

Fecha de recepción: 17 diciembre 2017
Fecha de aceptación: 30 enero 2018
Fecha de publicación: 15 febrero 2018
URL: <http://oceanide.netne.net/articulos/art10-6.pdf>
Oceánide número 10, ISSN 1989-6328

**Mass-market romance and the question of genre.
N. Sparks, E. L. James and D. Gabaldon**

**Inmaculada PÉREZ CASAL
(Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, España)**

RESUMEN:

La novela romántica ha servido de gran inspiración para el cine y la televisión, tal y como demuestran las adaptaciones de textos clásicos como *Pride and Prejudice* o *Jane Eyre*, y la atención que éstos han recibido por parte de la crítica. Por el contrario, las adaptaciones de otras novelas también llamadas "románticas", pero más próximas a la cultura de masas, han pasado desapercibidas a pesar de jugar un papel decisivo en la evolución del género en estos últimos años. Tomando como objeto de estudio las novelas de Nicholas Sparks, la trilogía *Fifty Shades* de E.L. James y la saga *Outlander* de Diana Gabaldon, así como sus adaptaciones correspondientes, este artículo analiza el impacto que estos textos han tenido sobre la novela romántica y la comunidad que la respalda. La etiqueta romance asociada a estas producciones ha elevado aún más la popularidad del género entre el público, pero a su vez ha creado un intenso debate en torno a la verdadera esencia del mismo. Así pues, todo apunta a que la novela romántica se encuentra en una fase crítica de su desarrollo, gracias a que el éxito comercial de adaptaciones como las de Sparks, James y Gabaldon han redescubierto y transformado el mundo del romance.

Palabras clave: novela romántica, romance, adaptación, Nicholas Sparks, *Fifty Shades*, *Outlander*

ABSTRACT:

The numerous adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* or *Jane Eyre*, reputed examples of canonical or highbrow romance, attest to the long-lasting appeal that romance novels have had for the world of television and cinema. Academic criticism has paid duly attention to these transpositions although, comparatively speaking, it has failed to assess the audiovisual adaptations of other successful forms of romance, closer to mass culture. This is a remarkable omission, because TV and film transpositions have played a significant role in the genre's development in the last few years. Through a case study of Nicholas Sparks' novels, E.L. James's *Fifty Shades* trilogy and Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* series, as well as their corresponding adaptations, this paper analyses the impact that these texts have had on mass-market romance fiction and its community. Usually tagged as 'romance' stories, these productions have raised the genre's popularity to unprecedented levels, but this in turn has been followed by a heated debate among readers over the very essence of the romance novel. Thus, the genre is now at a pivotal stage in its development, given that the great market success of Sparks, James' and Gabaldon's adaptations have rediscovered and transformed the world of romance.

Keywords: romance novel, romance, adaptation, Nicholas Sparks, *Fifty Shades*, *Outlander*

1. INTRODUCTION

The sales figures of romance novels attest to their popularity across the English speaking world and their ever-increasing presence in the international literary marketplace. The most commonly quoted figure is \$1.08 billion sales only in the year 2013, an information provided by the Romance Writers of America (RWA) Association, a guide for old and new authors of romance fiction ("Romance Statistics": n.pag.). Similarly, romance is said to represent a 13% of the total adult fiction market in the US, a percentage that is likely to keep growing in the years to come (ibid.). These estimates, however, tend to blur the definition of 'romance novel' itself and simplify its readership, at the same time that they equate 'romance' with 'easy profits'.

This paper tackles the question of genre in popular romance fiction in relation to other mass-culture texts like TV series and films, revealing the ways in which these products interrelate and continuously shape each other. It provides, firstly, an overview of the current state of mass-market romance and its fandom. This is followed by the analysis of Nicholas Sparks' and E.L. James' books and films, which reveals the controversial use of the term 'romance' and sheds light on the implications that this situation has for the world of popular romance fiction. Thirdly, this paper comments on the *Outlander* series because, unlike the previous two, Gabaldon's work seems to have the unanimous support of romance readers. Finally, the last section summarises the conclusions and lays out some directions for future research on this topic.

2. MASS-MARKET AND ROMANCELANDIA

Due to the growing academic interest in the genre, the term 'romance novel' has become under scrutiny in recent years (Regis, 2003; Kamblé, 2014; Roach, 2014), and these scholarly revisions and redefinitions now co-occur with more "popular" and customary proposals. Thus, the aforementioned RWA states that a romance novel is any novel concerned primarily with "individuals falling in love and struggling to make the relationship work"; additionally, "an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending" is mandatory ("About the Romance Genre": n.pag.). It must be said that RWA's former definition was slightly different, but full of meaning: the label 'romance' used to apply to heterosexual relationships only, excluding LGBTQ+ communities. In 2016, RWA expressed its apologies publicly and reaffirmed its

"commitment to making sure that 'any definition of romance should be broad and inclusive'" (2016: n.pag.). Nevertheless, comprehensive views of romance like this one can result in a misleading interpretation of certain texts. According to Pamela Regis, who has focused on the formal aspects of the genre, Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938) and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) exemplify this tendency to equate romantic stories (i.e. stories that include a love subplot) with romance novels, despite the fact that they do not comply with the (formal) requirements of the genre (2003: 48).

Further changes produced at the heart of the romance novel form in the past two decades make it substantially different from the one that feminist critics like Tania Modleski and Janice Radway analysed in the 1980s. An obvious involution is this democratisation of the happily-ever-after ending, although there are others. The genre echoes many second-wave feminist demands, such as emphasising the heroine's right to freedom and happiness, and offering alternative models of masculinity/femininity. Similarly, modern romance novels mirror multiple social concerns like PTSD syndrome in the US after the Iraq war, and discuss whatever issues may be affecting personal relationships in contemporary society, from single-parenthood to online dating services, to name some examples. In addition, new subgenres like fantasy or paranormal romance have emerged since the 1990s, and compete in popularity with the more traditional historical and contemporary subgenres. On the whole, these thematic innovations and the unstoppable move towards genre-blending problematize the definition of 'romance novel', and contribute to its confusion with other romantic/ amorous texts.

As to the question of who *consumes* romance fiction, the RWA's survey in 2014 presents us with the prototypical romance reader: a woman, in between 30 and 54 years of age, living mostly in the south of the US, and with an average income of \$55,000 per year ("Romance Statistics": n.pag.). In Janice Radway's seminal *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (1984), the stereotypical romance reader was slightly different: a Western, middle-class, unemployed housewife with children (46-64). Also, in Radway's study, men were portrayed as suspicious creatures who believed that too much fantasy might provoke their wives' unhappiness and the destruction of their marriages (87). By contrast, the afore-

mentioned RWA report includes a regular 16% of male romance readers ("Romance Statistics" n.pag.). The contemporary romance reader, therefore, continues to be primarily female, but with a greater acquisitive power and in all likelihood, with fewer family responsibilities.

This renovated romance novel is supported by a thriving community of writers, readers, librarians and publishers. In the last couple of decades, the genre has become increasingly active thanks to the widespread use of social networks and internet forums and blogs like *Heroes and Heartbreakers*, *All About Romance* or *Smart Bitches, Trashy Books*. While romance fandoms are still virtually unexplored territory, and as Phillips and Freund have observed in relation to the *Outlander* phenomenon, "much of the [fan] interactions must happen in person, between friends, and in private communications and emails" (2016: 25), these virtual havens offered romance devotees the possibility to discuss their readings without being exposed to public smear. Furthermore, they have become the real driving force behind the industry, by organising reading clubs, informal meetings, and even national conferences, with the sole purpose of defending and vindicating the romance novel from its detractors. In this respect, the documentary *Love Between the Covers* (2015) illustrates the complexities of romancelandia¹, as it follows the lives of several consolidated writers and the community that forms around them, revealing the great power that both authors and readers now possess within the industry.

3. "I DON'T DO ROMANCE": READING N. SPARKS AND E. L. JAMES

The label 'romance' works almost as a synonym for 'love' when applied to mass-market romance fiction. When attached to other cultural products, however, its meaning is more comprehensive in so far as it takes into account the different historical acceptations of the term. As a result, we find 'romance' in texts as varied as *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011–), *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005–) or *The Big Bang Theory* (CBS, 2007–), each representing one possible meaning, ranging from fantasy and adventure, to melodrama and love. The same happens in film productions, and some 2017 blockbusters certainly belong to this 'romance' category. A clear example of this is *Fifty Shades Darker* (2017), which, released near St. Valentine's Day, achieved \$374,275,967 worldwide by the 20th March 2017 (IMDB).

In light of the forthcoming debut of *Fifty Shades Freed*, scheduled for February 2018, the now customary clash between its supporters and detractors is likely to resurface, and questions such as the following will become one again widespread: is *Fifty Shades* a covertly conservative film? Is it empowering in any way for the billions of women who watch it? What elements make it so popular? Additionally, and more important for our discussion, what place (if any) does it occupy in the romance novel canon? The history of E.L. James' trilogy is quite illustrative of a contemporary cultural practice, in which successful novels are soon transformed into equally popular films or TV series. Think, for instance, of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, published in 2003 and with a film version directed by Ron Howard in 2006; or the *Millennium* trilogy, books that were published between 2005-2007 and whose corresponding TV adaptation premiered in 2010, directed by Niels Arden Oplev (additionally, there is a Hollywood film directed by David Fincher in 2011). In the section of 'romance' stories, besides the *Fifty Shades* trilogy, this trend probably has in Nicholas Sparks' novels its greatest representative, with the adaptations of *The Notebook* (book published in 1996; film version directed by Nick Cassavetes in 2004), *Dear John* (2006; film directed by Lasse Hallström in 2010), *The Lucky One* (2008; film directed by Scott Hicks in 2012) or *The Choice* (2007; film directed by Ross Katz in 2016). Like the prototypical romance that Tania Modleski and Janice Radway discussed in the 1980s, Sparks' novels are seemingly based on a successful and repetitive formula: boy and girl meet, they fall madly in love, and the relationship ends tragically.

During the *Fifty Shades* boom, in July 2015, the prizewinning Galician writer Teresa Cameselle dealt at large with romance novels on the screen.² On the one hand, she denounced the sexism inherent to the film and TV industries and the ways in which it affects romance fiction. On the other hand, she even doubted that the label 'romance', due to its modern Twenty-first century meaning, could be applied to most cinema and TV productions included in this category. Cameselle compared precisely the cases of Nicholas Sparks and Nora Roberts, one of the most influential romance writers of the last century, and in her presentation, she pointed at the fact that male texts are more readily accepted as movie material, and consequently given better means, including budget, cast, location, final advertisement, etc.

(2015: n.pag.). To put an example, the first of Sparks' films, *Message in a Bottle* (directed by Luis Mandoki in 1999), had an estimated budget of \$80.000.000 according to the *IMDB*, whereas the first of Roberts' titles to be adapted, *Montana Sky* (2006), was made into a TV movie (directed by Mick Robe in 2007) and cost around \$4.000.000 CAD (*IMDB*). Notice that not only the budget is around 95% lower in Roberts' case, but also, that her novel is adapted for television, and not made into an international blockbuster. In the same vein, *Message in a Bottle* includes familiar faces like Kevin Costner or Robin Wright, celebrities that attract the attention of the audience at the same time that they give popularity and prestige to the movie production. Nora Roberts's adaptations, by contrast, feature regular TV actors known for their work in other similar productions, but with very little presence outside the US and the TV medium.

Inevitably, one may wonder whether Nicholas Sparks' novels have sold better than Roberts', which in a way would explain why more money is invested on his productions. The answer, however, is a negative one: both writers are always on the top of the best-seller lists for 'Fiction' or 'Romance' categories. In 2012, for instance, the website *Publishers Weekly* included both writers in the top 3 of its best-sellers' list (Habash, 2012: n.pag.). More recently in 2016, both writers continued to be at the top of sales' lists. As a consequence, we cannot hold figures responsible for this unbalanced situation, in which successful women writers of romance seem to be at great disadvantage.

As far as Cameselle's second complaint is concerned, she established a relationship between genre and gender by arguing that romance novels have been traditionally a feminine literary form. What is more, she even argued that men's understanding of the genre is only superficial, because the issues discussed in these novels have no immediate resonance in their real lives (2015: n.pag.). Admittedly, a review of the genre's history confirms that women have been the regular practitioners of the romance novel since its origins in the Eighteenth century, with authors like Fanny Burney and Jane Austen, till the more recent contributions by Rosamunde Pilcher or Julianne Donaldson. Despite some reputed male romance writers like Harold Lowry (a.k.a. Leigh Greenwood) or Bills Spence (a.k.a. Jessica Blair), and the still marginal percentage of male romance readers, the genre is primarily written by women, and therefore, it is even more sur-

prising that only a handful of them have been noticed by the audiovisual industry.

Teresa Cameselle's reflections also suggest that these industries trick their audiences, and present their products as based on romance novels. That would be the case of Nicholas Sparks' novels and films, as well as other popular titles like John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) and its homonymous movie counterpart in 2014, directed by Josh Boone. For this reason, Cameselle urged film producers to distinguish between love stories and romance stories, and even sentimental stories. This way, she affirmed, romance readers will not feel duped when they go to the cinema (2015: n.pag.). Implicitly, it is also a means to safeguard the genre's essence and protect it from the bad critiques that self-proclaimed 'romance' movies/TV series usually receive.

In this sense, it is pertinent to notice how the term 'romance' is being differently used by writers, readers, film and TV producers, and their audiences. Despite the fact that his novels and movies are considered purely as romances, for instance, Nicholas Sparks openly rejects the label. In the F.A.Q. section on his website, he gives the following explanation:

Love stories must use universal characters and settings. Romance novels are not bound by this requirement and characters can be rich, famous, or people who lived centuries ago, and the settings can be exotic. Love stories can differ in theme, romance novels have a general theme—"the taming of a man." And finally, romance novels usually have happy endings while love stories are not bound by this requirement. Love stories usually end tragically or, at best, on a bittersweet note.

'Romance' for Sparks retains primarily connotations of fantasy, adventure and great deeds, whereas the love story is by definition universal, realistic and multi-thematic. In addition, he implies that romance novels are not concerned with real-life issues; what is more, the traditional happy resolution of romance novels deprives them of any possible catharsis. Notwithstanding, as was noted earlier in section 2, and as romance critics like Laura Vivanco have observed, romance novels are not by definition exempt of realism or political implications for readers; in other words, "no romance can be completely

apolitical" (Vivanco, 2016: 131), thus disproving Spark's reasoning.

The statement "I don't do romance" that names this section, and which belongs in fact to Christian Grey, could also apply to Nicholas Sparks. His attempts to distinguish himself from the rest of popular and disregarded romance writers may respond to a necessity to give prestige to his own oeuvre. However, his emphasis on the romantic (if not romance) essence of his novels suggests that he is in a way still trying to appeal to the wide romance community, since this would guarantee a significant increase in sales. A similar argument seems to be behind the screen adaptations: by attaching the label 'romance' to these productions, and by targeting romance readership as a potential audience, film and TV producers can secure more profits. This is what happened with E.L. James' *Fifty Shades* novels and films, and one of the reasons why some romance readers have joined the ranks of its detractors.

The inception of *Fifty Shades of Grey* is in itself very interesting from the point of view of intertextuality and fandom studies. Moreover, its eventual merging with popular romance fiction is no less fascinating. It is publicly known that the origins of E.L. James' novel go back to the Young Adult *Twilight* (2005) by American author Stephenie Meyer. A fan of the story herself, E.L. James posted on the internet her own fanfictions based on *Twilight's* protagonists, but eventually removed them from that website, due to their "provocative[ness]" (Bertrand, 2015: n.pag.). The original fanfics were re-written until an early draft of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, then titled *Masters of the Universe*, was self-published with an enormous success (ibid.). The rest is already known: the story soon caught the publishers' attention and in 2012, E.L. James signed a contract with Random House. In 2015, the first of the movie adaptations was released worldwide.

What is most interesting regarding the *Fifty Shades* novels and films is its progressive association with popular romance fiction, and in particular, the subgenre of erotic romance. There is still much confusion around the terms 'erotic romance' and 'erotica', since both are frequently used interchangeably by publishers, advertisers, as well as readers. The larger romance community, however, separates them by claiming that (erotic) romance novels maintain their emphasis on the development of a love relationship, whereas

erotica is concerned mostly with "the individual sexual journeys of the characters" (Ramsdell, 2012: 533). As a result of these definitions, many romance novels' supporters contend that *Fifty Shades of Grey* is an example of erotica, and therefore unrelated to popular romance fiction. The book's emphasis on sexual intercourse and its effects on the female protagonist are common arguments in this debate. Furthermore, its origins as a *Twilight* version with explicit sexual content seem to contradict the idea that the books are chiefly focused on the relationship *per se*. As one irritated romance reader succinctly phrased it, "I understand sex sells, but this is being touted as a love story!" (Bethwesson, 2015: n.pag.).

The detractors of *Fifty Shades of Grey* have dubbed it "mummy porn", while its supporters have advocated for its liberating power for women, who may now perceive their sexuality as something positive and worth discussing. This latter standpoint, which would need to be analysed in relation to postfeminist and third wave feminist discourses, clashes with the opinion of many readers of romance novels. Many see in the figure of Anna Steele a problematic return to passiveness and female dependence, whereas the majority of contemporary romance writers maintain that romance heroines must be strong and independent women, in charge of their lives (Krentz, 1992). In other words, they defend that romance heroines should challenge traditional portrayals of femininity, in order to dismantle the widespread belief in the genre's conservative ideology.

Besides these issues, the success of E.L. James' novels and films has had unquestionable repercussions for mass-market romance fiction. Publishing houses, editors and writers alike have taken advantage of it and fostered the creation of similar texts. Sylvia Day's *Crossfire* books are perhaps the most well-known examples of this situation, and they have been repeatedly and systematically compared to the *Fifty Shades* trilogy. An article in *The Guardian*, for instance, referred to Day's novels as "copycats" of E.L. James' formula, due to their similar plotlines and marketing strategies (Dugdale, 2012: n.pag.). Interestingly enough, Sylvia Day's profile as a romance writer should not be overlooked. She is a member of the Romance Writers of America Honor Roll, and served as the Association's president for the 2012-2013 board year. Her election might have been coincidental (she was a well-established author by the time), but her rise to this

position may have sanctioned the remarkable boom of erotic romance/erotica novels in 2012. As Sara Nelson, Editorial Director of Books and Kindle at Amazon.com., pointed out at the time, "This was truly the year of the billionaire bad boy in romance —Amazon readers just couldn't get enough of the genre" (qtd. in *BusinessWire*, 2012: n.pag.). Perhaps in an attempt to rival with *Fifty Shades'* box-office success, Day's *Crossfire* series were also initially considered for TV/film format, but having remained at an impasse for years, the project was finally dropped (Day, "Frequently Asked Questions": n.pag.).

Arguably, the changes produced within the romance genre as a result of the blatant success these other 'romantic' texts would be temporary. However, evidence suggests that some of these so-called trends have come to stay. Furthermore, the increasing number of TV and film adaptations of romance novels and other 'romance' is unlikely to decrease, and therefore, the mutual influence between these different types of texts will continue to grow higher.

4. OUTLANDER: ROMANCELANDIA'S FAVOURITE

As previously shown, there is a great disparity of opinions regarding the concept of 'romance', and this confusion stems partly from the romance novels or romantic stories that become films and TV movies or series. On the one hand, we have seen how male texts are more likely to be considered by producers, at the expense of canonical women writers of romance fiction. On the other hand, the label 'romance' is applied indistinctly to many of these products, probably looking towards better profits. Against this complex backdrop, an important part of the romance community struggles to preserve the essence of the popular romance novel, at the same time that it supports TV and film adaptations that respect, let's say, the genre's characteristics.

In June 2013, writer Diana Gabaldon announced the TV pre-production of her *Outlander* series on her website (2013: n.pag.). The show premiered in 2014, and began its third season on 10th September 2017. *Outlander*, the TV series, has little by little made its reputation as a quality product, and it has substantially contributed to enhance the prestige of popular romance fiction, and the genre's TV/movie adaptations. Very briefly, the *Outlander* books and TV series follow the story of Claire Randall, a Second World War nurse

that accidentally travels back in time to the early 1700s in Scotland. Claire must learn to survive in a very different and hostile environment, during a turbulent period in the history of Great Britain. Additionally, she must clarify her feelings for a young Scottish man she meets in the past, Jamie Fraser. Claire's decision to stay in the past as well as her attempts to interfere with the politics of the 1740s are at the heart of the story, and subsequent instalments/seasons centre on Claire's attempts to be reunited with her lover Jamie.

Indeed, *Outlander* has become a favourite in romancelandia, a series of books (and now a TV series) which reflect the complexities of modern romance fiction: behind its fantastic and love-centred plotline, one finds in this series an interesting discussion of, among other issues, female independence, gender roles, sexuality, and politics. However, the publication history of the books, alongside their formal characteristics, may also complicate this perfect union between *Outlander* and the world of romance fiction. In "Travelling Through Time and Genre: Are the Outlander Books Romance Novels?", popular romance critic Jodi McAlister summarises the controversy surrounding Gabaldon's books, tackling the question of genre directly. While Diana Gabaldon has been traditionally reticent to define her books as "romance novels", McAlister is categorical in her assertion that "romance readers are reading them as such" (2016: 95). Indeed, the books have been awarded repeatedly by the romance community, and as McAlister suggests at some point, they may have also contributed to the formal and thematic development of the genre throughout the 1990s (2016: 100).

In light of these troublesome origins, we may wonder what makes *Outlander* so especial when compared to other so-called 'romance' stories like *Fifty Shades* or *Sparks'* novels. The most important aspect influencing this choice would be characterisation: a well-known blogger and *Outlander* fan, for instance, claims that when compared to Christian and Anna, Claire and Jamie "are people you could fall in love with, people to admire and emulate. They are people with integrity, strength and kindness. They never lose their own identity in this relationship" (Bethwesson, 2015: n.pag.). Furthermore, as Eleanor Ty has observed in "Melodrama, Gender and Nostalgia: The Appeal of *Outlander*", both leading roles are attractive to readers in general, (and, I would add, to romance readers in particular) because Claire and

Jamie embody the ideal hero and heroine of popular romance fiction. Ty defines Claire as "feisty, strong, and capable" in many aspects (2016: 59), a description that matches the one given by romance writers and quoted earlier in this paper. As for Jamie, his greatest asset is his "admirable devotion to and adoration of Claire" (Ty, 2016: 63). Furthermore, he is "a combination of the kind of men we admire (...): the brave/warrior soldier, the teacher/intellectual, the superman who comes to the rescue of the weak, the strong leader, the caring father, the lord of the castle, the engineer and pioneer, the gentleman lover, and the reckless rebel" (Ty, 2016: 62-3). Thus, Jamie's character follows the pattern of modern romance fiction, by which the heroes are "based on elements of womanhood that women find appealing" (Ziddle, 1999: 25) and act as "good providers" for women (Marks, 1999: 12).

A second reason behind the success of *Outlander* in romancelandia might be the quality of its script, casting, costumes and make-up, locations, special effects, etc., something that earlier adaptations of romance novels (e.g. Nora Roberts) did not possess. A further explanation can be the series bond with the (romance) fandom, through interactions with the cast (live *Twitter/Facebook* chats), merchandising (clothing, junk jewellery), and so on. And last but not least, *Starz'* production has remained neutral in the issue of genre, more so than the books, allowing for an untroubled and intimate connection between the TV series and the wider romance community.

To sum up, *Outlander* offers fans of popular romance fiction an alternative to those other 'romance' stories, an alternative which they perceive to be more faithful to the essence of the genre. In addition, the show's success indicates that romance readers are willing to support those projects which ensure a quality product, perhaps opening the door to other similar productions in the future.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Summing up, I have overviewed the current relationship between mass-market romance fiction and the film and TV industries. It has been my intention to reveal some problematic aspects that range from terminology itself, to more ideological issues.

Firstly, the label 'romance' is used ambiguously on many occasions. The polysemic dimension of the term allows for its application to a wide variety of texts, thus pro-

voking misunderstandings and tensions within the romance community. Consequently, romancelandia may be divided into those who support a broad notion of the genre and of the label 'romance', and those who opt for restricting its meaning and equating it almost exclusively with mass-market popular romance fiction. My research has also hinted at some of the consequences of this terminological confusion. For instance, the market success of books/films like *Fifty Shades of Grey* has had an impact on the popular romance novel by rekindling the debate over the characterisation of the female protagonist. Similarly, the popularity of these other 'romance' texts has blurred the distinction between erotica fiction and erotic romance, introducing greater levels of sexual content and explicitness into mainstream mass-market romance. Nevertheless, an excessive reliance on sex can undermine the efforts undertaken by romance writers and readers in the last twenty years, and take us back to a reductive understanding of romance fiction as "pornography for women", a thesis defended by Ann Barr Snitow in 1979.

Secondly, the popularity of romance fiction has increased since the moment when novels like Nicholas Sparks' *The Notebook* or *Fifty Shades of Grey* have hit the big screen. Interestingly enough, mass-market romance novels have scarcely been transformed into important TV or film productions, a fact which reveals the sexist policies operating within these industries, and points at the prejudices still held against popular romance fiction and its readership and audience. This situation may change in the near future thanks to, among other circumstances, the success of *Outlander*, a TV show based on a series of books which, despite genre debates, have long-established links with romancelandia. Thus, the devotees' support of films and TV series such as *Outlander* can counteract the potential damage caused by these other 'romance' productions.

In any case, it seems that the relationship between romance novels, cinema and TV is likely to become more complicated in the near future. For this reason, I would argue that the implications of such relationship should be taken into consideration in order to understand not only the present state of mass-market romance, but also a great number of film and TV productions that influence the world of popular romance artistic expressions.

WORKS CITED

- "Amazon.com Announces Best-Selling Books of 2012" (2012). *BusinessWire*, 14 Dec. 2012. <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20121214005096/en/Amazon.com-Announces-Best-Selling-Books-2012>. (Last accessed: 23 July 2017).
- BENIOFF, D. and D. B. WEISS (creators) (2011). *Game of Thrones*. Home Box Office.
- BERTRAND, N. (2015). "'Fifty Shades of Grey Started Out as 'Twilight' Fan Fiction Before Becoming an International Phenomenon." *Business Insider*, 18 June 2015. www.businessinsider.com/fifty-shades-of-grey-started-as-twilight-fan-fiction-2015-6. (Last accessed: 15 March 2017).
- BETHWESSON (2015). "Writing Sex: The Difference Between *Outlander* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*". *My Outlander Blog*, 13 Feb. 2015. www.bethwesson.com/2015/02/13/writing-sex-the-difference-between-outlander-and-fifty-shades-of-grey/. (Last accessed: 15 March 2017).
- BROWN, D. (2003). *The Da Vinci Code*. London: Double Day, Penguin Books.
- CAMESELLE, T. (2015). "La Romántica en el Cine". IV Congreso de Literatura Romántica de A Coruña, 1-2 July 2015, Hotel Riazor, A Coruña, Spain. Conference Presentation.
- The Choice* (2016). Directed by Ross Catz, Nicholas Sparks Productions, Safran Company.
- The Da Vinci Code* (2006). Directed by Ron Howard, Columbia Pictures.
- DAY, S. (2012). *Bared To You*. Crossfire #1.
- . (2012). *Reflected in You*. Crossfire #2.
- . (2013). *Entwined with You*. Crossfire #3.
- . (2014). *Captivated by You*. Crossfire #4.
- . (2016). *One with You*. Crossfire #5.
- . (2017). "Frequently Asked Questions: Will there be a Crossfire motion picture or television series?" *sylviaday* <http://www.sylviaday.com/faq/crossfire-motion-picture-television-series/> (Last accessed: 15 Sept 2017).
- DUGDALE, J. (2012). "Best-selling Books of 2012: Commentary". *The Guardian*, 28 Dec. 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/dec/28/books-years-bestseller-charts-commentary> (Last accessed: 17 May 2017).
- Dear John* (2010). Directed by Lasse Halström, Screen Gems, Relativity Media.
- DU MAURIER, D. (2012). *Rebecca*. London: Hachette.
- The Fault in Our Stars* (2014). Directed by Josh Boone, Fox 2000 Pictures.
- Fifty Shades Darker* (2017). Directed by James Foley, Perfect World Pictures, Universal Pictures.
- Fifty Shades Freed* (2018). Directed by James Foley, Perfect World Pictures, Universal Pictures.
- Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015). Directed by Sam Taylor-Johnson, Focus Features, Michael De Luca Productions.
- GABALDON, D. (1991). *Outlander*. New York: Delacorte Press.
- . (2013). "It's Official". *dianagabaldon*, 26 June 2013. <http://www.dianagabaldon.com/2013/06/its-official/> (Last accessed: 15 June 2017).
- The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2010). Directed by David Fincher, Columbia Pictures, Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer.
- GREEN, J. (2012). *The Fault in Our Stars*. New York: Dutton Books.
- HABASH, G. (2013). "Big Names Dominated Bestsellers in 2012". *Publishers Weekly*, 11 Jan 2013. www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/55458-big-names-dominated-bestsellers-in-2012.html (Last accessed: 15 Feb 2017).
- IMDB. (2017). Internet Movie Database. www.imdb.com (Last accessed: 31 July 2017).
- JAMES, E. L. (2011). *Fifty Shades Darker*. *Fifty Shades #2*.
- . (2011). *Fifty Shades of Grey*. *Fifty Shades #1*.
- . (2012). *Fifty Shades Freed*. *Fifty Shades #3*.
- KAMBLÉ, J. (2014). *Making Meaning in Popular Romance Fiction: An Epistemology*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- LARSSON, S. (2005). *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Millennium #1.
- . (2006). *The Girl Who Played with Fire*. Millennium #2.
- . (2007). *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*. Millennium #3.
- The Lucky One* (2012). Directed by Scott Hicks, Warner Bros.
- KRENTZ, J. A. (1992). *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- LORRE, C. and B. PRADY (creators) (2007). *The Big Bang Theory*. Chuck Lorre Productions and Warner Bros.
- Love Between the Covers* (2015). Directed by Laurie Khan, Blueberry Hill Prod.
- MARKS, P. (1999). "The Good Provider

- in Romance Novels". In *Romantic Conventions*, A. K. KALER and R. JOHNSON-KUREK (eds.). Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press, 10-22.
- MCALLISTER, J. (2016). "Traveling Through Time and Genre: Are the *Outlander* Books Romance Novels?" In *Adoring Outlander: Essays on Fandom, Genre and the Female Audience*, V. E. FRANKEL (ed.). Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 94-105.
- MEYERS, S. (2005). *Twilight*. Twilight #1. *Message in a Bottle* (1999). Directed by Luis Mandoki, performances by Kevin Costner, Robin Wright, Paul Newman, Bel Air Entertainment, DiNovi Pictures.
- Millennium* (2009). Directed by Niels Arden Oplev, performances by Noomi Rapace, Michael Nyqvist, Lena Endre, Yellowbird, ZDF Enterprises, Sveriges Television.
- MITCHELL, M. (1936). *Gone with the Wind*. New York: Macmillan.
- MODLESKI, T. (1990). *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women*. New York: Routledge.
- Montana Sky* (2007). Directed by Mike Robe, Lifetime Television, Mandalay Entertainment.
- MOORE, R. D. (creator) (2014). *Outlander*. Tall Ship Productions and Sony Pictures.
- The Notebook* (2004). Directed by Nick Cassavetes, New Line Cinema.
- PHILLIPS, J. and K. FREUND. (2016). "Engaging with 'Herself': Fandom and Authorship in the Age of Tumblr". In *Adoring Outlander: Essays on Fandom, Genre and the Female Audience*, V. E. FRANKEL (ed.). Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 23-43.
- RADWAY, J. (1987). *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*. London: Verso.
- RAMSDELL, K. (2012). *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*. Libraries Unlimited.
- REGIS, P. (2003). *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- RHIMES, S. (creator) (2005). *Grey's Anatomy*. ShondaLand and Touchstone Television.
- ROACH, C. M. (2016). *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- ROBERTS, N. (1996). *Montana Sky*. New York: Penguin Random House.
- ROMANCE WRITERS OF AMERICA. (2016). "About the Romance Genre". <https://www.rwa.org/romance> (Last accessed: 08 March 2017).
- . (2016). "Romance Statistics". <https://www.rwa.org/p/cm/ld/fid=580> (Last accessed: 08 March 2017).
- . (2016). "Important Message". <https://www.rwa.org/p/bl/et/blogid=20&blogaid=1483> (Last accessed: 08 March 2017).
- SNITOW, A. B. (1979). "Mass Market Romance. Pornography for Women is Different". *Radical History Review* 20: 141-161.
- SPARKS, N. (1998). *Message in a Bottle*. New York: Grand Central Publishing.
- . (2007). *The Notebook*. New York: Grand Central Publishing.
- . (2010). *Dear John*. New York: Grand Central Publishing.
- . (2012). *The Lucky One*. New York: Grand Central Publishing.
- . (2016). *The Choice*. New York: Grand Central Publishing.
- . (n.d.) "Frequently Asked Questions". <http://nicholassparks.com/faqs/> (Last accessed: 25 Feb 2017).
- TY, E. (2016). "Melodrama, Gender and Nostalgia: The Appeal of *Outlander*". In *Adoring Outlander: Essays on Fandom, Genre and the Female Audience*, V. E. FRANKEL (ed.). Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 58-68.
- VIVANCO, L. (2016). *Pursuing Happiness: Reading American Romance as Political Fiction*. Humanities-Ebook.
- ZIDDLE, A. (1999). "From Bodice-Ripper to Baby-sitter: the New Hero in Mass-Market Romance". In *Romantic Conventions*, A. K. KALER and R. JOHNSON-KUREK (eds.). Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press, 23-34.

NOTES

¹ As used herein, the term "romancelandia" alludes to "the physical community of authors, readers and publishing professionals who engage with the genre and to their lively online discussions on reviewer websites, blogs and Twitter" (Roach, 2016: 197).

² Cameselle presented "La Romántica en el Cine" (i.e. romance novels on the big screen) in a national conference for romance writers and fans, annually celebrated in the city of A Coruña (Spain).

Contacto: <inmaculada.perez@usc.es>

Título: El género romántico en la era del consumo. N. Sparks, E. L. James y D. Gabaldon