

Carleton University
Winter 2022
Department of English

ENGL 5900W: Selected Topic in English Studies/
WGST 5902C: Pleasure, Politics, Pop Culture

Writing/Reading Desire: The Pleasures, Politics, and Poetics of Contemporary Popular Romance

In-Person Seminars: Wednesdays 8:30-11:30 a.m.
Location: 240 Patterson Hall

Instructor: **Prof. Brian Johnson**
Email: brian.johnson@carleton.ca

Prof. Johnson's Office Hours: Brightspace, Mondays, 9:00-10:00 a.m.

Course Description

This seminar introduces students to the study of popular genres through a focus on contemporary popular romance. The course begins with an introduction to the formal features of popular romance in its most ubiquitous forms (the Harlequin romance and the historical romance) and thinks about how the narrative structures and conventions of these books register, organize, and engage contemporary ideologies of gender, sexuality, race, class, ability, religion, and other topics of social concern. At the same time, we will theorize about the pleasures, meanings, and uses of fantasy that these often transgressive narratives celebrate. Subsequently, the course examines how the romance genre has been transformed by the activity of fan communities whose fan fiction and slash writing queered the genre and inaugurated the emergence of new forms like the extremely popular m/m romances of the last twenty years. Finally, the course examines the way romance subgenres continue to proliferate through genre-mixing and experimentation. Our approach throughout will be informed by recent scholarship on genre and audience, as well as by theoretical writings on gender, race, and sexuality.

Choosing What You Read:

An Important Heads Up About the Reading List and Seminar Format

This seminar has a somewhat unconventional approach to weekly readings and presentations. All seminar members will read a minimum of 9 romance novels total over the duration of the course (about 1 per week, with exceptions for weeks that focus more on secondary materials). However—and this is the unconventional part—we will not all be reading the same novels. During each regular week of the class, there will be a choice of 4-6 novels to read. Each of these books will be presented on and discussed during seminar; you will be responsible for reading ONE of them. (You are of course welcome to read more.) I will circulate an online sign-up sheet for the entire reading list early in the term, and I will ask you all to sign up to read 1 novel per week, as well as signing up to be the presenter for 3 of these. This will ensure that

every novel has a presenter and that several seminar members (including the presenter and myself) will have read and be able to comment on each book. Each regular in-person class meeting will be run like a conference panel in which the class will hear short seminar presentations on the week's 4-6 novels. Afterwards, we will have a general discussion of the presentations, readings, and topics for that week, with each seminar member bringing their own reading experience to bear on that week's discussion. This format ensures that we will cover a lot of ground; each presenter will usually have at least 2 class respondents with which to discuss their novel; and hopefully we will all come away from the course with a broad as well as nuanced understanding of this incredibly diverse, exciting, and understudied field of cultural production.

A Word About Challenging Content

Popular Romance overlaps with erotica and can often be a challenging genre because of its focus on intimacy, power, fantasy, kink, and transgressive themes. The required readings include sexually explicit material as well as potentially triggering material, including representations of homophobia, transphobia, sadism, sexual violence, and abuse.

Inclusivity Statement

I am committed to fostering an environment for learning that is inclusive for everyone regardless of gender identity, gender expression, sex, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, ability, age, class etc. All students in the class, the instructor, and any guests should be treated with respect during all interactions. It is my hope that our class will support diversity of experience, thought, and perspective.

Please feel free to contact me via email, anonymously, or in person to let me know about any experiences you have had related to this class that have made you feel uncomfortable. I will continually strive to create inclusive learning environments and would therefore appreciate your support and feedback. If you would prefer to talk to someone other than myself, please feel free to contact our Chair, Dr. Janice Schroeder <JaniceSchroeder@cunet.carleton.ca>. Additionally, I welcome emails or synchronous "in person" communications to let me know your preferred name or pronoun.

Texts

The course will be using online editions of all of the course texts, but you are of course welcome to use hard copies if you prefer. Students are responsible for purchasing digital or print versions of the primary texts from amazon.ca or chapters.indigo.ca or some other source. Some primary texts might also be available at smashwords.com. Additional secondary sources will be posted to our Brightspace page as needed throughout the term. Remember that you are not required to read all of these. You will only have to purchase 9 of the following primary texts. I would suggest waiting to purchase any of them until you have signed up for the readings.

- Johanna Lindsey, *Gentle Rogue* (1990)
- Jo Beverley, *My Lady Notorious* (1993)
- Mary Balogh, *Heartless* (1995)
- Linda Howard, *Son of the Morning* (1997)
- Loretta Chase, *Mr. Impossible* (2005)
- Julia Quinn, *The Other Miss Bridgerton* (2018)
- Tessa Dare, *A Week to Be Wicked* (2012)
- Scarlett Peckham, *The Rakes* (2020)
- Alyssa Cole, *An Extraordinary Union* (2017)
- Beverly Jenkins, *Rebel* (2019)
- Jasmine Guillory, *The Proposal* (2018)
- *Rebekah Weatherspoon, Xenia* (2019)
- Keira Andrews, *The Christmas Deal* (2019)
- Sarina Bowen and Elle Kennedy, *Him* (2015)
- Marshall Thornton, *Femme* (2016)
- Alex Beecroft, *Blue Steel Chain* (2015)
- Kaje Harper, *Unacceptable Risk* (2012; reissued 2021)
- Adriana Herrera, *American Love Story* (2019)
- Lila Rose, *The Secret's Out* (2019)
- Jamie Fessenden, *The Rules* (2017)
- Slade James, *Grumpy Bear* (2021)
- James Earl Hardy, *B-Boy Blues* (1994)
- E. E. Ottoman, *Documenting Light* (2016)
- Casey McQuiston, *One Last Stop* (2021)
- Victoria Holt, *Mistress of Mellyn* (1960)
- Vincent Virga, *Gaywyck* (1980)
- Kresley Cole, *A Hunger Like No Other* (2006)
- Gerri Hill, *Gillette Park* (2020)
- Sabrina Jeffries, *The Pirate Lord* (1998)
- Beverly Jenkins, *Captured* (2009)
- Keira Andrews, *Kidnapped By the Pirate* (2017)
- Michelle M. Pillow, *His Metal Maiden* (2016)
- Alyssa Cole, *Agnes Moore's Wild Knight* (2016)
- Alyssa Cole, *The A. I. Who Loved Me* (2019)
- Alyssa Cole, *How To Find a Princess* (2021)
- Alisha Rai, *Wrong to Need You* (2017)
- Alisha Rai, *First Comes Like* (2021)

Course Calendar

Each week, you are expected to read ONE of the listed romances (for which you will have signed up in advance), unless otherwise specified, and 1-2 of the secondary sources (except for the weeks of Jan 19, Jan 26, and Mar 2, when you are expected to read all the secondary sources).

Jan 10 – Introduction to the class

Part I: Romance as Genre

Jan 19 – The Romance and Formula Fiction (asynchronous session; no in-person meeting)

- 1 contemporary or classic category romance (see Assignment 1 for details)
- Ken Gelder, "Genre: history, attitudes, practice" from *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field*, Routledge, 2004, pp. 40-74.
- Merja Makinen, "The Romance" from *Feminist Popular Fiction*, Palgrave, 2001, pp. 23-43.

Jan 26 – Theorizing Romance: The Pleasures and Politics of Fantasy

- Janice Radway, "Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context." *Feminist Studies* vol. 9, no. 1, Spring 1983, 53-78.
- Sarah Brouillette, "Romance Work." *Theory & Event*, vol. 22, no. 2, April 2019, pp. 451-464.
- Laura Vivanco, "Feminism and Early Twenty-First Century Harlequin Mills & Boon Romances." *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 45, no. 5, 2012, pp. 1060-1089.

Feb 2 – Romance Chronotopes: Place, Time, and Difference

- Johanna Lindsey, *Gentle Rogue* (1990)
- Jo Beverley, *My Lady Notorious* (1993)
- Mary Balogh, *Heartless* (1995)
- Linda Howard, *Son of the Morning* (1997)

Feb 9 – Romance Chronotopes and the Politics of Historical Fantasy

- Loretta Chase, *Mr. Impossible* (2005)
- Julia Quinn, *The Other Miss Bridgerton* (2018)
- Tessa Dare, *A Week to Be Wicked* (2012)
- Scarlett Peckham, *The Rakes* (2020)
- Jayashree Kamblé, "White Protestantism: Race and Religious Ethos in Romance Novels" in *Making Meaning in Popular Romance Fiction: An Epistemology*. Palgrave, 2014, pp.131-156.
- Stacy E. Holden, "Love in the Desert: Images of Arab-American Reconciliation in Contemporary Sheikh Romance Novels," *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, Aug 29, 2015, <https://www.jprstudies.org/2015/08/love-in-the-desert-images-of-arab-american-reconciliation-in-contemporary-sheikh-romance-novelsby-stacy-e-holden/>

Feb 16 – Racism, Romance, and the Politics of Diversity

- Alyssa Cole, *An Extraordinary Union* (2017)
- Beverly Jenkins, *Rebel* (2019)

- Jasmine Guillory, *The Proposal* (2018)
- Rebekah Weatherspoon, *Xeni* (2019)
- Beverly Jenkins, "The African American Historical Romance: An Interview With Beverly Jenkins," interviewed by Rita B. Dandridge. *The Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2010.
- Lois Beckett, "Fifty Shades of White: The Long Fight Against Racism in Romance Novels," *The Guardian*, Apr 4, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/apr/04/fifty-shades-of-white-romance-novels-racism-ritas-rwa>
- Madhuri Sastry, "Palatable Love: Seeking Happily Ever After in a White Publishing World," *Bitch Media*, Sept 28, 2020. <https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/own-voices-indian-romance-novels-limitations>

Winter Break

Part II: What Is "Queer Romance"?

Mar 2 – Slash and Fan Fic (asynchronous session; no in-person meeting)

- See Assignment 2 for details
- Henry Jenkins, "Textual Poachers" from *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. Routledge, 1992, pp. 24-49.
- Joanna Russ, "Pornography By Women for Women, With Love" in *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse. Iowa UP, 2014, pp. 82-96.
- Patricia Frazer and Diana L. Veith, "Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and *Star Trek* Zines" in *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse. U of Iowa P, 2014, pp. 97-115.
- Kristina Busse, "Bending Gender: Feminist and (Trans)Gender Discourses in the Changing Bodies of Slash Fan Fiction, with Alexis Lothian" in *Framing Fan Fiction: Literary and Social Practices in Fan Fiction Communities*. U of Iowa P, 2017, pp. 57-77.
- Watch: Jill Bearup's History of Fanfiction (7 parts) https://youtu.be/lAkvQr_IVpE
- Archive of Our Own Show and Tell

Mar 9 – M/M Romance vs. LGBTQ+ Fiction

- Keira Andrews, *The Christmas Deal* (2019)
- Sarina Bowen and Elle Kennedy, *Him* (2015)
- Lila Rose, *The Secret's Out* (2019)
- Alex Beecroft, *Blue Steel Chain* (2015)
- Kaje Harper, *Unacceptable Risk* (2012; reissued 2021)
- Adriana Herrera, *American Love Story* (2019)
- Christine Grimaldi, "Reader, He Married Him: LGBTQ Romance's Search for Happily Ever After." *Slate.com*, 8 October 2015, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2015/10/lgbtq-romance-how-the-genre-is-expanding-happily-ever-afters-to-all-queer-people.html>
- Carole Veldman-Genz, "Selling Gay Sex to Women: The Romance of M/M and M/M/F Romantica," *Women and Erotic Fiction: Critical Essays on Genres, Markets, and Readers*, edited by Kristen Phillips, McFarland, 2015, pp. 133-149.
- Lucy Neville, from *Girls who Like Boys Who Like Boys*. Palgrave, 2018, pp. 191-254.
- Jonathan A. Allan, "Towards an Anatomy of the M/M Popular Romance Novel" from *Men, Masculinities, and Popular Romance*. Routledge, 2020, pp. 91-98.

- Guy Mark Foster, "What To Do If Your Inner Tomboy Is a Homo: Straight Women, Bisexuality, and Pleasure in M/M Gay Romance Fictions," *Journal of Bisexuality*, Dec 2015, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 509-531.

Mar 16 – LGBTQ+ Fiction vs. M/M Romance

- Marshall Thornton, *Femme* (2016)
- Jamie Fessenden, *The Rules* (2017)
- Slade James, *Grumpy Bear* (2021)
- James Earl Hardy, *B-Boy Blues* (1994)
- E. E. Ottoman, *Documenting Light* (2016)
- Casey McQuiston, *One Last Stop* (2021)
- Marshall Thornton, "I Am Not A Romance Writer," <https://thebloggergirls.com/2014/09/10/honorary-blogger-marshall-thornton-i-am-not-a-romance-writer-giveaway/>
- Marshall Thornton, "M/M Romance and Gay Fiction Duke It Out," <https://marshallthorntonauthor.com/thoughts-and-ideas/mm-romance-and-gay-fiction-duke-it-out/>

Part III: Exploring Genres and Genre Mixes

Mar 23 – Mixed Genre Romance: Gothic

- Victoria Holt, *Mistress of Mellyn* (1960)
- Vincent Virga, *Gaywyck* (1980)
- Kresley Cole, *A Hunger Like No Other* (2006)
- Gerri Hill, *Gillette Park* (2020)

Mar 30 – Mixed Genre Romance: Pirates

- Sabrina Jeffries, *The Pirate Lord* (1998)
- Beverly Jenkins, *Captured* (2009)
- Keira Andrews, *Kidnapped By the Pirate* (2017)
- Michelle M. Pillow, *His Metal Maiden* (2016)

Apr 6 – Case Study: Authors Across Genres: Alisha Rai and Alyssa Cole

- Alyssa Cole, *Agnes Moore's Wild Knight* (2016) and *The A. I. Who Loved Me* (2019)
- Alyssa Cole, *How To Find a Princess* (2021)
- Alisha Rai, *Wrong to Need You* (2017)
- Alisha Rai, *First Comes Like* (2021)

Evaluation & Assignments

Due Date	Assignment	Value
ongoing	Participation	15%
Jan 19	Assignment 1: The Romance Formula	5%
Mar 2	Assignment 2: Slash and Fan Fic Show and Tell	5%
sign up	3 Presentations/Critical Book Reviews (25% each)	75%

FINAL GRADES Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

PLAGIARISM The University Senate defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another’s works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.

Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft. It is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly with the course’s instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include failure of the assignment, failure of the entire course, or suspension from a program. For more information please go to: <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>

SPECIAL INFORMATION REGARDING PANDEMIC MEASURES

All members of the Carleton community are required to follow COVID-19 prevention measures and all mandatory public health requirements (e.g. wearing a mask, physical distancing, hand hygiene, respiratory and cough etiquette) and [mandatory self-screening](#) prior to coming to campus daily.

If you feel ill or exhibit COVID-19 symptoms while on campus or in class, please leave campus immediately, self-isolate, and complete the mandatory [symptom reporting tool](#). For purposes of contact tracing, attendance will be recorded in all classes and labs. Participants can check in using posted QR codes through the cuScreen platform where provided. Students who do not have a smartphone will be required to complete a paper process as indicated on the [COVID-19 website](#).

All members of the Carleton community are required to follow guidelines regarding safe movement and seating on campus (e.g. directional arrows, designated entrances and exits, designated seats that maintain physical distancing). In order to avoid congestion, allow all previous occupants to fully vacate a classroom before entering. No food is permitted in any classrooms or labs.

For the most recent information about Carleton’s COVID-19 response and required measures, please see the [University’s COVID-19 webpage](#) and review the [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#). Should you have additional questions after reviewing, please contact covidinfo@carleton.ca

Please note that failure to comply with University policies and mandatory public health requirements, and endangering the safety of others are considered misconduct under the [Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy](#). Failure to comply with Carleton’s COVID-19 procedures may lead to supplementary action involving Campus Safety and/or Student Affairs.

FORMATTING AND CITATION Written work should be typed/printed double-spaced using a 12 pt Times font or equivalent with a 1" margin on all sides of the page. Also, remember to keep backup copies of your papers. Please use MLA (Modern Language Association) documentation style. For examples, see: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_style_introduction.html.

LATE PENALTIES Because this is a seminar course with no final paper, your classmates are relying on you to present and share your work on time. No-shows for presentations will result in a grade of 0 for the oral component of the assignment (i.e. you will forfeit 40% of your grade for that assignment). If you require additional time to complete any of the critical book reviews or forum assignments, please get in touch with me about that.

Detailed Descriptions of Assignments

Weekly Participation (15%)

- Each week, you are expected to read 1-2 of the assigned secondary sources and ONE primary text (for which you will have signed up). (For the theory-focused weeks on Jan 19 and Mar 2, you are expected to read all of the secondary readings.)
- On weeks when you are *not* a presenter, you are expected to have at least a couple of thoughts to share with the class about the text you have read. This role is essential for the presenter for that week, as it will help to advance the discussion of the text they have worked on. You are in effect a respondent for the presenter, and you are responsible for being able to carry on an informed discussion with them about the text you have signed up to read. Don't let your classmate down!
- Note that the participation grade applies only to the in-person meetings; the work you do for the asynchronous meetings on Jan 19 and Mar 2 will be evaluated separately (see Assignments 1 and 2 below for details on those).
- Note that the participation grade applies only to the synchronous meetings; the work you do for the asynchronous meetings on Jan 18 and Feb 22 will be evaluated separately. See Assignments 1 and 2 below.

Assignment 1: Analytic Synopsis (5%)

The Classic Romance Formula: Now or Then

- First, watch Harlequin's short introductory video here: <https://harlequin.submittable.com/submit>
- Then, read the submission guidelines for some of the Harlequin "Category Romance" series (on the same page as the video--click on "more" to show the full guidelines).
- Select and read *either* a contemporary male-female category romance of roughly 200-250 pages published by Harlequin (i.e. *not* a 400-page Historical) *or* (if you have access to some) select an older category romance published by Harlequin, Silhouette, Loveswept or some other major category romance publisher from any decade between 1950-now (these can be found at most used bookstores and thrift shops, and some are available online if you hunt around). Ideally, I would like to see about half the class focus on contemporary category romances and half focus on earlier examples.
- Write a 400-500 word analytic synopsis (a summary of the romance plot and characters that identifies the work's main tropes, narrative structure, and strategies). It should conclude with one comment (1-2 sentences) about anything you found noteworthy or interesting about the book. **See the example of what this looks like below on pages 10-11 of the syllabus.**
- When selecting a book, be open to choosing something that strikes you as weird, tacky, or offensive. Beyond gaining a better understanding of the genre's conventions, the

purpose of this exercise is to get a sense of the range of “mainstream” North American romantic fantasy both now and in the past.

- Share your analytic synopsis in the online forum by 8:30 a.m. Wednesday, January 19th. Your post should also include an image of the cover of your book.
- On Wednesday morning (during our regular class time), read through all of the other summaries and contribute 2 comments to the new discussion thread that I open that morning.

Assignment 2: Slash and Fan Fic Show and Tell (5%)

- Watch Jill Bearup’s History of Fanfiction (7 parts) https://youtu.be/lAkvQr_IVpE
- Do all of the secondary readings
- Browse An Archive of Our Own <https://archiveofourown.org/>
- Choose One fanfic or one fanfic category and write a 250-300 word overview that relates its contents to some aspect of one of the week’s secondary readings
- Share your overview and one brief representative excerpt from the fanfic (or from one of the fanfics in the category) on the class discussion forum by 8:30 a.m. Wednesday, March 2nd.
- On Wednesday morning (during our regular class time), read through all of the other posts and contribute 2 comments to the new discussion thread that I open that morning.

Seminars Presentations and Critical Book Reviews 1, 2, and 3 (3 x 25% = 75%)

Sign up to present on THREE primary texts total, ONE for EACH of the following clusters of dates:

- **Seminar 1: Feb 2, Feb 9, Feb 16**
- **Seminar 2: Mar 9, Mar 16**
- **Seminar 3: Mar 23, Mar 30, Apr 6**

This is an assignment in two parts (oral and written) with a total of 3 components. Your oral presentation will need:

1. A clear, analytic summary of the text’s plot, characters, and use of romance tropes (by “analytic” I mean: don’t just list them; explain how they work together). Please *teach* us your text by making the analytic summary engaging, easy to follow, and *analytic* (i.e. do not just list the events of the plot—explain to us how character, plot, motif, tropes, genre, and theme all work together to a particular end).
2. TWO critical “points of interest” phrased as questions AND tentative answers to these questions. (This will help give the class a way to focus during the discussion period and also help facilitate the comparison of different texts.) When developing these two “points of interest,” feel free to make reference to any of the secondary readings for the week (though you do not have to use these). Note that these “points of interest” do not have to be narrowly interpretive—they could be larger questions about how your text might relate to other texts or genres we have studied, to broader literary or theoretical questions, or to issues about publishing or reception. Give us something significant to think about.

Your oral presentation must be **10-12 minutes in length (no longer!)**. This is roughly 4-5 pages or 1000-1250 words. (I hate doing it, but I will have to cut folks off if they go beyond 12 minutes in order to keep the seminars on track and make sure that everyone has enough time to present.) It is fine to speak from notes or to read directly off a script; whichever format works best for you is acceptable, so long as the time limit is respected.

The written component of the assignment is the Critical Book Review (of which you will produce a total of 3 in lieu of a regular term paper):

3. After you have presented, you will have a week to develop your presentation script or notes into an organically coherent and polished formal critical book review of about 2000 words. This review should reflect a deeper understanding of and engagement with the primary text than the oral presentation and have a sharper thesis and analytic edge. Think of the oral presentation component as an opportunity to workshop your initial ideas about the text; the written book review is the final, formal product.

You will be graded on both components after the written portion is submitted. The seminar presentation is worth 40% of the grade and the polished written review is worth 60%.

Sample Analytic Synopsis for Assignment 1

Here is an example of the kind of summary I'm asking you to write for Assignment 1. Notice how it does not get too distracted by the surface details of the narrative, but sticks instead to a structural summary of the plot and how it works. When analyzing any fiction—but especially formula fiction—look at the plot as a kind of machine that moves the characters (and readers) from one state to another; similarly, look at the characters in a more starkly impersonal way than you normally would—they are not real, obviously, but we tend to personify them as we read, allowing the narrative to seduce us into attributing subjectivity and autonomy to them. Resist this impulse. The characters might have some degree of psychological realism, but they are also slaves to the plot. Your job here is to explain how characters and plot work together (are created to be interconnected) in order to manifest the narrative's meanings and effects. For this exercise in particular, but also for this class in general, it will help to think like a structuralist literary critic: approach the characters first in terms of their "functions" (heroine, hero, helper, blocker, etc.) relative to the plot as a whole. Think of motifs, tropes, and themes this way too: how does a given motif, trope, or theme facilitate or frustrate the working out of the central love plot? In the example below I have included brief mentions of some narrative details (the real estate conflict, their names, etc.), but on the whole, this summary aims to deal with the features of the hero and heroine that are most generic (their shifting positions with respect to desire and love) and the features of the plot that are most revealing of the narrative's overall logic and thematic concerns (in this particular case, the overcoming of barriers to romance and the inverted maternal plots).

Janice Maynard's *Blame It On Christmas*, Harlequin, 2018 (Brian Johnson)

Janice Maynard's *Blame It On Christmas* (Harlequin, 2018) is a "second chance romance" that presents the hero and heroine's mutual refusal to risk emotional entanglement as the consequence of past traumas. The hero (handsome, sexually experienced real estate developer J.B.) no longer trusts women after a disastrous first marriage to a gold digger. The heroine (successful jewellery store owner Maisie), is similarly traumatized by a formative romantic



humiliation: J.B.'s rejection of her teenaged advances back in high school. When the two characters clash over the hero's attempt to purchase the heroine's property and her petty refusal to bargain fairly with him, their mutual sexual attraction initiates a series of encounters in which they act on their desire but defend themselves against acknowledging deeper feelings, both to each other and to themselves. The heroine suspects the hero of callously using his sexual charm to secure a business deal and masks her love for him in fantasies of revenge for past hurt; meanwhile, the hero is inflamed with genuine desire for her, but does not recognize his feelings as love.

Dovetailing with the gradual weakening of the hero and heroine's emotional defences against love is a second plot focused on maternal figures that complicates, clarifies, and helps to resolve the novel's depiction of the heroine's more powerful emotional reticence. As readers eventually learn, this reticence stems not just from the sting of the hero's high school rebuff but from the prior implosion of the heroine's family following her unstable mother's psychotic break. The mother's institutionalization during the heroine's childhood—itsself the result of her own parents' murder-suicide one further generation back—was a foundational trauma signifying poor choices in love that "cursed" the family and blocked the heroine's appetite for marriage and motherhood. The regenerating (hence, Christmas-themed) sequel to this blocking event occurs in the narrative present when a heart attack suffered by the hero's mother leads to a sequence of deceptions initiated by the hero in which he and the heroine feign an engagement to encourage his mother's post-op recovery; the hero's mother later reveals that she is wise to her son's deception but asks the heroine to sustain it because she senses unconscious motives in her son's playacting. The wise/intuitive mother is of course correct, and the couple's masquerade ultimately leads to greater physical intimacy, mutual empathy, and unvoiced self-recognitions of their true feelings. After symmetrical misunderstandings that temporarily separate the couple are cleared up, hero and heroine reunite and profess their mutual love. The convergence of the couple's romantic union with the mother's recovery foregrounds the novel's characterization of romantic love as the cure for the heroine's maternal wound.

(440 words)

REQUESTS FOR ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For accommodation regarding a formally-scheduled final exam, you must complete the [Pregnancy Accommodation Form](#).

Religious obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details [click here](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/focus/sexual-violence-prevention-survivor-support/>

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation will be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>