

Love in the Time of Self-Publishing: How Romance Writers Changed the Rules of Writing and Success

Christine M. Larson

Princeton University Press (Jun 4, 2024)

Hardcover \$29.95 (280pp)

978-0-691-21740-6

Christine M. Larson's *Love in the Time of Self-Publishing* uses the romance writing realm as a case study for how informal labor networks and mutual aid improve conditions for isolated workers.

Guided by a survey of thousands of romance writers, eighty interviews, archival research, and romance events, this book chronicles the rise and fall of the Romance Writers of America (RWA). Founded in 1980 when romance authors needed a support network, RWA was a space wherein they could share information and advocate for one another with publishers. They established an "open-elite" network: prospective romance writers could connect with published veterans, and the support went both ways.

This book blends the narratives of several romance authors and editors to tell the story of the RWA. It is mostly chronological and makes use of different anecdotes to open each chapter. These are the focal point for the book's analyses of topics including the ethics of care, issues of marginalization, and self-publishing and ebooks.

The birth of the RWA is described by its founding members, and its eventual collapse by those who were forced out. Larson shows that the factors that brought about the RWA's success were also the seeds of its downfall. Her book functions as both an exemplar and a cautionary tale for informal labor networks, extrapolating a paradoxical lesson for other isolated workers to consider within their fields. Potential futures for the RWA are also outlined—informed by Larson's extensive analysis.

An insightful work of literary criticism, *Love in the Time of Self-Publishing* shows how an informal labor network of romance writers impacted the greater literary and publishing world.

JULIA DILLMAN (May / June 2024)

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