

# Expanding Romance Market

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The stuff of dreams is big business, and today the romance business, at least in its paperback variety, is becoming especially big.

Seven new lines will be introduced in the coming year — by next Valentine's Day, as the publishers coyly put it — as the romance publishers go all-out in the competition for seemingly automatic commercial success.

Comprehensive figures are hard to find, but according to Publishers Weekly, up to 40 percent of all paperbacks sold in the United States in 1981 were romances, with total sales of more than \$200 million.

While two publishers, Harlequin and Silhouette, have a firm hold on the mostly female market, others are joining the fray, offering the romance reader something new by shifting away from the classical heroine to the experienced woman in a more modern world.

For example, the New American Library's "September Romances" will feature older, less naive heroines, experiencing love for the second time, and Dell's "Candlelight Ecstasy" romances are somewhat racier than the traditional fare.

## Basic Formula Underlies Genre

Although the genre, like the women who read it, has changed over time, a basic formula underlies each story, and seasoned readers seem to enjoy this careful consistency as much as the subtle differences.

"Women will pick up a romance novel knowing what to expect, and this foreknowledge of the reader is very important," according to Joan Schulhafer, publicity manager of Pocket Books, a division of Simon & Schuster. "When the hero and heroine meet and fall in love, maybe they don't know they're in love but the reader does. Then a conflict will draw them apart, but you know in the end



Novel lines by Silhouette Books, a Simon & Schuster division, and a romance published by Harlequin Enterprises Ltd.

they'll be back together, and preferably married or planning to be by page 192."

Silhouette Books, also a Simon & Schuster division, joined the market in May 1980, publishing six books a month, each retailing at \$1.75 for 192 pages of romance. Since the romance novel is marketed almost as if it were a household product, like a box of Kleenex with a fixed number of sheets, there are a set number of

pages correlated with the retail price. In the first year, 350,000 copies of each title were sold, bringing in more than \$30 million.

The publisher soon added new lines, and "First Love," a young adult romance series, was started last October, with two titles published per month. "Silhouette Special Editions," 256-page novels retailing for \$1.95,

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## Not a Business for Novices

While the formula looks simple enough to follow, those who have been developing it for years at Harlequin Books Ltd. in Canada, one of the oldest and largest publishers of romance fiction, say it is not. Many novice publishers, they say, find themselves unromantically out of business within half a year.

Harlequin holds a 50 percent share of the romance market, with an estimated 28 million readers. Since 1964, when it concentrated all of its output in romances, Harlequin said, it has had a 35 percent annual growth rate. In 1981 the company sold 200 million books, with worldwide sales of just under \$300 million.

Although many publishers feel the market may soon be glutted, the appeal of vicarious escape appears to be a constant. At Bantam Books Inc., Barbara Cartland, perhaps the most famous of the romance authors, has published 160 books since 1973 with sales exceeding 200 million copies.

As Walter Meade, executive vice president and publisher of Avon Books, a division of Simon & Schuster, put it: "The phone never rings, the baby never cries and the rent's never overdue in romances."

"Women are looking for escape," according to Judith T. Sullivan, vice president and editor in chief of Richard Gallen Books, which distributes romances under Pocket Books. And writers and editors are vying to create a package that, from cover to pictorial cover, will provide the most effective, satisfying escape a woman can buy.

There is even a science to the books' covers, according to one spokesman at Pocket Books. A regular reader can look at a cover and tell instantly what she is buying. The degree of sexual explicitness, for instance, can be indicated by the position of the man's hands in the picture. Colors such as red, black and purple denote passion, whereas lavenders, whites and pastels represent a tamer romance. The buttons on clothing are also higher on tamer romance covers.

soon followed at the rate of six per month for the reader who wanted a more intricate, obstacle-ridden love story. And finally, "Silhouette Desire," a more sexually explicit line, will appear in May for the many readers who have expressed an interest in less euphemistic material.

By late spring, Silhouette will be publishing more than 60 million books a year. It will spend \$14 million on advertising and promotion in women's magazines and television commercials, doubling last year's budget.

## Market Impervious to Recession

Such success has become common recently among romance publishers. Indeed, the romance fiction market has been impervious to the overall economic recession, with faithful readers spending up to \$40 a month in bookstores or on mail orders catching up with their heroines, and prolific writers keeping the shelves stocked with new titles.