

Cinderella Formula: The Romance Begins

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Abstract

As a type of formula fiction, a romance applies a fixed pattern of plot development, including the ending, which is always a happy one: celebrating the unification of the hero and heroine who previously struggled very hard against all obstacles threatening their mutual love. However, it does not mean that discussing the plot of romances is of no use. On the contrary, it is interesting to see how romance writers can create so many possibilities in the structure of the so-called formulaic plot. This study attempts to observe the benefit of characterization in the creation of these various structures of plot development. For this purpose, this study sets up two objectives. Firstly, the study observes the characterization of the hero and heroine as well as the construction of the plots. Secondly, the study points out the significance of characterization in driving the development of the plots. In the light of Cawelty's (1977) perspectives on literary formula and Radway's (1991) ideas about romance, this study concludes that the choice (i.e., the characterization) of "the hero and heroine" proves to be playing an essential role in the plot development. The gaps set between the hero and the heroine make it possible for the writers to develop various complicated plots, focusing on their relationship. Initially, it seems hard to match and unite the hero and the heroine in most romances. This fact, however, is the most crucial part of a romance. The struggles needed to overcome their problems will elicit more emotional conflicts and, thus, create more romantic suspense. The feeling of inferiority, jealousy, fear of losing the partner, and uncertainty about a deeper relationship is likely to occupy the heroine's (and sometimes the hero's) mind. And when they finally successfully overcome these problems, they will feel how great and strong their love is.

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Introduction

A romance is said to be a universal story because the experiences presented in its story are usually the experiences and the dreams

most people see in real life. Generally understood, a romance is a story of a love relationship between a man and a woman that ends in lasting happiness. Harmon and Holman add that a romance usually includes

"passionate love" (2003, p. 443). Its plot centers on the complicated problems of love and on how the main characters solve these problems. Who is never in love? And who does not want to have a love relationship as portrayed in romances?

In general, this type of story does not have much variation in its plot structure. The development pattern is always the same, whatever the intrigue and the main characters are. Because of the "monotonous" structure of the story, a romance is classified as one type of formula literature whose characteristics are, among others: (1) having certain standard conventions which establish a common ground both for the writer and the audience, and (2) putting forward the goals of escape and entertainment.

Besides romance, formula literature includes five other genres: detective story, adventure, mystery, melodrama, and alien beings. Cawelty (1976, p. 41) calls a romance the feminine version of an adventure story. While an adventure story focuses on the hero's heroic and triumphant action, a romance generally focuses on the heroine's persevering struggle, which ends in happiness.

This happy ending is another characteristic of a romance. All romances provide the readers with the heroines' good and appropriate decisions, which lead to happy endings (or at least a suggestion that there will be a happy ending). The usual outcome of the love relationship between the heroine and the hero is a lasting and permanent marriage.

The next characteristic of a romance is "romantic suspense" (Radway, 1991, p. 65). Radway points out that there is always a point in a romance plot where the heroine and her lover have a "love-hate" relationship. This situation will create suspense which will lead the story into complication. Radway (1991, p. 134) presents the following summary of the thirteen stages of an ideal romance:

1. The heroine's social identity is destroyed

2. The heroine reacts antagonistically to an "aristocratic" male.
3. The aristocratic male responds ambiguously to the heroine.
4. The heroine interprets the hero's behavior as evidence of purely sexual interest in her.
5. The heroine responds to the hero's behavior with anger and coldness.
6. The hero retaliates by punishing the heroine.
7. The heroine and the hero are physically and/or emotionally separated.
8. The hero treats the heroine tenderly.
9. The heroine responds warmly to the hero's act of tenderness.
10. The heroine reinterprets the hero's ambiguous behavior as the product of the previous hurt.
11. The hero proposes/openly declares his love for/demonstrates his unwavering commitment to the heroine with a supreme act of tenderness.
12. The heroine responds sexually and emotionally.
13. The heroine's identity is restored

Although the formula of romances has generally been the same from time to time, it is interesting to see that the readers' response is changing. Comparing the romance readers' response in 1980 and that in 2016, Fekete (2022) states that unlike the group of women reading in 1980, the group of 2016 readers enjoyed stories infused with much explicit description of sexual acts, heroines with clear sexual desires, and independent heroines. Changes in sex's meaning in romance novels evince an important shift in the nature of ideal intimacy (p.21).

Khairiah A. Rahman (2013) studied some Asian romance movies, which often portrayed behaviors against society's moral codes, such as obeying authority, adhering to cultural norms, and putting society before self. However, following the formula of romance, most of the problems are, in the end, resolved. This fact emphasizes the celebration of happy or agreeable endings, or in Radway's terms, "the restoration of the hero or heroine's identity."

Rahman gives an example of the Malay romance movie *Cun* (Attraction) that captures two contrasting lifestyles: the paddy fields of a village against the Kuala Lumpur Twin Towers. The story tells about a lead female who suffers an emotional breakdown when her fiancé, the country's leading actor, is caught on camera in a scandalous affair with an aspiring new starlet. The reporter escapes to the village and falls in love with a land-rich farmer who practices eco-friendly agriculture.

What may be viewed as scandalous to traditional practice is the marriage proposal itself, as the girl returns to the village to propose to her man. Traditionally, marriage is a collective process initiated by the man and involving the wider social group. In this case, though, the girl initiates the ceremony without her family (Rahman, 2013, p. 112).

The happy ending can be seen in the fact that the movie, in the end, reconciles the two opposing lifestyles of the city and country, although the girl's behavior to propose the village farmer, however, gained social sanction.

In conclusion, Rahman states that in Asian romance movies, "scandals are portrayed to highlight a deviance from the norm and the movies work to find a resolution as they bring back the familiar and accepted, acknowledging new perspectives without compromising social acceptance" (2103, p. 119). Thus, romance keeps promising agreeable endings for whatever problems.

In our wide-world web literature today, the plot of romance can even be seen in video games, a new narrative media that invites a closer study. According to Saito (2021), "romance games in Japan, which began as text-based adventure games and are today known as *bishōjo* games and *otome* games, form a powerful textual corpus for literary and media studies. They adopt conventional literary narrative strategies and explore new narrative forms formulated by an interface with computer-generated texts and audiovisual fetishism, thereby challenging the

assumptions about the modern textual values of storytelling" (2021, p.1).

In terms of the plot formula, romance games apply the same patterns. The complexity of the interaction between the hero and heroine contributes to the intensity of their love relationship. In *bishōjo* (for men), the hero is the player, and the heroine is the woman character in the game; in *otome* (for women), the heroine is the player, and the hero is the man character in the game.

Although one of the main characters in these video games is the player (either the heroine or the hero), interestingly, they tend to show a general formulaic plot and paradigm of romance. While *otome* games "show tendencies to sustain male-centric gender codes and historical settings,"

men's romance games [bishōjo], despite academic discussions of these games as paramount to postmodern culture, tend toward the reaffirmation of modern perceptions of romantic love as free will and thereby revalidates the illusion of gaining authorial control over the text. Facing the parallel plots and looped gameplay, the player learns to overcome divergences by finding the sole love object and thereby acknowledging one's patriarchal power of choice (Saito, 2021, p. 16)

Neisya and Yanti (2019) conducted a similar study about formulaic plots. They observed five soccer-themed movies, particularly the convention (formula) found in those movies and the invention that makes them different from one another. Neisya and Yanti found "a formula" that makes up the plot in the movies under study: the introduction of the main character, the main character's initiative to solve problems, the problem that is slightly solved, the suspense of success, the increasingly complex problem in the climax, and the happy ending (2019, p. 393).

The second finding of their study is about the invention that each of the movies showed. According to the research, what makes one movie different from the other is that each movie combines the theme of soccer with its

prevalent culture (including local wisdom). This is meant to create familiarity and an emotional bond with the target audience.

Garuda di Dadaku relates the football issue to the complexity of Indonesian educational culture: *Shaolin Soccer* puts forward the image of a China kung fu master; *Bend it Like Beckham* elevates the life of Indian immigrants living in London; *Barefoot Dreams* invites the audience to get to know the human side of a Korean who helped the local community in Papua New Guinea to achieve their dreams; and *Air Bud 3: World Pup* presents a fantasy of a smart pet named Buddy (2019, p. 400).

This study essentially examines the convention and invention in the formulaic romance plot, focusing on the hero and heroine. It particularly observes two problems: (1) the starting point of the plot of romances, *i.e.*, the choice of the hero and heroine and their characterization, and (2) the significance of the characterization in the development of the formulaic plot.

Methodology

Grounding the study on Cawelty's (1977) theory of literary formula and Radway's (1991) formula of romance, this study examines ten selected romances published by Mills and Boon and Harlequin. They are:

1. *Across the Lagoon* (1974, by Roumelia Lane),
2. *Young Tracy* (1973, by Rosalind Brett),
3. *An Apple from Eve* (1981, by Betty Neels),
4. *One of the Boys* (1981, by Janet Dailey),
5. *Escape to love* (1982, by Claudia Jameson),
6. *Man in charge* (1973, by Lilian Peake),
7. *The Man at La Valaise* (1974, by Mary Wibberley),
8. *Falcon's Prey* (1981, by Penny Jordan),
9. *The Silken Cage* (1981, by Rebecca Stratton), and
10. *The Sleeping Fire* (1982, by Daphne Clair).

The study first examines the characterization of the hero and heroine (the main characters). Secondly, the study observes how the characterization contributes to the complexity of the plot structure, which later makes the plot different from other romances.

The Cinderella Formula

According to Cawelty, a romantic effect of a love affair can be achieved when the two lovers can overcome social and psychological barriers (1976, p. 43). Therefore, it is crucial to set the major characters (the hero and heroine) in such a situation. One favorite, ever-green formula is that of a simple, ordinary girl who falls in love with a rich or aristocratic man, just like the story of Cinderella and her Prince. Other variations might include a love relationship between a young working girl and a rich man, or between a young simple-minded, innocent ordinary girl and a mature and experienced man. Such circumstances will provide more possibilities for romantic effects rather than a love relationship between two lovers of equal situations.

The term "Cinderella Formula" has its origin in the story of Cinderella, in which the heroine (Cinderella) finds an unbelievably romantic love after a long, sad, and hard life she had to go through in her stepmother and stepsisters' house. Cinderella's story is barely believable, but it is the dream of every woman. The possibility of this dream coming true is what romances try to convey to their readers.

In Cawelty's opinion, the romantic and dream-like love story between Cinderella and her Prince would provide not only many problems in its development but also a satisfactory and agreeable happy ending. The fact that the prince prefers to break social conventions about the ideal marriage (which should be between a prince and a princess) provides a path for the plot to produce a very romantic and moving atmosphere. Besides, the prince, too, disregards his own psychological burden of being looked down by other members of the Royal family who expect a lovely princess to be his spouse.

Such a situation gives the romance a good starting point and a good atmosphere to draw the readers' attention and, later, to bring the readers away from the burdensome life, i.e., to escape temporarily from daily life's problems.

The Hero and Heroine's Characterization in the Romances

In *Across the Lagoon* by Roumelia Lane (1976), Carol Lindley, a young woman whose job is to accompany a fifteen-year-old girl (Stephanie) on a long summer vacation in Italy, cannot escape her gradual love with Stephanie's uncle, Gray Barrett, who is Carol's employer. Carol is employed to take care of Stephanie's stay in Italy because Gray will be very busy.

Carol, the heroine, is a simple, "immature" twenty-year-old, small-city girl who practically has little experience. As a sales assistant selling lampshades, her circle has always been in the neighborhood.

She had always thought that she would be content to be a sales assistant for as long as she needed to work. Admittedly it hadn't exactly been a job of her own choosing. At sixteen, she had no idea what she wanted to do. At a loss, her mother had taken her along for an interview with the careers advice officer at school.....

She had been selling lampshades ever since; tall ones, short ones, flowered ones, plain ones. On rainy days and sunny days she had greeted the customers with a smile and wandered with them while they pondered over bright puce fringes, figured parchment and tinkling chandeliers (Lane, 1976, p. 5).

Dreaming of getting a job out of the ordinary, she took the chance to leave her hometown when she saw a vacancy in a newspaper: "Wanted, responsible person to supervise fifteen-year-old schoolgirl on Venetian Riviera for the duration of summer vacation. Ring Lyndhurst 34044." (Lane, 1976, p. 7).

On the other hand, Gray Barrett, the hero, is a thirty-five mature, experienced, successful businessman. He is so well-off that money is

not really a matter for him. Compared to Carol, Gray is just exactly the opposite.

The vista was lost on the man at the desk, presumably Gray Barrett, who sat, pen in hand, frowning over papers before him. Because he didn't look up, Carol felt obliged to move into the centre of the room if only to attract his attention. He went on scribbling, casting his glance up only for a second to flick it over her with a curt, 'Miss Lindley, I take it?' (Lane, 1976, p.9).

The wide gap between them creates an awkward situation in that communication seems to be unnatural for them, especially for Carol. She cannot express her feeling freely. In Carol's eyes, Gray Barret is an arrogant and cynical person, and what is more, he is so ignorant of her presence.

She couldn't get over the colossal conceit of the man. Without giving her time to open her mouth at her interview he had turned her down flat for the job. Now when he couldn't get anyone else and he was stuck he thought all he ha to do was snap his fingers ad she would come running (Lane, 1974, p. 22).

As the story unfolds, Carol, too, gradually adores Gray Barret. Unfortunately, the gap between the two is so wide that what Carol can do is keep her love for Gray only in her own heart. "Carol had to admit that she didn't notice the younger girl much. Her gaze was usually with Gray; watching him when he seemed about to smile, or when he strolled about somewhere nearby" (Lane, 1974, p. 146).

A slight variation can be observed in Rosaline Brett's *Young Tracy*. The Cinderella of this romance(a young, simple, and innocent Maggie) is in love with her prince, an attractive, mature, and experienced Nicholas Heward or Nick. The gap between the heroine and the hero is not only in terms of social status but also in maturity and experiences, particularly those with women.

This is what Maggie thinks about Nick after Nick kisses her on one occasion. For Nick, it is just an ordinary kiss that he usually has with his girlfriends. However, for Maggie,

.... the incident had been disquieting, to say the least. She, who usually slept only a moment after her head reached the pillow, had lain awake in bed, at first furious and then querulous. What outsize conceit the man had! What imperviousness! What a darn, bulldozing sort of nerve! (Brett, 1973, p. 70).

Maggie's anxiety about her feeling of love for Nick becomes complicated when she realizes that Nick considers her no more than just a lovely little girl. This situation creates a love-hate relationship between them. And it grows worse when she feels jealous after knowing that Nick has a relationship with a more mature girl of his level.

A closer version of the original Cinderella story is the story of Felicia and her Prince in *Falcon's Prey* by Penny Jordan. Felicia is just a typically ordinary English girl of no particular background, and she is going to marry a real prince from Kuwait, Faizal, a man who is immensely wealthy and cultured.

Nowadays, Faisal's family no longer roamed the desert, for Faisal's maternal grandfather had founded a merchant bank at the time that oil was first discovered in Kuwait, and now the bank had offices in New York and London, ruling a financial empire so vast and complex that Felicia's head spun whenever Faisal tried to explain its workings to her (Jordan, 1981, p. 9).

An additional gap between them is, of course, their cultural background. She is really overwhelmed when knowing that several days before this Kuwaiti prince does propose to her, and Felicia, a common London girl, says "yes."

Even now she could hardly believe that someone actually loved her. After all, she reflected humbly, there was nothing special about her, thousands of girls had creamy skin and red-gold hair, and thousands more had slender, elegant bodies; she was nothing out of the ordinary (Jordan, 1981, pp. 7-8).

Now she clearly realizes that all of this means nothing else but problems. And from this point on, their relationship grows more and more complicated. What Felicia worries about turns real when the first problem occurs. Faisal's uncle, Sheik Raschid al Hamid al Sahab, accuses Felicia of being an unprincipled gold-digger, a woman whose intention is to get Faisal's money. Felicia's struggle grows harder and harder.

The Silken Cage (Rebecca Stratton) presents a different variation of the Cinderella Formula. Rather than changing the setting and the circumstances around Cinderella and the Prince, Rebecca Stratton creates different characteristics for both Cinderella (Troy Darrell) and the prince (Kadir ben Raschid). Kadir ben Raschid is not a handsome and kind-hearted wealthy man, but instead, a barbaric wealthy man. He is a man whose words must be done, whose orders must be executed and not to be challenged. And, indeed, nobody dares to argue against his words.

Troy, playing the role of Cinderella, has different traits. While the real Cinderella is a very patient and submissive woman, Troy Darrell is full of curiosity in almost everything and is always eager to do anything to satisfy her curiosity. There is also a "wild" spirit inside Troy. These traits of Troy can be seen when she bravely goes to Morocco to look for her "missing" brother, Peter Darrell.

"Do you mean that you have definite information concerning his whereabouts?"

Troy shook her head, her curiosity showing itself in a small frown as she regarded him. "Not definite information, no, but I do know that a man drove Peter to Jelhabu Dhai. And no matter how long it takes me, or what I have to do to get there, I'll get to the wretched place too, even if I have to walk every inch of the ways" (Stratton, 1981, p. 35).

The fact that Peter Darrell is "missing" along with the Sheik's sister, Ayesha, gives way to the complication of the story. Troy and Kadir ben Raschid, an ordinary plain, travelling woman and a sheik, a very liberal individual and a religion-oriented leader, are

involved in a love-hate relationship.

In Lilian Peake's *Man in Charge*, the love relationship between the heroine (Juliet Bourne) and the hero (Drew Major) begins with the "hate" relationship. Juliet Bourne is delighted to work in a big famous department store, and she really enjoys being in charge of the new trendy boutique. However, her new ideas for the boutique prove to lead her to continual conflicts with the general manager of the department store, Drew Major, who seems to be always on the opposing side. Moreover, he is very cynical towards women in general and towards her in particular. Possibly, it is the gap in their status that gives reasons for Dane to behave that way. Here is one of their daily conflicts:

"Did you get permission to put up these works of art?"

No, Mr Major."

"Not from the general manager? Not even from the supervisor of this section?"

"No, Mr Major."

"Then you will kindly take them down and return them where they belong—in your portfolio of similar artistic masterpieces at home" (Peake, 1973, pp. 33-34).

What Juliet does not realize is that as she is getting tired and sick of this man, a growing love for him is developing in her heart. In the end, her love grows so strong that she finds it too hard to fight against it.

"No! She cried. "You can't kiss me. You can't kiss a thief! That's what you call me, isn't it? To you I'm a thief." She was twisting her face right and left away from his mouth (Peake, 1973, p. 141).

In the last comparison, it is very interesting to see a similar relationship between Sacha Donnelly and Nikolai Torlenkov. Trying to forget her boyfriend, Sacha goes to a cottage (Valaise Cottage) in a remote village with the hope of living alone in an isolated neighborhood. She thinks she can enjoy herself there, without anybody else disturbing her. Unfortunately, arriving at the place, she learns that somebody, Tor, is also going to stay at the same cottage. Sacha, then,

decides to leave the cottage soon.

For a certain secret reason, Tor cannot let Sacha leave the cottage, so in a sense, Sacha becomes his "prisoner." And like Juliet in *Man in Charge*, Sacha begins her relationship with Tor with a feeling of dislike.

"Please," she said suddenly. "Please tell me why you are keeping me here? I've done nothing—I just came here for holiday." And tears sprang to her eyes. They were partly caused by the very hot tea she had just swallowed, but he wouldn't know that, and it might help..... (Wibberley, 1974, p. 19).

Strangely enough, being Tor's prisoner is not at all a bad experience. In her heart, Sacha even feels an irresistibly growing love, and she begins to feel the pleasure of being Tor's prisoner.

The gap between them is not financial or intellectual. Instead, it is the blind spot between them that creates romantic suspense. Sacha does not know anything about Tor, but she feels so close to Tor. When she finally knows everything about Tor, she does not want to be separated from him.

"It's lovely, thank you, Tor," she breathed. She mustn't cry. She mustn't. She smiled at him, and the look in his eyes sent the blood rushing to her face, so that she had to look quickly down at the paperweight (Wibberley, 1974, p. 129).

Then everything goes as expected: Sacha and Tor are in love, and happiness comes to them.

Conclusion

The gaps set between the heroes and the heroines indeed make it possible for the writers to develop complicated plots, focusing on the relationship between the respective pairs. As seen in the table above, the gaps can be classified into three:

1. the gaps in experience and maturity (*Young Tracy, Across the Lagoon, The Man at La Valaise*),
2. the gaps in the social status (*Escape to Love*,

- Falcon Prey, and The Silken Cage*), and
 3. the gaps in the professional status (*The Sleeping Fire, An Apple from Eve, One of the Boys, Man in Charge*).

At the beginning of the story, it seems hard to match the hero and the heroine. This, however, is the most crucial part of a romance. The struggles needed to overcome their problems will elicit more emotional conflicts and, thus, create more romantic suspense (including love-hate relationships). Inferiority, jealousy, fear of losing the partner, and uncertainty about a deeper relationship are likely to occupy the heroine's (and sometimes the hero's) mind. And when finally they are successful in overcoming these problems, they will feel how great and strong their love is.

These emotional and social conflicts or problems are the results of the gap (which is provided by the Cinderella Formula) between them. Since romance is a genre of formula literature, the solution to the problems will just be the same: a satisfactory happy ending, whatever the variations of the development are. This, in fact, emphasizes one thing: that the problems and the process of solving them are more important than the ending of the story. Consequently, this entails a further feature: the importance of establishing a starting point for the plot. The Cinderella formula proves to be a very effective way to create a good starting point for the plot, i.e., by providing gaps to be cultivated further throughout the story.

The summary of the heroes and heroines in the ten romances can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Summary of the heroes and heroines

Title	The Heroine	The Hero
<i>Young Tracy</i>	a store attendant in a small village	an experienced housing developer
<i>Across the Lagoon</i>	a child keeper	her employer
<i>The Man at La Valaise</i>	an ordinary simple girl	an experienced Russian spy
<i>Escape to Love</i>	an ordinary London girl	a wealthy Spanish aristocrat
<i>Falcon Prey</i>	an ordinary young girl	an Arab aristocrat/sheik
<i>The Silken Cage</i>	an ordinary, adventurous girl	a Morocco sheik
<i>The Sleeping Fire</i>	an editorial staff	a manager of the magazine, Palmer's boss.
<i>An Apple from Eve</i>	a nurse	an experienced doctor, her employer
<i>One of the Boys</i>	a camera woman	a producer of TV shows
<i>Man in Charge</i>	a boutique attendant in a large department store	an owner and manager of the department store

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