Title: 
Write the Book of Your Heart: Career, Passion and Publishing in the Romance Writing Community

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Abstract (summary):
This dissertation explores how a solitary writer becomes a social writer, entering into the industrial and community relations of mass publishing. A significant part of this transformation is managed through writing organizations which mediate between the corporate world and individual writers. Despite being one of the most prolific and commercially successful book-markets in a time when both publishing and reading are perceived to be under threat, romance fiction, because of its gendered and classed status, is often neglected by the academy and patronized in the media. Researched through observation of the largest romance writers groups in Canada, which I call City Romance Writers, this dissertation explores how writers’ associations help shape would-be writers into players in the professional market, negotiating the boundaries between professional and amateur, local and global, creative and market-driven. It explores how romance writers organize to manage risk and uncertainty in the publishing industry and how they make claims to legitimacy and authority in the public sphere. Finally, it examines how structures of gender, race and class shape the communities romance writers form and the claims they make. I argue that romance writers’ discourses and practices surrounding writing and publication are a revealing terrain for the exploration of contemporary issues of media production, flexible labour, gender and community. In part because of the particular characteristics of romance writing itself, these themes are also underpinned by the constant presence of love, as a discourse, an activity and a story. While revealing the importance of affective discourses of passion and love in mobilizing writers to embrace their own flexibility, this dissertation also argues that writers’ affective relationship with their writing is not fully contained by capitalism.

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There’s nothing wrong with writing romance. In fact, adding a romantic relationship to your book can do it some good. There are way too many authors writing abusive relationships and passing them off as romantic, particularly in the young adult genre, though this can be seen in all types of books. If you’re not sure what this looks like, it’s when writers portray abuse as love. They write about a person being overly jealous and verbally abusive to their partner and have the main character justify it by narrating that the other person “just can’t live with the thought of losing” them. So the main character is written as seeing this abuse as true love. This romanticization of abuse is simply harmful to anyone. Connecting to the romance writers community can only help you as you work toward meeting your writing goals. There are other people out there walking your same path. You don’t have to do it alone, so don’t be afraid to get involved! Helen Hoang is that shy person who never talks. Until she does. And the worst things fly out of her mouth. She read her first romance novel in eighth grade and has been addicted ever since. In 2016, she was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder in line with what was previously known as Asperger’s Syndrome. Her journey inspired THE KISS QUOTIENT, which comes out in June 2018 with Berkley. Romance writing is also an accessible way for new authors to get their start in publishing. Houses like Harlequin allow unsolicited, unagented submissions and offer online communities that can help writers improve their craft, understand the requirements of the genre, and get published. Of course, not all writers are comfortable writing the racier books. Still, Bradford says, “The bar has risen in terms of explicitness. An average-heat-level romance today is far hotter than it was a decade ago.” Her romance writing career has lent her the confidence and energy to take another look at her literary work and try another novel. She’s bringing to her new draft a fresh perspective on how to write a successful story, reach a readership, and craft an authorial persona that suits her needs.