

It's Only a Paper Moon

Romance novels have captured one-quarter of the paperback market. An estimated 20 million readers spend \$200 million each year on these books, which are published at the rate of 100 titles a month. Among the *Updikes and Bellows* of the genre are Kathleen Woodiwiss ("The Flame and the Flower"), Rebecca Brandewyne ("No Gentle Love"), Danielle Steel ("A Perfect Stranger"). Recently more than 350 romance novelists and their fans, many of them aspiring writers, met at the St. Regis Hotel in New York City for the first Romantic Book Lovers' Conference. To cover the event, NEWSWEEK assigned Assistant Editor Elsie Washington, herself a romantic novelist writing as Rosalind Welles. Washington went in the guise of her own heroine, Kathy Goodwin, a London correspondent for the weekly American magazine *Upbeat*. Goodwin's report:

I delicately elbowed my way through the crowd and found myself heart-shaped face to heart-shaped face with Rosemary Rogers, one of romance fiction's superstars. Dark, lustrous waves fell about her shoulders and she wore a frilly, gossamer dress. Rogers first sizzled her way to fame in 1974 with the tempestuous "Sweet Savage Love." At her side, dressed in a sober, well-tailored suit, with white shirt, silk tie and adorable horn-rimmed glasses, was "Jennifer Wilde," otherwise known as Tom Huff, a Texan who wrote other genre adventures before striking it rich in 1976 with "Love's Tender Fury." Rosemary and Jennifer chatted easily about their work. "But why do your heroines always

Rogers, Huff: Love match

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have such big boobs?" Rosemary chided, looking down ruefully at her less than ample bust. Jennifer gently avoided the issue, insisting that the few men who are successful in the genre "know more about romance than women do and are more objective."

At the opening ceremony I recognized Rebecca Brandewyne because she looks exactly like the honey-blonde heroines on her book jackets. Kathryn Falk, editor of the bimonthly *Romantic Times*, welcomed us in a girlish voice that shimmered with enthusiasm. Falk looked like a heroine herself in a tantalizing silk fuchsia frock. "We have some surprises for you," she gushed, getting the Romantic Lottery under way. First prize was dinner with Prince Khedker of Khed Anjanvel, India, at New York City's La Petite Marmite Restaurant that very night. My pulse raced alarmingly as the darkly handsome prince strode masterfully to the stage. His dark-gray slacks were topped with a double-breasted navy blazer on which the pocket was heavily encrusted with a coat of arms. The lucky winner was Audrey Johnson, a sixtyish author of six romances, from Webster, N.Y. "I'm just overwhelmed," she said breathlessly. "But what will I ever talk to him about?" Wardrobe was no problem, for she was beautifully attired in a beige linen suit. Other prizes included a replica of Lady Diana's engagement ring. The luncheon menu, written in French, *naturellement*, featured *coq d'Inde*, *haricots verts amoureux*, sherbet with *fruits passionnés* and *café d'extase*. The meal was blissfully consummated.

Afterward, writers and readers attended seminars on such subjects as How to Manage Your Wife's Romance Writing Career (for "love's leading husbands") and The Four S's in Historical Romance—Sex, Silk, Swords and Swash. I sat in on a session on Improving Your Writing of Romance, moderated by Vivian Stephens, who was a vision in a spring silk, Chinese-inspired dress. A former senior editor of Dell's *Candlelight Romances*, Vivian is highly regarded in the industry for introducing ethnic stories and the racy *Ecstasy Romances*, which permit super-sensuous premarital affairs. From what I gathered, nearly every paperback house has jumped on Vivian's risqué bandwagon. Silhouette, produced by Pocket Books, plans a line called *Desire*, which will give insatiable readers "192 pages of compressed sensuality" bound in hot red covers. Signet-New American Library will offer "provocative situations" between contemporary men and women under the banner *Rapture*.



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Brandewyne: Off the jacket



I confess that some of the tip sheets handed out to aspiring writers made the blood rush to my cheeks. My own life suddenly seemed sheltered and pale. I remembered Lloyd Craig, whom I met in "Entwined Destinies" (Dell, 1980): *Lloyd held her foot and raised it to his lips. A broken moan escaped Kathy's parted lips; as a pulsing shock coursed through her body. His hard, firm mouth seared her instep and moved to the soft flesh beneath her ankle.*

Some of the new trends are perfectly fine. One seminar moderator said that the heroine should be "spunky without compromising her femininity, independent, job-oriented and no longer simpering." Vivian Stephens said that the heroes in her new North American line for Harlequin Books can have "love handles," be baldish and may even cry. Above all, I learned that the editors are desperate for new writers to keep up with the demand. I've already been the heroine of a romance—perhaps now I can write one! And, dearest reader, so might you.