Romance

Romance:
The History of a Genre

Edited by

Dana Percec

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The History of a Genre,
Edited by Dana Percec

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FOREWORD

This book is part of a larger project, the aim of which is to observe the evolution and dynamics of a number of literary genres in today's global culture.

The first book in the series, *O poveste de succes. Romanul istoric astăzi* (Percec 2011), published in Romanian, was devoted to the historical novel, a versatile genre, which has experienced a remarkable come-back during the last few decades. Eleven Romanian academics, with an interest in literary, cultural and film studies, focusing on a corpus of texts coming from different cultures and languages, set out to account for the interest in historical fiction shown by the general public, and by writers, editors and film producers. Whether the cultural product is a novel, a Hollywood film, a TV series, a documentary, or a video game, its box office success is secured today by its historical component. After the golden age of historical fiction in the 19th century, period drama plots enjoyed little success–with the notably rare exception of the post-war period, when a need for escapism favoured a brief resurrection of the genre–until the 1990s, when a historical fiction boom took place. The authors of the book's eleven chapters address the scepticism of mainstream criticism about the status of historical novels in the literary canon, and bring to bear arguments from cultural studies and the new historicism in evaluating this literary genre and in assessing its impact. The contributors discuss the complexity and adaptability of historical fiction as it is to be observed in the plethora of subgenres available, ranging from romance and thrillers, through time-slip fantasies and satires. Contributing authors, in alphabetical order, are: Luiza Caraivan, Simona Constantinovici, Magda Danciu, Gabriela Glăvan, Codruţa Goşa, Iulia Nănău, Dana Percec, Daniela Rogobete, Elena-Tia Sandu, Andreea Şerban and Andreea Verteş-Olteanu.

Some of the contributors to the volume devoted to the historical novel have been enthusiastic about continuing the project with a second volume about the equally popular–and even more controversial–genre of romance. This is a genre often condescended to on account of its stereotypical language, shallow characters and predictable plots, dismissed as "women's" fiction and accused of conventionality. Romance is a genre which, after ups and downs over the course of its thousand year history,

now holds a leading position in the international publishing market. This achievement has also been made possible by the endorsement of contemporary media and modern technology, cinema, television, and the Internet, to mention just some of the most frequently employed channels of expression. Much has been written in works of both traditional and more recent literary theory about the origins and evolution of the early forms of romance, from classical antiquity, through the Middle Ages, and into the Renaissance and early modernity in Western Europe. There already exists a significant and ever-growing corpus of critical comment on the gendered status of contemporary romance, whether seen in terms of the writing ethos or in terms of reader response, with theories being advanced which combine ideas drawn from feminism, the social sciences and psychoanalysis. Consequently the aim of the present volume is simply one of noting the fluid character of the genre, with its great number of mixed and hybrid subcategories, thus illustrating the polymorphous nature of contemporary popular culture. At the same time, several chapters deal with romance as a genre which goes beyond the confines of literature, since it is enriched by its interaction with the discourses of the print media, of TV and the film industry, of the Internet and of today's virtual communities.

The book is divided into four major sections: "Romance: Attempted Definitions", "Gothic Romance", "Imperial Romance", and "Romance on the Big Screen."

The first section is an attempt to offer definitions for the term romance as it appears in fiction and everyday language today. Codruţa Goşa's chapter *Sex and the Genre: The Building of Sexual Tension and Its Role in Popular Romance* reports her analysis and discussion of the place and role of sex scenes as defining elements for the building of sexual tension in contemporary romance novels. Her chapter documents and substantiates the claim that the romantic genre places great importance upon, and relies heavily on, such scenes, which play a crucial role. Her corpus is constructed by selecting three romance authors – all of Anglo-American origin - whose works are best-sellers in Romania. The novels selected for analysis have different settings: historical, fantastic, and contemporary. Goşa compares and contrasts the sequence, context and protagonists of the most important erotic encounters, and the particularities of the language used.

Andreea Verteş-Olteanu, in the chapter entitled *In a Facebook Romance, but It's Complicated*, essays a different definition of romance. She discusses the treatment of a private matter–love–in a public medium–Facebook, the icon of today's generation. On Facebook, there are families,

friends, and social networks, relationship statuses (“single”, “in a relationship”, “engaged”, “married”, “it’s complicated”, “in an open relationship”) are declared, and photos of (new) significant others are posted, in the hope of winning the community’s acknowledgement and approval in the form of trademark “like” tags. In the age of *amour courtois*, the lover used to receive a token, perhaps a glove or a girdle, while nowadays the Facebook wall is a public surface on which modern courtiers leave “token” messages to their intendeds. Andreea Verteş-Olteanu’s chapter analyses the way in which the world’s most popular social networking site, with its more than 750 million active users, can impact upon a relationship, in online as well as offline environments.

Irina Diana Mădroane’s chapter, *Watching Celebrity Selves on Reality TV: Class Transformation and Viewer (Dis)empowerment in a Romanian Reality Show*, examines the first Romanian celebrity reality show to adopt a “fly-on-the-wall” documentary format, focusing on a top model’s rags-to-riches story of success and love. It looks at the involvement of viewers in the interpretation of the show, starting from the claim that reality television opens up new avenues for the empowerment of ordinary people. For this purpose, it explores in what ways the construals of the protagonists–both by the serious press and in comments on blogs and YouTube–contribute to the reinforcement or challenging of class, and to some extent of gender, relations in postcommunist Romania. The main conclusions are that the show is framed in such a manner as to encourage a display of feelings of contempt, envy and even hatred which generally preclude any wider discussion of social mobility issues, due to their highly individualised focus. Opinions are not, however, uniform, and the claim that it enhances viewer empowerment is something that popular television continues to assert.

The second section of the book is concerned with gothic romance, a subgenre which is gaining more and more popularity today. From the Gothics and Charles Dickens’s romance of Merrie England to bestselling women’s fiction, romance has been arguably the most resilient and protean prose genre since the writing of *Don Quixote*; resistance, and sometimes outright opposition, to it have been equally long-lived and multifaceted. Ana-Karina Schneider’s *“Time to call an end to romance”: Anti-Romance in the Contemporary British Novel* describes a kind of attitude towards romance writing that is in evidence in much contemporary British fiction. Her chapter thus contributes to a wider inquiry into the grounds on which the centrality of the novel to Western culture has been epistemologically and politically established. However, the interest lies not so much in the epistemological, or even in the formal, aspects of anti-romance, but rather

in the rhetorical and symbolic resistance that novels offer to romance. Schneider's essay discusses the emergence of the novel as a genre which has been, from its inception, informed by this repudiation of romance, and identifies several instances of the same repudiation in recent fiction. Novels deploy an entire repertoire of ways of distancing themselves from romance, whether by embracing irony or the comic, elements that are largely alien to romance, or by deliberately setting anti-heroes at their centre, by veering into dystopia, by immersing themselves in memory-related preoccupations, or simply by making symbolic gestures of rejection in the direction of romance.

Developed from Gothic fiction, paranormal romance intertwines the real and the fantastic, blending contemporary life with creatures with magical powers, such as vampires and werewolves. Andreea Şerban's chapter, *Romancing the Paranormal: A Case Study on J.R. Ward's The Black Dagger Brotherhood,* looks at the mythical figure of the vampire, which has always exerted a powerful fascination, through its juxtaposition of a highly erotic feeding ritual with savage killing, but above all through its association with eternal youth and immortality–. The recent explosion in the number of vampire stories–be they in print or film format–not only testifies to this appeal but also shows the vampire as an ever-changing and highly adaptable creature that never fails to fascinate. Among writers who have brought new insights to the genre is the American J.R. Ward, whose now nine-volume series rewrites and relocates the vampire, by placing it at the heart of paranormal romance narratives. Ward's vampire protagonists are the best males of the species, members of an exclusive society–the Black Dagger Brotherhood–valiant and loyal heroes, abiding by a strict code of honour both in battle and in courtship. Şerban's text-oriented analysis draws on a cognitive approach to the fictional world (following Semino and Cook's schema theory) and looks at ways in which readers' romantic schemata are reinforced or disrupted, while at the same time exploring the vampire's romanticisation and Americanisation in the context of our contemporary consumerist society.

A similar interest in Gothic fiction is displayed by *The Twilight Saga: Teen Gothic Romance between the Dissolution of the Gothic and the Revival of Romance* by Daniela Rogobete. She interrogates the contemporary metamorphoses of the Gothic romance as illustrated in *The Twilight Saga*, the cinematographic adaptation of Stephanie Meyer's trilogy. Current criticism places the multiple manifestations of postmodern Gothic–conflictingly shaped by social realities, contemporary moral and ideological crises and by late capitalist consumerist society–at the intersection of a number of trends of thought, which are inclined to

include the Youth Goth phenomenon within the broad domain of Gothic Studies. Going far beyond its textual boundaries, though constantly coming back to its literary tradition, teen Gothic is now envisaged as a complex combination of text, music, fashion, film, and social and ideological criticism. Gothic romance has preserved the capacity to subvert conventions and give voice to the repressed fears and anxieties of the age, heightening the degree of ironic self-consciousness and self-referentiality, finding new means of undermining authority, and adjusting to the demands of postmodernism. Relying upon the visual and textual coordinates of the huge impact the *Twilight* series is still having upon its viewers and readers, her essay argues that the new tendencies of teen Gothic romance represent a novel and hybrid facet of a highly metamorphic genre rather than being a monstrous *revenant* coming back from a "vampiric" past as an overly-tamed, and feminized, Gothic whose "exhaustion" and "dissolution" have already been foretold.

In *Fairytales Gone Bad: Failures of Romance in Philip Roth's Short Novels,* Cristina Chevereşan focuses upon three of the American writer's recent works: *Everyman* (2006), *Indignation* (2008) and *The Humbling* (2009). She chooses to analyse these short novels as stages in the evolution of the typical Roth protagonist and his rebellious attitudes. From early boyhood until their inevitable departure from the world, the three men placed under scrutiny desperately try to fight off physical, mental, artistic, and moral degradation by means of eroticism. Whereas it is relationships that lie at the heart of their life stories, it is fears, frustrations, and obsessions that fuel the making and unmaking of whatever couples they temporarily become part of. Thus to read the minute accounts of their mundane adventures means to witness successive failures of romance in a contemporary world (mis)guided by unrealistic expectations and stereotypical behaviours. The chapter offers insight into the ways in which romantic ideals and codes are deconstructed by Roth, whose "heroes" are far from being heroic, exemplary knights in search of their beloveds.

Moving beyond Anglo-American culture, Orhan Pamuk's works are discussed by Adriana Luminiţa Răducanu in *Orhan Pamuk's New Type of Urban Gothic in The Black Book*. Her study provides a reading of this Turkish writer's *oeuvre* from an urban Gothic perspective, by discussing both its resemblances to and its differences from other Gothic and Gothic-influenced texts. In *The Black Book*, Istanbul transcends its role as a mere setting to become both character and story. Its mystique, rendered as impenetrable by many Western writers over the centuries, is also preserved by Pamuk, whose narrative actually reinforces this feature by focusing on its Istanbul's geographical and historical peculiarities as

perceived by an insider. The traditional Gothic plot of romance, which generally revolves around the stock figure of a fainting, helpless heroine, to be rescued from real or imaginary perils by her faithful lover, is given different significations. It thus becomes the pretext for a self-search, a quest for imaginary reconciliations between East and West, themselves effaced by the many voices of Istanbul as urban setting, character and story, corresponding to its many historical avatars, past, present, and future. The essay underscores the Gothic trope of the double or *döppelganger*, which traditionally expresses anxieties about the emergence of the dark side of human nature and its lethal potentialities - an emergence which is rendered as masochistic pleasure and employed as a means for preserving the freedom to impersonate the famous, the powerful, and the sacred.

The third section, devoted to Imperial romancefocuses on South African and Indian narratives. In *The Story of a South African Romance*, Luiza Caraivan analyses Olive Schreiner's novels *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897), as well as her *Dreams* collection (1890), in the context of 19th century English literature. The chapter starts from Michael Chapman's observation that Schreiner's realism is "a mutation of romance" (Chapman 1996:135) and elaborates on the concept of realistic romance as hybrid narrative. The impact of Olive Schreiner's writing on feminist and post-colonial theories is also taken into consideration, since she was one of the first writers who attempted to bring the margins of the British Empire towards its centre. The Victorian obsession with proper conduct and the sufferings of the characters connect with Schreiner's obsession with dreams, thus providing the ideal setting for a romance in the South African space. Yet these novels also underline the search for well-defined South African identities in that troubled region, at the start of its long transition towards the multicultural and multiracial society that was to emerge a century later. The author also argues that this multitude of possible identities that can be read in Schreiner's colonial works finds a correspondence in postcolonial South African literature.

In the same area of interest, Reghina Dascăl's *Raj Matriarchs. Women Authors of Anglo-Indian Romance* examines the role of the so-called Anglo-Indian women writers in constructing a particular image of colonial India, partly romancing the Raj (it is not by chance that the genre of romance flourished at the turn of the 20th century, reaching its peak in the interwar years), hypostasising it as the perfect setting for exotic romance, and partly construing it as a brittle, hybrid, creolised Anglo-Indian reality. The author suggests that, for British feminists and suffragettes, India

became a testing ground for female activism as they zealously embarked upon the salvation and emancipation of their sisters, throwing their weight behind campaigns against child marriage and suttee, and in favour of educational and professional inclusion. Like the benevolent, well-meaning and liberal fathers of the Empire, these imperial mothers and feminists–Josephine Butler, Christabel Pankhurst and Harriet Taylor Mill–in adopting their twin agenda of emancipation and deliverance , contributed substantially to the imposition of Western outlooks on the women of India. Writers of Anglo-Indian romance such as Maud Diver and Flora Annie Steel bring fresh perspectives to bear on the palimpsest reality of the British Raj.

The fourth section of the book is devoted to the vast subject of romance and film. Iuliana Borbely's *Romance with a Twist: Adapting Pride and Prejudice* focuses on the avatars of the Austen tradition in the present day culture industry. Jane Austen, "one of the ancestors of paperback romance" (Kaplan 1996), is also the writer whose novels have been the most frequently adapted for the screen. Film version of her novels have however tended to focus only on the romantic plot at the expense of other aspects . Due to their emphasis on this aspect of the plot, and to the attention physical appearance receives in the adaptations, these films "harlequinise" Austen's novels. The resulting adaptations come to be closer to modern romantic novels than to the source texts. Borbely's chapter focuses on the latest film version of *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), which represents an even greater departure from Austen's novel than previous adaptations in that the romantic plot is infused by the heroine's sexual awakening, while the cinematic rhetoric employed in the portrayal of both the hero and the heroine reflects a strange fusion of sexuality and restraint.

In the final chapter Gabriela Glăvan writes on *Romance. True Romance*. This is an analysis of two iconic postmodern films, Tony Scott's *True Romance* and David Lynch's *Wild at Heart*. While both are contemporary interpretations of the classic structures and clichés of the genre of romance, the discourse of cinema allows directors and actors to also create paradoxical and complex metaphors of love and its many tribulations. Visually innovative and artistically extravagant, these films bear the trademark impresses of their two original and uncompromising directors. Glăvan aims to identify the particular ways in which romance can be reinterpreted, and even deconstructed, with the aid of cutting humour and a bold sense of storytelling.

This same team of authors will continue this project with a third volume, to be published next year, on another versatile literary genre:

science fiction. The contributors will strive to account for the constant success of SF all the way from the technological fantasies of the 19th century to the three-dimensional experience of today's movie theatre.

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INTRODUCTION

WHY ROMANCE?

DANA PERCEC

"When it comes to romance novels, society has always felt free to sit in judgment not only on the literature but on the reader herself. The verdict is always the same. Society does not approve of the reading of romance novels. It labels the books as trash and the readers as unintelligent, uneducated, unsophisticated, or neurotic." These are the observations of a bestselling romance author, introducing a book on the secrets of mastering the art of this genre of fiction (Parv 2004, 19).

Romance is as popular as it is controversial. Statistics show that over 200 million women a year read the stories in the Harlequin series. This readership is very diverse, despite stereotypical expectations: women of all ages, social backgrounds and levels of education, with both high and low family incomes, housewives and professionals, all enjoy romances. Almost half of the 200 million women in western culture read a romantic story every two days. 35 to 40 percent of all mass market paperback sales are romance fiction (Krentz 1992, 23). Today's romance industry turns over almost 1.5 billion dollars annually, at a time when total book sales have gone down 4% in the past couple of years. This, argues Deindre Donahue in USA Today (2010, 3), happens because readers find it easier to cope with job anxiety and economic depression when they can sink into a Regency love story. Besides, the argument continues, the standard price of a title in a paperback romance series is hardly ever higher than the bill for a fancy coffee. Harlequin books are translated into dozens of languages, and have won popularity in over a hundred international markets, from Japan to South America. The numerous sites and blogs devoted to romance demonstrate that there is a global community of readers with an interest in the genre, a group which is homogeneous in its aesthetic taste and desire for escapism, though diverse when it comes to personal life and ambitions. One such blog, iconoclastically dubbed

"Smart Bitches, Trashy Books", visited by several million people monthly, is run by two avid romance readers in their thirties, who adopt a strong feminist position which can be summarized in a single rhetorical question: "Why do romance readers allow others to judge them?"

After all, it is true that romance is a lowbrow genre and largely a mass cultural product, but so are many others, from science fiction and whodunits to westerns and mysteries. However, none of these has so much shame and prejudice attached to it. In other words, as romance writer Jayne Ann Krentz puts it (1992, 13), it takes a lot of courage for a woman to open a romance book on a crowded plane. Writing romance fiction is considered a cliché, artificial, embarrassingly predictable, and kitsch, while the readers are seen as naïve, unambitious consumers, with low intelligence and unrefined aesthetic tastes, enslaved women, failures in their personal or professional lives, who search for an escape within the pages of cheap paperbacks. Despite this unflattering present perception, romantic fiction is one of the oldest and most traditional literary genres, whose evolution and diversification over the centuries is proof positive of the development of artistic taste, reader response and cultural feedback, authorship and *Weltanschauung*.

Early romance has much more in common with the popular genre in the 20th century than may appear. Firstly, it was disregarded, for several centuries, as a minor genre. Plato's influence, dominating early Christian thought, triggered a complete exclusion of this literary mode from the mainstream (Green 2003, 16). Aristotle's views, more in favour of fiction, had a belated reception in Western Europe (mainly from the 13th century onwards). Platonism, with its distinction between poetry and philosophy, adapted by the Church as a distinction between vernacular culture and theology, put the narratives of the secular world in the shade. Secondly, the very name of the genre of romance, deriving from the old French *romanz*, meaning "a vernacular language distinct from Latin", suggested a clear separation of it from academic and theological discourse, as well as from the rhetoric of official institutions (Cooper 2004, 25). Unlike Latin, available only to a limited–almost exclusively male–elite, the vernacular idioms were accessible to both male and female, lay and clerical, upper and lower classes, and, because they circulated in oral form, to both the literate and the illiterate. These were the languages of communal entertainment, secular pursuits, and the family. When the vernacular is used in story telling, the dissemination of the plot and its moral are immediate and continuous. Vernacular narratives were the stories everybody grew up with, "which they did not need to learn, because they were so deep a part of their culture." (Cooper 2004, 25) Being written in

the vernacular meant that stories, thus distinguished from academic discourse, did not tax the intellect, even if their accessibility did not limit their appeal only to a public with a lower level of intelligence. Moreover, this appeal was not confined to the primitive attraction of a sensational story; alongside the subject matter, every romance had to carry an inner meaning and/or to invite an engaged reception, in the form of debates or other types of active feedback. The vogue of the so-called *demandes d'amour*, love questions, dominated the centuries in which the habit of writing and reading romances was esteemed among the courtly elites of Western Europe (Cooper 2004, 29). Such debates were ignited by an adventure story, or a tale of *amour courtois*, providing lay, non-intellectual communities and private individuals with a secular forum that imitated the working mechanisms of public institutions, including law courts, the Church, the king's councils, and the universities.

In the Middle Ages, romance was crucial in the development of a culture that was headed towards secularization, as well as in securing a continuity into the early modernity of literature and philosophy. Early romance writers always made a point of giving their works a social, national, ideological, or at least didactic relevance. Romance records the secular ideals of an age and a community, passes on the group's need for self-representation, and encrypts civil role models. It accomplishes its mission successfully because it is accessible, due to its narrative form, and stable, due to the employment of invariables. A medieval romance is always anchored in a recognizable society, even if it is set in an exotic location and makes extensive use of supernatural elements. It is predictable in that it focuses on general themes, such as the battle between good and evil, heroic and gallant protagonists, mysteries, love, the quest for an ideal, ethical values, etc. More or less dramatic departures from these guidelines cannot estrange a story completely from the genre of romance: the happy ending, a very frequent feature, can sometimes be absent. The story may take the form of an allegory or ballad and still remain a romance, while even the narrative modality can be given up, in favour of poetry or drama, without impacting on the original genre. As Helen Cooper (2004, 26) argues, this happens because the principle of selective resemblance is acknowledged in the Middle Ages: "A family changes over time as its individual members change, but equally, those individuals can be recognized through their "family resemblance": […] even though no one of those [features] is essential for the resemblance to register, and even though individual features may contradict the model."

These characteristics enabled the medieval romance to survive into the 16th and 17th centuries. And because the English romance of the Middle

Ages also included the national dimension, being deeply embedded in native cultural traditions, the genre is much better preserved there than in other European countries, because of the specific history of Englishness during early modernity under the Tudors and Stuarts (Cooper 2004, 22). In an age of strong nationalism, of political and religious separation from the Continent, of economic competition with the important European powers of the day, "the writing of England" was achievable by means of continuing and adapting the native romance (and the romance naturalized from continental lore), such as the Arthurian cycle and the *Tristan* narratives. Invested with vitality, authenticity, and national pride, old legends and narrative traditions come to be regarded as a precious heritage, to be used as a model for future development and change. Consequently, even though it found its best expression in the narrative form, early modern English romance was adopted by the fashionable literary genres–poetry and drama–and permeated political thought, as when a female monarch, Queen Elizabeth I, was repeatedly represented as a typical romance heroine (Yates 1985).

In Shakespeare's age, "romance" was the name given not only to prose fiction but a much greater variety of texts (Lamb and Wayne 2009, 2). Prose romance consisted of the popular retellings of English medieval heroic tales (such as Guy of Warwick), translations of newer Italian novellas (Bandello's collection) or Spanish *pasos honrosos* of the *Reconquista*, adaptations of classical Greek tales, sophisticated or mannerist texts of the University Wits, such as John Lyly's *Euphues* (1580), pastorals of Hellenistic inspiration, such as Philip Sidney's *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1590), etc. In poetry, the features of romance are most famously illustrated in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590-1596), an allegory of the English State in the form of narratives of knights, ladies in distress, and supernatural creatures. Dramatic romance, not entirely distinct from prose and verse, manifests itself in nostalgic recoveries of native myths, as in William Shakespeare's early comedies, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1590-1596) or *As You Like It* (1599), and in redemptive plots laced with magic and pagan lore, as in Shakespeare's late romances.

The rise of empirical thought and the development of the natural sciences led to the almost complete eclipse of romance throughout the 17th century and the Enlightenment period. Secularization, the emergence of bourgeois thinking and realism removed romance from the literary scene for almost two centuries. But the end of the 18th century coincided with the birth of a philosophy of the sublime and an inclination towards the mysterious and the strange. Pre-Romantic and Romantic artists and

thinkers rediscovered the medieval world and revived the symbolic projections of Western culture from the Middle Ages. Thus new genres emerged, tributary to the conventions of romance: the Gothic and historical novel forms. The first arose in a cultural context characterized by a new interest in the exploration of emotions and imagination, which led to the configuration of a new aesthetic mode. The emphasis, in the Gothic novel, lies on the settings and feelings, which create a unique atmosphere and ineffable mood, dominated by the paradoxes of fascination and horror. Mysterious adventures and forbidden love affairs, thickly interlaced with supernatural elements, take place in farflung locations and in the distant past. The latter genre, pioneered by Sir Walter Scott, presents the past as deserving to enjoy a heroic impunity *vis-a-vis* contemporary laws, morality and ideals. Escapist and nostalgic, the historical novel favours romance to realism as a dominant mode.

Early 19th century romance, however, gained momentum with the sophistication and tranquility of Jane Austen's novels. Giving up the moralizing dimension of the sentimental tradition cultivated by Samuel Richardson and his followers, Jane Austen made an innovation in the style of romantic fiction by adding polished, entertaining repartee, which replaces earlier didactic dialogues and which has remained one of the distinctive marks of romance (Miller 2005). It is by means of the witty exchanges between the heroine and the gentleman of her dreams that readers come to know the moral codes, the customs and social priorities of the age, as well as the psychological evolution of the characters, for whom love works as a form of initiation. Jane Austen's romances are domestic novels, revolving around family life and the rhythms of the countryside or the London Season, valuable contemporary evidence of the elegance, aristocratic excess and glamour of the Regency period. They also highlight a feminine and a masculine ideal, which are so successfully reduplicated in the romantic plots of Victorian authors and of the popular fiction of a century later: while the women are virtuous, full of vitality and strength, loyal and graceful, the men are dutiful, courteous, poised and elegant.

By the end of the 19th century, romance had become geared to an ever wider middle-class readership, the umbrella term being employed to include subgenres such as Gothic (now called urban Gothic or imperial Gothic) and adventure. This marked, in fact, the beginning of romance as a popular genre in a period when a divide can already be observed between the "serious" literature of modernism on the one hand and lower brow fiction, catering for the tastes of the general public, on the other. The popular late Victorian adventure romance, as exemplified by the works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, R.L. Stevenson, Bram Stoker and George Du

Maurier, was already the perfect equivalent of the modern day bestseller (Daly 2004, 17). They were read by a broad section of the middle class, who were perfectly aware of their light character, although the genre was still more homogeneous than pop fiction is today. This *fin de siècle* romance revival coincided with the appearance of the modern culture industry. The print media being revolutionized by the appearance of new journalism in the 1890s. This expanded the market for periodicals and low-cost newspapers, with publishers also issuing the first cheap, paperback, single-volume editions, replacing the earlier three-volume novel: the number of novels published increased dramatically every year. The profession of the literary agent made its appearance, together with the fashion of "how to" books for aspiring writers (Daly 2004, 17). Since many novels appeared in periodicals, authors had to learn how to suit their writings to a certain group of readers and to fit their work to the length and format of a particular magazine.

The changes in the popularity of the genre can be explained by both ideological mutations and technological innovations in the bookselling industry, as well by organizational shifts in the publishing culture (Radway 1992, 15). The romance revival was projected against this economic background, but can also be accounted for in terms of a more complex aesthetic trend. Theorists of romance, such as R.L. Stevenson, welcomed the new success of adventure romance as a return to the freshness and authenticity of the native British novel, represented by Sir Walter Scott, by contrast with the foreign (especially French), degenerate aridity of contemporary realism and naturalism; they saluted the desire to escape the limits of the self in the search for a more dynamic, more involved mode of writing and reading. The romance, says Stevenson, works like a daydream to satisfy the reader's most secret longings (in Daly 2004, 22), offering a healthy alternative to unoriginal imports.

Nowadays, romance is the modern, consumerist equivalent of the fairy tale. Despite this loose pattern, romantic fiction survives because of the strictness with which authors and publishers (and readers) follow a given set of criteria. The story must focus on the romantic relationship between a male and a female. The plot must end happily, with the conflict resolved in marriage, reunion, enduring partnership, and mutual satisfaction. Despite this predictability, the plot line must be substantial enough for the reader to maintain her interest from the first chapter to the last. Consequently, subplots and secondary characters enter the stage, more often than not determining the subgenre to which the romantic story belongs. Affairs of the heart vary from conservative, traditional, "sweet" stories to real-life situations involving family traumas, frustrations, and the rat race of

today's urban environments. While more sexually explicit romances seem to validate female desire, traditional romances still find their place and new sex-free sub-genres have been created in response to the "havoc wrought by feminism on gender relations" (Radway 1992, 16). Period drama, with its Cinderella-like décor, competes with contemporary romance, in which the ballroom gives way to the train station or the airport, places symbolizing the dynamism, versatility, and lack of permanence of modern life. Many themes, settings, and dialogues are designed in order to enrich the love story and to increase the suspense within the conventions of the romantic plot. According to Jayne Ann Krentz (1992:19), "the reader may know from the beginning that the characters will live happily ever after but you should make them worry that maybe, this time, they won't get together. The course of true love certainly should not run smoothly–as in predictably–from beginning to end.", while Valerie Parv (2004, 2) considers that "at the core of each genre lie a group of ancient myths unique to that genre. The most popular writers in those genres continue to mine those ancient myths and legends for the elements that make their particular genre work."

Romance is, however, a challenging genre because of its inherent duality, as observed by some theorists (Radway 1991). According to them, the close connection between the female gender and the genre of romance is conferred by specific cultural conditions, which have to do not only with women's need for self-identification, but also with women's continuous negotiation with patriarchy:

> Does the romance's endless rediscovery of the virtues of a passive female sexuality merely stitch the reader ever more resolutely into the fabric of patriarchal culture? Or, alternatively, does the satisfaction a reader derives from the act of reading itself, an act she chooses, often in explicit defiance of others' opposition, lead to a new sense of strength and independence? [...]Romance reading permitted the ritual retelling of the psychic process by which traditional heterosexuality was constructed for women, but it also seemed to exist as a protest against the fundamental inability of heterosexuality to satisfy the very desires with which it engendered women. (Radway 1991, 15)

And a little later, paraphrasing Alison Light's commentary on Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, the same critic goes on:

> A narrative that is itself precisely about the process by which female subjectivity is brought into being within the patriarchal family. […] as much a measure of their deep dissatisfaction with heterosexual options as of any desire to be fully identified with the submissive versions of

> femininity the texts endorse. Romance imagines peace, security and ease precisely because there is dissension, insecurity and difficulty (Radway 1991, 16)

Romance literature almost invariably needs subgenres. Among them, chick lit and historical romance have been in the public's top preferences for quite a while now. The former, whose pioneer was Helen Fielding's weight-conscious Bridget Jones and her diary (1996, 1999), is literature written and read by young women in their twenties and thirties, which departs, to a greater or lesser extent, from the original pattern of battling with being single, having a career, and weight management. Readers enjoy chick literature mainly because it tends to be more realistic than other subgenres, because it deals with common, everyday problems, because it features characters with easily recognizable traits in just as easily recognizable settings, and because it is written in colloquial, informal language that reads with no difficulty. Chick lit is part of a wider subgenre, contemporary romantic fiction, with love stories set any time after World War II. The great success of chick lit has caused its rapid fragmentation into further subgenres, including so-called "mummy lit" and "baby lit", where the love affair extends to parental care, education, family bonding, or mother-daughter relationships, or even "biz chick lit", i.e. romancing the business environment and the corporate mentality. At the opposite end of the romantic spectrum, the historical romance is the most escapist subgenre of all. Imitating (more or less successfully, more or less gracefully) the values of courtly love or the cultural background of the sentimental tradition, romances drawing their inspiration from the past (with Regency England as one of the most sought-after settings, probably because of the flamboyance of the age and the renewed interest in the period's best known author of romantic fiction, Jane Austen) make up a significant part of romantic literature nowadays. Despite the privileged status of the early 19th century, historical romance includes any time period before 1945, with plots taking place in any location.

Other subgenres of romance range from young adult romance (a love affair involving teenagers and young adults) through paranormal romance (novels set in the future, in a fantasy world, or including paranormal events), to romantic suspense (novels which offer a mixture of love, mystery and thriller elements) or inspirational–or "evangelical"–romance (novels in which religious or spiritual beliefs play an important part in the romantic relationship of the protagonists) and even erotica (novels which depart from one of the conventions of the genre, namely that the heroine is chaste and virginal, sex being confined within wedlock, and instead challenge the language taboos of "sweet" romances). In the past decade,

the hybridization of the genre has moved further, creating such new subcategories as the western romance, time-travel love stories, and inspirational chick lit. The romance novel today generally appears in one of two possible formats: series or category romances–volumes issued under a series name, numbered and released at regular intervals, such as the Harlequin series, with books ranging from 50,000 to 85,000 words–and single-title romances–longer novels, of between 90,000 and 150,000 words, exploring more complex themes and containing subplots, released individually in both paperback and hard cover formats.

Romance today is a genre subject to postmodernist interventions, mingling with discourses imported from other media and with contemporary technological developments. Thus, present-day romance appeals to categories of the public not traditionally attracted by the sentimental genres and also to the younger segment of the reading public. A good illustration of this alliance is the mashup. The mashup, in Web developments, denotes a combination of data or functionality from two or more external sources to create a new service. At the level of culture, mashup developments permeate almost all cultural techniques and practices on a global scale. For Stefan Sonvilla-Weiss (2010, 9), the mashup is a metaphor for "*as well as*" ways of thinking and acting that promote parallel co-existence as against exclusionary, causal and reductionist principles of "*either/or*"–a unique representation of pluralism in contemporary culture. A remix practice, the mashup continues a long, historical tradition of combinatory techniques, which have been in use since the early days of modernism: collage, montage, sampling, etc., and bears a resemblance to different forms of appropriations within specific socio-cultural contexts. However, while collage, montage, sampling and remix practices use materials and media either from other sources, works of art or one's own artworks through alteration, re-combination, manipulation or copying, to create a whole new piece, mashups put together different information, media, or objects without changing their original source of information (the original format remaining the same, being identifiable as the original form and content, although recombined in a variety of new designs).

Equally bizarre is the way in which the sentimental tradition of the 18th -19th centuries mingles with the Gothic tradition of the pre-Romantic period and the *fin de siècle*, in these so-called mashups. While, in web design, a mashup is an application that uses and combines data from two or more sources in order to create new services, in culture, a mashup is a creative project of using famous source texts, to which new elements (of content: characters, themes, language, or form: illustrations, layouts) are

added. Good examples of the hybridization of (popular) culture today, mashups–the term is also used in contemporary pop music–are interventions into original texts, with additions specific to the genre which is superposed over the original, usually–as is the case of the pastiche–with parodic effect. In the print medium, textual elements are mixed so as to achieve a new composition. Jane Austen's novels have been, so far, some of the most susceptible to such transformations (other notable examples include *Jane Eyre*, turned into *Jane Slayre* by Sherri Browning Erwin in 2010, Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* made into *Android Karenina* by Ben Winters in 2010, or *Little Vampire Women*, by Lynn Messina, in 2010, etc.) Almost all Austen's novels have presented sufficient interest for mashup authors and illustrators: Ben Winters' 2009 *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* (with illustrations downloadable as wallpapers), Adam Rann's 2009 *Emma and the Werewolves*, Vera Nazarian's 2010 *Northanger Abbey and Angels and Dragons,* or the same author's *Mansfield Park and Mummies*. *Pride and Prejudice* scores better, with no fewer than three mashups, one of which superposes a zombie plot and zombie paraphernalia over the original Austenian language (Seth Graham-Smith's 2009 *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: The Classic Regency Romance–Now with Ultraviolent Zombie Mayhem*!), one which puts together the sentimental novel and classical adventure fiction (Wayne Josephson's 2011 *Pride, Prejudice, and Moby Dick*), as well as others, which insert the vampire story in an Austenian prequel: Steve Hockensmith's 2010 *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: Dawn of the Dreadfuls*, which takes place five years before Mr Bingley moves to Netherfield, and a sequel: Steve Hockensmith's 2011 *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: Dreadfully Ever After*, set during Elizabeth's honeymoon, which captures her attempts to rescue her husband and keep their love going.

The main features that characterize the mashup consist of the intricate way in which the original text is sprinkled with elements from contemporary genres. With variable percentages of original and new text, the romantic mashups bring together a classical love story and narratives which are highly popular with ever larger groups of readers worldwide: vampire sagas, paranormal epics, adventure stories, and thrillers.

In the view of some theorists (Cooper 2004, 35), one of the reasons why the modern form of romance has gained, and retained, such popularity is its striking similarity to the earliest versions of the genre, especially in terms of "the skill of individual writers in giving new vitality to stereotypes to the point where a new archetype, a new model for imitation, can be created and in turn generate its own posterity." It is,

therefore, the major purpose of this collection of essays to discuss the versatility of the literary genre of romance, its enduring appeal, its potential for controversy despite its complete confidence in the formulaic, and its hybridization in contemporary culture. The collection also underscores and tries to account for the continuity of the genre, despite its apparent discontinuity, by drawing attention to the fact that the practices of romance writing and reading are fluid and interactive.

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PART I:

ROMANCE: ATTEMPTED DEFINITIONS

CHAPTER ONE

SEX AND THE GENRE: THE ROLE OF SEX IN POPULAR ROMANCE

CODRUȚA GOȘA

Motto: "I'd be embarrassed for anybody to read my fantasies."
"Good! That means they're hot and juicy. That's just what they want. See? "Explicit, but tasteful," she read from the magazine. "That means make them good and dirty, but not crude."

Introduction

Undoubtedly romance sells. It is the most profitable subgenre of pop-fiction. It may be stereotypical, repetitive, clichéd, escapist or boring to some, but it incessantly seems to breed paper, bytes or film, an endeavour which is bound to breed money to justify its very existence. After all, as Elisabeth Lowell, a pop fiction writer herself, (Maxwell and Lowell 2011, doc.1) common-sensically argues: "In popular fiction, the only critics who really matter are the readers who pay money to buy books of their own choice. Reviews are irrelevant to sales."

So, what makes popular romance so profitable and prolific? Or, to put it differently, what sort of stuff is whatever it tries to sell made of? In this paper I argue that rather than the escapist mode it sets off, it is pure sex that makes its readers tick, as the motto of this paper does seem to suggest. To substantiate this claim I chose to analyse both quantitatively and qualitatively the pretexts, contexts, contents, length, place and language of sex scenes in three novels written by three best selling novelists of the genre in Romania.

In what follows, after trying to unveil what it is that makes romance be romance as a genre, I will discuss the methodological aspects underlying the process (both when it comes to the construction of the corpus and to