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The Romance Novel Cover

by

Jessica Spears

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
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Table of Contents

List of Illustrations	ii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The History of Paperback Publishing and Paperback Covers	9
Chapter 2: The Nature of Big Book Historical Romance Covers	24
Chapter 3: Images of Feminine Power and Submission	35
Chapter 4: The Shame of Being Seen to Read Romance	48
Chapter 5: Romance's Relationship with Pornography and Sexual Advertising	60
Chapter 6: The Male Figure on 1990s Romance Covers	69
Conclusion	77
Bibliography	89
Illustrations	96

Illustrations

1. Coby Whitmore. Illustration for <i>Good Housekeeping</i> , gouache on board, circa 1950s.	
2. Robert A. Maguire. <i>The Bleeding Scissors</i> . New York: Signet Books. 1955.	
3. Rudolph Belarski. <i>House of Fury</i> . New York: Berkley. 1959	
4. Artist Unknown. <i>Community Nurse</i> . New York: Ace Books, 1975.	
5. Artist Unknown. <i>It Happened One Flight</i> . New York: Fontana Books. 1961	
6. Lou Marchetti. <i>Thunder Heights</i> . New York: Ace Books. 1960	
7. George Ziel. <i>Shorecliff</i> . New York: Paperback Library. 1968	
8. Harry Bennett. <i>Thunder Heights</i> . New York: Fawcett Crest, 1970.	
9. Lou Feck. <i>Independence!</i> . New York: Bantam, 1979.	
10. Artist unknown. <i>The Flame and the Flower</i> . New York: Avon, 1972.	
11. Robert McGinnis. <i>The Flame and the Flower: 43rd printing</i> . New York: Avon. 1973.	
12. Artist unknown. <i>The Wolf and The Dove</i> . New York: Avon, 1974.	
13. Artist Unknown. <i>Sweet, Savage Love</i> . New York: Avon, 1974.	
14. Artist unknown. <i>Dark Fires</i> . New York: Avon, 1975.	
15. Robert McGinnis. <i>Captive Bride</i> . New York: Avon. 1977.	
16. Pino, <i>Time-Kept Promises</i> . New York: Zebra, Kensington. 1988	
17. Sharon Spiak, <i>Desert Dreams</i> . New York: Warner Books, 1988	
18. Joe DiCesare, <i>Man Overboard</i> . New York: Silhouette, 1995.	
19. Len Goldberg. <i>Time to Let Go</i> . Richmond, Surrey: Mills & Boon, 1990.	
20. Len Goldberg, <i>Time to Let Go</i> . Don Mills, Canada: Harlequin, 1992.	
21. Walter Popp, <i>Sweet & Twenty</i> . New York: Fawcett, 1979.	
22. Allan Kass, <i>The Enchanting Stranger</i> . New York: Signet, 1984.	
23. Artist Unknown. <i>An Unlikely Governess</i> . New York: Avon, 2006.	
24. Elaine Duillo. <i>Keeper of The Heart</i> . New York: Avon, 1993.	
25. Doreen Minuto. <i>You Belong to My Heart</i> . New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1996.	
26. Max Ginsburg. <i>Gray Hawk's Lady</i> . New York: New York: Avon, 1997.	

27. Sharon Spiak. <i>Loving Julia</i> . New York: Warner Books, 1986.	
28. Leslie Pellegrino Peck. <i>Evergreen</i> . New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.	
29. Victor Gadino. <i>A Fire in the Heart</i> . New York: Avon, 1990.	
30. Elaine Duillo. <i>A Well Pleasured Lady</i> . New York: Avon, 1997.	
31. Max Ginsburg. <i>Lakota Surrender</i> . New York: Avon, 1994.	
32. Don Case. <i>Sioux Slave</i> . New York: Zebra Historical, 1992.	
33. Sharon Spiak. <i>Wayward Wind</i> . New York: Popular Library, 1986.	
34. Pino. <i>Sweet Obsession</i> . New York: Zebra, 1990.	
35. Artist Unknown. <i>Wild Side</i> . Toronto; New York: Harlequin, 1989.	
36. Artist Unknown. <i>Vixen</i> . New York: Bantam, 1994.	
37. Artist Unknown. <i>Rapture's Tempest</i> . New York: Zebra, 1985.	
38. Pino. <i>Wild Southern Rose</i> . New York: Zebra, 1985.	
39. Sharon Spiak. <i>The Bayou Fox</i> . New York: Warner Books, 1987.	
40. John Ennis. <i>Arizona Ecstasy</i> . New York: Zebra, 1989.	
41. Max Ginsburg. <i>Midnight Angel</i> . New York: Avon, 1995.	
42. Leslie Pellegrino Peck. <i>Delilah</i> . New York: Jove, 1995.	
43. Victor Gadino. <i>Midnight Lady</i> . New York: Avon, 1997.	
44. Artist Unknown. <i>Captain Jack's Woman</i> . New York: Avon, 1997.	
45. James Griffin. <i>Silk Is For Seduction</i> . New York: Avon, 2011 .	
46. Robert McGinnis. <i>Fires of Winter</i> . New York: Avon, 1980.	
47. Pino. <i>Wild Embrace</i> . New York: Topaz, 1993.	
48. Elaine Duillo. <i>Man of My Dreams</i> . New York: Avon, 1992.	
49. Artist Unknown. "Cover". <i>Playgirl Magazine</i> (August 1995).	
50. Artist Unknown. <i>Once Upon A Pirate</i> . New York: Harper Collins, 1995.	
51. Unknown Artist. <i>Prince of Midnight</i> . New York: Avon, 1990.	
52. Victor Gadino. Stepback for <i>Lord of the Wolves</i> . New York: Dell, 1993.	
53. Elaine Duillo. <i>Mail-Order Man</i> . New York: Zebra, 1994.	

54. "Topaz Man." Photo by Charles William Bush. <i>Romantic Times</i> . v. 107 (Feb. 1993): 47.	
55. Pino. <i>Comanche Moon</i> . New York: Zebra. 1993.	
56. "Spine Logo from <i>Sweet Awakening</i> by Marjorie Farrell". New York: Topaz, 1995. Photo by Charles William Bush.	
57. Ad for one of Fabio's hotlines in <i>Romantic Times</i> v. 95 (Feb. 1992) p. 9.	
58. Steve Assel. <i>Viking</i> by Fabio. New York: Avon. 1994.	
59. Ad for Topaz Dreams in <i>Romantic Times</i> v. 105 (Dec. 1992) centerfold.	
60. Max Ginsburg. <i>Proud Wolf's Woman</i> . New York: Avon, 1996.	
61. Unknown Artist. <i>White Dusk</i> . New York: Leisure Books, 2002.	
62. Unknown Artist. <i>Savage Tempest</i> by Cassie Edwards. New York: Leisure Books. 2006.	
63. "Ad for The Keepsake." <i>Romantic Times Magazine</i> 109 (Apr. 1993): centerfold.	
64. "Ad for Relentless." <i>Romantic Times Magazine</i> 122 (May 1994): back cover.	
65. Addie Passen. Preparatory photograph for a romance novel cover. Circa 1990s. Image courtesy of Tom Lapadula.	
66. Addie Passen. Photographic contact sheets. Circa 1990s. Image courtesy of Tom Lapadula.	
67. Richard Newton. <i>Sweet Awakening</i> . New York: Topaz, 1995.	
68. Pino. <i>Lady of the Lake</i> . Toronto; New York: Harlequin, 1997.	
69. Max Ginsburg. <i>Knave of Hearts</i> . Toronto; New York: Harlequin, 2001.	
70. James Griffin. <i>Silk Is For Seduction</i> . New York: Avon, 2011.	
71. Pino. <i>Brazen</i> . New York: Bantam Books. 1995.	
72. Franco Accornero. <i>Whirlwind Courtship and High Energy</i> . New York: Leisure Books. 1996.	
73. Artist Unknown. <i>Seduced by A Stranger</i> . New York: Zebra Books. 2009 .	
74. Laura Duffy. <i>A Favorite of the Queen</i> . New York: Three Rivers Press, 2010.	

Introduction

A romance novel is a woman's object. According to a survey conducted by the Romance Writers' Association, romance buyers are 84% female.¹ The romance blog *All About Romance* sets the percentage of female readers at 99.4 percent.² Out of the 502 respondents to a questionnaire sociologist Carol Thurston sent out to romance novel readers in 1982, only 3 were male.³

Romance novel covers dating from the 1980s and 1990s reflect complex and contradictory ideas about gender, power, and sexuality. The covers overflow with stereotypes of what women are attracted to such as enormous pink roses, lush folds of silk, and hair long enough for Rapunzel. To this socially acceptable women's imagery, the covers add two less reputable aspects: sexual imagery and, occasionally, suggestions of female submission. Since the association of romance and conventional femininity is so strong, the covers make a visual argument that submission and sexuality are things that a conventional woman wants. Readers have to deal with what it means to be seen reading a book with such a cover. This thesis aims to tackle how these covers have been regarded by both the consumer and producers of the works, and what political, social and visual trends in American culture of the 1980s and 1990s account for these genre conventions.

Since so many romance novels have been published, and since the covers follow a fairly consistent visual formula, the covers of these novels constitute a genre. During the

¹ Romance Writers of America, "Romance Industry Statistics," myRWA: The Romance Writers of America, 2013, <http://www.rwa.org/p/cm/ld/fid=580>.

² Mary Novak, "All About AAR's Readers." *All About Romance: The Back Fence for Lovers of Romance Novels*, Feb. 1, 2005, <http://www.likesbooks.com/195.html>

³ Carol Thurston, *The romance revolution: erotic novels for women and the quest for a new sexual identity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 228.

1980s and 1990s, trends in big book historical romance novel covers came and went, but the covers remained distinctive of the genre. This thesis will examine the shared story of romance novel covers during these two decades, considering the implications and aims of that shared story. Individual artists, art directors and publication houses will be mentioned primarily in terms of their contributions to the genre's conventions.

The importance of genre to an understanding of romance novel covers explains the choice of the time period to be examined. It was in the 1980s and 1990s that some of the most recognizable conventions of the "big book" romance novel covers were created, perfected and exaggerated. The literary genre associated with these covers, the historical romance, began in 1972 with the publication of *The Flame and the Flower* by Kathleen Woodiwiss, but neither the conventions of the cover nor the conventions of the literature were established until the 1980s. By the end of the 1990s, the use of photo-editing software and photographs changed the look of the "big book" romance cover and led to new and different genre conventions.

In this thesis, the name used for the visual genre of covers will be the "big book" look, "clinch cover," or "big book historical romance cover". The term "big book look" is occasionally used by professionals in the romance novel cover industry,⁴ even though the term is not an industry standard. A "big book" refers to a romance that a publisher thought would sell well on its own, rather than as part of a series. The term refers, in other words, to a lead title. The simpler term "romance novel cover" is the more

⁴ See Romantic Times Staff. "The 1987 Romantic Times Historical Romance Eye-catching Cover Award Goes To JASMINE ON THE WIND." *Romantic Times Magazine*, no. 48 (Feb/March 1988) 38. See also James Plumeri, (art director for New American Library) interview by Thomas L. Bonn, April 19, 1978, Thomas Bonn Collection of Publishers' Interviews, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries. See also Judy York (cover artist) interview with the author through email, January-March 2015.

commonly used, but this leads to confusion because not all romances look alike. The term “historical romance novel cover” is more closely allied with the literary genre of historical romance, rather than with the visual genre of big book covers.

The first chapter will examine the visual trends that led to the “big book look”, which is the historical romance novel cover’s distinctive genre. Conventions of representation and visual formulas from earlier genres of paperback covers, such as the covers of 1960s romances, Gothics, men’s paperback covers and “family sagas” all contributed to the romance novel covers. The second chapter will tackle the question of the nature of the material. What are the “rules” of the romance novel cover genre and how did these rules change over time?

The third, fourth, and fifth chapters will discuss the problematic aspects of reading and viewing materials which are addressed specifically to women. Chapter three will delve into the power implied in the poses of the figures and their relative states of undress. Chapter four and chapter five will cover the sense of shame that readers experience, drawing comparisons between the romance novel and erotica, or pornography.

Conceptions of femininity do not exist in isolation. Instead they must be viewed in relationship to conceptions of masculinity. Romance novel covers advance a specific conception of masculinity that caters to an assumed female viewer. Images of the male romance cover model alone came into fashion in the mid-1990s. Chapter seven will discuss how the romance novel models appear on the cover, and how their gestures and appearance mirror larger social and advertising trends.

The scholarly and conventionally published material on this topic is minimal. To date, there have been two books published on romance cover art: *The Look of Love: The Art of the Romance Novel* (2002), and *The Art of Romance: Mills & Boon and Harlequin Cover Design* (2008). The books are strictly histories, and oriented towards a popular history reader. Neither of these works offers an interpretation of symbolism, or comparison of ways of looking. *The Look of Love* purports to be a general history of the genre but places an emphasis on the romance covers of the 1960s and 1970s. In this lavishly illustrated book, only two of the book covers date from the 1980s, and none date to the 1990s. Though the idea is never stated in words, the author of *The Look of Love*, McKnight-Trontz, suggests that the “big book historical romance” covers of the 1980s constitute a different genre of material from the covers of the 1960s and 1970s with which *The Look of Love* is concerned. *The Art of Romance* deals specifically with the covers made for Mills & Boon and Harlequin, a small subset of all the covers produced. Most of the major paperback publishers have produced or still produce romance novels. Among these are Avon, Berkley, Fawcett, Dorchester, Doubleday, HarperCollins, Kensington, New American Library, Penguin Random House, Warner, Signet, and Simon & Schuster through their acquisition of Pocket Books.⁵

The only in-depth scientific study to examine the effects of romance covers on the viewer was conducted by Christine Naber in 1995. This study was formulated with a very definite agenda in mind, which damaged its credibility as a source, as will be discussed in chapter three of this thesis. In 2000, Kim Brackett wrote an essay for “Social Science Journal,” addressing the topic of the shame that romance novel readers experience.

⁵ Thurston, *Romance Revolution*, 64. See also Thomas Bonn, *Under cover: an illustrated history of American mass-market paperbacks* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 70.

George Paizis wrote a poetic chapter on the symbolism of the romance novel cover in his 1998 book *Love and the novel: the poetics and politics of romantic fiction*. Unfortunately this book only discusses the implications of the symbolism used in British romance cover art, which is entirely different from the American version of romance cover art.

With so little material specifically on this topic, I used unconventional sources such as surveys on the opinions of romance readers. Whereas fine art is made to be discussed and viewed by the few, commercial art succeeds or fails based on the opinions of masses of people. It is natural then to use quantitative data based on collective responses in order to assess the success or failure of a piece of commercial artwork. One of the ways to talk about romance novels and their readers is that of using readers' responses. Carol Thurston based her highly respected work on the romance novel not only on a close reading of romance novels, but also on a survey she ran in 1982 that garnered 502 respondents.⁶ Janice Radway based her book *Reading the Romance* on a survey of fifty women in the small town of Smithton.⁷

Following this approach, I put together a survey about romance covers and asked a few websites devoted to romance novel culture to post the survey. The survey ran for a couple of weeks at the end of November of 2014 on one of these websites, "Smart Bitches, Trashy Books". The survey garnered two hundred and twenty four responses.

The sample size of the survey was small and the answers were incomplete and biased toward those readers of romance who can see the lighter side of the genre by the nature of "Smart Bitches, Trashy Books." The title of the blog makes it clear that these

⁶ Thurston, *Romance Revolution*, 227.

⁷ Janice Radway, *Reading the romance: women, patriarchy, and popular literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 47.

readers are those who understand the “trashy” reputation of romance novels, and are willing to own and laugh at the failings of the genre. Obviously the respondents were not the same viewers for which the covers of the 1980s and 1990s were intended. Still, the purpose of the survey was to discover which of the ideas on romance novel covers were not solely a personal view, but were also shared by others. The survey did provide another perspective on the covers and the respondents often phrased thoughts more clearly than I could.

The other unconventional source used was the magazine *Romantic Times*. *Romantic Times*, which was established in 1981, and runs reviews of romance novels and news articles about romance novel fan culture. Along with articles on trends in romance novel covers, the magazine offers biographical information on artists, and letters from readers. Most vitally of all, through the ads and illustrations for romance novels, *Romantic Times* offers a year by year chronology of what is popular on the covers of the best-selling romance novels from 1981 up until the present day.

Between 1978 and 1980, the publishing historian and librarian Thomas Bonn recorded interviews with art directors from major publishing houses as research for his book on paperback covers. Although Bonn’s book, *Under Cover: An Illustrated History of American Mass Market Paperbacks* barely mentions romance, the interviews date from the period when the romance cover art conventions of the 1980s were being worked out. Interviews with art directors Barbara Bertoli, Milton Charles, and James Plumeri shed light on the reasons why these art directors chose certain artists, and motifs for romance covers. These interviews are available at the Syracuse University Archive as the “Thomas Bonn Collection”.

I also conducted interviews by phone, in person and by email with cover artists, Sharon Spiak, Franco Accornero, Judy York, and James Griffin, and the art director at Kensington, Lou Malcangi. Interviews from websites, books and “Illustration” magazine also helped to understand the cover artists’ perspective on the works.

Although sources specifically on romance novel cover art are rare, the literature on subjects related to the covers is rich and plentiful. The romance novel covers touch on so many subjects that to mention each source would be onerous for the reader. A list of some of the most important sources on each of the subjects follows. Whenever possible I used classic, well respected sources. Kenneth Davis’ book *Two-Bit Culture*, Richard Lupoff’s *The American Paperback*, and most of all, Thomas Bonn’s *Undercover* are the main sources on the book publishing industry and on the history of illustration. The history and analysis of advertising also aided an understanding of romance novel covers because both covers and ads are meant to tempt the viewer into making a purchase. Anthony Cortese’s book, *Provocateur*, was vital to discussions of images of men in the mid-1990s. Works on women’s pornography, primarily Jane Juffer’s book *At Home with Pornography*, provided background on how sexually explicit material was viewed during the 1980s and 1990s. Understanding the gender symbolism in the covers was key because the covers are so associated with what being a woman means. The explanation of sexual imagery of men pulled heavily on Steven Neale’s essay “Masculinity as spectacle” and Sean Nixon’s essay “Exhibiting Masculinity”. Classics of women’s writings like *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* helped an understanding of a woman’s wants, but the classic theories of how a woman looks at visual imagery was

vital as well. Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," and Kaja Silverman's essay "Fassbinder and Lacan" put forth the information on female viewing.

Since the content of a romance influences how the reader views a cover, I relied on the classics of romance novel analysis, *Loving with a Vengeance* by Tania Modleski, *Reading the Romance* by Janice Radway, and *The Romance Revolution* by Carol Thurston, and also Susan Ostrov Weisser's analysis of the modern romance novel, *The Glass Slipper*.

The romance novel cover is a complex and contradictory subject that deserves further study. Perhaps with the rise in popularity of lurid pulp magazine covers, kitsch and women's studies, the romance novel cover will be more thoroughly studied and appreciated in the next few years.

Chapter 1: The History of Paperback Publishing and Paperback Covers.

The covers on the “big book” romance novels from the 1980s and 1990s had a distinct visual formula. This formula, called the “clinch,” or the “big book” look, was meant to signal to the reader that the book was part of a literary genre of romance called the historical romance, which began with the publication of *The Flame and the Flower* in 1972. *The Flame and the Flower* marked the point at which a genre was named and recognized as a distinct thing. As a distinct genre, publishers were incentivized to make a book’s cover look different from all other genres of books. However, both the visual language of the “clinch” covers, and the historical romance literary genre drew upon older influences.

As paperback historian Richard Lupoff said, “there were paperbacks before there were paperbacks.”⁸ The history of paperback publishing is marked by several key moments which could be taken as the start of the story of the rise of the paperbacks. In the 19th century, penny dreadfuls, dime novels and yellowbacks offered cheap, sensational entertainment inside a flimsy cover.⁹ Nickel and dime novels served up stories of cowboys, explorers, and detectives,¹⁰ but at the end of the 19th century these dime novels were superseded by the success of the pulp magazines.¹¹

The magazine boom of the 1920s through 1950s had some influence on later romance novel covers. Magazines such as *McCall’s*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Redbook*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Good Housekeeping* were aimed at women and offered serialized love

⁸ Richard Lupoff, *The Great American Paperback: Art, Collectibles, Pop Culture* (Portland, OR: Collectors Press, 2001), 21.

⁹ Bonn, *UnderCover*, 25.

¹⁰ Lupoff, *The Great American Paperback*, 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

stories along with health and social advice. Magazines such as *Street & Smith's Love Story Magazine* ran nearly exclusively romance stories. On the covers and in lavishly painted or drawn illustrations, the magazines set up a formula for how romance was portrayed.¹² Artists such as Jon Whitcomb, Coby Whitmore, Joe Demers, Bernard D'Andrea, and Joe Bowler made careers based on painting women for female magazine readers, called guy/girl art, or boy/girl art.¹³ The woman was the focal point of the painting, and her love interest was one more accessory to her perfect lifestyle. In Coby Whitmore's 1950s illustration for *Good Housekeeping*, the perfectly groomed and coiffed woman exudes elegance, innocence and sexuality. (fig. 1) The composition in which the man stands behind the woman, while she gazes out into space is very similar to the early romance covers of the 1960s and 1970s.

Historian Lee Server sets the beginning of the history of paperbacks in 1938, when Robert De Graf started Pocket Books, a publishing house that exclusively sold paperbacks for only a quarter.¹⁴ A quarter was one hour's pay at a minimum wage job. As historian Richard Lupoff points out, "Over the years, through good times and bad, through inflation, prosperity, recession, and boom, the typical price of a mass-market paperback has been close to an hour's pay for a worker earning minimum wage."¹⁵ Allen Lane started publishing Penguin Books paperbacks in England in 1935. What links these early Penguin books with later paperbacks is that Lane sold the books through

¹² Dan Zimmer, "The Art of Coby Whitmore," *Illustration* 10, no. 37 (Spring 2012): 38.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁴ Lee Server, *Over my dead body: the sensational age of American paperbacks, 1945-1955* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1994), 10. See also Lupoff, *The Great American Paperback*, 27.

¹⁵ Lupoff, *The Great American Paperback*, 37.

Woolworth's department stores.¹⁶ Again and again, paperback publishers would use mass-distribution venues such as grocery stores, newsstands and department stores to bring the books to a wider public.¹⁷ At about the same time as Lane and De Graf were starting Penguin and Pocket Books, the later legendary Ian Ballantine returned to the U.S. to start distributing English paperback titles by Penguin Books.¹⁸ Ballantine helmed the mostly independent American branch of Penguin Books after the advent of World War II made distribution of British imports nearly impossible.¹⁹ Avon Books would begin publication in 1941, and Popular Library and Dell Books both started publishing paperbacks in 1943.²⁰

Despite tight restrictions on paper, the early paperback publishing houses received an enormous boost in their publication numbers from World War II. Cheaply printed and stapled Armed Service Editions of paperback books were issued to soldiers and sailors during the war.²¹ Men who otherwise would not have picked up a book returned from the war as paperback readers.²² Along with educational titles, sleazy, bloody pulps were published after the war to cater to the tastes of ex-GIs who had experienced the grittier side of life.²³

¹⁶ Bonn, *UnderCover*, 27.

¹⁷ Kenneth C. Davis, "Trends in Twentieth-Century Mass Market Publishing," in *American Literary Publishing Houses, 1900-1980; Trade and Paperback*, Dictionary of Literary Biography v. 46, ed. Peter Dzwonkoski (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1986), 397.

¹⁸ Kenneth C. Davis, *Two-bit culture: the paperbacking of America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 54.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁰ Bonn, *UnderCover*, 47.

²¹ *Ibid.*, and Davis, *Two-Bit Culture*, 69.

²² Server, *Over my dead body*, 12.

²³ *Ibid.*

The covers of the pulp-style paperbacks were lurid, bright and eye-catching. Paperback historian Lee Server called the paperback covers from the 1950s and '60s, “Garish oils on canvas, a dreamlike, exaggerated realism, the depicted scene an overheated pheromone-charged moment from the enclosed narrative.”²⁴ Covers by artists such as Earle K. Bergey, Rudolph Belarski, and Barye Phillips served up dramatically lit, almost cartoonish drama while artist taking after the great James Avati reached for a slightly grittier tone.

Good examples of this genre are the covers for *The Bleeding Scissors* painted by Robert Maguire, and the cover for *The Damon Runyon Story* painted by Rudolph Belarski. (figs. 2-3) In both works the bright color bursts off the page. Drama is highlighted through the attractive young female’s evident distress, and violence is implied through the woman bursting out of the newsprint in figure 2, and with the blood seeping from beneath the man’s prone body in figure 1. Sex was another one of the cover genre’s selling points. The woman’s negligee in *The Damon Runyon Story* is getting perilously close to slipping off of her large breasts.

This kind of exuberant exaggeration from the pulp covers of the 1950s and 1960s crept into the big book clinch covers of the 1980s and 1990s. By the 1980s, photographic reproduction was good enough for use on book covers; nonetheless, “big book historical” romances used *paintings* instead. Photography simply could not capture the overblown emotion that both pulps and romance were thought to require.

In the 1950s, publishers discovered that they could get away with a higher level of sexuality than either radio or television because of the “relative freedom that the law

²⁴ Ibid., 57.

granted to literature.”²⁵ As veteran illustrator Robert Maguire points out, “the very same illustrators who had done so much of the male oriented scenes showing sexy women with low-cut blouses on the covers of the books of the ’50s and ’60s now were doing the sexy romance covers of the ’80s and ’90s.”²⁶ Walter Popp, Mitchell Hooks, Robert Maguire, and Robert McGinnis all moved from male-oriented sexual covers to women-oriented sexual covers during the romance novel boom of the late 1970s. Robert McGinnis was so famous for his paintings of sexy women that he was asked to work for *Playboy* painting pinups after Alberto Vargas died.²⁷ The so-called “Queen of the Romance Novel” in the 1980s and 1990s,²⁸ Elaine Duillo, did some sexy paperback covers intended for a male audience before making the romance covers she was known for. Artists spent their whole careers in illustration, but did not necessarily stick to one genre of literature. New artists joined the genre throughout the 1980s and 1990s, sometimes mentored or taught by the older generation.²⁹

The method of production of covers provided another direct link between the pulps and the big book romance covers, since cover production changed little between the

²⁵ Ibid., 43.

²⁶ Robert Maguire and Gary Lovisi. “The Magic of Robert A. Maguire,” *Illustration* 1, no. 3 reissue (Summer 2009): 31.

²⁷ Robert McGinnis, and Art Scott. *The Art of Robert E. McGinnis* (London: Titan Books, 2014), 8.

²⁸ Vincent Di Fate, “2003 Hall of Fame Inductee: Elaine Duillo,” Society of Illustrators Hall of Fame, 2003. <https://www.societyillustrators.org/elaine-duillo>

²⁹ Among the artists working in the 1980s and 1990s who painted at least a few romance novel covers were Franco Accornero, Ralph Amatrudi, Steve Assel, Peter Attard, Alan Ayers, Harry Bennett, Don Case, Dan Crouse, Pino Daeni, Joe DiCesare, Elaine Duillo, John Ennis, Renato Fratini, Victor Gadino, Charles Geer, Charles Gehm, Elaine Gignilliat, Max Ginsburg, James Griffin, Gregg Gulbranson, H. Tom Hall, Jaime de Jesus, George H. Jones, Morgan Kane, Frank Karel, Allan Kass, Roger Kastel, Robert Maguire, Lou Marchetti, Richard Newton, Doreen Minuto, Robert McGinnis, Leslie Pellegrino Peck, Barnet Plotkin, Walter Popp, SanJulien, John Solie, Sharon Spiak, Susanna Steig, David Stimson, Shannon Stirnweis, and Judy York. To this we could add a list of signatures gathered from book covers, but without any indication of the full name of the artist: Sandro, R. Aime, Sabin, Gerny, Ken, B. Emmett, Liana, Herring, and Kotzky.

1940s and the 1990s. An art director came up with a concept for a cover with input from the heads of marketing, editorial and production.³⁰ The art director then hired a freelance artist to paint an original artwork for the book's cover.³¹ The artist could work with a photographer, models, and a costumer to create a photograph to paint from, or could work from earlier images the artist had collected. The illustrator and teacher Thomas Lapadula says that artists worked from black and white illustrations even after color photography became cheap. Artists can more easily change lighting and color schemes and mood if they are undistracted from the original colors in the photograph.³²

Historian Kenneth C. Davis suggests that another pivotal moment in the rise of paperbacks was the birth of the Baby-boomers. The Boomers were more literate, richer and better educated than the generations before them, and they grew up with paperback books.³³ Between 1946 and 1964, nearly seventy-five million copies of Dr. Benjamin Spock's book, *Baby and Child Care*, were sold, giving a taste of how the Baby-boomers would continue to affect the paperback market for decades.³⁴ Along with the publication of sleazy pulps for ex- GIs, the 1950s also marked the beginning of the "teach-your-children-to-read" efforts that made readers out of the Boomers.³⁵

Historian Linda Scott advances the theory that these literacy efforts were uniquely gendered, teaching boys to read about pirates and cowboys, while girls were

³⁰ Bonn, *UnderCover*, 84.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

³² Thomas Lapadula, (cover artist) email to the author, February 2018.

³³ Davis, *Two-bit culture*, 1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁵ Linda M. Scott, "Markets and Audiences". in *A History of the Book in America: volume 5 The Enduring Book: Print Culture in Postwar America*, ed. David Paul Nord, Joan Shelley Rubin and Michael Schudson. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 72-91.

encouraged to read about princesses and love.³⁶ When these baby-boomers reached the age when they could buy their own books, there was a spike in the number of gendered paperbacks sold, such as Westerns, or romance.³⁷ Linda Scott opines that, “Because the typical romance reader buys her first romance at seventeen, the middle-aged readers who make up the bulk of the market probably started in the 1970s, about the time Harlequin novels were introduced.”³⁸

Since the 1950s, Canadian company Harlequin had been reprinting romances by Mills & Boon, a British company with a history of romance novel publishing stretching back to the 1930s.³⁹ Harlequin did not take a step into significant international sales until Harlequin hired marketing genius Lawrence Heisey in the 1970s. Lawrence Heisey, was a self-described “soap salesman” whom Harlequin hired away from Proctor and Gamble.⁴⁰ Heisey’s idea was to market, not the individual authors but the brand of Harlequin. Based on market research, Heisey developed writing guidelines for Harlequin writers that specified not just the length of the works, but also elements of the plot and the level of sexuality.⁴¹ The company set up book clubs which would ship a set number of either repackaged Mills & Boon titles or new Harlequins right to the reader’s door. The Mills & Boon titles, though increasingly erotic, contained no scenes of actual sex. Initially, Harlequin’s original titles likewise contained no sex scenes, thanks to a

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Albert N. Greco, *The Book Publishing Industry* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1996), 225.

³⁸ Scott, “Markets and Audiences,” 87.

³⁹ Joanna Bowring and Margaret O'Brien, *The Art of Romance: Mills & Boon and Harlequin Cover Designs* (Munich: Prestel, 2008), 10.

⁴⁰ Radway, *Reading the romance*, 39.

⁴¹ Thurston, *The romance revolution*, 46.

Harlequin editor's schoolteacher wife "who considered most paperbacks too sexy."⁴² It was only after the success of the "sensual" category series published by other companies that Harlequin allowed sex to enter certain sub-series of Harlequin romances, such as the American Romances series, introduced by Harlequin in 1983.⁴³

Chaste or not, Harlequin's marketing strategy was very successful in the late 1970s. Historian Kenneth Davis writes that, "Harlequins went from nowhere to second place in sales (behind Bantam) in 1979 with U.S. sales estimated at \$63 million to \$70 million, representing approximately 10 percent of the domestic market and with a profit margin of 25 percent to 30 percent, far exceeding even the highest of its general mass market competitors."⁴⁴

The covers for Harlequin covers and 1960s romances were staid and static compared to the shocking color and drama of the pulps and the later big book clinch covers. Alan Boon, a son of one of the founders of Mills & Boon, described the 1960s covers as, "Our nice young couple, neatly (and always fully) dressed with a bit of background, every object clearly recognisable for what it is."⁴⁵ The covers for *Community Nurse*, written by Arlene Hale, and *It Happened One Flight*, written by Maysie Greig, are representative examples of these early romance covers (figs. 4-5). In both covers, the woman stands in front of the man, half turned away from him, gazing out into space. The covers are painted, but the scene maintains enough relationship with reality to be one step away from photography. The touching is minimal and the

⁴² Davis, *Two-bit culture*, 363.

⁴³ Thurston, *The romance revolution*, 63.

⁴⁴ Davis, *Two-bit culture*, 364.

⁴⁵ Bowring and O'Brien, *The art of romance*, 12.

participants look almost bored. Although not much visual similarity can be seen between the covers of these '60s and '70s romances and the covers for big book romance covers, there is a strong visual correlation between these covers and the category romance titles of the 1980s and 1990s.

The idea of creating a distinctive look for a genre of romance fiction could have come from the success of the Gothic genre, one of historical romance's direct antecedents. The Gothics were renowned for having the most rigid cover formulas around. The covers nearly always showed a "woman in white dress fleeing from dark castle with one light in the window."⁴⁶ Historian Grady Hendricks says that the 1960s Ace Books editor Jerry Gross wrote his art director about the Gothic romance covers. "Make the heroine look like a very refined upper-class blond woman with good cheekbones.... She's running towards you... behind her is a dark castle with one light in the window, usually in the tower. Make the tower tall and thick, Believe me, they'll get the phallic imagery."⁴⁷ Lou Marchetti was generally credited with establishing this formula with his cover for *Thunder Heights* by Phyllis Whitney in 1960.⁴⁸ Tania Modleski says Gothics were a blend of mystery and romance. "In the typical gothic plot, the heroine comes to a mysterious house, perhaps as a bride, perhaps in another capacity, and either starts to mistrust her husband or else finds herself in love with a mysterious

⁴⁶ Robert E. McGinnis, Art Scott and Wallace Maynard, *The paperback covers of Robert McGinnis: a complete listing of the 1,068 titles and 1,432 editions of the paperback cover illustrations of Robert McGinnis* (Boston, MA: Pond Press, 2001), 96.

⁴⁷ Grady Hendrix, *Paperbacks from Hell: The Twisted History of '70s and '80s Horror Fiction* (Philadelphia, PA: Quirk Books, 2017), 13.

⁴⁸ Bonn, *UnderCover*, Fig. 20a.

man who appears to be some kind of criminal.”⁴⁹ As Davis observes, Gothics were “proven moneymakers through the 1960s,”⁵⁰ but were abruptly eclipsed and absorbed by romance novels in the mid-1970s.⁵¹ Although *Thunder Heights* has the elements to be classed as a Gothic cover, the woman in a diaphanous dress in front of a dark castle, (fig. 6) the dark tone of later Gothics can be seen better in the cover for *Shorecliff* by George Ziel (fig. 7).

Gothics perfected the emotional tone and moody, wind-swept look that “big book” romance covers brought to absurd heights. Although a number of artists painted both an occasional Gothic and an occasional “big book” cover, Harry Bennett’s loose, painterly style was deemed ideal for the feel of both genres of cover art. (fig 8) Art director Milton Charles said in a 1978 interview about romance cover art, “ Harry Bennett does this. He does it better than anybody else. He happens to be a guy who really just loves women and he gets the kind of sensitivity and the looseness and the fantasy in this better than anybody else.”⁵²

Another influence on the clinch covers may have been the covers for historical family sagas. Though relatively unknown today, these multi-volume works followed the rise of a family through turbulent historical events, and family sagas dominated paperback sales in the late 1970s.⁵³ *The Thorn Birds*, by Colleen McCollough, telling a

⁴⁹ Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (New York, London: Routledge, 1990), 59.

⁵⁰ Davis, *Two-bit culture*, 362.

⁵¹ Jennifer McKnight-Trontz, *The Look of Love: The Art of the Romance Novel* (New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 2002), 23.

⁵² Milton Charles, (art director for Pocketbook) interview by Thomas L. Bonn, April 17, 1978. Thomas Bonn Collection of Publishers' Interviews, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries.

⁵³ Bonn, *UnderCover*, 111.

family's struggle to put down roots in Australia, was a bestseller in 1977. Some of the covers on these titles, such as John Jakes' Kent family series, used multiple vignettes to appeal to multiple audiences.⁵⁴ Certain historical sagas, such as Lou Feck's illustrations for the Kent Family series, employ the central figures or wrap-around swirl of small vignettes which would prove very popular with big book romance cover artists. (fig 9) Artist Franco Accornero started his career illustrating the "family sagas" of the 1970s, before making dozens of romance covers in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s.⁵⁵

It was logical that art directors should treat the covers of historical romances and of historical family sagas in a similar fashion. Although there was a difference in the emphasis between historical romances and sagas, the similarities were undeniable. One of the earliest success stories of historical romance was the Skye O'Malley series by Bertrice Small. Skye's adventures were so episodic and disparate that her story contained an entire family's worth of drama. As Thurston says, Skye O'Malley "fearlessly engages in psychological and physical warfare with the Queen of England, among others, has four different husbands (including the Whoremonger of Algiers, who it turns out is a gentle and loving man), and bears six children—and then four years later came a sequel!"⁵⁶ Many of the family sagas were written by women and included a strong element of romance. According to the publisher's blurb, *The Thorn Birds* is, most of all, "the story of Meggie, who falls madly in love with a man she can never marry, and of Ralph, a truly beautiful man, whose ambition takes him from Outback parish priest to the inner circles of the Vatican—but whose love for Meggie Cleary will lead to a passion he cannot

⁵⁴ Ibid., 87.

⁵⁵ Franco Accornero (cover artist) interview with the author, February 11, 2015.

⁵⁶ Thurston, *The romance revolution*, 78.

control.”⁵⁷ Even if the blurb is inaccurate, it proves that what the publisher was trying to sell with *The Thorn Birds* was romance.

In the 1970s the prices for the rights to reprint hardcover bestsellers climbed to astronomical heights.⁵⁸ As noted by Davis, “by the mid-1970s million-dollar paperback auctions had become almost commonplace.”⁵⁹ Distressed by the escalating prices, in 1972 Avon decided to select all new titles for its paperbacks. “Avon announced that its entire list for September would be made up of original publications and projected that the following year 40 percent of its list would be originals.”⁶⁰ Avon editor Nancy Coffey, “known as the den mother of historical romance novels,” selected a manuscript by first time writer Kathleen Woodiwiss off of Avon’s slush pile.⁶¹ The novel, *The Flame and the Flower*, includes “a veritable pall of sensuality that is both pervasive and constant, amounting to 350 pages of sexual foreplay.”⁶² The book was such a runaway success that publishers scrambled to find manuscripts that duplicated the work’s mix of sex, romance, and historical adventure. “In 1981, romance sales were estimated at upwards of \$200 million, representing as much as 40 percent of the domestic paperback business.”⁶³

The Flame and the Flower was not, however, the beginning of big book romance cover art as it appeared in the 1980s and 90s. The first few covers released by Avon

⁵⁷ Avon Copywriters, “Avon Books is proud to publish the history-making bestseller *The Thorn Birds*” in *The Thorn Birds*, by Colleen McCullough, (New York: Avon, 1977), i.

⁵⁸ Thurston, *The romance revolution*, 47.

⁵⁹ Davis, “Trends in Twentieth Century...”, 406.

⁶⁰ Bonn, *UnderCover*, 73.

⁶¹ Mary Ann Landers, “Charting the Course of Romantic Fiction,” *Romantic Times Magazine* no. 100 (July 1992): 10.

⁶² Thurston, *The romance revolution*, 48.

⁶³ Davis, *Two-bit culture*, 363.

included only small illustrations on a overwhelming single color background (figs. 10-15). In this format, with the small illustration on a monochrome, usually white, the background was not unique to historical romance, but was popular across genres in the 1970s.⁶⁴ The early covers had something that distinguished romance covers from other genres for years to come: elaborate, hand-crafted type. The type follows no pre-established font; instead, the letters bend, lean, and intermingle. The letterforms swirl around each other in a unique, self-consciously pretty design. For instance in figure 13, *Sweet, Savage Love*, the initial capitals bend around each other, and in figure 15, *Captive Bride*, the capital ‘B’ in ‘bride’ loops below the initial ‘C’ of ‘captive’. The art director of Avon in the 1970s, Barbara Bertoli, explained that, “The long, curved forms have really been my trademark. Big, bold, sensual, and expressive type typography, where the typography is as expressive as a scene from the book.”⁶⁵ The trend of monochrome backgrounds graced with a tiny painted scene and large type was powerful enough that other publishers followed Avon’s lead.

By the end of the 1970s, the first larger vignettes began to appear. H. Tom Hall’s cover for *Shanna* by Kathleen Woodiwiss, published in 1977, contains most of the elements for which “big book” historical romance cover art is known: an image which fills the entire cover, large floating flowers, a central clinch, and a shirtless man. Elaine Gignilliat’s 1978 cover for *The Black Swan* has an early version of the clinch, the wrap around cover, the moody landscape and the flowing drapery and hair that became standard elements in the romance novel cover visual lexicon.

⁶⁴ Bonn, *Under cover*, 107.

⁶⁵ Barbara Bertoli, (art director for Avon) interview by Thomas L. Bonn, date unknown. (Listed as “Aesthetics and effectiveness of cover art undated - interviewee unknown”). Thomas Bonn Collection of Publishers' Interviews, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries.

Early romance novels before the 1980s had not perfected the final formula for the plot either. The later romance stories published *after* the early 1980s centered around the romantic relationship between a man and a woman and each book includes at least one sex scene. Something keeps the woman and man apart, sometimes their inability to change, or their inability to accept their feelings for each other, even though they feel a powerful sexual attraction. The formula is elastic enough to include an element of mystery, a futuristic or fantasy setting, or even a bit of magical time-travel.

The romances from the 1970s and early 1980s included a differently plotted subgenre of romance that *Romantic Times Magazine* called the “sweet-savage” subgenre.⁶⁶ Sweet-savage titles had a strong strain of rape in them.⁶⁷ Avon’s next major romance success after *The Flame and the Flower* was Rosemary Rogers’ *Sweet Savage Love* in 1974.⁶⁸ Thurston said of Rogers, “perhaps more than any other attribute, however, it is the mixing of pain with pleasure and cruelty with love that is the hallmark of Rogers’s work.”⁶⁹ Jennifer Wilde, Patricia Matthews and Catherine Coulter are other frequent offenders. The art director for Pocket Book, Milton Charles, said in a 1978 interview, “All of these historical romances you see that look somewhat similar to this by Avon are all filled with sex that would embarrass Harold Robbins. Every five pages there’s a rape, or a gang bang or something like that.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Landers, “Charting the Course of Romantic Fiction,” 10.

⁶⁷ Sarah Wendell and Candy Tan, *Beyond heaving bosoms: the smart bitches' guide to romance novels* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 137.

⁶⁸ Thurston, *The romance revolution*, 67.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁷⁰ Charles, interview by Thomas Bonn, April 17, 1978.

Although these “sweet-savage” titles lost popularity and disappeared from romance in the early 1980s, the stigma of violence haunted the romance genre for decades.⁷¹ To this day, one of the names for a historical romance is a “bodice-ripper”, referring to the woman’s clothes being ripped off her.

⁷¹ Landers, “Charting the course . . .,” 10.

Chapter 2: The Nature of Big Book Historical Romance Covers

The cover for *Time-Kept Promises* is a typical example of a big book clinch cover from the 1980s or 1990s. *Time-Kept Promises* was written by Constance O'Day-Flannery for Zebra in 1988, and the artwork was painted by an artist named Pino. (fig. 16)

The cover is pictorial and fantastic, removed from any reality a camera could capture.

The hero's leg seems to disappear into gigantic flowers. The heroine's dress is hiked up her leg and it is ambiguous whether the heroine is being supported by the hero, or is sitting on a flower. The plane of the picture is tipped upwards so that the central figures are up to their waist in some sort of streambed, just about to be run down by horses. One horse has legs, the other two are either buried chest deep in foliage, or are missing their bodies altogether. On the wrap-around image on the back of the book, pictures and newspapers as big as cars swirl around yet another image of the embracing couple.

More important than making the cover accord with seen reality is to make the cover irresistible by filling it with life, movement and color. One art director from the early 1980s said that the ideal romance cover was “akin to that of an attractive box of chocolates: a package hard not to pick up and sample.”⁷² Although the style is largely representational, the rules of perspective, gravity, reality, and anatomy can be bent in service of a dramatic flow of movement throughout the cover. Enormous floating flowers, ridiculously long hair and manic animals, such as the horses in *Time-Kept Promises*, are a few of the symbols meant to help convey “passion.”

Certain elements of *Time-Kept Promises* are representative of the big book romance covers created during the 1980s and 1990s. The covers of big book romances had a recognizable and fairly rigid formula. The embracing couple in a bucolic scene

⁷² Bonn, *UnderCover*, 110.

marks this cover as belonging to one of the most common and recognisable sorts of covers from the period called a “clinch.” Enormous flowers, glaring colors, and frantic animals were frequent additions to the clinch.⁷³ The way that the hero on *Time-Kept Promises* wears his shirt, unbuttoned but tucked into his pants, is so typical of the big book covers that authors Sarah Wendell and Candy Tan call it one of “the two never-fail elements” of romance covers.⁷⁴ The clinch was so common that in a 1983 interview art director Milton Charles said, “Every cover on a romance shows a man and a woman in an embrace.”⁷⁵ The formula could and did change, but change was often slow and gradual or else the result of one cover selling extraordinarily well. Once a change became established, covers followed the trend almost religiously, allowing only small deviations from the new agreed-upon formula.

The writing of the *Time-Kept Promises* also accords well with the formula of the romance novel. *Time-Kept Promises* is part of a sub-genre of historical romances, the time-travel romance. The story is about Kristine Gavin, a reporter for a Philadelphia television station, who is transported back in time to 1871 by a bolt of magical lightning. She meets and falls in love with a plantation owner, who mistakes her for his evil wife. When another bolt of magical lightning transports the two lovers back to 1988, they have to deal with troubles in their relationship before finally settling into wedded bliss. Constance O’Day-Flannery wrote a whole series of time travel romances after the success of *Timeless Passion* in 1985, but she was by no means the only author to do so. A

⁷³ Wendell and Tan, *Beyond heaving bosoms*, 172.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁷⁵ Beth Levine, “Who’s Designing those Luscious Covers? Milt Charles, Art Director,” *Romantic Times Magazine* v. 1, no. 2 (Sept./Oct. 1983) 5.

Romantic Times Magazine article from 1992 mentions twenty-four authors who had produced at least one romance with a time travel element.⁷⁶

The basic elements of a romance novel are present in *Time-Kept Promises*. The plot focuses on the romantic relationship between the hero and heroine. They feel sexual attraction for each other, but some hindrance keeps them apart. There is at least one sex scene and the hero and heroine end up together.

Close adherence to the “formula” is key to the understanding of what is and what isn’t a romance novel, or a big book romance cover. Janice Radway defines category or formulaic literature by its “reliance on a recipe that dictates the essential ingredients to be included in each new version of the form,”⁷⁷ and this definition works just as well for romance cover art as for other genre works. Romance covers are defined by their adherence to a formula, not by individuality or innovation. No artist or art director is solely responsible for a romance cover. Cover artist Joe DiCesare stated, “with all these trends, the one constant factor in every cover was the publisher’s commitment to research what their readers wanted to see.”⁷⁸ A cover designer for Hachette publishing, Claire Brown said in 2012, “There are constraints in how much we can deviate without alienating the reader. Familiarity in typeface and painterly style reassures the reader that *this* book is what you think it is going to be, and you are going to *love* it.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Melinda Helfer and Kathe Robin, “Something for Everyone in the garden of romantic fiction,” *Romantic Times Magazine* 100 (July 1992): 18.

⁷⁷ Radway, *Reading the romance*, 29.

⁷⁸ Joe DiCesare & Sarah Wendell, “An interview with cover artist Joe DiCesare,” Smart Bitches, Trashy Books Blog, Oct 23, 2013. <http://smartbitchestrashybooks.com/m/blog/an-interview-with-cover-artist-joe-dicesare>.

⁷⁹ Claire Brown and Gail Anderson. “The Seduction of Romance-Novel Design.” *Print Magazine*. (May 2, 2012) <http://www.printmag.com/imprint/the-seduction-of-romance-novels>.

Anecdotally, a cover that does not accord with the formula will not sell. An art director of New American Library in the 1970s, James Plumeri tried to change up the cover formula for a gothic romance series. At the time, gothics were selling well, but Plumeri commissioned well-respected illustrator Mark English to produce covers more akin to English's work in women's magazines, such as *Collier's*, *McCall's*, and *Good Housekeeping*. Sales "took a dive."⁸⁰ Plumeri repackaged the books a few years later with formulaic covers and the books sold as well as gothic titles usually did. Plumeri said, "And so now I put my castle...and I can see that it's part of the industry."⁸¹

Nor is there any reason why the covers should accord with seen reality. The bending of rules in fact marks them as genre material. The particular way in which they bend the rules mark them as romance. In discussing film genres in *Questions of Genre*, Steve Neale says that genres are bound by their own set of rules, "specific systems of expectation and hypothesis that spectators bring with them."⁸² These "rules of the genre" do not have to equate in any direct sense to "reality" or "truth."⁸³ Neale brings up the example of characters in musicals spontaneously bursting into song and dance routines on the street, which certainly does not accord with the lived experience of walking down a city street. Yet the viewer of the musical accepts such scenes because they accord with the agreed upon formula of the genre. In certain genres such as police procedurals and thrillers, the claim to authenticity is vital. In others, such as gothics, romances, and

⁸⁰ Plumeri, interview with Thomas L. Bonn, 1978.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Steve Neale, "Questions of Genre," in *Film and Theory: An anthology*, eds. Stam Robert and Toby Miller (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 158.

⁸³ Ibid.

comedies, the rules that govern the genre are set by public opinion, what “the readers believe is true,”⁸⁴ a sort of shared story.

It should be emphasized that the covers which are primarily going to be discussed are those made for historical, single title, big-sellers, called “big books.”⁸⁵ The formula for a romance novel cover is so specific, that during the 1980s and 1990s, a distinct formula existed for the covers of a different sort of romance: the so-called category romances. Category, or series romances, were written to strict publisher specifications and published in a set number each month.⁸⁶ The figures on the covers of category titles are stiffly posed, and although the hero and the heroine may be embracing, the surrealist elements of historical romance covers are rarely present. Art Director for New American Library, James Plumeri, said in 1978, “This is what they call category romance. Very light, surfacy kind of thing. You’re not getting into heavy clinches and passion. No passion. We don’t try for passion. Quiet, quiet romantic.”⁸⁷ Category works don’t usually include oversized floating flowers, five-foot-long swirling hair, skewed perspectives, or distorted anatomy.

Contrast the cover for the big book historical cover for *Desert Dreams* by Sharon Spiak with the category romance cover for *Man Overboard* by Joe DiCesare. (figs. 17-18) In the big book historical, diagonal lines dominate the composition. The hero’s knee, the heroine’s dress and legs, and the flow of her hair all create dynamic diagonal lines which play up the drama of the scene. Sharon Spiak used most of the conventions of big

⁸⁴ Ibid., 159.

⁸⁵ York, interview with the author.

⁸⁶ Thurston, *The romance revolution*, 32.

⁸⁷ Plumeri, interview by Thomas L. Bonn.

book historicals: long hair blowing in the wind, a sweeping gown, bright, eye-catching color, plentiful amounts of skin, and slightly tipped up perspective. Spiak even managed to work in the flowers, although in this case they are oversized flowering cacti. On the other hand, in *Man Overboard*, the hero and heroine are planted in the center of the composition. There are some diagonals in the woman's elbow and her raised knee, but these are counteracted by the strong horizontal lines of the railing and horizon behind the couple. The colors in *Man Overboard* are muted compared to the violent pink and mint green of *Desert Dreams*.

Category romances had a connections to Harlequin, and through them, to Mills & Boon. Remember that Harlequin jumped to international success when marketing specialist Lawrence Heisey started marketing romance stories like other consumer goods: following strict guidelines as to the contents and the packaging. Similarly, category titles were written to publisher guidelines as to length, sexual content and plot. In many ways, Harlequins were the original category romances. The look of category romances is far more closely connected than big book historical covers to the cover art of the Harlequins and romances from the 1950s and 1960s.

One possible reason for the stiff figures and central compositions of categories was that the published design of a category romance had a border around the central cover image which contained the name of the series and the number, branding the book as part of a particular series. The artist of a category work was not always sure how much of his image would be chopped off by this border. For instance, Len Goldberg created a larger image for *Time to Let Go*, as can be seen in the Mills & Boon version, which

includes a lot more of the edges of the artwork.⁸⁸ (figs. 19-20) Creating a centrally oriented composition was a practical adaptation to the necessity of borders, but also kept the compositions fairly static.

Veteran illustrator Judy York said that there was a hierarchy of work that illustrators were given. Category works had their own illustrators who worked primarily in that genre, such as Len Goldberg, Joe DiCesare, Dan Crouse, and Dick Kohfield, although many artists such as Franco Accornero painted both category covers and big book covers. Category artists were paid less than single-title cover artists and single-title artists proudly boasted about “their” writer.⁸⁹ These works were meant to be more staid and there was an understanding that they demanded less originality.

Sexual restrictions could also account for some of the staid quality of category covers. As mentioned above, some category titles had very strict conventions about how much sexual content could be allowed, and Harlequin began by publishing only books with a “safe, no-sex formula.”⁹⁰ Once a cover art convention gets thoroughly established, art directors are careful to maintain the convention in order to reassure the buyer that she knows what she is buying. A staid, minimal cover design could have been used at first to reassure the reader that she would not find the book to be pornographic. Later, the same cover style could be used even on category titles with sexual content, because staid and minimal also conveyed to the reader that this was a category novel.

⁸⁸ Bowring and O’Brien, *The art of romance*, 216.

⁸⁹ York, interview with the author.

⁹⁰ Davis, *Two-bit culture*, 363.

The last type of romance novel are the regencies. Regency romances were set in England between 1811 and 1820, and traditionally included no sex.⁹¹ For many years, writers of historical romances were afraid to set their books in the Regency period for fear that the books would be relegated to the relatively obscure and unpopular regency sub-genre of romances. Writers for *Romantic Times* say that a shift happened when Judith McNaught's regency historical romance *Whitney, My Love* was published in 1985. McNaught was a best-selling author and *Whitney, My Love* sold like a big book historical title set in any other period. "Today Regency historical romances regularly make the bestseller lists," and a good percentage of books classed as historical romances are set in the Regency period.⁹² These post-1987 "regencies" certainly contain explicit sex scenes. Older regencies were so formulaic they could almost be considered another form of the "sweet" category romance titles in the 1980s.⁹³

The covers of the early Regency books were their own genre, with their own style — almost, but not quite the same as a category romance cover. (figs. 21-22) Because early Regency titles did not include sex before marriage, illustrators could only portray as much physical contact as would be permitted between a strictly chaperoned Regency couple.⁹⁴ In all three of the example covers, both the woman and man are fully clothed, and they touch only on the arms. Perhaps in line with the more starched tone of the writing, covers for these works were a little more stiff than big book romance covers, but more sentimentally impressionistic than most category works. As with category works,

⁹¹ Kathryn Falk, "Romantic Fiction: The subgenres defined," *Romantic Times Magazine* no. 10 (Conference edition 1983): 18.

⁹² Helfer and Robin, "Something for everyone . . .", 21.

⁹³ Thurston, *The romance revolution*, 187.

⁹⁴ York, interview with the author.

certain artists were known for their work in Regencies, such as Francis Marshall, Ralph Amatrudi, and Allan Kass.

It should be noted that the covers' relationship with the contents is problematic and complex. The idea that the cover reflects the contents of the novel is so pervasive that we warn people not to "judge a book by its cover." In genre material, there is a well established tradition of covers that do not have a very strict relationship with the interior. Pulp paperback illustrator Rudolph Belarski said about editors in the 1950s, "It didn't matter to them if it wasn't in the story....The editors would say, 'Don't worry, we'll write it in!'"⁹⁵ Instead of reading the book they are illustrating, cover artists frequently worked from fact sheets submitted by the writer, which included some suggested scenes and a detailed descriptions of the main characters.⁹⁶ The fact sheets sometimes also included "heat level."⁹⁷ Art directors made a concerted effort to correctly represent the period, the setting, and the hero and heroine's hair color, but covers that did not match the book inside were fairly common. Romance writer Nancy Richards-Akers heard rumors that an art director might "willingly disregard the content of a manuscript simply because there had been too many fair-haired couples and they wanted a change of pace."⁹⁸

There is a feeling in the industry that all romances are essentially the same. Illustrator Judy York said, "But you know, a clinch is a clinch is a clinch.....which is a cynical way of explaining why we don't read Romance manuscripts!"⁹⁹ Romance covers

⁹⁵ Rudolph Belarski quoted in Server, *Over my dead body*, 64.

⁹⁶ Jean Riva, "Who made that Dark-Haired Girl a Blonde? Only her publisher knows for sure," *Romantic Times Magazine*, no.70 (Dec/Jan 1989), 35.

⁹⁷ York, interview with the author, 2015.

⁹⁸ Riva, "Who made that dark-haired girl a blonde?", 35.

⁹⁹ York, interview with the author, 2015.

reflected some aspect of the contents, usually the most obvious physical characteristics, but the sexuality of the contents was not in direct relationship to the sexuality of the cover. Nor did the power dynamics of the cover models reflect the relationship between the heroine and hero of the book. Any given cover is likely to be influenced more by visual trends in other romance novel covers than what's in the book itself.

Take for instance the relationship between the cover and the contents of the historical romance published in 2006, *An Unlikely Governess*. (fig. 23) The character on the cover does not look like the heroine described in the novel. The heroine, Beatrice Sinclair, is described by the hero as having “the blackest hair he'd ever seen,”¹⁰⁰ whereas the woman on the cover has light brown hair. Miss Sinclair is also a governess who wears threadbare, dull clothing for most of the book. She would be unlikely to wear the lacy orange gown shown on the cover. This novel has much in common with the plot of a gothic. Beatrice Sinclair comes to a lonely castle and falls in love with her employer, but someone, possibly her employer, is plotting the death of Miss Sinclair's young pupil. The light pastels on the cover do not evoke the windswept, dark drama of the classic gothic cover. In fact, the cover is a particularly bad fit for the novel, and may have been a reissued cover originally intended for a different book.

In other ways the cover for *An Unlikely Governess* is perfectly suited to the novel because it expresses aspects of the *genre* that the novel belongs to. The fact that this is a romance is communicated by the looped text and the classic clinch scene on the novel's back. The woman's bare back was also a very common motif in romance covers, although this trend did not appear until the end of the 1990s. The reader can see that the

¹⁰⁰ Karen Ranney, *An Unlikely Governess*, New York: Avon Books, 2006.

book is a historical romance because the woman on the cover is wearing a bad imitation of a nineteenth century gown. The plaid on the spine suggests that this book is set in Scotland. Knowing that Karen Ranney is a recognizable name in historical romance, the designer or art director made her name take up the majority of the front cover. The reader looking for either a Karen Ranney book or a historical romance has been given enough visual cues to pick up the book and see if it is worth buying. In the end, whether or not the cover accords well with the contents of a novel is immaterial, because by the time the reader discovers the error, the book has already been purchased.

Despite the fact that the cover is very rarely a direct illustration of the contents of the book, the contents did influence the perception of the cover, and, of course, whether the book was bought. In a self-reported study run by the Book Industry Study Group in 1994, only one percent of book purchases were made based on the cover.¹⁰¹ The cover is not meant to make the viewer buy the book. It is meant to intrigue the viewer into reading the blurb, remembering similar titles the reader has already enjoyed, and reading a bit of the interior. As a buyer for Dalton stated, “Good cover art is like the bait in fishing: It gets the customer’s attention. After that, it’s up to the author to reel in the reader for life.”¹⁰² This is why it is possible for readers to detest a cover, and yet still buy the book.

¹⁰¹ Greco, *The book publishing industry*, 217

¹⁰² Denise Little, “The History of Romance Cover Art,” *Romantic Times Magazine* 100 (July 1992): 29.

Chapter 3: Images of Feminine Power and Submission

A couple of key events in the 1960s and 1970s changed how women thought of themselves and how others thought of them. Of course the availability of birth control gave women a new feeling of safety about reproduction and sex. Historian Elaine Tyler May says that within a scant ten years in the 1950s, religious institutions went from condemning the use of birth control, to acceptance.¹⁰³ In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, which condemned how advertisers and educators locked women into an iconic role of domestic goddess. Despite the prominence of the ideal of the domestic goddess, women entered the workforce in increasing numbers.¹⁰⁴ White women formed groups like the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in 1965, and the National Organization for Women in 1966 to raise consciousness about unfair wages, discrimination in the workplace and oppression at home.¹⁰⁵ The Equal Right Amendment of 1972 stated that, “equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”¹⁰⁶ In 1973, the Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*, ensured that states could not pass laws which prohibited abortion.

The slow liberation of women during the 1970s made the romance novel boom possible. The success of the gothic novels in the late 60s and early 70s was due to using the magazine distribution system to get books into outlets that women visited frequently,

¹⁰³ Elaine Tyler May, “The Reproductive Consensus in the Postwar Era,” in *Major Problems in American Women's History: Documents and Essays*, eds. Alexander, Ruth M., and Mary Beth Norton (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Co, 1996), 419.

¹⁰⁴ Joanne Meyerowitz, “Competing Images of women in postwar mass culture,” in *Major Problems in American Women's History: Documents and Essays*, eds. Alexander, Ruth M., and Mary Beth Norton (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Co, 1996), 429.

¹⁰⁵ Mary Beth Norton, and Ruth M. Alexander, *Major Problems in American Women's History: Documents and Essays* (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Co, 1996) 438.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

namely drugstores and supermarkets.¹⁰⁷ During the course of the 1970s and 80s, as more women gained money of their own and spent more time outside of the house, the potential market for romances climbed. Women soon surpassed men as paperback buyers, a trend that continues into the current day.¹⁰⁸

For objects that were created to satisfy the interests of a new woman with more money and freedom than ever before, the covers fell far short of perfect feminist images. As critics have noted about the romance novel itself, covers contain a complex set of symbols, and each one falls somewhere between a wholehearted endorsement of a patriarchal worldview and a vision of a utopian celebration of female sexuality. Each argument for or against the feminism of romance novel covers can be countered by an equally valid argument for the opposing position.

One of the most troubling gestures in the works are the instances of submission and dominance. The woman is often put into the subordinate position in clinch covers. She is held by the male, clutched in his arms and picked up onto a galloping horse in a symbol of abduction and powerlessness. In many, though not by any means all the covers, the man in the image is also framed higher on the image. As one survey respondent said, “Some of the positions they put women in are very uncomfortable, and the poses can be very unrealistic while emphasizing gender tropes (ie weak fainting woman! Aggressive handsy guy!).”¹⁰⁹ Another respondent said, “Clinch covers, while they're pretty good at communicating the heat between the characters, usually feature the

¹⁰⁷ Radway, *Reading the romance*, 32.

¹⁰⁸ Davis, *Two-bit culture*, 361.

¹⁰⁹ “Your Opinion of Romance Covers”, on Sarah Wendell and Candy Tan, *Smart Bitches, Trashy Books*. (blog), November 21, 2014 to December 1, 2014. <http://goo.gl/forms/DO2CEe81y9> and https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1CibHYiyQLh1oVT-WJdyHumfKzn-Rr_vicHIKipEJKBE/viewanalytics

woman clutching at the man in such a way that she doesn't look like she can support herself or that she's subservient to him.”¹¹⁰

For instance, Elaine Duillo's cover for *Keeper of the Heart* places the woman literally at the hero's feet, perilously close to embracing his crotch. (fig. 24) Doreen Minuto's stepback for *You Belong to My Heart*, and Max Ginsburg's cover for *Gray Hawk's Lady* reverse the direction the heroine is facing, but still place her at the hero's feet. (figs. 25-26) In Sharon Spiak's cover for *Loving Julia*, not only is the woman passive and the man active, but the hero looks violent and angry. (fig. 27)

One reason for the submissive gesture is that the woman is dramatizing her femininity through her submission. Sociologists talking about gender relations from many different points of view have reaffirmed the importance of the idea of female passivity in our culture. Betty Friedan says that two generations of American women were made to believe Freud's theory that equated femininity with passivity.¹¹¹ Friedan says even the great social scientist Margaret Mead started out by using Freud's rubrics and equated the penis with assertive and creative acts and the uterus with “passive receptivity.”¹¹² Film thinker Kaja Silverman says that in Hollywood films, “male desire is so consistently and systematically imbricated with projection and control.”¹¹³ Sociologist Sean Nixon said that books on male sexuality in the 1980s advanced a singular unitary conception of masculinity, “one that was effectively seen as synonymous with men's

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 132.

¹¹² Ibid., 156.

¹¹³ Kaja Silverman, “Fassbinder and Lacan: A Reconsideration of Gaze, Look and Image,” in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London: Routledge, 1992), 144.

dominance over women.”¹¹⁴ By acting out surrender the heroines on the cover could be considered to be once again displaying femininity.

The rosy interpretation of the gesture would be that the heroine is supported by the hero. Sociologist Erving Goffman in the work *Gender Advertisements* says that women are routinely treated as women in ads: they are sheltered, helped, and express simplistic joy. However, Goffman characterizes the parent-child relationship as one in which “a loving protector is standing by in the wings, allowing not so much for dependency as a coping out of, relief from, the “realities,” that is, the necessities and constraints to which adults in social situations are subject.”¹¹⁵ Simone de Beauvoir suggests that domination and submission can be part of a loving and satisfying sexual and sensual relationship.

“The asymmetry of male and female eroticism creates insoluble problems as long as there is a battle of the sexes; they can easily be settled when a woman feels both desire and respect in a man; if he covets her in her flesh while recognising her freedom, she recovers her essentialness at the moment she becomes object, she remains free in the submission to which she consents.”¹¹⁶

The important point to determine, then, is whether the woman is being threatened or supported. Can the domination ever be considered “safe”?

There are a number of visual gestures which might help a female viewer interpret the clinch scene as “safe.” In significant number of the images the man is unmistakably carrying the heroine and she is not at all resistant to being supported. Although the man is visibly strong, he is supported and overwhelmed by the symbols of femininity. The central couple are surrounded and supported by hair, fabric and enormous flowers. For

¹¹⁴ Sean Nixon, “Exhibiting Masculinity” in *Representation*, eds. Stuart Hall, Jessie Evans and Sean Nixon (London: Sage Publications, 2013), 295.

¹¹⁵ Erving Goffman, *Gender advertisements* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 5.

¹¹⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The second sex* (New York: Vintage Books. 1989), 415.

instance, in Leslie Pellegrino Peck's cover for *Evergreen*, (fig. 28) the heroine is supported by the hero. However, the couple is encircled with greenery, and because of the way the heroine's dress flows upwards, it appears as if she were floating on her own instead of being carried. In Victor Gadino's stepback for *Fire in the Heart* (fig. 29), the hero is supporting the heroine, but his legs disappear into a swirl of her dress. He is also off-center and unbalanced, suggesting that it is the enormous bell of skirt that actually supports the couple. The woman's hands curl up the man's back, as if she is molding him.

Occasionally the symbols of femininity are very visibly issuing from the heroine. For instance in the stepback for Christina Dodd's *A Well Pleasured Lady* from 1997, (fig. 30) Elaine Duillo painted the heroine's hair overtaking the bottom of the painting. The hair even seems to grow more plentiful further from her head instead of tapering off. Nor is the abundant hair an anomaly for Duillo. Another common theme is that of the man's body appearing to merge into the woman, the earth or surrounding foliage. In Max Ginsburg's cover for *Lakota Surrender*, (fig. 31) the woman appears to be supported by the ground while the hero's legs disappear into the earth. The man may be muscular but he seems to be encumbered.

The covers also profit in this instance from the reading of the novel affecting the perception of the cover. In her book on romance, *The Glass Slipper*, theorist Susan Ostrov Weisser argues that in the utopian world of the romance novel, "the committed relationship is always pictured as the safe space instead of the producer of tension. A hero's sexual desire is a sign of sanctified love in hetero romance, as it is not always in

real life, where desire can be irritating, threatening, or even dangerous to women.”¹¹⁷

Radway in her study of fifty romance readers in 1979, said that one of the attractions of the romance is that it “provides a utopian vision in which female individuality and a sense of self are shown to be compatible with nurturance and care by another.”¹¹⁸ British romance writer Nancy Chodorow took the theme of the caretaking hero even further with her idea that what the reader was seeking a “male mother” figure.¹¹⁹ Seen through this understanding of the hero and heroine’s relationship, looming gestures which could be interpreted as abduction or rape become gestures of caring, carrying and protection.

Furthermore, although they are relatively rare, images of dominant women do exist in big book romance novel cover art. In Don Case’s cover for *Sioux Slave*, the hero has been tied up by the woman. (fig. 32) Sharon Spiak’s cover for *Wayward Wind* shows a less subtle form of female dominance. (fig. 33) The man’s arms and legs are disappearing into foliage, but the way that his back is arched suggests that his limbs have been forced downwards in some way, perhaps restrained by the foliage. The woman is above him, looking down her nose at him. She is clawing off his shirt and bending back his head to expose his neck, almost as if she is going to sacrifice him. He appears transported with his eyes shut, while she looks aware and slightly supercilious.

However much the artists may have done to soften the effect of the domination, the violent side of men’s strength cannot be fully erased. As advertising thinker Jean Kilbourne points out, “There is a world of difference between the objectification of men

¹¹⁷ Susan Ostrov Weisser, *Glass Slipper: Women and Love Stories* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 175.

¹¹⁸ Radway, *Reading the romance*, 55.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Mairead Owen, “Re-inventing romance: Reading Popular Romantic Fiction,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* v. 20, 4 (1997), Elsevier Science.

and that to women. The most important difference is that there is no danger for most men, whereas objectified women are always at risk.”¹²⁰ Romance covers also run the risk of affirming, not that women wish to sometimes have the option to be protected, but that women naturally *are* weak and in need of protection and domination.

Ann Snitow contends that a need for safety helped fuel the rise of the romance novel. In her essay “Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different” from 1979, she suggests that the social insecurity of the 1970s fueled a need for the reassuringly stereotypical gender roles of the 1970s Harlequin Romance. “In the seventies we have the blander Harlequins, novels that are picaresque and titillating, written for people who have so entirely suffered and absorbed the disappearance of the ideal home that they don’t want to hear about it any more.”¹²¹ For Snitow the increase in reported rapes and the high divorce rate made women need books that “soothe ambivalence.”¹²²

One of the only times that romance novel covers have been scientifically studied demonstrates how hard it is to prove the covers have only one interpretation. Sociologist Christine Naber conducted a study to prove that looking at romance covers made women more likely to excuse a man of a rape. Her idea was that the sexualized violence on the covers of fiction led women to excuse instances of sexualized violence in life. In her own

¹²⁰ Jean Kilbourne, *Deadly persuasion: why women and girls must fight the addictive power of advertising* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1999), 279.

¹²¹ Ann Barr Snitow, 1979, “Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different,” in *Understanding Gender & Sexuality in Popular Culture*, ed. Jennifer Maher (Cognella Academic Publishing, 2016), 58.

¹²² *Ibid.*

words, she was aiming to prove that, “‘Hero Rapes’ as eroticized violence would lead to victim blaming attitudes.”¹²³

To test the theory Naber divided the covers into four categories: what she called “romance novel covers chosen to codify rape myths, i.e., stereotypical but untrue beliefs about rape and rape victims;”¹²⁴ romantic covers which seem to be category romances; covers with the title of the romance and no illustration; and a control group of covers from other genres of fiction. After some questions on the romance cover, participants were asked questions about a rape vignette in what they were told was a study unrelated to the romance study.¹²⁵ Participants’ responses were then rated on how much they blamed the victim for her own rape.

The first group of covers that Naber mentions, the “covers chosen to codify rape myths” most likely correspond to the big book historical romance covers that are the subject of this thesis. Naber does not provide the images or the titles of the 160 romance novel covers that she used in her experiment. We are left to guess at the covers based on the one example of each of the three groups of covers that Naber does include. (figs. 34-36) Although the covers were “checked by romance readers for how closely they conform to the norm,”¹²⁶ there are indications that Naber selected the group of historical big-book romances to support her thesis by choosing the most violent covers that she could. Naber describes the group of covers as, “The first form, also known as ‘bodice

¹²³ Naber, Christine Marie. 1995. *Rape myths are the theory: romance novels are the practice : the impact of exposure to images of women in popular culture*, Thesis for Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology in the Graduate College of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, iv.

¹²⁴ Ibid., iii.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 18.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 24.

rippers' for their portrayal of the female's clothes being torn from her body." She explained that this group "generally shows a woman struggling against sexual advances while appearing at the same time to enjoy them."¹²⁷ Although this could apply to some of the big book romance covers, it is not a good description of all of them.

In her abstract Naber claims that her hypothesis was confirmed. Nonetheless in the actual text of the study she admits that priming with the carefully vetted clinch romance covers "resulted in *heightened victim sensitivity*."¹²⁸

As expected, priming with covers that codified rape myths in textual form (Title prime condition) *did* result in lessened victim sensitivity. However, unexpectedly, priming with covers that included both a visual and textual prime for rape myths (Rape Myth condition), resulted in *heightened* victim sensitivity.¹²⁹

In other words, showing the women in the study, the big book historical covers made the respondents more likely to sympathize with the victim of the rape, rather than blame the victim. Even when a study deliberately sets out to prove one interpretation of the imagery of a romance novel cover, the imagery is just too ambiguous for one interpretation.

Naber had a couple of explanations for the failure to find the results she expected. She theorized that the "rape myth" covers were so unattractively graphic that respondents were even more likely than after viewing the so called romantic covers to consider rape a horrible experience and to not blame the victim. She also suggested that the understanding of the stories of romance novels colored the perception of the covers. She

¹²⁷ Ibid., 12.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 41.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

claimed that an earlier study of hers proved that, “Readers of romantic fiction were more likely to view the victim as responsible for her rape.”¹³⁰

Naber’s characterization of the covers as portraying a “female’s clothes being torn from her body” and “a woman struggling against sexual advances,” seems misleading. Most covers are not so clearly a portrayal of rape, or of a sado-masochistic relationship. Naber might be allowing the content of the novels to color her reading of the covers, just as she accuses her test subjects of doing. Although by the time Naber was conducting this study in 1995, most of the rape had been phased out of romance and into specialized erotica, the stereotype of the sadistic nature of romances haunted the genre for decades.

Another way in which the covers make women uncomfortable is that they do affirm stereotypes of what a woman wants to an almost ridiculous extent. They include flowers, pretty dresses, hot guys and the occasional kitten, or horse. When asked if she thought that romance novel covers are sexist, one respondent to the survey said, “the covers feed into sexist understandings of what women care about (flowers, attractive men, fashion, etc) when the reason I read romance is actually to briefly access the innate variety of ordinary human experience.”¹³¹ Although in many ways the writing of romance novel stories do peddle heteronormative, and just plain normative, ideas of what a woman wants, the novels also include feminist themes that the covers do not attempt to portray. The covers never tackle feminist themes present in the books, such as the quest for financial stability, what Simone de Beauvoir calls a woman’s wish to feel “essential”, or the struggle to conquer a hero’s emotional resistance.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ “Your Opinion of Romance Covers”, 2014.

The idea that these “feminine” characteristics are in any way “natural expressions” rather than learned expressions could be potentially harmful. According to Goffman, gender gestures are not indexical, but instead express “the capacity and inclination of individuals to portray a version of themselves and their relationships at strategic moments — a working agreement to present each other with, and facilitate the other’s presentation of, gestural pictures of the claimed reality of their relationship and the claimed character of their human nature.”¹³² Thus, gender gestures can be seen as something that a person controls for themselves. The harm comes when women are pressured into conforming to these roles or expressions.

On the other hand, there is something liberating about the use of the imagery. Like many stereotypes, there is some truth to the idea that women will enjoy these “feminine” things. All of the things on a cover are not necessarily unattractive. Tania Modleski opposes the idea of criticism in which “there are two groups of people — those within ideology (the masses of people) and those on the outside who, without illusions themselves, manage to control the others by feeding them illusions. We are all ‘inside’ ideology.”¹³³ As women are aware of the stereotype, we may shy away from those symbols of femininity as an act of rebellion. It can be refreshing to see a shame-free celebration of this imagery.

Gender historian Alice Echols says that one of the major sources of dissention in the feminist movement in the 1980s was over the issue of feminine nature. She says that

¹³² Goffman, *Gender Advertisement*, 7.

¹³³ Modleski, *Loving with a vengeance*, 28.

the “valorization of femaleness” gained currency in the 1980s.¹³⁴ Feminists such as Jean Bethke Elshtain and Betty Friedan emphasized the importance of gender differences,¹³⁵ while other feminist works, notable Judith Butler’s dense work *Gender Trouble*, argued that both gender and sex are constructed and fluid. Again, the symbols of the romance novel covers are contradictory. A feminist viewing the covers in the 1980s may have thought that the covers affirm and valorize the power of femininity through the use of flowers and pink dresses, rather than lock women into oppressive stereotypes.

Tania Modleski found in romances and gothics a true expression of women’s fears, and feelings of constriction and powerlessness in the modern world. As she observed, “the so-called masochism pervading these texts is a ‘cover’ for anxieties, desires and wishes which if openly expressed would challenge the psychological and social order of things.”¹³⁶ If we look at the romance covers through a similar lens, we could see them not as a weapon for the advancement of a patriarchal agenda, but as an expression of an imperfect world of sexual and gender relations. Accepting the covers as an imperfect expression of female lust and fantasy may be the only way to reconcile the odd mix of feminist affirmation and subjugation in cover art.

The utopia of the romance cover imagines a world so perfect that there is no need for feminism. Laura Kipnis calls our culture’s preoccupation with physical female beauty “female appearance anxiety.”¹³⁷ She says that in our culture, “femininity is something to

¹³⁴ Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 288.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 287.

¹³⁶ Modleski, *Loving with a vengeance*, 30.

¹³⁷ Kipnis, Laura. *Bound and gagged: pornography and the politics of fantasy in America* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999, c. 1996), 70.

be strived for, worked at, and achieved after great travail. Any creeping traces of masculinity (unwanted hair, rough skin, figure problems) must be immediately countered with expensive, often painful measures (electrolysis, corseting, ect.).”¹³⁸ Feminism has fought to make these invisible struggles visible and to ensure that a woman can be valued even without these struggles and anxieties.

The romance cover heroine has no feminine anxieties because all the traces of the effort needed for physical appearance have simply disappeared. Romance novel cover heroine stands in fields without shoes and in long trailing dresses and yet she is not muddy. Her unbound long hair does not get snarled in the breeze. Her skin and makeup are flawless, even if she is supposed to be an 18th century pioneer living in the woods. All of the petty aggravations that hit us like blown sand during the course of a day, simply do not exist in the fantasy world of the romance cover.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Chapter 4: The Shame of Being Seen to Read Romance

There is a disconnect between romance novel and the readers' response to the covers that are theoretically meant to appeal to them. Of the two-hundred and twenty-four responses to a survey I sent to a blog for romance novel readers, close to half of the respondents said that they disliked romance covers. When readers were asked to choose words to describe the covers, "cheesy" was the most common word that resulted from their feedback. "Ridiculous" and "embarrassing" were also in the top ten most used words. Only ten percent of the words were unambiguously positive. When the readers were asked if they had ever hidden their romance novel cover, only thirteen percent, twenty-nine out of two-hundred and twenty-three, replied that they had never hidden their romance novel.¹³⁹ The covers were such a source of embarrassment that a romance novel mail order catalog, *Manderley*, offered complimentary book covers in the 1990s.¹⁴⁰ Prominent romance novel writer Jayne Ann Krentz called it an act of courage for a woman to read a romance novel on an airplane.¹⁴¹

In this chapter, I examine the embarrassment caused by romance novel covers, particularly as it relates to being looked at. The *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Psychology* states that embarrassment is "the powerful distress that overtakes someone when they are unable to continue performing the role they have adopted in a social encounter."¹⁴² Note that this definition takes place in a social encounter that is visible to others. In *Shame*,

¹³⁹ "Your Opinion of Romance Covers," 2014.

¹⁴⁰ Kim Pettigrew Brackett, 2000, "Facework Strategies among Romance Fiction Readers," *Social Science Journal* 37, no. 3, 2000), 351. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed October 24, 2017).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 352.

¹⁴² Nick Emler, "Embarrassment", in *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Psychology*, (London: Routledge, 2006) <http://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/hodderdpsyc/embarrassment/0> (accessed December 8, 2014.)

Exposure and Privacy, Carl Schneider states that, “shame arises at a point where some discrediting fact or quality seems to run the risk of appearing particularly prominent, thus calling into question the status and esteem in which this person is held by the others.”¹⁴³ Shame is thus linked to the twin concepts of a rupture in what a person expects of herself, and the visibility of that rupture. These points are relevant to the understanding of the reception of romance novel covers. Romance novel readers have to contend with being seen to read romances, and covers are the very visible sign of romance. The romance genre is subject to negative stereotypes associated with low-brow taste, sexual imagery, and sentimental art. All of these negative stereotypes weigh on a reader’s mind when she publicly displays a gaudy, sentimental cover.

Romance novel covers announce to every viewer that the reader is reading a romance. As Sarah Wendell and Candy Tan note, the covers employ a language of signs which is shorthand for romance. “If you see a beefy man with incredible pectoral muscles grabbing a flouncy tart, it’s a romance.”¹⁴⁴ Readers use the signs on the cover to easily sort through the piles of paperbacks on a supermarket shelf. This language of signs is not in any way subtle. Romance novels are made to catch the eye with loud colors and busy patterns. As the art director for Kensington Publishing, Lou Malcangi states, “We need to make sure that a consumer will know with just a quick glance (3 seconds usually) that this is the type of book they like.”¹⁴⁵ Not only is the reader reading a slightly embarrassing form of material, the cover is visually shouting that fact to the world.

¹⁴³ Carl D. Schneider, *Shame, Exposure, and Privacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 34.

¹⁴⁴ Wendell and Tan, *Beyond Heaving Bosoms*, 170.

¹⁴⁵ Lou Malcangi, (art director for Kensington) e-mail message to author, December 11, 2014.

Although shame is a deeply internal feeling, certain conceptions of shame link it directly to vision, the gaze, and being looked at. Susan Miller explains that in 1953 psychologists Gerhart Piers and Milton B. Singer developed a theory describing shame as a feeling of “failure to live up to one’s ego ideal.”¹⁴⁶ There also seems to be a “sense, however vague, of the self standing before another or potentially visible to another.”¹⁴⁷ This gives the sense of shame its particular biting sense of misery. Miller writes that the shame-filled person asks themselves, “What would happen if my father, or mother or teacher were to see this?” In *Shame Exposure and Privacy*, Carl Schneider relates the etymology of the word shame with covering and concealment.¹⁴⁸ He says that the “core of the shame experience is found in the sense of visibility and exposure.”¹⁴⁹ As the outer face of the romance novel, the cover is an important aspect of the shame of romance.

Romance novel covers are more publicly visible than other art objects. Unlike our photographs, which can be folded away in albums and on the private screen of smartphones, or artworks which are mounted on the walls in the privacy of our home, book covers are part of the public sphere. When you open up a book, and hold it up to your eyes, the cover participates in a public space that can be seen by anyone.¹⁵⁰

When the artwork is shifted into the public realm it becomes subject to the perceived control of the viewer. In *Panopticism*, Michel Foucault focuses on the state’s

¹⁴⁶ Susan Miller, *The Shame Experience* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Analytic Press, 1985), 32.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Schneider, *Shame, Exposure and Privacy*, 30.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 34.

¹⁵⁰ Ebooks undermine the entire thrust of this argument because they return reading to a strictly personal affair. Ebooks are popular with romance readers. Perhaps romance readers prefer ebooks for the anonymity, or perhaps the brevity of romances makes ebooks the logical choice. For an interesting chart on reader preferences see: Perry Jack. BISG Report – A Few More Ebook Stats. Digital Book World. (blog). November 14, 2013. <http://www.digitalbookworld.com/2013/bisg-report-a-few-more-ebook-stats/>

ability to control people through observation and he points out that infra-personal observation also helps to keep people in place. “We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism.”¹⁵¹ To be viewed is to be subject to an authority, perhaps the state, perhaps a judge, or an accumulation of viewers.

Romance readers contend with overt judgements from viewers, and a more subtle sense of being seen and judged. When Kim Pettigrew Brackett, a romance researcher, asked readers about reading romance in public one respondent said,

“In high school, sometimes I’d bring one [romance book] in to read between classes and stuff. And my friends that were guys, they’d always try to rip the book away from me, try to look through to find all the sexy parts.”¹⁵²

Reader Denise Little read her romances on the subway in the early 1990s, and said that snide comments about her reading material were a regular occurrence. When she asked her sneering viewers why they thought romance novels are inferior, they answered with some version of, “ Well, look at the cover.”¹⁵³

Even when these viewers do not make disapproval overtly felt, a reader sets her own definition of what is acceptable. Film theorist Kaja Silverman suggests that, “the subject might be said to assume responsibility for “operating the gaze by ‘seeing’ itself being seen even when no pair of eyes are trained upon it — by taking not so much the gaze as its effects within the self.”¹⁵⁴ The conscious subject takes control of operating her own sense of what is acceptable and what she herself is like, what part of her actions are

¹⁵¹ Michel Foucault, “Panopticism,” in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 217.

¹⁵² Brackett, “Facework Strategies among Romance Fiction Readers,” 351.

¹⁵³ Little, “Sneers and Leers,” 22.

¹⁵⁴ Silverman, “Fassbinder and Lacan,” 127.

really part of herself. In her book, *The Shame Experience*, Susan Miller says that a number of writers have defined shame as “a response to any variety of situations that a person judges to be evidence of personal failure.”¹⁵⁵ In this conception shame is something that a person exercises over herself. When a reader feels that she is not fulfilling the demands of her own internal calculation of who she is, she may well feel some embarrassment.

Individuals involved in the romance novel industry also contend with the shame of the genre. The art director for Avon, Barbara Bertoli, said in an interview in 1978 that, “People of my age or a little older would ask what you do. And I say I’m an art directors. They say, ‘Oh you put those dirty covers on those books.’”¹⁵⁶ The introduction to *Pino: Contemporary Realism*, a book about the romance novel cover artist Pino Dangelico Daeni, avoids mentioning Pino’s entire career in illustration, jumping from the moment when the young artist immigrated to America in 1979, to the time when he began exhibiting paintings in galleries in 1994.¹⁵⁷ Romance cover artist Steve Assel has a different spelling of his name on his website, and mentions nothing about working with romance novels covers.

This shame carries over to the writers of the romance novel genre. In 2015, Jennifer Lois and Joanna Gregson conducted a study of public shaming that romance novel writers experienced because of the material they wrote. The researchers said that not only did the writers experience judgement for writing intellectually inferior works,

¹⁵⁵ Miller, *The Shame Experience*, 20.

¹⁵⁶ Barbara Bertoli, (art director for Avon) interview by Thomas L. Bonn, April 21, 1978, Thomas Bonn Collection of Publishers' Interviews, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries.

¹⁵⁷ Jack Morris, “Pino: An Introduction.” In *Pino: Contemporary Realism*, edited by Robert V. Conte, 7 (Cresskill, NJ: Classic Publications Inc., 2003), 7.

they also experienced men assuming that the writers were sexually promiscuous because they wrote romance.¹⁵⁸

In the mid 1990s publishers acknowledged the embarrassing aspects of the romance novel covers by radically increasing the use of the step-back, or inset. A book with a step-back has two pages of full-color, stiff paper on the front of the book. The top cover, is “stepped back” around ¼ inch from the edge of the book, allowing the reader to see that there is an image inside if she lifts the top cover. Romance novelist Johanna Lindsey said that her first book with a step-back came out in 1991.¹⁵⁹ Historical romance novel art was so sexual that the stepback was pushed to a new ubiquity. Although viewers enjoyed the paintings, they did not want to be seen with such works.¹⁶⁰

Romance novels are inert objects, but we invest objects with the power to define the object’s owner. The objects that we wear, possess, or collect help defines our identity and sense of who we are. Susan Sontag mentions that government issued ID cards prove identity, but people also use a collection of photos to claim membership in a family.¹⁶¹ Ethnographer James Clifford suggests that the use of a collection to define identity may be something innate to all people. “Some sort of gathering around the self and the group — the assemblage of a material ‘world’, the marking off of a subjective domain that is not ‘other’ — is probably universal.”¹⁶² Book collections have a particular meaning. They

¹⁵⁸Jennifer Lois, and Joanna Gregson, “Sneers and Leers: Romance Writers and Gendered Sexual Stigma.” *Gender & Society* v. 29 issue: 4, (Aug. 2015): 459-483. Sage.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243215584603>

¹⁵⁹Yoon, Zoe and Johanna Lindsey. Letters from Readers ... Lindsey, Fabio & Duillo: The winning Combination”. *Romantic Times*. no. 87 (June 1991): 27.

¹⁶⁰Malcangi, interview with the author, 2014.

¹⁶¹ Susan Sontag, *On photography*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 9.

¹⁶² James Clifford, “On Collecting Art and Culture,” in *The predicament of culture: twentieth-century ethnography, literature, and art* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988) 218.

are the representatives of our intellectual selves. They are the visible proof not just of what we like, but of what we are intelligent enough to understand. Carol Thurston, a writer about romances and readers, acknowledges that viewers employ “the usual practice of judging books and then judging readers by the books they liked.”¹⁶³ The question thus becomes, what identity is the reader assuming when she picks up a romance novel?

Romance readers have a negative reputation. In 1983, a magazine article described the stereotypical image of the romance reader as “that lady who’s always ahead of you in the Safeway line, the one in the polyester pull-on pants pushing a cart loaded with Buckhorn beer for Buford and a few epics whose covers feature a flinty-eyed rake pouncing on a heaving *décolleté* morsel, the goal being to keep said shopping cart lady occupied while Boof watches the game.”¹⁶⁴ This quote perfectly encapsulates the expectations of a romance reader. She lacks taste, class, education and ambition. She is relatively poor and she is very likely trapped in a loveless marriage. This stereotype seems to be largely incorrect. In 1979, the publicity director for Silhouette Romances said that forty-five percent of their readers attended college.¹⁶⁵ Although the stereotype is almost completely untrue, the reader may believe that the viewer thinks it is true, and judges the reader accordingly.

Romance covers are a form of visual signifier which the owner did not necessarily choose. The owner chose to purchase the book, but she may have chosen it because of the contents, and despite the cover. Of the respondents to the blog survey, fifty-seven percent

¹⁶³ Thurston, *The romance revolution*, 130.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁶⁵ Radway, *Reading the romance*, 55.

said that they had decided not to buy a romance novel because of the cover.¹⁶⁶ With a book cover, a reader sends out a message chosen for her by a publisher. There is a measure of the loss of control in being asked to display an image, to project a role, that one did not choose.

Romance novel covers exhibit “bad” artistic taste as well since they are undoubtedly kitsch with all of its negative stereotypes: mass production, production to a formula, and sentimentality. Kitsch is intimately connected with mass production. The word “kitsch” comes from mass-produced goods made in Germany in the 19th century for the tourist trade.¹⁶⁷ Clement Greenberg in his 1939 essay “Avant-garde Kitsch” said that “Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas.”¹⁶⁸ Kitsch is related to the industrial products which displaced handcrafts. It is the “chromotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tin Pan Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc., etc.”¹⁶⁹ Since covers are mechanically mass produced to a formula, there is some sense that they are lacking in sincerity. The attempt at true emotion instead suggests “superficiality, saccharine sweetness and the manipulation of mawkish emotion”, as well as the strong appeal to “low-class” taste.¹⁷⁰ In the essay *On Kitsch and Sentimentality*, Robert Solomon goes so far as to say that sentimentality is considered morally wrong, a sign of undeveloped taste and falsity.

¹⁶⁶ “Your opinion of romance covers”, survey by the author, 2014.

¹⁶⁷ Monica Kjellman-Chapin, introduction to *Kitsch: history, theory, practice* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), xi.

¹⁶⁸ Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, 3-21. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 10.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷⁰ Robert C. Solomon, “On kitsch and sentimentality,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 49, no. 1 (Winter, 1991): 2.

“Kitsch” is not a hard and fast category of objects, but it does have certain attributes. Some “kitsch” is insincere, mass-produced, low-brow, derivative, or badly made.¹⁷¹ In her book on kitsch, Monica Kjellman-Chapin suggests that it lies on one side of a set of binary judgements of “good/bad, high/low, elite/popular, or art/kitsch.”¹⁷² Above all, kitsch is bound up with the viewer’s own values. In the words of critic Gillo Dorfles, kitsch is used as a synonym for “very bad taste.”¹⁷³ The word implies “bad” so thoroughly that, like “art,” “kitsch” serves an evaluative function.¹⁷⁴ One person’s treasured family heirloom, is the next person’s treasured bit of insincere, laughably sentimental kitsch. Because romance cover art is mass-produced, sentimental, and formulaic, all that a viewer has to do to tag it with the negative associations of kitsch is to state that cover art is bad.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman points out that each space has its own “decorum” which dictates how a person acts. These regions “may be defined as any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perceptions.”¹⁷⁵ The most backstage of these regions, those which are most forbidden to others’ perceptions, are those which are dedicated to the “biological functions,” of which sex is one.¹⁷⁶ Displaying sexually charged material in a public place ruptures the decorum of that space. This may lead to embarrassment both for the reader who caused the disturbance,

¹⁷¹ Kjellman-Chapin, *Kitsch: history, theory, practice*, ix-xxii.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, xv.

¹⁷³ Gillo Dorfles, *Kitsch: The world of bad taste* (New York: Universe Books, 1970), 10.

¹⁷⁴ Anna Bryski, “Art, Kitsch, and Art History,” in *Kitsch: history, theory, practice*. by Monica Kjellman-Chapin (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), 2.

¹⁷⁵ Erving Goffman, *The presentation of self in everyday life* (New York [N.Y.]: Doubleday. 1990), 106.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

but also possibly for the viewer. People help each other to maintain social roles. “To ensure that communication will follow the established, narrow channels, each team is prepared to assist the other team tacitly and tactfully, in maintaining the impression it is attempting to foster.”¹⁷⁷ To see another in a moment of embarrassment carries its own embarrassment.

Being seen as a sexual person has been historically, a complex subject for women. Beyond the threat of some public comment, or even violence, the admiring gaze carries the threat of the loss of control of the subject’s own ability to define herself. Simone de Beauvoir states that for a girl,

masculine desire is as much an offense as it is a compliment; in so far as she feels herself responsible for her charm, or feels she is exerting it of her own accord, she is much pleased with her conquests, but to the extent that her face, her figure, her flesh are facts she must bear with, she wants to hide them from independent stranger who lusts after them.¹⁷⁸

By carrying around a sexual image, a woman could see herself as inviting people to see her as a sexual being with all of its embarrassing implications.

If the covers is perceived to objectify men, it carries some embarrassment as well. Silverman writes about a scene in in which women “de-phallicize,” “sexualize” and “specularize” a man by exchanging him between them. “If many of Fassbinder's other films abound with scenes over which ‘Women on the Market’ might well be emblazoned, this scene should be entitled ‘Man on the Market.’”¹⁷⁹ To a much greater extent, a romance novel cover puts the man on the market. Pint-size images of naked chests, and men in the throes of passion are exchanged and bought by women. This reverses what

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 167.

¹⁷⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, *The second sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 351.

¹⁷⁹ Silverman, Fassbinder and Lacan, 141.

film theorist Laura Mulvey calls the “world ordered by sexual imbalance” in which “pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female.”¹⁸⁰

However, simply reversing the “active/passive heterosexual narrative” does not destroy it by any means.¹⁸¹ To objectify the male body in the way that women have been objectified does not sit easily with romance readers and could be its own source of embarrassment.

In some ways the covers acknowledge the embarrassment inherent in looking. A large number of covers include images in which the heroine and the hero, or both, has closed eyes. (figs. 37-45) In image after image, the hero and heroine are looking inward, or their eyes are heavily lidded as if they are in a trance. The persistent dreamlike elements, the tilted perspective, enormous flowers and floating bodies, also emphasize that the cover is meant to show an interior, imagined landscape, a landscape that can only be seen with closed eyes.

The closed eyes might also point to this being an image meant for women. As John Berger points out, “Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.”¹⁸² Sociologist and romance novel historian Tania Modleski says that this oppressive impression of being watched, especially watched by a man is a theme that Harlequin romances tackle. Harlequins are full of scenes of men hiding in closets, lurking in doorways and behind bushes.¹⁸³ The “women’s longing to be swept away” that she finds in Harlequin Romances is also a wish to be so lost in passion that women cease to be

¹⁸⁰ Laura Mulvey, “Visual pleasure and narrative cinema,” in *Film theory and criticism: introductory readings*, eds. Leo Braudy, and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 808.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 810.

¹⁸² John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 47.

¹⁸³ Modleski, *Loving with a vengeance*, 73.

conscious of how they appear.¹⁸⁴ The closed-eyed hero and heroine on the covers are far away from all the shame and power struggles of looking and being looked at. The man is not watching. The woman is not conscious of being watched. Passion has transported both the hero and heroine to a utopian world where passion overcomes shame.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 56.

Chapter 5: Romance's Relationship with Pornography and Sexual Advertising

One of the most recognizable features of the historical romance covers was their sexiness. The sexual content of *The Flame and the Flower* was part of what distinguished it from earlier romances, such as the gothic titles of the 1960s. Publishers wanted to assure the reader that she would find sex within the novel by adding very sexy covers to their romances. In a survey run on a blog in 2014, 29%, 63 out of 217 of the respondents, mentioned sex, the body or nudity when asked to list words they associate with romance covers.¹⁸⁵ Certainly the sexuality of the content was not something the covers hid.

Robert McGinnis took advantage of the relative tolerance for sexual content, with his naked-man covers on *A Gentle Feuding*, *Fires of Winter*, (fig. 46) and others. In *A Gentle Feuding*, the man is completely nude, and in *Fires of Winter*, the heroine was nude, until, under duress, McGinnis added a flimsy, mostly transparent garment.¹⁸⁶ Pino painted the hero and heroine of *Wild Embrace* standing in a stream nude. The hero's backside and the heroine's breasts and groin have been barely covered. (fig. 47) Elaine Duillo painted a cover which was nearly as racy for *Man of My Dreams* in 1992. (fig. 48) Certain hunk covers even shares visual similarities with images from *Playgirl*. The man has his hips thrust forward. The bare, over-muscular chest is the center of the image. He gazes out at the viewers, as if making a connection. (figs. 49-50)

Romance novel covers straddle the gray area between pornography and more socially acceptable forms of eroticism. The covers never show overtly taboo parts of the body. On the other hand they are undoubtedly sexual, and some beefcake covers are nearly as sexual as the cheesecake pinups Alberto Vargas made for *Playboy*, which were

¹⁸⁵ "Your opinion of romance covers," survey by the author, 2014.

¹⁸⁶ McGinnis and Scott, *Art of Robert E. McGinnis*, 87.

explicitly meant to be pornographic. Romance covers are certainly very sexual for material which was visible to a wide audience on supermarket shelves. They pushed the envelope of what was acceptable visual material for mass consumption by women in the 1980s, in a similar way to *Playgirl* in the 1970s. There was even some pushback against the sexuality of covers from the publishers and distributors. Robert McGinnis's cover for *Tender Is The Storm* was scandalous enough that copies began appearing with extra plants added to obscure the hero's exposed bottom, and later, when that wasn't enough, with a sticker strategically slapped over the whole area.¹⁸⁷ According to her notes, Elaine Gignilliat intended for one of her heroines on a stepback to be topless but her editor, Gene Mydlowski, rejected the idea. Pino added an awkwardly draped dress to his otherwise nude heroine on the step back for *Terms of Love* by Shirl Henke.¹⁸⁸

Romance novel historians and thinkers consistently sought to separate romance novels from the stigma of porn, but the fact that these historians have to make the argument over and over demonstrates how much pornography and romance are linked in popular imagination. Ann Snitow entitled her 1979 essay about Harlequin romances, "Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different." Susan Ostrov Weisser called one of the chapters in her book on the romance novel from 2013, "Is Female to Romance as Male Is to Porn?" For more practical reasons, writers avoided the categorization of pornography because porn could not be sold in most stores, or shipped over state lines whereas erotica was acceptable, and "fiction" with sex scenes avoided the debate entirely.

¹⁸⁷ McGinnis, Scott, and Maynard, *Paperback Covers*, 24.

¹⁸⁸ Romantic Times Staff, "Shirl Henke," *Romantic Times Magazine* no. 103 (Oct., 1992) 8.

Romance novels profited from a distinction in popular consciousness between erotica and pornography. In her 1967 essay, “The Pornographic Imagination,” Susan Sontag said that there is a well accepted consensus that pornography “disdains fully formed persons (psychology and social portraiture), is oblivious to the question of motives and their credibility and reports only the motiveless tireless transactions of depersonalized organs.”¹⁸⁹ Erotica, on the other hand, is considered to have a touch of sophistication and emotion, and to be less depersonalizing. In 1979, critic Ann Snitow said that, “sex books that emphasize both male and female sexual feeling as a sensuality that can exist without violence, are being called ‘erotica.’”¹⁹⁰ Romance novels would fall well within the bounds of erotica because narrative and romantic love are the important parts of the story, and because romance novels portray female sexual feeling.

As with so much of the imagery on the covers of big book historicals, the sexuality on the covers evokes mixed feelings in the readers. A reader identified as I.E. Taylor told *Romantic Times Magazine* in 1995, “I dislike nudity or even partial nudity, especially when it is the female exposed! I am buying reading books, not pornographic magazines that cater to men’s tastes.”¹⁹¹ Echoing the 1995 respondent, when asked if romance covers are sexist, one reader said, “I’m a female and I’m not attracted to women so why would I want to see something more suitable for *Playboy*?”¹⁹²

On the other hand, these female figures could be seen as expressing a healthy love for their bodies and freedom to experience sexuality. Additionally, readers are slightly

¹⁸⁹ Sontag, Susan. “The Pornographic Imagination.” in *Styles of Radical Will*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967, 2002. 40.

¹⁹⁰ Snitow, “Mass market romance,” 61.

¹⁹¹ Romantic Times Staff, “Reader Forum,” *Romantic Times Magazine* no. 135 (June 1995) 25.

¹⁹² “Your opinion of romance covers,” survey by the author, 2014.

less offended by the images of male nudity that appear on covers. A reader wrote to *Romantic Times Magazine* in 1991 to say how “lovestruck” she was by the picture of Colt Thunder on the cover of Johanna Lindsey’s *Savage Thunder*.¹⁹³ A few of the respondents from the 2014 survey also expressed approval of the half-nude solo male covers which first grew to popularity in the 1990s. One reader said, “My favorite covers are the ones that are simple and highlight the hero”¹⁹⁴

Readers’ ambivalence about the sexuality of the covers reflects a debate on women’s sexuality that took place in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1970s, there was a growth in the sexual material aimed at women, both pornographic and instructive. In the late 1970s there was a subtle backlash against that materials. In the 1980s, in feminist thought and advertising, arguments grew over whether or not pornographic materials and sexual advertising was harmful to women. Opinions both against and for sexual material affirmed the rights of women.

The romance novels grew in popularity as the same time as there was a growing interest in sexual material for women. Romance historian Carol Thurston argues that the invention of the contraceptive pill started an interest in female sexuality that was fed by the publication of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* in 1966, and its reissue in 1985.¹⁹⁵ By 2004 *Our Bodies, Ourselves* had sold 4 million copies.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Yoon and Lindsey, “Letters from Readers,” 26.

¹⁹⁴ “Your opinion of romance covers,” survey by the author, 2014. Publishers could avoid the sexuality debate by publishing images without human figures. However, although more respondents to the 2014 survey said that they liked covers without figures, such as covers with landscapes, significant objects, or flowers, covers that show the hero and heroine may be more memorable. When asked to suggest a cover they loved, most respondents named a cover that portrayed the hero, the heroine, or both.

¹⁹⁵ Thurston, *The romance revolution*, 17.

¹⁹⁶ Michael Schudson, “Chapter 1. General Introduction: The Enduring Book in a Multimedia Age.” in *A History of the Book in America: volume 5 The Enduring Book: Print Culture in Postwar America*, eds.

Jane Juffer in her analysis of women's pornography, says that there was a series of writings in the 1970s that taught women about their bodies and pushed the concept that a whole feminine life was not complete without a sexual understanding. Lonnie Barbach's *For Yourself: The Fulfillment of Female Sexuality*, published in 1975, worked to deconstruct the idea that the male orgasm was more central to sex than the female orgasm.¹⁹⁷ Shere Hite's analysis of female sexuality from 1976 cataloged different ways to masturbate and gave detailed instructions about each method.¹⁹⁸ Feminist Betty Dodson published *Liberating Masturbation* in 1974 and taught workshops that helped women overcome the shame associated with masturbation.¹⁹⁹ *The Flame and the Flower* might never have begun the romance novel genre if women were not more open than ever before to the appeal of sensual fare.²⁰⁰

Fed by the feminist emphasis on female sexuality, pornography aimed at women slowly flowered in the 1970s and 1980s. The first issue of *Playgirl* was published in June 1973 and attained its greatest popularity at the end of the 1970s.²⁰¹ In 1977, a group of women in the San Francisco Bay Area called "Kensington Ladies" began writing and sharing sexual fantasies. A collection of their work called *Ladies' Own Erotica* was published by Berkeley's Ten Speed Press.²⁰² "Femme Productions" was founded in 1984

David Paul Nord, Joan Shelley Rubin and Michael Schudson (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 13.

¹⁹⁷ Jane Juffer, *At home with pornography: women, sex, and everyday life* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2000), 82.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁰⁰ Thurston, *The romance revolution*, 18.

²⁰¹ Matthew Rettenmund, "A Penis on every page: The rise and fall of Playgirl," *Esquire* (June 24, 2017). <http://www.esquire.com/entertainment/a55592/playgirl-magazine-history/>

²⁰² Juffer, *At home with pornography*, 176.

in order to produce “‘couples’ erotica from a woman’s point of view.”²⁰³ The company was noteworthy enough to get an article about its videos in the *New York Times*, and in 1986 distribution of “Femme” pornography was picked up by a large porn distributor.²⁰⁴

However, this new interest in sexuality opened a divide in the second-wave feminist movement at the end of the 1970s. Alice Echols states that certain early anti-pornography feminists held that a woman could not really consent with all the weight of the patriarchy bearing down. Heterosexual desire under the patriarchy was a form of false consciousness.²⁰⁵ Echols suggests that in the late 1970s, this idea of sexuality was also fractured. Women began to question whether holding desire to a standard of political correctness did not deny desire. Others questioned whether desire needed to be disentangled from power in light of the existence of healthy, consensual sado-masochistic relationships and the variety of gender roles women wanted.²⁰⁶

Despite the feminist support for material teaching about the female orgasm, or perhaps because of it, by the mid 1980s the feminist condemnation of mainstream pornography was vitriolic, violent, and very public. The face of anti-pornography feminism, Andrea Dworkin, testified, along with Catherine MacKinnon, before the U.S. Supreme Court in support of a law which would have defined porn as sex discrimination so that any woman could file a lawsuit against pornography producers.²⁰⁷ Her opinion

²⁰³ Ibid., 173.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 174.

²⁰⁵ Echols, *Daring to be bad*, 290.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 291.

²⁰⁷ Betty-Carol Sellen and Patricia A Young, introduction to *Feminists, Pornography, & the Law: An Annot. Bibliography of Conflict, 1970-1986* (Hamden, Conn: Library Professional Publications, 1987), 3.

that mainstream pornography was hurting women was reproduced in countless journals, magazine articles, and in her books, reaching the general consciousness.

The idea that some sexual imagery hurts women affected the world of advertising as well. The 1980s and early 1990s saw the publication of a couple of key works on the negative effects of sexual advertising on women's self-worth. One of the most noteworthy voices against the exploitation of women in media, Gloria Steinem, started the *Ms.* magazine in 1972, and remained its consulting editor into the 1990s.²⁰⁸ Jean Kilbourne, a much cited crusader for better portrayal of women in advertising, wrote an influential article called *Beauty...And The Beast of Advertising* in 1989, and her book on the terrible effect of ads on women, *Deadly Persuasion*, in 1999. Naomi Wolf's 1991 book, *The Beauty Myth*, is an analysis of how ideas of beauty hurt women.

Activists took note of the objections and worked to dismantle sexist advertising. The "Dangerous Promise Coalition" thought that beer advertisements showed drinking as a way to attract sexually available women. They set up a series of billboards across the country with the slogan, "Quit using our cans to sell your cans."²⁰⁹ In 1992, four female workers at the Stroh Brewery Company launched a sexual harassment lawsuit against their employers alleging a host of nasty fondling and intimidation incidents, but also that the company's use of the Swedish Bikini Team in ads contributed to a workplace ripe for sexual harassment.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Gloria Steinem, "Sex, Lies & Advertising," *Ms. Magazine* 1, 1 (July/August 1990), 28. Retrieved from Genderwatch.

²⁰⁹ Juliann Sivulka, *Soap, sex, and cigarettes: a cultural history of American advertising* (Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1998), 385.

²¹⁰ Carol Kleiman, "Harassment Suit At Stroh Brewery Puts Focus On Company's Own Ads" *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL). March 9, 1992.

In *The Glass Slipper*, Susan Ostrov Weisser suggests that the appeal of both romance novels and pornography has as much to do with power as with sex. Weisser explains is that romance is the fantasy of the oppressed wishing for a world where men bow emotionally to her, while porn is the fantasy of the oppressor in which all women are happy to be oppressed.²¹¹ The emphasis on power is supported by the fact that some sorts of pornographic material do not directly relate to the sexual act. Neither in a strip club, nor in a pornography theater is a man allowed to find sexual completion. The point of these pornographic experiences then becomes more about holding power over a woman, rather than actually attaining sexual fulfillment.

Similarly, the power dynamic between the hero and heroine in the cover and in the romance book may not be incidental to the message of the piece, but central to it. The hero becomes attractive both because he is powerful and because he is chained by love. He represents safe masculine power. There are a few visual themes that the covers share with porn. Ann Snitow expresses the idea that some of the appeal of porn is its ability to break down of all barriers, and celebrate excess.²¹² Similarly, in trying to express passion, romance cover artists ventured past the bounds of reality, artistic conventions and what is considered good taste.

Romance illustrators have the difficult task of portraying, with utmost sincerity, something that cannot be seen: the turbulence and yearning of love. Critic Susan Sontag writes in her defense of Camp, “When something is just bad (rather than Camp), it's often because it is too mediocre in its ambition. The artist hasn't attempted to do anything really outlandish.... In Camp there is something *démesuré* in the quality of the ambition,

²¹¹ Ibid., 172.

²¹² Snitow, “Mass market romance,” 62.

not only in the style of the work itself.”²¹³ Although romance novel artists often fall short of the perfect solution to the problem of portraying love, romance novel art can be enjoyed for attempting the impossible. Romance covers reach for something beyond the simple fantasy of power and excess seen in men’s pornography. Cover art pushed romance novels away from the cruelty of reality by consistently emphasizing fantasy and dreamlike unreality.

²¹³ Susan Sontag, “Notes on “Camp”,” in *Against interpretation, and other essays*, (New York: Octagon Books, c. 1966, 1978), 283.

Chapter 6: The Male Figure on 1990s Romance Covers

In the early to mid 1990s, a new romance cover became popular: the single hunk cover. (figs. 51-53) The hunk cover features a man almost always shirtless or nearly so, gazing moodily out past the viewer. His long hair flows out behind him in the wind and his incredibly sculpted upper body gleams as if it were oiled. The first of these covers is said to be Laura Kinsale's *The Prince of Midnight* from 1990,²¹⁴ (fig. 51) but the solo hunk remains a popular trend into the current day.

The models for these covers were popular in their own right, and represented minor celebrities in the romance novel reading community. In 1993, *Romantic Times Magazine* began running a Mr. Romance modeling contests in which men paraded around in loincloths and bathing suits. The winner of the 1994 contest, John DeSalvo, became one of the biggest names in romance novel modeling. (figs. 26, 50) In 1995, two different readers of *Romantic Times* wrote in to say that they tore the covers and stepbacks off the books to save because of the cover models.²¹⁵ Even relatively unknown cover models received some recognition. Three hulking romance model brothers, the Bartling Brothers, appeared on the talk show, "The Leeza Show" on television, had their own calendar, and were spokesmen for the National Diabetes Foundation.²¹⁶

In May 1993, Penguin launched the Topaz imprint of romance novels by big name romance novelists, such as Mary Jo Putney, Cassie Edwards, and Deborah

²¹⁴ Wendell and Tan, *Beyond heaving bosoms*, 171.

²¹⁵ Terrie L. Nelson, and Phyllis Mancz, "Letters from Readers," *Romantic Times Magazine* 131 (Feb. 1995) 49.

²¹⁶ Romantic Times Staff, "Leeza Meets The Bartlings," *Romantic Times Magazine* 130 (Jan. 1995): 9.

Martin.²¹⁷ The Penguin marketing department chose model Steve Sandalis to represent the Topaz Man.²¹⁸ As the Topaz Man, Sandalis made in store appearances, and posed for bookmarks, posters, calendars, life-sized cardboard cut-out figures, and of course, romance novel covers.²¹⁹ (figs. 54-55) A tiny image of Sandalis shrugging out of his shirt appeared on the spine of every Topaz book in 1993. (fig. 56) In April of 1994, *Romantic Times* ran a story about a romance fan breaking into a bookstore to steal the life-sized cardboard cutout of Steve Sandalis.²²⁰

Nothing exemplifies the importance of the male romance novel model as the career of Fabio. When the readers of *Smart Bitches Trashy Books*, a blog for romance novel readers, were asked to choose words to describe romance novel covers, “Fabio” was the fourth most common words chosen, after “cheesy”, “clinch”, and “dresses.”²²¹ Fabio worked as a romance novel model from 1986 to around 1995.²²² At the height of his fame in the early 1990s, he posed for a calendar, a Fabio line of romance novels, life-sized cardboard Fabio cutouts for bookstores, and produced an exercise tape. He also appeared in a short-lived TV program called *Acapulco H.E.A.T.*²²³ and even had a love hotline that readers could call to hear Fabio’s advice on love in his heavy Italian accent,

²¹⁷ Romantic Times Staff. “Penguin USA turns up the HEAT on Romantic Fiction with the launch of TOPAZ BOOKS”. *Romantic Times Magazine*. 110 (May 1993): 10-11.

²¹⁸ Romantic Times Staff, “You’ve Been Waiting For Him All Your Life... The Topaz Man!” *Romantic Times Magazine*, issue 110 (May 1993): 11.

²¹⁹ Romantic Times Staff, “Penguin USA turns up the heat”, 10.

²²⁰ Romantic Times Staff, “Topaz Man Steals the Show,” *Romantic Times Magazine* 121 (Apr. 1994) 49.

²²¹ “Your opinion of romance covers,” survey by the author, 2014.

²²² Elaine Duillo and Gary Lovisi. “Elaine: The Queen of Romance Illustration,” *Illustration* 10, no. 37 (Spring 2012), 29. and Lynda Ryan, “The Cover Illustration Report: Meet Cover Illustrator David Stimson,” *Romantic Times Magazine* no. 140 (November 1995), 29.

²²³ Romantic Times Staff. “From Paperbacks to Perfume: Romance Takes Fabio Beyond His Wildest Dreams” *Romantic Times Magazine* 116 (Nov. 1993): 12-13.

despite the fact that Fabio had no professional qualifications for giving relationship advice. (figs. 57-59)

In *Reading the Romance*, Janice Radway says that “the hero of the romantic fantasy is always characterized by spectacular masculinity.”²²⁴ He is not merely described once in the text. The “hardness,” “angularity” and “darkness” of his face and body are repeatedly remarked on through the thoughts of the heroine. The heroine gazes at and touches the hero and it is directly stated that she derives sexual pleasure from what she sees. Often she is pleurably shocked by how much she likes looking at the hero. The romance book makes the female gaze something acceptable. The models on the man-alone covers express relaxation and acceptance through relaxed shoulders and wide-legged resting poses. His utter comfort with his nakedness sends a message of acceptance of this overturning of the norm of the male gaze.

As one would expect, the trend for sexualized men on romance covers mirrored a larger trend in advertising. In the 1980s and 1990s there was a growth in the number of advertisements sexualizing men. A Cologne ad from 1981 depicts a half naked man in bed. The text on the side lets us know that the man has stayed in bed after a steamy night while his high-powered lawyer female lover goes off to work.²²⁵ A 1994 ad for Diet Coke made a construction worker the focus of women’s lustful gazes. Female office workers cluster by the window to watch a shirtless construction worker down a Diet Coke. Ad critic Jean Kilbourne said that the Diet Coke ad “led to so much hoopla that you’d have

²²⁴ Radway, *Reading the romance*, 128.

²²⁵ Sivulka, *Soap, sex, and cigarettes*, 376.

thought women were mugging men on Madison Avenue.”²²⁶ Gianni Versace ran an influential ad campaign which linked masculinity with acres of exposed flesh.²²⁷ Versace used stereotypical images of masculinity such as the rock star or the westerner explorer and paired the image with a hint of sexuality. As academic Frank Mort said about a Levi 501 jeans ad from 1985-86, “the sexual meanings in play [in the adverts] are less to do with macho images of strength and virility (though these are certainly still present) than with the fetishised and narcissistic display - a visual erotica.”²²⁸ These ads highlighted the sexuality of the male body in a new way. Sean Nixon saw the images of sexual men in the ads of the 1980s and 1990s as something genuinely new and thought that the ads constituted a new “system of representation” that affected how men and women thought about masculinity.²²⁹ He emphasized that conceptions of masculinity are not universal or unchanging.

New music and film subgenres linked nakedness to masculinity as never before. The heroes of Sword and Sorcery films paraded around killing monsters in little more than loincloths. The Beastmaster, Ator, Deathstalker and most of all Conan the Barbarian were brutally good at demonstrating their masculinity with the manly acts of killing and making love to women.

The mid 1980s saw the rise of hair metal, a movement more about a look than a musical style.²³⁰ Men wore their hair long and sported very revealing clothing and often

²²⁶ Kilbourne, *Deadly persuasion*, 279.

²²⁷ Anthony Joseph Paul Cortese, *Provocateur: images of women and minorities in advertising*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 58.

²²⁸ Frank Mort quoted in Nixon, “Exhibiting Masculinities,” 291.

²²⁹ Nixon, “Exhibiting Masculinities,” 294.

²³⁰ Steven Blush, *American hair metal* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2006), 8.

women's make-up. Despite the use of women's clothing and make-up, "the focal point of the scene was alpha males -- assertive, athletic, attractive guys who got the girls."²³¹ With their outrageously misogynous lyrics and onstage and off stage antics, the hair metal rockers conveyed an unusual definition of sexual masculinity. They asserted that to invite a sexual gaze was part of being masculine.

The act of being the subject of a sexual gaze is so consistently coded as feminine, that the male romance novel hero runs the risk of being seen as less masculine because he is the recipient of a female version of the gaze. In his work on the male Pin-up from 1982, Richard Dyer points out that movie after movie includes a romantic scene where the boy is looking at the girl, but the girl's gaze is averted. The girl does not look. She is looked at. Dyer says that the male pin-up "does violence to the codes of who looks and who is looked at (and how), and some attempt is instinctively made to counteract this violation."²³²

In his essay "Masculinity as Spectacle," Steven Neale says that film has to deal with the feminization of the man who is the object of the gaze because the gaze is implicitly male. According to Neale, "the erotic elements involved in the relations between the spectator and the male image have constantly to be repressed and disavowed. Were this not the case, mainstream cinema would have to openly to come to terms with the male homosexuality it so assiduously seeks either to denigrate or deny."²³³ Neale shows that films repress the erotic by intertwining images of the male body and images of

²³¹ Ibid., 14.

²³² Dyer, Richard. 1982. "Don't Look Now: The Male Pin-up", in *Understanding Gender & Sexuality in Popular Culture*. ed. Jennifer Maher (Cognella Academic Publishing, 2016), 58.

²³³ Steve Neale, "Masculinity as spectacle," in *Representation*. eds. Stuart Hall, Jessie Evans and Sean Nixon (London: Sage Publications, 2013), 329.

violence, hatred or aggression, since violence is coded as masculine. In “Masculinism(s) and the Male Image,” Barbara Stern also makes the association of violence and heterosexual masculinity, “To ensure that male bonding is seen as heterosexual, films use the juxtaposition of a raw, active, and primitive lifestyle in which love and death are intermingled.”²³⁴

In order for the romance novel cover hero to be seen as heterosexual, the covers employ a number of conventions of masculinity. The men in “big book” clinch covers are always shown embracing a woman. After the 1990s covers without women became common. An explanation for this might be that romance novel cover art needed to build up a convention of the sexual heterosexual hero, before he could be shown without a woman at his side.

Romances routinely use the conventional occupations of macho men to reinforce the manliness of their heroes. The *Hot in Chicago* series by Kate Meader, *Fighting Fire* series by Lauren Blakely and the *American Heroes: The Firefighters* series by Jill Shalvis are just a few of the romance series using firemen. Long after men’s oriented western novels disappeared from the bookshelves, cowboy romances are still very popular. Romance heroes are cops, rangers, athletes, and agents of various different government agencies. Any occupation which is violent or physical is popular with romance writers.

Race plays a part in establishing the masculinity of the hero as well. As the Art Director for New American Library, James Plumeri noted in 1978, the male will “always have darker skin than the female if they don’t have the same shade of skin.”²³⁵ The trend

²³⁴ Barbara B. Stern, “Masculinism(s) and the Male Image: What Does It Mean To Be a Man?” in *Sex in Advertising: Perspectives on the Erotic Appeal*, edited by Tom Reichert and Jacqueline Lambiase (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2003), 221.

²³⁵ Plumeri, Interview by Thomas L. Bonn, 1978.

of the darker man and lighter woman reaches back to the time of the the boy/girl magazine illustrations from the 1920s-1950s. Interracial romance between black and white Americans has never been common in romance novels. In the 1970s there were a few titles that included interracial romance between African-Americans and Caucasians, but these books included cringeworthy instances of rape, slavery and racism. The 1976 novel *Rafe*, made a spectacle out of the pain and death of black slaves, and the taboo sexual relations and rape between blacks and whites. Although this violence and exploitation is only a step away from the violence of the early romance, the bodice ripper, that step does exist. Yet the cover is arranged exactly like a clinch cover. The first mainstream African-American romance novel was Elsie B. Washington's *Entwined Destinies* in 1980, followed by Sandra Kitt's *Adam and Eve* in 1985.²³⁶ In both novels the heroine and hero were both black. Current titles include black and white interracial romance, though these relationships are still a rarity.

However, romances between Native American men and white women, or Middle Eastern men and white women are common and even pre-date the publication of the *Flame and the Flower*. Thurston says that *The Sheik* by E. M. Hull was "so popular it is considered by some to be the first romance of the twentieth century."²³⁷ Hull paired a cold English socialite with a predictably hot-blooded Arab sheik. Author Cassie Edwards has spent most of her thirty year career in romance novels churning out novel after novel in which a white heroine and a Native American man fall in love, and she is by no means alone in embracing this trope. In her book on Orientalism in romance novels, Hsu-Ming

²³⁶ Hsu-Ming Teo, *Desert Passions: Orientalism and Romance Novels* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), accessed through ProQuest Ebook Central collection, 289.

²³⁷ Thurston, *The romance revolution*, 38.

Teo says that a romance novel with a Native American hero or Arab Sheik “has become so common that it has developed into its own subgenre.”²³⁸

Researcher Hsu-Ming Teo discusses the reasons why despite the terrorism hysteria in the US, “Arab sheiks should still be regarded as highly desirable sexual and romantic “alpha male fantasy” partners for white women, while black men are not.”²³⁹ She theorizes that black American men are not presumed to possess the exotic caché and the riches to truly sweep a woman off her feet. Black men are not as exotic as a Greek Tycoon or Arab Sheik. White women encounter black men, but they will likely never encounter a Sheik. Lastly, Sheiks are more white and therefore more acceptable to white society, while a white woman would lose the privileges of her skin if she dates a black man.

Sean Nixon seconds the idea that skin color is an important reason why a Middle Eastern or Native American hero might be more acceptable than a black man. In discussing an ad campaign for menswear from 1985 and 1987, he suggests that the model’s light black skin expresses the hypermasculinity associated with black men, but the masculinity and “savagery” is tempered or sanctioned by his fairness.²⁴⁰ Light brown skin provides just the right hint of the savage, or the exotic, associated in our culture with the Other.

When the cover, and not the novel, is considered, all pretense that this is an interracial romance is swept away. The hero is clearly a white man with a veneer of exoticism, because the model on the cover is a white man with his skin darkened by the

²³⁸ Teo, *Desert Passions*, 289.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 292.

²⁴⁰ Nixon, “Exhibiting Masculinity,” 302.

painter. Artists even used well-known male models for their faux Native Americans, including many images of the famous white romance novel model John DeSalvo in digital black face. (figs. 60-62)

Another noteworthy physical feature of the heroes on the covers is that they are impressively muscular. Whether the hero is described in the romance novel as lean and rangy or brawny, the hero on the cover looks like he lifts weights for an hour a day and has never touched a carb in his life. This is not necessarily the default for male bodies exposed for female sexual enjoyment. Several of the models in early issues of *Playgirl* are lean, but without defined muscles.

The mania for body-building also appeared in ads and fashion in the 1980s and 1990s. Advertising historian Anthony Cortese wrote in 1999, “Not many years ago, the slick and refined look defined fashion’s ideal man. Now the muscular guy dominates the runway and magazine pages.”²⁴¹ Barbara Stern also noted the increased interest in body-building in the 1990s. She said the emphasis on outer beauty led to dysfunctional body image syndromes such as reverse anorexia among men.²⁴²

The unusual muscularity is open to a few different interpretations. The body-builders’ enormous shoulders and lean hips emphasized his physical differences from a woman’s body.²⁴³ Richard Dyer, in talking about male pin-ups, suggests that the tensing of muscles which help to define the model’s musculature, also make him look ready to spring into action.²⁴⁴ Taking a more active pose might make the model seem more

²⁴¹ Cortese, *Provocateur*, 58.

²⁴² Stern, “Masculinism(s) and the male image,” 223.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 222.

²⁴⁴ Dyer, “Don’t look now,” 60.

masculine because masculinity and activity are inextricably linked in popular consciousness. Cortese theorizes that the muscular bulk could have been a reaction to violence and social unrest in the 1980s. Body-building gave men a sense of security in uncertain economic times and “the illusion of invincibility in hopes of being less vulnerable to random acts of violence.”²⁴⁵ If this was the case, the extreme muscularity of the models on the covers of romances could be a projection of the readers wish once again for security and safety.

At the same time that these attributes read as hypermasculine, they also run the risk of being read as threatening. Large muscles make the man look masculine, but also could be used to overpower a woman. A man of color could be read as exotic, but his supposed savagery could pose a threat to a woman if all the rules of empathy do not apply. Masculinity and violence or pain are joined in our culture.

The communication between the book’s plot and the cover helps ensure that the model’s look never steps over the line into outright threatening. Part of the attraction of these models was unquestionably an effect of the bleeding of the impression of the novel into the impression of the covers. Readers felt like they knew these men, because they read novels whose covers bore their faces. In 1991, reader Zoe Yoon wrote to *Romantic Times Magazine* to say she was “love-struck by the first sight of Colt Thunder in the bookstore, and then became hopelessly enamored of him after reading his story.”²⁴⁶

At the same time as the love for the male model was attaining new heights, there was a certain measure of prudishness. The stepback, or tip-in, attained new heights as well. Around 1993, publishers began running ads for romance novels featuring the full

²⁴⁵ Cortese, *Provocateur*, 59.

²⁴⁶ Yoon and Lindsey, “Letters from readers,” 26.

stepback artwork, since these works were eye-catching and appealing, and a small image of the book's outer cover so that readers could find the book in stores. (fig. 63-64) By June 1995, the stepback was such a ubiquitous element of a cover that *Romantic Times* ran a Readers Forum about stepbacks in which readers wrote in both praising and condemning the stepbacks.²⁴⁷ A buyer from Dalton said that she could finally read her romances on the subway without being hassled by other riders for reading romance.²⁴⁸ However much romance readers may have enjoyed the hunk only covers, the idea that a woman could want a man provoked a tinge of disgust.

²⁴⁷ Romantic Times Staff, "Reader forum", 24-26.

²⁴⁸ Little, "History of romance novel cover art," 29.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The end of the 1990s marked a slow change to the art of romance novel covers. Romance novel are still being produced and in massive numbers. Romance Writers of America list the percentage of the U.S. fiction market at 34% in 2015.²⁴⁹ Publishers Weekly set the unit sales of print romance novels in 2015 at about 28 million.²⁵⁰ However, according to the same Romance Writers of America statistics, 61% of romance novels are now read in ebook format, making the cover less of an omnipresent part of the publication for readers.²⁵¹ Older books reproduced as ebooks sometimes lack cover artwork entirely.

The widespread adoption of photo editing software accelerated what was arguably a decline in the quality of the big book romance covers at the end of the 1990s, and encouraged changes in the subject matter of romance covers. Before the introduction of the personal computer, the process for creating a paperback cover had changed only marginally since the founding of the great paperback publishing houses. As mentioned earlier, an art director, in consultation with representatives from marketing, editorial, and production, came up with a concept for a cover.²⁵² The art director then hired a freelance artist to paint or draw an original piece of artwork.²⁵³ The artist would work with a photographer, models, and costumer to create a photograph to paint from. Out of a couple

²⁴⁹ Romance Writers of America, "Romance Industry Statistics," *myRWA: The Romance Writers of America*, 2013. <http://www.rwa.org/p/cm/ld/fid=580>

²⁵⁰ Milliot, Jim. Fiction Rules Ebooks. *Publishers Weekly*. Online. June 20, 2011. <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/digital/content-and-e-books/article/47660-fiction-rules-e-books.html>

²⁵¹ Romance writers of America, "Romance industry statistics."

²⁵² Bonn, *UnderCover*, 84.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 87.

of rolls of black and white film, the artist would select the photo they wanted and get a larger image reproduced from a contact sheet.²⁵⁴ Robert Maguire and Robert McGinnis often set up and took the photographs they would need for their pulp covers from the 1950s and 60s.²⁵⁵ By the 1980s and 1990s romance illustrators mostly patronized the photographers Addie Passan, Bob Osonitsch and Michel LeGrou.²⁵⁶ (figs. 65-66) The photography session was such a part of the industry that cover artist Sharon Spiak was able to transition to being a full time costumer for romance novel photographs. If the artist was too busy, a photographer might take the photo without the artist's input.²⁵⁷

The photograph session with models was a mainstay of the creation of romance cover art throughout the 1980s and 1990s, but by and large these photos were used for reference material for a painting, not for the cover itself. It was thought that photographs could not appear on the cover of a finished romance because the cover should be as fantastical as the story. Photographs were deemed too realistic. The camera captured too much of seen reality and not enough of the shared conventions of the cover formula. Milton Charles, art director of Pocket Books, said of painted artwork in a 1978 interview, "Art painting has that quality even though it is very realistic art. A photograph somehow has that stark reality about it. That takes the fantasy out of it. ... I am right here. Research says the photograph will not work."²⁵⁸ Susan Sontag argues that we assume that

²⁵⁴ Lapadula, email to the author, 2018.

²⁵⁵ Maguire and Lovisi, "The magic of Robert A. Maguire," 17. See also McGinnis, Robert, and Art Scott. *The art of Robert E. McGinnis*, 15.

²⁵⁶ Klinkenburg, Kornelia. "The Face that Launched a Thousand Romances: Hilka Bohlen, Love's Leading Cover Girl". *Romantic Times Magazine* 13 (Holiday 1983) centerfold, pg. 23. See also Ryan, "The cover illustration report," 29. See also Duillo, and Lovisi. "Elaine: The Queen of Romance Illustration," 34.

²⁵⁷ Lapadula, email to author, 2018.

²⁵⁸ Charles, interview by Thomas L. Bonn, 1978.

photography presents a correct image. She says, “a photograph - any photograph - seems to have a more innocent, and therefore more accurate relation to visible reality than do other mimetic objects.”²⁵⁹ With romance novel covers art directors and artists were actively trying to avoid accurate visible reality.

By the mid-1990s, there were signs that photo covers were slowly becoming more acceptable. A 1992 article for the *Romantic Times*, while stating that “artwork, not photos, illustrates the covers of U.S. romance novels,” and that several publishing houses had “unsuccessfully tried photo covers” in the past, but it revealed that Harlequin was just starting a new line of “very attractive” photo covers.²⁶⁰ A very short *Romantic Times* article about a 1994 cover treated the fact that artist Franco Accornero digitally inserted a photo into a painting as an interesting fact to be discussed with pride.²⁶¹

When artists started to use altered photographs in the first half of the 1990s, there was a push back from art directors. Artist Franco Accornero said that at the time the famous phrase was, “Can you make it more painterly?”²⁶² Cover artist Judy York said that to convince her art director to accept digital work she created a virtually identical digital copy of a work she had also painted by hand.²⁶³ Changes could be made much more easily with Photoshop and files could be sent to the printer faster.²⁶⁴ By the end of the 1990s photo edited covers were becoming the industry standard. Cover artist James

²⁵⁹ Sontag, Susan. *On photography*, 6.

²⁶⁰ Romantic Times Staff, “George Haber the first entry for the Mr. Romance Paperback Cover model pageant,” *Romantic Times Magazine* issue 105 (December 1992), 63.

²⁶¹ Romantic Times Staff. “Zebra creates new Photo painting for spokesman and writer Tye Damon”. *Romantic Times Magazine* 118 (January 1994), 38.

²⁶² Accornero, interview with the author, 2015.

²⁶³ York, interview with the author, 2015.

²⁶⁴ Accornero, interview with the author, 2015. See also James Griffin, (cover artist) interview with the author through email, June-September 2017.

Griffin said that around 1997 his agent sat him down and explained that “art directors just didn’t want that ‘old fashioned’ painted look any more.”²⁶⁵

The cover of *Sweet Awakening* from 1995, is an example of an early photo edited work by Richard Newton. (fig. 67) The background has been replaced by a flat, purplish blue color, rather than a painted or drawn scene. The couple’s skin has been softened or smudged, until they look as if they were softly glowing around the edges. All of the bright color has been drained from the image. Newton might have been trying to subtly alter a photographic image to make it look less “real” without the tools necessary to create a really stunning image.

Pino’s cover for *Lady of the Lake* from 1997, (fig. 68) and Max Ginsburg’s *Knave of Hearts* from 2001 (fig. 69) both incorporate photographs and painting into one image. In *Lady of the Lake*, Pino painted the background of the scene, repainted the model’s hair and gown, painted highlights onto her face, but left her hands and neck untouched. Similarly in *Knave of Hearts*, Ginsburg painted the background of the scene, and added a pattern of brush-strokes to the hero’s doublet, but left John Desalvo’s iconic face and hair alone. James Griffin’s cover for *Silk Is For Seduction* from 2011 is an example of how photo editing is used more recently to evoke the earlier historical big book historical covers. (fig. 70) Instead of actually painting on the photo, or using a pre-formulated brush tool in photo editing software, Griffin softens and blurs together layers of color to create a riot of silk that is implied rather than stated.

The concentration on the male model in the mid 1990s, though it may not have provoked the shift to photography, may have caused photographic realism to be considered more attractive. Painters regularly slightly altered the face physique or hair of

²⁶⁵ Griffin, interview with the author, 2017.

the models. Once the models became one of the attractions of the cover, the artist had to stick to a certain level of accuracy to the modeling session. Illustrator Elaine Duillo said that the first time she used Fabio on the back of a cover, she altered his face to make him more attractive. After his sudden fame she faithfully reproduced his face.²⁶⁶ The accurate reproductions of models may have helped to reassure art directors that photographic covers on romance novels could work.

In 1995, *Brazen* by Susan Johnson was published with what would be a popular cover design. (fig. 71) The head is cut off by the top of the cover, avoiding the need to find the perfect looking model, or carefully alter a model's appearance. Franco Accornero's stepback for the double title *Whirlwind Courtship* and *High Energy* is another early example of this sort of cover. (fig. 72) The hero's rippling chest takes up easily eighty percent of the cover. There is no need for elaborate bucolic backgrounds that are hard to create even with the best photo-editing tools. A 2016 article on romance cover models in the *The New York Times* linked the headless trend to an overuse of the same model. Without the head, romance readers don't know that very different heroes are being portrayed by the same model.²⁶⁷ The headless hunk trend was followed by the equally popular headless woman trend and the bare back trend. (fig. 73) All of these trends allowed an adequate photograph for a cover to be taken relatively easily without a highly trained painter or a perfect model. In 2000, an editor, Heather Lazare, posed for

²⁶⁶ Duillo & Lovisi, "Elaine: The Queen of Romance Illustration." 34.

²⁶⁷ Laura M. Holson, "With Romance Novels Booming, Beefcake Sells, but It doesn't Pay," *New York Times* (March 30, 2016). <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/03/business/media/with-romance-novels-booming-beefcake-sells-but-it-doesnt-pay.html>

the covers of two reissued historical romances, despite not looking at all like either Elizabeth I, or Anne of Austria.²⁶⁸ (fig. 74)

The emphasis on photography also forced a more staid tone on the historical covers. Although photoshop artist can create eye-catching color combinations and fantastic settings, the enormous flowers, frolicing animals and improbable perspective have vanished. The expectations of a painted cover are different from those of a photograph. Painted covers had a whole history of absurd pulp covers and science fiction covers to draw upon. To a certain extent, a painted cover references these covers that the viewer has already accepted, the shared acceptance of unrealistic elements in a genre that Steve Neale discusses.²⁶⁹ Without this painterly history behind it, these elements are too absurd for acceptance.

There are proficient and beautiful works created for romance novels based on digital photo editing. This is the case for the works created by Tony Mauro, Jon Paul Ferrara, Chris Coccozza, James Griffin among others. However, Photoshop allows publishers and artists to prioritize speed over interest or attention. Even when a romance is selected by a major publisher, there is no assurance that the cover art will not end up being a piece of stock art.²⁷⁰ In *Paperbacks from Hell*, Grady Hendrix says that photo editing initially helped artists because they could create covers much more quickly and receive the same pay as for a painted cover. However, prices for covers fell, and marketing departments began demanding last minute changes and fast turn-around

²⁶⁸ Kira Walton. "The Editor-Model Hybrid is Born: Posing for Jean Plaidy covers with editor Heather Lazare," *Read it Forward*. <http://www.readitforward.com/author-interview/the-editor-model-hybrid-is-born-posing-for-the-covers-with-editor-heather-lazare-category-meet-the-editor/> 2000.

²⁶⁹ Neale, "Questions of Genre," 159.

²⁷⁰ Wendell and Tan, *Beyond heaving bosoms*, 278.

times.²⁷¹ The artist was encouraged not to invest as much time or creativity into the works.

In “The Wearing Out of Genre Materials,” Science Fiction writer Joanna Russ frames writing in a genre as a compromise between the expression of a wish, and the exposition necessary to make that wish plausible.²⁷² She suggests that readers search for the same story in every book they read. But better examples remain fresh while worse works pale in comparison. At some point a wish can wear out.

Although the basic impulse, the wish, behind a romance cover remains alive, most of the devices used in the 1980s and 1990s to express that wish have become overused and disappeared from the racks. The romance novel covers were tied to a particular time. Outside of that time period, they seem like a foreign language that modern readers can barely fathom but might enjoy none-the-less. The six foot hair, possibly carnivorous flowers, manic horses and floating, dream space, all accord with the “formula” of 1980s cover art, but do not at all accord with seen reality. When a reader expects seen reality and instead finds an enormous floating flower, the incongruity between expectation and actuality is enjoyable and funny.

Increasingly, viewers are embracing this half-mocking form of humor, humor that acknowledges drawbacks and even embraces them. If a work is too perfect, too tasteful, the viewer cannot engage with it. A whole culture of romance cover appreciation has grown up on romance blogs and book websites. There is a “stepback” group on *Goodreads*, in which readers compare old historical romance

²⁷¹ Hendrix, Grady. *Paperbacks from Hell*, 201.

²⁷² Joanna Russ, “The Wearing out of Genre Materials,” *College English*, 33, no. 1 (Oct., 1971), 46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/375521>

covers. The *Cover Snark* feature of the blog *Smart Bitches, Trashy Books*, is very popular. A commenter on the survey about romance covers from 2014 said, “I hated lurid romance covers until I discovered how vastly amusing they could be and now I would be very sorry to see them all disappear.”²⁷³ Romance readers are aware of the drawbacks of their genre. They laugh at the faults and embrace them. At least in this way romance novel covers are a good fit for the romance novel genre.

This new level of acceptance of the ridiculous and low-brow could be linked to a new attitude toward Kitsch. A modern, cosmopolitan reactions to Kitsch is cultural omnivorism. For a cultural omnivore, it is a mark of high status to embrace everything, or almost everything.²⁷⁴ In “Notes on Camp,” Susan Sontag pointed out that appreciation of Camp was “something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques.”²⁷⁵ “The coolest thing for a well-off and well-educated person to do is to consume some high culture along with heaps of popular culture, international and lowbrow entertainment.”²⁷⁶ Kitsh is composed of “gestures full of duplicity, with a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders.”²⁷⁷ The internet has allowed the formerly separated “insiders” to the appreciation of romance covers to find and share images. As a defender of Kitsch, John McHale points out, “Common charges of ‘standardized

²⁷³ “Your Opinion of Romance Covers,” survey by the author, 2014.

²⁷⁴ C.E. Emmer, “9/11 as schmaltz-attractor: A coda on the significance of “Kitsch,” in *Kitsch: history, theory, practice*, by Kjellman-Chapin, Monica (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), 208.

²⁷⁵ Sontag, “Notes on Camp,” 275.

²⁷⁶ Carl Wilson quoted in Emmer, “9/11 as schmaltz-attractor,” 208; see also Richard A Peterson, and Roger M. Kern. “Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore,” *American Sociological Review* 61; 5 (Oct., 1996), 900-907. retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2096460>.

²⁷⁷ Sontag, “Notes on Camp,” 281.

taste' and 'uniformity' confuse the mass provision of items with their individual and selective consumption. The latter remains more than ever, and more widely, within the province of personal choice — less dictated than ever formerly by tradition, authority and scarcity."²⁷⁸ A cultural omnivore has the choice to make even the disreputable romance covers part of their personal choice to consume. Romance novel covers are still very disreputable, but there is some hope that in the not too distant future, omnivores and the internet together will lead to a flowering of interest in these kitschy, sentimental celebrations of female passion.

²⁷⁸ John McHale, "The Plastic Parthenon," in *Kitsch: The world of bad taste*, by Gillo Dorfles, (New York: Universe Books, 1969), 99.

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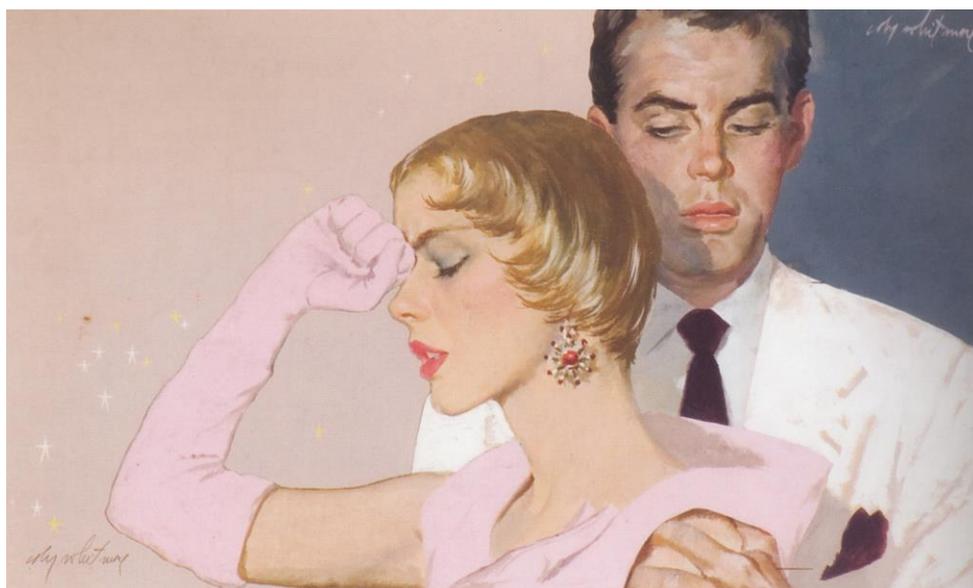


Fig. 1. Coby Whitmore. Illustration for *Good Housekeeping*, gouache on board, circa 1950s.

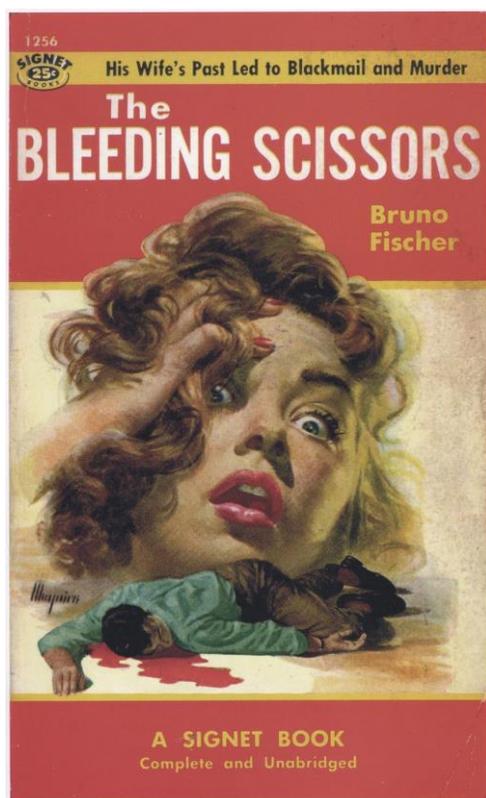


Fig. 2. Robert A. Maguire. *The Bleeding Scissors*. New York: Signet Books. 1955.



Fig. 3. Rudolph Belarski. *House of Fury*. New York: Berkley. 1959.

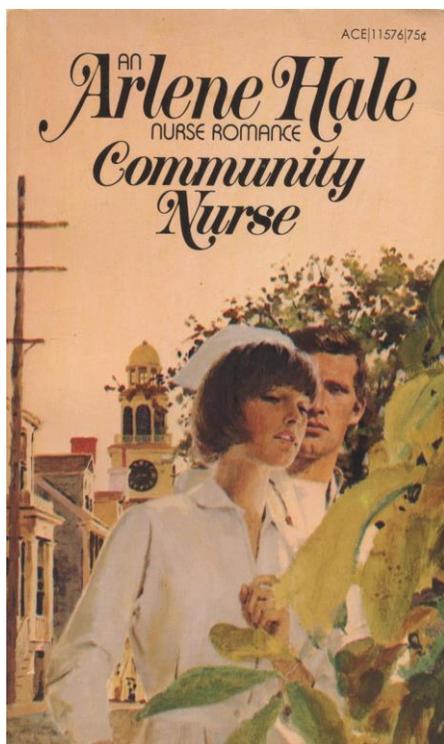


Fig. 4. Artist Unknown. *Community Nurse*. New York: Ace Books, 1975.

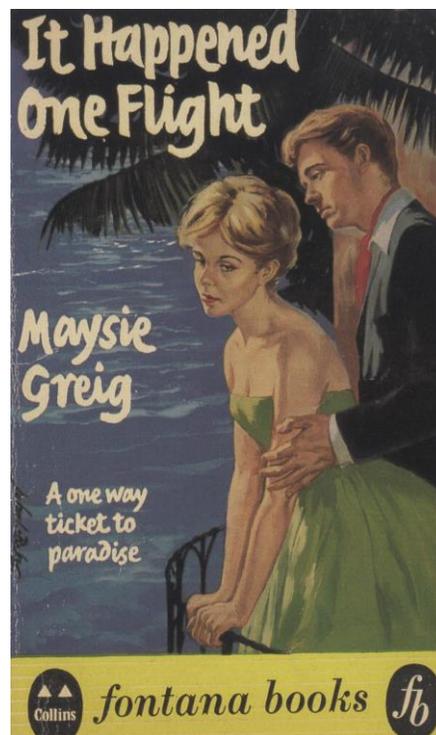


Fig. 5. Artist Unknown. *It Happened One Flight*. New York: Fontana Books. 1961.

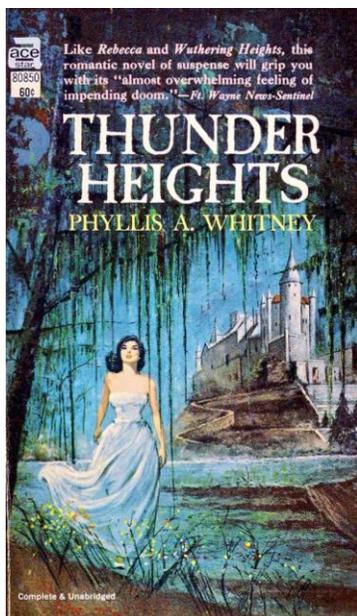


Fig. 6. Lou Marchetti. *Thunder Heights*. Ace. 1960

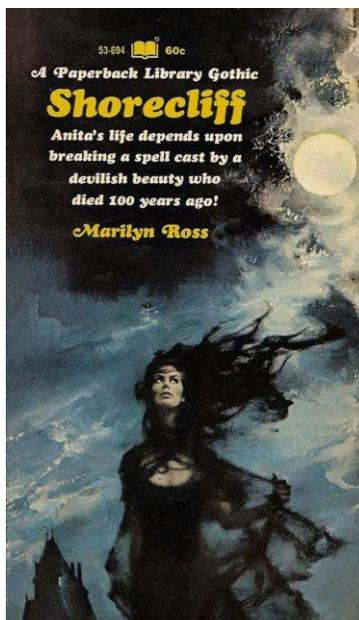


Fig. 7. George Ziel. *Shorecliff*. New York: Paperback Library. 1968.

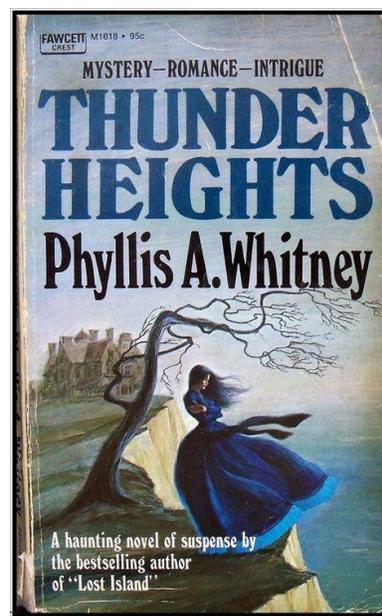


Fig. 8. Harry Bennett. *Thunder Heights*. New York: Fawcett. 1970.

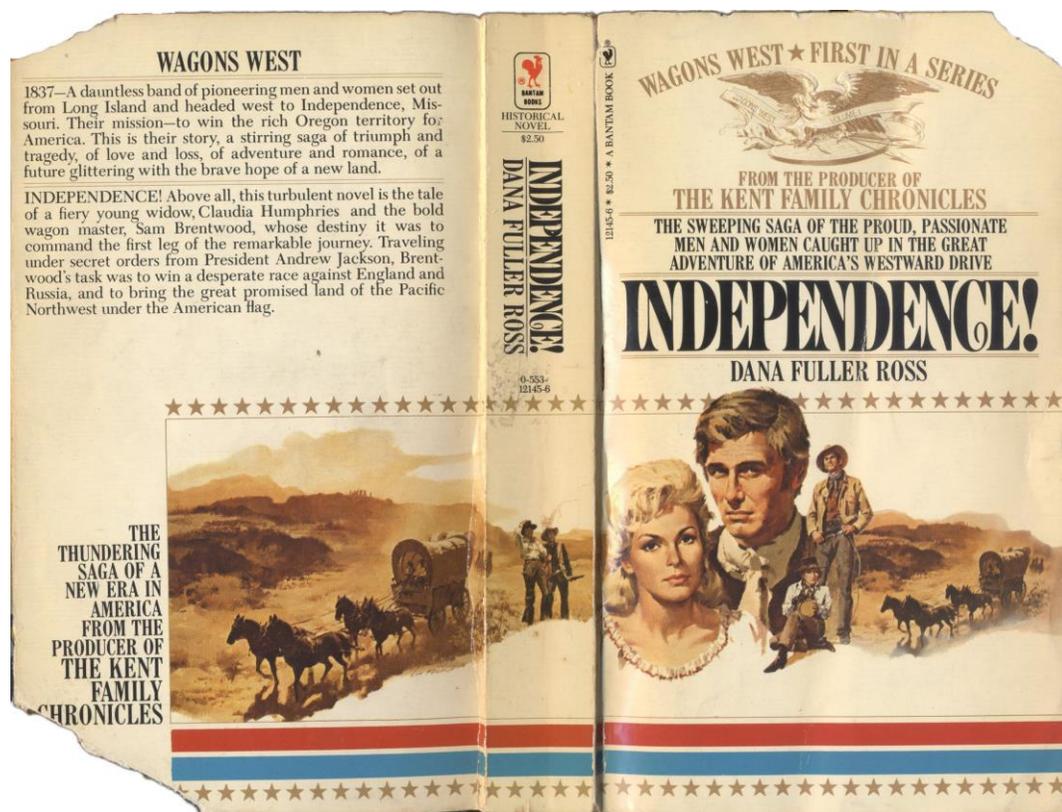


Fig. 9. Lou Feck. *Independence!*. New York: Bantam. 1979.

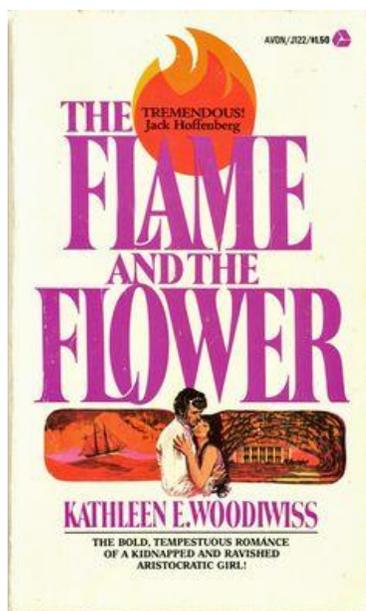


Fig. 10. Artist unknown. *The Flame and the Flower*. New York: Avon. 1972.

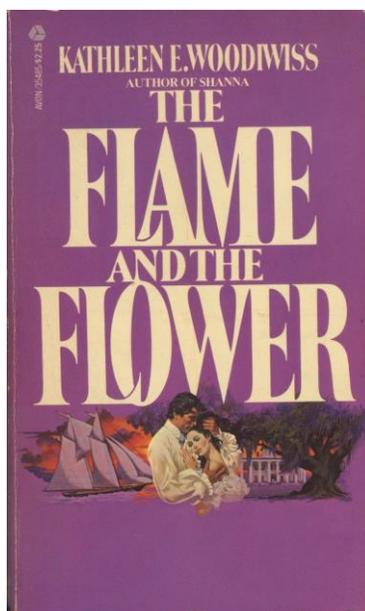


Fig. 11. Robert McGinnis. *The Flame and the Flower*: 43rd printing. New York: Avon. 1973.

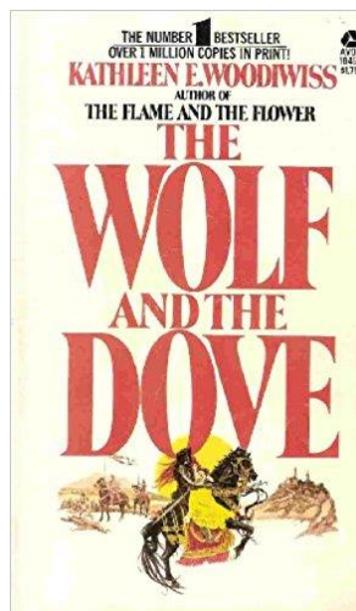


Fig. 12. Artist unknown. *The Wolf and the Dove*. New York: Avon. 1974

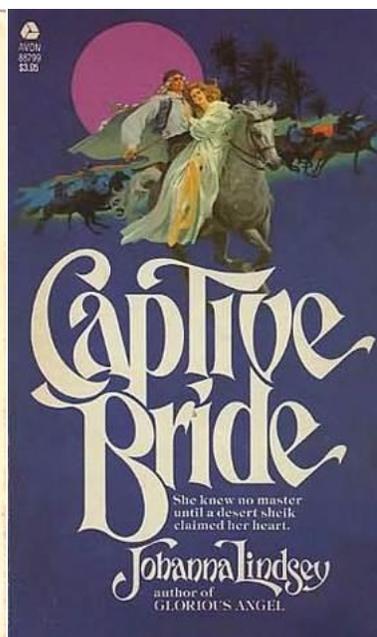
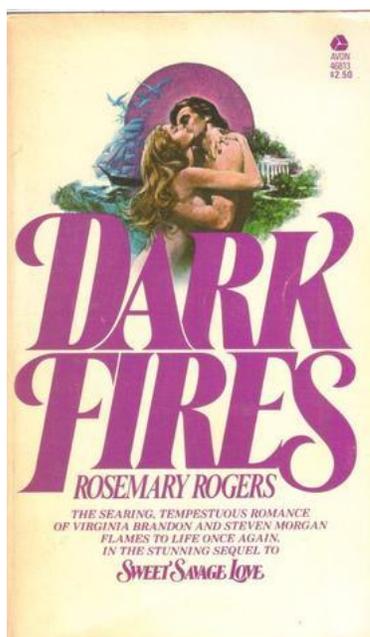
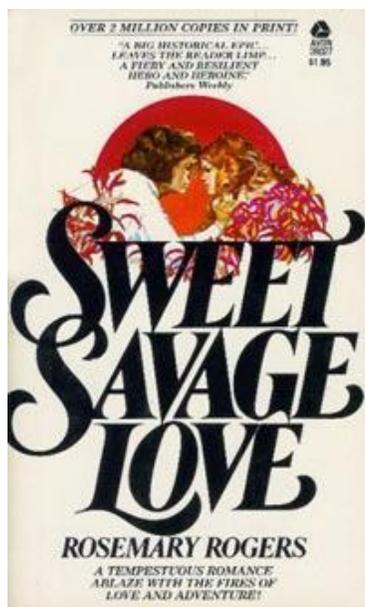


Fig. 13. Artist Unknown. *Sweet Savage Love*. New York: Avon. 1974

Fig. 14. Artist Unknown. *Dark Fires*. New York: Avon. 1975

Fig. 15. Robert McGinnis. *Captive Bride*. New York: Avon. 1977.

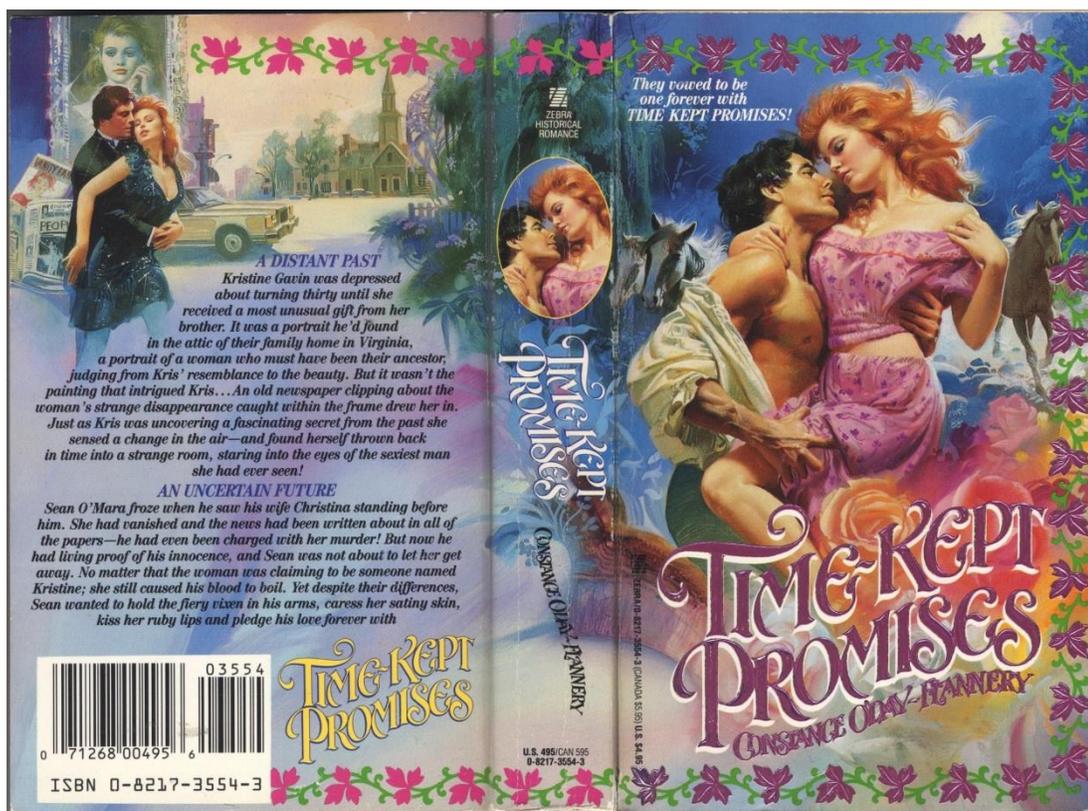


Fig. 16. Pino, *Time-Kept Promises*. New York: Zebra, Kensington. 1988.

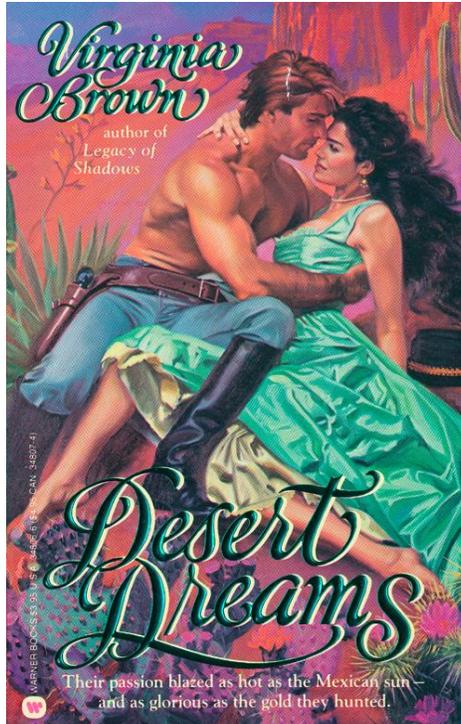


Fig. 17. Sharon Spiak, *Desert Dreams*. New York: Warner Books, 1988.

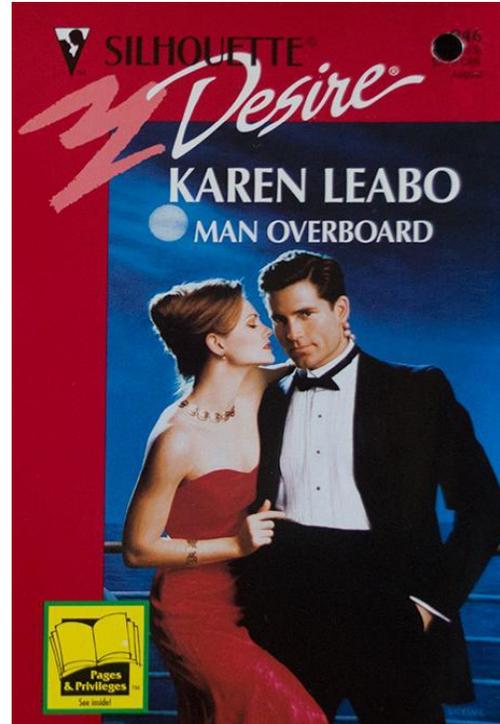


Fig. 18. Joe DiCesare, *Man Overboard*. New York: Silhouette, 1995.

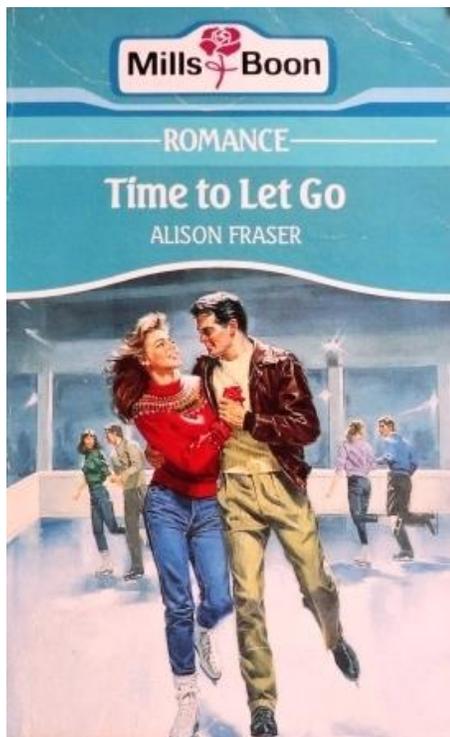


Fig. 19. Len Goldberg, *Time to Let Go*. Richmond, Surrey: Mills & Boon, 1990.

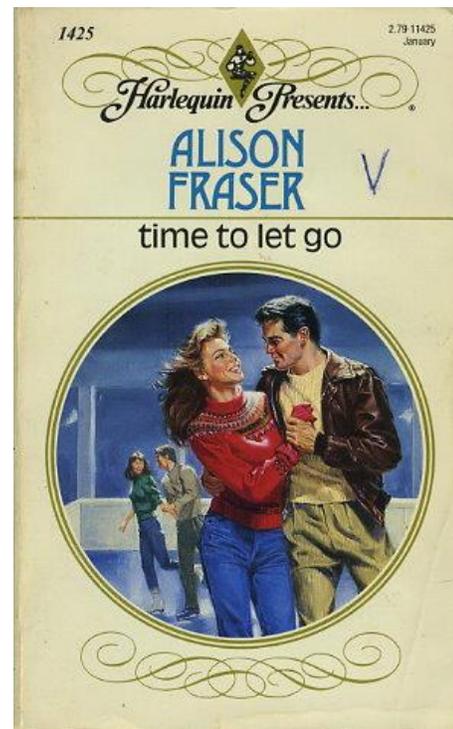


Fig. 20. Len Goldberg, *Time to Let Go*. Don Mills, Canada: Harlequin, 1992.

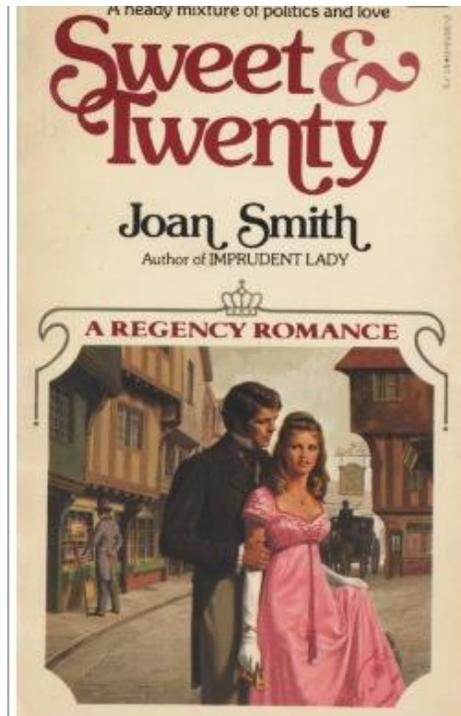


Fig. 21. Walter Popp, *Sweet & Twenty*. New York: Fawcett, 1979.

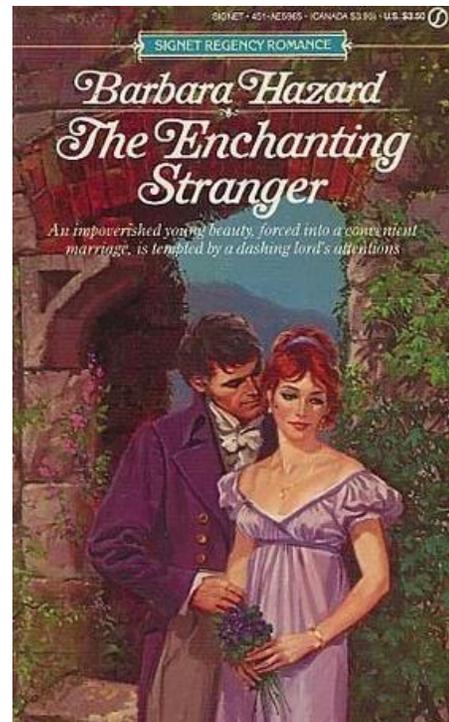


Fig. 22. Allan Kass, *The Enchanting Stranger*, New York: Signet, 1984.

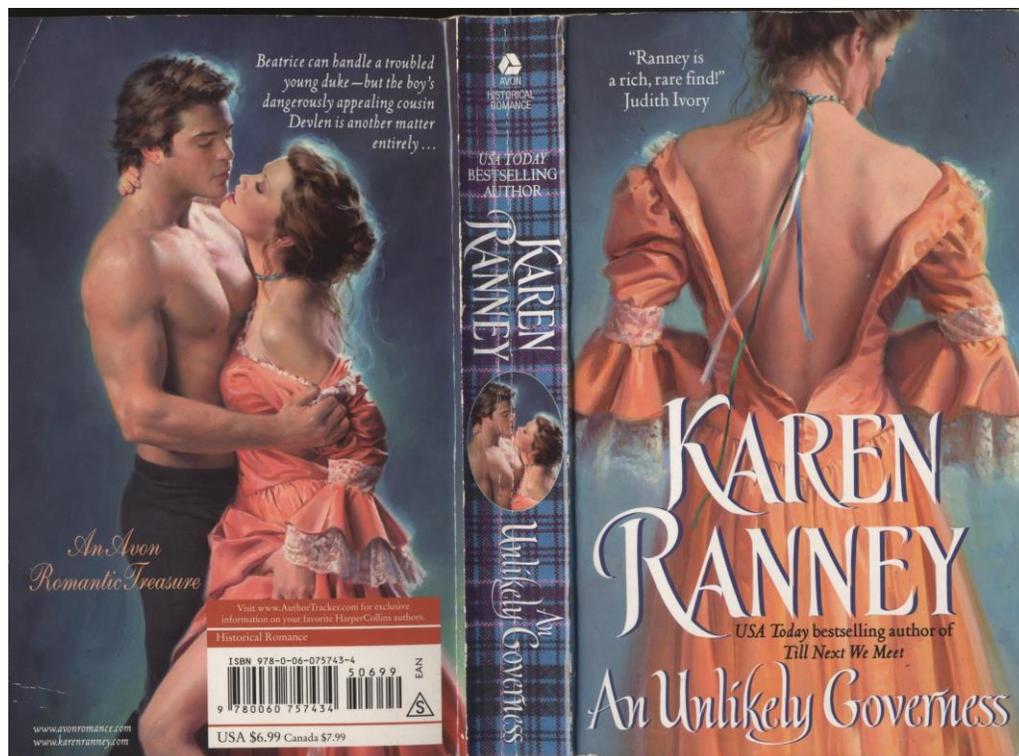


Fig. 23. Artist Unknown. *An Unlikely Governess*. New York: Avon, 2006.

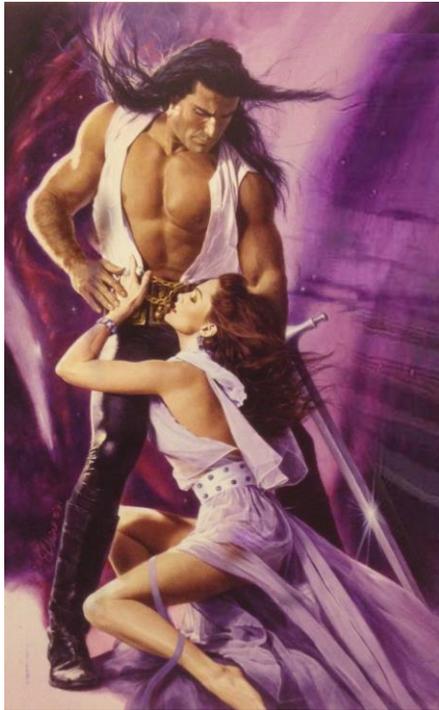


Fig. 24. Elaine Duillo. *Keeper of The Heart*. New York: Avon. 1993.

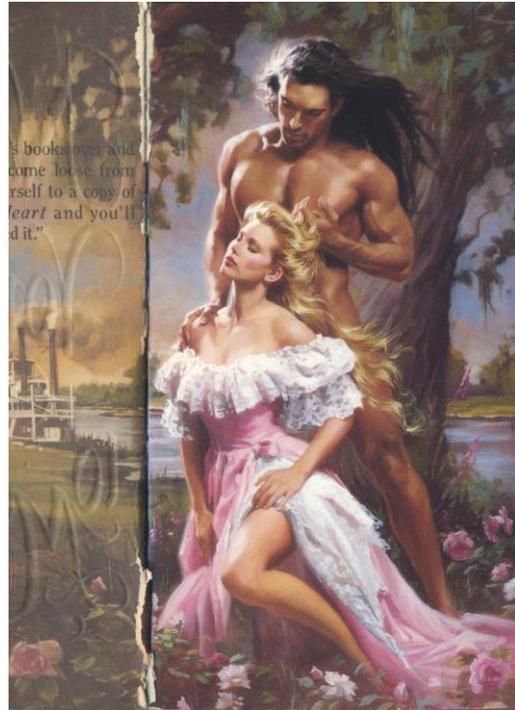


Fig. 25. Doreen Minuto. *You Belong to My Heart*. New York: Harper Paperbacks. 1996.

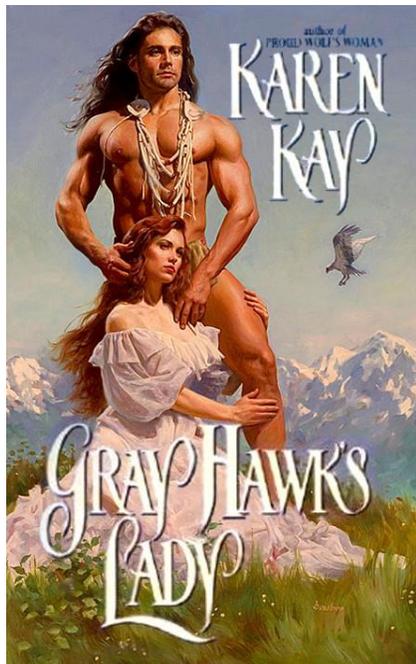


Fig. 26. Max Ginsburg. *Gray Hawk's Lady*. New York: Avon. 1997.

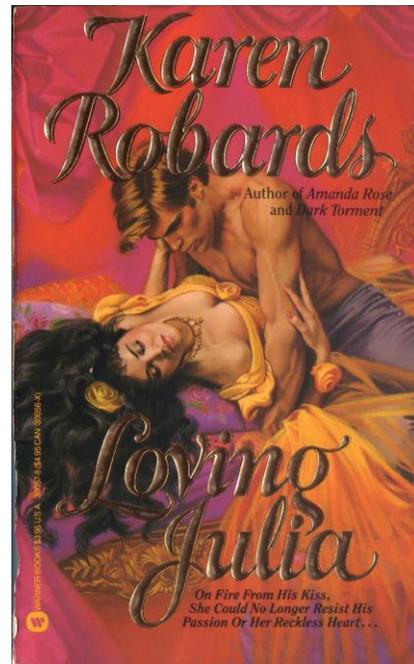


Fig. 27. Sharon Spiak. *Loving Julia*. New York: Warner Books. 1986.

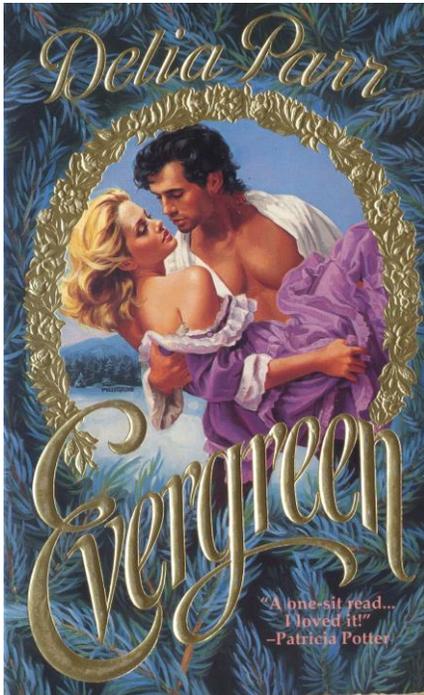


Fig. 28. Leslie Pellegrino Peck. *Evergreen*. New York: St. Martin's 1995.

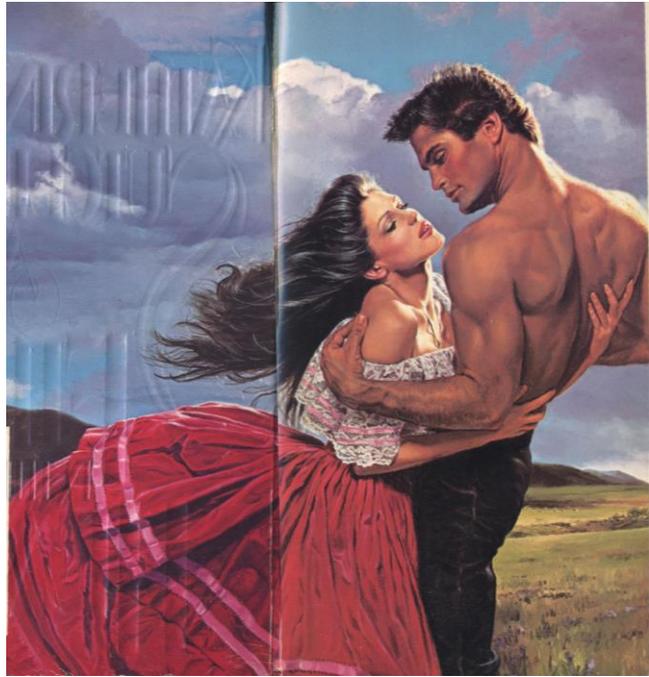


Fig. 29. Victor Gadino. *A Fire in the Heart*. New York: Avon. 1990.

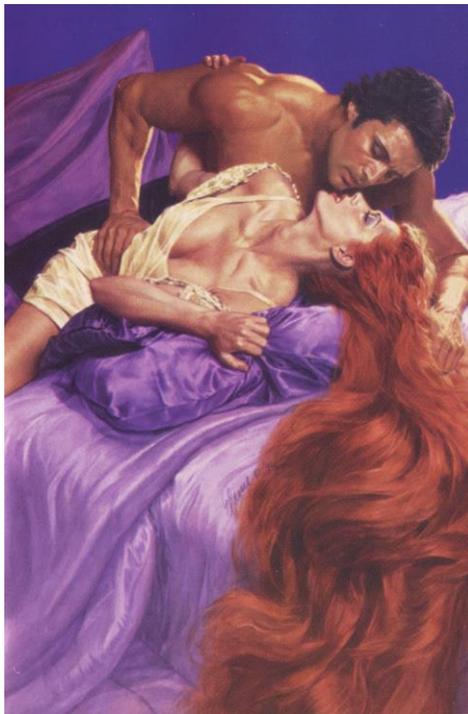


Fig. 30. Elaine Duillo. *A Well Pleasured Lady*. New York: Avon. 1997.

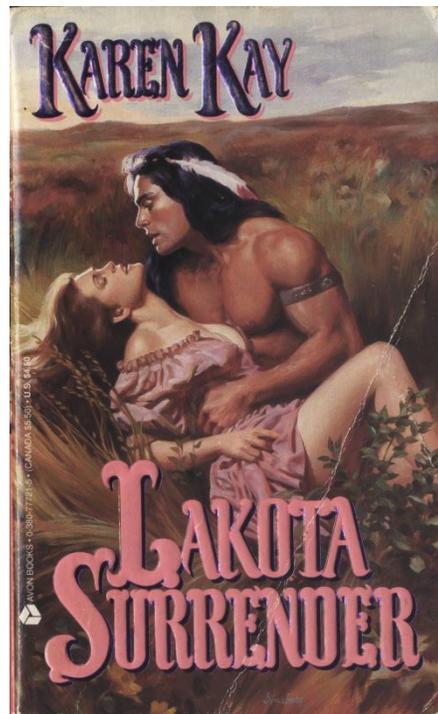


Fig. 31. Max Ginsburg. *Lakota Surrender*. New York: Avon. 1994.

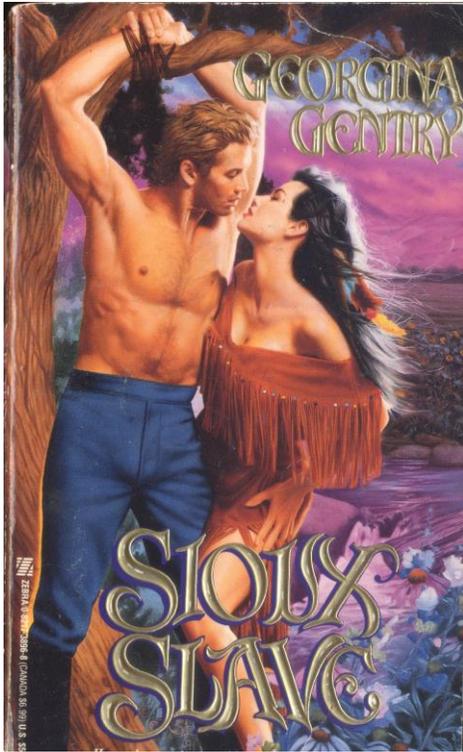


Fig. 32. Don Case. *Sioux Slave*. New York: Zebra Historical. 1992.

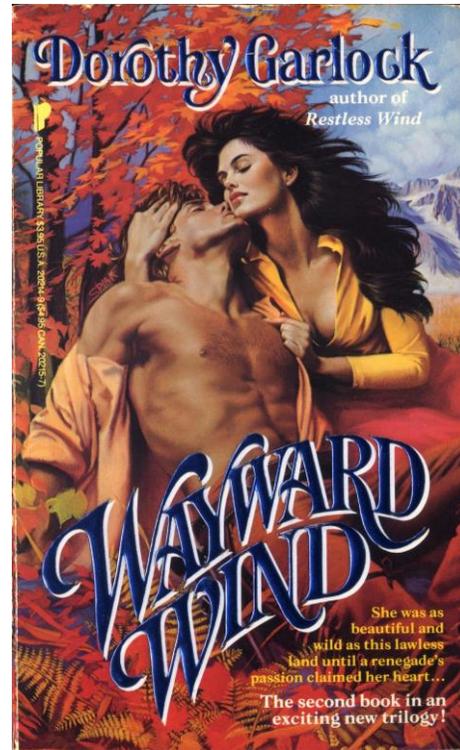


Fig. 33. Sharon Spiak. *Wayward Wind*. New York: Popular Library. 1986.

Fig. 34-36. Naber Examples

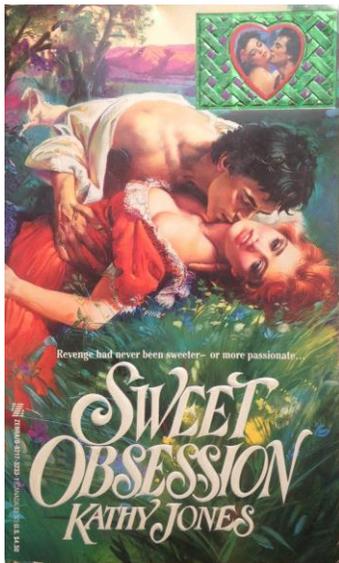


Fig. 34. Example of “rape myth”. Pino. *Sweet Obsession*. New York: Zebra, 1990.

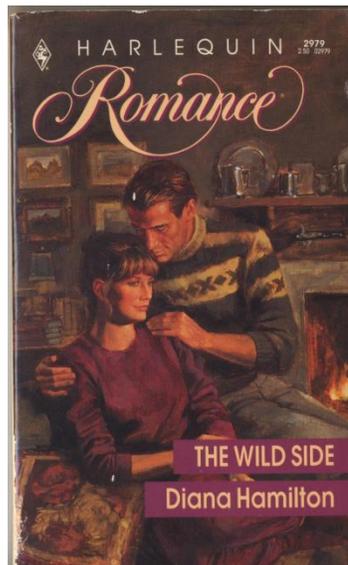


Fig. 35. Example of “sweet romance.” Artist Unknown. *Wild Side*. Toronto; New York: Harlequin, 1989

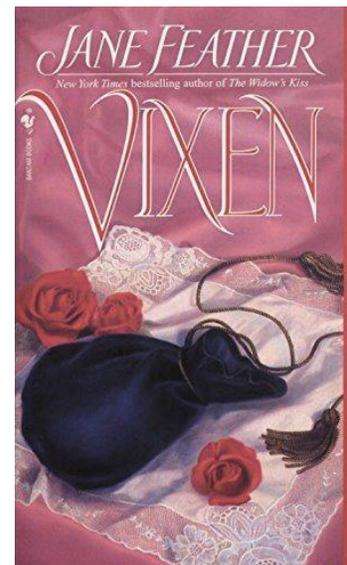


Fig. 36. Example of “title prime” cover. Artist Unknown. *Vixen*. New York: Bantam, 1994.

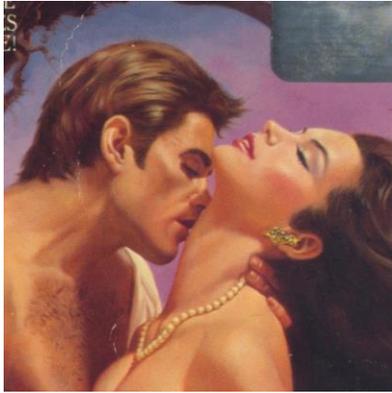


Fig. 37. Artist Unknown. *Rapture's Tempest*. New York: Zebra. 1985.

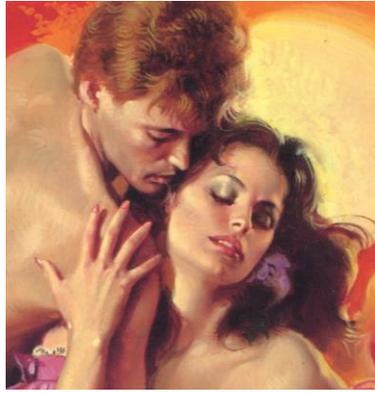


Fig. 38. Pino. *Wild Southern Rose*. New York: Zebra. 1985.

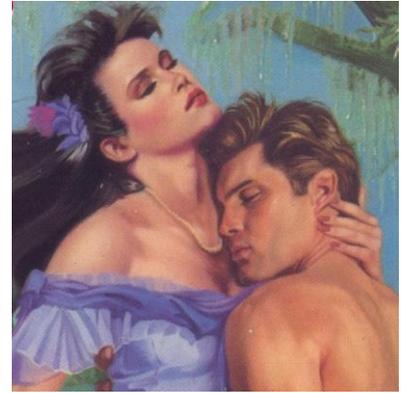


Fig. 39. Sharon Spiak. *The Bayou Fox*. New York: Warner Books. 1987.

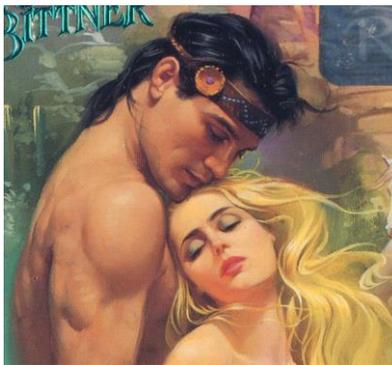


Fig. 40. John Ennis. *Arizona Ecstasy*. New York: Zebra. 1989.

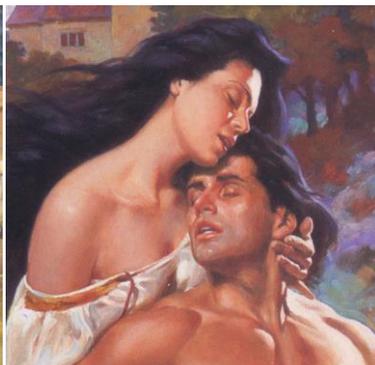


Fig. 41. Max Ginsburg. *Midnight Angel*. New York: Avon. 1995.

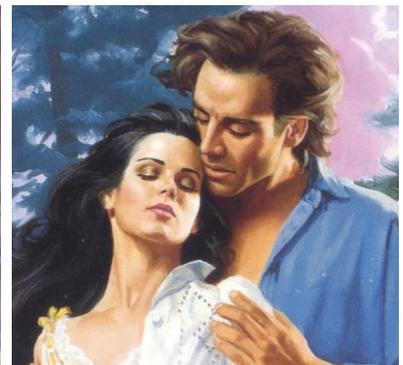


Fig. 42. Leslie Pellegrino Peck. *Delilah*. New York: Jove. 1995.

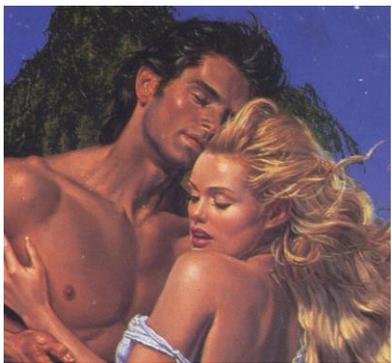


Fig. 43. Victor Gadino. *Midnight Lady*. New York: Avon. 1997.

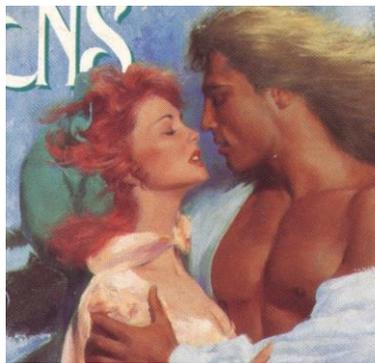


Fig. 44. Artist Unknown. *Captain Jack's Woman*. New York: Avon. 1997.



Fig. 45. James Griffin. *Silk Is For Seduction*. New York: Avon. 2011.

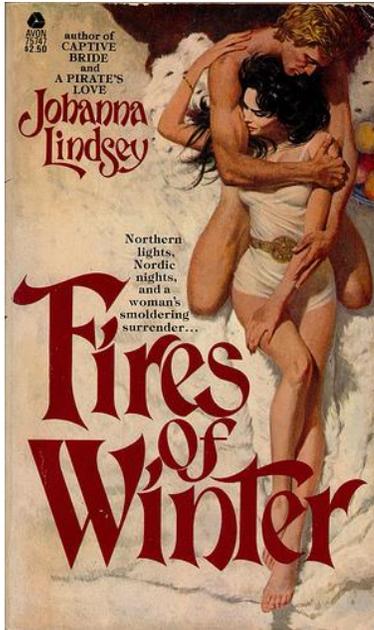


Fig. 46. Robert McGinnis. *Fires of Winter*. New York: Avon, 1980.

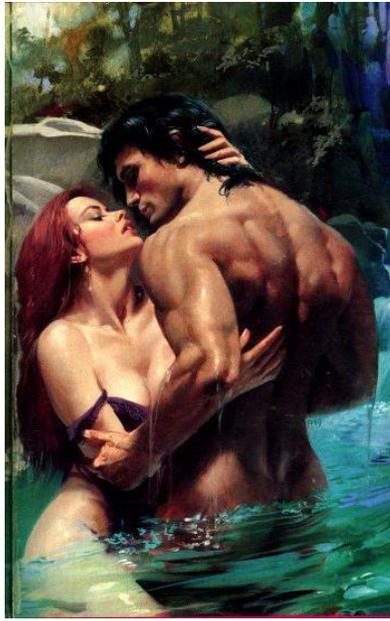


Fig. 47. Pino. *Wild Embrace*. New York: Topaz, 1993.

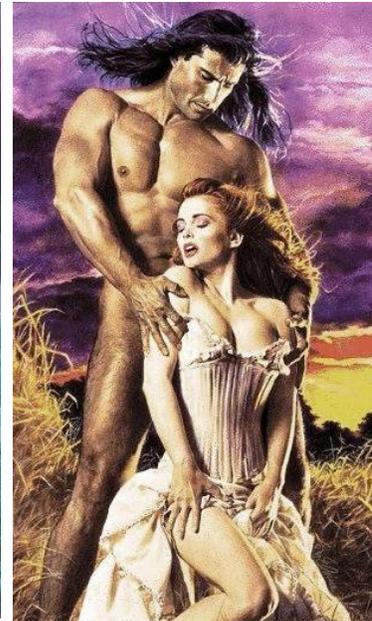


Fig. 48. Elaine Duillo. *Man of My Dreams*. New York: Avon, 1992.

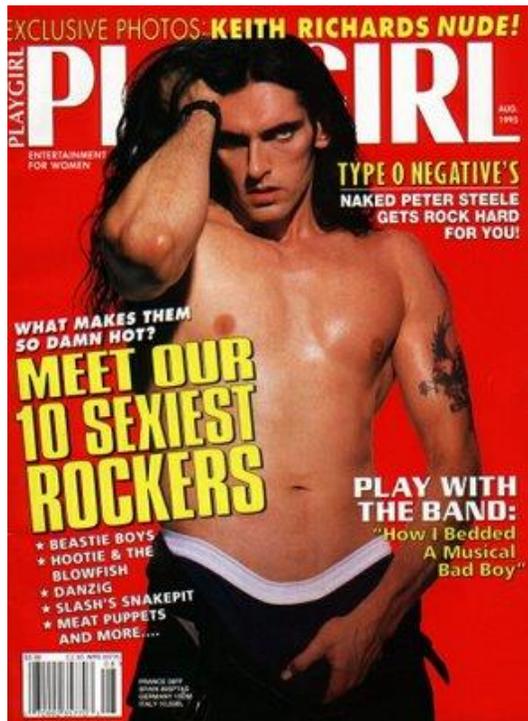


Fig. 49. Artist Unknown. "Cover" *Playgirl Magazine* (August 1995).

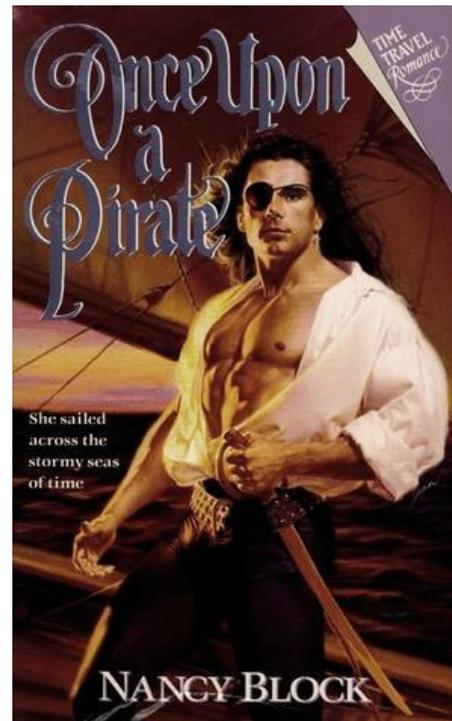


Fig. 50. Artist Unknown. *Once Upon A Pirate*. New York: Harper Collins, 1995.

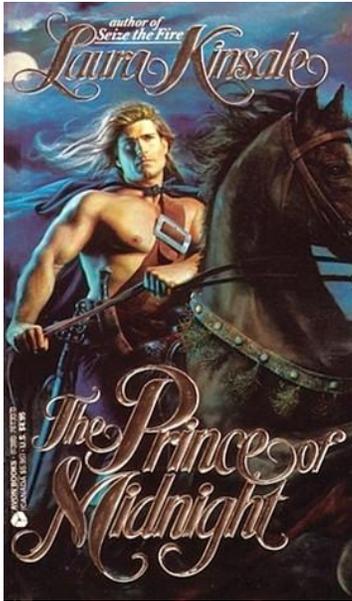


Fig. 51. Unknown Artist. *Prince of Midnight*. New York: Avon. 1990.

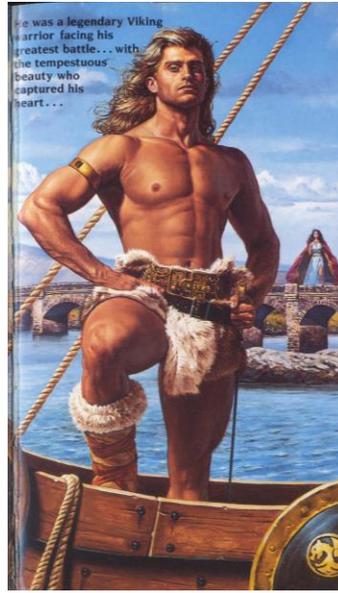


Fig. 52. Victor Gadino. *Lord of the Wolves*. New York: Dell. 1993.

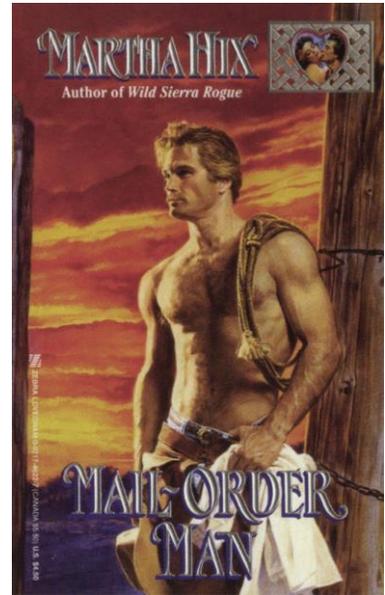


Fig. 53. Elaine Duillo. *Mail-Order Man*. New York: Zebra. 1994.



Fig. 54. The Topaz Man. Photo by Charles William Bush. *Romantic Times*. v. 107 (Feb. 1993): 47.

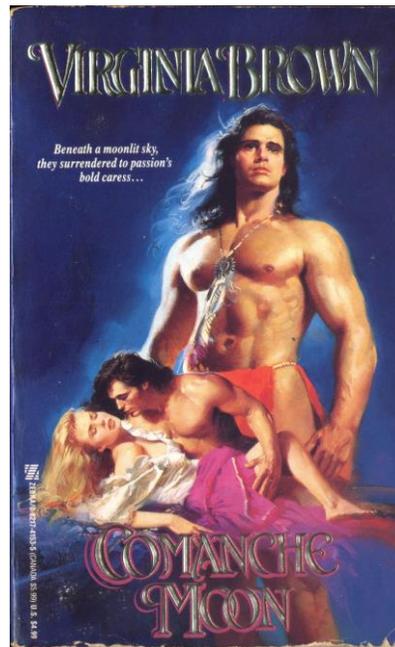


Fig. 55. Pino. *Comanche Moon*. New York: Zebra. 1993.



Fig. 56. Spine Logo from *Sweet Awakening* by Marjorie Farrell. New York: Topaz. 1995. Photo by Charles William Bush.

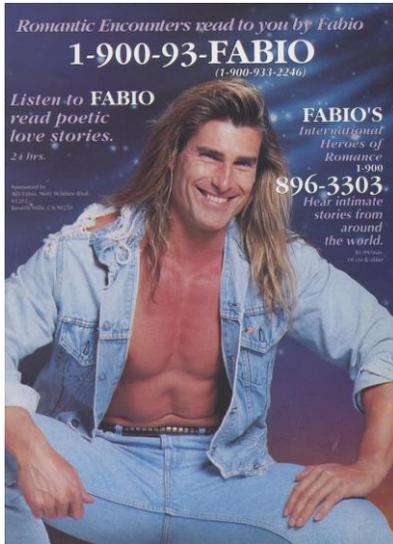


Fig. 57. Ad for one of Fabio's hotlines in *Romantic Times* v. 95 (Feb. 1992) p.9.

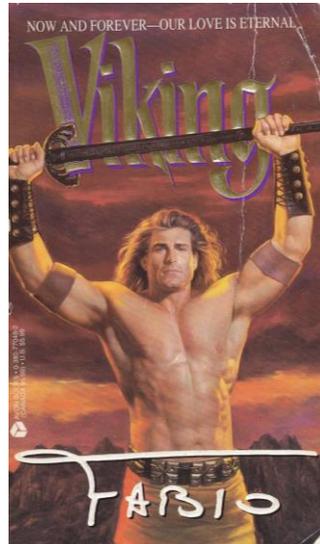


Fig. 58. Steve Assel. *Viking* by Fabio. New York: Avon. 1994.



Fig. 59. Ad for Topaz Dreams in *Romantic Times* v. 105 (Dec. 1992) centerfold.

John DeSalvo as an Indian

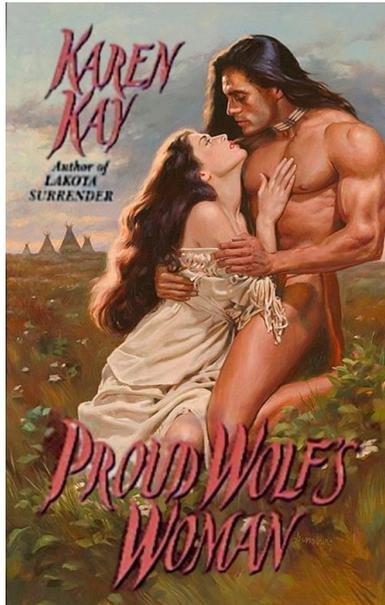


Fig. 60. Max Ginsburg. *Proud Wolf's Woman*. New York: Avon. 1996.

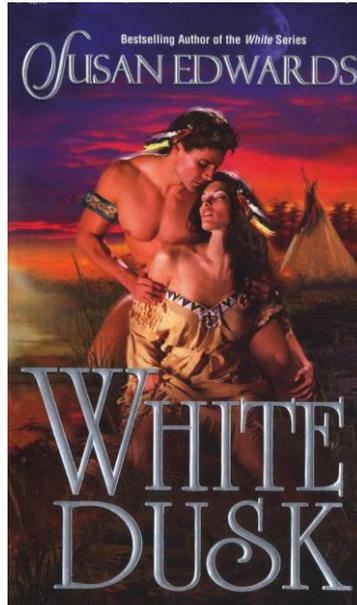


Fig. 61. Unknown Artist. *White Dusk*. New York: Leisure. 2002.

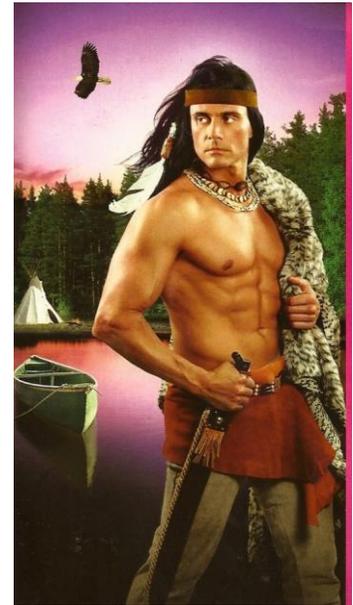


Fig. 62. Unknown Artist. *Savage Tempes*. New York: Leisure Books. 2006.

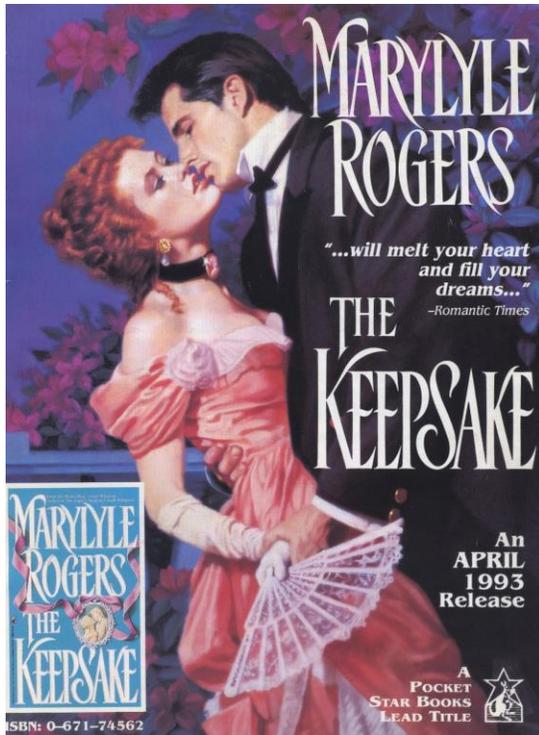


Fig. 63. Ad for *The Keepsake*. *Romantic Times Magazine* 109 (Apr. 1993): centerfold.

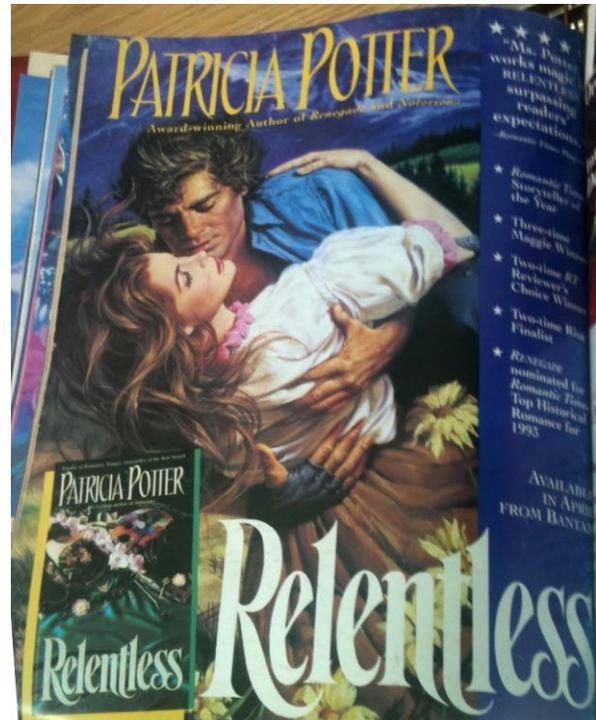


Fig. 64. Ad for *Relentless*. *Romantic Times Magazine* 122 (May 1994): back cover.



Fig. 65. Addie Passen. Preparatory photograph for a romance novel cover. Circa 1990s. Image courtesy of Tom Lapadula.

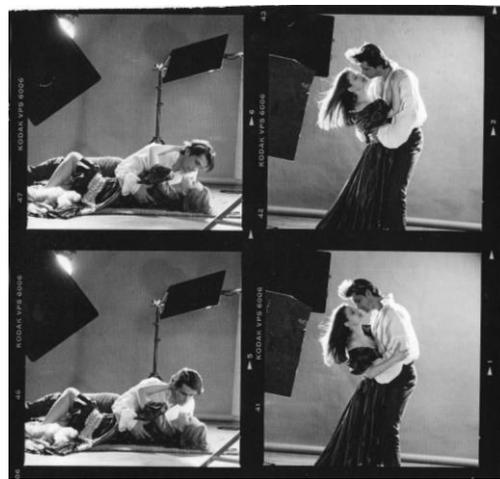


Fig. 66. Addie Passen. Photograph. Contact sheets. Circa 1990s. Image courtesy of Tom Lapadula.

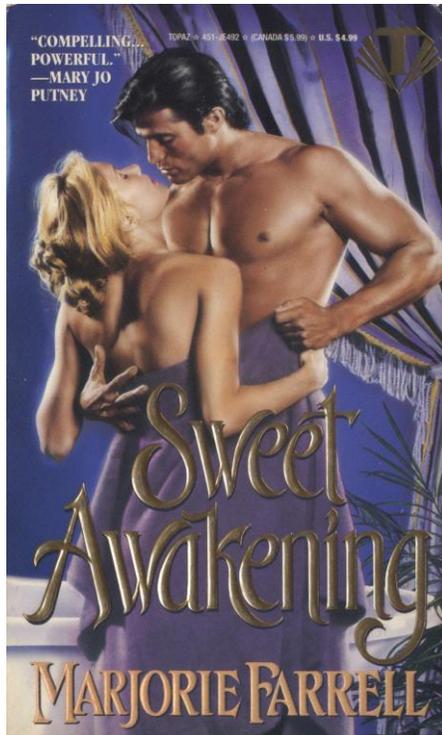


Fig. 67. Richard Newton. *Sweet Awakening*. New York: Topaz. 1995.

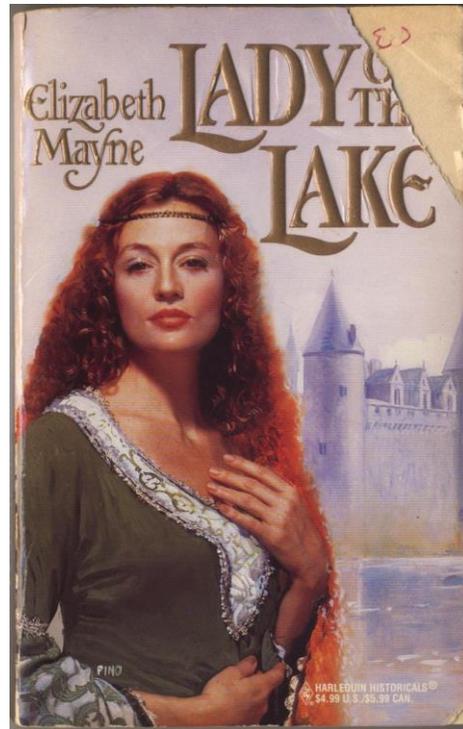


Fig. 68. Pino. *Lady of the Lake*. Toronto; New York: Harlequin. 1997.

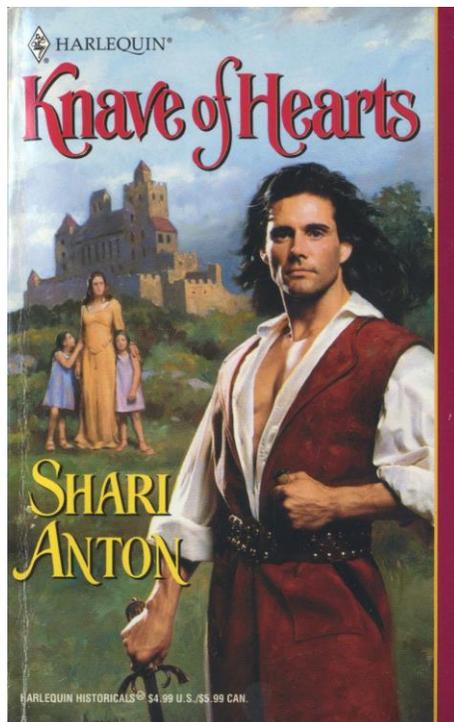


Fig. 69. Max Ginsburg. *Knave of Hearts*. Toronto; New York: Harlequin. 2001.

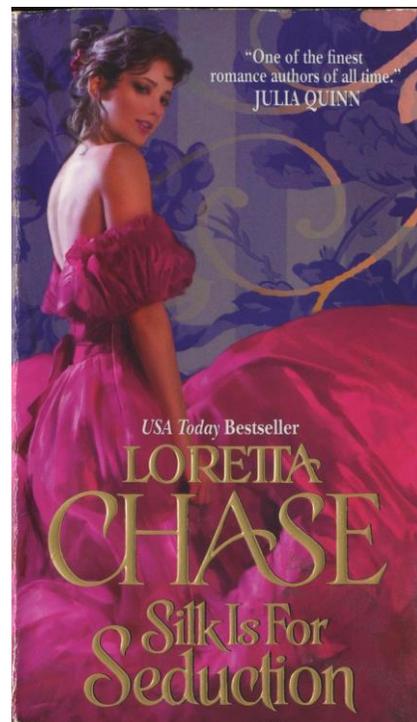


Fig. 70. James Griffin. *Silk Is For Seduction*. New York: Avon. 2011.

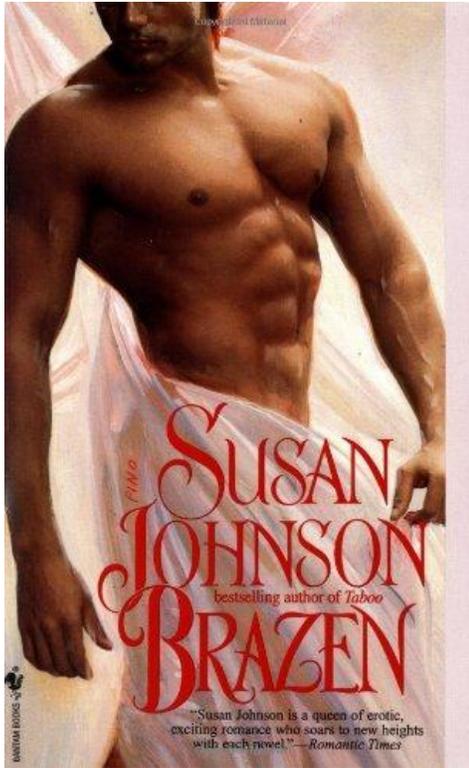


Fig. 71. Pino. *Brazen*. New York: Bantam Books, 1995.

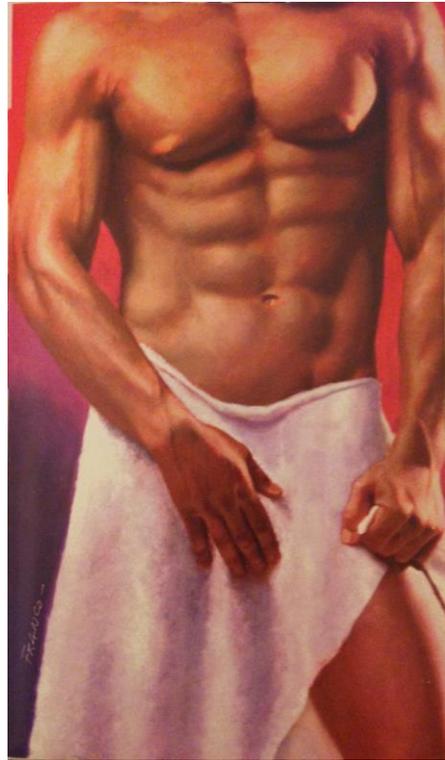


Fig. 72. Franco Accornero. *Whirlwind Courtship and High Energy*. New York: Leisure Books, 1996.

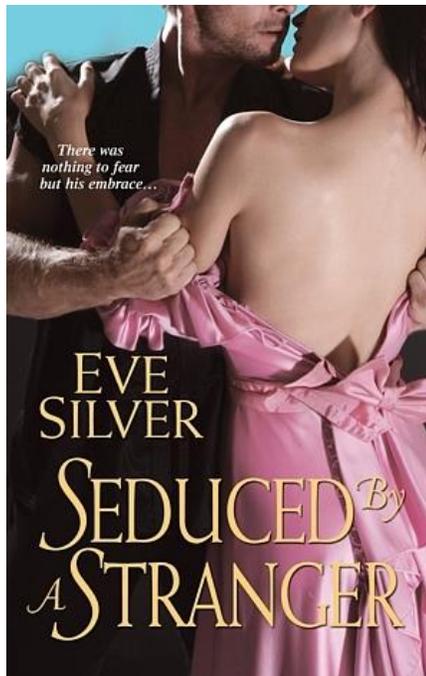


Fig. 73. Artist Unknown. *Seduced By A Stranger*. New York: Zebra Books, 2009.

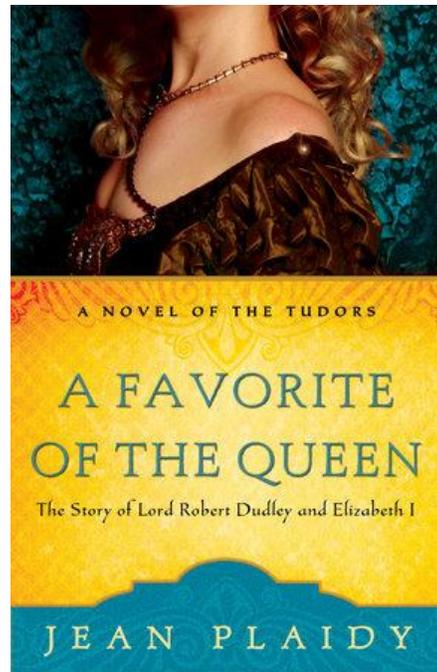


Fig. 74. Laura Duffy. *A Favorite of the Queen*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2010