

Low (Wo)man on the Totem Pole

by Jeanne Laws

When I told my mother that I was going to write a romance novel, she greeted the news with an uncomfortable silence.

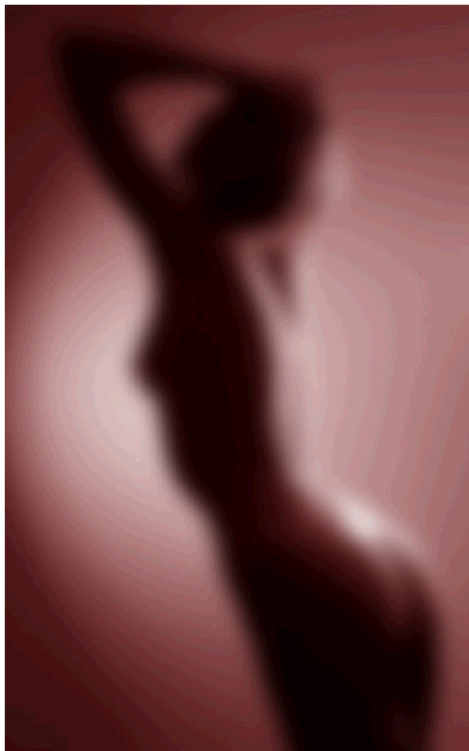
Ever since I discovered Barbara Cartland at the age of thirteen, Mom has suffered through my reading of “those dirty books.” Mortified, she had even gone so far as to sew a book cover for me so that people would not know the truth about her oldest daughter. And now I was going to write one. Her disappointment complete, she had only one request: “Make sure you use a pen name. I don’t want my friends to see your name on one of *those* books.”

I know that I’m not alone. Like many romance writers, I now not only have to justify reading the genre, but also explain to family and friends why I am wasting my talent writing “smut.” It doesn’t matter that profits from romance novels carry the publishing industry. To quote Rodney Dangerfield, “[We] just can’t get no respect!”

Over the years, I have come to a place where I don’t make excuses for the way I live my life. Be it my curly hair, my Birkenstock® sandals, or what I write. Life is too short to write what would make my mom happy—I write what I like and

what I feel comfortable with. Right now that means I’m writing erotic romance. Yes, I said it—the taboo word to “real” romance writers—and I’ll say it again. I write erotic romances.

I was so happy when I finally found RWA: a group of writers, supporting each other in their writing goals. It was a place where writing romance was actually cel-



ebrated, a warm and sharing community for us all—all, it seems, except erotic romance writers.

You have only to look so far as the RWR or the RWA email loops to see evidence of erotic romance bashing within our community. Most disturbing to me is the fact that this ridicule is not limited to the books, but has extended to include the writers themselves. The

recent messiness with regards to Graphical Standards within RWA has only served to encourage people to be more outspoken in their scorn.

I understand that everyone has his or her own reading preference. I certainly do not read all sub-genres under the heading “romance.” But neither do I make judgments about the people who write them, nor the companies who publish them. We are all trying to produce stories that entertain, heroines who grow, and heroes who are their match. We struggle to create compelling goals, motivations, and conflicts. (And, no, the goal in an erotic romance is *not* to have a lot of sex. Sex without GMC is pornography.) We try to show, not tell, and to take the reader away from real life for the time it takes to weave our spell.

Romance in general has long ranked low on the Literary Totem Pole. It is sad to me that among writers of the very genre that has been so unfairly ridiculed, there seems to be a need polarize and disrespect each other. Erotic romance has definitely become low man on the totem pole of romance.

And what, exactly, is wrong with erotic romance in the first place? The sex is more explicitly described than in non-erotic romances. Okay. So what? I’m of the opinion that, if you don’t want to read it, you shouldn’t open the book. But as writers especially, we should



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not put ourselves in the position of dictating what others can read, write or publish.

No one can *make* you respect erotic romance writers, but you've got to respect the readers. They are the ones who will be spending their hard earned money on our books. And as we all know, the reading demographic is changing. Readers are younger and are looking for something other than "their mother's romance novel."

Like it or not, erotic romance is growing. There are new lines at Harlequin, Tor, Kensington and Avon. And still, most erotic romances are e-published, one of the fastest growing sectors in the publishing business.

Is the erotic romance boom a fad? I don't think so, but it's possible. The same can be said of chick lit, inspirational and paranormal. Only time will tell.

In the meantime, maybe someone needs to be on the bottom of the totem pole. At least other romance writers have something to say to their mothers: "Hey, Ma, at least I'm not writing *erotic* romance." That won't work with my mom, so for now she's going to have to be content with the fact that it's not my real name on this article.

Jeanne Laws is the pseudonym of a curly haired, Birkenstock® wearing, mother of three. She is a member of LARA, FF&P, RWAOnline and Passionate Ink and lives in Southern California. She reads and writes paranormal erotic romance, among other things, and is currently working on her second novel. Please visit her website at www.jeannelaws.com.



Recommended Reading: Erotic Romance

by Jeanne Laws

[Editor's Note: Beginning writers are often advised to actually *read* the sort of books they want to write. With that in mind, I'd like to supplement every article on a particular romance subgenre with a list of recommended books. Feel free to contact me with your suggestions for articles and related reading lists. And thank you, Jeanne Laws, for kicking off this new feature!]

To Challenge the Dragon (shapeshifter)
Shelly Laurenston
www.triskelionpublishing.com

The Possession (bondage)
Jaid Black
www.ellorascave.com

Fantasy Fix (vampire)
Christine Warren
www.ellorascave.com

Whipped Cream & Handcuffs (quickie)
Shiloh Walker
www.ellorascave.com

Madam Charlie (historical)
Sahara Kelly
www.ellorascave.com

The Lady's Tutor (historical)
Robin Schone
Kensington

A Fine Work of Art (contemporary)
Shelby Reed
www.ellorascave.com

Beyond Innocence (historical)
Emma Holly
Jove Books