

# GSWS 4459G: The Feminist Romance Novel

## Tentative Course Outline

**Instructor:** Dr. Miranda Green-Bartee

**Course Description:** A romance novel is a work of genre fiction that primarily focuses on the relationship and romantic love between two people, generally with a happy ending. One of the most commercially successful genres, especially among female and female identifying readers, the genre has often been dismissed by critics for being “fluff” or escapist. As critic Pamela Regis argues, “critical characterization of the romance novel is overwhelmingly negative” (3). In this course, we consider why is the romance novel, a genre that is primarily written by women and read by women, is treated so dismissively. We will examine the genre from the nineteenth century to the modern day, exploring how the genre has evolved and asking ourselves: are romance novels feminist? In addition to this question, we will consider issues of consent, work-life balance, gender roles, social and societal expectations for women, and sex and sexuality. Novels that may be considered include Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple*, Daphne Du Maurier’s *Rebecca*, Gordon Merrick’s *The Lord Won’t Mind*, Kathleen E. Woodiwiss’s *The Flame and the Flower*, Julia Quinn’s *The Duke and I*, and Sarah J. Maas’s *Court of Thorn and Roses*, among others. In addition to novels, we will consider theoretical perspectives on the romance novel, including works by Pamela Regis, Kristin Ramsdell, and Janice Radway.

### Course Objectives

Throughout the semester, in addition to gaining and sharing knowledge through the assigned readings, you will engage with the following concepts:

- apply rigorous critical thinking and analysis by engaging productively with new ideas through reading and discussing literature and critical sources;
- develop an understanding of the romance genre;
- gain an understanding of how the romance novel has been viewed by feminist theorists;
- have a sense of how the romance novel has changed over time;
- consider how issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality affect how we view the romance novel;
- develop and refine close reading skills;
- apply theory to literature;
- research, assess, and synthesize information;
- and locate, evaluate, and critique sources using appropriate disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary research skills and tools.

### Course Texts

\*Please note: these are subject to change prior to the start of the winter term.

Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

Bronte, *Jane Eyre*

Du Maurier, *Rebecca*

Merrick, *The Lord Won't Mind*  
Woodiwiss, *The Flame and the Flower*  
Saenz, *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*  
Quinn, *The Duke and I*  
Maas, *The Court of Thorn and Roses*  
Oseman, *Heartstopper*, Vol. 1

**Term Work**

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| Engagement                                 | 10% |
| Reading Journal                            | 15% |
| Close Reading Papers (2 @ 750-1,000 words) | 30% |
| Paper Proposal and Annotated Bibliography  | 15% |
| Final Paper                                | 35% |