

Romance Subgenres

(Courtesy <http://www.cuebon.com/ewriters/Rsubgenres.html>)

(Definitions and Examples - All) Except where noted, all of the examples are novels. Many of these subgenres have specific 'imprints' from a major publisher such as Harlequin. Almost all modern romances are authored using a feminine *nom de plume*--including those from men.

Accidentally Pregnant is a new subgenre, which has rapidly filled the book shelves. A woman is the secret lover of (or enjoys a one-night stand with) an unlikely but powerful man, and unintentionally becomes pregnant. *The Billionaire's Pregnant Mistress*, by Lucy Monroe, is a quintessential example. (In a related subgenre, the heroine deliberately gets pregnant, in order to snare the man.)

Action romance is an overlapping subgenre, which brings in elements of the 'thriller' genre. The strong female protagonist is an adventurer, or perhaps a modern-day military officer. That's the case in Susan Grant's *The Scarlet Empress*. Many such titles are coming out, from Harlequin Intrigue. A different example is Robin McKinley's *The Hero and the Crown*. (Often the heroine gets her male lover out of trouble, perhaps rescuing him from the clutches of an enemy.)

Americana tales are defined by their Midwestern US setting. This small subgenre features life in small farm towns, about 100 years ago. Stephanie Mittman's *The Marriage Bed* is one example. (This subgenre is not to be confused with the larger 'Americana' genre.)

American West (precolumbian) These romances are set in the same milieu as the 'western' genre. This overlapping subgenre depicts the strong women who moved west, and helped tame the frontier. Johanna Lindsey's *Savage Thunder* is one of numerous examples. Some novels reach back to precolumbian times, with Native American characters only. Janelle Thomas's "Ecstasy" series depicts this well.

Baby Love romances embrace a modern social trend, with heroines who are also single mothers. The male love interest accepts both mother and child. One oft-cited example is Susan Elizabeth Phillips' *Nobody's Baby But Mine*.

Bodice Ripper romance is now out of favor, at least by that designation. It refers to the article of women's upper clothing of that name, and how the inflamed male hero gets it out of the way, the sooner to make love to the perhaps-reluctant heroine. One recent (and controversial) example is *Daughter of Fortune* by Isabel Allende.

Christian (Amish, contemporary, historical) This subgenre is widespread, and has a variety of settings. In adhering to Biblical standards, sex is not a feature until the heroine marries. Amish-centered novels are quite popular. One example is *The Wishing Pearl*, by Nicole O'Dell. Contemporary Christian novels are, of course, set in the present day. The behavior is relatively calm, but emotional turmoil is common, while maintaining

faith amid secular challenges. *When Sparrows Fall*, by Meg Moseley, is a fine example. As with the related 'historical' subgenres, these novels are set in a wide variety of past milieus. The protagonist is always Christian, and facing challenges to her (usually 'her') faith. *The Doctor's Lady*, by Jody Hedlund, is one example of many.

Civil War novels are set in the South, on the Confederate side. The lovers might be separated by the Mason-Dixon Line, or struggle due to postwar deprivations. Heather Graham's *One Wore Blue* and its sequels are a fine example. (Margaret Mitchell's epic *Gone With the Wind*, and its movie version, are the deans of this subgenre.)

Colonial America tales are defined by that time and place, and just as much by their social milieu. The lovers in this subgenre might be under harsh Puritanical strictures; or inspired (and perhaps divided) by the brewing American revolution. *Temptation's Trail*, by Dana Ransom, fits this subgenre.

Contemporary romance stories are just that, set emphatically in the present day. Modern cultural and other timely references abound, along with popular worldviews. *Over the Edge*, by Suzanne Brockmann, is a fine example. The "Sex in the City" franchise is a famous Hollywood example. (As the years pass, an abundance of hip-'n-trendy references will often 'date' a work terribly.)

Exotic Locales can be anywhere on Earth, from Antarctica to the Sahara desert. Something brought the protagonists there, whether with reluctance or eagerly, and that's where the relationship takes place. At the conclusion, they often head home together. Mary Jo Putney is well-known in this subgenre, as with her *Veils of Silk*, which is set in India.

Family Saga romances take place over a long time period, often depicting several generations. In many stories the location remains the same throughout, such as a country estate in England. Emily Bronte's classic *Wuthering Heights* is an early example.

Futuristic (other planets) This overlapping subgenre brings in elements of 'science fiction' (or science fantasy). The setting is ultra-modern, yet the relationship dynamics remain familiar. The lovers may be separated by great distances, and unusual challenges. Some novels, such as *Orchid*, by Jayne Castle, are set on different planets entirely. (In most such novels, the science is not rigorous.)

Glitz or Glamour subgenre tales focus on the lives and loves of the rich and famous. Many Judith Krantz and Danielle Steele novels fit this category.

Gothic romance is a wide category, which overlaps the 'horror' genre. Its stories have a dark 'atmospheric' setting, often mysterious haunted castles. *The Ravencliff Bride*, by Dawn Thompson, is a recent example. (This subgenre is not to be confused with 'Romantic' novels, popular in England since the 1700s.)

Historical (Elizabethan, Georgian, Medieval, Tudor, Viking, etc.) This subgenre's tales feature settings in the known past. Often famous personages are employed in a fictional role. Anne Chamberlin's novels, set in Ottoman Turkey, are a well-known example. *Shattered Rainbows*, by Mary Jo Putney, is another. The various sub-subgenres are defined by the European setting and culture named, and with the genre's expected relationships intact.

Indigenous or Primitive is a subgenre that reaches deep into the prehistoric past, and features characters in tribal societies. Jean Auel's sprawling tales (starting with *The Clan of the Cave Bear*) are the best, perhaps even the founding, examples. Sandra Saidek's *Daughter of the Goddess Lands* and its sequels envision an ancient matriarchal paradise.

Inspirational or Spiritual romances are written with religious beliefs in mind. With 'Christian' romance as a separate category, most of these novels feature New Age sensibilities. (If there are inspirational romance subgenres involving other major religions, such as Jewish or Hindu or Muslim, they're not very well-known. However, various 'Bollywood' films may qualify.)

Lesbian romance centers on the relationship of two women, as opposed to the usual male love interest. One example with a 'historical' setting is *Patience & Sarah*, by Isabel Miller.

Medical romances feature protagonists in the medical profession, and the special concerns that affect their relationships. This subgenre became popular in the 1950s. *The Doctor's Secret Family*, by Alison Roberts, is a recent example. (In this subgenre the romance is almost always between a male doctor and a female nurse, and seldom involves a patient of either gender.)

Men's romance is very rare. These novels are written in the standard 'romance' genre format, but from the viewpoint of the man, in a heterosexual relationship. (These are scarce enough that even a partial inclusion of the man's point-of-view qualifies a book for this subgenre.) One example is *Walking Disaster*, by Jamie McGuire.

Multicultural romances usually feature African-American characters. Anya Bast's anthology *Ellora's Cavemen* is one of many examples. The characters can also be Hispanic, Caribbean, or from the Third World, but Asian women are rare. (Serious fans have catalogued these interracial/interethnic novels.) (The American publishing industry once frowned upon stories about non-American characters in a non-American setting -- saying that stories must have one or both -- but this restriction has opened up a lot.)

Paranormal romance has, in recent years, enjoyed tremendous popularity. Overlapping the 'fantasy' genre, its characters have otherworldly experiences, and/or psychic abilities. In some novels the love interest is a ghost, vampire, werewolf, or even demigod. (Unlike the 'horror' genre, these may not be bad experiences, but rather the opposite.) *Stranger in*

the Mist, by Lee Karr, is one of many examples. Sherrilyn Kenyon's novel series often fit the bill. [L L L L]
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Regency romances are defined by a specific time and place, that is, Regency England. (To be precise, between 1811 and 1820.) This subgenre also has a specific style, based upon Jane Austin's 'novel of manners' foundation. Many of Barbara Cartland's novels are good examples; also *The Notorious Rake*, by Mary Balogh. (Readers can be ferocious about historical accuracy, for example, what sort of carriage the heroine rides in.) [L L L L]
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Romantic Suspense overlaps the 'thriller/suspense' genre. Often the heroine is in peril, and must be rescued by the male, at much risk to himself. *Carnal Innocence*, by Nora Roberts, is a popular example. (This switches roles from the premise of the 'action romance' subgenre.) [L L L L]
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Romantics is a romance subgenre for homosexual men, and features male rather than a female love interests. These novels emphasize the specific concerns of gay lovers. A clear example is *Surf 'N Turf* by Pomfret and Whittier. (Often the covers feature the usual bare-chested hunk -- except there are two of them.) [L L L L]
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Ruritanian* romances are a small subgenre. These older tales are set in fictional European countries. Usually they feature the affairs of the nation itself, along with the character's specific love interests. The name derives from Anthony Hope's *The Prisoner of Zenda* and its sequels. (The "Girl Genius" series of graphic novels have a similar setting.) [L L L L]
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Sensual or Spicy are the romance genre's terms for 'erotica.' This subgenre often features X-rated stories, written by women with a full plot and setting, and characters who build up to intense physical passion. Patty Salier's *The Love Twin* and Rachel Gibson's *Truly, Madly Yours* are two of numerous examples. (Unlike most 'romance' subgenres, in these tales, sometimes the lovers do not stay together at the end.) [L L L L]
[SEP:SEP] By some definitions, 'spicy' romances focus more on married couples. [L L L L]
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Sweet or Gentle romance tales feature slow-building relationships, and no bodice ripping, or even fought-down urges to do that -- except perhaps on the woman's part. The character's emotions and soul-searching are explored in great depth. Lisa Mondello's *Her Heart for the Asking* is a well-known example. (These novels are usually short, and marketed with a quick turnover.) [L L L L]
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Time Travel tales overlap with the 'fantasy' (or 'science fiction') genres, with such elements adding both opportunity and challenge. The lovers are separated by a normally insurmountable barrier, whether a few years or many centuries. One example is *A Knight in Shining Armor*, by Jude Deveraux. The "Outlander" series, by Diana Gabaldon, is realistic enough that she could've sold them as 'historical science fiction,' but a romance publisher offered far more money. (And then reissued them as 'mainstream' fiction, to better include male readers.) In a few stories, a visitor arrives from the past. (Serious fans have categorized this subgenre by which past-time periods are involved.) [L L L L]
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