

Special Issue: Love in Latin American Popular Culture (Editor's Introduction)

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By one of those quirks that make language so fascinating, in Spanish the word *romance*, although in common use to refer to a love story, is derived from the same word with an older meaning: *romancero*, which means something like “popular [song] ballad.” The connection lies in the way that these ballads “in the colloquial [Roman] manner” (thus the etymology of the word, as opposed to “in the formal Latinate manner”) circulated among the people, sung by professional balladeers, in opposition to learned literary works. One of the major categories of the ballads, and perhaps its most popular, was that of the love stories, and especially those that had unhappy endings. After all, lives lived in misery are intrinsically more interesting than lives lived in carefree happiness....

Because of their origins in oral rather than written literature (beginning in the late Middle Ages, the ballads were eventually gathered into collections), these “romance stories” are intrinsically marginal to the more elevated high culture canon. While Romanticism did much to make the medieval ballads important, most popular-language love stories did not make it into the canon. And in Latin America, where we do find popular love stories, now written in prose or presented on screen, rather than circulating as poetry, they are customarily read as allegories of larger sociopolitical issues. Whether in written novelistic form or as television drama, popular romance in Latin America has hardly been studied at all in its own right, and certainly not as expansively as English-language materials have been studied in recent years.

Thus, the opportunity to bring these essays together in this special issue is a particularly satisfying scholarly task. Authors were charged both with discovering pertinent examples of popular love stories and examining them within the context of contemporary theoretical models. Of particular interest would be that critical work that approaches popular romance from a feminist, queer, and masculine studies perspective: work which emphasizes the prevailing Hispanic critical practice of viewing cultural production in historical and ideological terms. It is for this reason that these studies all, in one way or another, challenge hegemonic patriarchal and heteronormative parameters, with a secure commitment to Alexander Doty's premise in *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (1993) that popular culture, far from simply repeating fossilized social models, allows, in

its loosely structured and often irreverently comical mode, for various degrees and forms of queering the social text.

The six texts brought together here are, if not predominately queer in focus, clearly positioned to go against the grain of heterosexist prerogatives, official narratives, and unreflective reinforcements of the amorous status quo. As with any special issue, they represent only a sample of the work that has been and might be done on the topic. Still, by ranging over straight and queer, masculine and feminine, and various national traditions in Latin America, these essays will, it is hoped, serve to stimulate a broader and more inclusive research agenda on Latin American popular romance than we have had to date.