



# Historical Romance Fiction

*Lisa Fletcher*

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## **Historical Romance Fiction** Lisa Fletcher

The first book-length study of romance novels to focus on issues of sexuality rather than gender, *Historical Romance Fiction* moves the ongoing debate about the value and appeal of heterosexual romance onto new ground, testing the claims of cutting-edge critical theorists on everything from popular classics by Georgette Heyer, to recent 'bodice rippers,' to historical fiction by John Fowles and A.S. Byatt. Beginning with her nomination of 'I love you' as the romance novel's defining speech act, Lisa Fletcher engages closely with speech-act theory and recent studies of performativity. The range of texts serves to illustrate Fletcher's definition of historical romance as a fictional mode dependent on the force and familiarity of the speech act, 'I love you', and permits Fletcher to provide a detailed account of the genre's history and development in both its popular and 'literary' manifestations. Written from a feminist and anti-homophobic perspective, Fletcher's subtle arguments about the romantic speech act serve to demonstrate the genre's dependence on repetition ('Romance can only quote') and the shaky ground on which the romance's heterosexual premise rests. Her exploration of the subgenre of cross-dressing novels is especially revealing in this regard. With its deft mix of theoretical arguments and suggestive close readings, Fletcher's book will appeal to specialists in genre, speech act and performativity theory, and gender studies.

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