

Nothing But Good Times Ahead: A Special Forum on Jennifer Crusie (Editor's Introduction)

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“Nothing But Good Times Ahead” marks the first of what will be an ongoing series of Special Features at the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*: a gathering of academic essays focused on a single author, a common topic, a particular region, a single convention, etc., from the vast array of global popular romance culture.^[1] Such focused attention has long been paid to authors, topics, regions, and so forth in other varieties of popular media: detective and science fiction, the Hollywood romantic comedy, even single texts, like *Twilight*. It has, however, been hard to find in the scholarship on popular romance fiction. Almost sixteen years after Kay Mussell, in a special issue of the journal *Paradoxa*, called for “more textual readings of individual authors,” and “more single-author or even single-novel studies” (“Where’s Love Gone?” 12), such in-depth, tightly focused investigations have remained, until recently, quite rare.^[2]

The twofold nature of Jennifer Crusie’s work makes it—and her—and ideal candidate for such inquiry. On the one hand, as her industry awards and readers’ poll ratings demonstrate, Crusie ranks among the best-loved authors in American popular romance fiction.^[3] In a genre where most novels have a shelf-life measured in months, most of Crusie’s category romance, single-title, and collaborative novels have either remained in print or been republished, some multiple times, some moving from mass-market paperback into hardcover release.^[4] Romance authors rarely boast that they will “make ‘literature’ out of it,” as Dashiell Hammett pledged to do with the detective story in 1928 (qtd. McGurl, 164). Yet Crusie’s novels defy the common assumption, inside and outside the academy, that popular romance fiction is formulaic, artless, and unable to sustain close critical attention. Meticulously crafted and richly intertextual, her novels challenge both genre conventions and readers’ expectations about romance heroines, heroes, and plot structures, all the while affirming the core values—love, optimism, emotional resilience—of the romance novel as a form.

Alongside her work as an author, Crusie has also been a significant advocate for, and theorist of, romance fiction as a genre. Writing by turns for academics, for her fellow

authors, and for romance readers, her essays about the genre have extolled its aesthetic potential and its place in readers' lives, and although some of these pieces were published in ephemeral, throwaway venues—"Inside Borders," for example, the in-house magazine of the now-defunct chain bookstore—Crusie's website has kept them available for writers, readers, students, and scholars. Crusie helped draft the Romance Writers of America's formal definition of the genre, designed to guide aspiring authors and reshape media accounts of romance. The definition they arrived at echoed the novelist's longstanding brief for romance fiction as a genre driven by not only by love, but also by optimism and a sense of "emotional justice."^[5] When Pamela Regis, author of *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, held a series of "Conversations About Romance" at the Smithsonian Institution in 2005-06, she chose Crusie as closing speaker, reaffirming her importance to the emerging generation of academics interested in romance. I would not be editor of this journal—in fact, the journal itself might not exist—had I not encountered Crusie's novels and essays in the early 2000s. They made me want to be a romance scholar, and since 2006, when I began to teach courses on popular romance, a novel and / or essay by Crusie has appeared on every one of my twenty-plus syllabi.

Born in 1949, Crusie grew up in Wapakoneta, Ohio: a model, perhaps, for the fictional Ohio communities that show up in her later work. Frog Point (*Tell Me Lies*), Tibbett (*Crazy for You*), and Temptation, Ohio (*Welcome to Temptation*) are all secret-keeping, gossipy small towns—and if, as Truman Capote once quipped, "all fiction is gossip," Crusie's romance fiction draws even more self-consciously on this resource. As Kimberly Baldus points out in her essay for this collection, Crusie sets that line from Capote as the epigraph for *Tell Me Lies*, her first hardcover romance. For Baldus, Crusie's fascination with the Janus-faced power of gossip to put lives on display and to limit women's choices, but also to build alternative, unorthodox networks of community and power, places her in a tradition of female authors dating back well into the eighteenth century. Reading Crusie's novels alongside the "secret histories" of early novelist Delarivier Manley, Baldus explores their shared interest in gossip as a sort of liminal territory, a borderland between the public and the private, and also in the sort of "gossip" that connects authors with readers. (In this essay and others, Crusie's connections with her on-line fan group, "The Cherries," her extensive blogging, and her elegant website become part of the oeuvre to be studied.)

At least since Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) one narrative element that defines the romance novel has been a "*definition of society*, always corrupt, that the romance novel will reform" (Regis, 14). In Crusie's work this "reform" happens in a variety of ways, both domestic and public, and she keeps a steady eye on the shifting border between these realms. As Kyra Kramer's contribution explains, Crusie's representations of women's bodies "Getting Laid, Getting Old, and Getting Fed" stand as instances of "cultural resistance," drawing our attention to the body as a site of intersection between socio-political and private life. Although her heroes' bodies get somewhat less detailed attention from the novelist, their careers and lifestyle choices are just as culturally and politically constrained, equally ripe for resistance. Patricia Zakreski's essay for this collection details the resistance to twentieth-century American norms for masculinity in Crusie's category novels, while Kate Moore and I attend to Phineas "Phin" Tucker, the mayor of Temptation, Ohio in her mid-career bestseller, *Welcome to Temptation*. A "stuck," unhappy patriarch, Phin finds himself liberated by the heroine, Sophie Dempsey, and the novel ends with the

two about to switch roles: he will retire, after one last term, to run a bookshop and raise his daughter while she puts her family talent for con-artistry to use in politics. The town will still be festooned, as it has been for decades, with posters reading “Tucker for Mayor: More of the Same.” But the meaning of the slogan has now changed, as the stasis and sterility of Phin’s life (and of the town more generally) find themselves imbued with sexual and political renewal.

In the late 1950s and 60s, as Crusie attended high school and college, literary scholars like Northrop Frye delighted in spotting seasonal myths and death-to-life cycles in ostensibly realistic plots.^[6] Frye might well have found one in *Welcome to Temptation*, since Crusie delights in weaving allusive subtexts for her novels, using materials from both popular culture (film noir, pop music) and highbrow literature (the Bible, John Donne, Theodore Roethke). When Phin snaps at his mother, late in the novel, “My life was a fucking *wasteland*,” the attentive reader pricks up his or her ears at the nod to T. S. Eliot, as she does to the etymological overtones of the hero’s and heroine’s names (352). (Depending on the source you consult, “Phineas” can mean either “oracle” or, by derivation, “serpent’s mouth,” while Sophie comes unambiguously from Sophia, or Wisdom.) The British literary historian Jay Dixon insists that “in order to enter the world of the romance, the method of analyzing literature which is taught in schools and higher education must be abandoned,” but this is quite false when it comes to Crusie (10). Far from offering readers instances of what Dixon calls “instinctive writing,” she will “play games” of many sorts: games of echo and reference, as in the dozen or more fairy tales that are touched upon by the later novel *Bet Me*; games with literary allusion, as in the repeated quotations from Theodore Roethke’s poem “I Knew a Woman” that thread through *Fast Women*; games with genre convention, literary history, symbolism, and the like (Dixon, 10).

This concern with artistry also appears on other levels in Crusie’s novels. Many of her characters are engaged with the arts, whether they are visual artists, authors, editors, or screenwriters, or simply women who find themselves engaged with fashion, interior décor, and cooking. In this collection, essays by Laura Vivanco, Patricia Zakreski, and Christine Valeo explore Crusie’s subtle, often metafictional deployment of art forgery, fashions in lingerie, and various forms of “lying”: telling stories that are “unreal but not untrue,” as Daisy Flattery insists in *The Cinderella Deal*, or simply conning people, as Sophie and her brother Davy learned from their con-artist father. Crusie uses her novels to explore, refine, and demonstrate ideas that she lays out in her essays, putting theory into practice—but as Valeo shows, her novels can also be read against the grain, as texts that dialogically challenge, or even subvert, some of the essays’ claims on behalf of the genre. Valeo, Vivanco, and other scholars in this feature emphasize the fundamental *complexity* of Crusie’s work, the internal variety that accompanies its enduring themes and aspirations. A single motif, like lingerie, or a single activity, like lying, can take on radically meanings in Crusie’s work, from novel to novel or even from scene to scene.

To hear Crusie’s characters debate the nature of stories or watch them read the material world around them, from clothing to china to paintings to home decor, is to learn how to *read*, better and deeper, in the broadest sense of the verb. Crusie’s own lessons in looking, reading, and teaching began with an undergraduate major in Art Education at Bowling Green State University, not far from her childhood home. She spent her twenties and thirties teaching first art, and then English to middle- and high-school students. Although she had not yet read a romance novel, the thesis she wrote for her master’s

degree shows that she already had an interest in genre literature; entitled “A Spirit More Capable of Looking Up To Him,” it considered “Women’s Roles in Mystery Fiction 1841-1920.” Many of her novels mix elements of romance and mystery, as do her first two collaborations with men’s adventure novelist Bob Mayer, *Don’t Look Down* and *Agnes and the Hitman*. Crusie’s early, comic category romance *What the Lady Wants* and the longer, darker single-title novel *Fast Women* both revisit Dashiell Hammett’s classics *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Thin Man*, not just in order to explore the moral and aesthetic tensions that divide romance fiction from the popular masculine genres of hard-boiled detective fiction and film noir, but also to explore, in *Fast Women*, the enduring—and sometimes life-threatening—mystery of heterosexual marriage. “Marriage was a mystery,” muses heroine Nell near the start (38); at the end, moments before she accepts the hero’s proposal, she thinks to herself that marriage is “a gamble and a snare and an invitation to pain,” a matter of “*compromise and sacrifice*” whatever its rewards (417). It’s not unheard of for a romance novel to face the worst about marriage—but for it to do so at such a moment, in such a context, is remarkable. (We have no essay in this collection devoted to *Fast Women*, but one is sorely needed, and I hope that this introduction will spur someone to write it.)

Crusie’s unsentimental vision of marriage derives, in part, from the transformations she has lived through as an American baby-boomer. Shortly before her twenty-second birthday, Crusie got married: a common pattern for women of her generation, but one that she looks back on with no little frustration. “Today it seems absurd that marriage would be a life goal for a woman,” she observes in the essay “A Writer Without a Publisher is like a Fish Without a Bicycle,” “but anyone who was around for the pre-Lib days can tell you that the worst thing anyone could say about a woman back then was that she was an Old Maid. It was one step down from Whore because at least whores had men asking to spend time with them. When I got married six weeks before I turned twenty-two, my entire family heaved a sigh of relief. Close call.” Divorce and single motherhood followed, so perhaps it is fitting that Crusie’s characters so often struggle to discover the qualities they really want in a potential spouse, walk away from bad relationships, recover from divorce, and look for the courage to negotiate new relationships which suit the people they have become. In *Crazy for You*, which starts as social comedy and modulates into stalker-driven romantic suspense, marriage seems so risky that the hero and heroine are neither married nor engaged by the end of the book: a sharp departure from romance conventions, albeit softened by a wink of symbolism. (We last see Nick and Quinn about to have sex at a drive-in; on screen is the movie *Bachelor Party*.)

Crusie is equally level-headed about children and family life. In an advice column for other authors, “Hello, I’m Your New PRO Columnist,” she once stated that “getting married and giving birth does not mean that you have sold your life away to perfectly healthy people who can get their own damn socks,” and this frankness can also be found in her novels. Blissfully happy families may form at the end of many a “secret baby” romance, and sweet and happy offspring may cluster cherubically around heroines in other authors’ epilogues, but not in Crusie’s work. Here, parents who dote on one another may cut out their children, causing emotional damage that our protagonists must heal, as in *Welcome to Temptation*; here a philandering husband may be a loving father, whose death remains a bitter loss for his daughter even as the novel’s main plot brings new happiness to her mother, as in *Tell Me Lies*. Adults try to protect children from emotional harm, but this impulse may drive them, depending on the book, to tragic-comic or violent extremes. No

wonder some of her couples explicitly state that they wish to remain childless: a break with romance novel expectations that Crusie has made both early (*Anyone But You*) and later (*Bet Me*) in her career.

In 1991, Crusie finished her master's degree and pivoted immediately into a Ph.D. program at the University of Ohio. Raising a daughter, teaching full-time by day and part-time at night, she struggled with exhaustion, poverty, and depression, and the reading for her classes didn't help. "I spent years reading about miserable women," she recalls with grim humor:

like the one who pursued the life she wanted, had great sex, and then ate arsenic; or the one who pursued the life she wanted, had great sex, and then threw herself under a train; or my personal fave, the one who pursued the life she wanted, had lousy sex with a masochistic dweeb, and spent the rest of her endless life atoning by doing good works in a letter sweater. What a great literary education gets a woman is depressed. Very, very depressed. Not to mention very reluctant to have sex. ("Glee and Sympathy")

These jokes at the expense of *Madame Bovary*, *Anna Karenina*, and *The Scarlet Letter* do to masterpieces of high culture what academics have long done to romance novels: that is, focus only on the sex lives of characters, the ending of the book, and the effect the text might have on its readers. With these quips, Crusie playfully reverses this evaluative standard, only to find these Great Books wanting.

As Crusie tells the story, reading romance fiction brought her out of this slough of despond. She hadn't expected this to happen. As she explains in her first major essay on the genre, "Romancing Reality," "in the midst of this misery I began the research for a dissertation on women's narrative strategies. In order to study the most female writing possible, I bought a couple dozen examples of the varied lines of romance fiction, holding my nose as I did so; it was trash, but anything for my dissertation." Some of the books she read confirmed her initial prejudice, at least on aesthetic grounds; they were, she writes, "so abysmal I gave up and skimmed for note-taking purposes only." Others, however, were "wonderful, so wonderful I didn't care about the notes." After reading the genre non-stop for a month she gave up her plan to contrast these books with an equal sample of men's adventure fiction. Story after story of "women who won on their own terms (and those terms were pretty varied)" had left her feeling "more powerful, more optimistic, and more in control of my life than ever before," and that sense of power brought with it a sense of obligation. "I decided I wanted to write romance fiction," she explains. "Anything that did that much good for me, was something that I, as a feminist, wanted to do for other women" ("Romancing Reality").

Crusie is not the first to describe the encouraging, even life-changing effect of reading romance fiction. In Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*—published first in 1984, and reprinted with a new introduction just as Crusie was starting her research—many of the scholar's interview subjects offer similar testimony. As Radway reports, they "vehemently maintain that their reading has transformed them in important ways" (101). The critic is noncommittal. "I neither asked questions of their husbands nor did I probe very deeply into the issue of whether romance reading *actually* changes a woman's behavior in her marriage," she demurs—this despite

the readers' "happy indignation" at her hesitation, and their laughing invitation to "Ask the men!" (101). In the preface she added seven years later, Radway admits that "romance reading, it would seem, profoundly changes at least some women by moving them to act and speak in a public forum," with some even "prompted to purchase their own word processor, to convert the former sewing room into a study, and to demand time, not now for pleasure, but for their own work" (17). Even in this revised introduction, however, Radway cannot quite bring herself to see romance fiction as a feminist genre. Some romance authors may call themselves feminists, she warns, but there is no way to know whether the changes they bring to their novels evince a true change of heart, or are merely the result of market forces (17).

In retrospect, it's clear that from the early 1970s well into the 1990s, popular romance fiction engaged in a long, complex negotiation with second- and third-wave feminist ideas about love, desire, and marriage. Indeed, as Carol Thurston showed as early as 1987—squarely between the first and second editions of *Reading the Romance*—the feedback loop that links romance readers, publishers, and authors had brought some feminist arguments into the heart of romance fiction as early as 1980. (Jay Dixon's *The Romance Fiction of Mills & Boon, 1909-1990s* shows a similar process of incorporation at work earlier in the century, in the relationship between popular romance and first-wave feminism.) Thurston's *The Romance Revolution: Erotic Novels for Women and the Quest for a New Sexual Identity* draws on romance novels, editors' guidelines, records of consumer feedback, and other historical documents to demonstrate that in the romance fiction that emerged in the 1970s and early '80s "the customary happy ending...is possible only through the heroine's emergence as an autonomous individual, no longer defined solely in terms of her relationship to a man" (86). By the end of the 1980s, Thurston observes, readers had grown accustomed to "hearing the sentiments of Virginia Woolf [in *A Room of One's Own*] on the lips of a romance heroine" (94), while goals of female economic independence, creative satisfaction, sexual knowledge and fulfillment (both before and after marriage), and even political power were increasingly commonplace.

By the time Crusie began to study romance novels, then, at the start of the 1990s, the anger at patriarchy and longings for comfort, communication, and egalitarian relationship that feminist scholars like Radway and Tania Modleski had seen as unconscious *subtexts* in romance fiction were often freely espoused, not just by the genre's heroines, but also by their authors. The conscious artistry of romance authors was also growing more visible, various, and ambitious. This is not to say that earlier decades had lacked deftly crafted, aesthetically satisfying romance fiction. Even if we leave out canonical texts that are also romance novels (e.g., *Pride and Prejudice* or *A Room with a View*), popular novels by Georgette Heyer, Mary Stewart, and others will give that idea the lie. Across the 1980s, however, a new generation of American romance authors had entered the genre, including Nora Roberts, Patricia Gaffney, Laura Kinsale, and Susan Elizabeth Phillips, and as the essays by romance authors make clear in Jayne Ann Krentz's anthology *Dangerous Men, Adventurous Women*, this new generation of authors was more than willing to challenge conventional wisdom, not just about the politics of the genre, but about its form and its effect on readers. (That "conventional wisdom" included ideas from several prominent academic scholars of the genre—but also assumptions that long antedated academic study of popular romance, such as ideas about the female reader's identification with the romance heroine.) When Crusie set aside her dissertation to write

romance fiction instead, she entered a genre that was open not only to progressive political ideas, but also to aesthetic experimentation: variations on, and games played with, the themes and conventions of the form.

In a *Writers' Market* article for would-be romance authors, Crusie gives us a glimpse into how she went about her own first ventures into romance authorship. "Don't bother trying to analyze [romance novels] for some non-existent formula or to find what works for "the average romance reader," she advises.

There is no formula and no average romance reader. You're writing new, original stories for a reader who is exactly like you, only a little bit smarter; always write up to your audience in romance, not down.

Then when you've discovered those aspects of that subgenre that you want to keep, think about the aspects you wanted that weren't there, the things that would have made the stories even better, the characters or actions or themes that you want to read but couldn't find. I loved the wit and romance of Jane Austen and Georgette Heyer, but they weren't contemporary. I loved the angry internal monologues of Dorothy Parker, but she wrote anti-romance. I loved the contemporary romance of Susan Elizabeth Phillips but her heroines weren't mean enough. *I loved romance, but nobody was writing the edgy, angry feminist love stories I wanted to read.* ("Emotionally Speaking," emphasis mine)

The implied reader of romance fiction, in this account, is an *aspirational* construct for the author: "a reader who is exactly like you, only a little bit smarter." The sorts of wit, conscious craft, and aesthetic play that we might find in any literature thus belong in romance fiction as well, since readers will engage the text with both hearts and minds. Finally, popular romance fiction can borrow tones and styles from across the literary spectrum. It has room for the wit, anger, edginess, even meanness that one might find anywhere, including from authors who stand before (and "above") the genre, such as Austen and Heyer, and from the genre's most undeceived debunkers, authors of "anti-romance" like Dorothy Parker, whom Crusie has called her "biggest influence" ("It's All About You").

Throughout her work, Crusie has made a place in romance fiction for "edgy, angry, feminist" elements. The hero and heroine of her first-written romance, the novella *Sizzle*, discussed in this gathering by Laura Vivanco, spar professionally as well as in their personal lives, and not simply as foreplay; in *Manhunting*, Crusie's first published novel, heroine Kate Svenson debates feminist ideas with her best friend, Jessie Rogers, and moments of slapstick violence directed at male obtuseness and self-importance punctuate the text. ("The hotel would appreciate it if you'd just throw back the men you don't like without maiming them," jokes Jake, the hero, after Kate has accidentally injured a series of pompous suitors, memorably stabbing one in the hand with her fork as he helps himself to her lunch [173].) Like Dorothy Parker, "who made people laugh while writing the saddest stories I've ever read," Crusie deploys humor "as a weapon and a shield," arming herself to explore the anger of women betrayed by their husbands and boyfriends, snubbed or scorned by their employers, and surviving the financial and emotional pain of divorce ("It's All About You").

Drawn by the “edgy, angry, feminist” potential of popular romance fiction, Crusie has also kept her eyes on the genre’s aesthetic potential, which must play out within a number of conventions and constraints. Such constraints are hardly uncommon in the arts. In the essay “So, Bill, I Hear You Write Those Little Poems,” Crusie compares category romance to the sonnet, since each is “an elegant, exacting, exciting form” which demands brevity, *précising*, and the ability to generate fresh, delightful work within recognized formal and thematic parameters. Crusie’s early category novels take up this challenge, playing with characterization and plot structure in subtle, elegant ways as recognizable to romance readers as a deft metrical variation or surprising rhyme scheme would be to a trained reader of verse. Kate, in *Manhunting*, is an ambitious career woman, while Jake has shrugged off his life as a businessman to relax and go fishing, as far from the classic “alpha hero” as one might ask. Nina, the heroine of *Anyone But You*, is a decade older than Alex, the hero, and the novel counterpoints her love story with a deft, metatextual narrative about romantic fiction in the form of a secondary character’s memoir-turned-novel, *Jane Errs*. Allie and Charlie, in *Charlie All Night*, have what both plan to be a “one night stand” by the end of chapter two, well before the reader (circa 1996) would expect them to sleep together, and well before they fall in love. Several of Crusie’s category novels receive extended attention in the essays gathered here, notably in Patricia Zakreski’s “Lying, Storytelling, and the Romance Novel as Feminist Fiction,” which demonstrates the intellectual and metafictional sophistication of *Strange Bedpersons*, *What the Lady Wants*, and *The Cinderella Deal*. I can testify from my own pedagogical experience that the artistry, appeal, and ongoing availability of Crusie’s category novels in reprint editions make them ideal classroom texts for teaching the category romance as a form. Students are always delightfully shocked to see that the novel we’ve spent two days discussing in political and philosophical detail was originally published in Harlequin’s Temptation or “Love and Laughter” line, with—in the case of *Manhunting*—a truly comical cover.

After the publication of *Bet Me* in 2004, Crusie turned from what she has called “classic romance” to the collaborative and genre-crossing work that she continues to write (“Writer’s Corner”). Limited by the submissions we received, our forum contains no pieces on these ongoing experiments, nor on Crusie’s ongoing work as a critic and editor.^[7] This recent material has great potential, however, for future scholarship. What might a narratologist make, for example, of Crusie’s three collaborations with male adventure novelist Bob Mayer: novels which Crusie’s website claims “put into practice everything she’d studied about the differences in the way men and women write fiction” back in her dissertation research? How do these collaborations differ in tone, structure, aesthetics, theme, appeal, the constructions of heroine and hero, etc., from the novelist’s single-authored work or from her two paranormal romance collaborations with female novelists, *The Unfortunate Miss Fortunes* (written with Eileen Drayer and Anne Stuart) and *Dogs and Goddesses* (written with Stuart and Lani Diane Rich)? What are we to make of the dialogue with literary history in *Maybe This Time*, Crusie’s “homage,” as her website has it, to Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw*—or, for that matter, of the elaborate, deeply reflective, multi-generic construct that is Crusie’s online presence? (This presence includes not only her official website and her blog, Argh Ink, but also her contributions to the Cherry Forum fan group and to The Popcorn Dialogues, a collaborative podcast on story construction in popular film.)

As Professor Van Helsing urges in *Dracula*, “there is work, wild work to be done”—just as there is on so many authors, producers, and motifs of popular romance, in whatever medium. We hope that this forum will be the first of many, and that much of this “wild work” will be published in the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*.

[1] This feature was first imagined, many years ago, as a book of critical essays, to be edited by Laura Vivanco and myself. I am very grateful to Laura for her work as an editor of the original set of submissions, and for her contributions to an earlier version of this introduction.

[2]The first section of Frantz and Selinger’s anthology *New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction: Critical Essays*, entitled “Close Reading the Romance,” contains essays devoted to individual novels: *The Kadin* by Bertrice Small, *Flowers from the Storm*, by Laura Kinsale, *Holding All the Cards* by Joey Hill, and *Dark Lover* by J. R. Ward. Two welcome, recent book-length studies of individual romance authors are Jennifer Kloester’s *Georgette Heyer: Biography of a Bestseller* (Heinemann, 2011) and *From Roberts to Romance and Back Again: Genre, Authorship, and Textual Identity*, a dissertation on Nora Roberts by An Goris.

[3]In a 2002 poll on the well-established All About Romance website, for example, Crusie received the highest rating possible from nearly 60% of those who have read her. The poll itself can be found here: <http://www.likesbooks.com/143.html>. Two of Crusie’s heroes, Phin Tucker and Davy Dempsey, took the sixth and seventh slots, respectively, in Sarah Wendell’s unscientific summary, “culled from discussions on Twitter and on varying websites,” of the “Top Nine Romance Heroes” (49).

[4]Crusie’s first novel, the 1993 Harlequin Temptation *Manhunting*, was among Amazon.com’s top twenty-five romance bestsellers when it was reissued in 2001, and it subsequently returned to print yet again in hardcover. Most of her early category romances have now been re-released at least once in paperback, and many are available in hardcover and digital editions as well.

[5]The idea of “emotional justice” may derive from the pioneering academic theorist of genre fiction, John Cawelti, who discusses various types of genre fiction in terms of the “moral fantasy” that each embodies. Crusie’s concern with optimism may stem from her own first transformative encounter with romance fiction in her forties; scholarship is needed on the means by which her novels attempt to impart an optimistic or emotionally resilient attitude to their readers. For the RWA definition, see “About the Romance Genre,” http://www.rwa.org/cs/the_romance_genre.

[6] In romance, Frye writes, we see a “tendency to suggest implicit mythic patterns in a world more closely associated with human experience,” while in what we call “realism” the tendency is to “throw the emphasis on content and representation rather than on the shape of the story,” although if we step far enough back from the text, we can often see the “mythopoeic designs” that structure the material (139-40). For a brilliant application of Frye’s ideas to the reading of popular romance fiction, see the chapter on “Mythoi” in Laura Vivanco’s *For Love and Money: the Literary Art of the Harlequin Mills & Boon Romance* (2012).

[7] In addition to an early “critical companion” volume on Anne Rice, published as Jennifer Smith, Crusie has more recently edited collections of essays on *Pride and Prejudice* and the TV shows *Gilmore Girls* and *Charmed*, all for BenBella Books’ Smart Pop series.

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