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Romance Novels

History and Social Impact

For as long as I can remember, I have always enjoyed spending time reading romantic stories because it helps me lost track of time and takes me to another place, far away from stress or problems. I read romantic novels because it is like being on a roller coaster: You know that at some point you are going to scream and die of fear when you find the descent or the somersault, but in reality you do not know when exactly that jump comes. We know that at some point the protagonists are going to end up together but we do not know is when exactly or under what circumstances so to find that out we have to experience a bunch of emotions like, happiness, anger, sadness and disappointments.

According to the article “A Brief History of Romance Novels” early romance novels featured white straight characters, either defying social conventions or overcoming personal struggles in search of their own happiness. In these novels, the heroines always find the love of their lives and end up happily ever after which is the fundamental guideline for romantic stories until this day. This article talks about the origins of romantic novels which are in the eighteen/nineteen centuries where novels like Pamela by Samuel Richardson, or Virtue Rewards, the gothic romances by Ann Radcliffe and the works of Jane Austen, readers were presented with a new form of fiction being the primarily focus the lives and struggles of the female leads.

Subsequently, when it comes to well known people within this genre, we can mention the authors named before. For example, Jane Austen whose name did not appear on her books until after she died but legacy has served as an example for many romance stories' authors especially women since her work shows the feline strength of the 18th and 19th centuries through a comic and ironic look at the rules of a rigid society in which the success of women relied on the choice of their husbands. Samuel Richardson who according to *The New Yorker* wanted to "teach readers not only how to write elegant letters but how to think and act justly and prudently in the common concerns of life." Last but not least, Ann Radcliffe who after the success of her book *The Romance of the Forest* is considered to be the leading exponent of the Gothic Romance. She is well known for her use of suspense and supernatural things to structure a novel.

A romantic novel we can take from one of these well known authors is "Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austen which was published anonymously in 1813. This story, critically approaches the society of its time, questioning key aspects such as the role of women. It is a novel of personal development, a romantic comedy that hides many reflections and perfectly reflects the English rural aristocratic society of the time. It focuses on the importance and difficulty of meeting the other person, where the main characters must leave behind their greatest values or defects: pride on the part of a high-class man and prejudice for part of a woman from rural life, to really know each other.

We live in a society that claims to be equal, but care and domestic work still fall mainly on women. Sometimes the problem is not the tasks themselves, but the mental and physical burden of organizing and supervising them. In the article "How Romance Novels Helped Lift Me Out of My Postpartum Depression" Sherry Thomas talks about her life after she gave birth of her first child at the age of 21, where she did not know how hard motherhood could be and describes

that moment of her life as a “long dark tunnel of hopelessness”. In her culture they were not used to address that topic at all, therefore, she had no idea about the things she was experiencing and if that was normal or not. She mentions how a day off at the library reading a romantic story brought her out of the drowsiness and joylessness of her own head and allowed her to experience someone else’s life but fictional. After that, every now and then she kept taking a little time off to read, which with the pass of time, helped her get out of that dark place called Postpartum Depression. Many women see how their identity is reduced to the traditional roles of wives, mothers and daughters in their day to day. Faced with this, we can say that a romance novel offers alternative experiences, rewarded with a happy ending, allowing evasion of dealing with everyday stress. The underlying message is that there is other ways of life, that obstacles can be overcome and there will always be a reward.

Rules and Message

Moreover, when it comes to rules romantic literature does have rules, people often think that romance novels are always the same or don’t have an structure but they are wrong, there has to be a pattern, an idea of what is coming next, is like a timeline where every thing that happens is the result of a past action that will lead the protagonist to have the happy ending the audience is expecting and it has to be different and fresh to catch the readers attention, to make it more interesting writers usually add supernatural things like vampires, a little bit of science fiction, mystery or comedy but there always has to be something that makes the story different and showy. In the article “Too Many Rules, Too Little Romance” Janet highlights how form and formula are essential and necessary in a romantic novel because while form ensures coherence and definitional consistency, formula provides familiar elements that a reader may like and want to see in particular combinations. She expresses that the things that make a book or a poem fresh

is not a change in form but the voice and the vision of the writer who understands that formal boundaries do not necessitate staleness and triviality. In other words, writers have to get out of their comfort zone and write something romantic but with a message behind it, to touch someone's heart and address topics or situations that society is facing at the moment while giving the audience the romantic story they like.

Discourse Community

The Discourse community that is mostly connected to Romance Novels is Women, we use reading as a way to escape from our reality for a moment, to please ourselves but most of the time to forget something that has been rounding our mind, something that worries us or we have no idea how to deal with it. Romance Novels serve to entertain, but it also makes us think and feel. Among its pages there are true treasures of description of human relationships with its pros and cons, its virtues, strengths and miseries. There are true gems of history behind the lives of some characters and by reading it we can take positive things that can help us in the future. Finally, when it comes to teenager girls read Romance Novels because when they have had a bad relationship the only way to see true love is by reading a romantic book, what it feels like and dream that some day life will be good enough and send them a person just like the character they read. In conclusion, women rely on romance novels to avoid the situations they are going through maybe because they are afraid of facing it or because they do not feel ready to move forward.

Focused Analysis

One of my favorite books in this genre is a Spanish book called "Tu, Nada Mas" which means "You, only you" by Ana Coello. The book is about a 19 years old girl, named Anel whose mother hurts and judges her because of the way she looks and whose Step father threatens her

saying that he will kill her if she is with another guy, because she is his property. In this novel we see the struggles of a girl that wants nothing but her mother's love back. She spends most of her time taking pictures or reading books to forget her reality, she is also majoring in Law to get her mother's attention. Subsequently, she meets a guy who has more traumas than her since his parents and sister died in a car accident almost in front of him where he could not do anything to save them and after that he has take the blame for that atrocious event. Throughout the story we see how both of the characters try to be together but for some reason there is always something stopping them from giving more in the relationship, the guy whose name is Marcel, wants to be with Anel, but for some reason he feels he does not deserve her. On the other hand, Anel feels safe only when he is around and even though she knows what her feeling for him are, she is afraid to tell him and freak him out. The story goes on showing how their trauma stops them from moving on as well as finding a way to live their life. In the end, Anel's is almost raped by his step father and when she tries to tell her mother what just happened, her mother hits her instead and asks her to move out of their house. She moves with her boyfriend but because she does not want him to feel responsible for what happened and she does not know if he loves her, she takes advantage of a discussion they had to move to another state with her sister. Six months later Marcel goes after her to tell her he loves her and does not want to be without her, he is ready to put an end to his pain and start a new life with her. They get married, she gets pregnant and when she is about to give birth her mother decides she is ready to explain her daughter the reason she treated her the way she did, which is the result of doubts and fear in her head that together became a mental health issue.

The message of this story is that you do not need to be perfect to have a happy ending, while I was reading the story I could relate to them in so many things, many couples in real life

face trauma every day and end up separate because they do not know how to deal with it or how to deal with somebody else's emotions. In addition, in a interview the author had where the readers had the chance to ask her question about this romantic story, she says that before she started writing it she talked to different psychologists, she was very careful with the details because her goal was to help somebody who is going through the same thing, maybe not in the romantic part but the things Anel faced with her mother and how to deal with it. This book shows how mental health is a fundamental factor in our life, if we are not okay with ourselves no matter how hard we try, we will never be truly okay with someone else. At the end of the day, that's what a book should be about, real characters that show the struggles a group of the audience may be living, showing that it is okay to not be okay and that nothing is permanent, there will always be a way to get better.

In the article "The Changing Face of Romance Novels" by Alexandra Alter, she describes Helen Hoang, a woman with autism (a disorder that impairs the ability to communicate) who found refuge on romantic stories that helped her deal with social anxiety and her struggles to make friends, and she describes those books as "frothy stories that allowed her to experience intense feelings that were clearly spelled out on the page, always with the promise of a happy ending". Years later, Ms. Hoang wrote a story herself to embrace who she is and help others not to feel left out and realize that a character does not have to be perfect to have a happy ending. The story is about an autistic woman who is smart and successful in her professional life, but lacking experience in her dating life and as a result of that decides to hire an escort to teach her the ways of dating. This article shows us that people like reading romantic stories but as I mentioned before they would also like to read something they can relate to, a story that helps

them embrace who they are and accept their flaws and that there is nothing wrong about that because those flaws are what makes each one of us unique.

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