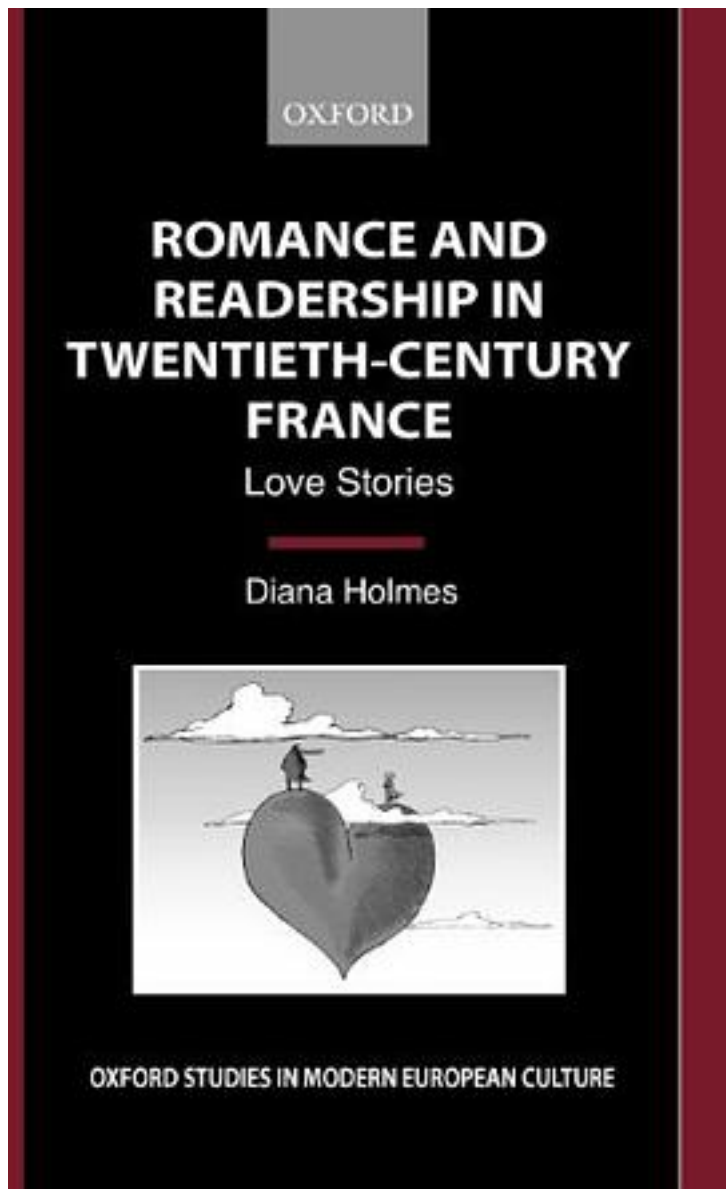


# Romance and Readership in Twentieth-Century France



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Romance in modern times is the most widely read yet the most critically despised of genres. Associated almost entirely with women, as readers and as writers, its popularity has been argued by gender traditionalists to confirm women's innate sentimentality, while feminist critics have often condemned the genre as a dangerous opiate for the female masses. This study adopts the more positive perspective of critics such as Janice Radway, and takes seriously the pleasure that women readers consistently seem to find in romance. Drawing on the social constructionist feminism of Simone de Beauvoir, the psychoanalytical theories of Jessica Benjamin, and a range of social theorists from Bourdieu to Zygmunt Bauman, the book uncovers the history of romantic fiction in France from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first century, and explores its place in women's lives and imaginations. Romance is not defined - as it usually is - solely in terms of its mass-market form. Rather, the history of women's popular fiction is traced in its full context, as one dimension of a literary story that encompasses the mainstream or 'middlebrow' as well as 'high' culture. Thus this study ranges from the formula romance (from the pious but popular Delly to global brand Harlequin), through 'middlebrow' bestsellers like Marcelle Tinayre, Francoise Sagan, Regine Deforges, to critically esteemed stories of love in the work of such authors as Colette, Simone de Beauvoir, Elsa Triolet, and Camille Laurens. Criss-crossing the boundaries of taste and class, as well as those of sexual orientation, the romance has been at times reactionary, at others progressive, utopian, and contestatory. It has played an important part in the lives of twentieth-century women, providing both a source of imaginative escape, and a fictional space in which to rehearse and make sense of identity, relationship, and desire.

作者介绍:

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