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## From Clinch to Cartoon:

How the Covers of the Romance Genre Changed From the 1980's Until Today

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### Abstract

Deze masterscriptie bekijkt de ontwikkelingen van de kaften van romantische boeken. De jaren tachtig zag een grote toename aan romantische boeken. Het is altijd al een van de populairste genres geweest, en in the jaren tachtig nam deze populariteit flink toe. In deze periode waren de kaften van romantische boeken nogal opvallend. Vaak waren er twee karakters afgebeeld die maar half gekleed en verstrengeld in elkaars armen op de voorkant stonden. Na de jaren tachtig werd deze design stijl van romantische boeken minder populair, en zijn er andere stijlen voor in de plaats gekomen. Als je tegenwoordig de boekenwinkel binnenloopt zie je de nieuwste variant van de kaften, namelijk de getekende kaft. Deze versie is een stuk simplistischer en de drama van de jaren tachtig ontbreekt. Deze scriptie zal met behulp van de werken van Gérard Genette, Nicole Matthews en Nickianne Moody onderzoeken waarom deze verandering heeft plaatsgevonden. De werken *Paratext: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987) en *Judging a Book By Its Cover* (2007) vormen samen het theoretische kader van het onderzoek. Deze theorie wordt samengevoegd met Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984) en Pamela Regis' *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003) om een overzicht van het romanitsche genre te creeëren. Daarna zullen de kaften van drie auteurs uit de jaren tachtig en drie auteurs van vandaag worden geanalyseerd om erachter te komen hoe de paratext, waar de kaften onderdeel van zijn, van romantische boeken over de jaren heen is veranderd.

*Key Words: Book covers, Paratext, Genette, Romance books, Clinch covers, Cartoon covers*

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## Introduction

People always say not to judge a book by its cover, and while this is a lofty ideal, it is not a very realistic one. Everyone makes assumptions based on first appearances and this goes for people, as well as books. Because of this reason, the cover of a book plays a very important role in both the marketing and the reception of the novel. The romance genre has always been a popular one, but it is also a genre that people feel ashamed of liking. It is heavily critiqued and is not considered to be of high literary value. For a long time, the covers of these books featured a painted picture of a couple intimately embracing, which made the novels very recognisable as being romance novels, but it did not help the public perception of the genre.<sup>1</sup> Even I grew up with the same apprehension that a lot of people share when they see a romance novel featuring a half-naked couple on the cover, but as the covers of the books changed so did my opinion of them, and I was able to see the works behind the somewhat gauche covers. In recent years, the painted covers with the half-naked people have been replaced by cartoon-style covers where the characters are fully clothed. This shift was accompanied by a shift in attitude towards the romance genre. Instead of being hidden in the dark corners of bookshops, there are now prominent displays that show the popular romance novels of today. However, while the genre has gained more acclaim in the public eye, this has not happened in the academic sphere. The genre, and especially its paratext, has not been researched as extensively as other genres such as science fiction and the detective genre. The paratext of these genres has been researched by academics such as James Gunn, who wrote *Paratexts: Introduction to Science Fiction and Fantasy*<sup>2</sup> and Malcah Effron, who examined the paratext of detective fiction in “On the Borders of the Page, on the Borders of Genre:

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<sup>1</sup> Penelope Williamson, “By Honor Bound: The Heroine as Hero,” in *Dangerous Men & Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance*, ed. Jayne Ann Krentz (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania, 1992), 125.

<sup>2</sup> James Gunn, *Paratexts: Introduction to Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013).

Artificial Paratexts in Golden Age Detective Fiction.”<sup>3</sup> The romance genre as a whole has been investigated, but this research is mostly limited to the contents of the romance novel and how the genre is perceived by society. Academic journals such as the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* are dedicated to the study of the romance genre. However, the covers of works written by popular romance authors such as Kathleen E. Woodiwiss and Emily Henry are rarely discussed. This thesis will attempt to fill this research gap by combining work on the paratext of books by Gérard Genette and the work of Nicole Matthews and Nickianne Moody, with the research that is done on romance novels, such as Pamela Regis’ *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003) and *Reading the Romance* (1984) by Janice Radway. In this thesis I will use these works to help me analyse the covers of romance novels of the 1980s and the early 2020s. Together these works will hopefully be able to answer the question of how the covers of romance novels have changed since the 1980’s compared to today.

To begin this research it is important to establish what exactly makes a romance novel a romance novel. A lot of books have romantic elements in them without actually being classified as part of the romance genre. For example, James Bond books always have a romantic interest in them, but these books are classified as spy fiction, not romance. For older books, the line between literary fiction and romance can become blurry. By its basic definitions, works such as Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, and Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* are all romance fiction. However, these are not found in the romance section of bookstores. Instead, these are placed on the shelves underneath literary fiction.

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<sup>3</sup> Malcah Effron, “On the Borders of the Page, on the Borders of Genre: Artificial Paratexts in Golden Age Detective Fiction,” *Narrative* 18, no. 2 (2010): 199-219, accessed April 13, 2024, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40856408>.

Critics often define romance by its formulaic nature; boy meets girl, their relationship develops, they fall in love and get married.<sup>4</sup> The married part does not have to be included in the novel, but there does need to be an implied happily ever after. It is an idealised version of the real world. The formulaic nature is one of the most criticised points of the genre, as critics think it means that these books lack originality.<sup>5</sup> Still, even *Pride and Prejudice* can be described as following a formula. There is a truth to the formulaic definition of the genre, but describing the genre by one simple formula is restrictive. Romance books can follow many different formulas, or tropes, in many different ways. In the end, they still meet the requirements of the genre as a whole, but the books can also be part of a smaller subset of the genre.<sup>6</sup>

Nowadays, books are often marketed by the tropes that are included. In Margaret Merga's research on the influence of TikTok on readers, she found that short, attention-grabbing hooks are used to appeal to readers.<sup>7</sup> Popular examples of these hooks are 'enemies-to-lovers', 'fake dating', and 'forced proximity'. Even though the formulaic nature of romance books is frequently criticised, it is also something that is used by publishers and authors to market their books. They make their criticism of the formulaic nature work for them by using them as marketing tools. Publishers are very aware of the audience for romance books, and for a lot of readers, the predictability is desired and provides comfort. These books are mostly read for fun and for a chance to escape the harsh realities of the real world. Knowing a book has a happy ending facilitates this.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Pamela Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 23.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret K. Merga, "How can BookTok on TikTok inform readers' advisory services for young people?" *Library and Information Science Research* 43, no. 2 (2021): 5, accessed October 28, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2021.101091>.

<sup>8</sup> Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 93.

The romance genre is not something that is new to literature. Pamela Regis details the extensive history of romance in her work *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003). Regis explains how romance has been popular in stories from Ancient Greece, through the mediaeval times, and how it is still popular in stories today.<sup>9</sup> Examples such as *Orpheus and Eurydice* and *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485) are stories that date back centuries where romance is an important theme in the plot. These works often had male protagonists, and therefore had different narrative elements compared to the modern romance novel, which often have a female lead. Where a female protagonist has to overcome society's expectations, a male protagonist has to defeat a more tangible rival. This is often a father or another paternal figure who tries to protect their daughter from the danger the protagonist poses.<sup>10</sup> Historically speaking, in romance books where there is a female protagonist, she is restricted by the state, church, society, or her family. The heroine, and the issues she must endure, are a representation of the issues women face in a certain time.<sup>11</sup>

Samual Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) is considered to be one of the first romance novels. The story might not seem particularly romantic to modern-day romance readers, but by following the basic formula of boy meets girl, it does meet the requirements of the genre. The female protagonist goes through all the troubles that are typical for the heroine. She faces judgement from society as she ends up marrying a man of a higher class than herself. Even popular modern tropes such as enemies-to-lovers can be found in the novel. According to Regis, its importance in the romance genre comes from the fact that the book is recognised to be the first best seller.<sup>12</sup> Its popularity was very widespread and almost everyone of the time had read it. However, it still faced a lot of criticism. The novel even inspired a parody only one year after its initial release, namely Henry Fielding's *Shamela* (1741).<sup>13</sup> *Pamela*

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<sup>9</sup> Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, 20-21.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

showcases that the critique and disdain towards the romance book have been around just as long as the romance genre itself.

Where *Pamela* might have been the first popular romance novel, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) is generally seen as the most beloved, by both romance readers and critics alike.<sup>14</sup> When it was originally published in 1813 it sold out quickly and became famous enough to even garner attention from the royal family. Nevertheless, *Pride and Prejudice* was not exempt from all criticism. However, the nature of this criticism was different from other romance books received. Austen's works are not accused of being formulaic and easy to write. Because of Austen's keen observations and commentary on the society she shared with her characters, most people see her work as more than just romance.<sup>15</sup> While people look down on more modern romance books, they do not look down on Jane Austen's work. Still, several popular tropes appear in *Pride and Prejudice* and it has the same elements other romances do. The main characters meet, and although they do not like each other at the beginning of the book, a relationship starts to develop, and in the end they fall in love and get married. It is a classic example of the enemies-to-lovers trope. The heroine overcomes the judgement that she faces from both society and her family and gains the freedom to marry whom she wants.

Over the next several decades, variations of the romance novel remained popular. In *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, Regis mentions works such as Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847)<sup>16</sup>, and E.M. Forster's *A Room With a View* (1908), which are all classics, in literature as well as romance.<sup>17</sup> In all of these works, romance is an important part of the plot and they follow the typical romance book formula, albeit sometimes in a somewhat unconventional way. They are all examples of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 85-92.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 99-104.

romance novels that are part of the English literary canon. Even books of the nineteenth century that are not considered to be romance books included romantic side-plots and frequently ended with a marriage.<sup>18</sup> Dickens' works are examples of this. His works are considered to be part of the realism genre, but both *The Pickwick Papers* (1837) and *Great Expectations* (1861) end with a marriage. This changed with the turn of the century, when the modernist movement started to appear. The traditional romantic ideals of the previous era were rejected as they no longer fit with the disillusionment that the modernist authors experienced after World War I. Romance was no longer seen as a realistic ideal after the horrors of the war.<sup>19</sup>

The popularity of the romance genre increased with the introduction of the paperback novel.<sup>20</sup> Since these books were easier to produce and sell, a lot more books were published. While romance already was a popular genre, it became even more popular during the 1940s.<sup>21</sup> More romance books started to be published and they became more accessible. Some publishers even started to specialise in romance novels. The most prominent example of this is Harlequin, a publishing company that was established in 1949 and started with general fiction and educational works. However, they quickly realised that the romance books were their best selling works and by 1964 they were only publishing romance novels.<sup>22</sup> Harlequin is still a big publishing company, but many other publishers such as HarperCollins, Berkley, and Piatkus also release a wide variety of romance novels each year.

While more and more romance books were released in the second half of the twentieth century, with their popularity being at an all-time high, the criticism of the romance

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<sup>18</sup> Julie Shaffer, "Non-Canonical Women's Novels of the Romantic Era: Romantic Ideologies and the Problematics of Gender," *Studies in the Novel* 24, no. 4 (1996): 469, accessed March 2, 2024, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29533161>.

<sup>19</sup> Kathleen Kuiper, "Modernism," last modified March 28, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Modernism-art>.

<sup>20</sup> Jennifer McKnight-Trontz, *The Look of Love: The Art of the Romance Novel* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002), 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

book started to increase as well. The tropes and the fact that all the narratives had to end with either a marriage or an engagement were being called into question. They were seen as unrealistic and often prescribed to the ideals of the patriarchy. Critics stated that women started to cherish the chains of their bondage by reading romance books.<sup>23</sup>

The criticisms of the romance novel never ceased, but the romance genre did develop over the years, becoming much more diverse. Although the formulaic elements are still present in the books, and the characters still get their happily ever after, the characters are no longer ruled by stereotypes. The female protagonists are not subjected to the will of men and the male characters are defined by more than their appearance. The romance genre has also become a lot more inclusive. Where the main couple was previously mostly cisgender, white, and heterosexual, there are now many popular romance books that feature characters of colour, trans characters, and characters that are part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Works by romance authors such as Casey McQuiston and Ashley Herring Blake portray queer relationships. The popularity of these works is evident, as McQuiston's title *Red, White & Royal Blue* (2019) was adapted to film in 2023.

While the content of the romance book changed over the years, the cover changed as well. Over the years, the romance book cover has had many different faces. When the paperback covers first started to appear in 1935, it opened a window for a cheaper production of books, and therefore a cheaper book for the customer.<sup>24</sup> Popular genres were mysteries, adventure, crime, and of course, romance. The success of the romance novel allowed publishing companies such as Harlequin to specialise in the romance genre. The covers of these romance books were bright and colourful, a deliberate move from the publishers to

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<sup>23</sup> Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> David H. Tucker, Philip Soundy Unwin and George Unwin, "History of Publishing," last modified March 21, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/publishing/The-paperback-revolution>.

make sure readers could tell what kind of book it was simply by looking at the cover.<sup>25</sup> The illustrations on the covers often depicted people, but they showed nothing scandalous. This drastically changed in the 1970s and 1980s. The covers started to become more and more scandalous. It began with only bare-chested men, but as publishers realised that sex sells, the covers became even more explicit. Painted scenes of half-naked men passionately embracing and kissing women were now featured on the covers. These covers were named “the clinch”, after the passionate embrace.<sup>26</sup> These covers remained popular for a long time, but as technology developed, the painted covers started to be replaced by photographs. In the 2000s, pictures of attractive men and women adorned the covers of romance books. Photoshopped covers, still with bare-chested men, were now the norm. Slowly, new types of covers started to appear. In the late 2010s, illustrated covers came out. The men with the six-pack abs were now replaced with cartoon renderings. Nowadays, these cartoon covers are the ones that are visible in shops. The bright colours and the illustrations are easily recognisable and became popular very quickly. They are even so popular that popular romance authors such as Talia Hibbert and Tessa Bailey are republishing their older works, which originally featured a photograph on the cover, and are giving them new and trendy illustrated covers.

There are many different reasons why the cover of a book is important. The main one being that the cover conveys what kind of book it is to a potential reader. The genre of a book can often be recognised by the cover itself. The colours, the font, and the art all give some indication of what kind of story is on the inside. Fantasy books tend to have darker colour schemes and might feature a mythical creature or a fantastical land on the cover. Romance books are easily recognised by their bright colours and the couple that is often depicted on the front. The publisher keeps the intended audience for their books in mind while also trying to

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<sup>25</sup> McKnight-Trontz, *The Look of Love: The Art of the Romance Novel*, 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

appeal to potential new readers.<sup>27</sup> The different aspects that go into deciding how to design a cover are complex. These complexities will be explored in this thesis, and they will be combined with the question of why romance covers look the way they do and how they have changed over the years.

Before starting the investigation into the question as to why romance books look the way they do, it is important to be aware of the historical context of the romance novel itself, as well as the early developments in its appearance. The changes of the romance book cover between the 1980's and the early 2020's will be investigated in the next several chapters. The first chapter of this thesis will look at the importance of the book cover itself, and how the outward appearance of a book plays a vital role in the audience's perception of it. Nicole Matthews's and Nickianne Moody's *Judging a Book by Its Cover* (2007) and Gérard Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997) will provide the basis for this analysis. The second chapter will examine the cover of romance novels in the 1980's, specifically the so-called "clinch cover". Covers of books by authors such as Johanna Lindsey, Kathleen E. Woodiwiss, and Jude Deveraux will be the representative authors of this decade. The third chapter will take a look at the current appearance of book covers. It will study the cartoon style that is used for romance book covers today, and how social media influenced the popularity of this style. The authors that will serve as examples for this decade are Emily Henry, Ali Hazelwood and Talia Hibbert. Some of these authors have published works that are not part of the romance genre or have books that were released before the cartoon-cover trend. Since the focus of this chapter is the cartoon cover, the works that do not fall in this category will not be discussed. The analysis in these two chapters will be done by examining the covers of all of the authors mentioned above and identifying what types of visual

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<sup>27</sup>Angus Phillips, "How Books are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover," in *Judging a Book by Its Cover*, ed. Nicole Matthews and Nickianne Moody (Ashgate: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 22.

elements are portrayed on those covers. For the 1980s clinch covers the books that I will research will almost exclusively be published in the 1980s, with all of the author's first novels being the only exception, as this will show the progress of the art style between the 1970s and the 1980s. For the modern romance novels, the earlier books with cartoon-style art already appeared in the mid to early 2010's, but they increased in popularity in the early 2020s. Because of this notable increase, the books I will be examining in this chapter will mostly be released in the late 2010s and early 2020s. An overview of all the works that are relevant to this study will be listed in the appendix, which will include all the covers of the books that Kathleen E. Woodiwiss, Johanna Lindsey, and Jude Deveraux released in the 1980s, and all the cartoon covers that were released by Emily Henry, Talia Hibbert, and Ali Hazelwood in the late 2010s and early 2020s. The covers will be analysed for the different codes that are used for romance books.<sup>28</sup> Romance covers often feature many different colours, and the characters on the front frequently wear costumes that give readers a clue about the themes of the novel, these visual elements are referred to as codes.<sup>29</sup> The analyses of the covers will hopefully reveal something about the publishing practices of each of the decades, as well as the so-called "hidden codes"<sup>30</sup> that are included on the cover, which tell the reader what kind of romance book they are faced with by just looking at the front.<sup>31</sup> The final chapter will serve as a conclusion and a comparative chapter where the two decades will be compared to see how the appearance of the romance book has changed over time.

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<sup>28</sup> An Goris, "Hidden Codes of Love: The Materiality of the Category Romance Novel," in *Consumerism and Prestige: The Materiality of Literature in the Modern Age*, ed. Anthony Enns and Bernhard Metz (London: Anthem Press, 2022), 115.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

## Chapter 1

The outside of a book always matters, regardless of what people say. The cover of a book is the first thing a potential reader sees, and if it does not appeal to that person, they are a lot less likely to buy or read a book. In many ways, the saying ‘don’t judge a book by its cover’ is more applicable to people than it is to books. A person might get a second chance at an introduction, but a book only has one shot. To make sure this shot strikes true, publishers try to make sure that a novel finds its intended audience by making the cover appeal to this target audience. The effects of this are evident when walking into a bookshop. The shelves labelled ‘fantasy’ have a very different aesthetic, with a noticeably darker colour scheme, especially compared to the shelves labelled ‘romance’, which often feature more pastel colours.<sup>32</sup> It makes the genre of a book more recognisable, and makes it easier for a fan of a certain genre to find the books they are searching for. However, a book also needs to look interesting enough to appeal to new readers, who have not read other books of this genre, in order to accumulate a larger audience. Academics have done extensive research into the paratext of books, and the question as to why books look the way they do. Before diving into the change in the romance book covers between the 1980s and the early 2020s, it is important to define the term paratext, and to examine how this plays an important part in the publisher’s and the reader’s perception of a novel. This chapter will do exactly that, by first giving a definition of paratext, according to Gérard Genette in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, after which I will be investigating its influence on publishers and readers with the help of Nicole Matthews’ and Nickianne Moody’s *Judging a Book by Its Cover*. Both of these works will help to create an insight into how the covers of books are designed and how they might change over time.

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<sup>32</sup> Phillips, “How Books are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover,” 24.

### **What is the Paratext of a Book**

Although the story that is inside of a book is important, physical aspects also play a significant role, as they contribute to the value a book holds for the reader. The name of the author, the cover, the dedication, and even the page numbers all contribute to the physical object that is the book without being part of the text itself. Without these elements, the text would become a lot less appealing and more difficult to interpret.<sup>33</sup> In his work, *Paratext: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Gérard Genette states that these elements, as well as a number of others, are part of the ‘paratext’ of a book. Genette further explains that “the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public.”<sup>34</sup> Simply put, without the paratext, a book would never be able to reach an audience. It is the decisive factor for someone to pick a book up and buy it or leave it in the store.

The paratext of a book is made up of two different parts, the peritext and the epitext. The peritext includes all physical aspects of the book itself, such as the title and the table of contents. The epitext is the opposite, and consists of everything outside of the book, for instance author interviews and book reviews.<sup>35</sup> The book cover is part of the peritext, more specifically the publisher’s peritext, as it falls under the responsibility of the publisher.<sup>36</sup> Although the author can be consulted on this matter, the publisher is often the one to make the final decision, as other entities are involved in this process as well, such as the person designing the cover, the marketing department, and the printer. All the details included on the front of a book are factors that need to be decided on, and these decisions are made with the consumer in mind. Genette explains this with the example of the size of the author’s name on

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<sup>33</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratext: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Macksey, introduction to *Paratext: Thresholds of Interpretation*, ed. Richard Macksey and Michael Sprinker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xviii.

<sup>36</sup> Genette, *Paratext: Thresholds of Interpretation*, 16.

the cover of a novel. It might seem inconsequential for someone walking through a bookstore, but the size of the author's name on the cover is a deliberate choice. If a novel is the author's first published work, the size of the name might be smaller, as they have not yet made a name for themselves. When an author has already published more works and has become more successful the name on the front might become bigger, as people are now also buying the books based on who the author is, not just because of the title of the book itself.<sup>37</sup> This is just one example of the many elements of the peritext of a book that are part of the publishing strategies that publishers use to appeal to readers. The paratextual elements can differ from book to book, not all books have a table of contents or a foreword, and some might include other items such as a music playlist to listen to while reading or a list of discussion topics for book clubs. They are not universal, and which ones are included are dependent on the period and genre in which the book is published.<sup>38</sup> The elements that appear on the cover are also different for each book. Genette states that nowadays only the name of the author, the title, and the publisher are cover essentials. Other information, such as the price, the genre, the name of the series, or a picture of the author, can be included, but these are not necessary.<sup>39</sup> The way in which these items appear can either be characteristic of the publisher, the author, or the series that the book is part of. The design of a book can even be characteristic of the genre of the book, and it can signal what kind of book it is. Genette illustrates this with the example of yellow book covers, which were associated specifically with licentious French books.<sup>40</sup> As the cover is the first introduction of a book to a reader, the paratextual elements that are displayed on it can play a large role in whether or not the book will be bought.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 32.

Genette gives a further analysis of all the other parts of the paratext of books, but the focus of this thesis is the covers of romance books, more specifically, the front covers of romance books. Genette's theory on the other parts of paratext, such as the titles, the preface, and the acknowledgements, will not be discussed in detail since this will not be part of the analysis of the romance novels that will be examined further on in this thesis.

### **The Importance of Book Covers**

Books have not always been sold in the way they are today. In the introduction of *Judging a Book by Its Cover*, Nicole Matthews outlines the history of the book cover and the evolution it went through over the years. In the nineteenth century novels were often published in several parts in periodicals, and if someone wanted all the parts combined in one book, they had to either wait for the bound versions or they had to commission a bound version.<sup>42</sup>

During this time, books were often expensive clothbound versions that served mostly as visual objects.<sup>43</sup> It was later when the covers took on the role that they have today: to invite readers to buy a book and to make sure it reaches their intended audiences. With the wider introduction of the paperback in the 1930s, the covers changed as well. Paperbacks already existed in the nineteenth century, but their form was different. O. Lawrence Burnette explains that the publishing company Tauchnitz first introduced the paperback in 1837, where they served as supplements to monthly periodicals, and later the paperbacks were sold on their own.<sup>44</sup> These books were cheap, which helped their popularity. However, they were seen as "cheap and nasty."<sup>45</sup> In the 1930s Albatross and Penguin Books elevated the status of these books and paperback covers became what they are today.<sup>46</sup> The colour, style and image of a

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<sup>42</sup> Nicole Matthews, introduction to *Judging a Book by Its Cover*, ed. Nicole Matthews and Nickianne Moody (Ashgate: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), xi.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>44</sup> O. Lawrence Burnette, Jr., "History Among the Paperbacks," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 42, no. 4 (1958): 280, accessed December 5, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4633311>.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>46</sup> Matthews, introduction to *Judging a Book by Its Cover*, xii.

book gave the audience the ability to identify what genre a book is part of. The covers of books are there for readers to understand what kind of book they are faced with. As previously stated, the cover alone is able to indicate what the genre of the book is, what tone it has and what kind of readers tries to appeal to.<sup>47</sup> They can even show the cultural value of a novel, as some covers have a lot more of a literary appearance than others. For example, a cover with muted colours and simple, clean illustrations is seen as a lot more respectable than a cover with a photograph of a partially clothed man, imagery that is rarely featured on the cover of a literary novel, but frequently appears on a romance book. Literary fiction and romance fiction have a different social status, and this is reflected in their covers and the perception of those covers.

Readers are able to recognise that a book can be a status symbol, and that the books that are on one's shelf are a reflection of who they are as a person. Shafquat Towheed analyses how this was especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic in his work "An Examination of Bookshelves in the Age of the COVID-19 Pandemic as a "Liminal Space". During online meetings, people often showed their bookshelves in the background. Not only was it seen as an appropriate background, by showing one's bookshelves people also wanted to show their professional credibility and their intelligence.<sup>48</sup> Bookshelves went from a private space to a public space, and since bookshelves only show the material aspects of a book, it was important that those material aspects were presentable enough to impress others.<sup>49</sup> Towheed describes that this need for an impressive personal library even went so far that it created a microeconomy where people were able to "buy books by the foot"<sup>50</sup>, which enabled people to buy a large quantity of books at once, to make sure their bookshelves were

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>48</sup> Shafquat Towheed, "An Examination of Bookshelves in the Age of the COVID-19 Pandemic as a "Liminal Space", in *Bookshelves in the Age of the COVID-19 Pandemic*, ed. Corinna Norrick-Rühl and Shafquat Towheed (London: Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2022), 32.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 32.

up to standard. People value the perception others have of them, and might not want to be seen with books with gaudy covers in their hands or on their bookshelves. It is the task of the publisher to release books people want to be seen with.

### **The Publishers' Perspective**

A publisher works just like any other business and has one main goal; namely to make money. To do so they have to sell as many books as possible, which can be achieved by using a variety of strategies of marketing books. Angus Phillips explains these strategies in his work "How Books are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover". Just like any other product, a book's marketing is vital for its potential success. Originally, the publishing industry was a product-led industry where the publishers released what they wanted to release without listening to their customers.<sup>51</sup> However, this changed with the introduction of marketing departments, which were put in place specifically to sell more books by listening to the public and releasing books that were in line with the needs of the market.<sup>52</sup> This awareness of the market increased with the rise of social media, as the opinions of the audience are now more easily accessible than ever before, and publishers are able to adapt their marketing strategies to these opinions.<sup>53</sup> Without proper marketing, it becomes a lot more difficult for a book to find its intended audience. The cover plays an important role in the marketing strategy.

The marketing of a book can be an expensive endeavour, and therefore publishers do their best to target the marketing at the group of people most likely to be interested in the novel. In his work "How Books are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover", Angus Phillips states that there are three important parts of the marketing process, namely

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<sup>51</sup> Phillips, "How Books are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover," 19.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 29.

segmentation, targeting, and positioning.<sup>54</sup> Each of these parts help publishers find the target audience of a book, which makes the marketing more effective. The segmentation of the market means that the consumers are divided in several groups, based on geographic, demographic, psychographic, and behavioural differences.<sup>55</sup> Publishers are able to use the results of their research into segmentation to target their books at the readers most likely to pick them up. All elements of a book, including price and promotional material, are based on the target group the publisher wants to reach. The cover is also crucial in the targeting, as some groups of people might be more interested in fun book covers with bright colours, while other people might lean towards more subdued covers. Releasing one book with multiple covers is a way for one book to reach different target audiences. Another is having different covers for a book when it is sold in a supermarket, compared to an upmarket version.<sup>56</sup> After the right target group has been found, it is time to position the novel. This positioning is not done to the book itself, rather it is done in the mind of a reader. The perception of a novel takes place in the reader's mind, as is the positioning. Again, the cover has an influence on the position of a book.<sup>57</sup> This is where the physical elements that are associated with certain genres come in. Bright, feminine colours such as purple and pink are associated with the romance genre, and dark black and blue are associated with fantasy novels. A book cover should be similar to others in its genre, so that it is recognisable as part of this genre, but it should not be too similar, as it will be unable to stand out.<sup>58</sup> As Phillips states, "covers have to be correct for the chosen market,"<sup>59</sup> and to make sure that they are, publishers use the entire process of segmentation, targeting and positioning.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 29.

When the right audience is determined and the book cover has been designed, the cover becomes a central part of the marketing strategy. Any promotional material will most likely feature the imagery that is used on the cover. Posters, bookmarks, and postcards are all part of the promotion of a new release that use the visual elements of a novel.<sup>60</sup> Nowadays marketing also takes place online, which allows a lot of new marketing techniques. Simone Murray discusses how digital culture has changed the literary world in her work “‘Selling Literature’: The Cultivation of Book Buzz in the Literary Sphere.” In this work Murray explains that the internet and the bookish community online have shifted the ways in which books are marketed. A large part of this marketing is dependent on the ‘discoverability’ of a novel, where online creators find a book and share their love for it with their followers on social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok.<sup>61</sup> Murray also states that nowadays, authors are a lot more involved with the marketing of their works. They do this through their social media platforms, where they have created a community surrounding their work. This promotion is often done with the use of the material aspects of a book. When it is announced that a new book will be released by a popular author, the first thing to be revealed is the title, but close behind is the cover reveal. These reveals are often made on social media.<sup>62</sup> Readers attach a lot of value to the cover of a book, which is visible in the way book announcements and cover reveals are made.

Nowadays, publishers go along with trends to make sure their books and their covers stay up-to-date and in demand with readers. Phillips observes that the traditional view that the publishing industry does not look at the needs of the market is in the past.<sup>63</sup> This can be seen in the re-releases of popular books with new and improved covers. Covers are often revamped to go along with the current trends. To explain this change further, Phillips uses the

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<sup>60</sup> Matthews, introduction to *Judging a Book by Its Cover*, xiii.

<sup>61</sup> Simone Murray, “‘Selling’ Literature: The cultivation of book buzz in the digital literary sphere,” *LOGOS: Journal of the World Publishing Community* 27, no. 1 (2016): 14, doi: 10.1163/1878-4712-11112094.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>63</sup> Phillips, “How Books are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover,” 29.

example of books by famous authors such as Jane Austen and Agatha Christie, whose works are often published with new paratext, such as new covers and introductions by other authors.<sup>64</sup> Publishers do this to make classics or older popular novels more appealing to new and younger audiences, who might not be as tempted to pick up a book that has an outdated cover.<sup>65</sup> The idea of a new design is not only for classics and older popular novels, as this idea is also applied to the works of modern-day authors. Examples of this are books such as the *Princess Trap* by Talia Hibbert, which was originally released in 2018, with a cover that pictured a shirtless man. In 2021 the book was released, this time with a cartoon-style cover, which is in line with the current trends of the design of romance books. This trend of re-releasing books will be further investigated in the third chapter of the thesis.

Bookstores also play an important part in the marketing of books. Before people are able to buy a book, it needs to appear in the store. In the introduction of *Judging a Book by Its Cover*, Matthews describes the process of how bookshops decide on what books they will sell. They often do this based on trade magazines, which are publications that show the upcoming releases of a publisher, and they focus heavily on the covers of the books. If a book does not have an interesting cover or the retailer does not think a book with a certain cover will be sold in their store, they might not stock it, and it might consequently not be able to reach readers.<sup>66</sup> In online bookstores the importance of a good cover is even more apparent, as it is the only thing a customer sees before clicking for more information. Where bookstores can have tables dedicated to books that the staff recommends, the online bookstore is much more limited and a lot less personable, making the first impression even more crucial. For both the publisher and the bookstore, online and offline, the cover of a book is essential for how it is marketed and sold.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>66</sup> Matthews, introduction to *Judging a Book by Its Cover*, xiii.

### The Readers' Perspective

The importance of a pretty and appealing book cover started to rise when the idea was introduced that a book was more than just something to read. Ever since the nineteenth century, a book was a status symbol. Elegant leather bound or clothbound versions were popular for the Victorian middle classes, to show the intelligence and the wealth of their owners.<sup>67</sup> Nowadays, a book can still be a status symbol. In some cases, it can even be used as an accessory. Phillips refers to a change that happened when the television show *Sex and the City* started to feature books in this way. The show itself already had a huge impact on making women want to look fashionable and sophisticated, and when it introduced books as an accessory, the books had to be able to fit into that desired aesthetic. The books that were featured on this show were often women's fiction, and as a result, the covers of this genre started to change.<sup>68</sup> The cover design of a book has always been important, but the example of *Sex and the City* shows just how important these outward appearances are to readers when buying a book.

Although the publishers have the final say in what a bookcover is going to look like, the readers are the ones who will show whether this decision was a good one or not. As previously stated, to make sure their choices are correct in regards to the cover of a book publishers will do extensive market research. Before releasing a novel they have to know what the target audience is, and what the best ways are to reach this audience. Again, an important part of this is the outward appearances of a book. A lot of factors are taken into consideration. Mainly the genre of a book and the audience the book desires to reach.

Women are an important demographic when it comes to potential readership. Phillips states that overall, women are the ones that read and buy more books than others, either as presents

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>68</sup> Phillips, "How Books are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover," 21.

or for themselves.<sup>69</sup> Because of this, gender is one of the main elements taken into consideration with the targeting, because women generally read more than men, men are reluctant to read a book that looks like it was targeted towards women. And while women are willing to read ‘male’ books, men are a lot less willing to read ‘female’ books.<sup>70</sup> This is part of the reason why romance books are so easily recognisable in the store. Those are the books with the bright and feminine colours, the pinks and the purples. Meanwhile the novels that are read by a wider demographic have very different covers, and they might still be colourful, but the designs on them are a lot more sophisticated. The readers’ perception of a book and its cover is very important, as the wrong impression might cause someone to never read it.

The importance of the outward appearances of books is also visible in the idea of ‘bookishness’. As Jessica Pressman explains in her work *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age*, this phenomenon is unique to the twenty-first century. The concept of bookishness has to do with the fact that the covers and outward appearances of books are displayed on a variety of different objects that are not books.<sup>71</sup> Pressman states that bookishness is not simply about a love for reading, it is “about maintaining a nearness to books.”<sup>72</sup> From phone covers that are made to look like books to throw pillows that feature the cover of *Pride and Prejudice*, the paratext of a book serves an even bigger purpose than before. It ties in with the idea that even the just appearance of a book can be seen as a status symbol.<sup>73</sup> Even if the object in question is not actually a book, it implies that the owner of the bookish item likes to read, and the item might even reflect their specific taste. If the cover of

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>71</sup> Jessica Pressman, *Bookishness: Loving Books in a Digital Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 1.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 2.

a book is appealing enough, people might want to use the cover art on other objects, extending the paratext beyond just the physical book itself.

A book is more than just the story contained in its pages. It is every material aspect, from the cover, to the title, to the acknowledgements, that together, make up a book. Each of these paratextual elements has an influence on the reader's understanding of a book. The cover is part of this paratext. It is the first thing a potential buyer sees when they pick a book up, and since first impressions are important, even for books, it is important that it is a good impression. Publishers try their best to make sure a book finds the right audience. By doing research into potential readers and what appeals to them, they are able to use marketing techniques that ensure the right audience is found. Readers also place a lot of importance on the design of books. As books are often seen as a status symbol, it is crucial that a book reflects this status. Of course, this is not the case for every book, but publishers try to make sure that a reader is able to recognise what kind of book they are dealing with based on its cover alone. Each genre comes with its own expectations. The expectations of the covers of the romance genre in the 1980s and the early 2020s will be investigated in the next two chapters.

## Chapter 2

In popular culture, the image of the romance book is embodied by extravagant covers, ones with a half-dressed, muscled man holding a woman with big, flowing hair close to his chest.<sup>74</sup> Romance books with these kinds of covers have numerous nicknames, such as bodice rippers, sweet savage romances, and category romances. Most of these monikers are used for books with a specific type of cover, namely the so-called ‘clinch cover’. These clinch covers started to become popular in the 1970s, and hit their peak in the next decade, the 1980s.<sup>75</sup> The term ‘clinch cover’ comes from the type of embrace that is frequently seen on the covers. The original meaning of the word ‘clinch’ comes from the nautical world and construction, where it was used in the context of securing something. It was later adapted as a term used in boxing, where it referred to holding an opponent.<sup>76</sup> From here it became a phrase that is well known within the romance-reading community when talking about the covers of romance books.<sup>77</sup> The clinch cover is a visual representation of what the book offers to the reader, namely the fantasy of a passionate love between two characters.<sup>78</sup>

Popular romance authors such as Kathleen E. Woodiwiss, who is often referred to as the mother of the modern romance,<sup>79</sup> Johanna Lindsey, and Jude Deveraux all published a large portion of their work during the 1980s, and their books often featured a couple in the typical clinch embrace. The first of these authors to release a romance book was Kathleen E. Woodiwiss, with her publication of *The Flame and the Flower* in 1972. Although the cover of *The Flame and the Flower* was not as dramatic as the books released in the following decade, it did show a small glimpse into the future, as the illustrations on the cover included a

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<sup>74</sup> Goris, “Hidden Codes of Love: The Materiality of the Category Romance Novel,” 111.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>76</sup> “Clinch,” Oxford English Dictionary, accessed January 3, 2024, [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/clinch\\_n1?tab=factsheet#9117465](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/clinch_n1?tab=factsheet#9117465).

<sup>77</sup> Goris, “Hidden Codes of Love: The Materiality of the Category Romance Novel,” 110-111.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>79</sup> Mary Rourke, “Kathleen E. Woodiwiss, 68; romance novelist,” last modified July 13, 2007, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2007-jul-13-me-woodiwiss13-story.html#:~:text=12%20AM%20PT-,Kathleen%20E.,She%20was%2068.>

miniature version of the infamous clinch. As the content of the romance books got more explicit, so did the covers.<sup>80</sup>

Academic An Goris notes that although the paratext of romance books, especially the cover, is well-known in the public imagination, it is not as popular in the academic field.<sup>81</sup> The research into the materiality of romance novels is limited. One author that did investigate the appearance of the romance novel is Jennifer McKnight-Trontz, who wrote *The Look of Love: The Art of the Romance Novel* (2002). In this work, McKnight-Trontz takes a close look at romance book covers, what they look like, and how society and the publishing industry caused them to change over time. Together with An Goris' work "Hidden Codes of Love: The Materiality of the Category Romance Novel", these sources will provide some insight into the design of the romance book cover. Other information for this chapter will largely come from the books themselves, as well as some non-academic works to compensate for the lack of academic writing. The main non-academic source is the podcast episode "The Clinch" from the podcast 99% Invisible, which consists of interviews with professionals within the publishing industry, such as romance book authors and book cover artists that designed some of the clinch covers of the 1980s. The chapter will use these sources to create a detailed analysis of how romance books were published in the 1980s. By looking at different facets of the industry, namely the publishers, the artists who created the covers, and the authors themselves, this chapter will give an extensive examination of the romance genre of the 1980s and develop a better understanding as to why the clinch cover of the 1980s was as popular as it was.

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<sup>80</sup> McKnight-Trontz, *The Look of Love: The Art of the Romance Novel*, 49.

<sup>81</sup> Goris, "Hidden Codes of Love: The Materiality of the Category Romance Novel," 109.

## Historical context

To understand why the romance novel became so popular during the 1970s and the 1980s it is imperative to look at the historical context and what women were occupied with during this time, both in regards to the women's rights movement as a whole and their daily lives. In the 1980s it was becoming more and more common for women to be present in the workplace. However, there were still a lot of women who remained at home. In her study, Janice Radway found that between their daily duties of cleaning the house, preparing dinner and taking care of children, many women found romance books as a way to temporarily escape their duties as a housewife.<sup>82</sup> Romance novels allowed readers to transport to another world where their worries were swept away. However, the genre faced many critiques, as at a first glance, the genre seems to go against any and all feminist ideas of the time. The feminist movement was standing up against the patriarchal ideals of society, and there was an increase in gender equality in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>83</sup> The support of the traditional role of the housewife decreased.<sup>84</sup> However, the romance genre, with its heteronormative and traditional ideals of marriage between a man and a woman, the genre does not seem to allow for much modern thinking. This is a discussion that does not go unnoticed within the romance-reading society, and Radway discusses this further in the chapter on 'The Readers and Their Romances', where she examines an interview with an avid romance reader, Dorothy Evans, as well as a survey of a larger group of women regarding their view of the romance genre and how it interacts with modern ideas of feminism. The interview with Dot reveals that feminist ideals and a love for the romance genre can coexist, despite what many critics say.<sup>85</sup> For romance readers, the typical ending where the female protagonist always ends up with her

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<sup>82</sup> Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, 51.

<sup>83</sup> Karen Oppenheim Mason and Yu-Hsia Lu, "Attitudes toward Women's Familial Roles: Changes in the United States, 1977-1985," *Gender and Society* 2, no. 1 (1988): 54, accessed April 13, 2024, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/190468>.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>85</sup> Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, 54.

romantic interest is not a restricting idea, and instead it is interpreted as a story of female triumph, with strong and fiery female characters who often defy their love interest.<sup>86</sup>

The influence of the feminist movement can still be seen in the romance genre. Especially as more sexual scenes started to be included in the romance books that were published during the 1970s and 1980s. In society, there was an increasing openness about female sexuality.<sup>87</sup> The publishers of romance novels responded to this increase by releasing books that included these themes.

### **The Publisher of the Romance**

During the 1980s, there were several publishers who played an important role in the growth of the romance genre. Prominent examples of companies who released a lot of romance novels are Harlequin Enterprises and Avon Publications. Both produce books that are not only romance books, but more specifically category romance books. The term ‘category romances’ refers to a specific type of romance novel within the larger romance genre. Within the genre, there are several different sub-genres. Examples of these are historical romances and gothic romances, each of these are part of a category within the romance genre.

Harlequin is a big publisher of the category romance as this enterprise, by itself, has sold a total of 6.8 million romance books since its founding in 1949.<sup>88</sup> In her work “Hidden Codes of Love: The Materiality of the Category Romance”, An Goris explains how the materiality of category romances is unique to the genre. They are published in the mass-market paperback format that is cheap to produce and is available in all kinds of stores, including supermarkets.<sup>89</sup> While books of many genres were sold in supermarkets, Harlequin reached a level of success other companies could only strive towards. Janice Radway, in “The

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>87</sup> McKnight-Trontz, *The Look of Love: The Art of the Romance Novel*, 23.

<sup>88</sup> Goris, “Hidden Codes: The Materiality of the Romance Novel,” 109.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 111.

Institutional Matrix: Publishing Romance Fiction”, discusses how W. Lawrence Heisey is the one that introduced the strategy to market Harlequin books like any other consumer product, namely, by brand. While this is a normal marketing technique for any other product, it is very unusual for books. This is the strategy that led to Harlequin’s success.<sup>90</sup> Instead of marketing each of their books individually, they marketed Harlequin itself.<sup>91</sup> By making the brand name a prominent feature on the cover Heisey managed to create an audience that was interested in most of the books Harlequin released. Radway argues that the success of this marketing technique for romance novels specifically is due to two reasons. The first being that women make up a majority of the book-reading public, and the second reason being that the romance novels themselves provide a reading experience that many enjoy, and therefore wish to repeat it.<sup>92</sup> These two factors show that there is a large audience that is interested in repeatedly buying the books Harlequin publishes. The fact that the covers of their books often look similar works in their favour, as it is this repetitiveness, the comfort of knowing how the book will end simply by looking at the cover, that appeals to the intended audience.<sup>93</sup>

However, there still is some variety in the books that publishers such as Harlequin and Avon release. The category romances, as the name suggests, are published in series, and these series are distinguishable for readers by the details included on the cover. A lot of category romances have a clinch cover, but details such as the type of clothing they wear or the colour that is used show what category the books belong to. For example, the couples pictured on historical romance novels will wear clothing belonging to the era the book is set in. In the case of the colours, the category romances that are part of the suspenseful line have purple in their colour scheme, while the more sensual books have red as a dominant colour. Avid

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<sup>90</sup> Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, 40.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

readers of romance novels are able to distinguish these codes to recognise what kind of book they are faced with.<sup>94</sup>

Where Harlequin remained relatively conservative, especially with their cover designs, other publishing houses started to release romance books with more scandalous covers.<sup>95</sup> One of these publishing companies was Avon Books. In the previous decades, the romance book covers were much more subdued, mainly hinting at the romance aspect through charming innuendos.<sup>96</sup> This was no longer necessary in the 1970s and 1980s, as society let go of the old-fashioned ideas of the previous decades. McKnight-Trontz specifically points to the growing feminist movement and a larger acceptance of female sexuality as the driving forces of this change. Publishers responded in kind, and started to release romance books that included sexual encounters between the love interest.<sup>97</sup> The covers of the romance novel changed to match the content, and they became more and more salacious.<sup>98</sup> Janice Radway explains that the way in which Avon marketed their books was very clever, as they “smartly created a demand through heavy advertising and promotion.”<sup>99</sup> While Harlequin also used clever marketing techniques with the help of W. Lawrence Heisey, Avon created an advantage by having a more informal approach to the publishing of romance books. This was done through the close relationship Avon had with its audience, as they read letters fans mailed in to establish what kind of books the readers wanted to read.<sup>100</sup> Avon published the novels of all three authors discussed in this chapter.

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<sup>94</sup> Goris, “Hidden Codes of Love: The Materiality of the Romance Novel,” 177.

<sup>95</sup> McKnight-Trontz, *The Look of Love: The Art of the Romance Novel*, 20.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>99</sup> Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, 34.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

### **The Design of the Clinch**

The design of the covers of 1980s romance novels is unique and easily recognisable. The pastel colours, the characters on the front, and even the lettering make the books unmistakable to be anything but romance novels. While many genres feature characters on the covers, the style in which they are depicted was unlike any others. The people on the front, depicted the two main characters of the book, were shown in a close embrace, with exposed skin and long, flowing hair. The illustration was often a depiction of a scene that appeared in the story. The clinch romance covers first started to appear during the 1970s, but these versions were a lot more subdued than the true clinch covers that were popular for the 1980s romance novels. Instead of taking up the entire cover, the illustrations only appeared at the bottom of the cover, leaving the rest of the space for the title and name of the author. In the 1980s the small vignettes were left behind and the true clinch became the standard of the romance book cover.

Within the romance field, there are several artists whose work can be found on numerous books. The process of making these covers consisted of first having a photoshoot with models, a process illustrator Max Ginsburg described in an interview as being similar to directing a movie, guiding the models so that their embrace was just right.<sup>101</sup> Both the artists of the covers and the models featured on them became famous for their works. Famous romance cover artists include Robert McGinnis, Elaine Duillo, and, as previously mentioned, Max Ginsberg. The artist for the clinch covers were the same ones who worked on the previous romance covers. Artists such as Robert McGinnis had already been designing covers for decades, before the tone shifted and the books' appearances became much more suggestive.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Katie Mingle, "445: The Clinch," June 1, 2021, in *99% Invisible*, produced by Katie Mingle, podcast, MP3 audio, <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/the-clinch/>.

<sup>102</sup> McKnight-Trontz, *The Look of Love: The Art of the Romance Novel*, 23-24.

The most notable model of the romance cover is Fabio. His full name is Fabio Lanzoni, but he is such a phenomenon in the genre that he is mostly only referred to by his first name. During his career, he appeared on more than 400 romance book covers. Fabio's first major appearance was on a Johanna Lindsey novel, *Hearts Aflame*, which was published in 1987. He soon started to appear on many other romance novels and became a recognisable face on many covers. He even became somewhat of a household name, with late-night talkshow hosts mentioning him in their shows.<sup>103</sup> The context in which Fabio was talked about was often somewhat condescending, making fun of his overly masculine appearance, but his popularity cannot be denied.

It was undeniable that clinch covers were successful. While in previous decades the romance book had to compete with the magazines sold on the same shelf in the supermarket, the new look of the romance novel eliminated this concern.<sup>104</sup> Instead the covers of the romance books started to compete with each other, and because of their similar appearances, it became difficult to differentiate between them. Even though the books were published by different publishers, they all pictured a similar cover in similar clothes in a similar setting.<sup>105</sup> Not only was the plot of the romance novel formulaic, the cover art was too. The examples that will be given in the next part of this chapter will show how this formula was applied, and they will illustrate the similarities and the differences of the 1980s clinch covers.

### **Kathleen E. Woodiwiss**

Author Kathleen E. Woodiwiss published her first romance novel, *The Flame and the Flower*, in 1972. Even though the romance genre was already a popular genre before her first novel was released, she is still considered to be 'the mother of modern romance'<sup>106</sup> as she

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<sup>103</sup> Mingle, "445: The Clinch."

<sup>104</sup> McKnight-Trontz, *The Look of Love: The Art of the Romance Novel*, 24.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>106</sup> Rourke, "Kathleen E. Woodiwiss, 68; romance novelist."

revolutionised the genre. The reason for this is the fact that she introduced several new aspects to the typical romance novel. Romance author Sarah MacLean describes the history of why Woodiwiss started her writing career on the 99% Invisible podcast on the clinch cover. MacLean explains that instead of simply writing a romance book, Woodiwiss wanted to write an adventure novel for women. The adventure novel was very popular during this time, but these novels were mainly aimed at men, as they only featured male protagonists.<sup>107</sup> Woodiwiss took this idea of the adventure novel and wrote one for women instead. Her first book, *The Flame and the Flower*, tells the story of Heather Simmons, a woman who falls in love with an adventurous sea captain. It is a tale that includes murder and mystery, as well as romance.

Another addition Woodiwiss made to the genre was the inclusion of explicit sex scenes. Before Woodiwiss, romance novels were very wholesome and chaste, with an innocent female protagonist. Intimacy only appeared in the form of kisses and embraces, any sex outside of wedlock did not appear on the page.<sup>108</sup> This changed with Woodiwiss, who wrote detailed descriptions of sex scenes. As previously stated, these sex scenes were often non-consensual, which was part of the heavy criticism of the romance genre during the 1970s and 1980s. However, since the couple fell in love and lived happily ever after, it became more and more popular to include these kinds of scenes. It started a trend for other romance novels. After the release of *The Flame and the Flower*, other romance books by other authors also began to have scenes of sexual encounters. Despite the criticism, *The Flame and the Flower* was a huge success, selling 2.3 million copies in the first four years after its release.<sup>109</sup> Woodiwiss' combination of the adventure and the romance genre proved successful as similar books by other authors also started to be published at an increasing rate, now often containing explicit scenes.

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<sup>107</sup> Mingle, "445: The Clinch."

<sup>108</sup> McKnight-Trontz, *The Look of Love: The Art of the Romance Novel*, 16.

<sup>109</sup> Mingle, "445: The Clinch."

The cover of *The Flower and the Flame* was also a first of its kind. Although not as extravagant as the covers in the following decade, the art on this novel is the first instance of a clinch cover. As can be seen in Appendix A, the first edition of the novel is a deep purple, with the title taking up most of the front. Underneath the title is a small strip picturing a ship, a house with a big tree in front of it, and most importantly, a man and a woman embracing. Compared to other clinch covers, the art is fairly subdued, as everyone pictured is fully clothed. The novel was designed by Barbara Bertoli, the art director of the publishing company Avon. The books Avon published during the late 1970s that were targeted towards a female audience all had this look, the solid background colour, the large title, and the small illustrations at the bottom. Thomas L. Bonn refers to this look as the “Avon look” in his work on the history of the American mass-market paperback. Bonn notes that although publishers generally tried to have different designs for their books, publishers still replicated designs by other publishers after it became popular. This was also the case for the romance book cover of the 1970s, and when the ‘Avon look’ became too repetitive, it started to be replaced by the true clinch covers, where the illustrations take up the entire cover.<sup>110</sup>

As detailed by Janice Radway in “The Institutional Matrix: Publishing Romance Fiction”, the fact that Kathleen E. Woodiwiss even managed to get her first novel published was somewhat of a miracle. Woodiwiss sent her manuscript to Avon without having an agent, which is rarely successful, but by a coincidence, the executive editor of Avon picked it up and made sure it was published.<sup>111</sup> The release of *The Flame and the Flower* was fairly unusual, as it included the publicity, advertising and promotion that is usually only used for the big bestsellers.<sup>112</sup> After this initial success, this technique was used for other romance books, and was adopted by other publishers.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Thomas L. Bonn, *Under cover: An Illustrated History of American Mass-Market Paperbacks* (London: Penguin, 1982), 107.

<sup>111</sup> Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, 33.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

Woodiwiss published twelve books in total, the first released in 1972 and the last in 2007. Three of these novels were published during the 1980s, namely *A Rose in Winter* (1981), *Come Love a Stranger* (1984), and *So Worthy My Love* (1989), see Appendix A. All three of these novels were originally published with a clinch cover, continuing the trend Woodiwiss herself started. Both the cover of *A Rose in Winter* and the cover of *Come Love a Stranger* are a bit more daring than the original cover of *The Flower and the Flame*, as the couples show a lot more skin. *So Worthy My Love* however is a lot more conservative, with most of the cover being solid red with only a small portrait of a woman with voluminous hair in the middle. While Kathleen E. Woodiwiss might have started the trend of the clinch cover, her works are not the most extreme examples.

### **Johanna Lindsey**

An author whose books are truly committed to the trend of the salacious clinch covers is Johanna Lindsey. Lindsey released over fifty books during her lifetime, with the earliest being *Captive Bride*, which was published in 1977 by Avon. Her final novel was released in 2019, the same year that she passed.<sup>114</sup> Lindsey wrote a lot of books throughout her career, and seventeen of them were published during the 1980s. The covers of these books were some of the most sensational clinch covers, as several of them showed entirely nude men with women strategically placed in front of them. The cover of her first novel, *Captive Bride*, was still part of the typical style of the seventies. The background is solid blue and the title takes up half of the cover. Although the illustration is relatively small, it still shows the quintessential couple embracing each other while on horseback. The cover style changed drastically with the turn of the decade, as the first novel Lindsey published in the 1980s was *Fires of Winter*, released in September of the year 1980. It was her third novel, and the tone

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<sup>114</sup> Richard Sandomir, "Johanna Lindsey, Best-Selling Romance Novelist, Dies at 67," last modified December 22, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/22/books/johanna-lindsey-dead.html>.

of the cover completely shifted in comparison to the previous two. This book was the first to show a fully naked man on the cover, with a woman draped over his front to cover him in the necessary places. This new style became a staple for Lindsey, and of the seventeen books published in this decade, a total of eleven books showed naked men on the cover. Only at the end of the decade were the men allowed to wear clothes again. Although the nudity on the cover does not directly correlate to the explicit content in the novel, the covers that do show fully-clothed people frequently do contain sex scenes.<sup>115</sup> As Goris noted in her research, the style of the cover reflects what type of romance novel it is.<sup>116</sup> Lindsey's covers are an excellent example of this. If the novel is about vikings, as is the case with *Fires of Winter*, it is clear by simply looking at the cover, which can be seen in Appendix B. The same goes for most of Lindsey's novels. *Love Only Once* (1985), is set in regency-era England, which is visible from the regency-style dress that the woman on the cover is wearing. *Savage Thunder's* (1989) western setting is evident from the Arizona landscape in the background and the cowboy attire that the male love interest is wearing. The covers of Johanna Lindsey's books help readers determine what kind of book they are dealing with. However, not everyone was comfortable being seen with books with these salacious covers in public. In order to appeal to potential readers who did not want to be seen with these books, the publisher Avon also released some more discrete editions, which only had the title on the cover with a solid background. By releasing these discrete versions the publishers gave readers the option to be a bit more private about their reading practices. Janice Radway notes in her research, that it became apparent that many women felt guilty about spending money on something that was ridiculed by society.<sup>117</sup> And while these newer covers did not stop the overall romance genre from being ridiculed, the new covers did eliminate one of the more exposing components.

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<sup>115</sup> Goris, "Hidden Codes of Love: The Materiality of the Romance Novel," 115.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>117</sup> Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, 53-54.

These suggestive covers were made by a variety of artists, one of the most prominent being Robert McGinnis. He made the artwork for the *Fires of Winter* (1980), *Tender is the Storm* (1985), and *A Heart So Wild* (1986), the last being one of the only covers that showed both people fully clothed. McGinnis designed over 1,200 different novels, all from different genres. His style is best known for being provocative.<sup>118</sup> His work can also be seen on a variety of film posters, the most famous ones being the artwork for the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) with Audrey Hepburn and the poster for the James Bond movie *You Only Live Twice* (1967). However, the provocative covers of the books Johanna Lindsey published in the 1980s were not limited to those designed by Robert McGinnis, and many of Lindsey's other book covers were designed by artist Elain Duillo.

It was Lindsey's books that introduced the world to the romance cover phenomenon that was Fabio. Fabio's first major appearance is on the cover of *Hearts Aflame* (1987), on a cover painted by Elain Duillo. It is one of the only Johanna Lindsey covers of the decade that had the male model appear fully clothed. Despite this one exception, Fabio was the poster picture of the bare-chested macho man that appeared so frequently on the clinch cover. Fabio appears on several of the covers included in Appendix B. McKnight suggests that the popularity of the "beefcake covers"<sup>119</sup> reflects the fact that the societal roles of men and women were becoming more equal. With the rise of the feminist movement, women got more rights and men finally became the sex object.<sup>120</sup> These covers were a visual manifestation of the fact that a lot of women were affected by the sexual revolution of the 1960s.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> "Robert McGinnis," Illustration History, accessed January 18, 2024, <https://www.illustrationhistory.org/artists/robert-mcginnis>.

<sup>119</sup> McKnight-Trontz, *The Look of Love: The Art of the Romance Novel*, 31.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>121</sup> Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, 73.

## **Jude Deveraux**

Similar to Kathleen E. Woodiwiss and Johanna Lindsey, Jude Deveraux started her career in the 1970s, with the release of *The Enchanted Land* in 1978. Deveraux's body of work consists of a total of 73 books, 43 of which are *New York Times* bestsellers.<sup>122</sup> She is still writing books today, and the latest was released in April of 2023. Nineteen of her works were published during the 1980s, and a majority of these books were published with Avon Books. According to her author's profile in Kathryn Falk's book *Love's Leading Ladies* (1982), which is a collection of personal interviews with popular romance writers of the 1970s and 1980s, Jude Deveraux sent her first manuscript to Avon specifically because she liked the romantic covers of their books.<sup>123</sup>

Deveraux's first novel, *The Enchanted Land*, which was published in the late 1970s, has a full clinch cover. Whereas the books of Woodiwiss and Lindsey that were published before the 1980s were still in the typical Avon style, with the solid background colour and small illustration, the painting on *The Enchanted Land* takes up the entire front. However, it is a very tame version of the clinch, as it shows a fully clothed man and woman, and the woman is holding a child. In general, the covers of Jude Deveraux's works during the 1980s are a lot more subdued than, for example, Johanna Lindsey's covers, as can be seen in Appendix C. The first several books of the decade, *The Black Lyon* (1980), *The Velvet Promise* (1981), and *Highland Velvet* (1982) all have a clinch cover. However, the colours are darker than other clinch covers and the couple on the front still have all their clothes on. While the covers do have the typical elements of characters with long flowing hair and the couple in an intimate embrace, they are not as extravagant as other clinch covers. The books that were published in the last part of the decade were, similarly to Johanna Lindsey, a lot more restrained, with the illustrations only taking up a small part of the cover. *The Maiden*,

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<sup>122</sup> "About Jude Deveraux," Jude Deveraux, accessed January 16, 2024, <https://judedeveaux.com/about/>.

<sup>123</sup> Kathryn Falk, *Love's Leading Ladies* (New York: Pinnacle Books, 1982), 92.

which was published in 1988, only has a small vignette that is surrounded by the title and the name of the author on a solid background. Even though the style of Deveraux's book covers was always more minimal than other covers of this time, the overview in Appendix C shows that it still went along with the major trends. The reason that the covers of her books are a lot more subdued can be found in the works themselves. On several different occasions Deveraux mentioned how she was a fan of Kathleen E. Woodiwiss' *The Flame and the Flower*, but disliked the rape scenes that were included in the book. This dislike is also part of the reason why she began writing in the first place, as she was not able to find the books that she wanted to read. In her interview for *Love's Leading Ladies* Deveraux states that "personally, I wouldn't want a kidnapper and rapist in my house. I'm the old-fashioned type. I like my heroine to love one man and sleep with one man - some exciting near misses maybe - but no rapes or other lovers."<sup>124</sup> These rape scenes do appear in the works of Woodiwiss and Lindsey, authors whose book covers also tend to show a lot more nudity. In this case, there does seem to be a correlation between the extravagance of the covers and the sensual content of the book itself. The content of Jude Deveraux's books is different to that of the other writers, and the covers reflect that.

Since the 1980s, the look of the romance novel has drastically changed. This is especially visible in Jude Deveraux's works, as she is still publishing works to this day. While her books do not have the covers that other modern-day romance books do, it is clear that the artwork of her books has changed over the years to adapt to more modern trends. The covers of her recent works show pictures on the covers, and while some still show a couple in an embrace, plenty of her works now simply have pictures of houses or other objects. One of the possible reasons for the fact that Deveraux's covers do not have the comic style that is so popular nowadays, might be her long-established audience. Whereas other, newer, authors

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<sup>124</sup> Falk, *Love's Leading Ladies*, 91-92.

want to appeal to as many new readers as possible, this is not as necessary for Deveraux's books. Jude Deveraux is already an established name within the genre and readers know what to expect of her books. In addition, Deveraux's works already have an established look, and while covers often go along with trends in order to maintain relevance and attract a new audience, authors also work with a level of recognisability, and adapting a whole new look would negate this.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the style of the romance novel had undergone many changes. From small vignettes, to fully-painted renditions, and back to more discrete covers, these decades saw covers of all kinds. However, what tied all of these covers together was the clinch. While the size of the clinch changed over the years, the half-naked couple intimately embracing was always present. Although *The Flame and the Flower* by Kathleen E. Woodiwiss, the first book that appeared with this style, was revolutionary for its time, it would not take long for other books to appear with similar and even more extravagant styles. The covers of Johanna Lindsey's books took the clinch to a whole new level, with the increased amount of nudity on the works designed by Robert McGinnis and the introduction of Fabio by Elain Duillio. Jude Deveraux's works show another side of the clinch. Even though Deveraux's works were published by the same publisher that released Woodiwiss and Lindsey's novels, Deveraux's covers were much more subdued. The decreased amount of nudity reflected the contents of the novel itself. This shows that to some extent, there is a correlation between the iconography on the cover of the novel and the contents of the book. The ability to recognise certain elements of the different kinds of romance novels largely stayed intact in the following decade, but the overall look began to change. By the 1990s the appearance of the clinch cover decreased as other trends took over. Romance covers still showed couples in a variety of compromising positions, but instead of being painted, they

were simply photographs. The trend of the true ‘clinch’ was left behind. Trends come and go, and even though the clinch-style cover is not as popular today as it once was, it is still present in many people’s minds when they think of the romance genre.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Victoria Lessard, “A Brief History of the Clinch,” last modified February 8, 2023, <https://hazlitt.net/feature/brief-history-clinch>.

### Chapter 3

Times have changed drastically since the 1980s, and so has the materiality of the romance genre. When browsing in the romance section of the bookstore, it is now rare to see the clinch cover that was so popular during the 1980s. The paratext of a book is influenced by society and the outside world, and the romance novel is no exception.<sup>126</sup> The clinch cover of the 1980s reflected the society of the time, and therefore it can be assumed that the cartoon cover reflects the society of today. Towards the end of the 1980s, the number of covers picturing the full clinch already started to decrease, being replaced by smaller illustrations in the form of vignettes. These books still featured the clinch, but it was a lot less extravagant. In the time between the 1980s and now, romance books have had several different appearances. Some barely feature any illustrations of the characters in the book, only having the title and the author's name, with a landscape in the background. However, the pastel colours and the curved lettering of the title still made them recognisable as part of the romance genre. With the further development of technology and photography, particularly with photoshop, it became popular to have characters grace the front of romance books again.<sup>127</sup> The photo of a shirtless, very muscled man now often appeared on the cover. Notably, elements of the 1980s clinch still shone through on these covers, specifically the ones that showed both a man and a woman on the cover. On these books, the couple appeared in a similar position to that of the 1980s clinch, with the two characters tightly embracing. Examples of these types of covers are Talia Hibbert's earlier novels. Before releasing her books with cartoon covers, her novels had these types of photographs on the front. *A Girl Like Her* (2018), as well as the rest of the books in these series, are all in line with the popular art style that preceded the cartoon cover. Hibbert's more recent works, starting with *Get a Life, Chloe Brown* (2019), all have a cartoon

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<sup>126</sup> Yra van Dijk, "The Margins of Bookishness: Paratexts in Digital Literature," in *Examining Paratextual Theory and its Applications in Digital Culture*, ed. Nadine Desrochers and Daniel Apollon (Amsterdam: SCOPUS, 2014), 24.

<sup>127</sup> Mingle, "445: The Clinch."

cover and will be discussed further on in this chapter. These earlier works show that, the only real difference to the original clinch was the fact that these were not painted renderings, and the hair was of a much more normal volume. They were an updated version of the 1980s clinch.

Although there were already romance books with illustrated covers before the trend started to take off in the late 2010s, they were an anomaly. One example are the UK covers of the *Bridgerton* series by Julia Quinn, while the first edition still adhered to the older style, with the same lettering and same pastel-coloured background that was popular in the 1980s, the newer version that was released in the United Kingdom in 2010 was fully illustrated. Albeit not in the exact same style as we see today, it was still different from the other covers released during this time. During the late 2010s this trend really started to take on, with more and more romance books appearing with illustrated covers.

To create some insight as to why these changes have happened, this chapter will investigate the influence of social media, specifically the online platforms of YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Scholars such as Simone Murray, Bronwyn Reddan, and Margaret K. Merga, have looked into how these digital spaces have influenced the publishing industry. Social media and the larger digital literary sphere play an important role in this chapter, both when looking at trends in book cover design and the ways in which cover art is used as promotional material. However, before continuing this chapter, it is important to understand one specific factor, namely that, as pointed out by Simone Murray in “Charting the Digital Sphere”, it is impossible for a researcher to stand outside of the digital literary sphere while doing research into that exact phenomenon, as the researcher is most likely already part of that sphere.<sup>128</sup> This is also the case here, and it should be noted that any of these observations are heavily influenced by algorithms that are personalised for each user by tracking their

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<sup>128</sup> Simone Murray, “Charting the Literary Sphere,” *Contemporary Literature* 56, no. 2 (2015): 332, accessed December 4, 2023, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24735010>.

interests and behaviours on social media, so these observations might not be true for everyone. There is an endless amount of bookish content on the internet, and some things might be missing here, or the observations made in this chapter might go unnoticed by other people, simply because most social media platforms have personal algorithms.

### **The Influence of Social Media**

Society is not the only thing that has changed since the 1980s, the literary industry has changed drastically as well. One major change since the 1980s is the development of the internet. Although the internet was around in the 1980s, it did not look like it does today, as it experienced a massive growth during the 1990s.<sup>129</sup> The first social media sites were launched around the turn of the century, with platforms such as Myspace and Facebook being founded in 2003 and 2004, respectively. Soon after, other social media sites started to appear. All of these sites share one purpose, namely to share content with other people.<sup>130</sup> This content can come in many forms, and each social media site focuses on a different type of content. For example, YouTube is a platform for videos, Instagram for pictures, and TikTok for short-form videos.<sup>131</sup> Although there is some overlap in content form between these sites, such as the ability to post short videos on Instagram and pictures on TikTok, each site still has its own features. Due to these differences, the ways in which books are discussed and promoted are different on each site. One academic who has done research on the digital literary sphere is Simone Murray, who studied the relationship between the digital community and contemporary literary culture.<sup>132</sup> Murray states that these digital communities, discussed here in the form of communities on different social media sites, have become inseparable from the

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>130</sup> Bronwyn Reddan, "Social Reading Cultures on Booktube, Bookstagram, and Booktok," *Synergy* 20, no. 1 (2022): 3-4, accessed January 10, 2024, <https://slav.vic.edu.au/index.php/Synergy/article/view/597>.

<sup>131</sup> Simone Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, and Selling Books in the Internet Era* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2018), 35.

<sup>132</sup> Murray, "Charting the Literary Sphere," 311.

publishing industry.<sup>133</sup> Publishers, authors, and readers use these platforms to promote and discuss books. Publishers and authors use social media to advertise any upcoming releases and gain a bigger readership.<sup>134</sup> The way in which readers use social media is somewhat different, although they do sometimes promote books, the content on their page can come in many different forms, such as reviews, recommendations, and in-depth discussions on novels. However, the exact form this content takes is often dependent on the platform on which it is posted.<sup>135</sup>

On YouTube, the people who discuss books are referred to as being part of ‘BookTube’. Most of the social media platforms have a nickname for the bookish community, with specific authors and readers being associated with the ‘BookTube’ community. One of the ways in which publishers make use of this website is by making book trailers for the books they publish in order to promote their works.<sup>136</sup> Authors can use YouTube to show their writing process to give some behind-the-scenes information, or they can use it to promote their upcoming works. Murray refers to John Green as an example of an author that has a large following on YouTube, and explains that Green is someone who uses the platform to engage with his audience in unique ways. One example of ways in which he involved his audience with the writing process was by hosting a competition to design the cover for his book *An Abundance of Katherines*.<sup>137</sup> The reader community is significantly more active on the platform in comparison to the publishers and the authors, posting all sorts of bookish content, from book reviews, to recommendations and bookshelf tours.<sup>138</sup> Bronwyn Reddan explains in his article “Social Reading Cultures on BookTube, Bookstagram, and BookTok” that BookTube started with a small community around 2009, who mostly posted content

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 313-314.

<sup>134</sup> Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, and Selling Books in the Internet Era*, 12-14.

<sup>135</sup> Merga, “How can BookTok on TikTok inform readers’ advisory services for young people?,” 4-6.

<sup>136</sup> Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, and Selling Books in the Internet Era*, 12.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>138</sup> Reddan, “Social Reading Cultures on Booktube, Bookstagram, and Booktok,” 3-4.

about young adult literature.<sup>139</sup> Since YouTube is largely a visual media, the so-called ‘booktubers’ often show the covers of the books they are discussing. YouTube also allows the audience to participate in the discussions that are brought up in the videos, through commenting, liking, and sharing, the audience can engage with other readers and participate in literary conversations on a global scale, which is also the case for the other social media platforms that will be discussed here.<sup>140</sup>

Bookstagram, the nickname for the bookish community of Instagram, is also used by industry professionals and readers alike. Looking at the hashtag #bookstagram makes it evident how big the bookish community is on this site, with over 75 million posts under this hashtag.<sup>141</sup> The pictures in these posts often feature one or more books, bookshelves or other book-related items. The importance of the material aspects of books becomes very obvious by looking through this tag, as posts often feature the cover, with a carefully styled background that matches the cover.<sup>142</sup> Similarly to YouTube, publishers, authors and readers make use of the platform. The content publishers post is mostly promotional, but the pages of authors can be a bit more personal, sharing photos and stories about their personal lives as well as posts about upcoming projects they are working on. Authors are significantly more present on this platform, which might be due to the fact that this format is a lot more accessible, one does not need the skills to edit a ten-minute video, and can instead simply post a photo to the platform to engage with their audience.

The content readers post can come in different forms. Although they are all mostly pictures, there are different types of ‘Bookstagramers’. The first type of Bookstagram really leans into the fact that books are visual objects. The posts are carefully crafted to portray not only the books themselves, but also the aesthetics of reading, by showing beautifully styled

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>140</sup> Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, and Selling Books in the Internet Era*, 169.

<sup>141</sup> Reddan, “Social Reading Cultures on Booktube, Bookstagram, and Booktok,” 6.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 6.

bookshelves and picturing a book next to a cup of tea and a cosy blanket, reading is shown as a desirable activity that is part of an aspirational lifestyle.<sup>143</sup> The importance of a book cover that matches this desired aesthetic is shown in an article for *The Guardian*, where Bookstagram creator Femke Brull (@booksfemme) stated “If I don’t like the cover, I won’t photograph it and put it on my feed.”<sup>144</sup> Brull explains that she still posts about books with covers that do not appeal to her, but instead of showing the cover in these posts she uses the title page of the novel, in order to avoid putting the less aesthetically pleasing cover on her page.<sup>145</sup>

Another, more recent trend on Bookstagram is where creators post recommendations and reviews in a format that is comparable to infographics. They feature collages of books, showing only their covers, mentioning in a few words the genre, themes, or tropes they all have in common. In these cases, an appealing cover is even more important, as it is grouped together with other, similar books, and someone is more easily persuaded to read a book with a cover they like. In all posts, the creator can accompany the picture with a small text where they can start a conversation with their audience through the comments.<sup>146</sup>

Of all these social media platforms, TikTok is the newest. The platform quickly became popular with its short and entertaining videos. Although initially mostly used to post clips of people dancing, the short-form video platform soon found different uses as well, and nowadays all types of content are posted to the site on a daily basis, including bookish content.<sup>147</sup> On this platform, the bookish community has the nickname ‘BookTok’. The impact of Booktok has been a lot more noticeable than that of the other platforms, with a poll of over 2,000 people made by The Publishers Association revealing that 59% of 16-25 year

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>144</sup> Holly Connolly, “Is social media influencing book cover design?,” *The Guardian* online, August 28, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/aug/28/is-social-media-influencing-book-cover-design#:~:text=Corral%20says%20social%20media%20directly,to%20spread%20across%20the%20internet.%E2%80%9D>.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Reddan, “Social Reading Cultures on Booktube, Bookstagram, and Booktok,” 6.

<sup>147</sup> Merga, “How can BookTok on TikTok inform readers’ advisory services for young people?,” 2.

olds have started reading because of BookTok.<sup>148</sup> This influence is also evident in bookstores, as many shops now have special tables dedicated to books that are popular on TikTok. Publishers recognise the influence that BookTok has on the literary industry, and the companies often have their own accounts, sharing insights into the publishing industry and promoting any upcoming releases. There are also many authors that use TikTok in this way, but again, the readers form the largest part of the bookish community on TikTok. These creators share all kinds of videos, the content of which is largely similar to that on YouTube, with reviews, monthly-wrap ups, and other literary discussions being held all over the platform. However, since TikTok's platform is made for short videos that are shown in quick succession to viewers on their feeds, which are based on an algorithm, the videos are a lot easier to consume. Margaret K. Merga, in her article "How can BookTok on TikTok inform readers' advisory services for young people?" discusses that the people on this platform often recommend books based on the tropes that appear in the novel, such as enemies to lovers and friends to lovers.<sup>149</sup> Although TikTok is also a platform based on visual content, the importance of an appealing cover seems less important here in comparison to the other platforms, with some books being recommended to others by only showing a small snippet of text in the video, and nothing else. However, the cover still plays a vital role, as they are often shown in the videos.

There are websites that are specifically made for global literary conversations, such as Goodreads, Fable, and Storygraph, which are made to log reading habits, write reviews and join book clubs where people can discuss the book they are reading with strangers from all over the world. However, the bookish communities on other platforms have a similar, if not bigger, impact on the publishing industry. Both the consumers, publishers and authors make

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<sup>148</sup> "The BookTok Generation: How social media is transforming Gen Z reading habits," *The Publishers Association* online, November 23, 2022, <https://www.publishers.org.uk/the-booktok-generation-how-social-media-is-transforming-gen-z-reading-habits/>.  
<sup>149</sup> Merga, "How can BookTok on TikTok inform readers' advisory services for young people?," 5.

sure to follow the popular trends. Social media has a lot of impact on the lives of the people who use these apps, and publishers and authors are aware of this, and make sure to use it to their advantage to promote their books. The readers, in turn, prove how effective word of mouth actually is as a marketing tool, as their online recommendations have influenced the entire publishing industry.<sup>150</sup>

The most popular genres on social media are young adult, fantasy, science fiction, and most importantly, romance.<sup>151</sup> The sales of these genres have increased along with their popularity.<sup>152</sup> For the romance genre, the books that became popular often had cartoon covers. Publishing houses saw this success, and similarly to the 1980s clinch cover, more books with these type of covers started to be released in an attempt to replicate this success.<sup>153</sup>

### **The Publisher of the Modern Romance**

Publishers of the modern romance is different from the publisher of romance of the 1980s. The industry has grown a lot and no longer is the romance genre ruled by industry giants such as Harlequin and Avon.<sup>154</sup> While these publishing companies still exist and publish romance novels, it is not often that their logos appear on the spines of modern romances. There are many publishers that release romances, such as Piatkus Books, Berkley Books, and Simon & Schuster. These are the publishing houses that release books in line with the new design trends of romance book covers. Especially Berkley, which is a subsidiary of Penguin Random House, releases books according to the new format. The cover of the new romance novels is not the only material aspect that has changed. The physical format has also changed. Whereas category romance novels are generally sold as a mass market paperback, a format that is

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<sup>150</sup> Murray, "Selling Literature: The Cultivation of Book Buzz in the Digital Literary Sphere," 12.

<sup>151</sup> Reddan, "Social Reading Cultures on Booktube, Bookstagram, and Booktok," 9.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>153</sup> Bonn, *Under cover: An Illustrated History of American Mass-Market Paperbacks*, 107.

<sup>154</sup> Elena Nicolaou, "How These Instagrammable Book Covers Are Tricking People Into Reading Romance," *Refinery* online, October 11, 2018, <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2018/10/213494/romance-novel-cover-trend-modern>.

small and cheap to produce, the ones published by Berkley are the size of trade paperbacks, and are therefore bigger and more expensive.<sup>155</sup> Although Berkley was not the first to publish romance novels in this format, it is currently the largest distributor of this style of romance books.<sup>156</sup>

With an increase in publishers that release romance novels, there is also an increase in the number of books that are marketed to readers, often in online recommendations. Murray calls attention to the fact that there are downsides to the enormous amount of content that is available online. There are downsides for all parties involved, but Murray specifically points to the audience's response to this abundance and states that it can create choice anxiety.<sup>157</sup> As a response, people look for some type of reassurance in the things they consume, either in the form of buying books from authors they already know, or by taking recommendations from people whose opinions they trust. In turn, publishers choose to release and market only a limited amount of books, which are often similar to previous bestsellers, hoping that they garner a similar amount of success as the original.<sup>158</sup> This creates a selection of books that either have comparable narratives, or as is relevant here, covers that all use one style of design. This is true for any genre and for any era, but most recently this trend is very visible in the cartoon-style romance covers.

### **The Design of the Cartoon Cover**

Compared to the clinch covers of the eighties, the cartoon covers of this decade are a lot more simplistic. There are no painted renderings of hunky men embracing their lovers, instead, the clinch design has been replaced by simple illustrations. Although still distinctive with their bright colours, the design has become a lot more subdued, and the characters that are featured

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, and Selling Books in the Internet Era*, 61.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 61.

on the front often lack details. They are abstract renditions of the characters in the novel. Elena Nicolaou, in her article “How These Instagrammable Book Covers Are Tricking People Into Reading Romance” for *Refinery29*, discusses the reasons behind these changes. These changes were made to appeal to readers who would not normally be interested in romance novels. The new covers reflected the similarities the books have with the romantic comedy film genre. Instead of romances, the books became rom-coms. Even though this is only a small difference, the new covers show that the romance genre is a lot more complex than just love and sex. Emily Osborne, an associate art director at Penguin Random House explains this idea further in an article for *Refinery29*. In the article “How These Instagrammable Book Covers Are Tricking People Into Reading Romance” Osborne states that ‘Romance covers can be very one-note. They’re about love or lust [...] These covers are more complex and indicate a broad sense of what romance is. They’re complicated. The books aren’t just about the romance.’<sup>159</sup>

However, these new covers are only reserved for one kind of romance novel, namely the one that follows two equal partners in the modern age, whose story, as previously stated, is similar to the one that is portrayed on screen in romantic comedies. Nicolaou states that other romance sub-genres, such as regency romances and paranormal romances, still feature imagery associated with the romance covers of the 2000s and 2010s, with photos of real people on the covers.<sup>160</sup> And while this was true for a long time, there have been some changes in these sub-genres as well. There are more and more romance books that feature the now common cartoon couple on the front, even if they fall outside of the contemporary romance genre. Examples of this are *A League of Extraordinary Women*, a regency romance series by Evie Dunmore, and Ali Hazelwood’s paranormal romance *Bride*. All of these novels

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<sup>159</sup> Elena Nicolaou, “How These Instagrammable Book Covers Are Tricking People Into Reading Romance.”

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

have cartoon covers, showcasing that this style is no longer limited to contemporary romance novels.

### **Emily Henry**

One author who is a prominent example of the illustrated book cover trend of the 2020s is author Emily Henry. Henry currently has currently written a total of four romance novels, with a fifth being released in April 2024. All these books are designed in a similar style, namely the cartoon style that is characteristic of the modern romance novel. Her first romance novel, *Beach Read*, was released in 2020 and shows two characters that are facing away from each other from above. The cover shows that the days of the detailed paintings of characters who hold each other close in intimate embraces are gone. Instead, the new trend of simplistic cartoon designs has taken over. All of Henry's romance books are interconnected, as some of the characters are mentioned and sometimes make appearances in other books. Although not technically a series, the art on the covers does match in terms of style and colour scheme, as can be seen in Appendix D. Because of this, it is easy to see that the books were written by the same author. Currently, a lot of romance authors follow the trend of the cartoon cover, but Emily Henry's books show that there is still space to have a distinguishing style, even if it is part of a larger trend.

*Beach Read*, Henry's first romance novel, is a book that explores how the perception of romance fiction differs from literary fiction, as the two main characters are authors of these two genres who decide to swap genres to combat their writer's block. In the novel, the characters, January and Augustus, have several discussions where they talk about the importance of the romance genre and the literary value of romances.

'If you swapped all my Jessicas for Johns, do you know what you'd get?

*Fiction*. Just fiction. Ready and willing to be ready by anyone, but somehow

by *being* a woman who *writes* about women, I've eliminated half the Earth's population from my potential readers, and you know what? I don't feel ashamed of that. I feel *pissed*.'<sup>161</sup>

In this quote, Henry shows that although there are substantive differences between the literary genre and the romance genre, the main reason the genre is looked down on, is because of society's perception of the genre. The book portrays discussions that are still held in both society as a whole and in the literary sphere.<sup>162</sup>

All of Emily Henry's novels have the same style and are designed by the same artist, Sandra Chiu. Chiu's work appears on numerous romance novels, by a variety of different authors and they all have the same elements of the cartoon style, namely the bold colours and the characters which are portrayed with very simplistic features. However, this style is not only reserved for the modern romance covers in her catalogue. It is also used in covers of Jane Austen's novels, which she designed for Signet Classics, an imprint of Penguin Random House, the same company that is also in charge of Berkley, which publishes Emily Henry's novels. However, not all elements of the 1980s clinch cover have disappeared. One characteristic that has remained intact is the brightly coloured covers. The covers in Appendix D show that all of Emily Henry's covers feature a solid coloured background with two, or sometimes more characters on the front. With bright yellow, orange, blue and pink covers, it is clear that the genre has not left its penchant for colourful covers behind. This, together with the fact that most of Henry's covers show the two main characters, make the books still somewhat recognisable as being part of the romance genre. However, a lot of detail that was included in the clinch covers is still lost. This more sophisticated style is in line with what Angus Phillips discusses in "How Books are Positioned in the Market:

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<sup>161</sup> Emily Henry, *Beach Read* (New York: Berkley, 2020), 68.

<sup>162</sup> Allison P. Davis, "The Women Are Smart. The Men Are Sincere. And the Ending Is Always Happy. Emily Henry cracked the modern romance novel.," *Vulture* online, March 29, 2023, <https://www.vulture.com/article/emily-henry-romance-novel-profile.html>.

Reading the Cover”, where he states that this trend of more sophisticated covers for women’s fiction and romance books started with the show *Sex and the City*, which influenced books to become an accessory, as well as something to be read. In turn, the covers of these books have become bolder and more sophisticated.<sup>163</sup>

The 99% Invisible podcast episode on the materiality of romance books draws a comparison to women’s fiction with these covers. Katie Mingle states that from just looking at the covers, it is not immediately clear that the books are part of the romance genre.<sup>164</sup> Although some of the covers do feature the main couple, they are no longer half-naked and locked in an intimate embrace. Instead, they are abstract renderings, lacking any defining features. Unfortunately, this does mean that some of the coding that was associated with the original category romance covers, where certain colours stood for certain tropes and elements that were present in the book, are lost. Previously, a reader could tell a lot about the story behind the cover by simply looking at the cover of a romance book, but since the covers of new romance novels are often so similar to general fiction, it can be hard to tell that it is even a romance book at all.<sup>165</sup>

### **Talia Hibbert**

Talia Hibbert is a romance author who has been publishing novels since 2017. The covers from her earlier works all fall into the category of half-naked torsos of men. However, with her transition to a new publisher, namely Avon Books, her newer works started to have a new look, one that is in line with the popular cartoon style of the late 2010s and early 2020s. The first book she released with an illustrated cover was *Get a Life, Chloe Brown*, which was published in 2019. This cover has a solid white background and features the two main characters, a mid-sized black woman besides a ginger-haired white man. Unlike the painted

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<sup>163</sup> Phillips, “How Books are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover,” 21.

<sup>164</sup> Mingle, “445: The Clinch.”

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

renderings of the clinch covers, these characters lack precise detail. As can be seen in Appendix E, the other books in this series all have a similar style to this. *Take a Hint, Dani Brown* (2020) and *Act Your Age, Eve Brown* (2021) both have a solid coloured background with a simple illustration of the two main characters. Although the characters do embrace on these covers, the positioning is nothing like the 1980s clinch cover. The title takes up most of the front on all these books, and the focus is not on the image of the characters. In an interview with Entertainment Weekly, Hibbert is questioned about the design of the cover and was questioned whether or not she had any influence in the design. Hibbert reveals that she was actually quite involved in the process, as her editor asked her if there were any covers that she liked the look of, also inquiring after specific design preferences such as colour and character designs. As inspiration Hibbert mentions Sally Thorne's *The Hating Game*, a novel with a cartoon cover which was released in 2016 that reminded her of the chick-lit genre that used to be popular. Similarly to what Mingle observes, the modern romance covers are similar to women's fiction, and Hibbert jokes that "[People are] being stealth tricked into reading romance."<sup>166</sup>

However, not all of her romance novels have these cartoon covers. Hibbert's older novels all have covers with photographs, and in order to appeal to new readers, Hibbert is rereleasing her back catalogue with new, trendy, illustrated covers.<sup>167</sup> Multiple editions of a novel are not unique, and in some cases, the various covers of books can simply be explained by the fact that the books are released in different countries. Even when the book is in the same language, another country means that there is another market, one that might not have the same tastes as the first. While a cover might be successful in sparking the interest of potential readers in one country, it might fail in the other. An example of this is the taste of

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<sup>166</sup> Maureen Lee Lenker, "How Talia Hibbert's own experiences with chronic pain inspired her latest romance heroine," *Entertainment Weekly* online, March 20, 2019, <https://ew.com/books/2019/03/20/talia-hibbert-chronic-pain-romance-heroine/>.

<sup>167</sup> Talia Hibbert, "The Princess Trap has a New Look!," last modified January 5, 2021, <https://taliahibbert.com/2021/01/05/the-princess-trap-has-a-new-look/>.

the consumers in the United Kingdom and the United States. Angus Phillips, in his work “How Books are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover”, cites Adrian Shaughnessy, stating that “Books are culturally sensitive things: imagery that might have a subtle resonance in one country can appear meaningless gunk in another.”<sup>168</sup> Each country has a different market, and it is not possible to create one global design that appeals to everyone.<sup>169</sup> However, markets can not only be separated by country, but also by age. Social media introduced a whole new generation to the romance genre, and it is understandable that the taste of this new generation is different than that of the last. Talia Hibbert recognises that this new audience requires a new look, and to make sure her older works also appeal to this audience, her books are being released with new covers. It is not unusual to have different or special editions for a book, but in the case of Talia Hibbert, it is more complex than simply releasing a special edition, as some of these books also get new titles, along with extra content such as a bonus epilogue.<sup>170</sup> The covers of these rereleased books are slightly different from the ones that were originally released with a cartoon cover. The style of the newer covers of books such as *The Princess Trap* has a different look than *Get a Life, Chloe Brown*, which can be seen in Appendix E. Where the cover of *Get a Life, Chloe Brown* was still relatively simplistic, a small, simple illustration of the two main characters, the cover of *The Princess Trap* is much more extravagant. The characters take up much more space and although the artistic style is still cartoonish, the general feel is much more reminiscent of the 1980s clinch cover, with the characters in a more dramatic pose, especially compared to Hibbert’s earlier cartoon covers.

Talia Hibbert is not the only author who is rereleasing older works in this way.

Romance author Tessa Bailey is also releasing updated versions of her older works in this

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<sup>168</sup> Adrian Shaughnessy, “Balance the Books,” *Design Week*, April 15, 2004, 18-19, quoted in Angus Phillips, “How Books are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover,” in *Judging a Book by Its Cover*, ed. Nicole Matthews and Nickianne Moody (Ashgate: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 20.

<sup>169</sup> Phillips, “How Books are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover,” 20.

<sup>170</sup> Hibbert, “The Princess Trap has a New Look!”

way. Just like Hibbert, Bailey's older novels adhere to the older style that was more popular during the 2000s and the early 2010s. Interestingly, there are some authors who publish the two styles simultaneously, releasing both a photograph and an illustrated version, examples of such authors are Elsie Silver and Lauren Asher. In these instances the photograph version is often only available for digital editions, and the illustrated designs are used for the physical books. The reason for this can again be found in the different markets, and the people who exclusively read these books on their phones or e-readers might not care as much if a book has a cover that is considered 'cringey', while people who buy the physical book do not only buy the story inside, they also buy the visual object that is the book itself, and therefore their the cover design is of greater importance.

### **Ali Hazelwood**

Of all the authors that are discussed in this chapter, Ali Hazelwood is the newest to the traditional publishing industry, with her first work being published in 2021. However, Hazelwood is not truly a new author. Her works are part of a somewhat controversial side of the literary sphere, since all of her published novels were originally released online as fan fiction. The release of fan fiction by a traditional publisher is not a new concept, with works such as *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E. L. James and *After* by Anna Todd being released in 2011 and 2014, respectively. Part of the criticism that fan fiction receives is the fact that it has started to change the understanding of what a real 'writer' actually is. Simone Murray explains that previously, being a writer meant that that person had actually published their work in the traditional sense, through a publishing company. However, with the internet and its many uses, people are now able to write and release many different works without ever having to go through those traditional channels.<sup>171</sup> Authors such as Ali Hazelwood prove that

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<sup>171</sup> Murray, "Charting the Literary Sphere," 332.

these lines are being blurred even further, as fan fiction is now being published by traditional print media. Many academics have had discussions about the place of fan fiction in the literary sphere, and with the increasing number of fan fictions being published by traditional print media, the works both gain more cultural status and value, as they are moving from a corner of the internet to physical shelves in bookstores.<sup>172</sup>

The fact that Ali Hazelwood's works were originally fan fictions is recognisable from the cover, with the character on the front of *The Love Hypothesis* having a striking resemblance to the characters Rey and Kylo Ren from the *Star Wars* movies, on whom the characters in the novel are based. As can be seen in Appendix F, this trend continues in Hazelwood's next novel, *Love on the Brain* (2022), but starts to lessen with the more recent release of *Love, Theoretically* in 2023. The fact that one can recognise the original characters this book was based on, is largely because the illustrations on these covers are a lot more detailed than those on Emily Henry's and Talia Hibbert's novels. Because of this, they also share a lot more resemblance to the 1980s clinch cover. Although the characters are still drawn in a cartoonish style, they are not standing apart like the character's on Emily Henry's covers, and two of the three covers depict the two main characters kissing. This is a clear step away from the simplistic illustrated covers that can be mistaken for women's fiction. The similarities to the original category romance novel covers can also be seen in the background details of these covers. Although, for the most part, the ability to recognise what category a romance novel belonged to by simply looking at the cover, has largely disappeared, these covers do have some context clues to the settings of the novels. The covers make it clear that these novels take place in a scientific setting, as the background features small illustrations of atoms and other scientific drawings. The covers of Hazelwood's books include the 'codes' that were used on the 1980s clinch covers.<sup>173</sup> The bright colours and the couple on the front

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>173</sup> Goris, "Hidden Codes of Love: The Materiality of the Category Romance Novel," 115.

indicate that the novels are part of the romance genre, and the smaller details, such as the clothes of the characters and the illustrations in the background, signal that they are romances that take place in a scientific setting. The covers of Ali Hazelwood's works showcase that although the clinch is no longer the popular design style, there are still some elements of the clinch present in modern book design.

The internet has had a big impact on the publishing industry.<sup>174</sup> The romance genre was not exempt from this influence, and thanks to the initial popularity of a few romance books with cartoon covers, the rest of the genre followed and more and more cartoon-style romance covers started to appear. Even though the full 1980s clinch cover is not in fashion anymore, its impact is still visible in the covers of romance books today. The influence of the covers of the past slowly starts to reappear again on the romance covers that are released today. While many books now have somewhat abstract illustrations on the covers, there are also books that have a lot more detail and are clearly part of the romance genre, with characters in clinch-like positions starting to appear once again. These covers look more like an evolved version of the 1980s clinch cover. The changes that are currently happening to the romance book covers are similar to the ones that took place in the 1970s and 1980s, with the covers starting more modest, only featuring a small illustration that is relatively inconspicuous, and changing over time to more extravagant paintings. Emily Henry's works all share the same style, a simplistic illustration with two or more characters on the front, all some distance away from one another. This simplistic style can also be found on Talia Hibbert's earlier cartoon covers. However, recently covers have started to be released that are more similar to the traditional clinch cover. This is the case for all of Ali Hazelwood's covers and Talia Hibbert's rereleases, which feature couples who are kissing or who are embracing

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<sup>174</sup> Reddan, "Social Reading Cultures on Booktube, Bookstagram, and Booktok," 9.

one another. Although the new covers are not as dramatic as the original 1980s clinch cover, several elements of the art style do seem to be making a comeback.

## Conclusion

Over the years, the romance novel has known many different faces. From the innocent covers from the 1950s, to the extravagant clinch covers of the 1980s, to the photoshopped photos of the 2000s and the 2010s, to the cartoon covers of today. The design of the cover, which is part of the novel's paratext, can be seen as both a reflection of the story that is inside, as well as a reflection of the time in which it was created. During the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, romance novels were chaste, as the main love interests only shared an innocent kiss.<sup>175</sup> The covers from these decades were conservative, especially compared to those created in the decades to come. A shift took place in the 1970s and 1980s, as more explicit details were introduced to the genre. This change in the genre was not contained to the inside of the romance books, the outside appearance started to transform as well. Since the 1980s the romance genre has continued to develop, which has led to the simple illustrated covers that can be found in bookstores today. The purpose of this thesis was to examine this development, to analyse how the paratext has changed, specifically the book covers, and how society's perception of the romance genre has changed along with those covers.

The idea that the look of the romance novel is related to the time period in which it is released is not entirely a new one. Jennifer McKnight-Trontz has investigated the early developments of the romance novel, and concluded that in these early decades, the cover of the romance novel is not only related to society as a whole, but to the roles of women specifically.<sup>176</sup> As a result of the Second World War, there was a focus on family and creating a home in the 1940s. In the 1950s, women had to make a choice between marriage and a career. The covers of the books released during this time often showed the female protagonist

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<sup>175</sup> McKnight-Trontz, *The Look of Love: The Art of the Romance Novel*, 18.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

in the workplace.<sup>177</sup> By the 1960s, women started to enter the workforce more and more, but they mainly held traditional roles such as teachers and nurses, and again this is what the covers of the romance novel portrayed.<sup>178</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, the idea of a woman's sexuality became less stigmatised, and as the content of the romance novel became more explicit, the covers evolved alongside with it. This led to the introduction of the clinch covers of the 1980s.<sup>179</sup> McKnight-Trontz's research ended with the romance novels of the 1980s. Part of the purpose of this thesis was to investigate if there is still a correlation between the developments of society and the cover of romance books, or if this changed after the 1980s. Chapter Three shows that these developments continued in the following decades, leading us to the romance cover of today, and it comes as no surprise that modern romance novels portray modern ideas. Novels such as *The Love Hypothesis* by Ali Hazelwood showcase this idea, as it features a woman in a lab coat, illustrating how many women are nowadays encouraged to take up a profession in the scientific field, a field that used to be largely dominated by men.

Even though the modern romance has gained a lot of popularity and is discussed much more freely, both in public and on the internet, there are still prejudices against certain parts of the genre. Not every romance novel is seen as equal. This is especially visible in the attitudes of modern romance readers towards the romance books of the 1980s. Modern readers of romance novels today still look down upon the romance novel of the 1980s, perceiving the books of that decade to be outdated in both content and looks.<sup>180</sup> The novels with the clinch covers are seen as the ones that only the older generation reads, they are the ones that can be found on their mother's shelves, not on theirs.<sup>181</sup> The colourful illustrated

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>180</sup> Allison P. Davis, "The Women Are Smart. The Men Are Sincere. And the Ending Is Always Happy. Emily Henry cracked the modern romance novel."

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

covers are made to appeal to the younger readers. The modern looks match the modern ideals that are present in the new romance books.<sup>182</sup> However, these critiques do not take the differences in society and the place of women in this society into consideration. Where there is now more freedom for women to express their sexuality, this was a relatively new idea in the 1980s.<sup>183</sup> The increase in popularity of the romance books with the bare-chested men showcases this. Although people were mostly aware of the salacious content that was hidden behind the dramatic clinch covers, the romance books were not discussed a lot in public. Even in interviews with the authors, the salacious elements that appeared in most of the books were never addressed. Instead there was a focus on the personal life of the author, often a quiet one with her family.<sup>184</sup>

The internet has allowed for a global discussion about romance novels to take place. The discussion of the love of romance books has exited the confines of book clubs and personal conversations, and instead romance books, and the people's love for them, are shared with the world.<sup>185</sup> Even though bookish content on the internet is relatively confined to the bookish communities, it is still available for all to see. This has allowed for more people to discover a love for reading, and sometimes even a love for reading romance books. The effects of the online reading-community are visible in the real world. Platforms such as TikTok have had a big impact on the publishing industry, which has led to bookstores having special displays dedicated to the books that are popular on TikTok.<sup>186</sup> Although these displays include books of many different genres, the genre that is represented the most is romance. If the table with the TikTok display is not indicated with a sign, it is recognisable by the large number of romance books with colourful cartoon covers mixed with a couple of darker covers that belong to some literary fiction titles, such as Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* and

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> McKnight- Trontz, *The Look of Love: The Art of the Romance Novel*, 31.

<sup>184</sup> Kathryn Falk, *Love's Leading Ladies*, 92.

<sup>185</sup> Reddan, "Social Reading Cultures on Booktube, Bookstagram, and Booktok," 7.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 7.

M.L. Rio's *If We Were Villains*. Social media, and TikTok in particular, has helped the romance genre to step out of the shadowy corners of the bookstore. People no longer hide their love of romance, instead they proudly display it.

The publishing industry changed along with society. During the 1970s and 1980s there was a limited number of publishers that released romance novels. The genre was mostly ruled by two publishers, Harlequin and Avon, and any adjustments they made to the romance novel became the new standard.<sup>187</sup> This is especially visible in the development of the romance covers over the years. When Avon introduced the world to Kathleen E. Woodiwiss, they also introduced a new type of cover to the world. Although Woodiwiss' first novel only had a small vignette that portrayed an couple in an intimate embrace, this type of image quickly grew and ultimately took up the entire cover of the book. Many other publishers followed in Avon's footsteps, not wanting to be left out of the success that the other publishers experiences, thanks to these romance novels. Because of the ways in which Harlequin and Avon designed their covers, they became recognisable enough that people bought the books purely based on the fact that they were published by one of these two companies.<sup>188</sup> Instead of advertising the books, Harlequin and Avon advertised the company. This type of marketing is no longer seen today. With more publishing houses releasing romance and the introduction of the internet, the marketing of romance books has changed drastically since the 1980s. Even though there are still several publishing houses that release a large number of romance novels each year, the marketing of a book is no longer linked to the publisher of that book. The publishing house today does not play the role it used to play in the marketing of a book in the 1980s. This thesis has argued that this is a result of the increased number of publishers who release romance books and the trends that are popular on

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<sup>187</sup> Bonn, *Under cover: An Illustrated History of American Mass-Market Paperbacks*, 107.

<sup>188</sup> Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, 40.

social media. The market of romance novels has become a lot bigger and companies are no longer able to market their upcoming releases based on their brand name alone. Instead publishers try to replicate the success of previous best-sellers, ones that were often popular on social media.<sup>189</sup> This creates a uniform market where many books look alike, which explains why there are so many romance books with a cartoon cover, even if they are produced by a different publisher. Harlequin and Avon are still two publishers that are part of this market, and they still publish a large number of romance books on a yearly basis. However, they do not have the influence they had in the 1980s.

Although the romance book market is no longer ruled by two publishers, there are still some publishers who release more popular romance books than others. Publishing houses whose brand logo is often seen on the spines of popular novels are Piaktus Books, Berkeley Books, and Simon & Schuster. The novels that are released by these companies are all in accordance with the modern design choices for the romance novel. In the format of trade paperbacks, with simple, colourful illustrations of the main characters on the front.

With the introduction of social media, the role that authors play in a reader's life has also changed. They have become a lot more visible and play a much bigger part in the marketing of their books. The famous romance novel authors of the 1970s and 1980s had a very different public image than the romance authors of today. Authors such as Kathleen E. Woodiwiss, Johanna Lindsey and Jude Deveraux all started their career in the 1970s, and apart from a few interviews, very little is known of their personal lives.<sup>190</sup> The life of a romance author today looks very different. Social media has entered the life and marketing strategies of many authors, and the writers of romance novels are no exceptions. The privacy that the authors of the 1980s had, is not something that is available to the modern romance

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<sup>189</sup> Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, and Selling Books in the Internet Era*, 61.

<sup>190</sup> Falk, *Love's Leading Ladies*, 327.

author. Emily Henry, Talia Hibbert, and Ali Hazelwood all have social media accounts that post frequent updates on their lives and their works. A lot of the marketing of books takes place on the internet, and the authors play an important role in this marketing. By frequently placing posts about the works they have released, as well as the things they are currently working on, they keep readers interested and up to date with their upcoming novels. Due to the fact that most social media platforms use visual content, authors often use one of the most visual elements of a novel to market it, namely the cover.

Of all the parts of the industry surrounding the romance novel, it is the cover itself that has changed the most. The 1980's clinch cover can rarely be found in a bookstore, instead most of the covers have cartoon illustrations. Society and trends change, and books change with them. Books reflect the times they were written in. By laying romance novels of the 1980s and the 2020s side by side it becomes clear that society has changed quite a bit. While some elements have stayed intact, such as the bright colours and the couple that is frequently featured on the front, many other elements have changed. In the 1980s, the most popular style of romance book covers was the clinch. They were portrait-style covers that showed a muscled, half-naked man embracing a beautiful woman with luscious hair that is flowing in the wind. Nowadays, the covers are much more simplistic. The portrait-style has been replaced with illustrations, which have cartoon renderings of the main characters of the novel. The men are fully dressed and the women's hair no longer defies gravity. Although some modern covers do show the couple embracing or even kissing, it does not come close to the dramatic covers of the 1980s.

Nowadays, the cartoon style is preferred over the clinch designs, which is visible in the fact that most of the popular romance novel feature a cartoon couple on the front. The clinch covers are not only less preferred because of their association with outdated content,

but also for their outdated looks.<sup>191</sup> Leah Koch, co-owner of a bookstore that focuses solely on romance novels, notes that the readers entering her bookstores value something different than the romance readers of the 1980s. Instead of wanting romance heroes with a lot of muscles, modern readers search specifically for romances where the main love interest is nice, steady, sees a therapist, and respects women.<sup>192</sup> The covers of the 1980s, and the books that are underneath these covers, do not portray men in such a way. The modern covers manage to convey this idea, and Koch states that “these stories are not your mother’s romances, although sometimes, they are.”<sup>193</sup>

The covers of the 1980s show that these books are adventure novels, where the leading lady is swept away to foreign lands to go on an adventure where she discovers both herself and a love interest. The type of romance that is popular today portrays a different story, closer to that of a romantic comedy. There are no wild adventures to foreign lands, instead the modern romance portrays the lives of women in a much more realistic way, frequently focussing on their work and their day-to-day lives, and this is then intertwined with a romantic story between the two main characters.

The importance of going along with the trend of the illustrated covers can be seen in the actions of several authors, as there are numerous authors who are rereleasing their older works with shiny new covers. A large portion of the popular romance novels today have social media to thank for their success. On social media, going along with trends and having aesthetically pleasing content is important to be popular. This does not only go for creators, but for other examples, such as books, as well. To bring new attention to the novels authors

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<sup>191</sup> Allison P. Davis, “The Women Are Smart. The Men Are Sincere. And the Ending Is Always Happy. Emily Henry cracked the modern romance novel.”

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

have previously released, authors such as Talia Hibbert and Tessa Bailey are giving their old books new looks.

Trends can be found in every part of life, and they are always changing. Book covers are not exempt from this phenomenon. Between the 1980s and today, a lot has changed. Both in society and the romance genre. The findings of this research support the initial theories that the changes of the romance novel are correlated to society, as publishers continuously try to adapt to the ever-changing times. In turn, the covers have shaped the public opinion of the romance novel. The clinch covers of the 1980s faced many critiques, as they were seen as gaudy and unrealistic. In comparison, the cartoon covers of today are a lot more conservative. Without the half-naked characters on the cover, the romance books have taken on a more sophisticated look. This improved society's perception of the genre as a whole.

Although the romance genre has always been popular, I found that the academic work on the genre, and its paratext, was lacking during my research. Creating an entire overview of the look of the romance genre of the 1980s and 2020s was made difficult by the fact that there were only a few academic sources to gain information from. However, the many developments in the genre's paratexts make it an interesting subject to study, and more research could be done in both decades, as many other romance authors were active in the 1980s besides the three mentioned here, and the current decade is not even halfway over, and the future may bring many new developments. The 1980's and the 2020's were chosen in this research as they showcased two seemingly drastically different design styles, but in the time between these decades the romance novel has seen other art styles as well, ones that could also be investigated in future research.

The trend of the cartoon cover is currently at an all-time high, and will be the art style that defines the current era of romance novels. Only time will tell what the future of the

romance will look like. However, one thing is for certain; even though the romance novel has known many different faces, the love for love is the one thing that has remained unchanged.

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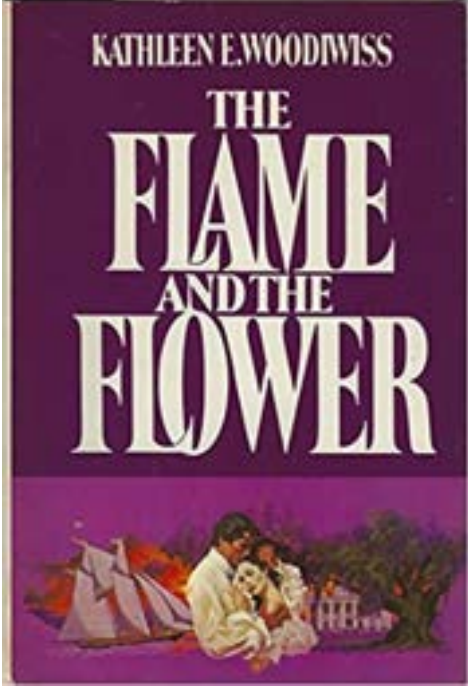
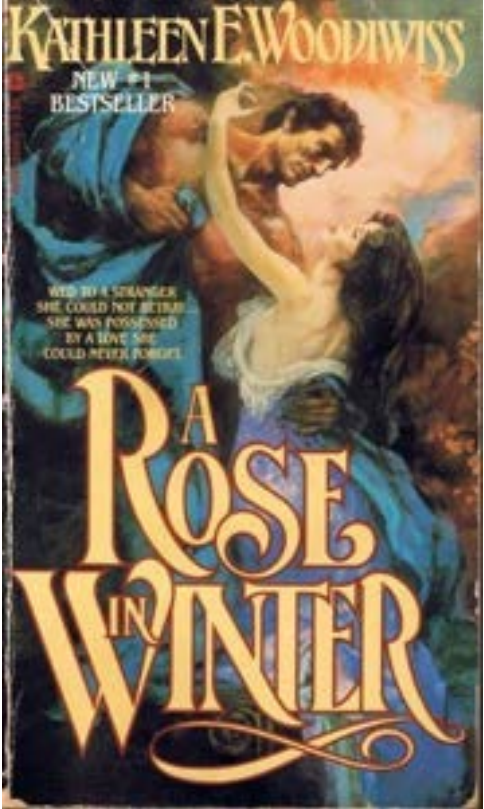
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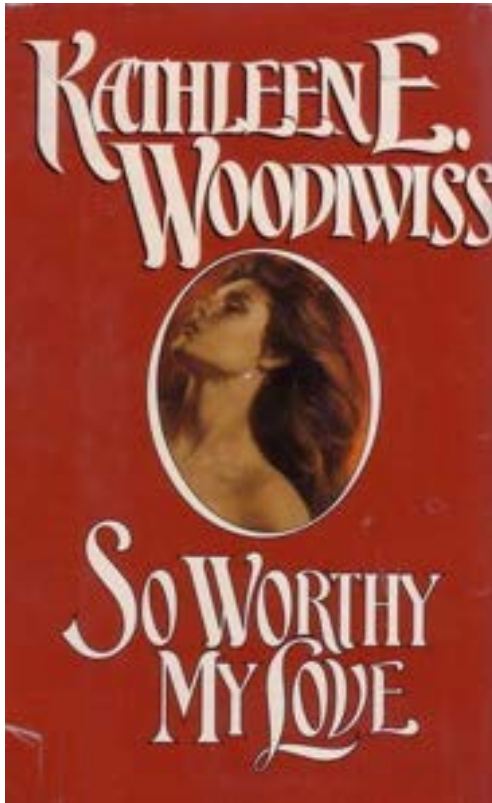
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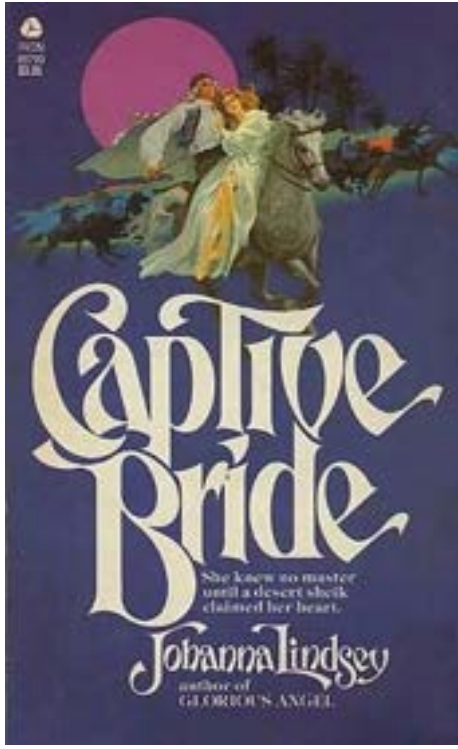
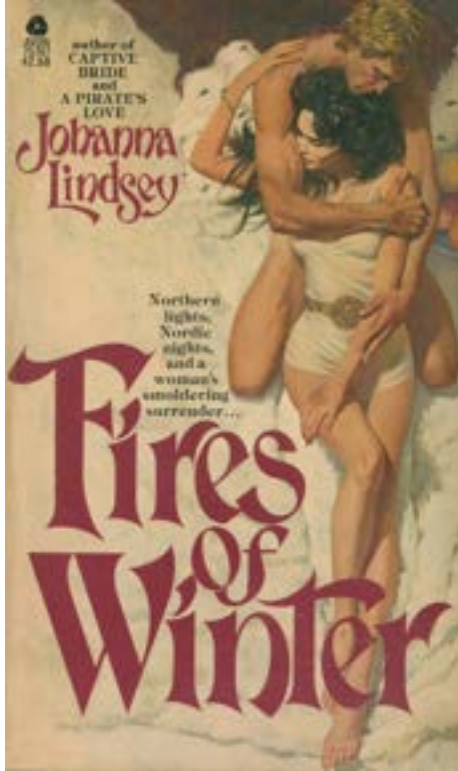
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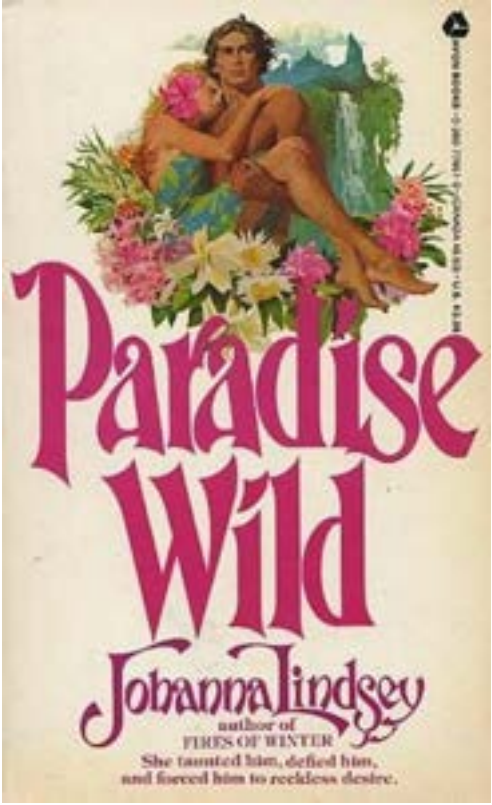
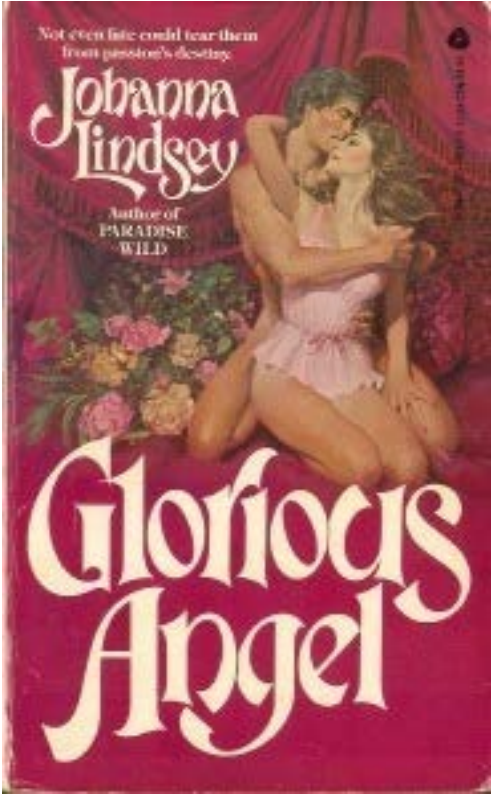
**Appendix A - Kathleen E. Woodiwiss**

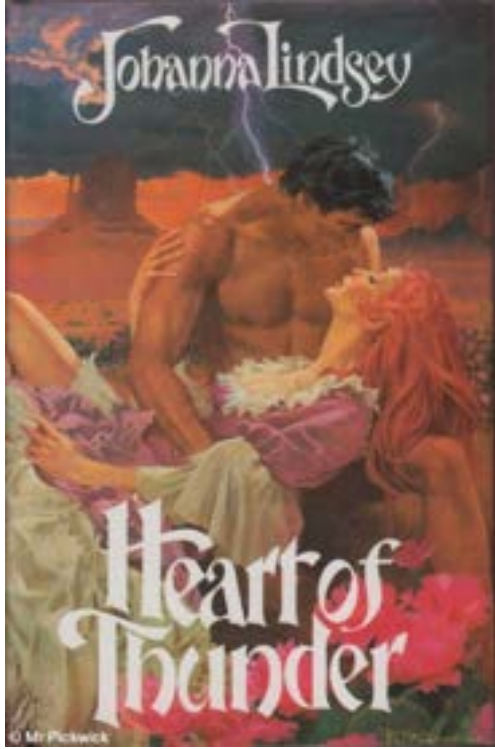
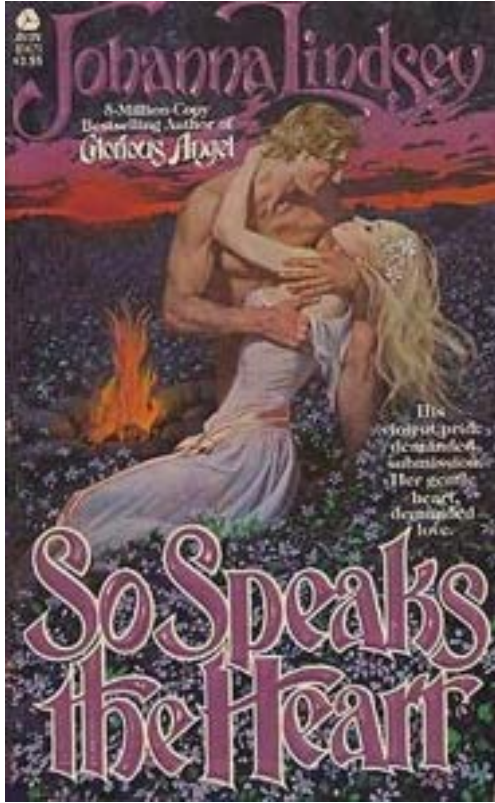
Title	Year	Publisher	Cover
<i>The Flame and the Flower</i>	1972	Avon Books	
<i>A Rose in Winter</i>	1981	Avon Books	


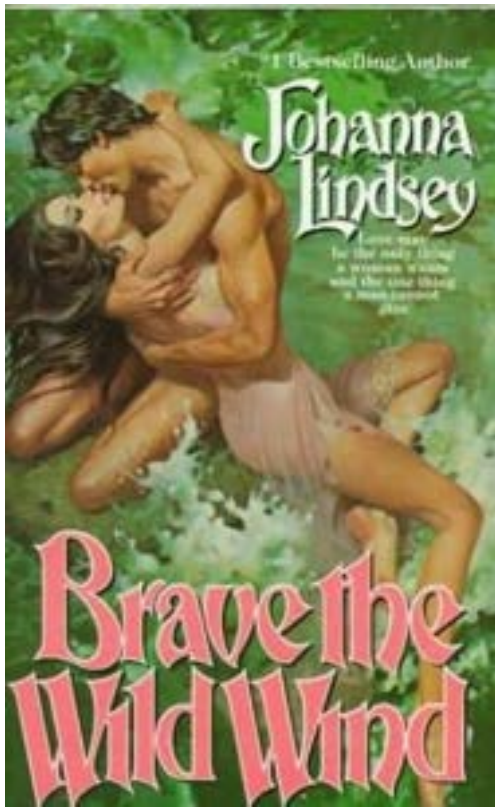
<p><i>Come Love a Stranger</i></p>	<p>1984</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	
<p>So Worthy My Love</p>	<p>1989</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	


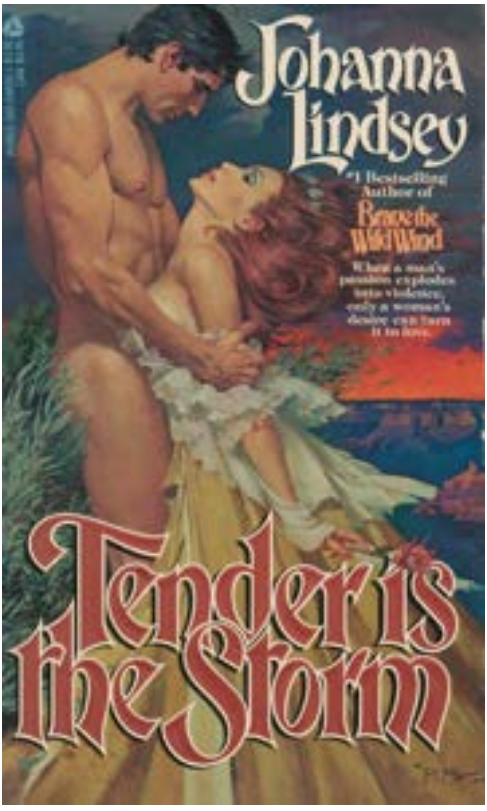
**Appendix B - Johanna Lindsey**

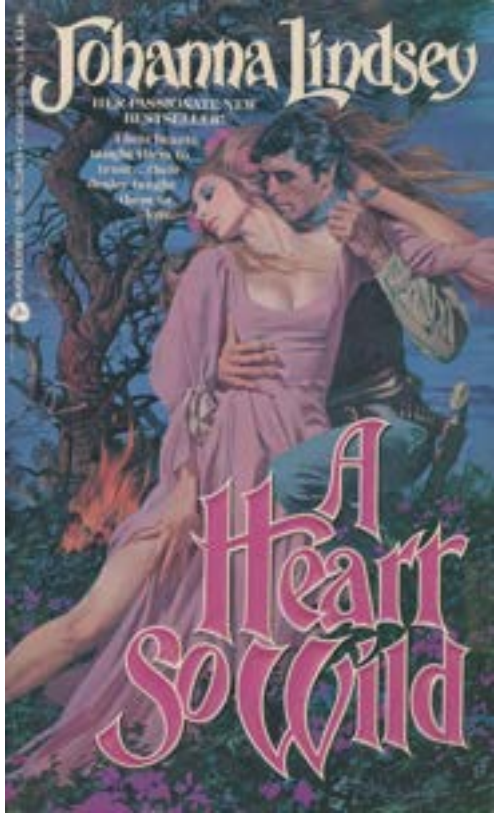

Title	Year	Publisher	Cover
<i>Captive Bride</i>	1977	Avon Books	
<i>Fires of Winter</i>	1980	Avon Books	

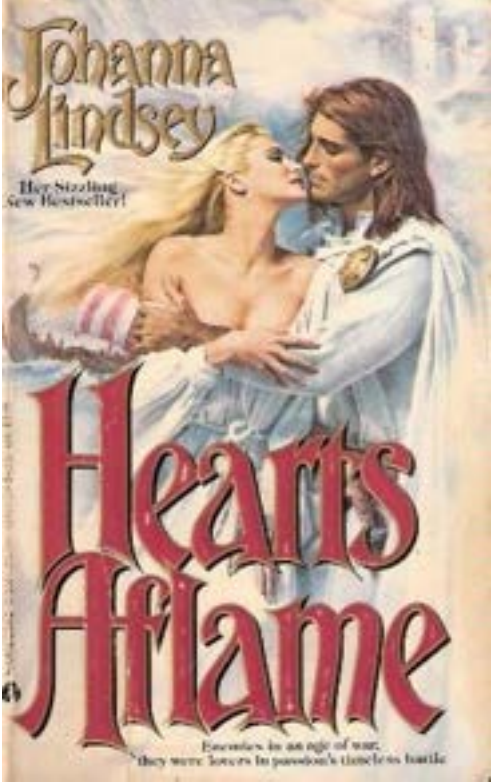

<p><i>Paradise Wild</i></p>	<p>1981</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	 <p>The cover features a man and a woman in a lush, tropical setting. The man is shirtless and muscular, and the woman is wearing a pink bikini. They are surrounded by vibrant flowers and a scenic background. The title 'Paradise Wild' is written in large, stylized pink letters. Below the title, the author's name 'Johanna Lindsey' is written in a cursive font, followed by 'author of FIRES OF WINTER'. At the bottom, a tagline reads: 'She taunted him, defied him, and forced him to reckless desire.'</p>
<p><i>Glorious Angel</i></p>	<p>1982</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	 <p>The cover features a man and a woman in a romantic embrace. The man is shirtless and muscular, and the woman is wearing a pink dress. They are surrounded by vibrant flowers and a scenic background. The title 'Glorious Angel' is written in large, stylized white letters. Above the title, the author's name 'Johanna Lindsey' is written in a cursive font, followed by 'Author of PARADISE WILD'. At the top, a tagline reads: 'Not even fate could tear them from passion's destiny.'</p>

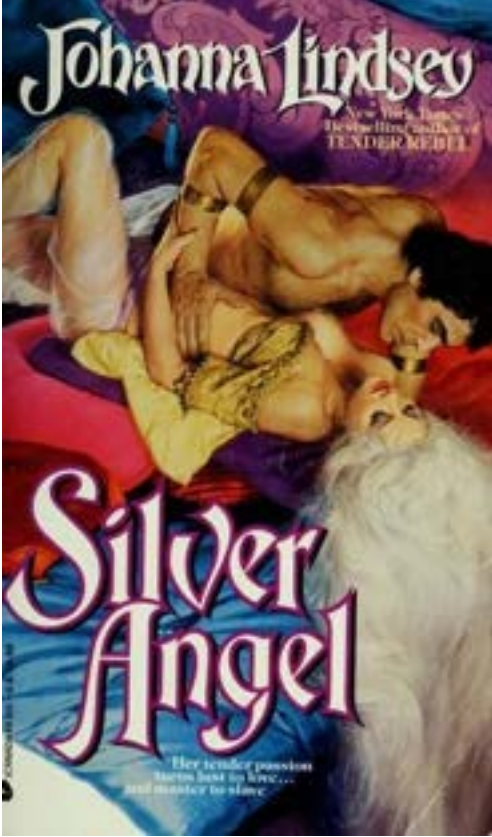
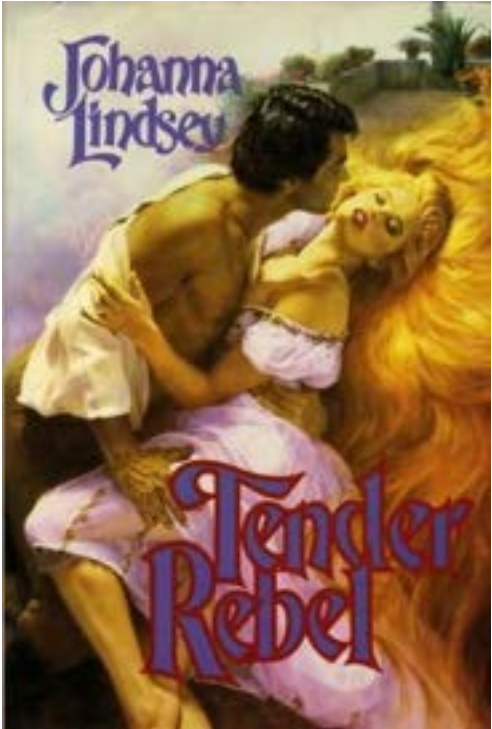
<p><i>Heart of Thunder</i></p>	<p>1983</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	
<p><i>So Speaks the Heart</i></p>	<p>1983</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	

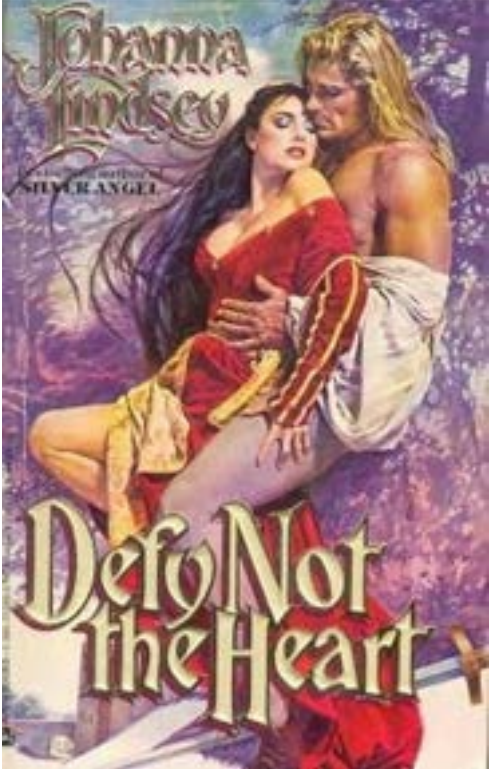
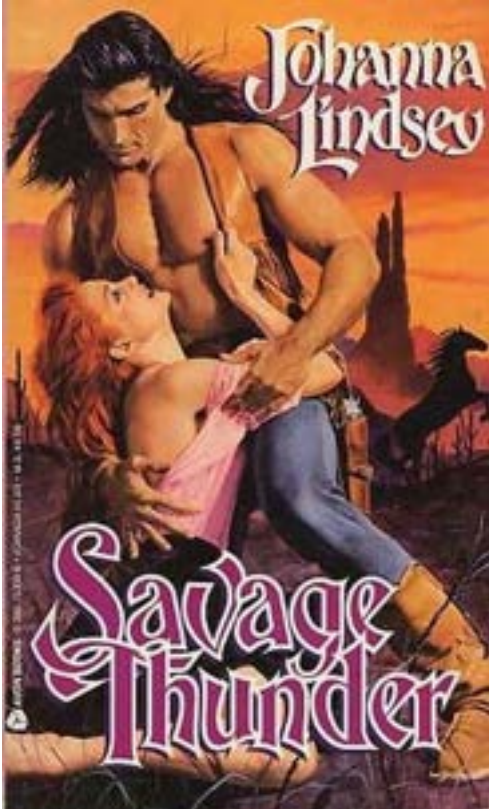
<p><i>A Gentle Feuding</i></p>	<p>1984</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	
<p><i>Brave the Wild Wind</i></p>	<p>1984</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	

<p><i>Love Only Once</i></p>	<p>1985</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	
<p><i>Tender is the Storm</i></p>	<p>1985</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	

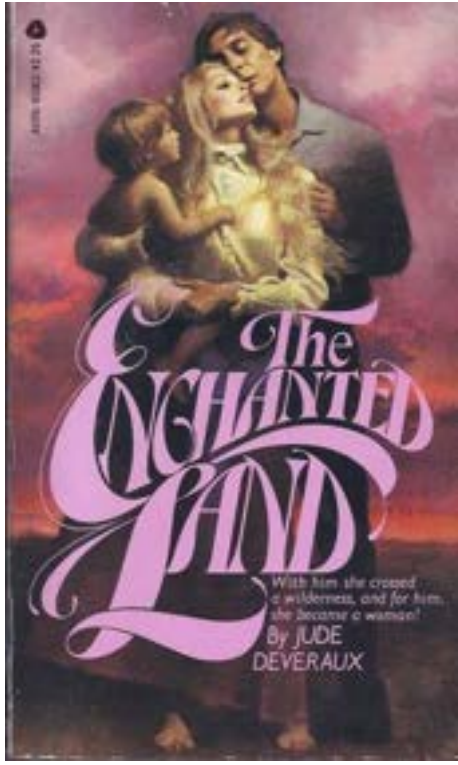
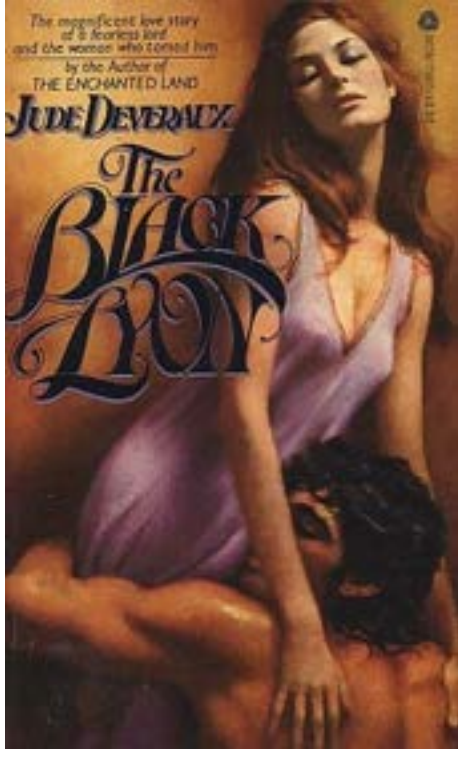
<p><i>A Heart So Wild</i></p>	<p>1986</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	
<p><i>When Love Awaits</i></p>	<p>1986</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	

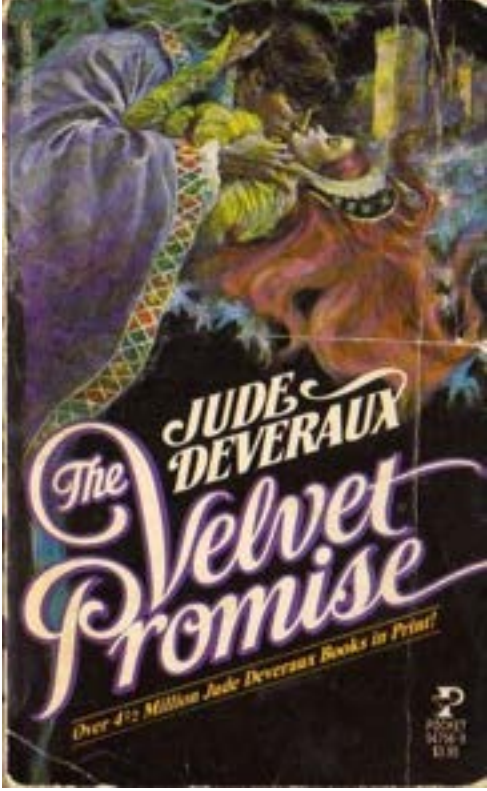
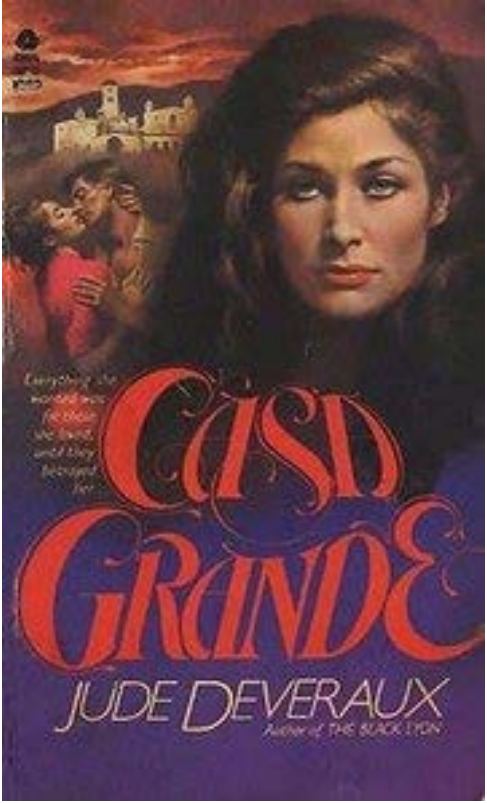
<p><i>Heart Aflame</i></p>	<p>1987</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	 <p>The cover features a romantic illustration of a man and a woman in historical attire. The man is holding the woman, and they are about to kiss. The title 'Hearts Aflame' is written in large, stylized red letters. Above the title, the author's name 'Johanna Lindsey' is written in a decorative font. Below the title, there is a small line of text: 'Enemies in an age of war... they were lovers in passion's timeless battle.'</p>
<p><i>Secret Fire</i></p>	<p>1987</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	 <p>The cover features a romantic illustration of a man and a woman in historical attire. The man is holding the woman, and they are about to kiss. The title 'Secret Fire' is written in large, stylized white letters with a red outline. Above the title, the author's name 'Johanna Lindsey' is written in a decorative font. Above the author's name, there is a small line of text: 'Bestselling author of HEARTS AFLAME'. Below the title, there is a small line of text: 'In the raging passion of war, they discovered the timeless ecstasy of their love.'</p>


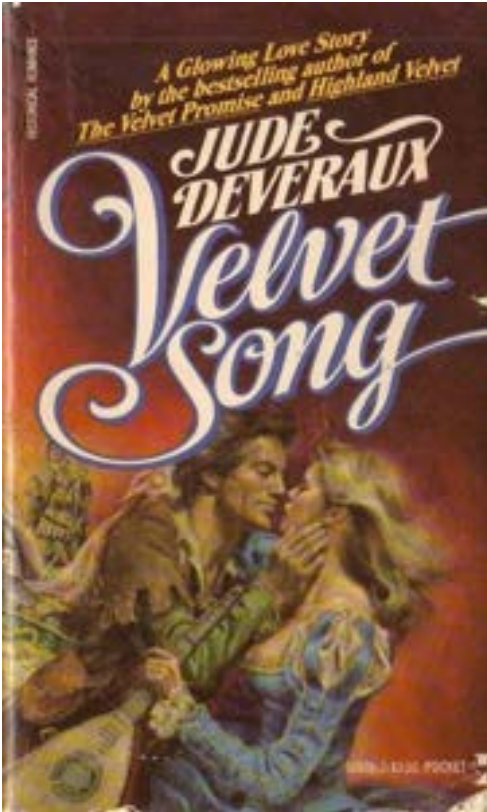
<p><i>Silver Angel</i></p>	<p>1988</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	 <p>The cover features a man with a long white beard and a woman in a yellow top and purple skirt. The title 'Silver Angel' is written in a large, stylized font. At the top, the author's name 'Johanna Lindsey' is written in a gothic font. Below the author's name, it says 'New York Times Bestselling Author of TENDER REBEL'. At the bottom, there is a quote: 'Her tender passion burns hot as fire... and melts to stone.'</p>
<p><i>Tender Rebel</i></p>	<p>1988</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	 <p>The cover features a man in a white shirt and a woman in a pink dress. The title 'Tender Rebel' is written in a large, stylized font. At the top, the author's name 'Johanna Lindsey' is written in a gothic font.</p>

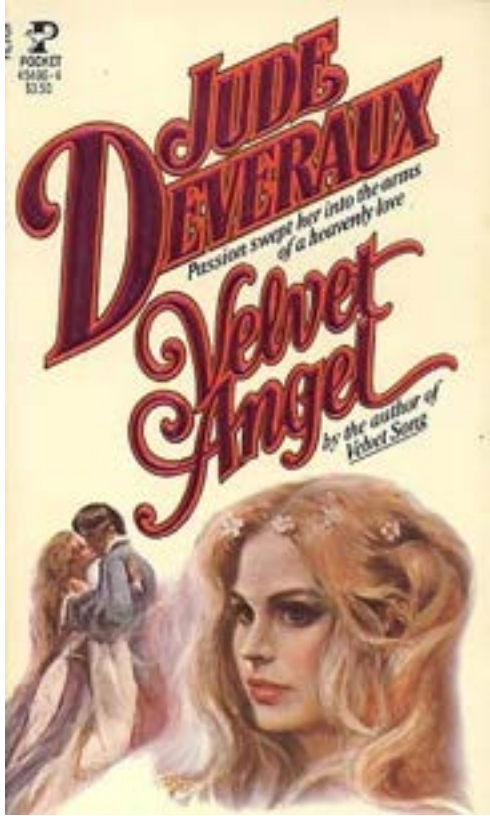
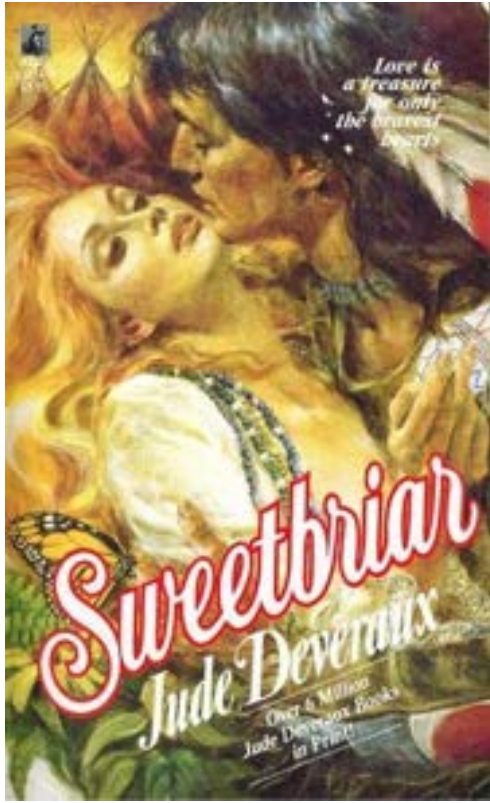
<p><i>Defy Not the Heart</i></p>	<p>1989</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	
<p><i>Savage Thunder</i></p>	<p>1989</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	

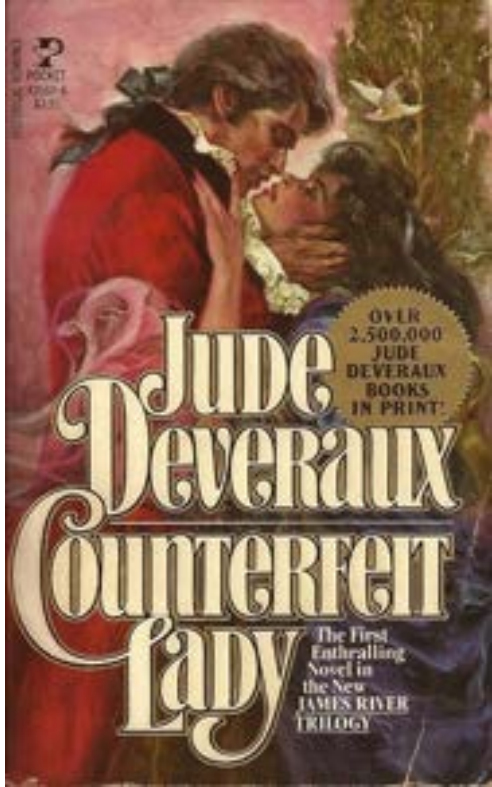
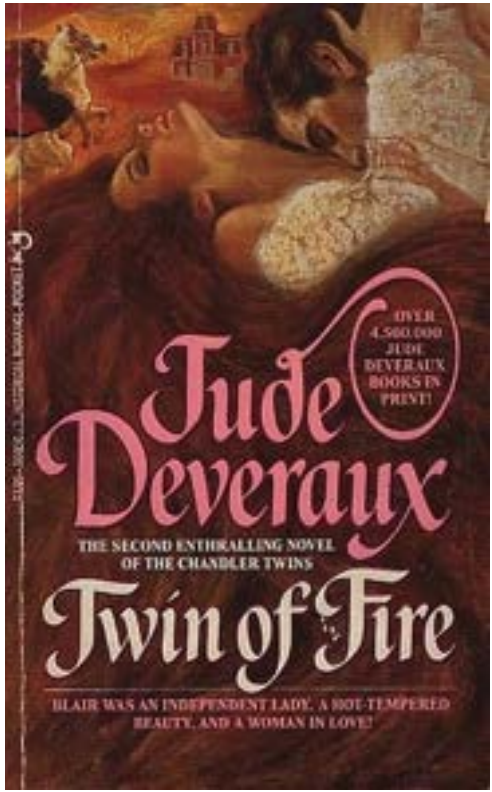
**Appendix C - Jude Deveraux**

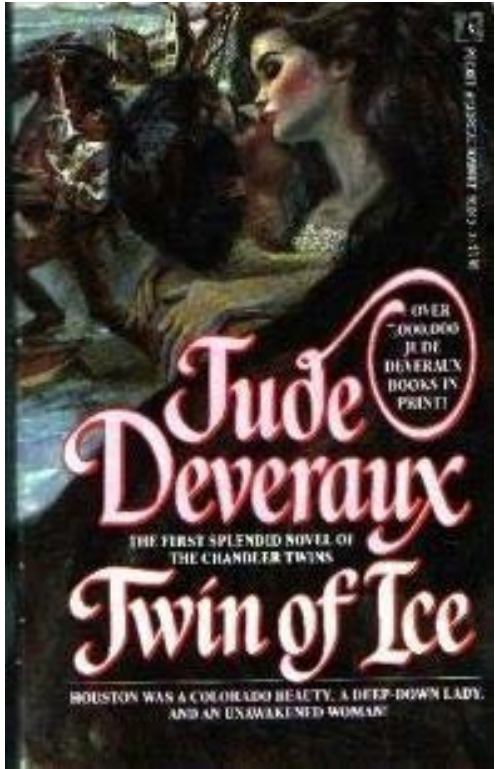
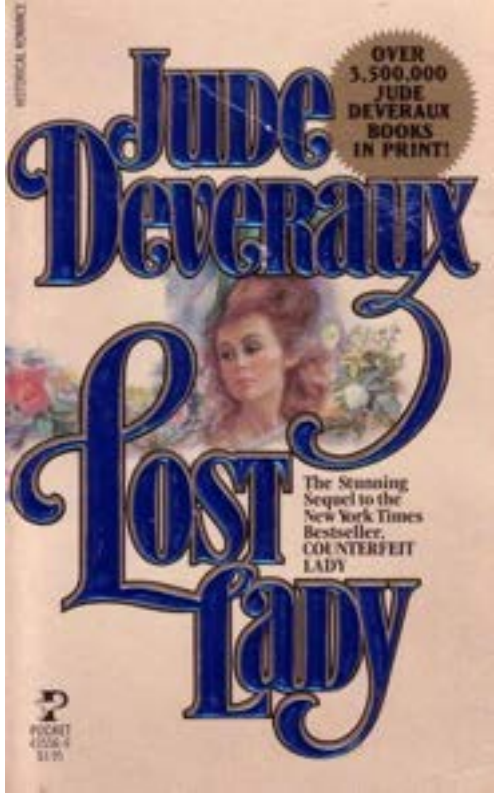
Title	Year	Publisher	Cover
<i>The Enchanted land</i>	1978	Avon Books	
<i>The Black Lion</i>	1980	Avon Books	

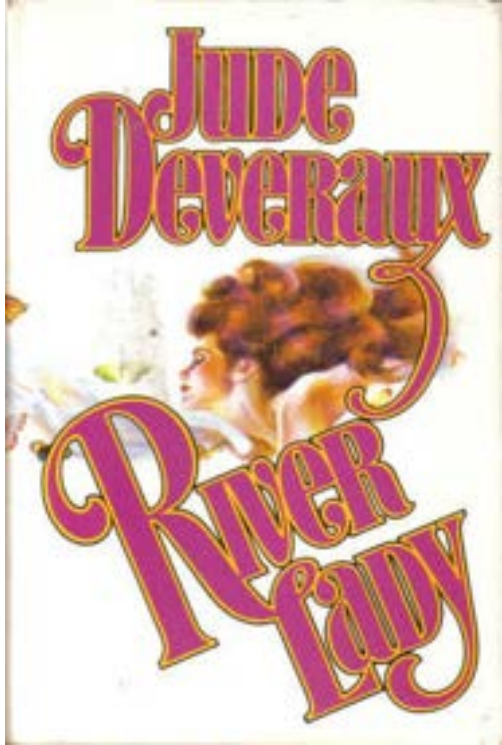
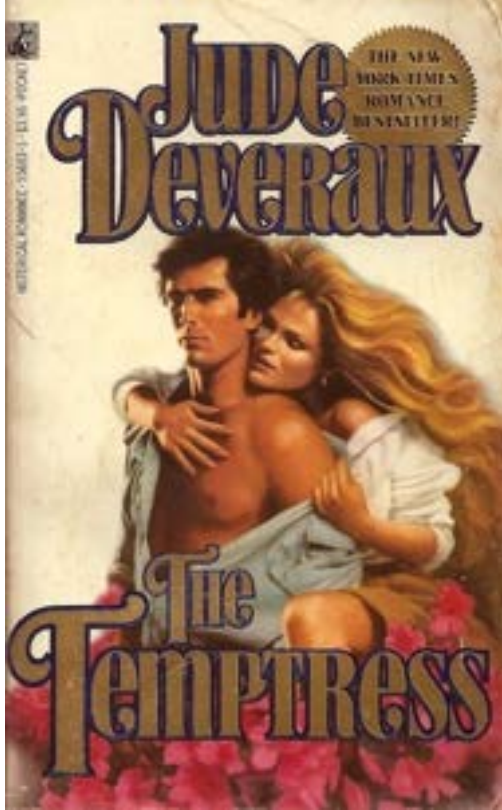
<p><i>The Velvet Promise</i></p>	<p>1981</p>	<p>Pocket Books</p>	
<p><i>Casa Grande</i></p>	<p>1982</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	

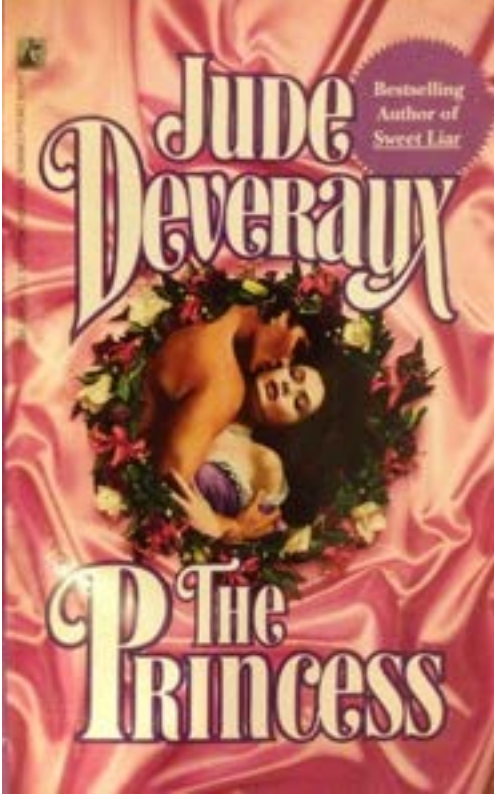
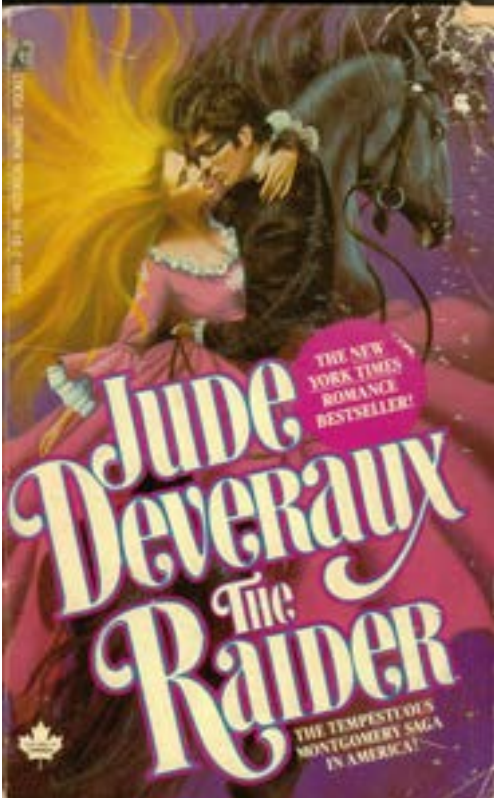
<p><i>Highland Velvet</i></p>	<p>1982</p>	<p>Pocket Books</p>	 <p>The cover features a woman in a red cloak embracing a man on a white horse. The title 'HIGHLAND VELVET' is written in large, stylized, pinkish-red letters. At the top, it says 'An Epic Romance by JUDE DEVERAUX' and 'author of The Black Lion and The Velvet Promise'. At the bottom, a quote reads: 'It isn't for Like No Other in a Land Where Hatred Was Sown One Great Love Grew...'. A 'POCKET BOOK' logo is in the top right corner.</p>
<p><i>Velvet Song</i></p>	<p>1983</p>	<p>Pocket Books</p>	 <p>The cover shows a man playing a bagpipe and a woman in a blue dress. The title 'Velvet Song' is written in large, white, cursive letters. At the top, it says 'A Glowing Love Story by the bestselling author of The Velvet Promise and Highland Velvet'. At the bottom, it says 'JUDE DEVERAUX'. A 'POCKET BOOK' logo is in the bottom right corner.</p>

<p><i>Velvet Angel</i></p>	<p>1983</p>	<p>Pocket Books</p>	
<p><i>Sweet Briar</i></p>	<p>1983</p>	<p>Pocket Books</p>	

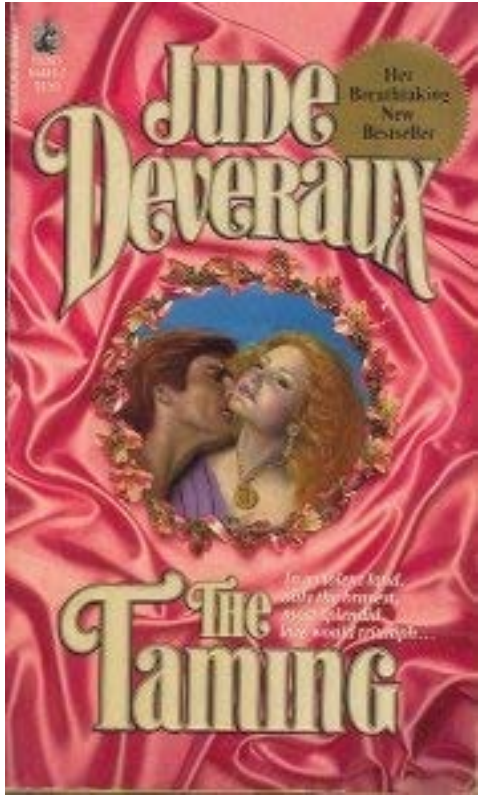
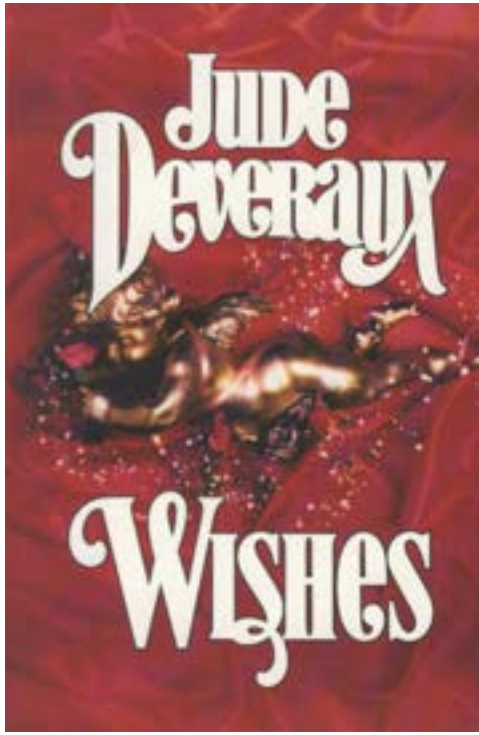
<p><i>Counterfeit Lady</i></p>	<p>1984</p>	<p>Pocket Books</p>	
<p><i>Twin of Fire</i></p>	<p>1985</p>	<p>Pocket Books</p>	

<p><i>Twin of Ice</i></p>	<p>1985</p>	<p>Pocket Books</p>	
<p><i>Lost Lady</i></p>	<p>1985</p>	<p>Pocket Books</p>	



<p><i>River Lady</i></p>	<p>1985</p>	<p>Pocket Books</p>	 <p>The cover features the author's name 'Jude Deveraux' in a large, stylized, purple and gold font at the top. Below it is a painting of a woman with voluminous brown hair, looking upwards. The title 'River Lady' is written in a similar stylized font at the bottom.</p>
<p><i>The Temptress</i></p>	<p>1986</p>	<p>Pocket Books</p>	 <p>The cover features the author's name 'Jude Deveraux' in a large, stylized, gold and blue font at the top. Below it is a painting of a man and a woman in a romantic embrace. The man is shirtless, and the woman has long blonde hair. The title 'The Temptress' is written in a stylized font at the bottom. A circular badge in the top right corner says 'THE NEW YORK TIMES ROMANCE BESTSELLER!'. On the left side, there is a vertical line of text: 'WITH AN AFTERWORD BY THE AUTHOR'.</p>


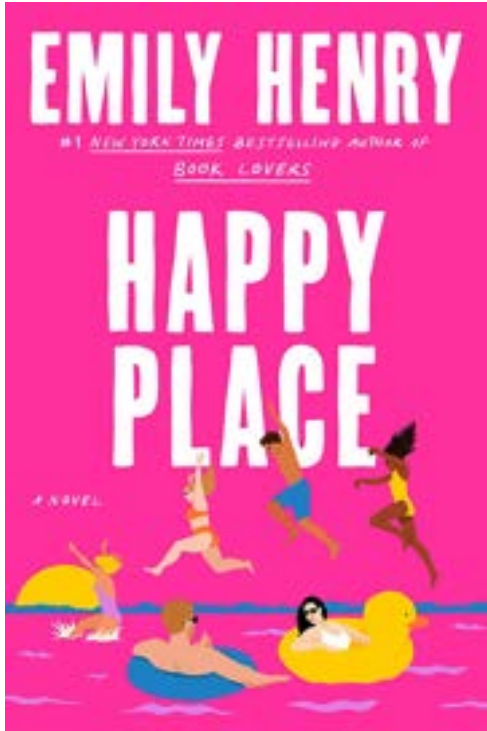
<p><i>The Princess</i></p>	<p>1987</p>	<p>Pocket Books</p>	 <p>The cover features a woman in a purple corset and a man in a dark suit, both framed by a wreath of red and white flowers. The background is a shimmering, pinkish-red fabric. Text on the cover includes 'Bestselling Author of Sweet Liar' in a purple circle, the author's name 'Jude Deveraux' in large, stylized white letters, and the title 'The Princess' in a large, ornate white font.</p>
<p><i>The Raider</i></p>	<p>1987</p>	<p>Pocket Books</p>	 <p>The cover depicts a woman in a pink dress with a long, flowing yellow veil embracing a man in a dark coat, with a dark horse in the background. Text on the cover includes 'THE NEW YORK TIMES ROMANCE BESTSELLER!' in a pink box, the author's name 'Jude Deveraux' in large, stylized white letters, and the title 'The Raider' in a large, ornate white font. At the bottom, it says 'THE TEMPESTUOUS MONTGOMERY SAGA IN AMERICA!'.</p>

<p><i>The Awakening</i></p>	<p>1988</p>	<p>Pocket Books</p>	
<p><i>A Knight in Shining Armor</i></p>	<p>1989</p>	<p>Pocket books</p>	

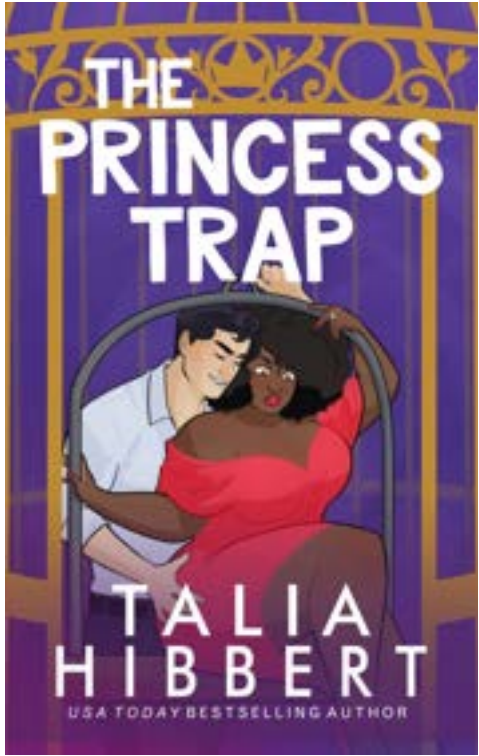
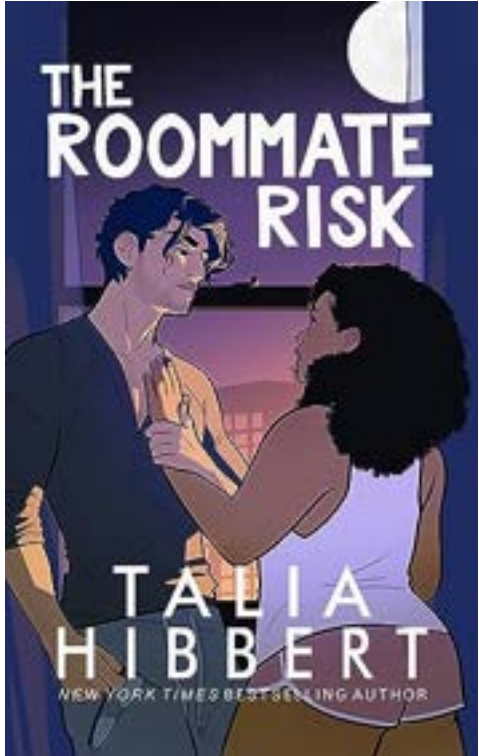
<p><i>The Taming</i></p>	<p>1989</p>	<p>Pocket Books</p>	 <p>The cover features a romantic scene of a man and a woman in a circular frame, set against a background of pink, draped fabric. The author's name 'Jude Deveraux' is at the top in a large, stylized font. The title 'The Taming' is at the bottom in a similar font. A gold seal in the top right corner reads 'Her Breathtaking New Bestseller'. A quote at the bottom right says 'In a time and with a man most women would reject...'</p>
<p><i>Wishes</i></p>	<p>1989</p>	<p>Pocket Books</p>	 <p>The cover features a golden, winged cherub or angel figure lying on a red, shimmering background. The author's name 'Jude Deveraux' is at the top in a large, stylized font. The title 'Wishes' is at the bottom in a similar font.</p>


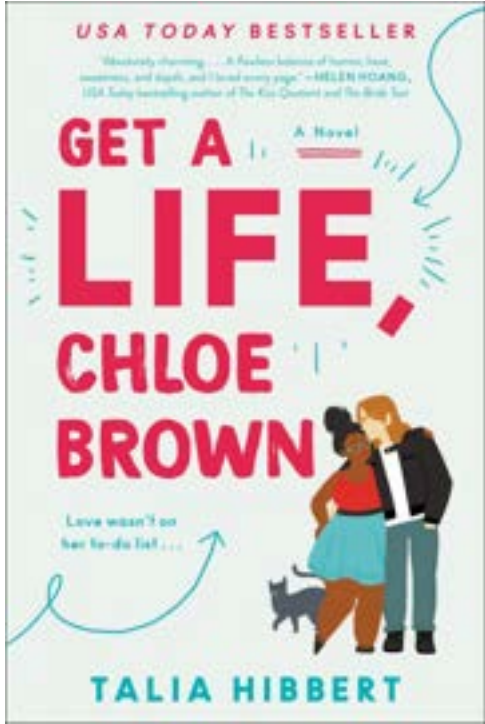
### Appendix D - Emily Henry



Title	Year	Publisher	Cover
<i>Beach Read</i>	2020	Berkley Books	
<i>People We Meet on Vacation</i>	2021	Berkley Books	

<p><i>Book Lovers</i></p>	<p>2022</p>	<p>Berkley Books</p>	 <p>The cover for 'Book Lovers' by Emily Henry features a bright blue background. At the top, the author's name 'EMILY HENRY' is written in large white letters. Below it, in smaller white text, is '#1 New York Times Bestselling Author of PEOPLE WE MEET IN VEGAS and BEACH READ'. The central illustration shows a woman in a yellow top and blue pants sitting on an orange beach bag, and a man in a blue shirt and brown pants sitting on a yellow beach bag. They are both holding books. At the bottom, the title 'BOOK LOVERS' is written in large, bold, white letters.</p>
<p><i>Happy Place</i></p>	<p>2023</p>	<p>Berkley Books</p>	 <p>The cover for 'Happy Place' by Emily Henry has a vibrant pink background. At the top, 'EMILY HENRY' is written in large white letters, followed by '#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF BOOK LOVERS' in smaller white text. The title 'HAPPY PLACE' is prominently displayed in the center in large, bold, white letters. Below the title, it says 'A NOVEL'. The bottom half of the cover features a colorful illustration of people at a beach: a woman in a yellow swimsuit is jumping, a man in a blue swimsuit is running, and a woman in a black swimsuit is jumping. In the foreground, a man is relaxing in a blue inflatable ring, and a woman is in a yellow duck-shaped inflatable ring.</p>

**Appendix E - Talia Hibbert**

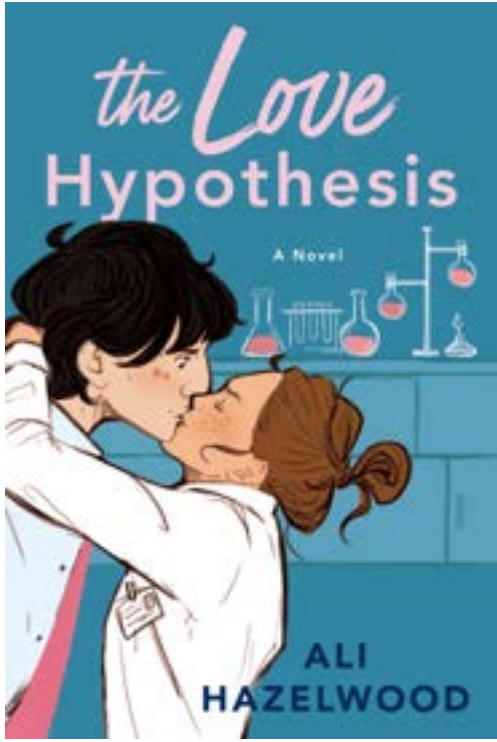
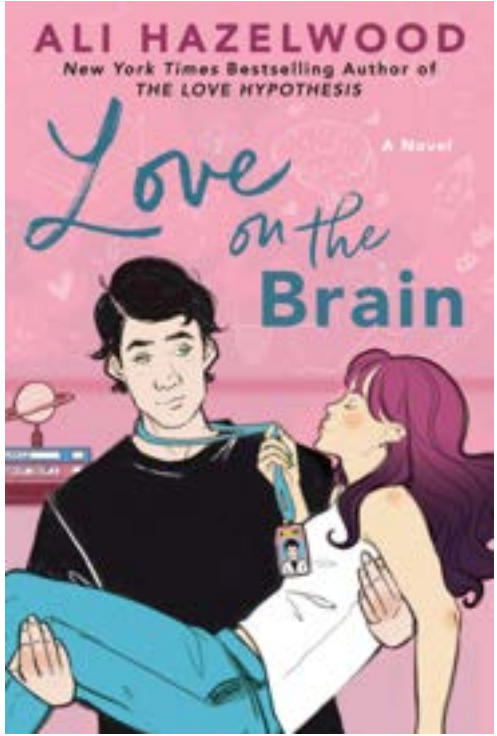
Title	Year	Publisher	Cover
<p><i>The Princess Trap</i></p>	<p>Originally released in 2018, this edition is a rerelease from 2021.</p>	<p>Nixon House</p>	
<p><i>The Roommate Risk</i></p>	<p>Originally released in 2018, this edition is a rerelease from 2023.</p>	<p>Nixon House</p>	

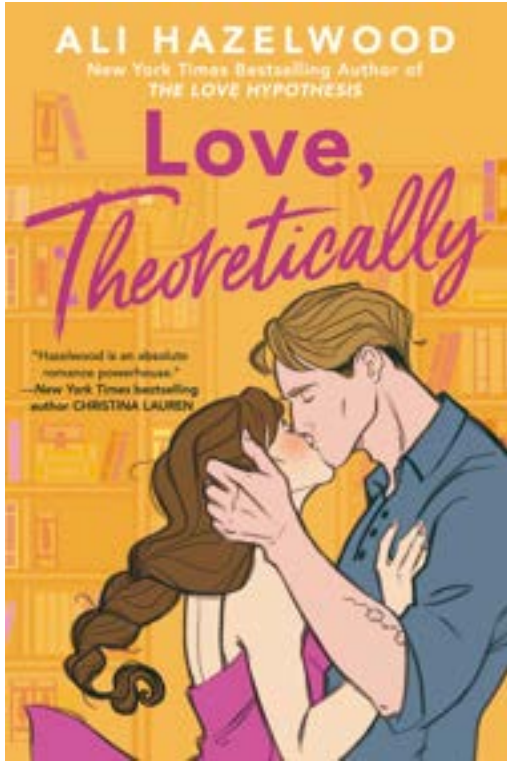
<p><i>The Fake Boyfriend Fiasco</i></p>	<p>Originally released in 2018, this edition is a rerelease from 2023.</p>	<p>Nixon House</p>	
<p><i>Get a Life, Chloe Brown</i></p>	<p>2019</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	

<p><i>Take a Hint, Dani Brown</i></p>	<p>2020</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	
<p><i>Act Your Age, Eve Brown</i></p>	<p>2021</p>	<p>Avon Books</p>	

<p><i>Highly Suspicious and Unfairly Cute</i></p>	<p>2023</p>	<p>Piaktus</p>	 <p>NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF GET A LIFE, CHLOE BROWN <b>TALIA HIBBERT</b> <b>HIGHLY SUSPICIOUS</b> <i>and</i> <i>unfairly</i> <i>cute</i></p>
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**Appendix F - Ali Hazelwood**

Title	Year	Publisher	Cover
<i>The Love Hypothesis</i>	2021	Berkley Books	
<i>Love on the Brain</i>	2022	Berkley Books	

<p><i>Love, Theoretically</i></p>	<p>2023</p>	<p>Berkley Books</p>	 <p>ALI HAZELWOOD New York Times Bestselling Author of THE LOVE HYPOTHESIS</p> <p><i>Love, Theoretically</i></p> <p>"Hazelwood is an absolute romance powerhouse." —New York Times bestselling author CHRISTINA LAUREN</p>
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