
Core Collections in Genre Studies

Romance Fiction 101

Neal Wyatt and Georgine Olson, Kristin Ramsdell, Joyce Saricks, and Lynne Welch, Guest Columnists

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Building genre collections is a central concern of public library collection development efforts. Even for college and university libraries, where it is not a major focus, a solid core collection makes a welcome addition for students needing a break from their course load and supports a range of academic interests. Given the widespread popularity of genre books, understanding the basics of a given genre is a great skill for all types of librarians to have.

It was, therefore, an important and groundbreaking event when the RUSA Collection Development and Evaluation Section (CODES) voted to create a new juried list highlighting the best in genre literature. The Reading List, as the new list will be called, honors the single best title in eight genre categories: romance, mystery, science fiction, fantasy, horror, historical fiction, women's fiction, and the adrenaline genre group consisting of thriller, suspense, and adventure.

To celebrate this new list and explore the wealth of genre literature, *The Alert Collector* will launch an ongoing, occasional series of genre-themed articles. This column explores the romance genre in all its many incarnations.

Five librarians gathered together to write this column and share their knowledge and love of the genre. Each was asked to write an introduction to a subgenre and to select five books that highlight the features of that subgenre. The result is an enlightening, entertaining guide to building a core collection in the genre area that accounts for almost half of all paperbacks sold each year.¹

Georgine Olson, who wrote the historical romance section, has been reading historical romance even longer than the thirty years or so she has been recommending good reads to fellow readers, and is a regular contributor to *NoveList*, editor of *Fiction Acquisition/Fiction Management: Education and Training* (Haworth, 1998), and chair of the Alaska Library Association Adult Readers Roundtable. Kristin Ramsdell, who wrote the Regency romance section, works at California State University, East Bay, and won the 1996 Romance Writers of America (RWA) Librarian of the Year award. She also is the romance review columnist for *Library Journal*. Joyce Saricks won the RWA Librarian of the Year award in 2000 and is the author of two groundbreaking readers' advisory titles, *Readers' Advisory Service in the Public Library* and *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*. Lynne Welch, who wrote the paranormal romance section, reviews for *Booklist*, contributes to *NoveList*, and was the 2004 RWA Librarian of the year. Neal Wyatt, the *Alert Collector* editor, contributed the contemporary romance section.

Note: Romance titles are frequently republished. Publication information is given for the newest in-print version

of each title listed. Out-of-print titles are indicated with o.p.—*Editor*

The romance genre can be divided into five main subgenres: contemporary, historical, Regency, suspense, and paranormal. Each offers readers an emotional connection with characters, an expected story arc that, while providing plenty of room for twists, turns, and innovation, also offers the comfort of familiarity and the assurance of a happy ending. Romance novels are built around the relationship between hero and heroine and the conflicts within that relationship. They are ultimately positive and optimistic novels that involve the reader on an emotional level. Fans of this genre love the snappy dialogue, well-crafted scenes, connection between the characters, and details of the character's lifestyles.

TRADITIONAL REGENCY ROMANCES

Tracing its origins from the witty, perceptive social commentaries of the critically observant Jane Austen, the traditional Regency romance often is considered to be the most elite of the romance subgenres. Graced with sparkling dialogue; intelligent, well-turned phrases; a glittering, though highly restrictive, social backdrop; and a preoccupation with the importance of social consequence and behavior, these chaste, refined comedies of manners have captured the imaginations of writers and readers alike; while few now are being published, they still have a small but militantly devoted fan base.

Despite its current decline, the traditional Regency is one of the earliest of the classic romance subgenres, and, as such, helps provide a foundational introduction to the romance genre as a whole. Also, with the rise in popularity of the Regency-set historical, it is increasingly important that readers' advisers know the differences between the two.

In the strictest sense, Regencies are set during the "reign" of the Prince Regent (later George IV), and span only a brief period, 1811–1820; however, in the hands of current writers, particularly of Regency-set historicals, the boundaries have expanded by at least a decade on each side of that date line.

As the popularity of the traditional Regency waned, the Regency-set historical stepped up to take its place. Bolder, sexier, more adventurous, and less restricted, these lively tales kept the trappings of the period but often forfeited much of the traditional subgenre's core appeal in order to fit the broader historical mold. Some writers wrote traditional Regencies almost exclusively (for example, Evelyn Richardson, Allison Lane, Anne Barbour); however, many authors wrote both or switched to historicals as the direction of the market became clear. Loretta Chase, Mary Jo Putney, Sophia Nash, Carla Kelly, Candice Hern, Mary Balogh, and Jo Beverley are a few of the better-known authors who have had a foot in each camp.

It is impossible to define the traditional Regency with only five books; however, readers looking to familiarize themselves with this elegant subgenre should consider the historical (but

not mystery or contemporary) works of Georgette Heyer, the standard-setting author of the modern Regency, as well as the following more recent authors and titles, as a starting place. While all of these core titles are out of print, they are listed to illustrate the foundations and standards of the subgenre. Libraries should be careful when weeding these collections and keep an eye out for the inevitable reprints.

Hern, Candice. *A Garden Folly*. New York: Signet, 1997 (ISBN: 978-0-451-18627-0). o.p.

Catherine Forsythe and her sister Susannah, realizing that attending the house party on the Duke of Carlisle's estate is their one chance to attract wealthy husbands and avoid poverty, are attracted to totally unsuitable men, or so they think. This charming, insightful, well-written story highlights one of the primary concerns of Regency heroines—marrying well.

Kelly, Carla. *Mrs. Drew Plays Her Hand*. New York: New American Library, 2003 (ISBN: 978-0-451-20924-5). o.p.

Still grieving, a young vicar's widow struggles to make a home for herself and her two children in the rundown dower house on a nearby estate. There she finds unexpected love with the owner of the estate, who is in need of healing himself. Poignant, emotionally compelling, laced with humor, and graced with characters you'd like to meet, this expertly written, award-winning romance is typical of Kelly's work.

Lane, Allison. *The Rake's Rainbow*. New York: New American Library, 1996 (ISBN: 978-0-451-18666-9). o.p.

Forced to wed when a carriage accident compromises their honor, a vicar's daughter and an infamous rake find love in spite of the hero's infatuation with another woman in this complex Regency that not only presents a rewarding romance, but beautifully delineates some of the social concerns of the times.

Metzger, Barbara. *A Debt to Delia*. New American Library, 2002 (ISBN: 978-0-451-20586-5). o.p.

An admirable major is determined to pay a debt of honor by marrying the compromised sister of the man who saved his life but meets with unexpected resistance from the heroine, who is determined to marry for love in this lively, often funny Regency by one of the genre's best-known writers. A dog and a horse add interest to this award-winning tale that is typical of Metzger's beloved stories.

Richardson, Evelyn. *Lady Alex's Gamble*. New American Library, 1995 (ISBN: 978-0-451-18340-8). o.p.

When her profligate twin brother's wayward behavior forces her to choose between a disgusting marriage or losing the family estate, the intrepid Lady Alex "becomes" her brother and heads for London to gamble her way to solvency. A perceptive hero who is wonderfully ahead of his time pairs perfectly with the strong heroine in this intelligent, well-researched Regency that makes use of a classic historical plot device—cross-dressing.

HISTORICAL ROMANCE

Historical romance is a blending of historical fiction and romance. The romantic relationship between two people is the main focus of the book, but the course of the romance is framed and sometimes limited by the events and customs of the times. The historical threads woven into the story can be very detailed and integral to the outcome of the love story, or the history can simply function as a backdrop to the romance. Historical romances cover a wide range of time periods, with Medieval, Victorian, and Regency eras currently being the most popular European settings; Civil War and pioneer stories are popular North American time periods. Hallmarks of historical romance include accuracy in dates, events, personages, clothing, dress, and cultural and social mores. Authors frequently use a few keywords or expressions to bring reality to a historical setting, and they often share their interpretation of events in an afterword. Female protagonists are apt to be somewhat rebellious, whether by nature or forced by circumstances—this is how authors enable them to behave in a manner somewhat more comfortable to today's reader.

Roberta Gellis is often credited with bringing “real” history into historical romance. Her *Roselynde Chronicles*, the first of which was published in 1978, are still popular with readers interested in Medievals. In the late 1980s, Susan Johnson began publishing explicitly sensual romance with strong historical underpinnings in settings ranging from the American West to Tsarist Russia. Several continually popular authors, including Julie Garwood, Stephanie Laurens, Linda Lael Miller, and Amanda Quick, use history as a background, with historically accurate clothing, food, and social mores framing stories only loosely tied to actual historical events. The five authors below represent slightly different niches and approaches to historical romance. The individual titles are representative of the author's style and illustrate the wide range of approaches in historical romance.

Beverley, Jo. *Forbidden Magic*. New York: New American Library, 2005 (ISBN: 978-0-451-21613-7).

Jo Beverley seamlessly weaves solid history into involving, sensuous stories. Her Medievals are loosely linked, while the Georgian Malloren Chronicles and Regency-era Rogues are true series. *Forbidden Magic* is a Regency-era stand-alone. Here, Meg Gillingham's wish (on a truly lewd family heirloom) to save her family from dire straits, brings the glossy, eccentric Earl of Saxonhurst into their lives; the novel also offers a fascinating household, mysteries old and new, and some exquisitely sexy moments.

Putney, Mary Jo. *The Wild Child*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2000 (ISBN: 978-0-449-00584-2).

Mary Jo Putney is an author whose knowledge of history gently infuses her elegantly written and emotionally involving stories. *The Wild Child* is a Regency-era story about whether an heiress, traumatized when her parents were killed in India years ago, is truly insane, and whether estranged twin broth-

ers, one the future earl, the other, the spare, can resolve their differences long enough to honor their obligation to court her and thereby save her from being confined to an asylum.

Wiggs, Susan. *The Lightkeeper*. New York: Mira, 2002 (ISBN: 978-1-55166-880-2).

Susan Wiggs writes “warm” historical romance, from Medieval to regional Americana. Her women are more apt to be comfortable with themselves, if not their present situation, while it is the men who are more often troubled or are seeking atonement. Wiggs offers interesting insights into the past of her home territory, the Pacific Northwest. *The Lightkeeper* is the story of a lighthouse keeper and the pregnant woman he rescues from the sea in 1870s Washington territory.

Quinn, Julia. *The Duke and I*. New York: Avon Books, 2000 (ISBN: 978-0-380-80082-7).

Julia Quinn's tales are known for their humor and sparkling conversation. Her Bridgerton books follow eight warm, loving, and rambunctious Regency-era siblings through sometimes-reluctant courtship into wedded bliss. The series begins with *The Duke and I*, in which Daphne, the eldest Bridgerton daughter, is just not having any luck finding a likely man who doesn't treat her like a sister. Desperation brings Daphne into a sham courtship with the newly minted Duke of Hastings, who hopes that this “courtship” will protect *him* from the *ton's* matchmaking mamas.

Schone, Robin. *Scandalous Lovers*. New York: Kensington, 2007 (ISBN: 978-1-57566-699-0).

Robin Schone writes sensual, explicit stories (a growing trend in some areas of romance) about characters who are frequently older and less beautiful than most romance protagonists. Her history is impeccable; the storytelling is straightforward but emotionally driven. *Scandalous Lovers* is the story of a middle-aged widow and widower who meet in The Men's and Women's Club, a scholarly club in London in the late 1800s devoted to the discussion of sexology.

CONTEMPORARY ROMANCE

These romance novels tell the stories of modern women and the men who turn their worlds upside down. Loosely defined as a romance set after World War II, contemporary romances often incorporate many of the aspects of other romance subgenres, such as African-American, paranormal, and suspense, and other genres, such as chick-lit, women's fiction, and urban fiction. They, therefore, account for a wide and flexible swath of the romance world, with a huge range of approaches and styles.

Hallmarks of a contemporary romance go far beyond a modern setting, however. The women in these books are independent: living their own lives, following their own dreams, and building a future for themselves. They stumble over love rather than wait for it. This focus on the dreams and aspirations of the heroines outside of their relationships with

the heroes is one of the most notable features of contemporary romance and allows for a wide range of detail and back-story to find its way into the novels.

Contemporary romances also reflect the society in which they are written. During the early 1990s yuppie boom, writers such as Judith McNaught were chronicling the lives of high-powered businessmen and glossy, but sweet, women. Today, many contemporary romances focus on families, well-rounded lives, and deeply connected circles of friends (which often extend into series). African-American writers and characters also have an adaptive home in contemporary romance today, as do inspirational romance writers and their fans. And no consideration of contemporary romance would be complete without a nod to the importance and influence of category romances, such as the Harlequin Presents line. Writers such as Brenda Jackson, Kathleen Eagle, Carly Phillips, Penny Jordan, Lynne Graham, and Helen Bianchin all write contemporary romances that cover a range of approaches and represent the varying styles of writers in this subgenre. Whether verging softly into chick-lit, dabbling into the paranormal, brushing up against suspense, or simply telling a modern story, contemporary romance offers readers the widest range of romance choices and thus is an important part of any romance collection.

Crusie, Jennifer. *Bet Me*. New York: St. Martin's Pr., 2004 (ISBN: 978-0-312-98785-5).

A hilarious mix of eavesdropping gone awry and old-fashioned courtship, the story of Minerva Dobbs and Calvin Morrisey shimmers off the page. *Bet Me* is a deeply romantic and lovely story of two people who actively dislike each other coming to terms with the inevitability of fate. Min thinks Cal is trying to date her on a bet and is determined to punish him for the affront. Cal thinks Min is crazy . . . then cute . . . then addictively compelling. Toss in great secondary characters, strong friendships, lightening-fast dialog, and fantastic scenes, and the result is a classic in the contemporary romance genre.

Gibson, Rachel. *See Jane Score*. New York: Avon, 2003 (ISBN: 978-0-06-000924-3).

A fan favorite, *See Jane Score* features *Seattle Times* columnist Jane Alcott and the sexy Seattle Chinooks hockey player Luc Martineau. Assigned to cover the team, Jane thinks this will be her big break. But the team shuts her out, hazes her to no end, and dashes her dreams of moving from the fluff pages to serious journalism until Luc decides Jane is good luck and sets wide the team doors. One would think all would be well, but the growing attraction between Jane and Luc brings up dark secrets on all sides. Gibson has created a compelling love story, full of hockey details, with great characters and abiding warmth.

Greene, Jennifer. *Blame It on Cupid*. New York: HQN Books, 2007 (ISBN: 978-0-373-77177-6).

Known for her well-crafted characters and her addictive sensibility that is at once charming, sweet, funny, and sexy,

Greene is a writer worth getting to know. Writing both longer contemporaries as well as category romances, her books have a large and growing fan base. In this story, carefree Merry Olson suddenly finds herself as guardian of a grief-stricken eleven-year-old. Clueless on how to help Charlene cope with the loss of her father, Merry gains some unexpected help from her sexy next-door neighbor, Jack MacKinnon. Their story simmers, is delightfully sweet, and makes a great introduction to the charms of modern contemporary romance.

Phillips, Susan Elizabeth. *Natural Born Charmer*. New York: William Morrow, 2007 (ISBN: 978-0-06-073457-2).

Finishing up the Chicago Stars football series, in this novel quarterback Dean Robillard finally meets a woman he cannot charm. When he picks up Blue Bailey on the side of the road (in a beaver costume), he thinks she will be a fun distraction. He did not count on her rapid-fire wit and irritating talent of always being right. Nevertheless, he takes her to Tennessee, where he faces his estranged family and a new sister, and comes to understand that charm carries no weight when faced with love. Phillips has written several knockout titles in this series (especially *This Heart of Mine*), but here she delivers the ultimate romance novel; emotionally charged, redemptive, and so sweetly satisfying that it makes the perfect introduction to the genre for new readers.

Roberts, Nora. *Born in Fire*. New York: Jove, 1996 (ISBN: 978-0-515-11675-5).

No romance collection can be considered complete without the works of Nora Roberts and her alter ego, J. D. Robb. *Born in Fire* starts a trilogy, a format Roberts frequently employs, set in Ireland. Maggie Concannon is a struggling glass artist, devoted to her work and haunted by family discord. She has no time for the rich and arrogant Rogan Sweeney, even if he does own some of the most important art galleries in the world. Their clashes and eventual partnership trace a classic contemporary romantic trope—how do two strong-headed individuals blend their lives together and acknowledge their need for one another?

ROMANTIC SUSPENSE

Today's romantic suspense grew out of the Gothic novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many readers fondly remember the heyday of popular authors Victoria Holt and Phyllis Whitney, whose romantic tales with historical (Holt) and contemporary (Whitney) settings spanned the 1950s to 1990s. Along with Mary Stewart, Elizabeth Peters, Ellis Peters, and others, they set the standard for the popular heroine-in-jeopardy novels, complete with young women placed in dangerous situations and unsure of which of two men they should trust—and love.

A seismic change occurred in the genre in the late 1980s, as popular romance authors such as Nora Roberts began adding large doses of suspense to their novels. Over the last decades, many romance writers (Linda Howard, Karen

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Robards, Heather Graham) have begun to write romantic suspense exclusively, while others (Sandra Brown, Nora Roberts) have continued to write both romance and romantic suspense. Still others (Kay Hooper, Nora Roberts, and Iris Johansen) have added extensive paranormal elements to their romantic suspense. These popular romance authors have brought their readers with them, creating an enormous fan base for the subgenre.

Unlike the earlier, safer version of romantic suspense, with violence offstage and a chaste love story, this new incarnation includes graphic violence and strong language in addition to steamy romance. No longer the passive heroine on the castle parapets waiting for rescue, today's heroines save themselves—and sometimes the hero as well. In both the classic and contemporary versions, the story moves quickly. Mounting suspense creates an uneasiness that colors the tone of the novels and keeps readers on the edge of their seats waiting to read what will happen next.

Older titles, particularly those by Daphne DuMaurier (*Rebecca*) and Ellis Peters (*House of Green Turf*) remain readable and should be kept if you can, as they make excellent suggestions for readers who appreciate a spirited, old-fashioned story combining danger and romance. Authors and titles that exemplify the subgenre's new direction, such as the authors listed below, should be owned by all libraries.

Brockmann, Suzanne. *Unsung Hero*. New York: Ivy Books, 2000 (ISBN: 978-0-8041-1952-8).

In this first in her popular Navy SEAL Team 16 series, injured SEAL Tom Paoletti is on his way home to recover his health and his memory when he spots a terrorist long believed dead. Unable to gain official authorization or assistance in tracking down the killer, Paoletti enlists his own team, including the newly rediscovered love of his youth. Fast-paced action and steamy romance follow apace.

Brown, Sandra. *Chill Factor*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006 (ISBN: 978-0-7434-6677-6).

When his attempt to reconcile his marriage fails, police chief Dutch Burton heads back to the sleepy North Carolina town where he lives. His ex-wife, Lily, an Atlanta magazine editor, waits too long in their mountain cabin and is trapped by a blizzard—stranded with a man who might be a killer. A menacing atmosphere with building suspense, breakneck pacing, and satisfying plot twists characterize this fast-paced, claustrophobic tale.

Garwood, Julie. *Heartbreaker*. New York: Pocket Books, 2001 (ISBN: 978-0-671-03400-9)

When a killer confides his crimes in the confessional—and threatens the priest's sister, Lauren—Father Tom Madden turns to his best friend, FBI special agent Nick Buchanan, to protect his sister. Investigative details and Lauren's haunting dreams frame this story, while mounting suspense and cliff-hanger chapter endings quicken the pace toward the final confrontation with the killer. Although she doesn't write a

series, Garwood weaves familiar characters in and out of her novels as main and supporting characters.

Lowell, Elizabeth. *Always Time to Die*. New York: William Morrow, 2005 (ISBN: 978-0-06-050419-9).

Genealogist Carolina May discovers dangerous secrets in a politically prominent New Mexico family's past. Surprisingly, her research puts her own life in danger. Who is trying to kill her and why? Assisted by Dan Duran, a man with his own secrets and extensive commando skills, Carolina unmasks the villain and, in the dangerous melee, discovers love. Lowell also has written two popular romantic suspense series featuring the Donovan family of rare gem traders, and the Rarities Unlimited group, whose interests include ancient manuscripts and more.

Stewart, Mary. *My Brother Michael*. New York: Morrow, 2001 (ISBN: 978-0-380-82075-7).

Every library should have Stewart's timeless titles. While her Arthurian saga remains popular, her other novels should not be neglected. Often set in exotic locales and filled with legends and literary references, they offer a range of satisfactions. Delphi and the legends of ancient Greece provide the background for this atmospheric tale of love and adventure, first published in 1960, in which Camilla takes up an offer to deliver a car to an unfamiliar man on Delphi and becomes entangled in the dangerous search into his brother's death.

PARANORMAL ROMANCE

Paranormal is the umbrella under which speculative fiction merges with romance, both as integral to the plot as is the required HEA (Happily Ever After ending). Settings include alternate realities, future or alternate Earth, or fictional planets or star systems. Characters range from humans and non-humans with special powers (vampires, witches, ghosts, cyborgs, sentient aliens or animals) who exhibit aspects beyond the range of currently accepted scientific explanation. Subgenres include time travel, science fiction, vampire, urban fantasy, shape-shifter, fantasy, and futuristic romances.

With crossover appeal to readers of mythology, science fiction, and fantasy (SFF) who enjoy a romantic subplot, the genre has experienced a resurgence in popularity over the past several years due to the emergence of authors skilled in world-building and readers willing to suspend disbelief to follow them. Alpha protagonists—powerful men and women willing and able to protect the vulnerable—are a major focus of the genre and one of its greatest attractions; the clash between the supernatural and the ordinary, as well as the sensual nature of many paranormals, are others. Paranormal is another area where romance subgenres blend, as many include elements of historical romance and romantic suspense.

Feehan, Christine. *Dark Prince*. New York: Dorchester Leisure Books, 2005 (ISBN: 978-0-8439-5528-6).

Feehan's darkly sensual, groundbreaking Carpathian series re-energized the vampire romance industry. This first book introduced Mikhail, the acknowledged prince of an ancient and powerful race. Mikhail is weary of life until Raven, a human psychic and his lifemate, brings light and color back into his world. But in order to keep her, he must protect her from his powerful enemies—both vampire and human—while he binds her with ties of sexual desire and mental telepathy.

Krentz, Jayne Ann. *White Lies*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2007 (ISBN: 978-0-399-15373-0).

Jayne Ann Krentz has championed paranormals since the 1980s. Her new Arcane Society series effectively employs her trademark wit, sparkling dialog, and supportive family networks as her psychically talented characters investigate attempts to co-opt a secret formula meant to strengthen those talents. Psychic hunter Jake Salter was undercover when he encountered Clare Lancaster, whose talent is the ability to detect lies, but he is reluctantly fascinated by her passion and precipitates an affair.

Owens, Robin D. *HeartMate*. New York: Berkley, 2006. ISBN: 978-0-425-21240-0).

Owens captured attention with her RITA-winning Planet Celta-based series featuring opinionated, telepathic, and extremely entertaining animal companions. *HeartMate* introduces Rand, who survived and prospered against great odds, eventually reclaiming his heritage as the head of a ruling family. His life will not be complete, however, until he finds his HeartMate. When he discovers Danith Mallow, he and his familiar know she is his destiny. Now he just has to convince her and her jewelry-loving cat.

Sinclair, Linnea. *Gabriel's Ghost*. New York: Bantam, 2005 (ISBN: 978-0-553-58797-5).

Written by one of SFF romance's brightest stars, the RITA-winning novel *Gabriel's Ghost* is a richly nuanced, multidimensional love story between a cashiered fleet captain and her nemesis, the enigmatic mercenary Gabriel Ross Sullivan. A galactic quest for justice on behalf of an endangered race, intrigue at the highest levels of imperial government, and Sully's own dark secrets make this an emotional, riveting quest adventure as well.

Stuart, Anne. *Cinderman*. New York: Harlequin, 1994 (ISBN: 978-0-373-16525-4). o.p.

Stuart achieved grandmaster status by always pushing the envelope, and *Cinderman* epitomizes her outrageous, slyly humorous, totally entertaining perspective. When Suzanna, a brash reporter, invades sexy genius Dr. Daniel Crompton's top-secret lab and is caught in an explosion meant to kill him and steal his work, they join forces to escape their rich and powerful enemies until they master their new superpowers—invisibility and mind-reading, among others.

RESOURCES

To learn more about romance and the major appeals of the genre, consider these resources.

Books

Bouricius, Ann. *The Romance Readers' Advisory: The Librarian's Guide to Love in the Stacks*. Chicago: ALA Editions, 2000 (ISBN: 978-0-8389-0779-5).

One of the first books to explore the ways librarians can work with fans of the genre, this early title in ALA's Readers' Advisory series includes chapters on creating a romance-friendly library and becoming romance savvy.

Charles, John, and Shelley Mosley, eds. *Romance Today: An A-to-Z Guide to Contemporary American Romance Writers*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2006 (ISBN: 978-0-313-32841-1).

This guide surveys the current romance world by summarizing the work of key American writers. It includes more than one hundred profiles, with author-verified biographies, bibliographies, and brief critical essays of each writer.

Krentz, Jayne Ann, ed. *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance*. Philadelphia, Pa.: Univ. of Pennsylvania Pr., 1992 (ISBN: 978-0-8122-1411-6).

Considered a classic examination of the romance novel, Krentz leads readers through what amounts to a literary criticism of the genre plus its appeal to readers.

Ramsdell, Kristin. *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 1999 (ISBN: 978-1-56308-335-8).

Ramsdell, Kristin. *What Romance Do I Read Next?: A Reader's Guide to Recent Romance Fiction*. Stamford, Conn.: Gale, 1999 (ISBN: 978-0-7876-4478-9). o.p.

An expert on romance, Ramsdell writes *Library Journal's* romance column. In these two books, she guides librarians to the best of the genre.

Saricks, Joyce G. *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction*. Chicago: ALA Editions, 2001 (ISBN: 978-0-8389-0803-7).

Perhaps the most comprehensive and best guide to genre books in general; Saricks has a lengthy chapter on romance. A new edition is slated for publication in 2009.

Review Sources

In the past, collection development librarians had good reason to complain about the lack of professional reviews in the romance genre. No more—all the major library review journals now include romance coverage, even reviews of paperback originals.

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Booklist. Chicago: ALA, 1905–. Bimonthly (ISSN: 0006-7385).

This review journal offers a special romance spotlight issue each September and features regular romance coverage all year long. Several *Booklist* reviewers have won the RWA Librarian of the Year award, and Donna Seaman, who edits the romance section, won RWA's Industry award for furthering the genre in print.

Library Journal. New York: Reed Business Information: 1876–. Semimonthly, monthly July/Aug. (ISSN: 0363-0277).

Providing readers with a special focus on romance, *LJ* features a romance column six times a year (published in the February 15, April 15, June 15, August, October 15, and December issues) edited by Kristin Ramsdell. *LJ* also selects five romance books a year to include in their best books of the year section.

Publisher's Weekly. New York: Reed Business Information: 1872–. Weekly (ISSN: 0000-0019).

While it includes romance reviews in every issue, what makes *PW* noteworthy is that its bookseller's viewpoint helps librarians pinpoint trends, identify new authors, and suggest sales language that will help librarians hand sell titles to their patrons.

Romantic Times Magazine. Brooklyn, N.Y.: C. Stacy, 1981–. Monthly (ISSN: 1071-930X)

This is the top non-library industry review source for the genre. It provides exhaustive coverage of all romance subgenres as well as news, interviews, and an in-depth look at trends.

Web Sites and Electronic Discussion Lists

Perhaps the best places to find out what readers like and what trends are affecting the genre, fan Web sites and discussion lists are an important resource to include in any collection building effort.

All About Romance, www.likesbooks.com

A primary source for readers and romance writers to share reviews, ideas, and create lists, such as the top one hundred

romances or books readers would take to a desert island. It's worth noting that several All about Romance reviewers are librarians, and the site makes a conscious effort to provide the kind of information librarians often seek about books and authors.

The Romance Reader, www.theromancereader.com

This Web site has become a staple resource for romance savvy librarians, offering reviews divided by subgenre, author interviews, and special lists. Of particular note is their Readers Helping Readers feature, which allows a reader (or librarian) to post a query about a long-lost book and get help in tracking down the title.

Romance Writers of America, <http://rwanational.org>

The professional organization for romance writers features many useful items on its Web site. Of particular note is the exhaustive list of new titles published each month and the RITA award archives.

Fiction-L

A general readers' advisory list, the very active group of subscribers often focuses on the romance genre. Not only a great resource for tracking down a title, the list also offers archives that provide a wealth of booklists relating to romance. To join the list: www.webrary.org/rs/flsubunsub.html. To search the archives: www.webrary.org/rs/FLarchive.html.

RRA-L

An indispensable guide to the romance genre, the Romance Readers Anonymous electronic discussion list has helped readers and librarians find books and understand the genre for fifteen years. Reading the posts, even as a lurker, is a great way to become familiar with the genre as a whole. The moderators shut down the site in August 2007 after many years, and a successor site was created on Yahoo!Groups, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/rra-l>.

Reference

1. Romance Writers Association, "Industry Statistics," www.storyforum.com/statisticsnew.htm (accessed Aug. 11, 2007).