THE ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH COMPANION *to* POPULAR ROMANCE FICTION

Edited by
JAYASHREE KAMBLÉ, ERIC MURPHY SELINGER, AND HSU-MING TEO

The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction

Popular romance fiction constitutes the largest segment of the global book market. Bringing together an international group of scholars, *The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction* offers a ground-breaking exploration of this global genre and its remarkable readership. In recognition of the diversity of the form, the Companion provides a history of the genre, an overview of disciplinary approaches to studying romance fiction, and critical analyses of important subgenres, themes, and topics. It also highlights new and understudied avenues of inquiry for future research in this vibrant and still-emerging field. The first systematic, comprehensive resource on romance fiction, this Companion will be invaluable to students and scholars, and accessible to romance readers.

Jayashree Kamblé is an Associate Professor of English at LaGuardia Community College in the City University of New York. She is the author of *Making Meaning in Popular Romance Fiction: An Epistemology* (2014) and a Vice-President of the International Association of the Study of Popular Romance.

Eric Murphy Selinger is a Professor of English at DePaul University, Executive Editor of the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, and President of the International Association for the Study of Popular Romance. He is the author of *What Is It Then Between Us? Traditions of Love in American Poetry* (1998) and co-editor of *New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction* (2012) and *Romance Fiction and American Culture* (2016).

Hsu-Ming Teo is a novelist and cultural historian at Macquarie University, Australia, where she is an Associate Professor of literature and creative writing. Her academic publications include her monograph *Desert Passions: Orientalism and Romance Novels* (2012), and the edited books *The Popular Culture of Romantic Love in Australia* (2017) and *Cultural History in Australia* (2003).


Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

The Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance Fiction

Edited by Jayashree Kamblé, Eric Murphy Selinger, and Hsu-Ming Teo

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2021
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-1-4724-4330-4 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-61346-8 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo
by Swales & Willis, Exeter, Devon, UK

Contents

Notes on contributors

Kecia Ali is a Professor of Religion and Chair of the Department of Religion at Boston University. In addition to her most recent book, *Human in Death: Morality and Mortality in J. D. Robb's Novels* (2017), she is the author of articles about race, religion, and romance, and several books about Islam. Her work explores the complex intertwining of Muslim and Western norms about gender, sexuality, and marriage. Her current projects include an introductory book on women in Muslim traditions and a study of the gender politics of academic Islamic Studies.

Jonathan A. Allan is Canada Research Chair in Men and Masculinities and Professor in the Department of English and Creative Writing and in the Gender and Women's Studies program at Brandon University. He is the author of *Reading from Behind: A Cultural Analysis of the Anus* and *Men, Masculinities, and Popular Romance*, and he is currently writing a book titled *Men, Masculinities, and the Procreative Realm*.

Amanda K. Allen is an Associate Professor of Children's Literature at Eastern Michigan University. She is currently working on a revised history of twentieth-century young adult literature, in which she argues that the shift between pre-1967 "junior novels" and post-1967 "young adult fiction" was predicated on a conflict between librarians' and academics' differing value systems and institutions. She also publishes on fandom and fan studies.

Rebecca Barrett-Fox is a Professor of Sociology at Arkansas State University. Her research focuses on religion, especially conservative Christianity, sexuality and gender, and hate, politics, and the law. She is the author of multiple articles and book chapters on Christian romance novels.

Amy Burge is a Lecturer in Popular Fiction at the University of Birmingham, U.K. Her work focuses on popular genres, in particular romance, with a focus on intersectional and transhistorical readings and approaches. She is the author of *Representing Difference in the Medieval and Modern Orientalist Romance* (2016), a comparative study of late medieval English romance and twenty-first-century sheik romance novels. She is currently working on a literary history of romantic masculinity and race, and a project on Muslim women's genre fiction.

Kathrina Mohd Daud is an Assistant Professor in Writing and Literature at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti Brunei Darussalam. Kathrina received a Ph.D. in Creative Writing from the University of Manchester in 2011 and has been published in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *World Englishes*, and a number of edited volumes for her work at the intersections of popular fiction, Bruneian literature, and the representation of

Islam in fiction. Kathrina's first novel, *The Fisherman King*, was shortlisted for the Singaporean Epigram Books Fiction Prize and will be published at the end of 2020.

jay Dixon is an independent scholar who has written on various aspects of romance, including Regency-set romances by Georgette Heyer and a book *The Romance Fiction of Mills & Boon 1909–1990s* (1999). In her other life she is a freelance editor of both fiction and non-fiction.

Kristen Donnelly (MSW, M.Div., Ph.D.) is perpetually curious about people—their stories, their lives, their choices, their communities. To that end, she pursued Ph.D. research into the intersections of gender and religion, with particular attention to how Christianity talks about and deals with the female body. She is now the EVP of Abbey Research, a HR consulting firm focusing on emotional intelligence and inclusion. She lives outside Philadelphia with her husband and their overflowing shelves of books and video game consoles, and she reviews for All About Romance.

Sarah H. Ficke is an Associate Professor of Literature at Marymount University in Arlington, VA, U.S.A. Her research and teaching interests focus on nineteenth-century British literature, early African American fiction, and popular culture. Her publications include "Constructing a Post-Victorian Empire: Rupert Gray, a Tale in Black and White" (2015) and "Crafting Social Criticism: Infanticide in 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point' and Aurora Leigh" (2013), and she has presented conference papers on steampunk, time travel romance, and the historical romances of Beverly Jenkins and Rose Lerner.

Joanna Gregson is a Professor of Sociology at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, WA. She was appointed Provost and Senior Vice-President for Academic Affairs in 2017. Dr. Gregson has taught and conducted research in the areas of deviance, gender, and qualitative research methods. Throughout her career, she has published on such topics as teenage mothers, incarcerated mothers, and divorced women. Since 2010 she has been conducting participant observation research with the authors of romance novels with collaborator Dr. Jen Lois. Dr. Joanna Gregson earned her Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Amira Jarmakani is a Professor of Women's Studies at San Diego State University. She is the author of *An Imperialist Love Story: Desert Romances and the War on Terror* (2015). She also authored *Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S.* (2008), which won the NWSA Gloria E. Anzaldúa book prize. She is president of the Arab American Studies Association and a Series Advisor for the Critical Arab American Studies Series with Syracuse University Press. She works in the fields of women's, gender, and sexuality studies, Arab American studies, and cultural studies.

Jayashree Kamblé is an Associate Professor of English at LaGuardia Community College in the City University of New York. She is the author of *Making Meaning in Popular Romance Fiction: An Epistemology* (2014) and a Vice-President of the International Association of the Study of Popular Romance. She has also published articles on mass-market romance novels in journals, popular magazines, and essay collections.

Jennifer Lois, Professor of Sociology at Western Washington University, specializes in the areas of gender, emotions, identity, and ethnography. She has previously studied the gendered culture of mountain-environment search-and-rescue volunteers (*Heroic Efforts* 2003) and the emotional culture of home-schooling mothers (*Home Is Where the School Is* 2012). Her current research project on the gendered culture of romance writers (in collaboration

with Dr. Joanna Gregson) has examined the sexual stigma of the genre (*Gender & Society* 2015), and the emotion work aspiring authors do when seeking publication (*Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 2018).

John Markert is a retired (2019) Associate Professor of Sociology at Cumberland University. He has published widely on issues relating to social dynamics shaping cultural products. Markert is the author of *Publishing Romance* (2016) and has recently completed a book on the music industry, *Making Music in Music City*, that will be published by the University of Tennessee Press in the spring of 2021.

Jodi McAlister is a Lecturer in Writing, Literature, and Culture at Deakin University in Australia. Her research interests include representations of romantic love and the popular fiction and culture industries. She is also an author, and her young adult novels *Valentine* (2017), *Ironheart* (2018), and *Misrule* (2019) are published by Penguin Teen Australia.

Hannah McCann is a Lecturer in Cultural Studies at the University of Melbourne. Her research sits within critical femininity studies, exploring areas such as feminist debates on femininity, affects in beauty culture, and queering the fangirl. Her publications include the monograph *Queering Femininity: Sexuality, Feminism and the Politics of Presentation* (2018), and her co-authored textbook *Queer Theory Now: From Foundations to Futures* (2020).

Julie E. Moody-Freeman is the Director for the Center for Black Diaspora and an Associate Professor in the Department of African and Black Diaspora Studies at DePaul University. She is the co-editor of *The Black Imagination, Science Fiction, and the Speculative* and *The Black Imagination: Science Fiction, Futurism, and the Speculative*. Her scholarly essays on Belizean writer Zee Edgell have been published in *African Identities*, *Macomeré*, *Canadian Women Studies/les cahiers de la femme*, and *Seeking the Self—Encountering the Other: Diasporic Narrative and the Ethics of Representation*. Her work on African American Romance has also appeared in *Romance Fiction and American Culture: Love as the Practice of Freedom?* (2016).

Lauren O'Mahony is a Lecturer in Global Media and Communication at Murdoch University, Western Australia. Much of Lauren's research is focused on the analysis of popular literary and media texts, especially using romance and feminist theoretical frameworks. Her research has been published in *The Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*, *The Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, *Communication Research and Practice*, *Outskirts*, and *TEXT Journal*.

María T. Ramos-García is a Professor of Spanish in the School of American and Global Studies at South Dakota State University. Over the last few years her research has concentrated on paranormal romance and urban fantasy in English, a topic she has developed into an honors colloquium. She is co-editor, with Laura Vivanco, of *Love, Language, Place, and Identity in Popular Culture: Romancing the Other* (2020).

Kristin Ramsdell is a Librarian Emerita at California State University, East Bay. She is the author of the first and second editions of *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre* (1999, 2012) and its predecessor, *Happily Ever After: A Guide to Reading Interests in Romance Fiction* (1987); the editor of the Romance section of the readers' advisory series *What Do I Read Next?* (1990–2016); the editor of *The Encyclopedia of Romance Fiction* (2018); and *Library Journal*'s Romance columnist from 1994 to 2019.

Pamela Regis is a Professor of English at McDaniel College. She has been studying popular romance fiction since the 1980s and is the author of *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*. She has served as both Vice-President and President of the International Association for the

Study of Popular Romance. Her work on romance writer Jane Austen has been published in *Persuasions*.

Catherine M. Roach is a Professor of Gender and Cultural Studies in New College at The University of Alabama, U.S.A. A two-time Fulbright Award winner, she is the author of *Mother/Nature: Popular Culture and Environmental Ethics* (2003) and *Stripping, Sex, and Popular Culture* (2007), along with two historical romance novels published as Catherine LaRoche (2012, 2014). Her most recent academic book, *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture* (2016), won Silver Medal in the 2017 Independent Publisher Book Awards. She is currently at work on a trade book about America's new gender and sexual revolution.

Eric Murphy Selinger is a Professor of English at DePaul University, Executive Editor of the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, and President of the International Association for the Study of Popular Romance. He is the author of *What Is It Then Between Us? Traditions of Love in American Poetry* (1998) and co-editor of several collections, notably *New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction: Critical Essays* (with Sarah S. G. Frantz 2012) and *Romance Fiction and American Culture: Love as the Practice of Freedom?* (with William Gleason 2016).

Hsu-Ming Teo is an Associate Professor, novelist, and cultural historian based in the Department of English at Macquarie University, Australia, where she teaches literature and creative writing. Her academic publications include her monograph *Desert Passions: Orientalism and Romance Novels* (2012), and the edited books *The Popular Culture of Romantic Love in Australia* (2017) and *Cultural History in Australia* (2003), as well as a wide range of articles on Orientalism, imperialism, fiction, popular culture, romantic love, and popular romance studies. Hsu-Ming is an associate editor of the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* and an editorial board member of the *Journal of Australian Studies*.

Angela Toscano specializes in the eighteenth-century novel with a particular emphasis on romance and amatory fiction. She has written extensively on genre romance and her article "A Parody of Love: the Narrative Uses of Rape in Popular Romance" was published in the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*. Currently she teaches at the University of Utah but has previously taught rhetoric, composition, and writing at the University of Iowa.

Laura Vivanco is an independent scholar whose Ph.D. thesis from the University of St Andrews was published in 2004 as *Death in Fifteenth-Century Castile: Ideologies of the Elites*. After changing field from Hispanomedievalism to popular romance studies she has written many articles on a variety of issues relating to romance novels as well as two books: *For Love and Money: The Literary Art of the Harlequin Mills & Boon Romance* (2011) and *Pursuing Happiness: Reading American Romance as Political Fiction* (2016).

Erin S. Young, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Literature and Cultural Studies at SUNY Empire State College. She is also the Managing Editor of the peer-reviewed *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*. Her research and teaching interests include popular romance fiction, Asian American fiction, and science fiction.

Acknowledgments

Our heartfelt thanks to all the romance scholars who have pioneered and continue to illuminate and energize this field of research, and to all the romance authors who have actively and generously supported romance scholarship. We are grateful to Ann Donahue, our first editor at Ashgate Publishing, and especially to An Goris, the first managing editor of the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, for her time and effort facilitating the growth of popular romance scholarship, and for the part she played in bringing this volume to life

Every effort has been made to trace or contact all copyright holders. The editors would be pleased to rectify any omissions brought to their notice at the earliest opportunity.

Introduction

Jayashree Kamblé, Eric Murphy Selinger, and Hsu-Ming Teo

The romance novel is the most popular and bestselling genre of fiction produced and consumed in the world today. In North America alone, the romance industry generates more than 1 billion dollars of sales each year ("About the Romance Genre"), and this figure does not include the second-hand market, or romance novels borrowed from libraries or other readers. The biggest global imprint of romance novels, Harlequin, publishes more than 110 romance titles a month in print and digital format, in over 30 countries and 150 languages, drawing from a stable of over 200 authors in the U.K. and more than 1300 worldwide, including the U.S.A., Australia, and New Zealand ("About Harlequin"). But the romance genre is important for more than its impressive sales. Although the readers and writers of romance fiction have diversified significantly since the twenty-first century, with a male readership of around 18 percent ("About the Romance Genre"), it is still the most woman-centered form of popular culture in the western world today. Written and read by women globally, the romance novel provides a public platform for women not only to voice ideals about gender and family relationships, but also to articulate opinions about contemporary social, cultural, environmental, economic, and political issues. The romance novel puts women's needs and desires at the center of contemporary life and accounts of the past —and perhaps this accounts for the myths that have multiplied about this complex and colossal genre. Increasingly, in the twenty-first century, the genre also acts as a forum for authors from very diverse backgrounds to explore and express ideas about their intersectional experiences of sexual, gender, racial, ethnic, and cultural identities, and to do so in a narrative that does not give way to despair but to a utopian hope that a happily ever after ending is possible for everyone.

Popular misconceptions

Although many forms of popular culture meet with ridicule and skepticism—comics, games, fan fiction, heroic "sword and sorcery" fantasy—no genre receives as much sustained and widespread disapprobation as mass-market romance fiction. In the popular imagination, romance novels are narratives of sexual encounters meant to titillate the reader. They are (when thought of at all) considered lacking in intellectual merit, stylistic rigor, or innovation, and indistinguishable from each other. Non-readers often use the phrases "a Harlequin" or "bodice-ripper" or "trashy novels" as a catch-all that conflates the thousands of romance novels written over many decades of changing tides involving different trends and thematic preoccupations—novels of various

lengths, which span dozens of sub-genres, and contain a variety of literary styles and modes. Similarly, romance publishing, which has a global history and has experienced changes in the primary nationalities and ethnicities of its writers, and in its editorial hubs and distribution modes and mechanisms, remains largely invisible outside academic research (and under-theorized within it). Unsurprisingly then, romance readers are targets of ridicule and condescension, as are romance writers. Both groups are stereotyped in misogynistic, heteronormative, and often ageist terms.

Romance fiction, traditionally a straight cis-woman-centered form (though it has become more inclusive) is thus treated the same as a woman in public often is—as an "open person," a body that heterosexual patriarchy considers open to anyone's approach/acquisition/assault/definition (Gardner 333). The wide acceptance that this reductive ideology enjoys is further visible in the fact that romance fiction is rarely recognized as having a history, or of being shaped by historical forces, or of being created and read by people of varying socio-political and economic communities, sexualities, and gender identities. As a result, romance is constantly misrecognized, conflated with non-romance narratives based on minimal similarities, and equated with descriptions of sexual activity completely divorced from the concerns that "real literature" allegedly examines with care. The truth is far more complex.

Defining the genre

The largest professional organization of romance fiction, the Romance Writers of America, defines a romance novel as containing "a central love story and an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending" ("About the Romance Genre"). Critic Pamela Regis speaks of a romance novel as "a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines" (14; since 2009 she has revised this to "one or more protagonists") and she lists eight structural elements that must be present for a work to be recognizable as a romance novel:

> [1] the initial state of society in which heroine and hero must court, [2] the meeting between heroine and hero, [3] the barrier to the union of heroine and hero, [4] the attraction between the heroine and hero, [5] the declaration of love between heroine and hero, [6] the point of ritual death, [7] the recognition by heroine and hero of the means to overcome the barrier, and [8] the betrothal.
>
> (30)

For the purposes of this collection, the romance genre refers to English-language novels that are written in various parts of the world, aim at a broad (mass-market) readership, and center around a love plot that holds the promise of a future with a unified emotional life for two or more protagonists. Romance novels may involve a plot set in the writer's own time (termed "a contemporary") or be a period piece (termed "historical romance"), be set in our familiar world, or one that includes elements of science fiction/fantasy/paranormal, may or may not include detailed scenes of sexual activity (vanilla or kink), and might foreground straight and/or queer partnerships. A romance novel may be 180 pages long or over 500, the former usually published under a numbered series or imprint (such as Harlequin Mills & Boon's many "lines") and termed a "category romance" and the latter referred to as a "stand-alone" or "single-title" with more room for the narrative to unfold and the author name

being given more prominence in the marketing and branding of the work. While the action in a romance novel may range from fighting in a war to solving a mystery, from raising a family to running a small business, and from saving a civilization to coping with trauma, the genre's primary drive is to imagine ways that romantic love and desire (erotic or asexual) might serve as a path to self-fulfillment and, increasingly, socio-political equality.

By and large, the contributors to this volume address the research on twentieth and twenty-first-century romance novels, since it is only in the twentieth century that the romance novel emerges as a distinct category of publishing and readership, marked both by textual features (the necessity of a "happy ending" of successful relationship formation) and by the array of paratextual features (cover art, gendered marketing practices, distinctive networks of distribution and reception) that distinguish it both in the public eye and in the eyes of potential readers. That said, inasmuch as the romance novel is a story of successful courtship, the genre has an old and complex history, and several of our chapters provide a historical genealogy of the genre going back into the eighteenth century or farther.

A brief history of romance

Romance novels have long and tangled roots. As a literary mode, romance can be traced as far back as the first century CE, when Greek prose romances began to be written, recounting stories of young men and women who meet, fall in love, are separated by numerous obstacles, undergo a series of journeys and adventures, and are eventually reunited by the gods to live happily ever after (Reardon 5). These conventions of love, adventure, journeys, and obstacles to the union of the lovers continued during the Middle Ages in chivalric romances such as the fourteenth-century *Bevis of Hampton* or the early fifteenth-century *Sir Degrevant*, but the plot emphasis in such quest romances was on the hero's life of adventure, rather than on courtship or the marriage plot. Pamela Regis suggests that the late sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century comedies of Shakespeare, including *As You Like It*, bring us closer to the modern incarnation of the romance novel because these plots work toward the freedom of the lovers to choose union with each other, thus creating the happy ending of the romance story (28, 56).

However, it was only with the publication of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) in Britain that the romance novel as we recognize it today began to emerge. As jay Dixon observes in Chapter 1, Richardson built on the work of early eighteenth-century English women writers such as Elizabeth Rowe, Susannah Dobson, and Eliza Haywood, who pioneered epistolary novels about the complications of love and courtship. However, Regis argues that *Pamela* was the first prototype of the romance novel because of its focus on courtship and seduction, and the obstacles to be overcome in order for the hero, Mr. B, to marry the virtuous servant heroine Pamela (Chapter 7). As Regis shows in Chapter 2 of this volume, *Pamela* had a significant impact on the development of love and courtship stories in the United States after its publication there in 1742–3. It inaugurated the sentimental novel which, in the hands of women authors such as Sukey Vickery, Catherine Maria Sedgwick, Lydia Maria Child, and Louise May Alcott, gave rise to the romance novel in America.

In Britain, however, the influence of Richardson's novel on the romance genre was eclipsed by Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

(1847)—two classic novels that would become ur-texts for romance plots even if, in their own time, they were not originally read as romance novels and did not enjoy the status and popularity they would garner in the twentieth century. Both were variations of the broader British domestic novel of manners that was popular in the nineteenth century, and it was from this genre that British romantic fiction would develop from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, after the publication of Charlotte M. Yonge's bestselling *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853) spawned a host of similar works by writers such as Rhoda Broughton and Mary Elizabeth Braddon. The novels of these writers are certainly concerned with love and the obstacles to courtship and marriage, but while they are romantic fiction, they are not modern romance novels as the term is commonly understood today because the plots often ended tragically, with the lovers parted by death. As Rachel Anderson comments, for the Victorians, "the truest, purest romantic love is a fatal love" (26). It was not until the twentieth century that the happy ending, with the romantic protagonists united at the end of the love story, became a more regular feature of the British romantic novel. Even so, the ambivalence toward the Happily Ever After (HEA) ending can be seen in the British Romantic Novelists' Association broad ranging definition of romantic fiction that, until 2017, included tragic stories such as Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* or Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* as romantic fiction. Even today, the RNA (which is the equivalent of the American Romance Writers Association or the Romance Writers of Australia) keeps its remit broad, talking about "romantic fiction" that "explores and celebrates love in all its messy, unexpected, improbable, imperfection" (RNA website), rather than the narrower American and Australian definition of the "romance novel" that focuses on the development of a love relationship between two (or more) protagonists that ends optimistically in their union. Readers who seek a guaranteed happy ending in British romantic fiction associate this with the Mills & Boon "category romance" novel, rather than with romantic fiction as a genre in its own right.

Many British publishing houses produced romantic fiction in the early twentieth century but by the 1930s romance novel publishing had come to be dominated by Mills & Boon, which increasingly standardized the length and structure of their books during the 1950s, excised extraneous subplots to focus on the developing love relationship between the romantic protagonists, and invariably featured the HEA ending (McAleer 85). Mills and Boon drew their authors from all corners of the British Empire and Commonwealth, so it had a global reach from its inception, while also influencing the style of romance fiction that would be produced in these countries even though specifically national characteristics are still evident (Flesch *From Australia*; Teo "Imperial Affairs"). The nascent North American romance market began to be influenced by Mills & Boon too, after Canadian publishing firm Harlequin signed a deal in 1957 to distribute selected novels as paperback editions. But the influence went both ways, especially after Harlequin bought the British firm in 1971 to form the publishing powerhouse, Harlequin Mills & Boon. Although Harlequin dominated the global Anglophone romance market in the 1970s, it was challenged by New York-based American companies—such as the historical romance publisher Avon in the 1970s, and Silhouette and Dell in the 1980s—which saw a gap in the hitherto British-dominated market and began producing American-centered romances. It should be noted, however, that the United States had its own home-grown traditions of romance fiction, as Pamela Regis shows in Chapter 2 of this volume. Regis points out that this history of the American romance is only starting to be excavated

and constructed, but already the underlying associations of love and freedom in the American romance are evident (see also Gleason and Selinger).

Although Harlequin eventually absorbed Silhouette and Dell by the mid-1980s, the end of the twentieth century and the rise of digital publishing in the twenty-first century saw the romance genre diversifying with regard to the representation of gender and gender relations, race and ethnicity, sexuality, and different cultural traditions, as well as the emergence of new subgenres such as the paranormal and erotic, joining existing subgenres such as medical, historical, crime/thriller, and inspirational romances. Today, the romance industry is dominated by the "big five" transnational trade publishers—HarperCollins (which now owns Harlequin), Hachette, Macmillan, Penguin Random House, and Simon & Schuster—alongside a host of independent publishers and self-publishing authors at the forefront of new developments within the romance genre.

It is impossible to cover the various, complex trends within the romance genre throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in this introduction. Generally speaking, the genre has always placed value on the happiness of women and the opportunities for freedom and fulfillment offered them in terms of work and social inclusion, as well as through romantic love. Over time, the intense religiosity of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century novels has waned and formed its own subgenre (the inspirational romance), giving way instead to a secularization and, from the 1970s onwards, a sexualization of romantic love. Ideals of femininity, masculinity, and gender relations have changed noticeably over the course of the twentieth century, as jay Dixon shows. By the 1980s, second-wave feminism had a notable impact on the portrayal of women's needs in social, economic, and romantic relationships, while the expansion of civil liberties to address the disadvantages of hitherto marginalized citizens began to impact the genre from the 1990s onwards. The advent of digital publishing and inexpensive e-book readers from 2007–8 onwards has allowed new subgenres to proliferate. A wider range of representation has thus entered the genre, not least because authors of color and LGBTQIA authors (among others) can now bypass the gatekeeping practices of mainstream publishing houses and the limited distribution practices of chain bookstores in order to reach interested readers.

The mass-market romance in the twenty-first century, then, is a genre whose ostensible sameness from book to book—every story centrally a love story; every central love story ending with some promise of romantic futurity—reveals, on inspection, a surprising variety of characters, desires, relationship structures, themes, and areas of ideological (and often immediate, practical) concern to its global writer and reader community. The genre includes progressive texts dedicated to expanding the universe of persons represented as worthy of romantic happiness, whether in terms of race, ethnicity, disability (mental, physical, and emotional), religion, age, size, or sexual and gender identity, but it also includes texts that are conservative and even unabashedly reactionary on all of these topics, and it is easy to find romance novels whose politics and representational practices are a hodgepodge of diverging or contradictory impulses. The same can be said of the genre's treatment of sexual consent, which runs the gamut from an explicit insistence on "exuberant consent" as the sine qua non of sexual activity to romance novels which not only contain scenes of "dubcon" (dubious consent) or nonconsensual sex between protagonists, but are tagged and marketed, mostly online, on this basis. This dynamic tension between convention/familiarity and variation/novelty may be found within all forms of genre fiction (see Roberts 162–72)

but only in the twenty-first century has scholarship on popular romance turned, by and large, from claims about the genre as a whole to the disaggregated analysis of texts, subgenres, local traditions, reader communities, and other sites of multiplicity.

Introducing popular romance scholarship

Scholarship on popular romance fiction begins considerably later than the serious consideration of other forms of genre fiction. Thoughtful essays on detective fiction, for example, can be found as early as the mid-1920s, with the first critical history of that genre, Howard Haycraft's *Murder for Pleasure*, published in 1941. By the end of the 1940s, a comparable history of science fiction had been published (Evans 48), and the first scholarly journal dedicated to SF/Fantasy, *Extrapolation*, made its debut in 1959.[1] By the mid-1970s there were monographs and essay collections on important texts and authors from these and other genres, and although prejudice against taking popular fiction seriously certainly still existed, both in print and in university classrooms scholars defended such fiction both on intellectual grounds—as they argued, significant socio-political and philosophical material might well be addressed in genre fiction—and on aesthetic grounds, as when John Cawelti calls Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler "significant artists" (4) and insists that what he calls "formula literature" is, first and foremost, "a kind of literary art" (8).

In principle, popular romance might have received the same sorts of attention and advocacy. In practice, it did not: a gap that is particularly vivid in Cawelti's groundbreaking study, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (1976), which despite its title, as Cawelti himself would note a few years later, contains "almost nothing about romance" and indeed discusses not one female author ("Masculine Myths and Feminist Revisions" 123). The first critical history of popular romance did not appear until 30 years after the first such books on detective fiction and SF, and far from defending the genre or singling out authors for their unrecognized merit, Rachel Anderson's *The Purple Heart Throbs: The Subliterature of Love* (1974) describes its subject matter as a "branch of fiction consisting of lightweight, but full-length, novels of no great literary qualities" (14). Five years later, Ann Barr Snitow's "Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different" likewise insists that "to analyze Harlequin romances is not to make any literary claims for them" (142); indeed, Snitow pauses to reassure her readers that she is "not concerned here with developing an admiration for their buried poetics" (143). Their interest lies elsewhere: for Anderson, in the genre's curious "vitality" (a term she borrows from Q. D. Leavis 14); for Snitow, in the way these novels illuminate—precisely *because* of their artlessness—the "pathological experience of sex difference" created by heteropatriarchy and the "particular nature of the satisfactions we are all led to seek by the conditions of our culture" (143).[2]

As Snitow's analysis suggests, the impulse to take romance seriously from was born out of second-wave feminism, both in its focus on recovering heretofore unexamined or trivialized aspects of women's history and culture (high art or popular) and in its terms of critical engagement, which often quite explicitly set aside the approaches favored by earlier scholars of other genres. In her foundational study *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (1982), for example, Tania Modleski begins by mocking the "aggrandized titles of certain classic studies of popular male genres ('The Gangster as Tragic Hero')" and the "inflated claims made for, say, the

detective novel which fill the pages of the *Journal of Popular Culture*" (1), and she dismisses as both silly and intellectually incoherent the idea of simply adapting such frameworks for female-focused texts (e.g., "The Scheming Little Adventuress as Tragic Hero" 2). Kay Mussell's *Fantasy and Reconciliation: Contemporary Formulas of Women's Romance Fiction*, published two years later, opens by acknowledging the impact of "the contemporary women's movement" on her project (xi) and by framing its analyses of authors, texts, and genre "formulas" in the context of a discord between second-wave feminism and the enduring, indeed *increasing* popularity of popular romance fiction across the 1970s and early 1980s. "How can such apparently conservative and traditional stories be especially popular today, when we see many women casting off old roles and values and choosing to live more instrumental lives in the world? This book addresses that paradox" (xii).

Although second-wave feminist thought provided the crucial context for taking romance seriously in the academy, a range of critical models and methodologies were deployed in the foundational works of romance scholarship. Modleski's study and Janice Radway's epochal *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984) drew on post-Freudian psychoanalysis, Frankfurt School cultural theory, structuralist and poststructuralist theoretical models, and, in Radway, the emerging disciplines of reader ethnography and publishing studies, what we would now think of as History of the Book. The more theoretical of these moves were not uncommon in studies of popular literature in the 1970s and 1980s. Most and Stowe's anthology *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, published in 1983 (just between Modleski's and Radway's studies) gathered nearly two dozen examples of such investigation by an impressive, international crew including Umberto Eco, F. R. Jameson, Frank Kermode, and Geoffrey Hartman; likewise, as the editor of *Science-Fiction Studies*, Darko Suvin had made the use of Marxist and Russian Formalist theory a staple of scholarship on this genre. The deployment of a sophisticated critical/theoretical apparatus to study popular romance, however, served not as a means to illuminate the complexity of subtly crafted artifacts, attributable to the compositional decisions of romance authors (as, often, in *The Poetics of Murder*), nor to demonstrate the cognitive processes instilled by the genre in its readers (the detective and reader as hermeneutic partners or rivals; the cognitive estrangement central to worldbuilding in SF), but rather to identify unconscious, otherwise invisible tensions, complexities, and ambivalences in popular romance novels and in readers' interactions with them.[3] As Radway memorably announces, romance reading is "a profoundly conflicted activity centered on a profoundly conflicted form" (14).

In their introduction to *New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction: Critical Essays* (2012), Eric Murphy Selinger and Sarah S. G. Frantz note the personal contexts and professional exigencies behind the recurring tropes of "duality, conflict, ambivalence" that they observe in what they call the "first wave" of popular romance scholarship (4; for more on the difference in critical rhetoric between first wave and later "Millennial" scholarship, see Regis, "What Do Critics Owe the Romance?"). Running from 1979 (Snitow) through the end of the 1980s or perhaps the early 1990s (Jan Cohn's *Romance and the Erotics of Property* appears in 1988; Scottish sociologist Bridget Fowler's *The Alienated Reader: Women and Popular Romantic Literature in the Twentieth Century* in 1991), this first wave of romance scholarship is marked by a twofold effort to identify the appeal of romance to its readers and to *unmask* how this ostensibly optimistic and idealistic genre—and the pleasurable, sustaining act of reading it—in fact encodes any

number of real-world angers, anxieties, protests, and conflicts, often through the use of sophisticated critical theory. As the chapters of this Research Companion document, other, less visible modes of romance scholarship were seeded during this first wave and would blossom in the years after it, including structuralist and other formalist accounts of romance topoi (Barbara Bowman's "Victoria Holt's Gothic Romances: A Structuralist Inquiry" is an early instance), archivally-documented publishing history (Carol Thurston's *The Romance Revolution: Erotic Novels for Women and the Quest for a New Sexual Identity*), and the first stirrings of author-focused scholarship (A.S. Byatt's and Kathleen Bells' essays on Georgette Heyer [1991, 1995]), as well as work on the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history of African American love stories which would be crucial to the study of African American popular romance in the decades to come (see Chapter 10 of this volume).

In the Selinger/Frantz account, a second wave of scholarship begins when popular romance novelists begin to publish as theorists and advocates of their own genre in the 1990s: first in the essays commissioned by Jayne Ann Krentz for the anthology *Dangerous Men, Adventurous Women* (1992), then in a special issue of the journal *Paradoxa* (1997) and a pair of conferences at Bowling Green State University (1997 and 2000), each of which presented romance authors and scholars as equal partners in the investigation of the genre (see Selinger and Gleason 11–13). As Selinger and Gleason document in their introduction to *Romance Fiction and American Culture*(2016), this "second-wave" emergence of romance authors as contributors to scholarship on the genre was part of a concerted effort led by romance novelist Jayne Ann Krentz to push back against what she and others saw as a condescending attitude toward romance authors and readers among first-wave scholars. The feedback loops are worth noting. Just as the ideas of Modleski, Radway, and other first-wave scholars prompted discussion in the romance community (see Selinger and Gleason 11–12), authors' political and aesthetic claims on behalf of the genre drew reaction from scholars. These range from Modleski's sometimes-scathing skepticism ("My Life as a Romance Reader") to Radway's frank curiosity ("Romance and the Work of Fantasy") to the matter-of-fact integration of authorial claims as a resource for further discussion by George Paizis, a British scholar of French literature working at a safe remove from the American fray (see *Love and the Novel: the Poetics and Politics of Romantic Fiction*).

The rhetoric and substance of this contretemps warrants future exploration, whether as an instance of fraught dialog between waves of white American feminism—none of the participants was a woman of color—or as a "ritual matricide" (Goris "Matricide in Romance Scholarship?"). That said, much of the most important scholarship on popular romance during the late 1990s and early 2000s played out in a separate, parallel universe where new topics of interest were introduced, including the first significant work on race and popular romance (Wardrop; Burley "Shadows and Silhouettes"; Caton; Dandridge; Foster), on queer romance and the curiously insistent construction of heterosexuality in the genre (Burley "What's a Nice Girl"; Fletcher *Historical Romance Fiction*); on romance publishing history and the genre's production and readership in diverse national contexts (McAleer; Dixon; Flesch; Puri; Parameswaran, "Reading Fictions"); on individual romance authors and novels (Westman; Hinnant; Fletcher, "Mere Costumery"); and on the relationships between popular romance fiction and fan fiction (Driscoll) and a range of resolutely canonical texts (Osborne "Romancing the Bard", "Sweet, Savage Shakespeare", and "Harlequin Presents"; Regis). In retrospect, this diversity is exciting; at the time, however, there was little

critical dialog among the various participants and approaches, as though many were unaware of what the others were up to. Popular romance lacked the academic infrastructure—a dedicated journal, a scholarly association, a regular conference meeting, a comprehensive bibliography, or research guide—that scholars at work on other popular genres had established decades before.

The establishment of this infrastructure marks the start of the current wave of popular romance scholarship and the emergence of "popular romance studies" as a field. The story is easy to trace. In 2005 the Romance Writers of America inaugurated an Academic Research Grant program designed to "develop and support academic research devoted to genre romance novels, writers, and readers" ("Academic Research Grant"). Jayashree Kamblé was the first recipient, using the grant to support her dissertation on romance at the University of Minnesota; the following year Eric Murphy Selinger received the grant and used it to support a series of infrastructure-building efforts, including a listserv (RomanceScholar), a collaborative academic blog on romance (Teach Me Tonight, now written by Laura Vivanco), a review-essay on the past decade in romance scholarship, published in *Contemporary Literature*, and a reboot of the Popular Culture Association's then-dormant PCA Romance Area. Each of these efforts, in turn, bore fruit. The listserv gave rise to a live-linked, steadily growing Wiki bibliography of essays, chapters, books, and dissertations on popular romance compiled by Kassia Krozier, Vivanco, and many others; through it and through Teach Me Tonight, Selinger and Darcy Martin recruited an array of presenters for the 2007 and 2008 PCA national conference, including emerging figures from Australia (Toni Johnson-Woods; Hsu-Ming Teo; Glen Thomas), the U.K. (Amy Burge) and the E.U. (An Goris), as well as established figures whose work he had encountered while writing the *Contemporary Literature* essay-review, notably Kamblé, Pamela Regis, Hsu-Ming Teo, and Sarah S. G. Frantz. With Frantz, Selinger founded the International Association for the Study of Popular Romance (IASPR) and the peer-reviewed *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* (*JPRS*); as Selinger collaborated with William Gleason on a major conference at Princeton (April, 2009) Frantz worked with Australian colleagues to organize the first IASPR conference in Brisbane (June, 2009); the following year Goris received a Fulbright fellowship to work on romance with Selinger in Chicago while she organized a second IASPR conference (Brussels 2010), during which the first issue of *JPRS* was published, with Goris soon joining as Managing Editor and Burge, a bit later, as Book Review editor. Almost all the contributors to this volume have presented at IASPR conferences; several have organized these or other IASPR-affiliated conferences at their home institutions in the E.U., U.K., and Australia; and more than a few have served or currently serve as masthead editors of *JPRS* or on its editorial board.

Although other romance conferences and research projects have emerged in the United States in the 2010s, notably at Bowling Green State University (home of an archive of popular romance texts and of the papers of the RWA), IASPR and the PCA Romance Area remain major hubs for romance scholarship in the United States, along with the ongoing RWA grant program. These have also served as incubators for scholars elsewhere. In the early 2010s, for example, Amy Burge and An Goris (a 2013 RWA grant recipient) led efforts to build a romance cohort at the European Popular Culture Association (EPCA), and Australian scholar Jodi McAlister (RWA 2019) has done the same for the Popular Culture Association of Australia and New Zealand (PopCAANZ). That said, it is important to note that Selinger attributes the creation

of IASPR and JPRS to his encounters, in 2007, with the global perspective on romance found in Australian scholarship, and that popular romance studies in the U. K., E.U., and Australia has its own set of institutional frameworks, including university courses and dissertations on the genre, affiliations between scholars and romance writer organizations (the Romance Writers of Australia and, in the U.K., the Romantic Novelists Association), a variety of national and international conferences, and, recently, a range of ambitious and well-staffed research projects, the likes of which have yet to appear in the U.S.A.

In the U.K., early British explorations of the romance genre took place in an ad hoc fashion by writers recounting the history of the British romance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Rachel Anderson's *The Purple Heart Throbs: The Sub-Literature of Love* (1974), or engaged in research related to Mills and Boon because of its dominance in the British romance industry. From the late 1960s to the early 1980s, sociologist Peter H. Mann carried out a number of surveys on British Mills and Boon readers, publishing his findings in 1969, 1981, and 1985. In 1999, two books outlining the publishing history of Mills and Boon appeared: jay Dixon's *The Romance Fiction of Mills and Boon, 1909–1990s*, and Joseph McAleer's *Passion's Fortune: The Story of Mills and Boon*. More systematic studies on romance was largely carried out in the fields of Women's Studies and feminist literary studies. In 1991 Bridget Fowler published *The Alienated Reader: Women and Romantic Literature in the Twentieth Century*: a Marxist analysis of British romance novels grounding the rise of the genre in the transition to capitalism, Protestantism, and patriarchy, highlighting the agency of working-class readers in their critical responses to certain authors, and the limits of the genre in relation to female-centered fantasies. Stevi Jackson's work in cultural studies emerged in the early 1990s ("Even Sociologists Fall in Love") and in the same year a conference entitled "Romance Revisited" was hosted by the Centre for Women's Studies at Lancaster University with an aim to "put romance back on the feminist agenda": a collection of essays edited by Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey emerged from the event in 1995.

This interdisciplinary approach to the study of romance and love has been extended with the creation of the Love Research Network, founded by Michael Gratzke in 2011 (in 2017 Gratzke and Burge co-edited a special issue of the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* on critical love studies and popular romance scholarship). A number of U.K.-based scholars have undertaken funded research projects on romance topics: Ruth Deller and Clarissa Smith's 2012 survey examined the complex responses of "romance" and "casual" readers to E. L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* series; Mary Harrod's British Academy-funded project on romance and social bonding produced research events in 2019 and a forthcoming edited book; and Ria Cheyne won an RWA grant in 2017 to support the *DisRom* project on romance and disability. Significant monographs include Lynne Pearce's *Romance Writing* (2007), Laura Vivanco's *For Love and Money: The Literary Art of the Harlequin Mills & Boon Romance* (2011), Joseph Crawford's *The Twilight of the Gothic?: Vampire Fiction and the Rise of the Paranormal Romance* (2014), Amy Burge's *Representing Difference in the Medieval and Modern Orientalist Romance* (2016), and Ria Cheyne's *Disability, Literature, Genre: Representation and Affect in Contemporary Fiction* (2019).

A steady stream of research and networking events have demonstrated the strength of popular romance scholarship in the U.K., burgeoning connections between the academic community and the industry, and the developing expertise of postgraduate and

postdoctoral researchers. A number of these events have signaled the specific U. K. context and history of romantic fiction for romance research; a conference on Regency romance author Georgette Heyer took place at the University of Cambridge in 2009, followed by a further conference on Heyer and contemporary women's historical fiction at the University of London in 2018, while a symposium at the University of Birmingham in 2019 marked 100 years since E. M. Hull's *The Sheik* was published in Britain. Public engagement activities have included an Edinburgh Festival Fringe show on romance devised by Amy Burge, an editor-scholar panel at Sheffield Festival of the Mind in 2016 organized by Ph.D. student Val Derbyshire, and regular romance author events hosted by institutions in collaboration with the U.K.-based Romantic Novelists' Association. There is a growing institutional interest in teaching popular fiction and, correspondingly, romance; a number of institutions offer both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in popular fiction with a few offering romance-specific courses. A significant number of recent and ongoing Ph.D.s are working on romance-related topics in the U.K. (including twenty-first-century LGBTQIA romance, early twentieth-century Orientalist romance, recent romantic subgenres, and feminism and romance).

Romance scholarship in Europe has also expanded southwards to Spain. This is largely due to the efforts of two groups of scholars: the first organized by Maria-Isabel Gonzalez-Cruz from the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria; and the second led by Paloma Fresno-Calleja at the University of the Balearic Islands. Both groups focus on representations of exoticism in the romance genre, with *Love, Language, Place, and Identity in Popular Culture: Romancing the Other* (2020), edited by Maria Ramos-Garcia and Laura Vivanco, emerging from the first group. Meanwhile, Fresno-Calleja's group, which includes scholars from the universities of Oviedo and Granada, have embarked on a project exploring "The politics, aesthetics and marketing of literary formulae in popular women's fiction: History, Exoticism and Romance." This research, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness (MINECO), the Agencia Estatal de Investigación (AEI) and the European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) (see HER website), adopts postcolonial and gender approaches to analyzing Anglophone romances set in the past—especially the British Empire and war-torn Europe in the first half of the twentieth century—or in locations considered "exotic" by romance writers and readers. The aim is to engage critically with the patriarchal legacies in these texts, the use and misuse of historical material, including its neo-colonial and neo-orientalist implications, and to consider how these strategies frame the marketing and reception of the novels, whether deliberately or inadvertently. The novels examined come from western metropolitan centers as well as the Anglophone postcolonial world, and they constitute works that simultaneously appropriate and subvert some of the narrative formulae of historical fiction and popular romance, thereby de-exoticizing their settings and re-politicizing their content. Publications thus far range widely, examining related genres such as women's historical fiction, contemporary romance and chick lit, while topics explored include gender and national identities, and marketing strategies —among many other themes (see HER website).

Government funding has been important for spurring popular romance research in the twenty-first century. This is evident in the case of the Spanish HER research group, but also in the American National Endowment for the Humanities' support for Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Laurie Kahn's documentary *Love Between the Covers*

(2015) about the American romance community. Meanwhile, government funding through the Australia Research Council has supported Hsu-Ming Teo's research into the popular culture of romantic love in Australia, Glen Thomas's industry-based collaboration with Harlequin Mills and Boon Australia, researching romance as a creative industry (see Thomas; Thomas and James), and Lisa Fletcher, Beth Driscoll, and Kim Wilkins' exploration of the romance industry as a "genre world" that "recognises the multiple dimensionality of popular genres: as bodies of texts, collections of social formations that gather around and produce those texts, and sets of industrial practices with various national and transnational orientations."

In Australia, the scholarship of romantic fiction began as an offshoot of the second-wave feminist project to recover marginalized or forgotten Australian women writers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Alison Alexander was among the first to focus on women romance writers in her monograph *A Mortal Flame: Marie Bjelke Petersen. Australian Romance Writer* (1994). Fiona Giles soon followed with *Too Far Everywhere: The Romantic Heroine in Nineteenth-Century Australia* (1998): her exploration of the Australian tradition of romantic literary fiction. This focus on nineteenth century women writers who produced romantic fiction among their literary output continued with author studies such as Patricia Clark's *Rosa! Rosa! A Life of Rosa Praed, Novelist and Spiritualist* (1999).

However, the focus on Australian women writers' romance novels as a specific genre undoubtedly begins with Juliet Flesch's pioneering work in the 1990s identifying and recovering Australian romance novels. Flesch's *Love Brought to Book: A Bio-Bibliography of Australian Romance Novels* (1995), together with Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver's *Anthology of Colonial Australian Romance Fiction* (2010), have been invaluable references for twenty-first-century romance scholars, for they did the work of digging through the archives and locating the often ephemeral Australian primary sources on romance fiction that Pamela Regis has just started to do for the American romance novel. Because of its origins in feminist interventions in the Australian literary tradition, the specifically Australian focus of Flesch's and Gelder and Weaver's works, and government support for Australian-focused research projects, the Australian scholarship on the romance genre is strongly characterized by the contextualization of this genre within the broader Australian literary tradition, and the desire to distinguish what is particularly "Australian" about the love stories produced by this nation's authors—something Lauren O'Mahony discusses at length in Chapter 3. Nevertheless, Australian romance scholars such as Lisa Fletcher, Jodi McAlister, and Hsu-Ming Teo have also engaged in broader, transnational studies of historical fiction, sexuality and virginity, and Orientalism, imperialism and postcolonialism in romance novels, respectively.

Introducing this volume

Given the 40-year history and twenty-first-century proliferation of popular romance scholarship, the need has emerged for a systematic, comprehensive resource for scholars and graduate students researching the genre, as well as for undergraduate teaching purposes. A course on popular romance fiction whose scholarly framework comes from the 1980s would be as misleading as a course on television centered on scholarship that predates cable and digital streaming; likewise, new research on the texts, reception, distribution, publishing, and readership of popular romance cannot

constantly return to the same few foundational studies—Modleski's *Loving with a Vengeance* (1982); Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984); Regis's *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003)—as definitive descriptions of the genre. This volume presents the first overview of popular romance fiction studies as it has evolved and currently stands. It is designed to provide a history of the genre, an overview of various disciplinary approaches to studying popular romance fiction, and an analysis and critical evaluation of important subgenres and themes or topics. Each chapter also highlights new and still-needed avenues of inquiry for future research.

The first part of this volume offers an introduction to the history of popular romance fiction and some of its most enduring subgenres. Jay Dixon's "History of English Romance Novels 1621–1975" (Chapter 1 in this volume) traces the emergence of modern popular romance fiction—first for contemporary romance novels (that is, works set in the time when they were written) and then for historical romances—from a matrix of other, related genres, such as amatory fiction, the domestic novel of manners, and sensation fiction, and it documents the contested reception of romance by critics, literary historians, and novelists from other, competing traditions. In "The Evolution of the American Romance Novel" (Chapter 2 in this volume) Pamela Regis explores the conceptual and archival challenges of identifying American romance novels before the middle of the twentieth century, offers an outline of American romance from the start of the nineteenth century to just after the Second World War, and presents an overview of major critical works which either aid or, in some cases, actively *impede* the recognition and understanding of these texts. Our third chapter, "Australian Romance Fiction," overlaps chronologically with the first two, as it covers writings from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twenty-first, but unlike Dixon and Regis, contributor Lauren O'Mahony is able to draw on the substantial body of scholarship devoted to the national specificities of Australian romance —the "beetroot in the burger," in Juliet Flesch's memorable metaphor—which have distinguished it from other Anglophone romance traditions and which have enabled it, in the past and now, to serve an "outward facing ambassadorial function" (O'Mahony, 73) in presenting Australia and Australianness to readers elsewhere. (Scholarship devoted to other global Anglophone and non-Anglophone popular romance traditions, with particular attention to India, Malaysia, Japan, and Nigeria, can be found in Chapter 24 of this volume.)

Having introduced the general histories of English, American, and Australian romance, the next part turns to more focused investigations of scholarship on seven enduring subgenres of popular romance fiction and on African American romance, a category whose publishing history is defined by its authorship and characters rather than by setting or other plot conventions. Angela Toscano's chapter (Chapter 4) on Gothic romance explores what was, in the 1960s, the most popular version of the romance novel. Drawing on important early work on the Gothic popular romance by Joanna Russ, Toscano details the conventions of this subgenre, documents the history of Gothic romance criticism during its heyday and after, and makes the case that scholars of the Gothic tradition in literature can benefit from the study of this now-neglected corpus, even as popular romance scholarship can learn from the robust and theoretically-sophisticated world of scholarship on Gothic. A comparable case is made by Sarah Ficke in her chapter (Chapter 5) on historical romance fiction. As she moves chronologically from the foundational Regency and Georgian-set works of Georgette Heyer and Barbara Cartland to the more highly sexualized American historical

romances of the 1970s and 1980s to the diverse innovations found in twenty-first-century historical romance, Ficke outlines recurring and emerging themes in scholarship on this work: its treatment of sexualities and desires; its function as a form of alternative (queer, feminist, etc.) historiography; its history of othering Black, Asian, Arab, and Native characters and corresponding efforts by authors of color to resist this practice; and its confrontations with the question of whether some historical periods and contexts cannot or should not feature in the happy-ending context of the romance novel.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries four romance subgenres experienced significant growth, transforming both the romance marketplace and public perceptions of the genre. Chapter 6, on Paranormal Romance, details the emergence of paranormal romance (and its affiliate genre, urban fantasy), its critical reception, and its contributions to a change in popular romance aesthetics from the centrality of a stand-alone volume which ends with a decisive HEA for its protagonists to a series aesthetic in which what An Goris calls the "post-HEA" life of romance protagonists—sometimes contented, often vexed—appears as a secondary or even central feature of subsequent novels. As Maria Ramos-Garcia shows in this chapter, the popularity of paranormal romance in the 2000s has been linked by many critics to the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the United States and the subsequent Global War on Terror; likewise the racial and gender politics of paranormal romance have drawn substantial attention, whether focused on particular texts (the *Twilight* novels; the *Black Dagger Brotherhood* books; *Nalini Singh's Psy-Changeling* series) or on distinct paranormal creatures (werewolves, vampires, shape-shifters, etc.).

Although the popularity of the *Twilight* franchise in the early twenty-first century brought Young Adult (YA) Romance to public attention, Amanda Allen's chapter (Chapter 7) on this subgenre demonstrates that critical debates over fiction written for young readers—especially young women—have existed for many decades. Allen divides her history into three periods: work from the 1940s–60s, when it focused on the socialization of young women through what were called "junior novels" (tales of young love set mostly in American high schools); scholarship from the 1980s, which often including feminist critiques of the same socialization practices lauded some decades before; and scholarship since 2000, which addresses paranormal YA romance, queer and otherwise diverse YA romance, and non-traditional forms of YA romance publishing, including fan fiction and romance in visual media (e.g., graphic novels and manga).

The question of whether YA romances are, to put it crudely, good or bad for their readers has also marked critical debates about Christian Inspirational Romance, the topic of Chapter 8, but this has not been the only question addressed in scholarship on this subgenre. As Rebecca Barrett-Fox and Kristen Donnelly demonstrate, the unabashed sentimentality, religiosity, and cultural conservatism of Christian romance fiction has long made it the target of both aesthetic and political critique, but it has also been investigated and defended, often with considerable nuance, by scholars interested in its deployment of Biblical allusion, its perhaps-unexpectedly complicated construction of romantic masculinity, and its place in the devotional and communal lives of its readers. Although most of this scholarship has focused on white Evangelical romances in the United States, this chapter also surveys important work on non-Protestant Christian romances, Black and Hispanic Christian romances, Amish romances (a popular sub-sub-genre in the United States), and the emerging genre worlds of

Muslim and Jewish romance, both of which are also discussed in Chapter 22 ("Romance and/as religion").

Jodi McAlister's chapter on erotic romance (Chapter 9) begins by framing it in an "industrial context": that is, by looking at how the term is defined and deployed by authors, editors, and publishers, as well as in guides for aspiring authors. She documents the modern publishing history of erotic romance, which long predates its twenty-first-century global visibility, and she clarifies its relationship to fanfiction, with particular attention to the writing, distribution, and impact of E. L. James's *Fifty Shades* trilogy, the erotic romance series that has, to date, received the most sustained and widespread scholarly attention.

A similar attention to publishing history marks Chapter 10, Julie Moody-Freeman's survey of African American romance and its reception, both in academic contexts and in the often-overlooked journalism, much of it from Black publications, which documents its history. Although this history is deeply intertwined with the story of American romance publishing more generally—for example, the author and editor who founded the Romance Writers of America, Vivian Stephens, was a Black woman—it cannot be reduced to a subset of that story, not least because of the long, ongoing, racially-specific struggle to have Black love and marriage recognized, let alone considered "romantic," by white Americans. The scholarship Moody-Freeman surveys thus begins with work on love stories and marriage plots in the first decades of Black fiction after Emancipation—work whose negotiations with the politics of middle-class respectability sets the stage for comparable concerns in twentieth and twenty-first-century Black romance novels—and continues through modern intersectional analyses of race, gender, class, and disability not only in Black romance novels. This chapter also addresses work that has been done to document racism and anti-racist resistance in American romance institutions, in particular the RWA and its RITA awards program.

Few romance subgenres have drawn as much sustained critical attention—including attention to race—as the "desert" romance: books which, as Amira Jarmakani explains, "feature a sheik, sultan, or desert prince as their hero" and which deploy a desert setting as the framework for narratives featuring "gender fluidity, racial anxiety, and the realities of war and terrorism" filtered through "masculine/feminine, black/white, and fantasy/reality dichotomies" (252). Scholarship on this subgenre begins with work on E. M. Hull's epochal bestseller *The Sheik* (1919) and continues with studies of the contemporary desert romance, which surged in popularity in the United States after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Analyses of the racial status of the desert romance hero feature prominently in this critical corpus—at times, like Hull's Sheikh Ahmed ben Hassan, he is a racially ambiguous figure; at times he is unambiguously Arab—along with studies of how these texts represent gender and sexuality and of the relationship between all of these topics to the artistic and narrative traditions of orientalism. Like McAlister's account of erotic romance, Jarmakani's chapter (Chapter 11) attends to the place of desert romances in the romance industry, and it discusses scholarship on the explanations that desert romance authors give for their attraction to this subgenre and for why, in their view, readers continue to purchase and enjoy them.

The methodologies that critics (academic and popular) of romance novels have used span the humanities and the social sciences. In the second part of this volume, some authors have provided a model of how new scholars could engage with the genre (such as through historicizing mass media criticism in Jayashree Kamblé's chapter

(Chapter 12), literary approaches in Eric Murphy Selinger's chapter, and author studies in Kecia Ali's) while others have surveyed existing methodological practices, outlined their strengths and suggested new lines of inquiry within them. Kamblé's chapter performs a metacriticism of the popular pillorying of romance through a survey of articles on the genre in popular print and other media. It documents how these fluff pieces create an image of the genre as lacking substance, focused on thoughtless sex, and written and read by silly women. She terms this journalism phenomenon a genre in itself, one that endlessly produces the "media romance." Selinger's chapter (Chapter 13) reviews critiques of romance fiction that find it lacking in artistry and identifies the instances within the field that do the opposite, often by challenging the notion that working within genre conventions necessarily limits (or dumbs-down) a novel. He includes cases of the application of techniques from the literature classroom that identify and critique formal elements of a romance novel or an individual romance author's corpus. The chapter thus models how romance novels may be analyzed using the same tools as used in the analysis of canonical works, and it highlights scholarship on the playful, critically self-aware metafictional gestures often found in the novels themselves.

Kecia Ali's chapter (Chapter 14) defines author studies, including both traditional studies of a literary oeuvre by a named individual and studies of the "author function" which emphasize collective elements of production and reception. It explores gendered reasons for the relative scarcity of author studies for popular romance and surveys the extant literature (monographs, journal special issues, as well as dissertations), using Nora Roberts as the primary example. It concludes with a discussion of promising avenues for future research which, by taking account of popular romance writing, could help reimagine the field of author studies.

Sociologists Joanna Gregson and Jen Lois review the existing social scientific research on romance novels, readers, and authors from the last four decades (Chapter 15). They tap into the significant contributions made by social scientists and social science methodology to romance criticism while noting lacunae and calling attention to the need for research that is more attentive to the specificities of the genre. They observe that while content analyses of romance novels reveal conformity to traditional gender roles and sexual scripts, studies of romance readers show that these books serve important functions in women's lives, that they are read critically, and that their take-away messages are both positive and progressive. The chapter also notes that research with authors reveals how and why they became romance authors, how they experience the stigma of writing in a disparaged genre, and how they forge community with other authors.

Chapter 16, John Markert's survey of international romance publishing history (twentieth and twenty-first century), provides a bird's eye view of the production forces that power the genre's development. Markert calls attention to the role of upper management as "gatekeepers" in the field and the rise and fall of different romance "lines" while he recounts previous studies of the industry-side of the genre. He shows how different publishing houses launched or altered their romance offerings in response to each other's successes, focusing mainly on print but with a brief look at the digital/e-book landscape. It is a concrete narrative that is a needed corrective to the often-abstract understanding of romance as a mass commodity.

Apart from readers, authors, and publishers, another key component of the romance matrix is libraries and librarians. In Chapter 17, Kristin Ramsdell discusses the

scholarship on the role played by libraries in disseminating the genre, with the three main foci being public libraries, university libraries, and K-12 libraries, mainly in the United States and Australia. She touches on the varied methodologies and objects of analysis (including readership) in these studies and summarizes their findings on the structural and ideological factors that affect romance collections development, particularly in academic libraries, as well as the potential impact of these factors on the study and long-term preservation of romance novels. The chapter also mentions some studies that reference libraries with relation to Gothic and romance-adjacent works in previous centuries. It ends with a list of several lines of inquiry that remain to be pursued and would broaden this sub-field of romance research.,

The final part of this volume focuses on thematic issues that characterize romance novels or frequently arise in discussions of the genre: class, wealth, materialism, gender, sexuality, romantic love, romance as it overlaps with and articulates a new form of religion, and race and ethnicity. The overwhelming majority of romance novels and the scholarship on it originates from the Anglophone world. However, variations of the genre are emerging in non-Anglophone and non-western markets, and this book concludes with a consideration of this emerging market.

The thematic part opens with Amy Burge's consideration of the scholarship on class, wealth, and materialism in romance novels—a body of work that spans over 30 years, largely emerging from Britain and America (Chapter 18). Burge begins by considering what "class" means in relation to the romance novel, whether it is defined in terms of a materialist relation to property, or a culturalist performance of class identity. After providing a brief overview of portrayals of wealth, class, and social mobility in romance novels since the nineteenth century, in both contemporary and historical modes of the genre, Burge turns her attention to the frameworks scholars employ to analyze class, arguing persuasively that all investigations into class and romance novels are necessarily intersectional, for it is impossible to consider class without simultaneously considering gender and race—specifically, whiteness and white privilege. The chapter ends with a critical discussion of whether feminist scholars' characterization of the genre as middle-class propaganda that generates stultifying and crippling escapist fantasies for working-class women can be sustained.

Chapters 19 and 20 then examine representations of sex, gender, and sexuality in contemporary romance novels. Focusing primarily on heterosexuality in the genre, Hannah McCann and Catherine M. Roach argue that popular romance novels center on fulfilling women's sexual desires and pleasures in sex-positive ways, creating a fantasy space in which to explore the conundrum of women's sexuality and sexual experiences in a male-dominated world (Chapter 19). Romance novels, they suggest, offer women a "reparative reading" of sexuality that allows them to reformulate sexual and gender ideas, consider the principles and limits of sexual consent, and to celebrate sexual and sensuous pleasures, yet the genre is only beginning to embrace representations of more diverse, non-binary, non-heterosexual identities, and more scholarly analysis of these LGBTQIA novels is needed. This call is answered by Jonathan A. Allan in his incisive investigation of the complex social construction and performance of gender and sexuality in romance novels (Chapter 20). Allan begins with a discussion of how foundational works of popular romance scholarship by Snitow, Modleski, and Radway theorized and critiqued gender and sexuality in ways that essentialized gender. He argues that Snitow's "Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different" marked out the terms in which gender and sexuality in

romance novels is discussed by establishing the language of critique, creating a binary between romance and pornography that dominated subsequent discussions and defenses of gender and sexuality in romance. However, the twenty-first century has seen a move toward more diversified methods of analyzing romance novels, influenced by queer approaches, as well as more scholarly interest in gender and sexuality in LGBTQIA novels. His chapter ends with the observation that scholars are only beginning to study constructions of men and masculinities, not only in the genre but also in the romance industry, and that much more work is needed in this emerging field.

The third wave of romance scholarship in the twenty-first century has seen innovations, not only with regard to gender and sexuality, but also in relation to the representation and meaning of love and romance itself—themes that are explored in Chapters 21 and 22. Melding romance scholarship to the historical, sociological and literary scholarship about romantic love in Europe and America, Hsu-Ming Teo's chapter (Chapter 21) begins with a description of how ideas about romantic love developed and changed from the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries, and how these ideas have influenced the portrayal of love in romance novels—particularly who is worthy of being loved and, consequently, who can enjoy the role of romantic protagonist. Teo argues that by the mid-twentieth century, the markers of love had become secularized and sexualized, but that love in late twentieth- and twenty-first-century romance novels began to emphasize the importance of developing and maintaining intimacy—a problematic concept in itself, as the work of David Shumway shows. The chapter then reviews the extant scholarship on the romance novel, charting changing approaches from the early feminist writings arguing that love was precisely the problem for romantic heroines, for it disempowered them individually, economically, and politically, and made them submissive to or accepting of the patriarchal order of society. However, more recent third-wave scholarship on love moves away from the "empowerment versus oppression" (Goade) binary to ask instead how love functions in individual novels, and how these representations of love develop over time and across different cultures.

Eric Murphy Selinger and Laura Vivanco's chapter (Chapter 22) then extends the exploration of love and romance to consider how these representations of these entities overlap with religion and are themselves invested with the structure, purpose, and practice of religion. Chapter 22 begins with a consideration of how religion—especially Protestant Christianity—can be read as a discourse of romance: a redemptive and ennobling relational experience that ends in a happily ever after. Rather than a secularization of the romance novel occurring throughout the twentieth century, Selinger and Vivanco argue that the romance itself took on religious qualities, representing romantic love as unconditional, omnipotent, and eternal, and therefore redemptive or salvific. It is an act of faith. Love as religion is something that romantic characters must learn to "believe in," so that lasting happiness may be achieved. The chapter ends with a call for the connections between romance novels and other forms of religion—such as Islam or Buddhism—to be explored, especially in light of the diversification of the genre with regard to gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and cultural diversity in the twenty-first century.

Where Chapters 19 and 20 examine diversity in gender and sexuality, the last two chapters of this volume explore the diversification of the romance genre in relation to the latter themes. Erin S. Young's chapter on "Race, ethnicity, and whiteness" (Chapter 23) begins with a review of the romance scholarship analyzing and critiquing

representations of race, blackness, and whiteness in romance fiction. Young observes that extant studies emphasize the role of romance in shoring up white privilege and supremacy, before navigating her way through the fraught problem of how non-white characters and cultures have often been caricatured and (mis)represented in the genre. Romance, she notes, has a race problem. However, this is not only a problem of misrepresentation, but a problem of racial politics as well, evident in the debates over Black authors who feature the "taboo" of Black/White interracial romance. Young's chapter ends with a summary of current concerns among academics working in this field, as well as an optimistic hope that representations of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in romance novels are improving because readers are demanding change, as shown in the conversations taking place among the romance community in online venues.

This volume by necessity focuses overwhelmingly on Anglophone romance novels coming out of Britain, the United States, and Australia, simply because these are the countries that have developed the genre and the scholarship. It is with great pleasure, therefore, that we can end with a snapshot of what is happening to the genre globally in the twenty-first century. Kathrina Mohd Daud concludes this volume with a chapter (Chapter 24) considering how romance novels—especially category romances—translate into non-western cultures, focusing specifically on India, Japan, Nigeria, and Malaysia. Daud describes local romance publishing initiatives responding to the success of Harlequin in these markets, with the emergence of local romance lines such as the francophone *Adoras* series (known as the "African Harlequin") in Cote d'Ivoire in 1998, the romance genre called *Littattafan Soyayya* (books of love) in Nigeria, the *Sanrio New Romance* series of Japanese-authored romances, and a more variegated Malay-language romance market in Malaysia. However, Daud notes that local initiatives to imitate the success of Harlequin have not always been successful, as evidenced in the failure of Rupa & Co.'s line of local romances in India because part of the appeal of Harlequin romances was the foreignness of the romantic protagonists. Clearly, much more work needs to be done on non-western traditions of romance but, as Daud argues, a foreign form of fiction that was introduced through the global dominance of Harlequin does not remain a homogenized product when it becomes indigenized. Rather, local variations of the popular romance draw on the authors' own culture and traditions to produce new forms of the genre that can reflect resistance to cultural colonization.

Scholarship on romance novels has been around for more than half a century now. Yet in many ways we are still just beginning to develop new approaches to understand and analyze this complex, heterogeneous and endlessly diversifying genre. It is our hope that this volume, Janus-faced, casts a backward look to what has been written, as well as a forward look to the work still to come.

Notes

1 For these and other relevant details about the history of Science Fiction studies see Latham, 1–6.

2 Two essays on Gothic romance predate Snitow's influential study of (non-Gothic) Harlequin romance novels: Joanna Russ's "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me And I Think It's My Husband", and "Beautiful and Damned: The Sexual Woman in Gothic Fiction" by Kay Mussell. Although Angela Toscano's chapter for this volume says that Russ "engages with romance as

literature, naming titles and describing plots" (108), neither she nor Mussell makes any stronger claim on the texts' behalf than we find in Anderson or Snitow.

3 Exceptions to this general rule are discussed in Chapter 13, "Literary approaches."

Works cited

"About Harlequin." *Harlequin* website, https://corporate.harlequin.com/. Accessed 1 August 2018.

"About the Romance Genre." *Romance Writers of America* website, www.rwa.org/Online/Resources/About_Romance_Fiction/Online/Romance_Genre/About_Romance_Genre.aspx?hkey=dc7b967d-d1eb-4101-bb3f-a6cc936b5219. Accessed 26 September 2019.

"Academic Research Grant." *Romance Writers of America* website, www.rwa.org/Online/Awards/Other_RWA_Awards/Academic_Research_Grant/Online/Awards/Academic_Grant.aspx?hkey=be7fd849-eec0-4e48-90c5-21cdb3c20ed9. Accessed 3 January 2020.

Alexander, Alison. *A Mortal Flame: Marie Bjelke Petersen. Australian Romance Writer*. Blubber Head Press, 1994.

Anderson, Rachel. *The Purple Heart Throbs: The Subliterature of Love*. Hodder and Stoughton, 1974.

Bell, Kathleen. "Cross-dressing in Wartime: Georgette Heyer's *The Corinthian* in its 1940 Context." *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two Britain*, edited by Pat Kirkham and David Thoms. Lawrence and Wishart, 1995, pp. 151–160. Reprinted in *Georgette Heyer: A Critical Retrospective*, edited by Mary Fahnestock-Thomas, Prinny World Press, 2001, pp. 461–472.

Bowman, Barbara., "Victoria Holt's Gothic Romances: A Structuralist Inquiry." *The Female Gothic*, edited by Julian E. Fleenor. Eden Press, 1983, pp. 69–81.

Burge, Amy. *Representing Difference in the Medieval and Modern Orientalist Romance*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Burley, Stephanie. "Shadows and Silhouettes: The Racial Politics of Category Romance." *Paradoxa: Studies in World Literary Genres*, vol. 5, no. 13–14, 2000, pp. 324–343.

———. "What's a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Book Like This? Homoerotic Reading and Popular Romance." *Doubled Plots: Romance and History*, edited by Susan Strehle and Mary Paniccia Carden. University Press of Mississippi, 2003, pp. 127–146.

Byatt, A.S. "An Honourable Escape: Georgette Heyer." *Passions of the Mind: Selected Writings*. Vintage International, 1993, pp. 233–240.

Caton, Steven C., "*The Sheik*: Instabilities of Race and Gender in Transatlantic Popular Culture of the Early 1920s." *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870–1930*, edited by Holly Edwards. Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 99–117.

Cawelti, John G. *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. University of Chicago Press, 1976.

———. "Masculine Myths and Feminist Revisions: Some Thoughts on the Future of Popular Genres." *Eye on the Future: Popular Culture Scholarship into the Twenty-First Century in Honor of Ray B. Browne*, edited by. Marilyn F. Motz et al. Bowling Green State University Press, 1994, pp. 121–132.

Cheyne, Ria. *Disability, Literature, Genre: Representation and Affect in Contemporary Fiction*. Liverpool University Press, 2019.

Clarke, Patricia. *Rosa! Rosa! A life of Rosa Praed, Novelist and Spiritualist*. Melbourne University Press, 1999.

Cohn, Jan. *Romance and the Erotics of Property*. Duke University Press, 1988.

Crawford, Joseph. *The Twilight of the Gothic? VampireFiction and the Rise of the Paranormal Romance*. University of Wales Press, 2014.

Dandridge, Rita. *Black Women's Activism: Reading African American Women's Historical Romances*. Peter Lang, 2004.

Deller, Ruth A. and Clarissa Smith. "Reading the BDSM romance: Reader responses to Fifty Shades." *Sexualities*, vol. 16, no. 8, 2013, pp. 932–950.

Dixon, jay. *The Romance Fiction of Mills & Boon, 1909–1990s*. University College London Press, 1999.

Driscoll, Catherine., "One True Pairing: The Romance of Pornography and the Pornography of Romance." *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse. McFarland, 2006, pp. 79–96.

Evans, Arthur. "Histories." *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction*, edited by Rob Latham and Oxford University Press. 2014, 47–58.

Flesch, Juliet. *Love Brought to Book: A Bio-bibliography of 20th-century Australian Romance Novels*. National Centre for Australian Studies, 1995.

———. *From Australia with Love: A History of Modern Australian Popular Romance Novels*. Curtin University Press, 2004.

Fletcher, Lisa. "Historical Romance, Gender and Heterosexuality: John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and A.S. Byatt's *Possession*." *Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1–2, 2003, pp. 26–42.

———. "'Mere Costumery'? Georgette Heyer's Cross-Dressing Novels." *Masquerades: Disguise in English Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present*, edited by Pilar Sánchez Calle and Casellas. Jesús López-Paláez. Gdansk: University of Gdansk Press, 2004, pp. 196–212.

———. *Historical Romance Fiction: Heterosexuality and Performativity*. Aldershot, U.K. Ashgate, 2008.

Foster, Guy Mark, "How Dare a Black Woman Make Love to a White Man! Black Women Romance Novelists and the Taboo of Interracial Desire." *Empowerment versus Oppression: Twenty First Century Views of Popular Romance Novels*, edited by Sally Goade. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007, pp. 103–128.

Fowler, Bridget. *The Alienated Reader: Women and Popular Romantic Literature in the Twentieth Century*. Prentice-Hall, 1991.

Frantz, Sarah S. G. and Eric Murphy Selinger editors. *New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction: Critical Essays*. McFarland, 2012.

Gardner, Carol Brooks. "Passing By: Street Remarks, Address Rights, and the Urban Female." *Sociological Inquiry*, vol. 50, no. 3–4, 1980, pp. 328–356.

Gelder, Ken and Rachael Weaver. *The Anthology of Colonial Australian Romance Fiction*. Melbourne University Publishing, 2010.

Giles, Fiona. *Too Far Everywhere: The Romantic Heroine in Nineteenth-Century Australia*. University of Queensland Press, 1998.

Gleason, William A. and Eric Murphy Selinger editors. *Romance Fiction and American Culture: Love as the Practice of Freedom?* Ashgate, 2016.

Goris, An. "Matricide in Romance Scholarship? Response to Pamela Regis' Keynote Address at the Second Annual Conference of the International Association for the Study of Popular Romance." *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2011, http://jprstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/JPRS2.1_Goris_MatricideRomScholarship.pdf.

———. "Happily Ever After... And After: Serialization and the Popular Romance Novel." *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture (1900–present)*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2013. http://www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/spring_2013/goris.htm

Haycraft, Howard. *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story*. D. Appleton-Century, 1941.

Hinnant, Charles H., "Desire and the Marketplace: A Reading of Kathleen Woodiwiss's The Flame and the Flower." *Doubled Plots: Romance and History*, edited by Susan Strehle and Mary Paniccia Carden. University Press of Mississippi, 2003, pp. 147–164.

Jackson, Stevi. "Even Sociologists Fall in Love: An Exploration in the Sociology of Emotions." *Sociology*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1993, pp. 201–220.

Krentz, Jayne Ann editors. *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance*. HarperPaperbacks, 1996.

Latham, Rob., "Introduction." *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction*, edited by Rob Latham. Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 1–18.

Love Between the Covers. Directed by Laurie Kahn. Blueberry Hill Productions, 2015.

Mann, Peter H. *The Romantic Novel: A Survey of Reading Habits*. Mills & Boon, 1969.

———. "The Romantic Novel and Its Readers." *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1981, pp. 9–18.

———. "Romantic Fiction and Its Readership." *Poetics*, vol. 14, no. 1–2, 1985, pp. 95–105.

McAleer, Joseph. *Passion's Fortune: The Story of Mills & Boon*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

McAlister, Jodi. "'That Complete Fusion of Spirit as Well as Body': Heroines, Heroes, Desire and Compulsory Demisexuality in the Harlequin Mills & Boon Romance Novel." *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2014, pp. 299–310.

———. "'You and I are Humans, and there is Something Complicated between Us': *Untamed* and Queering the Heterosexual Historical Romance." *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2016, http://jprstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/YAIAH.07.2016.pdf.

Modleski, Tania. *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women*. Archon, 1982.

———. "My Life as a Romance Reader." *Paradoxa: Studies in World Literary Genres*, vol. 3, no. 1–2, 1997, pp. 15–28.Reprinted in *Old Wives' Tales and Other Women's Stories*. New York University Press, 1998, pp. 47–65.

Most, Glenn W. and William W. Stowe editors. *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.

Mussell, Kay J. "Beautiful and Damned: The Sexual Woman in Gothic Fiction." *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1975, pp. 84–89.

———. *Fantasy and Reconciliation: Contemporary Formulas of Women's Romance Fiction*. Praeger, 1984.

Osborne, Laurie E. "Romancing the Bard." *Shakespeare and Appropriation*, edited by Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer. Routledge, 1999, pp. 47–64.

———. "Sweet, Savage Shakespeare." *Shakespeare without Class: Misappropriations of Cultural Capital*, edited by Donald Hedrick and Bryan Reynolds. Palgrave, 2000, pp. 135–151.

———. "Harlequin Presents: That '70s Shakespeare and Beyond." *Shakespeare after Mass Media*, edited by Richard Burt. Palgrave, 2002, pp. 127–149.

Paizis, George.*Love and the Novel: The Poetics and Politics of Romantic Fiction*. Basingstoke, Hampshire. Macmillan, 1998.

Parameswaran, Radhika. "Western Romance Fiction as English Language Media in Postcolonial India." *Journal of Communication*, vol. 49, no. 3, 1999, pp. 84–105.

———. "Reading Fictions of Romance: Gender, Sexuality, and Nationalism in Postcolonial India." *Journal of Communication*, vol. 52, no. 4, 2002, pp. 832–851.

Pearce, Lynne. *Romance Writing*. Polity, 2007.

Pearce, Lynne and Jackie Stacey editors. *Romance revisited*. NYU Press, 1995.

Puri, Jyoti. "Reading Romance Novels in Postcolonial India." *Gender and Society*, vol. 11, no. 4, 1997, pp. 434–452.

Radway, Janice. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

———. "Romance and the Work of Fantasy: Struggles over Feminine Sexuality and Subjectivity at Century's End." *Viewing, Reading, Listening: Audiences and Cultural Reception*, edited by Jon Cruz and Justin Lewis. Westview Press, 1994, 213–231.

Ramos-Garcia, Maria and Laura Vivanco editors. *Love, Language, Place, and Identity in Popular Culture: Romancing the Other*. Rowman, 2020.

Reardon, B.P. *The Form of the Greek Romance*. Princeton University Press, 1991.

Regis, Pamela. *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.

———. "What Do Critics Owe the Romance? Keynote Address at the Second Annual Conference of the International Association for the Study of Popular Romance." *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2011, http://jprstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/JPRS2.1_Regis_Keynote.pdf.

Roberts, Thomas J. *An Aesthetics of Junk Fiction*. University of Georgia Press, 1990.

Romantic Novelists Association. "About Romantic Fiction." *Romantic Novelists Association Website*. https://romanticnovelistsassociation.org/about-romantic-fiction/. Accessed 18 September 2019.

Russ, Joanna. "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband: The Modern Gothic." *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1973, pp. 666–691.

Shumway, David R. *Modern Love: Romance, Intimacy, and the Marriage Crisis*. New York University Press, 2003.

Snitow, Ann Barr. "Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different." *Radical History Review*, no. 20, 1979, pp. 141–161.

Teo, Hsu-Ming. *Desert Passions: Orientalism and Romance Novels*. University of Texas Press, 2012.

———. "Imperial Affairs: Colonialism, Race and the Early Twentieth-Century Romance Novel." *New Directions in Popular Fiction: Genre, Distribution, Reproduction*, edited by Ken Gelder. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 87–110.

Thomas, Glen J., "Romance: The Perfect Creative Industry? A Case Study of Harlequin-Mills and Boon Australia." *Empowerment versus Oppression: Twenty-First Century Views of Popular Romance Novels*, edited by Sally Goade. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007, pp. 20–29.

Thomas, Glen J. and Bridie James, "The Romance Industry: A Study of Reading and Writing Romance." *The reinvention of everyday life: Culture in the twenty-first century*, edited by Howard McNaughton and Adam Lam. Canterbury University Press, 2006, pp. 164–174.

Thurston, Carol. *The Romance Revolution: Erotic Novels for Women and the Quest for a New Sexual Identity*. University of Illinois Press, 1987.

Vivanco, Laura. *For Love and Money: The Literary Art of the Harlequin Mills & Boon Romance*. Humanities E-books, 2011.

Wardrop, Stephanie. "Last of the Red Hot Mohicans: Miscegenation in the Popular American Romance." *Melus*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1997, pp. 61–74.

"Welcome to HER." *History, Exoticism, Romance website*. http://her.uib.es/. Accessed 20 September 2019.

Westman, Karin E., "A Story of Her Weaving: The Self-Authoring Heroines of Georgette Heyer's Regency Romance." *Doubled Plots: Romance and History. Doubled Plots: Romance and History*, edited by Susan Strehle and Mary Paniccia Carden. University Press of Mississippi, 2003, pp. 165–184.

Wilkins, Kim, Beth Driscoll and Lisa Fletcher. "What is Australian Popular Fiction?" *Australian Literary Studies*, special issue on *Genre Worlds: Popular Fiction in the Twenty-First Century*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2018, www-australianliterarystudies-com-au.simsrad.net.ocs.mq.edu.au/articles/what-is-australian-popular-fiction. Accessed 20 September 2019.


Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

Part I

National traditions


Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

1 History of English romance novels, 1621–1975

jay Dixon

Romance is one of the oldest and most enduring literary modes (Radford 8). As Hall says, "The history of the romance novel might begin as early as the first century CE, with Chariton of Aphrodisias's prose romance, *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, the earliest surviving ancient Greek novel." That said, the romance novel is notoriously difficult to define (Saunders 1–2; see also Fuchs) because "romance" means different things to different readers in different periods. In the early years of fiction writing "romance" was used interchangeably with "novel." However, Clara Reeve, herself the author of romances, and the first Englishwoman to write a history of romances, argues in *The Progress of Romance* (1785) that there is a distinction between the "novel," which depicts everyday life, and "romance," which is a more elevated form concerned with high emotion, and past times. A century later, "romance" became linked with male adventure novels. As Judith Wilt says romance can be a story foregrounding inventiveness, fabulation, and "the marvelous"; or a story about the quest for the ideal or heroic; or a story of lovers (vi; see also Beer; Radford).[1]

In the mid-nineteenth century, after Charlotte M. Yonge's bestselling novel *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853) inspired other writers such as Rhoda Broughton and Mary Elizabeth Braddon to write novels about English heroes and heroines who fall in love and experience internal and external opposition to the consummation of their love, romances were just as likely to end in a tragic parting of the lovers through death as in their marriage. A happy ending was not always assured, nor did readers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century require one.

However, between the ending of the First World War and the start of the Second, the meanings of "romance" and "romantic" as "terms of literary description became more narrowly specialised and signified only those love stories which ... end happily in marriage" (Light 160).

In this chapter, I use the term "romance(s)" as a general term for any novel whose foremost concern is a love relationship between the main protagonists: fiction in which the relationship between hero and heroine is paramount, and other types of plot—crime, science fiction—are subordinate to the main relationship. Those stories with a happy ending I refer to as "romance novel" and I use the term "romance fiction" for those that, in today's terms, do not. I concentrate on that fiction written mainly by women, for women, and from the woman's point of view.

This chapter is about both contemporary and historical English (not British) romances. That is, it talks about only those romances set in England, and it ignores those set in the other countries of the United Kingdom and, with one or two exceptions, those

written by non-English authors, as Ireland, Scotland, and Wales have a different history and thus, in many respects, a different set of concerns and attitudes. The introduction is followed by a history of contemporary romances (that is, those romances written during the period they are set in) from the beginnings in the seventeenth century to 1975. This also includes positive criticisms of romances. Next comes a history of negative criticism of romance fiction during roughly the same period. The subsequent section is a history of the English historical novel (that is, those romances written at least 50 years after the period they are set in), again followed by a history of criticism. Each section has sub-sections describing the sub-genres prevalent in a certain period.

Contemporary romance before the nineteenth century: the beginnings

When Lady Mary Wroth published a prose romance, *The Countess of Montgomerie's Urania*, in 1621 she was criticized, not so much for writing it, but because she published it. This was in an era when women were meant to be "seen but not heard," and by publishing her novel Wroth brought public attention to herself, and was excoriated for it (Hannay).

Urania is generally acknowledged as the first romance novel in English (Hannay; Lamb; Miller and Waller). It is a radical work, in that it argues against patriarchal rules for women and marriage, by depicting love and marriage from the woman's point of view.

Wroth wrote *Urania* to try and get herself out of debt. She was influenced by her aunt, Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, who was one of the first women to publish her own literary works. The niece of Sir Philip Sidney, Wroth used his *Arcadia* as one of the sources for her own novel. It tells the story of Queen Pamphilia and Emperor Amphilanthus, who are cousins, intertwined with hundreds of sub-plots concerning their siblings and others. None end happily, including the love story of the main characters, as Amphilanthus is constantly unfaithful.

Wroth had to withdraw her book due to the scandal it caused, as it was widely thought to reference her own life, in particular her love for, and her adulterous affair with, her cousin William Herbert, Pembroke's son. Although this first English romance contains few of the tropes to be found in later romances, it has two major similarities to later romance novels: its author was following in the footsteps of another woman's publications, and it is the first literary endeavor to tell its story from a woman's point of view.

Unlike Wroth, an aristocrat, Aphra Behn (1640?–89) was born in obscurity but became the first Englishwoman to earn her living by her pen, becoming a literary model for later female writers (Todd 2017).[2] She wrote poetry, plays, and novels, the best-known of which is *Oroonoko* (1688). Written from the point of view of an unnamed female narrator, it is the story of a captured slave (Oroonoko), whom the narrator claims to have met, and his love for fellow captive Imoinda. Both Oroonoko and Imoinda are dead by the end of the novel. This is hardly the "happy ever after" (HEA) ending we expect from romances these days. But many English romances up to the later nineteenth century were to end with the death of the hero for, as Anderson says, a tragic ending which parted the lovers could be satisfying for readers because "traditionally, the truest, purest romantic love is a fatal love" (26).

Behn's earlier epistolary novel, *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*, originally published in three separate volumes between 1684 and 1687, is of more interest for the history of romances. This is because it has many of the tropes that later romances used, although at this time the romance genre did not adhere necessarily to the conventions that we, in the twenty-first century, expect from a romance. Famously, Janice Radway in her *Reading the Romance* (1984) set out 13 points of narrative structure necessary for an "ideal romance" (134). It starts with (point 1) the destruction of the heroine's social identity, and (point 2) the heroine reacting antagonistically to an aristocratic male, who (point 3) responds ambiguously to the heroine. In point 4 "the heroine interprets the hero's behavior as evidence of a purely sexual interest in her" (i.e., he does not love her), to which she responds (point 5) with coldness and anger. The hero reacts to this by punishing her (point 6). In point 7 the protagonists are separated, either physically or emotionally. Then the hero treats the heroine tenderly (point 8), and she responds warmly (point 9), leading her to "reinterpret the hero's ambiguous behavior as the product of previous hurt" (point 10), so when he "openly declares his love for [and] unwavering commitment to" her (point 11), she can respond "sexually and emotionally" (point 12). In point 13 the heroine's identity is restored.[3]

Although she was analyzing twentieth-century mass-market historical romances, this 13-part summary of an ideal romance applies to many English romances, and certain aspects of it can be seen in the first two parts of Behn's romance. The first part is the story of the seduction of Silvia by her brother-in-law Philander. As this was considered to be incest at this time, Behn here is being courageous on two fronts—not condemning the lovers for their illegal affair, and not blaming her immoral hero for seducing the heroine. Instead she celebrates the passion of the lovers and the courage of Silvia in standing up to her father, to convention and to society.[4]

In the second part Silvia disguises herself as a young man and she, her husband, and her lover flee to Holland. Silvia develops a fever, her true sex is discovered, and Philander is forced to leave her to avoid being arrested. Unknown to Silvia, Philander and his two male friends agree that Silvia will join him once she has recovered. But the friends play him false, and Silvia thinks Philander no longer loves her. She attempts suicide. Having been saved from death, Silvia decides to exact revenge on Philander by marrying his best friend, Octavio, despite the fact that she is already married. This part ends with her setting off to her wedding with Octavio. The third part becomes very complicated, and rather loses sight of the love relationships. But, as is evident from the above outline, the second part contains many of the features that Radway outlines: the destruction of the heroine's identity (both through an adulterous and illegal seduction and by her male attire) at the start; then the separation of the lovers and Silvia deciding Philander no longer loves her (points 4 and 7); her attempted suicide (another form of separation); followed by her resolution to take revenge on Philander (point 5). The ending of marriage restores her social identity (point 13). However, this marriage is not to the hero, who has proved unworthy of the heroine as he is not faithful to her (hence his name), which is contrary to our twenty-first-century expectations.

These days it is unusual for the hero and heroine not to come together at the end of a romance, but in earlier periods the convention had not been established. Pamela Regis, however, in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003) upholds the

convention, arguing that there are eight narrative elements of a romance all of which must be present but which can appear in any order:

(i) the initial state of society in which the hero and heroine must court
(ii) the meeting
(iii) the barrier to their love
(iv) an account of the protagonists' attraction
(v) the recognition that fells the barrier
(vi) a point of ritual death
(vii) the declaration of love
(viii) and the betrothal

(30)

Again, most of these can be seen in *Love Letters*. Behn's novel also contains some plot points which are common to romances of the twentieth century, in particular the heroine dressing as a male (or being taken for a boy), and a marriage of convenience.[5]

Behn herself was attacked for lewdness in her writings, and in her plays *The Dutch Lover* (1673) and *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678), and she protested against the double standards for male and female playwrights and defended her right to write as freely as any man. Even so, until the twentieth century her reputation was one of scandal and her writings seen as indecent. But Virginia Woolf, in *A Room of One's Own*, pointed out that she paved the way for other female writers, who could claim that they also would be able to earn a living by their pen (see also Roach).

It was not until the late eighteenth century that the English novel, and the literary romance, really started, when the size of the reading public started to grow and, due to increased literacy, moved down the classes and across the gender divide, and romances emerged as a genre of popular fiction for women readers.

It used to be generally acknowledged that Samuel Richardson was the first English author to write a romance: *Pamela, Or Virtue Rewarded*, published in 1740. Richardson does seem to have set the structural style for later romances, by concentrating on the courtship plot. However, it is now agreed that, although he was the first bestseller (Regis 63), he was standing on the shoulders of many previous women authors. Indeed, the eighteenth century saw an influx of women readers and writers, which caused some men to use female pseudonyms in order to get published (MacCarthy 289). As Dale Spender argues,

> women did not imitate men; it was quite the reverse; many women seized upon women's novels as an entry to a new dimension of understanding ... for so many women these novels meant access to the world of ideas, to self-analysis and social issues.
>
> (5)

Two of the authors were Elizabeth Rowe and Susannah Dobson. Elizabeth Rowe (1674–1737) was a poet, essayist, and novelist. She published two epistolary novels—*Friendship in Death, in Twenty Letters from the Dead to the Living* (in 1728) and *Letters Moral and Entertaining* (in three parts between 1729 and 1732) (Backscheider). Not romances, these novels provided Richardson with the epistolary idea he uses in *Pamela* (1740). Susannah Dobson, who died in 1795, published translations of French works, including Sainte-Palaye's *Memoirs of Ancient Chivalry* (1784) for which she wrote

a preface that defends romance writers and stresses medieval chivalry toward women. Her translations made significant contributions to the revival and rehabilitation of romance (Berg; Blain, Clements, and Grundy).

Eliza Haywood (1693–1756) wrote amatory fiction: an "explicitly amorous, politically engaged, and fantasy-oriented" genre of British fiction popular during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries which is generally acknowledged as the precursor of today's romance fiction (Ballaster 10; see also Baldus; Benedict; Bowers; Hultquist; Lutz; Vivanco). These romances were popular from roughly 1660 to 1730 and are narrated from the woman's point of view. Heywood published over 70 works during her lifetime, including fiction, drama, translations, poetry, conduct literature, and periodicals. Her first novel, *Love in Excess; Or, the Fatal Enquiry*, published 1719–20, is in three parts, and set in France and Italy. It is the story of Count D'Elmont, a rake, who is eventually reformed through loving a woman. Many of Haywood's subsequent novels end either with the death of the heroine, or her incarceration in a nunnery. But in the working out of the plot, Haywood depicts heroines who act on their own desire for a man, and she shows in the endings how women are silenced by society. Her later novels, for instance *Betsy Thoughtless*, where the heroine learns that women can find happiness in marriage, moved toward what became the popular domestic novel of the nineteenth century.

Amatory fiction, however, had brought to prominence the romance novel's themes of the conflict for women between public behavior and individual yearning, and the role they are forced to take on by society, irrespective of their own needs and desire. This is particularly evident in Frances Burney's novel, *Evelina* (1778), where a sensitive, young, middle-class heroine, with a sharp eye for the mores of society, eventually, through various courtship trials, is able to marry the man she loves, having rejected the man who romantically harasses her. This "other man" conforms to the conventional romantic suitor, but Evelina sees that the "passionate, romantic man is dangerous in that he physically and sexually violates the autonomy of woman" (Forbes 299; Doody; Rogers). Instead, she marries the man whom she loves as a brother.

This theme of a brother-protector being the ideal man is repeated in Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* (1788), where the heroine marries the brother of her closest female friend. I have argued elsewhere that the hero-as-brother is also a trope of twentieth-century romances (Dixon) but as the earlier romances were written during the period of "the cult of sensibility," when it was believed that people were innately good and approval was given to a hero who exhibited "almost" a feminine sensibility (Tompkins, qtd. in Modleski 17), it can be argued that the hero as brother can also be seen as the feminization of the hero, a theme which is also prevalent in some twentieth-century romances, particularly in those published by Mills & Boon (Harlequin),where the hero eventually succumbs to the heroine, leaving her triumphant.[6]

These novels strike a new note in romances, as they combine a love relationship with a novel of manners, but at the same time there were other sub-genres being written, in particular the Gothic romance and the domestic novel.[7]

Contemporary romance in the nineteenth century: the Gothic, domestic novels of manners, and novels of sensation

From the 1790s to about the 1820s the Gothic romance was a mainstream of English fiction, read by both men and women. Its plot centered round a virginal heroine who

has to fight for her virtue against the man who should have her best interests at heart (generally her guardian) before she can find and marry the man who will protect her. Gothic novels are set in an "unreal world of fantastic happenings" (Terry 50), generally abroad, in turreted castles where eerie events take place. In 1938 Daphne du Maurier published *Rebecca*, which helped to revive the popularity of the Gothic novel after the Second World War (for an extended discussion of the Gothic and its influence on modern popular romance fiction see Chapter 4 of this volume).

For romance readers the towering author of the early nineteenth century is Jane Austen, whose early novel *Northanger Abbey* (completed in 1803, although not published until 1817) satirizes the Gothic while offering an ardent defense of the novel as a genre.[8] Austen's novels portray the main protagonists' growth in self-knowledge through their developing love relationship. Her novels were not bestsellers at the time, but Sir Walter Scott praised their realism, an assessment followed by other nineteenth-century literary critics, including George Lewes (George Eliot's partner) and Henry James. It was not until the twentieth century that she became a world-wide phenomenon.

Jane Austen was part of the rise of the domestic novel of manners (Spacks), which idealized the domestic sphere. This genre was influenced by Maria Edgeworth, who wrote about family life and women's search for equality in marriage. Her novels *Belinda* (1801) and *Patronage* (1814) are about women's search for a compatible marriage, extolling love over duty and reason, a theme also present in Austen's best-loved novel, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), though handled rather differently.

The domestic novel of manners can be divided into three subgenres: governess novels, the prime example of which is Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, 1847 (see Wadső-Lecaros), which are often seen as the precursors of today's category romances;[9] social problem novels, the best example being Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, 1854–5 (Kestner; Vargo; Williams); and religious novels, exemplified by Charlotte Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe* (Anderson). These religion-based romances all ended, to today's mind, unhappily, with the hero dying, but at the time the emphasis was on the struggle between faith and doubt, and when the hero dies *as a Christian* it is seen in the novel as a triumph, not a defeat.[10]

Many romances of the mid-Victorian period follow this religious tradition. *Robert Elsmere* (1888) by the popular author Mrs. Humphrey Ward (niece of Matthew Arnold), is about a clergyman who loses his faith when confronted with scientific evidence but recovers it under the influence of his wife before he dies from overwork. Ward portrayed men as intellectually superior to women, but the "emotional register resides within the heroine, Catherine, and her sister, Rose" (Hipsky 32; see also Daly; Terry; Waller). In Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely But Too Well* (1867), which has an adulterous relationship at its core, both the villain and the hero die at the end, and the heroine continues doing good works in the slums of London.

In a twist on this ending, in *Under Two Flags* (1867) by Ouida (Maria Louise Ramé), it is the heroine who dies, saving the hero from a firing squad, and he returns to his first love. However, this is not a religiously themed romance, and is more of a male adventure story, despite being written by a woman. Ouida's later 1880 novel, *Moths*, is another adulterous romance, but this time, although the hero is shot, he survives and he and the heroine are able to marry, and the novel is less focused on adventure than on an indictment of contemporary society "for its artificiality, hypocrisy, cruelty, and immorality" (Schroeder 21). Similar plot elements, that is to say,

were repurposed to serve quite different ends, evincing the flexibility and variety of the romance during this period.

Many romances published during the nineteenth century can be regarded as domestic novels, particularly those by Margaret Oliphant and Elizabeth Gaskell. These romances sentimentalize the duties of the good wife and faithful daughter while, Modleski argues, revealing a covert longing for power and revenge (24). Issues of power are sometimes quite explicitly on display in the contrasting sub-genre of sensation novels, which started with Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860), Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861), and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), a novel which, Jenny Uglow argues, "uncovered horrors in the very heart of Victorian society, in the sacred institution of marriage itself" (qtd. in Callil 5).

Sensation novels reveled in accounts of insanity, illness, identity-theft, and long-held family secrets, exposing the uncertainties rife in the nineteenth century. The heroine of *The Woman in White*, for example, is forced to marry a man she does not love and then incarcerated in a lunatic asylum under someone else's name. Eventually her husband dies in a fire of his own making and her true identity is restored, enabling her to marry the man she loves. In Ellen Wood's *East Lynne*, the heroine commits adultery, is thrown out of the family home and is disfigured in a railway crash, enabling her to return to the family home in disguise to care for her children. She eventually dies, confessing all to her husband on her death bed. *Lady Audley's Secret* centers on an adulterous relationship, entered into unwittingly by Sir Michael Audley when he marries Lucy Graham. Good ultimately triumphs, with Lucy (the villainess of the title) dying in an institution for the insane and thus enabling the other main characters to marry. "Hinting at shaky moral foundations beneath rock-like respectability, and at undercurrents of violence, greed, or sexual betrayal in every home sweet home," Braddon's novels "threatened the values the reviewers held most dear" (Uglow qtd. in Callil 5). One of the tropes Braddon uses is the beautiful temptress threatening the happiness of the heroine, the good woman, a trope that became a staple of later romances; likewise, her use of "domestic circumstances as the setting for intrigue, secrets, violence and death" makes her work a precursor of modern gothic romances such as du Maurier's *Rebecca* and *My Cousin Rachel* (Callil and Tóibín).

The end of the nineteenth century saw the rise of the New Woman, and a different type of heroine. New Woman novels built on the anxiety about the home that sensation novels had displayed by openly critiquing domesticity and marriage, recasting the home as corrupt, not pure and spiritual as earlier domestic novels had idealized it (Katz 44). These novels upset the domestic ideal of women, portraying women walking alone on the street, reading what they wanted, and refusing to marry. Authors included Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, George Egerton (Mary Bright), and Ella D'Arcy, whose novels emphasized women's freedom and right to live life as they wished to: themes which endure in modern popular romance.

Contemporary romance in the twentieth century

According to R. C. Terry, Victorian authors and artists from a wide range of genres and movements generally agreed that "a visionary world of action, heroism, spiritual revelation and fulfilment made more tolerable a world of sordid gain, intractable social problems and the widespread malaise of religious schism or, worse, no religion at all"

(21). This *zeitgeist* may have been shaken by the end of the nineteenth century, but it endured in popular romance. Marie Corelli's many bestselling novels, for example, "mingled romantic love with Christian spirituality, featured all manner of celestial voyaging, and hummed with affective intensities" even as her protagonists offered "streams of opinion on the urgent social issues of the moment" (Hipsky 65). Corelli often combined mysticism with science to make sweeping pronouncements about the meaning of life, and as a rule her plots and characters are secondary to her opinions on whatever she is inveighing against in the novel—the Press and sexual novels (*The Sorrows of Satan* 1895), drunken fathers (*Boy* 1900), religious hypocrisy (*The Master Christian* 1900), and the dangers of secular humanism (*Innocent: Her Fancy and His Fact* 1914).[11]

Another bestselling author who combined romance with religion—and, unlike Corelli, combined the two with a gripping plot—was Florence Barclay. Barclay's *The Rosary*, published in 1909, presents earthly love as a manifestation of divine love: a connection of the earthly and the sacred which has to be acknowledged by both lovers for the plot to be resolved (Waller). Bloom argues that Barclay's novels are "Christianized" morality tales which are "contemporary in theme (in attitude) and *consolatory* in times of confusion or trouble" (88), and that we see in them the roots of "a thousand Mills and Boon romances" (88). For more on Barclay, see Chapter 21 of this collection.

The novels of Ethel M. Dell combine a semi-religious background with Ouida's imperial adventure romances.[12] Her first novel, *The Way of an Eagle* (1911) is set in India, with a feminine heroine and an alpha male who, like many of Dell's heroes, is ugly-looking but a protector, rescuing the heroine from native uprisings and loving her from afar until she eventually realizes his worth and falls in love with him.

Alongside this new wave of religious romantic fiction, the domestic novel remained popular in the early twentieth century. In 1914 Berta Ruck, who wrote domestic novels aimed at the young working-class woman, published her first novel *His Official Fiancée*, which had first been serialized in the magazine *Home Chat*. The story of a girl who marries her employer, this novel was a hit with the public, and was the forerunner of the Cinderella plot which many later romances were to follow. By the time of her death in 1978, Ruck had written over 100 novels, most about the quest for love by a young girl (Anderson; Blain, Clements, and Grundy).[13]

One hallmark of contemporary romance in the twentieth century is the emergence of more explicitly sexual romances, where love is based on a sexual attraction which is described, rather than implied.[14] In Elinor Glyn's *Three Weeks* (1907), which Martin Hipsky reads as a "further development of the 'New Woman' novel" (16), the hero has a three-week sexual encounter with the queen of an Eastern European country which results in his son being crowned king.

Perhaps the most well-known romance of the early twentieth century is *The Sheik* (1919), by E. M. Hull, which is a prime example of the dangerous lover novel of the twentieth century: "the one whose eroticism lies in his dark past, his restless inquietude, his remorseful and rebellious exile from comfortable everyday living" (Lutz ix, 89). *The Sheik* recounts the story of an upper-class Englishwoman who, while traveling in the Sahara Desert, is abducted by a handsome Bedouin sheik with whom she falls in love, despite being repeatedly raped by him. The brutish hero eventually learns to love her self-sacrificially, while she in turn discovers at the end of the novel that he is not Arab after all but, rather, the half-Spanish son of a Scottish earl. In a reversal of Radway's point 13 regarding the restoration of the heroine's identity by the hero,

here it is the heroine who returns the hero to his real racial identity (Hipsky 190). Pamela Regis notes that "*The Sheik* is the ur-twentieth-century popular romance novel" (120) for several reasons. It was the first romance to tell the story almost entirely from the heroine's viewpoint, and to cut away extraneous subplots to focus on the emotional relationship between the hero and heroine. It was also a precursor of romance novels that would explore women's sexual experiences of romantic love and interracial relationships (see Teo). For these reasons, *The Sheik* has generated a wealth of scholarship examining these and other aspects of the novel, including its medieval antecedents and contemporary manifestations in the form of late twentieth- and twenty-first-century "sheik romances" (see Ardis; Bach; Blake; Burge; Chow; Gargano; Holden; Jarmakani; Melman; Raub; Taylor; Teo *Desert Passions* 2012b).

In *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties* Billie Melman describes the rise of the "sex novel" in the 1920s, which she argues presents realistic descriptions of women's sexual experience (42). Beauman also discusses the rise of the sexual novel in the 1920s in her chapter on romance. Melman points out that many of the novels of this period were sadomasochistic (45), even though written by women (Dell, Glyn, Hull) for women. This was a period of sexual liberation for women, and sadomasochism arose again in the novels of the 1970s, when women's sexual freedom was again to the fore (Dixon).

Mills & Boon

The 1930s saw the rise of the mass-market formula romance, when Mills & Boon became a romance-only publisher (see Dixon; Jensen; McAleer; Modleski). Mills & Boon had already published widely in the genre in previous decades, and their pre-1930s romances can be divided into four subgenres—those with city backgrounds, those with country backgrounds, those set abroad and those set among the upper-crust of English society (Dixon 43–63). The city and country novels are in the tradition of the domestic romance, but the other two are more sexual, and these more sexual novels continued into the 1920s, echoing the popularity of sex novels in the mainstream.[15]

Many authors got their start with Mills & Boon (although not Barbara Cartland as is sometimes alleged). Denise Robins, who was the first President of the Romantic Novelists' Association, joined them in 1927, after ten years of successfully publishing elsewhere, but left in 1935. While at Mills & Boon she wrote rather provocative novels, with sexual themes which included adultery. But the most popular author of the 1930s, Mary Burchell, wrote more domestic-set romances, although she tackled some controversial subjects—the heroine having a baby out of wedlock (*Such is Love* 1939), married women working (*After Office Hours* 1939)—which were to become themes of later Mills & Boon romances (Dixon).

At first the Second World War was not mentioned in Mills & Boon romances, but as the war continued, both Mills & Boon authors and other authors of romances took one of two approaches to the conflict—they either ignored it altogether (e.g., Ruby M. Ayres) or used soldiers as heroes, and put their heroines in uniform, though they did not describe the real horrors of war (e.g., Ursula Bloom). The latter novels were set overseas or the home front, with the more independent heroine saving the day for Britain (McAleer 174).[16] According to Anderson, however, by the end of the 1940s,

> war had finally killed off any of the last remaining traces of the reckless spirit of E M Hull and E M Dell, or Elinor Glyn. Heroines were never again to know the wild sweet joy of mad, passionate love. Such experiences began to be classed out of romantic fiction and into pornography. From this point on, the aim of popular romantic novelists was to make their fiction respectable, in both the literary and the moral sense. In the attempt it began to lose much of its earlier vigour.
>
> (223)

To Anderson, the post-war history of Mills & Boon romance is one of decline. "By the end of the 1950s the romantic hero and heroine were becoming increasingly stereotyped," she writes (237), reflecting post-war attitudes, and despite the glamour provided by setting romances abroad in the 1960s, a set of strict taboos ruled Mills & Boon romances throughout the decade: no mixed marriages, no drunkenness, no disability, as romance championed domestic and bourgeois values in the face of the emerging counterculture (Anderson 267, 270). "Today's romantic novelists," she writes in 1974, "have come to see themselves as a restraining, conservative element in society, upholders of proper standards of public morality. No longer pioneers, they have become the curators of a tradition" (276–7). Indeed, she predicts the end of romantic novels, since romantic fiction "will only continue to be an interesting genre if its authors can rediscover a passionate belief in their convictions, the total commitment to dotty ideals which once gave to that inimitable prose style its power, emotional drive and luxuriant vitality" (277) which she thought would not happen.

More recent historians have read this period differently. Even during the 1950s there were some Mills & Boon authors who were beginning to blow away the cobwebs and write about more adventurous and intelligent heroines (Dixon 124ff), and a variety of new hero types emerged as well, as the "boy next door" hero popular in the mid-to-late 1940s (Dixon 70) was supplemented, then largely replaced by "rough and rugged, aggressively masculine" men from the colonies and former colonies (e.g., Australia) and by Spanish, French, Greek, Italian, or other "Latin lover" figures (Teo *Desert Passions* 204–5). (These are also the years, Teo points out, when the Sheik hero is revived in Mills & Boon fiction, [204].) After the 1950s women started to be depicted as being in command of their lives, with many heroines in the 1960s portrayed as "economically independent and emotionally no longer tied to home, with a job she does competently and confidently" (Dixon 90). In these novels the focus is more on the emotional elements of the hero's and heroine's relationship, and the "mingling of sex, work and female equality in the name of 'freedom' that was a hallmark of the emerging counterculture" was increasingly evident (Dixon 127). Far from bringing the story of contemporary romance to a close, then, the 1970s brought about a resurgence of the genre, fueled by new, younger, authors and by feminism. The 1970s was a period of rapid change which, Beer (78) argues, is when romances flourish. Indeed, the following chapters in this volume discussing subgenres and thematic innovations focus on developments within the romance genre from the 1970s onwards—including the Americanization of the romance novel.

Serious novelists on "silly novels"

From the beginning, the romance novel has been criticized as well as defended, not only by literary reviewers, critics, and scholars, but also by novelists. One of the earliest books to satirize the romance genre was Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* of

1752, which also "inaugurates within the English novel tradition the inherent relationship between heroines and romance" (Langbauer 62). A re-writing of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605 and 1615) it tells the story of Arabella, who expects life to be like the French romances she has been brought up on, but who eventually accepts the reality of life and marries the man who has loved her all along. Lennox explores the clash between the romance genre and realism, a theme of romance criticism from the beginning, and one which has often been interwoven with issues of gender. (As Crawford observes, "the eighteenth-century novel tradition ... often went to some lengths to demonstrate that an overly 'romantic' view of the world, and of love, could lead young people—especially young women—very dangerously astray" [14].) Although *The Female Quixote* has often been read along these lines as endorsing the emerging, more realistic discourse of the novel as preferable to the misleading extravagance of romance, recent scholarship has sometimes seen Lennox as "reversing the contemporary opinion that romances teach nothing" in order to critique the limitations imposed by realism (Watson 32). "More than a late attack on romance," Watson writes, *The Female Quixote* "is an early landmark in thinking about how realistic discourse represents reality and interprets desire" (32).

In 1785, some 30 years after Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, novelist Clara Reeve published *The Progress of Romance*, a history of romance and its reputation. "Nearly a novel in itself" (Maxwell 8), this literary history is presented as a debate between Euphrasia and her male antagonist Hortensius, with Sophronia as judge; across the text Euphrasia's knowledge is set against Hortensius' eloquence. Reeve argues, through Euphrasia, that male critics are prejudiced against not only the genre of romance—here defined as a "wild, extravagant, Fabulous story" (vol. 1, 6)—but also its female authors and readers. Praising by name a number of authors discussed in this chapter, including Behn and Heywood, the book is thus "not only concerned with the status and history of romance, it also touches upon attitudes towards literature and upon gender questions" (Omdal 2013). Ros Ballaster argues that *The Progress of Romance* is signally important for its early effort to describe and contest an "association between the 'literary' and the masculine, and the 'popular' and the feminine" (191). As Euphrasia ably refutes Hortensius's charge that romance is simply "trash" (vol. 1, 6), Reeve presents romance as a "formidable, praiseworthy body of writing" (Maxwell 9) and she implicitly defends her own decision to write in the genre, for example in her Gothic novel *The Old English Baron* (1777).

A hundred years later, the reputation of romance remained in dispute. George Eliot belittled popular romantic fiction by women in her 1856 article "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," where she argued that many female authors are writing such an idealized version of the world that the romances become "silly." Ignoring the critiquing of domesticity and marriage in these stories she concentrates on other aspects of the novels. She particularly decries the perfect heroines these novels describe:

> her eyes and her wit are both dazzling; her nose and her morals alike free from any tendency to irregularity; she has a superb *contralto* and a superb intellect; she is perfectly well-dressed and perfectly religious; she dances like a sylph.
>
> (140; see Roberts' *Silly Lady Novelists?* for a modern reply to this argument)

Instead she praises the realism of literary novels (such as her own).

Four years after Eliot's essay, David Manon published "Three Vices of Current Literature" in *Macmillan's Magazine* in May 1860. In it he criticized the awkward

syntax, mixed metaphor, slipshod expression, and triteness in fact, doctrine and thought to be found in popular novels, which, according to him, were full of "extravagant scene-painting, grandiose character description and elaborate effects" (qtd. in Terry 53).

In 1922 Rebecca West attacked romances, echoing the critiques of their style and substance of Eliot and Manon but slightly altering the underlying criticism by concentrating on the lack of *thought* that was purportedly needed to write them. Using Dell's novels as representative she says of one of Dell's heroes:

> And in every line that is written about him one hears the thudding, thundering hooves of a certain steed at full gallop; of the true Tosh-horse ... one cannot reach the goal of best selling by earnest pedestrianism, but must ride thither on the Tosh-horse. No one can write a best-seller by taking thought.
>
> ("The Tosh Horse")

West, a feminist herself, was articulating feminist writers' disapproval of romances, which they believed belonged to childhood and the teenage years and which they thought perpetuated gender stereotypes (Trodd 120).

In *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932), Q. D. Leavis wanted to explore why serious fiction and the bestseller had been split apart with, for example, Henry James and Marie Corelli having radically different readerships. Like her early mentor, Leslie Stephen, she believed that literature was "the product of the interplay between writer and reader." So, it was always important to Q. D. Leavis to analyze even the best novels with a full awareness of their socio-historical context (Ferns). Like her predecessors Leavis argues that authors of romances seem to lack education, but unlike them, she admires the energy of popular writing, in which "bad writing, false sentiment, sheer silliness, and a preposterous narrative are all carried along with magnificent vitality" (qtd. in Anderson 15).[17]

Leavis was not a novelist, and her engagement with popular fiction coincides with the emergence of a new, professionalized mode of academic literary criticism. The sometimes contentious relationship between such criticism and the genre of popular romance is described, from a variety of angles, in many other chapters in this collection. The treatment of popular romance by post-war English novelists in other genres, both literary and popular, is in need of further study, both in terms of the contemporary romances I have discussed thus far and in terms of historical romance fiction, a genre which pre-exists and often blurs the distinction between literary, middlebrow, and popular forms.

English historical romances[18]

The English historical romance has several sub-genres, including what is now called fictional biography, which is generally about the love lives of royalty, or well-known figures from the past, and family sagas, where the protagonists are generally fictional, and the story chronicles the lives of one or more families over a period of time. Margaret Irwin and Jean Plaidy (Eleanor Hibbert) are two of the best-known authors of fictional biography. Eleanor Hibbert was one of the authors who revived the Gothic in the 1960s, writing as Victoria Holt, and also wrote family sagas as Philippa Carr. The family saga sub-genre includes Storm Jameson's *The Triumph of Time* (1927–30)

about a nineteenth-century shipbuilding family based on her own family, Clemence Dane's (Winifred Ashton) *Broome Stages* (1931), which follows a family from strolling players in the eighteenth century to film stars of the 1920s; and Phyllis Bentley's *Inheritance* (1932 about a family of self-made mill owners from Luddites in the nineteenth century to the Depression of the 1930s.

This chapter, however, concentrates on the main genre, which allies a love story between the two protagonists with a historical background. It is often cross-fertilized with fantasy, Gothic, adventure, and detective fiction (Wallace, 3).

According to Diane Wallace the first English historical romance was Sophia Lee's (1750–1824) *The Recess or a Tale of Other Times*, published in 1783, and which was the first female gothic (Wallace 16). (See Chapter 4 on the Gothic for the history of the genre.) In the story of the (mythical) twin daughters (Elinor and Matilda) of Mary, Queen of Scots, and the Duke of Norfolk, Wallace argues, "it is (sexual) desire that shapes the world" (17)—for instance, the failure of the Earl of Essex's campaign in Ireland is blamed on his depression when Ellinor, his lover, is captured by the Earl of Tyrone. The novel was criticized for its lack of historical truth, not adhering to the facts of history, and reducing all motives to romantic emotion (Wallace 17). However, the feminist critic Jane Spencer argues that *The Recess* transforms history into romance in order to reinstate women and the arena of private emotion into history (in Wallace 17). Lee's handling of the female consciousness from the sidelines of history is her most important bequest to her successors (Wallace 18).

Thus, a direct line of descent can be traced from the Gothics of Lee and Ann Radcliffe to present-day women authors of historical romances (Wallace 16), as they write women back into history, reinstating women's matrilineal genealogy (De Groot 69), which has been erased by patriarchal culture (Wallace 16).[19]

The Minerva Press kept the Gothic genre popular, but soon after its demise in 1814 (Wilson 17), the silver fork novel, set in the Regency period, rose to prominence. It flourished from the mid-1820s to the mid-1840s, by which time, of course, the genre had become historical. One of the better-known novels of the genre is *Pelham; or Adventures of a Gentleman* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, published in 1828 (Sadoff).

Both Bulwer-Lytton and Benjamin Disraeli were prominent silver fork novelists in their early careers, although they were writing more in the dandy-hero subgenre of the silver fork novel. Both Bulwer's *Pelham* (1828) and Disraeli's *Vivian Grey* (1826) feature dandy heroes. These novels were frequently modeled after scandals and events that could be found in gossip columns of newspapers. The genre had mostly gone out of fashion by the 1850s. Of the many female authors of this genre, Catherine Gore is perhaps the most well-known today. Her best-known novel is *Cecil, or Adventures of a Coxcomb*, which purports to be the autobiography of a companion of Lord Byron. Published in 1841, it has a hero, Cecil Danby, who is a dandy. It sheds a witty and revealing light on the Regency and, most significantly, how the Victorians thought of that period. According to Andrew Elfenbein Victorian silver fork novels "bring women to the centre of their plots to suggest that carefree Regency men, including Byron, cause considerable suffering to the women with whom they are associated" (78).

Edward Copeland traces in silver fork fiction many borrowings from Jane Austen, including her characters, dialog, story events (such as *Mansfield Park*'s amateur theatricals), inscription of female subjectivity, and, most importantly, the narrative negotiation of rank and class necessary for individual and social improvement during the age of reform. Later silver fork novels, written by, about, and for women, are not without

moral or political critique, ruthlessly satirizing the social system of an earlier generation. Heroines in this sub-genre earn their happy endings, rewarded with a newly intimate marital life.

By the Victorian period, silver fork novels had lost their popularity, and other historical periods rose to prominence, in particular medieval, which led to a revival of the Gothic (see Chapter 4).

The historical novels of the 1890s and 1900s were adventure novels that centered around a mission of public importance. One of the main authors of this genre and period was Baroness Orczy, author of the *Scarlet Pimpernel* series of novels, the first one being published in 1905. In this series the hero rescues French aristocrats from the guillotine, while he and his estranged wife eventually overcome their misunderstandings and declare their love for each other.

Rafael Sabatini's *Scaramouche* (1921) is also set during this period with a hero who is a French lawyer. He has to frequently change sides in order to survive. He saves his cousin from the guillotine and eventually marries her.

Jeffery Farnol wrote swashbuckling novels set in the Georgian and Regency periods. *The Amateur Gentleman* (1913) is about Barnabas Barty who determines to become a gentleman, goes to London, and falls in love with Cleone Meredith.

It was the female authors of the 1920s who gave new life to the historical novel, as the swashbuckling romances of the pre-War period fell out of favor (Wallace 29). Authors such as Sheila Kaye-Smith, Constance Holmes and Mary Webb started the vogue for rural novels, set in the past of a lost rural England. Webb's *Precious Bane* (1924) is today perhaps the most well-known. Set during the Napoleonic Wars, it is the story of Prue Sam, who has a hare lip, and her love for Kester Woodseaves, a weaver, who sees beyond the surface to the beauty of her character.

The other sub-genre of the historical novel of this period was the romance, and in particular the Regency. Partly due to Georgette Heyer who, along with Farnol was the initiator of the twentieth-century Regency romance, the primary readership of these novels changed from male to female (Hughes 38).

These Regency novels of the twentieth century use some of the tropes found in silver fork novels, including brides keen to impress the women who command the social elite at Almack's, the club to which those hoping to rise in social class needed to seek entry. However, silver fork novels rarely recount courtships, but preach fashionable society's dangers for the newly married young woman, unlike the later Regencies, which concentrate on the courtship plot.

Heyer published her first novel, *The Black Moth*, set in the Georgian period, in 1921. Her first Regency was *Regency Buck* (1935), which Germaine Greer tore to shreds in *The Female Eunuch* (1970), calling the hero "a fine example of a stereotype ... with such *world-weary lids*! With ... patrician features and aristocratic contempt ... and the titillating threat of *unexpected strength*! Principally, we might notice, he exists through his immaculate dressing" (175, original emphasis), while she says of the heroine "her intelligence and resolution remain happily confined to her eyes and the curve of her mouth" (176), epitomizing feminist thought on romances of the time. However, Heyer wrote 28 Regencies before her death in 1974, all of which were bestsellers and continue to sell well today.[20] Her novels gradually moved away from the adventure type to the comedy of manners type, with older, independent heroines and sophisticated heroes, as in *Frederica* (1965).

She also subverted the genre with, for example, a young and not particularly clever hero, as Sherry in *Friday's Child* (1944) and shy, retiring heroines, as Lady Hester in *Sprig Muslin* (1956).

In the 1930s and 1940s Heyer wrote three Regencies with cross-dressing heroines, a not unusual occurrence in this period (e.g., Daphne du Maurier's heroines), when the suitability of women for war work was being publicly debated (Bell 152). According to Wallace female cross-dressing was also related to an understanding that femininity is a masquerade, and a desire by women to escape from the confines of it (23), as dressing as a man allowed the heroine to enter into male spaces and encounter the hero without a chaperone. There are, however, some historical romances with cross-dressing heroines which pre-date the Second World War—in Heyer's *These Old Shades*, for instance, the heroine for the first half of the novel is the hero's page, which again draws attention to the constructed nature of femininity (Wallace 39; see also Fletcher 58–63).

These cross-dressing heroines were a part of the transgressive women depicted in the 1940s historical romances, showing heroines as highwaywomen or "wicked ladies" (Wallace 80). Gillian Spraggs argues that these transgressive heroines are important for what they tell us about the fantasies of female autonomy of the women of the 1940s (264). These transgressive heroines were also a way of exploring the new possibilities that were opened for women during the Second World War, and a rebellion against the expectation that after the war women would return tamely to the home and their traditional role as wife and mother.

By the 1970s the Regency had lost its mass-market appeal in England (though not America). However, Mills & Boon (now Harlequin Mills & Boon) kept the genre going with their historical line, which generally included a Regency-set romance each month.

Throughout the twentieth century other authors took different periods as their background.

Barbara Cartland started her writing career with contemporaries, but in 1946 published her first historical, *The Hidden Heart*, set in 1903. She went on to write novels set in the Regency period as well as the Victorian and Edwardian periods, all of them featuring a virginal heroine and a rake for a hero. The remarkably prolific nature of Cartland's output has drawn some attention from scholars. Gwen Robyns and John Pearson have written biographical studies of Cartland, while Rosalind Brunt and Marsha Vanderford Doyle have explored the romantic and fantasy aspects of her confected historical world.

Norah Lofts wrote both stand-alone novels and novels based on a single house and its occupants through the ages. Her most famous series is the *Suffolk* trilogy (1959–63), which starts in the fourteenth century and ends in the twentieth.

Elizabeth Goudge wrote many historicals, including the Victorian-set *Green Dolphin Country* (1944), published in the U.S. as *Green Dolphin Street*. Her novels do have a romantic sub-plot, but most of them concentrate on the themes of redemption and growth through suffering.

Catherine Cookson set her novels in north-east England, publishing both contemporaries and historical romances about overcoming the adversities of life, generally with a poor heroine who has to fight for her place in society, finding love on the way. The combination of "realism and utopia" in her work has been studied in some depth by Fowler (73–98), who finds that it "records … working-class experience while

simultaneously offering refuges for conservative myths" (97); a collection of essays on her work and its reception (including television adaptations and Cookson-related tourism) situates "Catherine Cookson Country" in a figurative space at "the intersection of the romantic novel, the historical novel, and social realism" (Taddeo xv).

Daphne du Maurier is also known for both historical and contemporary novels. Her historicals, however, are not strictly romances, as I have defined the term, as most of them do not end with a happily-ever-after for the heroine. She covers various periods, including the English Civil War in *The King's General* (1946) *Jamaica Inn* (1936) set in 1820 on Bodmin Moor, and *Frenchman's Creek* (1941) set during the reign of Charles II, though she is perhaps most famous for her novel *Rebecca* (1938), which is a contemporary.

A motif of historical novels from the 1960s and 1970s was the captive heroine, mainly based on historical figures, such as Sophia Dorothea in Jean Plaidy's *The Princess of Celle* (1976), and this was, of course, echoed in the Gothic romances by the same author writing as Victoria Holt. The trope of captivity in popular romance has so far primarily been explored in the context of American romance novels and American captivity narratives before them (Harders); scholarship is needed on this motif in other national traditions, including English romances. As Wallace says this was a period in which the historical romance exposed women's victimization, but also was used by women to encompass their own desires, re-writing history to show maternal influence and power (149).

Criticism of historical romances

All these authors were accomplished writers, but from the start of the genre critics were dismissive of historical romances, as of contemporary romances. Much of the criticism leveled against contemporary romances is also leveled against historical romances, but historicals have an extra layer of criticism.

Both Thomas Carlyle, in his essay "Sartor Resartus" and Hazlitt in his 1827 essay "The Dandy School" criticized the silver fork novel (Wilson 55), as formulaic, arguing that such books privilege form over feeling, depicting the outward show of the characters' lives rather than their emotions and moral struggles (Wilson 56). This was the start of 200 years of critical dismissal, with few critics even acknowledging the genre.

One of the first English critics to do so was Herbert Butterfield, who sympathetically argued that the historical novel is a "'form' of history—a way of treating the past" and is therefore "linked with legend, and the traditions of localities, and popular ballads" in that it, like these, goes "beyond the authenticated data of history ... in order to tell its story; and like these it often subordinates fidelity to the recovered facts of history, and strict accuracy of detail, to some other kind of effectiveness" (3). While being a form of fiction it also "claims to be true to the life of the past" (4), and thus the historical novel itself becomes a maker of history (42). A good historical should not be mere picturesqueness, satisfied with mere externals (32) but has to have what he calls historical "atmosphere" (97), without which it can appear to be a modern story in fancy dress. Jerome De Groot argues that to achieve this authentic atmosphere, the author needs what Butterfield calls "historical empathy" (49).

The historical novel "emphasises the influence of personal things in history" (Butterfield 73). This is particularly true of romances, where it is the personal that matters more than the political background.

According to the major Marxist scholar György (Georg) Lukács, Sir Walter Scott was the first (European) author of historical fiction, but neither Lukács nor, indeed, Scott himself, acknowledged his female progenitors, who included Jane Porter, author of *The Scottish Chiefs* (1810). Lukács argues that the period of the Napoleonic Wars was a unique historical moment, which led to an acknowledgment of historicity by individuals for the first time—that is, individuals realized they were living in a historical period, and this awareness of history enabled Scott to seek to understand individuals historically, expressing history through character, and with a nationalistic bent.

Although Lukács was writing about the historical novel, much of what he says is relevant to the historical romance. Thus, nationalism is very evident in the authors of the English historical romance, where English society is shown as essentially harmonious and sound (Hughes 67), and where England is associated with freedom and democracy (Hughes 74). An obvious example of this is Baroness Orczy's *Scarlet Pimpernel* series (1905–40), where England is portrayed as a sound and healthy society, in contrast to revolutionary France (Hughes 76) and where Englishness is tied up with a male aristocratic code of generosity, loyalty, bravery, and love of the land (Hughes 86).

As Wallace (7) says, the historical novel enables female writers to examine masculinity as a social and cultural construct. This is evident in Catherine Cookson's social history romances of the 1970s with her working-class heroes, although Cartland's novels of the same period accept the traditional patriarchal view of the male as all-powerful, without interrogating it further. However, there are differences in political outlook presented by different novelists. Jerome De Groot argues that where Cartland's novels generally affirmed the status quo of a glamorized, hierarchical class society, Cookson's novels presented the past as a place of deprivation and oppression for women: "It is a place of poverty, fear, drunkenness, neglect, illegitimacy and dirt"; a place that women could escape through individual determination, relationships with other women, and romantic relationships with men (55–6).

In Heyer's early novels English masculinity is blended with French style (*The Black Moth*), *Powder and Patch*, first published as *The Transformation of Philip Jettan* (1923), giving masculinity an element of femininity, but in later novels, for instance in her non-Regency *Beauvallet* where the Tudor hero travels into Spain to abduct the willing heroine, there is no element of femininity in him, and this is also the case in the heroes of her Regencies. But for Heyer, as with other historical romance authors, masculinity is a masquerade, with the hero's outward appearance masking his sterling qualities, for example, in *Cotillion* (1953) and *The Unknown Ajax* (1959) (Wallace 104, 107).

By the 1950s masculinity was seen to be lacking. The old warrior trope for men had proved inadequate in the aftermath of both World Wars (Dixon 70; Maslen 18), and other types of masculinity were being explored in historical romances. Thus Heyer's *Cotillion* (1953) has a not particularly clever hero, with not a violent bone in his body. Many heroes of this period are physically damaged, for example, Marcus, in Rosemary Sutcliff's *The Eagle of the Ninth* (1954).

The Marxist critic Fredric Jameson argues that "we live in a world of surface and echo, unable to properly remember or create anything new" which according to Jerome De Groot leads to the acknowledgment that all historical fiction imitates a past which never existed (115). So novelists and historians "use tropes, metaphors, prose, narrative style to interpret and render a version of something which is innately other and unknown" (De Groot 113). This gives women a space into which they can insert a female-centered re-writing of accepted (male) versions of history.

As Linda Hutcheon argues, postmodern imitative techniques have been particularly effective for those excluded by dominant cultural ideology (22–36), allowing "marginalised people to emerge as equal historical subjects and narrators" (De Groot 116). Hutcheon coined the term "historiographical metafiction," referring to postmodern fiction which is highly self-reflective (Tuite 247), which can be seen in those romances which refer to well-known novels of a previous age—e.g., *Pride and Prejudice* is often referred to in Regencies.

One of the first critiques of the genre to concentrate on the historical romance *per se* was Hughes, where she argues that historical fiction can be seen as myth, defined by Barthes as a semiological system which gives a "natural" image of a "reality" that has actually been fabricated within a historical past, and is an ideologically charged construct (8). So that women's historical romances use the past setting and stock motifs of romance as symbolic expressions of female concerns (107).

This is a point picked up by many feminist critics of the genre, including Alison Light, who argues that for women the genre has a subversive potential, creating a dissonant space in which various issues of legitimacy, authority and identity might be considered and depicting a fantasy of female power and agency not found elsewhere (see De Groot 68), and Diana Wallace, who finds that women's historical fiction puts women at the forefront of events, thus imaginatively returning "the girl child to her place within a maternal genealogy, and thus a re-union with the mother" (Wallace x). The historical romance form allows women a freedom and license not granted in other genres, Wallace writes, which women have used to express multiple complex identities and as sites of possibilities and potential (67).

Admittedly, some critics have been skeptical. Anthea Trodd, for example, criticizes historical romance authors who focus on female royal protagonists for implicitly endorsing a view of history as male property, since this focus perpetuates class division and casts "female characters in domestic and sexual roles only" (Trodd 113). De Groot, however, argues that historical romance fiction can be used to challenge the mainstream (140) precisely by putting love at the center of the story, and Teo points out that the focus in historical romance novels on amatory, domestic, and sexual aspects of well-known historical settings (e.g., the Ottoman court of Selim I and his son Suleiman the Magnificent in Bertrice Small's *The Kadin*) presages developments in feminist historiography since the 1980s ("Bertrice Teaches You"). As Wallace points out, authors have also used the form in order to explore taboo subjects, such as sex, or critique the present (Wallace 2). As Naomi Mitchison said when one of her contemporary novels was censored by her publishers in the 1930s, "in some stories in *The Delicate Fires* (1933) there is, I would have thought, far more sex than in *We Have Been Warned* (1935), but apparently it's all right when people wear wolfskins and togas" (qtd. in Beauman 141). Conversely, in the more sexually liberal world of the later twentieth century Barbara Cartland turned to historicals in order to more easily represent the frisson resulting from sexual restrictions and restraint. As she explained to Deborah Philips in a 1986 interview, it was "very difficult to have virgins and all the excitement in the present day."

Conclusion and suggestions for further study

Romantic fiction is a genre of fiction that has long antecedents. It reflects both women's position in society, and the events and ethics of the society it is written in.

For instance, the twentieth century saw a diversity of romantic fiction, with subgenres featuring the New Woman, foreign heroes, more sexual heroines and plots, as well as the continuation of the domestic novel. And from the mid-century on it saw an appreciation of this genre, in particular from female critics. But there are still areas of study to explore. These include investigating the early literary roots of the genre, before the split into the current categories of "literary" and "popular" and the historical antecedents of the romance genre, along with such topics as how death is handled in these apparently upbeat novels, the differences nationality makes to the genre, the effect of feminism (from the first wave to the latest manifestation) have on the novels, how each generation of authors have been affected by the previous generation, how external events impact on what authors wrote about and why they are written mainly by women, not men.

Notes

1 The scholarly bibliography on Romance, broadly construed, is vast and potentially daunting. Foundational studies include Frye (86–205), Jameson, and Mikhail Bakhtin. For a useful history of how medieval Romance evolves into more modern versions, see Crawford (11–59); for discussion of how classical "Greek romances" influenced Renaissance fiction and drama and the subsequent history of the novel, see Doody; for a helpful discussion of the term in its broadest sense, with application to global literatures, see Goyal (1–24).
2 For Behn as a model and resource for modern popular romance, see the encomium by Roach (142–3); Lutz, citing Ballaster 1998, refers to Behn's "amatory fiction" as "the early modern equivalent of the contemporary [that is, 20th-twenty-first century] mass-market romance" (2): a connection elaborated upon by Baldus in her essay on American romance author Jennifer Crusie, "Gossip, Liminality, and Erotic Display: Jennifer Crusie's Links to Eighteenth-Century Amatory Fiction." See also Toscano.
3 Radway's is the first of several attempts to codify the essential structure or defining elements of the romance novel. For others, see Regis (30–9), discussed below, and Roach (21–7).
4 For an extended, historicist analysis of Philander's "Whiggish and libertine antinomianism" (McKeon, 508) and Silvia's measured, undeceived response, see McKeon (506–13).
5 For an extended discussion of cross-dressing by heroines in popular romance (albeit historical romance rather than contemporary-set novels) see Fletcher, 49–92.
6 For a partial list of twentieth-century romances featuring the "hero-as-brother" motif, from a variety of decades, see Dixon, 79; for more on the feminization of the hero, see Beauman; Light; Miller; Showalter. Talia Schaffer's *Romance's Rival: Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction* does not focus on feminization—her categories include "neighbour marriage," "cousin marriage," "disability marriage," and "vocational marriage"—but she offers a useful, historically detailed discussion of marriage plots in which the male suitor who offers "security, kindness, safety, care" is preferable to a more erotically compelling rival (x).
7 For a discussion of Jane West's domestic novel *A Gossip's Story* as an inspiration for Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*—with attention in both texts to the phenomenon of gossip, a topic of ongoing interest in popular romance scholarship (e.g., Baldus)—see Goss.
8 Austen's place as a romance pioneer has not always been so assured. As many literary historians have noted, Charlotte Brontë believed that Austen was either unwilling or unable to write about women's passions and desires ("what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through" as Brontë calls it in a letter [qtd. in Armstrong, 53]; see Weisser, 35–8).
9 Both Heathcliff, from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, and Rochester, from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, have been described as the precursor of many twentieth-century heroes (Jensen; Modleski).