THE BUSINESS OF
Romance Novels
IN THE U.S. AND THE WORLD
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Mass market literary genre
Focuses on relationships and romantic love
Outperforms other genres of literature
Has become more popular with more access to technology
- Smartphones, Ereaders, Tablets, and anonymity
- Social media, self publishing, fanfiction

**Romantic Subgenres**

- Suspense: 22%
- Contemporary: 17%
- Historical: 14%
- Erotica: 14%
- New Adult: 14%
- Paranormal: 8%
- Young Adult: 7%
- Christian: 7%
Stats in America: the Romance Reader

- **2014 Nielson Romance Buyer Survey**
  - 70% of readers discover the genre between the ages of 11 and 18
  - Main readers are 30-54 years old, female
  - 45% having a college degree
  - More than half of the audience worked outside the home
  - Most highly represented in the south
  - Readers were more likely to be married or living with a partner

- Has had a stigma attached to it, which has faded over time

  - “Overweight women eating bonbons in bed, reading alone” → **stereotype**
Money in the Book Business

- Romantic and erotic fiction remains the top-selling sector of the book market
- “Last year, the genre brought in a whopping $1.5 billion in the U.S. alone” (International Business Times)
- 2005 study showed Romance fiction comprises a 26.4% share of the consumer market revenue
- One out of every two mass-market fiction paperbacks sold in the United States this year will be a romance title
- More than half of the mass market paperbacks sold in the U.S. are romance
Romance Novels in America

- Emotional audience
- Enjoys exploring male on male, paranormal, and shifter stories
- Enjoys British literature
- “Everyone agrees that British fiction is different from American fiction, but no one can really pinpoint why,” (USA Today Life)
- **Harlequin** – was a British publishing company based in Toronto
- Now under the name HarperCollins, based in NYC
  - Majority of its customers are Americans
  - In 1991, over half of Harlequin's customers purchased 30 novels per month
  - 64% read romance novels more than once a month
Romance Novels in Europe

- Contemporary stories, chick-lit, BDSM titles
- Harlequin Publishing
- UK has different tastes and lower sales numbers than the U.S.
- Many Americans like the appeal of a European novel

“British culture is different from American or Australian culture, despite the language we (sort of) have in common. The humor is different, the social rules are different, and since romance fiction often involves both humor and social rules, the experience of a British romance is unique.” (USA Today Life)

“British authors create more clever, quick-witted and interesting dialogue between characters. There is often a directness and irreverence that seems more contemporary and realistic.” (USA Today Life)
Fifty Shades of Grey

- Sold over 125 million copies worldwide by June 2015
- Has been translated into 52 languages
- Rights to the book have been sold in 37 countries (NY Daily News)
- Seemed to “epitomise escapism” – why it became so popular (“Which 5 Books”)
Romance Novels in China

- All literature is subject to review by the government
- Literature can be banned for numerous reasons
- Banning the books doesn’t stop them from being read (*Shanghai Baby*)
- Cultural Revolution and Literary Reformation (Maoist Era and Post-Mao)
- Today writers have a *little* more freedom
  - What is usually banned: politics, government, works that spark social tension, “obesities”
What Gets You Censored on the Chinese Internet

Are you famous?

Does your post criticize the government or put it in a bad light?

Does your post relate to public life—i.e. areas of government control?

Does your post contradict central government priorities?

Does your post mention or reveal specific wrongdoings?

Does your post criticize local as opposed to central government?

Do you live in that locality?

Has your post gone viral?

Does your post criticize the government or put it in a bad light?

Does your post contend or encourage specific illegal activity?

Does your post contemplate or encourage a large or recurring gathering?

Does the post contain obscene images?

* Police or government agent involvement including but not limited to account deletion, questioning, and detention
Conclusion: Romance as a Literary Genre

- It’s popular because love is an emotion everyone can relate to
- How do you define it?
  - “protagonists who meet, fall in love, and struggle to overcome the barriers between them are always rewarded with true love in the end” *(Americana)*
- Societal importance:
  - Relationships and reflection
  - Definition of love
  - Self expression
  - Acceptance of others
- Why do we read them?
  - Inspiration, escape, to live vicariously, entertainment
- Romance novels will continue to be a large cultural influence on society

*Women write and read romance heroes to examine, subvert, discuss, revel in, and reject patriarchal constructions of masculinity,*

—Sarah Frantz Lyons
Works Cited


