Suzanne Brockmann, *New York Times* best-selling and RITA-award-winning author, pioneered and popularized military romances. Her well-researched, tightly-plotted, highly emotional, action-packed novels with their socially- and politically-pertinent messages have firmly entrenched the romance genre in the previously male-dominated world of the military thriller and expanded the reach and relevance of the romance genre far beyond its stereotypical boundaries.

The Navy SEAL heroes of her *Tall, Dark and Dangerous* series published under the Silhouette Intimate Moments imprint and the heroes and even occasionally the heroines of her best-selling, mainstream Troubleshooter series who work for various military and counter-terrorism agencies have set the standards for military characters in the romance genre. In these two series, Brockmann combines romance, action, adventure, and mystery with frank, realistic examinations of contemporary issues such as terrorism, sexism, racial profiling, interracial relationships, divorce, rape, and homosexuality. Brockmann’s strong, emotional, and realistic heroes, her prolonged story arcs in which the heroes and heroines of future books are not only introduced but start their relationships with each other books before their own, and her innovative interactions with her readers, have made her a reader favorite.

Suzanne was born in Englewood, New Jersey on 6 May, 1960 to Frederick J. Brockmann, a teacher and public education administrator, and Elise-Marie “Lee” Schriever Brockmann, an English teacher. Suzanne and her family, including one older sister, Carolee, born 28 January, 1958, lived in Pearl River, N.Y., Guilford, Conn., and Farmingdale, N.Y., following Fred Brockmann’s career as a Superintendent of Schools. Suzanne graduated from Farmingdale High School in 1978 and began attending the School of Public Communication at Boston University, majoring in Broadcast and Film with a minor in Creative Writing. She dropped out of school in her junior year, however, to became the songwriter, lead singer, and organizer for a rock band. After achieving their only goal—to play in the Boston club The Rathskeller in Kenmore Square—on their first gig, the band waited unsuccessfully to be discovered. A lesson in setting a series of attainable goals was not the only result of Brockmann’s band experience, however; she also met her future husband, Edward Gaffney, the former freshman-year roommate of the lead guitar player in the band, and a law student. Brockmann and Gaffney married 13 August, 1983 and moved to Phoenix, Ariz. Their first child, Melanie, was born on 29 August, 1984, and their second child, Jason, was born on 11 December, 1985 after they moved to East Meadow, N.Y.. In 1986, the family moved off Long Island to Mahopac, N.Y., and has lived since in Katonah, N.Y., Wayland, Mass., and Waltham, Mass., a suburb of Boston.

Brockmann’s parents were both avid readers and books and trips to public libraries were a staple in her life. Additionally, when Suzanne was in middle school, her mother wrote a series of half-hour episodes attempting to turn the play and 1972 movie *Butterflies are Free* into a television show. In an email, Brockmann recalls watching her mother channel her creativity into writing,
which “gave me permission to do the same.” When Brockmann became a stay-at-home mother in Phoenix, Ariz., she began looking for an organized creative outlet. She describes her creativity in an interview with Allen Pierleoni: “I arranged a cappella music, I wrote songs, I sewed costumes for shows, I cooked elaborate dinners. My creativity was like I had thrown a Ping-Pong ball into a room and it was bouncing off everything.” Brockmann remembered how much she had enjoyed writing when she was in high school, surviving a chemistry class by writing a Star Trek parody with a friend, and decided to transcribe onto her new computer the “serious” Star Trek novel she had written by herself in twelfth grade. When she finished editing and rewriting the original story, she wrote a sequel, and then finally began to write with an eye to joining the Simon and Schuster Star Trek novel boom of the late 1980s. Although the result, Uneasy Alliance, was never published commercially, Brockmann shared it with her fans in 2002 on an Internet Countdown to the publication of one of her mainstream, single-title novels.

During a subsequent attempt to become a screenwriter, Brockmann received what she describes in her interview with Pierleoni as “the absolute best rejection phone call” from an agent who said that he liked her scripts but asked when she was moving to Los Angeles. Brockmann, who at this time lived in New York with two small children and a husband with a burgeoning law career, admitted that she would only be able to think of another intercoastal relocation when her children went to college. The agent said that he chose not to represent her because there were ten writers as good as her who lived in Los Angeles. Brockmann decided to set herself apart by becoming a published author in genre fiction. Convinced that the large romance market—over 150 romances published each month—meant that there had to be room for her, Brockmann decided to model her career on best-selling authors like Nora Roberts and Sandra Brown who had begun their own incredibly successful careers by writing category romances for Harlequin and Silhouette.

In June 1992 Brockmann outlined and finally began writing her first romance novel. Almost immediately she had what she termed in her interview with Pierleoni as “a eureka moment” when she realized that the romance genre was the “perfect outlet” for her writing voice. Brockmann wrote ten books during the year after she started writing and her first published novel, Future Perfect, was released in August 1993 by Meteor Publishing under their Kismet Romances line. The heroine, Juliana Anderson, runs a Victorian Bed and Breakfast in Bedford, Mass. and seems to be a prudish, old-fashioned spinster; in fact, she has a wild background that includes reform school because of her lifelong struggle with severe dyslexia, a topic that immediately demonstrated Brockmann’s propensity to tackle real-life, contemporary issues in her novels. The hero, Webster Donovan, a writer struggling with writer’s block, maintains a cynical front to ward off too much emotional involvement. While the themes of false perceptions and false barriers presage the dominant themes of most of Brockmann’s novels, Future Perfect had the dubious honor of being the last book Meteor ever published.

Brockmann’s second published novel, Hero Under Cover (June 1994), began her long relationship with the Silhouette Intimate Moments imprint and immediately gained her a reputation as an easy author to work with because, when asked by her editor, she changed the object around which the mystery of the novel revolved and, because of a mix-up with the cover picture, the color of the heroine’s hair. Kendall “Pete” Peterson, the first of Brockmann’s heroes
to work for a government agency, is a CIA agent who goes undercover as a bodyguard for Annie Morrow, a suspect who has been framed both in overseas museum bombings and in an art theft ring and is also receiving death threats. When Pete’s real job is revealed, Annie refuses to forgive him, even though she believes that he loves her, until she thinks he is dead after being shot by one of the villains. This resolution brought about by a character’s realization of the precious nature of love and of the fleeting nature of the time people have together is one of Brockmann’s favorite themes.

*Embraced by Love* (January 1995) was the first book in a multi-author, four-part series by Pinnacle Romance about heroes and heroines who are already married when the book begins. In constructing the narrative, Brockmann revealed her ability to create conflict that arises from the internal action of the novel, rather than because of external, pre-existing circumstances. The hero, Cooper McBride, also inaugurates the line of Brockmann’s famously crying heroes: throughout the ending of the novel, both when he decides to divorce Josie and also when they reconcile, Cooper expresses the depth of his emotions by crying, a trait many of Brockmann’s future heroes emulate while retaining their considerable masculinity. Although the reviewer for *Affaire du Coeur* claimed that the premise of the new line for Pinnacle and Brockmann’s contribution in particular would “revolutionize the romance genre,” *Embraced by Love* sold only 1,300 copies.

Brockmann first included recurring characters with her next two releases. *Not Without Risk* (June 1995) and *A Man To Die For* (December 1995), both published by Silhouette Intimate Moments, tell the stories of two undercover police partners. In connecting these two novels, Brockmann begins to establish her series trademarks: unhappy secondary characters, short plot timeframes, and ethnically-diverse characters. Counter to the comedic trope that most other romances follow that provides happy endings for all secondary characters in relationships, in *Not Without Risk*, the relationship between the hero’s partner and a secondary female character is unsuccessful. Brockmann feels that the requisite happily-ever-after ending of romances denies readers “a lot of cathartic emotions” that take them out of their “comfort zone.” She explains in her interview with Allen Pierleoni: “I have a contract with my readers: ‘Dear Reader: I promise I will give you a happy ending for the two main characters in this book. But I’m going to have subplots that may end unhappily or even in death. In ways you don’t expect, I will create different emotional responses in you.’” Additionally, both *Not Without Risk* and *A Man To Die For* have short plot timeframes: *Not Without Risk* takes place within a ten day period, while *A Man To Die For* happens within about three days. Finally, Felipe Salazar of *A Man To Die For* is Latino, the first of Brockmann’s characters to reflect her desire to depict the true diversity of the United States.

Brockmann writes on the Frequently Asked Questions page of her website that she purposely creates “a diverse American world filled with the same variety of people who live in my urban American neighborhood”:

> I have neighbors who are Caucasian, African American, Asian American, Italian American, Irish American, German American, Hispanic, Native American, Polish American...And on and on...as well as tall, short, fat, thin, gay, straight, bi, young, old, middle aged...Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Druid, Wiccan, atheist,
agnostic...The list goes on and on and on. IDIC, like Mr. Spock says, you know? Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations! That’s what makes America great. We’re a melting pot of all kinds of people—all unique and fascinating (my buddy Spock would agree!) in our differences, but all alike in our quest for equal rights and freedom.

_A Man To Die For_ received four and a half stars and Felipe Salazar received a WISH (Women in Search of Heroes) Award from the reviewer for the industry’s review journal, _Romantic Times_, an honor given only to two to four of the sixty or more heroes of the category romances each month, beginning Brockmann’s long list of awards and recognition for her novels and especially for her heroes.

_No Ordinary Man_ (April 1996) was Brockmann’s only novel for Harlequin Intrigue. It was published under their “Dangerous Men” imprint because the hero, Rob Carpenter, is the primary suspect in a series of brutal rapes and murders. Despite receiving only three stars, Brockmann’s lowest-ever rating from _Romantic Times_, this novel did more to advance reader recognition of Brockmann’s name than any of her previous books because Intrigue gave away just under 100,000 copies in a promotional giveaway.

On the other end of Brockman’s writing spectrum from the darkness of _No Ordinary Man_, Brockmann’s affinity for romantic comedy served her well in her affiliation with Bantam Loveswept, which began in May 1996 with _Kiss and Tell_, the first of a trilogy of books connected by their setting in Sunrise Key, Fla. _Kiss and Tell_, a gentle story about the heroine falling in love with her childhood adversary and finding her way back home to Sunrise Key, is the first of Brockmann’s novels to be nominated for a _Romantic Times_ Reviewers’ Choice award. The second Sunrise Key novel, _The Kissing Game_ (December 1996), is the story of the brother and best friend respectively of the heroine from _Kiss and Tell_ and demonstrates Brockmann’s tight and innovative plotting: the journals that the heroine has written all her life are not only the key to the solution of the minor inheritance mystery in the novel but the hero also uses them to win the heroine’s trust during the resolution of the novel. Finishing the Sunrise Keys trilogy, _Otherwise Engaged_ (February 1997) uses Brockmann’s typical whirlwind romance as part of the conflict of the plot: the hero mistrusts his quickly-developing feelings for the heroine because he married his first wife after a courtship of just two weeks only to discover that she was using him. He quickly realizes that the heroine is nothing like his first wife and they too marry after knowing each other for two weeks. Brockmann writes on her website that she had plans to continue the Sunrise Key series with at least two more stories, but abandoned them because Loveswept was folding and Silhouette was more interested in her romantic suspense than her romantic comedy.

Brockmann found her true niche with her “Tall, Dark and Dangerous” series published by Silhouette Intimate Moments. Brockmann had been searching for an innovative series hook that was based on neither geography nor family. Eric Ruben, a long-time friend of Brockmann’s, read a _Newsweek_ magazine article that detailed the grueling Hell Week of the entry training for the US Navy SEAL teams. Ruben called Brockmann and told her to run to a library because he had
found her mini-series hook. On her website, Brockmann remembers “sitting on the floor in the library, between the stacks, reading this article about these amazing men and thinking, ‘Oh. My. God.’ I knew right then and there that I could create a miniseries for Silhouette Intimate Moments about a fictional team of Navy SEALs that would be a) outrageously fun to write and b) potentially endless.” During her interview with Pamela Regis at the Resident Associates Program for the Smithsonian Institute, Brockmann recalled that she also felt that, with her “deep, abiding regard for the military men and women” created by her personal interest in and extensive research about World War Two, not only could she provide her readers with great entertainment, but she could also “do the SEALs justice.” In fact, when she read in the Newsweek article that there were over two thousand active duty SEALs, she dreamed, “I’ll write a happy ending for every single one of them!”

After researching the SEALs (an acronym for Sea, Air, and Land, the terrain in which SEALs are expected to operate), Brockmann created the fictional Alpha Squad of SEAL Team Ten. In creating the storylines for the first three novels, Brockmann recalls on her website that she applied her new knowledge of SEALs to her “number one rule of creating romantic heroes. I believe that in order to create truly wonderful, compelling romantic heroes, I have to set up a situation in which that character will really suffer. In fact, the question I ask myself as I’m doing my preliminary sketching of my characters and the story is ‘How can I make my hero suffer the most?’” She knew that SEALs worked in tight-knit teams of seven or eight men, are “take charge types who prefer to take action,” and are “usually intensely motivated and highly driven” to become SEALs and stay on the Teams. So she decided that her first three storylines would center around a SEAL who was separated from his team and forced to act alone, a SEAL who was forced into passivity, and a SEAL who was forced off active duty.

Consequently, Prince Joe (June 1996), Brockmann’s first SEAL novel, told the story of Lieutenant Joe Catalanotto who impersonates a Prince who is threatened with assassination. Rather than going out and confronting the danger, as he is trained to do, Joe is forced to wait passively for the danger to come to him. He falls in love with Veronica St. John, the image consultant who helps him perfect his transformation into the Prince. Veronica, however, refuses Joe’s marriage proposal because she does not believe she will be strong enough to deal with the fact that Joe’s career as a SEAL puts him in constant danger. For the resolution of Prince Joe, Brockmann revisited the theme of her very first romantic suspense, Hero Under Cover: life is too short to ignore love. Threatened with her own death at the hands of the assassins, Ronnie realizes: “She loved Joe Catalanotto. So what if he was a Navy SEAL. It was who he was, what he did. It was quite probably the reason she’d fallen in love with him. He was the best of the best in so many different ways. If by being a SEAL, he had to live on the edge and cheat death, so be it. She would learn to cope.”

It was immediately obvious from the reviewers’ responses to Prince Joe that Brockmann had hit on something huge. Melinda Helfer from Romantic Times gave the novel four and a half stars, gave Joe a WISH award, and called the story a “firecracker”: “Not only is the suspense nail-bitingly intense, the blistering passion and emotional sensitivity make this a love story you’ll put in your treasure chest.” It was selected as the Romantic Times Reviewers Choice Finalist for Best
Silhouette Intimate Moments of the Year, received the HOLT medallion for Best Long Contemporary of the Year from the Virginia Romance Writers, and the Francis Award from the Romance Journal. All About Romance, the comprehensive romance review website, gives Prince Joe “Desert Island Keeper” status, categorizing it as one of the books a reader would want if she were stranded on a desert island. The most compelling evidence of the appeal of Prince Joe, however, was that it reached 104 on the extended best-seller list of the USA Today, an unusual achievement for a category romance. In 2002, Prince Joe was also the first of the “Tall, Dark and Dangerous” novels to be reissued by MIRA Books—again a sign of its appeal, because only the most successful of category series are reissued as general release novels.

Brockmann immediately followed the success of Prince Joe with Forever Blue (October 1996), the second Tall, Dark and Dangerous novel, which is plotted around her second insight into SEAL psychology. Carter “Blue” McCoy returns to South Carolina in order to act as best-man for his stepbrother’s wedding to Blue’s own high-school sweetheart. Once there, however, he is framed for his stepbrother’s murder and has to survive the resulting dangers without his Team, with only the heroine Lucy Tait believing in his innocence. Despite being an admitted loner in his personal life, Blue is not used to acting in dangerous situations without his SEAL colleagues and his resulting vulnerability makes him a compelling hero. As a result, not only did Blue receive a WISH award, but the novel received Brockmann’s first Gold Medal review, the Reviewers’ Choice Award for Best Silhouette Intimate Moments of the Year (beating Prince Joe), and the Reviewers’ Choice Award for Best Series Romance of the Year, all from Romantic Times.

In January 1997, three months after the publication of Forever Blue, Brockmann completed the first Tall, Dark and Dangerous trilogy with Frisco’s Kid, using the third of her ideas about SEALs by giving the hero, Alan Francisco, a career-ending injury documented in the very first vignette that served as the Prologue to Prince Joe. Frisco’s story begins five years later when he finally leaves the Navy’s medical care able to walk but without the ability to rejoin the SEAL Teams: “All those years had worn him down. He wasn’t upbeat anymore. He was depressed. And frustrated. And angry as hell.” Frisco’s journey to accepting himself as a man despite not being a SEAL reaffirms the promise of the romance genre, that the love of a good woman will heal the most devastated of men.

Brockmann was still writing non-SEAL novels, however. Loveswept, known for its romantic comedy, nevertheless published Brockmann’s dark Bartlett Brothers series, Forbidden (April 1997) and Freedom’s Price (February 1998). In Forbidden, Cal Bartlett and Kayla Grey rescue Cal’s brother Liam from his imprisonment on the fictional Caribbean island of San Salustiano. In Freedom’s Price, the heroine Marisala, the freedom fighter who saved Liam’s life on San Salustiano, comes to America trying to conform to the expectations of normality after fighting in a war. In these two novels, Brockmann frankly examines a number of controversial issues: Kayla is a survivor of date rape; Liam explicitly describes the torture he endured for two years on San Salustiano; Marisala saw her brother and father gunned down during the civil war; and the U.S. government was supplying the repressive regime in San Salustiano with arms to use against the democratically-elected resistance.
In 1997 and 1998, Brockmann published six stand-alone category romances that reveal her versatility, her willingness to experiment, and her appeal to readers. *Stand-In Groom* (June 1997), a light romantic comedy, tested the boundaries of the romance genre with a well-received scene in which the characters have mutually satisfying phone sex. *Ladies' Man* (August 1997), the Holy Grail of books for collectors of Brockmann’s backlist, was sold as a subscribers’ only promotion for Bantam’s Loveswept line. After it was printed, but before it was released, the promotion was canceled, and because *Ladies’ Man* had already been bound in a cover without a barcode or price, tens of thousands of copies were destroyed. The only copies of this printing in circulation are those Brockmann herself has distributed from her one hundred author copies and copies have sold at the online auction house eBay for more than $1,200. In August 2006, however, *Ladies’ Man* was republished by Bantam Books.

Brockmann’s only paranormal novel, *Time Enough For Love* (November 1997), about the inventor of a time machine who goes back in time to prevent himself from inventing the time machine, demonstrates her thematic treatment of love as a healing and life-altering force that can change the course of history. During the course of the story, the hero, Charles Della Croce, begins to understand the effects of the heroine’s love for him:

> What a powerful thing this love that she had for him was! Without any intricate equations, without any high-tech equipment, without any help from science at all, her love could travel through time and touch the child he had once been, the man he was, and the man he would become. With that love, she could soothe and start to heal wounds that had festered too long.

*Time Enough for Love* was the first of Brockmann’s novels to be a finalist for the Romance Writers of America’s RITA award, the “Oscars” of the romance genre.

Brockmann’s final publication in 1997 was *Give Me Liberty*, a Precious Gems Romance, a line by Zebra Romance released exclusively in Wal*Mart stores. Brockmann used the pseudonym “Anne Brock,” a shortened form of her name, because of stipulations in her contract with Loveswept against writing short contemporary romance under her own name. *Give Me Liberty* is one of Brockmann’s most uncharacteristic novels, taking place over an entire summer.

Brockmann’s first novel of 1998, *Love with the Proper Stranger* (January 1998), presents one of her most tortured heroes, FBI agent John Miller, on the trail of a female serial killer nicknamed the Black Widow. Miller finds absolution for his guilt over his partner’s murder two years previously in the love of the Black Widow’s unsuspecting best friend, Mariah, who is involved in building houses for lower income families, one of Brockmann’s own favorite charities. Returning to the light end of Brockmann’s writing spectrum, *Body Language* (May 1998) is a tightly-plotted romantic comedy with a simple story about two friends finally falling in love with each other after fifteen years.

A full eighteen months after Brockmann’s first SEAL trilogy, Silhouette Intimate Moments published the second trilogy. With their much more interconnected storylines, these three books
reveal Brockmann’s apprenticeship for the writing techniques that make her mainstream SEAL series bestsellers. *Everyday, Average Jones* (August 1998) is the first of Brockmann’s novels in which she creates realistic, humorous camaraderie between multiple male characters as they work and play together. This camaraderie is expanded in *Harvard’s Education* (October 1998), only the second of 884 Silhouette Intimate Moments novels to feature an African-American hero and heroine. Although racial discrimination is the reason that Darryl “Harvard” Becker became a SEAL in the first place, the main thematic concern in the novel is sexism: the heroine, P.J. Richards, Brockmann’s first female government employee, is the only female in a training mission involving SEALs and FinCOM agents, Brockmann’s fictional version of the FBI. As P.J. reveals to Harvard:

“You can like flowers,” she told him. “You can read Jane Austen in the mess hall at lunch. You can drink iced tea instead of whiskey shots with beer chasers. You can do what you want. But if I’m caught acting like a woman, if I wear soft, lacy underwear instead of the kind made from fifty percent cotton and fifty percent sandpaper, I get looked at funny. People start to wonder if I’m capable of doing my job.”

*Harvard’s Education* and the final book in the second trilogy, *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear* (December 1998), demonstrate Brockmann’s increasing comfort with complex, multi-book plots based on politics internal to the counter-terrorist teams she depicts. Additionally, both P.J. from *Harvard’s Education* and Billy “Crash” Hawkens from *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear*, the first SEAL hero who is not a member of her Alpha Squad of SEAL Team Ten, indicate Brockmann’s willingness to include in her novels characters from agencies outside her primary SEAL Team. All three novels in this second trilogy received a Gold Medal Review from *Romantic Times*; additionally, *Everyday, Average Jones* was a RITA finalist and *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear* won the *Romantic Times* Reviewers’ Choice for best Silhouette Intimate Moments and best Series Romance for 1998, indicating the continued appeal of Brockmann’s SEAL series.

In 1999, Brockmann published *Heart Throb*, her first mainstream novel, using her experience on the sets of low-budget films managing the acting careers of both her children. Jed “Jericho” Beaumont is an ex-superstar actor attempting to make a comeback after destroying his career with an addiction to alcohol and prescription drugs. Although Jed is five years sober at the start of the novel, he can only control the anger that was the indirect cause of his addictions by completely divorcing himself from his emotions. Jed’s torment and subsequent return to life are mirrored by that of the character he plays in the movie *The Promise*. Kate O’Lauglin, the heroine of *Heart Throb* and author and producer of *The Promise*, does not trust Jed to remain sober during the movie shoot and insists on draconian measures that invade Jed’s privacy in order to ensure his sobriety. Brockmann does not end her use of contemporary issues with Jed’s alcoholism and recovery: Jed’s brother was gay and died of AIDS, Jed’s mother and sister are victims of domestic abuse, and Kate has to overcome her own history of body-image problems and a sexual assault in middle school. Brockmann’s true accomplishment in *Heart Throb*, however, is her ability to handle the large and literal cast of characters made up of the cast of the movie. Especially compelling is the burgeoning romantic relationship between the white, fifteen-
year-old child-star, Susannah McCoy, a victim of her father’s verbal and emotional abuse, and the black, eighteen-year-old, up-and-coming actor, Jamaal Hawkins. The depth of the emotional development of the characters in Heart Throb and the complexity of the plot are previously unparalleled in Brockmann’s novels and amply demonstrate her ability to handle longer mainstream romances.

Brockmann then immediately returned to the Navy SEALs of her Tall, Dark and Dangerous series for Silhouette Intimate Moments. The third trilogy begins with The Admiral’s Bride (November 1999), the story of fifty-three year-old Admiral Jake Robinson and twenty-nine year-old Zoe Lange, the daughter of a soldier Jake rescued in Vietnam before Zoe was born. Brockmann creates a homegrown terrorist organization of white supremacists who have stolen deadly nerve agent that Zoe, an expert in weapons of mass destruction, Jake, and a team of SEALs must recover. Once again, when Zoe is presumed dead, Jake realizes that love is too precious to reject despite his concerns about their age difference:

Because love didn’t always make mathematical sense. And forever was completely relative. Zoe wasn’t ever going to turn fifty now. Not ever. Her forever had been obscenely short. And Jake had forsaken every opportunity in the far-too-briefness of their time together and hadn’t even told her that he loved her.

The Admiral’s Bride, a RITA finalist, received a five-star review from Romantic Times, an honor given to only thirty-two other romances between 1981 and 2000. It was also the first of Brockmann’s books to be voted one of the Top Ten Favorite Books of the Year for 1999 by the Romance Writers of America.

Identity: Unknown (January 2000), the second book in Brockmann’s third SEAL trilogy, demonstrates Brockmann’s thematic forethought: the hero, Mitch Shaw, has lost all memory of who he is after being shot. Because he is not a regular member of Brockmann’s cast of SEALs, having played only a very minor role in The Admiral’s Bride, he is equally a stranger to the reader as to himself. Brockmann also hints at the reality of the cost to their wives of the SEALs’ constant deployments by showing Joe and Ronnie from Prince Joe, now happily married, having a marital spat over his threatened departure. Lucky O’Donlon, who plays a major secondary role in both The Admiral’s Bride and Identity: Unknown, finally gets his own happy ending in the last book of the third trilogy, Get Lucky (March 2000), most notable for its truly awful cover. As Brockmann explains on her website, “Here I’ve finally written the story of the best-looking guy in Alpha Squad, and they give me the Pillsbury Doughboy on the cover of the book!” While Get Lucky confronts the issues of body image and rape, it also seems to be a reward for Brockmann’s avid readers, because the entire cast of the previous eight SEAL books plays a role both in apprehending the serial rapist who provides the plot of Get Lucky and also in convincing the heroine Sydney Jameson that commitment-shy Lucky is serious when he proposes marriage. Get Lucky, another of Brockmann’s RITA finalists, was voted one of the Top Ten Favorite Books of the Year for 2000 by the Romance Writers of America.
Brockmann finally received her first—and second—RITA awards in 2000. *Undercover Princess* (December 1999), published by Silhouette Intimate Moments as the second book of the multi-author series *Royally Wed*, won the RITA for Best Long Contemporary Category Romance, beating Brockmann’s own *The Admiral’s Bride*. Brockmann’s second single-title novel, *The Bodyguard* (1999), won the Best Contemporary Single Title Romance, the RITA equivalent of the Oscar for Best Picture. Unlike *Heart Throb*, which was pure romance, Brockmann returned to romantic suspense in *The Bodyguard*. FBI agent Harry O’Dell’s desire for revenge against the mob bosses who ordered his son’s murder drives his life; his protection of Alessandra Lamont, an ex-trophy wife and another of the mob bosses’ targets, drives the plot. Harry’s partner, George Faulkner, has unhappy relationships with not one but two secondary female characters during the course of the novel. However, the driving theme of both *The Undercover Princess* and *The Bodyguard*, unrelated though they are, is the heroine’s ability to reconcile the hero with his estranged children, beginning the process of healing families torn apart by loss.

In June 2000, Brockmann published her first non-category SEAL novel, *The Unsung Hero*, with Ballantine’s Ivy line. In her *Tall, Dark and Dangerous* series, Brockmann tortured her first three heroes individually with the three worst things that could happen to a SEAL hero. In *The Unsung Hero*, the first of her Troubleshooter series, she piles all three problems on one hero. First, after a near-fatal head injury, Lieutenant Tom Paoletti, the commander of the most elite counter-terrorist SEAL team, has been given a month of convalescent leave, unsure as to whether he will ever be able to rejoin his Team, like Frisco in *Frisco’s Kid*. Additionally, during his return home, he thinks he recognizes a terrorist at the airport; unsure of what he saw, however, he has to wait passively to see the terrorist again, like Prince Joe in Brockmann’s very first SEAL novel. Finally, because Tom is on leave, once he does locate the terrorist, he is without his SEAL team to help him with the threat, like Blue McCoy in *Forever Blue*. Instead, Tom builds a motley team of teenagers, octogenarians, SEALs and a female Navy officer who take leave to help him, and the heroine Kelly Ashton, a pediatrician.

Taking advantage of the longer format, *The Unsung Hero* includes a World War Two subplot that Brockmann claims on her website is the true heart of the book, told in reminiscences by Joe Paoletti, Tom’s uncle and a member of the OSS, the spy agency that was the precursor to the CIA, and Charles Ashton, Kelly’s father and a pilot who had been shot down over France and was hidden by members of the French Resistance. Both Charles and Joe fall in love with Cybele, the leader of a cell of the French Resistance, who eventually sacrifices herself for Charles. Brockmann also introduces her two most famous characters: Sam Starrett, one of Tom’s SEAL officers, and Alyssa Locke, a Navy sharpshooter. Brockmann controls the large cast of characters by using the theme of the damaging effects and ensuing correction of mistaken first impressions. The novel ends in a seamless culmination of action and themes, each character and subplot no matter how apparently disconnected from the suspense plot playing their part in eliminating the terrorist threat and contributing to the happily-ever-after ending for Tom and Kelly. *The Unsung Hero*, a RITA finalist, was voted the #1 Favorite Book of the Year for 2000 by the Romance Writers of America, beating *Get Lucky* for the top position.
The Defiant Hero (2001) continues the adventures of the Troubleshooter squad of SEAL Team Sixteen with the story of Lieutenant (junior grade) John Nilsson and Meg Moore. Meg is viewed as Brockmann’s least realistic heroine: after terrorists kidnap her daughter and grandmother in order to make Meg herself kidnap a rival terrorist, Osman Razeen, Meg dreams up an elaborate plot to get herself and Razeen out of the embassy in which they both work and away from surveillance; she asks Nilsson, with whom she had an abortive relationship three years previously, for help and then deceives him and the FBI about her plans and strikes out on her own to rescue her daughter. But as Publisher’s Weekly claims, readers “will forgive the plot’s implausibility” because of Brockmann’s ability to “stand the romance formula on its head, making the SEALs chase the intelligent, self-confident women who’ve done just fine so far without them.” In fact, Nilsson only convinces Meg to let him and the FBI help her by revealing both his love for her and his subsequent emotional vulnerability: “Ah, Jesus, he was crying. But instead of turning away, he held his ground and let her see. She wanted the truth from him. Well, there it was. F---ing streaming down his face.”

Brockmann includes another World War Two subplot in The Defiant Hero as Meg’s grandmother tries to calm her great-grand-daughter during their hostage ordeal by telling the story of her role in the miraculous rescue of the British Expeditionary Force at Dunkirk. Brockmann also reintroduces Sam Starrett, Nilsson’s best friend, and Alyssa Locke, who has left the Navy to join the FBI and is part of the team brought in to deal with the hostage situations. Sam and Alyssa have an explosive sexual encounter that involves handcuffs, ice cream, and chocolate syrup, but any possibility of a genuine relationship is precluded by Alyssa’s concern for her career as an African-American woman in the male world of the FBI. In fact, Alyssa’s character seems to be a reproduction of P.J. Richards from Harvard’s Education, without P.J.’s willingness to take emotional risks that grant her a happy ending. This encounter begins one of Brockmann’s most famous trademarks: a story arc that spans many books.

While The Defiant Hero was voted the #2 Favorite Book of the Year for 2001 by the Romance Writers of America, the next book in the Troubleshooter series, Over the Edge (2001), was voted #1. Senior Chief Stan Wolchonok saves helicopter pilot Lieutenant (junior grade) Teri Howe from sexual harassment by a superior officer by getting her assigned to his team’s training assignment, which is unexpectedly rerouted to the fictional country of Kazbekistan after a hijacked airliner lands there. It is revealed at the climax of the novel that the hijackers are on a suicide mission to blow up the plane at the point the SEAL team is sent in to save the passengers. Unfortunately, Over the Edge was released two weeks before the September 11 terrorist attacks and as Brockmann related during the Smithsonian interview, after the attacks, it was both “too close to home and yet instantly obsolete.” The World War Two subplot, told by Helga Shuler, dramatizes the refusal of the Danish government to give their Jews to the Nazis, as well as the effects of the ravages of Alzheimer’s disease on Helga’s commitment to “never forget” and bear witness to the Holocaust. Over the Edge also introduces Max Bhagat, the top FBI negotiator, and Gina Vitagliano, a passenger on the hijacked plane who becomes the intermediary between Max and the hijackers. She is gang-raped by the hijackers at the climax of the novel, for which Max blames himself, setting the foundations for another six-book story arc. And while Teri and Stan fulfill the main romance plot of the novel, Sam and Alyssa have sex again, and just when Alyssa
begins to imagine the possibility of a relationship, Sam’s ex-girlfriend Mary Lou Starrett, a bar bunny and SEAL groupie, shows up pregnant and Sam insists on marrying her, ending his budding romance with Alyssa.

Although the next Troubleshooter’s novel, Out of Control (2002) was published after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Brockmann wrote it before the attacks and did not change anything to reflect the attacks. Ken “WildCard” Karmody, the computer specialist of the Troubleshooter squad and an unconventional hero, meets Savannah Van Hopf, a college acquaintance who asks him to go to Indonesia with her to drop off a ransom for her kidnapped uncle. The World War Two subplot is told as the characters of the novel read the New York Times best-selling autobiography of Savannah’s grandmother Rose, a double-agent for the CIA during the war. George Faulkner, a secondary character from The Bodyguard, Brockmann’s stand-alone, RITA-winning novel, is reintroduced as Rose’s godson and is assigned to Max Bhagat’s elite, FBI counter-terrorism team as Rose’s liaison. While a secondary romance is established between Molly Anderson, a charity worker in Indonesia, and Grady Morant, an ex-special-forces soldier, the continuing saga between Sam and Alyssa is told only from Alyssa’s perspective as she watches Sam struggle with his marriage and new daughter. Out of Control was voted the #1 Favorite Book of the Year for 2002 by the Romance Writers of America, the third year in a row one of Brockmann’s books was top of the list.

In Into the Night (2002), the fifth book in the Troubleshooter series, a presidential visit to the SEAL base at Coronado, San Diego brings together White House staffer Joan DaCosta and SEAL Lieutenant Mike Muldoon. This novel seems to focus more on Sam’s perspective than on Mike’s, but also includes the perspective of Mary Lou Starrett, Sam’s racist, uneducated wife, as she falls in love with a Saudi Arabian gardener. Brockmann performs the difficult task of making Mary Lou a sympathetic character, despite the revelation that she did purposely get pregnant to trick Sam into marriage. The World War Two subplot details the romance of Joan’s grandparents and the beginnings of the Underwater Demolition Teams (UDT), the precursor to the SEAL Teams. Into the Night was the first of Brockmann’s novels to hit the New York Times bestseller list. It started at #13 on the list, rose to #8 the next week, then dropped down to #13 for its final week on the list. All her hard-cover novels since then have reached the New York Times bestseller list.

Sam and Alyssa finally get their own book in Brockmann’s first hardcover novel, Gone Too Far (2003), the sixth book in the Troubleshooters series. Told over only three days, Sam, now divorced, and Alyssa finally talk to, rather than just have sex with and make assumptions about, each other and therefore finally deserve their happy ending. Max Bhagat and Gina Vitagliano, however, have sex without communication, continuing their tortured story arc. The World War Two plot describes the Tuskegee Airmen, the Women’s Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) program, and the romance of a black man and a white woman in Texas in the 1940s. Brockmann also does not shy away from the political and moral issues raised by the War on Terror. The villain in both Into the Night and Gone Too Far is a white American who uses an Arabic alias in his dealings with Al Qaida. As Jules Cassidy, Alyssa’s partner, says, “This is the flip side of
racial profiling. This bastard is taking advantage of our fine, Western propensity for assumption.”

_Gone Too Far_ also finally gives Tom Paoletti and Kelly Ashton from the very first Troubleshooter book their happy ending. At the end of _Into the Night_, Tom had ordered his SEALs to shoot the terrorists who were attempting to assassinate the President during his visit to Coronado and although Tom’s order saved the President’s life, it was technically unconstitutional and therefore ended his career. Unable to visit him when Tom is pulled in for questioning during _Gone Too Far_ because they are not yet married, Kelly finally marries Tom in a sort of reverse shot-gun wedding, probably the most delayed “happily-ever-after” wedding in a romance series. Additionally, although Tom’s career in the Navy is over, at the end of _Gone Too Far_ he establishes Troubleshooters Inc., a private security company, and immediately hires Alyssa as his second-in-command and also hires Sam, establishing an additional outlet for storylines for Brockmann’s _Troubleshooter_ series.

While publishing the first six _Troubleshooter_ books, Brockmann also published _Taylor’s Temptation_ (July 2001), the tenth “Tall, Dark and Dangerous” novel for Silhouette Intimate Moments. Bobby Taylor falls in love with his swim buddy’s sister and the novel examines how this affects his legendarily close relationship with Wes Skelly as much as it examines the relationship between Bobby and Colleen Skelly. Wes’s own turn comes in _Night Watch_ (September 2003), the eleventh “Tall, Dark and Dangerous” novel, when he goes on a blind date with Brittany Evans, the sister of Melody, the heroine of _Everyday, Average Jones_. Taylor and Skelly had previously acted purely as comic relief in the series, until Brockmann realized that the success of the series meant that they would need to act as heroes in their own right. Brockmann also published _Letters to Kelly_ (April 2003) and _Scenes of Passion_ (July 2003), both originally sold at the very beginning of her career to Meteor’s Kismet line just before it folded and finally published by Silhouette almost exactly ten years after they were first sold. _Letters to Kelly_ has an unusual hero who was a political prisoner in Central America and is now a romance author whose talks to his characters and who hides his literary identity behind his sister’s name. The novel is a testament to the success of the letter-writing campaigns of Amnesty International, in which Brockmann herself participates. _Scenes of Passion_, on the other hand, is a gentle story in which the hero and heroine act in a community theater that draws on the acting experience of Brockmann’s own family and friends.

Brockmann returned to her _Troubleshooter_ series in 2004 with _Flash Point_. An anomaly in the series, _Flash Point_ tells the story of James Nash and Tess Bailey, two previously unknown characters who are hired away from a secret, unnamed government Agency by Tom Paoletti to work for his new private security company Troubleshooters Inc. Lacking a World War Two subplot, _Flash Point_ deals directly with the War on Terror when Nash, Tess, and Nash’s partner Lawrence Decker are sent to the fictional country of Kazbekistan to recover the laptop of an Al Qaida operative who died in an earthquake. The characters confront the harsh realities of life in a third-world, Islamic nation, including uncovering a school in which the girls were not allowed to join the boys in the earthquake shelter, sentencing them to death when the school collapsed. _Flash Point_ begins another story arc for Lawrence Decker and Sophia Ghaffari, an American
who was forced into sexual slavery by the Kazbekistani warlord who beheaded her husband. Sophia escaped but uses and is used by Decker in their mutual attempts to survive. After she is hired by Troubleshooters, Inc., their continued and currently unresolved storyline consists of their desperate need to avoid each other and their past.

Hot Target, published in 2004, returns to familiar characters and format with the story of SEAL Chief Cosmo Richter. Although still in the SEAL Teams, he is hired by Tom Paoletti to act as a temporary bodyguard for Jane Mercedes Chadwick, a movie producer. The issue that drives the novel, however, is homosexuality: Cosmo was brought up by a gay man; the World War Two subplot, retold in the film Jane is producing and the source of the death threats she has been receiving, reveals the homosexual relationship of two soldiers in a psychological operations unit; Jules Cassidy, the openly gay FBI agent who is Alyssa’s former partner, has sex with his ex-lover who is just using him to land a starring role in Jane’s movie. Jules then falls in love with Robin Chadwick, Jane’s brother and the other star in Jane’s movie, who is so deeply closeted he himself does not realize he is gay. In fact, Brockmann begins Hot Target with a lengthy dedication to her own openly gay son Jason, detailing her total and loving acceptance of his sexuality when he came out to her at fifteen. As she writes, “This story is for you.” Publisher’s Weekly claims, “At times, Brockmann goes too far in pushing her agenda,” but “Brockmann's uncanny ability to give each character an authentic voice and dialogue to match will pull readers through this shaky installment.”

In May 2005, Brockmann’s husband Ed Gaffney published his first book, Premeditated Murder, a courtroom drama. The main characters, law partners Terry Tallach and Zach Wilson, are also the main characters of Suffering Fools (2006) and Diary of a Serial Killer (2007). Gaffney branched out into a stand-alone first-person narrative in his most recent novel, Enemy Combatant (2008), another courtroom drama which confronts the War on Terror head-on, just as Brockmann’s books do.

Breaking Point (2005) finally finishes the romance of Max Bhagat and Gina Vitagliano, completing their story arc that began in the third Troubleshooter novel, Over the Edge. It also provides a happy ending to Molly Anderson and Grady Morant, first introduced in the fourth novel in the series, Out of Control. Breaking Point does not include a World War Two subplot, instead telling in flashbacks the double story of Max and Gina’s relationship that ended eighteen months previous to the action of the novel, making the novel somewhat scattered. Jules Cassidy, the gay FBI agent, again plays a strong secondary role in the novel and meets a potential partner in a Marine Captain at the very end of the novel.

Brockmann’s only original publication in 2006 was Into the Storm, the tenth Troubleshooter novel. The novel pairs Mark Jenkins, a SEAL and well-liked recurring character, and Lindsay Fontaine, an Asian-American ex-cop who works for Troubleshooters, Inc. A snow-bound joint SEAL Team/Troubleshooters Inc. training operation in New Hampshire turns real when the Troubleshooter’s secretary, Tracy, is captured by a serial killer. The novel introduces as serious characters the SEALs Izzy Zanella and his friends, who had previously provided only comic relief, in a manner similar to Bobby Taylor and Wes Skelly from the “Tall, Dark and Dangerous”
Silhouette series. As a publicity giveaway, Brockmann produced a collectible “Reader’s Guide to the Troubleshooter Series” for the book-tour, including a character list for the entire series, Sam and Alyssa “ratings” for each book, a guide to military terms and ranks, “interviews” with previous characters, review sound-bites, bookmarks, and rebate coupons.

Another booklet, “Extras for Readers,” was produced for the eleventh Troubleshooter novel, Force of Nature (2007). The hero in Force of Nature was a very minor character from Gone Too Far, the sixth book in the series, but his relationship with his personal assistant, Annie Dugan, shares equal time with the relationship between Jules Cassidy and Robin Chadwick, the brother of the heroine in Hot Target. As Brockmann describes it on her Bulletin Board: “Truly, it was not my intention for Jules to find his happy ending in FON. In fact, I’d been planning for a very long time to give Jules a book of his own. When I first outline FON, I intended the book to be merely another installment in the Jules/Robin story arc. In that outline version, the book ended with Robin going into rehab, unable to give up his career for Jules, and with Jules unable to compromise to be in a relationship with Robin.” However, both Robin and Jules “rebelled” as characters and Brockmann wrote their happy ending in Force of Nature, instead of in their own book. As a result, her holiday novella, All Through the Night (2007), relates the Massachusetts wedding of Jules and Robin just before Christmas, with cameos from most of her previous main characters detailing their happy marriages. As Robin asks Jules at one point, “Are any of your friends not pregnant?” Brockmann explains in her Author’s Note that she donated “every single penny” she earned from All Through the Night to MassEquality, “an organization whose sole purpose is to preserve equal marriage rights” for gays and lesbians in Massachusetts, a gift that has already exceeding $250,000.

In July 2008, the thirteenth Troubleshooters installment will be released. Into the Fire features the biracial Vinh Murphy, who lost his wife to a sniper in Hot Target. The fourteenth Troubleshooter book will be Dark of Night (2009), which is, as Brockmann writes on her website, “probably more of a direct sequel to Into the Fire than any other of my Troubleshooters series books have ever been. For example, the action in DON begins on the exact same day that ITF ends.” Brockmann sees the Troubleshooter series, with its focus on homegrown and foreign terrorism, as an open-ended source of characters and storylines. Her skill with creating long-ranging story arcs—currently unresolved are the relationship between Lawrence Decker and Sophia Ghaffari and potentially one between the SEAL Izzy Zanella and Tracy Shapiro, the Troubleshooter receptionist—builds reader anticipation for each new installment.

Brockmann promotes her Troubleshooter novels in innovative ways, carefully nurturing her relationship with her readers. She creates increasingly sophisticated Countdown pages on her website for each of the novels, posting a new page almost every day in the month before a novel’s release, including interactive trivia contests and raffles, excerpts, character lists, and reviews of the upcoming novel, stories and pictures of her own vacations and book promotion tours, and stories from the lives of her readers. She has also established a tradition of weekend-long release parties during which she gathers authors and fans together for book discussions, readings, skits, and personal time with her. Additionally, short stories about the Troubleshooter series characters are included as bonuses at the end of her novels or in her Reader’s Guides. In
the short story included in Flash Point, Alyssa learns to accept Sam’s optimistic view of life; in the back of Hot Target, Sam, supported by the heroines of the previous books, experiences the helplessness that all military spouses feel when their loved ones are in danger; at the end of Into the Storm, Sam experiences the homophobia Jules Cassidy has to deal with every day; three short stories in the Force of Nature “Extras for Readers” detail the romance of a SEAL who dies in the third installment of the series, an adventure in which Jules contemplates his love life, and a card game between Mark Jenkins, Izzy Zanella, and their SEAL team. Brockmann has also written a snap-shot short story about Cosmo from Hot Target for the 2005 Thanksgiving edition of Romantic Times Magazine, rewarding her avid fans with continued glimpses of their favorite characters.

Suzanne Brockmann’s Navy SEAL novels skillfully and successfully unite the genres of romance and military thriller. Her heroines, intensely driven, skilled professionals, prove that women can do or overcome anything, while her heroes, brave, strong, and proud, prove time and again that even the most masculine of men can and should cry. Fiercely unafraid to tackle contemporary issues, Brockmann exposes her readers to realistic, diverse characters—gay and straight, African-American and Arab, white and multi-racial, educated and ignorant, rich and poor—who have lived full, complicated lives and have surmounted sexism, racism, rape, abuse, and divorce. Amazingly generous with her time, knowledge, and skills, Brockmann maintains a strong and personal relationship with her readers. Skilled in light romantic comedy as well as politically-relevant romantic suspense, effortlessly combining romance, action, and adventure with innovative story arcs, Brockmann’s novels are consistent best-sellers and her success represents the innovation, significance, and success of the romance genre itself.
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On her website, Anita Richmond Bunkley identifies herself as the author of nine book-length novels, two romances, three novellas, and one work of non-fiction. While it is difficult to say which two titles she would characterize as romances, what is certain is that all of her novels contain an element of romance. Born September 29, 1950 to Clifford and Virginia Richmond in Columbus, Ohio, Anita Richmond Bunkley received her B.A. from Mount Union College in Alliance, Ohio, afterwards working as a middle school teacher of English, French, and Spanish. She later worked as a director with the American Red Cross. In recent years, she has combined her writing career with writing residencies and workshops and work as a motivational speaker for women. She currently resides in Houston, Texas, with her husband Crawford B. Bunkley II, an oil company executive. They are the parents of two adult daughters.

Bunkley's books consistently appear on the *Blackboard African American Bestsellers List*. In the 1990s, her novels were included as selections by the Literary Guild and the Doubleday Book Club. They are reviewed in such publications as *Black Issues Book Review* and *Romantic Times*. Bunkley is an inductee in the Texas Institute of Letters, and earned as Excellence in Achievement Award from the United Negro College Fund. Additionally, her short story, "At the End of the Day," was a nominee for an NAACP Image Award in 2000 as part of the *Girlfriends* anthology. Bunkley has been voted one of 50 favorite African American authors of the 20th century by the on-line African American Literature Book Club (www.aalbc.com/the besta.htm). In 2007, *Romantic Times* voted her a Career Achievement Award in African American Fiction. In addition to her writing, Bunkley offers workshops on women's empowerment. Her 1998 volume, *Steppin' Out with Attitude* offers her personal story and the experiences of other successful women as models.

Bunkley's first novel, *Emily, the Yellow Rose* (1989), provides the back story for the song "The Yellow Rose of Texas." Set during the 1830s, the novel explores the story of Emily D. West, a mulatto servant whose heroics help defeat the Mexican army. Her song is composed by her lover. In *Black Gold* (1994), Bunkley turns her attention to a little known episode in African American history, the discovery of oil in a section of the town of Mexia, Texas, settled by freed blacks after the Civil War. While Bunkley has done her research into 1920s life in a boom town, her plot is melodramatic; for example, a potential suitor turns out to be the heroine's half brother. There are references to the female protagonist's African grandmother, a prologue episode involving life for African American railroad workers in the 1890s, a secondary character who aspires to a career as a journalist, a victim of spouse abuse, several racial attacks, and a sensational murder trial. However, the novel establishes several elements that continue to appear in Bunkley's fiction. She often sets her work in the recent past or traces the impact of that past on present situations. Bunkley also likes to flavor her plots with elements of magic or the supernatural.
Wild Embers (1995) is set during World War II and tracks the slow path to romance between a female protagonist who becomes an Army nurse and a male protagonist who becomes a Tuskegee airman. [The relationship is complicated by the attentions to the heroine of a white NAACP attorney who is reluctant to give voice to his growing feelings for the heroine.] Other essential elements include the struggles to desegregate the armed forces and the workforces of companies with government contracts. A sub-plot involves the heroine's brother, a deserter from the segregated army. Bunkley further strays from her main plot thread. She introduces one episode in which "colored" army nurses are recruited for duty in Liberia and another in which African American troops must guard German prisoners of war in the segregated South where the white prisoners receive better treatment than the black soldiers. Publishers Weekly proclaims this novel the “most romantic” of the year.

In Balancing Act (1997), Bunkley returns to Texas, this time to a fast-fading African American community that is the hometown of the female protagonist. She is media spokesperson for a corporation whose chemical storage facility is the scene of a fire that raises fear of dangerous contamination. The romance elements of the plot involve the heroine's troubled marriage. Her husband wants to leave his accounting job and start his own business. The couple has a five-year old son. Bunkley mixes parallel stories of environmental racism in Texas and Mexico with the unraveling of a mystery about the reasons for numerous ailments in the small town. Her happy ending includes both the resolution of the mystery and the reconciliation of the married couple.

Starlight Passage (1996) combines romances in both the past and the present. Beginning in 1839 in Africa with the capture of a pregnant woman subsequently enslaved in North Carolina, the novel reveals the life of the captive's daughter. She married a glassmaker, and her descendant, a Houston schoolteacher is researching the life of her glassmaking ancestor for a doctoral thesis. The teacher has as her primary source material a journal containing the family history researched by her late mother. Bunkley combines research on the Underground Railroad and research on antique glass collection to provide the backdrop of her story of the heroine's search for her roots. Romantic interest is provided by a Smithsonian-affiliated photographer who initially is to be her guide on an Underground Railroad tour. Bunkley also adds elements of the campaign for reparations for the descendants of former slaves and gang violence in Washington, D.C., into her story. The intricate weaving of the various strands of her plot relegates the love story to third place behind the past and present mystery stories. By novel's end, however, Bunkley has resolved her multiple plot lines in a town whose mysterious inhabitants help reveal the secrets of the heroine's ancestral past.

Mirrored Life (2002) moves between Texas and Las Vegas, Nevada, in its tale of the fates of three girls after one of them shoots a shopkeeper in a robbery attempt. The novel recounts their lives after incarceration. One has been paralyzed in a prison attack. Another, the heroine, who has trained as a beautician in prison, changes her name after her release, and attempts to create a life and a profession for herself. The third, the shooter, escapes from prison to embark on a life of crime. The heroine has as her
mother's legacy a booklet of herbal beauty treatments. She meets the hero of her romance when he is working as chauffeur/bodyguard for a famous singer whose hair and makeup the heroine does for a local appearance. The action of the novel moves back and forth between the heroine's rising career as a stylist and cosmetologist and her childhood neighbor's escalating crimes. Somewhat neglected is the story of the paralyzed preacher's daughter who has a growing career as a web designer and internet correspondent. A Native American shaman is introduced as a source of plants needed for the cosmetologist's remedies; he also serves as the occasion for the climatic reunion of two of the female principals. The love story has its ups and downs as the hero must untangle his relationship with the singer before his relationship with the heroine can move forward. Evil is punished and virtue rewarded by novel's end.

Relative Interest (2003) serves up Bunkley's usual mixture of history, current issues, and romance. The journalist heroine returns from researching a story on child labor in Africa to learn that her deceased sister's only child has been placed with white foster parents for potential adoption. The novel's love interest is provided by the owner and director of the adoption agency that has placed the child, himself an adoptee. A sub-plot involving a black mayoral candidate’s efforts to save a mill building originally built by freed slaves takes over the novel’s two main narrative threads, and the child labor story is dropped abruptly. Bunkley juggles too many plot elements to satisfy a reader expecting connections among the story’s many elements. However, the author deserves credit for turning to unfamiliar aspects of African American history and culture to provide a frame of reference for her work.

In Silent Wager (2006), Bunkley features a mature heroine and also turns her attention to the problem of compulsive gambling. Her travel agent protagonist has been married for twenty years to the owner of a supper club established by his father. She is also the mother of an 18-year-old daughter about to enter Brown University. Both the marriage and the mother-daughter relationship are in trouble as the novel opens. Additionally, the supper club is suffering financial difficulties. The marriage is the central relationship of much of the novel. The reader is probably given too much information about the book’s villains; however, one is a compulsive gambler who steals from his criminal partner and ultimately invests in the supper club. It is only when the heroine’s husband dies in a fire while the couple is on a marriage-saving cruise that the gambling sub-plot is tied to the story of the marriage. Still another sub-plot follows the daughter to school. Her tangled relationships bring all the remaining characters together. The last part of the book tracks the heroine’s efforts to re-open her deceased husband’s club.

Between Goodbyes (2008) features an Afro-Cuban protagonist and tracks her relationships with three very different men: the first, an African American jazz musician; the second, a white American Broadway producer; and the third, an African American owner of a Nevada resort. When the book opens, the protagonist is planning her wedding. There is a flashback to 1998 where the reader discovers that the heroine has traveled from Cuba to the United States with her brother on a boatload of Haitian refugees. When the boat is sunk, the two are separated. A sub-plot tracks the fate of the brother. Other issues introduced are the compulsory spending of the first over who is subsequently jailed for
tax evasion, the producer’s relationship with his late mother (and taste for teen-age girls!) and the fact that the resort owner has never divorced his “ex-wife.” (The resort owner also is a board member of the Black Western Heritage Museum.)

As is often the case with Bunkley, she tries to cram too much into a single novel. The story of the heroine’s brother, who becomes a successful rapper, takes Bunkley into urban literature territory while another sub-plot involving the sibling’s Cuban mother allows Bunkley to comment on life in Castro’s Cuba. Bunkley manages to bring all of her plot elements together in the book’s rather melodramatic final chapter.

Suite Embrace (2008) is a more conventional romance in which a Florida paralegal, after receiving a large settlement from an accident, moves to a friend’s Colorado ski resort to work as a concierge while she decides her future as a wealthy woman. There she meets a mixed-race former Olympic champion skier now working as the resort’s instructor. The only complications on the road to happily ever after are the skier’s over-bearing mother who has relied on her son to provide her with a wealthy style of living and the heroine’s failure to mention her wealth as she becomes involved with a man who has abandoned the lifestyle of the rich and famous to teach skiing to African American youth. Since this is a Kimani romance novel (Harlequin’s African American series), all turns out well. Bunkley has at least one more Kimani novel in the works.

For the most part, Bunkley has chosen to write about successful career women, often over 30, for whom romance is not necessarily a primary goal. Her love stories posit relationships between equals. Her interest in history and current events often overtake her stories of romance. When she is able to integrate all of the elements of multilayered, interlocking plots, history lessons, issues analysis, and romance, she is a thought-provoking and entertaining writer.

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During the 1990s, Jennifer Crusie successfully made the transition the niche market of category romance novels to worldwide recognition as a bestselling novelist of women’s fiction. Crusie’s popularity derives from her understanding of the appeal of romance fiction to its primarily female readership. Her novels focus on women heroines that readers relate to, women caught between their communities’ expectations of them and their own needs. Crusie’s heroines always prevail, always learn to balance those competing pressures. As Crusie argues, romance fiction makes women feel “more powerful, more optimistic, and more in control … than ever before.”

Crusie’s fiction is distinguished by the ways it inverts many typical romance conventions, such as the ingénue heroine, and experiments with different genres, from fairy tales to hard-boiled detective stories to screwball comedy. Her novels are also known for their more playful elements, such as humor, popular culture references, and the frequent appearance of pets, mainly dogs, as supporting characters. As of 2006, she intends to leave “classic” romance behind to focus on more experimental writing that returns to her original motivation for writing romance fiction, an exploration of the differences between men’s and women’s popular narrative styles.

Jennifer Crusie was born on September 17, 1949 to Jack and JoAnn Smith and raised in Wapakoneta, Ohio. Married in 1971, she and her husband, who served in the Air Force, moved to Texas briefly before returning to Ohio, where she graduated from Bowling Green University with a degree in art education in 1973, and where her only child, Mollie, was born in 1975. Crusie’s marriage ended in divorce, and Crusie worked as an art teacher in the Beavercreek, OH public school system for approximately 15 years. She received a master’s degree in English from Wright State University and later began attending Ohio State University’s doctoral program in English, but she put aside her doctoral dissertation in order to complete her thesis for a Masters in Fine Arts.

Crusie’s first masters thesis on mystery fiction was titled *A Spirit More Capable of Looking Up To Him: Women’s Roles in Mystery Fiction, 1841-1920*. She has published brief articles on 1930s detective novelist Ngaio Marsh and on the genre of romantic suspense for reference works. Though she has never completed a mystery novel, several of her novels contain mystery elements. Two of her novels, *What the Lady Wants* and *Fast Women*, feature private detectives as main characters, and Crusie cites *The Thin Man*’s Nick and Nora Charles as an influence.

Crusie was in her 40s when she began writing romance novels in 1991. As a graduate student at Ohio State University, Crusie embarked on a project to compare men and women’s narrative styles by comparing adventure novels written by men to romance novels written by women. Crusie was enthralled by the romance fiction, an antidote to the tragic stories about women that she was reading as part of the literary canon: “For the first time, I was reading fiction about women who had sex and then didn’t eat arsenic or
throw themselves under trains or swim out to the embrace of the sea, women who won on their own terms (and those terms were pretty varied) and still got the guy in the end,” she wrote in a 1997 article for *Paradoxa*. Crusie dropped her original thesis in order to concentrate solely on women’s romance fiction, in particular their connection to fairy tales. Her dissertation, titled *The Feminization of Enchantment: Women's Popular Fiction in Late Twentieth Century America*, is currently on hold, and Crusie does not expect to finish it. However, in several of her published essays, she analyzes and explains the appeal of romance fiction for its primarily women readers. “My theory was that one of the reasons women write romance was to ‘fix’ the toxic fairy tales they’d been told, tales they needed but that had been twisted from their original versions by patriarchal redactors. And then the romance writers came in and revised them again to make them modern and to restore the strong images of women.”

When Crusie’s first novel was published, she decided to use a pen name, partly because of Harlequin’s requirements that authors use pseudonyms and partly because she was a high school teacher and wanted to preserve her anonymity. Her real name, which she had reclaimed upon her divorce, was Jennifer Smith, but for her pen name she adopted her grandmother’s maiden name, Crusie, because she thought it was well-suited to the lighter style of romance fiction.

Her first novel, which appeared in 1994, was really a novella, *Sizzle*. *Sizzle* was published as part of Silhouette’s “Stolen Moments” line, shorter works marketed for the woman on the go. Crusie considers this novella to be her least successful published work and, on her web site, begs readers not to ask for it to be reprinted.

*Sizzle* is the story of Emily, an executive at a perfume company, and Richard, the new financial advisor overseeing her project. The professional and personal began to overlap as Emily thinks that seducing Richard will be a way to ensure his compliance on the project. Unfortunately, the strategy backfires, and as the two become more sexually and emotionally involved, Emily’s resistance of Richard’s control over her project mirrors the power struggle of their personal relationship. *Sizzle* explores the issues of power and trust in the relationship of two equals in the professional world. In the end, both parties compromise, personally and professionally, but the lesson is harder for Richard to learn.

Though *Sizzle* was the first book bought, it was not the first one published. After Silhouette rejected Crusie’s next manuscript, Harlequin purchased it and published it in late 1993. *Manhunting* features another ambitious, driven heroine who is not willing to settle for anything less than an equal partner in love. Kate is a beautiful, blonde, classy management consultant looking for a husband during a weeklong vacation at a small golf resort in Kentucky. She dates and rejects several prospects before realizing that she’s drawn to Jake, the aggressively underachieving brother of the resort’s owner, Will. Interacting with a series of foils, including Will’s ambitious girlfriend Valerie and the sweet, sexy and clueless Penny, Kate refines her original goals and realizes that she can build a satisfying relationship with Jake.
Crusie says that in Kate she wanted to create a strong feminist character faced with a typical situation: having devoted her life to her career, Kate has neglected the basic human need for a committed love relationship. The conflict of the book lies not necessarily between Kate’s career and her relationship with Jake but between her illusion that she can plot out a course for love as efficiently as she does a business deal and the reality that love happens when you least expect it. When she realizes she has fallen in love with Jake, she not only has to face the sheer inconvenience of falling for an unambitious man, but she also has to face the deficiencies of her worldview, one that equates success with efficiency, organization, and profit. Once she sees that all the planning in the world cannot make love happen, it’s only a short step to reformulating her expectations about her relationships, and she is able to make the kinds of changes that will allow her and Jake to make a relationship work. Of course, Jake makes changes as well. But his willingness to change seems to validate her choices and show that her changes were worthwhile. In the end, the message is that a successful business executive can find happiness without sacrificing either career or love.

*Getting Rid of Bradley*, Crusie’s second published book and third written, is the first to feature animals as major supporting characters. Lucy Savage Porter, who obtains a divorce from her husband Bradley in the first pages of the novel, has three dogs, all named after famous scientists (she is a high school physics teacher). Zach Warren is a police officer on the trail of an embezzler coincidentally also named Bradley. As Lucy and Zach untangle the question of her Bradley’s involvement with the Bradley he is tracking, they fall in love. *Getting Rid of Bradley* was Crusie’s first novel to win an award, the RWA Rita Award for Best Short Contemporary, and is also one of Crusie’s favorites.

*Getting Rid of Bradley*, like *Manhunting*, explores the idea of the unpredictability of love. When Lucy’s sister Tina asks her why she married Bradley, Lucy explains that it was because of the second law of thermonuclear dynamics: “isolated systems move toward disorder until they reach their most probable form, and then they remain constant.” Lucy feared that she was isolated and reaching her most probable form, so she married Bradley thinking that she was applying rationality to the problem of love. *Getting Rid of Bradley* looks at the physics of love, the very nature of attraction and repulsion. Lucy’s ex-husband, Bradley, should be everything she wants and needs, but their similarities do not allow Lucy to grow and develop. Lucy represents rationality, and Zach, described by Lucy as “an exposed nerve,” is all instinct. It is Zach, seemingly her polar opposite, who instigates Lucy to change from the timid science teacher, bossed around by her loving but overbearing sister, to an emotionally and sexually assertive woman.

Like Crusie’s dissertation research on romance fiction, her next novel, *Strange Bedpersons* (1994), addresses the role of fairy tales in a young woman’s life. Ever since she was an eight year old girl living on a commune with her counterculture parents, Tess has been trying to rewrite the Cinderella myth to make it more empowering. It’s fellow commune resident Lanny who first tells Tess the story of “CinderTess,” a heroine doesn’t wait for the prince to rescue her but instead saves herself. Tess is Crusie’s most politically feminist heroine, a character who insists on non-sexist language (saying
“strange bedpersons” instead of “strange bedfellows”), paying her own way, and opening her own doors. But how can she reconcile her romantic relationship with upwardly mobile attorney Nick, who represents everything she sees herself as fighting?

Parallel to Tess and Nick’s story is that of Tess’s best friend Gina, a dancer past her prime, and Parker, Nick’s partner at the law firm. Gina is the true Cinderella of the story, falling for the wealthy, patrician Parker, who must find the courage to challenge his parents’ disapproval of Gina and declare his love for her. But Gina serves an important purpose for Tess’s story. Tess can’t change her perspective and mature through her relationship with Nick because she has too much invested emotionally, but her recognition of Gina’s changes, from a bohemian dancer to a more conventional theater administrator, serves as a vehicle for her to explore a more mature outlook on negotiating social class difference and love. Observing Gina and Parker adapting to each other’s needs, Tess is able to see that she and Nick just might be able to complement and help each other grow as well.

What the Lady Wants, which appeared in 1995, is Crusie’s attempt to rewrite the hard-boiled detective story, with a twist. Mitch, the hero, plays out his Sam Spade fantasies with Mae Belle, the niece of a wealthy and powerful trio of uncles, who is not quite what she seems. Mae desperately wants to find a notebook left by one of her uncles, who recently died. Mae presents the case to Mitch as a murder mystery but is surprised when it really turns out to be one. As the storyline progresses, Crusie is able to send up not only the Sam Spade story but also the detective story conventions of femme fatales, young trophy wives, mob-connected uncles, and mysterious servants.

What the Lady Wants relies on humor not only in dialogue but also to reveal character and challenge gender stereotypes. One of Crusie’s funniest novels in terms of dialogue and the way it plays with expectations about stereotypical characters, such as Mae’s mafia-connected family members, it also uses humor strategically. When Mitch tries to explain how the sexes perceive sexuality differently (men want to “lay pipeline” and “open the West,” he claims), Mae Belle turns his words around and ridicules them. Crusie thus uses humor not only to entertain but also to challenge and minimize the use of gender stereotypes to control women’s sexuality.

Charlie All Night (1996) is perhaps Crusie’s most mature category romance. Crusie says that for this book she gave herself the challenge of distinguishing between great sex without love and great sex with love. Ally is a producer at a small-town radio station, and Charlie is the newly hired disc jockey she plans to make a star. Recently jilted and mysteriously demoted at the radio station, Ally is vulnerable but willing to take a risk when she meets Charlie for the first time. The two end up in bed the first night they meet, and the sex is fantastic. But the two must work to discover whether there is more to a relationship than great sex.

Once again, Crusie explores the connections between personal and professional relationships. In her previous relationship with primetime disc jockey Mark, Ally couldn’t help blurring the lines between work and romance. With Charlie, she similarly
combines the two, but Charlie resists. Ally represents everything Charlie has avoided: ambition, commitment, community. He is only in town to investigate a situation for his father’s friend, the owner of the radio station, and he plans to leave as soon as he’s done. Ally doesn’t realize that Charlie has no plans to succeed, and his resistance to committing to anything work-related parallels his unwillingness to see himself as staying in Tuttle (and in a relationship with her) for very long.

*Charlie All Night* also stands out as an early example of a category romance with a gay supporting character. Ally’s roommate, Joe, is gay, the “perfect man,” she claims. But as a character, he has few of the stereotypical quirks often assigned to gay supporting characters, and his love life is no more or less complicated than that of any other supporting character.

*Charlie All Night* ended Crusie’s involvement with the Harlequin Temptation line. In 1996, Crusie began writing for Bantam Loveswept and Harlequin Love and Laughter. One of Crusie’s favorite books is her first Love and Laughter title, *Anyone But You*, which helped launch the new line. The novel’s most popular character is not 40-year-old divorcée Nina or 30-year-old emergency room physician Alex, but a basset hound named Fred whom Nina adopts at the beginning of the novel. It is Fred who engineers the meeting between Nina and her downstairs neighbor, Alex, who find they share a physical and emotional attraction despite their age difference.

*Anyone But You* is the favorite of many of Crusie’s readers. It won several reader awards as well as being named a *Library Journal* best book of 1996. Known as “Fred’s book” by many readers, it is appealing not only because of Fred but because of its unconventional heroine. Nina is 40 years old, divorced, and concerned that she is no longer physically attractive. She doesn’t want children and is at the end of her childbearing years anyway. She thinks Alex should marry someone younger, more attractive, and more conventional. What she doesn’t realize is that it is her unconventionality, warmth, and strength of character that make her so appealing to Alex, who has been surrounded by overachieving, emotionally repressed, overly conventional family members all his life and who longs to break free of their expectations. Readers empathize both with Alex and Nina. Alex represents everyone who has ever been pressured by family members to be something they are not. Nina’s fears reflect readers’ fears of being unattractive and over the hill and reassure readers that finding love is still a possibility in a world where physical attractiveness and economic success so often define individual identity.

After *Anyone But You*, Crusie began writing for Bantam Loveswept. Though all her Harlequin titles have been re-released by Mira, her Bantam titles, *Cinderella Deal* and *Trust Me On This*, have not been re-released and are hard to find.

Published in 1996, *Cinderella Deal* is thematically similar to *Strange Bedpersons* with its emphasis on the Cinderella story. Like Tess, Daisy is down to earth, eccentric, and a less than ideal wife for a college professor looking to impress his conservative colleagues. Lincoln Blaise is young, smart and ambitious, and his goal is a plum tenure-track job at a small-town college in Ohio. In order to impress his potential employers, he needs a
fiancée, and he finds the perfect solution in his unconventional neighbor Daisy. When his employers fall in love with Daisy, the couple embarks on a strange deception, an arranged marriage that will give Linc the opportunity to gain professional success and Daisy the chance to paint without financial worry.

_Cinderella Deal_ is another “opposites attract” story from Crusie, but it also reflects her recurring theme of women’s adaptation of fairy tales to their own needs. In order to justify her decisions, Daisy reformulates it as a Cinderella story. She will be rescued by the prince, Linc, but instead of true love, she will get her big break professionally. Since this is a romance novel, of course the personal love story accompanies the professional success. But Crusie makes the unlikely “arranged marriage” plot work in this contemporary romance. Daisy was dissatisfied with her life even before Linc came to her with his proposition. His suggestion that they marry gives her an opportunity for a fresh start and to recreate herself. With a few rough starts, she adapts readily to life as a faculty wife. The problem is that she veers too far in the other direction and begins to lose herself. Crusie directly confronts the negative consequences of giving oneself over to the Cinderella myth so completely. Daisy earns social acceptance, but the price is too high. Both Linc and her friend Julia must intervene to remind Daisy that maturity shouldn’t have to involve repressing her passion and creativity in order to conform.

_Trust Me On This_, which appeared in 1997, introduces the subject of confidence men (and women) into her storytelling, a topic she would return to in _Welcome to Temptation_ and _Faking It_. Alec is in the business of preventing con men from taking advantage of innocent people, and he wrongly believes Dennie is involved with the con man he’s tracking. But Dennie is involved in a bit of a con of her own—trying to get a noted feminist author to give her an interview on a very sensitive subject. In this book, Crusie also creates a believable and moving secondary romance between Alec’s aunt Victoria and his boss Harry.

One of the subplots of _Trust Me On This_ involves Crusie’s subtle mockery of academic life. Alec’s aunt teaches literature, and the story takes place at a major convention for college English professors, a milieu Crusie was familiar with from her experience as a doctoral student in Ohio State’s English department. During most of her early career, Crusie continued to pursue her doctorate, even writing an academic study of Anne Rice’s fiction, which she published under her real name (Jennifer Smith) in 1996. _Trust Me On This_ reflects Crusie’s disenchantment with academic life; at around this time, Crusie put her dissertation writing on hold in order to complete the MFA program at Ohio State. There she completed a collection of short stories that was the basis for her second single-title novel, _Crazy For You_.

Crusie was also poised to take advantage of a new development in the fiction market—the rise of “chick lit.” The popularity of Helen Fielding’s _Bridget Jones’ Diary_ had publishers craving novels with unconventional madcap heroines who found themselves in wacky situations but found love nonetheless. Crusie’s preference for small-town Ohio settings made her an awkward fit in the genre, but her breezy offbeat style and heroines
struggling with social discomfort, failed relationships, and/or weight issues caught the attention of a reading public ready for these stories.

Critics responded favorably, for the most part. Crusie’s category romances won many reader awards as well as honors from the Romance Writers Association. However, her single-title novels, published after 1996, brought her to the attention of more mainstream critics. Crusie stood out because of her colorful characters and fast-paced witty dialogue, but some critics found fault with the relative lack of plot in her novels.

Criticisms such as the New York Times Book Review’s complaint about Welcome to Temptation’s “preposterous plot and clichéd characters” and predictability sound familiar to romance readers. Romance fiction has long been maligned by critics, and in a 1998 essay, Crusie argues that the reason why romance fiction has been attacked is because it challenges rather than reinforces patriarchal beliefs about women. In much of her writing about romance fiction, Crusie takes aim at critics, including feminist critics, who denigrate the appeal and influence of romance fiction. In an essay she wrote for Paradoxa in 1997, Crusie argues that romance fiction is not fantasy but instead is centered on women’s reality

“So this is what the best romance fiction does: it tells the story that reflects a woman’s reality as it could be and as it often is. It tells her she is not stupid because she’s female, that she understands men better than they understand her, that she has a right to control over her own life, to children, to vocational fulfillment, to great sex, to a faithful loving partner. It doesn’t promise her she’ll get these things, but it shows her a woman like herself who struggles to attain any and all of these and wins, not because she’s beautiful or young or lucky, but because she works for them.”

Crusie’s essay establishes that romance fiction does not oppress women but instead empowers and encourages women and puts them at the center of the story. This essay has a fitting placement at the end of her academic career and basically asserts her divergence from academic feminism and the academic literary canon.

Crusie described her next book, 1998’s Tell Me Lies, as “the book of my heart, the one I always promised myself I’d write when I could handle something this complicated.” Tell Me Lies begins when heroine Maddie Faraday discovers her husband may be cheating on her – for the second time. Meanwhile, her high school boyfriend comes back to town, and her daughter wants a puppy. When her husband is found murdered, Maddie must not only comfort her daughter but defend herself from the town’s suspicions that she is the murderer.

Crusie’s novels have generally involved multiple subplots and a supporting cast of offbeat characters, but her move to single-title hardcovers freed her to delve into more complex plotting and a larger cast of characters. In addition, it enabled her to explore themes that are considered taboo in most category romance novels, such as adultery. In Tell Me Lies, Maddie and hero C.L have sex while she is still married to her husband.
Maddie views this as an act of selfishness, but for her it is a liberating act. Crusie portrays Maddie as having been stifled and restricted by her selflessness. She has no identity other than as Brent’s wife, Em’s mother, Martha’s daughter. For Maddie to act selfishly is to free herself finally to figure out who she really is.

The conflict between selfishness and selflessness plays itself out in the implications of the book’s title, *Tell Me Lies*. When Brent is murdered, Maddie’s first thought is for how it will affect Em, who is destroyed by the loss of her father. Maddie’s need to protect and comfort her daughter is admirable, motivated by her deep love for her daughter, but when it extends to telling her daughter lies to protect her, she becomes part of a web of dishonesty and self-abnegation that has surrounded her all her life. It is not until she realizes the harmful effects of these lies on her daughter that she understands that selfishness has benefits. Em does not need a mother who is a shadow, a coward but will instead thrive with a parent who is confident and loving and truthful.

Lies also play a role in the other main relationship in Maddie’s life, her friendship with Treva. It is not until late in the novel that Maddie realizes that Treva has been keeping a secret for many years. At first, the discovery leads Maddie to believe their friendship is over, but later, after her epiphany with Em, she realizes that the bonds of friendship transcend the lies of the past. Lies are strategies, ineffective and self-defeating strategies used to handle the complications of life, but they do not mean that the person telling lies is morally and irrevocably flawed.

*Tell Me Lies* can be classified as a romance, but the romantic elements are subordinated to Maddie’s struggle to change her life. Her initial desire to hide her relationship with C.L. is wrong because it implies that her selfishness in beginning the relationship is wrong. Instead, Crusie wants to point out that Maddie’s selfish act probably saved her life and also contributed to Em’s well-being.

*Crazy For You*, published in 1999, evolved out of Crusie’s MFA thesis, a series of short stories about women in a small town in Ohio. Crusie’s goal in writing *Crazy For You* was to explore what happens when a woman makes a small change in her life. Quinn McKenzie decides to adopt a dog, and the consequences of her decision ripple outward, affecting not only Quinn’s life but those of the people around her.

Like Maddie in *Tell Me Lies*, Quinn feels that she has always been defined by her relationships with other people. Her relationship with her live-in boyfriend Bill, the high school football coach, is a perfect example. Bill expects things of Quinn; he expects her to be reasonable and to comply with his wishes. But one day she decides to adopt a dog, knowing that Bill will disapprove and that the dog will not fit into her life—so she decides to change her life to accommodate the dog. The dog thus becomes a catalyst for the changes Quinn needs to make in her life. Her friends and family—and particularly Bill—cannot understand how she could end a two-year relationship with a man over a dog, but for Quinn, this decision is a turning point as she changes her life from her old “beige” routine into something more exciting and different.
Bill represents everything Quinn is trying to escape. As a football coach, he values competitiveness, physical strength and appearance, conformity, and routine. These traits have earned him popularity and success. But Quinn rebels against that. She has always been the person who fixes things, while her free-spirited older sister is the one who acted on emotion and passion. It only makes sense then that Quinn would be drawn to her sister’s ex-husband Nick. Nick, with his fear of commitment and his endless cycle of girlfriends, lives perpetually in the present, never worrying about the future or commitment or other people’s expectations of him.

Quinn’s small changes lead to bigger changes—her relationship with Nick, her purchase of a house. But they also inspire the people she loves to make changes as well. Darla, her best friend, decides she cannot continue in the same old rut of a marriage and challenges her husband to be more attentive to her needs. Quinn’s mother comes out of the closet and throws her husband out of the house; no longer will she live according to other people’s expectations. Crusie stacks the deck in favor of change. Bill, who represents stability, permanence, and routine, turns out to be pathological in his refusal to acknowledge Quinn’s desires. He stalks her, nearly rapes her, and holds her prisoner in his home. Bill symbolizes the violence that underlies society’s—particularly men’s—resistance to women changing their lives. Although Quinn has an excellent support system in her family, friends, and Nick, she is unable to escape the menace posed by Bill until she herself fights back.

Crusie had her biggest success in 2000 with Welcome to Temptation, her first of four New York Times bestsellers in a row. Set in the small town of Temptation, Ohio, Welcome to Temptation is about Sophie Dempsey, a videographer who, along with her more creative camerawoman sister Amy, comes to Temptation to make a short film for their brother’s ex, Clea. What she thinks is going to be an easy weekend of filming turns into something far more complex, as Clea is hoping the video will help her make a splash in the emerging genre of female erotica. Sophie’s struggles to write and produce the erotic film parallel her own evolving romantic relationship with Temptation’s mayor, Phin Tucker, who is more than willing to help the tightly wound, straight-laced Sophie explore her erotic fantasies. However, they quickly realize that what they thought would be a weekend fling is much more, but as they work on figuring it out, they become embroiled in Temptation’s political and social class conflicts.

One of the pleasures of Welcome to Temptation is Crusie’s liberal use of popular culture references. The Dempsey girls were born and raised on Dusty Springfield, whose music they are always playing. When Sophie is nervous, and she often is, she resorts to quoting well-known lines from famous movies.

Fast Women, a 2001 release, returns to the milieu of the detective agency, first visited in What the Lady Wants. Crusie admits to being a fan of mystery fiction, so it’s not surprising that some of her fiction would involve incorporating the genre. Nell Dysart is a recent divorcee who takes a job at a detective agency run by cousins Gabe and Riley McKenna. Gabe is stuck in the past. He is so resistant to change that he still sleeps with his ex-wife and refuses to make any changes in the office. Nell, who was her ex-husband’s secretary in name but partner financially in his insurance agency, is trying to
get back on her feet emotionally. She has a one-night fling with the younger Riley, which has the benefit of breaking her out of her numbness and renewing her hunger for food, sex, and passion. But the real target of her attention is Riley’s cousin Gabe.

The mystery of *Fast Women* revolves around the tangled relations of the Dysart, Ogilvie, and McKenna families. Ogilvie and Dysart is a major company that has been using the McKennas’ agency (originally run by Gabe’s father) for years to investigate corporate and personal issues. The McKennas also do a lot of “relationship investigation”—surveillance of cheating spouses and background checks. When several main partners in Ogilvie and Dysart report attempts to blackmail them, Gabe and Riley investigate, and the answers lead back to the relationships among these families—and even back to their father.

Like most of Crusie’s books, *Fast Women* features an adorable pet, the long-haired dachshund Marlene, named after 1930s/1940s film star Marlene Dietrich. In a recurring theme in Crusie’s work, pets and people save each other; it is Katie in *Crazy For You* who saves Quinn from a “beige” life with an obsessive man; it is Fred in *Anyone But You* who brings Nina and Alex together. In *Fast Women*, Marlene more literally saves Nell, barking like Lassie in order to save her from suffocation in a walk-in freezer. In her fiction, Crusie explores the ways that companion animals can save people, literally and figuratively, from death.

Crusie insists that her 2002 novel, *Faking It*, is not a sequel but a spinoff focusing on Davy Dempsey, the brother of *Welcome to Temptation*’s Sophie Dempsey. *Faking It*’s heroine, Tilda Goodnight, is an artist with a secret—she has a talent for forgery. When she attempts to steal back a forgery in order to prevent her secret from coming out, she runs into Davy, who is also involved in his own scheme to regain some money his ex-wife stole from him.

Like so many of Crusie’s stories, *Faking It* involves coming to terms with one’s identity when one has been “faking it” for a long time. Davy was raised in a con man’s household and knows how to present a false appearance to the world, but what he really wants is to go straight and leave the conning behind. All the women in the Goodnight family are “faking it” in some way. Tilda is desperate to keep her secrets (she has forged paintings for her father), and Tilda’s sister Eve is living a double life as Eve, a teacher, and Louise, a party girl. Crusie says that originally Tilda’s sister Eve was intended to be the heroine, but she soon became more interested in Tilda’s story and her relationship with Davy. Both Tilda and Davy come from colorful families involved in less-than-legal activities, and both characters feel torn between the desire to go straight and the need to acknowledge their inner selves.

Like most of Crusie’s books, *Faking It* portrays sexual experience as a constantly evolving and developing process. Tilda and Davy’s first sexual encounter is unsatisfying, and Tilda must learn that the false identity she presents to the world prevents her from achieving emotional and sexually satisfying intimacy. Crusie does not comply with the convention in romance fiction that the first sexual experience of a couple will be
spectacular. “The first time is often not that good,” she states, “because people are with each other for the wrong reasons or haven’t been with each other long enough to really trust each other and so things go wrong. I like the idea of exploring the arc of the relationship in the arc of the sexual relationship, too.”

Appearing in 2005, Bet Me is, according to Crusie, her last classic romance and returns to the fairy tale roots that propelled her into writing and analyzing romance fiction. Minerva Dobbs is an unlikely princess to Calvin Morrissey’s handsome prince. Overweight (by her mother’s standards) and overanalytical (by her own standards), Min has never expected very much for herself. An actuary by trade, she has applied her own ideas about risk analysis to her romantic relationships, preferring to engage only in safe, unexciting relationships. Cal, on the other hand, is a gambler by nature, and it is because of a bet that he and Min meet and have dinner. Min only spends time with Cal because she thinks there is no chance at all of any future involvement; with nothing to lose, she’s able to take the biggest risk of all.

Crusie sets the fairy tale romance of Cal and Min alongside psychological theories about the development of longterm love relationships—and it’s clear which one wins. Cal’s ex-girlfriend Cynthie is a popular psychologist writing what she hopes will be a career-making book on the stages of a committed romantic relationship. Desperate to win Cal back so she can finish her book, Cynthie observes and analyzes Cal and Min’s relationship every step of the way. She bonds with Min’s ex-boyfriend David, who wants Min even as he attempts to play power games with her. On one hand, Cynthie’s observations hold up; she notes that nicknames are a form of intimacy, that couples may share “copulatory gazes” that signal their attraction, and that attachment is indicated when one partner gives the other something valued. On the other, Cynthie’s scientific approach to intimacy cannot account for the spark that happens between two people. As Crusie said in an analysis of romance conventions on television shows, “Your lovers spark because they're opposites on the surface, but they love because they're twin souls at heart.”

Cal and Min are opposites in many ways. He is a gambler; she is risk-averse. He is a teacher, a people person; she deals with numbers and statistics. He is gorgeous; she has been told all her life she is unattractive because of her weight. He likes Elvis Costello; she loves Elvis Presley. But they are more similar than they think. They are devoted to their friends. They love their families but feel like outcasts and disappointments, Min because of her weight and Cal because of his dyslexia. The sexual spark comes from their differences, but their commitment is based on their shared values and their complete acceptance of each other.

As what is probably her last novel in the classic romance tradition, Bet Me is an excellent summation of Crusie’s major themes: the ways romance novels are feminist revisions of fairy tales, the need for people to accept themselves instead of constructing false identities, the dynamics of seeming opposites who find themselves attracted and committed despite apparent differences, the use of popular culture references, and the role of pets (Cal brings Min a cat, whom she names Elvis).
Crusie’s success as a writer of fiction and her background in academic writing has made her much in demand. She not only writes regularly about the process of writing and the ins and outs of the publishing industry, but she also has written pieces on popular culture and fictional archetypes. In 2003, she contributed to the growing field of Buffy Studies with an essay, “Dating Death,” which appeared in the collection Seven Seasons of Buffy. In the essay, she analyzed how the three major romances of Buffy’s life fell into the patterns of typical love stories. She establishes the four stages of the portrayal of romance, assumption, attraction, infatuation, and attachment, and applies them to the relationships of Buffy with Angel, Riley, and Spike. A year later, “The Assassination of Cordelia Chase” appeared in the collection Five Seasons of Angel, by the same publisher. Most recently, Crusie has edited two collections of essays, one on the television series Charmed, a show about three sisters who are also witches, and one on Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen’s most famous novel, which has been adapted on television and film numerous times, exploring the fascination Pride and Prejudice holds for readers and viewers alike.

Starting in 2006, Crusie began writing collaborative novels. Her first, co-written with Bob Mayer, Don’t Look Down, featured two narrative voices, the heroine’s, written by Crusie, and the hero’s, written by Mayer. Don’t Look Down is the story of Lucy Armstrong, a successful director of commercials featuring animals, who is asked to fill in as director of a high-stakes yet seemingly cursed feature film project. Lucy's ex-husband, Connor, is the stunt coordinator of the film, and he wants her back, but it is J.T. Wilder, a fill-in stunt double for the movie's star, who captures her interest.

As in most of Crusie's work, the relationships among women characters are central. Lucy comes to the project at the request of her sister, Daisy, a script coordinator, and her young niece Pepper. Pepper is fascinated by Wonder Woman, and the novel effectively juxtaposes the motif of the superheroine (whom Lucy resembles) with the hardened Special Ops military hero represented by J.T.

Crusie's second collaboration, The Unfortunate Miss Fortunes, published in 2007, was a joint effort with Eileen Dreyer and Anne Stuart, fellow romance novelists. Undoubtedly influenced by Crusie's enjoyment of Charmed, the novel features three main characters, all sisters with magical powers. Crusie and her co-authors collaborated on the plot of the novel, then each individual author was responsible for writing the sections centering on one of the main characters. Crusie's character is Mare, the youngest sister and a typical Crusie character who strives to be Queen of the Universe and drops famous movie lines into everyday conversation. Mare, like her sisters, struggles with the idea that her magical powers prevent her from living a “normal” life. However, the sisters learn how to manage their power and find “true love” and happiness – in other words, to have it all.

Agnes and the Hitman, published in 2008, is Crusie's second collaboration with Bob Mayer, and it was better received by critics and readers than the duo's first collaboration. Featuring one of Crusie's typical heroines, a cranky cook/food writer enmeshed in a dysfunctional family, Agnes and the Hitman touches on several of Crusie's recurring
themes: the pleasures of food, love at first sight, generations of women, and a man who is dangerous both physically and emotionally, but who ultimately proves to be a good match for the heroine.

Agnes Crandall is cooking in the kitchen of her new home when someone tries to kidnap her dog, Rhett. She calls on an old family friend to help her deal with the consequences, and he sends his nephew Shane, a professional hitman, to protect her. In untangling the reasons why someone is trying to kidnap her dog, Agnes and Shane uncover the dark history of the Fortunato family to whom they both are connected.

One recurring motif in the novel is anger. Agnes has a history of hitting men with frying pans, and throughout the story she imagines her anger management therapist talking her through her feelings of anger. Agnes must learn that suppressing her anger is suppressing a part of herself and that it is okay for her to express her anger instead of keeping it bottled up until it explodes.

Despite her move toward collaborative authorship, Crusie is not giving up writing on her own. In 2006 she wrote a story, “Hot Toy,” for a Christmas anthology titled Santa Baby. While trying to track down the hottest toy of the holiday season, Trudy Maxwell ends up juggling both an international espionage case and the man, Nolan Mitchell, whom she dated briefly but cannot forget. In 2009, Always Kiss Me Goodnight, another novel, will be published.

However, Crusie is also working on three more collaborative novels, two more with Mayer, and another collaborative romance titled Dogs and Goddesses with Anne Stuart and Lani Diane Rich. Her commitment to writing collaboratively has led to a break with her longtime agent but also has revitalized her creatively, according to a recent entry on her blog, Argh Ink. Crusie wants to further explore the nature of collaborative writing and has explored returning to graduate school to write her dissertation on the subject.

A best-selling author on the New York Times and USA Today lists, Crusie is now reviewed not only by the trade journals and romance web sites but also by publications like the Boston Globe, People, Washington Post, Playgirl and Entertainment Weekly. She also continues to write short pieces in industry journals giving advice on the writing process and on negotiating the ins and outs of the publishing industry. In addition, she frequently gives conference presentations and offers workshops for aspiring writers. “I think I’m a much better teacher than I am a writer,” she said in a 2002 interview.

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Wendy Wagner
*Johnson and Wales University*
“I’d rather laugh than cry,” says Janet Evanovich in the author’s note introducing the first of the romance novels she co-authors with Charlotte Hughes. That preference is readily apparent throughout Evanovich’s oeuvre, from the series romances she wrote in the 1980s and 1990s for Berkeley’s Second Chance at Love and Bantam’s Loveswept line to her bestselling Stephanie Plum mystery novels to the “Full” series she and Hughes continue to co-write. Although she never suggests that love and romance are not themselves serious subjects, Evanovich consistently invites readers to laugh at or with her characters as they stumble and fumble their way toward the happy endings they deserve. Her heroines are typically plucky but accident-prone and skittish about romantic entanglements, while her heroes, who run the gamut from the stereotypical tall-dark-handsome-and-wealthy to average-looking, down-to-earth and working class, are almost invariably nice, well-intentioned, and unabashedly devoted to the women they fall for.

A love story Evanovich style is thus not so much an account of how the heroine tames an ostensibly unobtainable man or overcomes seemingly insurmountable obstacles to find and land Mr. Right as it is a reflection on how men and women alike have to make adjustments—sometimes subtle, sometimes more significant—in their perspectives in order to recognize the opportunities for romantic happiness that they might otherwise have missed. The following passage from Back to the Bedroom, for example, is typical in its explication of the heroine’s reaction when she realizes she’s falling in love:

“She’d known other men and shared varying degrees of intimacy with them…. But she’d never experienced this type of pull.
It didn’t occur to her to label it love at first sight. In her mind, love at first sight was something that happened to Cinderella and Fred Astaire. Love at first sight was when two strangers locked eyes across a crowded ballroom, and the whole rest of the world faded away…. The feeling she had for Dave was more like locking wire carts at the supermarket. Some humor, some annoyance, and an inability to separate the damn things.
The truth was, she didn’t want to unlock her cart from Dave’s just yet…. [U]nder the restless energy of sexual attraction was security, comfort, and satisfaction. How she could derive those stable emotions from an unemployed bum, she couldn’t begin to guess.” (72-73)

Love, for Evanovich’s characters, is never simply experienced; it is also carefully analyzed. And while it is generally treated as an unavoidable, gut-level emotional response to the love interest, love is also, these novels suggest, worthy of thoughtful intellectual reflection as well. But these reflections are, regardless of their profundity or
of the weight of the consequences that ensue from them, almost invariably laced with the kind of wry humor that’s a defining characteristic of all of Evanovich’s fiction.

The trajectory of a typical Evanovich romance—two nice people meet, are almost instantly attracted to one another, start a relationship, but have to iron out all the details that will make the relationship last and/or overcome the personal problems that make it hard for them to commit to a healthy relationship—does not in itself tend to create the kind of dramatic tension that readers have come to expect from romance novels. Nor is Evanovich particularly adept at creating or sustaining sexual tension. “I never enjoyed writing the love scenes as a romance writer,” she explains in an interview with the online journal *Writers Write.* “I suppose because the attitude was … [m]ore serious somehow.” Consequently, her descriptions of her characters’ sexual interactions tend to be perfunctory and almost invariably to elide or euphemize the more graphic details.

In all of these respects, her novels fall short of meeting the expectations readers typically bring to romance novels. What an Evanovich novel does typically offer, however, is warm-hearted humor, laugh-out-loud pratfalls, witty and often savvy observations about human nature, and, to varying degrees, caustically funny repartee between the hero and heroine. Moreover, perhaps to compensate for the fairly flat trajectory of her romantic plots, Evanovich often spices up her romance novels with mystery or action-adventure plots. (It’s perhaps not surprising, then, that Evanovich ultimately made her mark as a writer of mystery/adventure novels.) While the action plotlines in her romance novels may at times feel artificially grafted on, and at other times threaten to subsume or overwhelm the romantic plot, they do help sustain readers’ interest. Ultimately, though, the real pleasure in reading an Evanovich novel comes from the author’s relentlessly sunny perspective, her ability to find the humor in any situation, no matter how ostensibly dire, her insistence that no matter how serious the implications of a romantic attachment may be, it should also be fun, and her gift for crafting the perfect turn of phrase that throws the humor in each situation into the sharpest possible relief—a gift that’s on clear display, for example, in this exchange between the hero and heroine of *Metro Girl*:

> “I guess this isn’t much of a vacation for you,” I said to Hooker.
> “It’s not that bad,” Hooker said. “I’m in Key West with a pretty girl. So far you haven’t put out, but I still have hopes. Someone’s threatening to kill me. I’m sort of on a treasure hunt. And the breakfast burrito was first class.”

Janet Evanovich was born Janet Schneider in South River, New Jersey in 1943 and attended South River High School and Douglass College, where she majored in art. She married Peter Evanovich, a doctoral candidate in mathematics at Rutgers, in 1964 and graduated from college in 1965. Their son Peter was born in 1970 and their daughter Alexandra in 1973.

On her website (*www.evanovich.com*), Evanovich says of her early professional life, “Since a degree in studio art qualified me to do NOTHING I had a variety of awful jobs after graduation—used car salesperson … file clerk, hospital supply customer service rep
(sold colostomy bags), insurance claims adjuster, telephone solicitor, etc. Mostly I was a stay-at-home mom.” Evanovich calls motherhood “the best job in the world,” but as her children grew older, she began to feel the need for a creative outlet. As she explains in a 2001 interview with audiobookcafe.com,

I was always the kid that could draw. I was an artist … And then I got married and had a couple of kids. While I was at home and the kids were in school, I was looking for something to do, because, basically, I just like to make things. And somewhere along the line I decided I wanted to try writing.

Evanovich spent the next ten years writing literary fiction, none of which she was able to get published. Then, as she recalls in the same interview, “it was getting to the point where we were looking at the kids getting older and saying, ‘College isn’t that far away and if I can’t start supplementing the income with my writing, then there’s a real good chance that I’m going to have to go out and get some kind of a job to see the kids through school.’” That realization, she says, “gave me the impetus to be more practical.” As a result, when a friend suggested she try writing romance novels, she was receptive: “I had never read one, because we didn’t read that trash in the Douglass College art department. I went out and bought a whole bag of romance novels—all different kinds—and read them and liked them a lot; found that a lot of them were really well written.” And, she adds, “It was at a time in my life when it was very appealing to me because romance is about commitment and family and they’re very positive reads and I identified with that.”

Evanovich sold the second romance novel she wrote; it—*Hero at Large*—was published in 1987 by Berkeley’s Second Chance at Love. For it and the two other novels she wrote for the Second Chance at Love line, Evanovich used the pen name Steffie Hall. In 1988, using her own name, she published *The Grand Finale*, the first of the nine books she wrote for Bantam’s Loveswept series. Like many other romance novelists, Evanovich was at this point in her career quite prolific, publishing twelve books in five years. But as her writing skills evolved, she began to feel that her authorial ambitions were to some extent thwarted by the constraints of the romance genre. As she explains in a 1998 interview with likesbooks.com,

[H]alfway through my romance career, I began to realize I wasn’t in exactly the right place. I was having a hard time getting enough pages out of sheer relationship. I realized I liked writing action scenes and never felt totally comfortable with the long romantic passages. My first thought was to write romantic adventure. Something along the lines of *Romancing the Stone*. But I couldn’t secure a contract for that. So eventually I gave up with the women’s fiction editors and made the jump to crime.

In fact, Evanovich took two years off from writing, spent some time mulling over exactly what kinds of novels she wanted to write, did some research—‘drinking beer with law
enforcement types, learning to shoot, practicing cussing” is how she puts it on the Biography page of her website—and launched the Stephanie Plum mystery novels (*One For the Money; Two for the Dough*, etc.) which now regularly top bestseller lists and have made her into one of the most popular authors in the world. While the Plum novels are not romance novels in the conventional sense, romance is more central to their plots than it is in most mystery novels. That, says Evanovich in the likesbooks.com interview, is because “When I left romance, I actually created a hybrid. I took those things that I loved about romance and felt I did well and squashed them into a mystery/adventure storyline.” Stephanie Plum is in many respects similar to Evanovich’s romance heroines—savvy, sassy, witty, insecure and accident-prone—but her plotlines are not as tightly focused on her romantic life.

Evanovich says in her writerswrite.com interview that she prefers writing mysteries to writing romances “for structural reasons. I like writing in first person and it’s more accepted in mystery. I write with a lot of humor and I think humor can get tedious, so I prefer a short book … I prefer writing action to relationship, because I suck at internal narrative.” Still, as the Plum novels became more successful, Evanovich reentered the romance field, collaborating with Charlotte Hughes on a series of novels that all spin off of Evanovich’s early romance novel *Full House*. As Evanovich explains to crescentblues.com, “I had a lot of ideas in my head that I just didn’t have time to put on paper. Plus I wanted to give something back to the romance community. I had started writing romance novels at the same time that Charlotte did. She’s a great writer with her own distinct sense of humor. I thought she was the perfect person to help me start a new romance series.” If the Plum novels are hybrids, the “Full” novels are even more so: bearing distinct hallmarks of both Evanovich’s and Hughes’s approaches to romance as well as featuring some of the qualities—in particular the breezy repartee—that have made the Plum novels so successful. When these novels are compared with those that each co-author has written on her own, it is readily apparent that Hughes does the bulk of the writing for the “Full” series, but it is also obvious that both writers do have an active hand in developing the characters and storylines.

A self-described “really boring workaholic with no hobbies or special interests,” Evanovich has remained prolific, also launching a new series of adventure/romance novels, starting with 2004’s *Metro Girl*, that are set in different locales and feature different characters. Both the tone and the plot of *Metro Girl* are similar to those of the Stephanie Plum novels, but the glamorous setting—Miami and the Florida Keys—and the strong and instant chemistry between the hero and heroine owe a lot to the romance tradition too.

Publishing several books a year, and even several different kinds of books a year, is not unusual for a romance writer, but it is for a best-selling mystery writer; and Evanovich’s ability to crank out so many novels so quickly has raised some eyebrows in the publishing industry. A 2005 feature story on Evanovich in the New York *Times* describes her as a savvy self-promoter who is as much the head of a business empire as an author, and notes that “Ms. Evanovich does not apologize for flooding the market with a new book every two to three months, nor for her calculated efforts to send her new novels
straight to the top of the best-seller lists.” Adding that critics “have sometimes been less than enthusiastic” about Evanovich’s writing, repeatedly calling it formulaic, the article concludes with Evanovich’s defense of her “calculating” approach to popular fiction:

“I’m a writer, but this is a business … You have to look at it in the way you would look at any business. You have to have honesty to the product. You have to meet consumer expectations. You give them value for their money and give them a product that they need. I don’t see anything wrong with all these things. And I don’t think it’s a bad thing to meet consumers’ expectations.”

The Stephanie Plum novels have certainly met many readers’—and even many reviewers’—expectations from the start. Publishers Weekly called the series debut, One for the Money, “a delightful romp” with a heroine who “flaunts a rough-edged appeal.” Library Journal dubbed it “a witty, well-written, and gutsy debut.” And Kirkus Reviews found it “a smartly-paced debut with an irresistible heroine.” In a review of 2004’s Ten Big Ones, Publishers Weekly concludes that Evanovich is “a master of screwball comedy.” Reviews of Evanovich’s romance novels, however, have not always been so glowing. Booklist calls Full House, first published in 1989, and revised and reissued in 2002, “pleasant, nondemanding fare” which, “if nothing else … will give fans a clear view of how far Evanovich has come in terms of style and characterization;” while Publishers Weekly calls the novel’s romance plot “artificial” and concludes that “this trussed-up tale may fall flat for both [Evanovich’s] mystery-loving fans and readers seeking a truly contemporary romance.”

Evanovich clearly has evolved as a writer since her series romance days. And the fun but uneven “Full” series she coauthors with Hughes—in which both the humor and the romance tend to get bogged down by almost mind-numbingly hair-raising adventure plots—suggests that she still struggles when it comes to navigating the boundaries between different genres of popular fiction. As a mystery/adventure writer who spices things up with some steamy romance, Evanovich has plainly been a huge success. (The New York Times notes that in 2004 her books sold some 4 million copies worldwide.) Working within the romance genre itself, though, Evanovich does not emerge as one of that genre’s masters. But readers who are less concerned with dramatic romantic storylines than they are with exploring the process by which two people figure out how to make a life together are likely to find Evanovich’s early romance novels enlightening, while those who care less about character development than about a fast-paced plot and a wildly eccentric set of secondary characters will find the “Full” novels quite entertaining.

1989’s Back to the Bedroom, for example, is typical of her early novels in its exploration of the conundrum its heroine, Kate Finn, is faced with when she falls for a man whose lifestyle and goals seem hopelessly incompatible with her own. While she’s a driven, successful professional musician, he is a recent lottery winner who seems perfectly content not to work at all now that he no longer needs a paycheck. As a result, she
concludes their relationship is doomed to failure, no matter how crazy they are about each other:

Her real problem was Dave. She loved him. More than music. More than she ever thought possible. He was always there for her. … And he made her feel needed. … Their mating went far beyond the physical. It was emotional and intellectual, as natural as breathing. And just as essential.

Thinking about it, having him here on the bed beside her brought so much pain she could hardly speak, because she was firmly convinced they would never get married. … She and Dave were all wrong for each other.” (217-218)

In the end, Kate discovers Dave does have a vocation after all. But even before that, she’s learned that even the most significant differences between two people are not insurmountable barriers for love to overcome, and that in fact the ostensible incompatibilities between two people can actually add to the quality of their lives together:

Never in a million years would she have suspected it could be like this. Loving someone so much that their pain was your pain, and their joy was your joy. That’s how much Dave loved her, and that’s the love she returned … She’d been incredibly stupid. She’d almost thrown away the love of a lifetime because Dave didn’t fit into her silly preconceived husband mold. (226)

For the heroine of an Evanovich novel, where even the most rapturous moments of passion and the most profound of existential insights are always kept tethered to the practical and the mundane, what all this ultimately means is that “She could buy houseplants now because Dave would remember to water them.” (228)

That ability to couch the philosophical underpinnings of her writing in such charmingly mundane terms is one of the most distinctive hallmarks of Evanovich’s fiction. In Ivan Takes a Wife (reprinted as Love Overboard), for example, the heroine uses her fondness for junk food as a metaphor for the predicament in which she finds herself when her need for an emergency plumbing job she can’t afford compels her to take a job on a notorious womanizer’s boat:

Life was filled with trade-offs. If you packed away a whole bag of cookies, then you had to wash them down with diet root beer. This was just another of life’s cans of diet root beer. Cousin Lucy worked as a cook on Ivan’s windjammer. That morning cousin Lucy had decided to run off and marry Stanley Shelton. Stanley Shelton was a plumber. Stephanie
desperately needed a plumber. Simple, right? Cousin Lucy got a
honeymoon, and Stephanie got a toilet. (4)

Rakish Ivan, who has a terrible reputation, charms Stephanie’s pants off just a few pages
further in. But if he has a womanizing past, there’s no evidence of it whatsoever in his
behavior as he courts Stephanie. Hard-working, good-natured, and willing to sacrifice his
own desires and ambitions for the greater good of his small-town Maine community, he’s
a likeable hero but not at all a credible rake.

In both of these respects, Ivan Takes a Wife demonstrates how Evanovich struggles as a
romance writer. When her protagonists fall for each other and jump in bed with each
other so quickly, it’s hard to generate the kind of sexual tension that typically serves as
the primary engine driving a romance plot. And while she seems to feel compelled to rely
on stock romance-fiction conventions like the reckless womanizing hero, her use of these
conventions lacks conviction and therefore registers as a kind of strained effort to meet
readers’ expectations.

Evanovich is at her best, however, when she allows her irrepressible sense of humor and
her obvious affection for her characters to overcome her attempts to adhere to traditional
romance-lit formulas. While, as the author herself admits, her romance novels do usually
fall short when it comes to the steamy passion and emotional upheavals that draw so
many readers to romance fiction, all of her books do have moments of sweetly tender
romantic interaction and of savvy, witty, and sharply-observed insight.

And if Evanovich has not been as successful, or as comfortable, as a romance writer as
she has been with other genres, it is nevertheless apparent that her experience writing
series romance has informed her subsequent novels in ways that have contributed to those
novels’ success. For one thing, she says, it helped her know “a lot about the sort of
heroine I liked” (readersroom.com); for another, all the struggle she went through trying
to graft romance, adventure, mystery and comedy together while working within the
confines of the romance genre was clearly instrumental in shaping the distinctive voice
and genre-transcending style of her current work. And, she says, even as she has in many
respects moved beyond romance writing, she still has a lot of respect for its merits: “I
think I didn’t alienate my romance readers,” she remarks to likesbooks.com, because it’s
obvious I love and respect them. I might poke fun at my own shortcomings as a romance
author but I would never trash the genre. I’m proud of the romance elements in my
books, and I’m still a big romance fan.”

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*The GrandFinale* (New York: Bantam Loveswept #254, 1988);
*Thanksgiving* (New York: Bantam Loveswept #289, 1988);
*Manhunt* (New York: Bantam Loveswept #303, 1988);
*Full House*, as Steffie Hall. (New York: Berkeley Second Chance at Love #456, 1989);
revised and reprinted, (New York: St. Martin’s, 2002);
Ivan Takes a Wife (New York: Bantam Loveswept #343, 1989); revised and reprinted as Love Overboard. (New York: HarperCollins, 2005);
Foul Play, as Steffie Hall (New York: Berkeley Second Chance at Love #466, 1989);
Smitten (New York: Bantam Loveswept #392, 1990);
Wife For Hire (New York: Bantam Loveswept #422, 1990);
The Rocky Road to Romance (New York: Bantam Loveswept # 460, 1991; reprinted, New York: HarperCollins, 2005);
Naughty (New York: Bantam Loveswept #537, 1992);
One for the Money (New York: St. Martins, 1994);
Two for the Dough (New York: St. Martins, 1996);
Three to Get Deadly (New York: St. Martins, 1997);
Four to Score (New York: St. Martin’s, 1998);
High Five (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999);
Hot Six (New York: St. Martin’s, 2000);
Seven Up (New York: St. Martin’s, 2001);
Hard Eight (New York: St. Martin’s, 2002);
Visions of Sugar Plums (New York: St. Martin’s, 2002);
Full Tilt, coauthored with Charlotte Hughes (New York: St. Martin’s, 2003);
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Full Speed, coauthored with Charlotte Hughes (New York: St. Martin’s, 2003);
Ten Big One (New York: St. Martin’s, 2004);
Full Blast, coauthored with Charlotte Hughes (New York: St. Martin’s, 2004);
Metro Girl (New York: HarperCollins, 2004);
Full Bloom, coauthored with Charlotte Hughes (New York: St. Martin’s, 2005);
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Leslie Haynsworth
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Beverly Jenkins (15 February 1951-

Beverly Jenkins has established herself as a writer of historical romance, specializing in the African American experience. Since 1994, her novels have explored relationships between enslaved and free blacks across the United States. In the process, she has probably also revised what readers think they know about Black History, especially in the all-black towns of the Southwest and her native Michigan. In recent years, she has turned her attention to the genre of contemporary romantic suspense. Born February 15, 1951, in Detroit, Michigan, Beverly Hunter Jenkins is the eldest of seven children of Delores, an administrative assistant, and Cornelius Hunter, a high school science teacher. After graduation from Cass Technical High School, Jenkins attended Michigan State University where she majored in Journalism and English Literature. She met and married fellow student Mark Jenkins (d. 2003). They are the parents of two children, a son and a daughter. Although Jenkins left Michigan State without receiving her degree, she continued to work in the graduate school library. She also co-founded a theater company at the university.

Jenkins began writing in elementary school when in fourth grade she edited the school newspaper. However her love of reading and writing originated in her home. Her parents encouraged academic achievement in their children, filling their home with books. Jenkins credits her mother for her interest in African American history and her grandfather with her fascination with the West. As a child, she included Zane Grey, Louis L’Amour, and Isaac Asimov among her favorite authors. With the encouragement of her husband, Jenkins, who had earlier experimented in writing poetry, began work on her first novel, a historical romance. "History books have a tendency to say we didn't exist," Jenkins said in a 1995 People Magazine interview. "It's always black people came to America, black folks were slaves, black people were freed in 1865. Then we disappeared. History picks us up again rioting in Watts in 1965. But what happened in those 100 years?" Jenkins' novels explore some of the possible answers to her question.

Although several of her novels are set before the Civil War, most of Jenkins' historical romances during the late 1800s and explore the lives of African Americans after Emancipation. Her female protagonists are usually independent women in their 30s. Their love interests are strong men who come to appreciate a corresponding strength in women. Her contemporary fiction follows the same pattern. Jenkins' novels also occasionally feature repeat characters. That is, minor characters in one novel take center stage in another.

Her first novel, Night Song (1994), took 13 years for Jenkins to complete. Published by Avon Books, the novel was an alternate Book of the Month Selection for both the Doubleday Book Club and the Literary Guild and established Jenkins' reputation, allowing her to quit her job and devote herself to full-time writing. Set in Kansas in 1882, the novel recounts the twists and turns of a romance between schoolteacher Cara Lee Henson and "Buffalo Soldier" Chase Jefferson, a member of the all-Black Tenth Calvary. The novel's setting is one of the towns settled by former slaves and free Blacks who
moved into the Western Territories after Reconstruction gave way to a rise in anti-Black violence in the South. Some of Jenkins' research is detailed in an author's note including a bibliography at the end of the novel, a feature that she would continue in subsequent works. While at times the history overwhelms the story, Jenkins' strong-willed heroine and noble hero constitute unique variants on the stock characters of American historical romance. They set the model for characters in her successive ventures in the genre.

*Vivid* (1995) details the romance between Dr. Viveca, "Vivid," Lancaster and Mayor Nate Grayson, a veteran of the Civil War. The novel's setting is the all-Black town of Niles, Michigan, in 1876. Jenkins uses the romance to explore such issues as the changing status of women at the end of the nineteenth century, the roles of Black women in the elevation of the race, relations between Blacks and Native Americans, and the relationship between Blacks and the Republican Party. The heroine's mixed-racial heritage (Her mother is a descendant of California's original Spanish settlers) introduces another common element in Jenkins' work. Jenkins also includes a sub-plot involving Nate's Aunt Abigail.

*Indigo* (1996) picks up the story of two characters introduced in *Vivid*, Hester (Wyatt) and Galen, formerly Caleb, Vachon. When the novel opens, Hester is an underground railroad station master in 1858 Michigan. Galen Vachon is "Black Daniel," a legendary slave stealer. The historical background is the workings of the Underground Railroad that enabled the escape of slaves to Canada through Northern free states. The book takes its title from the blue-stained hands of the female protagonist, outward manifestations of her slave heritage on a Carolina indigo plantation. Although she has free papers, she, like other free Blacks in the United States, is endangered by the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act and the ruling in the Dred Scott case. (Any Black person could be enslaved on the word of any white person in the absence of evidence to the contrary.) The mixed-race Creole heritage of the male protagonist provides another complication on the road to the novel's happy ending.

In *Topaz* (1997), Jenkins turns to a tale of the American West. A romance between an investigative journalist Katherine Love and a United States Marshall Dix Wildhorse, a Black Seminole, plays out on a wagon train of mail-order brides headed to an all-Black town in Kansas. Wildhorse is returning to his duties in the Western Indian Territories and, as best friend of the wagon master Jackson Blake, agrees to be the wagon train's guide. Love is escaping an investigation gone bad. Nineteenth century financial swindles, mistreatment of Native Americans, and women's roles are the issues that Jenkins begins to weave more seamlessly into her love story in this work.

*Through the Storm* (1998) picks up the story of Raimond Le Veq, best friend to Galen Vachon of *Indigo* and tells the story of his courtship and marriage to Sable Fontaine, a former slave of mixed-race (and royal African) heritage. The setting is Civil War Georgia and post-war New Orleans. The plight of freed slaves during and after the war provides the backdrop for the love story. The work of the female protagonist with orphaned children enables Jenkins to introduce her usual history lessons.
In The Taming of Jessi Rose (1999), Jenkins returns to the West, this time Texas in the 1880s. Dix Wildhorse of Topaz, sets in motion the novel's story of the redemptive power of love. Convicted train robber Griffin Blake is released from prison, sworn in as a marshall, and sent by Wildhorse to Texas to investigate the death of the father of Jessi Rose Clayton, a widowed former schoolteacher attempting to hold on to the family ranch for her orphaned younger brother. (Blake is the adopted brother of the wagon master in Topaz.) The reluctant hero enlists the assistance of some outlaw friends, also deputized. The schoolboy status of Jessi Rose's brother enables the author to introduce some of her history lessons as she unfolds her story of love and redemption for not only the outlaw hero but also for a heroine of less than virtuous reputation.

In Always and Forever (2000), Jenkins provides her readers with the story of the romance of two other characters introduced in Topaz, wagon master Jackson Blake and wagon train organizer and banker Grace Atwood. The female protagonist has been left at the altar by a cad who has found a wealthier bride, and the male protagonist is a former sheriff who has been accused, unjustly) of murdering the wealthy white landowner responsible for the death of his father. Jenkins works out the conflict between Blake's desire for vengeance and his love for Grace Atwood as she moves the plot between nineteenth century Chicago, Kansas, and Texas. In the process, she explores further her interests in the lives of late nineteenth-century, independent Black women as well as the experiences of free Blacks in a world of growing anti-Black violence. Elements of suspense combine with the romance as the novel works its way to its conclusion.

Before the Dawn (2001), set in the late 1800s, tells the story of Leah Barnett, a Boston tavern owner, and Ryder Damien, a Colorado businessman. Barnett is of Black British parentage and illegitimate, and Damien is the illegitimate son of a Creole father and Native American mother. The plot is set in motion when Barnett marries Louis Montague just before his death. As her late mother's lover of almost 30 years, he wishes Leah to inherit his wealth. Damien is his son. Leah travels to Colorado to claim Montague's estate where she discovers that has left enemies, rumors of murders, a legitimate son, and challenges to his estate. Race relations, corporate corruption, and intra-racial prejudices are some of the issues forming the backdrop of the romance. As much novel or romantic suspense as it is an historical romance, this work is evidence of Jenkins' growing strength as a storyteller.

In A Chance at Love (2002) Jenkins brings back the lady gambler Lorelei Winters from Topaz and Always and Forever. The entreaties of charming seven-year-old twin girls bring Lorelei together with their uncle Jake Reed, the local veterinarian and chief organizer of a farmers' union. The girls are looking for a mother, and their uncle believes that the orphaned daughters of his only sister need a woman in the house. The independent and unconventional Lorelei does not fit the ideal he has in mind, but of course opposites attract. The hazards of labor organizing at the end of the nineteenth century form the core of this novel's history lesson.

In Winds of the Storm (2006), Jenkins returns to the post-Civil war New Orleans to tell the story of a former Union army spy. In what she hopes is her final mission, Zahra
Lafayette is posing as a madam to gather intelligence on organized anti-freedmen violence. Archer had been rescued by Zahra from Confederate imprisonment during the war, and they are re-united while Zahra is under cover. (Archer is the youngest brother of Raimond LeVeq of *Through the Storm.* ) The couple’s courtship and marriage plays out against the backdrop of white supremacist campaigns at the end of Reconstruction.

*Wild Sweet Love* (2007) re-introduces Teresa July, sister to the outlaw July brothers who first appeared as secondary characters in *The Taming of Jessie Rose.* Teresa, who first made a cameo appearance in *Something Like Love,* meets her love, Madison Nance, who first appears *A Chance at Love.* The setting moves from post-Reconstruction Philadelphia to Kansas as the apparently mis-matched pair battle misunderstandings and Teresa’s parolee status to their happy ending.

*Jewel* (2008) returns us to Grayson’s Grove, the setting of *Vivid.* The Crowleys and the Graysons have played prominent roles in Jenkins’ Michigan stories. Eli Grayson is owner/editor of the bankrupt town newspaper and acting mayor. When a prospective funder, who wants to fund the re-opening of the paper, comes to town, he announces that he expects his editors to be married men. Eli proposes to his mother’s spinster step-daughter, Jewel Crowley that she pretend to be his wife. The sham marriage becomes an actual one, but the relationship is troubled when Eli’s philandering past comes back to haunt him. A past relationship and a murder complicate the couple’s efforts to admit their mutual love. Jenkins’ portrait of the intrigues of life in the small, black town are highly entertaining. The murder is solved and the marriage woes resolved before the absent mayor and his wife (protagonists of *Vivid*) return to town.

In 2002, Jenkins published the first of her historical romances for young adults, *Belle and the Beau,* alaso set in her home state of Michigan. *Belle and the Beau* is a story of young love. Sixteen-year-old Belle Palmer is a runaway slave who takes refuge with the Best family when she is separated from her father in the escape. Daniel Best, the son of the family, soon finds himself diverted from his more conventional love interest. Jenkins offers up her usual mixture of love story and history lesson with somewhat less spice for younger readers. In 2003, Jenkins published a second historical romance for young adults. *Josephine and the Soldier* focuses on the adventures of Daniel's seventeen-year-old sister Josephine "Jojo" Best who has returned to Michigan from college to open her own business, a hair salon. The love story is paired with the story of Jojo's determination to be an independent "modern" woman even as she face courtship from two Civil War soldiers. How she finally chooses her brother's best friend Adam Morgan is the core of the story.

In 2004, Jenkins published *The Edge of Midnight,* the first novel of a trilogy set in the present in version of twenty-first century Detroit. Thirty-three -year-old Sarita Grayson directs an under-funded community center in a building from which she faces imminent eviction. Forty-year-old Mykal Chandler is a former Special Forces agent and successful architect who has a hidden life as leader of a cadre of anti-drug crime fighters called NIA (Purpose in ki-Swahili). Sarita is a neighborhood activist and 21st century model of Jenkins' usual strong-willed independent women. (In fact she is a descendant of Dr.
Vivica Lancaster and Nick Grayson, the protagonists of Vivid. Mykal is one of three half brothers descended from Galen Vachon of Indigo.) The two are brought together when Sarita is "persuaded" to steal some diamonds from a man Mykal is pursuing in his undercover life. The novel of romantic suspense is interlaced with Jenkins' social commentary on urban crime, gang violence, corporate corruption, and other social ills. Jenkins uses the device of a "marriage of convenience" that evolves into true love artfully.

In The Edge of Dawn (2004), Jenkins gives us the story of Galen Anthony St. Martin, known as Saint, the foster brother of Sarita Grayson and youngest half-brother of Mykal Chandler. Saint is a former mercenary who now works undercover and reports directly to the president. His love interest is Narice Jordan, age 37, a former businesswoman, now owner and director of a private school in Baltimore. The two meet when Narice returns to Detroit to bury her father who has died in a fire. Again, the novel's setting is not quite the present (There is an African American President of the United States). The novel's plot revolves around the search for "The Eye of Sheba," a blue diamond pendant that is the symbol of a North African country. A quilt made by Narice's aunt enables the couple to locate the gem. The hunt for the diamond occupies more of the story than the romance between Saint and Narice; however, Jenkins is able to resolve both by novel's end.

Black Lace (2005) is the third novel of Jenkins' contemporary trilogy. Lacy Green is the newly-hired assistant director of Detroit's Environmental Protection Department. Drake Randolph is not only mayor of Detroit but also a physician and half-brother of Mykal Chandler and Saint St. Martin. They meet when Mayor Randolph's driver sideswipes Lacy's car during a snowstorm. The romance develops alongside Detroit's struggle against an epidemic of illegal dumping. NIA makes a repeat appearance in the on-going anti-drug wars. A corrupt politician is behind both evils. Jenkins fills in the blanks about the parentage of all three of the Vachon descendants, but we are left to wonder about whether the mayor will campaign for a second term.

NIA agent Max Blake takes center stage in the 2006 thriller Sexy/Dangerous. Assigned to protect the government scientist Dr. Adam Gary, Max and Adam slowly discover their love for each other as they struggle to keep the scientist’s invention out of the hands of terrorists. In 2007, Jenkins introduced Max’s sister Jessi or JT, a sport’s agent. JT meets Reese Anthony, a former police officer and attorney, but mistakes him for a truck driver when he rescues her after her car breaks down on the Los Angeles freeway. They are brought together again when JT becomes the target of mobsters involved in sports corruption and gambling. Jenkins does some of her usual interlinking of texts. The Black sisters are descendants of Grace Atwood Blake and Loreli Winters Reed of Topaz, Always and Forever, and A Chance at Love while Reese Anthony is a descendant of the LeVeq Brothers of Through the Storm and Winds of the Storm.

In all of her novels, Jenkins combines her interest in nineteenth-century African American history with warm stories of love between strong female and male characters overcoming obstacles of race and class. Her mix of romance and suspense enlivens her plots. Thus far, her venture into contemporary-era novels follows the pattern established
in her historical ones. However, as the first African American writer since Frank Yerby (1916-1991) to establish a reputation as an author of American historical romance, Beverly Jenkins today stands alone.

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Vivid (New York, Avon, 1995);
Indigo (New York, Avon, 1996);
Topaz (New York, Avon, 1997);
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The Taming of Jessie Rose (New York, Avon, 1999);
Always and Forever (New York, Avon, 2000);
Before the Dawn (New York, Avon, 2001);
A Chance at Love (New York, Avon, 2002);
Belle and the Beau (New York, Harper, 2002);
Josephine and the Soldier (New York, Harper, 2003);
The Edge of Midnight (New York, Harper, 2004);
The Edge of Dawn (New York, Harper, 2004);
Something Like Love (New York, Avon, 2005);
Black Lace (New York, Harper) 2005.;
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LaVyrle Spencer’s prolific and highly successful twenty-one-year career as a novelist began characteristically, with an historical romance (*The Fulfillment*) that became a popular sensation. Her twenty-three novels perhaps owe their commercial and critical success to Spencer’s trademark commitment to creating characters – and especially heroines – who are attractive, likeable, and yet flawed and very human. Even more than the often highly detailed and conscientiously researched settings of her historical and contemporary novels, it is these characters and their typically honest, believable interactions that made her one of the publishing world’s superstars of the 1980s and 1990s.

LaVyrle Kulich was born in Browerville, Minnesota, on 17 August 1943, living there until the age of nine, and this small town, shaped by the values and customs of surrounding family farms and immigrant enclaves, would become the precise setting for her first and last (*Then Came Heaven*) novels, while the larger Minnesota/Dakota region would provide the environment for several more in between. Her parents, Louis Joseph Kulich and Janet Adamek Kulich, facilitated Kulich’s connection to what appear to be two of the most formative influences on her later writing: exposure to her extended Polish-Bohemian families and unlimited access to Hollywood films. The daughter of a carpenter, Kulich never lived on a farm, but she frequently visited her aunt’s farm, where she learned about a lifestyle from an earlier time, complete with kerosene lanterns, outhouses, and feather ticks. As she explains in a letter to her readers from one of her last books, Kulich also reveled in the inclusiveness, ethnic food, and social interaction the big Bohemian family provided. In an interview with *Contemporary Authors* in 1981, Spencer characterized her parents’ marriage as “unhappy,” and she credits a childhood spent in dark movie houses watching love stories, dramas, and comedies of the 1950s with shaping her concepts of compelling relationships. Despite marital tension between her parents, however, Kulich appears to have enjoyed an early childhood also typified by warmth and modest pleasures, proudly attending St. Joseph’s School in well-starched, homemade dresses and living in a house with an open-door policy, where family friends and neighbors invited themselves in for coffee and conversation.

After an adolescence she described as “transient,” Kulich spent the last two years of high school in Staples, Minnesota. She had plans to attend college and train to become an English teacher, but instead the nineteen-year-old married Dan Spencer on 10 December 1962. Spencer has claimed never to have regretted her decision to forego higher education, and it seems to have had no negative ramifications for her later writing career. Spencer and her husband, an estimator for a general contractor, had two daughters, Amy Elizabeth and Beth Adair.

Working first as a seamstress, from 1969 through 1972 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and then as an instructional aide at Osseo Junior High in Osseo, Minnesota from 1974 through 1978, in her early thirties Spencer began laying the groundwork for her first
novel, *The Fulfillment*. After reading Kathleen Woodiwiss’s *The Flame and the Flower*, the 1972 surprise hit that dramatically expanded the American market for paperback romances, Spencer was inspired to analyze what elements would, for her, constitute the perfect love story. In the midst of this, she began repeatedly dreaming the plot of what would become *The Fulfillment*. She told *Contemporary Authors* that after once again dreaming of its plot in its entirety in June of 1976, she finally “decided to give it reign: I got up and started putting it on paper.”

Spencer’s dream took shape in the early-twentieth-century love triangle of Mary Ellen, Jonathan, and Aaron Grey. In Moran Township (later known as Browerville), Minnesota, husband Jonathan and wife Mary have struggled their entire marriage with infertility. In 1910, after seven years of frustrated attempts, Jonathan suggests the unthinkable — that his brother, Aaron, attempt to sire a child with Mary. Children, and particularly sons, are crucial to the future of their small family farm, and it appears that it is Jonathan’s devotion to the land, rather than any empathy for his wife’s sadness over her childlessness, that leads him to ask his wife and unmarried brother to “breed.”

Despite their initial revulsion at Jonathan’s idea, Mary and Aaron do consummate their relationship, not out of obedience to or compliance with Jonathan’s wishes, but instead because they realize their past intimacy and friendship as siblings-in-law has grown into sexual attraction and romantic attachment. Aside from the obvious complications of Mary’s being married, in a time and place that made divorce an unrealistic option, and of communal adultery and incest taboos against her relationship with her husband’s brother, the lovers’ situation is further problematized by the following elements: Aaron’s understood engagement to Priscilla, the daughter of a neighboring farmer; the joint ownership of the Gray farm by the two brothers, with Aaron’s owning the farmhouse and Jonathan deeded the land; Mary’s becoming pregnant after her liaison with Aaron and then delivering a daughter, Sarah, rather than the hoped-for son and heir; and Jonathan’s blaming his brother for his own infertility because of a shared case of mumps in childhood.

Spencer employs several themes and motifs in *The Fulfillment*, most notably in the characters’ connections with the seasonal cycles on the farm. Life on a farm is dictated by the seasons, with they and not the farmer controlling the timeline of planting, cultivating, and harvesting, but Spencer forges a much deeper symbolic connection in her novel. At first painfully and ironically, and then directly, Mary’s physiological state is contrasted to and then reflected in what is happening in the physical world around her. Similarly, her husband Jonathan carefully follows the growth and sexual maturation of his prized bull calf, Vindicator, carrying on long conversations with the Angus about how he will soon be fertilizing cows and creating offspring, an experience of the natural cycle Jonathan will only be able to experience vicariously, whether through his bovine friend “Vinnie” or his brother Aaron.

Spencer’s title resonates more completely with her first text than many of those of her later novels, as it refers not only to the sexual fulfillment Mary Gray finally discovers with her brother-in-law, but also, and just as importantly, to the romantic fulfillment she
finds with Aaron, a man who feels more than mere respect for her, and the biological and emotional fulfillment she realizes in pregnancy and motherhood, with her formerly static, childlike body altering and her circumscribed life expanding dramatically.

The barrier to Mary’s complete fulfillment, the obstacle to her total happiness, becomes her husband Jonathan, and when she is widowed by a confluence of natural and animal-husbandry-related events, the result is satisfying to the reader from standpoints of plot as well as theme. When the Minnesota weather unpredictably turns dangerous, Jonathan’s first thought is, of course, of his beloved Angus stud, Vinnie. In attempting to save the bull from a tornado, Jonathan is trampled to death, beaten into the loamy ground he loves by Vinnie’s hooves. Mary’s path to a love-match marriage and legal union with the biological father of her daughter is thus cleared by the whirling, destructive, and yet cleansing path of the tornado as well as by her husband’s obsession, the Angus with the burgeoning procreative power.

*The Fulfillment*’s immediate popularity upon its 1979 publication surely owes something to the fully realized world Spencer crafts, with details of early-twentieth-century farm life gleaned from her own childhood experiences and from the recollections of her grandmother, Bessie Adamek. Spencer dedicates *The Fulfillment* to her maternal grandmother, and the meticulously but not stiltedly recreated lifestyle Spencer depicts, from laundry duties to primping procedures, is a testament to the combined power of Adamek’s memories and Spencer’s descriptive abilities.

Spencer’s sophomore effort, *The Endearment* (1982), initiated her into the world of critical success, winning for her the Romance Writers of America’s Historical Romance of the Year award. Set in the Minnesota Territory in 1854, *The Endearment* details the development of a marriage founded on misrepresentations, awkwardness, and ignorance. Anna Reardon and her brother James perpetrate a fraud against Karl Lindstrom, a Swedish immigrant who finds Minnesota a land of plenty but who, suffering from loneliness on the predominantly male frontier, solicits a mail-order bride. After representing Anna as older, literate, Catholic, virginal, and domestic, Anna and James succeed in convincing Karl to invite her to leave Boston and join him in the west. Almost immediately, Anna’s lies begin to be exposed, and a tenuous natural attraction is repeatedly jeopardized by Karl’s disappointment in each new revelation. Most troubling to him is his wife’s sexual history: the daughter of a prostitute, Anna, too, has once exchanged sex for money.

Much as in *The Fulfillment*, in *The Endearment* Spencer crafts vivid and historically accurate environments for her realistically drawn characters to inhabit. Since both Anna and James are city-bred and ignorant of rural ways and basic survival skills in the wilderness, Spencer can handily allow her knowledgeable Karl to educate the modern reader and the new members of the Lindstrom family simultaneously. While the Reardons learn about building fires and log homes, Karl must learn about building relationships and practicing forgiveness. Dangers range from the life-threatening to the emotionally destructive, with the unorthodox family facing scavenging bears, predatory...
wolves, and cougars, as well as blinding pride, moral inflexibility, and sexual jealousy, generally stirred by the picture-perfect Johanson family’s attractive adult children.

Readers might find especially refreshing Spencer’s creating, in Anna, a heroine who is neither breathtakingly beautiful nor a paragon of any particular virtues or accomplishments. As Karl begins to realize that his ideal mate is not the blond, Swedish, even-tempered, and domestically-gifted woman he had always imagined, the reader, too, can appreciate and perhaps identify with Anna’s scrappiness and flaws.

With her third paperback novel, *Forsaking All Others*, published in October of 1982, Spencer ventures into a contemporary time period for the first time, telling the story of an ambitious photographer, Allison Scott, and her inability to fully trust a too-good-to-be-true model, Rick Lang. Spencer continues to utilize a familiar region, however, setting her novel in Minneapolis, Minnesota. With sly self-referentiality, Spencer opens her novel with a breakthrough assignment for Allison – shooting a lusty cover for a romance novel Allison finds herself absorbed in reading, although she bristles at the tidy, happily-ever-after ending and what she imagines will be its surefire appeal to women readers.

In 1983, Spencer’s *Hummingbird* and *A Promise to Cherish* were both published. In *A Promise to Cherish* (February 1983), Spencer again features a heroine whose eventual romantic happiness depends as much on her coming to terms with her own fears and shortcomings as on her meeting an appropriate partner. In this contemporary romance set in Kansas City, Missouri, Lee Walker is an estimator for a construction company. Spencer’s husband, Dan, worked as an estimator for a contractor, and she draws on this familiarity to depict a work environment at times hostile to the anomaly of a woman estimator. Lee has something to prove in her career, and she also feels both burdened by and proud of her Native-American ancestry. A business rival who calls her “Cherokee” would appear the last person to help Lee find professional and personal satisfaction, but Sam Brown answers her needs in a way she would never have expected.

*Hummingbird*, which went on to win its writer more accolades with another Historical Romance of the Year award (for 1984) from the Romance Writers of America, describes a decorous spinster’s inescapable attraction to the seemingly wrong man, an alleged train robber, despite the attentions of a much more suitable shoe salesman in 1870s Colorado. Even if the plot seems at times contrived, Spencer’s research shines through again, as Abigail McKenzie employs period folk remedies to care for her two potential love interests, entrusted to her care after a gunfight aboard a Rocky Mountain Railroad car, and as Jesse DuFrayne utilizes then-revolutionary photographic techniques and equipment to document the building of the railroad.

Three of Spencer’s novels were published in 1984: *Twice Loved*, *Sweet Memories*, and *The Hellion*. *Sweet Memories* and *The Hellion* are contemporary romances, with *Sweet Memories* set in Apple Valley, Minnesota, a suburb of Minneapolis, and with *The Hellion* venturing further afield, to Russellville, Alabama. *Twice Loved*, an historical romance, is set in New England in the late 1830s.
Twice Loved opens in the fishing community of Nantucket, Massachusetts, where Rye Dalton, presumed lost at sea, returns home after five years to discover his wife has remarried. The situation is further complicated because her new husband is Rye’s best friend, Dan Morgan. Desired by two men she loves and values for different but important reasons, Laura must choose between passion and loyalty, attraction and gratitude. Rye is the biological father of Laura’s son Josh, but Dan is the only father figure the young boy has ever known. Spencer captures the smells, sights, and customs of the early-nineteenth-century setting, incorporating such elements as seafaring men’s carving of whalebone to pass long voyages and the critical role a cooperage played in a port’s commerce.

Sweet Memories, perhaps one of the most poignant of Spencer’s early contemporary novels, sensitively explores the psychological trauma suffered by a twenty-six-year-old woman, Theresa Brubaker, who developed disproportionately large breasts at a young age. Although Theresa undergoes a physical and emotional metamorphosis with the help of corrective surgery and under the inspiration of the attentive Brian Scanlon, her brother’s best friend, Spencer, ever-cognizant of her readers’ tastes, is careful not to take her heroine’s transformation beyond belief into Cinderella territory. At the end of the novel, Theresa is still individual and flawed; the real change is that she accepts herself.

The Hellion centers on the relationship between a respected widow, Rachel Hollis, and her high-school sweetheart, Tommy Lee Gentry, a sybarite and the resident bad-boy of Russellville, Alabama. While Spencer’s use of the dialect and vernacular of the region sometimes rings false, seeming to draw more from filmic and televised sources than from life, her depictions of the physical surroundings and of the social environment of the time period are accurate and evocative. Rachel and Tommy Lee must contend with obstacles presented by their families and their town, convincing censorious parents and neighbors as well as rebellious children that they belong together. Much like heroines in Spencer’s other novels, in The Hellion it is the alcohol-abusing and hard-living Tommy Lee who must become someone he himself is comfortable with and proud of before he can fully realize happiness with Rachel, the woman he’s always regretted losing.

Alcohol abuse seems to have been a creative preoccupation for Spencer at this time, as her contemporary novel published in 1985, Separate Beds, features a heroine who is the product of a drunken, abusive home. College student Catherine Anderson, after a miserable childhood with a belittling, hateful, alcoholic father and a cowering mother, finds herself pregnant after a one-night-stand with Clay Forrester, a handsome, self-assured law student from an upscale suburb of Minneapolis. With her pregnancy, Catherine assumes value in her father’s eyes for the first time: he plans to use her as his free pass to all he feels he has been unjustly deprived of, from easy money to a fine house to an endless supply of liquor. In their attempts to satisfy Clay’s traditional, upright parents and to thwart Herb Anderson’s blackmail plans, Catherine and Clay discover their attraction extends beyond the one Fourth of July evening they first spent together. Clay and Catherine decide to marry, with the understanding that it will be a marriage in name only, one with a fixed expiration date. Between Clay’s sense that he has been cheated of the life he was meant to have and Catherine’s defensiveness and self-
protectiveness, the marriage appears to have little chance of success. Through Catherine’s pregnancy, the birth of their daughter, Catherine’s mother’s savage beating at the hand of her husband, and Clay’s exploration of the life he had planned, Catherine and Clay mature and begin to face the validity of their feelings toward one another. Spencer’s deft handling of these contemporary issues earned her Affaire de Coeur’s Silver Pen Award in 1985, and her dedicating the novel to her husband, Dan, “the best thing that ever happened in my life,” indicates that its characters and their eventual happiness were close to her heart.

Two of Spencer’s earlier titles, Forsaking All Others and A Promise to Cherish, were reissued in one volume, entitled A Heart Speaks, in July of 1986, and in the same year, Spencer’s latest novel, Years, was published. In this historical romance, Spencer chooses a location from the region she favors, setting the novel in 1917 North Dakota. She tells the story of Linnea Brandonberg, a first-time schoolteacher hired sight-unseen to manage a one-room schoolhouse in the isolated farming community of Alamo. A city-bred eighteen-year-old, Linnea is challenged by the environment, her students, and, most of all, by the man with whom she boards, Theodore Westgaard, the father of one of her pupils. Proving she is not, as the much-older Theodore accuses, a “hothouse pansy” becomes a guiding ambition for Linnea, and, similarly, as he begins to appreciate her more, for Theodore the priority becomes concealing his embarrassing illiteracy and his unseemly attraction to this girl his son’s age. Linnea’s trials do not end upon her wedding to Theodore: after becoming his wife, she must face natural and geopolitical forces beyond her control. By continuing the novel far beyond the ceremony and consummation of the marriage, Spencer simultaneously violates an understood tenet of the romance novel and ventures into an emerging sub-genre in which she will find continued popular success – women’s fiction.

Over 1987 and 1988, four of Spencer’s historical romances were published to great critical acclaim and commercial success. Also, in 1988, a one-volume version of three previously released titles (The Gamble, Years, and Separate Beds) was published by Jove under the title LaVyrle Spencer, a testament to her growing readership and reputation as well as the increasing economic heft of the Spencer brand.

The Gamble (1987), the Romance Writers’ of America 1998 RITA Award winner for Best Long Historical Fiction as well as an Affaire de Coeur 1988 Golden Certificate winner, follows the love story of Agatha Downing and LeMaster Scott Gandy from the Kansas frontier to a Florida spa town to a plantation in Mississippi. Spencer again crafts characters who are not the creatures of fantasy romance: while the handsome Scott is emotionally crippled by the mysterious deaths of his beloved wife and young daughter in the wake of the civil war, Agatha is physically disabled, limping around Proffitt, Kansas with a hip permanently injured by an abusive, drunken father. Scott earns his living in a glamorous if morally suspect way, running the profitable Gilded Cage Saloon, while thirty-five-year-old Agatha makes ends meet as a respectable but uninspired milliner. When a famous temperance leader recruits Agatha to pioneer Proffitt’s own local branch of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, Agatha becomes the target of hostility and threats in the prairie town, and she finds an unlikely protector in the form of one of those
she works to put out of business. The pair is drawn even closer by their unofficial foster parenting of a neglected little boy.

Spencer employs Scott’s neglected Mississippi plantation, Waverley, as a symbol of the growth and healing Scott and Agatha experience both individually and as a couple. When they, along with Scott’s ragtag band of musicians and former dancing girls, successfully transform the house into a tourist attraction and inn, they find they have created a home and community, a place where pasts and imperfections are forgiven and where a hopeful future seems possible.

Set in 1888 Wyoming Territory, Vows (1988) offers two love stories: the primary focus is on Emily Walcott, a Victorian-era young woman with trailblazing veterinary ambitions, and the choice she must make between her faithful fiancé, Charles, and the exciting, challenging new man in Sheridan, Tom; the secondary love story involves Emily’s father, Edwin, whose loyalties to his dying wife are tested when Mrs. Walcott’s free-thinking cousin, Fannie, moves to Sheridan to help out in the Walcott household. Edwin and Tom are business competitors with rival livery stables, and between Emily’s thirst for veterinary knowledge and experience and her determination to fill the role traditionally held by a son, Spencer crafts a well-researched and tightly constructed setting in which her love stories unfold. The passions Emily, Tom, Charles, Edwin, and Fannie attempt – with varying degrees of success – to repress and hold in check blaze out symbolically in a destructive and dramatic fire near the end of the novel. Spencer uses the fire and its aftermath to remind the characters and her readers of what aspects of life and relationships truly matter in the final analysis. Vows was awarded a Golden Certificate by Affaire de Coeur in 1988.

Morning Glory, published in 1988, was an important novel for Spencer in several ways. First and foremost, it was her first hardbound novel, and it also led to motion picture development deals and critical as well as popular success. Spencer told Inside Books that “the majority of authors dream about the day when they can go from paperbound to hardbound. It reaches a new audience; you make more money; there’s more prestige.” As Lauren Picker outlines in “New Shades in Pink Ink,” a Publisher’s Weekly article tracking the hardcover success of some romance writers, “the ingredients for crossing over into hardcover include a marquee-worthy name, a solid track record, and a commercial manuscript broad enough to appeal to readers who aren’t ordinarily moony for romance.” Spencer’s publishers trusted that her mass-market paperback success could be replicated, and her enviable record of hardbound bestsellers would bear out that faith.

Both winning the 1989 Golden Choice Award and garnering Hollywood’s attention, Morning Glory is an unconventional historical romance that incorporates more suspense and complex plot developments than most of Spencer’s novels while still featuring her strongest and most appealing gift – creating engrossing, realistic, and unexpected characters. Pregnant Elly Dinsmore, known around her small Georgia town as “crazy Elly” or “Crazy Widow Dinsmore,” struggles to raise her two sons in a run-down place that is part farm, part rubbish heap. Afraid to go into Whitney proper and hear the jeers
or bear the stares of the townsfolk, Elly keeps to her dead husband’s property, advertising for a husband in the local paper. Only an ex-convict newly hired and fired from the local sawmill shows any interest in the advertisement. Despite his conviction for murder, Elly trusts and takes care of Will Parker, and, in turn, he begins to transform her property into something trim, neat, and profitable. His affection for Elly and her sons lead the two to marry, and their feelings for each other turn into love, an emotion neither thought he or she would ever experience. Their relationship and home life are challenged by World War II, during which Will distinguishes himself with a Purple Heart and a promotion, and by the killing of a local waitress, a murder for which Will is framed. As a result of Will’s arrest, both Elly and Will must leave the warm, isolated cocoon they’ve created with their love and venture out into the wider world, facing and fighting public perceptions and personal fears.

*Morning Glory*’s critical success was widespread, as Spencer garnered a Golden Certificate and a Minnesota Writers Award for Favorite Book in 1989, and later she was awarded WIN’s Popular Fiction Readers’ Choice Award in 1991 in the Favorite Mainstream Historical Fiction Author category. The novel’s appeal was also appreciated by actress Deborah Raffin, who initiated *Morning Glory*’s later development into a motion picture in which she would star.

*Spring Fancy* (1989), a contemporary novel set in Minnesota, deals with weightier issues than its title might suggest. Winnie Gardner and Joseph Duggan meet when both are honor attendants in a wedding. Despite her impending marriage to Paul Hildebrandt, Winnie feels an irresistible attraction to Joseph. The more they are exposed to one another, the more they realize they share many common interests, and the passion, athleticism, and intensity Winnie finds in Joseph bring into greater relief her fiancee’s off-putting analytical detachment. Convincing herself that what she feels for the new man is real and not just a passing fancy relates to more than just possibly calling off her wedding – one in which her mother is even more heavily invested than she – it speaks to Winnie’s discerning her own priorities and learning about herself. Wisely, Spencer allots a tighter time frame and utilizes a less epic scale in *Spring Fancy* than in most of her novels.

In 1989 and 1990, Spencer’s overwhelming popular success did not overshadow her critical acclaim. For *Hummingbird*, Spencer earned a 1989 Golden Quill Award, and for *The Fulfillment*, she was given the Bronze Pen Award in 1989 and the Classic Award in 1990. Chain book retailer Waldenbooks named her its Outstanding Writer for 1990, and Spencer also won the praise of her peers, garnering the Romance Writers’ of America RITA Award for Members’ Favorite Book (for *Morning Glory*) and being inducted into their Hall of Fame.

With the publication of the hardbound *Bitter Sweet* in 1990, Spencer delved into the complex contemporary topics of marital infidelity and mid-life single motherhood. Maggie Stearn, devastated after the death of her husband in a plane crash and depressed by her recently empty nest, is inspired by an old high school friend to leave Seattle for her hometown, where she purchases an historic home and establishes a bed-and-
breakfast. Part of the attraction to Door County, Wisconsin is her high-school sweetheart, Eric Severson. Eric, too, returned home after time spent in a big city, but he has brought back with him his stunningly beautiful but self-centered wife, Nancy. Eric grows increasingly dissatisfied with his marriage, as Nancy refuses to consider starting a family and spends most of each week out of town on business, and he and Maggie begin a passionate and emotionally fulfilling affair. When Maggie finds herself pregnant rather than menopausal, her world becomes infinitely more complicated. Eric’s wife fakes a pregnancy and miscarriage to keep her husband trapped in the marriage he now finds burdensome. Maggie must face censure from her community and her family, with the small town watching the widow’s movements closely and her mother and college-aged daughter uniting in disapproval of the choices Maggie makes.

Spencer uses the restoration of Maggie’s historic inn, the Harding House, as a symbol of Maggie’s healing and rediscovering joy in her life. At first, it functions primarily as an outlet for her energies and a place to invest some of the money settled on her by the airline responsible for her husband’s death, but it comes to mean much more: as its quarter-sawn hardwood floors and brilliant Victorian-era exterior paint are returned to their former glory, Maggie learns which people and priorities nurture her spirit and makes changes and adjustments in her life and concerns accordingly. Both Maggie and Eric are granted second chances to find happiness, but Spencer makes clear that pain, difficulty, and personal action/choice are involved in the process.

Spencer’s sixteenth novel, Forgiving, published in 1991, explores complex psychological issues in the famously lawless town of Deadwood in 1870s Dakota Territory. Sarah Merritt, whose revered father has recently died, brings her printing press and a personal mission to Deadwood: she has tracked her younger sister Adelaide, a runaway, to this town, and she is determined to give Addie her share of the inheritance and learn why she left home with no explanations. Sarah, always the smart but plain sister, is wryly amused at her reception by most of the town’s populace; as the only single woman in Deadwood of marriageable age other than the prostitutes, she is treated royally by almost all the miners and businessmen. The notable exception is Noah Campbell, Deadwood’s marshal, with whom she clashes immediately, first encountering him at the whorehouse where her long-lost sister, under the name of Eve, entertains a long list of clients, including Noah. Before they can marry, Sarah must forgive Noah for his sexual history with her sister, but, more significantly, Sarah and Addie must come to terms with a dark family secret: Sarah’s beloved father molested Addie for years, and both daughters have to find ways to forgive themselves for his crime before they can find happiness and fulfillment in marriage.

Three Complete Novels: The Hellion, Separate Beds, Hummingbird, another hardcover three-in-one volume of Spencer’s previously released titles, was published in 1991, featuring one historical romance and two contemporary love stories. For her next new title, November of the Heart (1992), Spencer returns to the familiar environs of Minnesota for her story’s setting. In this New York Times-bestselling historical novel, she sets a rich girl/poor boy romance against the glamour and social claustrophobia of late-nineteenth-century Minneapolis and the wealthy resort enclave of White Bear Lake,
Minnesota. Lorna Barnett realizes her parents’ plan for her future revolves around marriage to the right man from the right family, and once she meets a handsome and ambitious house servant named Jens Harken, she chafes more than usual against their ideas of right and wrong, proper and unseemly. Always more independent and athletic than her parents think attractive or appropriate, Lorna finds a way to secure her father’s financial backing for Jens’ imaginative boat-building project, and she and Jens discover a passionate attraction to one another that is consummated before she leaves Rose Point Cottage, the Barnettts’ vacation home, for the winter. Lorna finds herself pregnant and quickly hustled off by her horrified parents to a convent to secretly bear her illegitimate child. Before Jens and Lorna can find happiness with each other, each must stand up to Lorna’s formidable father and the high society of White Bear Lake. Spencer’s descriptions of the boat-building process indicate extensive research, as she captures both sensory details such as the fragrance of steamed wood and sawdust and practical matters such as the peripheral framing and specialized equipment needed to craft a custom-built yacht.

Spencer’s reviews for *November of the Heart* were mixed, with a typical response coming from *Publishers Weekly*, whose reviewer finds the novel’s plot turns too “neat” and period language too “florid” and precious, but who praises Spencer’s “human and touching” characterizations.

In 1993, Spencer’s *Bygones* was published. In this contemporary romance, Spencer presents a couple forced together again by circumstances several years after their acrimonious divorce. Physical attraction remains strong between forty-year-old Bess Curran and her ex-husband Michael, but memories of slights, betrayals, and disappointments are often more powerful. Bess, now a successful businesswoman, and Michael, facing his second divorce, must interact and be at least civil to one another as their daughter reveals she needs their help in pulling together a wedding in only a few weeks and their continued support as she carries their first grandchild. Their path to reunion is troubled by their son Randy, whose recreational drug use and lack of ambition escalate when his experimentation with cocaine turns life-threatening. In addition to righting wrongs in their own relationship, Bess and Michael must try to grow and improve as parents as well. Keeping her novel grounded in reality, Spencer does not conclude with the remarriage ceremony of the Currans; instead, she adds a coda describing the challenges Bess and Michael face as Randy undergoes intensive drug therapy while continuing to live with his reunited parents.

*Family Blessings*, also published in 1993, is another contemporary novel set in Minnesota that treats complicated relationships and refuses to offer solutions or resolutions that are too pat. This *New York Times* bestseller, lauded by *Booklist* as a “moving” novel, details how shared loss and mourning can lead to an unlikely love affair. Lee Reston’s son Greg, a police officer, is killed, and his roommate and best friend Christopher Lallek tries to work through his own sorrow and help fill the void her son’s death has left in Lee’s life. Despite their age difference, Lee and Christopher discover common interests and an undeniable, if surprising, physical attraction. Lee’s daughter has a crush on Christopher herself, and this is only one of the family barriers to Lee’s and Christopher’s happiness,
as Lee’s sister and mother are also scandalized by her interest in a contemporary of her son’s.

Spencer’s publisher capitalized on her growing prominence, reissuing three of her older novels in a one-volume format: *Three Complete Novels: Years, Twice Loved, and Spring Fancy* was published in 1993. Spencer’s success became officially multimedia in 1993 and 1994, when the film version of *Morning Glory* was released and Spencer signed a multiple-picture deal with CBS television. *Morning Glory*, starring Hollywood notables Christopher Reeve (as Will Parker), Deborah Raffin (as Elly Dinsmore), and J.T. Walsh (as Sheriff Goodloe), thus holds the distinction of being Spencer’s first film and her first hardcover novel. In her 1994 deal with CBS, Spencer reserved executive producer rights over the future films to be developed.

In the midst of her great professional successes of 1993 and 1994, Spencer experienced major personal events. In June 1993, her daughter Amy held her wedding and reception at Spencer’s Victorian-style home in Minnesota. A few months later, Spencer and her husband Dan traveled to Camden, Maine to research *That Camden Summer* (1996). The next month, October of 1993, *Morning Glory* was released, and in November Spencer, along with the film’s star Deborah Raffin, promoted the film’s Minnesota release by lighting the world’s largest Christmas tree at the Mall of America. Both of Spencer’s parents died during this two-year period, tempering the joy of her achievements.

*Home Song*, published in 1994, joined the ranks of Spencer’s bestselling novels and also would be developed into a television movie. Spencer’s publisher, Putnam, promoted her novel with a nationwide television advertising campaign in January of 1995. The novel’s unusual premise generated great reader interest, and *Home Song* was a Main Selection for both the Literary Guild and Doubleday. When high school academic and athletic standout Kent Arens transfers from Austin, Texas to Hubert H. Humphrey High in Minnesota, he does not expect to find his biological father, and especially not as his principal. As the truth is revealed, Tom Gardner must deal not only with a son he never knew existed but also with the fallout of his family’s discovering that he was unfaithful to his wife of eighteen years the very week before their wedding. Claire Gardner, Tom’s wife and Kent’s new English teacher, fears her husband’s betrayal continues with Kent’s mother, the successful Monica Arens, and Claire’s jealousy, mistrust, and hurt further divide a family already shell-shocked. Spencer carefully explores the angst and confusion felt by Kent, his half-brother Robby and half-sister Chelsea, Tom, and Claire, developing a taut sense of drama that never missteps into melodrama. A *Publishers Weekly* review from 28 November 1994 calls the plot “predictable” but praises Spencer for her “warmly drawn” characters and their “realistic” dilemmas.

Six more Spencer titles were reissued in 1994 and 1995, first with the publication of *Three Complete Novels: Morning Glory, Vows, The Gamble* and then with *Three Complete Novels: The Endearment, Bitter Sweet, Forgiving*.

1996 was an active year for Spencer professionally, as one new hardcover title was published, three older ones were reissued in one volume, she was able to visit the set of
the latest television-movie version of one of her novels, and *Home Song* aired on television. *Three Complete Novels: Bygones, November of the Heart, Family Blessings* was issued in hardcover in 1996, and in July of that year Spencer flew to Regina, Saskatchewan for the filming of CBS version of LaVyrle Spencer’s “Family Blessings,” starring Lynda Carter as Lee Reston and Steven Eckholdt as Chris Lallek. Spencer’s friend and colleague from *Morning Glory*, Deborah Raffin, directed. Raffin also starred in LaVyrle Spencer’s “Home Song,” co-starring Lee Horsley and Polly Draper, which aired in 1996. Spencer’s new novel, *That Camden Summer*, became a bestseller.

Spencer dedicates *That Camden Summer* (1996) to her daughter Amy, son-in-law Shannon Kimball, and first grandson Spencer McCoy Kimball, and as the text of her dedication intimates, a concept of childhood as a time of unhampered exploration and discovery, of imagination and expression, and of happiness inevitably tempered by external events is at the center of *That Camden Summer* and of great importance to the mother and new grandmother. Recently divorced Roberta Jewett returns to her hometown of Camden, Maine in 1916, bringing nothing but three precocious daughters, nursing-school training, a few hundred dollars, and an attitude that is unconventional to say the least. The sleepy town is repeatedly set abuzz by her liberated choices, whether in relatively small matters such as how little attention she pays to her hair, clothes, and surroundings or in relation to larger issues such as her purchasing and driving an automobile, taking a job as a traveling nurse and health educator for the county, and allowing her daughters an unprecedented level of freedom and encouragement.

Thanks to her scandalous marital status, Roberta, although no beauty and not a young woman, attracts the attention and lascivious interest of almost every man she encounters in the town as well as the censure and mistrust of almost every woman. The most dangerous of these covert admirers is her brother-in-law, a successful realtor and respected businessman. Despite her repeated rejections, Elfred Spear is determined to turn their relationship sexual, and he eventually seizes the opportunity to rape her when her Model T breaks down on a deserted stretch of road. Although Roberta is too self-reliant and independent to believe she needs one, she finds a champion and would-be protector in the form of the contractor who has been hired to make her ramshackle old house habitable. Gabe Farley, a widower with a shy daughter, finds his initial fascination with the divorcee, the first Camden has ever seen, turning into troublingly real feelings of respect and attraction. The violent penance he exacts from Elfred after learning of the rape scandalizes the entire town and initiates a movement to have Roberta declared an unfit mother.

Spencer again utilizes the rejuvenation of a house to develop her text on two levels: in terms of plot, the close proximity forced on Roberta and Gabe by his intimate and near-constant presence in her house creates many opportunities for interaction and discovery, while symbolically the rehabilitation of the house from derelict and town eyesore into a functioning home (if hardly a showplace) mirrors Roberta’s slowly changed status in her community and Gabriel’s changed perception of her.
Small Town Girl, Spencer’s penultimate novel, was published in 1997, and it went on to become her twelfth bestseller in as many years. In this Literary Guild Main Selection, Spencer bases her heroine, Tess McPhail, on country-music star Reba McEntire, and while some of the novel provides a window on the fast-paced world of Nashville recording studios, concert dates, and public appearances, much takes place in Tess’s hometown of Wintergreen, Missouri. It is in Wintergreen that she must reconnect with her siblings, mother, and high school acquaintances, and it is there that she finds love and begins to build her own non-traditional family, something she thought incompatible with her demanding career. Unlike so many of Spencer’s novels, where the renovation of a home reinforces relationship-building or transformative personal growth, in Small Town Girl the opposite is true: the static nature of Tess’s childhood home and her mother’s stubborn refusal to change anything about it, even a yellowed, curled plastic doily, eventually demonstrates to the singer that there is value to this other way of life, that change and difference are not always preferable. In a Booklist review, Melanie Duncan finds Spencer’s next-to-last novel less engaging than previous efforts but still considers it likely to be popular: “Although not as emotionally wrenching as past novels, expect high demand and start counting how many copies your library will need to meet it.” Rumors of a feature-film adaptation of the novel ran rampant, as reported in the 29 January 1996 Publishers Weekly, with Reba McEntire mentioned as the star of the proposed movie and also as the singer of its eponymous theme song.

With the submission of her manuscript of her twenty-third novel, Then Came Heaven, to her editor on 22 April 1997, Spencer’s retirement officially began. In a 29 September 1997 Publishers Weekly article, Spencer explained why she decided to leave the publishing industry while still achieving bestseller status with every new novel: “I want to be free!” She cited spending more time with her husband, children, and grandchildren as a major reason behind her choice, and she also intimated that she had attained a long-set financial goal. Then Came Heaven debuted at number eleven on the Publishers Weekly new fiction list, and the audiobook version of the novel, read by actor Amy Irving, was including among Publishers Weekly’s top picks of 1997.

Spencer consciously pays homage to her literary beginnings with her last novel, New York Times bestseller Then Came Heaven (1997). Returning to the setting of her first novel, The Fulfillment, her hometown of Browerville, Minnesota, Spencer captures a time and place she remembers well, centering much of the action at a parochial school in 1950 very reminiscent of St. Joseph’s, where she began grade school in 1950. Eddie Olczak, the school’s janitor, loses his wife in the first pages of the novel, when her car is hit by a train as she travels to her mother’s house to help can pickles. Krystyna Pribil Olczak’s unexpected death shatters Eddie’s world and leaves him with two grade-school-aged daughters. Sister Regina, the most compassionate teacher at their school, seems much more dramatically affected by Mrs. Olczak’s death than any of the other nuns, and while part of her sadness and despair stems from her love of the Olczak daughters, another part springs from an appreciation of and latent attraction to Eddie. Many barriers exist to a possible love relationship between Eddie and Sister Regina: he is still mourning the loss of his love and she has vowed celibacy and poverty; both could anticipate extreme societal censure, given their relative positions; her family would be
incensed by the perceived disgrace of her leaving the sisterhood; and she could be blackballed from any other parochial school teaching position if she were to leave the order. To become Jean Potlocki again rather than Sister Regina, Regina, like Eddie, has to confront inner conflict over perceived duties to God and self as well as cultural mores.

Mining her own memory provided the best research for Spencer’s last novel, as she could remember the smells of Toni home perms and the cultures and traditions of mid-century immigrant communities and incorporate these into her setting. Spencer more actively researched the rules and regulations of religious communities, endeavoring to make these details ring as true as those closer to her own experience.

Then Came Heaven is an appropriate text to close Spencer’s literary career, as it capitalizes on her greatest strengths as a writer, offering flesh-and-blood characters whose scale of action is small and intimate but whose tribulations and triumphs are deeply felt. Spencer conjures families and environments far from glamorous but, as a result, realistic and compelling. In fact, she seems almost to make a final stand against the popularly held stereotypes of romance and women’s fiction: both as a nun and after leaving her order, Spencer’s heroine Jean is plain and unstylish, more likely to be found with a dishtowel wrapped around her head than in sophisticated or fashionable clothing, and Jean’s love interest, the widower Eddie, is hardly dangerous or worldly, working as a janitor and enjoying the relatively pedestrian pleasures of beer and dancing at the community’s Bohemian Hall.

Spencer, after finding phenomenal success in mass market paperbacks as well as hardcover novels, spends her retirement in Minnesota with her husband Dan, where she enjoys hobbies such as gardening, sewing, and hosting Victorian-style teas. Even in retirement, her status as a commercial powerhouse remains undiminished, as in August of 1999 Harlequin paired her Sweet Memories with new writer Jan Freed’s One Tough Texan, counting on Spencer’s reputation to generate a market for this volume, one of four in the publishing house’s special Fiftieth Anniversary Collection. LaVyrle Spencer’s career blazed trails for a generation of authors to follow, as Susan Spano notes in her 14 December 1992 article in Publisher’s Weekly, “Flower Power:” “Authors like Sandra Brown, Judith McKnaught, Karen Robards and Nora Roberts are now regularly cited among hardcover fiction top sellers at the chains and a number of independents. Their paths were paved by romance writers who made the move to hardcover in the last decade – Danielle Steel, LaVyrle Spencer, Jude Deveraux, Janet Dailey, and Jennifer Blake, all of whom were long seen as the rare exceptions to the rule that romances work best in paperback.” The continued popularity of Spencer’s titles in the romance and women’s fiction categories demonstrates that more important to her readers than the historical significance of her achievements are her novels’ abilities to engross and entertain.

**BOOKS:**
*The Fulfillment* (New York: Avon, 1979);
*The Endearment* (New York: Pocket Books, 1982);
*Forsaking All Others* (New York: Jove, 1982);
*Hummingbird* (New York: Jove, 1983);
A Promise to Cherish (New York: Jove, 1983);
Twice Loved (New York: Jove, 1984);
Sweet Memories (Tarrytown, NY: Harlequin, 1984);
The Hellion (Tarrytown, NY: Harlequin, 1984);
Separate Beds (New York: Jove, 1985);
Years (New York: Jove, 1986);
The Gamble (New York: Jove, 1987);
Vows (New York: Jove, 1988);
Morning Glory (New York: Putnam, 1988);
Spring Fancy (New York: Jove, 1989);
Bitter Sweet (New York: Putnam, 1990);
Forgiving (New York: Putnam, 1991);
November of the Heart (New York: Putnam, 1992);
Bygones (New York: Putnam, 1993);
Family Blessings (New York: Putnam, 1993);
Home Song (New York: Putnam, 1994);
That Camden Summer (New York: Putnam, 1996);
Small Town Girl (New York: Putnam, 1997);
Then Came Heaven (New York: Putnam, 1997);

COLLECTIONS and EDITIONS:
A Heart Speaks (New York: Berkley, 1986), a one-volume edition of Forsaking All Others and A Promise to Cherish;
LaVyrle Spencer (New York: Jove, 1988), a collection of The Gamble, Years, and Separate Beds;
Three Complete Novels: The Hellion, Separate Beds, Hummingbird (New York: Putnam, 1991);
Three Complete Novels: Years, Twice Loved, and Spring Fancy (New York: Putnam, 1993);
Three Complete Novels: Morning Glory, Vows, The Gamble (New York: Putnam, 1994);
Three Complete Novels: The Endearment, Bitter Sweet, Forgiving (New York: Putnam, 1995);
Three Complete Novels: Bygones, November of the Heart, Family Blessings (New York: Putnam, 1996)

PRODUCED SCRIPTS:
Television:
The Fulfillment of Mary Gray, television, Picture Entertainment Corporation, 1989.
LaVyrle Spencer’s “Home Song,” television, Dove/CBS-TV, 1996.

Motion Picture:
References:


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Nora Roberts is the most prolific writer of romantic fiction of this century. According to Roberts's web site more than 294 million of her nearly 200 books are in print. A charter member of Romance Writers of America, Roberts has nineteen times been awarded a Rita by that organization for outstanding achievement in various sub-genres of romance fiction. Her novels have received awards from booksellers (B. Dalton and Waldenbooks), romance fiction publications (Romantic Times, Affaire du Coeur), and online romance communities (All About Romance, Romance Readers Anonymous), and RWA and Waldenbooks have recognized her with Lifetime Achievement Awards. More than 145 of her books have been bestsellers, many of them reaching the coveted number one position. Her books have been published in thirty-five languages. The Washington Post describes her as "the most successful romance novelist on Planet Earth."

Critics have for the most part been generous in their praise of Roberts's work, frequently noting her powerful storytelling, her likeable characters, and her witty dialogue. Nora Schoenberg, writing for The Chicago Tribune in April 2002 characterized reviews of Roberts's books as "good and sometimes glowing." The consistent quality of her writing, clever marketing by her publishers, and the unparalleled popularity she enjoys have enabled Roberts to move beyond the limits frequently imposed on writers of romance fiction and allowed her to enter the mainstream of popular fiction.

Son Dan was born in 1972, and a second son, Jason, followed in 1975. After Jason's birth, Roberts entered what she mockingly refers to as her "earth mother stage." A full time homemaker now, hungry for a creative outlet, she baked, canned, sewed, and invested hours in macramé and ceramics. She also started reading category romances. Roberts recalled in a 1997 interview with Kay Mussell, "Category romance novels were something I could devour during nap time. I could read a book, save my sanity, recharge." The transition from reader to writer began in the winter of 1979 when a blizzard struck Maryland. Roberts with her two small sons, then six and three, was trapped with only games of Candyland for entertainment. In desperation she started writing one of the stories running though her head. Sitting at her kitchen table, using a steno pad and a # 2 pencil, she wrote her first novel. In a 2004 address to the Romance Writers of America, Roberts related that her writing "began as a buffer against insanity and became, almost immediately, a dream."

Roberts later termed her first manuscript as "simply dreadful," a compendium of all the elements she had observed in her reading. But she persisted and within two years she had six manuscripts. Roberts submitted manuscripts to Harlequin, a company synonymous with romance novels. At first she received only standard rejection letters, so she was elated when a submission garnered a personal note from a Harlequin editor who termed Roberts's manuscript promising. A casual acquaintance told Roberts of a new publisher looking for romance manuscripts, and in 1980, Roberts submitted a manuscript to
Silhouette. Editor Nancy Jackson pulled Roberts's submission from the slush pile and called Roberts; their conversation resulted in *Irish Thoroughbred* (Silhouette Romance #81), published in May of 1981. Eleanor Robertson Aufdem-Brinke had become Nora Roberts, author.

*Irish Thoroughbred* shows both the influence of Roberts's category reading and her inclination to ignore convention. Heroine Adelia Cunnane, a virginal orphan newly arrived in the United States from Ireland, is nine years younger than hero Travis Grant, wealthy owner of Royal Meadows horse farm. So far Roberts is right in line with the formula that was making substantial profits for Harlequin. But Adelia Cunnane is also a hot-tempered, independent young woman with a job she finds meaningful and survival skills that have already been tested. Roberts thus established from the beginning her predilection for strong heroines who could take charge of their own lives.

Between 1982 and 1984, Roberts published twenty-four additional books, all but two for Silhouette. Her first four books of 1982 (*Blithe Images*, *Song of the West*, *Search for Love*, and *Island of Flowers*) were Silhouette Romances, the company's first and least sensual line. November 1982 saw the publication of Robert's first title for the Silhouette Special Edition imprint. This longer imprint, featuring more contemporary characters, became the Silhouette line that most frequently published Roberts's work. Her first Special Edition, *The Heart's Victory*, set in the world of racecar driving, was also her first award-winning novel, earning a Golden Medallion (later renamed the Rita) from the fledgling Romance Writers of America. The same year Roberts published *Melodies of Love* under the name Jill March. The story appeared in a now-defunct tabloid and has never been reprinted.

Roberts wrote eight books for Silhouette in 1983, including *Once More with Feeling* which helped launch a new Silhouette line, Intimate Moments, and two more Golden Medallion winners: *This Magic Moment*, the first of Roberts's novels to be adapted for film (*Magic Moments* aired on cable 19 March 1989) and *Untamed*, which boasted a lion-training heroine and a circus-owner hero. Roberts's name has come to be associated with connected stories during her more than twenty-year career, but, according to Isabel Swift, Vice President, Editorial, Silhouette, the concept was new in category fiction when *Reflections* and *Dance of Dreams* appeared in 1983. In *Reflections*, architect Seth Bannion and dance teacher Lindsay Dunne are brought together by Bannion's niece Ruth and her desire for ballet lessons. *Dance of Dreams* completes the story of Ruth Bannion, now a prima ballerina, and Nickolai Davydov, ballet company director and a secondary character in *Reflections*. Early in her career, then, Roberts was displaying the skill with linked stories that would become a trademark of her fiction.

Despite innovations, some of Roberts's early work is marked by the characteristics that prompted feminist critics to deride romance novels. *Tonight and Always*, another 1983 title, focuses on the relationship of Kasey Wyatt, a twenty-five-year-old anthropologist with an enviable reputation, and Jordan Taylor, a best-selling author who needs Kasey's help to complete his new book. In Kasey, Roberts creates an appealing character—intelligent, compassionate, and independent. Yet an encounter between Kasey and
hero becomes what romance readers euphemistically describe as a "forced seduction: "His hands were everywhere, pulling, tearing her clothes as she struggled against him." Ultimately Kasey "softens and surrenders," in the conventional manner for such encounters. Roberts insisted in an interview with Kristin Kloberdanz (Book 2002) that she believes her readers are astute enough not to confuse fiction and reality, but she admitted that such a scene would not appear in a current book. "I wouldn't play it that way now," said Roberts. "It's too lazy, and it's demeaning to both characters."

In 1984, Roberts enjoyed an even more prolific year. She published nine titles for Silhouette. Storm Warnings has Autumn Gallagher discovering a dead body; blackmail also becomes part of the plot. Roberts says this was her first genuine mix of mystery and romance. For the second consecutive year, Roberts received two RWA Golden Medallions: one for A Matter of Choice, her third in as many years for long contemporary, and one for Opposites Attract, the winner for short contemporary.

Promise Me Tomorrow (Pocket), Roberts's first single-title release, was also published in 1984 to little fanfare. Roberts herself said in response to a question on ADWOFF: A Day Without French Fries, her best known fan site, that calling this first attempt at mainstream publication a "mediocre book" was a generous estimation. Like Melodies of Love, Promise Me Tomorrow has never been reprinted.

Roberts's life reached a turning point personally and professionally in 1985. Her marriage to Aufdem-Brinke had grown troubled, with tensions exacerbated, Roberts has suggested, by her growing success; the couple was divorced in January 1985. Roberts hired local carpenter Bruce Wilder to build bookshelves, and the rest of their story sounds like romance fiction. Roberts was reluctant to re-enter the dating game, but Wilder was persistent. They were married 6 July 1985. "He brought order to our lives," Roberts told one reporter.

Marriage and family were the rule of the day in Roberts's fictional world as well, and in 1985 she introduced her readers to the Clan MacGregor, headed by patriarch Daniel, a self-made financier with a tender heart and a penchant for matchmaking. Linda Mowery of The Romance Reader describes Daniel as "one of the most memorable, finely drawn characters in category history." Playing the Odds, the first MacGregor book is the story of the MacGregors' only daughter, Serena, and part Comanche casino owner, Justin Blade. Thanks to The MacGregor's machinations. Justin and Serena meet, sexual tension is high, and their happy-ever-after is assured, although not without a few difficulties along the way. Roberts knows the conventions, and she fulfills her readers' expectations. Less predictably, she gives her readers an intelligent, strong-minded heroine who will settle for nothing less than a partnership. "Equal partners, Justin. . . . That's the only way you'll get me," Serena tells man-in-control Blade. Equal partners they become, both in the casino and in their relationship.

Roberts told Laurie Gold, owner of All About Romance, that Playing the Odds was originally planned as a single book, but Roberts fell in love with the MacGregors and felt compelled to tell other stories. Two months later the second MacGregor book, Tempting
Fate, paired Serena MacGregor's brother Caine with Justin Blade's sister Diana, a wounded protagonist with a fear of love, an almost obsessive need to maintain control of self and situation, and a fierce commitment to a career as the means to independence and purpose. This description could apply to hundreds of romance fiction heroes, but Roberts reverses the pattern. It is Diana who fears love and clings to the identity her profession gives her; Caine is a confident, generous-hearted charmer.

All the Possibilities, the third MacGregor book, added the Campbells to the MacGregor mix. Senator Alan MacGregor, a dedicated politician with presidential aspirations, falls for Shelby Campbell, daughter of a senator felled by an assassin's bullet. A self-described "potter by trade and merchant by whim," she is a free spirit devoted to her art, her silent parrot Auntie Em, and her one-eyed tomcat, Moshe Dayan. Alan courts the reluctant Shelby with strawberries, balloons, and a lavender stuffed pig. Eventually a Campbell storms the MacGregor castle and the MacGregors win a Campbell's heart. The 1985 MacGregor quartet ended in September with One Man's Art, the story of Shelby's brother Grant Campbell and artist Genevieve Grandeau, a cousin of the Blades.

Harlequin had purchased Silhouette in 1984, so Roberts's success with the MacGregors was achieved under the banner of the company who had rejected her five years earlier. However, her work in 1985 was not limited to the MacGregor quartet; she also penned six other novels, including Night Moves, her only title under the Harlequin Intrigue imprint and Partners, a Louisiana-set tale of two rival journalists that blended mystery and romance.

In 1986 Roberts published eight books and a novella. One Summer, the first of a pair of books involving employees of Celebrity Magazine, won a Golden Medallion from RWA. Affaire Royale introduces another of Roberts's family series, this one a royal family much like the Grimaldis of Monaco. Kidnapping, amnesia, a princess-bodyguard romance—all the elements are in place to make this novel just another formulaic romance, but Roberts, as reviewers consistently observe, can take hackneyed plots and redeem them through her vivid characterizations. The novella Roberts wrote in 1986 set a precedent of its own.

According to a Silhouette editor, Silhouette Christmas Stories 1986, which boasted Roberts's "Home for Christmas" as the lead story, was the first anthology of romance Christmas stories.

Roberts began 1987 on a familiar note. In February, Silhouette released For Now, Forever, the fifth book in the MacGregor series, dedicated to the author's own parents "in celebration of fifty years of marriage, five children, eight grandchildren, and one great-grandson." Roberts sets the prologue and epilogue of the book in the present in a hospital where the MacGregor clan gathers as Daniel fights for his life, but the novel quickly flashes back nearly forty years into the past when Daniel MacGregor was newly successful and looking for a proper wife. Instead he meets the blue-blooded Anna Whitfield, whose serene beauty belies a passionate nature and a fierce commitment to becoming a surgeon. In the earlier MacGregor books, Anna is little more than a wise background presence, but in For Now, Forever, she emerges as arguably the most
revolutionary heroine among Roberts's category romances, a feminist in an age before the word was coined. Daughter of socially prominent Boston parents who anticipate their daughter's following the traditional path for a young woman of her class, marrying well, producing heirs, and playing the social games that will advance her husband's career, Anna defies expectations by entering medical school where she is the only woman in her class. She defies Daniel MacGregor as well. When he scoffs that "being a doctor is a man's job," Anna replies, "I happen to believe there is no such thing as a man's job if a woman is capable of doing it." Like her daughter after her, Anna will agree to marriage only as a relationship between equals. "It was nice perhaps, in a story, to dream about white chargers and heroes, but a woman wanted more in real life. In real life, a woman wanted—well, a partner."

In a 1997 *All About Romance* interview, Roberts defined the power of her MacGregor books: "[T]hough each of the characters has a life of his or her own, the family roots are dug deep. These people care about what happens to each other." At the heart of the series is the family with all its steadfastness and continuity. Fittingly, near the end of *For Now, Forever* a new grandchild, Robert Campbell MacGregor, is born, a third grandchild for Daniel to enjoy. The MacGregors helped Roberts break more new ground in romance publishing when Silhouette reissued the first four MacGregor books to accompany Daniel and Anna's story. These "Special Plaid Editions" marked the first time Silhouette had reissued titles.

Roberts also continued the family story of the Cordina royal family in 1987, publishing *Command Performance* in which Eve Hamilton, a secondary character in *Affaire Royale*, and Alexander, crown prince of Cordina, battle terrorists and fall in love and *The Playboy Prince*, in which Alexander's younger bother Bennett, the title character, and Lady Hannah Rothchild, undercover agent, overcome danger to achieve their own happy ending. The Cordina series lacks the compelling characterization that made the MacGregor series so popular with Roberts's readers, but the synthesis of suspense and romance that Roberts used in the Cordina series and other categories, particularly those published under the Silhouette Intimate Moments imprint, would lead to even greater success as she ventured beyond the limits of category fiction.

In the six years since the publication of her first book Roberts had forged ahead of her peers in both the quantity and quality of her work. Between 1983 and 1987 she won six RWA Golden Medallions, four of them in the long contemporary category. This achievement led to her becoming the first writer to be inducted into the Romance Writers of America's Hall of Fame. Roberts' earliest attempt at single-title publication had been the one failure in her remarkable career. Amy Berkower, Roberts's agent since the first Silhouette contract in 1980, had urged caution, advising Roberts to build a solid fan base with her Silhouette novels before another try at mainstream fiction. Both author and agent felt the time was ripe, and in 1987 Roberts's first romantic suspense novel for Bantam was published.

From the opening sentences of *Hot Ice*, it is clear that Roberts has moved into another genre: "He was running for his life. And it wasn't the first time." The story of Whitney
MacAllister, "accustomed to affluence and deference" and Douglas Lord, who turned his back on his blue-collar background and a Princeton scholarship to become a thief and a con artist, opens with a car chase through Manhattan and then shifts to Washington, D.C. and then to Madagascar. The plot involves a kidnapping of sorts, Marie Antoinette's jewels, and bodies scattered along the way. Yet amid the improbable plot and the action-movie pace of the novel, Roberts's particular gifts shine. The dialogue is clever, the secondary characters are touchingly human, and the interaction between the protagonists is both sexy and tender. Hot Ice has "all the elements of great romantic suspense," said Darina Milovanovich, reviewer for AllReaders.com.

Roberts proved that she was capable of greater complexity with her second Bantam title, Sacred Sins, also published in 1987. Dr. Teresa "Tess" Court and Detective Ben Paris are decent but flawed characters. A Romance Review found them "intelligent, strong-willed people" and praised Roberts for presenting a police department that functions without corruption and with minimal political in fighting. In Sacred Sins Roberts repeats what she did so well in her category fiction. She gives the readers a vivid context for her protagonists. The reader sees Tess's loving relationship with the grandfather who brought her up and discovers the tragedy of Ben's Vietnam-veteran brother. Roberts also employs multiple points of view to give her reader access not only to the thoughts of the hero and heroine but also to the twisted mind of the killer and the broken spirit of a fourteen-year-old suicide, one of Tess's patients. She gives a name and a life to characters as diverse as Ben's sharp-shooting partner, a Black priest, a grieving mother, and the murder victims.

Roberts also carried the penchant for linked stories from her category to her single-title fiction. Brazen Virtue (1988), her third romantic suspense novel for Bantam, focuses on Ed Jackson, partner of Ben Paris in Sacred Sins. Jackson finds himself entangled physically, emotionally, and professionally with Grace McCabe, a successful mystery writer and sister of a murder victim with a double identity. Brazen Virtue won Roberts her first Golden Medallion in the suspense category, but Jane Jorgenson, reviewer for All About Romance, while praising the humor and "sparkle" of the protagonists' relationship, found the conflict limited and potential complexities unexplored.

Meanwhile, Roberts had not abandoned her category fans. She had six Silhouette publications in 1988 in addition to her first Harlequin Historical. She began the year with Local Hero, featuring Mitch Dempsey, creator of comic-book hero Captain Zack. The book includes an illustration of Captain Zack drawn by Roberts's son Dan. Roberts also added to two existing family series and introduced another. Irish Rose tells the story of Erin McKinnon, cousin to the heroine of Roberts' first book Irish Thoroughbred (1981), and Burke Logan, a gambler and a horse breeder. Rebellion helped to launch a new Harlequin imprint and offered Roberts' loyalists the story of the first Serena MacGregor set against the background of the Battle of Culloden.

The Last Honest Woman introduced the O'Hurley triplets and their lovable Irish family. It was Roberts's fiftieth title for Silhouette, and Roberts herself served as the cover model for Abigail O'Hurley Rockwell, the novel's heroine. In "The Romance of Writing," an essay she wrote for Kay Mussell and Johanna Tunon's North American Romance Writers
(1999), Roberts gives her take on what she calls "the constants of the genre": "the one man-one woman love story, the emotional commitment, the conflict, the sexual tension, and the happy ending." The Last Honest Woman possesses all of these ingredients. Abby Rockwell, a woman with secrets, and Dylan Crosby, a writer determined to uncover those secrets, experience a reluctant attraction to one another. Their conflicting positions and their slow surrender to love are predictable fare. However, Abby's combination of strength and vulnerability and Dylan's struggle to reconcile his growing love for Abby and her children with his professional integrity increase the novel's appeal, and the eccentric O'Hurley parents and Abby's children showcase Roberts's developing skill with secondary characters. Six-year-old Chris is ebullient and direct, always leading with his heart. Ben, older by two years, is more reserved, more aggressive, and more aware of life's shadows. Roberts also avoids formulaic writing in her creation of Chuck Rockwell, Abby's deceased husband, a self-absorbed racecar driver who "forgot . . . that he was human."

Roberts continued the O'Hurley series with Dance to the Piper, the story of Broadway star Maddy O'Hurley, another of Roberts's vibrant free spirits, and Reed Valentine, a rather stiff hero who shows up in other of Roberts's novel in his role as CEO of Valentine Records. Skin Deep centers on Chantel, the oldest triplet and the hungriest for fame, who has become a Hollywood star and a stalker's prey. She hires the abrasive Quinn Doran to protect her, and the two fight their way into triumph over the stalker and a happily-ever-after love. The latter two O'Hurley novels are entertaining, and the charm of the O'Hurley family wins praise from readers, but neither has the warmth and intensity of The Last Honest Woman, as is perhaps evidenced in its winning the Waldenbooks award for best selling long contemporary (series).

Roberts's total publications for 1989 included five novels and a novella for Silhouette, one historical romance for Harlequin, and Sweet Revenge, a fourth single-title romantic suspense for Bantam. Three of the category titles are connected. Jack in Loving Jack is romance writer Jackie MacNamera, another of Roberts's independent heroines, who finds her romantic hero come to life in architect Nathan Powell. Cody Johnson, Powell's partner, has the male lead in Best Laid Plans, and Lawless is the romance Jackie was writing in Loving Jack. Time Was marked Roberts' foray into time travel and showcases her underrated humor. Liberty Stone and her sister Sunbeam Stone, heroine of the companion book Times Change (1990), are the daughters of "counterculture parents" turned "respected artist and successful entrepreneur." The twenty-third-century heroes, Caleb (Time Was) and Jacob (Times Change) Hornblower, recall C. S. Forester's Horatio.

The following year was a slack one for the prolific Roberts, who published a mere four titles in 1990, one of those a novella. In addition to the second Hornblower book, her Silhouette titles include Without a Trace, the conclusion of the O'Hurley family saga, and Taming Natasha, the first book in a series about a Ukrainian immigrant family. Roberts, as she frequently does, reverses gender roles in Taming Natasha. Spencer Kimball's healing is almost complete when the novel opens. His love for his young daughter Frederica has redeemed him from a past that included emotionally and physically distant parents, a shallow marriage, easy success as a composer, and a self-absorbed lifestyle.
The exotically beautiful Natasha Stanislaski, on the other hand, remains a wounded creature, betrayed by a faithless lover and by her own innocence and idealism (something of a recurring motif in the categories of Roberts) and devastated by the death of her five-week-old daughter. Fearful of emotional intimacy beyond the proven bonds of family, Natasha, in the role most frequently reserved for the heroes of romance, must become vulnerable to the risks of loving before she can achieve her happy ending. The epilogue in grand Roberts style gives the reader a view of the Kimball family complete with six-month-old Brandon celebrating his first Christmas and Freddie dreaming of a little sister "next Christmas."

*Public Secrets* (Bantam), Roberts's only non-category title in 1990, takes place in the rock-star world of sex, drugs, and power. It won both a Waldenbooks Award and a Rita for best single-title contemporary romance. *Publishers Weekly* praised the novel for its "complex relationships" and its "believable ensemble of characters." *Genuine Lies* (1991), another Bantam single-title, also made use of the world of celebrity. Eve Benedict, an aging film goddess, decides to write her tell-all autobiography and convinces Julia Summers to be her ghostwriter. *Genuine Lies* became the first book by Roberts to reach the *New York Times* bestseller list. In a Novelists Inc. newsletter, Roberts recalled, "I remember feeling thrilled and dazzled but mostly relieved. . . . Even if I never hit again, I could have NYTBSA engraved on my tombstone."

Roberts also added another title to her "Wild Ukrainians" series for Silhouette in 1991. *Luring a Lady* centers on the relationship of Mikhail Stanislaski, part-time carpenter, full-time artist, and Sydney Hayward, a heroine who illustrates how dramatically the heroine's character had changed since Roberts's first categories a decade earlier. Roberts declared in a 1997 interview with Kay Mussell that the 90s signaled "the end of the Cinderella era," and Sydney Howard supports this claim. She is a wealthy, twenty-eight-year-old divorcee who not only has a man's name, but, as Mik observes on their first meeting, as head of Hayward Industries, she also has a "man's job." She can take care of herself. She defeats her enemies, both internal and external, using her own resources. Mikhail observes, "She was strong and smart and sensible. And she needed love." Romance is still romance, and as Roberts also noted in the Mussell interview, "Love gets them every time."

Other 1991 publications include *Night Shift* and *Night Shadows*, with its mysterious hero Nemesis created by Roberts in response to Silhouette editor Swift's request for a Batman-like hero. These books were the first two in a five-book series that, despite their category designation, were a fairly even blend of romance and suspense. RWA recognized the blend by awarding Roberts her second Rita in the romantic suspense category. Roberts set yet another precedent in category publishing in 1991 when her novels about the Calhoun sisters became the genre's first cross-series publication. Each Calhoun title bore a different Silhouette imprint: *Courting Catherine*, Roberts's final Silhouette Romance; *A Man for Amanda*, Roberts's only book for the Desire imprint; *For the Love of Lilah*, a Silhouette Special edition; and *Suzanna's Surrender*, Roberts's twenty-fifth Intimate Moments book.
The following year Silhouette published four Roberts books: *Unfinished Business*, the prolific author's take on a conventional romance plot, the reunion story, and a paranormal trilogy, *The Donovan Legacy*, composed of *Captivated*, *Entranced*, and *Charmed*. Released in successive months, the stories of three double cousins descended from two ancient Irish families with supernatural gifts, were immediate favorites with Roberts's fans. Reissued by Silhouette as a single volume (*The Donovan Legacy*) in 1999 to accompany the release of *Enchanted*, a fourth book in the series, the Donovans made the bestselling lists.

Two single-title novels, both published in 1992, marked the end of Roberts's contract with Bantam. Roberts set *Carnal Innocence* in Innocence, Mississippi, a tiny bayou town with stereotypical Southern trappings: an antebellum plantation owned by the Longstreets for two hundred years, an alcoholic good old boy, a crazed evangelist, twisted family secrets, and murder in the swamp. The melodrama has a definite Southern Gothic feel, but, as *Publishers Weekly* observed, in Caroline Waverly, a concert violinist and wounded beauty in search of herself, and Tucker Longstreet, a charmer with more depth than he allows himself to know, Roberts gives her readers a pair of "likable lovers." Roberts does justice to the region's love affair with guns, fast cars, and hot music. She even suggests something of the complex race relations. All these elements plus a shatteringly surprising solution to the murders earned *Carnal Innocence* award nominations from both *Romantic Times* and RWA. In *Divine Evil* Clare Kimball, another of Roberts's artist protagonists, leaves New York City to return to her Maryland hometown, site of her father's mysterious death and Clare's own haunting memories. Clare reconnects with Cameron Rafferty, former town bad boy turned sheriff (a romance staple character), and the two find passion, love, and a partial solution to the terrors plague Emmetsboro. *Publishers Weekly* labeled the novel a "no thrills thriller" and faulted it for being too similar to *Carnal Innocence*, but RWA members liked it enough to give it a Rita for best romantic suspense.

Her many awards, her best-selling status, and the sheer volume of her work made Roberts a figure of note within the publishing community. In the early 90s she caught the attention of G. P. Putnam's Sons Publishers. According to Thomas Kellner of *Forbes*, Putnam's Phyllis Grann believed Roberts's books were "much more complex and textured" than typical romance fare. Grann offered Roberts a six-book contract and a plan, conceived with the help of then-editor Leslie Gelbman, to satisfy Roberts's existing fan base with a paperback romance trilogy and to court a new audience of "college-educated urban women" who might be alienated by the romance tag and the paperback format with hardcover books with "more intricate" plots and a larger, more developed ensemble of characters.

*Honest Illusions*, Roberts's first book for Putnam and the first hardcover of her prolific career, was published in 1992. Roberts crafted the novel using elements that had worked well in category fiction. The relationship between Roxy Nouvelle, daughter of celebrated magician and master thief Max Nouvelle, and lost boy Luke Callahan has history, chemistry, and conflict, but the family unit is as important to the story as the couple's relationship and the struggle with the vengeful antagonist. Sales of the novel did not
measure up to Roberts's paperback sales, but the reviews were mostly positive. *Kirkus* praised it as a "compelling and detail rich first hardcover." Joyce Slater informed *Chicago Tribune* readers that the novel showcased Roberts's connection to her characters and her "eye for evocative detail." *Publishers Weekly* was even more generous: "Roberts combines conventional elements—sizzling sex, a cunning villain, a captivating story, some tugs at the heartstrings—then adds a twist . . . and the result is spellbinding."

Taking advantage of Putnam's marketing of their new star and catering to category readers' demands, Silhouette began regularly reissuing Roberts's earlier titles in 1992. The collection, appropriately called "Language of Love" began with Roberts's first book *Irish Thoroughbred*. Over the next two years Harlequin reissued another forty-seven of Roberts's Silhouette titles.

Jove's paperback reprint of *Honest Illusions* was published in 1993, setting the pattern for Roberts's hardcover reprints, and Silhouette published *Falling for Rachel*, the third book in the Stanislaski family series as part of their "That Special Woman" promotion. Tough-minded, tender-hearted Rachel, a public defender determined to save if not the world at least some of its downtrodden inhabitants affirms Roberts's commitment to strong women characters. This commitment is seen also in secondary characters such as Rachel's mother Nadia, a warm maternal figure who feeds the bodies and spirits of her family and her guests, and in Judge Marlene C. Beckett, "a staunch feminist and former flower child who had proven that a woman—an unmarried, career-oriented woman—could be successful and intelligent without being abrasive or whiny." *Falling for Rachel* became Waldenbooks best-selling series romance of the year.

Roberts also extended the *Night* series for Silhouette in 1993 with *Nightshade*, again successfully blending in the short category form elements of suspense and adventure with romance. *Nightshade* won another Rita for Roberts, her second for the *Night* series and her fourth in romantic suspense, making her the only writer to be inducted into RWA's Hall of Fame in a second sub-genre. She won another Rita for *Private Scandals*, her second hardcover for Putnam. However, *Publishers Weekly* found the plot device weak, and *Kirkus* declared that the "sudsy romantic suspense" was hampered by "weak humor, implausible plot, and trite glitz."

Early in 1994 Silhouette published *Night Smoke*, the fourth book in Roberts's mix of crime and passion, and *Convincing Alex*, the tale of the fourth Stanislaski sibling and soap opera write Bess McNee. The latter was Waldenbooks' best-selling Silhouette for the year. Roberts also contributed to two Silhouette anthologies: "The Best Mistake" in *Birds, Bees, and Babies '94*, a Mother's Day collection of three novellas and "All I Want for Christmas," another novella in *Jingle Bells, Wedding Bells*, Silhouette's annual Christmas collection.

*Hidden Riches*, the last hardcover in her original contract with Putman, earned Roberts still another Rita and uniformly rave reviews. *Kirkus* praised the "refreshingly contemporary" courtship plot. *Publishers Weekly* observed that Roberts "delivers the goods with panache and wit." *Hidden Riches* gives readers an egomaniacal villain, a
Teaching American Literature: A Journal of Theory and Practice
Special Issue Spring/Summer 2008 Volume 2 Issue 2/3

heroine who credibly manages to be both a 90s career woman and a family-centered traditionalist, and yet another in her line of psychically wounded cop-heroes, but it is in the creation of the Conroy family, a group Publishers Weekly termed "endearingly eccentric" that sets this Roberts novel above other successful romantic suspense efforts.

Family also lies at the center of Born in Fire, Book 1 in the paperback romance trilogy that was part of Roberts's contract with Grann. In the letter to her readers that prefaces the original edition of Born in Fire, Roberts writes, "The idea, for me, was to write of Ireland, and of family, as they intertwined in my heart." Speaking of Ireland to All About Romance's Laurie Gold in 1999, Roberts said, "I feel comfortable there, and it calls to my heart. The best stories start in the heart." Maggie Concannon, the glass artist heroine of Born In Fire, is a woman for whom the ties of family are sometimes comforting, sometimes burdensome, but always inescapable: "To the outside world she preferred to pretend she had responsibilities to herself and her art, but beneath the façade was a constant love of family, and the dragging, often bitter obligations that went with it." Publishers Weekly termed the relationships "believable and compelling," and Cathy Sova of The Romance Reader, an online review site, announced, "Make room on the keeper shelf. Nora Roberts has delivered a winner."

Born in Ice, the second Concannon book, was published in 1995 and reprised the success of Born in Fire. Roberts endows the serene Brianna Concannon, a marked contrast to her sister Maggie, with the traditional female gifts—cooking, gardening, weaving, hospitality—not gifts that garner attention. Yet Brie uses her gifts to operate a successful bed and breakfast, to enrich the lives of her family, and to satisfy her own need to nurture. Grayson Thane, the American mystery writer who comes to stay for a season, recognizes her beauty and her strength and is captivated by both. Publishers Weekly declared that Born in Ice "captured the charisma and earthy charms of Ireland and the gentleness of her people." It won Roberts another Rita and her third induction into RWA's Hall of Fame.

Roberts's paperback books for Jove that targeted her romance-reading base had proved successful, but the hardcovers had failed to meet the 100,000-unit target. Roberts contract with Putnam expired in 1995, but Grann's faith in Roberts was unshaken. The contract was extended, and a fourth hardcover was published by Putnam in June 1995. Roberts dedicated True Betrayals to Grann and Gelbman. Combining her genius for capturing family dynamics with a return to the thoroughbred- horse-farm setting of her first novel, Roberts again earned praise from the critics. Publishers Weekly called True Betrayals a "fast-paced engaging tale of envy, greed, and romance"; the Chicago Tribune observed, "With the kind of setting that would do Dick Francis proud, Roberts gives [the reader] a peek at the sabotage and skullduggery the horsy set is capable of when the stakes are high."

Meanwhile Roberts writing habits were creating a rare problem for her publishers; she was writing faster than Putnam and Jove could publish her work. Berkower urged Roberts to adopt a pseudonym, something Roberts was reluctant to do. "I thought it would be a dilution of my readership," Roberts told Forbes's Kellner. "But Amy
[Berkower] knows me and said, 'Look, it's like having Coke and Caffeine Free Coke.'" Roberts took the first letter of her sons' names (Jason, Dan) and originally planned to add them to MacGregor, the name of her celebrated fictional family, but she was persuaded to adopt Robb instead, thus insuring that books by Roberts and by Robb would be shelved conveniently near one another. The first book by J.D. Robb, Naked in Death, appeared in bookstores July 1995. Darker than books published under Nora Roberts's name, the Robb book combined elements of the police procedural and science fiction with romance. Set in the near future, the novel introduced Lieutenant Eve Dallas, a tough New York City detective and the Irish billionaire Roarke. The first Robb books were published with no official recognition of the Roberts/Robb connection. By 2001 when J.D. Robb was officially identified as Nora Roberts, the books had become bestsellers. In 2005 Berkley (the wing of the Penguin Group that publishes the Robb books) published the twenty-first In Death book, Origin in Death, in hardcover.

Despite her increasing success in mainstream fiction, Roberts did not abandon her category fans. In 1995 Silhouette introduced the MacKade Brothers series with The Return of Rafe MacKade and The Pride of Jared MacKade. The Heart of Devin MacKade and The Fall of Shane MacKade followed in 1996. The MacKade Brothers quartet also displayed once again Roberts's skill in creating heroes. Claire E. White observed in an interview with Roberts for Writers Write, an online writing journal, that readers have frequently praised Roberts's "believable and fascinating male characters." Roberts wryly acknowledged that having grown up with four brothers and having lived her adult life with a husband and two sons, she was forced to "figure them out or run screaming." The MacKades with their expletive-rich language, quick tempers, tender hearts, and steady love for family suggest that in the creation of male characters, as in other areas, Roberts has moved far beyond the limits of formulaic romance.

Family relationships remained central to Roberts's work in 1996 as she completed three family series, introduced a new one, and published a breakout hardcover about still another family. The year began with Born in Shame (Jove), the conclusion of the Concannon trilogy. American-born Shannon Bodine, the daughter Tomas Concannon never knew, goes to Ireland where she discovers what it means to have sisters and falls in love with Murphy Muldoon, farmer, book lover, and brother-figure to Maggie Concannon Sweeney and Brianna Concannon Thane. Publishers Weekly called Roberts's prose "lively and compelling," her story one of "unexpected poignancy," and her characters "exceptional." Roberts creates relationships, continued the reviewer, that "develop and grow and live on in the reader's imagination and heart."

Spring of 1996 saw the final two books in the MacKade series, and in these category novels as in her mainstream fiction, Roberts won praise for the power of her characterization. Melinda Helfer, writing for Romantic Times, declared Roberts "without peer in her ability to bring . . . characters to vivid life." Megan's Mate, the fifth Calhoun book, published in November, was followed by the trade paperback reissue of the first four Calhoun books. Susan Scribner of The Romance Reader concluded that this final installment in the Calhoun story lacked the skillful story crafting of the earlier books in the series, although it served well as "a nice coda to a well-written series."
With *Daring to Dream* Roberts introduced her second paperback trilogy for Jove. The *Templeton House* series, as the trilogy came to be known, like the *Born in* series, focuses on three women. Margo Sullivan, the housekeeper's daughter, Kate Powell, orphaned daughter of a Templeton cousin, and Laura Templeton, daughter of international hoteliers Susan and Thomas Templeton, have grown up together at the Templeton family home high on the cliffs of Monterey, California. Margo, protagonist of Book 1, is a familiar type to romance readers, the beautiful woman fully aware of her sexual power and accustomed to using it. What sets Roberts apart from lesser talents is the skill with which she uses the type yet creates a distinctly individual character. Courage in the face of betrayal and loss, irrepressible humor, a complex relationship with her mother, genuine affection for the elder Templetons, and the unshakable loyalty and brutal honesty that characterize her friendship with Kate and Laura all serve to make Margo unique.

*Publishers Weekly* faulted Roberts for the lack of "plot innovations" in *Daring to Dream*, but also acknowledged that she combined "brains, humor, and sex" to give her readers another vintage Nora Roberts novel.

By a broad consensus, Roberts's most important publication of 1996 was her fourth hardcover, *Montana Sky* (Putnam); it was also her 100th published novel. Gelbman, in an interview for *The Official Nora Roberts Companion*, termed *Montana Sky* "a kind of seismic shift" in Roberts's career. For the first time in a single-title novel Roberts blended the family-centered relationships of her best categories and successful trilogies with the physical action and psychological conflict of her best suspense novels. The result was the story of Jack Mercy's three daughters (each with a different mother), forced by their father's will to live together for a year on the 25,000-acre Mercy Ranch in order to inherit a share of their father's estate. The "cabin romance" is a staple in romance fiction; Roberts herself had used it successfully in *A Will and a Way*, a 1986 Silhouette Special Edition, but *Montana Sky* uses the convention of forced shared habitation not to light the fires of passion but to create a family of three sisters who start out as strangers who don't even like one another. Each of the sisters--hard-headed, ranch-loving Willa, Hollywood sophisticate Tess, and gentle Lily seeking refuge from a painful past--comes to know and accept her sisters and herself. Along the way to acceptance, their lives are endangered by a psychotic killer, and their hearts are captured by a trio of handsome cowboys.

Margaret Hanes, reviewer for *Library Journal*, praised Roberts's characterization: "All six of the major characters are wonderfully written, with just the right touch of genuineness, warmth, and distinctiveness." *Publishers Weekly* raved, "Roberts just keeps getting better and better," and noted particularly her "crackling dialogue," "snappy use of humor," and "majestic scenery integral to plot." Readers clearly agreed with the critics; they made *Montana Sky* Roberts's first hardcover to reach the *New York Times* bestseller list. According to *Publishers Weekly* (29 April 1996), TriStar optioned the novel for television with an advance of $100,000 against $400,000, one of the highest prices paid at that time for a two-hour TV movie. Roberts's hardcover success had reached the level of her paperback popularity; she had become, in the words of Gelbman, "a major player in the mainstream fiction marketplace."
Montana Sky reached the New York Times bestseller list for a second time the following year when it was released as a paperback by Jove, as did Books 2 and 3 in the Dream trilogy. Holding the Dream, the story of career-driven Kate Powell and Byron DeWitt, a Southern hero who is "poster-boy gorgeous" and "steeped in tradition and chivalry." Publishers Weekly observed the novel's "witty narrative, sassy dialogue, and the savoir-faire that readers have come to expect from Roberts." Finding the Dream concluded the trilogy with the tale of Laura Templeton, a fairytale heroine surviving a collision with reality. The book opens on the eighteenth birthday of Laura Templeton who is in love and "certain of her feelings, and her future, and the man who would share them both with her." Time shifts forward to a thirtieth birthday that finds Laura dealing with a prince who has proved himself a faithless frog, a diminished fortune, two young daughters, two jobs, and a struggle to "still be a Templeton." Roberts has defended the romance genre on several occasions as the genre of "women who win." Laura Templeton is one of those Roberts-crafted heroines who wins her own battles. Laura's happy ever after is sealed by her relationship with Michael Fury, a hero Publishers Weekly described as a "modern-day Heathcliff," but Laura's battles to claim her identity and build a life for herself and her children are won through her own strength and resources.

Roberts's bestsellers for 1997 were not limited to her paperback publications. Sanctuary (Putnam) became her second best-selling hardcover, although its critical success did not match that of Montana Sky. "Roberts stumbles when she dilutes her tale with an all too obvious murder mystery," wrote People. "A silly murder mystery," echoed Publishers Weekly. Yet both reviewers praised the characterization of protagonist Jo Hathaway and her family. Publishers Weekly commended the "intriguing elements of Jo's confrontation with her past, her discovery of true love and her reconciliation with her family," and People concluded, "When she concentrates on the Hathaway clan's slow healing, the prolific novelist is at the top of her game." CBS saw potential in the story and turned it into a made-for-TV movie billed as Nora Roberts' Sanctuary. The movie aired 28 February 2001.

Still faithful to her beginnings, Roberts also added four 1997 titles to her impressive list of Silhouette publications. Hidden Star introduced the Stars of Mithra trilogy; Captive Star followed in December 1997, and Secret Star in February 1998. The three tales that center on three mythical blue diamonds and the lives of three friends whose lives are transformed by the gems revealed Roberts's continuing interests in integrating paranormal elements into her fiction. To the delight of Roberts's fans, she also returned to two of her family sagas, this time with the stories of a new generation. Waiting for Nick gave readers the love story of Frederica Kimball, a charming child in Taming Natasha (1990), and Nicholas LeBeck, an angst-ridden teen in Falling for Rachel (1993). Freddie's struggles to make Nick recognize her as a woman ready to be his collaborator in music, in love, and in life was enthusiastically received. Linda Mowery, reviewer for The Romance Reader, called Waiting for Nick "a big joyful family reunion" with clever dialogue and likeable characters. Longtime fans recognized that Roberts had given them a two-for-one pleasure by having the O'Hurleys, complete with spouses and progeny, make a cameo appearance in the last of the Wild Ukranian books.
The MacGregors also returned in 1997. *The MacGregor Brides*, a tripartite tale of MacGregor granddaughters, became the first Silhouette title to reach the *New York Times* bestseller list (it reached #3). Kristin Ramsdell of *Library Journal* called the stories "charming, though lightly plotted," but praised Roberts's "deftly portrayed characters."

In some ways Roberts enjoyed a banner year in 1997. She shattered another category barrier, she published nine new titles (including two as J. D. Robb), and RWA recognized her contributions to the romance genre with a Lifetime Achievement Award. But the year was shadowed by what Roberts considers the worst experience of her professional life. Janet Dailey, a prolific romance novelist herself, admitted to plagiarizing Roberts's work. According to Judy Quinn of *Publishers Weekly*, thirteen of Roberts's novels and at least four of Dailey's were involved. Roberts donated the money received in the settlement to Literacy Volunteers of America.

However stressful Roberts may have found the plagiarism suit, her sales were unaffected. In 1998 she had ten books on the nation's bestseller lists, including *Sea Swept* (Jove), the first of the Chesapeake Bay books, Roberts's first title to reach #1 on the *New York Times* list. *Rising Tides* (Jove), the second Chesapeake Bay book, set yet another record by becoming the first Roberts book to debut at #1 on the prestigious list. *Inner Harbor* (Jove), the story of the third Quinn brother, was published in January 1999, and it too debuted at #1. Roberts told *All About Romance*'s Laurie Gold that her purpose in the Quinn stories was to provide the "male viewpoint, their sensibilities and style." Susan Scribner, reviewer for *The Romance Reader*, declared that Roberts "nailed down perfectly male behavior and dialogue," commending particularly her skill in creating brotherly bonding based on "doing, not talking." Jessi Rose Lucas, writing for the *Barnes & Noble Review* termed Roberts a "consummate storyteller" and her characters in *Sea Swept* "real people dealing intelligently with genuine problems." Jodi Israel in *Library Journal* claimed *Inner Harbor* was "Roberts at her best" and praised the novel's "multifaceted characterizations" and its "carefully crafted plot twists."

Roberts also published two hardcovers in 1998. *Homeport*, a romantic suspense novel, moves from Jones Point, Maine, to Florence, Italy, as Dr. Miranda Jones, "a Jones of Jones Point," and art expert joins forces with an art thief to vindicate her reputation and uncover layers of betrayal. Margaret Hanes, reviewing for *Library Journal*, termed *Homeport* "an irresistible page turner" with "just the right combination of romance, humor, and suspense." Contrasting *Homeport* with *Hot Ice* (1987) reveals Roberts's growth as a writer. The powerful characterization and the clever dialogue continue to be strengths, but the suspense thread in the later book is more tightly woven and less improbably spectacular than in *Hot Ice*. Roberts's second hardcover of the year also hearkens back to an earlier book. *Treasures Lost, Treasures Found*, a 1986 Silhouette Intimate Moments, tells the story of a treasure hunt and reunited lovers. *The Reef* (Putnam) uses the same basic situation, but the bigger book allows for fuller plot development and more complex characters. *Library Journal*'s Israel praised the plot "rich with intrigue" and the "full complement of fascinating characters." *The Reef* remained on the *New York Times* bestseller list for more than two months.
Roberts told Kay Mussell that the 90s marked the end of Cinderella in romance, but in a 1998 addition to the MacGregor series, *The Winning Hand* (Silhouette), Roberts created a fairy tale romance that combines elements of the Cinderella tale with elements of *The Wizard of Oz*. Darcy Wallace leaves her Kansas home for Las Vegas, which Roberts describes as "Oz-like." An innocent in casino-land with $9.37 to her name, Darcy hits the jackpot and wins $1,800,079.37. Falling for casino owner Robert "Mac" MacGregor, she "wanted more than anything a few more magical days with Mac before her coach turned into a pumpkin and the glass slippers no longer fit." The reader knows that Darcy's happy ending is assured, but before Prince Mac offers her his kingdom and his heart, she finds a publisher for her book, buys her own castle, and stands up to the wicked fiancé of the Midwest. This Cinderella saves herself; this Dorothy finds a new home and a true family in her Oz.

Susan Scribner of *The Romance Reader* called *The Winning Hand* "a strong effort from the incomparable Nora Roberts," but Roberts's most successful Silhouette publication of the year was *The MacGregor Grooms*, another three-story collection about Daniel MacGregor's strategies to push his grandchildren into happy marriages. "Roberts excels in stories involving family ties, and this series is a marvelous case in point," *Publishers Weekly* enthusiastically reported. Daniel MacGregor's journal links the three stories and is arguably the strongest part of the book. *Publishers Weekly* found the journal "wonderfully done with just the right mix of humor and sentiment." The first story centers on artist Daniel Campbell "D.C." MacGregor and department store CEO Layna Drake, not so coincidentally the goddaughter of Myra Ditmeyer, Anna MacGregor's oldest friend. Their love story, according to *Publishers Weekly*, "sparkles with wit and fiery passion." The reviewer found Duncan Blade's story slow-paced, but observed that the pace picks up again with the third story that is "filled with love and compassion and a good dose of humor." The final story belongs to Ian MacGregor and Naomi Brightstone, an appealing bookstore-owner heroine. Roberts insists that she never thought of the Kennedys when she was writing the MacGregor books, but the similarities are strong with Ian, son of a former Attorney General, nephew of a former President and a "Harvard Hunk" pursued by the paparazzi. *The MacGregor Grooms* as a whole, however, is greater than the sum of its parts. Readers learn through the three new stories that the MacGregor line is flourishing. Clearly MacGregor fever continued unabated; fans made *The MacGregor Grooms* the first Silhouette single title to debut at #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

In addition to her single-title paperbacks, romantic suspense hardcovers, and category fiction, Roberts began a new venture in 1998 with the first collaboration with Jill Gregory, Ruth Ryan Langan, and Marianne Willman. Roberts's contribution "Spellbound" was the lead story in *Once Upon a Castle* (Berkley), and the publisher capitalized on her fame by displaying her name prominently above the title. The novellas were linked by an Arthurian quest theme and the castle image. *Library Journal*'s Ramsdell called the collection "charming" and predicted it would be particularly popular with readers who enjoyed "romance on the magical side." The five additional *Once Upon* volumes attest to the accuracy of Ramsdell's prediction, as does the 2005 reissue of *Spellbound* in a limited edition chapbook format, a *USA Today* Top 50 bestseller.
In 1999 first publications, reprints, and reissued titles combined gave Roberts fourteen titles on the bestseller lists. She completed the Chesapeake Bay series and introduced a new trilogy with *Jewels of the Sun* (Jove). Returning to the Irish setting that she had used so effectively in the Born in trilogy, she interlaced into the tale of the Gallaghers of Ardmore another story that might have been culled from Celtic folklore. In an online interview with *Crescent Blues* Roberts said, "If I'm crafting a trilogy, I have to fall for the people in it, and I need a thread, some theme or question that will weave through all three of the books and be resolved at the end." The tale of Carrick, prince of the faeries, and Gwen, "a woman of humble birth but a lady in heart and manner," becomes the thread that unites the stories of the three Gallagher siblings. *Jewels in the Sun* centers on Aidan Gallagher, a wanderer who has come home to run the pub that has been the pride of generations of Gallaghers. Into his life comes Jude Frances Murray, a Chicago professor on a quest for self. Jude falls in love with Ireland, with the magical tales of Ardmore, and with Aidan. This first book in the Irish trilogy prompted *Publishers Weekly* to label Roberts "a storytelling wizard," and Scribner of *The Romance Reader*, noting Jude's self-determination, to call the novel "a powerful feminist statement."

Books 2 and 3 of the Irish trilogy were published in 2000. *Tears of the Moon* (Jove) garnered rave reviews. Whitney Scott of *Booklist* described the book as "lyrical and engaging." The story of the second Gallagher son Shawn, a dreamer and a composer, and carpenter Brenna O'Toole, fiery of head and of temper, led *Library Journal's* Ramsdell to exclaim, "Roberts nails her characters and settings with awesome precision, drawing readers into a vividly rendered world of family-centered warmth and unquestioned magic." *Publishers Weekly* declared the novel "delightful to the core," praising Roberts as "a storyteller of immeasurable diversity and talent." *Heart of the Sea* (Jove) concluded the Gallagher series with the story of Darcy, the third sibling, and the wealthy and powerful Trevor McGee and with a happy ending for Prince Carrick and Lady Gwen. *Publishers Weekly* found the novel "rich and satisfying" and described the protagonists as "vulnerable human beings with appealingly ordinary hopes and dreams."

*River's End*, Roberts' only hardcover publication in 1999, not only added to her list of bestsellers but also broke new ground in book promotion when it became one of a handful of popular fiction titles to have excerpts included with purchases of Diet Coke. Melanie Duncan, reviewing the novel for *Booklist*, noted that Roberts "consistently gives fans what they want—complex characters, snappy dialogue, and an intriguing plot." In *River's End* Roberts shows Olivia McBride as a tormented four-year-old, a tough but sensitive twelve-year-old, a heartbroken college student, and a young woman passionate about nature and fearful of love. Roberts creates with detail and emotional power not only Olivia but also the hero Noah Brady, a journalist turned true crime writer, and a large supporting cast. The vivid rendering of the Pacific Northwest adds another rich dimension to the novel, as does what *Publishers Weekly* termed Roberts's "artful manipulation of the plot construed so that amour and horror escalate in tandem."

Roberts was experiencing unparalleled success. The J.D. Robb books had been steadily gaining in popularity, and *Loyalty in Death* (Berkley), the ninth book in the series,
became the first Robb title to reach the *New York Times* bestseller list. Both new titles and reissues from Silhouette were regularly making the bestseller lists. *The Perfect Neighbor* (Silhouette), the final book in the MacGregor series that spans fourteen years of Roberts's career, was another record-setting publication; it became the first regular category romance ever to reach the *New York Times* list. Roberts was also breaking new ground in the United Kingdom where audiences knew her work under the pseudonym Sarah Hardesty. In 1999 Piatkus began publishing Roberts's titles in England under her own name.

Roberts's sales continued to soar in 2000, and her non-category titles won increasing respect for her abilities as a storyteller. In *Carolina Moon* (Putnam) Roberts combined elements of mystery, paranormal tale, psychological thriller, and romance to produce a book that *Publishers Weekly* described as "as atmospheric and unsettling as a Tennessee Williams play." *Carolina Moon*, Roberts's biggest release with more than half a million copies in its first printing, reached #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list and remained there for five weeks; it also won Roberts a sixth Rita for romantic suspense. In May the Jove paperback reprint of *River's End* (1999) was released. Surpassing the success of the hardcover edition, it became one of the top five best-selling romance titles of the year and the first reprint to reach #1 on the *New York Times* list.

Her Silhouette titles proved no less successful. In *Irish Rebel* Roberts returned to Royal Meadows Farm, the setting of her first book, to give readers the story of Keely Grant, daughter of the protagonists of *Irish Thoroughbred* (1981). Both *Irish Rebel* and the compilation volume *Irish Hearts* (reissues of *Irish Thoroughbred* and *Irish Rose*) were among Roberts's million plus sellers for the year, as was *Night Shield*, the fifth book in the Night series and Roberts's final book for Silhouette's Intimate Moments imprint.

In November of 2000 Silhouette reissued two of Roberts' Stanislaski family titles: *The Stanislaski Brothers*, which included both *Luring a Lady* (1991) and *Convincing Alex* (1994), was among the five top-selling romances of 2001. In February of 2001 Silhouette reissued *The Stanislaski Sisters: Natasha and Rachel* and released *Considering Kate*, Roberts's final installment in the Stanislaski family saga; both the reissue and the new title became top five bestsellers. Roberts's deft touch with character building is evident in all of the Stanislaski stories, but in the final installment of the family series she demonstrates her virtuosity in revealing her characters through layers of relationships. *Considering Kate* is the love story of Kate Kimball and Brody O'Connell, but as subtext of that story, Roberts reveals the deep-rooted love Kate shares with her parents and siblings, Brody's troubled relationship with his father and his fierce dedication to his son, and even the bonds of friendship with the cameo appearances of Nickolai and Ruth Bannion Davidov (*Dance of Dreams* Silhouette 1983). That she does all this in fewer than 250 pages makes her skill more remarkable.

With her 2001 trilogy for Jove, Roberts returned to the witchcraft theme that had worked well for her in the category format (i.e., the Donovan series). In the *Three Sisters Island* trilogy, Roberts again takes a legend from the past and weaves it into the lives of contemporary characters. The past is 1692 when three witch sisters use their powers to
create an island of refuge from the insanity of the Salem witch hunt. The present is 2001 on Three Sisters Island where three women, descendents of the original three witches, unite their powers to lift an ancient curse, defeat evil (human and supernatural), and embrace the happy endings that eluded the original three sisters. *Dance upon the Air* (Jove), the first book in the trilogy, focuses on Nell Channing, an abused wife who has faced her own death to escape her abuser. On Three Sisters Island, Nell builds a new life and with Sheriff Zach Todd, a new love built on passion, strength, and tenderness. Kristin Ramsdell's review for *Library Journal* reminds readers that Nora Roberts is "one of the best and most consistent writers in the genre" and cites her "magnetic hero," a "heroine who finds herself," and "memorable secondary characters" as evidence that *Dance* is Roberts as usual. Diana Tixier Herald calls the novel an "enchanting, empowering tale" that "vividly shows how a capable woman can be swept into an abusive relationship and how extremely difficult it can be for her to extricate herself." *Publishers Weekly* concludes, "It's probably witchcraft that Roberts can turn out so many books and still create something that's sexy and charming."

Tempered praise best describes reviewers' reactions to *Heaven and Earth*, the second book of the trilogy. Ripley Todd, edgier and more aggressive than Nell Channing, is a less sympathetic heroine. *Publishers Weekly* labeled it a "conventional saga" and regretted that Roberts was "not in her top form." Still, the reviewer noted Roberts's "deft use of metaphor" and her "charismatic hero," paranormal researcher Mac Booke. Lezlie Patterson, writing for the *Columbia, South Carolina, State*, calls the novel "Nora Roberts... at her magical, whimsical and emotional best."

Six months after *Heaven and Earth*, Jove published *Face the Fire*, the story of Mia Devlin and Sam Logan. Theirs is a reunion story in two senses. Fearful of the bonds that had linked him to Mia and the island, Sam fled both and lived in exile for eleven years. Sam is also supernaturally gifted, water to the three sisters Air, Earth, and Fire. The elements must unite in the final battle against evil. *Publishers Weekly* found the material "weak" and lacking "compelling emotional drama.' In a charge rare concerning a Roberts book, the reviewer also declared the characters "barely human enough to move the reader's heart." Despite such harsh words, *Publishers Weekly* acknowledged "graceful style" and "deft storytelling," and fans embraced the book, sending it, like its sister volumes, to the top of the mass market bestseller lists.

Roberts's two 2001 hardcovers were also bestsellers. *The Villa* debuted at #3 on the *New York Times* hard cover list, and critical reception was generally positive to this cross-generational saga of the Giambellis and the lust, love, greed, betrayal, murder, and mergers that surround the family and their wineries in Napa Valley and Venice. *Booklist* (Diana Tixier Herald) observed that with *The Villa* Roberts had moved "further into the real of mainstream fiction" without abandoning "her romance-writing roots." Reviewers also agreed that Roberts continued to excel at creating intriguing characters and their complex interactions. *Library Journal* (Ramsdell) noted Roberts's skill in developing "characters you care about," and *Booklist*’s Herald declared that Roberts "shines at portraying relationships, from the romantic to the antagonistic."
Midnight Bayou, Roberts's second hardcover for 2001, was even more successful than The Villa. It was her first hardcover title to reach #1 on the New York Times bestseller list. Barbara Perkins of Library Journal argued that Midnight Bayou was Roberts "at the top of her game." Booklist's Herald noted that Roberts had "cleverly crafted an enticing triangle of times and relationships featuring characters whose pain and triumphs are palpable." Kirkus was more cautious in their praise, finding the resolution of the suspense plot "predictable," but even Kirkus had no reservations about the power of Roberts's protagonists. Angelina "Lena" Simone, another Roberts heroine leery of love but sexually experienced and comfortable with her sexuality, demonstrates again how masterfully Roberts takes the familiar and makes it individual. Lena may have much in common with Margo Sullivan and Sophie Gamely, but her exotic looks, her Cajun speech, and her deep love for her grandmother made her a distinctive character. The same observation can be made about Declan Fitzgerald. Another Irish American, he is wealthy, handsome, and highly educated--typical hero material. But he is also a man who has fallen in love with rebuilding: "The taking of something already formed and enhancing, repairing, restoring." In a trans-gender bit of reincarnation, Declan becomes the innocent young mother destroyed by lust and jealousy. He restores Manet Hall physically but he also restores it psychically as his sensitivity and healthy love for Lena finally put the past to rest. The Kirkus reviewer found the plot "improbable," and faulted Roberts for her "hokey hauntings at the bayou," but even this less than enthusiastic reviewer was charmed by Declan and Lena and by Roberts's "neat piece of home restoration."

Betrayal in Death, Roberts's twelfth novel written as Robb and "Interlude in Death," her second novella in the In Death series were also published in 2001, as was "Winter Rose," a fairy tale of wounds and healings in a fantasy world of ice and snow, Roberts's fourth contribution to the Once Upon anthologies. Roberts had thirteen bestsellers in 2002. According to USA Today, she sold more paperbacks than any other author and placed six books among the years top 100 in sales, also more than any other author. Only J.K. Rowling outsold Roberts in total sales for the year.

Despite Roberts's phenomenal success with paperback titles for Jove and Berkeley and hardcovers for Putnam, she had continued to write category fiction. In 2002, she published her 100th and final novel for Silhouette. Appropriately, Cordina's Crown Jewel, a light tale of a runaway princess and a surly archaeologist was a Silhouette Special Edition, the category line for which Roberts had most frequently written, and the end of a family series. The book relates the love story of Camilla of Cordina, daughter of Her Supreme Highness Gabriella and Reeve McFee, and Delaney Caine, a loner who needs to be saved from himself. The resolution to the story places the lovers in Cordina, now blessedly free of terrorism, where Alexander (Command Performance) is now king and all the royal family is proud and happy. Published in February, Cordina's Crown Jewel, was followed in July by Cordina's Royal Family, Silhouette's reissued compilation of the three earlier Cordina titles. Both books joined Roberts's growing list of bestsellers.

Speculation was rife about Robert's reasons for leaving Silhouette. Roberts insists via her web site that it was a mutual decision made without acrimony on either side. When Forbes, in an article on the changing fortunes of Harlequin Enterprises, claimed that
"Nora Roberts—better known by her nom de plume, J.D. Robb—recently ditched the publisher [Harlequin] for Penguin Putnam," Roberts was quick to respond. In a letter to the editor printed in Forbes two weeks after the magazine's claim, Roberts wrote, "I continued to write for both Harlequin and Putnam for over a decade before making the decision to focus solely on mainstream fiction. I was not poached."

While Roberts's long-term fans may have been disappointed to know that there would be no more category original titles by the prolific author, Silhouette was prepared to feed the hunger for Roberts's categories by reissuing her booklist at a steady pace. Before 2002, reissued titles had generally been tied to a new title, making older titles in a series available to new fans captivated by the new title. In 2003 alone, Silhouette reissued seven Roberts titles in three volumes, a practice that has continued in succeeding years. These titles too frequently land on bestseller lists.

Publishers expressed some concern about over saturation, but the reissues had little effect on the sales of new titles. Three Fates, Roberts's first hardcover of 2002 debuted at #1 on the New York Times bestseller list. Moreover, the same week Jove's paperback reprint of The Villa debuted #1 on the mass market list. The dual achievement was not only a first for Roberts, but, according to the Official Nora Roberts Companion, the first for any romance author. Reunion in Death, the fourteenth Robb title, published in March of 2002, became the first of the In Death series to reach #1.

Despite the impressive sales, Three Fates received mixed reviews. John Charles, writing for Library Journal found it "marvelously entertaining, one of Nora Roberts's patented blends of passion and danger, seasoned with tart wit," and Roberts's peers in Romance Writers of America gave it a Rita, her seventh win in romantic suspense. But Publishers Weekly condemned it with faint praise, calling the novel a "slick, snappy read." In marked contrast, Susan Scribner, writing for The Mystery Reader, declared Three Fates "the divine Miss Roberts's best book in years." While the heroes, Ms. Scribner says, might be run-of-the-mill "strong, courageous, and sexy," the novel itself is "suspenseful, humorous, sexy, and full of Girl Power."

Roberts's second hardcover in 2001 was one that she never planned to write. The Quinn Brothers stories were planned as a trilogy that ended with Phillip's book, Inner Harbor (Jove 1999). According to the Official Nora Roberts Companion, readers fell in love with Seth, Ray Quinn's last "lost boy," and despite the solution to the mystery surrounding Seth and his connection to the Quinns in Inner Harbor, fans "clamored for Nora to write his story." Even though a Christmas short story, "Christmas with the Quinns" (published in a Jove promotional giveaway December 2000 and available now only on Nora Roberts' web site) showed Seth happy and contented with his family, fans begged for the rest of Seth's story. Roberts initially opposed the idea, but eventually Seth reappeared in her imagination as an adult, and in May of 2002, Chesapeake Blue, Seth's story was published. It, too, was a #1 bestseller, and this time reviewers and readers were in accord. Roberts "has once again crafted a poignant and often humorous tale," praised Shelley Mosley in Library Journal. Chesapeake Blue is "a book filled with familial tenderness, compassion, and passionate love," declared RomanticTimes. Book Page called the novel
"a welcome crescendo to the story-symphony that is the family Quinn in all its boisterous, loving resonance." This final Quinn book is about Seth's homecoming, about his coming to terms with his mother's vengeful presence in his life, about the happy ending he earns with Drusilla Witcomb Banks, proud proprietor of Bud and Bloom, a woman who "brought faeries and spellbound princesses to a man's mind." The story ends with Seth giving Stella Quinn's ring to Dru. An ending that Roberts insists is her final word on the brothers Quinn.

Two more J.D. Robb books, the last book in the *Three Sisters Island* trilogy and yet another novella, ("A World Apart" in *Once Upon A Kiss*) rounded out Roberts's publishing year. Nora Roberts's name appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list 91 times in 2002; it topped the list 23 times. It was an impressive year, but the next one would be even better.

Critics routinely referred to Roberts as a "publishing phenomenon." According to her official web site, Roberts spent 101 of the 104 weeks of 2001 and 2002 combined on bestseller lists. But 2003 gave the word "phenomenal" new meaning when applied to Roberts. In that one year alone, Roberts's books had a print run of well over twenty million. She had two hardcover bestsellers, and three bestsellers on the trade paperback lists, but, as *Publishers Weekly* reports, it was on the mass market paperback lists that Robert's presence manifested itself most strongly. She had fifteen paperback bestsellers, giving her a ten percent share of the year's best paperbacks. Still more remarkably, six Roberts titles (*Key of Light*, *Key of Knowledge*, *Key of Valor*, *Three Fates*, *Truly Madly Manhattan*, and *Engaging the Enemy*, the latter two Harlequin reissues of Silhouette titles) were among the top fifteen bestsellers of the year across all genres.

*BIRTHRIGHT*, Roberts's first hardcover of 2003, won enthusiastic reviews from critics. *B & N Reviewer* Sue Stone said, "Nora Roberts has a matchless ability to blend romance and suspense, and this gift is on full display in *BIRTHRIGHT.*" Callie Dunsbrook, an archaeologist arrives in Woodsboro, Maryland, when an examination of human remains uncovered by a developed reveals Woodsboro is the site of a possible five-thousand-year-old settlement. Roberts's deft touch allows the reader to share Callie's fascination with the human story and the historical significance of the site. Roberts throws murder, kidnapping, local politics, and complicated family relationships into the mix to produce what *Publishers Weekly* called "a big delicious meal." In less skillful hands, the interwoven threads could have become wildly improbable, but Roberts endows her characters from Callie Dunsbrook and her former husband and current lover Jake Greystone to the various family members, friends, associates, and enemies with such pervasive humanity that the reader follows where she leads. John Charles, writing for *School Library Journal*, praised the "compelling realistically flawed hero and heroine," the "clever banter spiced with just the right amount of acerbic wit," and the "wonderfully satisfying conclusion." The rest, Charles declared, is "pure reading magic." *BIRTHRIGHT* won Robert's a fourth Rita for single-title contemporary.

Roberts's second hardcover of the year was also a Rita winner, her eighth for romantic suspense. *REMEMBER WHEN* is a unique collaboration between Nora Roberts and her alter
ego, J.D. Robb. In Part I (the Rita-winning part), the year is 2002, Laine Tavish, daughter of Jack O'Hara, thief and confidence man, finds her quiet life far from her father and his connections shattered when an accomplice of her father's is killed in Angel's Gap, Maryland, the small town to which Laine has retreated. Max Gannon, insurance investigator, has come to Angel's Gap determined to solve a multi-million-dollar diamond theft. Part I provides a happy ending for both the romance and suspense plots.

Part II is set in 2059. Samantha Gannon, granddaughter of Laine and Max, has written a best-selling book based on her grandparents' story. She returns home to find her house sitter murdered, and Lieutenant Eve Dallas, heroine of Robb's *In Death* series is assigned to the case. *Remember When* marked Eve and Roarke's first appearance in hardcover. *Kirkus* called the pairing a "smoothly written contemporary caper with a murder mystery and a little meet-the-Jeffersons futurism."

In addition to two best-selling hardcovers for 2003, Roberts published two more titles in the *In Death* series, another novella in the *Once Upon* anthology series, and the first two books of a new trilogy that in typical Roberts fashion blended romance and the supernatural. Despite the predictable mix of elements, the Key trilogy shows Roberts's willingness to experiment. The action of the female quest stories takes place in a narrowly defined space and time. Each heroine is given twenty-eight days to complete her quest; the books, in order to create a "real-time" effect were published consecutively in November and December of 2003 and January of 2004. The ordinary human world and the mythic world intersect when three women receive an unexpected invitation "for cocktails and conversation" to Warrior's Peak, a mysterious estate high on a ridge outside Pleasant Valley, Pennsylvania. Mallory Price, manager of an art gallery; Dana Steele, librarian; and Zoe McCourt, hairstylist, are challenged to find three keys that will unlock the box that imprisons the souls of three demigoddesses. A successful quest will bring a bountiful reward ($1,000,000); a failed quest will cost a year of their lives. Individual success is impossible; they will fail or succeed together.

*Key of Light* is the story of Mallory, who must use her knowledge of art and the aid of newspaper editor Flynn Hennesy and his dog Mac to find the first key. The mortal characters in *Key of Light* are vital and likable, and the relationships that develop between Mallory and Flynn and among the three women are strong and credible. The supernatural element is less successful. *Publishers Weekly* termed it "mistily silly" and insisted that the prize money sounds more reality show than mythic quest. Despite this weakness, *Publishers Weekly* declared that "Roberts's crisp writing, earthy humor, and vivid characterization combine to make *Key of Light* a compelling read." In the second book, *Key of Knowledge*, Dana follows Mallory's pattern, using her knowledge and love of books and the strength of the lover with whom she has been reunited, Jordan Hawke, appropriately a novelist, to find the second key. John Charles (Booklist) praised the "sexy chemistry" and "sharp wit" of the pair, but *Publishers Weekly* again found the tale "far-fetched" and Dana an "inept detective."

Somewhat surprisingly, since trilogies often falter with the third book, *Key of Valor* is the strongest story. Zoe McCourt has greater complexity than the other heroines. Like many of Roberts's strongest heroines, she is a survivor who has already proved her strength. It
is Zoe, the mother whose love for her child has empowered her to win those early battles, who not only finds the third key but who destroys the evil force that imprisoned the Daughters of Glass and now threatens the mortal world. *Publishers Weekly* was extravagant in praise of the final book, calling Zoe an "appealing heroine," praising her "working-class grit," finding in Bradley "a perfect foil" for Zoe, and describing the scenes with nine-year-old Simon as "genuinely moving." Roberts, the reviewer concludes, is "the most powerful spellbinder of all." *Key of Valor* followed the first two *Key* books to the top of the charts, and for several weeks in 2004, all three books in the trilogy were among the top ten paperback bestsellers.

In addition to the conclusion of the paperback *Key* trilogy, Roberts also published three hardcovers in 2004, two of them as J.D. Robb. *Divided in Death*, her eighteenth book marked the switch of the series to hardcover for original publication, a move Roberts agreed to only with the stipulation that the paperback reprint follow in six months rather than the standard twelve. Roberts's only romantic suspense title for the year was the Putnam hardcover *Northern Lights*, her 116th *New York Times* bestseller. Perhaps more fully than any of her previous titles, *Northern Lights* affirmed Roberts's move to mainstream fiction. Although the novel has a romance, its heart is Nate Burke, a former cop devastated by a divorce and the brutal death of his partner. He leaves Baltimore to take the job of police chief in Lunacy, Alaska (population 506). Nate, as Sandy Coleman of *All About Romance* observes, is a "real guy hero far from the fantasy figure found in many romance novels." His view of his new home and the "Lunatics" who live there determine the reader's views. Readers propelled the Northern Exposure-like novel with its manly, vulnerable hero and lovably eccentric secondary characters to the top of the bestseller lists. Reviewers chorused their approval with few sour notes. "Amazingly, Roberts doesn't miss," said *Kirkus*, praising the novel's "original characterization, brisk pace, and great feel for the grandeur of the setting." Roberts has an "uncanny ability to balance high-quality work and high-frequency publication," observed *Publishers Weekly*, also noting that in *Northern Lights* Roberts "forsakes artificial genre conventions in favor of a wry, affectionate look at community bonds, generational wounds, and soul testing landscapes."

Late in 2004, Jove published Book One of another Roberts trilogy. This one carried a new touch, an "official Nora Roberts seal" that Jove initiated to separate new Roberts titles from the booming backlist business Harlequin was enjoying. The trilogy might carry a new seal, but it joined Roberts's long list of series focusing on the relationships—romantic, familial, and professional—of three women. The thread that connects the three women is place: In *The Garden*, Roz Harper's nursery where the three women work, and Harper House, Roz's family home, "Tara and Manderley all in one," where the three of them live. Stella Rothchild, a thirty-three-year-old widow with two young sons; Roz Harper, a forty-seven-year-old mother of three adult sons with two marriages in her past, a happy one that ended too soon to John Ashby, father of her sons, and a shorter, more recent marriage and divorce from Bryce Clark, a faithless charmer; Hayley Phillips, a twenty-four-year-old former bookstore manager who is six months pregnant. *Publishers Weekly* called *Blue Dahlia* a "promising start to a new series," although the review expressed reservations about the ghostly *Harper Bride*. Ramsdell (Library Journal)

In June of 2005, Black Rose followed Blue Dahlia to the top of the bestseller lists. The second book advances the stories of all the characters introduced in Blue Dahlia, but the protagonist of Black Rose is forty-seven-year-old Rosalind Harper, a far from typical romance lead. Publishers Weekly described her as "a warmly appealing heroine, resolutely finding her way through a midlife romance that is more complex and hard-fought than 20-something love." Red Lily (2005) concluded the trilogy. Booklist’s John Charles had only praise for the "consistently excellent Roberts" and the "spooky, sexy conclusion with this spellbinding romance that beautifully celebrates the power of love in all its guises." Roberts's 2005 hardcover romance Blue Smoke joined her paperback trilogy on the bestseller lists and in critical praise. "Roberts does it again with this fast-paced romantic mystery that's both steamy and thrilling," Kirkus exclaimed, and Publishers Weekly noted that Roberts trademark blend of family dynamics, skillful characterization, and accurate research had generated yet another "appealing story."

In 2006 Roberts's publications included the paranormal Circle trilogy (Morrigan's Cross, Dance of the Gods, and Valley of Silence), a stand-alone romantic suspense (Angels Fall), two additions to the In Death series (Born in Death and Memory in Death) as well as a novella under the J.D. Robb pseudonym, and eighteen reissues. Publishers Weekly praised Angels Fall as a "cunningly calibrated portrait of a young chef's recovery from violent trauma" and acknowledged her "skill and range" in the Circle trilogy, and readers insured that every title published by Roberts that year made the New York Times bestseller list; each book in The Circle Trilogy, debuted at #1 in the New York Times. For three weeks all three titles were on the bestseller list. Roberts, under the name of J.D. Robb, added yet another Rita to her impressive list and received the Quill Award in the Romance category for Blue Smoke.

Roberts's accomplishments in 2007 were phenomenal even for the much celebrated author. Roberts repeated her bestselling record with reissues again in the double digits, two more Robb books, High Noon, a single-title romantic suspense, and Blood Brothers, the first book in the Sign of Seven trilogy, bestsellers all. Elizabeth Mellett (Library Journal) praised Roberts as among the best writers of romantic suspense and noted that in High Noon "One of her strengths is her portrayal of family (the Quinns of her "Chesapeake Bay" quartet come immediately to mind), and the family members we meet here are people we believe in and care about." Publishers Weekly was less impressed with Blood Brothers, observing that "this trilogy kickoff suffers from a dearth of twists and little payoff; fans of the brisk, colorful Roberts style will enjoy the ride, though probably not as much as they'd expect." Sales were unaffected by such negative views. Blood Brothers followed Roberts's other titles to the bestseller list.

Roberts also began a new venture in 2007. Lifetime Television launched "Nora Roberts Month" in late January with an adaptation of Angels Fall as a Lifetime Original Movie starring Heather Locklear. The movie garnered mixed reviews. The Boston Globe mocked Locklear's acting, calling her "a living version of an airbrushed romance-
paperback cover, a female Fabio," but Laura Fries in *Daily Variety* praised the lush scenery and the successful creation of mystery, even though she found that "what is supposed to be a slow-burning affair looks more like a dysfunctional hookup." Lifetime followed *Angels Fall* with three more adaptations of Roberts bestsellers: *Carolina Moon, Montana Sky* and *Blue Smoke*. Roberts made a cameo appearance in each and wrote an article about her experience for *TV Guide*.

Roberts was also named as one of *Time Magazine*'s 100 Most Influential People in 2007, one of only two authors to receive this honor. Writing for *Time*, Andrea Sachs called Roberts "the world's leading romance writer," declaring that Roberts had "inspected, dissected, deconstructed, explored, explained and extolled the passions of the human heart ." In October Roberts captured double Quill Awards when *Angels Fall* was named both Romance of the Year and Book of the Year. The Sign of Seven trilogy continued into 2008 with *The Hollow* and *The Pagan Stone*, but Roberts announcement in her February newsletter that she was working on a new "quartet of books about the women who own and run a wedding business" scheduled to begin publication in 2009 suggests that she is leaving the paranormal bandwagon and returning to the kind of stories that first garnered her legions of fans. The "hyperprolific bestseller," as *Publishers Weekly* termed her, added *Tribute* another single title romantic suspense to her achievements. John Charles, writing in *Booklist*, praised Roberts's wit and her "magnetic and superbly nuanced characters." He also found the plot "cleverly ordered" and "spiced with subtle suspense and sexy romance," but *Publishers Weekly* called the plot "half-baked" and a distraction from the romance. Despite the occasional harsh word from a critic, Roberts's fans continue to increase, sending to the bestseller lists books such as the Stanislaski and MacGregor books that have been reissued multiple times. Fans also seem unaffected by the tepid critical response to the 2007 movie adaptations. Ratings were high enough for Lifetime Television to announce that they would again team with Mandalay Television and Stephanie Germain Productions to produce four more original movies based on Nora Roberts books.

Critics and readers alike are astounded by the size and consistent quality of Roberts's oeuvre, but Roberts's contribution to romance extends far beyond her impressive backlist and record-shattering awards. When Roberts entered the field in 1981, category romance was successful as a genre, but individual works within the category format had a shelf life of about thirty days. Nora Roberts challenged that limitation. She has proved that twenty-year-old category fiction still sells; publishers and dozens of other successful romance writers now profit from reissued works. Roberts has also transformed the conventions of the genre. Kloberdanz notes that from the earliest days of her career, Roberts "has helped lead American romance away from the clichés of simpering heroines and heroic rapists toward more complex characters and contemporary, multi-faceted plots." Even at the height of mainstream success, Roberts remained true to her romance roots, continuing to write category fiction for more than a decade after her hardcover debut and weaving with increased skill elements of other genres such as mystery, adventure, and women's fiction into the category mix. Roberts did not invent connected stories or family sagas, but she made them her own and started a trend in romance fiction that shows no decline decades later. She extended her use of trilogies, begun in her category days, into her mainstream
work, and there, too, she set a pattern that others have eagerly followed. But even amid increased competition, Roberts's Calhouns, O'Hurleys, Quinns, and others ride the bestseller list.

Nora Roberts's name has become synonymous with romance fiction in American popular culture. *Forbes* lists her among such luminaries as J.K. Rowling and Dan Brown in the five writers they included in the magazines Top Ten Celebrities for 2005. Amazon.com named Roberts #3 on their list of twenty-five best-selling writers of the past decade. Both *Blue Dahlia* (Jove) and *Northern Lights* (Berkley) were among the five nominees in the romance category for the first Quill Award, defined by its sponsor Reed Business Information, parent of *Publishers Weekly*, as "an industry qualified 'Readers Choice' awards program for books, honoring the current titles readers deem most entertaining and enlightening." Roberts shows no sign of slowing her production or her popularity. Reviews may praise the current bestseller, fans may hungrily consume new works and reprints, but Roberts's own focus is on the next book. "It's always the next book," she told *Bookreporter.com* in 1998. "The biggest dream is inside that story and those people. I just want to find out about that, dive into that—then hope the reader will care as much as I did."

Rira Awards winner for best novel 16 times since 1983
BOOKS: *Irish Thoroughbred* (New York: Silhouette, 1981);  
*Blithe Images* (New York: Silhouette, 1982);  
*Song of the West* (New York: Silhouette, 1982);  
*Search for Love* (New York: Silhouette, 1982);  
*Island of Flowers* (New York: Silhouette, 1982);  
*The Heart's Victory* (New York: Silhouette, 1982);  
*From This Day* (New York: Silhouette, 1983);  
*Her Mother's Keeper* (New York: Silhouette, 1983);  
*Once More with Feeling* (New York: Silhouette, 1983);  
*Reflections* (New York: Silhouette, 1983);  
*Dance of Dreams* (New York: Silhouette, 1983);  
*Untamed* (New York: Silhouette, 1983);  
*Tonight and Always* (New York: Silhouette, 1983);  
*This Magic Moment* (New York: Silhouette, 1983);  
*Endings and Beginnings* (New York: Silhouette, 1984);  
*Storm Warning* (New York: Silhouette, 1984);  
*Sullivan's Woman* (New York: Silhouette, 1984);  
*First Impressions* (New York: Silhouette, 1984);  
*Promise Me Tomorrow* (New York: Pocket Books, 1984);  
*A Matter of Choice* (New York: Silhouette, 1984);  
*Less of a Stranger* (New York: Silhouette, 1984);  
*The Law Is a Lady* (New York: Silhouette, 1984);  
*Rules of the Game* (New York: Silhouette, 1984);  
*Opposites Attract* (New York: Silhouette, 1984);  
*Playing the Odds* (New York: Silhouette, 1985);  
*The Right Path* (New York: Silhouette, 1985);  
*Partners* (New York: Silhouette, 1985);  
*Tempting Fate* (New York: Silhouette, 1985);  
*Night Moves* (Toronto: Harlequin, 1985);  
*All the Possibilities* (New York: Silhouette, 1985);  
*One Man's Art* (New York: Silhouette, 1985);  
*Boundary Lines* (New York: Silhouette, 1985);  
*Summer Desserts* (New York: Silhouette, 1985);  
*Dual Image* (New York: Silhouette, 1985);  
*Second Nature* (New York: Silhouette, 1986);  
*The Art of Deception* (New York: Silhouette, 1986);  
*One Summer* (New York: Silhouette, 1986);  
*Affaire Royale* (New York: Silhouette, 1986);  
*Lessons Learned* (New York: Silhouette, 1986);  
*Treasures Lost, Treasures Found* (New York: Silhouette, 1986);  
*Risky Business* (New York: Silhouette, 1986);  
*A Will and a Way* (New York: Silhouette, 1986);  
*For Now, Forever* (New York: Silhouette, 1987);
Mind over Matter (New York: Silhouette, 1987);
Command Performance (New York: Silhouette, 1987);
Hot Ice (New York: Bantam Books, 1987);
Temptation (New York: Silhouette, 1987);
The Playboy Prince (New York: Silhouette, 1987);
Sacred Sins (New York: Bantam Books, 1987);
Local Hero (New York: Silhouette, 1988);
Irish Rose (New York: Silhouette, 1988);
Brazen Virtue (New York: Bantam Books, 1988);
The Last Honest Woman (New York: Silhouette, 1988);
Dance to the Piper (New York: Silhouette, 1988);
Rebellion (Toronto: Harlequin, 1988);
Skin Deep (New York: Silhouette, 1988);
The Name of the Game (New York: Silhouette, 1988);
Loving Jack (New York: Silhouette, 1989);
Sweet Revenge (New York: Bantam Books, 1989);
Best Laid Plans (New York: Silhouette, 1989);
Lawless (Toronto: Harlequin, 1989);
Gabriel's Angel (New York: Silhouette, 1989);
The Welcoming (New York: Silhouette, 1989);
Time Was (New York: Silhouette, 1989);
Times Change (New York: Silhouette, 1990);
Taming Natasha (New York: Silhouette, 1990);
Public Secrets (New York: Bantam, 1990);
Without a Trace (New York: Silhouette, 1990);
Night Shift (New York: Silhouette, 1991);
Night Shadows (New York: Silhouette, 1991);
Courting Catherine (New York: Silhouette, 1991);
A Man for Amanda (New York: Silhouette, 1991);
For the Love of Lilah (New York: Silhouette, 1991);
Genuine Lies (New York: Bantam, 1991);
Suzanna's Surrender (New York: Silhouette, 1991);
Luring a Lady (New York: Silhouette, 1991);
Carnal Innocence (New York: Bantam, 1992);
Unfinished Business (New York: Silhouette, 1992);
Honest Illusions (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1992);
Captivated (New York: Silhouette, 1992);
Divine Evil (New York: Bantam, 1992);
Entranced (New York: Silhouette, 1992);
Charmed (New York: Silhouette, 1992);
Falling for Rachel (New York: Silhouette, 1993);
Private Scandals (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1993);
Nightshade (New York: Silhouette, 1993);
Convincing Alex (New York: Silhouette, 1994);
Hidden Riches (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1994);
Born in Fire (New York: Jove, 1994);
Night Smoke (New York: Silhouette, 1994);
The Return of Rafe MacKade (New York: Silhouette, 1995);
True Betrayals (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995);
Naked in Death, as J.D. Robb (New York: Berkley, 1995; Piatkus 2003);
Born in Ice (New York: Jove, 1995);
Glory in Death, as J.D. Robb (New York: Berkley, 1995; Piatkus, 2003);
The Pride of Jared MacKade (New York: Silhouette, 1995);
Born in Shame (New York: Jove, 1996);
The Heart of Devin MacKade (New York: Silhouette, 1996);
Montana Sky (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1996);
The Fall of Shane MacKade (New York: Silhouette, 1996);
Immortal in Death, as J.D. Robb (New York: Berkley, 1996; Piatkus 2003);
Daring to Dream (New York: Jove, 1996);
Rapture in Death, as J.D. Robb (New York: Berkley, 1996; Piatkus, 2003);
Megan's Mate (New York: Silhouette, 1996);
Holding the Dream (New York: Jove, 1997);
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Known as the “Queen of Historical Romance”, Rosemary Rogers has had an undeniable impact both on the form and content of the genre in contemporary times. Her *Sweet Savage Love* (1973) became a fan favorite and endeared its protagonists, Steve Morgan and Ginny Brandon, to millions of readers worldwide. In addition to touching off Rogers’ literary success, *Sweet Savage Love* (along with Kathleen Woodiwiss’ 1972 *The Flame and the Flower*) ignited a national passion for historical romance novels that would last through the 1970’s. Since their publication, Rogers’ early novels have served as a template for other writers looking to duplicate her success both in selling novels and capturing the imaginations of female readers.

Rogers’ most memorable contribution to the field of romance writing, however, has been her insistence on depicting graphic physical love in her novels. Eschewing what she called the “candlelight atmosphere” of other popular women’s fiction, Rogers portrays her male and female characters in highly sexualized, explicit scenarios. Readers have frequently disputed the glamorization of violent sex in Rogers’ work, making her a controversial figure in the contemporary debate about gender and sexuality.

Rosemary Rogers was born Rosemary Jansz on December 7, 1932 in Panadura, Ceylon, which is now known as Sri Lanka. Rogers lived her early life in what her publicist describes as “colonial splendor” with her father, Cyril Allan, and her mother, Barbara Jansz. Allan owned and operated a private school in the province, and Rogers took full advantage of the life of privilege his wealth provided for her, traveling to chic European spas in the summertime and allowing family servants to pamper her year-round.

As a girl, Rosemary Rogers steeped herself in romantic literature. She was an avid reader, and found herself drawn to the works of classic writers like Sir Walter Scott, Alexandre Dumas, and Rafael Sabatini. Fiction came naturally to her, and she wrote her first short story when she was eight years old. Throughout her teenage years, she would continue to write for pleasure, penning unpublished novels and stories about lovers in historical settings in imitation of her own favorite authors.

Despite her fanciful imaginative life, Rogers chose a practical path for her early career. She availed herself of the best private education her parents could provide and eventually earned her Bachelor’s degree in politics at the University of Ceylon. Having been raised in nearly complete luxury, Rogers stunned her parents after graduation with her desire to enter the working world as a newspaper reporter. The first woman in her family to work outside the home, Rogers used her education to secure a position with the local paper. Her first job as a professional writer with the Associate Newspapers of Ceylon allowed her to explore the local culture through feature stories, but Rogers quickly decided that she wanted more. She surpassed her editors’ expectations for a female reporter by insisting that she be allowed to cover stories outside of the traditional “ladies’ beats.”
Soon she was making use of her background in politics to write news articles on public affairs.

It was around this time that Rogers met and fell in love with a local celebrity, Summa Navaratnam. Navaratnam was a competitive sprinter who had been dubbed “the fastest man in Asia,” and Rogers’ parents were shocked by her interest in him. Regardless, the two married and had two daughters, Roseanne and Sharon. Unfortunately, the track star’s infidelity led to the eventual collapse of the marriage, which prompted Rogers to move to London with her daughters shortly thereafter.

In London, Rosemary Rogers continued to pursue writing while searching for love. She met an American G.I., Leroy Rogers, whom she quickly married. In 1964, along with her daughters and her husband, Rogers moved on to the Travis Airforce Base in Fairfield, California, where she began work as a secretary in the billeting office. Rosemary and Leroy Rogers settled down in California and devoted themselves to expanding their family. Over the next few years, Rosemary had two more children: her sons, Michael and Adam. Meanwhile, as Rogers became a naturalized citizen of the United States, her homeland of Ceylon became immersed in military conflict. A socialist revolution swept the country, and Marxist revolutionaries sought to re-distribute the wealth Cyril Allan and his wife had accumulated. Rogers’ parents abandoned their property, escaped Ceylon, and immigrated to America to live with their daughter. By this point, Rogers’ second marriage was in trouble, and she soon found herself alone with four children and two elderly parents to support.

Rosemary Rogers was now working as a secretary for the Solano County Parks Department for a salary of $4,200 per year, struggling to make ends meet as a single parent. She still continued to write for pleasure, and began to look back on the romantic novels she had written as a teenager. Rogers began compulsively rewriting one of her early efforts, the story of a young heroine seduced by a gunslinger in the post-Civil War American Southwest. In 1973, after several years supporting her family, she had finally reached the 23rd draft of her book when one of her daughters discovered the novel sitting on the kitchen table. According to Rogers, it was her daughter’s advice that led her to seek out Nancy Coffey of Avon Books. Coffey, the editor responsible for Kathleen Woodiwiss’s popular first novel, *The Flame and the Flower*, was interested in exploring the potential of the new market for women’s mass-market “bodice-rippers.” Looking for the next blockbuster romance, she discovered Rosemary Rogers’ *Sweet Savage Love* in her slush pile and immediately contracted Rogers to Avon.

*Sweet Savage Love* sold over 1.8 million copies in its first two years in print. Its tremendous popularity was attributed by many to its use of a classic romance novel formula combined with erotic, sometimes violent, love scenes. The story focuses on the exploits of Ginny Brandon, the daughter of a California Senator in the late 19th century. Courted by a number of “acceptable” men, Ginny rejects them and finds herself romantically entwined with Steve Morgan, the guide her father has hired to carry her and her mother, Sonya, into Mexico with a wagon-load of hidden gold. *Sweet Savage Love*
details the “enforced companionship” the two lovers share when Steve kidnaps Ginny and carries her with him through Mexico and the Southwestern states. Despite the fact that Steve keeps her by force and repeatedly rapes her, Ginny is drawn to his crude masculinity and sadistic use of force. For the remainder of the novel, Steve and Ginny are regularly separated, Ginny is sexually assaulted by three men at once and forced to barter with sex for her freedom, and both lovers involve themselves in international political intrigue. Throughout these manifold obstacles, however, Steve and Ginny retain their passion for each other and seek each other out in the end. Steve is eventually (ostensibly) subdued into a more domesticated love for Ginny and the formerly virginal heroine discovers her emotional tenacity and willful strength. Rogers’ true innovation, however, was in her trademark style, notable for its breathless emotional descriptions, attention to historical detail, and graphic depictions of sex.

This combination of sweetness and “savagery” proved successful with readers, and *Sweet Savage Love* was a runaway success. Rogers quickly followed with her second novel, *Wildest Heart*, which immediately hit the *New York Times* bestseller charts and remained in the top ten for 12 weeks in the late fall and winter of 1974. *Wildest Heart* tells the story of Rowena Dangerfield, who leaves England for America to find her father on the frontier of New Mexico. As in *Sweet Savage Love*, the hero of Rowena’s story is a distant, brooding man named Lucas Cord, a half-Apache renegade with a troubled past; however, *Wildest Heart* deviates from the classic historical romance narrative in its depiction of male-female relationships. While in the Steve and Ginny books, the hero frequently abuses his lover as part of their violent repartee, in this novel, Lucas demonstrates vulnerability and waits for affirmation of Rowena’s love before “taking” her. Still, the novel features several incidents of Rogers’ unique brand of sexually charged violence, dwelling on the men who seek to separate Rowena from Lucas. In these scenes, Rowena is forced to submit to sexual advances from Lucas’s brother and her own step father. Gradually hardened by these trials, Rowena must be wooed by Lucas in order to trust again.

*Wildest Heart* proved an uncharacteristic break from Rogers’ focus on violent love as she returned in 1975 to the Steve and Ginny saga. Impressed by the immediate success of her first two novels, Avon planned a 1st print order of 1,354,000, which *The New York Times* reported as “probably a record for an original novel.” *Dark Fires* did not disappoint, and after only a month in print, the book had sold 2,014,000 copies. Rosemary Rogers’ third book follows Ginny and Steve from the point where *Sweet Savage Love* leaves off, and continues the epic tale of their erratic romance. In this novel, Steve and Ginny are once again torn apart by the complicated circumstances of international politics. Ginny is captured and tortured by Carl Hoskins, one of her spurned suitors from the first book, and Steve finds himself involved with other women as the narrative veers from Mexico to Paris. Throughout the novel, the lovers’ affair remains tempestuous and vicious, with Steve at one point describing Ginny as “the kind of woman who needs to be beaten regularly.”

In 1976, Rogers’ *Wicked Loving Lies* continued Rogers’ streak of popular successes, debuting on the *Times* bestseller list at number two and reaching number one after just a
week. *Wicked Loving Lies* capitalized on the success of Rogers’ sweet/savage romances, introducing a new pair of lovers, Dominic and Marisa Challenger. Like *Dark Fires*, the locale of the story shifts from 19th century America to Paris and back, as the two lovers marry as the result of an incidence of mistaken identity, are separated by political machinations, and struggle to find each other again. Also similar is the treatment of sexuality in the book – Marisa is raped several times, both by her husband (who first believes her to be a prostitute) and a band of strangers. These experiences do not impede her in pursuit of love, however, and she has more or less consensual affairs with her husband’s cousin, an Arabian prince, and Napoleon before admitting her true desire for Dominic.

The response to *Wicked Loving Lies* was tremendous. In the fall of 1976, Rogers embarked on a 20-city tour to promote the novel and discovered throngs of eager fans packing the bookstores she visited across the country. *The New York Times*, upon observing this phenomenon, named her “The Queen of the Historical Romance.” With these achievements came a more comfortable life-style and a restoration of some of her former aristocratic status. She moved her family to a beautiful new home in Carmel, California. Whereas she had written *Sweet Savage Love* in her nightly free time between caring for her children and attending to her secretarial work, now she had the luxury of working at night and sleeping during the day.

Rogers reveled in her new-found triumph, but once again desired to challenge others’ conceptions of her “place” as a writer. In the latter half of the 1970’s, Rosemary Rogers would reinvent herself as a prominent writer of contemporary jet-set romance. Rogers’ next two novels, *The Crowd Pleasers* (1978) and *The Insiders* (1979) told the story of women caught up in the pill-popping social elite of 1970’s California. These novels more closely resembled the work of Jacqueline Susann than Kathleen Woodiwiss, but they retained a number of Rogers’ signature set-pieces.

*The Crowd Pleasers*’ heroine, Anne Hyatt, is a divorcee looking for fulfillment as a model in the hyper-competitive world of the entertainment industry. In her quest for professional advancement, she travels from London to California, where she encounters America’s hottest new screen star, Webb Carnahan. Along her journey, she is sexually and emotionally abused by all of her male colleagues, forcing her to learn (much like Ginny Brandon) how to use her sexuality to her advantage in order to get ahead. Similarly, *The Insiders* tells the story of another naïve young woman, Eve Mason, a news anchorwoman who unknowingly stumbles into a crowd of sadomasochistic sexual libertines who find sexual pleasure in holding auctions for sex slaves at their stylish parties. In true “bodice-ripper” fashion, Eve falls for the ringleader of this group, the charming but brutal Brant Newcomb. Brant and his friends gang rape the heroine in order to shame her into silence about their behavior, which creates the messy entanglement that keeps the characters in constant interaction. In the end, though, just like Steve Morgan or Dominic Challenger, Brant admits his love for Eve and proposes to her as a sign of his commitment.
Both these roman-a-clef contemporary novels drew in a massive audience, with *The Crowd Pleasers* on the bestseller list for just under 10 months. However, this increased exposure led to public concern about the content of Rogers’ books. Many readers who had been willing to accept Rogers’ reliance on rape themes in a 19th century historical context were disturbed by her depiction of contemporary women who accepted sexual violence as a natural expression of primitive love. By 1979, Rosemary Rogers’ books had already been banned by schools in Scottsdale, Arizona, and some questioned whether her novels were appropriate for even an adult audience. In addressing this concern to reporter Carol Lawson, Rogers stressed the “escapist” nature of her “fairy-tale fiction,” insisting that “there is a difference between actual rape, which is horrifying, and fantasy. In the rape fantasy, you pick the man and the circumstances.” By arguing that her fiction was a way for women to explore their fantasies, she made the claim for the romance as a means of female sexual liberation rather than exploitation.

In 1981, Rogers revisited the Steve and Ginny story with its third installment, which, like *The Crowd Pleasers*, made its first appearance on the bestseller list at number one. *Lost Love, Last Love* showed a more restrained Rosemary Rogers, displaying fewer explicit sex scenes than the first two installments. Again, though, Rogers investigates the eroticism of brute force, providing Steve’s foil in the character of Richard, his rival for Ginny’s affections. Though Ginny is temporarily won over by Richard’s less vicious ways, after he is defeated in a military battle, she returns to Steve’s virility and aggressive seduction style.

Still interested in the contemporary scene, Rogers returned to the present with her 1981 *Love Play*. This novel’s heroine, Sara Coleville, is the daughter of a movie star mother and sister to a pornographic film actress. In an attempt to mediate the tangled love affair between her sister and an Italian man from Brooklyn, Sara herself becomes entangled with the Brooklynite’s cousin (an Italian duke) Marco Marcantoni. Marco kidnaps Sara in his private plane and spirits her away to a secluded locale where he can have his way with her, beginning a long and tumultuous love affair. Like its predecessor, this novel seemed to reflect a slightly subdued, less violent sensibility, suggesting that Rogers had altered her style to suit the less permissive mood of the new decade.

*Surrender to Love* (1982) marked Rogers permanent return to historical romance and, in many ways, the end of Rogers’ formal experimentation. By this point, Rogers had settled into a more controlled style that balanced her desire to express powerful sexual relationships with her need to connect with female readers. The story of Nicholas Dameron and Alexa Howard begins in 19th century Ceylon and follows the two lovers through the “night worlds” of several European capitals. Like so many of Rogers’ protagonists, Alexa is drawn to Nicholas for his cruelty and unable to stop herself from pursuing him. Rogers’ 1985 *The Wanton* echoed this theme in a familiar, 19th century American setting, charting the stormy relationship between Trista Windham and Blaze Davenant. Trista finds herself at the mercy of her desire for Blaze, submitting to sexual attacks from several men (most unfortunately, her own step-brother) in the process of pursuing him.
In 1988, Rosemary Rogers penned yet another sequel to her Steve and Ginny series, *Bound by Desire*. This latest installment introduced Laura, Steve and Ginny’s daughter, who follows in her mother’s footsteps as a romantic, fiery leading lady. Like her mother before her, Laura falls deeply in love with a cruel man, Trent Challenger, who attempts to discipline her independence through rape and captivity.


In 1999, Rosemary Rogers enjoyed some public attention for leaving Avon, the publisher that had invested in her as a brand name in women’s fiction. Rogers had been instrumental in the success of Avon’s mass-market division, but now Rogers looked toward a future with a new publisher. With the help of Nancy Coffey, who had by this point become her agent, Rogers negotiated a deal with Mira, a division of Harlequin.

Rogers celebrated the move by writing the final installment in the Steve and Ginny story, *Savage Desire*, which was published in 2000. Readers who hadn’t heard from Steve and Ginny since 1980 were eager to see how those characters had matured in the intervening 20 years; some were disappointed to see that not much had changed between the two lovers. In *Savage Desire*, Ginny is still the impetuous gamin and Steve is still the savage outcast of the earlier novels – throughout the book they meet, are separated, and sustain their love through fierce physicality.

Since 2000, Rosemary Rogers has produced roughly a novel each year: *A Reckless Encounter* (2001), *An Honorable Man* (2002), *Return to Me* (2003), *Jewel of My Heart* (2004), *Sapphire* (2005), *A Daring Passion* (2007), and *Scandalous Deception* (2008). Like her novels of the 90’s, these books more or less consistently adhere to the tenets of historical romance established in *Sweet Savage Love*, but none have replicated the literary explosion that Rogers’ early work inspired. Rogers’ personal life has grown quieter as well. She is currently married to poet Christopher Kadison, and the two have made a life together in Connecticut.

Despite the fact that Rogers current works do not have the same audience draw as her earlier works, those early works are still in print and continue to sell worldwide. Rogers herself, as an artist and a public figure, continues to inspire her readers and her fellow romance writers to consider the positive power of romance and sexual fantasy. Although the sexual demeanor of her books may seem dated to contemporary readers, Rogers endures as a controversial figure in the cultural debate about women’s reading and women’s sexuality.
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Few writers of romance fiction have enjoyed the success that Danielle Steel has. With over 530 million copies of her works in print, distributed in 47 countries and translated into 28 languages, Danielle Steel is one of the most widely-read romance fiction writers of this century. Over the course of her writing career, it is common to see two to five works published in a given year. Steel has indicated that she spends, on average, two and a half years on a novel from conception to completion. To date, Danielle Steel has authored eighty works and coauthored one non-fiction work. Sixty-five of her writings fall into the category of romance fiction, fourteen are children’s fiction, one work is a biography of her son, Nick Traina, and one is a book of verse. She has co-authored a book on childbirth and contributed to three other works. Twenty-two television movies, several of which are miniseries, represent novel adaptations of her romance works. Over the years, Steel has published a number of articles, predominately, but not exclusively in women’s magazines. Most of these articles address family-related issues.

In 1989, Steel entered the Guinness Book of Records for having at least one of her novels on the New York Times bestseller list for 381 consecutive weeks; a number that has since grown to 390 weeks. Since the 1980’s and after a solid twenty-seven years since her first major break into the publishing world, her popularity has not waned. Her personal website through Random House (www.randomhouse.com/features/steel/) regularly updates this data and provides more detailed information about Danielle Steel.

In the article, Reaching Millions, Steel discusses her success.

There may be other writers who are as good as I am, or better, but none who work harder. I put in an 18-hour workday when I’m not writing a book and a 22-hour workday when I am. I don’t need much sleep.

Danielle Fernande Schuelein-Steel was born in Manhattan, New York, August 14, 1947, the only child of John Schuelein-Steel and Norma da Camara Stone des Reis. According to Vickie Bane and Nicole Hoyt, Danielle Steel’s paternal grandfather and members of his family immigrated during the 1930’s and early 1940’s to escape the Holocaust. Her paternal great-grandfather had founded a brewery in Munich in 1895. Wolfgang Behringer’s book provides a good historical account of the Löwenbräu brewery from its inception to the present day. A successful merger with Löwenbräu in 1921, negotiated by her grandfather’s brother, formed the largest brewery in Germany. Within a decade, the fortunes of the Schuelein family were reduced to one-quarter of their worth, while the Nazi’s enjoyed the remaining three-fourths as ransom to secure safe passage out of Germany.

The Schueleins’ passage to the United States, like so many immigrants, was a promise of life coupled with the challenge of carving out a new one. Two years later, in 1938, subsequent to his
death, her great grandfather’s estate was confiscated. After the war, Danielle Steel’s father added Steel to the family name to blend in better with his newly adopted country.

Danielle Steel’s mother, Norma, is the daughter of Gil da Camara Stone des Reis, another immigrant, who left the Azores Islands for Massachusetts in the early 1900’s, eventually relocating in the 1920’s to New Jersey. Norma and John met during World War II in New York and were married. According to Goldberg’s article, Steel describes her mother, Norma, as beautiful and flirtatious. She describes her father as a playboy, who enjoyed the finer things in life. The marriage between her parents ended after seven years, with Steel’s father retaining custody. Her mother moved to Europe.

Danielle Steel has described her childhood as lonely. In an interview with Plaskin, she made a reference to feeling unloved by her parents and stressed the importance of children having parents who loved them, cared for them, and wanted to spend time with them. In reading various interviews, her description of her childhood paints a picture of a child standing on the periphery of adult life watching, absorbing, feeling invisible, and to some degree, emotionally abandoned.

The evocation of an emotionally solitary childhood is strengthened by accounts of Steel’s childhood health issues. Vickie Bane, who cited as information sources, letters written by Steel to both her second and to her third husband, indicates that Steel did not have the benefit of parental care while confronting various maladies. Afflicted with asthma and allergies, and diagnosed with a mild form of polio at the age of twelve, Danielle Steel was hospitalized fairly frequently. At fifteen, she contracted hepatitis from food, and at the age of sixteen, Steel ended up with a stomach ulcer. Following these illnesses, she was diagnosed with an ovarian tumor, which turned out to be cancerous and was subsequently removed.

Schooled in New York at the Lycée Français, Steel had a rigorous education and spent copious amounts of time studying, a discipline that may have served her well in her career as a writer. She graduated at the age of fifteen and a year later, she entered the Parson’s School of Design. Within a year, she chose to discontinue her studies and enrolled at the New York University. Her field of study was French literature with a minor in Italian. Steel excelled in the humanities and is fluent in French and Italian, with proficiency in Spanish and German. In 1963, her father remarried a Japanese artist, Kuniko Nakamura, who taught Danielle a little Japanese.

At the age of eighteen, Danielle and Claude-Eric Lazard announced their engagement and were married four months later. Danielle and Claude-Eric had met when Danielle was fourteen. Claude-Eric was eleven years her senior. The Lazard family made their fortune as bankers. Gleaned from two decades of newspaper articles, Bane and Benet provide a composite of the Lazard family. Formerly from France, the Lazard brothers initially were dry good merchants, opening shops in New Orleans, and eventually settling in San Francisco during the Gold Rush. The influx of gold into San Francisco, coupled with the population boom, appears to have provided the incentive to shift gears and move into banking—a move that positioned them well in high society. Over time, the Lazard family adopted the Roman-Catholic faith and relinquished their Jewish faith. Knowledge of the union of two high-society families, the Lazard’s and the Ehrman’s, along with information about the experiences of various family members, would lead
the reader to conclude that these families’ lives were likely sources of inspiration for the novels, *Summer’s End*, *Crossings*, *Jewels*, and *Echoes*.

Steel’s marriage to Claude-Eric secured her a home in New York, San Francisco, and Paris, but her marriage to Claude-Eric did not afford her happiness. In 1986, in an article entitled, “The Romance of Danielle Steel,” Steel alludes to her husband attempting to control her stating, “My great act of defiance came when he’d [her husband] been away for a month or two. He came back and said, ‘Open the Window,’ and I said, ‘No I won’t,’ and thought that I’d invented the wheel. I got sent to my room a lot.”

Born into Catholicism, Steel adopted Christian Science as her faith of choice at the age of twenty. There has been speculation regarding the reason for her choice, with attributions made to her illnesses as motivators, but these remain assumptions. During an interview with Plaskin, Steel mentions her strong faith, but explains that she is not a “rabid fanatic,” and states that she did not care for “the guilt of the Catholic Church and the idea that adversity is God’s will.” Her reference during this interview to the Christian Science belief, and her own faith in the belief, that “if you hit a rock 10 times, eventually it will break open,” characterizes her indomitable spirit.

At twenty, she gave birth to her first daughter, Beatrix. A few months after the birth of her daughter, while watching the Tonight Show, she learned about two women (Jessup and Chipps) who had started a public relations business. Through steady persistence, Steel secured a temporary position in the year 1968 with the firm, Supergirls and worked there until 1971. Aware of her husband’s family standing, Danielle Steel chose to use Steel in lieu of her married name in the workplace. Her work at Supergirls is perhaps the cornerstone of the career that followed. While at Supergirls, she earned the title of Director of Public Relations and Vice President in charge of marketing. In an interview of the cofounders of Supergirls, conducted by Bane and Benet, Steel is described as a person possessing boundless energy, exceptional organizational skills, generosity of spirit, and a great sense of style. In their book, *Supergirls: the Autobiography of an Outrageous Business*, Steel’s fascination with typewriters is discussed. Danielle Steel is noted for writing her works on the same manual typewriter that she used while writing her first novel, a 1948 Olympia.

In an interview with *Contemporary Authors*, conducted on November 18, 1985, she credits John Mack Carter for encouraging her to consider writing a book. Steel met Carter while marketing Supergirls’ services. At that time, he was the editor of *Ladies’ Home Journal* and Steel impressed him enough to hire Supergirls to do a press project, which she handled. Carter suggested she write poetry to give expression to her passionate nature, which apparently was evidenced by the emotion that went into her job-related assignments. Poetry had been a vehicle of expression for Danielle as a young girl, but with Carter’s encouragement, Steel had a number of her poems and articles published in periodicals such as *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *McCalls*, to name but a few.

A self-declared avid reader, in this same interview, she cites Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette, a celebrated female author—who, in her own lifetime, wrote several contemporary novels—as her favorite author. Colette was a colorful woman for her times; she married three times and openly
acknowledged her bisexuality. Love and betrayal were standard themes in Colette’s works, not unlike many of Steel’s works. In the book, *Supergirls*, reference is made to Steel’s appetite for romance novels, citing Georgette Heyer, an historical romance fiction author, as one of her favorite authors at that time.

Steel was given another opportunity to write the “Lifestyle” column for *American Homes* in 1969, when the editor, Fred Smith, temporarily hired staff from Supergirls to fill in while he made changes. Essentially, the column was composed of snippets drawn from conversations at social events ranging from the bizarre habits of the rich, to fashion trends, to discoveries, and to whatever else might pique a reader’s interest. John Mack Carter, referenced earlier, was at the time the president of Downe Communications, the company that owned *American Homes*.

In the 1969 summer issue of *American Homes*, the first page of the “Lifestyle” column features an ad for Supergirls. It reads, “Supergirls do anything. The new country-wide service organization has 800 with-it young ladies, like Danielle Steel of New York, who tackle offbeat chores.” Hoyt attributes Steel’s high energy, work experience, and her sincere belief in the Supergirls Corporation philosophy—determine what it is you want and do what it takes to get it—as key factors for her to take the next important step in her career.

In 1970, Danielle Steel unofficially separated from her husband, Claude-Eric, and in 1971 she made a number of trips to San Francisco, staying several months at a time, to work on her second manuscript, *Going Home*, and to conduct research for her third book, *In the Fog*, a first, but unsuccessful attempt at mystery writing. Five of Steel’s novels would not get published early in her career. Her first novel, composed at the age of 22 was rejected, but *Going Home*, her first published novel was completed in 1971, submitted in January 1972, and published in 1973. It symbolically signaled the end of her marriage. She filed in June 1972 for a legal separation and gained custody of Beatrix, plus the use of their New York co-op. That same year, she would find herself once again facing a health issue; a lump that turned out to be a benign cyst.

The publication of *Going Home* (1973), a story about a single mother, Gillian Forrester, and her daughter, Samantha leaving New York for San Francisco to start a new life parallels elements of Steel’s life. In 1973, Danielle Steel officially moved to San Francisco with Beatrix. She secured a position with Grey Advertising, writing copy. Her first romance novel, *Going Home* is a tale of a young woman who falls in love with a rogue, who treats her with great insensitivity. It is the modern version of a classic tale of a young woman whose infatuation with a bad boy blinds her to his selfish, manipulative, and cruel tendencies. Pregnant and rejected, she returns to New York and meets Gordon, the antithesis of Chris. Unfortunately, the contrast between Gordon and Chris is initially lost on Gillian, but through circumstance, tragedy, and heartbreak, Gillian learns about the consequences of one’s choices and ends up with Mr. Right.

The review in *Publishers Weekly* deemed the heroine of *Going Home* as “…not very interesting and neither is her story.” (*Publishers Weekly*, August 20, 1973). As her current publication record shows, Steel did not waiver from her goal to be a writer, despite the rejection of five works, nor was she deterred by reviewers who did not share her readership’s enthusiasm for her novels.
In late December 1975, she completed the manuscript, *Passion’s Promise*, which was released for publication in 1977, and began working on her next manuscript, *Now and Forever*. This work was submitted in December 1976 and was published in February 1978. In 1977, Steel secured the moving services of the Delancey Street Foundation, and met Bill Toth, the man soon to be her third husband (April 1978) and father of her second child, Nick. Like her second husband, Toth had his own set of demons, but did not show any indication of his past choices being current practice. Unfortunately, his past addiction resurfaced and Steel found herself living a harsh reality. September 1980, Steel filed for a divorce. In the same month, the book *Loving* went into print, a book she completed in July 1979.

Her next novel, *Passion’s Promise* (1977) is the story of Kezia Saint Martin, who, at the behest of her lover, Lucas breaks free from the life of the upper crust to pursue a serious writing career. Not unlike Steel’s column in *American Homes*, Kezia maintains a gossip column, but she also engages in serious journalism focusing on social issues. Her involvement with Lucas, a prison reformer, leads her to give up her career and her lifestyle. Lucas, her lover, is lost to her twice. The first time is when he is sent to prison; the second time she loses him to death. Kezia finds solace in a bottle for a while, but eventually pulls herself together and gets her life back on track. Noblesse oblige is a familiar refrain of Danielle Steel’s. The inferred obligation of people of high social standing to maintain a certain decorum and to behave nobly is a reoccurring theme in Steel’s writing.

*Now and Forever* (1978) is a novel about an innocent man accused and convicted of rape, which may have been inspired by her second husband, a convicted rapist, to whom the book is dedicated. Jessica and Ian Clarke’s seven-year marriage is challenged when he exercises poor judgment and sleeps with another woman while his wife is away on business. A drawn out trial leads to a two-year sentence. Jessica’s love is put to the test and with the help of therapy she works through her depression and sense of loss, which eventually leads to a return of faith. Steel’s use of various plots to explore how individuals face emotional challenges that lead to personal growth and positive outcomes is a signature theme of her romance novels.

Danielle Steel made her mark in the seventies by writing love stories dealing with contemporary issues, something her romantic fiction counterparts were not writing. *The Promise* (1978) is a significant career marker and while the television movie didn’t earn high marks, the publicity turned Danielle Steel into a recognized name, her book remaining on the paperback bestseller list for several months, with two million copies being printed.

The success of this novel induced her publisher to set up “The Danielle Steel Fan Club.” In the back of novels were entry forms to clip out. The filled out form entitled Steel fans to an autographed photograph, a “first look” at Steel’s upcoming books, and information about scheduled visits to the person’s hometown. *The Promise* was a novelization of a screenplay by Gary Michel White. Reputedly, (Hoyt) Carole Baron, publisher of Delacorte, asked Danielle Steel what she would like for her birthday and she indicated she would like a billboard on Sunset Blvd. *The Promise* being made into a television movie may be viewed as a symbolic shift to billboard status for Steel. In 1978, she returned to New York to participate in the publicity for Universal MGA’s movie. In this novel, Steel weaves a plot that tests the strength and endurance
of a couple's love for each other against seemingly insurmountable odds. Money, politics, and social station create the fabric of the storyline whose overarching theme is true love conquers all.

The chronicle of Steel’s works requires an understanding of the genre itself. In *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, Pamela Regis thoroughly explores the elements that constitute romance fiction. She details eight narrative elements: “a definition of society, always corrupt, that the romance novel will reform; the meeting between the heroine and hero; an account of their attraction for each other; the barrier between them; the point of ritual death; the recognition that falls the barrier; the declaration of heroine and hero that they love each other; and their betrothal.” (Regis, p. 14) These structural narrative elements allow Steel to explore the twentieth-century woman’s quest. Dana Heller states that “women’s quests must be able to embody the opposite impulses of separation and connection. Their journeys must affirm the need to reroute heroic destiny through these paradoxes of female psychic development: How is a capacity for both autonomy and relationship, attachment and independence, to be expressed?”

Steel succeeds in capturing through the narrative process, a woman’s quest for self-definition through the discovery of the power that comes from within as she [the heroine] finds expression within a social context. (Heller, p.13)

*Season of Passion* (1979) explores the transitory nature of life and the opportunities for growth that change creates. Eighteen-year old Kate is disowned by her parents for dropping out of Stanford to marry Tom, America’s biggest pro-football star. She experiences the joy and intensity of first love only to lose her vibrant partner, to heavy drink and eventually to a failed suicide attempt that leaves him both physically and mentally disabled. Pregnant, emotionally alone, and ravaged by her loss, she takes up writing and six years later publishes a bestseller and is invited to promote her book on television. While love is an inherent theme to romance fiction, this is a story about the growth of a young woman who finds herself face-to-face with some of life’s dilemmas, and who must learn to take a risk in order to revive her own life.

Deanna Duras, the heroine of *Summer’s End* (1979) is about a woman who is dominated by her husband, Marc Edouard, a French businessman whose strong control molds Deanna into a compliant subject. This controlling behavior is strongly characterized in a passage in the novel when Deanna recognizes that she married a way of life, not a partner. “She would have to be perfect, understanding, --and silent. She would have to be charming and entertain his clients and friends. And she would have to give up the dream of making a name for herself with her art. Marc didn’t really approve.” When Deanna’s husband informs her of his plans to be gone for the summer, she turns to her painting. When a gallery owner takes an interest in Deanna’s art, her life becomes more complex. Tragedy, infidelity, and other emotionally difficult issues allow Steel to insightfully explore issues related to self-esteem, morality, preservation of self, and the psychological struggle that fear creates when making a decision between the known and the unknown.

With few exceptions, Danielle Steel writes about talented and generally well-educated women, who endure some form of romantic loss and through these losses realize themselves as strong women who can have a successful career and a supportive partner. The stratus of society in which these women live is upper middle to high class, enjoying good looks, attractive bodies, and exposure to the finer things in life. The central theme of her novels is an exploration of love
lost, love found, and self-actualization, however, distinctions do exist amongst the heroines of her novels and her ability to write plausible dialogues lends credibility to her characters.

In *Reaching Millions*, Steel indicates that her characters become real to her, allowing her to create characters of integrity. Steel’s novels, unlike many of her counterparts, do not involve explicit sex scenes, but more tender and passionate renderings. No matter how wealthy her heroines may be, they are not indemnified from the harsh lessons of life and this makes her characters accessible and allows readers to identify on some level with these characters. Danielle Steel’s fiction is woven around the reality of the human condition, which ranges from the good, to the bad, to the ugly. Her novels address topics like child abuse, spousal abuse (both physical and mental), AIDS, war, social injustice, infidelity, sexuality, child-parent struggles, to name but a few. Readership identification with these real-life issues is a key ingredient to Steel’s success for creating plots that serve to chronicle the quest for or process of self-individuation. Central themes of love, loss, and longing, which are intricately woven into these variable plots, create the emotional pull that anchor avid readers of Steel’s brand of romance fiction.

In her novel, *To Love Again* (1980), Steel writes about a woman whose husband is kidnapped and subsequently killed, causing her to be enveloped by the consuming fear that her young son will be the next victim. Isabella’s fear is so great that she leaves Rome and flees to New York with her son to live in a friend’s apartment. Steel shows keen insight into how a traumatic event can have a crippling effect on a person, creating a wariness that is difficult to overcome.

*Loving* (1980) is about the journey of a young woman, Bettina, into womanhood. On the surface, Bettina, the daughter of a self-absorbed and well-known author, leads an enviable life—the life of affluence, which buys a person popularity and all the creature comforts of the rich. Bettina’s father exerts a strong influence over her and the focus of her life is to please her father, and upon his death, other men. Her need for approval leads her to subsume her own needs and hence, her own personality, until she takes her first real step toward self-actualization; she leaves her self-absorbed husband to pursue her writing interests. Bettina, through her failed relationships, learns along the way more about herself and her own needs, and in doing so, sheds light on the tendency for women to subsume their own identity in their relationships with men. Her successful career, coupled with her personal growth, results in an identification of her need to be with someone with the same intensity of personality and purpose as her own. Bettina’s awakening process serves to validate the quest to self-awareness and growth, and in turn lead to a more fully conceptualized relationship with another person.

*The Ring* (1980) was chosen by both the Doubleday Book Club and the Literary Guild, securing Steel greater recognition and professional leverage. Steel convinced Delacorte to publish *The Ring* as a hardcover novel, signaling another professional milestone for Steel and for romance fiction. Set during the rise of Nazi Germany, *The Ring* is a multi-generational tale about a woman, Kassandra von Gotthard, whose husband, Walmar, doesn’t fulfill her emotional needs, leading her to an affair with a Jewish writer, Dolf Sterne. Steel describes this woman’s dual life, one foot set in the life of the very rich, whose lives are filled with rich trappings and emotional barrenness: the other foot in the world of emotional richness and few luxuries. The Gestapo murders Kassandra’s lover and she takes her own life, leaving behind a young daughter and son, her husband, and two large rings. Walmar gives his daughter one of the rings before he takes his
son, who is eligible for the draft, out of Germany. Through an irony of fate, Ariana is separated from her family, the ring her only familial possession. Archetypal ring symbolism is timeliness, wholeness, and homecoming. The endless circle of the ring symbolizes undying bonds forged through a vow of love. Ariana’s journey has many parallels with her mother’s, and through her own child’s matrimony to Tamara Lieberman, generational paths come full circle and the ring acts as a talisman that eventually leads to a fateful reunion with Ariana’s brother. Steel’s passion for preserving historical threads that link past, present, and future surfaces in a number of her subsequent works.

In interviews, Steel has indicated that she is drawn to stories woven around wartime and several of her novels are woven around wartime. Like The Ring, her book, Crossings, published in 1982, takes place during World War II. Both of these works are focused on the relationship between a man and a woman, but the political and social context of the times are examined as well, adding depth to the storyline. In Crossings, the lead character, Liane, is depicted as a happily-married woman, whose French husband finds himself in a position of having to choose between his family and his country. Nick Burnham, an unhappily married friend, recognizes in Liane all the qualities that embody the ideal woman. Out of concern for his son’s well-being, he endures his marriage. Circumstances draw Liane and Nick together. Nick and Liane are portrayed sympathetically as two people who find themselves torn by their love for each other and their loyalty to their family. The characters’ desire to protect loved ones from pain is not possible, and the attempt to protect creates its own suffering. Steel manages to convey, through her portrayal of her characters’ experiences, that situations in life can take place without the intention of betrayal and that individuals can be caught in an intricate emotional web due to circumstance and choice, sometimes self-imposed, often as a twist of fate. Life’s ironies often surface in her works.

Remembrance (1981) is about a strikingly beautiful young woman of nobility who finds herself working as a servant in her family’s former palace after World War II. An American army major rescues her from her plight and their love blossoms leading to the birth of their daughter. The Korean War takes her husband’s life and Serena draws on her inner strength and rises to the many challenges of the fashion industry. The bittersweet journey of the heart and the process of self-individuation are portrayed.

Palomino (1981) explores the emotional challenges of a woman who loses her husband to another woman. Through friendship and hard work she starts the healing process, only to have her lover disappear. Samantha’s life is further complicated when she falls of a horse and finds herself wheelchair-bound. Finding the courage to persevere requires Samantha to turn inward to find the answers. Struggling with her physical handicap, a metaphor for the struggle of self-abreaction, she faces new challenges and discovers new loves in the process.

In addition to the three novels published, Steel’s book of verse Love: Poems (1981) punctuates Steel’s romance with romance. The poem, “Party Shoes,” expresses joy in a simple, yet profound manner. The lack of ambiguity heightens the accessibility of these poems. This accessibility is a strong element of her success as a romance fiction novelist and many of her novels are preceded by a relevant poem.

Brown galoshes and red party shoes
my old life and my new,  
my days alone, my life with you,  
funny funky old galoshes, sad and brown and cold,  
then you, my love, smiling, sparkling, shy yet bold,  
changing my life, my world, my blues,  
to dazzling, dancing, party shoes  

In June, 1981, Danielle Steel and John Traina were wed, blending two families together. John had two sons from his previous marriage, Trevor (1968) and Todd (1969). Danielle had Beatrix (1968) and Nick (1978). Together, Danielle and John would add five more over the next seven years to the family: Samantha (1982), Victoria (1983), Vanessa (1984), Maxx (1986), and Zara (1987). Danielle Steel’s love for her children and her interest in the welfare of children is well-publicized. In Having a Baby (1984) Steel provides a candid portrait of pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood, providing the reader with a strong sense of the person behind the career. In Steel’s article entitled, “The Turning Tides,” she states “as an only child, I had longed for a big family, and my husband is the perfect husband, the perfect father to such a big brood.”

The novel, Changes (1983), explores the challenge of pursuing a career and raising a family single-handedly. Melanie Adams is an anchor for a national news broadcast. She is also the mother of teenage twin girls. Years have past since her husband walked out on her and she has kept men at an emotional distance. Peter Hallman, a heart surgeon and a widower, shares her trepidation about getting too emotionally attached. The two have been dating for some time and their eventual admission of their love for each other leads them to matrimony and with that comes the realization that with marriage comes compromise and the challenges of blending two families. One of her daughters becomes involved with her stepbrother and faces pregnancy. Like most parents, Melanie and Peter do not have all the solutions and this makes their characters far more credible to the reader. With the daily tensions of work and family comes the realization that fear of change is the stronghold preventing a more harmonious relationship. Steel succeeds in showing the reader that the trappings of successful careers, do not secure emotional happiness and that in order to grow personally and as a couple requires both partners to stretch their respective comfort levels.

Thurston House (1983), a turn-of-the-century home in San Francisco, built as a tribute to the young socialite, Camille Beauchamp by her husband, Jeremiah Thurston, is the staging ground for Steel to explore greed, honor, betrayal, and ambition within a generational family.

Full Circle (1984) is a keen exploration of the mother-daughter relationship, as well as the multifaceted nature of relationships between women and men. It spans two generations and explores how the mores of the time influence a woman’s choices. The mother’s experience takes place during and after WWII. Tana, on the other hand, is a young woman living through the civil rights movement and Vietnam. While the events of the times provide a political and social context, more importantly, the different eras heighten the irony of her choices and that of her mother’s. Eventually, Tana learns that a husband is part of realizing fulfillment in marriage, family, as well as career. This story embodies the quest for self-individuation with marriage serving as a component of the quest rather than the resolution.
*Family Album* (1984) has as a backdrop the familiar Hollywood lifestyle of excess, but the central theme of this novel is the tenuous relationship between parents and children as they journey through life. Faye and Ward Thayer are the parents of two boys and three daughters. Faye and Ward find themselves facing issues that many parents will no doubt identify with on some level. Their eldest son, Lionel is a homosexual, who is battling with his own identity issues and his search for love and acceptance. Steel provides a sensitive, non-judgmental rendering of homosexuality, identifying Lionel, the eldest son, as an individual, whose orientation is only one dimension of a multifaceted personality. Unlike previous books, Steel has added some sexual scenes to underscore this particular theme, the treatment of which is refined.

Greg, their second son, is the stereotypical football star, who is drafted for not making the grade in college and goes to Vietnam, only to lose his life within two weeks. The harshness and the irony of the war are revealed by the sudden loss. Valerie and Vanessa are the twin daughters with distinctly different personalities and approaches to life. Both young women realize their individual talents and subsequently find long-term satisfactory relationships by different means. The depiction of their respective paths is once again non-judgmental and reveals the individuality of each child.

Anne, the youngest of the five children, earns the unfortunate distinction of being a victim of her parent’s weaknesses. Born shortly after her mother makes the discovery that her husband has exercised poor judgment regarding their finances, her mother becomes the sole provider with little energy to devote to her daughter. Left to her own devices, Anne makes the most serious mistakes. She runs away and joins a cult that engages in substance abuse and sex orgies. Her family manages to come to her rescue, but she is pregnant, and unknowingly, her mother makes an error in judgment and forces Anne to give the child up for adoption. Anne continues on her journey for the love and security she didn’t have as a child and adolescent, eventually marrying the father of one of her friends. By the end of the novel, Faye and her daughter come to terms with the heartfelt, but misguided decisions Faye made with regards to the adoption, and Anne’s unconventional marriage works out well for her. Each character helps to define the process of emotional development and growth. At the time, Danielle Steel, was the mother of six children, ranging in age from newborn to sixteen years of age. Her own life experiences and that of raising boys and girls reveal itself in her understanding of the individuality of each child and their choices, as well as the challenges parents face.

Not unlike the characters in her novels, Steel’s life is built around the institution of marriage, family and a successful career. Steel is noted for her ability to organize her time and her projects. While reluctant to share information about her personal life, Steel has communicated in magazine articles and on her own web site how she manages to be such a prolific writer, and at the same time be a devoted mother and wife.

In the Myer’s article, “Danielle Steel on how to get it all done,” disavows the reader of any notion that her wealth and ability to hire staff—a nanny, a cook, a housekeeper, two housecleaners, a security guard, and three secretaries—translates into a life of leisure, reminding readers that she manages the household staff, pays bill and responds to correspondence personally. She states that twice a year, she spends a month, working twenty-two hour days to finalize her novels that have been in progress. *No Greater Love* (1991) took approximately three
years to complete. Her bible is a black book that she uses to plan every activity. She color-codes her files to distinguish them from her husbands, and she charts a course of errand-running based on geography to utilize her time as efficiently as possible. The art of learning to say, “no” applies to volunteer work, benefits, book tours, and chatting on the phone. Thursday afternoons are set aside to spend time with husband, John Traina.

Danielle Steel’s and John Traina’s first home together, was a San Francisco Victorian residence, built in 1895, a home John Traina had occupied already for fifteen years. Featured in the April 1985 issue of Architectural Digest, Steel authored the accompanying article detailing the history of the house and the changes she and her husband implemented utilizing their own ideas. What started out as a small venture turned into a major renovation project, and the same energy she puts into her books reveals itself in her house project. Walls were removed on the second floor, marble laid, ceilings gilded and painted, some “subtly painted with sky and clouds.” The third floor, to be occupied by the youngest children, involved artist, Bill Russell who was commissioned to create “a make-believe world of illusion and delight in each one.” Her descriptions of the rooms of the children have a storybook quality. In 1990, Danielle and John purchased the 1913 Beaux Arts Spreckels Mansion, a landmark in San Francisco. Once again, Danielle undertook a major renovation and remodeling project and moved the belongings of their former home room by room to ease the transition.

While the tabloids focus on her marriages, a portrait of Steel would be incomplete without a mention of her passion for children. In interviews with Danielle Steel, her concern and interest for children is a dominant theme, documented in the many of the reference sources listed, like Something About the Author, as well as in her own writings and on her web site where she notes that her writing occurs at night and into the wee hours of the morning to facilitate raising her family. In an interview published in the Detroit Free Press, Steel, mother to nine, indicated that when she looked for specific themes to address the issues her own children were encountering—like their father going into the hospital—she was unsuccessful, and the books known to the public as the Max and Martha series were born. The Max and Martha series (1989-1990) deal with problems children face like a new stepparent or the loss of a grandparent, or a new baby in the family. The second series, known as the “Freddie’s” (1992), deal with situations children encounter like a stay in the hospital or being away from home. Diane Roback, children’s book editor of Publishers Weekly, while critical of these series, citing the Freddie’s series as an improvement on the Max and Martha series, does credit Steel with focusing in “…on many legitimate concerns with empathy.”

Secrets (1985) focuses on six characters, three soap-opera actresses, who possess considerable physical attributes and three actors, all six of whom have secrets. This novel represents a departure from her usual format. Physical beauty is synonymous with power in tinsel town and ironically, the plot mimics a soap opera plot, as these women pair off with actors during the shooting of a primetime soap, their secrets unfolding in the process, forcing each of them to deal with their past.

Wanderlust (1986) explores the life of a young woman in the 1930’s who daringly ventures beyond her familiar well-to-do surroundings. Crossing the Atlantic on the Queen Mary, leads to numerous new experiences in far-flung places like China and North Africa during wartime.
Born in an era when women were expected to fulfill the traditional role of wife and mother, Audrey represents an emancipated woman. Her journey is about personal choices that are life-changing as she is drawn into the drama of world events. Captured is the tug-of-war that exists between heartfelt personal longing and the dictates of the socially-conscious. It is also a journey about perseverance in the face of misunderstandings and evil plots. This represents the “lighting out” motif in women’s fiction, which Heller has explored and defined as the movement “toward new territories of being, and of becoming a hero[ine]. (Heller, p.21)

Fine Things (1987), like Wanderlust, made the New York Times bestseller list, with a run of twenty six weeks on the list, nine weeks as number one. A story about how family unity overcomes the loss of a loved one, this is another novel about the power of love. In this work, perhaps an attempt simultaneously to expand her readership and to emphasize the commonality of the human experience in a dualistic world, her protagonist is a male. Bernie Fine loses his wife to cancer and is left with two children. A series of bizarre events take place, adding to his loss. Bereft, he learns a number of life’s lessons, but with courage and a sense of humor, he eventually realizes these lessons are enriching.

Like some of her former novels, Kaleidoscope (1987) begins as a World War II love affair. The attractive Parisian, Solange Betrand has two American soldiers smitten with her, Sam Walker and Arthur Patterson. Sam wins her, but his personality leads to a double tragedy, leaving three young daughters orphaned. Arthur, unhappily married and lacking backbone, separates the three girls. The eldest, Hilary, is dealt the harshest fate and her resolve to find her two younger sisters is a key to her survival. Betrayal, abandonment issues, sexual abuse and the inadequacy of social programs is portrayed with descriptive certainty, making all the associated experiences palpable to the reader. The irony of life reveals itself when the lies and secrets that initially separated them serve to unify three sisters who have led distinctly different lives. Morality issues are explore in the character development. Arthur provides a high contrast to Hilary. His weakness births a private hell, while her strength and determination fuels her survival from an imposed hell. The ability of the human spirit to endure harshness and persevere is a recurrent theme in Steel’s novel, as is the portrayal of love as the balm that heals and allows for new beginnings.

Zoya (1988) is the daughter of a count, who is a distant relative of Tsar Nicolas. She has a privileged life until the Russian Revolution results in her family members dying at the hands of the revolutionaries. She flees to Paris with her grandmother. Impoverished, Zoya secures a job with the Ballet Russe until she meets an affluent New Yorker. The stock market crash and other tragedies leave Zoya to fend for herself and her children. Men are portrayed as the weaker sex in this novel. Zoya, through hard work and perseverance, eventually comes into her own creating an empire in the process, a quest for self-individuation.

Star (1989) explores a range of emotional issues. Portrayed are the conflicts that arise when personal desires and familial expectations are incongruent, when self-deception leads to disharmony. Strikingly beautiful and talented Crystal Wyatt lives in a rural community in California. It is shortly after WWII and the dye is cast when she meets Spencer at her older sister’s wedding. Spencer, however, fulfills his crusty East Coast family’s wishes by entering into a socially and professionally lucrative marriage. Crystal becomes a Hollywood star and lives with her manager. As the story unfolds, Crystal learns that she must not allow herself to be
limited by another’s desire to control and possess, which leads to self knowledge. Spencer’s experience in the Korean War brings home to him the emptiness of his marriage. Their love is tested and the impact of their respective decisions allows Steel to explore the emotions of the heroine, the hero, and the subcharacters. Jealously, betrayal, manipulation, and acts of self-preservation are woven into the plot, revealing that the heart has its own intelligence and prevails even in the face of adversity.

In *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*, Ramsdell provides definitions of romance subgenres, defining contemporary romance as one of the largest subgenres; “essentially love stories with contemporary settings, these novels usually focus on the attempts of a woman to find success and happiness both professionally and romantically.” Ramsdell indicates that marriage and most often family are the end goals of this subgenre, but that in more recent works, social trends are often mirrored in these contemporary romance novels, depicting women who continue with their careers. While the surroundings or circumstances may vary widely in this subgenre, the basic plot pattern of romance remains a constant. What has changed over the years is that issues that would have been deemed taboo for this genre—the very issues Danielle Steel has included in her novels since she started writing—like abuse in its various forms or serious illnesses like cancer are becoming the norm. Contemporary romance fiction is reflecting the times and as a result the plots and the characters appear more realistic. This trend has allowed contemporary romance fiction to mainstream with women’s fiction in general—a trend in which Steel had a strong hand.

Bridget Fowler takes a more in-depth look at popular romance fiction, citing Steel’s work, *Daddy* (1989) as an example of how “the ideological structure of contemporary middlebrow and popular romance is more complex and heterogeneous than is usually supposed.” She discusses the new social groups and representation of gender relations; the latter is a particular focus of Steel’s. Fowler points to the frequency of “problematising sub-text” at work “within the main narrative and its normative closures. In *Daddy*, the desire of a married woman to advance her education is the ‘narrative pivot.’” She contrasts Steel’s novel to another author of this genre, wherein both novels have structural characteristics of the traditional romantic story, but differ in culture. She uses Pierre Bourdieu’s divisions of the cultural field, ascribing the label of “bourgeois art” to *Daddy*, which as she so aptly describes, “is organised around the cult of economic success and belongs to the ‘school of good sense’, which Bourdieu describes as subjecting the most frenzied Romanticism to the tastes and norms of the bourgeoisie, celebrating marriage, good management of property, the honourable placement of children in life’.”

In *Daddy*, the narrative voice begins with Sarah Watson, a wife of eighteen years, who in the sixties was a student radical, but whose life reflects the corporate wife model, until she decides to pursue a degree at Harvard. Oliver, her husband, assumes the narrative voice. The reader is introduced to a man experiencing what has traditionally been ascribed as the woman’s domestic suffering. Steel’s treatment of Sarah’s character adds to the complexity of the story. Steel’s rendering is initially empathetic, but during the course of the novel, Sarah’s self-awakening morphs into self-absorption at the expense of family.

Fowler’s conclusion provides additional insight into why Steel and other romance fiction writers are successful in spite of the harsh rhetoric from literary critics who tend to trivialize this genre. “For the romance offers—like the good family photography—an image of integration of the
social group, with the harmonious couple at its centre. In doing so, of course, its ideological elements continue to legitimate the existing order.” Contemporary twentieth century fiction writers have taken this definition a step farther. Steel’s contemporary themes and emphasis on the process of the heroine’s self-individuation, contributes to redefining traditional male-based literary heroism and may be viewed as part of the movement to remap literary traditions to represent a more feminized age. In response to the critics, with their focus on the marriage component as the governing element of the story, Regis demonstrates that the barrier and the point of ritual death narrative elements reinforce that the process, not the conclusion, is what binds the reader. (Regis, 14).

Other types of exploration by researchers of romance fiction led to the analysis of the expression of stance. Lisa Opas and Fiona Tweedie conducted a study to compare Harlequin and Regency romance texts to Danielle Steel’s works, using cluster analysis to see how the texts grouped together, and principal components analysis to determine important elements of style. The outcome of the study revealed that Steel’s works reveal far greater use of doubt verbs and affect expressions. The basis for this methodology is to determine “the representation of consciousness in the text, the point of view within the narrative, and the withdrawal of the author’s voice.” These aspects point to reader involvement in the lives of the characters and in the outcomes of their choices. Cited in this study is Radway’s book, which notes intertextual repetition as intrinsic to romantic fiction. The outcome of this study reveals marked differences. Steel’s novels, as a whole, are characterized by a dominant use of hedges and emphatics. Doubt verbs like disbelieve, feel, wonder if, and guess, as well as affective expressions like enjoy, ache for, love, despise, happy, ashamed, and afraid cropped up repeatedly in Steel’s novels. Steel’s novels reveal more interactional evidence, while Regency texts revealed more predictive persuasion. The Harlequin texts revealed a faceless stance. In other words, Steel’s writing reveals a significantly higher use of forms of expressive stance that foster reader involvement.

In first chapter of *Message from Nam* (1990), the narrative voice of teenage Paxton Andrews chronicles her emotions toward and her impressions of her mother and father. Her mother is cold, aloof, and self-absorbed. Her father, who died as a result of plane crash, was warm, affectionate, and open-minded. She was her father’s child, her mother barely acknowledging her existence. President Kennedy has been shot. Her grief sharply brings into focus the feelings she experienced at age eleven when she lost her father, but more importantly, this emotive narrative fosters reader involvement in the unfolding of her story. Her decision to leave Savannah and the social fabric of the South to pursue schooling at UC Berkeley is pivotal to her character development. Through her lens, the reader experiences the events of the sixties and through the depiction of personal loss while serving as a frontline reporter and journalist in Vietnam for two years, grief issues are punctuated. Strongly portrayed is the numbness and sense of emptiness experienced through the loss of loved ones. The ending, however, is a message about the strength of the human spirit and how love fuels that strength.

*Heartbeat* (1991) is a portrait of two individuals who through chance encounter and circumstance find fulfillment. California-based soap opera writer and producer, Bill Thigpen literally bump into Adrian Townsend at the supermarket. Three years into her marriage, her husband, Steven gives her an ultimatum when he learns she is pregnant with their child and moves out. Abandonment as a result of pregnancy is a recurrent theme in Steel’s novels and
speaks to both physical and emotional abandonment. This recurrent theme of betrayal, and the feelings of rejection it produces, has a deeper root in the female psyche. Pregnancy, like the quest to self-individuation, is a journey only the heroine can experience. Alone, she experiences the child growing in the womb and through this process of creating the mother/child connection and of giving birth, the heroine is empowered; empowered emotionally and physically through her life force, empowered socially by giving birth to a member of society, merging nurturance and service, important elements of the human experience. The character of Bill, who stands by Adrian and who is seeking a second chance at experiencing childrearing, represents a solid contrast between the self-absorbed, immature, and underdeveloped man (Steven) and the caring, mature man who values family, a symbolic reinforcement of the power inherent in the female psyche and her connection to society, as well as a symbolic shift to merging male and female literary traditions through the portrayal of shared emotions and needs.

It is 1912 and twenty-year old Edwina Winfield is soon to be married to an Englishman. The Winfields and her fiancé are booked on the Titanic for the voyage back to San Francisco. Tragedy strikes. Edwina and her five younger siblings survive. Her mother’s love for her father is so great that she chooses to remain with him. No Greater Love (1991) is a story of a young woman’s resolve to raise her brothers and sisters in the same loving manner that they were accustomed to when her parents were alive. In her role as parent, Edwina’s own emotional needs are subsumed by her desire to fill her mother’s shoes, which she does with a quiet strength, but in the process she has buried her youth, and aborted her self quest. Alexis, in search of the father figure she never had, makes a poor choice that takes Edwina on a life-altering journey in an effort to rescue Alexis from herself. Edwina sets sail for England and is forced to face the ghosts of twelve-years past. Her time on board with Patrick, a man she meets, who turns out to be a cousin of her deceased fiancé, is cathartic and she realizes she has the ability to love again. Edwina setting sail is a metaphor for her awakening to self. In realizing and giving voice to her unresolved issues related to feelings of guilt being a survivor, anger towards her mother for loving her husband more than her children, guilt for not remaining with her fiancé, and unlike her mother, for choosing life, plus acknowledging the pain of devotion and sacrifice to raise her parent’s children, she is set free to pursue her destiny. The self-individuation theme supplants the theme of noblesse oblige, portrayed in both Edwina’s story and Patrick’s story of familial duty.

Jewels (1992) is about a family with a strong matriarchy. Sarah Whitfield turns seventy-five and on the eve of her birthday, as she waits for her family, she takes a journey down memory lane recounting years of experiences, which are woven into historical events (WWII). Highlighted is the benefit of a nurturing relationship and its ability to provide the foundation for the growth of an individual. The process of self-individuation is encouraged by Sarah’s husband, a strong, loving, encouraging, and supportive man. His role is that of nurturer, a symbolic shift that emphasizes contemporary romance fiction’s impact on the traditional heroic journey. A highly successful jewelry business results from the purchase of jewels from individuals trying to begin anew after the war. Between them, they raise several children. After his death, Sarah grows the business into a very lucrative family enterprise. Jewels is a metaphor for family, each person precious and distinctive like the facets of a gem.
Mixed Blessings (1992) is an exploration of the emotional toll infertility has on three married couples and how this issue tests the definitions of a couple’s commitment to each other and their vision of a future together. In this process of discovery, each person must examine personal values and work through a variety of emotional issues that surface from past events.

Set in the late 1930’s, Vanished (1993) is the story of a couple whose lives unravel when their young son is abducted. Guilt, misfired passions, and duplicity are revealed. As in most of Steel’s novels, morality issues are explored in a male-dominated society. The female spiritual quest to reclaim, through self-awareness, the power of the female psyche—a rich embodiment of psychological and physical aspects of the human experience—is portrayed through the storytelling process. The heroine is led “through states of nothingness, awakening, insight, and finally, an act of self-naming that calls her new identity into being by transforming a relationship between her individual spirit and the world which she inhabits.” (Heller, p 18).

The year 1994 was a pivotal year for Steel, both personally and professionally. According to Carroll’s article in the San Francisco Chronicle, Steel described her marriage to John Traina as “her perfect life,” but cited an unauthorized biography—one which she unsuccessfully attempted to suppress by filing for the surrender of confidential court documents prior to its release in 1994—as the publication that led to the demise of her marriage by bringing to light details of her former marriages for public consumption, something she felt Traina was unable to overcome. From a publishing perspective, the year 1994 put Steel on the bestseller list for not one, but two hardcovers, Wings and The Gift, as well as the paperback publication of the Accident. Wings (1994) dedication is to John Traina and reads, “To the Ace of my heart the pilot of my dreams…the joy of my life, the quiet place I go to in the dark of night, the bright morning sun, of my soul at dawn…the bright shining star in my sky, to my love, to my heart, to my all, beloved Popeye, with all my heart and love, always, Olive.”

As her success has grown, the story of her life has received marked attention in a variety of presses. While she has attempted to avoid her personal life being made public, the intense fascination with her life has led Danielle Steel to state in an interview, available on her personal website, that her plots are not autobiographical, nor based on actual individuals. Material about and communicated by Ms. Steel does reveal an experience-rich life, one which portrays a woman who is not afraid to exercise options and to explore the limits. The “persona” of Danielle Steel is an intricate weave of publisher marketing, tabloid press, interview-based data, and her writings—both poetry and romance fiction.

Whether Danielle Steel draws from personal experience or the study of the human experience or blends the two together to create a fiction, analysis of her works underscores that Ms. Steel’s popularity in large part stems from her exploration of the human condition and the challenges life presents and how a person’s choices shape the experience of self-growth. Steel’s novels reinforcing themes and plots serve to legitimize the quest for self-individuation as well as acknowledge that women’s ties with “the social group” serve to empower, not restrict the female psyche. Heller, p.13)

Wings (1994) is a story about a woman’s passion for flying and the price she pays for pursuing her adventurous spirit. Like all of Steel’s novel, the heroine, Cassie, must assert herself in a
male-dominated world; first to her father, a pilot, and then to her millionaire husband, an airplane manufacturer, who is cold and manipulative and uses her flying expertise to launch his own financial interests. Through a series of events, Cassie learns that she must set her own course and pursue her own interests, which brings her back to what had always been there for the asking.

In a small midwestern town in the 1950’s, a young woman, Maribeth, provides a family with The Gift (1994) of new life. Sixteen and pregnant, Maribeth plays a key role in the lives of a family she comes to know and they in turn provide her with the emotional support to follow her dreams. This is a story of nurturance and the type of love that bridges past, present, and future. Young and naïve on the one hand, Maribeth’s choices reveal a maturity and self-awareness beyond her years, early signs of her ability to take an active role in her future. Steel manages to simultaneously emphasize that there are no guarantees in life while conveying a sense of hope.

One event, an Accident (1994), is the catalyst in protagonist Page Clarke’s life. Fifteen-year old, Allyson is in a coma from a car accident and on the heels of this event, her husband admits to adultery. Captured is the weariness of a woman coping with holding hospital vigil for a child while trying to meet the needs of a young seven-year old boy—all in the midst of feeling emotionally abandoned as she deals with a self-absorbed husband whose guilt leads to an inability to make a decision to stay or leave, which in turn translates into aggressive justification for his behavior. During this difficult time, she finds support from the father of her daughter’s seriously-injured girlfriend and in time their shared experiences lead to a mutually satisfying relationship built on friendship and trust.

Five Days in Paris (1995) is about making a choice between duty and passion. Olivia Thatcher is married to a senator, whose career has absorbed their entire marriage. Her husband’s insatiable political ambition has transformed a man she once loved into a person she no longer recognizes. The loss of their son breaks the only remaining bond, but maintaining the marital façade is important to her husband’s career. The other protagonist is Peter Haskell, who earned the presidency of his father-in-law’s pharmaceutical empire through hard work and compromise. A man of integrity, he is working on a cancer drug. The trials show promise, but his key researcher in France has concerns about its safety and recommends more time. Peter’s wife and father are of a different mind and his wife’s first loyalty is to her father. Olivia and Peter meet in Paris through a chance encounter and their paths cross again when events lead them to independently examine their respective values and make decisions. Self-awareness, mutual respect, and integrity issues are addressed in this novel.

Five Days in Paris and Lightning, according to information gleaned from two biographies about Steel, may have been inspired by Tom Perkins, a man she knew from social circles and whom she invited to one of her dinners in 1994. That same year, he lost his wife of thirty plus years to cancer. Perkins, in an effort to find a cure for his ailing wife, had done a great deal of research and founded the biotechnology company Genentech. His experience with this topic made him a good source of information for this work. A venture capitalist extraordinaire with a passion for sailboat racing, he would become Danielle’s husband in 1998, a marriage that lasted seventeen months.
Lightning (1995), as the title suggests, is a metaphor for the unexpected events that strike us and how these events can change the landscape of our lives. Alexandra Parker is a partner at a major New York law firm. Her husband, Sam Parker, is a celebrated venture capitalist. Their marriage is a good one and they are the parents of a three-year old daughter. Leading a hectic, but happy life, Alexandra doesn’t foresee the outcome of a routine medical check up. The bad news serves to shatter their world. Sam, who is used to feeling in control and making things happen, goes into an emotional tailspin and the specters of his past surface. Rather than providing the emotional support Alexandra needs, he withdraws and they find themselves strangers rather than partners. To compound the problem, another metaphorical bolt of lightening strikes and Sam’s career takes a nosedive making him question his identity and his life. The uncertainty of their future puts into question for Alexandra whether her feelings for Sam are strong enough to sustain the tenuous bonds of marriage or whether she must strike out on her own.

Malice (1996) deals with parental abuse and non-parental sexual abuse perpetrated by several men over the course of twenty years. When Grace Adams finally has a chance at happiness, the press uncovers her past. This is a dark story of the victimization of women and a commentary on the tabloid media’s appetite for sensationalist material. Abuse and exploitation are central to this novel. Steel is no stranger to the power of the press and the deleterious effects it yields at times. This year marked the end of a sixteen-year marriage to Traina.

Silent Honor (1996) marks an ignominious time in American history. Subsequent to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans and Japanese residing in the United States found themselves uprooted from their homes and placed in detention centers which Steel chronicles in this story. Masao Takashimaya is a college professor in Kyoto whose modern thinking runs counter to his wife’s traditional orientation. Their daughter, Hiroko, is sent to California attend a women’s college for one year while living with her father’s cousin, Tak, a professor at Stanford. Hiroko’s homesickness is lessened when she meets Tak’s assistant, Peter, who is instantly smitten with her. The bombing of Pearl Harbor results in Hiroko and her cousins being sent to different internment camps. Hiroko’s internment and the trials and losses she faces during an after her internment results in her maturation as a strong, independent woman. The “lighting out” motif at different stages (pre- and post-internment) of a woman’s life are represented.

The Ranch (1997) was published several months prior to the loss of Steel’s son, Nick Traina. The story is about three former college roommates, who twenty years later decide to meet each other at a Wyoming dude ranch. Mary Stuart, married to a New York attorney, is living in the shadow of her college-age son’s suicide and the knowledge that her husband blames her for their loss. Mary Stuart’s description of the ache of the loss of a child creates and the challenge it presents to the soul, reveals the heart of a mother—Danielle Steel—writing about the unspoken fear all mothers harbor in their hearts—the potential loss of a child. Singer and rock star, Tanya Thomas has all the material trappings that success brings, but suffers from a broken heart. Zoe Phillips is a doctor at an AIDS clinic, and is a single mother to a two-year old she adopted. Their stay at the ranch reinforces the bond of friendship as their respective stories unfold and they unite with men who either rekindle or replace past loves. The circle of life punctuates this story.

September 20, 1997 marked the death of her firstborn son, Nick Traina. Nick Traina had suffered for nineteen years with manic-depression and died of a fatal overdose of morphine. In 1998, the
book *His Bright Light* was published as a tribute to his vibrant life and a testament to the struggle he endured. The one possible allusion to his struggle may have been her dedication to him in her novel, *Vanished* (1993), which reads, “To Nick—For the pain of having a mother who follows you everywhere, and the agony of so many years of not being able to do what you want…” Two poems, written in 1995 about Nick Traina, were part of the service and are available on the web site. These poems express the fear Danielle Steel must have felt and reveal her perception of her son’s personality.

*Special Delivery* (1997) is about two individuals in their fifties who have an affair in spite of an initial dislike of Jack (59) on the part of Amanda. Their children, who are married to one another disapprove and express what can only be described as parental concern. Fifty-year old Amanda unexpectedly becomes pregnant and the couple is faced with some choices. In the midst of disapproval and a number of obstacles, the couple realizes the pregnancy has given them a renewed sense of vitality and happiness, and they decide to marry. Children are often mentioned as gifts in Steel’s novels and often represent renewal in her storyline.

*Ghost* (1997) is a return to historical romance fiction and it received positive reviews overall. Charles Waterston, a London-based architect, learns that his idyllic life is not so idyllic when his wife leaves him for another man and he is assigned to head up the declining New York office. Like *Daddy* and *Fine Things*, the heterogeneity of the human experience is emphasized. Unable to push ahead, he takes a leave of absence. En route to Vermont for a vacation, a snowstorm forces him to stay at a bed-and-breakfast in Massachusetts. The owner—a delightful old woman—and Charles strike a chord and she offers to rent to him her grandmother’s home. Upon entering the small chateau, he senses a spirit and is validated Christmas Eve when he catches a glimpse of a beautiful woman with raven-colored hair. The discovery of old diaries in a trunk belonging to Sarah Ferguson, Countess of Balfour, who arrived in America in 1789, is pivotal to his personal journey. As he turns the pages of her diaries that chronicle her escape from an abusive marriage in England and her strong love for an Indian-adopted French nobleman, the centuries slip away and Charles, aided by Francesca, the historical society curator and librarian, begins the healing process that allows him to let go of the past and take hold of the future. *Ghost*, although a departure from her usual glamour-filled novels, stills bears her hallmark for sentimentality.

*The Long Road Home* (1998) is a young girl’s story of severe parental abuse (mother), indifference and neglect (father), abandonment, betrayal and opportunism by authority figures (priest/church), and continued ill-fate, which almost results in death. It is a portrait of an ugly reality of abuse and while seemingly extreme, it chronicles the cycle of abuse that happens to individuals whose lives are shattered both psychologically and physically at an early age, leading to a lack of personal boundaries into adulthood, which generally perpetuates further abuse. The physical and the psychological aspects necessary for her to heal are represented by the young physician, who tends her physical wounds and by her writing, which gives her the courage to face her perpetrators. The process of forgiveness, release from guilt, and healing the heart represent the journey.

*The Klone and I* (1998) is a comic portrayal of life after marriage. After nineteen years together, Stephanie suffers all the injuries of an abandoned woman (divorce, alimony and support awarded
to ex-husband, Roger, girlfriend in the wings). Stephanie realizes that being a trust baby fostered a parent-child relationship with Roger. Her analysis represents an awakening and she sets out to “repair” herself and her appearance and look for a meaningful, well-rounded relationship. A trip to Paris, leads to a madcap love triangle with Peter, who runs a biotech company and a klone, Paul, who physically is a look alike, but has traits that distinguish him from Peter. Peter, whose business takes him away frequently, complicates their lives, when he sends Paul to keep Stephanie company. Eventually, Stephanie is forced to evaluate her feelings and choose between Peter (reality) and Paul (illusion); however, each one possesses uniquely lovable qualities. This work is a stylistic departure from her other romance novels. With humor and imagination, Steel highlights the often absurd experiences of dating and illustrates the dilemmas one faces during the elusive search for the impossible—a perfect mate.

*Mirror Image* (1998) takes place in upstate New York at the turn of the century. It is the story of two identical twin heiresses who represent mirror opposites of each other, but whose lives are inextricably woven as events unfold. Victoria is the rebel, who defies social convention and abandons herself to a married man, involves herself in the suffragette movement, and finds herself in a loveless, arranged marriage, orchestrated by her father to save her reputation. Olivia is the quiet, responsible sister who spends much of her time rescuing her headstrong sister from her entanglements. In a bold move, Olivia, who secretly has a crush on Victoria’s husband, assumes her identity while Victoria goes to France to help the allies in the war effort. Steel’s choice of twins with distinctly different personalities is a vehicle to explore women’s choices in the context of social realities: family nurturance versus social service; domesticity versus adventure; desire versus duty. Each of them journey down a different path and experience different realities.

*Bittersweet* (1999) is the tale of a suburban housewife, who for the last fourteen years has devoted her life to her husband and her children, abandoning a career as a photojournalist. A series of events awakens a longing in India Taylor to reevaluate her life and entertain the option of dabbling once again in photojournalism by taking on assignments stateside, so that she can still fulfill her role as mother—the service and nurturance themes. India realizes that her husband’s desires and the limitations he has imposed on her have robbed her of an integral part of her identity. His intractability leads to a separation and he enters into another relationship—the abandonment theme. As the story unfolds, her friendship with Paul Ward, yachtsman and “Lion of Wall Street” develops, and with his encouragement, she decides to strike out and pursue her photojournalism. Her photojournalism becomes a vehicle to awaken her selfhood, mobilize her power and influence world perceptions—the lighting out theme. She breaks through gender barriers, asserting her power as nurturer both in her role as mother and in the service she provides to society through her use of her lens. Her career leads to a Rwandan jungle adventure and the journey of self discovery continues as does her bittersweet romance with Paul.

*Granny Dan* (1999) is the story of beloved Russian grandmother who goes to her grave with a secret that unfolds when her granddaughter inherits a box that holds her Granny Dan’s love letters and her ballet shoes. It is the story of a prima ballerina whose life is dramatically changed when she follows her heart. It is a story of strength, sacrifice, risk, loss, and heartbreak. As her granddaughter reads the letters, she recognizes that her grandmother had a rich history of life experiences that she never could have imagined or thought to have asked about. The narration in
the epilogue speaks to the recognition that the young have a tendency to diminish the old through a lack of acknowledgement that they, too, were once young. It is also an entreaty for the elderly to share their story and reinforces Steel’s enduring interest in history.

Irresistible Forces (1999) is an insightful portrayal of the delicate balance that exists in relationships and the forces that impact couples. The Whitmans have maintained a strong marriage, despite demanding careers, but have postponed having children. Meredith, receives an opportunity for significant advancement, but it requires a move to San Francisco. Steve encourages her to pursue it while he looks for work. The rigors of maintaining a bi-coastal marriage are intensified by career demands with the unintended result of both of them leading increasingly separate lives in different cities. The bond that comes from shared experiences begins to weaken, and the tenor of their interaction changes. The unpredictability of circumstance and the uncertainty of life are captured in this work.

The Wedding (2000) involves members of the celebrated Hollywood family, the Steinbergs, whose public façade belies the reality that each member is contending with familiar challenges and weaknesses inherent to humans. The main character, Allegra, whose involvement in a dead-end relationship with a married man has ceased, focuses on her highly-demanding career as an entertainment attorney. A trip to New York leads to a serious romance with a novelist. With a wedding to be planned in a few short months, to be held at her parent’s Bel Air home, the tensions run high for all involved and a number of revelations surface, forcing family members to deal with unresolved issues. A variety of family matters, a bigoted future mother-in-law, and a career that threatens her relationship, require Allegra to evaluate her priorities. The Wedding symbolizes new beginnings for Allegra and reinforces for family members the importance of the vows that create a bond with another.

The plot of House on Hope Street (2000), Steel’s forty-ninth book, pulls out all the emotional stops. The Sutherlands jointly run a legal practice in San Francisco. Married for eighteen years with five children, it’s Christmas at the Sutherland home, and Jack Sutherland heads out for a short errand, which leads to tragedy. Liz Sutherland must face her new reality, a single mother attempting to deal with her own grief and still offer five children—one with special needs—the emotional support they need to deal with their loss. Her children’s love bolsters her and she resumes work and assumes both parental roles. No sooner does she regain some of her equilibrium, her eldest son is hospitalized after a terrible diving accident, bringing Dr. Webster into her life. His care of her son leads to an eventual friendship, which experiences the customary stop and go dance between a man and a woman trying to decide whether to commit to each other. Steel captures the transient nature of life and the stages of grief very well, and her skill lies in her ability to compress so much emotional drama into a readable work.

Journey (2000) is about the troubled marriage of a high profile couple, Jack (owner of a television network) and Madeleine Hunter (award-winning anchorwoman). Viewed by Washington D.C.’s elite as the idyllic couple, life at home paints a different picture. Jack Hunter, a shrewd businessman and media advisor to the president of the United States, is a man who is used to getting his way. Rescued by Jack from a physically-abusive former husband, Madeleine (Maddy) finds herself the victim of mental abuse when she doesn’t toe his line. As Maddy’s career continues to blossom, Jack uses an arsenal of verbal put-downs, career-related threats, and
mind games to diminish her confidence and self respect. Maddy’s appointment by the president’s wife to a commission on violence against women opens a Pandora’s box as Maddy hears stories of spousal abuse that are a fresh reminder of her past and an eventual eye opener to her loss of self in her current marriage. Her friendship with a commission member, Bill Alexander, coupled with the appearance of an important person from her past have an impact on her journey of self development, but it takes a tragedy and a life-threatening event to free Maddy of the subtle, but nonetheless devastating abuse that so many individuals face. Steel weaves a tale that reminds the reader that regardless of social status, abuse has no boundaries.

The recurrent Pearl Harbor, WWII scenario, a favorite historical period of Steel’s, is the setting for *Lone Eagle* (2001). Like *Jewels*, the heroine, Kate Jamison, reflects back on the past—a span of thirty-three years from the time she became involved with twenty-nine-year old, Joe Allbright, a pilot. Kate, a beautiful and poised seventeen-year old, falls in love with Joe, whose first passion is flying. Chronicled is their tumultuous love affair that endures numerous dramatic events and Joe’s inability to make a lasting commitment. Kate’s infatuation is so great that she accepts his transient ways and breaks the heart of the man she married. One interpretation of the central theme and most likely, the intended one, is if you love someone enough, you set them free, an affirmation of the complexities of human nature; the other is that those who do not self-individuate allow others to control their lives, a potential set-up for repeated heartbreak.

*Leap of Faith* (2001) is a Cinderella story about eleven-year old Marie-Ange, exiled to live with a cold-hearted great aunt in Iowa, when her family perishes in an auto accident. From chateau to farm, from a pampered life to one of servitude, her friendship with Billy Parker provides her with the strength to endure. At eighteen, she learns she has inherited a large trust and fate brings her back to France and her family chateau, which is now occupied by Comte Bernard de Beauchamp, a young widower. A happy marriage, children, and a lavish lifestyle take a turn when a stranger tells her a foreboding story that bears poisonous fruit. Marie-Ange is forced to face the truth, and to literally and figuratively take a leap of faith to save her life and that of her children.

Isabelle Forrester and Bill Robinson, the main characters in *The Kiss* (2001), are friends whose respective marriages are wanting. Married to a cold-hearted, aloof banker, Isabelle has focused her attention on her ailing teenage son. Bill and Isabelle take comfort in each other’s friendship and decide to meet in London. An evening out on the town, leads to their first kiss while driving to the hotel, but this kiss is punctuated by a horrendous collision with a double-decker bus, leaving many dead and Isabelle and Bill in critical condition. The road to recovery is a long journey that twists and turns as each one is forced to evaluate marriage, career, and their newfound love for one another. *The Kiss* is about how love can heal and transform lives.

*The Cottage* (2002), a not-so-modest estate, belonging to Cooper Winslow, a charming, seasoned actor whose money has run out becomes the stage for growth and renewal. Rather than lose his estate of forty years, he swallows his pride and rents out part of his home to two male tenets, one whose wife has left him, the other who has lost his wife to illness. Winslow’s home is transformed when one of his tenets’ children move in and amongst the noise and activity, three very different men become friends as their lives unfold. This is a story about being open to change and its transformative power to create opportunities for growth and happiness.
Sunset in St. Tropez (2002) is strongly focused on lost loves, love put to the test, love regained, and newfound love. On New Year’s Eve, three couples, who are long-time friends, agree to spend the summer together in St. Tropez. Each of these couples has a good marriage and shares a strong bond with one another. Two weeks after New Year’s, Robert’s wife, Anne, dies unexpectedly of heart failure. Devastated by the loss of a wife and a good friend, it brings sharply into focus that life is ephemeral and each couple examines their respective marriages more closely. Six months later in St. Tropez, infidelity, marital complacency, and the introduction of a young woman into their circle create a dynamic that turns out to be transformative for each of them. Their time together allows them to learn about each other and realize that there is room to expand their hearts and gain entry to new beginnings, whether in an existing or new relationship.

Danielle Steel and her family are known to sojourn in France regularly. France, with its long history of recognizing exceptional accomplishments in various fields, decorated Danielle Steel into the highest rank of the Order of Arts and Letters. She received the rank of Chevalier on July 10, 2002 in Paris. This order was established in 1957 to recognize individuals who have contributed to the arts in France and around the world. Two months later, as indicated in the San Francisco Chronicle, the Deauville Festival du Cinema Americain acknowledged her with its literary award for her novel, The Kiss.

Answered Prayers (2002) is somewhat reminiscent of Crossings, with a friendship between married individuals burgeoning into unintended romance, but traumatic events and people in their respective lives create emotional obstacles that they eventually learn to overcome and a long-standing prayer is finally answered. The empty nest syndrome creates the emotional pivot in this work for the heroine to examine her life.

Three more novels were published in 2003, Dating Game, Johnny Angel, and Safe Harbour. Dating Game, her fifty-seventh romance novel, like The Klone and I, deals with a woman whose husband leaves her for a significantly younger woman after twenty-four years of marriage. Feelings of betrayal, loss, and anxiety are explored and her well-meaning friends, who set up on blind dates heightens her despair. Paris makes a bold move from Connecticut to San Francisco and experiences the single life. In the process of starting a new life (rebirth of self), Paris learns that challenges can lead to happiness. “…even in the midst of sorrow, there was always some small ray of light.”

Like so many of Steel’s novel, the healing power of love is the dominant theme in Johnny Angel, but the storyline represents a departure from her other romance stories. Johnny returns as an angel when is family is rendered dysfunctional by his death. He is only visible to his mother and his younger brother, who need him the most. His presence allows the healing process to take place and seemingly irresolvable issues resolve themselves. Again death signals a chance at rebirth, and love ’s transformative power leads provides the hope that leads to renewal.

Safe Harbour explores the fragility of relationships and captures the stages of grief, heightening reader awareness of both the frailty and the resilience of the human spirit. A dominant theme in
many of her novels is the affirmation of life, the renewal of hope in the face of sorrow, and a symbolic rebirth after ritualistic death or actual death of a loved one.

The year 2003 not only resulted in three publications, but another career avenue. On October 7, 2003, the Steel Gallery of Contemporary Art opened its doors: a 1000 square feet gallery, located in San Francisco, the front merely bearing the name “steel” in lower case. Steel, who has collected art for a number of years indicates in her mission statement posted on the gallery web site (www.steelgalleryinc.com) that the artists represented are chosen on the basis “that [the works] bring the viewer joy, happiness, and are fun to live with.” The artists are predominantly emerging artists, but are not limited to the undiscovered. Reading the web site text reinforces a down-to-earth quality that is apparent in all her writing. She mentions as part of the mission creating a place in the world of art for “work that is accessible.” This statement captures the essence of all of Danielle Steel’s writing; the language and style is highly readable making it equally accessible.

This writing style may explain the fact that Danielle Steel’s popularity has spanned continents. International bestsellers include: The House on Hope Street, Irresistible Forces, Granny Dan, Mirror Image, Bittersweet, The Ranch, The Wedding, The Klone and I, The Long Road Home, The Ghost, and Special Delivery, to name several.

In spite of her overwhelming success, Danielle Steel, like many romance writers, has not escaped the harsh criticism of the literati, who chide her for her poor use of grammar and punctuation, but more often than not indicate that her novels are a good read. A review of Fine Things by Meredith Brucker states, “Danielle Steel’s sentences either run on and on haphazardly, or they veer off in the middle with startling non sequiturs. And her sentences are sprinkled with more dots than a measles ward...at the end of a line of dialogue...right in the middle to show agitation...wherever the writer paused in her dictation, it seems. But while many writers form more elegant sentences, few can match Steel’s knack for creating lovable characters who hold reader interest.” One might postulate that these overt grammar and punctuation issues are quite intentional—that her characters are not likely to communicate in a scholarly fashion and may be viewed by the reader as less credible were they to do so. Kirkus Reviews of her works are rarely positive. The review of Granny Dan closed with the following statement. “With her gift for turning tragedy into treacle, Steel writes the equivalent of one of those children’s jewelry boxes where a plastic ballerina twirls to a very old tune.” Kirkus Reviews 67 (June 1, 1999).

In contrast, a recent Booklist review of Ransom reads, “The world’s most popular author tells a good, well paced story and explores some important issues...Steel affir[ms] life while admitting its turbulence, melodramas, and misfiring passions.” Booklist (2004). Reviews of her works truly run the spectrum ranging from expressions of saccharine and banal to riveting and compassionate, but Steel’s popularity with her readership has not waned.

Ransom (2004) is a suspense romance novel about a crime that impacts the lives of four strangers. Exposed is the underbelly of society, the shortcomings of humans, and the vulnerability of the innocent. As in Vanished, it involves the abduction of a woman’s son and how strangers, whose lives have collided impact each other. A romance develops between the
heroine and the detective, who has spent his efforts tries save Fernanda and her family, emphasizing the strength we draw from one another.

*Second Chance* (2004) is a tale about when opposites attract, the challenges of adjusting to different lifestyles, and the price one is willing to pay for love. Fiona is the chief editor of a leading New York fashion magazine, whose has a fulfilling, dynamic career that includes frequent travel to couture shows in Europe. An icon in the industry, Fiona has earned the respect of her colleagues. She meets with recently widowed, John Anderson, an attractive, wealthy, conservative businessman who is heading up an ad agency that she had contracted. As the story unfolds, their attraction, which leads to marriage, is put to the test as they deal with barriers of lifestyle, personality differences, career demands, antagonistic daughters, and emotional baggage. Divorce follows only a year later and devastated, Fiona makes a major decision that leads to a second chance at love.

*Echoes* (2004) has some of the same overtones as *The Ring*, in its portrayal of the love between people of two faiths during wartime. Human strength in the face of opposition and brutality, bolstered by love, faith, and sheer determination is the theme of this work. In Steel’s portrayal of the love between two people from a German-Jewish family and a French-Catholic family, she keeps alive her own heritage and the impact history has on the present and the future. Amadea, a Carmelite nun and the only survivor from her family, is unaware of her Jewish heritage since her mother in an attempt to protect her keeps part of her heritage a secret. Her heroic journey, which involves participating in the French resistance, leads to her discovering her heritage and her role in history. In the end, Amadea’s future echoes the love her parents shared and upholds both faiths. Religious tolerance is a subtheme.

Recently widowed, Quinn Thompson plans to lose himself in an eighty-meter boat, with plans to sail around the world. As he reads his wife’s poetry and journals, he is filled with regrets. His only focus has been on his career. Alone, rejected by his daughter, and consumed by his guilt for ignoring his wife and children he forges a friendship with neighbor, Maggie, a lonely divorcee, and Jack, a smart, but illiterate carpenter, who is repairing Quinn’s and Maggie’s respective homes after a storm. *Miracle* (2004) is about the gifts these three people have to offer. It is a story about making choices, trusting again, and second chances.

*ImPossible* (2005) is another love story about the relationship between two radically different people who possess equally strong personalities and the struggles they face. Their age differences and socioeconomic differences add an additional layer of complexity. Conservative Sarah, is a widow, who owns two lucrative art galleries, one in New York, the other in Paris. Liam, is an emerging artist, who is young and impulsive. Portrayed is a couple who are sexually drawn to one another, but who perpetually spar as a result of their different outlooks on life. A secret love affair to avoid currying public disapproval from Sarah’s social set adds to the problems. The weaknesses of the ego and the pitfalls humans experience are explored.

*Toxic Bachelors* (2005) refer to three confirmed bachelors in their forties, who all have taken a vow to enjoy life without commitment to avoid more disappointment. Yacht parties and numerous women sail through their lives, but the tides turn when one-by-one they fall in love
with unlikely women. Their happy fates are not secured until they experience challenges that require them to work through issues from their phobic-inducing pasts.

*The House* (2006) explores the emotional growth of an attorney, Sarah, whose life has been primarily shaped by her work. A single, elderly, wealthy client, with whom she has fostered a strong tie and who mirrors her own choices, leaves Sarah a large sum of money and a strong word of advice to live well and not make her work her life. As she begins to examine her choices, she realizes that she is involved with a self-absorbed man who sets all the parameters for their relationship. The purchase of a large mansion in need of restoration and the hiring of an architect to assist her is the second catalyst leading to self discovery, to taking chances, and to finding fulfillment.

Her sixty-seventh novel, *Coming Out* (2006) received less than favorable reviews for its lack luster attempt to portray social injustice in a plot that revolves around a New York debutante ball. An attorney, Olympia Crawford Rubinstein, is also the mother of four, three from her first marriage. The stage is set when her one of her teenage daughters, who have distinctively different personalities, refuses to go to the ball, leading their biological father to threaten cutting off the college tuition if both do not attend. Add a Jewish mother-in-law, a moody college-aged son, who will unexpectedly be coming out, a case of chicken pox, tattoos, and a punk-rocker for an escort, plus the disapproval of her current husband who believes these debutante balls to be anti-Semitic, and you have recipe for the challenges of blended families, a theme previously explored in other novels.

*H.R.H.* (2006) explores the recurring theme of the struggle to choose between love and duty. Christianna, princess of Liechtenstein, bears the weight of fulfilling her family obligations when her older brother, the royal heir, fails to shoulder his responsibilities. After seeing children die during a Russian terrorist act, she marshalls her energy and provides support for the suffering by working with the Red Cross. Filled with a sense of her life having meaning, she convinces her father to allow her to spend one year in Eritrea to participate in an hospital project before returning to her royal duties. The familiar theme of familial duty or noblesse oblige versus personal actualization are explored. No romance is without a lover, who she meets in the form of an American doctor, who doesn’t know her true identity. Christianna realizes that she may never marry a non-royal and the lovers part and Parker returns to Harvard. A local war forces her to return home, but their love is strong enough to overcome the barriers.

Four sisters, with uniquely different careers (supermodel, television producer, artist, and attorney) are united after a fatal car accident that killed their mother and blinded, Annie, the artist in Steel’s novel, *Sisters* (2007). Sabrina, the attorney, comes up with a plan to live together in a Manhattan Brownstone to grieve their loss and to facilitate Annie’s adjustment to losing her sight. Each of the sisters has her own demons to exorcise (blindness, eating disorder, unfulfilled life, commitment phobic workaholic, and poor choices in men). Their father has his own journey as well. Various forms of violence and emotional betrayals strike the Adams family, but through it all they find their inner strength, new beginnings, and the importance of family.

Tanya Harris, a stay-at-home mom, who is a freelance writer, married to attorney husband, Peter for twenty years, is the protagonist of *Bungalow 2* (2007). Similar to *Bittersweet*, when Tanya
takes on an assignment that requires her to be away from home for an extended period, her husband, while initially supportive is unable to go beyond the limitations of his own comfort zone and lets his fear of her success overshadow their marriage, which leads to him having an affair with their neighbor and asking for a divorce. Her one daughter resents her mother’s departure to Hollywood and emotionally withdraws from her mother, adding to the heartache. The often unforeseen consequences of exploring the self are a central theme of Steel’s works, with a prevailing message that through the trials of self-individuation, the protagonist finds renewed happiness.

Amazing Grace (2007) is a departure in that Steel explores the lives of several people who attend a fund-raising event in San Francisco. An earthquake occurs and serves as a metaphor for how this event literally shakes the very foundations of the lives of six individuals, most notably three women, an unconventional nun, a 19-year old singer, and a socialite. Each of them is forced to reevaluate their lives and their respective priorities, and each of them finds their voice in the process and ultimately new beginnings lead one to embrace change and the others to find fulfillment.

Unable to make progress at home, Carole Barber, a well-known actress of fifty, returns to an old haunt, Paris, to work on a semi-autobiographical work after her second husband dies in Honor Thyself (2008). Paris represents a key to her past, one which was both joyful and sad. In an attempt to explore her writer’s block, she decides to visit her former home and finds herself a victim of a terrorist bomb explosion in a tunnel on her way back to the hotel. She awakens in a hospital with no memory intact. Her former husband concerned by the fact that she has contacted no one flies to Paris and tracks her down. Her family and closest colleagues try to help her reconstruct her past, but it is her former lover, Matthieu, whom she left fifteen years prior who helps her the most. Reconnecting the past allows her to pursue her own goals and to set parameters for herself and her relationships with the men in her life, as well as address the issues with her daughter. Honor Thyself is about self-growth and the importance of acknowledging are own truths.

So what distinguishes Danielle Steel’s success from other romance novelists beyond the accessible writing style and treatment of contemporary issues? While it is evident that Steel’s romance novels seek to affirm life while simultaneously acknowledging the dramas that humans face in the course of living, her decision to stretch her readership net may be another factor worth noting. Her male protagonists in Daddy, Fine Things, and The Ghost represent a departure from the traditional romance novel’s focus on the heroine. While women are considered the primary consumers of this genre, an article in the in The Oregonian reports that Larry Birdine, an Oklahoma defensive linesman, found himself reading his sisters’ novels, of which many were written by Steel. He cites as one of his favorite’s a Steel novel dealing with a family torn apart by a secret. To form a composite of her success merits a look at a number of variables.

One of these other variables is branding. Danielle Steel’s novels are clearly distinguishable from other romance fiction writers. The covers can be recognized on the display shelves of any bookstore, with her name emblazoned across a gold background at the top-fourth of the novel, with the remaining three-fourth represented by a dramatic color as a backdrop for a symbolic icon. The typography, cover design, and marketing strategies occurred with a change of agents.
In the Spring of 1983, Steel severed her ties with her former agent Phyllis Westberg and hired Mort Janklow, an agent with a legal background and a stronger voice. Westberg is credited for negotiating Steel’s first eighteen novels and the novelization deal with Universal for *The Promise*. She also secured three hardcover contracts (*Once in a Lifetime, Crossings, and Changes*). Steel became the first paperback romance fiction writer to publish in hardcover as well as in paperback, something she pushed her agent to accomplish. It appears the industry recognized her accomplishment when it was reported in a 1992 Forbes article, that Harlequin, as well as other publishers, agree that Danielle Steel has name recognition and an audience sizable enough to “break from supermarket paperbacks into mainstream hardcovers.” At that time her novels in paperback had print runs of 2.5-3.5 million copies. A complete list of her novels in both paperback and hardcover is available on her web site, as well as a list of audiobooks.

The Steel and Janklow partnership signaled a shift in market strength, with Janklow selling foreign rights for *Family Album* and the repackaging (1984) of the 1980 work, *Love: Poems*. Currently twenty-nine foreign publishing houses/agencies located in Europe, Eastern Europe, South America, and Asia, are producing her works for the international market. Previously listed on the romance fiction register, Danielle Steel’s books made their way to the general fiction list; thereby increasing her market potential substantially.

Another factor governing her success is the speed with which Steel is able to produce a novel. Various articles, like “The Steel Industry,” indicate that Danielle Steel negotiated a sixty million dollar contract to write five books. In the 1992 Forbes article, “I’m Hungry. But not for Food,” the romance novel market estimated at $750 million. Dell, Steel’s publisher, reported spending one-fifteenth of the eight million dollars Harlequin reported spending on advertising and promotion. Interestingly, Danielle Steel is cited as one of the most financially successful American romance fiction writers, earning millions many times over.

It is significant to note that Dell promotes single-title romances and Harlequin promotes series romances. Barnes & Noble’s experience paralleled Harlequin’s experience, reporting that the average romance customer spends twelve hundred dollars per year or an average purchase of thirty novels per month. As Charter’s coverage of Dell’s marketing campaign reveals, Dell publisher, Carole Baron, felt Steel’s record sales had not reached a plateau. *Special Delivery* (June 25, 1997) marked a $1.5 million marketing campaign, the “Danielle Steel Reading Group”, which officially began in September. The strategy behind this was to expose readers to Steel’s backlist. Readers who joined on June 25, 1997 were provided with a kit that included a booklet with a backlist of Steel’s works, which were tied to a tiered incentive system, bookmarks with a checklist of titles, and the Group newsletter. The premise behind this campaign was to reach readers who may have been too young to have read her earlier works and secondly to focus in on Steel, the writer, whose publication pace positioned her as a “brand-name author.” The stage for the campaign was six 30-second television spots, which aired on *Entertainment Tonight* and *Today*.

Another marketing strategy employed by Delacorte—a response to Steel’s distaste for book tours—to promote her fiftieth romance novel, *Journey* (2000) was to give away a million paperback copies of three previously published novels. Kirkpatrick of the New York Times reported that Applebaum, president and publisher of Random House’s Bantam Dell publishing
group, had a special printing of one million copies of *Kaleidoscope, Family Album,* and *Fine Things.* These copies were available at bookstores, drug stores, Wal-Mart, and the like. These free books had a note to the reader, which was representative of her romantic dedications to loved ones that the reader sees in her other novels. This represented a unique strategy.

One obvious measure of financial success is her record sales worldwide and the number of her novels adapted for television. In the context of the romance fiction genre, it bears repeating that Steel’s more contemporary rendering of historical romance fiction in the seventies acted as a lightening rod for the development of the contemporary romance subgenre. In the article, “Love and History—A Perfect Match,” Leslie Gelbman describes many current historical fiction works as “history lite”—the character development and the relationships take center stage and the historical setting is merely a backdrop and consequently, lacks the level of detail ascribed to earlier historical romances. This is seen as a reflection of readers’ tastes having changed over the years. Greater emphasis is placed on the main characters, the heroine and the hero, and secondary characters and the historical context are deemphasized. This changing landscape, which is reflective of the changing times, has allowed romance fiction as a genre to continue to thrive.

Danielle Steel, as Jacqueline Briskin stated, is a publishing phenomenon. The persona of Danielle Steel, the public figure, is a composite of her writings, product branding, publicity, and reader perception. Whether by accident or by design, her literary life and her personal life are intertwined, which creates a sense of intimacy/accessibility with the reader. Prestigious, yet seemingly down-to-earth, Steel’s romance is romantic, and obviously meets a need.

The final measure though is Steel’s success as a writer, which may be attributed to three underlying themes. One is her belief that a woman can have both a career and a family. In an interview by Contemporary Authors, she stated that she is a contemporary woman who views her family and her work as very important and she has managed to have both. This belief touches on an important subject in contemporary life; the roles of women have changed dramatically and women increasingly occupy the work force and still juggle a family. Another element is that Steel appeals to the sensibilities of her readers: women who want it all.

Steel is the modern day woman’s best cheerleader; she promotes, in the face of emotional hardships and sacrifice, self-actualization. The third and perhaps, the most important theme is the one that is not gender bound. Steel understands the underlying drive to connect with another person, who supports, promotes, and reciprocates in kind, is a core need for most individuals. This understanding of human nature, casts a wider readership net, since her readers are not exclusively women. In short, romance fiction à la Steele keeps alive the hope that the need to connect with a special person and maintain and develop one’s identity is not mutually exclusive; it requires a strong resolve, and a willingness to ride out painful life experiences in order to catch that elusive golden ring. It is a formula by which Steel writes and lives.

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Purpose and Scope
This special issue of *Teaching American Literature: A Journal of Theory and Practice*, devoted to essays written about selected contemporary American romance fiction writers, is intended to provide instructors with bio-bibliographical information about several novelists, highlighting primary themes and motifs, with some analysis of the author’s contribution to the genre. Each entry provides a comprehensive list of the author’s fiction works that can be further explored in the classroom. This issue may also be of interest to researchers, librarians and readers who wish to learn more about a particular novelist.

Introduction
Love stories have existed for millennia, but as Kristin Ramsdell indicates in *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*, Samuel Richardson’s heralded work *The History of Pamela, or, Virtue Rewarded*, written in 1740, is generally acknowledged as the “direct antecedent of today’s romances….”

The historical journey of the romance novel is a fascinating read, evidenced by the growing body of literature exploring the romance genre and related subgenres. Recognition of its significance is marked not only by scholarly publications, but also by the number of universities and colleges offering popular culture courses and comparative literature courses that include the romance genre as a topic of serious inquiry. Professional association conferences, both regional and national, are regularly featuring romance fiction presentations and panel discussions.

The discourse generated by romance fiction is in large part is inspired by its mass market appeal. The importance of the marketplace and its overall impact should not be discounted in shaping the growing interest in romance fiction. Industry statistics underscore the significant role popular consumption plays in shaping society. Data on the educational levels of romance fiction’s readership dispel some of the myths surrounding the appeal of romance, so much so that sociologists like Elizabeth Long have explored the changing ideologies of our society through the novel, and well-known scholars like Janice Radway, who is noted for her first book, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, explores the ethnography of readers.

An extract from Romance Writers of America’s data collection provides a relevant snapshot.

**ROMANCE WRITERS OF AMERICA’S MARKET SALES**
- Romance fiction generated estimated sales of $1.375 billion in 2007.
- Approximate number of romance titles released in the last five years:
MARKET SHARE OF ROMANCE FICTION

- In 2007, romance fiction represented 12.9% of the entire book market, which is the largest fiction category
- 26.4% of all fiction sold is romance (2006 data).

EDUCATION LEVEL OF ROMANCE READERS (2004 data)

- 42% hold a bachelor’s degree or higher.
- 27% college graduates
- 15% post-graduate work or degrees
- 7% associate degrees

**Sources:** "Romance Literature Statistics." Romance Writers of America. 2008.

*TALTP* chose to focus on contemporary authors since it is one of the largest subgenres. The contemporary romance can be traced back to the 1980’s when historical romance was still popular, but a variety of sociological trends created a socio-psychological shift and romance writers responded to these changes by creating more assertive heroines who played an increasingly significant role in shaping their own destiny. The 1990’s mark another major shift in the romance genre. Kristin Ramsdell succinctly describes this as the “genreblending” decade, noting growth within the genre both in terms of greater diversity and inclusiveness. Particularly noteworthy during this decade are the writers of ethnic and multicultural romance, a few of which are represented in this issue.

These love stories with contemporary settings tend to focus on the female protagonist’s journey to find happiness and success both personally and professionally. Although romance is still at the core, greater emphasis is placed on character development of the primary characters. Since the relationship is explored within a societal construct, it allows for current trends to be woven into the plot. A double-edged sword, this “genreblending” makes it more difficult to categorize the subgenres for marketing purposes, but widens the readership net and provides a richer landscape for these authors to explore.
There are a myriad of reasons romance fiction has been able to cast such a wide readership net beyond the core message of a positive love relationship; contemporary romance fiction redefines traditional heroism and has remapped it to be more representative of the more feminized age within which we live. Romance fiction celebrates life, both reflecting, upholding, and to some extent shaping social trends.

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