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Elsa
M2 EDITION

ROMANCE



English Class
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I. Presentation of the genre

a) The beginning of romance

Romance fiction is a literary genre focused on the development of a relationship and romantic love between two people. Its roots can be traced back to ancient Greece, where early narratives explored love and desire, but the genre truly began to take shape in the 18th and 19th centuries. During this period, authors such as Samuel Richardson, with *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740), and later Jane Austen, developed stories that centered on courtship, emotion, and social constraints, laying the foundations of modern romance novels¹.



In the early 20th century, romance fiction became more commercially sold. Mills & Boon began publishing romance novels in the 1930s, and their books were later sold internationally by Harlequin Enterprises², making romance more accessible to a wider audience. Harlequin became the first major publishing house to specialize in romance novels.

A major turning point came in 1972 with Kathleen E. Woodiwiss's *The Flame and the Flower*, the first romance novel published as a paperback in the United States. Also called a “bodice ripper”, this novel introduced more explicit passion and dramatic storytelling. Its success had a long-lasting impact, influencing romance fiction for decades and expanding the genre's popularity.

The genre grew significantly in the 1980s, with numerous subgenres such as historical, contemporary, and later paranormal and romantic suspense. Romance novels largely focused on the lives of female protagonists and were primarily written by women, for women, and about women. For many female readers constrained by social norms, these stories offered both escape and inspiration, presenting emotional fulfillment and personal agency.

¹ Amanda Pagan, “A Brief History of the Romance Novel”, New York Public Library, February 15, 2019, <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2019/02/15/brief-history-romance-novel-recommendations>

² Wikipedia, “Romance novel”, December 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romance_novel#:~:text=The%20genre%20of%20works%20conventionally,the%20novels%20of%20Jane%20Austen.

Throughout the 20th century, historical romance flourished with authors like Georgette Heyer, while popular writers such as Danielle Steel and Nora Roberts brought romance into the mainstream with widely read titles.

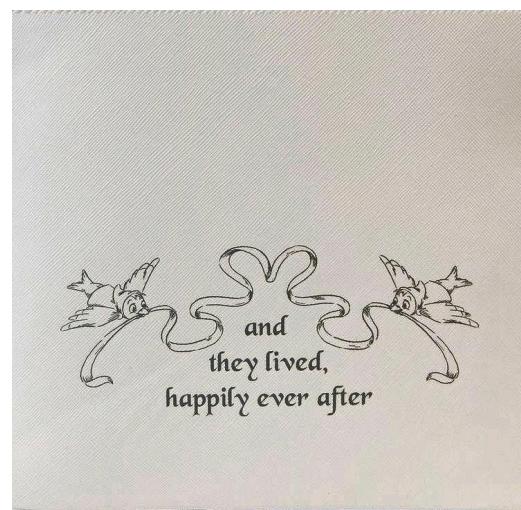
Today, modern romance continues to evolve, placing greater emphasis on representation and inclusivity. Contemporary romance novels reflect diverse identities, relationships and experiences, showing how the genre has grown from its early literary origins into a broad genre that continues to resonate with readers worldwide.

b) Literary characteristics

Romance novels continue to top *The New York Times* best-seller lists³, and their long-lasting popularity can be explained by a combination of clear literary conventions. At their core, romance books are designed to meet readers' emotional needs while offering compelling storytelling within a recognizable framework.

One of the defining literary characteristics of romance fiction is that the main plot must revolve around two people and the development of their romantic relationship. Unlike other genres where romance may be a subplot, in romance novels the love story is the main narrative. Every major conflict, turning point, and character decision is tied to the evolution of the relationship.

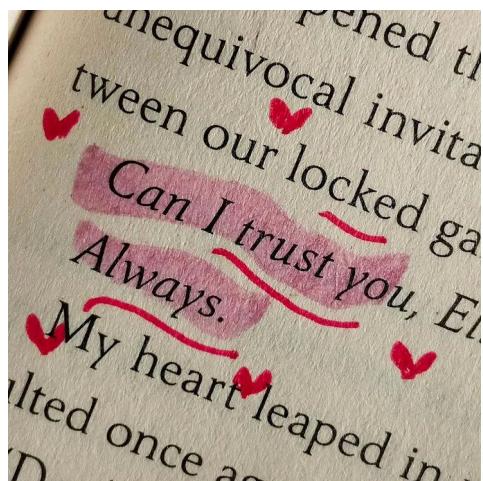
Escapism plays a crucial role in the genre's appeal. Romance novels allow readers to step away from everyday pressures and immerse themselves in emotionally intense worlds. This escapism is closely linked to another key characteristic: the promise of a happy ending. Most romance novels conclude with a "Happily Ever After", which is considered an industry standard. Readers go into these books knowing that emotional investment will be rewarded with a happy ending.



³ Masterclass, "Writing 101: What Is a Romance Novel? Learn About the History and Characteristics of Romance Novels", September 2, 2022, <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/writing-101-what-is-a-romance-novel-learn-about-the-history-and-characteristics-of-romance-novels#3ROmIg njCt0giFwSDPSQmR>

Many romance novels follow what is often called the “80% rule.” Around 80% into the story, a major conflict or crisis threatens the relationship. It is often a misunderstanding, personal flaw, or external event. This moment creates maximum tension and temporarily separates the couple, forcing them to confront their fears and grow before the final solution restores the relationship.

Traditionally, romance novels were written primarily from the perspective of the female protagonist, who is typically portrayed as strong-willed, intelligent, and emotionally complex. While this remains common, modern romance increasingly portrays multiple points of view. Readers today often expect to know both the female and male characters’ thoughts and emotions.



A recurring moral framework within romance fiction is that good behavior, such as honesty, loyalty, and personal growth, is rewarded with unconditional love⁴. This reinforces the genre’s optimistic side and contributes to its appeal. At the same time, romance novels are highly flexible in terms of setting and structure, allowing the same emotional core to exist across different places and time.

Modern romance also reflects evolving gender roles. Contemporary heroines are frequently portrayed as independent and professionally successful in traditionally male-dominated fields. In the same way, male love interests are often gentler, more emotionally available, and supportive than the men in the beginning of the genre, showing a shift toward healthier relationships.

Sensuality is another important characteristic. Some romance novels focus on emotional intimacy and subtle physical affection, while others include explicit sexual content. This allows readers to choose stories that match their preferences.

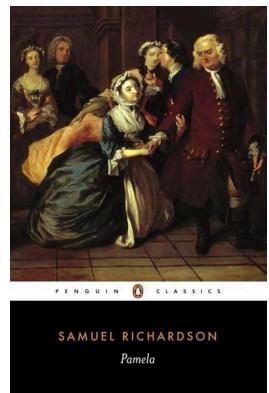
⁴ Masterclass, “Writing 101: What Is a Romance Novel? Learn About the History and Characteristics of Romance Novels”, September 2, 2022, <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/writing-101-what-is-a-romance-novel-learn-about-the-history-and-characteristics-of-romance-novels#3ROmIgjCt0giFwSDPSQmR>

The genre's diversity is expressed through its many subgenres. Contemporary romance, while emerging after World War II, reflects modern social norms and everyday settings. Historical romance is set before WWII and explores love within strict social hierarchies. Romantasy blends romance with fantasy, placing love stories in magical worlds. Other popular subgenres exist including sports romance and rom-coms that blend humor with romantic tension, dark romance which explores more intense and toxic relationships, and new romance, a category that focuses on new adults and their life experiences. Finally, romance relies heavily on recognizable tropes (recurring narrative patterns that readers want). Popular examples include enemies to lovers, second-chance romance, forced proximity, or even the grumpy x sunshine dynamic. These tropes provide familiar emotional frameworks that allow authors to innovate while still writing the emotional tropes that readers crave.

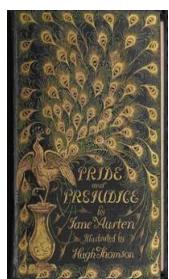
c) Cornerstones of the romance genre

* Samuel Richardson (1689-1761)

Samuel Richardson is widely recognized as one of the earliest novelists to establish the romance genre. His works, such as *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and *Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady* (1748), were among the first best-sellers, with *Pamela* printed in five editions within the first eleven months of release⁵. Richardson's novels introduced emotional and moral development in the character, creating a template for romance narratives: a focus on virtue, and the heroine overcoming romantic obstacles.



* Jane Austen (1775-1817)

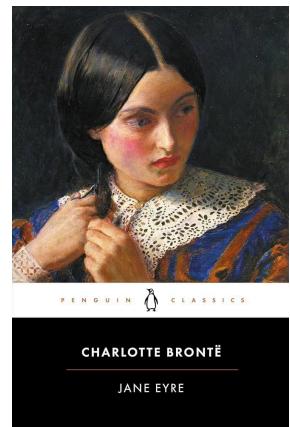


Jane Austen improved the romance novel by blending emotional depth with social critique. Her works, including *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), centered on courtship and marriage, emphasizing the heroine's intelligence, wit and discernment. Austen's turning point of the genre include the realistic depiction of social constraints, the slow development of romantic relationship and personal growth with love and social advancement, creating a blueprint for the "Happily Ever After" ending that remains a standard of the genre.

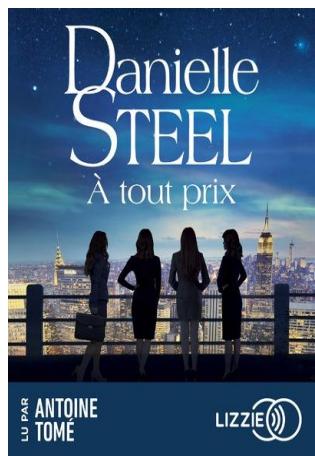
⁵ Wikipedia, "Romance novel", December 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romance_novel#:~:text=The%20genre%20of%20works%20conventionally,the%20novels%20of%20Jane%20Austen.

* The Brontë Sisters (Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, 1816-1855)

The Brontës, particularly Charlotte (*Jane Eyre*, 1847) and Emily (*Wuthering Heights*, 1847) brought intensity and psychological depth to romance. Their novels explored passion, integrity and resilience against social and familial pressures. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* emphasizes a strong heroine who insists on equality and respect in her romantic relationship, establishing the archetype of the intelligent and independent female protagonist. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* introduced dark romance elements, with obsession and morally complex relationships, showing that romance could fully explore human emotion, not just idealized love.



* Danielle Steel (1947-) and Nora Roberts (1950-)



Danielle Steel and Nora Roberts are two of the most commercially successful modern romance authors. Steel's novels combine glamour, family drama, and resilience with romance plots, emphasizing the triumph of love over adversity. Nora Roberts, meanwhile, is known for crossing multiple subgenres, including contemporary, historical and romantic suspense. Both authors reinforce key romance archetypes: strong and relatable female protagonists, emotional narratives, and a satisfying ending that rewards growth and love. Their popularity also illustrates the genre's mass appeal.

* Ana Huang (1991-) and Morgane Moncomble (1996-)

Ana Huang and Morgane Moncomble represent the evolution of romance fiction into contemporary, inclusive and socially aware storytelling. Moncomble often writes emotionally intense contemporary romance with strong female leads and portrayals of consent, communication and growth. Ana Huang's novels, featuring multiple points of view, explore modern relationships with psychological complexity, sensuality and power dynamics in relationships. Both authors exemplify how the genre now accommodates modern social contexts, while maintaining the essential focus on romantic connection.

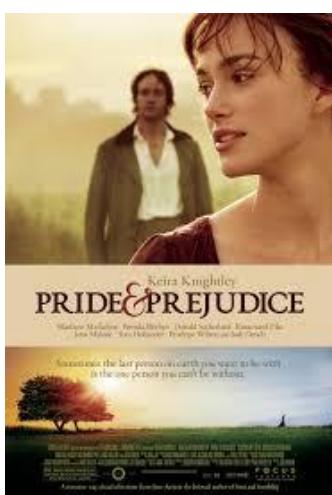


d) *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen

Pride and Prejudice (1813) by Jane Austen is one of the most influential novels in the history of the romance genre and remains a model for romantic storytelling. Both a comedy and a love story, the novel established patterns and character dynamics that continue to shape romance fiction today.



The novel follows Elizabeth Bennet, a witty, intelligent young woman, and her evolving relationship with the reserved and wealthy Mr. Darcy. Set in Regency England, the story focuses on issues of marriage, class, reputation and morality. The romance unfolds gradually, driven by misunderstanding, personal flaws, and social prejudice. Elizabeth's initial dislike of Darcy and Darcy's wounded pride create conflict that must be resolved through self-reflection and emotional growth on both sides. This "enemies to lovers" dynamic, now one of the most popular romance tropes, demonstrates Austen's lasting influence on the genre. Elizabeth Bennet is a foundational romance heroine: independent and unwilling to compromise her values.



The novel's enduring appeal is reflected in the countless adaptations it has inspired. It has been repeatedly adapted into films, television series, and modern retellings, including period-faithful versions as well as contemporary reinterpretations. Each new adaptation reshapes the story for its audience while preserving the core of the novel, proving the narrative's flexibility and timeless relevance. These adaptations have helped introduce *Pride and Prejudice* to new generations of readers and viewers, keeping the story alive in pop culture.

As a foundational text, *Pride and Prejudice* links literary fiction and popular romance. It demonstrates that romance can be intellectually rich, socially aware, and emotionally fulfilling at the same time. Nearly every modern romance novel owes something to Austen's work, whether through character archetypes or narrative structure. More than two centuries after its publication, *Pride and Prejudice* remains a cornerstone of the romance genre.

e) *Twisted Love* by Ana Huang

Twisted Love (2022) by Ana Huang is a significant example of new romance, a subgenre that reflects contemporary relationships, emotional complexity, and explicit intimacy. Widely read and internationally successful, the novel illustrates how the romance genre has evolved in themes and audience expectations while still maintaining its core foundations. The novel follows Ava Chen and Alex Volkov, whose relationship develops within a contemporary setting. The story combines romantic tension with personal trauma, emotional wounds, and themes of trust and healing. One of its defining dynamics is the “grumpy x sunshine” trope, with a guarded, emotionally distant male protagonist contrasted with a warm, optimistic heroine. This pairing, now extremely popular in modern romance, creates emotional conflict that drives the narrative forward. Unlike earlier romance novels, *Twisted Love* presents a heroine who is emotionally expressive but not passive, and a male protagonist whose journey involves learning emotional openness and accountability. The novel also makes use of multiple points of view, a feature increasingly demanded by readers who want insight into both characters’ minds.



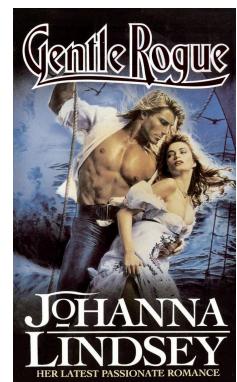
As part of the new romance category, *Twisted Love* is aimed at an adult readership and features more explicit sensuality than traditional romance novels. The inclusion of sex is not merely for shock value but serves to emphasize emotional intimacy. This reflects a broader shift in the genre, where physical desire is openly acknowledged as a part of romantic connection rather than hidden or implied. The book’s success on social media platforms and its translation into multiple languages have helped establish Ana Huang as an internationally recognized romance author. *Twisted Love* exemplifies how modern romance is shaped by global readerships and online communities that actively discuss tropes, characters and emotional impact. Its popularity highlights how romance has become more visible and culturally influential than ever before. *Twisted Love* is important to the romance genre because it demonstrates how traditional romance characteristics (central love story, emotional conflict, Happy Ever After) can be adapted to modern books. It blends familiar tropes with contemporary themes such as trauma, independence, and consent, showing how romance continues to evolve without losing its identity. *Twisted Love* stands as a modern counterpart to classic romance books, proving that stories centered on love remain relevant by reflecting the desires and expectations of their time.

II. Editorial strategies

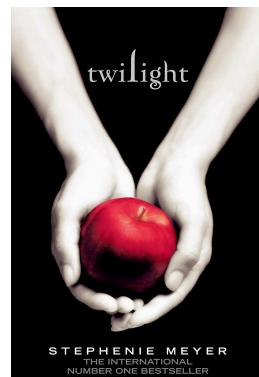
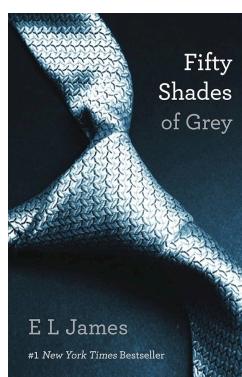
a) Book covers analysis

Romance book covers are more than just packaging, they are visual promises that set up the emotional journey readers are about to take. Over time, these covers have changed dramatically, reflecting not only trends in publishing and design but also shifts in what readers want from their love stories.

In the early days of romance books, during the WWII era, covers often looked like dramatic illustrations or movie posters. The cover was supposed to be a preview of the story, it was directly connected to the story. As the industry developed and during the sexual revolution (1960s-1970s), some covers became more sexual. Couples were pictured in a passionate embrace, the “clinch” cover⁶, as it was called, aimed at communicating the chemistry at the heart of the story. Those covers were often characterized with shirtless male protagonists to appeal to female readers.



In the 2000s and 2010s, publishers began experimenting covers with simple objects like flowers, apples or everyday items set against simple backgrounds. These designs were more subtle, suggesting a story rich with feeling rather than boldly declaring it. According to *Time*, this shift toward simplicity coincided with a desire to make romance novels appear more literary and accessible to wider audiences who might overlook the genre⁷.



⁶ Olivia B. Waxman, “How Romance Novel Covers Have Evolved Through Time”, *Time*, August 1, 2024, <https://time.com/7005391/romance-novel-cover-history/>

⁷ Olivia B. Waxman, *ibid.*

Today's romance covers are often vibrant, playful, or boldly stylized. Cartoon-like figures, bright color palettes (especially pink or pastels), and lively typography have become common, particularly in subgenres like rom-com and new romance. A lively, illustrated couple might indicate humor and light-hearted flirting. This modern aesthetic also mirrors how romance has changed underneath the covers. Whereas earlier editions leaned heavily on idealized figures and classic romantic poses, contemporary designs reflect diverse characters and modern settings⁸. Representation on the cover matters: readers want to see themselves, in body type, ethnicity and life experiences, before they even read a single page.



Even with all these shifts, one thing remains constant: romance covers still promise connection, emotion, and a satisfying journey toward love. Whether through dramatic paintings, symbolic objects or playful illustrations, each cover design works to capture the genre's appeal.

b) Target audience

Romance novels have traditionally been aimed at a predominantly female readership, and this remains true today. A study by Romance Writers of America found that women make up about 82% of romance book buyers, while men account for roughly 18%⁹. This gender imbalance reflects the genre's historical focus on women's emotional lives, relationships, and personal growth. Romance has long been written largely for women, offering stories with female perspectives, desires, and agency as central. For many readers, romance novels provide both emotional validation and a sense of comfort, reinforced by familiar narrative conventions such as the Happy Ever After.

However, the target audience of romance fiction is not uniform and varies significantly depending on the subgenre. Many contemporary subgenres, such as new romance, dark romance, or romantasy, are clearly intended for adult readers, often featuring explicit sexual content and mature themes. At the same time, classic romance novels, particularly works by

⁸ Olivia B. Waxman, "How Romance Novel Covers Have Evolved Through Time", Time, August 1, 2024, <https://time.com/7005391/romance-novel-cover-history/>

⁹ Wikipedia, "Romance novel", December 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romance_novel#:~:text=The%20genre%20of%20works%20conventionally,the%20novels%20of%20Jane%20Austen.

authors like Jane Austen or the Brontë sisters, remain accessible to younger readers, including teenagers, because they focus more on emotional development, social constraints, and growth rather than explicit intimacy. This flexibility allows romance as a genre to reach readers across different age groups.

In recent years, the audience for romance has expanded notably due to Gen Z readers, who are now a major force behind the genre's commercial success. According to *NPR*, Gen Z is driving romance novels to the top of bestseller lists, largely through social media platforms such as TikTok, where readers recommend romance titles¹⁰. As a result, romance today reaches a broader, younger and more engaged audience than ever before, while still retaining its core female readership.

c) Marketing

Social media has reshaped the marketing landscape for romance novels. Platforms like TikTok (BookTok) and Instagram (Bookstagram) are now central to how romance books are discovered, discussed and promoted. CBC highlights how a younger generation of readers has moved the conversation about romance out of newsletters and blogs and into highly visible social accounts, where they openly share what they love with large audiences¹¹. This has accelerated sales and broadened the genre's appeal, making romance one of the most talked-about categories in fiction.

BookTok has emerged as a particularly powerful marketing force. Videos tagged with #BookTok or romance-specific tags often get millions of views, and viral recommendations can turn books into bestsellers overnight. BookTok's short and engaging clips encourage viewers to read, share reactions, and participate in trends like the “book boyfriend” hype. This virality helps authors find audiences that might never have encountered their work through conventional marketing channels. At the same time, Bookstagram plays a

¹⁰ Deanna Schwartz and Meghan Collins Sullivan, “Gen Z is driving sales of romance books to the top of bestseller lists”, *NPR*, August 29, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/08/29/1119886246/gen-z-is-driving-sales-of-romance-books-to-the-top-of-bestseller-lists>

¹¹ Nicole Thompson, “How social media is influencing the romance novel genre — and wider trends in fiction”, *CBC*, February 14, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/books/how-social-media-is-influencing-the-romance-novel-genre-and-wider-trends-in-fiction-1.7115076>

complementary role. This community emphasizes visual appeal. Detailed reviews, aesthetic photos, and reading lists help build sustained interest around authors and books.

These platforms have also helped push romance into one of the largest segments of the global book market¹². Romance's strong sales have made it a dominant category worldwide, and social media has only strengthened that position by expanding visibility.

In summary, modern romance marketing is defined by digital community engagement and algorithmic visibility. BookTok accelerates viral success while Bookstagram builds deeper reader engagement and aesthetic appeal; and both contribute to the genre's ongoing expansion, making romance a social media phenomenon in the global literary market.

¹² Wikipedia, “Romance novel”, December 2025,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romance_novel#:~:text=The%20genre%20of%20works%20conventionally,The%20novels%20of%20Jane%20Austen.

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