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Wandering the Web — Reviews of Romance Novels: Online Sources for Evaluating Popular Fiction

by **Ellen Micheletti** (ERC Specialist, WKU Libraries)

Column Editor: **Jack G. Montgomery** (Coordinator, Collection Services, Western Kentucky University Libraries) <jack.montgomery@wku.edu>

Column Editor's Note: *It is a privilege to have Ms. Micheletti write for this column. She is an internationally recognized authority on the subject of the romance novel as a genre of popular fiction. She has written well over 800 reviews of romance novels for the popular romance Website, All About Romance (<http://www.likesbooks.com/>), which boasted 4.9 million visitors in 2009. She has also contributed background information on historical periods for readers of romantic fiction to the AAR Website. Ellen has moderated panels for romance authors at the Kentucky Writers Conference and the Southern Kentucky Book Fest. For her day job, Ms. Micheletti is the Educational Resources Center Specialist for Western Kentucky University Libraries and teaches children's literature as an adjunct in WKU's Library Media Education program. — JM*

Romance novels are the most popular form of genre fiction published in the United States. Over half the mass market fiction paperbacks sold are romances. You would think that reviewers would notice such a popular form of fiction, but for a long time it was difficult to find *any* reviews of romance novels, and when the press did notice them, more often than not it dismissed the entire genre with the phrase, "bodice ripper." Granted, the covers of many romance novels were a bit eye-brow rising, but romance fans quickly learned that the old saying, "You can't judge a book by its cover" was true. There are some excellent novels out there, but with no guidelines, how to tell the gold from the dross? Happily, there are a number of Internet sites featuring reviews that actually take romance novels seriously.

The Romance Reader — <http://theromancereader.com> — This is one of the oldest reviewing sites for romance novels on the Web. It reviews romances in these categories: Contemporary, Historical, Paranormal, Series, and Eclectica. Reviews are archived under the author's last name. The reviews are ranked from one to five hearts and there is a sensuality rating based on movie ratings from G to NC-17. Other features are author interviews and a needle in the haystack section where readers can ask questions and get answers.

All About Romance — <http://www.likesbooks.com> — This is the largest reviewing site for romance novels with almost 7,000 reviews in its database. Books are graded A to F and there is a sensuality grade that ranges from Kisses to Burning. AAR has a power search function that allows the reader to search by a wide variety of criteria: author,

title, time period, grade, sensuality, year of publication, etc. There are also lists of books in a number of categories such as: Road Romances, Favorites Funnies, Guardian/Ward Romances, and many others. The site has discussion boards, author interviews, blogs, reader polls, and contests.

Dear Author — <http://dearauthor.com/> — **Dear Author** bills itself as a romance review blog by readers for readers. It features articles on various topics of interest to the romance fan, articles by authors on how they got published, and book reviews. The reviews are graded A to F and are archived under the grade they received. The site also reviews movies and some non-romance titles as well. It also has publishing industry news.

Smart Bitches, Trashy Books — <http://www.smartbitchestrashy-books.com/> — The bitches (**Sarah Wendell** and **Candy Tan**) dish about all things romantic and in the process manage to review books too. The books are graded from A to F and are archived under grade, author and category. **Wendell** and **Tan** have also written a book: *Beyond Heaving Bosoms: The Smart Bitches' Guide to Romance Novels*.

Mrs. Giggles — <http://www.mrsgiggles.com> — If you like your reviews polite and diplomatic, don't bother with this site. **Mrs. Giggles** is a lady of strong opinions and doesn't mind sharing them. She backs up her strong opinions with a lively writing style, and agree or disagree, you will find her reviews fun to read. She grades the books on a numerical scale, from 0-100. The reviews are archived under the author's last name. **Mrs. Giggles** also reviews movies.

Harlequin Publishers — <http://www.eharlequin.com/> — Not really a review site, but it has a lot of information for the reader. **Harlequin** publishes many books a month under the imprints: **Harlequin**, **Silhouette**, **MIRA**, **HQN**, **RedDress Ink**, **Kimani**, **Steeple Hill**, and **Luna**. This site has information about the books, authors and some free online reads. There are blogs and bulletin boards and much, much more.

Romance Reader at Heart — <http://romancereaderatheart.com/> — This site was originally devoted to historical romances only, but has since branched out to include other romance genres. The reviews are archived under the historical period (Colonial, Georgian, Old West, etc.) and under the name of the author. The reviews are rated from one to four roses, with a flashing rose denoting a keeper. There are links to publishers, a list of forthcoming titles, a blog, and much more. 🌹

Interview — Bipin Patel from page 47

the platform would impact different types of users. I think this approach could be useful for libraries as they consider new policies and programs, and we'll be introducing these profiles to librarians. Our common goal is to serve the research needs of the community through the gateway of the library. The more we work together and share what we've learned, the more we'll secure the role of the library.

As for feedback, I'm very happy with what I'm hearing... but then, creating a platform that was intuitive, productive, and engaging was what this process was all about. We tested, adjusted, and tested again until we heard "just right." We wouldn't have rolled this out if it weren't ready for prime-time.

ATG: *Will there be extra costs associated with this platform changes? Will database prices be increased in light of discoverability and platform changes?*

BP: This question makes me think of a **Geico** ad where that charming gecko says in his English accent, "Pie and chips for free, what could be better?" We may not be providing a meal, but I'm delighted to tell you there is no additional cost for libraries to use the new **ProQuest** platform. In fact, we're looking for new ways to use technology to deliver more to libraries without impacting the library's bottom line. Let me give you an example. In June we launched a very interesting initiative — Open Web Article Linking — which many of your readers are already using. It enables libraries to offer popular content from the Open Web inte-

grated in any **ProQuest** search, and there is no charge for this service. We started the program with content from *TIME*, and we're in the midst of adding *BusinessWeek*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Entertainment Weekly*... and we'll just keep going from there. It works like this: the links from **ProQuest's** abstracts and indexes go directly to the publisher's articles on their own Open Websites, while the A&I is searched on the **ProQuest** platform along with other **ProQuest** content. The content is integrated in the search results and links to the full-text on the Open Web. So, these popular periodicals can be viewed along with the high-value content that the library is known for and can be interacted with using very powerful tools. I like to think it's like getting free pie and chips. 🌹