Constrained Writing, Creative Writing: The Case of Handbooks for Writing Romances

Dirk de Geest
University of Louvain, Literary Studies

An Goris
University of Louvain, Literary Studies

Abstract   This article broadens the concept of "constrained writing" by applying it to a less prestigious domain of literature, namely, popular romance novels. In order to find out how constraints play a role in writing and publishing such commercial texts, a corpus of handbooks for writing romances is carefully analyzed. Such handbooks meticulously guide aspiring writers through the entire process of writing romances, from the first ideas to the final act of having their texts published. This product- and process-orientated approach is ultimately based on a number of discursive strategies that enable the aspiring writer to conceive of romance writing as an accessible and feasible yet highly constrained activity. In this article, three such dominant strategies are carefully discussed. One is the handbooks' constant appeal to the reading experience of the romance. Another is their conceptualization of writing as a craft and a profession and their infrequent but functional use of explicitly normative language. Finally, the role of the genre's highly influential institutional context in the handbooks' formulation of generic norms and constraints is considered as well. This article ultimately demonstrates the broad applicability of the notion of constrained writing to many forms of literature.

1. Constrained Writing as a Literary Practice

Although the concept of constrained writing has established itself as a legitimate and useful notion in the field of literary studies, the scope of the term has until now been rather limited. In fact, it is commonly (if not exclusively) used in reference to a very specific corpus of literary texts and/or a particular conception of writing literature. In line with the French Oulipo group—which clearly functions as a landmark and as a productive paradigm—constrained writing designates a form of literary production in which the writer submits his or her text to specific formal (and to a lesser extent also thematic) constraints. On the one hand, such constraints function as boundaries that explicitly limit the possible realizations of a text in some respects. On the other hand, those constraints are not primarily intended as strict limitations but rather as creative stimuli for the artistic process; they reduce the endless possibilities—the common, rather naive association of literature with boundless freedom and complete originality—and thus contribute to a stronger focus on the mechanisms on which genuine literature should be based: formal control and a maximal artistic concentration within an appropriate frame of constraints. Nowadays, this project of constrained writing is articulated by its advocates in both theoretical and artistic terms. Constrained writing as a literary practice is represented by, among others, Georges Perec, François Bon, and Jacques Roubaud (see, e.g., Motte 1986; Mathews and Brotchie 1998). Its theoretical foundations are analyzed in literary studies by, among others, Jan Baetens (1985, 2005).

2. Norms and Constraints

In this article, however, we would like to advocate a much broader viewpoint on constraint writing.[1] One could indeed argue that literature never arises from a boundless "anything goes" principle. At least to a certain extent, all literature is subjected to constraints and (in a broader perspective) norms that bear on a specific subject matter, on certain formal principles, or on a generic framework of structures and expectations.

   In this respect, the relation between norms and constraints may be tentatively presented as follows. Generally speaking, literary texts are constructed (but also read and evaluated) by recourse to sets of norms that guarantee, at least to a certain extent, that the texts under consideration

---

1. In this respect, our research fits into the tradition of functionalist literary studies as it is exemplified in polysystem studies (Even-Zohar 1990; de Geest 1996).

will be recognized, interpreted, and evaluated as genuine instances of literature. Such norms relate to specific aesthetic and literary conventions but also to a much broader linguistic, sociocultural, and historical constellation. Without this regulating principle, literary texts would hardly be understood in an appropriate manner, that is, according to the conception of literature prevailing in a particular cultural context. The fact that most utterances about literature actually present themselves in a neutral, seemingly "descriptive" way does not alter their normative impact. In this respect, one could argue, taking inspiration from Michel Foucault's (2002 [1969], 1971) discourse theory, that the sheer event of particular utterances occurring in a discursive situation is already a manifestation of those normative mechanisms at work. In fact, a basic set of questions, especially regarding cultural and literary communication, concerns the "eventiveness" of utterances: why do some utterances (notions, stylistic devices, genres, etc.) occur time and again, whereas others do not (cannot, must not)? How do such recurrent utterances relate to one another? How are they repeated or transformed? By considering all utterances about and within literature as normative, scholars have become increasingly aware of the cultural and historical relevance of such questions.[2]

The most explicit manifestations of such norms are constraints, which state the formal limitations and formulaic conventions that (particular types of) literary texts have to realize. The strongest constraints are undoubtedly related to generic and formal principles. Texts that are meant to function as sonnets, for instance, consist "naturally" (as if such constraints were a "natural" component of the genre) of fourteen lines, divided in the Shakespearean model into four separate stanzas that are integrated into an overall poetic structure. Of course, virtually any constraint may be overruled in specific cases, but this departure from the cognitive and normative prototypical structure will in most cases entail estrangement and inevitably also the risk of not being recognized as a valuable realization of the genre involved; in this respect, it is easier to abandon the particular rhyme pattern and the rhythmic structure of the Shakespearean prototype than to produce a text of seventeen lines and expect this to be recognized as a "genuine" let alone a "typical" sonnet. Especially in the context of a strict hierarchical generic system and a strongly classicist aesthetics, such constraints are not only formulated in an unequivocal way; they also regulate literary behavior by functioning as the most economical solution for

2. For a more systematic overview of this approach, see de Geest 1996, which attempts to combine a systemic view of literature with a discursive and normative perspective. A brief summary in English can be found in de Geest 1997.

so-called coordination problems which might arise but should be avoided as much as possible.[3]

However, these constraints—which are mostly related to formal aspects or to formulaic language—do not by any means exhaust the realm of normativity in literature. In fact, norms not only articulate what must and must not (or cannot) be said in literature (explicit obligations and prohibitions, on which most constrained writing is based) but also the less stringent and less apodictic zone of possibilities: that which can be said and which ought to be said. In this respect, normativity may be best conceived of as a semiotic square (according to Greimasian principles),[4] where "prohibitions" and "obligations" coexist with the weaker (though not less strategic) normative categories of "nonprohibitions" and "nonobligations." Indeed, even the so-called free choices made by individual authors are to be inscribed in the global zone of normativity as instances that are merely tolerated or else explicitly encouraged and recognized as literary "originality" and "personal style." Yet all these norms often remain implicit and as such are to be constructed and analyzed by means of a meticulous literary historical research.

By the same token, even our post-Romantic literary condition—that is mostly associated with the transgression of norms, with originality and creativity—by no means evades all norms. On the contrary, norms remain of considerable importance in the organization of avant-garde literary communication. We need only consider the empirical fact that avant-garde texts strongly resemble one another (and hence are fairly easily recognizable) in order to grasp the normativity that inheres in their production and reception.

Consequently, while the two concepts of norm and constraint are often distinguished from each other and while most scholars tend to concentrate on constraints, since they offer the most explicit formulations of normativity, we suggest that the conceptualization of certain norms as constraints might provide an interesting perspective on the writing of literature. The distinction between norms and constraints commonly assumes that norms are often observed only a posteriori (e.g., as the result of meticulous scholarly research), that they are necessarily collective in nature, and that their application is less obligatory, while constraints are defined beforehand (as

3. This view of literary genres as prototypically structured categories and the consequences of such a cognitive perspective for a functionalist approach to literature are briefly discussed in de Geest and van Gorp 1999. That article also contains succinct examples which apply this theoretical model to a static genre, such as the sonnet, on the one hand, and a flexible genre, such as the picaresque novel, on the other hand.
4. See Greimas and Courtés 1982.

a guideline for the creative process), are potentially entirely individual and conscious, and are intended to be observed. Seen from a broader cultural perspective, however, this current opposition is indeed blurred in most literary practices.

3. Handbook for Creative Writing: Learning How to Write

In this article we will demonstrate how the concepts of norms and constraints not only pertain to the analysis of so-called constrained writing as a specific literary practice and a particular corpus of literary texts but may be usefully applied to a much wider range of literary communication. More specifically, we focus on handbooks for creative writing, a very successful genre which nevertheless has been largely neglected in the field of literary studies. Yet in their continuous efforts to guide and to instruct aspirant writers, these books tend to foreground precisely the relevance (and sometimes the absolute necessity) of all kinds of norms. In fact, they explicitly intend to provide guidelines that will enable the aspirant writer to obtain maximal results by teaching him or her how to write successful poetry, novels, and plays or how to practice more popular genres, such as detective novels, children's books, or romance novels. In this respect, such handbooks concentrate on recipes that have proven their efficacy, on the one hand, and on the pitfalls a writer should definitely avoid, on the other hand. The resulting discourse manages to construct an ingenious conceptual framework in which writing is simultaneously conceived of as a natural, free, even self-evident practice and as a constrained utilization of norms based on hard work, study, tools, and above all the writer's own extensive reading experience. This, we believe, ultimately allows the aspiring author to regard the handbooks' normative perspective as one of both creatively inspiring and pragmatically as well as commercially useful constraints.

In the following pages, we want to analyze briefly a number of such handbooks for creative writing as a distinct genre, which might be considered a kind of "normative narratology." The basically descriptive categories of classical narratology (characters, plot, setting, style, etc.), which are normally used to analyze particular literary texts, are rearticulated here in order to direct and legitimate a particular writing practice. More precisely, we concentrate on one particular subset of those handbooks, namely, those devoted to the writing of romance novels. To this end, they combine literary with institutional advice, since actually getting published is seen as an integral part of the literary activity. Hence the dimension of commercial and economic viability cannot (or must not) be left out when

one discusses norms and constraints formulated in handbooks for writing romance novels.

In this regard, traditional "artistic" constraints (e.g., those used by the Oulipo group) should be distinguished from those formulated in handbooks for popular writing. Whereas traditional constraints are mainly intended to function as creative stimuli, the constraints pertaining to popular literature always (implicitly or explicitly) operate under the understanding that publication and commercial success are (part of) their ultimate goal.[5] As a result, the economic, commercial, and institutional frameworks surrounding popular genres such as the romance novel constantly influence the formulation of their norms, despite the fact that the illusion of writing as a free and autonomous creative activity is maintained throughout the handbooks. Although the authors of such handbooks stress the institutional constraints of the genre (publishing houses, reviewing procedures, editorial lines, etc.), they tend to minimize these factors by treating them as supplementary and even secondary aspects which do not fundamentally affect the creative process as such.

The ground covered by the handbooks is of course importantly related to the specific genre under discussion, because the norms and constraints require intimate knowledge of the generic characteristics. With regard to romances, for instance, it is crucial that the aspirant author should understand both the genre's specific narrative conventions and its current institutional organization; the more so because neither set of characteristics is static. The repeated use of the basic romance narrative—the story of a man and a woman who meet, fall in love, overcome a conflict, and live happily ever after—the materiality of the romance novel as a small, cheap paperback book with a colorful cover of a man and a woman in a passionate embrace, and the generically widespread use of lines (e.g., Harlequin Historical, Silhouette Desire, etc.) for publishing thematically related romances have given rise to the culturally prevalent image of the romance genre as formulaic, repetitive, and unchanging.[6] But the handbooks' dis-

---

5. Whether this economically functional legitimation is characteristic of the entire genre of handbooks for creative writing or specific to its subgenres that specialize in popular literature is an interesting question for future comparative research. Thus handbooks for writing romance or detective novels might be usefully compared with handbooks for writing poetry.
6. For more on this perception of the popular romance novel—and in particular the degrading use of the term *formula* to describe its narrative generic conventions—see Pamela Regis's (2003) study of the literary history of the romance genre. A foundational study of the concept of formula in popular genre fiction is John Cawelti's *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (1976).

cussion of the genre's current inner narrative and institutional mechanisms is indicative of its recent developments in these areas.[7]

Institutionally speaking, romances are nowadays published in two different formats: the category and the single title (Romance Writers of America 2009). Category romance novels are small, cheap paperback books published in a specific line. Lines group together thematically related romances (e.g., medical or historical romances, more or less sexually explicit romances, etc.) and are paratextually very similar (in cover color and design, prominence of imprint logo on the cover, the number of pages, etc.); each line publishes a set number of romances (often four or six) each month.[8] While a category romance is emphatically presented as an instance of an already-existing line—at the expense of the visibility and importance of the individual author—the single-title romance novel is presented and promoted more as the unique creative product of an individual. Single-title novels are substantially longer, have more complex plots, and very often incorporate elements from other genres in their subplots—a romance tale is often combined with a detective story or with a historical narrative, for example. While both categories and single titles use the basic narrative conventions of the romance genre, the single-title romance thus allows for considerably greater variation. Consequently, the growing importance, in the last two decades, of the less constrained single-title format signals the romance genre's increased literary characteristics and aspirations.

This development from a line-driven to an author-driven genre is also traceable in the coming into being of a genre-specific canon of romance authors, including Nora Roberts, Suzanne Brockmann, Susan Elizabeth Phillips, and Laura Kinsale. While lines nearly obliterate the individual author, who becomes in effect virtually invisible and anonymous, those single titles are fundamentally different in this regard. These books are written by writers in the established sense of the notion: authors who have an oeuvre, a career, a public persona, and last but not least, their own

7. Some of the most important studies of the popular romance novel and its (recent) changes are Radway 1984 (a foundational study but no longer any more up-to-date than Modleski 1982); Regis 2003; Flesch 2004; and Wendell and Tan 2009. Important academic anthologies on the romance genre include Krentz 1992; Mussell 1997; Goade 2007; and Frantz and Selinger forthcoming.

8. The publisher most associated with this system of publication is Harlequin, the world's biggest and best-known romance publisher. The system of lines, however, was originally developed by British romance publisher Mills and Boon, which merged with Harlequin in 1972. For more on the history of romances by Mills and Boon, see McAleer 1999; for more on the history of romances by Harlequin, including its 1984 takeover of American romance publisher Silhouette, see Grescoe 1996; for more on Harlequin's recent publication strategies, see Goris 2009.

characteristic "tone." This indicates that Foucault's (2001 [1969]) notion of the "author function" can be connected to this kind of writing. In fact, the common use of pseudonyms to publish novels in different (sub)genres, quite apart from an already established oeuvre or, inversely, the reissuing of older category romance novels as apparent single titles that constitute an integral part of an established oeuvre, provides an interesting perspective for research into the relevance of notions of authorship and genre in the context of contemporary romance.[9]

4. Romance Writing as a Normative Activity

All of this indicates the crucial significance of norms to the genre of creative writing handbooks—and their even higher importance to handbooks on the writing of popular romance novels. The handbooks' readers receive hundreds of tips and guidelines on how to write successful (or at least more successful) texts. At the same time, however, the handbooks take care not to create the impression that romance writing is merely a mechanical process—an automatic repetition of invariable formulas and previous examples—since this impression would fundamentally conflict with readers' and potential authors' experience of new romance texts. On the contrary, the emphasis is placed on the way the "spontaneous" aspect of the writing process remains dominant: the suggested tips and guidelines are mainly presented as strategies that enable and even optimize the spontaneity and individuality of the writing process. Accordingly, the handbooks suggest that following the norms and constraints will contribute to the optimal realization of personal freedom and the creation of an original romance novel. Such a novel will be recognized—and hopefully published and evaluated—by reference to the principles of the genre and (at least in an ideal scenario) as a valuable continuation of its established tradition.[10]

This articulation of generic norms in such a manner that they are also perceivable as useful, easy-to-observe, and creatively stimulating constraints (without, however, losing their normative force) is based on a number of strategies. In our corpus of handbooks, three overall trends can be distinguished, which will be discussed more extensively in the following pages: (1) the continuous appeal to the aspiring author's own experience of romance reading, (2) the conception of writing as a craft and a profes-

9. This line of research is currently pursued by An Goris in her PhD project on genre and authorship in popular culture, "From Romance to Roberts and Back Again."
10. For more on the handbooks' specific discussion of originality and creativity and the role of the author's individuality in the romance writing process, see Goris forthcoming.

sion, and (3) the infrequent but strategic recourse to overtly normative language.

The first strategy ultimately allows the handbooks to present the formulated norms as being self-evident and natural within the generic framework in which romances operate—and consequently also handbooks for writing romances. These norms are therefore primarily portrayed not as extrinsic (e.g., commercial) factors, imposed upon the creative process in an authoritarian way, but rather as aids to creativity. Generally speaking, the strategy (at least on the level of explicit discourse) consists predominantly of reminding would-be writers of what they probably know but might still overlook while writing their first romance novel. The second strategy constantly reminds the reader that anybody can learn how to write a successful romance novel, provided he or she uses an appropriate handbook. This is stressed by the numerous tools that are presented, including summaries of the argumentation, points to be remembered, character questionnaires, and scenarios for interviewing potential agents. The handbook thus presents itself as a toolbox for both neophytes and more experienced writers. The third strategy would ensure that the novice writer avoids particular, often genre-specific problems or pitfalls. Here enter addresses that assume the shapes of dos and don'ts.

These strategies are simultaneously applied throughout the handbooks, and they all combine textual with institutional remarks. Together, they communicate their most basic message: avid romance readers can fairly easily become successful (i.e., respected and rich) romance authors, and without detriment to individual creativity either, if they apply the norms and constraints articulated in the manuals.

4.1. Writing as Reading

One of the handbooks' most dominant strategies is their constant appeal to the reading experience. They contend that only fervent readers of romances will be eager (and will eventually be able) to write successful romances of their own. This strong association of readership with authorship is considered essential by every handbook we analyzed, from the introductory remarks to the conclusion. Consider for example these typical remarks:

> And there is an important secret to this sort of writing that, while it can't guarantee any sort of success, will give you a far better chance of creating a romance that an editor will be interested in reading. . . . It can be summed up in four short words: *write from the heart*. It's no coincidence that many of the most successful romance writers were also—and still are—ardent romance readers themselves.   (Walker 2004: 10; emphasis in the original)

There is no substitute for reading. The fact holds true no matter what you want to write. Whether you look at reading as a way to learn the so-called rules, figure out where the publishing industry has set the bar, or scope out the competition, you need to know something about your chosen genre and the elite company of published authors you hope to join. . . . [Y]ou should read extensively before you start writing and when you're in between manuscripts. You're not writing in a vacuum, and romance is *popular* fiction, which means you need to use every tool you can to figure out what can make you popular, too. The more you read, the more you know what works.   (Wainger 2004: 20; emphasis in the original)

Good romance writers are also regular readers who love the genre. It is unprofessional and insulting to your readers to despise what you're doing, and you are not likely to be good at writing something you dislike.   (Clair and Donald 1999: 4)

This connection, which is emphasized by constant direct addresses to the reader ("you"), functions as a kind of overall contract: the genre-specific knowledge (intuitive and fragmentary as it may seem) will crucially aid the handbook reader in writing his or her own romance novel. The pitfalls of wrong expectations and harmful transgressions of the genre's limits are minimized, since readers intuitively know how to distinguish good romances from failures. Handbooks obviously do not offer entirely new ideas and constraints (or so at least they pretend) but merely formulate what the reader already knows and feels in an explicit and instructive manner. Thus the gap between nonwriters and writers is strategically reduced to a minimum. (Of course, buyers of handbooks may be well aware of this tendentious and misleading presentation of creative writing, but why should they be denied their dreams?)

    This overall strategy has a number of manifestations in the handbooks' discourse. For example, the reader is often implicitly or explicitly reminded of the fact that he or she actually already knows the constraint that the handbook is articulating at the moment. For example: "Remember, you are writing about modern women who are unlikely to break their hearts over a problem that could quickly be tackled and worked out if she just asked the man involved a couple of questions" (Walker 2004: 32). Furthermore, the handbooks often refer to—but articulate in a more systematic way—the intuitive and fragmentary genre knowledge that the aspiring author has *as a romance reader*. To this end, many elements, both general and genre specific, are explicitly defined in the handbooks. In the following quote, for example, the crucial difference between the external and internal conflict in the romance plot is clearly defined: "Internal conflicts are emotional in origin, usually resolved by the couple's agreeing to accept each other's differences, gaining in maturity, or finding that they aren't

as far apart emotionally as they first thought. . . . External conflicts arise from sources outside the character" (Parv 1997: 78–79). As an experienced romance reader, the aspiring writer is familiar with this distinction, but he or she probably has not yet conceptualized it in quite such formal terms. Presumably, it is precisely the above plain definition of this generic norm that will allow aspiring authors to apply it in their own writing.

In a similar manner, the rest of the vast but fragmentary body of knowledge available to the aspiring writer is often explicitly structured in the handbooks' articulation of generic norms. This particular strategy is most often concerned with the romance novel's plot, which is highly genre specific and determinate. As the romance's basic plot structure is among the genre's indispensable narrative conventions and thus familiar to the reader, the constraints on the plot appear to the reader as both far more self-evident and more obligatory than those concerning other aspects of the novel and the writing process.

In our research, we have found that all handbooks, with very few deviations, distinguish seven basic plot phases in the romance novel. The novel begins with the first, dramatized encounter between hero and heroine, in which both the mutual immediate attraction and the seeds of conflict between the protagonists are established. The second phase develops the conflict along both external and internal lines. During the third plot phase (the middle), both conflict and attraction further intensify (often hero and heroine engage in a full sexual relationship at this phase of the story). Toward the end of the story, four plot phases occur in rapid succession: during the crisis, the conflict bursts out, and the relationship between hero and heroine seems to be doomed; this leads to the so-called black moment, in which the protagonists are separated and believe the relationship to be irretrievably over. This belief in turn leads to insight and character growth, enabling the resolution of the conflict; and finally, the actual happy ending, in which the relationship between hero and heroine is definitively stabilized (and often, though not necessarily these days, institutionalized by an engagement and a marriage).[11] Again, the presumption is that the handbook reader is thoroughly familiar with the plot as a whole but lacks the structural overview required to construct such a plot successfully oneself. The handbooks thus focus more on systematizing and making explicit the

11. This description of the romance plot is based on our analysis of the handbooks' extensive discussions of the plot. Although most handbooks comment upon the plot throughout—as the plot cannot be completely isolated from characters, conflict, pace, or setting, for example—specific parts of the books dealing with plot and the phases here discussed are Parv 1997: 10–15, 74–94; Clair and Donald 1999: 26–45; Estrada and Gallagher 1999: 4–8, 43–64, 94–103; Vinyard 2004: 79–84, 105–9; Wainger 2004: 77–102; and Walker 2004: 30–63, 94–104, 117–31.

romance reader's experience and intuitive (generic) knowledge than on providing completely new information.

The most important consequence of constantly appealing to the reader's genre knowledge is the impression of self-evidence, of a "natural" competence, as it were, which the handbook strategically expresses. This important (though unspoken) discursive strategy allows the handbooks to formulate the constraints in a seemingly "neutral" and "descriptive" manner instead of a normative language. Accordingly, the most stringent norms are presented as statements describing inherent characteristics of the texts themselves.

This does not diminish, however, the normative force of the handbooks, which seeks to construct and promote an image of a "good" romance novel. Take, for example, the following norm: "Strong, believable, appealing characters are the most important part of your book. They are the way to grab your readers' interest, win their sympathy and get them involved in your story. All twists and turns and complicated plots in the world won't redeem a book that is peopled by stiff, wooden, one-dimensional people" (Walker 2004: 83). Two norms are formulated here: first, the romance novel's characters have to be "strong, believable, appealing," and second, they are "most important," even more so than the plot. Although these norms might be considered rather strange by someone unfamiliar with the romance genre—who will probably associate the genre instead with stereotypical plot lines, an unbelievable and unrealistic story, and stock characters—they are nonetheless presented as if they are natural. The use of the verb "to be" (as in "characters are the most important part," or "they are the way to grab your readers' interest") does not present these norms as such but "disguises" them as simple observations and representations. Ultimately, this presentational strategy suggests that the romance's norms are so natural that another conception of the genre seems impossible, at least within the (normative) framework of these handbooks.

4.2. Writing as Craft and Profession

A second important strategy the handbooks use to formulate the generic norms as constraints involves the conception of writing as a profession. Literary creation is treated as a specific kind of craft, an activity based on expertise and hard work rather than on innate talent alone. This strategy has two main facets. First, the act of writing is explicitly presented as a professional occupation geared to practical needs. For example:

> Writing is a profession like any other. If you opened a café, you'd need to spend a fortune on equipment, rental of premises, staffing and legal requirements. Yet because writing needs only a work surface, a chair and a typewriter or com-

puter, other equally important requirements are often overlooked. For example, what about bookkeeping? . . . What about marketing?   (Parv 1997: 114)

A professional attitude is the mark of the real writer. . . . Invest in your writing, even if at first you're not earning much—most jobs have a training period before you begin to earn a living. Writing is no different.   (Clair and Donald 1999: 92)

This attitude fits in with the handbooks' overall demystification of the culturally prevalent conception of writing as an infinitely creative and unbound activity. Pointing out such practicalities helps the handbooks make writing seem accessible, if not easy, to authors who are talented but above all initiated into the mechanisms of romance writing.

Second, this particular conception of writing also influences the articulation of some of the generic norms. Writing is presented as the practice of putting together a set of tools, making optimal use of all ingredients indispensable to a good romance novel. The guidebooks thus present themselves to the reader as an essential toolbox. Such tools range from explicitly commercial advice to genre-specific and detailed tips to rather technical matters. For example, Valerie Parv (1997: 97) provides her readers with a "plot chart" that they can fill in: it gives a structural overview of the plot's stages or (emotional) developments and emphasizes the connections among them. Other tools focus on particular parts of the story. Consider, for instance, how the concept of a "catchy beginning" is introduced explicitly and connected to the influence of television on readers' changing expectations and attitudes:

The opening brings up questions and shows character development. That development must continue for the opening to hook and keep the reader's interest, which is the sole *purpose* of a catchy beginning. Grab the reader while you introduce her to your character, then show the reader the reason for this character's actions. . . . The phenomenon of television in the mainstream of our lives caused reading to change, too. Today's audience must be captured within . . . ten seconds of the book's beginning. Your best chance of instantly snagging the reader's interest is to begin in the middle of the action and create a feeling of immediacy.   (Estrada and Gallagher 1999: 97–98; our emphasis)

The norm of in medias res opening formulated here appears easy to implement. Phrases such as "purpose" and "best chance" enhance this pragmatic impression.

Other constraining tools are very genre specific. A case in point would be the description of the heroine's physical appearance:

To create what editors call a well-rounded character, you need to provide both an inner and outer view. The outer view is seldom overlooked and includes the

physical description of the character—age, hair colour and style, eye colour, build. In romance novels, these details are almost obligatory. There are lots of ways to get this information across, most commonly by having the character look into a mirror or at a reflection in a shop window. In *Tasmanian Devil*, I used a portrait of my heroine's mother to 'mirror' her appearance: [the author inserts an example scene from her romance novel]. By making Evelyn [the heroine] unaware that she was every bit as beautiful as her mother, I could stick to her viewpoint and still describe her, feature by feature, in flattering terms, without making her sound vain.   (Parv 1997: 23)

Making your heroine feel real . . . overlooking her own great looks. Don't let your heroine realize she's beautiful. This tip may seem like a small point, but especially in our visually driven society, it's actually an important one. Most women are very critical of their own appearances. [*sic*] . . . Most romance heroines are quite attractive, but if all your heroine does is admire her own beauty, readers aren't able to identify with her. So, instead of working your heroine's description into the story through her point of view, let the reader see her through the hero's eyes. After all, no one can object if *he* finds her beautiful.   (Wainger 2004: 61; emphasis in the original)

As Leslie Wainger points out here, this descriptive principle originates in the reader-text interaction characteristic of the romance genre; the reader's identification with the heroine is crucial in this matter. Such norms implicitly appeal to the aspiring author's awareness as an experienced romance reader, but by stating those norms explicitly (as a "tip") and by making a distinction between "readers" and "you" (i.e., the would-be writer), the handbook creates the impression that knowledge about tools such as the one detailed here crucially aids readers in becoming writers.

Generally, articulating norms and constraints in the form of accessible, user-friendly, practical tools seems designed to suggest that writing is something that everybody can learn, that everybody can ultimately achieve the status of an established writer. From this viewpoint, the handbooks appear indispensable, because they enable the reader to move quickly from an uninitiated position toward expertise in romance writing. Indeed, titles such as *You Can Write a Romance* (Estrada and Gallagher 1999), *The Romance Writer's Handbook: How to Write Romantic Fiction and Get It Published* (Vinyard 2004), or *Writing a Romance Novel for Dummies* (Wainger 2004) invariably imply a very optimistic view on writing romances, provided one follows the instructions detailed in the book. The titles are primarily intended as attractive advertisements. They are ultimately based on the phantasmic idea that everybody has the talent to write successful romances. This strategy of presenting creative writing as a craft that all readers should in principle be able to master essentially serves self-legitimating and self-promoting ends.

A final point with regard to the handbooks' presentation of tools concerns the abundant use of brief examples and larger sample texts. In a number of cases, these examples are clearly fabricated in order to illustrate a specific argument, but on other occasions sample texts from the established romance canon (and often excerpted from the oeuvre of the author of the handbook) are used to exemplify certain writing tips or certain reading effects. This didactic technique runs through most of the handbooks, and it is particularly implemented when they discuss tools. Using example scenes effectively helps explain and illustrate a tool; it also adds to the overall impression that these tools—and by extension the whole writing process—are indeed accessible and easy. Aspirant writers not only find inspiration in the many examples offered by the handbooks for romance writing, they may even imitate and copy certain suggestions (e.g., when a list of phrases is given to describe the emotions or the body language of the main characters).

Besides contributing to the impression of writing as a practice that everybody can learn, well-chosen examples from established romances are cited time and again in order to reinforce the normative view on the genre and to demonstrate the aptness of the advice given to the reader. Their importance is of course related to the fact that romance forms a rather conventional and constrained genre, in which the modeling upon canonized texts is a major factor. Variations are thus tolerated and sometimes even valorized, but only insofar as they do not lead to generic transgressions or generically ambiguous works. Canonical authors who are quoted or referred to in our corpus of romance handbooks include Roberts, Sandra Brown, Diana Gabaldon, Penny Jordan, and Emma Darcy.

Interesting in this respect is the use made of rewriting. Quite often, "bad" examples are presented to the reader in order to demonstrate the ways a text may fail to realize its function. Subsequently, they are meticulously rewritten in accordance with the normative principles that have been discussed in the guidebook. Here is an example of a bad scene rewritten as a good one to explain to the reader the tricky aspects of writing a romance novel in the first person:

> In the first person, it is also difficult to describe the heroine in flattering terms without making her sound vain. The opening paragraph of *Ask Me No Questions* [Parv 1985] was originally written from the viewpoint of Richard Bligh, the heroine's fiancé. It sounds dreadful rewritten in the first person:
>
>> Richard Bligh gazed affectionately at me, obviously delighted by sight of my smooth, honey-coloured hair and large mahogany eyes set in almost translucent skin.
>
> Very few romances are written in the first person. . . . There are ways around

the problem illustrated above. One is to have another character observe the viewpoint character and comment on her attractiveness.

> "Do you think Richard really loves me?" I asked Sandra.

She paused, half in and half out of the bridesmaid's dress she was trying on. "Are you kidding me? I've heard the things he says to you. 'You have the smoothest, honey-coloured hair and your skin is like fragile china,'" she mimicked Richard's admiring tone.   (Parv 1997: 49–50)

Rebecca Vinyard (2004: 45–47) rewrites a bad scene to illustrate the importance of pace and the use of "sensory details" in representing an action scene:

> Here's an example of a bad action scene:
> As Mary was watching the stagecoach zigzag down Main Street, she could see the sun glint off John's golden blonde hair. He sure wasn't paying attention to his driving. In fact, he looked as if he were asleep, just as he always did when she tried to tell him about the goings-on at the quilting bee. Oh, maybe he wasn't asleep! Maybe he was in trouble. Should she wake him up? He always got so mad when she interfered with his work. Like the time she tried to clean his guns and ended up shooting a hole in his Sunday boots. Boy, was he ever fit to be tied then. But look, the coach just barely missed Reverend Smith's dog, Bowser. Bowser was such a cute mutt, so friendly and good with children. Mary decided then and there she should climb on John's horse Trigger and chase the stagecoach down.
> ZZZZZZZZZZzzzzzzzzzz.
> Okay, I doubt anybody ever wrote anything *that* bad. The point is: don't dally around. Get Mary off her butt and moving. Even if she's a complete airhead, she's not going to think about all those piddling details or stop to admire John's hair when lives are in danger. . . . Action is living in the moment. The readers should be right there with your characters as they act and react to the given situation. Let's try the scene again.
> > The stagecoach zigzagged down Main Street with John slumped over the reins. Dust rose like smoke under the horses' pounding hooves as the team careened past Mary. Reverend Smith's dog yelped as it skidded out of the way. Mary shouted for help and ran to unhitch Trigger.
> . . . There are more sensory details. Words like *zigzagged*, *slumped*, *pounding*, *careened*, *yelped*, *skittered*, *shouted*, *ran*[,] . . . these are all active and descriptive verbs. In the first example, it's hard to tell if John is in any danger at all. In the second version, it's plain that Mary has a life-threatening situation on her hands.   (Emphasis in the original)

Once again, this strategy emphasizes the essential reliance upon the reader's experience. Rather than offering an extensive close reading of textual segments, such illustration is intended to make its point in a less analytic but by no means less convincing manner. As a matter of fact,

all handbooks of creative writing believe in the guideline "showing rather than telling."

4.3. Writing as Constraining

A final strategy that the handbooks manifest in articulating generic constraints is the less frequent but still functional use of explicitly normative discourse. Overt normative language, such as the recourse to dos and don'ts, is rare in the handbooks: if used too frequently, this technique would endanger the conceptual framework described above. As we have remarked, the overall tone of the handbooks is encouraging and reader friendly; a "softened" diction prevails, which might be characterized in Greimasian terminology as "nonprohibitions" and "nonobligations." Phrases like "you might . . . ," "it is advisable . . . ," or "you shouldn't . . . too much" are first and foremost intended to appear as instances of good advice formulated by an expert to help motivated pupils. This constructive didactic practice also manifests itself in the overwhelming amount of positive suggestions. Strongly prohibitive utterances ("you definitely must not . . .") might frighten or frustrate the aspiring writer and are therefore strategically avoided as much as possible.

However, such strong, explicitly normative discourse does occur to a limited extent, especially concerning generic features that have (recently) been subject to generic evolution. The handbooks apparently feel the need to stress innovative elements and tendencies which might be hindered by the reader's possibly conservative attitude toward the genre. The author may then resort to strong language, either negative or positive. Such prohibitions and obligations sound apodictic and authoritative. They are often intended to warn the reader that his or her intuitive feeling might be wrong.

Several striking examples of this strategy occur in our corpus, often with regard to the formulation of norms concerning (sexual) violence perpetrated by the hero on the heroine. The romance genre has changed significantly in this respect; while rape, under specific conditions, was acceptable in a romance novel three decades ago, this is no longer the case today. The handbooks stress this change—which relates events in the fictional world to the ideological and moral standards prevailing in contemporary society—in an unmistakable manner:

> Forced sex or any kind of abuse is *out*. The bodice-ripper type of romance was mercifully short-lived and is not popular with modern readers. If the hero and the heroine make love, it should be because they both want to.   (Parv 1997: 39; our emphasis)

> Heroes . . . *never* rape or explicitly threaten to do so. And they *never* hit or physi-
> cally hurt her [the heroine]. Some of the male attitudes common in an earlier
> generation which were depicted or somewhat exaggerated in romances of their
> time *aren't acceptable* now.   (Clair and Donald 1999: 19; our emphasis)

Not only do the handbooks thus make explicit the change in generic norm,
by means of strong normative phrases such as "should," "never," and
"aren't acceptable," they explicitly establish the correct norm.

Another example of such a constraint related to generic evolution is the
one that governs the conflict. Here again, women's emancipation has left
visible traces in the romance novel:

> The reason the hero and the heroine can't get together—the conflict—*must be*
> strong enough to last the whole book through.   (Parv 1997: 78; our emphasis)

> Conflict *has to be* worthwhile—it *has to be* something that would really matter,
> something worth arguing over, something worth taking the risk of losing the
> love of your life for.   (Walker 2004: 32; our emphasis)

Notice again the use of strong normative language ("must," "has to").
Conflict, like (sexual) violence, is a narrative feature that has undergone
generic change over the past three decades. In older romance novels, the
conflict was often based on misunderstandings involving potential rivals in
love, but this plot device is now considered unacceptably outdated:

> Not too many years ago, simple misunderstandings were a common tool to
> create conflict, and none was more common than the Other Woman. A sample
> scenario: The heroine would call the hero while he was away, and the Other
> Woman, who was really only his assistant, would answer the phone. . . . While
> the hero was otherwise engaged and didn't know the heroine had even called,
> the Other Woman would imply all sorts of intimacies were going on and that he
> was right there and unwilling to waste time talking to the heroine. The heroine,
> instead of reaming the hero out the next time she saw him and asking just what
> game he was playing, immediately and without a word packed a suitcase . . .
> and ran off to the Outback or somewhere else suitably remote. Or she simply
> refused to talk to the hero, and the two of them shared smoldering looks and
> angry remarks but no actual conversation, because if they'd actually talked, the
> truth would come out and the book would have been over.
>   I'm glad to say that those days are over. Neither heroines nor readers are sat-
> isfied with such transparent plotting and meatless conflicts. A modern heroine,
> even in a historical romance, has too much backbone to avoid confrontation.
> Current readers are looking for much more convincing and interesting plotting,
> so steer clear of simple misunderstandings.   (Wainger 2004: 95)

Wainger explicitly invokes the changed generic constraint ("the Other
Woman") here, expresses her dislike for it ("glad those days are over"), and

emphasizes that it is out-of-date ("modern heroine," "current readers") and to be avoided now ("steer clear"). Nearly all handbooks examined in our study refer to the changed nature of the conflict and the obsoleteness of conflicts based on misunderstanding and lack of communication.[12] This indicates both that the handbook authors assume the reader has intimate knowledge of the genre's (relatively recent) past and that this particular change occupies a key position among generic constraints.

We indeed noticed that handbooks try to account for recent innovations in the genre. Consider the following remarks regarding innovative generic characterization:

> Gone are the days when the heroine waited around for Mr. Right to rescue her. She's too involved in a real life to keep searching for some guy to make her complete. . . . She's fair, but unwilling to take less than her share. She's assertive but not aggressive. And she's not afraid of being single and living alone.   (Estrada and Gallagher 1999: 78)

> Twenty-five years ago . . . a wide gap usually existed between him [the hero] and the heroine in every way—age-wise, financially, and in career and social position. Throughout the book, he kept her in one-down position, even though she did her best to combat him, and he never let on that she was getting him. At the very end, he confessed his feelings for her and let her know how much she mattered to him. These days . . . heroes have more range.   (Wainger 2004: 68)

In this way, the handbooks present themselves as being up-to-date ("gone are the days," "these days"); they articulate the norms and constraints of today's romance genre. The heroine is no longer waiting passively and patiently for a hero who will rescue her from her lethargic existence and introduce her to real life and passion. On the contrary, she leads an active and independent life, professionally as well as in her personal capacity; she freely takes the initiative and seems quite happy to remain single (but this, needless to say, does not prevent her from falling in love with the future hero). As the romance novel has become in recent years a much more dynamic and evolving genre, handbooks have to be rewritten and reissued accordingly (apart from obvious commercial reasons).

5. Writing and Institution

However, the strongest constraints have to do not with the proper writing activity itself but with institutional factors in romance writing and

---

12. See Parv 1997: 75; Clair and Donald 1999: 30; Walker 2004: 34. For more on the concept and the role of misunderstanding in older romance novels, see Wendell and Tan 2009: 100–102.

publishing. Handbooks, and their readers, are not interested in how to write a romance merely for one's personal pleasure, as a kind of hobby; creative success is linked very closely with getting published and sold. To this end, the handbooks' chapters on writing romances are strategically framed within an institutional context that will ultimately bestow on the new writer the public recognition he or she deserves. Consequently, a lot of attention is paid to the choice of the publisher and the series that will be approached after the manuscript has been finished. This institutional context is stressed right from the outset:

> These days there are dozens of romance imprints (branded lines of books such as Silhouette Desire or Harlequin Intrigue) catering to different readerships. Read them all until you find an imprint you feel comfortable with. This is probably the line you should initially try writing for.   (Parv 1997: 3)

> Having studied basic fiction techniques, decide what kind of book you want to write. A short category romance of about 55,000 words? A longer category book, up to 75,000 or 85,000 words? Or a 100,000–word single title romance for a mainstream publisher?   (Clair and Donald 1999: 5)

> As you will have seen from your study of various lines in romance, it's best to try to target your romance to a specific line when you start writing, rather than just writing a story and then trying to make it fit a certain category. . . . So you need to know *before you submit* that you are writing the sort of romance that the editor is looking for in her particular line. . . . If you start writing before you've considered exactly which line you're aiming for, then you could be wasting a lot of time.   (Walker 2004: 7; emphasis in the original)

> The single most important decision you can make, after you've decided to be a romance writer in the first place, is what kind of romance you want to write. Despite what sceptics, non-romance readers and plain old killjoys believe, romances are *not* all the same. Romances account for about 50 percent of all mass market paperback fiction sales, and the genre has made strong inroads into the hardcover and trade paperback markets in the last few years. . . . In order to choose what to write, you need to know what kinds of romances publishers are releasing, who's reading them and where your own interests and strengths lie.   (Wainger 2004: 17)

The handbooks' emphasis on targeting a "line" so early in the writing process derives from the fact that highly line-specific constraints pertain not only to so-called external factors, such as format or length (see below), but often to the theme and the tone of a romance. The constraints regarding the portrayal of sexuality, which varies enormously within the romance genre, are exemplary in this matter. "Each romance line you write for will have varying amounts of love scenes and a varying degree of explicitness

in those scenes. . . . The line itself tells you how much physical love you need to fulfil that story. The readers who pick up those books expect a certain amount of lovemaking in whatever line they read" (Estrada and Gallagher 1999: 100–101). Different lines and subgenres each have their norms and constraints regarding the forms and manifestations of sexuality that are considered acceptable or unacceptable. Such constraints not only bear on the possible occurrence (or the required avoidance) of certain "love" scenes. They also govern the stylistic and structural features of such scenes: the phase of the story in which a certain sexual scene is considered appropriate, the construction of the climax, the connection (or lack thereof) between sex and ideas about love (before or after the sexual act, for example), and so forth. Constraints also govern the appropriate language whereby to describe the sexual encounter; certain lines are far more or less "explicit" than others in this regard. Generally, slang and vulgar language are to be avoided, unless the specific (erotic) subgenre or line requires them. Some handbooks even provide rather extensive lists of appropriate and inappropriate phrases that relate to sexuality.

Furthermore, the handbooks provide extensive information about the ways the final manuscript has to be prepared for publication; in some cases, this type of information comprises even half of the handbook.[13] The problems mentioned (and accordingly "solved") range from practical details to all kinds of general questions. For example, all handbooks articulate strong norms regarding manuscript formatting—spacing, margins, fonts, page headers, word count, chapter breaks, page numbers, and the like. For example:

> First of all, you need to make sure that your manuscript is professionally prepared and presented. These are the basic things you need to remember: Make sure that your manuscript is typed or word-processed as clearly and as cleanly as possible. . . . Use plain white, good quality A4 paper. . . . Margins should be at least 25mm (1 inch) on all sides. . . . Only print on one side of the paper. Do not staple or bind the manuscript in any way. Double space the lines. Use a readable font in a reasonable size, for example Times New Roman, Courier, or Courier New in 12 point type. Don't use fancy script styles. . . . Number your pages consistently throughout, putting them in the same place—usually the centre of the bottom line of the page. Use a header at the top of every page

13. Vinyard's *The Romance Writer's Handbook* (2004) goes farthest in this regard: Vinyard devotes five of her book's seven parts (or thirty of its fifty chapters) to institutional matters that concern the actual writing process. Rita C. Estrada and Rita Gallagher also devote nearly half (four out of eleven chapters) of their *You Can Write a Romance* (1999) to aspects other than actually writing a manuscript. Wainger, finally, deals with these questions in two of her five parts (or six out of eighteen chapters) in *Writing a Romance Novel for Dummies* (2004).

except for the title page. Your header should include your book's title and your name.   (Walker 2004: 134)

The recourse to explicit normative language ("need to," "use," "do not," "don't") indicates the strength of these norms. Besides providing very practical and detailed advice to the novice author, these norms are also in line with the conception of writing as a profession. Living up to these "rules" is indeed often overtly related to a professional attitude:

> What *is* a big deal is that you want your submission to look professional. So let's take it from the top and go over these rules [of manuscript formatting].   (Vinyard 2004: 150; emphasis in the original)

> Certain standards of manuscript preparation will show your professionalism and make your work easier to read.   (Estrada and Gallagher 1999: 36)

It is thus no coincidence that this "external" frame justifies virtually all literary constraints that are formulated; in order to get a manuscript published (which is, after all, the ultimate ideal of the entire writing process), it is indispensable to take into account every piece of advice formulated and illustrated in the manual.

The writing activity itself is also presented in relation to this public, institutionally defined dimension. Not only are the expectations of readers and publishers stressed time and again; writing is seen as a complex process, which bears a strong similarity to the tradition of public speaking. This resemblance is clearly observable in how the chapters are structured. The overall structure nearly always corresponds to what traditional rhetoric proposes for public address. Starting from the mere association of ideas and motives (the rhetorical phase of *inventio*), the writing process transforms these vague and still unstructured elements into a coherent text (*dispositio*), which is subsequently finalized (*elocutio* and *narratio*) and presented to the public (*pronuntiatio*). In this way, writing romances is envisaged as a kind of process whose ultimate goal is the printed text.

In some of the handbooks, this principle is also reflected in the table of contents. For example, the seven parts of Vinyard's *The Romance Writer's Handbook* (2004) are roughly based on the traditional rhetorical structure. Her handbook starts with "Part 1: For Beginners" (which includes "Chapter 2: The Idea Garden" and "Chapter 3: Stuck in the Starting Gate"). "Part 2: Elements of Romance Storytelling" structures these "ideas" into a coherent text (e.g., "Chapter 14: "Plotting: Your Way" and "Chapter 19: "Finding Your Voice"). "Part 3: Support Networks" can still be considered part of the "disposition" phase, as it addresses the value of using fellow aspirant writers as critique partners during the writing process and the

potential benefits of entering chapters or completed manuscripts into contests to win a publication contract. "Part 4: Submitting Manuscripts" discusses the finalizing of the text, while "Part 5: Inspiration, Commiseration, and Information," "Part 6: Advice from Bestselling Authors," and "Part 7: Resources for Authors" deal with presenting the text to the public and the subsequent status of being an author.

6. Conclusion

This article has shown how the notions of norms and constraints may be usefully extended to large areas of literary studies. Instead of restricting the concept of constraints to a very particular, avant-garde literary practice (as done in the Oulipo tradition), it would help to study the various kinds and aspects of constraints (their nature; their function; their concrete realization on the textual surface; their legitimation by authors, publishers, readers, and critics) found in other corpora as well. In this perspective, the analysis of handbooks for creative writing proves very promising.

   Yet in order to substantiate and to refine our claims about the relevance of such "normative narratology," further research is definitely needed. On the one hand, it is necessary to confront the handbooks' discourse on romance writing with the actual romance practice. Such research will reveal to what extent the norms and constraints outlined in handbooks accord with the creative romance writing itself. There may indeed be significant differences between the normative approach and the realization of the norms concerned. As a matter of fact, the growing "literary" prestige of the romance genre probably involves a stronger (tolerated and in some instances even welcomed) deviation from the stringent norms and formulaic structure that defined the genre in earlier days (and still continues to define the category romance lines).

   On the other hand, it would be equally interesting to compare the tradition of handbooks for romance writing with other guidebooks for creative writing. Such a transgeneric approach would lay bare certain convergences and general assumptions about writing and the constraints involved in that practice. At the same time, this approach would reveal the substantial differences that separate various literary genres (e.g., novels, detective fiction, children's literature) and subgenres (in our case, for instance, historical as against erotic romances).

   Complementary to this synchronic corpus analysis, a more historical investigation is needed as well. In fact, numerous handbooks for writing romances are published every year; in some cases, they are presented as "new," fundamentally reworked editions of earlier volumes, in other cases

as entirely new handbooks (though often written by the same established authors). This is due partly to commercial reasons (constantly forcing readers to buy new editions and similar new works), partly to recent substantial evolutions within the genre of romance writing itself. Moreover, nowadays most aspirant writers do not start their careers by writing full-scale romance novels and sending them to a literary agent. Instead, it has become a common procedure to write some shorter stories and have them published, read, and evaluated via the Internet. This initial stage contributes to the author's fame as a competent writer who might be encouraged to produce more ambitious texts. It goes without saying that the new medium of the Internet will fundamentally change the writing process of popular literature. Future handbooks of creative writing will undoubtedly include several chapters for Internet authors, and even handbooks specializing in Internet literature will probably appear shortly.

Therefore the foregoing pages are merely intended as a *captatio benevolentiae*, a plea for further research into the complexity of our contemporary popular literary culture.

References

Baetens, Jan
    1985 *L'éthique de la contrainte* (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters).
    2005 *Romans à contraintes* (Amsterdam: Rodopi).
Cawelti, John
    1976 *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
Clair, Daphne, and Robyn Donald
    1999 Writing Romance Fiction (London: A. and C. Black).
De Geest, Dirk
    1996 Literatuur als systeem, literatuur als vertoog. Bouwstenen voor een functionalistische benadering van literaire verschijnselen (Literature as System, Literature as Discourse: Elements for a Functionalist Approach to Literary Phenomena) (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters).
    1997 "Systems Theory and Discursivity," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue canadienne de littérature comparée* 24: 161–75.
De Geest, Dirk, and Hendrik van Gorp
    1999 "Literary Genres as Prototypes: A Systemic Point of View," *European Journal of English Studies* 3: 33–50.
Estrada, Rita C., and Rita Gallagher
    1999 *You Can Write a Romance* (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books).
Even-Zohar, Itamar
    1990 "Polysystem Studies." Special issue, *Poetics Today* 11: 1–270.
Flesch, Juliet
    2004 *From Australia with Love: A History of Modern Australian Popular Romance Novels* (Perth: Curtin University Books).
Foucault, Michel
    1971 *L'ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard).

2001 [1969] "What Is an Author?" translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch, 1622–36 (London: Norton).

2002 [1969] *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (translation of *L'archéologie du savoir*), translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge).

Frantz, Sarah, and Eric Selinger
forthcoming *New Perspectives on Popular Romance Fiction* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland).

Goade, Sally, ed.
2007 *Empowerment versus Oppression: Twenty First Century Views of Popular Romance Novels* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars).

Goris, An
2009 "Romance the World Over," in *Global Cultures*, edited by Frank Salamone, 59–72 (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars).

forthcoming "Loving by the Book: Voice and Romance Authorship," in *New Perspectives on Popular Romance Fiction*, edited by Sarah Frantz and Eric Selinger (Jefferson, NC: McFarland).

Greimas, A. J., and J. Courtés
1982 *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).

Grescoe, Paul
1996 *The Merchants of Venus: Inside Harlequin and the Empire of Romance* (Vancouver: Raincoast).

Krentz, Jayne Ann, ed.
1992 *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).

Mathews, Harry, and Alastair Brotchie, eds.
1998 *Oulipo Compendium* (London: Atlas).

McAleer, Joseph
1999 *Passion's Fortune: The Story of Mills and Boon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Modleski, Tania
1982 *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (Hamden, CT: Archon).

Motte, Warren F., ed.
1986 *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press).

Mussell, Kay, ed.
1997 "Where's Love Gone? Transformations in the Romance Genre." Special issue, *Paradoxa: Studies in World Literary Genres* 3 (1–2): 1–303.

Parv, Valerie
1985 *Ask Me No Questions* (London: Mills and Boon).

1997 *The Art of Romance Writing: How to Create, Write, and Sell Your Contemporary Romance Novel* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin).

Radway, Janice A.
1984 *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press).

Regis, Pamela
2003 *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).

Romance Writers of America
2009 "About the Romance Genre," The Romance Genre, www.rwanational.org/cs/the_romance_genre (accessed July 9, 2009).

Vinyard, Rebecca
2004 *The Romance Writer's Handbook: How to Write Romantic Fiction and Get It Published* (Waukesha, WI: Writer Books).

Wainger, Leslie
    2004 *Writing a Romance Novel for Dummies* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley).
Walker, Kate
    2004 *Kate Walker's Twelve–Point Guide to Writing Romance* (Somerset, UK: Studymates).
Wendell, Sarah, and Candy Tan
    2009 *Beyond Heaving Bosoms: The Smart Bitches' Guide to Romance Novels* (London: Fireside).