

# In Defense of Romance: A Heartfelt Matter

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Christian romance writers receive their share of persecution, that's for sure. Since I've written 14 novels for Heartsong Presents, 7 romantic novellas, and a women's fiction series, entitled the "Faded Photographs Series" (Barbour Publishing), I wear the label "romance writer" myself. So what "persecution" am I referring to?

Years ago, I attended a major Christian writers conference, and I overheard a well-known author condemn Christian romance as not being "real" literature. I felt all eyes turn to me as my cheeks burned with embarrassment. Everyone at that conference knew I was a "romance writer" as my novels were for sale in the lobby of the building. And hearing such discouragement from another published author caused me to feel unworthy and self-conscious. Later, I decided this gentleman was simply behaving like a literary snob - and not very Christ-like, I might add.

Christian romance is literature...and it sells. Christian romance touches lives and, by God's Holy Spirit, it can change hearts. Romance is about relationships. Conversely, our interactions with others, with friends, family, spouses, are the very essence of our beings. In addition, romance is the core of our salvation; from the beginning of time, God has courted mankind, wooing, pleading, persuading until the decision is made. "Yes, Lord, I accept You..."

However, because romance is frowned upon in many elitist writing circles and by a few CBA editors, as well as some pastors, it would be easy for a writer to feel like her work wasn't good enough to be considered "literature." I have felt that way. But after praying, and seeking the Lord's direction for my work, He has shown me over and over again that the stories I write play an important part in furthering His will. My novels influence, and affect readers. I don't mean to sound prideful or haughty. I only mean to convey the responsibility I feel towards my writing. After all, the written word is a powerful tool - and it's one God can and does use!

Thankfully, I am not alone in taking the Christian romance genre seriously. Here's what two other published authors have to say about romantic fiction in general.

"I believe Christian authors are responsible for the thoughts and emotions we evoke in our readers, but keep in mind that there are people whose minds pervert even the most sacred or honorable words or intentions. I don't think we bear responsibility for that.

"Because the Christian romance genre has evolved from secular romance, I think we walk a very fine line in portraying romance the way God intended it. The formula for secular romance is so incredibly unrealistic and skewed from the way God ordained romantic love to be. Having said that, I will also say that I gobbled up Janette Oke's novels as a young bride and I truly believe her portrayals of romantic love made my marriage even better. I have even recommended romance novels to young mothers who are almost too tired to be the wives their husbands need when they come home. I have recommended that young mothers put the children down for a nap and curl up with a Christian romance before their husbands come home. It can relax them and put them in a romantic mood. I truly think I am a better wife and mother today because of Janette Oke's books. I think there is very definitely a place for stories that portray the beautiful love relationship between a man, a woman, and their God."

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Deborah Raney

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"God created love - He created Adam and Eve to procreate and to share their lives together. Part of that relationship, designed by God, was to feel that love and to use that love for growth, healing, compassion, kindness, and all the gifts of the spirit. Next, God gave each of us (Christian writers) a talent, obviously, since many of us are published and have received reader mail to tell us how our stories have touched their hearts. Reading missionary pamphlets leaves me cold. That wasn't the gift of the spirit the Lord gave me. He gave me stories to tell, like His parables, that teach lessons of forgiveness and compassion and love - and all stories are woven together to show us how the love of God stands over and above all earthly love. I do not feel compelled to question my gift or my writing career. I believe totally that God has blessed my work. He has touched and validated my work with His message and grace."

Gail Gaymer Martin

[www.gailmartin.com](http://www.gailmartin.com)

I think these ladies have adequately summed up what I, too, feel in my heart. This past summer, I received a letter from a reader thanking me for writing THE SUMMER GIRL (Heartsong Presents). This reader wrote: "Thank you for a beautiful story, filled with God's love! I am a 'senior' and read a lot. It helps much to chase away lonesomeness (not loneliness, because I know God is always with me)."

Christian romance - it's not just mind candy. It's hope and encouragement, as well as wholesome entertainment.

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