The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms

roman à clef: A **novel** that **represents** real people in the guise of novelistic **characters** bearing fictional names. Usually the author makes the identities of the characters readily apparent, at least to contemporary readers. This is particularly true when the novelist has written a *roman à clef* to **satirize** an individual or individuals, or some associated event.

EXAMPLES: Lady Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon* (1816) is a *roman à clef* about the poet George Gordon, Lord Byron, thinly disguised as the character Ruthven Glenarven. In Mary Shelley's **apocalyptic** novel *The Last Man* (1826), the characters of Adrian, Earl of Windsor, and Lord Raymond are portraits of Percy Bysshe Shelley (Mary Shelley's husband) and Byron, respectively. Many of the minor characters in *The Last Man* have also been linked to real people, such as the politician Ryland, widely acknowledged to be a **caricature** of popular journalist and editor William Cobbett. In Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (1928), real people such as D. H. Lawrence and critic Middleton Murry are barely disguised under thin fictional veneers.

In the novel *Primary Colors* (1996), the author Joe Klein (who covered the 1992 presidential race as a *Newsweek* correspondent and who was anonymous at the time of publication) essentially told the story of Bill Clinton's first campaign for the White House. Clinton is portrayed via a character named Jack Stanton; Orlando Ozio is former New York governor Mario Cuomo. A character named Henry Burton, though an African American, is recognizable as the ever-adaptable George Stephanopoulos, and Clinton's campaign director, James Carville, is Richard Jemmons — "a hyperactive redneck from outer space."

romance: A term that has been used at different times to refer to a variety of fictional works involving some combination of the following: high adventure, thwarted love, mysterious circumstances, arduous quests, and improbable triumphs. Although some scholars during and since the **Renaissance** have maintained that romances were first written in ancient Greece (Homer's *The Odyssey* [c. 850 B.C.] has been called a prototypical romance), most literary historians maintain that the romance originated in twelfth-century France. The term *romance* derives from the French word *roman* and was first used exclusively to refer to **medieval romances** (sometimes called *chivalric romances*) written in French and composed in verse. These **narratives** were concerned with knightly adventure, **courtly love**, and chivalric ideals. By the seventeenth century, the term was used to refer to any medieval romance, whether in verse or prose and regardless of country of origin.

Unlike the **epic**, a narrative form that exalts the struggles associated with a heroic era of tribal warfare, the romance pertains to a courtly era associated with chivalry. Romances represent the supernatural as characteristic of this world rather than of the gods or their will. They also tend to have what we would describe as a psychological interest or component; the landscapes of romance are often outward manifestations of the **hero's** or

heroine's inner state. Thus, a despairing character is likely to stumble into a cave, and temptation is likely to be encountered in a deep forest rather than on a broad, sunny plain. The *quest romance* was adapted and internalized by **Romantic** and **Victorian Period** poets, who in works like Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Alastor" (1816), John Keats's "La belle dame sans merci" (1820), and Robert Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (1855) turned the search for the Grail (or Girl) common in medieval and Renaissance romances into an often frustrated psychological quest for some ideal, forbidden, lost, or otherwise unreachable state or condition.

The meaning of *romance* broadened considerably over time, especially in the twentieth century. The term has been used to refer to any fictional work that features the supernatural, some sort of quest or "impossible dream," intense love, and unusual subjects and events. Today, *romance* is usually understood to refer to a fictional account of passionate love prevailing against social, economic, or psychological odds, but any **plot** that revolves around love can now be characterized as a romance. (*Romance* may even be used as a synonym for love, as in the sentence "Our romance had to end.") Love stories whose **characters**, situations, or events are given a historical **setting** are often referred to as *historical romances*. When romance **conventions** are overlaid, as is often the case, with the emotionally and supernaturally charged features of **Gothic** literature, the resulting works may be called *Gothic romances*. In a further broadening of this term's meaning, *romance* has been recently used to signify any work whose author rejects **realistic** verisimilitude in favor of fanciful or **fantastic depictions.**

Romance is also used in the phrase *Romance languages*. The five principal Romance languages, all of which are derived primarily from the Roman language Latin, are French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, and Spanish.

FURTHER EXAMPLES: Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung's *Le roman de la rose* (*The Romance of the Rose*) (c. 1230, c. 1270) and Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596) are romances in the original sense of the term, which, with varying levels of laxity and generality, may be used to describe Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), William Morris's poem "Rapunzel" (1858), Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* (1936), Erich Segal's *Love Story* (1970), any Harlequin paperback, Danielle Steele's books, and films like *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993) and *Notting Hill* (1999). The latter two works are examples of a hybrid **genre**, the **romantic comedy.**

romantic comedy: See **comedy.**

romantic irony: See **irony.**

romanticism: Broadly speaking, a term applicable to philosophy, politics, and the arts in general. Even when specifically applied to literature,