



Beyond Heaving Bosoms: The Smart Bitches' Guide to Romance Novels

By Sarah Wendell, Candy Tan

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The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name...

We do it in the dark. Under the sheets. With a penlight. We wear sunglasses and a baseball hat at the bookstore. We have a "special place" where we store them. Let's face it: Not many folks are willing to publicly admit they love romance novels. Meanwhile, romance continues to be the bestselling fiction genre. Ever. So what's with all the shame?

Sarah Wendell and Candy Tan—the creators of the wildly popular blog Smart Bitches, Trashy Books—have no shame! They look at the good, the bad, and the ugly in the world of romance novels and tackle the hard issues and questions:

-The heroine's irresistible Magic Hoo Hoo and the hero's untamable Wang of Mighty Lovin'

-Sexual trends. Simultaneous orgasms. Hymens. And is anal really the new oral?

-Romance novel cover requirements: man titty, camel toe, flowers, long hair, animals, and the O-face

-Are romance novels really candy-coated porn or vehicles by which we understand our sexual and gender politics?

With insider advice for writing romances, fun games to discover your inner Viking warrior, and interviews with famous romance authors, *Beyond Heaving Bosoms* shows that while some romance novels are silly—maybe even tawdry—they can also be intelligent, savvy, feminist, and fabulous, just like their readers!

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Beyond Heaving Bosoms: The Smart Bitches' Guide to Romance Novels By Sarah Wendell, Candy Tan Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #369796 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Touchstone
- Published on: 2009-04-14
- Released on: 2009-04-14
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.44" h x .90" w x 5.50" l, .60 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 304 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Funny, irreverent, and insightful, this guide zeros in on the joys and woes of the romance genre... delivering both in delightful, readable style." -- Nora Roberts, *New York Times* bestselling author

"A high-octane, hilarious and revelatory look at the romance genre...It's too much fun to be missed!" -- Lisa Kleypas, *New York Times* bestselling author

"Sarah and Candy point out all that's ridiculous and annoying in the genre, while showcasing all that's good and valuable, with wit, style, intelligence, and snark." -- Jennifer Crusie, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Welcome to Temptation* and *Crazy for You*

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Chapter Cleavage

An Introduction to Romance and to the Smart Bitches

Welcome!

No, no, don't hide your romance novel. You don't have to wrap it in a quilted cover or slide it in between the pages of *The New Yorker*. We know you're smart. We also know you like romance novels.

Your romance novels are welcome here. Celebrated. Loved. Cuddled, even, if they're particularly good. Adorned with man titty and paraded up and down the street to acclaim, applause, and perhaps stray dollar bills. We'll occasionally poke -- with savage abandon, even -- at the more ludicrous aspects of the genre, but we kvetch because we love. Our point is:

Welcome.

This is *Beyond Heaving Bosoms: The Smart Bitches' Guide to Romance Novels*. We're not egomaniacal enough to think it's the Definitive Guide to Romance Novels, but guides written for readers by readers are few and far between. There are plenty of articles and books that dismiss the genre, and some excellent academic examinations that subject the genre to a long-overdue analysis. Us? We're here to throw a party for

the genre -- to celebrate its soaring successes as well as its appalling excesses, and to raise a beverage to the continued health and happiness of our favorite reading material. And yes, we're here to throw a drunken yet solidly comforting arm around your shoulders and say, "Oh, yes! We read them! We love them! Even the awful ones, them, too. And people who think we're dumb for reading them? Screw 'em! What the hell do they know? "

There are some things only a reader of romance can understand and appreciate. The bemuddled cover models. The alpha hero whom you love to read about but who'd be fodder for *COPS* episodes in real life. The heroines who are either so feisty they make your teeth hurt, or the embodiment of every virtue known to man, dog, and Chthonic deities. Deep tongue kissing first thing in the morning after a long night of bonkety-bonk, because romance protagonists do not *ever* have morning breath.

Then there are the fun parts of romance novels: the escape into a story that's happy and satisfying, but won't insult your intelligence. The spicy passages that feature...spicy passages. The characters you befriend and revisit when you're feeling down or in need of comfort reading. The stories that unabashedly depict love, relationships, and happiness.

There's nothing quite like a beautifully executed romance novel or the afterglow upon finishing an especially good one, and that's why we Smart Bitches are celebrating them.

If you were to gather romance readers into one room, that room would circle the earth seventeen times and do the hokey-pokey while it turned itself around. Most likely we'd all get seasick. But while we fought for the Dramamine, no doubt we'd notice that romance readers represent an astonishing cross section of political, social, religious, and economic groups. According to the oft-quoted statistic from Romance Writers of America (RWA), one out of every five people reads romance. This is, in mathematically correct notation, "a shitfuckton of people." A quick examination of the highlights of those statistics yields numbers with decimal points that are necessary only because that many zeroes become tiresome to type out. In 2006, romance accounted for \$1.37 billion in sales, and 64.6 million Americans read at least one romance in 2005. No matter what you do to those numbers, whether you divide them or watch them do a tango, those numbers are freaking huge.

And yet, despite the millions of dollars and those millions of readers and that (quivering alabaster) mound of books sold in every language known to print, romance is easily the most well-hidden literary habit in America. Millions of dollars are spent on romance novels, yet few will admit to reading them. We Smart Bitches, we know you read romance.

In fact, we'll come right out and say five out of five readers have read romance -- they just didn't know it. Think about it: just about every work of fiction has a romantic element in it. The love, sex, or attraction part might not be the primary focus, but they're almost always there. What would the *Iliad* be without Paris and Helen, or the *Odyssey* without Odysseus and Penelope? What would a story of danger and intrigue be without sexual attraction and tension? What would horror be without some damn fool woman running around so that some muscled hero could rescue her scantily clad ass? Love stories, from epic poems to schlocky bestsellers, form the backbone of our storytelling tradition.

So tie another ribbon around the What-the-Fuck tree: a staggering number of people read romance, few admit to it, and romantic elements are ubiquitous, but when that romance stands on its own two glass-slipped feet as the focus and driving element of the plot, then it's craaaap. No one who is anyone likes romance novels.

But somehow, everyone has a very firm idea of what the average romance reader is like. We bet you already know her. She's rather dim and kind of tubby -- undereducated *and* undersexed -- and she displays a

distressing affinity for mom jeans and sweaters covered in puffy paint and appliquéd kittens. So even though repeated surveys conducted by independent research reveal that an astonishingly diverse and often affluent population reads romance novels, in popular depictions, we're all the same.

"In all honesty, the dichotomy inherent in the conflicting nobility and morality of the duke is quite a fascinating subject to analyze."

Here she is: meet Mavis. She's not only a romance reader, she's *the* romance reader, the image everyone pictures when they discuss the romance novels those bored housewives love so much. Funny thing about Mavis, and you, and us, and everyone else who read romance: our love of romance novels is probably all that we have in common, but because of this shared interest, we're transformed from women of all walks of life to storm troopers: not very bright, evidence of the triumph of the Evil Empires of Bad Taste and Degraded Literature, and impossible to tell apart from one another.

Maybe you're already familiar with the genre. Maybe your budget is earmarked for romance novels, then rent, then food. Maybe your bookcases look like ours, and there are paperback romance novels wedged two deep on each shelf. Or maybe you're curious why romance is so popular, and why the otherwise-intelligent women in your life enjoy this cultural blight. Or perhaps you know us from our site, and you're just wondering how many times we're going to say expletives like "fuck" or "shit" or "holy cuntmonkeys" in this book.

Maybe you're just curious why women proclaiming themselves to be "Smart Bitches" would spend time, effort, and adoration on a genre that everyone else dismisses as tawdry, smutty, and lame. Sit down. We will explain -- or at the very least provide a profanity-filled précis.

So Who Are You, and Where Did You Come From?

When people ask us why we started Smart Bitches, we usually have a hot pink list of reasons we trot out. The Internet was riddled with romance Web sites whose grading curve wasn't curvy enough for our tastes, and we figured we could help change that. Or: we wanted the freedom to provide honest, noholds-barred commentary on all aspects of romance novels. Or: we wanted a public venue in which we could use the words "cuntmonkey" and "dichotomy" in the same discussion as "man titty" and "Fabio," and make all the fart jokes we possibly could whenever we came across titles like *Savage Thunder* or *Brave the Wild Wind*.

But ultimately, it boiled down to this fact: the two of us, we're neither fish nor fowl nor meat -- which would make us either TVP or tofu, but we digress. See, there tend to be two big camps in the discourse surrounding romance novels:

Camp Number One consists of those Who Just Don't Get It. They've either never read a romance novel before, or they picked one up, discovered it was awful, experienced permanent retinal scarring from the terrible cover, and wrote the entire genre off -- and the readers, too. The people in this camp are fond of accusing romance readers of being intellectually lazy, or hopelessly addicted to emotional porn. When the people in this camp find out they have friends -- friends whose tastes they trust, even -- who read and enjoy romance novels, their reaction is usually incredulousness, followed up by some variant of this backhanded compliment: "But you're so smart!" they cry out. "How can you possibly read that tripe? "

Unfortunately, it often feels as if Those Who Just Don't Get It outnumber the ones who do. Those Who Just Don't Get It are the readers and critics who object strenuously to the idea of romance novels being reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review*. They're the ones who, feeling defensive after having their media habits thoroughly scrutinized, say, "Well, at least I don't read romance novels." They're the people who don't know

nearly as much as they think they do; they often end up making ludicrous flubs, such as mistaking Harlequin romances for erotica. But then, it's difficult to properly criticize a genre when one hasn't read extensively in it, and let's face it: romance novels, with their titty-licious covers, overwrought cover copy, and genre constraints are an easier piñata to smack around than most. But because most of the people in this camp don't know the genre, most of them don't suspect that the best is on par with the best books in any genre, and that the worst books are even more vile than they could've imagined.

Camp Number Two is the cheerleader camp. Almost everything is at least four stars, or throbbing hearts, or fluffy kittens, or calling birds (partridge in a pear tree not included). Their attitude seems to boil down to: "Romance is awesome, and if you don't have a nice word to say then you should just shut up. Bless your heart." One of the signature arguments of this camp involves a contradictio...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Homer Anderson:

Information is provisions for individuals to get better life, information nowadays can get by anyone on everywhere. The information can be a information or any news even a huge concern. What people must be consider any time those information which is inside former life are challenging to be find than now's taking seriously which one is acceptable to believe or which one typically the resource are convinced. If you obtain the unstable resource then you understand it as your main information you will have huge disadvantage for you. All those possibilities will not happen throughout you if you take Beyond Heaving Bosoms: The Smart Bitches' Guide to Romance Novels as your daily resource information.

Doris McNeal:

Your reading sixth sense will not betray you actually, why because this Beyond Heaving Bosoms: The Smart Bitches' Guide to Romance Novels reserve written by well-known writer who knows well how to make book that could be understand by anyone who all read the book. Written in good manner for you, leaking every ideas and producing skill only for eliminate your own hunger then you still uncertainty Beyond Heaving Bosoms: The Smart Bitches' Guide to Romance Novels as good book not just by the cover but also with the content. This is one guide that can break don't evaluate book by its include, so do you still needing one more sixth sense to pick that!? Oh come on your reading through sixth sense already told you so why you have to listening to yet another sixth sense.

Corinne Parsons:

What is your hobby? Have you heard which question when you got college students? We believe that that question was given by teacher for their students. Many kinds of hobby, Everyone has different hobby. Therefore you know that little person such as reading or as studying become their hobby. You have to know that reading is very important and also book as to be the thing. Book is important thing to include you knowledge, except your teacher or lecturer. You get good news or update in relation to something by book. A substantial number of sorts of books that can you take to be your object. One of them is Beyond Heaving Bosoms: The Smart Bitches' Guide to Romance Novels.

Wade Diaz:

A number of people said that they feel uninterested when they reading a book. They are directly felt the item when they get a half parts of the book. You can choose the particular book Beyond Heaving Bosoms: The Smart Bitches' Guide to Romance Novels to make your reading is interesting. Your personal skill of reading proficiency is developing when you such as reading. Try to choose basic book to make you enjoy to read it and mingle the opinion about book and reading through especially. It is to be initially opinion for you to like to open a book and examine it. Beside that the publication Beyond Heaving Bosoms: The Smart Bitches' Guide to Romance Novels can to be a newly purchased friend when you're feel alone and confuse with what must you're doing of that time.

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