

# RESEARCHING THE MARKET



**A Literary Romance  
by  
Carl Tighe**

The needs of all publishers – TV, radio, magazines, newspapers and books alike – tend to be specific. However, the needs of publishers are often *highly* specific. Publishers are very busy and no matter how brilliant it might be, will not look at work if it is not packaged and presented as if it is something they should be interested in. So that their time is not continually wasted, publishers usually make their requirements clearly known via their website. Before you submit a piece of work to any publisher – but particularly to a genre publisher - it is essential that you find out what they want and how they want it – that is you must research their requirements and their Style Sheet.

There is no way round this. Whether you are writing books, articles, essays, stories or poems, researching the market – finding out what a publisher or editor wants to read and publish - is an essential part of a professional writer's work, part of the writing process and a valuable transferrable skill. If you do it you may prosper, if you don't you will certainly flounder.

For our purpose it really makes no difference which genre we investigate – romance, science fiction, teenage fiction, sword and sandal, sword and sorcery, gothic horror, fantasy, fan-fic, fang-fic, soft porn, erotic fiction, westerns, thriller, crime fiction, forensic fiction... even literary fiction. They all have their own rules, famous publishers, trend-setting authors, specialist imprints and series, dedicated specialist bookshops and loyal fans. Here we are going to look at the Romance Fiction market. What you learn about one literary market can always be applied to another...

### **THE ROMANCE OF ROMANCE**

As most writers of Romance Fiction will tell you, the business has its serious side and it is susceptible of literary and political analysis. Whether or not we like it, or want to write Romance Fiction, we have to respect the seriousness of the writers and publishers involved in it, and their continued massive success. And what we learn from looking at this specific market can be applied to other genres. Here is the opening of the Wikipedia entry on the Romance novel:

The Romance novel is a literary genre developed in Western culture, mainly in English-speaking countries. Novels in this genre place their primary focus on the relationship and romantic love between two people, and must have an 'emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending.' Through the late 20th and early 21st centuries, these novels are commercially in two main varieties: category Romances, which are shorter books with a one-month shelf-life, and single-title Romances, which are generally longer with a longer shelf-life. Separate from their type, a Romance novel can exist within one of many subgenres, including contemporary, historical, science fiction and paranormal.

One of the earliest Romance novels was Samuel Richardson's popular 1740 novel *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, which was revolutionary on two counts: it focused almost entirely on courtship and did so entirely from the perspective of a female protagonist. In the next century, Jane Austen expanded the genre, and her *Pride and Prejudice* is often considered the epitome of the genre. Austen inspired Georgette Heyer, who introduced historical Romances in 1921. A decade later, British company Mills and Boon began releasing the first category Romance novels. Their books were resold in

North America by Harlequin Enterprises Ltd, which began direct marketing to readers and allowing mass-market merchandisers to carry the books.

It is often claimed that the modern Romance genre was born in 1972 with Avon's publication of Kathleen Woodiwiss's *The Flame and the Flower*, the first single-title Romance novel to be published as an original paperback in the US, though in the UK the Romance genre was long established through the works of Georgette Heyer, Catherine Cookson, and others. Nancy Coffey was the senior editor who negotiated the multi-book deal. The genre boomed in the 1980s, with the addition of many category Romance lines and an increased number of single-title Romances. Popular authors began pushing the boundaries of the genre and plots, and characters began to modernize.

In North America, Romance novels are the most popular genre in modern literature, comprising almost 55% of all paperback books sold in 2004. The genre is also popular in Europe and Australia, and Romance novels appear in 90 languages. Most of the books, however, are written by authors from English-speaking countries, leading to an Anglo-Saxon perspective in the fiction. Despite the popularity and widespread sales of Romance novels, the genre has attracted significant derision, skepticism and criticism.

In fact Romance Fiction has a long and honourable literary pedigree stretching back in English to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and perhaps even to ancient Greece and Rome. Shakespeare seems to have been familiar with the Romance novels of his day and made use of them in his later plays like *Cymbeline* and *A Winter's Tale*.

Writing in 1929 the Italian revolutionary leader Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) identified Romance Fiction as part of a spectrum of genre fiction that included 'popular novels, adventure novels, detective novels, gothic novels, novelized biographies and serialized novels' and he wondered: 'Why are these books always the most read and the most frequently published? What needs do they satisfy and what aspirations do they fulfill? What emotions and attitudes emerge in this squalid literature to have such wide appeal?'<sup>1</sup>

Part of Gramsci's answer was that these novels with their insistence on specific forms of 'romance', 'hero' and 'heroine' in a story of 'respectable' middle-class love and 'marital ambition' represented not a form of literary exploration, a quest for knowledge and understanding, or an expansion of the horizons of the mind, but were instead simply a restrictive form of entertainment, a kind of literary fascism that kept people – particularly middle-class women – in their place by offering them a world where their position, expectations and possibilities were sharply defined in a particular kind of 'romance' sanctioned by Italian society and by the Catholic Church and ending in a respectable marriage. He also said that intellectuals and their tastes had little or no real influence and that consequently publishers catered mainly for lower middle-class tastes and dreams, where there was also a little spare cash. This, he said, indicated a serious stagnation and 'pathological involution' of social development.

Gramsci may have been right in his perception that this particular kind of 'heroism' and 'romance' was a serious indicator of social and political collapse and impending

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<sup>1</sup> A. Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings* (Lawrence & Wishart: London, 1985), p.342.

disaster. Within a decade Italy experienced a dramatic failure of civic responsibility in the rise of Fascism under the 'strong', 'masculine' leadership of Mussolini, and in the alliance with Nazism. Though of course, while it may have been a symptom of what was then unfolding, no sensible observer would blame fascism or World War Two on readers who favoured Romantic novels.



Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937)

Germaine Greer wrote scathingly of Romantic Fiction in her first book, *The Female Eunuch* (1971). Her main target was the romantic weekly magazine market, including *Woman's Weekly*, *Sweethearts*, *Mirabelle*, *Valentine*, *Romeo* and *Jackie*, but she also cast a wary eye over romance novels by Barbara Cartland, Violette Leduc and Georgette Heyer. She pointed out that most romance was a kind of 'masochistic posturing' on the part of women, a kind of 'titillating mush', and in so far as romance prepared women for domestic drudgery, she defined it as the 'opiate of the supermenial'. But, she pointed out that, according to Mills & Boone's own research, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, some 25-45 year old women, especially housewives and secretarial workers, bought as many as 80 romance books per year.



Germaine Greer (b.1939)

She pointed out that the men in these novels were 'masterful' 'authoritative' 'bewitching' and 'superior'; that the heroines were in need of protection, 'ineffectual against ravishment', and defined themselves mainly through their clothes and their hopes of marriage. She was very clear that if the women's movement was to accomplish 'anything at all' it would have to cope with the 'million dollar Cartland industry'. She confessed:

The strength of the belief that a man should be stronger and older than his woman can hardly be exaggerated. I cannot claim to be fully emancipated from the dream that some enormous man, say six foot six, heavily shouldered and so forth to match, will crush me to his tweeds, look down into my eyes and leave the taste of heaven or the scorch of his passion on my waiting lips. For three weeks I was married to him...<sup>2</sup>

She pointed out that in the novels of Barbara Cartland in particular, the observance of a kind of 'devotionism' was a kind of sexual religion, without which sexual intercourse was just 'another household duty'. In passing she had a swipe at the 'romance' style of D. H. Lawrence and Ernest Hemingway, neither of whom, in spite of their posturing, challenged the content of traditional romance writing. She concluded: 'If female liberation is to happen, if the reservoir of real female love is to be tapped, this sterile self-deception must be counteracted.' But then she went on: 'the only literary form which could outsell romantic trash on the female market is hard-core pornography.'<sup>3</sup>

More recently the novelist Linda Grant (b1951) has suggested that one reason why the Romance novel – the Harlequin-Mills & Boon variety in particular – has remained popular is that women, unlike men, prefer the idea of love not as a sexual act, but as part of a narrative that includes the sex act. This, she feels is not only why Romance novels have lasted so long, but also why they have not (for the most part) become simply 'steamy' or pornographic.<sup>4</sup>



Linda Grant (b.1951)

### **HARLEQUIN-MILLS & BOON**

These days, Romance Fiction is very tightly defined (even in its various sub-genres) and works to the taste of a well-established, traditional and rather conservative readership. The most successful publisher in this area is Harlequin-Mills & Boon, who regularly sell over 2,000,000 books per annum world-wide, with UK print runs of 100,000. They have been publishing Romance novels since the end of the First World War and they are very good at what they do. Mills and Boon branched out into

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<sup>2</sup> G. Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (Paladin, London 1971), p.180.

<sup>3</sup> G. Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (Paladin, London 1971), p.188.

<sup>4</sup> L. Grant, *Sexing the Millennium* (Harper Collins: London, 1993).

Erotic fiction a few years ago, but their stock in trade is still the short Romance novella.

And the company has not stood still in regard to digital publishing either. The new 'Spice' imprint, a more explicit genre of erotic fiction, is also said to be selling particularly well through internet downloads for devices such as Amazon's Kindle and the Sony Reader. In 2010 Mills & Boon's digital sales rose by 57% at Tesco alone in the five months after the Sony Reader went on sale. Tesco's own customer research shows that younger fans - aged 30-42 - prefer to use electronic readers than buy the books. However, almost a third of this group – 31% - said they prefer not to be seen putting Mills & Boon books into their shopping baskets because of their association with an older readership.<sup>5</sup>

Contrary to popular belief, Harlequin-Mills & Boon novels are usually written very carefully and to a precise series outline. They know exactly what type of book their loyal Romance readers expect in any given series and their guidelines make this clear to all their potential writers. You can find out more about Mills and Boon by going to their website or by reading the semi-official history of the company, J. Dixon's *The Romance Fiction of Mills & Boon 1989-1990*. This book has the advantage of being written and researched by someone who worked at Mills & Boone as an editor in the 1990s. Although Harlequin-Mills & Boon novels are often dismissed as rather chaste and dull, ending in a slow fade on a long awaited kiss, rather than with actual sex, Jay Dixon makes the point that female orgasm figured in a Mills and Boon title as early as 1923, and, she adds, there have been several since...<sup>6</sup>

### BARBARA CARTLAND



Barbara Cartland (1901-2000)

One of the biggest selling and most prolific authors in Romantic fiction was Barbara Cartland (1901–2000). In their day her early novels were considered rather 'racy', but her later writing, particularly after the 'liberation' of the 1960s, was judged tame and formulaic with virginal debutante heroines, limp but moneyed, upper-class male love

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<sup>5</sup> 'Mills & Boon boom sparked by young fans in rush to download romances', [www.Mailonline](http://www.Mailonline), 12 December 2012.

<sup>6</sup> J. Dixon, *The Romance Fiction of Mills & Boon 1989-1990* (University College London Press: London, 1999).

objects and absolutely no suggestive situations or real sexual content. However, in media terms she was an accepted media authority on love, marriage, infidelity and divorce among the British moneyed classes and when 'Royal Romance' was in the air (e.g. Charles and Diana) could always be relied upon for a TV sound-bite. Here is how Wikipedia described her:

Dame Mary Barbara Hamilton Cartland, DBE, Commander of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem (9 July 1901 – 21 May 2000) was an English author, one of the most prolific and commercially successful of the twentieth century. Her 723 novels were translated into 36 different languages, and she continues to be referenced in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the most novels published in a single year. As Barbara Cartland she is known for her numerous romantic novels, but she also wrote under her married name of Barbara McCorquodale. She wrote more than 700 books, which reportedly sold more than 750 million copies. Other sources estimate her book sales at more than 1 billion copies. She specialised in 19th-century Victorian-era pure romance. Her novels all featured portrait style artwork. Cartland also became one of London's most prominent society figures and one of Britain's most popular media personalities, right up until her death in 2000 at the age of 98.

Whatever we think of her work (and many dismiss it as formulaic, romantic, escapist fantasy, pap, junk, a kind of children's writing for emotionally deficient adults) if we judge Barbara Cartland on longevity and sales, she must have been doing something right. In 1963 alone she is credited with writing no less than 23 novels – which in itself is a world record. *The Guinness Book of Records 1982*, described her as the world's 'top selling authoress' and it is said that in her lifetime over 1 billion copies of her books were sold. Since her death her early novels have been re-released, a series of e-books have appeared and a whole collection of posthumous novels has been published. What she did right was to know her market very, very well indeed.

Below are the Harlequin-Mills & Boon General Submission Guidelines, three of their detailed Series Outlines and an extract from a Barbara Cartland novel.

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### **HARLEQUIN-MILLS & BOON GENERAL GUIDELINES HOW TO WRITE THE PERFECT ROMANCE!**

Before you put finger to keyboard, preparation is key: know and respect your readers – choose the most recent novels and read widely across the romance market. Then target the series/genre that excites you and suits your voice.

Innovate, don't imitate! There is no formula – only a format, as with all genre fiction, which allows room for creative expression, unique writing voices and memorable characters. So throw those clichés out of the window!

#### **Romancing the reader: why we ♥ the perfect romance**

I ♥ my characters: At the heart of all great romances are two strong, appealing, sympathetic and three-dimensional characters.

I ♥ my conflict: Emotional, character-driven conflict is the foundation of a satisfying romance. Conflict spawns tension and excitement.

### **There are two types of conflict: internal and external**

Internal conflict should be the writer's main focus: defined by either character – the opposing forces within a personality, motivations and aspirations – or by an emotional situation within a relationship – for example, an unexpected pregnancy or an arranged marriage.

External conflict should only be brought in as additional support to the developing romance and plot. External conflict is defined by misunderstandings, circumstances or a secondary character's influence.

Check that your conflict is believable and that it can be sustained over the course of a whole book – ideally two or three conflicts that unfold and are resolved in the course of the story work best. Conflict doesn't mean endless arguments; layer it with emotional highs and lows. All the best stories have stormy weather and sunny days.

I ♥ dialogue! It's the key tool to giving life, energy and pace to your writing. Great dialogue can propel your story; bad dialogue can grind it to a halt. Remember to keep it relevant and consistent to your characters.

I don't like secondary characters - use with caution! You're writing a romance, readers are interested in your hero and heroine so keep the focus on them.

### **How to keep your spirits up**

We receive thousands of submissions so competition is tough. If the writing does not show potential a standard response will be sent - this is the case with most submissions.

If you do receive feedback it is intended constructively and is a vital part of the writing process. Take time to digest any criticism, then apply it to your next submission.

### **What we want in a nutshell**

Talented, dedicated authors who are savvy about the romance genre and its readers.

Unique, fresh voices, compelling characters and innovative stories that will keep readers turning the pages!



## HARLEQUIN-MILLS & BOON SERIES GUIDELINES

### HARLEQUIN MEDICAL SERIES



**Length:** 50,000-55,000 words

Do you love handsome, big-hearted doctors? Are you a fan of *ER*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Nip/Tuck*, *House*? In Medical Romance you'll find our trademark devilishly alluring doctors – as well as the highs and the lows, warmth and passions, of medical life! Medical Romance is first and foremost about heart-racing romance, with the added bonus of pulse-raising medical drama that throws our heroes and heroines together...even when they might not want to be!

For the doctors, nurses, paramedics and midwives between our pages, it's all about overcoming the challenges and obstacles of finding love under pressure in the demanding world of modern medicine. Readers enjoy falling in love with top-notch docs and hot-shot surgeons from around the world, experiencing love and life in the shoes of smart, caring and beautiful medical heroines. Our stories can be intensely passionate or warm and tender; but we're ultimately looking for a range of emotionally intense reads, from the traditional to the ground breaking. We promise our readers contemporary romantic relationships, whether sophisticated, emotive, tender or dramatic, set against a compelling medical backdrop. They're a big read in a short book.

### HARLEQUIN ROMANCE SERIES

**Length:** 50,000 words

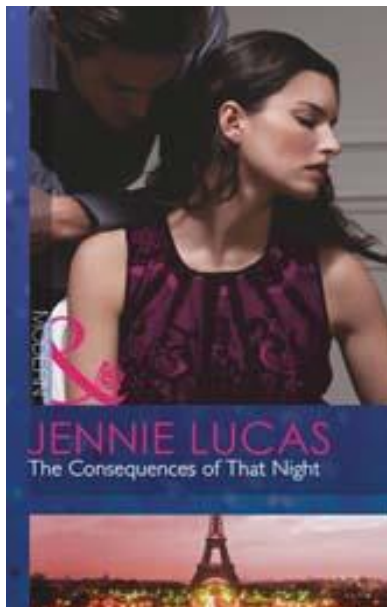
Mills & Boon Cherish showcases the best in heart-warming, emotional and uplifting romances that will take you on a rollercoaster of emotions with a happy ending guaranteed!

#### **Walk in your heroine's shoes...**

We celebrate women: their lives, triumphs, families, hopes, dreams...and most importantly their journey to falling in love. These are heroines every woman can relate to, root for, a friend you can laugh with and cry with. There should be a sense that the story really could happen to you!

**Behind every strong woman...**

There's a strong man! A guy you could meet on the sunniest of days, but who'll be there for you on the rainiest. Each story delivers 100% pure romance - but happily leaves the explicit detail on the cutting room floor. Readers come to this series to experience the feel-good high of love blossoming.

**Explore a rainbow of emotional scenarios?**

Vibrant, heart-wrenching, exciting, uplifting, unexpected, intelligent, warm...all this and more can be found in Cherish. We welcome a variety of settings, characters and themes, from the unusual to the classic, but at the heart of each story should be a strong emotional conflict and an unpredictable story that will have the reader turning the pages in anticipation.

**Is this the series for you?**

The best way to get to know the series is to read our current books and let your imagination fly!

**HARLEQUIN RIVA SERIES**

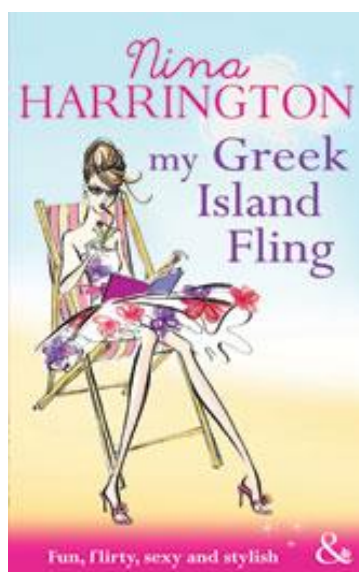
**Length:** 50,000 words

Launching in January 2011, Riva is a vibrant, exciting new stream of editorial for readers who enjoy authors such as Louise Bagshawe, Tasmina Perry, Marian Keyes and Sophie Kinsella. Upmarket, glossy and sharply contemporary, these stories sparkle with humour, passion and emotion.

**If you like your stories hot & steamy...**

Then you'll love the Rivas written by original, fresh authors such as Heidi Rice, Natalie Anderson, Kelly Hunter, Kimberly Lang, Anne Oliver, Anna Cleary and Lucy King, formerly published in Mills & Boon Modern Heat. These entertaining romances reflect the life experiences of today's young women, within a chic, glamorous, and usually urban setting. They offer international glamour, passion and alpha male heroes you expect from modern Mills and Boon novels, with a flirty young voice and a whole load of sass. The heroines are

often your twenty-something girls-about-town but there's no compromising on the hero: he must be very alpha and absolutely to die for. There'll be sparks flying when these two meet – and nothing short of fireworks once they get to the bedroom!



**If you like your stories flirty & sweet...**

Then you'll love the Rivas written by flirty, young voices such as Liz Fielding, Nina Harrington, Fiona Harper and Jackie Braun, formerly published in Mills & Boon Romance. These stories should reflect the experiences of today's young women – whether it be dating disasters, juggling a work/life balance or overcoming a broken heart. Each story should have an emotional core with believable emotional conflicts but told in an up-beat, fun, contemporary way. The hero should be sexy, aspirational and the romantic tension should sizzle, but when it comes to the bedroom – the door should be firmly closed. We are open to romantic comedies, first person narratives and interesting twists on classic romantic themes.

We are on the lookout for new authors who can convey that young urban feel with 21st century characters, simmering tension, either with or without the hot sex!

Our top editor tip: there is no better way to fully understand the Riva experience than to read as many of them as possible!

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**BARBARA CARTLAND'S MISSION TO MONTE CARLO**

Moving on from Mills & Boon... The blurb Barbara Cartland's novel *Mission to Monte Carlo* (1982) says that it was her 321<sup>st</sup> novel. That novel is part of her 'Eternal' series and is now available in a Kindle version. Here is how it was described on Amazon:

Craig Vandervelt, handsome son of the richest man in America is begged by his cousin, the Marquis of Lansdowne, the British Foreign Secretary, to undertake a secret mission in the most flamboyant principality in Europe - Monte Carlo. Intrigued by the fact that one of Britain's top agents in India, the reclusive but respected Randall Sare, has disappeared without a trace, Craig agrees once more to use his playboy status as a mask to find out what is really happening.

Craig is also told to beware of a beautiful Russian Countess suspected of being a spy. Young, glamorous and continually in the company of Lord Neasdon, a newcomer to the Foreign Office, she is suspected of using her charms to lure Neasdon into inadvertently give her information regarding the British interests in Tibet. Moving amongst Europe's elite and the beauties of the Beau Monde in the gambling houses of Monte Carlo, Craig is soon drawn into danger and treachery, which threatens the delicate political situation between Britain and Russia. But as he uncovers each secret, moving ever nearer to the centre of the plot, he discovers something he never expected to find – true love.



Below are some extracts from *Mission to Monte Carlo*.

### **Him**

The marquess sat down opposite him thinking that, as a great many women had thought before about him, it would be hard to find a better-looking, more attractive young man anywhere in the world.

It was not surprising. Craig Vandervelt's father came from Texas, and it was his astute and brilliant brain which had turned what had been the Vandervelt's misfortune into one of the greatest fortunes in America.

His mother, a daughter of the Duke of Newcastle, had been one of the great beauties of her generation. It was therefore not surprising that their only son would be not only extremely good-looking and irresistibly attractive, but also, though not many were aware of it, had a brain which matched his father's. Because he had no inclination to add to the enormous wealth his family had already accumulated, Craig had, from the world's point of view, become a 'playboy'.

He travelled extensively, enjoyed himself not only in the great Capitals which catered for rich young men, but also in more obscure, unknown parts of the earth, where a man had to prove his manhood rather than rely entirely on his pocketbook.

### **Her**

'By Jove! There is something to look at!' and Craig thought he could have echoed his words.

She was, as he had noticed when he had seen her walking down the passage, very slim. She was taller than many other women in the room, and if she had dressed in order to cause a sensation she had certainly succeeded.

Every other woman was clothed in colours of the spring fashions; green, blue, pink, yellow, and a great deal of soft white chiffon or tulle.

The Countess of Aloya was wearing black. It was quite a severe black and the bodice was plain and very tight, accentuating the soft curves of her breasts and her very slim waist.

Her skirts, billowing out, were not ornamented, and what at first glance seemed so extraordinary was that unlike every other woman in the room she was not glittering with jewels.

Craig, as a connoisseur of women, knew there was no need for them, for the whiteness of her skin was a jewel in itself, and her hair, so fair that it seemed almost silver in the light of the chandeliers, appeared to glitter without the aid of diamonds.

Them, together at last!

As Craig was kissing her he undid her gown and lifted her onto the bed. She realised he had pulled back the curtains from the porthole and now there were not only the stars, but the light from a young moon climbing the sky.

She felt it was like the life they were starting together, with a light of such beauty and glory to guide them that it was impossible to express it except by love.

The Craig came to her and she felt his body against hers, his heart beating on hers, and his hands touching her.

The moonlight not only covered them with its silver light, but vibrated within them, and it was the Power of Love that had been theirs in the past and would be theirs in the future and for all eternity.

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It was three o'clock in the afternoon and the sun was very hot, when Craig, after their swimming in the sea, climbed back onto the yacht to join Aloya who was resting under an awning.'

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Before Craig sat down he looked at her, thinking how lovely she was and how, with her hair falling over her shoulders, she looked very young, little more than a girl.

'I love you,' he said. 'I was aware of it just now when I saw what was happening in the Casino.'

Aloya made an inarticulate little sound and her eyes filled with tears. Slowly Craig bent his head and very gently his lips found hers. Only when he felt that they were one with the stars and the moon, and at the same time enveloped by a glory that was not of this world, did he raise his head and she said in a whisper:

'I love... you... and I ought not bring you into this ... ghastly situation which is... very dangerous... but there is no one... else I can turn to.'

'You must tell me about it,' Craig said, 'but first I must kiss you again...'

It is important to remember that Romance as a genre has moved on a long way since Barbara Cartland wrote *Mission to Monte Carlo*. Mills and Boon, for example, now publish novels with a much 'steamier' content than this.

## Follow-Up Work

- What are the main elements of Barbara Cartland's writing formula?
- What stereotypes can you see in the extract from Barbara Cartland?
- How are her characters described?
- Do they have any character at all?
- Do Craig and Aloya come alive on the page?
- Do we care about these people?
- Why / why not?
- How does the author use adjectives and adverbs?
- Are the adjectives and adverbs precise and detailed or are they general and vague?
- What details of expression, gesture action or personality can you find?
- What evidence of thought or emotional life can you find in these characters?
- If this is how the main characters are presented, how do you think the minor characters will be treated?
- Why do you think Barbara Cartland left a gap

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in the narrative?

- Use the elements of the writing formula you have identified to try this type of writing for yourself. Don't write a parody, but take it seriously. Put your own writing and the 'real you' to one side. Write as though you want to make money from what you produce. Write a short romantic passage.
- Produce a one-page plot synopsis (approx. 300 words) for any one of the three Mills and Boon imprints
- Write a short blurb (max 40 words) for your book making use of your synopsis
- Write the publisher's brief for intending authors in a new Romance Fiction series (approx. 400 words)
- Go to the LRC and browse through the collection of Mills and Boon novels
- What is the difference between literary success and commercial success?
- Do you think this difference is important to you and your writing?
- Investigate genre fiction for yourself - see if you can find a publisher's website in your chosen genre with a brief detailing the kind of writing they are looking for.
- What do you think Gramsci meant by 'squalid' in this context?
- Is Gramsci's judgment on 'Romance' fair?
- Is Linda Grant right – are these books successful because their female readership prefers the idea of love not as a sexual act, but as part of a narrative?
- Why are these books still so popular?
- What needs do they satisfy and what aspirations do they fulfill?
- What emotions and attitudes emerge in this literature?
- Why do they have such wide appeal?
- How and in what way does 'Romance' relate to your idea of 'professional writing'?
- Do the processes involved in writing a Romance differ from those of writing any other kind of fiction?
- In the same way that Gramsci analysed Romance Fiction, think about exactly what social and political role is fulfilled by your chosen genre.

### **FURTHER READING**

It is easy (and fashionable) to sneer at Romance as a branch of writing. However, while many professional writers have tried to write in this genre, few have succeeded. Kathryn Hughes has written an account of her attempt to write a Romance novel in which she reveals how seriously she underestimated the professional demands of the genre. Look at: Kathryn Hughes, 'The Great Escape', *The Guardian*, 9 February 2008: [www.theguardian.com/books/2008/feb/09/featuresreviews.guardianreview31](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/feb/09/featuresreviews.guardianreview31)