

As an English Major with an Emphasis on Creative Writing, my senior project will be a modern romance in the form of a short story. I have been interested in the genre of romance since I took the Feminist Literary Theory course with Dr. Amster last fall. In this class, we discussed the typical format in which romance novels are written in order to analyze the interactions between males and females and answer the question: Why do these novels appeal to female readers?

While we could never fully answer this question, we came to the general consensus that the power dynamics that exist between males and females in romance novels play a major role in their appeal. Since beginning my college career and diving into topics related to literature, history, sexuality, gender, and sociology, I have become increasingly interested in the different types of power dynamics present in our society and their consequences. This interest has caused me to push past the question of why these novels appeal to female readers and ask what role the power dynamics of gender play in their appeal.

In order to explore this question, I am setting out to write a modern romance set in a world in which gender does not exist. Every character will be referred to using they/them pronouns and will be given gender nondescript names. Originally, I considered making the main character, Zephyr, and their love interest, Aphelion, equal in every way possible — socioeconomic status, employment, educational history, etc. — but I quickly became aware that a relationship such as this would lack emotion, conflict, and passion. I will not, however, shy away from describing their physical characteristics.

I have been asked why I am choosing to create a genderless world rather than simply switching the traditional gender roles and behaviors of a male character and female character. This is not something I had thought of previously, and I find the idea rather intriguing. After

some thought, however, I have come to the conclusion that this is not a new or unique trope in the literary world. All kinds of literature exist in which the woman becomes the dominant, strong, and mysterious character while the man becomes the open and sensitive character. It is possible that I should be striving to create something with more reference materials considering the time period in which I have to work on this project, but it just does not seem worthwhile to me if I do not aim to do something a little more revolutionary. Other scholars and writers have explored the ins and outs of genderless worlds, but it is not common and I am excited to expand on this subgenre.

While I am hoping to wander into new territory, I will still be drawing from a plethora of scholarly sources regarding the history and contents of romance novels, how to write them, interactions between characters, different types of romantic relationships, and the role dialogue plays in romance novels. I plan to read novels written by the most popular authors, such as Nora Roberts, Nicholas Sparks, Danielle Steel, and Robyn Carr. I will also be pulling information from non-scholarly sources such as magazine articles, podcasts, and online communities dedicated to the romance genre because I feel as though these sources will be key in helping me translate theory into practice by showing me what the modern female romance novel enthusiast is looking for.

Although I would love to turn this idea into a full fledged novel in the future, my senior project will be written in the form of a short story. I will explore many avenues of how to condense a romance into a short story, such as focusing on a specific part of the relationship itself rather than writing the entire story of these characters, or giving their relationship some sort of tangible deadline.

As this is a big project, I fully anticipate that there will be challenges. I believe that the set of due dates that the department has set will help me stay on track. I do not believe that this project is too much to complete in the allotted time, but I am worried about how my mental health will affect my progress because my depression tends to come with a healthy dose of lethargy. My other topic of concern is condensing a romance — usually a complete novel — into the format of a short story.

## Annotated Bibliography

Cabag, Yen. "How to Write a Romance Novel: 11 Tips for a Passionate Bestseller." *TCK Publishing*, 11 Nov. 2020, [www.tckpublishing.com/how-to-write-a-romance-novel/](http://www.tckpublishing.com/how-to-write-a-romance-novel/).

This article is a step-by-step guide on how to start writing a romance novel with an emphasis on the steps that should be taken prior to writing.

Caldwell, Sarah and Martin, Alexa. "Advice for New Romance Writers." *All The Kissing*, HelenKay Dimon, 25 July 2019. *iTunes* app.

This podcast has been written by romance authors with the purpose of teaching writers new to romance novels where to begin and what to avoid.

Davies, Kate. *In at the Deep End*. Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020.

This modern queer romance follows two women who fall in love and become deeply involved in the queer community until their relationship goes awry.

Hamlett, Christina. "Romance Primer: Learn the Basics and Get to the Heart of Romance. (Cover Story)." *The Writer*, vol. 115, no. 9, Sept. 2002, p. 34.

The purpose of this article is to explain the basics of romance novels such as characters, categories, and conflicts.

Kenner, Julie. *Release Me*. Headline, 2013.

This book takes place in the present and is the first in a series that is beloved by the fans of *50 Shades of Grey*. The purpose of reading this book is to examine the relationship dynamics between the two main characters.

Northcote, Jay. *Starting from Scratch*. Jaybird Press, 2017.

This book follows the adventures of a newly transitioned FTM transgender person in college who falls in love without looking for it.

Vivanco, Laura. *For Love and Money the Literary Art of the Harlequin Mills & BOON ROMANCE*. HEB, 2011.

The purpose of this book is to counter the idea that Harlequin Romance novels are nothing but mass-produced pieces of literature with the goal of making money. Vivanco discusses how romances use themes and concepts from canonical literature as well as the typical "form" for writing romances.

Winterson, Jeanette. *Written on the Body*. Vintage, 1994.

This romance novel is written in a poetic style and is centered around two lovers whose genders are unknown to the reader. It covers many topics, but the main focus is on love and the emotions that come from it.

“Write for Harlequin Community.” *Facebook*, Facebook Groups, 2018,  
[www.facebook.com/groups/HarlequinWritingCommunity](http://www.facebook.com/groups/HarlequinWritingCommunity).

This Facebook group is a community of Harlequin Romance writers who are dedicated to the craft. Both people who are new to writing romance and people who are experts in the field are welcome to join and share their ideas.