

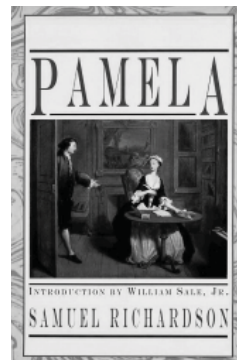
Romances and Ohio

by Nancy Down, PhD

During the last few decades, romantic fiction as an academic field of study has become more accepted by the scholarly community. Dissertations, journal articles and books, conferences, and academic courses have been analyzing and studying the genre and individual authors within the genre. In April 2009, Princeton University hosted the Love as the Practice of Freedom: Romance Fiction and American Culture conference, bringing researchers together to discuss romance fiction. An online website Teach Me Tonight: Musings on Romance Fiction from an Academic Perspective (<http://teachmetonight.com>) is dedicated to disseminating information about the academic study of romances. This year the International Association for the Study of Popular Romance and the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* will be launched.

At Bowling Green State University, the Ray and Pat Browne Library for Popular Culture Studies has been collecting romances and romance related materials for the last 40 years. The Browne Popular Culture Library is an archive dedicated to collecting and preserving primary resources for American popular culture from the late 19th century to the present. The Library collects comprehensively in all areas of popular culture; but, has three main areas of strength—popular entertainment, graphic arts, and popular literature.

The major strength of the Browne Popular Culture Library is its popular fiction collection. The history of American popular literature is documented in the Library's collections of story papers and nickel weeklies, dime novels, pulp magazines, vintage paperbacks, Big Little Books, adolescent series fiction, and hardcover and paperback editions of popular authors in a variety of genres. Not only popular reading interests, but the forms of distribution (for example, the pulp magazine format)

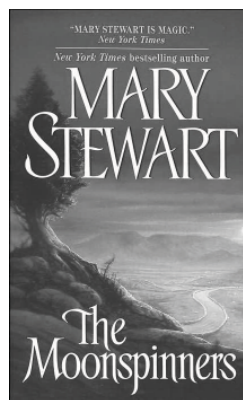


can be seen in the Library's popular literature collections.

The romance collection is a particular strength of the Browne Popular Culture Library. This collection might perhaps be the only academic archive for past and present romance literature. The Library collects series from such publishers as Mills & Boon, Harlequin, Silhouette, Loveswept, and Candlelight Ecstasy. The authors represented in the romance collection span the centuries and includes romance writers such as Bertha Clay, E.D.E.N. Southworth, Dorothy Daniels, Barbara Cartwright, Danielle Steele, Nora Roberts, and a host of others.

We associate romances with series and single titles, but romances can also be found in comic format and as pulps. Romance comics, a popular genre after World War II, feature such titles as *Young Love* and *Love Diary*. Pulp, a magazine type format for popular fiction from the 1920s to the 1950s, are well-known for their damsels in distress and rescuing heroes. However, a number of pulps focused on romance plots. Such titles as *Rodeo Romances*, *Western Romances*, and *Exciting Love* feature strong, capable women who fall in love and marry their heroes.

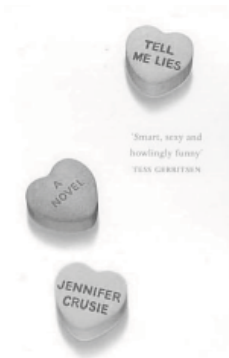
The Browne Popular Culture Library is also the repository for the institutional papers of the Romance Writers of America, a national non-profit writers organization. The Library is also the repository for the papers of such romance writers as Susan Elizabeth Phillips, Dixie Browning, Sylvie Kurtz, Linda Varner, Linda L. Crockett, Becky Barker, Kathleen Morgan, Patricia Gaffney, Roberta Gellis, Alice Brilmayer, Darlene Scatera, Gwynne Foster, Shirley T. Hailstock, April Kilstrom, Ludima Gus Burton, Valerie Taylor, and Patricia McLinn. The Library also collects, when possible, the foreign language editions of these authors work.



As the collections of the Browne Library reflect, romances have always been a popular genre for American readers in the 19th and 20th centuries. Even today, romances have been extremely popular, outselling mysteries and science fiction/fantasy titles in the

marketplace. Romances are selling despite the recent recession and show every sign of continuing their popularity and gaining more readers.

Perhaps this is a good time to stop and ask what is a romance? Pamela Regis, Professor of English at McDaniel College and a noted author of critical works about the romance genre, defines a romance novel as “a work of prose fiction that tells the story of courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines.” She sees the romance novel as having eight essential narrative elements. These elements include: the initial state of society in which the heroine and hero must court, the initial meeting between heroine and hero, the attraction between them, the barrier(s) to their union, their declaration of love, the point of ritual death (where it seems impossible they will get together), their recognition of the means to overcome that barrier (often the hero admitting to the heroine that he loves her), and their betrothal.



The Romance Writers of America offers a similar definition that I believe would be accepted by both readers and romance writers. In their definition, two basic elements comprise every romance: a central love story and an emotionally satisfying optimistic ending. The plot centers around two individuals falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work. In the end, the lovers who risk and struggle for each other and their relationship are rewarded with emotional justice and unconditional love. (Romance Writers of America,

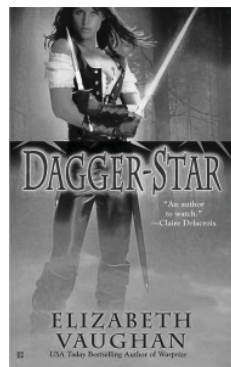
2009)

Within this basic formula, romances can vary in tone or style, in setting or time period, and in varying levels of sexuality. Romances are classified into subgenres by their setting and plot elements. For instance, historical romances are set in a time period prior to 1945 and contemporary romances are set after 1945. Regency romances are set in a specific time period in English history, between the years 1811 and 1820, when the Prince of Wales ruled England as regent for his father George

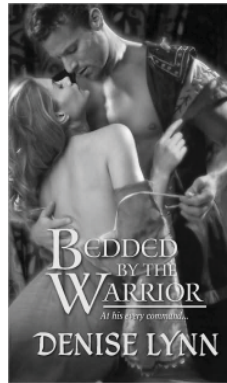
III. Romantic suspense novels must include suspense, mystery, or thriller elements as an integral part of their plot. Likewise, paranormal romances include futuristic, fantasy, or paranormal happenings in their plots.

Romances have a long history in English Literature. Some scholars cite Samuel Richardson's 1740 novel *Pamela*; or, *Virtue Rewarded* as perhaps the first romance novel in English (or at least the first best selling romance novel). Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* has often been called the greatest romance novel of the English language. The 19th century Domestic Sentimentalists (writers such as Catharine Maria Sedgwick, E.D.E.N. Southworth, and Augusta Jane Evans) are also seen as antecedents of today's romance writers.

Each subgenre of romance also has its own rich history. For example, Mary Stewart is considered the mother of 20th-century romantic suspense. Stewart was able to seamlessly blend both romance and mystery elements in novels such as *The Crystal Cave* and *The Moon-spinners*. In a similar way, Georgette Heyer's name is associated with Regency novels. Recently journalist Elsie Washington, writing under the pen name Rosalind Wells, died at the age of 66. Her romance novel *Entwined Destinies*, the 575th title in Dell's Candlelight Romance Series, was widely considered the first contemporary black romance.



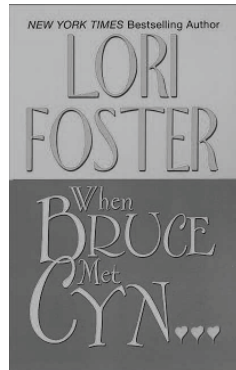
Returning to the popularity of romances, the latest publishing industry statistics show that in 2007 about 8,090 romances titles were published. Romance writers who live or have their roots in Ohio published many of these novels. (Romance Writers of America 2009) Throughout the state, romance writers are publishing in a variety of subgenres, making bestselling lists, and winning



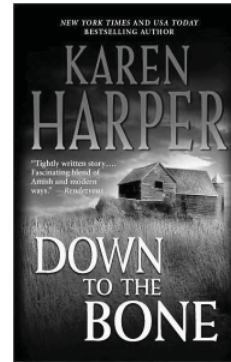
awards that show they are respected by their peers in the romance field.

Romance Writers of America (RWA), an organization established in 1979 to support authors of romance novels and to work toward the recognition of the romance genre as a valid literary form, has five state chapters in Ohio. These chapters include: the Central Ohio Fiction Writers, NEORWA (North East Ohio Romance Writers Association), Maumee Valley Romance Writers of America (Toledo), KYOWA #180, and the Ohio Valley Romance Writers of America. Each chapter has monthly meetings, holds workshops and contests, and helps support both new and well-established romance writers.

Who are these Ohio romance writers? I will highlight some of these authors in the rest of this article, but it is certainly not inclusive of all the talented romance writers associated with Ohio.



Jennifer Crusie has deep roots in Ohio. She was born in Wapakoneta, a small town on the banks of the Auglaize River. She attended Bowling Green State University for a BS in Art Education, Wright State for her MA in Professional Writing and Women's Literature, and the Ohio State University for her MFA in Fiction and is completing her dissertation for a PhD in Feminist Criticism. She has written fifteen novels, edited two essay collections, and published a book of literary criticism on Anne Rice. Her dissertation research focused on the impact of gender on narrative strategies, looking at the differences in the way men and women tell stories. Her first sale was a novella titled *Sizzle* to Silhouette. She continued to write category romances for Harlequin and Bantam's Loveswept line. Then, in 1995, she began writing single title novels for St. Martins Press. She is currently collaborating with Bob Mayer on romantic adventure novels.



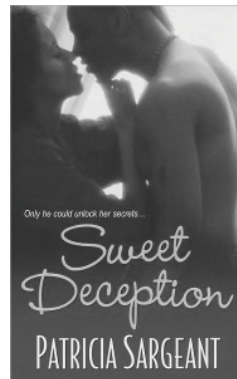
Many of Crusie's romances belong to the subgenre of romantic comedy. Crusie describes romantic comedies as "the designer chocolates of literature, rich, fun and seemingly without nutritional value. But underneath that sugar coating is one of the most feminist forms of literature ever devised." Romantic comedies are an excellent way for women to read stories about love without any feminist guilt. They also show women how to wield power without being aggressive. (Crusie, 2009)

Crusie is known for both her humor and feminist viewpoint. Her romance *Tell Me Lies* (1998) for instance, is the story of a woman who is finally learning how to claim her own identity. And, in the state famous for Winesburg, Ohio, Crusie also offers in *Tell Me Lies* a satiric look at the Midwestern small town, but, in the end, embraces the values of friendship and love.

Denise Lynn is an award-winning romance writer from Northwest Ohio and a co-founder of the Maumee Valley RWA. She writes historical romances, such as *Bedded By the Warrior*, which are set in medieval times. One of her newest ventures, *Dragon's Lair*, is a contemporary set in a paranormal world. In this novel, which deftly blends realism and fantasy, the protagonists discover their love for each other as they try to stop an evil wizard.

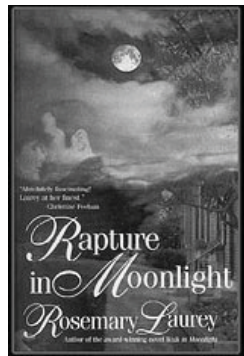
Elizabeth Vaughan, another Northwest Ohio writer, is a lawyer and a fan of fantasy and science fiction. She is the author of the *Chronicles of the Warlords*, a romance trilogy published by Tor. She has also written two fantasy romances *Dagger-Star* and *White Star*.

Lori and Tony Karayianni are a husband and wife team writing under the pen name of Tori Carrington. Tony was born in Smila, Greece and immigrated to the United States in 1976. Lori is a native of Toledo. After getting married, they decided to write a novel together and today their collaborative efforts have produced more than thirty published novels. Their first published title was *Constant Craving*. Many of their romances have been published in the Harlequin Blaze series. Besides ro-



mances, they also have a comedy-mystery series, starring Sofie Metropolis (the Greek “Nancy Drew”).

Karen Harper, a former college English instructor at Ohio State University, writes contemporary romantic suspense, historical novels, and a historical mystery series set in Tudor, England. These historical mysteries feature Queen Elizabeth I as an amateur sleuth. Since the publication of her first novel *Island Ecstasy* in 1982, she has written over 40 novels and novellas. Her romantic suspense novels such as *Down to the Bone*, *Dark Road Home*, and *Dark Harvest* are set in Ohio’s Amish country.



Lori Foster (who also writes as L. L. Foster) began writing romances at thirty-something and published her first novel *Impetuous* in 1996. Her second novel *Outrageous* (1997) launched Harlequin’s Temptation Blaze line and a later book *Sex Appeal* (2001) launched the Temptation Heat line. She is known for writing in the more sensual series, but can also write a more innocent sort of sexuality such as the Harlequin Duets. Her preferred setting is a small town, preferably near water.

She has written romances dealing with serious social issues, such as *When Bruce Met Cyn*. “Cyn” is a former prostitute who was sexually abused as a child. As L. L. Foster, she writes paranormal romances.

Susan Elizabeth Phillips was born in Cincinnati and grew up in Central Ohio. She received her BFA in Theater from Ohio University and, after graduation, taught English, speech, and drama for several years. She wrote her first novel, *The Copeland Bride*, with a friend and neighbor in New Jersey in 1983 under the pen name Justine Cole. Then, she published her second novel *Risen Glory* under her own name. Her first two novels were historical romances and she then turned to writing contemporary romances, many set in the entertainment world.

Patricia Sargeant grew up in New York City, but now calls Columbus, Ohio her home. Her romantic suspense novels, including *Sweet Deception*, feature African-American women and

men struggling to overcome their inner demons and, in the process, finding each other.

Rosemary Laurey, originally from England, now lives in the German Village area of Columbus. She has written the *Vampires in Moonlight* trilogy. The second book *Rapture in Moonlight* is actually set in German Village. Writing in the paranormal subgenre, her novels feature vampires and dragons.

Becky Barker is another prolific writer who lives in rural Ohio. She writes contemporary romances for such series as Silhouette Intimate Moments, and Precious Gem Romances. Her *My Prescott Pilot* series is available in e-book format. Her works have been very popular and have been reprinted as trade editions.

Ohio is the home of many excellent romance novelists and the home of an archive which takes romance seriously as a genre worthy of academic study. On one level, romances are a popular form of reading. At another level, they are a strong reflection of the values, history, and attitudes of our culture. We can learn much about American society and how it has changed over the decades by looking through the lens of romance novels.

Nancy Down is Head Librarian of the Browne Popular Culture Library at Bowling Green State University. She has worked at BGSU for almost twenty years as a cataloger, reference librarian, and, most recently, as an administrator. Nancy has an MLS from Indiana University at Bloomington, and an MA and PhD in English Literature from Drew University in Madison, NJ. She is an avid reader of popular literature and has presented numerous papers on mystery and romance writers at various conferences.

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