



Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance

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In *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*, Jayne Ann Krentz and the contributors to this volume--all best-selling romance writers--explode myths and biases that haunt both the writers and readers of romances.

In this seamless, ultimately fascinating, and controversial book, the authors dispute some of the notions that plague their profession, including the time-worn theory that the romance genre contains only one single, monolithic story, which is cranked out over and over again. The authors discuss positive life-affirming values inherent in all romances: the celebration of female power, courage, intelligence, and gentleness; the inversion of the power structure of a patriarchal society; and the integration of male and female. Several of the essays also discuss the issue of reader identification with the characters, a relationship that is far more complex than most critics realize.

Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance Details

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Nathan Albright says

This book is the example of authors seeking to legitimize their work and in the process making it more deeply but also more openly problematic. My own familiarity with genre fiction, including romance fiction, is fairly well known and probably somewhat amusing to many people [1]. This book takes square aim at those who believe that there is nothing substantial or notable about romance fiction despite its popularity, and in proving that there is, it merely proves that there is something deeply dark and unpleasant in women's fiction. I'm not sure that was the intent that was in mind--this book is written in short chapters and sort of assumes that it is written to fellow women who are either already in on the matter or would do well to be, and few men are likely to be reading this book or giving it the sort of critical reading that I have. Those men who do read this book are likely not to find it to be all that enjoyable as a read, as this book is pretty openly and relentlessly written from a female perspective in ways that are contradictory and generally repellent.

About twenty essays fill this book of less than two-hundred pages, and given the amount of biographical information included about each essayist, one can imagine that these essays are fairly small and for the most part relatively undemanding on readers. That is not to say that the essays are not revealing, though, as they discuss issues from the androgyny of the reader, who is asked to identify with both the male and female character of the romance plot, the mythic importance of the romance novel that takes advantage of the sacred feminine and common dualistic views of nature that go back to heathen religions, and the subversion of masculine power by showing female sexuality to be a greater power. Even the common trope of virginity is used to look at the power of female agency in choosing a worthy male lover. I cannot promise that a reader will like this book--I found much to dislike--but there is no question that the writers of these essays take romance literature very seriously and are intent on showing its involvement with the sacred feminine and with the larger body of mythic and religious writing.

Ultimately, it was the attempt of many of these authors to crown their romance writing with glory by appealing to heathen religious thought and practices that ultimately bothered me the most about this book. Romance in general is a genre where women triumph over men by showing them that developing intimacy is ultimately better than the dark visions that many men (and women) are drawn to as a result of life in a fallen world. Yet I am extremely hostile to the praise of vestal virgins and heathen myths that populate the master plots of the romance genre. Many of these writers have read too much in the way of Joseph Campbell and others of his ilk and do not understand that a massive part of romance literature deals with Christian romance and includes readers (and likely authors) who are quite hostile to the viewpoint expressed here. The fact that the writers rather openly consider their writing to be palliative and escapist and have no particular desire to make the world less intolerable for those people who would be drawn to escapist literature is somewhat disappointing as well. This is not a bad book--to be sure, it is a worthwhile book one should read to get a feel for the deeper roots and worldview of romance literature, but that does not mean that this book wins over its readers in the way its authors might have wished.

[1] See, for example:

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2013...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2017...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2017...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2014...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2017...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2017...>

Bungluna says

This collection of essays is a little dated but illuminating. The most telling thing for me is how the romance authors love their craft and their readers, in spite of enormous pressures to "write real books".

Sadder still is all the scorn these women endure from those who feel entitled to tell them the correct way to be, especially when it comes from so-called feminists who seem to want to exchange patriarchal norms for their own, no doubt, more enlightened feminist creeds.

Gina says

An excellent book for those who have either authored or are writing romantic suspense novels. Excellent tips!

SSShafiq says

There is something wonderful about hearing all the writers speak about their genre proudly and fearlessly. Loved this collection .

Thomas says

Why do "trashy" romance novels make up forty percent of mass market paperback sales each year? Are they simply an opiate or escapist strategy for millions of women? Many critics have dismissed them as such, but a closer reading reveals far more.

The romance novel is primarily written by women, for women. In contrast to the man's world that we currently live in, this is a woman's world, containing the values and relationships that our society often lacks. There is true love and happy endings in these novels-- why shouldn't there be? Perhaps the problem is not with the romance genre, but the world that we live in.

One of the more controversial aspects of these novels is the depiction of both men and women. The male lead is usually tall, dark, handsome, aggressive, exciting, dangerous, and erotic. The heroine struggles with him at first, but she has a powerful allure about her that he finds irresistible. She shows him how to love without emasculating him, thereby "taming the wild stallion." The love between them heals them and

enhances their lives together. This fantasy has a powerful appeal to many women.

How does the fantasy relate to reality? Should romance writers have to answer this question any more than authors of mystery or crime novels? We should not forget that the primary function of popular novels is to entertain. The male equivalent to romance novels is watching sports. Human drama, comradery, emotional highs, escapism, heartbreak, and happy endings are just a part of sports as the novels that critics mock. There is something amazing about watching larger-than-life humans act out a drama scripted according to certain rules (athletic or literary), where outcomes are predictable but the details are never the same.

There is a lot that men and women can learn from each other. We may not chose to read dozens of romance novels or watch the playoffs, but we can learn to understand and appreciate why others do. This book is a good start for those who are curious.

Lucy says

This is an interesting collection of essays by romance writers. I'm not familiar with all the writers in this collection and some of the articles were about topics that don't personally interest me. The highlight of the collection for me was Susan Elizabeth Phillip's essay, probably because I'm writing an essay about one of her novels and it was interesting to get her feelings on the topic.

I found some of the other essays to be a little dated now, making it difficult for me to understand or enjoy what the author was trying to express.

Overall a decent collection of essays.

Miriam says

This is a collection of short discussions from romance authors about why their stories are popular. Most of them use their own books and feelings as reference, so if you like the authors listed you may enjoy it. If you're looking for a more scholarly examination of the appeal and themes of romance, don't bother as this isn't very rigorous. At some points I was even a bit embarrassed by the weakness or illogic of certain claims.

Jack Masters says

Fascinating essays by authors of the Romance genera.

Andd Becker says

Romance writers expound on the theme of female empowerment in romance novels. They explore the hero/villain dichotomy. The book provides insights into the nature of the genre.

Margaret says

Needs some updating. Good stuff though.

Read harder task: Read an essay anthology.

Elizabeth says

At its best this book was insignificant; at its worst it was incredibly offensive. This book is a series of essays about romance novels by romance writers. I have no use for this book other than as a guide of what authors I will not read due to their anti-feminist stance. Some of the authors seem to have misunderstood the term feminist and claim that they are feminist when, in fact, their essays give them away as strongly anti-feminist. I will not recommend this book other than as a counterpoint to feminism.

Lisa Kay says

This landmark 1992 book, edited by Krentz, is for all those people wishing to understand why women read romance. There are several good discussions here and one can learn (or reminisce) about the advancement of this genre of past authoresses through analyses and debates of various essayists. However, IMHO, the best line in the book comes from Daphne Clair in her submission of '*Sweet Subversions*'.

Half a century later, in the very teeth of women's liberation, Kathleen Woodiwiss's *The Flame and the Flower* and Rosemary Rogers's *Sweet Savage Love* generated a flood of immensely successful rape-romances that enraged feminists, created guilt in many avid readers, and were cited as perpetuating the notion that women really do like being forced. (**We might assume then that men, major consumers of thrillers, westerns, and detective fiction, enjoy being beaten up, tortured, shot, stabbed, dragged by galloping horses, and thrown out of moving vehicles.**)

That last line was so good I had to e-mailed it to my sister-in-law when I informed her that romances, with its ever expanding sub-genres, comprise 55% of the current paperback market. I don't favor rape scenes in my romance books, I think because I identify too much with the heroines, and I have no desire to re-read *Sweet Savage Love*. However, there are notable exceptions where the author is so talented she can pull it off (as I mentioned in my review of *The English Heiress* by Roberta Gellis). But, alas, now fortified with Ms. Clair's words, I no longer have to feel guilty for having that ~~awfully embarrassing~~ wonderful 'bodice-ripper' *The Flame and the Flower* on my 'all-time-favorites' bookshelf. What an enormous relief! :-)

geekturnedvamp says

Despite being a little dated now, I think this book of essays is still helpful for understanding why people like what they do when it comes to romance novels. It also talks about why as a "women's genre" romance is still stigmatized despite the fact that it generates billions of dollars per year in sales and represents the largest market share of any type of fiction, as well as the false belief that the romance formula is easier to write than other genre fiction if you're just looking to churn out books for profit. Other topics addressed include the usual questions about sexism and the prevalence of rape fantasies, misogynistic/abusive heroes, etc., as well as discussions of subtext, POV, and different archetypes for both men and women.

Lara says

I'd love to read an updated and/or expanded edition--the romance genre has changed a lot in the last 25 years.

Sarah Eiseman says

This book, edited by Jayne Ann Krentz, was a fascinating gathering of opinions and essays by twenty well-known romance authors. Although the book is a little on the old side (originally published in 1992), many of the themes are still true today. Themes such as fantasy, fun, and strong women (heroines) finding their equally strong mates (heros).

When I first moved to Connecticut, my employment prospects were not as great as I had hoped, and I found myself with more time on my hands than I had ever had before. Even applying to jobs all day, I still needed to find something that relaxed me at the end of the day, or at least took the edge off the constant worry I had about finding a job. I remember going to the library, which was only a few blocks walk, and I wandered around the stacks trying to find a book that would peak my interest. I chose a few mysteries and a few general fiction books, but nothing did the trick. I remembered that my mother had a Nora Roberts book by the back door the last time that I was home. She's an avid reader, so I thought I'd give this author a go and see if I liked her. It was quite literally as if the world opened up to me. I found that I couldn't put the book down—I had to know what happened next. I had to know how the book ended. I was compelled to see if the hero figured out how much he loved the heroine.

Sometimes it's tough for me to use words like "hero" and "heroine," especially in contemporary romance contexts, which is where most of my reading hours are spent. These characters seem so normal and every day in many ways that often "hero" sounds more archaic than contemporary. Yet that is what they are and the changes that happen to both characters over the course of the story make that title true.

I know many people believe that romances are "trashy" or go against the feminist agenda. I heartily disagree with both points, and this book does, too. Romances have strong women (only a strong heroine could love a strong hero) doing amazing things. Unlike other genres, women in romance do, rather than are. They may be beautiful, but that's secondary to their inner strength, character, and tenacity. Beyond all these points, is that romance is written for women, by women, about women doing amazing things. It's fantasy, that's for sure, but why would a book about a win-win situation be a bad thing to read? The hero learns by the end of the book that he loves the heroine and can be loved in return, without losing any of the aggressive traits he demonstrated at the beginning of the book.

If you are looking for a book to help you understand why readers flock to Romance and why it's an important genre, I strongly urge you to give this book a read. Yes, some of the content is a little dated, but the general themes are still quite true today.
