readers are overly simplistic and do not recognize how individuals can speak back to and interpret texts in creative ways. Finally, my approach to orientalism may offer suggestions for the practice, rather than the theory, of moving beyond orientalism.

In Chapter 2 I examined the literature on orientalism and ARS paying particular attention to feminist scholars' contributions in both fields of inquiry. Feminist scholars in studies of orientalism altered Said's definition by acknowledging the feminine gaze toward the masculine East while ignoring the role of the audience. Feminist scholars in ARS drew attention to the underprivileged sites of women's engagements with cultural products. In particular, I drew from Janice Radway's ethnography of romance readers to inform my position that DR readers opinions are both worthwhile and an important form of cultural politics.

In Chapter 3 I reviewed hundreds of DR novels for basic information as well as reading thirty novels in detail. Through my thorough analysis of the novels I found that 1) some instances of claimed orientalism were in fact indicative of the broader romance genre 2) some instances of claimed orientalism were part of the older pre 9/11 representations, but not characteristic of the post 9/11 novels and 3) the representations in the novels were not monolithic, but showed variation in the presentation of the material and in cultural sensitivity toward the Middle East. While some novels and some passages within novels do conform to Said's description of orientalism, others do not. My careful attention to reading a large sample of novels, selecting novels across time periods, and using Harlequin's best-seller's list enabled me to see patterns in DR novels, in DR novels relationship to the larger romance genre, and changes in representations over time that the articles by Bach, Taylor, and Jarmakani did not recognize or acknowledge. My analysis of the novels show that in the post 9/11 DR, the novels increasingly present a more favorable "Arabia" and are more sensitive and respectful to representations of difference.

In Chapter 4 I interacted with readers of DR novels, both through Amazon.com reviews and through open-ended interviewing. My interactions with readers also showed first, a diversity of responses in how readers thought about these novels and the Middle East. While some comments affirmed orientalism, others directly challenged an orientalist reading. After hearing the words of DR readers and the ways they at times complicated an orientalist reading, I do not believe scholars can make assumptions about audiences of “orientalist” products again. Just as the East is not a stable monolithic category, the novels and their readers are not a stable monolithic category. Without including, or in the least acknowledging the complexity of audience interpretations, the scholarship on orientalism suffers.

In addition to variation in the readers’ responses, I found that several interpretations of the novels not only countered assumptions about the content, but clearly articulate why audience response is imperative to studies of orientalism. In one instance several readers saw in the racially marked hero, not an orientalist stereotype, but a character who is breaking down racial boundaries. For readers who are accustomed to finding white male leads in romance novels, the presence of a non-white male assuming the role of the desirable hero is both refreshing and progressive for some readers. In another instance, several readers described an alternative view of the exchange between the hero and heroine. DR scholarship presents the heroine as the exporter of neo-liberalism and western modernity to the hero and his country. The exchange is presented as one-sided. In the readings, however, several of the interviewed women described instead an exchange between equals. While the heroine often assists the hero in pursuing western notions of liberalism, the hero offers to the

heroine notions of honor, loyalty and family warmth the readers believe are lacking in the West. Rather than domination of the West over the East, the readers found an exchange among equals.

Finally, through their interactions with DR novels and their awareness of the troubling history of representations and public opinion of the Middle East in the United States (U.S.), several of the DR readers describe the novels as a positive alternative for U.S. engagement with the Middle East. By engaging in these more positive representations and using the representations to facilitate conversations and other ways of knowing, these women are expressing their Vernacular IR. While couching “orientalist” DR in a language of progress may be troubling to scholars of representation, I believe it is time to move the conversation out of the ivory tower and examine the ways everyday people engage with representations of the Middle East and articulate their version of a Vernacular International Relations (IR).

I am not advocating on behalf of DR novels as the means to move forward with healthier representations of the Middle East in the U.S. While the descriptions in the novels are generally more positive than other representations of the Middle East, the novels still fetishize the setting, the hero, etc. of the “Arabian” country and can create disturbing depictions. What I *am* suggesting is to take these readers at face value. They are interacting with “orientalist” texts in ways that at times create openings for more compassionate interactions (while acknowledging constraints as well) that they may not have experienced otherwise. Examining these connections and the ways people can move forward with healthier interactions with the Middle East *in spite of* orientalism is important as this provides the possibility for change. The reality is, transformation will

not come through elusive notions of humanism and alienation available to the few, but through people harnessing their interactions with texts (such as DR) and their everyday knowledges and experiences toward empathy, compassion and equality.

One reason scholars may hesitate to engage with audiences is simply because people are not an easy methodologically choice. Finding the audiences can be difficult enough, but once a scholar contacts them, getting individuals to open up to an academic researcher can be challenging. I would have ideally liked to conduct more than six interviews, but found resistance among DR readers to participate. Books and films are more easily managed data than people. In addition, cross-comparison of orientalist products becomes much more challenging when people are involved. The audiences for DR novels may not be the same audiences that collect “orientalist” fine art or watch “orientalist” action films.

Despite the complications of ARS, I believe the benefit audiences bring to the discussion on orientalism is worth the inconveniences. In the future, I would like to increase the number of interviews and interactions I had with DR readers. With enough time I believe I could accomplish this goal by continuing online searches for readers and by attending romance conferences and book clubs. I would also like to expand my interaction with audiences of orientalist products by engaging with other mediums such as film and television. With multiple sites of orientalism and multiple interactions with audiences, I believe I can further strengthen my argument and more clearly articulate what type of politics readers are practicing.

However, through the interactions with audiences I have conducted to date, I have shown that the relationship between orientalism and ARS complicates the story of

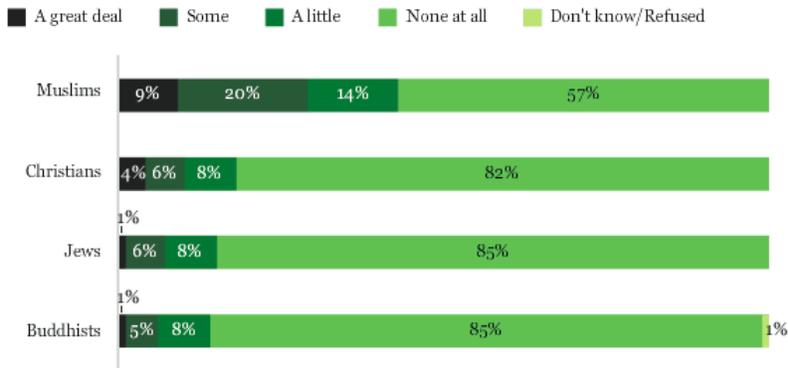
orientalism in the above numerated ways. While complicating orientalism with ARS can result in less clear and conclusive findings, acknowledging audiences as agents and part of the political discourse within orientalism is worth less definitive conclusions. By factoring in the complications peoples' opinions on the texts they engage, scholars can move beyond assuming how the texts interact with peoples worldviews and begin listening to the nuances they bring forth. Adding texture and nuance to audiences' relationships with "orientalist" texts will strengthen orientalism and perhaps representation studies of representation more broadly.

APPENDIX A  
 POLLING DATA: AMERICANS FEELINGS ABOUT ISLAM/ MIDDLE EAST

In a January 2010 Gallup poll 43% of survey respondents admitted to having some prejudice toward Muslims, compared to 18% toward Christians, 15% toward Jews, and 14% toward Buddhists. The admitted prejudice toward Muslims is two to three times higher than toward the other major religions.

*Americans Express the Most Prejudice Toward Muslims*

Thinking honestly about your feelings, how much prejudice, if any, do you feel toward each of the following religious groups?



Oct 31-Nov 13, 2009

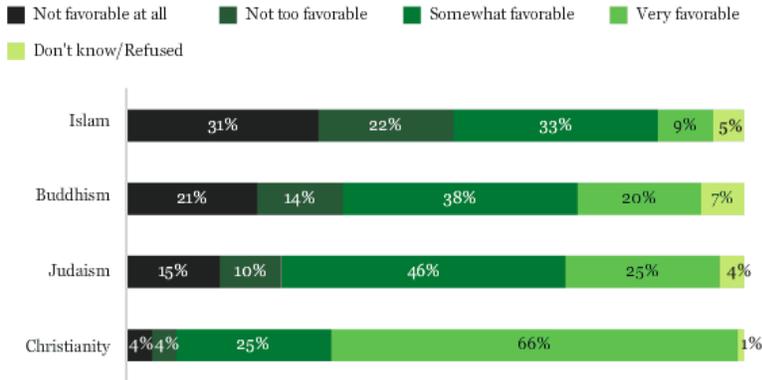
GALLUP®

Figure A-1. American prejudice toward Islam/Middle East

In the same survey, 53% of respondents said they did not have favorable opinions of Islam compared with 35% Buddhism, 25% Judaism, and 8% Christianity. Again, the percentage of unfavorable opinions of Islam stands out as considerably greater when compared to other religions.

*Islam Is the Most Negatively Viewed Religion*

What is your opinion of each of the following religions? (among American respondents)



Oct 31-Nov 13, 2009

GALLUP

Figure A-2. Islam most negatively viewed religion

Notation: Results for this Gallup Panel study are based on telephone interviews with 1,002 national adults, aged 18 and older, conducted Oct.31-Nov.13, 2009. Gallup Panel members are recruited through random selection methods. The panel is weighted so that it is demographically representative of the U.S. adult population. For results based on this sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is  $\pm 3.4$  percentage points.

In an August 2010 Gallup Poll, when asked their overall impression of Islam, 55.4% of respondents replied unfavorably, 24.1% gave no response and 20.5% answered favorably.

**Overall Impression of Islam**



Figure A-3. Overall impression of Islam

In a December 2005 Gallup survey respondents were asked: *In your own words, what do you admire most about the Muslim or Islamic world?* While the question was open-ended and received many responses, 32% of all respondents replied with “nothing” while 25% had no opinion for a total of 55% of the responses. The third most common response was sincere religious beliefs at 22% and all the other responses totaled to 21% with none dominating the remaining percentage.

### What do you admire most about the Muslim world?

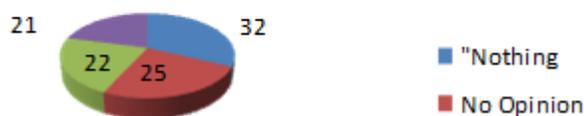


Figure A-4. Little admired about Muslim world

Notation: These results are based on telephone interviews with a randomly selected national sample of 1,004 adults, aged 18 and older, conducted Dec. 19-22, 2005. For results based on this sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum error attributable to sampling and other random effects is  $\pm 3$  percentage points.

In addition to expressing prejudices and unfavorable opinions about Muslims and predominantly Muslim countries, respondents also believed Muslim countries to have a low opinion of the U.S. When respondents were asked in 2002 and 2007, if they thought people in Muslim countries have a favorable, neither favorable or unfavorable, or unfavorable opinion of the United States, in most years at least 80% of Americans responded unfavorably.

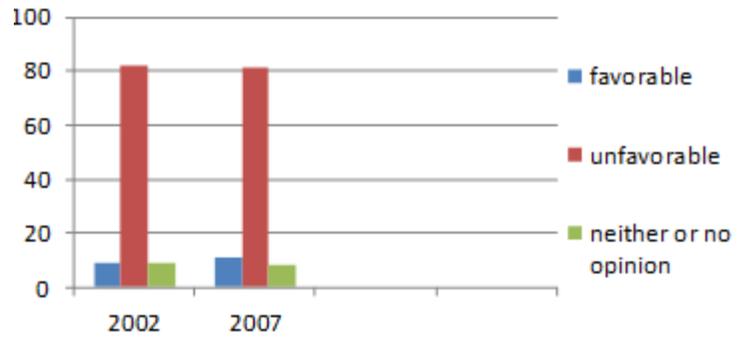


Figure A-5. Americans believe Muslim countries are prejudice against U.S.

APPENDIX B  
275 NOVEL SURVEY RESULTS

When Novel Was Published

1919-2001:	79	82 years (average 1 per year)
2002-2012	196	10 years (average 20 per year)
1919-1925	2	
1925-1959	0	
1960-1969	1	
1970-1979	5	
1980-1989	12	
1990-1999	32	
2000-2009	161	
2010-2012	40	

Category Novel vs. Single Title Novel

Category	251 (242 of those are H/M&B/S)
Single title	24

91% of the novels  
are category  
romances

Heroine Ethnicity

Unknown:	19
Arab:	19 (17 after 2001)
Arab/western mix:	6 (3 after 2001)
White western:	229 (159 after 2001)
Black western:	1 (after 2001)
Asian western:	1 (after 2001)

90% of the known heroines are  
white western women

Hero Ethnicity

Unknown:	0
Arab:	266
Arab/ western mix:	9 (3 after 2001)

96% of the known  
heroes are full Arab  
men

Era of Novel: Historical vs. Modern

Unknown:	17
Historical:	8
Modern:	250

97% of the  
known novels  
are set in  
modern times

Location/ Setting of Novel

Unknown:	105	(believe most to be fictional)	
Real Locations: (ME and US)	28	Before 2002	15
		2002 and after	13
Fictional Arab Countries:	142	Before 2002	39
		2002 and after	103

80% of known locations are fictional  
Prior to 2002 62% of known locations are  
fictional settings

After 2002 88% of known locations are  
fictional settings

APPENDIX C  
SPREADSHEET OF DESERT ROMANCE NOVELS

The novels are listed by year published beginning with the earliest.

Yellow represents the novels I read.

Blue represents romance novels with a Middle Eastern theme, but are not DR novels because the hero is an American or British identified man.

Author	Nation	Eth.	Title	Publisher	Date	Sp. Genre	I. lady	I. man	location	how meet
Hichens, Robert	Brit	W	The Garden of Allah		1904	modern	W, Brit	Euro. Monk	Algeria	she travels and meets a monk
Hull, E.M.	Brit	W	The Sheik	B, S, M	1919	modern	W, Brit.	part Arab shiekh	Algeria	kidnapped
Hull, E.M.	Brit	W	Shadow of the East	B, S, M	1921	modern	W, Brit	Englishman	?	?
Hull, E.M.	Brit	W	Sons of the Sheik	B, S, M	1925	modern	Arab	Arab sheikh	Algeria	kidnapped, misunderstanding
Winspear, Violet	Brit	W	Blue Jasmine	Harlequin	1969	modern	W	sheikh	Oasis of Fadna	kidnapping rescue
Davis, Maggie	Am.	W	The Sheik	Fawcet Crest	1977	modern	?	Arab sheikh	?	?
Lindsey, Johanna	Brit	W	Captive Bride	Avon	1977	modern	W, Eng.	1/2 arab sheikh	?	kidnapping
Fitzgerald, Julia	Brit	W	Royal Slave	Bart Books	1978	historical	W, Brit	French, Sultan	North Africa	sold into slavery
Lamb, Charlotte	Brit	W	Desert Barbarian	Harlequin	1978	?	W, Brit	half Arab, Eng	?	kidnapping
Nicholson, Christina	Brit	W	The Savage Sands	Fawcet Crest	1978	historical	W, Brit	Arab and a German	Algeria	sold into slavery
Pargeter, Margaret	?	?	The Jewelled Caftan	Harlequin	1978	modern	W	part Arab?	Morocco	kidnap rescue
Small, Bertrice	W	Am.	The Kadin	Avon	1978	historical	W, Brit	sultan	?	sold into slavery
Jordan, Penny	Brit	W	Falcon's Prey	Harlequin	1981	modern	W, Brit	Arab	Kuwait	meet family
Dunaway, Diane	?	?	Desert Hostage	Dell	1982	?	W, Brit	Arab sheikh	El Abadan	vengeance, kidnapping
Faith, Barbara	Am.	W	Bedouin Bride	Silhouette	1984	modern	W	Arab man	Morocco	work, kidnapping
Lyons, Mary	Brit	W	Desire in the Desert	Harlequin	1984	modern	W	arab prince	Assir	betrothal
Monteith, Hayton	?	?	Desert Princess	Dell	1986	modern	W, Am	Arab prince	Dharan	college in US
Wood, Sara	Brit	W	Perfumes of Arabia	Harlequin	1986	modern	W, Brit	Arab man	Riyam	work,
Faith, Barbara	Am.	W	Desert Song	Silhouette	1987	modern	W	Arab man	Morocco	looking for brother
Darcy, Emma	Aus.	W	The Falcon's Mistress	Harlequin	1988	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	Bayrar	looking for father
Faith, Barbara	Am.	W	Flower of the Desert	Silhouette	1988	modern	Arab	Arab man	Morocco	family gathering
Lindsey, Johanna	Brit	W	Silver Angel	Avon	1988	?	W Brit	Pasha	?	sold into slavery
Mason, Connie	Am	W	Desert Ecstasy	Dorchester	1988	?	W, Brit	Arab man	Constantine	rescues her from harem
Edwards, Sarah	?	?	Fire and Sand	St. Martin's	1989	?	W,	American	Tunisia	rescued from slavery
Graham, Lynne	Brit	W	An Arabian Courtship	Harlequin	1989	modern	W, Brit	Arab prince	Dharein	arranged marriage

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Redd, Joanne	?	?	Desert Bride	Dell	1989	historical	W, Brit	Am. captain	?	rescued from slavery
Faith, Barbara	Am.	W	Lord of the Desert	Silhouette	1990	modern	W, Am.	Arab man	Kashkiri	work
Wood, Sara	Brit	W	Desert Hostage	Harlequin	1990	modern	W, Brit	Arab Sheikh	?	kidnapping rescued from
Faith, Barbara	Am.	W	Lion of the Desert	Silhouette	1991	modern	W	Arab sheikh	Rashdani	kidnapping
Wilding, Lynne	Aus	W	The Sheikh	Silhouette	1991	modern	W	Arab sheikh	Cassar	work, tutor
Johansen, Iris	Am	W	The Golden Barbarian	Bantam	1992	?	princess	Arab sheikh	?	arranged marriage
Darcy, Emma	Aus.	W	The Sheikh's Revenge	Harlequin	1993	modern time travel	W, Brit W, Am, Dr	Arab king sheikh	Zubani Saudi Arabia	revenge kidnapping
Valentine, Terri	Am	W	Sands of Time	Zebra	1993	travel	Dr	sheikh	Saudi Arabia	time travel manipulated her into going
Faith, Barbara	Am.	W	Desert Man	Silhouette	1994	modern	W, Am.	Arab prince	Adbu Resaba	work, tutoring, kidnapped
Malek, Doreen	Am	W	The Panther and the Pearl	Dorchester	1994	modern	W, Am.	Arab man	?	kidnapped
Owens	Am	W	The Panther and the Pearl	Dorchester	1994	modern	W, Am.	Arab man	?	kidnapped
Marion, Sandra	Am	W	Hostage of the Hawk	Harlequin	1994	modern	W, Am	Arab man	Morocco	kidnapping
Darcy, Emma	Aus.	W	Climax of Passion	Harlequin	1995	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Xabia	kidnapping
Sinclair, Tracy	?	?	The Sultan's Wives	Silhouette	1995	modern	W, ?	Arab sultan	Sharribai	work, photojournalism
Bianchin, Helen	Aus	W	Desert Mistress	Harlequin	1996	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Saudi Arabia	helping brother work, academic, kidnapping
Graham, Lynne	Brit	W	The Desert Bride	Harlequin	1996	modern	W, Brit	Arab prince	Datar	kidnapping
Malek, Doreen	Am	W	Panther's Prey	Dorchester	1996	historical	W, Am.	Arab man	?	kidnapping
Owens	Am	W	Panther's Prey	Dorchester	1996	historical	W, Am.	Arab man	?	kidnapping
Mayne, Elizabeth	Am	?	The Sheik and the Vixen	Silhouette	1996	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Kuwait	work, aircraft designer
Ryan, Nan	Am	?	Burning Love	Harper Collins	1996	?	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	kidnapping
Howard, Stephanie	?	?	Amber and the Sheikh	Harlequin	1997	modern	W, ? Berber	Arab prince	Ras al-Houht	work, researcher
Mason, Connie	Am	W	Sheik	Dorchester	1997	?	princ	Arab sheikh	Morocco	warrior taken prisoner
Sellers, Alexandra	Can	W	Bride of the Sheikh	Silhouette	1997	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	?	reuniting, kidnapping
Darcy, Emma	Aus.	W	The Sheikh's Seduction	Harlequin	1998	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	help out family
Diamond, Jacqueline	Am	W	How to Marry Real Live Sheikh	Harlequin	1998	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	adopted baby
Roberts, Doreen	Brit	W	The Mercenary and the Marriage Vow	Silhouette	1998	modern	W, Am.	Am.man	Saudi Arabia	mystery
Sinclair, Tracy	?	?	The Seductive Sheik	Silhouette	1998	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	Jalameer	work, manager searching for stolen child
Toombs, Jane	Am	W	Baby of Mine	Silhouette	1998	modern	W, ?	Arab man	Kholi	searching for stolen child
Young, Brittant	?	?	The Sheik's Mistress	Silhouette	1998	modern	W, Am.	part Arab king	Sumaru	helping brother
Grace, Carol	Am	W	Married to the Sheik	Silhouette	1999	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	work, assistant
McWilliams, Judith	Am	W	The Sheik's Secret	Silhouette	1999	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	mistaken identity
Michaels, Kasey	Am	W	The Sheikh's Secret Son	Silhouette	1999	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	?	have a child together

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Reid, Michelle	Brit	W	The Mistress Bride	Harlequin	1999	modern	W, Brit	Arab sheikh	Behran	in a relationship
Schone, Robin	Am	W	The Lady's Tutor	Zebra	1999	historical	W, Brit	half Arab	England	teach her seduction
Sellers, Alexandra	W	CAN	The Soiltary Sheikh	Silhouette	1999	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	?	work, tutor
Sellers, Alexandra	W	CAN	Sheikh's Ransom	Silhouette	1999	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	Bakarat	kidnap, ransom
Diamond, Jacqueline	Am	W	Captured by a Sheikh	Harlequin	2000	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	misunderstanding child
Fielding, Liz	Brit	W	His Desert Rose	Harlequin	2000	modern	W, Brit	Arab prince	Ras al Hajar	journalist, kidnapping
Gordon, Lucy	Brit	W	The Sheikh's Reward	Harlequin	2000	modern	W, Brit Part	Arab sheikh	Kamar	journalist, captive
Leclaire, Day	Am	W	To Marry a Sheik	Harlequin	2000	modern	Arab ?	Arab prince	Rahman	escape marriage
Mallery, Susan	Am	W	The Sheik's Secret Bride	Silhouette	2000	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	El Bahar	kidnapping
<b>Mallery, Susan</b>	<b>Am</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>The Sheik's Kidnapped Bride</b>	<b>Silhouette</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>modern</b>	<b>W, Am.</b>	<b>Arab prince</b>	<b>El Bahar</b>	<b>works for him</b>
Mallery, Susan	Am	W	The Sheik's Arranged Marriage	Silhouette	2000	modern	W, Am.	Arab prince	?	arrnaged marriage
Marton, Sandra	Am	W	Mistress of the Sheikh	Harlequin	2000	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	?	work for him
McMahon, Barbara	Am	W	The Sheikh's Solution	Silhouette	2000	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	Manasia	work with him, pregnant
Palmer, Diana	Am	W	Lord of the Desert	MIRA	2000	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Qawi	?
Sellers, Alexandra	Can	W	Sheikh's Honor	Silhouette	2000	modern	W, Canada	Arab sheikh	Barakat	?
Sellers, Alexandra	Can	W	Sheikh's Temptation	Silhouette	2000	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Parvan	reuniting
Weston, Sophie	Brit	W	The Sheikh's Bride	Harlequin	2000	modern	W	Arab sheikh	Cairo	? Had one date
Dayton, Gail	Am	W	Hide-And-Sheik	Silhouette	2001	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Qarif	she is security guard
DeVita, Sharon	Am	W	I Married a Sheikh	Silhouette	2001	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	consultant for him
Grace, Carol	Am	W	Taming the Sheik	Silhouette	2001	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	masquarade as fiance
Grace, Carol	Am	W	Fit for a Sheik	Silhouette	2001	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	work for him
<b>Graham, Lynne</b>	<b>Brit</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>The Arabian Mistress</b>	<b>Harlequin</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>modern</b>	<b>W, ?</b>	<b>Arab prince</b>	<b>Jumar</b>	<b>help brother, mistress</b>
Gold, Kristi	Am	W	Her Ardent Sheikh	Silhouette	2001	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Amythra	protection, pregnancy
Kendrick, Sharon	Brit	W	Surrender to the Sheikh	Harlequin	2001	modern	W, Brit half Am.	Arab prince	Maraban	?
Mallery, Susan	Am	W	The Sheik and the Runaway Princess	Silhouette	2001	modern	pr. Princess,	Arab prince	?	kidnapping
Sellers, Alexandra	Can	W	Born Royal	Silhouette	2001	modern	?	Arab sheikh	Tamir	pregnant
Sellers, Alexandra	Can	W	Sheikh's Woman	Silhouette	2001	modern	?	Arab prince	Barakat	amnesia, baby
Sellers, Alexandra	Can	W	Sleeping with the Sultan	Silhouette	2001	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	tv star, intrigue
Sellers, Alexandra	Can	W	Undercover Sultan	Silhouette	2001	modern	?	Arab sheikh	?	intrigue undercover
Sellers, Alexandra	Can	W	The Sultan's Heir	Silhouette	2001	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Baraket	claimed child
Walker, Kate	Brit	W	Desert Affair	Harlequin	2001	modern	W, Brit	Arab sheikh	Kuimar	short affair
Cassidy, Carla	Am	W	Promised to a Sheik	Silhouette	2002	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	?	mistaken identity
Collection	Am	W	The Sheikhs of Summer	Silhouette	2002	modern	?	Arab sheikh	all fictional	?
Creighton, Kathleen	Am	W	Vigin Seduction	Silhouette	2002	modern	Arab pr.	Am. man	Tamir and U.S.	forced wedding

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Cross, Carolyn			The Sheikh Takes a Bride	Silhouette	2002	modern	local, pr.	Arab sheikh	Altaria	arranged marriage
Grace, Carol			Falling for the Sheik	Silhouette	2002	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	nursing him to health
Graham, Lynne	Brit	W	An Arabian Marriage	Harlequin	2002	modern	W,	Arab prince	Quamar	claim child
Herries, Anne			Captive of the Harem	Harlequin	2002	?	W, ?	Arab man	?	boat captured
Herries, Anne			The Sheikh	Harlequin	2002	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	saves her life
Jackson, Brenda	Am.	B	Delaney's Desert Sheikh	Silhouette	2002	modern	B, Am.	Arab sheikh	mostly U.S.	misundertanding
Jones, Linda W.			Secret Agent Sheik	Silhouette	2002	modern	? half Arab	Arab sheikh	Tamir	woman the enemy?
Mallery, Susan	Am	W	The Sheik and the Virgin Princess	Silhouette	2002	modern	pr.	Arab sheikh	Bahania	protection
Mallery, Susan	Am	W	The Prince and the Pregnant Princess	Silhouette	2002	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	Bahania	pregnant marriage of
McMahon, Barbara	Am	W	The Sheikh's Proposal	Harlequin	2002	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Kamtansin	convenience
Porter, Jane			The Sheikh's Wife	Harlequin	2002	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Zwar	reunion, have child
Rawlins, Debbie			By the Sheikh's Command	Harlequin	2002	modern	W, Am.	Arab prince	? Mostly in Texas	honor marriage
Reid, Michelle	Brit	W	The Arabian Love-Child	Harlequin	2002	modern	W, Brit	Arab sheikh	Rahman	reunion, have child
Reid, Michelle	Brit	W	The Sheikh's Chosen Wife	Harlequin	2002	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Rahman	reunion with husband
Sellers, Alexandra	W	CAN	Beloved Sheikh	Silhouette	2002	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	save from kidnapping
Sellers, Alexandra	W	CAN	The Playboy Sheikh	Silhouette	2002	modern	?	Arab sheikh	Baraket	reunion, actress
Vanak, Bonnie			The Falcon and the Dove	Dorchester	2002	historical	W, Brit	Arab sheikh	Egypt	Kidnap, time travel
Gold, Kristi			The Sheikh's Bidding	Silhouette	2003	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	?	reunion, have child marriage of
Gold, Kristi			Expecting the Sheikh's Baby	Silhouette	2003	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	convenience
Jordan, Penny	Brit	W	One Night with the Sheikh	Harlequin	2003	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Zuran	paint for family
Jordan, Penny	Brit	W	The Sheikh's Virgin Bride	Harlequin	2003	modern	Arab	Arab sheikh	Zuran	arranged marriage
Laurens, Elly- Royce			Sealed by Revenge	?	2003	?	W,	Arab sheikh	?	intrigue
Lee, Miranda			Sold to the Sheikh	Harlequin	2003	modern	W, Aus.	Arab Prince	Dubar	model auction
Singh, Nalini			Desert Warrior	Silhouette	2003	modern	W, NZ	Arab prince	Zulheina	revenge from former rel.
Southwick, Teresa			To Catch a Sheik	Silhouette	2003	modern	W, Am.	Arab prince	El Zafir	work in his country
Southwick, Teresa			To Kiss a Sheik	Silhouette	2003	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	El Zafir	nanny to his kids
Southwick, Teresa			To Wed a Sheik	Silhouette	2003	modern	W, Am.	Arab prince	El Zafir	nurse in his country
Swift, Sue			In the Sheikh's Arms	Silhouette	2003	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	Adnan and U.S.	revenge marriage
Vanak, Bonnie			The Tiger and the Tomb	Dorchester	2003	?	W, Brit	half Arab	?	resuce her father investing brother's
Diamond, Jacqueline			Sheik Surrender	Harlequin	2004	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikj	Alqedar	murder
Gold, Kristi			Daring the Dynamic Sheikh	Silhouette	2004	modern	Arab	Arab sheikh	Azzril	going home from US teaches her to ride
Gold, Kristi			Challenged by the Sheikh	Silhouette	2004	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	?	horses
Gold, Kristi			Fit for a Sheik	Silhouette	2004	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	?	intrigue
Kendrick, Sharon			The Desert Prince's Mistress	Harlequin	2004	modern	W, Brit	Arab prince	Maraban	model for his company

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Mallery, Susan	Am	W	The Sheik and the Princess Bride	Silhouette	2004	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	Bahania	work as flight instructor
Mallery, Susan	Am	W	The Sheik and the Princess in Waiting	Silhouette	2004	modern	W, Am.	Arab prince	Bahania	reunion, married work for him, conv. Marriage
Marton, Sandra			The Sheikh's Convenient Bride	Harlequin	2004	modern	W, Am.	Arab king	Suliyam	Marriage
Mason, Connie			The Pirate Prince	Dorchester	2004	historical?	W, Brit	Arab royalty	?	saved from slavery
McMahon, Barbara	Am	W	Her Desert Family	Harlequin	2004	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	?	widow
Monroe, Lucy			The Sheikh's Bartered Bride	Harlequin	2004	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Jawhar	arranged marriage help brother for marriage
Morgan, Sarah			In the Sheikh's Marriage Bed	Harlequin	2004	modern	W, ? W, ?	Arab prince	Kazban	marriage
Porter, Jane			The Sultan's Bought Bride	Harlequin	2004	modern	Princ Arab	Arab sultan	Baraka	fraudulant identity
Sellers, Alexandra	Can	W	The Ice Maiden's Sheikh	Silhouette	2004	modern	prin? Arab	Arab sheikh	Bagestan	flees Arab country
Sellers, Alexandra	Can	W	Sheikh's Castaway	Silhouette	2004	modern	prin?	Arab sheikh	?	betrayal and reunion
Wright, Laura			A Bed of Sand	Silhouette	2004	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Emand	pretend marriage
Darcy, Emma	Aus.	W	Traded to the Sheikh	Harlequin	2005	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Zanzibar	helping sister plane crash in his country
French, Isabelle K			Beauty and the Sheikh	Universe	2005	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	Moldhar	country
Graham, Lynne	Brit	W	The Sheikh's Innocent Bride	Harlequin	2005	modern	W, Brit	Arab prince	?	pregnant, marriage rescues her from abductors
Jordan, Penny	Brit	W	Possessed by the Sheikh	Harlequin	2005	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Zuran	abductors
Kendrick, Sharon	Brit	W	Exposed: The Sheikh's Mistress	Harlequin	2005	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	past relationship
Mallery, Susan	Am	W	The Sheik and the Bride Who Said No	Silhouette	2005	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	Bahania	help neice, captured
Mallery, Susan	Am	W	The Sheik and the Virgin Secretary	Silhouette	2005	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	Lucia-Serrat	works for him
Marton, Dana	Am	W	The Sheik's Safety	Harlequin	2005	modern	W, Am. part Arab	Arab sheikh	?	She is American soldier
Porter, Jane			The Sheikh's Virgin	Harlequin	2005	modern	Arab Arab	Arab sheikh	Baraka	political marriage
Sellers, Alexandra	W	CAN	The Fierce and Tender Sheikh	Silhouette	2005	modern	princ.	Arab sheikh	Bagestan	bring princess home
Stephens, Susan			The Sheikh's Captive Bride	Harlequin	2005	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Abadan	pregnancy
Swift, Sue			Engaged to the Sheik	Silhouette	2005	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	?	arranged marriage
Vanak, Bonnie			The Cobra and the Concubine	Dorchester	2005	?	?	white Arab	?	he helps protect her
Weston, Sophie			In the Arms of the Sheikh	Harlequin	2005	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	meet at friend's wedding
White, Loreth Anne			The Sheik Who Loved Me	Silhouette	2005	modern	W, Brit Arab	Arab sheikh	?	spy sent to look into him
Wright, Laura			Her Royal Bed	Silhouette	2005	modern	princ.	Am. man	Emand	revenge seduction
Wright, Laura			The Sultan's Bed	Silhouette	2005	modern	W, Am.	Arab sultan	Emand	he is looking for sister
Fielding, Liz			The Sheikh's Guarded Heart	Harlequin	2006	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Ramal Hamrah	he rescues her
Jones, Linda W.			The Sheik and I	Silhouette	2006	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	peace negotiations

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Lee, Miranda			Love-Slave to the Sheikh	Harlequin	2006	modern	W, Aus.	Arab sheikh	?	sexual proposition
Marton, Dana			Undercover Sheik	Harlequin	2006	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	Beharrain	he rescues her
Marton, Sandra			The Desert Virgin	Harlequin	2006	modern	W, Am.	Am. military	Baslaam	he rescues her
McMahon, Barbara	US	W	The Sheikh's Secret	Harlequin	2006	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	wants to marry her
McMahon, Barbara	US	W	The Nanny and the Sheikh	Harlequin	2006	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Qu'Arim	help as nanny
Morey, Trish			Stolen by the Sheikh	Harlequin	2006	modern	W,	Arab sheikh	Jebbai	work for him
Morgan, Sarah			The Sultan's Virgin Bride	Harlequin	2006	modern	W, ?	Arab sultan	Tazkash	revenge marriage
Parv, Valerie			Desert Justice	Silhouette	2006	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Nazaar	he protects her
Porter, Jane			The Sheikh's Disobedient Bride	Harlequin	2006	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	captured
Stephens, Susan			Bedded by the Desert King	Harlequin	2006	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Zaddara	have a past
Vanak, Bonnie			The Panther and the Pyramid	Dorchester	2006	historical	W, Brit	sheikh	Egypt	adventure in Egypt
Walker, Kate			At the Sheikh's Command	Harlequin	2006	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	Barakhara	helping brother
White, Loreth Anne			A Sultan's Ransom	Silhouette	2006	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	she dr. need her to stop virus
Fielding, Liz			The Sheikh's Unsuitable Bride	Harlequin	2007	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	his driver in western country
Gates, Olivia			The Sheikh Surgeon's Proposal	Harlequin	2007	modern	W, ? Dr.	Arab sheikh	Damhour	both doctors
Graham, Lynne			The Desert Sheikh's Captive Wife	Harlequin	2007	modern	W, Brit	Arab prince	Bakhar	reunited, revenge
Jordan, Penny	Brit	W	A Royal Bride at the Sheikh's Command	Harlequin	2007	modern	local?	Arab sheikh	Niroli- not Arab?	duty marriage
Jordan, Penny	Brit	W	Taken by the Sheikh	Harlequin	2007	modern	W, Brit	Arab prince	Zuran	finding wife for brother
Kendrick, Sharon			The Desert King's Virgin Bride	Harlequin	2007	modern	W, Brit	Arab sheikh	Kharastan	marry for honor
Kendrick, Sharon			The Sheikh's English Bride	Harlequin	2007	modern	W, Brit	Arab prince	Kharastan	inherit kingdom
Kendrick, Sharon			The Sheikh's Unwilling Wife	Harlequin	2007	modern	W, ?	prince	Kharastan	reuniting, have child
LaCroix, Marianne			Stolen by the Sheikh	Red Rose	2007	?	W, Brit	Arab sheikh	Morocco	sold to sheikh
Mallery, Susan			The Sheikh and the Christmas Bride	Silhouette	2007	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	El Deharia	nanny
Porter, Jane			The Sheikh's Chosen Queen	Harlequin	2007	modern	W, Brit	Arab sheikh	?	reuniting
Radley, Tessa			The Desert Bride of Al Zayed	Silhouette	2007	modern	W, NZ	Arab sheikh	Zayed	reuniting
Southwick, Teresa			The Sheikh's Contract Bride	Harlequin	2007	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Bha'Khar	arranged marriage
Vanak, Bonnie			The Sword and the Sheath	Dorchester	2007	?	Arab	Arab sheikh	?	battle together
West, Annie	Aus.	W	The Sheikh's Ransomed Bride	Harlequin	2007	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	island Kingdom of Q'aroum	rescued
West, Annie	Aus.	W	For the Sheikh's Pleasure	Harlequin	2007	modern	W, F	Arab prince	island Kingdom of Q'aroum	hard to get
Beckenham, Jane			The Sheikh's Proposal	Red Rose	2008	modern	?	Arab sheikh	La Isla Perfumada	tension, accustations
Gates, Olivia			The Desert King	Silhouette	2008	modern	W, Am, mod	king	Judar	reunion, marriage for duty
Gates, Olivia			The Desert Lord's Baby	Silhouette	2008	modern	?	prince	Judar	have child together

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Gates, Olivia			The Desert Lord's Bride	Silhouette	2008	modern	1/2, Fr	prince	Judar	marriage for duty works for him as assistant
Grace, Carol			Her Sheikh Boss	Harlequin	2008	modern	W, F	prince	Tazzatine Vacation Greek island	she thinks he is a thief become his mistress beauty in disguise pregant with another, mechanic
Jans, Honey	Brit	W	The Sheikh's Captive	Red Rose	2008	modern	?	Arab sheikh	?	needs to marry for duty protect her and brother's baby
Jordan, Penny			Harlequin	2008	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	?	protects her from danger	
Lawrence, Kim			Harlequin	2008	modern	W, Eng.	Arab prince	?	baby, marriage duty works for him rescues her from marriage	
Mallery, Susan			The Sheikh and the Pregnant Bride	Silhouette	2008	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	El Daharia	rescues her, photographer works for him, time to marry
Marsh, Nicola			The Desert Prince's Proposal	Harlequin	2008	modern	W, F	prince	Adhara	marriage of duty goes for adventure he helps her he rescues her adopted son is royalty she gets pregnant sold into slavery look a like to celebrity
<b>Marton, Dana</b>			<b>Sheik Protector</b>	<b>Harlequin</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>modern</b>	<b>W, Am</b>	<b>prince</b>	<b>Beharrain</b>	<b>caters for him</b>
Marton, Dana			Sheik Seduction	Harlequin	2008	modern	W, Am	prince	Beharrain	engaged to his brother reunited, father of her child
Marton, Sandra			The Sheikh's Defiant Bride	Harlequin	2008	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	Dubaac	work for him
Marton, Sandra			The Sheikh's Rebellious Mistress	Harlequin	2008	modern	W, Am	Arab sheikh	Senahdar	rescues her from marriage rescues her, photographer works for him, time to marry
Marton, Sandra			The Sheikh's Wayward Wife	Harlequin	2008	modern	?	Arab sheikh	?	he helps her
McMahon, Barbara	US	W	Rescued by the Sheikh	Harlequin	2008	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Moquansaid	he rescues her adopted son is royalty she gets pregnant sold into slavery look a like to celebrity
Monroe, Lucy			Hired: The Sheikh's Secretary Mistress	Harlequin	2008	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	?	he helps her
Morey, Trish			The Sheikh's Convenient Virgin	Harlequin	2008	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	he rescues her
Oakley, Natasha			Cinderella and the Sheikh	Harlequin	2008	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Amrah	adopted son is royalty she gets pregnant
Pierce, Nicole L.			Seduced by the Sheik	Red Rose	2008	modern	W, Am.	Arab man	mostly U.S.	she gets pregnant
Porter, Jane			King of the Desert, Captive Bride	Harlequin	2008	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	she gets pregnant
Shaw, Chantelle			At the Sheikh's Bidding	Harlequin	2008	modern	W, ?	Arab royalty	Qubbah	she gets pregnant
Stephens, Susan			Desert King, Pregnant Mistress	Harlequin	2008	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Arab island	she gets pregnant
Waters, Sheniqua			Slave Girl	Red Rose	2008	?	Arab	Turkish prince	Egypt, Turkey	she gets pregnant
Fielding, Liz			Her Desert Dream	Harlequin	2009	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	she gets pregnant
<b>Hardy, Kate</b>			<b>Surrender to the Playboy Sheikh</b>	<b>Harlequin</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>modern</b>	<b>W, Eng, B</b>	<b>Arab prince</b>	<b>Harrat Salma</b>	<b>caters for him</b>
Hewitt, Kate			The Sheikh's Forbidden Virgin	Harlequin	2009	modern	?	Arab prince	Calista	engaged to his brother reunited, father of her child
Hewitt, Kate			The Sheikh's Love-Child	Harlequin	2009	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	kingdom of Biryal	work for him
<b>Kendrick, Sharon</b>			<b>The Playboy Sheik's Virgin Stable Girl</b>	<b>Harlequin</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>modern</b>	<b>local, poor</b>	<b>Arab prince</b>	<b>Calista</b>	<b>work for him</b>
Lawrence, Kim			Desert Prince, Blackmailed Bride	Harlequin	2009	modern	W, ?	Arab, prince	Kingdom of Zatarra	arrnages marriage for brother works for him, mistress debt
Mallery, Susan			The Sheikh and the Bought Bride	Silhouette	2009	modern	W, Am	Arab prince	El Deharia	debt
Marinelli, Carol			Secret Sheikh, Secret Baby	Harlequin	2009	modern	W, ?,	Arab prince,	?	pregnant, duty marriage

Author	Nation	Eth.	Title	Publisher	Date	Sp. Genre	I. lady	I. man	location	how meet
Marton, Dana			Desert Ice Daddy	Harlequin	2009	modern	mw	dr		
Morgan, Sarah			The Sheikh's Virgin Princess	Harlequin	2009	?	W, Am	wealthy Arab man	Texas	helps find her son
Philips, Sabrina			The Desert King's Bejewelled Bride	Harlequin	2009	modern	W, princ	Arab Sheikh	kingdom of Zangrar	arranged marriage
Porter, Jane			Duty, Desire and the Desert King	Harlequin	2009	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	?	reunited, she is a model
Radley, Tessa			The Untamed Sheikh	Silhouette	2009	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	Dhahara	duty marriage, wants her
Sellers, Alexandra	W	CAN	Sheikh's Betrayal	Silhouette	2009	modern	?author	Arab prince	Sarq	thinks she is causing problems
Stephens, Susan			Sheikh Boss, Hot Desert Nights	Harlequin	2009	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	Khouri	reunited, stop his marriage
Webber, Meredith			Claimed by the Desert Prince	Harlequin	2009	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	A-Qaban	work in his country
West, Annie	Aus.	W	The Desert King's Pregnant Bride	Harlequin	2009	modern	W, F, dr.	Arab prince, dr	Zaheer	needs to marry, wants her
Young, Donna			Captive of the Desert King	Harlequin	2009	modern	W, Aus	Arab prince	Shajehar	marriage of duty
Beckenham, Jane			In Love with the Sheikh	Red Rose	2010	modern	Asian,	King	Taer	he protects her, journalist
Braun, Jackie			A Dinner, A Date, A Desert Sheikh	Harlequin	2010	modern	Am	Arab sheikh	?	bidding war
Bruhns, Nina			Lord of the Desert	Harlequin	2010	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	?	dating
Bruhns, Nina			Shadow of the Sheikh	Harlequin	2010	modern	W, Am.	English man	Egypt	paranormal, ancient Egypt
Collection			Chosen by the Sheikh	Harlequin	2010	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Egypt	paranormal, ancient Egypt
Conrad, Linda			Her Sheik Protector	Silhouette	2010	modern	W, Am.	Arab prince	?	reunited,
Crews, Caitlyn			Majesty, Mistress...Missing Heir	Harlequin	2010	modern	?	Arab man	?	he protects her
Dees, Cindy			Medusa's Sheikh	Silhouette	2010	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	?	duty marriage
Gates, Olivia			To Tame a Sheikh	Silhouette	2010	modern	Eng,	Arab prince	?	she guards him, special opps
Graham, Lynne			Desert Prince, Bride of Innocence	Harlequin	2010	modern	nanny	Arab prince	Quaram	reunited, pregnant
James, Melissa			The Sheikh's Destiny	Harlequin	2010	modern	?	prince	?	pregnant
Lawrence, Kim			The Sheikh's Impatient Virgin	Harlequin	2010	modern	?	Arab sheikh	?	nursing him to health
Leigh, Lora			Guilty Pleasure	St. Martin's	2010	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	?	arranged marriage
Lewis, Jennifer			Desert Prince	Silhouette	2010	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	?	FBI agents
Lucas, Jennie			Tamed: The Barbarian King	Harlequin	2010	modern	Arab princ	Arab man	?	business relationship
Marinelli, Carol			Wedlocked: Banished Sheikh, Untouched Queen	Harlequin	2010	modern	?	Arab prince	?	overcoming obstacles
Marinelli, Carol			The Desert King's Housekeeper Bride	Harlequin	2010	modern	?	Arab prince	?	marrying for duty
McMahon,			Marrying the Scarred Sheikh	Harlequin	2010	modern	?	Arab sheikh	Quishari	work as his housekeeper
										she accepts him

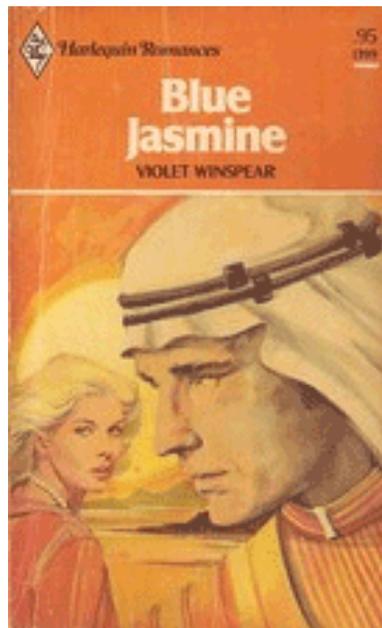
Author	Nation	Eth.	Title	Publisher	Date	Sp. Genre	I. lady	I. man	location	how meet
Barbara McMahon, Barbara	Am	W	Accidentally the Sheikh's Wife	Harlequin	2010	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	?	pilot for him
Morey, Trish			Forbidden: The Sheikh's Virgin	Harlequin	2010	modern	?	Arab sheikh	?	betrayed by woman
Radley, Tessa			Saved by the Sheikh	Silhouette	2010	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	?	she is pregnant
Stephens, Susan	Brit	W	Ruling Sheikh, Unruly Mistress	Harlequin	2010	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	she is pregnant
Stephens, Susan	Brit	W	Master of the Desert	Harlequin	2010	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	she is a stowaway
Webber, Meredith			Desert King, Doctor Daddy	Harlequin	2010	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	she is a dr. helping his daughter
West, Annie			Scandal: His Majesty's Love-Child	Harlequin	2010	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	?	pregnancy
White, Loreth			The Sheik's Comand	Silhouette	2010	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	captive for protection
Anne Aidan, Nadia			The Sheikh's Concubine	Cobblestone	2011	?	Arab	Arab sheikh	?	brought to Harem
Bruhns, Nina			Vampire Sheikh	Harlequin	2011	modern	W, Am.	Arab vampire	Egypt	paranormal, ancient Egypt
Collection			Desert Knights	Harlequin	2011	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	bodyguard/terrorism
Conrad, Linda			The Sheik's Lost Princess	Silhouette	2011	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	help rescue son
Conrad, Linda			Secret Agent Sheik	Silhouette	2011	modern	W, Am.	Arab man	Rio de Janiero	CIA agents nuclear weapons
Gates, Olivia			To Touch a Sheikh	Harlequin	2011	modern	Arab	Arab sheikh	?	reunion
Gates, Olivia			To Tempt a Sheikh	Harlequin	2011	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	?	rescues her from enemy
Graham, Lynne			Jewel in his Crown	Harlequin	2011	modern	W, Brit	Arab prince	?	marriage for duty
Green, Abby			Breaking the Sheikh's Rules	Harlequin	2011	modern	Arab	Arab sheikh	Merkazad	works for him
Holland, Sarah			Desert Destiny	Harlequin	2011	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	kidnapped
Kaye, Marguerite	Brit	W	The Governess and the Sheikh	Harlequin	2011	historical	W, Brit	Arab sheikh	?	governess for daughter
Kaye, Marguerite	Brit	W	Innocent in the Sheikh's Harem	Harlequin	2011	historical	W, Brit	Arab sheikh	?	rescues her
Kaye, Marguerite	Brit	W	The Sheikh's Impetuous Love-Slave	Harlequin	2011	historical	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Arabia	given a woman as a gift
Lane, Katheryn			The Royal Sheikh	Amazon	2011	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	architect for him
Lennox, Elizabeth	Am	W	The Sheik's Love-Child	Amazon	2011	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	Asham	pregnant
Lennox, Elizabeth	Am	W	The Sheik's Missing Bride	Amazon	2011	modern	Arab	Arab sheikh	?	engaged
Lennox, Elizabeth	Am	W	The Sheik's Rebellious Mistress	Amazon	2011	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	intrigue
Lennox, Elizabeth	Am	W	The Sheik's Unfinished Business	Amazon	2011	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Ashir	reunion, misunderstanding
Marinelli, Carol	Aus	W	Heart of the Desert	Harlequin	2011	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	?	suppose to marry for duty
Marton, Dana	Am	W	The Black Sheep Sheik	Harlequin	2011	modern	W, Am. dr.	Arab sheikh	Wyoming	protect her, pregnant
McMahon, Barbara	Am	W	Sheik Daddy	Harlequin	2011	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	?	baby, reunion
Metcalfe, Josie			Sheikh Surgeon Claims his Bride	Harlequin	2011	modern	W, ?, dr.	Arab sheikh, dr	?	work together

Author	Nation	Eth.	Title	Publisher	Date	Sp. Genre	I. lady	I. man	location	how meet
Monroe, Lucy			For Duty's Sake	Harlequin	2011	modern	?	Arab sheikh	?	broken betrothal
Morgan, Sarah			Bella and the Merciless Sheikh	Harlequin	2011	modern	W, ?	Arab Sheikh	?	rescues her in desert
Morgan, Teresa			Cinderella and the Sheikh	Amazon	2011	modern	W, Am.	Arab sheikh	Abbas	avoid marriage captured, mistaken identity
Morgan, Teresa			Handcuffed to the Sheikh	Amazon	2011	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	?	
Peterson, Ann Voss			Seized by the Sheik	Harlequin	2011	modern	W, Am.	Arab Sheikh Arab sheikh,	Wyoming	intrigue, death threats she comes to help his mother
Webber, Meredith			Sheikh, Children's Doctor...Husband	Harlequin	2011	modern	W, ?, dr.	dr	Al Janeen	rescues her in sandstorm
Winters, Rebecca			Her Desert Prince	Harlequin	2011	modern	W, Am. Arab princ	Arab prince	Nafud	
Yates, Maisey			The Inherited Bride	Harlequin	2011	modern		Arab prince	?	arranged marriage reunited, historian wort there
Cox, Maggie			One Desert Night	Harlequin	2012	modern	W, ?	Arab sheikh	Kabuyadir	
Green, Abby			Secrets of the Oasis	Harlequin	2012	modern	?, Fr	sheikh	?	reunited
Green, Abby			The Sultan's Choice	Harlequin	2012	modern	W, ?	Arab sultan	?	arranged marriage
Harris, Lynne			Strangers in the Desert	Harlequin	2012	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	?	reunited, thought wife dead
Raye		rescued from kidnapping								
West, Annie			Girl in the Bedouin Tent	Harlequin	2012	modern	W, ?	Arab prince	?	

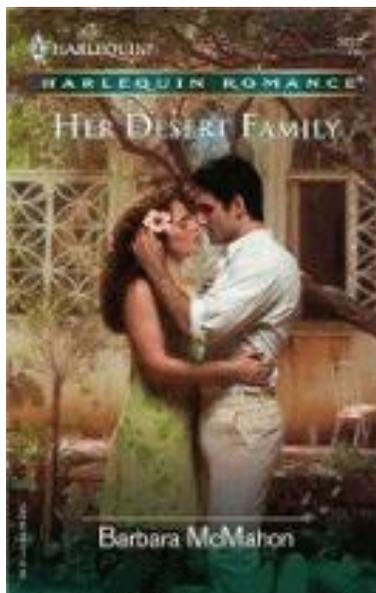
APPENDIX D  
ROMANCE NOVEL COVERS



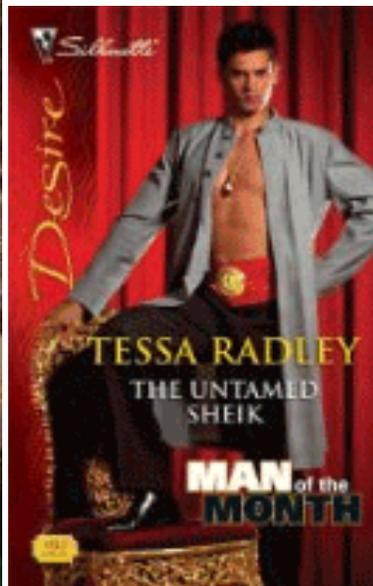
Falcon's Prey (1981)



Blue Jasmine (1969)



Her Desert Family (2004)



The Untamed Sheik (2009)

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