

Fuchs, Barbara. *Romance*. Pp. viii + 146. New York: Routledge, 2004. US \$24.95. ISBN: 041521260X.

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As Barbara Fuchs acknowledges in the first line of *Romance*, “romance is a notoriously slippery category” (1). This compact book, part of Routledge’s *New Critical Idiom* series, proposes to outline the development of romance across European literature from classical antiquity to contemporary articulations. Fuchs seeks particularly to challenge the critical distinction between novel and romance—the so-called “progress narrative”—whereby the fantastic romance stands as inferior precursor to the realist novel.

The unique approach of Fuchs is to treat romance as a “a more general type of literary production” (5): a “*strategy*” (9), rather than a genre. Drawing on Northrop Frye’s conception of romance as a “mode” and Patricia Parker’s poststructuralist interest in the “dilation and error” of narration in the romance, Fuchs neatly sidesteps the slippery problems of generic categorisation. As a *strategy*, explains Fuchs, romance can be defined as “a concatenation of both narratological elements and literary topoi”: a definition she finds particularly useful, she adds, “because it accounts for the greatest number of instances, allowing us to address the occurrence of romance within texts that are clearly classified as some other genre and incorporating the hybridization and malleability that, as we shall see, are such key elements of romance” (9).

Following a short introduction outlining the definition of romance as strategy, *Romance* begins with a chapter on classical romance that is deeply rooted in strategies of form and anchored in close readings of the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid* and Greek romances. The chapter draws heavily on Parker’s reading of romance “as an undoing or complication of narrative progression” (8), marked by “the tension between . . . the quest, and the constant delays or detours from that quest.” (19). Thus, the narrative interest of the *Odyssey* is in what delays Odysseus’ return home: there is a pleasure in this narrative delay or stasis, from which readers must be dragged back into the progress of the story. The overriding idea of romance as strategy informs Fuchs’s reading of these Greek romances; suspending generic categories in favour of smaller-scale strategies can expose continuities between divergent texts in the “hodgepodge” (31) genre of Greek romance. In so doing, hierarchical debates about the classification of these Greek texts as “romances” or “ancient novels” can

be sidestepped, as approaching these works from the perspective of romance-as-strategy allows for a recognition of romance as active in a variety of genres.

A chapter on medieval romance follows, in which it is noted with interest how medieval romance as a genre has avoided the critical scorn that marks romance in other periods. Fuchs finds, in these medieval romances, the motivating tension between *eros* and adventure that she argues drives Greek romance. For Fuchs, medieval iterations of romance privilege *eros* in a way that earlier Greek romances do not, re-animating the strategy of erotic postponement and offering more complicated narrative delays and an interlace form, where different strands of the narrative are woven together, resulting in a text that places the tension between the pursuit of love and the quest for arms or adventure at its core. Fuchs argues forcefully that these medieval strategies are not simply evident in texts defined as romance, but are present more widely, in chronicles, hagiography (saints' lives), lays, and—more tenuously—in lyric poetry, thus making visible the dialogues between textual genres. She also notes the serialisation of medieval chivalric romance, with its continual returns to and development of popular characters (such as Arthur and his knights): a process that continues into the Renaissance, where prose romances were regularly reprinted and provided with sequels, and which forms the origin of modern associations of romance with prolific and popular genre literature.

The third chapter, "Romance in the Renaissance," begins by challenging the opposition between the "pleasurable multiplicity" of romance as a literary strategy, and the "single-mindedness and political instrumentality of epic" (66). Fuchs reiterates that romance "infects other genres" (72), acknowledging its "often unwelcome . . . strategy of errancy and multiplicity" (72), arguing that it "has a particularly productive role within epic" (67). Prominent texts of the Renaissance, including Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Ariosto's *Furioso*, combine epic and romance and are motivated by the tension between martial quest and erotic detour (68). Spenser's text, in particular, is characterised by displacement and delay.

The Renaissance is also the origin of romance criticism. The wide readership of chivalric and Greek romance following the invention of the printing press led to a documented conflict between pleasure and moral value. Fuchs posits: "the attempt to reconcile . . . what we might call reception, with prescriptive categories for literary creation was one of the central strands in sixteenth-century theoretical debates" (81). We are offered an expanded discussion of *Don Quixote* and its parallel celebration and defamation of romance themes of reality and fantasy, the ideal and the mundane, in terms that are not altogether different from those used to refer critically to today's genre romances (85-93). It is precisely the expansion of romance reading in this period that, Fuchs argues, gives rise to the critical marginalisation of popular texts, particularly those marked by their gender and class.

The final chapter, expansively titled "Post-Renaissance Transformations," examines the development of the novel as a genre and argues that rather than being separated from romance in a narrative of progression, romance as strategy is implicated within the novel. Drawing on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century critics, this chapter draws out the ways in which the two genres were conflated and confused, and how romance appears in texts that no longer fit a generic definition of romance: what Fuchs terms the romance as strategy. An emotional intensity, produced by narrative deferral, functions as romance strategy in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*. While Fuchs acknowledges *Pamela's* debt

to romance, she stops short of claiming the text, as Pamela Regis does, as a “romance novel.” Indeed, later in the chapter, Fuchs critiques Regis’s effort to “redefine the [romance novel] genre . . . by invoking illustrious predecessors” (127). Citing evidence from Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance* (1984), Fuchs asserts that the romance novel in its contemporary form is an essentially formulaic genre, and that the term “romance novel” should be more narrowly defined in order to mark that formulism.

The chapter also briefly addresses Gothic romance and Romanticism, arguing that while early novels such as *Pamela* are unwittingly indebted to romance, the Gothic draws self-consciously on romance, although Fuchs also contends that Gothic deployment of fantastic romance motifs is part of the modern trajectory of romance from “high” to “low” literature. On the other hand, Fuchs argues that romance has little to do with Romanticism, the nineteenth-century movement in art, literature and music, analogising the relationship between Romantics and romance to that of medievalism and the Middle Ages: “while interesting cultural phenomena in their own right, they have relatively little to do with any precise meaning the latter might have had in their original contexts” (123). Finally, the chapter moves to consider the modern popular romance, and the way its strategies of nostalgia, idealism, stress on the feminine and narrative delay connect it both with previous examples of romance, and with other contemporary genres, such as film, soap opera and non-romance fiction.

If there is any weakness in this study, it is perhaps that, while the author’s non-Anglocentric position is admirable, the way the book jumps from one country’s literature to another’s is occasionally disorientating, and general claims made for romances in different language traditions perhaps obfuscate some national and cultural differences, although Fuchs is careful to acknowledge historical contexts where apparent. Equally, certain literary traditions are privileged over others; the chapter on medieval romance focuses almost exclusively on French romance, and the chapter on romance in the Renaissance focuses mainly on Italian and Spanish texts. The book is also much stronger on pre-Renaissance strategies of romance, the discussion of which takes up most of the book. Fuchs is weakest when discussing contemporary formula romance, which she takes as representative of the “modern romance”: she does not mention non-Harlequin Mills & Boon romances or other forms of romantic literature, such as chick-lit. Furthermore, the analysis privileges Radway’s 1984 study to argue for the formulism of mass-market romance over engaging with more recent studies (by Regis, among others) that have called for nuanced interpretations. As this is a book intended for student readers, a glossary of key terms might also have been useful.

This book treats romance “in its broadest, most abstract form” as “a cluster of narrative strategies that can be employed with greater or lesser degrees of self-consciousness” (130). The expansiveness of its definition of romance as strategy is a real strength of this study, opening up a broad exploration of romance and its textual presence without being limited to issues of genre. The diachronic approach of this study is also welcome; its historically-inflected view of romance joins other such studies taking a *longue durée* approach to romance, namely Pamela Regis’s *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003) and Hsu-Ming Teo’s *Desert Passions* (2012), which traces the evolution of the sheikh romance. I would recommend this book as a concise, easily digestible overview of romance in different periods, which successfully traces continuities and developments while challenging historic issues of genre and the value of romance.