Beyond the bodice ripper: Innovation and change in the romance novel industry

Description

Title Beyond the bodice ripper
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Description Romance novels have changed significantly since they first entered the public consciousness. Instead of seeking to understand the changes that have occurred in the industry, in readership, in authorship, and in the romance novel product itself, both academic and popular perception has remained firmly in the early 1980s when many of the surface criticisms were still valid. Using Wendy Griswold’s (2004) idea of a cultural diamond, I analyze the multiple and sometimes overlapping relationships within broader trends in the romance industry based on content analysis and interviews with romance readers and authors. Three major issues emerge from this study. First, content of romance novels sampled from the past fourteen years is more reflective of contemporary ideas of love, sex, and relationships. Second, romance has been a leader and innovator in the trend of electronic publishing, with major independent presses adding to the proliferation of subgenres and pushing the boundaries of what is considered romance. Finally, readers have a complicated relationship with the act of reading romance and what the books mean in their lives. Understanding the enduring appeal of the happily ever after and the emotional escape are central to their enjoyment.

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The whole romance novel industry is about women being grabbed and thrown on a horse and ridden off into the distance," Clinton said during a recording of the Post's Cape Up podcast. The comment was met with swift backlash from romance readers, with a multitude of think pieces to boot. In the early age of bodice rippers—1970s-era romance novels that helped to reignite the genre—consent was dubious at best. But in the intervening years, stories of "forced seduction" became increasingly taboo. But as the real-life standards about women's desire—and how they could vocalize that desire—you see that change within the genre. Most people know them as bodice rippers, trashy books, and sometimes overlapping relationships within broader trends in the romance industry. In my opinion, bodice ripper refers to any romantic novel that induces heart pounding tension in the reader and not necessarily inclusive of the elements the writer here ascribes to it as having by way of definition. Although I would agree that most people have come to associate the term bodice ripper to refer usually to a novel set in a historical setting rather than a contemporary one, as for the plot and story line elements as per its relevance to a definition, I would have to disagree entirely. Honestly, bodice ripper isn't a sub-genre of anything. Historical romance is a proper genre, used by the publishing industry and by readers alike; bodice ripper is a nickname given to historical romances that have a swashbuckler cover (bare-chested man embraces woman with heaving, corseted bosom). Romance novels taught me that sexual pleasure was something women could not just hope for but insist upon. Beyond the dirty bits, the books I read described the story and the characters rather than simply the act of love.
feminist statement. The genre makes up more than a third of the U.S. publishing market, according to researcher Nielsen BookScan, with sales topping $1 billion annually. And while romance fans are twice as likely as readers of literary fiction to go digital—e-books represented 61 percent of romance sales in 2015, Nielsen says—they're exceedingly loyal. Nielsen says 15 percent buy a new title at least once a week and 6 percent do so more than twice weekly. True fans “will read ten $2.99 e-books, then buy phys