

**What the librarians did:  
the marginalisation of romance  
fiction through the practices of  
public librarianship**  
by Vassiliki Veros

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

under the supervision of Dr Hilary Yerbury

University of Technology Sydney  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

December 2020

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, *Vassiliki Veros* declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of *Doctor of Philosophy*, in the *Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences* at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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## Abstract

Public libraries are cultural institutions with broad reaching stated values of inclusion underpinning their service delivery and collection provision to engage and reflect their local communities. These values of inclusion are enacted through a variety of practices of librarians. Anecdotal evidence suggested that the practices of librarians were leading to romance fiction potentially being excluded from collections and associated services. This study, set at the intersection of librarianship and studies of popular culture, explores these practices, using Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and structuring structures, Raymond Williams's concept of ordinary and popular culture along with his concept of the selective tradition, and Catherine Sheldrick Ross's metaphors of reading. Through an ethnographic case study, the practices of public librarians in New South Wales are examined using field observations, interview and document analysis. The data analysis was enriched by an approach based on Bourdieu's notion of "thinking tools", a key tool being Gérard Genette's notions of transtextuality, providing a framework for both the thesis structure and for understanding the research data. The key findings of this thesis by compilation are that romance fiction novels are marginalised through the practice of creating absences with implications for other library services, authors and readers. These absences are situated within the practices of acquisitions and collection policies, the provision of cataloguing bibliographic records with its associated metadata, the placement and shelving of romance fiction, and the selection of fiction titles and the provision of kits for book groups. The conceptual context of the study identified that the tension arising from perceptions of legitimacy of romance fiction continues to prevail within the profession. As a consequence, public librarians no longer play a significant role in the selective tradition through which popular culture is institutionalised, their range of cultural competence tends to not include knowledge of the genre of romance fiction resulting in a lessening of the cultural capital of the wider community. At a methodological level, the study has demonstrated the usefulness of Bourdieu's thinking tools, in particular, field, structuring structures, and cultural competence. At a conceptual level, it has shown that while Williams's notion of popular culture is relevant, his concept of the selective tradition is constrained in the contemporary context; public librarians no longer have sole responsibility for the institutionalisation of culture, with the rise of internet-based services allowing people through their everyday lives to contribute to determining the cultural expressions that will become part of the cultural record.