

IASPR 2025

conference program



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24-26 June

Mexico City, Mexico & Online

The theme for the 2025 IASPR conference is *Romantic Regions*, thinking through the evolving relationships between romance, place, and space.



IASPR 2025

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24-26 June

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
Mexico City & online

About the conference

Romantic Regions is the tenth annual conference of the International Association for the Study of Popular Romance. Our theme for the 2025 IASPR conference is *Romantic Regions*, thinking through the evolving relationships between romance, place, and space, building on the previous two IASPR conferences—Sydney 2018 (“Think Globally, Love Locally”) and Birmingham 2023 (“Romance Revitalised”). “Region” may refer to geographic, economic, and/or political regions such as North America, to industrial, social, and textual spaces, and can occur in many different scales, localities and contexts.

About IASPR

The International Association for the Study of Popular Romance (IASPR) is dedicated to fostering and promoting the scholarly exploration of all popular representations of romantic love. IASPR is committed to building a strong community of scholars of popular romance through open, digital access to all scholarly work published by the Association, by organizing or sponsoring an annual international conference on popular romance studies, and by encouraging the teaching of popular romance at all levels of higher education.

IASPR 2025

Location information

IASPR 2025 is hosted by the Centro de Investigaciones sobre América del Norte (Center for Research on North America) at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico).

Sessions will feature two hybrid concurrent panels, held in-person at CISAN and on Zoom:

Stream A and the keynotes: Sala de conferencias "Mónica Vereá" del CISAN (Floor 7 of the Torre II de Humanidades).

Stream B: Sala de juntas del CISAN (Floor 10 of the Torre II de Humanidades).

program snapshot



IASPR 2025

Tuesday June 24, 2025

All times given in Central Standard Time (GMT -6)

Registration	9-9:30	
Session 1A	9:30-11	Sensational Bodies: Senses in Romance
Session 1B		Appealing to the Classics
Break	11-11:20	
Session 2A	11:20-1:10	Romantic Worlds: Places, Spaces & Homes
Session 2B		Looking Back to the Romantic Future
Break	1:10-1:30	
Session 3A	1:30-3	Where Are We With This?: Genre Revisited
Session 3B		Romance, Revolution and Redemption
Lunch	3-5	
Keynote 1	5-6	Romance Skin: Escape, Space, and Desire in Reading Communities Javaria Farooqui

Wednesday June 25, 2025

All times given in Central Standard Time (GMT -6)

Registration	9-9:30	
Session 4A	9:30-11	(In)fidelities: Adaptation & Translation
Session 4B		Connection & Connectivity: Romance Online
Break	11-11:20	
Session 5A	11:20-1:10	Romantic Landscapes and the Power of Kilig
Session 5B		Romancing History I: The Past for Now
Break	1:10-1:30	
Session 6A	1:30-3	Reading the Romance, Reading the Romance Reader
Lunch	3-5	
Keynote 2	5-6	Narcotelenovelas: Melodrama for Sensitive Machos and Audacious Heroines Ainhua Vasquez

IASPR 2025

Thursday June 26, 2025

All times given in Central Standard Time (GMT -6)

Registration	9-9:30	
Session 7A	9:30-11	Confabulating with Alterity: Romance and Other Worlds
Session 7B		The Logics of Triangular Desire
Break	11-11:20	
Session 8A	11:20-1:10	Falling in Love with the Darkness: Dark Romance
Session 8B		Romancing History II: The Past as a Place
Break	1:10-1:30	
Session 9A	1:30-3	Black Romance Podcast: Rountable
Session 9B		Paper, Screens, Phones: Sites and Images of Romance
Lunch and conference close	3-5	

papers and speaker info



Session 1

A) Sensational Bodies: Senses in Romance

Chair: Jayashree Kamblé

Floor
7

Sensory Discrimination: Gender, 'Race,' Flavor and Feelings in Nalini Singh's Psy-Changeling Novels

Kecia Ali

Visualizing Romancelandia

Alexis Boylan

Perfumed prose: scent, space, and characterisation in romance fiction

Ellen Carter

B) Appealing to the Classics

Chair: Sarah Ficke

Floor
10

Reading the erotic landscape in the writing of the Brontes and their subsequent collaborators

Lucy Sheerman

Companionate Marriage': How the 'Queens of Crime' used Romance in Detective Fiction to Challenge Women's Inequality in Marriage

Kelly Thomson

Session 2

Tuesday
June 24, 2025

A) Romantic Worlds: Places, Spaces and Homes

Floor
7

Chair: Jodi McAlister

Idealized landscapes, spaces, and places of romance in urban India

Meghna Bohidar

Something to Write Home About: Titles, genre, and the word 'home'

Kate Cuthbert

Looking For a Good Home: The Textual Domain of South Asian Diasporic Romance Novels

Sreepurna Datta

Love in the Emergency Room: Romance in Hospital Narratives

Kristen Loutensock

B) Looking Back to the Romantic Future: Romantic Ecosystems

Floor
10

Chair: Hanna Hoorenman

Erin Doom's The Tearsmith: A Case Study on the Transnational Circulation of Romance

Francesca Pierini

Revisiting the Border: Chicanx and Hispanic Spaces in the 1980s Wave of American Category Romance

Jayashree Kamblé

Session 3

A) Where Are We With This?: Genre Revisited

Chair: Kristin Noone

Floor
7

Queerly Beloved: Queering the Happily Ever After in popular historical romance

Justina Ashman

What Ever Happened to Paranormal Romance? The 2010s and 2020s

Maria Ramos-Garcia

B) Romance, Revolution and Redemption

Chair: Amy Burge

Floor
10

Redemption Love Songs: How Romance Takes On Decolonization

Carole V Bell

Connection to Country in Indigenous Romantic Comedy Novels

Melanie Saward

Love in the Time of Dictatorship and Revolution

Jonathan Allan

Keynote 1

Tuesday
June 24, 2025

Romance Skin: Escape, Space, and Desire in Reading Communities

Floor
7

Javaria Farooqui

Assistant Professor of English and Literary Studies
COMSATS University Islamabad

The embodied experiences of readers in the spaces of genre retail shape their understanding of romance in their everyday lives. Utilizing the case study of Pakistani leisure reading communities of Anglophone and Urdu romance fiction, this study explores the relationship between romance genre retail spaces and readers' sensory perception, tactile engagements, and formation of subjective sexual desires. My study combines the theorization on 'skin', primarily through Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey's concept of 'Thinking Through the Skin,' with the discourse on escapism in popular romance studies, to argue that readers develop 'romance skins' that scaffold their everyday existence. Ahmed and Stacey link writing and skin by looking at them as processes that engage both with material reality and symbolic meaning. We 'skin ourselves into being' with writing and the skin acts as a readable text that can be interpreted according to shifting contexts. Extending the theorization of skin to my study of romance reading practices in Pakistan, which are inextricably connected to the materiality and signification of physical spaces, I maintain that the escapism offered by the romance genre is a nuanced inward journey in which the readers skin themselves into being.

Field observations and individual interviews show that sexuality and gender is constructed, challenged, and reimagined for the Pakistani romance readers when they navigate the genre retail spaces. The concept of 'romance skin' not only facilitates an analysis of Pakistani readers' responses to descriptions of sexual intimacy in their preferred novels, and their commentary on the relationship between their sexual selves and the retail spaces of genre romance, but also aims to provide theoretical insights that can be applied to deepen our understanding of romance reading communities and retail spaces across diverse cultural contexts.

Session 4

A) Fidelities and Infidelities: Adaptation and Translation

Floor
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Chair: Hsu-Ming Teo

Shaking up Stereotypes: The Turkish Translation of a Harlequin Sheikh Romance

Heather Schell and Derin Ozkan

She Lived for Him: Adapting Intimacy and Love for Arabic Readers

Nusaiba Imady

Genre-Bending Love: Adaptation and the Fusion of Romance in Julia Quinn's Bridgerton Series

Mehvish Nawreen

B) Connection and Connectivity: Romance and Online Platforms

Floor
10

Chair: Melanie Saward

Hoarding in Survival Fantasy: Chinese Women's Affective Labor in Web Novel Platforms During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Yansha He

Romance in a post-FOSTA-SESTA world: Platform governance, romance fiction and imaginaries of 'adult' material

Claire Parnell

It Takes a Village to Write One Direction Fanfiction: Authorship in the Digital Age

Lucy Rouse

Session 5

Wednesday
June 25, 2025

A) Romantic Landscapes and the Power of Kilig: Sites of Love across Philippine Media and Culture

Floor
7

Chair: Heather Schell

**He's My Oppastar! Exploring Korean-Japanese Fantasies in
Contemporary Philippine Romantic Culture**

Thomas Baudinette

The Filipino Romantic Imagination and Teleserye 'Love Teams'

Louie Jon A Sánchez

Imagining Queer Romances in Contemporary Philippine Comics

Kristine Michelle L Santos

**SUS 6INOO!: Kilig in P-Pop Idol Boy Band ALAMAT's Boyfriend
POVs**

Andrea Anne I Trinidad

B) Romancing History I: The Past for Now

Floor
10

Chair: Evdokia Valiou

**Queer Romance and Historical Accuracy in the Works of KJ
Charles**

Molly Winters

**Comic Medievalism, Christmas Carols, and Happy Endings in KJ
Charles' 'Masters in This Hall'.**

Kristin Noone

**Reparative History and Reparative Reading in Alyssa Cole's An
Unconditional Freedom**

Sarah Ficke

**Invading France, Invading the Body: Sarah Adlakha's Midnight on
the Marne**

Bonnie White

Session 6

Floor
7

A) Reading the Romance, Reading the Romance Reader

Chair: Maria Butler

My Entire House Feels New with Possibilities': The Ordinary Storyworld of the Young Adult Romance

Emma K McNamara

Voting with their Wallets: Romance Reader Values' Potential Impact on Purchasing Behavior

Margaret Bates

'I'm not gonna be a movie star, or a singer, or any of those things, but ... I could pretend': Escapism and the 1980s bonkbuster

Amy Burge and Jodi McAlister

Keynote 2

Wednesday
June 25, 2025

"Narcotelenovelas: melodrama para machos sensibles y heroínas audaces" / Narcotelenovelas: Melodrama for Sensitive Machos and Audacious Heroines

Floor
7

Ainhoa Vásquez Mejías

PhD in Literature from the Pontificia Universidad Católica of Chile and researcher at Universidad Austral of Chile

Las narcotelenovelas, marcadas por su alto contenido de balas y sangre, han alterado en cierta medida el melodrama clásico, a la vez que han sostenido algunas estructuras tradicionales. El amor, como elemento central, sigue presente en la figura de romances truncados y parejas que deben luchar para mantenerse unidas, sin embargo las configuraciones de género han cambiado. Los protagonistas masculinos no son héroes, sino hombres violentos que buscan poder y dinero; aunque también son sensibles, cariñosos, fieles y buenos dueños de casa. Las mujeres, por su parte, son activas, audaces y decididas. Al contrario de las telenovelas clásicas, en que el sujeto femenino era principalmente pasivo, estas protagonistas deciden. No obstante, por sobre las transformaciones estéticas y argumentales respecto del melodrama tradicional se mantiene la moral como un elemento clave. A pesar del contexto violento en que se desarrollan estas historias, en cada una de ellas se reflexiona acerca de lo que es bueno y malo, tanto en lo social como en lo personal, con un final que apunta a que nadie que hace el mal puede librarse del castigo. /

Narcotelenovelas, marked by their high dose of bullets and blood, have modified the classic melodrama while also preserving some of its traditional structures. Love, as a central element, plays a role in the trope of truncated romance and couples that must fight to stay together; however, gender formations have changed. Male protagonists are not heroes but violent men who search for power and money; although they are also sensitive, affectionate, faithful and good home owners. Women, on the other hand, are active, audacious and resolute. In contrast to classic telenovelas, in which the typical female subject was passive, these heroines are decisive. However, despite the aesthetic and narrative transformations of traditional melodrama, morality is a mainstay. Despite the violent context in which these stories take place, each and every one of them reflects upon good and evil in social and personal terms, with an ending that signals that whoever is evil cannot escape punishment.

Session 7

A) Confabulating with Alterity: Romance and Other Worlds

Floor
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Chair: Jayashree Kamblé

Feral Femininity: FMC Shapeshifting and Animality

Hanna Hoorenman

Soulmates and Scent Matches: Free Will and Gender in Alternate Universe Romance Fiction

Johanna Kluger

The writer-reader-page-place assemblage of Rebecca Yarros's Fourth Wing series (2023-)

Evdokia Valiou

B) The Logics of Triangular Desire

Floor
10

Chair: Heather Schell

Marian Keyes' This Charming Man: An alcoholic love story

Maria Butler

Subject of Desire & Desire to be Subject: Beauvoir's Relationship of Ambiguity in Romance Novels

Matthew A Hoffman

Why Choose, Must Choose: Juxtaposition of Fantasy and Reality in Doctor Odyssey (2024-2025)

Justina Clayburn

Session 8

Thursday
June 26, 2025

A) Falling in Love with the Darkness: Dark Romance

Chair: Amy Burge

Floor
7

“‘In the Gray’: Making Space for Race in Dark Romance

Kim Manganelli

Allure of the Anti-hero in Dark Romance: An Analysis of Emotional
Engagement and Reader Preferences

Dilpreet Kaur Sandhawalia

B) Romancing History I: The Past for Now

Chair: Sarah Ficke

Floor
10

Hells, Belles, and the Moors: Racialization, Romance, and Place in
the Regency Romance Novel

Semilore Sobande

Romantic Historical Fiction and the Foreign Country of the Past:
Revising History through Reparative Readings

Hsu-Ming Teo

Session 9

A) Black Romance Podcast: Studying Romance in Africa and the Black Diaspora Roundtable

Floor
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Chair: Jayashree Kamblé

Julie Moody-Freeman and Carole V. Bell

B) Paper, Screens, Phones: Sites and Images of Romance

Floor
10

Chair: Hanna Hoorenman

Uncredited Artists and Unsmiling Women: Researching Category Romance Cover Art

Ginny Bishton

From Paper to Screen: Romance Writers and Hollywood (1910-1949)

Suzanne Mpouli

I am on my KNEES: TikTok as a New Site of Female Sexual Desire

Nicola Welsh-Burke

abstracts



Sensory Discrimination: Gender, 'Race,' Flavor and Feelings in Nalini Singh's Psy-Changeling Novels

Kecia Ali

In the Psy-Changeling paranormal romance series (2006—) by Nalini Singh, food—in particular, its sensory impacts on diverse individuals—functions to delineate categories, demonstrate character, and mark boundaries of gender, “race,” and communal identity. In Singh’s fictional universe, ordinary humans coexist with changelings and the powerful but emotionally stunted psychic Psy. Singh focuses on interactions—and often romances—between Changelings and Psy, and in doing so explores their radically different approaches to sensory experience, especially touch and taste.

The Silence Protocol, which has long governed the Psy, required them to abstain from all unnecessary touching, including sexual contact, and to subsist on flavorless nutrient bars and drinks. At the outset of the series, these are individual issues, dealt with at an individual level (*Slave to Sensation* [2006]). But as the Psy discover that Silence has fostered corruption among their leaders and degraded the psychic network on which they all depend, they learn that to survive and thrive, they must reintegrate emotion and interact on a more equal basis with humans and changelings. The second arc of the series, beginning with *Silver Silence* (2017), still reflects an individual journey for its Psy protagonist and her changeling paramour—but the social ramifications of dietary needs and choices come to the fore. Issue of tastes, flavor, and enjoyment hinge on cultural associations that conjoin food, sensuality, and pleasure—and treats overcoming sensory sensitivities around food, especially strong flavors and spice, as a marker of emotional growth and maturity, marking the Psy in question as capable—and perhaps worthy—of feeling, connection, and love.

Visualizing Romancelandia

Alexis Boylan

For the past decade, there has been two distinctly contradictory narratives about sex, bodies, and the visual. The first is that the sex scene---cinematic, painted, photographed---is disappearing. The second narrative is that what sex is being had and seen has been detrimentally and pathologically twisted due to impact of pornography. What both sides seem to agree on is that we are seeing bad sex, the visual is the “problem,” and we all suffer for this visual lacuna/overload.

Much of the root of both these arguments is born out of what Judith Butler terms “restoration” thinking; a deeply regressive political impulse that distorts the potential for a radicalized future. Instead, I want to suggest a new way to imagine both the potential of visual culture and the potential of investing in the idea of pleasure rooted in the visual world that is being produced to sustain and enhance Romancelandia. While certainly still reflecting dominant and repressive ideas about race, gender, and bodies, what I want to highlight is how romance spaces have opened a new visual economy that shifts power and expectations. How the images of Romancelandia are made, distributed, displayed, and used, suggest spaces of radical potential.

Perfumed prose: scent, space, and characterisation in romance fiction

Ellen Carter

This romance fiction corpus study explores how a main character (MC) labels the smell of their desired other and how these descriptors can transport characters and readers to imagined places.

From 750 descriptions of an MC's smell found in 650 romance novels, I identified 250 smell-related adjectives. I mapped these adjectives onto Michael Edwards' 'Fragrance Wheel', a tool used in the perfume industry to articulate the relationship between innate fragrance preferences and 14 fragrance families grouped into four categories: floral, oriental, woody, and fresh. Analysing the frequency distribution of the smell-linked adjectives from romance novels showed overlap between real-world gender-based fragrance preferences and those of the imaginary romance space. I extended this exploration to compare smell descriptors applied to MCs in mainstream contemporary MF romance novels with those in other sub-genres, including FF, MM, erotic, clean, BBW/BBM, and historical romance.

Such recurring scent tropes not only build characterisation and evoke emotional responses in MCs and readers alike but also encode information about physical places primed for romance. Depending on the MC's (and author's) predilections, these can range from intimate spaces redolent of whisky, leather, or clean linen, to the great outdoors of flower-filled meadows, sunshine, cedar, and sea-spray.

I remembered that the real world was wide, and that a varied field of hopes and fears, of sensations and excitements awaited those who had the courage to go forth into its expanse': reading the erotic landscape in the writing of the Brontës and their subsequent collaborators

Lucy Sheerman

As children in Haworth the Brontës populated the moors that surrounded them with protagonists who became the most iconic romantic figures in history, arguably forging the romance novel as we currently know it in the process. Angria, the fantasy world they created, was a complex imaginary kingdom mapped directly onto the coast of West Africa, although its landscape remains one of bleak moorland. These stories are the subject of a major new commission, celebrating Bradford's status as 2025 UK City of Culture, for fantasy writers from Bradford and Ghana.

In my paper I will outline the way in which the Brontës write the moors as the location and catalyst for romantic encounters and the expression and manifestation of desire. Regardless of where in the world the protagonists might actually be, the moors are always the location in which desire, self-expression, romantic attachment and freedom exist.

Finally, I want to consider the physical experience of the moors which, while they remain hostile and remote, are signposted in both English and Japanese, such is the power of attraction for literary tourists from Japan. The moors are a site of international pilgrimage to encounter scenes imagined by the Brontës while walking there. Referencing contemporary versions of Bronte scenes set on these moors, such as the new City of Culture commissions, I will describe their function as a backdrop for fantasies which transcend the hyperlocal environment and lived experience of the Brontës, creating a portal to a transnational space of erotic imagination.

Companionate Marriage': How the 'Queens of Crime' used Romance in Detective Fiction to Challenge Women's Inequality in Marriage

Kelly Thomson

In this paper, I argue that, like writers of popular romance during the interwar years (O'Brien, 2022; Smith, 2022), women writers of detective fiction also used romance in their novels to engage in contemporary debates around women's equality, particularly through their depictions of the new "companionate" model of marriage. While readers of popular romance were women, it was generally accepted that readers of detective fiction were primarily men (Bogen, 2008). When Christie was writing her first novel in 1916, she said: "at that period detective stories always had to have a love interest" (Christie, 1977 259). Through a close reading of the early novels of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, I consider the subversive potential of their novels in promoting reflexivity among male readers about marriage. Christie's first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* centers on the marriage between a wealthy older woman and her decision to marry a man over fifteen years younger with no money or prospects. The novel inverts the unequal relations between men and women within the typical patriarchal marriage, situating the woman in the dominant role and the man as subservient. Her second novel *The Secret Adversary* presents a young couple in a budding romantic relationship predicated on equal partnership at work and later as husband and wife, the epitome of the "companionate marriage". Both of Sayers' first two novels vividly depict domestic abuse in marriage as well as women prevented from marrying the man of their choice by their male guardian. I suggest that despite the critiques of their work as conservative and uninterested in social change, both women meaningfully engaged their readers in exploring the violence of patriarchy in marriage as well as the novel idea of "companionate" marriages promoted by first wave feminists.

Idealized landscapes, spaces, and places of romance in urban India

Meghna Bohidar

In this presentation, I discuss how idealized romantic landscapes and places are conceptualized in the narratives of young, heterosexual couples in Delhi. Borrowing from Eva Illouz's theory of the 'romantic pastoral utopia', I show how topographies such as fields, beaches, mountains, and so on, are experienced as transcendental. Illouz demonstrates how these spaces, though constructed as the antithesis of capitalism, are deployed by media and tourism industries to generate a romantic imaginary. In the Indian context, the desire for such landscapes also translates into a nostalgic valorization of the village, constructed in virtuous opposition to morally corrupt cities. Ironically, romance is fashioned as 'away from the city' even as it is largely possible only in 'away-from-home', anonymous urban spaces, free from the gaze of the patriarchal, traditional family. Using themes of beauty, nostalgia and modernity, I discuss how participants across class, caste and gender imagine utopian romantic spaces in the city. I find that both parks and malls are viewed as a 'refuge from the city', albeit for different reasons. While parks are seen as a temporary escape from the concrete jungle, malls generate a sense of 'timelessness' through a round-the-clock well-lit built environment, free of dirt and pollution. Both are spaces of beauty – one, natural and nostalgic, and the other, the epitome of modernity and progress. This mapping of romantic places allows us to capture the essence of romantic practice and the struggle for straddling the traditional/local alongside the modern/global in the contemporary Indian context.

Something to Write Home About: Titles, genre, and the word 'home'

Kate Cuthbert

In his ground-breaking work, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Yi-Fu Tuan touches on the notion of home, writing that the hometown is intimate, familiar, unobtrusive. Gaston Bachelard refers to a house as 'our corner of the world...it is our first universe', the 'nest for daydreaming, a shelter for imagining' and a keeper of our memories. In romance fiction, home becomes more than a town, a nest, a physical place. Instead, it occupies an emotional space, something that Sandra Schwab notes 'stands for the protagonists' love for each other and for a new harmony in their relationship'. For romance readers (and other citizens of Romancelandia) the word home carries deep generic promise: that the protagonists will find not only a physical place of belonging, but also an emotional place through the establishment of a long-term, loving romantic relationship.

It is not surprise, then, that word-based romantic paratexts make strong use of the word 'home' to attract readers, provide generic information, and transmit the inherent emotional promise necessary to the romance genre. This paper will explore the use of 'home' in romance novel titles, covering a brief history of home as a region in romance novels, and a distant analysis of titles incorporating the word 'home', including a discussion on the emotional resonance of titles, trends and timelines, and the different ways that sub-genres incorporate the promise inherent in the word 'home' while broadcasting the unique plot elements, characters, or settings within their expected story scaffolding.

Looking For a Good Home: The Textual Domain of South Asian Diasporic Romance Novels

Sreepurna Datta

Part of a larger project which applies Kim Wilkins, Beth Driscoll and Lisa Fletcher's "genre worlds" to study South Asian diasporic romance novels, this paper closely examines the textual domain of this category of works. I demonstrate how South Asian diasporic romance fiction (SADRf) sits in the contact zone between genre romance and South Asian diasporic fiction. SADRf works such as Sonali Dev's *A Bollywood Affair* (2014), Sandhya Menon's *When Dimple Met Rishi* (2017), and Nisha Sharma's *Dating Dr. Dil* (2022) emerged as an identifiable category in the 2010s, at a time that marked a rise in multicultural works in the genre as a whole. Following romance genre traditions, these narratives move towards the happily-ever-after ending, but they are also infused with specifically transnational, diasporic and multicultural concerns. This paper shows how SADRf breaks away from what Jayashree Kamblé identifies as the "cultural monoglossia" of earlier eras in romance, while still retaining the general anglophone romance novel structure and subscribing to the genre's rules. For this presentation, I closely analyze Sophia Singh Sasson's *First Comes Marriage* (2016), published by Harlequin Mills & Boon in the Heartwarming line. The paper discusses the diasporic anxieties and intense geographical movements within the narrative, which strengthen the romance novel imperative of rootlessness, and initially destabilize the idea of home. This destabilization is only resolved when the two characters are able to find their conjoined home within each other. I argue that not only is the romance narrative in general built around the act of finding a 'home' in the form of another person, but in SADRf this act is dramatized further by adding a second metaphor of the diasporic struggle to find a geographical and cultural home. This paper aims to understand the implications of such a dramatization in relation to the romance genre and contemporary book culture practices.

Love in the Emergency Room: Romance in Hospital Narratives

Kristen Loutensock

In this paper, I examine the prominence of romance plots across representations of the hospital in American popular culture, ranging from the serial film series Dr. Kildare to the contemporary television drama The Good Doctor. While the prevalence of romance in medical fiction is often seen as connected more broadly to melodrama, I argue that these romance plots do something more, connecting medical fiction more broadly to heteroablentionalism. The disabled bodies in medical fiction are recuperated into capitalism and reproduction via romance, yet this romance also opens up a space to consider how medical fiction troubles the notion of the bounded, stable, individual bodies. Hospitals operate as spaces where bodies are tended to and dependent, where needs and desires are bodily and immediate. Romance funnels this into a more acceptable form yet also reminds us that sex and romance are also examples of interdependency, fragility, and care.

Erin Doom's *The Tearsmith*: A Case Study on the Transnational Circulation of Romance

Francesca Pierini

This presentation analyses the transnational movement of romantic tropes from Anglo-America to Italy. It does so through a discussion of (*Il Fabbicante di Lacrime*) *The Tearsmith*, Erin Doom's extraordinarily successful novel published in 2021. The book is in the process of being translated from Italian into multiple languages, while a Netflix TV series is in preparation. Set in a small Minnesotan town, the story has Nica as its protagonist, a young girl living in an orphanage. Nica's path becomes closely intertwined with Rigel's, a charming and mysterious boy who gets adopted by Nica's same family. The text unmistakably refers to the Anglophone (Gothic) literary tradition, with visibly detectable references to classic works of literature such as Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847).

The presentation begins with an investigation of the notion of "postmodern pastiche" (Hoesterey, 2001) to continue with Bartens and Fokkema's examination of the global travel of postmodern writing. This approach, very much focused on the spatialization of cultural tropes, acknowledges the complexity and speed of today's cultural trajectories converging in a "workable poetics" (1997: 303) adaptable to multiple locales. It will be argued that the narrative element at the core of this specific instance of such poetics is the "Cinderella theme" (Huang, 1990) interconnecting Doom's novel to the classic works of Anglophone literature mentioned above. It will be shown that such theme is strategically employed to reshape and recast, within a contemporary globalized setting, the idealized outcomes of fairy tales and romance novels.

Revisiting the Border: Chicanx and Hispanic Spaces in the 1980s Wave of American Category Romance

Jayashree Kamblé

In the first crop of category romances that Black editor Vivian Stephens acquired in 1980-81 for Dell Candlelight Ecstasy Romance and Harlequin American are novels written by and centering people of color, including Chicanx and Latinx protagonists. Stephens wanted to portray American ethnic diversity—diversity that would draw on the author's own ethnic heritage. She also wanted authors to romanticize U.S. locales, reasoning that proximity would make the regional settings more relatable to the American reader.

One of the authors she signed was Marisa de Zavala. De Zavala's work drew on her Mexican-American background and family roots in Texas. Her novel *Golden Fire, Silver Ice* is set in San Antonio and the cast of characters is Chicanx. Similarly, Frances Flores's *Desperate Longings* is set in a Mexican-American community in Los Angeles, and has Hispanic characters. Additionally, De Zavala wrote under the pen name Ana Lisa De Leon for the Harlequin American romance line, likely also under Stephens' brief editorial stewardship of that imprint. That novel, *Kiss Goodnight and Say Good-bye*, is set in New Mexico, evokes its Mexican history, and also references the indigenous community who are the traditional stewards of the land.

This presentation surveys the characters, settings, and conversations in these novels in order to broaden the scholarly record on category romance. It also places them in a moment when the U.S. Mexico border and identity appears as a point of contact and continuity—the hyphen in “Mexican-American”—rather than one of political, geographic, and cultural separation.

Queerly Beloved: Queering the Happily Ever After in popular historical romance

Justina Ashman

This paper examines the optimistic ending of the romance novel—the Happily Ever After or HEA—that is considered definitional by influential popular romance critics and institutions (Regis, 2003; Roach, 2016; RWA, n.d.). Using Cat Sebastian’s M/M Regency romance series *Seducing the Sedgwicks* as a case study, I explore the role and function of the HEA in queer historical romance and the importance of finding queer joy in oppressive pasts. I unpack the role of the traditional HEA as defined by Pamela Regis’s eight essential elements (particularly in relation to marriage and procreation) and argue that this approach to the HEA in queer historical romance constitutes an example of Lisa Duggan’s notion of ‘homonormativity’ in its attempt to assimilate queer relationships into a heteronormative romantic ideology. I also discuss the limitations of Catherine Roach’s assertion of the HEA as a feminist ‘reparation fantasy’ (2016) in its heteronormative conception of relationships and gender. I argue that both Regis’s and Roach’s versions of the HEA are based on an individualistic happiness achieved through heterosexual love and propose that a queered HEA finds happiness in community and collectivism.

What Ever Happened to Paranormal Romance? The 2010s and 2020s

Maria Ramos-Garcia

During the first decade of the 21st century, paranormal romance (as well as urban fantasy written by women) took off in North America, and later extended to the English-speaking world and beyond. Both genres became best-sellers, and many of the most successful series of both young and adult paranormal made the transition to television and movie theaters, with varying levels of success. This rise of the paranormal seemed to peak around 2013, and by 2014 Joseph Crawford was announcing its demise. It was around this time when a marked tendency towards imaginary worlds (i.e. what is usually called "high" fantasy) instead of realistic settings began in young adult paranormal and paranormal romance. Even well-established series turned more towards the fantastic, paying less and less attention to their realistic settings and emphasizing their fantastic nature. However, even a decade after Crawford's announcement, paranormal romance is still alive and well, albeit not as prominent or visible as in its 2000s boom period. This paper will attempt a preliminary literary history of the paranormal romance in the last decade and change, discussing the evolution in ongoing series, as well as trends arising from new series by new authors.

Redemption Love Songs: How Romance Takes On Decolonization

Carole V Bell

What does emancipation look like in a postcolonial love story? This paper will explore the concept of decolonization as liberation and the narrative strategies romance writers from the global south use to express this within the bounds of the mainstream romance genre— both independent and traditionally published. From her 2019 debut novel *American Dreamer* on, Adriana Herrera (Dominican Republic) has made ideas about race, sex and gender inclusivity in the United States a central facet of her romances. But her late nineteenth century *Las Leonas* series is set in Europe and arguably more explicitly part of a rising postcolonial and decolonial project. Other writers like Aminat Sanni-Kamal (Nigeria), Sarah Dass (Trinidad and Tobago) and Amita Murray (India and England) wrestle with similar ideas in their works. Sometimes life outside of the metropole is a part of that and sometimes not. Decolonization can be a mental process more than one defined by geography as some of these writers and their characters have roots in the Global South but live as expats in the United States and the United Kingdom. This paper will explore how the idea of decolonization has emerged as a liberatory psychological, cultural and material goal in popular romance of the last ten years.

Connection to Country in Indigenous Romantic Comedy Novels

Melanie Saward

Indigenous literature often emphasises the profound relationship between characters and their Ancestral lands. Though it is an obvious inclusion in literary novels, romantic comedy writers also weave connection to Country into their stories. By analysing works from contemporary Indigenous authors such as Anita Heiss (*Meeting Mr Right*, *Not Meeting Mr Right*, *Manhattan Dreaming*, *Paris Dreaming*, and *Red Dust Running*), Colby Wilkens (*If I Stopped Haunting You*), Danica Nava (*The Truth According to Ember*), Dani Trujillo (*Lizards Hold the Sun* and *When Stars Have Teeth*), and my book *Love Unleashed*, this study highlights how these novels entertain and educate readers about the cultural significance of Country. My research employs textual analysis to explore how Indigenous authors address characters' connection to Country and its significance in their stories. For example, in Anita Heiss's *Manhattan Dreaming* and *Paris Dreaming*, travel away from Country is used to emphasise characters' connection to their culture. These novels offer a unique perspective on contemporary Indigenous connection to Country, highlighting how this connection shapes characters' identities and relationships within the romantic comedy narrative. This paper argues that integrating Country into romantic plotlines enriches the genre, providing depth and authenticity to characters' experiences. It also examines humour's role in fostering understanding of Indigenous worldviews. Commercial fiction like romantic comedy provides a vital vehicle for empathy, reaching a wide audience and teaching non-Indigenous readers about the integral role of Country in every Indigenous person's life.

Love in the Time of Dictatorship and Revolution

Jonathan Allan

Romance novels are known for their “happily ever after” endings, where all things seem to work out for the good; however, such a novel seemingly depends on cultural and political stability. This understanding aligns with Frye’s theories of romance, wherein romances not only involve the couple finding love and conclusion but also restore society. In this paper, I am interested in exploring Latin American fiction that delves into the themes and structure of romance, but does so against the backdrop of politically unstable times. To this end, I review the Latin American romance as a genre, drawing heavily on Doris Sommer’s *Foundational Fictions*, and then move on to consider novels that explore romance (love) and dictatorship. Is there room for love in politically unstable times? In this paper, I consider Marmol’s *Amalia*, wherein the romance unfolds in the age of Juan Manuel de Rosas, and a contemporary novel, *Loving Che* by Ana Menendez, which explores a tempestuous yet passionate affair between the narrator’s mother and Ernesto Che Guevara. What does it mean, then, not only to fall in love during a revolution but also with a revolutionary? Opinions about Che Guevara may be disparate, and some may see him as a hero, while others as a villain. I argue that through the lens of romance, we can begin to complicate ideas not only about who can be loved but also what love means in revolutionary and dictatorial times.

Romance Skin: Escape, Space, and Desire in Reading Communities

Javaria Farooqui

The embodied experiences of readers in the spaces of genre retail shape their understanding of romance in their everyday lives. Utilizing the case study of Pakistani leisure reading communities of Anglophone and Urdu romance fiction, this study explores the relationship between romance genre retail spaces and readers' sensory perception, tactile engagements, and formation of subjective sexual desires. My study combines the theorization on 'skin', primarily through Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey's concept of 'Thinking Through the Skin,' with the discourse on escapism in popular romance studies, to argue that readers develop 'romance skins' that scaffold their everyday existence. Ahmed and Stacey link writing and skin by looking at them as processes that engage both with material reality and symbolic meaning. We 'skin ourselves into being' with writing and the skin acts as a readable text that can be interpreted according to shifting contexts. Extending the theorization of skin to my study of romance reading practices in Pakistan, which are inextricably connected to the materiality and signification of physical spaces, I maintain that the escapism offered by the romance genre is a nuanced inward journey in which the readers skin themselves into being. Field observations and individual interviews show that sexuality and gender is constructed, challenged, and reimaged for the Pakistani romance readers when they navigate the genre retail spaces. The concept of 'romance skin' not only facilitates an analysis of Pakistani readers' responses to descriptions of sexual intimacy in their preferred novels, and their commentary on the relationship between their sexual selves and the retail spaces of genre romance, but also aims to provide theoretical insights that can be applied to deepen our understanding of romance reading communities and retail spaces across diverse cultural contexts.

Shaking up Stereotypes: The Turkish Translation of a Harlequin Sheikh Romance

Heather Schell and Derin Ozkan

During its 3-year existence, the Istanbul office of Harlequin Enterprises (HQN) translated and published a single sheik romance, Sharon Kendrick's 2011 *Monarch of the Sands* (Özgür ve Güzel). Of the various subgenres of Anglosphere popular romance, the sheikh romance seems least likely to appeal to a readership in the Middle East. In fact, the novel's translator, Zeynip Arda (a pen name), mentioned in an interview that she despised this novel, particularly for what she saw as its apologist approach towards state-mandated modest dress. She also admitted to adding new material to another romance she was assigned to translate. Such opportunities for rewriting were facilitated by Harlequin Türkiye's small staff, who provided minimal supervision—only the translators ever read the novels in English. Harlequin Enterprises outsources international translation and distribution to national affiliates, relying on "glocalization" to bridge the gap between its Anglosphere romance novels and local preferences. However, rather than simply easing cultural transitions, loose translation practices may instead invite translators to make substantive modifications with confidence that such rewriting will remain invisible to editors and readers. This project examines how Zeynip Arda's redactions, additions and other revisions as an intervention in a culturally problematic text. We can read Zeynip Arda's translation as her commentary on both the original novel and the subgenre. This study will explore how a well-educated, politically liberal Muslim woman rewrote the subgenre for women like herself.

She Lived for Him: Adapting Intimacy and Love for Arabic Readers

Nusaiba Imady

Between 1980 and 1990, Harlequin (Cyprus) Limited distributed Arabic translations of Harlequin romances under the imprint Abir and later its sister imprint Aḥlām, bringing popular romance fiction to Arabic-reading audiences.

In a comparative analysis of Violet Winspear's *Love's Prisoner* (1964) and its Arabic translation *She Lived for Him* (ʿāshat lahu), the inaugural publication of the Abir imprint in 1982, I explore how expressions of love and intimacy are adapted, transformed, and censored in translation.

Through a comparative close reading, I further examine the reported 10–15% content reduction in the translation, questioning whether the omissions result from censorship of sexual and intimate themes or, as is the official claim, the removal of culturally specific references that might not resonate with Arabic-language readers. As societal norms and values shape the portrayal of love and romance, a poignant aspect of this study is situating *She Lived for Him* within the context of the Arabic literary tradition. While Arabic literature is rich in tales of love and tragedy, genre-compliant romance novels with happily-ever-after (HEA) endings are rare.

Ultimately, my paper seeks to provide insight into the complex process of translating not just language but also emotion and cultural perception. I shed light on how concepts of love and intimacy are reinterpreted, offering a deeper understanding of the interplay between language, culture, and the universal themes within romance literature.

Genre-Bending Love: Adaptation and the Fusion of Romance in Julia Quinn's Bridgerton Series

Mehvish Nawreen

This paper explores the Adaptation and Romance Across Genres theme in Julia Quinn's Bridgerton series, how the novels and adaptation on Netflix combine historical romance with modern cultural themes to make a unique example of genre-bending. The original novels, set in Regency-era London and following standard tropes of romance, become reimaged through modern concepts of gender, race, and sexuality. The methodology shall employ a comparative analysis of the two, novels and the series, comparing, in particular, the manner in which the romantic relationships, social hierarchies and cultural norms found within the original text have been reinterpreted and reinvented in the television series. This is based on genre theory and adaptation studies, more precisely, as described by Linda Hutcheon (2006), who claims that adaptations are not just translations but creative re-imaginings working on current issues. This paper investigates how such adaptations push the limits of the genre with diverse characters and social settings yet retain the basic essence of romance. By combining the historical with the contemporary, Bridgerton breaks genre conventions and offers a fresh perspective on romance that challenges traditional norms and appeals to modern sensibilities. Intellectual significance lies in demonstrating how adaptation allows the evolution of romance narratives, which makes them relevant to the contemporary audience without losing foundational appeal. It will also contribute to the discourse in regards to how genre boundaries may shift across mediums, hence providing a nuanced understanding as to how romance could be adapted and redefined.

Hoarding in Survival Fantasy: Chinese Women's Affective Labor in Web Novel Platforms During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Yansha He

Accompanied by China's stringent zero-COVID policy and government intervention on panic buying during the COVID-19 pandemic, tunhuo 囤货 (hoarding) flows from real space to fictional space, prevailing as a trope in Chinese women's survival-themed web novels on Jinjiang Literature City, a major Chinese female-oriented platform for producing and consuming web novels. In a typical tunhuo novel, the heroine seizes the opportunity to hoard all kinds of survival necessities and utilizes them to encounter diverse crises such as extreme weather and zombies, building an orderly life in the disordered apocalypse. Most tunhuo novels still belong to the big romance genre. However, in terms of affective narration, romantic love becomes relatively marginal compared with fear and uncertainty in this specific subgenre.

Through text and discourse analysis of several popular tunhuo novels on Jinjiang Literature City and reader-reader/author-reader communication in the comment section, this study argues that the popularity of tunhuo novels reflects Chinese women's affective labor in contemporary Chinese web novel platforms in two aspects: first, Chinese women exert sensitivity and creativity to stitch the quotidian affects and desires during the crisis into the fabric of survival fantasy to escape from and negotiate with reality; second, they create a shared affective virtual community to resist the isolated pandemic life in a period with limited physical interactions. This study expands the existing research on Chinese popular romance by illuminating the non-romantic affective aspects and the potential momentum to go through contemporary crises hidden in women's affective labor.

Romance in a post-FOSTA-SESTA world: Platform governance, romance fiction and imaginaries of 'adult' material

Claire Parnell

In 2018, the U.S. Congress passed FOSTA (Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act) and SESTA (Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act), which made online service providers liable for illegal sexual acts and material for the first time. Despite the intent, these laws have had a significant impact on how platforms moderate and govern all forms of sexually explicit material online; content such as sex education materials, art, literature and LGBTQ+ community resources are caught up in processes of overblocking. The impacts of FOSTA-SESTA show that while platforms may facilitate the transnational circulation of romance to a degree never seen before, they are heavily influenced by governance frameworks of particular political regions. This paper considers the global impacts of FOSTA-SESTA and other regional governance frameworks on the visibility and circulation of romance fiction online. Through case studies, digital walkthroughs, gray literature and in-depth interviews, it explores the moderation of romance fiction and erotica and the “imaginaries” (Bucher, 2018) of these frameworks and systems held by self-published authors; that is, how they understand moderation systems to work and how they position themselves in relation to them. Preliminary findings show: romance fiction and erotica are being caught up in the deplatformisation of sex; authors’ platform imaginaries can impact on cover design, keyword choices, use or avoidance of particular words or phrases in titles and descriptions, and the length they write; and a general understanding that LGBTQ+ titles face a higher risk of suppression and banning across platforms.

It Takes a Village to Write One Direction Fanfiction: Authorship in the Digital Age

Lucy Rouse

Authorship is inevitably changing in our increasingly digital literary world. Where the author used to be the nucleus of the novel, authorship is being divided across many actors, making it increasingly difficult to ascribe sole ownership of a text. In this paper, I use Anna Todd's *After* series as a case study to argue that the "region" and boundaries of the author are more flexible in an age of social reading practices. As a series that originated online, ex-One Direction fanfiction, *After* has experienced many iterations in its journey from one woman's passion project to transmedia empire.

I argue that the role of the author, and the boundaries of this role, have become dispersed over Todd's journey, as she shares her authorship with her fans, muses, editors, and other transmedia actors. From this case study, I propose that contemporary, genre fiction has been complicated by increasing reader and industry interactivity, enabled by digital media such as self-publication platforms (Wattpad, Amazon) and powerful marketing tools (BookTok, Goodreads). Furthermore, I suggest that social media has streamlined the interactivity of texts: an author is only a message away, and readers can publicly respond to, adapt, or 'meme' fiction, actively changing the transmedia landscape of the primary text. Using Driscoll, Fletcher, and Williams' Genre World's model, as well as Rita Felski's understandings of Affect and Actor Network Theory, I posit that this interactivity blurs the lines between author and reader, imposing chaos on the space or "region" of authorship.

He's My Oppastar! Exploring Korean-Japanese Fantasies in Contemporary Philippine Romantic Culture

Thomas Baudinette

Recent years have witnessed an explosion in fandom for both Japanese and Korean media in the Philippines, with the consumption of Japanese manga and anime and Korean pop music and television dramas increasingly impacting how Filipinos conceptualize gender and sexuality. In this presentation, drawing upon my work exploring the “fantasy work” of Philippine fans of Japanese and Korean media, I explore the impacts of Japanese-Korean fantasies on notions of romance. Through a close reading of *He's My Oppastar*, a “mangaserye” released by ABS-CBN publishing in 2017 that “stars” former Pinoy Big Brother contestants Maymay Entrata and Edward Barber, I investigate how this comic extends the Philippine convention of the “love team.” I reveal how *He's My Oppastar* draws upon the aesthetic and generic conventions of Japanese manga and Korean dramas to generate the Filipino romantic affect known as kilig, thus uniting the worlds of Philippine celebrity culture to Japanese and Korean media fandom and their fantasies to the Philippine context. I then place *He's My Oppastar* in dialogue with both my current ethnographic work exploring the penetration of Japanese and Korean media into contemporary Philippine consumer culture and my interviews with over 50 Filipino fans of Japanese and Korean media between 2019 and 2023. I argue that fantasies of Japan and Korea are not “colonizing” Philippine romantic culture but are instead producing new romantic and sexual longings grounded in inter-Asian affective entanglements which are unleashing the potential for kilig to act as a decolonial force in contemporary Philippine culture.

The Filipino Romantic Imagination and Teleserye 'Love Teams'

Louie Jon A Sánchez

Filipino scholarship, via the critic Soledad S. Reyes (1991), has comprehensively explored romance as a mode, popular in orientation and heavily reliant on “formulas and stereotypes...which (are) characterized by a refusal to be judged according to strict correspondence with reality,” or realism, that other pervasive and often valorized literary mode in the Philippine postcolony. This study re-evaluates Reyes’ pioneering work on the romance mode in Philippine literature and extends her assumptions on what may be called the “Filipino romantic imagination.” The study examines manifestations of romance in its most popular vehicle in contemporary times, the teleserye [“tele” for television and “serye” for series], or the televisual drama series. More specifically, this study looks at the TV format’s most important element, the locally termed “love teams” or the romantic pair of actors headlining serial narratives. With the cultural history of the teleserye as basis, the study will establish the formations, features, and functions of teleserye love teams and offer insights as to how they, on the one hand, help discourse, circulate, and disseminate ideas and insights on the Filipino romantic imagination, and on the other, perpetuate the Filipino romance mode’s “telling commentary on the world we know,” as articulated by Reyes.

Imagining Queer Romances in Contemporary Philippine Comics

Kristine Michelle L Santos

This study explores the evolving role of romance in Philippine comics, focusing on the emergence and localization of Boys Love (BL) and Girls Love (GL) genres. Romance has long been a fixture in Philippine literature, including comics, yet it has often been dismissed due to its association with popular culture and women's consumption. During the Golden Age of Philippine comics, romance narratives—though largely heteronormative—gained popularity and inspired radio and television dramas. However, as the comics industry declined in the 2000s, their narratives shifted towards cultural and nationalist themes, with romance becoming less prominent. Recently, global trends in BL and GL have revived interest in romance within Philippine comics. This research examines anthology works published by Komiket (e.g., *Thirsty*, *Gigil*, *Alapaap*, *Rurok*), select webtoons (*Sari-sari Story*, *Ang Jowa kong Crosswise*), and titles by popular creators such as Dead Balagtas and Tomo I. By analyzing these comics, the study aims to understand how contemporary creators both embrace and challenge traditional romance tropes, highlighting the affective narrative and visual elements that BL and GL narratives foster among Filipino audiences. This work contributes to a critical understanding of the BL and GL genres within and outside of Philippine romantic literature, illuminating how local creators adapt and reinterpret these genres in ways that enrich Philippine and global notions of queer romance.

SUS 6INOO!: Kilig in P-Pop Idol Boy Band ALAMAT's Boyfriend POVs

Andrea Anne I Trinidad

Imagining a male idol as a 'boyfriend' is a facet of the fan experience, with fan activities underscoring this tendency. It is quite common to find photos taken by fans with their beloved idols' photocard, mimicking quality time with a romantic partner. Though many other fan activities treat idols as imaginary boyfriends, fans recognize the fantasy's fleeting nature, summed up by the playful slogan, "delulu is the only solulu," which guides moments of play and transformation within the fandom. At times, the portrayal of idols as 'boyfriends' shifts from fans to the idols themselves. Members of ALAMAT, a P-pop boy group, for example, curate photos and host spontaneous live sessions on TikTok or Instagram to present themselves as potential 'boyfriends.' Besides evoking surprise—conveyed by the Filipino expression "'Sus 6inoo!," a contraction of "Hesus Ginoo!" ("Jesus Christ!") with the number '6' representing the group's six members—these offerings from the idol, known as boyfriend POVs (points of view), easily generate kilig, a Filipino term for romantic elation. Focusing on kilig, this presentation suggests that ALAMAT's comfort in initiating romantic feelings through online engagement stems from their uniqueness as a multiethnic, multilingual band formed during the pandemic. With members hailing from various regions across the country, these idols are accustomed to building relationships through screens. Meanwhile, for fans whose regional affiliations with their biases create distinct factions within the fandom, these boyfriend POVs foster a shared appreciation of a member, temporarily collapsing 'imaginary' borders through the kilig they evoke.

Queer Romance and Historical Accuracy in the Works of KJ Charles

Molly Winters

Alexander Moran posits that “genrefication (...) refers not only to a new type of writing but also to the sense that a different type of reading is required”; that in addition to being a political concept, genrefication “brings into focus an alternative tradition of literary history” (2018:230). KJ Charles is an author of queer historical romance, an increasingly popular subset of historical romances. Charles’s stories use realistic portrayals of 18-20th century England to guide her stories without compromising the inherent queerness of her characters, a refreshing contrast to the precedent set by previous queer historical romances that bend to heteronormativity or otherwise elide the realities of 18th-20th century life for queer peoples. This paper explores how Charles’s body of work depicts queer romance in a historical setting, how historical politics come into play, and how these contexts impact modern interpretations of her works. Using Moran’s notion that “the manner in which genres register a particular moment in time, and the period at which a person enters the genre (...) reflects the language, subjectivity (...) and historical context of the writer” (Moran 2018:234) and John Fiske’s idea that “one must (...) be attentive to bricolage— the adaptation or adoption of practices, symbols, objects, texts, into different contexts than their previous ones— and how in those different cultural settings their meanings are reworked and resignified” (Fiske and Hancock 2016:XV), this paper examines how historical texts written and read in a contemporary world allow for a provocative and profound exploration of romance.

Comic Medievalism, Christmas Carols, and Happy Endings in KJ Charles' 'Masters in This Hall'

Kristin Noone

Louise D'Arcens suggests that comic medievalism—the pop-culture medievalism that foregrounds pleasure, laughter, and affection, as opposed to the darkly grim and gritty—functions as a vehicle for commentary on the past in tandem with the present, expressing anxieties about social change and tolerance/intolerance. D'Arcens identifies three strands of comic medievalism: first, drawing attention to incongruities; second, puncturing narratives of superiority; and finally amelioration, involving the ability to laugh, to be relieved of burdens momentarily, and consequently to continue on despite those burdens. This approach emphasizes emotional investment and pleasurable experience; similarly, Tara Moore proposes that Victorian Christmas narratives instructed their audience in a newly-codified national ritual of space/time, in which nostalgia for an imagined medieval past became joined to newfound consumerism, and emotional reaction to holiday literature became a requisite performance. As Monika Markéta Šmídová argues, queer romance novels by nature question established social order, and KJ Charles' novels in particular work to queer traditional folklore; I suggest that KJ Charles' Victorian historical m/m romance Christmas novella "Masters in This Hall" (2022) employs all of D'Arcens' strands of comic medievalism—incongruity, social critique, and amelioration—to achieve the reparative, emotionally connected, future-oriented queer romance happy ending. "Masters in This Hall," through its Victorian medievalism, engages with constructed "Englishness," nostalgia, and conspicuous consumption to achieve that happy ending, as main characters John and Barnaby navigate a wealthy country-estate performance of "medieval" holiday customs, including carols, banquets, and games, alongside their own history, present dangers and desires, and potential future.

Reparative History and Reparative Reading in Alyssa Cole's An Unconditional Freedom

Sarah Ficke

Alyssa Cole's *Loyal League* trilogy, which is set during the American Civil War, participates in the work of reparative history by foregrounding Black freedom fighters and highlighting guerilla groups and organizations outside of the traditional Civil War narrative. The first two novels focus on interracial romantic relationships that model the power of allyship focused on Black-led and multiracial resistance movements. Throughout those stories, Cole uses the characters' musings about the future to encourage her readers to consider the progress America has made, and the repairs needed to address ongoing harm from its past. However, the third book in the series, *An Unconditional Freedom*, departs from that pattern. In her Author's Note, Cole describes how this book—written during the 2017-18 surge in anti-Black violence in America—seemed impossible to write: "what promise could I make a character like Daniel about America, knowing that in 2018 it had reverted back to everything he feared?" In this paper, I argue that Cole confronted that impossibility by engaging in not one, but two forms of reparative work. As in the previous books, she continues to address America's biased representations of slavery. However, through the hero Daniel's story, Cole also explores the kind of reparative work an individual might do to move through traumatic experiences towards happiness and love in a flawed world, a process that I analyze through the lens of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's framework of reparative reading.

Invading France, Invading the Body: Sarah Adlakha's Midnight on the Marne

Bonnie White

Sarah Adlakha's *Midnight on the Marne* (2022) is a work of historical fiction centered on the events of the Second Battle of the Marne in First World War France. Adlakha tells the story of Marcelle, a French spy, and George, an American soldier, who fall in love after she is brutally raped by the Germans, and he and his friend Philip rescue her and return her to her family home in Soissons. The novel, vacillating between 1991 and 1918, presents a counterfactual history where the Allies lose the war and France suffers under German and then Russian occupation. The novel employs time travel to restore readers to the correct timeline, but in doing so undoes the love story between the protagonists. Their story is ultimately tied to the tragedy of France's loss, which become concomitant with Marcelle's rape and torture, and George's death, but returning to the correct timeline results in victory for France, but the death of George's best friend Philip and the loss of his true love, Marcelle. Through the tale of a love story, *Midnight* transforms the geography of the First World War, including its landscapes and national/personal identities, by mapping geopolitical spaces onto the corporeal body as Marcelle's dual experience in two timelines represents her as either colonized by Germany or as wholly French. This paper explores the way that time and space (nations, families, and bodies) are reimagined through the choices of the protagonist and the profound practical and ethical implications of those choices.

My Entire House Feels New with Possibilities': The Ordinary Storyworld of the Young Adult Romance

Emma K McNamara

The young adult contemporary realistic romance (YACRR) genre is often set in ordinary spaces, like schools, hometowns, the transit between schools and homes, and during summer breaks from school. These texts provide a model for how to navigate the world for young people who are constantly facing new-to-them experiences. These settings are primarily chosen, however, because these are spaces known to young readers and thus they will feel better oriented to them. Ordinary storyworlds juxtapose the intense emotions and scenarios that teen and tween characters experience in YACRR. Acknowledging the ordinariness of adolescence/ts invites young readers into the narrative by allowing themselves to see their own neighborhoods and communities reflected back to them as well as providing the opportunity for the reader to easily place themselves as the protagonist. In this way, ordinary storyworlds contribute to the escapism that is inherent to genre fiction, and particularly to the romance genre. Most importantly, however, as both the adult romance genre and YACRR grapple with their relationship to diverse protagonists, and, refreshingly, begin to incorporate more and more protagonists who are not white and thin, ordinary storyworlds proffer safety to each protagonist despite their identities. Ordinary storyworlds are quietly reliable, stable spaces in which the love interests can learn, discover, and blossom. Using Carpan, Doermann, Kuznets and Zarin, Ryan, and Waller, this presentation contextualizes ordinary storyworlds in YACRR from the late C20 to present, and interrogates why the YACRR narrative foregrounds ordinary storyworlds, almost insinuating that the storyworld is a character itself.

Voting with their Wallets: Romance Reader Values' Potential Impact on Purchasing Behavior

Margaret Bates

Romance writing is a billion-dollar industry that comprises a significant percentage of publishing. This study used semi-structured interviews to determine which values were held by romance readers, and if these values influenced their book purchasing behavior. It looked through the lens of Rosenblatt's Reader-Response Theory to explain potential reasons why an aesthetic view of a text helps a reader bring their own perception to a literary work. Previous studies have shown that romance readers have used reading these works to help model behavior. In this qualitative study, three romance readers were asked a set of 11 interview questions, and their answers were assessed for themes using Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis. Commonalities were found in their responses, and six emergent themes were determined, including Enticing Packaging of romance books, Gender Roles, Transformation, Acceptance, Representation, and Current Political Climate, which overall described subthemes and values that were shared by the participants. Participants indicated that both non-value-based characteristics of books, such as aesthetics like book covers, as well as value-based aspects of books, like the theme of accepting others, contributed to readers' purchasing behavior. Overall, it was found that the readers were driven to buy books that represented aspects of themselves and were also dissuaded from buying books that supported values antithetical to their own. This study serves as a pilot to explore how values can drive purchasing behavior. However, more research should be done on a larger sample size with more diverse genders and subgenre reading preferences.

'I'm not gonna be a movie star, or a singer, or any of those things, but ... I could pretend': Escapism and the 1980s bonkbuster

Amy Burge and Jodi McAlister

It is a truism that part of the appeal of much genre fiction is escapism – a chance to “pretend” or to imagine a life other than your own, at least for a few chapters. Janice Radway’s 1980s study of romance readers was the basis for this view in popular romance studies – but what about the break-out bestselling genre of the 1980s – the bonkbuster? Marketed similarly, but generically and aesthetically distinct, the bonkbuster offers a similar escapism, with its exotic locations, glamorous clothing and interiors, and fantastical plot elements.

However, the bonkbuster often contains darker, more gritty, realist elements, such as rape, sexual assault, abuse, that readers would not typically find escapist in a romance novel. So, how escapist is a bonkbuster? And is this escapism enduring, when these texts are re-read decades later?

Drawing on focus groups and book clubs we conducted from 2022-2024 with people who were reading bonkbusters in the long 1980s we consider these questions, exploring the nature of bonkbuster escapism for readers and the extent to which escapism was balanced with lessons readers applied directly to their own lives. When re-visiting these texts in the twenty-first century, readers reflected differently on the escapism they had felt in the past, pointing to, we argue, the specificity of conditions that are required in order to access escapism in the experience of reading bonkbusters.

"Narcotelenovelas: melodrama para machos sensibles y heroínas audaces" / Narcotelenovelas: Melodrama for Sensitive Machos and Audacious Heroines

Ainhoa Vásquez Mejías

Narcotelenovelas, marked by their high dose of bullets and blood, have modified the classic melodrama while also preserving some of its traditional structures. Love, as a central element, plays a role in the trope of truncated romance and couples that must fight to stay together; however, gender formations have changed. Male protagonists are not heroes but violent men who search for power and money; although they are also sensitive, affectionate, faithful and good home owners. Women, on the other hand, are active, audacious and resolute. In contrast to classic telenovelas, in which the typical female subject was passive, these heroines are decisive. However, despite the aesthetic and narrative transformations of traditional melodrama, morality is a mainstay. Despite the violent context in which these stories take place, each and every one of them reflects upon good and evil in social and personal terms, with an ending that signals that whoever is evil cannot escape punishment.

Feral Femininity: FMC Shapeshifting and Animality

Hanna Hoorenman

Drawing on Dominic Pettman's *Creaturely Love: How Desire Makes Us More and Less Than Human* and Boria Sax' *The Serpent and the Swan: Animal Brides in Literature and Folklore*, this paper is part of a larger project in which I examine the dynamics of female transformations into animals including David Garnett's 1922 novella *Lady into Fox* and Rachel Yoder's 2021 *Nightbitch*. My paper specifically explores the question of animality in shape-shifting romance novels in which either the FMC or both FMC and MMC are (part) were-animals, with particular attention to Celia Kyle's *Bears of Grayslake* series and part 4 of Nalini Singh's *Psy/Changeling* series, *Mine to Possess*. I discuss the gendered implications of shifting, the species considerations of transformation and the dynamics of predation and physiological difference in inter-species were-relationships. Primarily, I ask what form of animality is explored in these paranormal romance novels, and in which ways these fantasies of 'becoming animal' speak to the humanimal that we are.

Soulmates and Scent Matches: Free Will and Gender in Alternate Universe Romance Fiction

Johanna Kluger

In 2021, the science fiction erotic romance series *Ice Planet Barbarians* (Ruby Dixon) experienced a surge of popularity on TikTok and jumped to the top of Amazon bestseller lists. The world-building in the series utilises a kind of biological soulmate phenomenon in order to facilitate an intergalactic, interspecies romance plot. Since the introduction of “Pon Farr,” essentially a phase of a reproductive cycle that leads to madness and even death if not satisfied by sexual intercourse, in *Star Trek: The Original Series*, variants of “mate or die” tropes like soulmate bonds or the omegaverse system have proliferated in transformative works, romance fiction, and erotica to invent alternate universes or social structures that enact a degree of force upon the protagonists, prioritising biological or spiritual compatibility to show that they are “meant to be.” In constructing these alternate social structures, these tropes emphasise some aspects of sexual and romantic relationships while downplaying or subverting others, and often comment on real-world issues such as reproductive health or gendered oppression. This paper investigates the origins and purposes of alternate and fantasy worlds for romance plots as well as their implications for social structures and relationship models, with specific attention to ideologies of consent, free will, and gender roles.

The writer-reader-page-place assemblage of Rebecca Yarros's *Fourth Wing* series (2023-)

Evdokia Valiou

A novel as a “spatial event” is an ongoing process operating on three levels: a) intra-textually in particular fictional geographies, be those a land of magic or an alien planet; b) inter-textually as connections between different texts and genres, such as the Smythe-Smith musicals in separate series by Julia Quinn; and c) extra-textually through a work's influence on real spaces, such as the *Bridgerton* tours running in London and the Jane Austen festival balls in Bath (Hones 2014; Anderson 2015). Novels are thus understood as relational: not independent, static things but as “writer-reader-page-and-place” assemblages which produce ephemeral (intra/inter/extra)textual geographies depending on readers' imagination and knowledge, the text, and the changing socio-economic environment (Anderson 2015: 126). This conference paper uses the spatial event and the writer-reader-page-space assemblage by literary geographers Sheila Hones and Jon Anderson to explore the geographies produced by Rebecca Yarros's *Fourth Wing* series. Since I (a romance fantasy reader, speculative romance PhD student and an immigrant) am necessarily part of the assemblage, the aim of the paper is not to propose what the text means in itself but to show, instead, how assemblage thinking can be applied systematically to frame the interpreter's inevitable entanglement in the work analyzed. I argue that the writer-reader-page-space assemblage I participate in produces and negotiates contested spaces in its textual geographies: in the fictional contested territories of Navarre, Poromiel and the Barrens; within the academic romance genre territory with the ‘invasion’ of romantasy; and in the context of real-life anti-immigrant discourse.

Marian Keyes' *This Charming Man*: An alcoholic love story

Maria Butler

Marian Keyes' *This Charming Man* (2008), marketed as a "chick lit" novel, is a multi-person narrative told from the perspective of four women: Lola, Alicia, and twins Grace and Marnie. Despite its colourful packaging and nod to chick lit tropes, its primary themes concern addiction, domestic violence and violence against women. This paper analyses how Keyes' depiction of alcoholic Marnie's descent into active addiction and her early steps towards recovery can be read as an unconventional love triangle between an alcoholic, alcohol, and AA. I argue this by demonstrating how Keyes subverts romance tropes to reframe Marnie's alcoholism as an abusive relationship between herself and alcohol and suggesting that Keyes' casts AA as Marnie's romantic endgame. In doing so, I propose that the promise of a Happily-Ever-After indicated by Keyes' integration of romance tropes and her chick lit genre positioning creates a fantasy space whereby Marnie's alcoholism will be cured by the end of the novel. This, in turn, enables a form of reparative reading which helps readers to reconcile the negative affects of fear, disgust, and shame elicited by addiction thereby facilitating a compassion-based approach towards those caught in its crosshairs.

Subject of Desire & Desire to be Subject: Beauvoir's Relationship of Ambiguity in Romance Novels

Matthew A Hoffman

At the end of *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir suggests that the solution to the problems she has been analyzing can possibly be found in heterosexual erotic relationships. On the existential analysis, the already-fraught recognition of others as Subjects becomes calcified under sexism. Woman becomes Other, existing as defined by men. Romantic relationships, Beauvoir thinks, provide a space for women and men to relate to each other as two equal subjects. The relationship becomes a dialectical process by which the woman's self-definition is recognized by, but not fixed by, the man's subjective view of her.

While Beauvoir hardly thinks this ideal is a common occurrence, it is exactly the kind of relationship we find in romance novels. I track this concept in both poly romances and in stories of unchosen relationships. Where characters are forced together by circumstances outside their control (especially where that involves magic or other compulsion), it might not look like the heroine's interpersonal self-concept is chosen by her. Yet, the story would not have a happy ending but for the characters being engaged in a process of mutual recognition, working out for themselves who they are to each other. In poly romances, the structure of the characters' relationship itself becomes the subject of their dialectic. In all these stories, romantic relationships are the space in which heroines can assert their subjecthood, dramatizing the possibility of interpersonal recognition even in a society that fails to acknowledge women as Subjects.

Why Choose, Must Choose: Juxtaposition of Fantasy and Reality in Doctor Odyssey (2024-2025)

Justina Clayburn

ABC's Doctor Odyssey is a medical drama set aboard a cruise ship, The Odyssey, starring Don Johnson as Captain Robert Massey, Joshua Jackson as Dr. Max Bankman, and Phillipa Soo and Sean Teale nurses Avery Morgan and Tristan Silva, respectively. Each episode revolves around the ship's theme of the week and places the main characters in new and exciting situations, both medically and romantically. The premise of the show establishes The Odyssey as a sort of floating Las Vegas, where what happens there, stays there. However, that very premise is immediately undercut by the nature of the medical emergencies the characters face; rarely can the medical conditions with which they diagnose the passengers stay on the ship once they have disembarked.

The same is true for the relationships between the three members of the medical staff. Their relationship is tense from the beginning both professionally, as Dr. Max's arrival disrupts the routines of the nurses who have served onboard for several seasons, and personally, as the sexual tension between Avery and both of her male coworkers is palpable to all aboard. When professional and personal boundaries are eventually crossed—between all three of them—the medical crew, as well as the passengers, may face reality encroaching on their workplace fantasy, challenging the entire premise, not only of the ship and show, but of the very idea of fantasy altogether.

'In the Gray': Making Space for Race in Dark Romance

Kim Manganelli

With a unique cocktail of titillation and trauma, the Dark Romance genre has grown in popularity in recent years with stories of imperilled white heroines being kidnapped, stalked, coerced, and assaulted by the “morally grey” male main character with whom they eventually fall in love and live happily ever after. Although some readers have questioned whether these narratives, which are often accompanied by multi-page lists of trigger warnings, should even be considered romance or should perhaps be renamed “traumance” or “erotic horror,” Dark Romance novels have begun to claim space on bestseller lists and bookstore shelves. In addition to being stacked alongside the Dark Romance novels of Emily McIntire, Penelope Douglass, Rina Kent, and Navessa Allen in Barnes and Noble, H. D. Carlton’s *Haunting Adeline* has spent 13 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list for paperback trade fiction. Most recently, Allen’s *Lights Out* has spent four weeks on the trade paperback list while the accompanying audiobook is currently #3 on the audio fiction bestseller list. Although the most popular books in this genre are predicated upon emotional and bodily trauma experienced by a white FMC, what happens in Dark Romance novels written by non-white authors? My essay will explore the ways in which the tropes of the genre shift, as well as the new tropes introduced, in Dark Romance novels written by African American authors, such as B. B. Reid’s *In the Gray*, Elle Kayson’s *Demon’s Dream*, and Kenya Goree-Bell’s *Easy Like Sunday Morning*, whose Black FMCs come from a lineage of women of color whose bodies were sexualized, racialized, and traumatized within the systemic structures of racism and sexism in the United States.

Allure of the Anti-hero in Dark Romance: An Analysis of Emotional Engagement and Reader Preferences

Dilpreet Kaur Sandhawalia

Romantic fiction has developed over time to provide readers with stories that dive into the complexities of passion, love, and human relationships. The potential of dark romance to challenge established norms sets it apart from the variety of subgenres that evolved. Dark romance novels have a committed fanbase because of their unorthodox relationships and mysterious morally grey protagonists, the anti-hero. This study explores the psychological and emotional foundations of readers' fascination with the characters that bend the lines between right and wrong. A detailed survey will be conducted to examine reader responses through psychological theories, providing quantifiable evidence on reader preferences. Attraction theory investigates the factors influencing readers' choices and participation providing quantifiable traits that attract the audience, while Attachment theory clarifies the emotional connections that the readers develop with these characters. To provide a focused analysis, specific book clubs are chosen as the study's sample population. The participants considered are of the age 18 and above, ensuring a diverse audience that is representative of modern readers who deliberately seek out novels with anti-hero characters. The survey considers readers from different backgrounds, which broadens the range of viewpoints. The goal of the research is to highlight the evolving romance genre, and the growing tastes of readers by exploring the allure of anti-heroes. The result will provide insights into the complex and changing world of romance literature, highlighting the continuous fascination with anti-heroes ultimately advancing knowledge of the relationship between human emotions and literature.

Hells, Belles, and the Moors: Racialization, Romance, and Place in the Regency Romance Novel

Semilore Sobande

The motto of the Cynsters, the eponymous leads of Stephanie Laurens' multidecade Cynster series, is "to have and to hold." But this phrase, which in most cases references only marriage vows, for the Cynsters, references all of their possessions; namely, their land and their women. What they have, they keep, and do so by force of personality, primitive instinct, and (often) dark good looks.

This paper seeks to discuss the intersection that regency romance novels draw between the acquisition of land and the acquisition of women, and to highlight how that juxtaposition is often racialized. I argue that novels like the Cynster series propose a vision of conquest where a male lead's ability to conquer the wild land around him is indistinguishable from his ability to conquer the women in his life, and that that aura of conquest is rooted in a racial ambiguity. Looking at figures from Jane Eyre's Rochester to Lorraine Heath's Marquess of Dain, I suggest that the marcher lord trope is one that is deeply racialized, using a loose metaphorical darkness to represent these figures' ability to be wild but also their ability to defeat the wild—or rather, to hold it.

Romantic Historical Fiction and the Foreign Country of the Past: Revising History through Reparative Readings

Hsu-Ming Teo

In her work *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture* (2016), Catherine Roach argues that romance narratives “do deep and complicated work for the (mostly) women who read them,” and that “[t]here is a reparative aspect to this work, to try to make up for the costs to a woman’s psyche of living in a culture that is still a man’s world” (11). If the romance exemplifies par excellence the process of reparative reading, what happens to the narration and interpretation of history when it is framed through the narrative tropes (although not necessarily the narrative arc) of romance? This paper discusses the key questions and concepts that frame two recent volumes that explore the idea of reparative romantic historical fiction: *Conflict and Colonialism in 21st Century Romantic Historical Fiction: Repairing the Past, Repurposing History* (Routledge, June 2024), and its companion volume, *Travel and Colonialism in 21st Century Romantic Historical Fiction: Exotic Journeys, Reparative Histories?* (Routledge, December 2024), edited by Hsu-Ming Teo and Paloma Fresno-Calleja. Both books argue that 21st century Anglophone women writers use romantic narrativizations of history to explore, revise, repurpose, and challenge the past in their novels, exposing the extent to which past societies were damaging to women by instead imagining alternative histories. They contend that the discourses and genre of romance work to provide a reparative reading of the past, but also that there are limitations and entrenched problems to such readings. The volumes examine how twenty-first century romantic historical fiction – a term we use to emphasise the novels’ serious engagement with history, not just historical cosplay – grapples with the deeply painful and uncomfortable historical legacies of war, genocide, colonialism, and racism, while simultaneously succumbing to the commercial imperative to exoticize and exploit these same legacies.

Black Romance Podcast: Studying Romance in Africa and the Black Diaspora Roundtable

Julie Moody-Freeman and Carole V Bell

This roundtable provides insights about the experiences of four Black Romance writers living, writing, and publishing romance novels in Africa, the Caribbean, and Britain. In season four of the Black Romance Podcast, Julie E. Moody-Freeman and Carole V. Bell interviewed the following writers and talked in depth with them about their romance novels and journeys to becoming published authors: Aminat Sanni Kamal (Nigeria); Rufaro Faith Mazarura (Britain); N.G. Peltier (Trinidad); and Sarah Dass (Tobago). We will share what we learnt by looking comparatively at how place and space shape their novel's setting, characters, editorial experiences, marketing experiences, audiences, and definitions of what love looks like in their novels. In addition, we will engage with the varying ways these novels – set between 2021 and 2024 – imagine spaces where Black love thrives outside of a colonial imaginary and white colonial context.

Uncredited Artists and Unsmiling Women: Researching Category Romance Cover Art

Ginny Bishton

Throughout the 1960s, 70s and early 80s, Mills & Boon and Harlequin Enterprises published well over 5,000 category romances with illustrated covers. Yet in spite of the phenomenal growth in scholarship devoted to the romance genre there remains a striking lack of published research or information about these covers and the artists who created them; further there is scarcely an acknowledgement that such a lack exists. I have situated my research in this gap by working to recover the identities of the illustrators and supply the attribution which the publishers withheld, focusing on primary research in the conviction that it will prove a useful foundation for others. Unlike the single-title romances with their dramatic clinches and torrid sumptuousness, the 1970s and early 1980s saw Mills & Boon and Harlequin still in their pre-clinch era. Eye-catching colors were paired with (completely dressed) figures, attractive but not extravagantly so, inhabiting a space of familiarity not entirely outside of the reader's own experience; beckoning the reader with the promise of a good comfort read. This presentation of cover images will identify artists and demonstrate stylistic diversity within the generic formula. A specific discovery which surprised me: In a space supposedly devoted to inconsequential escapism few of the women so prettily gracing the covers are actually smiling. If anything, the covers appear to be offering a space of an altogether different familiarity — the tense body language between apprehensive women in uncertain and stressful relationships with stern hovering men.

From Paper to Screen: Romance Writers and Hollywood (1910-1949)

Suzanne Mpouli

The first half of the 20th century tremendously shaped romance both as a cinematic and as a literary genre. In addition to being both centred on a love story and aimed at a female audience, romantic movies and novels were undeniably very popular during this period; the 1930s, for example, not only witnessed the release of a record number of more than 400 romantic movies (Dowd and Pallotta 2000) but also the recognition of the romance novel as a genre on its own right (McAleer 1999). However, while romance novels at that time remained a women's affair, the advent of the sound in the late 1920s gradually transformed screenwriting into a male dominated activity (Bielby and Bielby 1996).

Drawing from freely available data, this presentation will explore the role romance writers played in the development of the Hollywood romance. First, I will look at popular romance novels adapted to the big screen during these formative decades in terms of their number, the composition of the writing team and their thematic content. Then, I will discuss the rare cases of romance writers who successfully transitioned into writing scripts for the film industry.

I am on my KNEES: TikTok as a New Site of Female Sexual Desire

Nicola Welsh-Burke

In this project, I examine the ways in which adolescent and young adult female creators use the online platform TikTok as a space to explore and negotiate their sexual desire, arousal, and pleasure, via the creation of, and comments on, fan edits. The 'hysterical teen girl fan' has long been a source of derision, criticism and dismissal; adolescent girls and adolescent girl fans are dismissed as 'hysterical', 'unintelligent' and 'ultimately, silly' as a matter of course (Ewens 2017, 'Teen Girl Fans', n.p.). Despite this, however, academic analysis and discussion of the teen girl fan recognise the participants as self-aware, intelligent and discriminating, and their engagement in participatory culture as a site of complicated, multifaceted and at times contradictory negotiations of facets of adolescent girlhood such as sexual desire and arousal, the pursuit of romance and the development of identity. Via comments, captions and reactions on TikTok fan edits of celebrities, character pairings ('ships') and fictional characters, young female fans openly discuss their sexuality, acknowledging their desire within the 'safe' space of over-exaggeration and humour. I argue that this draws on the long history of teen girl 'bedroom culture', where the bedroom is recognised as a space for the active discovery and negotiation of the self, particularly in relation to cultural practices and identification. In performing this bacchanalic exploration of sexuality in the youth-dominated space of TikTok, displays of and engagement with sexual desire and arousal are heightened and 'taken seriously', allowing for the recognition of female sexuality.

Romantic Regions

