

Universiteit Utrecht

Covers of Lovers:

A Multimodal Comparison of the Front Covers of Romance Novels in 2011 and 2021

Lisa Leenstra

4996879

Master's Thesis Literature Today

Supervisor: Dr. Lida Amiri

Second reader: Dr. Paul Bijl

7 June 2023

19.489 words

**Abstract**

This thesis explores how romance book covers—as multimodal media—have changed between 2011 and 2021, specifically due to the influence of digital advancements. It makes use of multimodal theory as proposed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in *Multimodal Discourse* (1996). The first part of this thesis contextualizes the case study that is performed in the second part. It does so by providing a theoretical framework, a description of the role of covers in a book’s marketing process, and a historical overview of romance book covers. This is followed by a qualitative case study that analyzes the front covers of the Goodreads Choice Awards’ top 10 romance books of 2011 and 2021. It examines the front cover image, the use of color, and the text—the title and author’s name—through the lenses of discourse, provenance, and ‘thumbnailability’—a concept described in “How Are Book Covers and Their Components Represented in the Digital Market?” by Sophie Darling. It concludes that there are various differences between the covers of romance novels of 2011 and 2021. These changes can be understood to be related to digital advancements—specifically in relation to the growing influence of the internet.

## **Acknowledgments**

Several months ago, I was not sure I would reach the moment where I would finish this thesis. While I am proud of myself for being able to submit it today, I am also aware that I could not have done it without help from others.

Most prominently, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Lida Amiri for her patience and kindness. Her assurances and trust in my ability to complete this thesis sparked my belief in myself.

This endeavor would not have been possible without Marcella van Itterzon, who dedicated many hours to helping me during my process—guiding me through it, editing my writing, and helping with structuring my thoughts.

My appreciation also goes out to my friends, whether they spoke loving words from the other side of the world (Juliet), helped me brainstorm and listened to my rambling (Brenda & Meaghan), or were kind enough to proofread the entire thesis (Emrys). I would also like to thank my family, who are always there for me in countless ways. Finally, special thanks to my mom, who guided me when I needed help the most.

I am thankful that I got to share this process with you all.

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## **Introduction**

As a literature student and occasional romance reader, I took note of the contrast between the covers of the romance novels I read myself and those that I had come to associate with romance novels in the past. When I had to decide on a topic for my master's thesis, I was reminded of a former professor who had told us—his bachelor's students—that when starting a research project, all we had to do was inspect small, peculiar things that had caught our attention. He assured us that more often than not, a good research topic would present itself during the process. The result lies before you. In this thesis, I will explore if my observations were correct by looking at the covers of romance novels from 2011 and 2021.

The discussion of current topics and recent changes has the advantage that it is more likely to benefit the areas it concerns. In line with this, I believe this thesis will prove relevant for several reasons. Romance novels are part of popular culture and are the bestselling genre of books, with millions of readers worldwide (e.g. Kamblé et al. 1). For a long time, researching popular culture was forgotten or abandoned (e.g. Kamblé et al. 6; Matthews xvii). Despite being forgotten or abandoned for a long time, researching popular culture is a useful endeavor because it also allows the inclusion of socio-political and philosophical messages and it focuses on the reader instead of the critic (Kamblé et al. 6; Matthews xvii). The case study at hand is rooted in popular culture not only because its subject is romance novels, but because the selected novels were top-ranked in a vote-based popularity contest. Therefore, the analysis in this thesis could benefit the literary field. Secondly, this thesis focuses on the front cover. Covers play an important role in the marketing process, for even though they do not impact the content of the narrative literally, they do influence the readers' interpretation of the text (Matthews xi; Nørgaard 271). For this reason, gaining an understanding of covers—e.g. the included elements and the chosen color palette and how they communicate/make meaning—is a valuable endeavor for the marketing of books. Thirdly, the digital revolution has had a significant influence on the literary landscape (Darling 22). Moreover, we are still in

the middle of this revolution. It is, therefore, a good idea to keep up with the changes that the growing digitization brings to the literary field. In this thesis, I will specifically look at the influence of web shops and online social platforms, like Goodreads, on the covers of romance books.

Goodreads takes a prominent place in this thesis because the database used in the case study is derived from the Goodreads Choice Awards—hereafter referred to as the GCA. Goodreads is an online social platform where one can review books, record the reading progress and interact with fellow readers. In 2013 the site was announced to have 20 million users (Chandler) and this is said to have grown to 90 million users in 2019 (Dixon). What is more, a report shows that Goodreads had over one hundred million visits in May 2023 (“goodreads.com”). In other words, Goodreads is a widely used platform for readers. I believe that it, therefore, lends itself to be used as a springboard for information on reader experiences and databases. Specifically, I will make use of the results of the GCA, which is held at the end of each year. The GCA is a popularity contest. The award is bestowed by the users of Goodreads through a public voting system (“How does voting work in the Goodreads Choice Awards?”). Therefore, the top-ranked books are guaranteed to be successful among readers. The case study will consider a total of twenty books. These books consist of the top ten books of the GCA within the romance genre in 2011 and 2021. These included:

2011

1. *Lover Unleashed* by J.R. Ward
2. *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James
3. *Hot Head* by Damon Suede
4. *Just Like Heaven* by Julia Quinn
5. *Chasing Fire* by Nora Roberts
6. *Kiss of Snow* by Nalini Singh

2021

1. *People We Meet on Vacation* by Emily Henry
2. *The Love Hypothesis* by Ali Hazelwood
3. *One Last Stop* by Casey McQuiston
4. *The Spanish Love Deception* by Elena Armas
5. *Act Your Age, Eve Brown* by Talia Hib
6. *The Ex Hex* by Erin Sterling

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|--|--|
| 7. <i>Call Me Irresistible</i> by Susan Elizabeth Phillips | 7. <i>Neon Gods</i> by Katee Robert                  |
| 8. <i>Retribution</i> by Sherrilyn Kenyon                  | 8. <i>Seven Days in June</i> by Tia Williams         |
| 9. <i>The Darkest Surrender</i> by Gena Showalter          | 9. <i>It Happened One Summer</i> by Tessa Bailey     |
| 10. <i>Dreams of a Dark Warrior</i> by Kresley Cole        | 10. <i>The Soulmate Equation</i> by Christina Lauren |

A full overview of these books and their covers can be found in Appendix A. This selection makes for a relevant case study not only because it includes books that have proven to be appealing to readers, but also because the selection is well-recorded and covers exactly one decade.

While there are advantages to discussing a current topic and recent changes, it comes with challenges as well. Few sources discuss the exact topic at issue. Luckily, this thesis topic finds itself at a crossroads of topics that have been well considered in other contexts. For example, there are accounts on the covers of romance covers, specifically, that prove to be of great use in this thesis. During the writing phase, I found myself inspired by accounts of “Candy-Colored Covers” and “effectively soft-core pornography paperback[s]” that were found in the romance genre (Fisher & Meredith 1; Sky 130). At the same time, I also make use of the large pool of information about marketing in the literary field, like “the function of a digital cover” and that the cover is part of “the publisher’s peritext” (Darling 25; Genette 23). Finally, my thesis will, in large part, rest on multimodal theory as described by Kress and Van Leeuwen in *Multimodal Discourse* (1996). This approach will help understand how various elements—different modes—on the front cover can make meaning (Nørgaard 223). In this manner, multimodal theory will serve as the basis for the analysis of the covers of the 2011 and 2021 GCA top 10 romance books in the case study.



Through this analysis, this thesis aims to explore the following question: “How have romance book covers—as multimodal media—changed between 2011 and 2021, specifically due to the influence of digital advancement in Western society?”. While this thesis focuses on English books, I have decided to not limit the culture to be discussed to anglophone countries such as the United States or Great Britain. Instead, I will call upon the broad term of Western culture, which is often believed to consist of the countries in North-America, (West-)Europe, and Oceania. I will do so because there are many multinational practices and trends to be found in the book industry and Goodreads is an internationally used online platform (“Goodreads.com”; Matthews xiv; Slee). For this reason, I believed it was more appropriate to speak of Western culture when discussing the possible changes due to digital advancements.

I intend to explore how covers have changed and if those changes may be connected to digital advancements in various steps. In the first part of this thesis, I will provide context for the case study, which will be performed in the second part. The contextualization in part one will consist of three chapters and will, among other things, introduce the concepts that will take a central position throughout the thesis.

Most of these concepts will be discussed in Chapter 1, the theoretical framework, in which I discuss multimodal theory as presented in *Multimodal Discourse* (1996) by Kress and Van Leeuwen. This theory is rooted in social semiotics and argues that meaning is made at all levels of communication and that various media besides language can partake in this process. In this theory, communication is said to consist of individual communicative practices, that are “multi-layered and include, at the very least, discursive practices, production practices, and interpretive practices, while they may also include design practices and/or distribution practices” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 111). In other words, communicative practices are realized through various practices—which Kress and Van Leeuwen call strata. The theory revolves around four strata: discourse, design, production,

and distribution. Moreover, communicative practices move through media, which are vehicles that contain various meaning-making elements. These elements are called modes and they can be influenced by the person sending the communication. Because they contain meaning, they can guide the interpretation process. The meaning carried in modes can, in part, be attributed to the concept of provenance—which means that signs are copied from other cultures and periods. Provenance will be central in this thesis because it shows how historical practices associated with romance novels can influence current practices. Aside from the central concepts that are introduced in this theoretical framework, Chapter 1 also illustrates that the front covers analyzed in the study can be understood as the product of the (design and) production stratum and can, therefore, be used to explore the underlying discourse. As Kress and Van Leeuwen explain, this “approach makes it plausible to ‘read’ the social from the semiotic” (*Multimodal Discourse* 124). As such, a multimodal approach allows the interpretation of book covers and their contents as signs and illustrates how covers are the result of the practices and advancements—the discourse—found in the societies they are created in.

In Chapter 2, I will further contextualize this thesis by discussing the role of covers in the marketing of books. This chapter will consist of three sections. Firstly, I will discuss what functions covers hold, taking information from, for example, *Judging a Book by Its Cover* (2007), edited by Nicole Matthews and Nickianne Moody. The second section revolves around the question ‘What makes a cover?’. The answer to this question will largely rely on the understanding of the cover as part of the publisher’s peritext, as formulated by Gerard Genette in *Paratexts* (1997). Finally, this chapter will cover the influence of the growth of the internet on the marketing of books. This section will also introduce the final central concept of this thesis, namely that of ‘thumbnailability’. This concept is coined in “How Are Book Covers and Their Components Represented in the Digital Market?” by Sophie Darling and

explains how book covers have changed due to their use as thumbnails in online settings. The conditions for a ‘thumbnailable’ cover will be used as a lens through which the covers will be analyzed during the case study.

Chapter 3 will conclude the contextualization of the case study by providing a historical overview of Romance covers. As will become apparent in Chapter 1, historical practices influence contemporary communicative practices due to discourse and provenance. For this reason, understanding the historical context of romance book covers will prove to be beneficial. The historical overview will start in the 1930s. This is partially because the 1930s mark the emergence of the paperback (Matthews xii). Additionally, the portrayal of romantic love, as we associate with the romance genre, emerges during this period as well (Kamblé et al. 5). The overview includes all the following decades up to around the start of the 2010s. As such, this chapter provides the historical context for this thesis’ case study.

During the second part of this thesis, I will perform a qualitative case study. This case study aims to answer if and how covers have changed and to explore if this may be due to digital advancements—especially the growing influence of the internet. In other words, I will take note of the changes in the front covers of the GCA top 10 romance books of 2011 and 2021, to then reflect on the potential meaning of these changes. I will look at three essential elements of the covers, namely the image, the use of color, and the text—specifically the title and author’s name. In Chapter 4, I will analyze the covers of 2011 and 2021 to examine if there are visible changes. Here, I will discuss my methodology per point of focus and present the corresponding findings. To do so, I will make use of quantitative research methods as well. As covers are the product of the (design and) production stratum, possible changes may be understood as indications of changing discourse and developments in societal areas—such as digital advancements. As such, Chapter 5 will consist of an analysis of and commentary on these findings. I will analyze the possible changes through the lenses

introduced in the first section of this thesis. These lenses include the concepts of discourse, provenance, and thumbnailability.

By following these steps, I hope to get a better understanding of whether digital advancements—especially the internet—have influenced romance covers, and if so, how.

## 1. Covering the Theory

### 1.1 Introduction

This first chapter will function as the theoretical framework for this thesis. It will provide an outline of multimodal theory as described by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen in *Multimodal Discourse* (1996). I will begin by discussing the general theory of multimodality, after which I will address the four strata that are central to this theory. The goal of this chapter is to lay the foundation that will be used throughout the rest of this thesis. This will be done in part by defining central concepts, such as discourse, provenance, media, and modes.

### 1.2 Multimodal Discourse

Multimodality is a theory that believes that not just language but multiple other modes, as well, are able to make meaning. Traditional linguists have considered texts—taken in the broad sense—to be monomodal, which means that meaning is made once and through a single form. Kress and Van Leeuwen argue, rather, that there are “multimodal resources ... available in a culture” that are “used to make meanings in any and every sign, at every level, and in any mode” (*Multimodal Discourse* 4).

Modes thus take a central role in multimodal theory. However, there is no single, straightforward definition of what a ‘mode’ is (Bateman 18, Nørgaard 18). When defining the term, Bateman et al. list eight different descriptions of the term and then continue to specify their own (18-19). Nørgaard settles by defining the exact conceptions of a mode while discussing specific ones (20). I will, however, use the definitions of Kress and Van Leeuwen and Bateman et al. to come to a broad understanding of mode, because I believe that for my thesis, such a definition will suffice. Firstly, Bateman et al. understand (semiotic) modes to consist of multiple layers. Explaining that they have a material dimension that allows them to be perceived and a semiotic dimension that allows users—both actor and recipient—to ascribe

some kind of meaning to them (113). Secondly, Kress and Van Leeuwen assign two characteristics to a mode in *Multimodal Discourse*, saying that it should “allow the simultaneous realisation of discourses and types of (inter)action” and it should be able to “be used in multiple forms of media” (21-22). Modes are thus resources that have to be perceivable and that should be able to carry meaning so that they can convey discourses. The presumption in multimodal theory is that a mode does not (only) make meaning by itself but also works with other modes to create meaning together (Bateman et al. 17, Nørgaard 17). This is closely related to the concepts of connected or disconnected elements. This notion arises from *Reading Images*, another book coproduced by Kress and Van Leeuwen. Here they discuss how, when multiple elements arise together, they may be understood as separate and having independent or even contradictory meanings, or as connected and collaborating to produce one meaning (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Reading Images 2*). This distinction is, however, not always clear in practice. In book covers, for example, people will regard the cover both as a connected entity, while also being able to see the title and image, for example, as separate elements. Therefore, I will be looking at various elements and their modes separately in the case study of this thesis, in order to explore how, together, they allow the cover to convey meaning.

Secondly, a mode should be able to be perceived and communicate meaning in a variety of media. A medium, here, is understood to be a site or an instrument for communicative practices. It is a resource that employs—for multimodality, specifically multiple—modes in order to establish communication between the actor and the recipient (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse 22*, Bateman et al. 123). Bateman et al. further highlight its typically historically stable nature, as media have certain affordances—things that are naturally pertinent to a specific medium. Books, as a medium, will generally include written text, typography, and layout—these are its affordances. It will, however, not

include mobile text, because the static pages do not allow movement. Finally, it is important to note that a medium itself cannot make meaning. Instead, as Bateman et al. put it, “meaning can only be realised in a semiotic mode *participating* in a medium” (124). As such, the front cover of romance novels is the central medium in this thesis, for it does not make meaning on its own, but through the various modes—which will be focused on—that make meaning separately and collectively.

Multimodal theory revolves around two things, namely “(1) the *semiotic resources* of communication, the modes and the media used, and (2) the communicative practices in which these resources are used” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 111). The first focus is on how meaning is made in communication. The basis for this lies in semiotics, which originally revolved around how language is centered around meaning-making. More specifically, multimodal theory is rooted in Hallidayan or social semiotics, which regards meaning-making as a social experience that is influenced by the context and/or culture in which it occurs (Nørgaard et al. 3). Nowadays, semiotics not only covers language but all sorts of media that are capable of containing meaning—e.g. videos, architecture, and advertisements. In other words, all media can be used for communication. Kress and Van Leeuwen refer to specific instances of communication through media as ‘communicative practices’. These communicative practices form the second focus of multimodal theory. Multimodal theory takes an interest in the multi-layered nature of communicative practices, due to the presence of multiple modes. In *Multimodal Discourse*, Kress and Van Leeuwen additionally ascribe the multidimensional aspect of communicative practices to the fact that they “include, at the very least, discursive practices, production practices, and interpretive practices, while they may also include design practices and/or distribution practices” (111). Meaning-making thus happens at every point: in the creation and the interpretation of communicative practices. However, interpretation is subjective and is outside of the control of

the sender. Because of this, Kress and Van Leeuwen focus on the practices of discourse, design, production, and distribution in their theory of multimodality, which they have decided to refer to as the four strata (*Multimodal Discourse* 4). This term has been derived from a concept in Hallidayan linguistics, however, Kress and Van Leeuwen emphasize that they do not believe strata to be hierarchical—meaning is made equally throughout all four strata (*Multimodal Discourse* 4). This equality is central to their theory of multimodality. Therefore, this thesis will adhere to this view as well.

### *1.3 Discourse*

One of the necessary strata in a communicative practice, according to Kress and Van Leeuwen, is discourse. They see a communicative practice mostly as an articulation—done through modes—of underlying discourse or discourses (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 40). If communicative practices revolve around discourse, it has to lay at the basis of it and it is thus an indispensable stratum. This begs the question: what is discourse?

Discourse is encountered in every aspect of life, but it is also an abstract concept. In essence, discourse consists of “socially constructed knowledges of (some aspect of) reality” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 4). In line with the social semiotic understanding, discourse is socially constructed, meaning that it arises in social contexts—formed by communities large (Western culture) and small (families). It is a broad concept, for it concerns our understanding of life and all that it involves and therefore has a strong influence on how people interpret the things they encounter.

Noticeably, Kress and Van Leeuwen speak of multiple knowledges. This plurality results from the broadness of the concept of discourse. Kress and Van Leeuwen handle this broadness by dividing discourse into two types of knowledges. The first is a ‘knowledge of practices’ that is a socially shared and broad understanding of “how things are or must be done” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 114). In other words, it aligns with the



norms and values, and beliefs that are carried community-wide. Popular discourses may include the desirability of democratic political systems or that decorating a tree is inherent to celebrating Christmas. Discourse in the sense of knowledge of practices can be communicated in many ways. Here, the second type of knowledge comes into play. This knowledge revolves around the expectations and beliefs that are involved in communicative practices (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 114). More specifically, it is based on the context that is created by a chosen medium, and how a medium comes with certain expectations—largely the result of limitations and affordances—that influence the communication (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 114). This distinction closely resembles another division of the concept, namely that into ‘Discourse’, with a capital D, and ‘discourse’, with a lowercase d. The capitalized Discourse closely resembles the knowledge of practices, in that it is described as a generally shared way to think about things (Bateman et al. 134). The lowercase discourse also relates to how texts—which function as a synonym for communicative practice here—are organized or constructed (Bateman et al. 134). As follows, discourse is active in the communicative practices that are employed to convey Discourse (Bateman et al. 134).

Both aspects of the broader concept of discourse are involved in this thesis, as their interaction illustrates how communicative practices reflect the culture that it is born out of and thus how changes in one will likely be linked to changes in the other. This is supported by the fact that Kress and Van Leeuwen set out to establish multimodal theory “as a means to account for changes in discursive practices”, that specifically were connected to social, political, economic, and technological advancements (*Multimodal Discourse* 34). In other words, as discourse underlies communicative practices, changes in discourse will cause changes in communicative practices and so changes in communicative practices can be indicative of changes in a culture’s discourse. More specifically, they may be indicative of social, political, economic, and technological changes. This will be central to this thesis, as it

sets out to explore if the growing influence of the internet—a technological advancement—has influenced the communicative practices found on the front covers of romance novels.

#### *1.4 Design*

The second stratum discussed in *Multimodal Discourse* is design. Here, design consists of conceptual ideas that precede the end product of a communicative practice. However, it is best understood as a stratum that builds on the foundation laid down by the stratum of discourse. It does so in two ways. Firstly, design may contextualize the discourse so that it works well in the context in which a communicative practice takes place. It may, for example, draw on the lowercase discourse of the chosen medium—which is often the first step in the design process (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 119). One should stay close to the generic ideas associated with the medium and its intended medium, in order to guide the recipient's interpretation. Bateman et al. call this practice adhering to a genre—"a way of characterising patterns or conventions that some society or culture develops to get particular kinds of 'communicative work' done"—which is specifically done with this goal in mind (129). As such, the contextualization of the communicative practice through choosing a medium is an essential part of the design stratum. The second way in which design builds on the discourse is by selecting what modes to include in the medium's communicative practice (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 51). As mentioned before, a medium does not make meaning, it merely serves as a vehicle for modes. These modes then are able to make meaning, to show the recipient the underlying Discourse. At this point then, the actor starts planning how they wish to shape the specific utterance—what colors to use, what gesture to make, or how an end product should sound.

While the repetition of certain aspects of media and modes is indispensable to accommodate accurate interpretation, one should also make design decisions that divert from what has been done before, to best adapt to the specific context of the circumstance and, at

times, to ensure that the communicative practice is distinctive from previous ones (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 63-64). This is especially important in book covers. As will become clear in the following chapter, book covers play an important role in distinguishing both genres and books. If all books were to look the same, potential readers would not know what book to pick up, because they are not able to differentiate between them. As such, to avoid these issues, different choices will always have to be made during the design stratum of books.

Finally, it should be noted that the notion of a design stratum does not come without complications of its own. Kress and Van Leeuwen bring to light how the blurry boundary of the strata of design and production may cause issues (*Multimodal Discourse* 55). On this basis, design revolves around making a production plan. However, these strata may cross boundaries or may even fully merge due to changes, such as digital and technological advancements (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 55). This is also true for these strata in the medium of the book cover, for previously a cover had to be designed before being printed into a full cover. Even in the design process, the cover may have involved multiple specialists—one focusing on the image, while the other would be concerned with the text. Nowadays, it is easier for graphic designers to handle both modes. If the two strata are indeed at a point of merging, it is the design stratum that is removed from the process, for the design now automatically becomes the end product—and thus becomes the process of production rather than design.

Both Nørgaard and Bateman et al. question parts of the stratal approach. Bateman et al. believe that the stratum of design should not be taken into account during an analysis of the communication practice, because they believe it is “not related in a relation of signified to signifier,” giving the example that a building does not “‘signify’ its architectural blueprint” (224). Building on this, they argue that the products of the design stratum may well be

subjected to analyses on their own (224). The same argument is made by Nørgaard, who sees the value in approaching meaning-making as a process that happens at various stages, but also notes the challenges that may arise due to the unclear boundaries of—especially—the design and production strata (21).

While I understand these concerns and believe it is noteworthy that Kress and Van Leeuwen mention these challenges themselves, I do not believe these issues will form a problem for this thesis. I am focusing on digital front covers, where the strata of design and production have merged (almost) completely. For this reason, I believe I will be able to use the medium of the front cover as the end product—whether it has gone through both strata or just the production stratum—as an indication of the underlying foundation of the discourse.

### *1.5 Production*

The stratum of production does more than carry out the ideas of design, although it was introduced in relation to this stratum (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 66). The production stratum is an active stratum in which the tools and materials of media are actually used to communicate (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 66). At this point in the process, the communicative practice becomes concrete and perceptible. This perceptibility is important because otherwise, it would be impossible for the recipient to interpret the intended message (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 66).

As mentioned before, the process of design may be cut because it is not always necessary to plan a communicative practice. However, in order to exist, the communicative practice has to move through the production stratum. Even after the design stratum, there may be—perhaps unintentional—modifications in the production stratum, for example, due to an accidental off-key note during the performance of a composition (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 66). The production stratum thus revolves around the articulation of the intended message. As such, it is also the moment in which the various modes used in the

medium are able to convey the underlying discourse. Kress and Van Leeuwen exemplify this by linguists who, when monomodally focused, regarded a handwritten and printed sentence as being the same, because they both consisted of the mode of the written word (*Multimodal Discourse* 69). However, the difference in the way these words are conveyed may influence the message—a handwritten sentence in pencil may be understood as less final and decisive than a sentence in print. As such, the meaning-making process is influenced by the form of communicative practices.

Because this is where modes are actually put to work, the result of the production strata is most frequently subjected to (discourse) analysis. I too will tread this path by analyzing front covers to explore the discourse that may lie underneath. However, so far, I have mostly shown that the modes used in the communicative practice make meaning that is rooted in discourse, without discussing *how* they do so.

Modes draw upon principles to become meaning-making signs. In *Multimodal Discourse*, Kress and Van Leeuwen explain that signs can carry meaning because of two principles (79). The first principle is that of experiential meaning potential. These are signs that result from “the basis of our physical, bodily experience of them” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 75). In other words, the meaning of these signs is derived from everyday experiences—or more specifically, they are rooted in what is perceived. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen, experiential meaning potential rests on three principals (*Multimodal Discourse* 77). It is naturally suitable for broadly carried experiences, for they are rooted in inherently human experiences (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 77). The resulting signs will also have multiple qualities and may be valued variously based on context, for meaning is never neutral and will always engage in value judgment (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 73; 77). Softness can invoke the positive connotations of ‘comfort’ and ‘gentleness’, but also negative ones like ‘weakness’ (Kress and Van

Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 75). Finally, experiential meaning potentials are typically multimedial, and at the basis of synaesthetic correspondences” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 77). In other words, the perception of every day, at times physical, experiences often draws upon multiple senses. This makes that experiential meaning potential often rests in multiple senses as well.

The second principle which signs can derive meaning from is that of provenance, which forms a central concept in this thesis. Provenance is used to identify meanings that are “ ‘imported’ from some other domain (some other place, time, social group, culture)” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 72). Kress and Van Leeuwen based this concept on the semiotic principles of ‘myth’ and connotation’, as introduced by Roland Barthes, which revolve around a secondary, ideational meaning (*Multimodal Discourse* 72). Provenance thus refers to a pre-existing sign of another context—time, place, culture, or social group—to make meaning in occurring communication practice. It should be noted, however, that “[a] sign that signifies through provenance evokes a complete discourse, but without making that discourse explicit, so that, subjectively, only a vague ... complex of ideas and values is communicated” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 73). The goal of provenance is that the implicitly referenced pre-existing signs guide the interpreters to the corresponding discourse. However, because of its implicitness, there is a risk that the recipient does not understand or notice this hidden meaning. Still, this risk is taken because by using signs that are associated with the intended meaning, the “implication is that people already know them” and that “they know what is meant ... despite the fact that they would probably not be able to put that knowledge into words” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 73).

The notion of provenance correlates with the notion of ‘genre’ as discussed in terms of lowercase discourse. As Bateman et al. explain, decisions during the production process are—explicitly or unconsciously—based on the framework that is provided by genres (130). By

doing so, they lean into the practices and conventions that form the discourse in the culture where the communicative practice is taking place, thereby guiding the interpretation (130).

Thus, I will look at the covers of romance covers to explore the visible changes in the product that has resulted from the production stratum, and give an analysis of the discourse which may have brought these changes about. I will include a historical overview of romance covers in Chapter 3 so I can focus on the concept of provenance—specifically historically evoked signs—during my case study.

### *1.6 Distribution*

For completeness, I will end the discussion of multimodal theory with distribution—the last stratum. However, like design, distribution is not always present in the formation of a communicative practice, and I believe this to be the case for the digitally used front covers discussed in this thesis. As such, I will not discuss this stratum in depth.

Distribution consists of the technologies and actions that revolve around preserving and/or spreading the communicative practice as a result of the production stratum (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 21). The technologies used for distribution are often meant to refrain from influencing the meaning. That is to say, their goal is often to reproduce the communicative practice as close as possible to the end product of production. Kress and Van Leeuwen illustrate how this often fails through two music-related examples. First, they discuss how distribution technologies may have their own semiotic potential and may even become new production formats—such as the megaphone which was meant to distribute, but also came with a mode of its own, as the sound that comes from the megaphone is influenced by the distance between the microphone and the mouth (*Multimodal Discourse* 21, 87).

Additionally, distribution technologies may influence the process of meaning-making through (unintended) noise, like with the small scratches that have become iconic for listening to music using a record player—and were, later on, even used to create a new way to make

music by DJ's (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse* 21, 95). As a result, a stratum that seems to be made to refrain from adding meaning still leaves its mark on a communicative practice.

### *1.7 Conclusion*

Multimodal theory involves the belief that communicative practices make meaning through modes. These modes consist of multiple layers that contain and create meaning and they should be suitable for a variety of media. Modes may rely on signs from other cultures, places, social groups, or times to adopt (parts of) their meaning. This is called provenance. Communicative practices are produced during the discourse, design, production, and distribution strata. The first three will return throughout this thesis. Discourse is, in short, the underlying meaning and principles of a communicative practice. It comes to be by choosing what medium and modes to use during the design stratum—in short, creating a detailed plan—and the production stratum—where the communicative practice becomes ‘real’ or perceivable. Finally, it is important to restate that it is possible for a communicative practice to just include the discourse and production stratum. This chapter has provided the theoretical framework for the rest of this thesis. It has shown how multimodal theory shows that book covers consist of modes that carry meaning and that these can be analyzed to see how they were influenced by underlying discourses.

It is now time to continue the first section of this thesis, by considering the role of covers in the marketing process of books.



## 2. Covering the Marketing

### 2.1 Introduction

Marketing is just as important in the publishing industry as it is for any other one. In her book *Marketing Literature* (2007), Claire Squires describes the marketing of books as “a *form of representation and interpretation*, situated in the spaces between the author and the reader ... and surrounding the production, dissemination and reception of texts” (3). Within the marketing process of books, covers are essential (Matthews xiii; Squires 3). The value of book covers in marketing practices is the focus of this chapter. I will explore what functions are ascribed to book covers—or, rather, what publishers may aim to achieve with a cover. Once the answer to this question is clearer, I will seek to set out what elements may be included in a front cover. Finally, I will discuss recent changes in marketing through book covers concerning the continued growth of the internet’s influence on present-day Western culture.

However, I first want to discuss one of the most influential accounts on book covers. In *Paratexts*, Gerard Genette presents covers as part of the ‘publisher’s peritext’. Peritext here means that, while not part of the book’s official text, a paratextual element is provided as an extension of the text in the text’s direct context (Genette 4-5). It is considered part of the *publisher’s* peritext because providing a cover is part of the publisher’s tasks, even though, in practice, this responsibility may be (partially) passed onto third parties (Genette 9, 16). According to Genette, covers have earned their prominent role in book marketing because they form “a *threshold* ... that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back” (Genette 2). A front cover is often the public’s first introduction to and impression of the book which—despite the well-known phrase—often means that their judgment is subject to a cover’s presentation. In line with Kress and Van Leeuwen, Genette argues that covers are susceptible to their context and will reflect the culture they are created

in—which means that they continually change to fit accordingly (3). This will become clear throughout this chapter, as the final section will give a preliminary account of changes that covers may have been subject to because of digital advancements.

## *2.2 The Functions of Covers in Marketing*

Before discussing changes, it is imperative to gain an understanding of the main functions of covers in the marketing of books. Indeed, covers often have multiple aims, which I believe can be arranged into three categories. These categories consist of the presentation and positioning of a book in the market, the relationship between a book and its (potential) readers, and the role it plays in a shop. I will discuss these categories respectively.

A cover often serves as an introduction to potential readers and should therefore aid sales by presenting and positioning the book in the large market of books. Indeed, Genette believes that a cover is used to present a text and should thus ensure that people know of the book's existence and give them an idea of what it contains (9). The role of covers in this process is also considered by Angus Phillips in "How Books Are Positioned in the Market: Reading the Cover." Phillips believes that the cover is mostly employed to influence the positioning of a book or author within the large supply of books (19). It aims to influence the stockers and potential readers of books by conveying a message about the book's content (Phillips 19). Phillips explains that publishers invest in marketing departments and market research in the hope of effectively positioning the book (19). He adds that they make use of so-called 'positioning strategies.' These strategies indicate the position of a book by "concentrat[ing] on the usage occasion (summer reading), the benefits offered (a thriller) or how the product relates to the competition (the 'new Catherine Cookson')" (Phillips 24). An additional positioning strategy is the use of target audiences (Phillips 24). Moreover, the design generally is adjusted to the market it is published for. For example, if a book is meant for the mass market, the cover design will fall in line with others as the masses will not be

looking for something cutting-edge, while literary books can take a chance in their cover design—as being innovative is more likely to be appreciated here (Phillips 22). Squires also acknowledges that book covers can be seen as branding strategies that are largely based on associations to guide readers' interpretation and expectation of the book (89). This statement is reminiscent of provenance and the second type of knowledge in discourse—that resembling lowercase discourse—as described by Kress and Van Leeuwen. Specifically, Squires states that “[t]he assertion of generic and cultural categories through branding is consequently a negotiation with the various systems that assert meaning” (89). In other words, she upholds the notion that covers are mediums that contain modes that make meaning—and that they do so, at least in part, by relying on pre-existing signs. This paragraph has revealed that this is likely done to help with the cover's role of presenting and positioning a book in the market.

As described earlier, the cover is also concerned with making a connection with (potential) readers (e.g. Nørgaard 241). A book cover should entice the target audience. Phillips notes that if a cover successfully does so, they are five times more likely to purchase a book (28-29). One of the advantages of a cover as a marketing tool is that it is facing out when it is read in public and is, therefore, automatically marketed to other potential buyers (Darling 27). On the other hand, this also means that a reader may feel that reading a book in public may influence the public's impression of them. Indeed, the understanding of books as an accessory has grown over the years (Carlin and Jones 95; Phillips 21). This means that a cover benefits from having a “style [that] reflects its readership” (Vanderschantz & Timpany 1). As such, the development of regarding books as an accessory illustrates how creating a positive relationship with (potential) readers is an aspiration of a front cover.

Covers are not only used to lure readers into reading a book—but they are also used to guide them through and lure them into a bookstore. In “In Real Life: Book Covers in the Internet Bookstore,” Alexis Weedon notes that displaying new books is a good way to draw

customers into a shop (117). This is not just true for physical shops. Covers need to work in a number of settings, whether in a bookstore, a web shop, or a library (Phillips 29). To make a novel successful, one has to make sure that covers not only convince readers, but vendors—for they decide what books they will stock (Phillips 29). Once they are taken into the assortment, covers can be used as signs to guide customers through the shop, for example through color usage (Phillips 23-24; Vanderschantz & Timpany 3; Weedon 117). In other words, covers also function as genre markers. There are differences between the appearances of covers which align them with their respective genres. However, in line with the expectation created by the unstable nature of discourse described in Chapter 1, the features that align a cover with a specific genre are not fixed, and therefore “genre definition is not an absolute but a comparative process” (Squires 84). This malleability, however, does not take away from the fact that front covers function as signs that navigate consumers in or into shops. Ultimately, it has become clear that covers have no single aim, but rather assist the marketing of books in a number of ways.

### 2.3 *What Is Included in a Cover?*

To understand *how* a cover executes these functions, it is essential to understand what is generally included in a cover. In *Paratexts*, Gerard Genette made lists of what is typically included as part of the publisher’s peritext based on combining various time periods and genres (24). In these lists, he distinguishes different ‘types’ of covers, differentiating between the front cover, the back cover, the inside of both these covers, and the spine. Since this thesis will focus on the front cover of romance novels, I will only discuss the list he presents for the front cover. Genette suggests that front covers typically include many things, including:

- “Name or pseudonym of the author(s)” (24)

This is one of the most regularly included elements on a book cover (Nørgaard 226). The size of the author’s name notably varies. Genette explains that this practice is related to the

popularity of an author, as the names of well-known authors typically take up more of the cover's space (39). He also adds, however, that publishers may enlarge the name to mirror this practice and consequently create an illusion of acclaim (Genette 39). This may work especially well due to the circular reasoning found in the market, where the public's interest is often most successfully attracted by previous bestselling authors (Squires 87).

- "Title(s) of the work" (24)

According to Nina Nørgaard, together with the author's name, this is one of the stable elements of a front cover (226).

- "Specific illustration" (24)

In *Paratexts*, Genette refrains from discussing this element in depth because he believes this lies out of his depth (406). While understanding this decision, Nina Nørgaard remarks that, from a multimodal approach, images are equally important to the textual aspects of the cover and that including them in an analysis could complement his work (223).

- "Genre indication" (24)

In essence, the genre indication does precisely as its name implies—denoting what genre a book falls under. Examples of this are the labels 'a memoir' or 'a thriller' on the cover of books that fall under these respective genres. The genre indication can be seen as a practical part of the title but functions autonomously at the same time (Genette 58).

- "Name and/or colophon of the series" (24)

This element is not a standard element on covers for not all books are part of a series. Besides, this indication is not guaranteed to be included even if a book is an installment in a series.

Still, it is an optional element and its presence may add to the front cover.

- "Name or tradename ... of the publisher" (24)

Finally, a cover may include the name of the publisher. This may be in conjunction with the publisher's logo.

In *Multimodal Stylistics of the Novel* (2019), Nørgaard notes that Genette's list of elements is not exhaustive (306). Some missing elements later come forward in her analysis—the mention of literary prizes and blurbs, for instance (Nørgaard 228). Nevertheless, in general, it can be said that the elements listed above are the standard elements of the front cover as a medium. Due to the general consistency, these elements may be understood to be part of the contextual—or lowercase—discourse of the front cover.

Even though all of these elements contribute to the meaning of a front cover, I had to adjust the scope of my focus to make this research project feasible. For this reason, I will limit my focus to the three elements that I believe are most commonly found on the front cover. Two of these—the title and the author's name—correspond with Nørgaard's view (226). Additionally, I will discuss the image as a principal element of a front cover. In this process, I might touch upon the other elements listed above, however, an in-depth discussion of these will be left for future endeavors.

#### *2.4 The Influence of the Internet*

Finally, I will look into the online marketing practices that involve the front cover. These practices are most likely to be indicative of the possible changes in the discourse of front covers as a result of the technological advancements in regard to the growth of digitization in the last decade. The speed with which the influence of the internet has increased since the turn of the century becomes clear when reading Nicole Matthew's introduction to *Judging a Book by Its Cover* (2007) in today's context. She writes that “book sales over the internet still form only a small part of book sales and internet booksellers have not been as profitable as many may have expected in the late 1990s” (xv). Since then, online book sales have grown rapidly. A study done by Daniela Coppola in cooperation with the US Census Bureau shows that online book sales in the United States have grown from 8.817 million US dollars in 2011 to 20.949 million US dollars in 2021. These numbers are an indication of the size of this growth.

Online browsing is different from physically browsing books in a library or bookstore. Web shops have changed browsing by giving consumers interactive options, such as recommendations, voting systems, and lists (Weedon 119). What has not changed, however, is the importance of book covers. All digital browsing is based on book covers and tries to resemble physical browsing by showing the covers ‘facing out’ (Darling 25; Weedon 121). In other words, the front cover is transformed into a thumbnail (Darling 26; Weedon 121). In “How Are Book Covers and Their Components Represented in the Digital Market?” (2019), Darling describes how book covers are adjusted to better fit the demands that this practice induces—explaining that, nowadays, “a cover’s ‘thumbnailability’ is crucial to a book’s success” (26). The concept of thumbnailability will take a central position in the upcoming case study, for it gives a clear identification of what has changed in covers due to digital marketing. To be ‘thumbnailable,’ a front cover should fulfill three conditions. Firstly, a cover should remain aesthetically pleasing (Darling 26). This is a largely subjective condition and will therefore not be discussed hereinafter. Furthermore, a front cover should be “simplified ... with stronger colours and a higher saturation” (Darling 26). This simplification will result in a higher contrast. In turn, this will help the book attract the attention of potential readers despite its smaller size (Darling 26). Finally, to preserve information delivery, one should also make sure that the title remains legible when the cover is reduced in size (Darling 26). In line with what Genette so accurately expressed in *Paratext*—“how would we read Joyce’s *Ulysses* if it were not entitled *Ulysses*?” (2)—how would we choose a book if we cannot read what it is called? The concern with the preservation of legibility is plausible due to the significance tied to the title, along with the author’s name—exemplified by its practically obligated presence on a cover.

The concept of thumbnailability thus provides a clear illustration of the adjustments that may follow the growing influence of digital practices in the marketing process of books.

Therefore, the front covers will be analyzed through the lens of thumbnailability during the case study. Specifically, this will be done by looking at the contrast found on the cover and the legibility of the text—paying special attention to the title.

### *2.5 Conclusion*

In short, covers play a central role in book marketing. They have various functions; they present books to readers and professionals, position them within the literary market, operate as signs to draw readers in and guide them through book shops, and serve as a marker of genres. In this chapter, I have also discussed what is included in a book cover and explained that this thesis will focus on the front cover image and the title and author name, alongside the use of color. Finally, this chapter examined how the growth of the internet has influenced book marketing and covers specifically. This included the concept of thumbnailability, which will be a central concept in the case study, as it provides characteristics that are likely present in book covers that have been produced to be successful in digital book marketing.

Whereas the last paragraph of this chapter focused on recent developments, the next chapter will consider the historical overview of romance book covers.



### **3. Covering the History**

#### *3.1 Introduction*

The framework of multimodal theory explained that communicative practices—such as those taking place through front covers—are rooted in pre-existing signs due to the concepts of discourse and provenance. This chapter will provide a historical overview of romance covers. This will benefit the case study because it contextualizes the analysis of romance covers and it provides points of reference to discuss the potential presence of provenance. The historical context will be presented in chronological order, starting from the early-twentieth century—specifically, the 1930s.

At this point in time, the intensity of religiosity started to diminish and the sexualized, romantic love that we associate with the romance genre emerged (Kamblé et al. 5). It has almost been a century since then and a (lowercased) discourse has been formed around the medium of the romance cover, while the (capitalized) Discourses in society have evolved (Kamblé et al. 5). Within this chapter, I will focus on the former as my goal is to contextualize the forthcoming case study rather than analyze the changes that have happened in the past. Still, since the two are tied, at times I will comment on the context of Discourse as well. As described by Fisher & Meredith in “The Success Behind the Candy-Colored Covers” (2012), the overall arrangement of covers changes over time but the primary difference seems to be in the cover image—or at least, that is where most historical accounts of romance covers seem to focus on. As such, while it is not the primary focus of my case study, this chapter will mostly concentrate on the images found on the front covers of romance books.

#### *3.2 1930s*

The 1930s mark the emergence of the paperback and with this development, many aspects that are now central to book covers appeared as well (Matthews xii). However, Matthews also

notes that the practice of using style, colors, and images to differentiate genres as illustrated in the previous chapter developed relatively slowly (xii). These changes in the production of book covers, however, will progress throughout this chapter as they developed over time.

### *3.3 1940s-1950s*

After the world wars, there was a “post-war ‘pulp’ explosion” (Carlin and Jones 98). During this time, two contradictory discourses dominated the romance genre and this showed in the front covers. On the one hand, people craved a sense of normalcy after the war and this was reflected in the sales of traditional romance novels (Sky 130). This trend was accompanied by non-sexual, innocent images on the front cover that included pretty, young, and modest female characters, see Figures 1 and 2 (Fisher & Meredith 159). On the other hand, there was a counter-culture that created a desire for extreme books, including those about sex (Sky 130). This meant that there were also “lurid” romance covers “that promised sex”, see Figure 3 (Carlin and Jones 98). Perhaps most illustrative of this counter-movement is the popularity of lesbian pulp fiction, with extravagant covers painted in a realistic style that “featured curvaceous women, scantily clad, whose overt sexuality dripped off the cover”, see Figure 4 (Sky 129, 132). But these playful and lewd images were also present in heterosexual romance covers (Sky 143).

The images on romance covers continued to be drawn during the fifties because photographic covers remained too expensive (Fisher & Meredith 159). Fisher and Meredith also describe that they found cover images that solely contained a woman, but none with just a man (159). This is noteworthy because the lone man becomes a common practice in future decades (Fisher & Meredith 159).

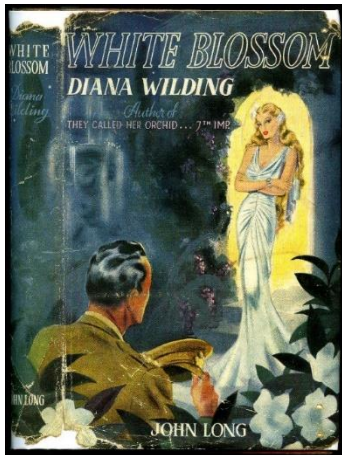


Figure 1 Cover of *White Blossom* by Diana Wilding (1947)

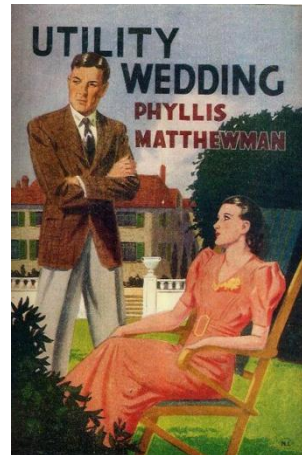


Figure 2 Cover of *Utility Wedding* by Phyllis Matthewman (1946)

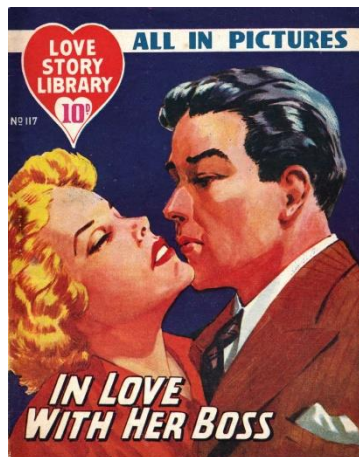


Figure 3 Cover of *In Love With Her Boss* by Love Story Picture Library (1956)

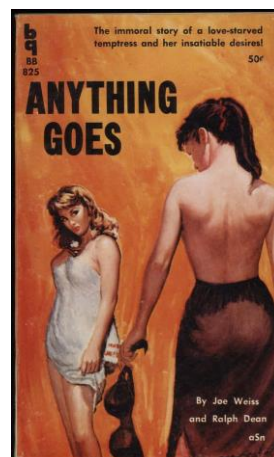


Figure 4 Cover of *Anything Goes* by Joe Weiss and Ralph Dean (1959)

### 3.4 1960s

The state of affairs of the 1950s bled into the early 1960s—the decade where Western post-war society is characterized by a recovered economy, technological advancements, and growing welfare. As predicted by Kress and Van Leeuwen, these changes in societies resulted in changing discourses—such as the emergence of pop culture. During these years, “[b]ook covers and the images they carried began to indicate where literature and its traditions might fit ... in the new environments of popular culture” (Carlin and Jones 96). The book covers in this period consisted of extravagant, illustrated designs that appealed to a larger audience (Carlin and Jones 96). In the romance genre, specifically, covers looked more uniform, with

less cursive and therefore more legible typography, see Figure 5 (Fisher & Meredith 159). Additionally, while characters were still “not touching, certainly not kissing”, Fisher & Meredith describe that it was still to be assumed that there was a romantic connection between the couple (159). They do not, however, elaborate on what signs may lead to this assumption. The couples themselves were dressed in a professional manner that seemed to reflect the middle and upper class and remained to look young and conventionally attractive (Fisher & Meredith 159). Considering these descriptions, we can infer that conservative romance novels were most prominent during this time.

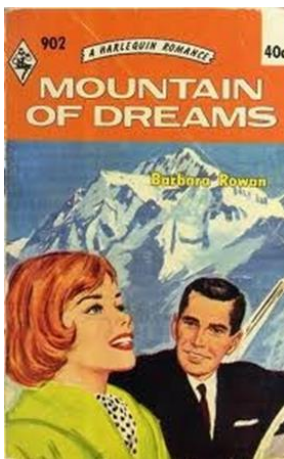


Figure 5 Cover of *Mountain of Dreams* by Barbara Rowan (1965)

### 3.5 1970s

Things slowly changed in the 1970s, when romantic love started to be sexualized (Kamblé et al. 5). This shift is also noticed by Fisher and Meredith, who describe that characters are making more eye contact and are even close to kissing at times, see Figure 6 (159). While visible, the changes remained subtle, as chastity and ‘tastefulness’ were still valued at large (159). During this time, for example, a bare-chested male character was still an exceptional case, while in the next decade, the male character took a more prominent position on romance covers (Fisher & Meredith 159-161).

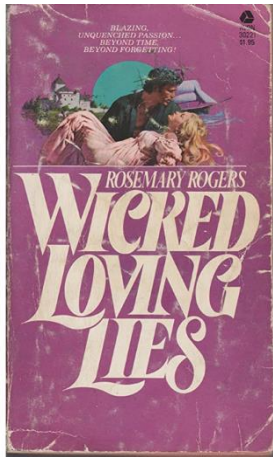


Figure 6 Cover of *Wicked Loving Lies* by Rosemary Rogers (1976)

### 3.6 1980s and 1990s

Indeed, the ‘sexualization of romantic love’ persisted in the 1980s and 1990s. Whereas touching had been minimal in the past, intimate physical contact became the norm in the eighties, see Figure 7 (Fisher & Meredith 159-160). This may have been impacted by a change in Discourse in Western culture, as second-wave feminism impacted the depiction of romantic relationships and lead to an open portrayal of women’s needs and desires (Kamblé et al. 5). In this fashion, couples were portrayed while intimately touching and kissing, or covers featured a single, enticing male figure, see Figures 8 and 9 (Meredith and Fisher 159-161). In general, the covers look similar because they include many of the same features and because they are the same size (Kamblé et al 57). The covers of the 1990s remained similar to those of the 1980s (Fisher & Meredith 160). However, as Kamblé et al. observe, the nineties do mark the start of marginalized groups—such as people of color and the queer community—entering the publishing field of romance novels (5). While this may have started in this decade, the impact became even more notable after the turn of the century.

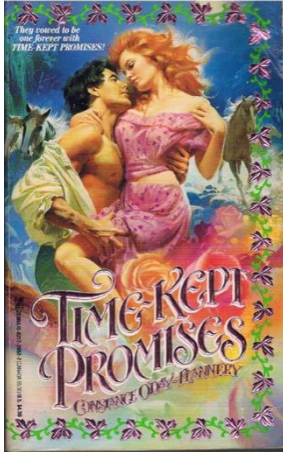


Figure 7 Cover of *Time-Kept Promises* by Constance Oday-Flannery (1988)

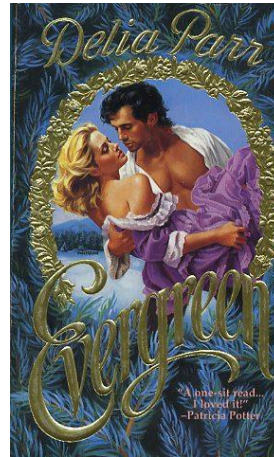


Figure 8 Cover of *Evergreen* by Delia Parr (1995)

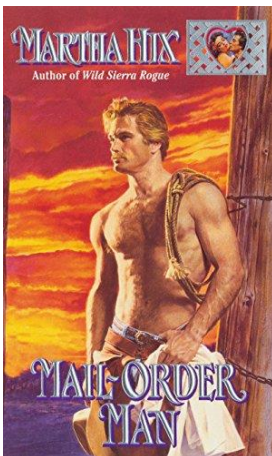


Figure 9 Cover of *Mail-Order Man* by Martha Hix (1994)

### 3.7 2000s and 2010s

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, book covers are marked by a number of characteristics and changes. For instance, digitization resulted in the emergence of digital publishing, through e-books and e-readers (Kamblé et al. 5). Because digital publishing comes at a relatively low cost, independent publishing became easier (Kamblé et al. 5). In turn, this resulted in more romance novels published by marginalized groups, as they could now circumvent the exclusive practices of publishing houses who were convinced that these books would sell poorly (Kamblé et al. 240). Thus, the representation within the romance genre

increased and while not explicitly stated, this is likely to have had effects on the representation of covers as well, see Figure 10.

The technological advancements in color printing resulted in front cover images that consisted of photographs, see Figure 11 (Fisher & Meredith 160). At this point, the characters on the covers “are often kissing, embracing, and in some cases, engaging in more erotic behaviors”, see Figure 12 (Fisher & Meredith 160). The rise of explicit sexuality thus seems to have continued into the new century. Fisher and Meredith also mention that, in the twenty-first century, “[t]he setting is still staged but less often a collage” (Fisher & Meredith 161). Previously, a romance cover could surround a couple with many things—e.g. a unicorn or flowers—conventionally overlapping as in a collage, see Figure 8. This made way for a simpler space around the couple, like a background that consists of one specific location (Fisher & Meredith 161).

Thus, the beginning of the twenty-first century leaves us with covers that “have evolved from simplistic drawings that focused on the face of the heroine, to realistic depictions of a couple engaged in an intimate act” (Fisher & Meredith 161).



Figure 10 Cover of *Tempted by the Billionaire Next Door* by Therese Beharrie (2018)

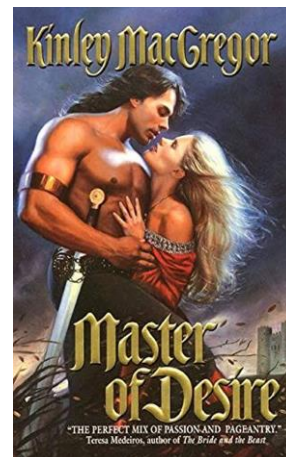


Figure 11 Cover of *Master of Desire* by Kinley MacGregor (2005)

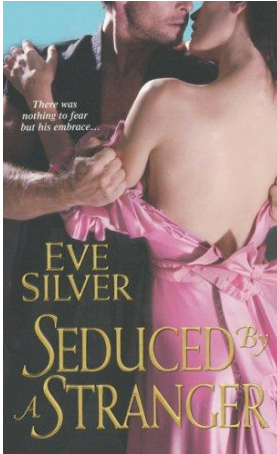


Figure 12 Cover of *Seduced by a Stranger* by Eve Silver (2009)

### 3.8 Conclusion

Through the historical overview, this chapter has exemplified that the different strata—and thus communicative practices—indeed change over time. It has also provided the context needed to discuss the potential presence of provenance in the front covers of the GCA top 10 romance books of 2011 and 2021.

This leads us to the second part of this thesis, where I will explore the changes found in the covers of the GCA top ten romance novels of 2011 and 2021.



## 4. Covering the Case Study

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter marks the start of section two, in which I will conduct a case study on the top 10 Romance novels from the 2011 and 2021 GCA. More specifically, I will analyze the front covers of these books in terms of their image, their color use, and the author name and title—brought together under the umbrella term ‘text’. This case study will thus consist of qualitative research. The goal is to get a better understanding of if and how the covers have changed and explore whether digital advancement may have been the cause of them. While I will use quantitative methods to examine the covers and report changes, the overall research is qualitative. This is also why I have chosen to focus on a relatively small database. It is important to note that the next chapter will contain a qualitative analysis. In this chapter, I will solely examine the covers as the end product of the (design and) production stratum and report changes between 2011 and 2021.

### 4.2 Images

In the front cover image, readers find a visual representation of what they can expect from the book’s story. These cover images will be analyzed through three metrics, namely nature, representation of human characters, and background. At times, these metrics contain further subdivisions. The tables that are referenced in this paragraph can be found in Appendix B.

The images were first categorized by nature, that is, whether they were made up of photographs or illustrations. This difference was based on the principles of modality, which is how close an image is to reality (*Reading Images* 155). The degree of realism in an image can be deducted from the following metrics:

- color differentiation—does color naturally progress? For example due to shade and light

- color modulation—does a blue shirt have slight modulations or is it plain blue?
- contextualization—does the image contain a detailed background?
- representation—how much “pictorial detail” is found? Or is the image abstract?

Through these criteria, the differentiation between photographs and illustrations crystallized. Please note that, here, illustrations were understood to be images that were created by hand, either on paper or through digital techniques, or seem to have the intention of resembling this art style.

### **Nature**

In 2011, there was a clear preference for front cover images that consisted of photographs (Table 1). Only two covers featured an illustration and the other eight were photographs. Again, this practice changed thoroughly over the next ten years, for there was a single photographic cover in the 2021 top 10, and eight others were illustrated. What is more, the cover of *Seven Days in June*, which was top 10 in 2021, consisted of mixed media, for the front cover image was created by blending a photograph with a highly abstract illustration.

### **Content**

The second metric is the representation of human figures in the images. More specifically, a distinction was made between it containing a couple, solely a man, solely a woman, or no humans. The covers which included human figures were then subdivided into two categories, namely those containing nude, or those containing dressed characters. In this thesis, I considered a figure to be nude when large areas of the body were uncovered. To illustrate, the female character on the cover of *Just Like Heaven* would not count as nude, for while the leg is uncovered, most of the skin that could have been shown was covered by clothes. However, *Hot Head* was considered to contain nude characters, because a large part of the chest is uncovered.

Representations of humans on the cover were varied in the images of 2011 (Table 2). Only three books did not include human figures and the content varied in the others. Equally spread to a degree, the images contained a couple (n=2), a single man (n=3), or a single woman (n=2). This variety is also found in the degree of nudity on the covers (Table 3). Of the seven books containing human figures, a little over two-thirds included nude bodies, while the others were clothed. The amount of covers without human representation is about the same in 2011 (n=3) as it is in 2021 (n=2). However, most of the diversity found in 2011 was lost in 2021. All eight covers containing human figures presented a couple, a 300% growth. What is more, this growth is extended in the level of nudity, for all eight couples were completely dressed. The most nudity is found on the cover of *People We Meet on Vacation*, where the female character is portrayed in a bikini, however, due to the setting, this can still be understood to be a legitimate attire.

### **Background**

Finally, this paragraph looks at the metric of the background. The background is categorized by the following characteristics: it is part of the image, it is made up of a solid color, it consists of a gradient, texture, or pattern, or it is formed by a collage. Here too, the use of different categories is more evenly spread in 2011 than in 2021 (Table 4). In 2011, a background is most likely to be part of the image (n=4) or to consist of a gradient, pattern, or texture (n=4). If this is not the case, it is made up of a collage (n=2). This means that there is not just one element that forms the background but that it is made up of, for example, a mix of textures and images. This method of creating a background does not reappear in 2021. In that year, the top 10 books are most likely to feature a solid background, which was the case for 80% of the covers. If this is not the case, the background is either part of an image (n=1) or it is made up of a gradient, texture, or pattern (n=1).

### 4.3 Use of Color

For this case study, five representative colors were taken from each cover. These always include the color of the title, the author's name, and—if present—the solid background. The others were deducted from the cover images. The representation of the colors per cover is portrayed in Table 5, which can be found in Appendix C.



When providing a grammar for color in “Colour as a semiotic mode,” Kress and Van Leeuwen propose to analyze color through the following values, which all need to be understood as consisting of a scale:

- Value – marks how light or dark a color is, the scale is a grayscale (355)
- Saturation – how intense colors are, ranging from, for example, a true light or dark green to a de-saturated black and white (356)
- Hue – this is perhaps the most well-known way to analyze colors as this is the scale that follows the rainbow, from red to blue (357)
- Purity – whether a color is pure or mixed with other colors, for example, a true red or a strawberry red (356)
- Modulation – as explained in the previous section when discussing modality, modulation indicates if a color has subtle variations or not (356)
- Differentiation – this always involves multiple colors, since it indicates whether a palette is monochrome or maximally varied (357)

Not all of these are of a nature that is easily measured. Value, saturation, and hue are well recorded and easily found through a color name. Measuring differentiation and modulation, however, is a bit more challenging. Using longstanding concepts in color theory, ideas by others—such as Kress and Van Leeuwen—and main principles in science, I have set out to compare the use of color in 2011 and 2021 in a representative way. Purity, while without a doubt an interesting value in some circumstances, is of little relevance to this thesis—there

were only three pure (white) occurrences in a hundred samples (Table 5). For this reason, I will not discuss purity from here on.

As mentioned, value is how light or dark a color is. In other contexts, it is also referred to as the brightness of a color. The value of all colors is represented in Table 7. The higher the number, the lighter the color. In other words, in the grey hue, white will score 100 and black 0. To generalize and compare the years, the average value per year is included in Table 6, which displays the averages of value, saturation, and hue. This shows that, on average, the colors in 2021 were lighter than in 2011.

However, the colors were less saturated. This means that the colors were less likely to be intense and more likely to be muted—closer to being black and white. This follows from the average that was drawn from the recorded saturation per color in Table 8. Saturation is easily found through color names—for it is a metric that is inherent to the color presentation. A higher number—ranging from 0 to 100—signifies a higher intensity and thus a more saturated color. Take for example color 2 (#027333, ) and color 5 (#A6976A, ) of *Retribution*. The eye sees that color 2 is a richer green than color 5. This is also true when taking in the saturation—98 and 36, respectively. In other words, the colors in 2011 were more intense than the colors in 2021.

The third value recorded per color is hue. This is the value that is considered most when discussing colors. It can be used to see what colors are preferred in a year, however, for this thesis, I am more interested in using hue to look at differentiation. Differentiation is important for contrast, which in turn influences the thumbnailability of a cover. Hue plays a role because a varied color palette has more differentiation than one that is rooted in the same color. Hue is a spectrum and can therefore be visualized in a circle (see Appendix D). Its value ranges from 0-360—in accordance with the degrees of a circle, where, 0 (and 360) mean the color is defined as red, 120 is green, and 240 is blue. I have included Table 9 to represent

these values per color. Additionally, in Appendix D, the hues are portrayed graphically. The large circles in the middle combine the colors per year, while the smaller ones to the side illustrate the hues per cover.

As mentioned earlier, differentiation is the difference between colors. This is not readily calculated or measured because it depends on the values of hue, saturation, and value. For this reason, I have calculated the differences per value per cover (see Appendix E). The averages of these differences are represented in Table 10. This illustrates that, while on average colors were brighter in 2021, the variation in value (brightness) was greater in 2011. In other words, the differentiation as a result of value was greater in 2011 than in 2021. The opposite is true for saturation. On average, colors were more saturated in 2011, but there was more differentiation due to saturation in 2021. The differences in hue in Table 10 suggest that the color use—in terms of hue—is more diverse in 2021 than in 2011. This seems to be in agreement with the graphic representation of hue in Appendix D, where the points seem to be more spread out over the spectrum. When taking the sum and average of differentiation into account, it can be said that there is more differentiation in 2021 than in 2011 (Table 10).

There is one value of colors that is left to discuss, namely modulation. As described earlier, modulation illustrates if a color contains small variations—if it does not, the color will seem ‘flat’ (Van Leeuwen 357). To assess the presence of modulation in the covers, all covers are divided into three categories. In the first category, ‘full’, the covers have full modulation, as the colors and color shades blend without clear boundaries, and many gradients of colors are used. The ‘moderate’ category contains colors that have slight variations in tone and softer edges, because of shading techniques in illustrations for example. Finally, the ‘low’ modulation category includes the covers where colors are solid and contain (practically) no variety in tonalities. An in-depth representation of this analysis can be found in Appendix F, while Table 11 contains a summarized overview. In 2011 all covers (n=10) have full

modulation. In 2021, however, the degree of modulation is rather varied. Two covers contain full modulation, three contain low modulation, and five have moderately modulated colors.

#### 4.4 Text

##### **Size of author name and title**

As mentioned in the chapter on the role of covers in marketing books, the size of the author's name and title is relevant. Especially so, because the title and author's name are, arguably, the most prominent elements on the front cover (Nørgaard 226). In *Reading Images*, Kress and Van Leeuwen discuss how size is one of the markers of salience—a way to ensure attracting the attention of spectators (177). Because of the importance of the text and because of the effect of its salience, the sizes of the title and the author's name have an influential role in the cover as a marketing device.

To compare the size of these elements, I have calculated the surface of the covers, the title, and the author's name. The results are presented in percentages. Presenting the results as relative values makes up for the possible difference in cover sizes, for not all covers have the same absolute size and so the size of the text may adjust accordingly. Thus, percentages also make for easier and more representative comparisons between covers. What is more, this process was done digitally, so relative values eliminate the possible difference between the digitized versions of the covers. As such, I was able to calculate what percentage of the cover these two elements take up. This was done to compare the respective sizes of the text in 2011 and 2021. First, the surface of the book cover was calculated by multiplying the length and width of the cover. Afterward, the title and author name were precisely outlined in rectangles. A title and name were considered to be one entity. This means that when a title or name was spaced apart, the space between the words was understood to be part of the title. What is more, at other times a name or title was split up into multiple rectangles in order to most

accurately represent the size of the element. By doing so, the surfaces of these elements were calculated. Finally, the surfaces of the elements were expressed as a percentage of the total area of the front cover. An in-depth presentation of my methodology can be found in Appendix G and the results of these calculations are portrayed in Table 12 (Appendix H).

However, I will focus on Table 13, which contains the averages of the results per year. In 2011, the average size of the title is one-eighth of the cover (12,5%), while the author's name generally occupied about one-fifth (21,4%). These averages have changed quite a bit in the years afterward. The titles had more than doubled in size (27,6%) in 2021. What's more, author names merely took up a little over a third of the space as they did a decade before (7,5%). Consequently, there was a change in which of the two elements was given the most prominence on the cover (Table 14). Most authors' names were larger than the titles (n=6) in 2011. As the number illustrates, it was still quite evenly spread. In 2021, however, all book titles were larger than the name of the author.

### Typography

Of course, the appearance of text is not just influenced by its size, typography consists of more elements. As our society is becoming increasingly visual, typography has become an important element of graphic design (Van Leeuwen 141). As such, it is valuable to analyze how the text on the front cover of romance books was styled in 2011 and 2021 and to see if there have been any visible changes in this practice.

The basis for categorizing types is determining whether their style is serif, sans-serif, or script (Poulin 260). Serif types contain so-called serifs, small additions on the edge of letters, visible on the 'E' in the title of *The Ex Hex* (Figure 13). It then follows that these serifs are absent in sans-serif fonts, such as the 'E' in Erin Sterling, the author's name (Figure 13). Finally, there is script, which consists of types that consist of or resemble handwriting. An



example of this can be seen in the genre indication, ‘a novel’, in the title of *The Ex Hex* (Figure 13).

To get an understanding of how these types were used in the front covers, I have decided to categorize the covers in three manners. Firstly, I have determined how often the various types were present on book covers (Table 15). At this point, no distinction was made between the size or role of the text itself. What is more, multiple types were tallied if, for example, a title consisted of multiple styles. This shows that there was a significant shift in what types were used. Whereas serif types were largely favored in 2011, it was the least used type in 2021. Instead, the use of sans-serif types tripled, making it the most common font. Finally, the usage of script types has also increased notably, for it was used merely twice in 2011, while there were eleven instances found in the top ten covers in 2021.

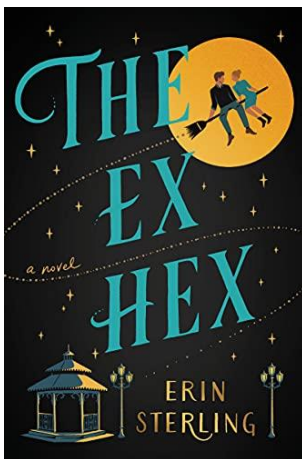


Figure 13 Cover of *The Ex Hex* by Erin Sterling (2021)

However, as mentioned before, it is especially the title and author’s name that play a larger role in book covers than the other text, often quite literally so. As such, I believe it to be essential to shift the focus and take a closer look at the typography in these two elements. Before we do so, it is important to note that I have added another possible metric here, namely that of a combination of multiple types used. When looking at titles, this was the case for 20% of the titles in 2021, while it did not occur in 2011 (Table 16). When a combination was made

in 2021, the title consisted of sans-serif and script types. Therefore, while the absolute use of sans-serif and script types in titles seems to have been consistently low, in practice their use has gone up in 2021. This also becomes apparent when looking at the use of serif titles, which went down from being used in almost all instances (n=8) in 2011, to being used three times in 2021.

The shift in the favored types is also found in author names (Table 17). In 2011, 80% of the names were presented in a serif type. The remaining cases made use of a sans-serif type. These proportions persisted ten years later, but here the majority used a sans-serif type while the other 20% made use of script types. Within this database, the use of serif types thus disappeared, while author names in sans-serif types quadrupled. What is more, while mixing different types was well-used in the titles of 2021, this was not the case for author names.

#### *4.5 Conclusion*

The first part of the case study shows that there are indeed differences to be found between the covers of the GCA 2011 and 2021 top 10 books. This has been examined in three elements in the covers. First, the front cover images have changed from photographs to illustrations. The illustrations in 2021 contained dressed couples, whereas the photographs in 2011 showed more variety in their contents. The front covers of 2011 also featured various types of backgrounds, whereas the covers of 2021 most likely featured a solid background.

The use of color has also changed. The colors of 2011 were more saturated than those of 2021, whereas the saturation was less differentiated. The opposite was true for the brightness of the colors. This chapter also showed that there was a greater variety of hues in 2021 than in 2011, which again heightens differentiation. Finally, the front covers of 2011 all contained fully modulated colors, while this degree varied in 2021.

The paragraph on text focused on the titles and author names present on all twenty covers. It showed that between 2011 and 2021, on average, the author names diminished in

size, whereas the title grew in size. As a result, the title is often larger than the author's name in 2021, while the opposite is true in 2011. I also looked at the typography. The analysis of the covers showed that in general, serif types were favored in 2011 while 2021 favored sans-serif types. In the title, the 2011 covers mostly used serif types, whereas the 2021 covers used a variety of types—including a combination of sans-serif and script types. The author names in 2011 too were mostly presented in a serif type. Serif types were also used for author names in 2021, however, covers more often made use of sans-serif types.

In short, it is apparent that there are differences between the covers of the GCA top 10 romance novels in 2021 and 2011, but it is not yet clear where these changes may have come from, nor what they may indicate. The next chapter will revolve around exploring possible answers to these questions.

## 5. Covering the Changes

### *5.1 Introduction*

This chapter will analyze the changes found in Chapter 4 through three lenses. These lenses consist of the concepts of discourse, provenance, and thumbnailability. As the main focus of this thesis is on digital advancements, the concept of thumbnailability will be most prominently present. The structure of this chapter resembles that of Chapter 4 and will cover the cover images, use of color, and text, respectively. In doing so, Chapter 5 will lean on multimodal theory by analyzing the romance book covers as products of the (design and) production stratum to explore the underlying (changes in) discourse.

### *5.2 Image*

#### **Nature**

In 2011, most of the top 10 covers used photography as the medium in the image. This can be traced back to provenance and technological advancement. As we saw in Chapter 1, provenance is the idea that the signs—used to make meaning—are retraceable through history or different cultures. In this case, the practice of using photographic images started in the early twenty-first century. In this sense, the photographic covers of 2011 are simply a continuation of the design discourse that already existed in the genre. At the time, this discourse was relatively new because the ability to alter a photo and reproduce it as a cover was a recent technological advancement. Because this technological advancement is relatively new, the photographic nature of the cover images could be seen as a sign for modern book covers—at least at the time.

As such, when the popular discourse of romance cover design changed to illustrations by 2021, this also makes it possible to differentiate between romance covers of 2021 and

2011. In that line of thought, the illustrations of 2021 are part of a new design discourse. However, it also demonstrates a return to past discourses of romance covers. As became clear in the discussion of the history of romance covers, they used to be known for their illustrated covers. Therefore, the return to illustrated covers is a clear example of provenance, as it is a sign that is historically tied to the genre and is used to represent the cover as a ‘part of the romance genre’. What is more, as perhaps expected with provenance, the style of illustration is not a one-on-one adoption, there are readjustments to tailor the illustrations to contemporary Western culture. One of the most evident reasons for this could be technological advancements, for most of the cover illustrations made in 2021 are created digitally. While sketches in the design stratum may be made on paper, the production stratum is often carried out on drawing tablets and computer programs like Adobe Illustrator and Adobe Photoshop—which first came out in 1988 and 1990, respectively. As such, these methods were simply unavailable in the years when Fisher and Meredith pointed out that it was too costly to use photographs as cover images (159). The illustrations created with these tools often show a higher resolution and are more streamlined than the traditional illustrations found on romance covers before the photographic covers.

Because the digitally created illustrations are more streamlined, they are also more in line with the concept of thumbnailability than photographs. In keeping with the ideas about modality in the introduction of this chapter, these illustrations are less modal than photographs used as images priorly, which goes hand in hand with the involvement of more contrast. As previously mentioned, contrast is one of the central principles of thumbnailability—or covers working in an online environment. The influence of the qualities of modality on thumbnailability will be individually discussed in some depth throughout this chapter. For this reason, I will only cover the basics right now. Still, because it is a recurring topic, the relation between modality and thumbnailability will be reinforced throughout the chapter.

In essence, illustrations are likely to score lower on the scale of modality than photographs. The basis of photographs lies in a direct representation of the world—it is a snapshot of real things—and will thus be somewhat realistic. This was not immediately clear from the contextualization, for only four of the ten covers in 2011 made use of the natural background of the image as the cover’s background. However, the use of these, collages and gradients, textures, or patterns, is still in stark contrast with the solid colors that were the backdrops for the covers of 2021. What is more, solid colors allow for more contrast. As for representation, the illustrations found in 2021 are much less detailed than the photographs of 2011. In the cover of *Call Me Irresistible* (Figure 14), for example, the hair of the woman consists of many single strands and, while the cover of *It Happened One Summer* (Figure 15) tries to emanate this by using different colors, her hair seems to be made up of sections rather than single strands. Color is also used to evaluate modality. For example, based on color differentiation. Figure 17 shows how, in pictures, the colors of palm tree leaves naturally progress from green to yellow. The leaves on the cover of *People We Meet On Vacation* consist of a single color that does not progress (Figure 16). This is highlighted by the lack of color modulation, which is the second way to evaluate modality through the use of color. In Figure 17, the upper leaves contain lighter shades of green than the bottom leaves due to shadows, while all leaves in the illustration are the same tones of green. In other words, the leaves in the photographed palm tree contain variations in color and tone, while the leaves in Figure 16 are flat as seen in cartoons. This heightens the contrast between the leaves, veins, and background on the cover. As contrast corresponds with thumbnailability, the use of illustrations in 2021 falls in line with the described conditions for the success of covers on the internet.

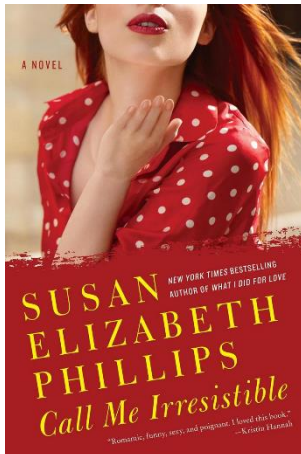


Figure 14 Cover of *Call Me Irresistible* by Susan Elizabeth Phillips (2011)



Figure 15 Cover of *It Happened One Summer* by Tessa Bailey (2021)

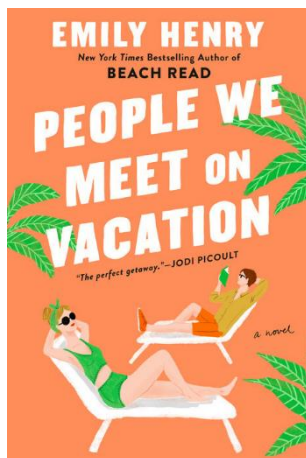


Figure 16 Cover of *People We Meet on Vacation* by Emily Henry (2021)

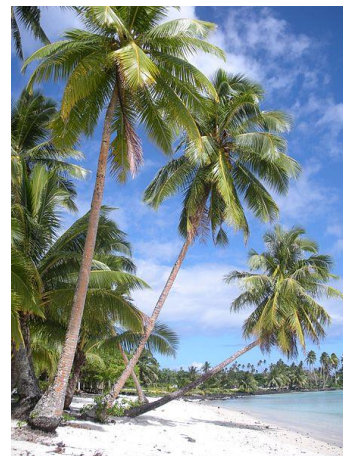


Figure 17 Image of Palm Tree (Glauser)

## Content

As has become clear in the previous paragraph, the main distinction between photographs and illustration is in modality. In other words, photographs lean toward realism and illustrated covers are more fantastical. As mentioned before, photographs are rooted in reality because they are snapshots of real humans and/or real places. In the case of romance covers, they at least include real humans. As such, even though the photos may be taken in a studio, staged, and likely edited, the basis still lies in realism. Because of this, the photographic cover helps the reader to conceive the characters as human. However, spectators are still given some

freedom for fantasy, because all photographic covers that contain a human being (n=6) show no face in its entirety. The face is either partially or fully cut off—such as in *Kiss of Snow* (Figure 18) and *Call Me Irresistible* (Figure 14)—or obscured because the character is looking away or because it is covered—such as both characters on the cover of *Lover Unleashed* (Figure 19). As such, the readers are still free to shape the characters' appearances to fit their own fantasy, while the characters are also presented as human, as a part of reality (Liffen 352, Mitchell 116). The discourse of the photographic covers can thus seem to steer readers into interpreting the books as part of reality (Spears 81). As such, while the story is fictional, readers are steered to interpret it as something that could truly occur due to the realism of photographic covers.

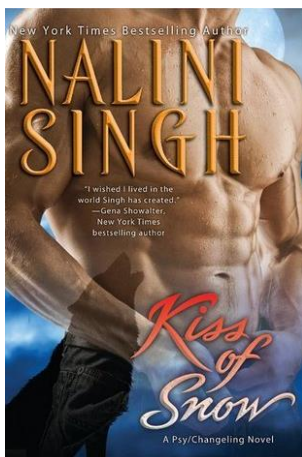


Figure 18 Cover of *Kiss of Snow* by Nalini Singh (2011)

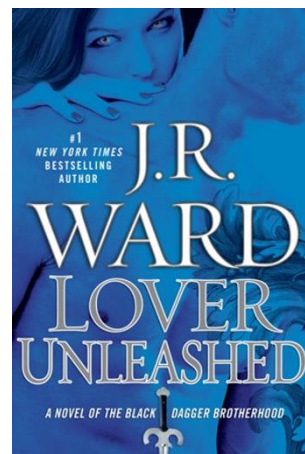


Figure 19 Cover of *Lover Unleashed* by J.R. Ward (2011)

The opposite is true for illustrations. The modality is low, which means that the images are not as lifelike (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Reading Images* 155). Other than in the past, choosing to go with an illustrated cover is an active decision, for there are other options—photographic covers are affordable and have proven to work, due to their popularity in previous years. In other words, during the design stratum, a choice is made for illustration. Because of this choice, the representation of the book is no longer rooted in reality (Spears 81). Thus, the design leans into the discourse of an imaginary story. The illustrations require



more fantasy of the spectator to come to life (Mitchell 116). To do so, there is an opposite trend from 2011: all characters in the illustrations are prominently displayed with their face. This was likely done to keep some humane aspects of the characters, which makes it more relatable to readers so that they are more empathic towards the main characters. As such, the fantastical element does not take away from this aspect of the reading experience. In discourse, one can understand thus an illustrative cover as embracing its identity as fictional. This is supported by the fact that genre indications were twice as likely to be part of the cover in 2021 (n=8) than they were in 2011 (n=4) (Table 18). What is more, in 2011, they were often (n=3) buried in a statement that marketed the book as a novel that is part of a series. In 2021, they were detached. While modest in comparison with the title and author name, this reinforces the book's nature as 'a novel'—a fictitious story. As such, the covers of romance books in 2021 seem to promote the discourse of reading romance books as a form of fantasy.

As has become clear in this chapter and the history of romance covers, human representation plays a large part in the front cover image. I thus want to take a moment to look at the changes in terms of this in the covers of 2011 and 2021. The first noticeable shift was from varied forms of human representation in 2011 towards just couples on the cover in 2021. What is more, there was an even bigger shift visible in nudity. Where over two-thirds of the humans on the covers of 2011 contained large areas of exposed skin, while there was no nudity on the covers of 2021 at all. The cover that contains the most nude skin in 2021 is *People We Meet on Vacation* (Figure 16), where the female character is portrayed in a bikini. However, due to the setting, this can still be understood to be legitimate attire. Taken together, it seems that the romantic connection is more important in 2021—for there is a preference given to displaying couples who are clearly romantically involved, yet in a modest way—often connected through physical touch or eye contact. The human representation in 2011 seems to present the characters displayed on the cover more as lust objects, with sensual

women—clothed, but blowing kisses or showing a hint of skin that makes spectators long for more nudity—bare-chested men—with bulky arms and muscled stomachs—or sexy couples—partially nude and/or in a sensuous embrace. As such, the dichotomy that was noted in the chapter on historical context lives on in the different years. 2021 seems to align with the traditional covers, that were modest in their presentation—even if the content of the books may not mirror this.

### Background

Aside from the shift from photographs to illustrations, we also see a shift from a wide variety of background types to a dominance of solid, monochrome backgrounds. To start, I want to explain how this shift can be understood to be a natural progression due to the change from photographic to illustrated covers. What is more, I also want to discuss the role of some of the central concepts of this thesis, namely provenance, and thumbnailability, in relation to the types of backgrounds seen in 2011 and 2021.

But first, I want to discuss the natural progression toward a solid background. In 2011, there was a greater variety of covers. In three of the covers, the background was simply part of the photograph that dominated the cover. Since this adds contextualization to the measurement of modality, these covers should seem more realistic than others (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Reading Images* 161). The truth of this can be seen in comparing the covers of *Call Me Irresistible* (Figure 14)—where the photo *is* the background—to that of *Lover Unleashed* (Figure 19) where the background consists of a solid color. *Call Me Irresistible* shows a partially visible woman blowing a kiss, surrounded by the—albeit faded—backdrop of the environment where the photo was taken. The photo on the cover of *Lover Unleashed*, however, was edited so that the original background has been removed and replaced by a solid color. Consequently, while both covers can be assumed to be staged—as photographic covers are often, if not always, the result of a photoshoot (Spears 80-81)—*Call Me Irresistible* feels

more realistic due to the hint of a realistic environment, while the lack of context makes *Lover Unleashed* even more fabricated (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Reading Images* 161). Another three of the covers with photographs had a background that consisted of a gradient, texture, or pattern while another two were surrounded by a collage of images. Except for the gradient of *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Figure 20), all five of these backgrounds did consist of background elements of photographic quality. For example the clouds of smoke or dust of *The Darkest Surrender* (Figure 21) and the plastered wall of *Dreams of a Dark Warrior* (Figure 22), but also the wolf and moon that make up the collage for *Kiss of Snow* (Figure 18) and—perhaps the clearest—the photo of the New York City skyline in the collage of *Hot Head* (Figure 23). As such, while the question of modality is not clear, the photographic qualities make these backgrounds go well with the photograph-central covers in 2011.



Figure 20 Cover of *Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James (2011)

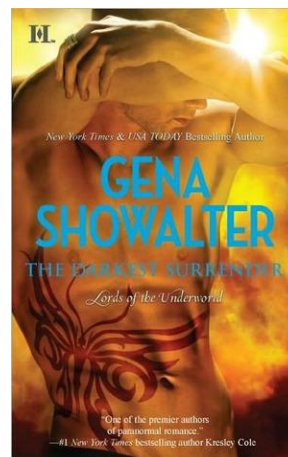


Figure 21 Cover of *The Darkest Surrender* by Gena Showalter (2011)

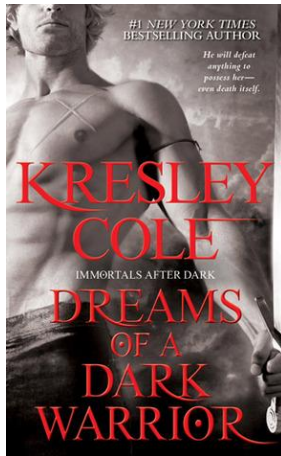


Figure 22 Cover of *Dreams of a Dark Warrior* by Kresley Cole (2011)

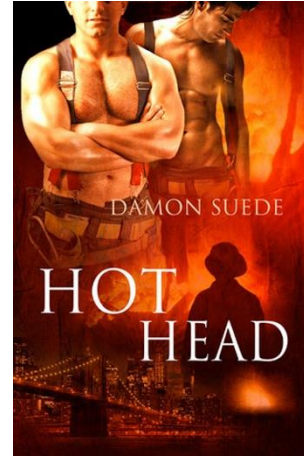


Figure 23 Cover of *Hot Head* by Damon Suede (2011)

We have seen that with the shift towards illustration, also came a shift towards the use of solid, monochrome covers. Of the nine illustrated book covers, eight have such a cover. Even the exception—the front cover-filling illustration of *One Last Stop* (Figure 24)—resembles a solid background, due to its pink sky and only slightly darker skyline. Aside from this cover, all covers use a solid background. In this case, a solid background quite literally serves as a blank canvas for the illustration to be presented upon. It is also more work to draw a detailed background that would correspond with the image. However, it is not infeasible. The art style of *Just Like Heaven* (Figure 25), one of the illustrated covers of 2011, resembles a traditional painting and the background is what one might expect from the illustration's setting. What is more, this cover is more aligned with the history. During the historical accounts of front images in the romance covers in Chapter 3, we saw that it was custom to give an impression of the novel's setting or to envelop the characters with a collage that added to the image.



Figure 24 Cover of *One Last Stop* by Casey McQuiston (2021)

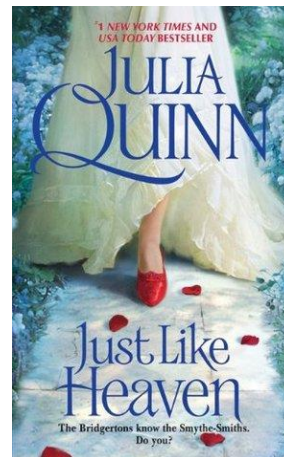


Figure 25 Cover of *Just Like Heaven* by Julia Quinn (2011)

So, if it was custom and worth the effort in the past, why do the illustrated covers of 2021 mostly opt for a blank background? The answer may hide in the contrast that is favored by thumbnail-appropriate covers. Opting for a solid background undoubtedly simplifies the front cover design as there is less to look at. If there is less surrounding an element, viewers will intuitively assign more weight to it, making it more salient (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Reading Images* 202). Because it gains more weight, the spectator will, intuitively, find it easier to understand that the image is what they are supposed to look at, even when presented on a smaller scale. What is more, because there is a large block of one color, the other colors included in the cover—whether it is the colors used in the image or text—will be more likely to gain contrast with the background. This, again, aids the interpretation of a cover on a smaller scale—making it more appropriate as a thumbnail.

### 5.3 Use of Color

Colors play an important role in what Darling described as ‘thumbnailability’. To make a cover appropriate for thumbnail use, it was said there was a bigger focus on “stronger colours” and “higher saturation” so that “the cover still stands out” (Darling 26). In other

words, the colors are said to be used to embolden the cover and to ensure a higher contrast between the various elements.

While the concept of thumbnailability is said to include an increase in saturation, the opposite is true for the covers of 2021 compared to 2011. The average saturation actually went down by 12,4% (Table 6). In this sense, the concept of thumbnailability does not apply to the covers of 2021. However, there is an argument to be made that the colors have gotten stronger. In 2021, the average value was higher than that in 2011. This means that, on average, the colors used in the covers of 2021 were brighter. Bright colors are more likely to catch a spectator's eye than dark colors. As such, they are 'stronger colors,' as is wanted for thumbnailability. This reasoning does not always hold. Due to contrast, when surrounded by many light colors, something put in a dark color will become more salient (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Reading Images* 177, 202).

Contrast is an important condition for thumbnailability and, as we have seen, it is one of the values of colors, in the form of differentiation. The previous chapter illustrated that color differentiation is more present in 2021 than in 2011 (Table 10). This means that among themselves, colors contrast more with each other through variances of value (brightness), saturation, and hue. This is intensified through the use of a solid background which—if chosen wisely—makes it easier for the other colors to contrast with and the decrease of color modulation associated with the illustrations of 2021.

The increase in differentiation is especially visible in the graphic representation of the hues in Appendix D. In 2011, for example, the graph of *Retribution* shows that all hues land on the same side of the spectrum. The visual representation of the hue differentiation of *Dreams of a Dark Warrior* shows that the cover is relatively monotone—it consists of a greyscale image—with one color breaking with this—the text is a contrasting red color. However, in 2021, the colors of *Act Your Age*, *Eve Brown* are quite literally spread over the

entire spectrum. It thus contains many contrasting hues. Also, the circle that represents *It Happens One Summer* illustrates the presence of two opposing colors on the cover—red in the top center and blue just left of the bottom. The spectra thus reinforce the argument that the covers of 2021 seem to contain more contrast than those of 2011. As such, even though the expected rise of saturation proved to be untrue, the higher amount of color differentiation shows that the concept of thumbnailability to enhance the covers for online marketing may have played a role in the changes visible in the covers from 2011 and 2021.

#### 5.4 Text

##### Size

In continuation of salience, one of the concrete aspects that are named to add to the weight of elements is the relative size (Kress and Van Leeuwen, *Reading Images* 177). This is substantiated by the fact that, in the marketing chapter, instances of large author name's on covers were said to correlate with the popularity of the author, because a well-known author sells more books. The discourse of cover design is, thus, that the text sizes on the covers indicate what is thought to be more significant. The top 10 covers of 2011 mostly gave the most weight to the author's name (n=6). In other words, the author's name is arguably given more weight than the title in this case as well. It should be noted that it could be argued that two other covers gave more weight to the author's name because the font size of the author's name seems larger than the title, but the title is longer and therefore takes up more space. Either way, all these authors have indeed published a lot of work before, and even most of these books were part of a larger series—an indication that they are well-known to the genre's readers. This then corresponds with the account given in Chapter 2. However, this seems to be different for 2021, because the average size of the title grew while the average size of the author's name diminished. As a result, author names are now given less weight than the titles, while many of these authors are well-known and have a bestselling status (n=6). This means

that the reason for smaller author names is not that they are not reputable. What is more, Claire Squires stated that this mechanism is even employed for lesser-known or unknown authors as well. Regarding the existing discourse of romance cover design, this trend seems rather peculiar.

However, when taking the rise of the internet and the accompanying concept of thumbnailability into account, the changes in size become plausible. Here, it is important to note that one of the descriptors given of thumbnailability is “that the title is legible when the cover is limited to ... a thumbnail size” (Darling 26). While the same is true to some extent for author names, titles are the main means to distinguish a book from others—for when asked what book one is reading, people will likely respond with a title. It is only when this title is common that it becomes necessary to clarify what book it is by using an author's name. What is more, previously, the title would still be legible on a full-size cover even if it was smaller than the author’s name. It thus was still easily discerned from other books. For reduced covers on the internet, however, it is harder to make sure that the other remains legible when one is favored because of the limited size. As such, in regards to the legibility aspect of thumbnailability, it seems plausible that titles have become larger in 2021.

### **Typography**

In the previous chapter, we saw that, in the studied years, the favored types have shifted from serif types to sans-serif and script types.

On printed covers, the difference between serif and sans-serif types likely makes little difference in legibility. For his book *The Legibility of Serif and Sans Serif Typefaces*, John T. E. Richardson reviewed various studies done on the legibility of types. He found that in the overall legibility of sans-serif and serif types, no significant differences were found—and if they were, the results are unreliable, for one study will state the one is preferred, while another claims the opposite (Richardson 106-107). However, there is an exception, namely



when the text is small. During his review, Richardson found that in smaller texts, especially on a screen, serif types were less legible than sans-serif types (107). This brings to mind the concern of legibility in ensuring the thumbnailability of a cover in today's digital age. It has been established that, due to the internet, covers should also work in a reduced size—meaning that the text will become smaller as well. Moreover, I have just discussed how the title seemingly has gained priority over the author's name. As such, the switch to the use of sans-serif types rather than serif types in the titles seems to be in line with the thumbnailability concerns expected in 2021. Take, for example, the covers of *People We Meet on Vacation* (Figure 16) and *Hot Head* (Figure 23), which both have a white title set against a red/orange background and which titles are comparable in size. While *Hot Head* remains legible on a reduced scale, the edges of the letters get blurred because the serifs become unclear. Meanwhile, *People We Meet on Vacation* does not deal with the same problem, because the letters have straight edges and corners—there are no decorative elements that risk becoming vague.

Unfortunately, script fonts have not been taken into account in Richardson's work. Since the matter of legibility appears to be complicated and the results turn out contradictory, basing an argument on fewer studies than the amount taken into account by Richardson would be irresponsible. However, the disadvantages of serif fonts—decorative elements that make a letter less straightforward—often apply to script fonts as well. In other words, one can assume that script fonts work poorly in terms of thumbnailability as well. However, we saw that in 2021 script types were used in half the titles (n=5)—either by themselves or in combination with sans-serif types. While this phenomenon may appear peculiar at first, the conditions it occurs in may explain why it is used anyways. Script was used in three variances in the titles of 2021. It was used, for instance, for articles, conjunctions, and prepositions that are uncapitalized in the traditional title type—see 'the' on *The Soulmate Equation* (Figure 26).

Another example is when it does resemble handwriting—and thus counts as script—but not in the cursive kind that script is often associated with. This can be found on the cover of *Act Your Age, Eve Brown* (Figure 27), where ‘act your age’ is written in a script that consists of thick strokes. Finally, when the letters were especially large, script was also used. This is the case for *It Happened One Summer* (Figure 15), which is completely written in script—though not the cursive kind—and ‘Spanish’ in *The Spanish Love Equation* (Figure 28)—which is written in cursive. Remarkably, this last condition is also true for *One Last Stop* (Figure 24), which makes use of a serif type. Because it is relatively large, the risk of the serifs becoming vague is lower. Still, sans-serif types were used more often in 2021 than in 2011. This shift can be explained through the concept of thumbnailability and thus through the growth of the internet. In 2011, covers were mostly presented as physical books and, therefore, designers were freer to choose any type. In 2021, the title had to remain legible as smaller text, which could explain the preference for sans-serif types. We have already established that titles were typically bigger than author names in 2021—as opposed to 2011. Therefore, it is in line with the assessment above that the shift towards sans-serif types is even more prominent in author names. Again, in 2011 covers were printed and the author names were relatively big—both in comparison to 2011’s titles and 2021’s author names. There was thus freedom to choose serif types. In 2021, author names decreased in size. Substituting serif author names for sans-serif author names then becomes a logical choice if they should maintain a chance of remaining legible in the thumbnail format.

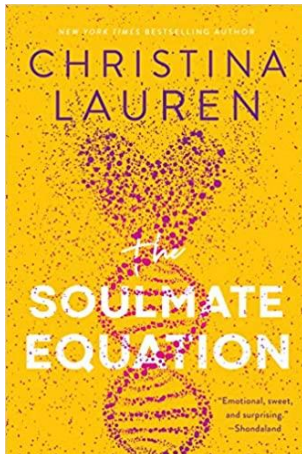


Figure 26 Cover of *The Soulmate Equation* by Christina Lauren (2021)

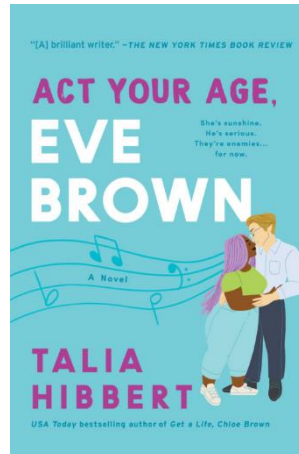


Figure 27 Cover of *Act Your Age, Eve Brown* by Talia Hibbert (2021)

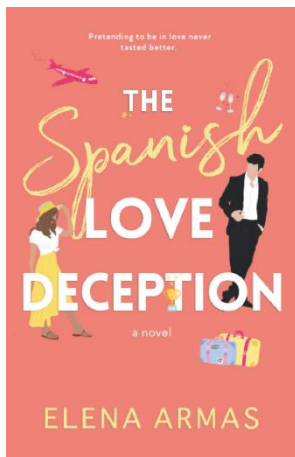


Figure 28 Cover of *The Spanish Love Deception* by Elena Armas (2021)

### 5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has built on the context provided in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 to analyze the changes found in Chapter 4. When examining the changes in the front cover image, the photographs of 2011 seem to be a continuation of the discourse of that time, whereas the illustrations of 2021 exemplify provenance by returning to the former romance cover discourse. The illustrations of 2021 are simplified images, whereas the photographic covers of 2011 were more detailed. As such, the covers of 2021 contained more contrast, which aligns with the conditions of thumbnailability. This is supported by the heightened presence of solid backgrounds in the covers of 2021.

The use of colors seems to reinforce the shift towards thumbnailable covers because, while the average saturation in 2021 was lower than in 2011, the colors became more differentiated. The colors used in the covers of 2021 were also less modulated than those used in 2011, which further heightens the contrast. As such, the color palettes seem to indicate that the covers of 2021 are more aligned with the concept of thumbnailability than those of 2011.

This chapter also analyzed the changes in the text—consisting of the title and author's name. The shift towards larger titles seems to be in line with the concept of thumbnailability. It calls for large titles that are also legible in reduced sizes. This is supported by the shift towards sans-serif fonts in the titles.

In general, the alignment with the conditions of thumbnailability seems to indicate that the changes that have occurred in the covers of the GCA top 10 romance books of 2011 and 2021 may be impacted by the growing influence of the internet in the decade.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored the changes in romance book covers between 2011 and 2021. The aim was to understand if these covers had changed and if they were influenced by digital advancements—specifically by the growth of the internet’s influence. To do so, I have performed a case study, during which I looked at the image, use of color, and text—the latter regarded through the author’s name and title.

The case study was rooted in multimodal theory as proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen. In line with this, the front covers were understood to be media that were the result of the (design and) production stratum. Because of this, changes in the covers could be understood to be indications of changes in the underlying discourse—as to be expected in a changing society due to digital advancements. More specifically, these changes are made through changing modes—elements that can be influenced to make meaning.

The front cover images were analyzed based on three metrics: nature, representation of human characters, and background. In 2011, the top 10 book covers predominantly used photography, which represented a continuation of the design discourse at the time. However, by 2021, there was a shift towards illustrations, marking a return to past discourses of romance covers. These digitally created illustrations, made possible by technological advancements, demonstrated higher resolution and streamlined aesthetics compared to traditional illustrations associated with the romance genre. As such, these illustrations are better fit to the concept of ‘thumbnailability’. This is also true for the contents of the covers. The illustrations of 2021 score lower on the scale of modality than the photographs of 2011. Because the loss of realism is often marked by simplification, this shift, too, seems to be in line with making covers more suitable for online thumbnails. This is supported by the solid backgrounds that were favored in 2021, as they allow for increased contrast. Overall, the shift from photographs to illustrations seems to align with the concept of thumbnailability, which is crucial for successful book covers in an online environment.

The concept of thumbnailability was described to involve the use of bold colors and high contrast to make covers stand out as thumbnails. However, the average saturation of covers in 2021 decreased when compared to 2011. Nevertheless, on average, the colors used in 2021 covers were brighter and, therefore, more eye-catching. The contrast was enhanced through increased color differentiation. Solid background and lower color modulation in the illustrations of 2021 contributed to the heightened contrast. Thus, while the expected increase in saturation did not hold, the greater color differentiation suggested that thumbnailability may have played a role in the observed changes in romance covers between 2011 and 2021.

Finally, I looked at the changes in the presentation of the text—specifically the author’s name and title—on the covers of the top 10 romance books of 2011 and 2021. Traditionally, large author names were associated with popular authors. This is evident in the covers of 2011, where the author names were often larger than the titles. In 2021, however, the average size of author names decreased, while the average size of the title increased. This shift may be attributed to the concept of thumbnailability, which values a legible title even in reduced size. In titles, there was also a shift from serif types in 2011 to sans-serif types in 2021. This aligns with legibility concerns in reduced sizes, as sans-serif fonts are generally more readable in small text. Script fonts, though often understood to be less legible, were also used more in 2021. This can be attributed to the fact that they were used in specific circumstances, such as uncapitalized words and larger printed words. In summary, the changes in size and typography in the author names and titles seem to reflect the considerations of legibility in regards to thumbnailability.

Overall, the changes found on the covers of romance books in 2011 and 2021 can be understood to be related to thumbnailability and thus to the growth of the internet’s influence in the digital age.

It should be noted that I came to this study as a literature student and not a design student. While I have tried to compensate for this lack of knowledge, a potential future study could cover the same topic but approach it from a design angle. What is more, I believe that future studies could benefit from different scopes. For example, through the use of a bigger data set—potentially even covering all years between 2011 and 2021; through focusing on other modes and elements that I have left undiscussed due to the size of this thesis; or by narrowing the scope to provide a more in-depth focus.

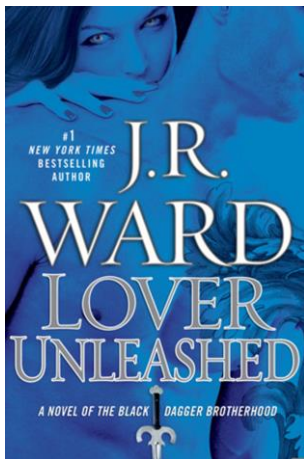
Evidently, I was not able to accurately cover the breadth of this topic in the limited space of a master's thesis. However, I hope that the changes and their involvement with the growing influence of online marketing practices I have found and discussed in this thesis will contribute to the discourse around this topic because I believe that taking note of current changes will help the prosperity of the literary market. And, in turn, this success should mean that my fellow readers and I can keep enjoying the stories of lovers—and, undoubtedly, their covers.

## Appendices

### Appendix A Overview of Database

The covers and titles of the Goodreads Choice Awards top 10 romance novels of 2011 and 2021 in order of ranking, highest to lowest.

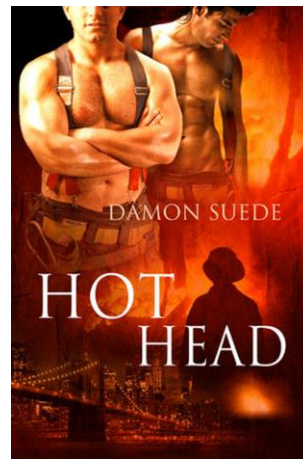
2011



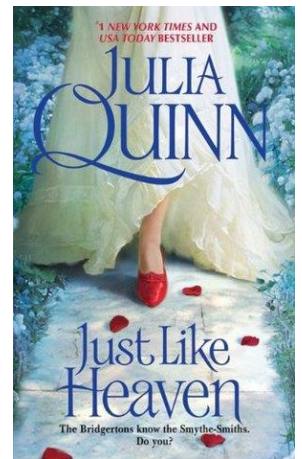
*Lover Unleashed* by J.R. Ward, NAL (2011)



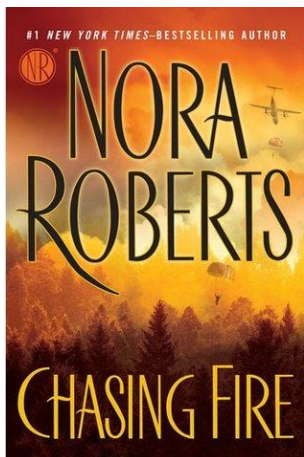
*Fifty Shades of Grey* by E.L. James, Vintage (2011)



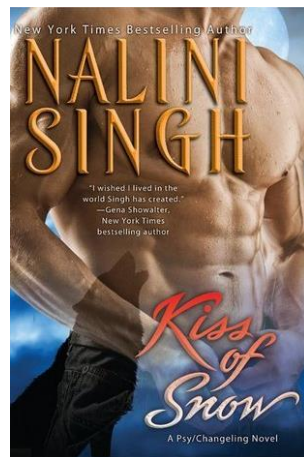
*Hot Head* by Damon Suede, Dreamspinner Press (2011)



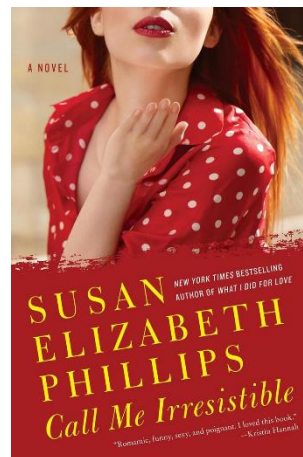
*Just Like Heaven* by Julia Quinn, Avon Harper Collins (2011)



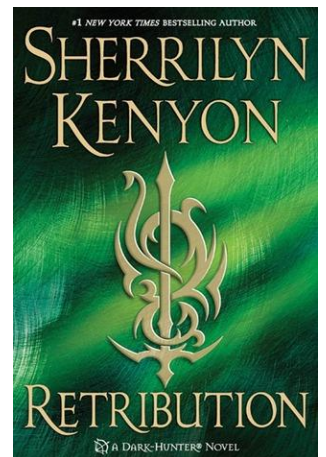
*Chasing Fire* by Nora Roberts, Putnam (2011)



*Kiss of Snow* by Nalini Singh, Berkley (2011)

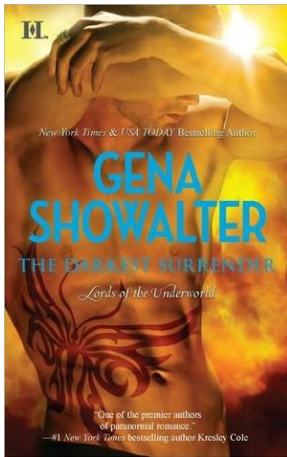


*Call Me Irresistible* by Susan Elizabeth Phillips, William Morrow (2011)

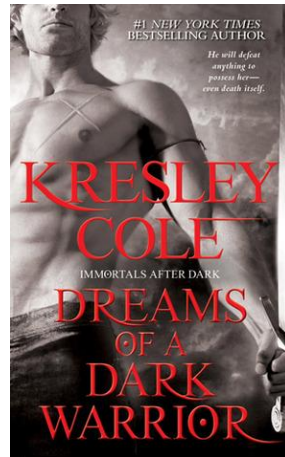


*Retribution* by Sherrilyn Kenyon, St. Martin's Press (2011)



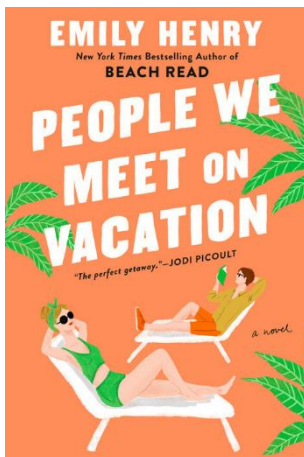


*The Darkest Surrender*  
by Gena Showalter, HQN Books (2011)

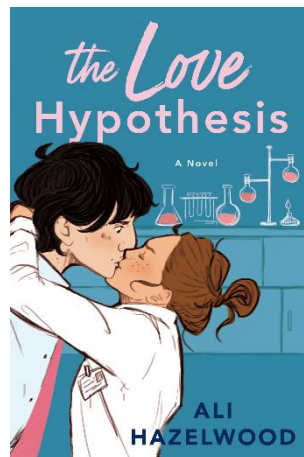


*Dreams of a Dark Warrior* by Kresley Cole, Pocket (2011)

2021



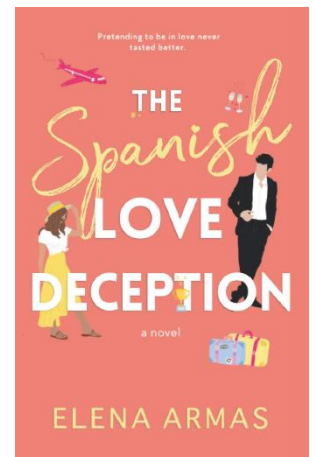
*People We Meet on Vacation* by Emily Henry, Berkley (2021)



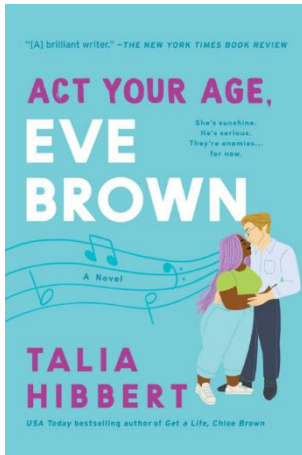
*The Love Hypothesis* by Ali Hazelwood, Penguin Publishing Group (2021)



*One Last Stop* by Casey McQuiston, Griffin (2021)



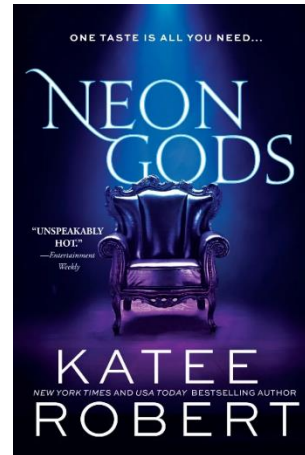
*The Spanish Love Deception* by Elena Armas, Atria Books (2021)



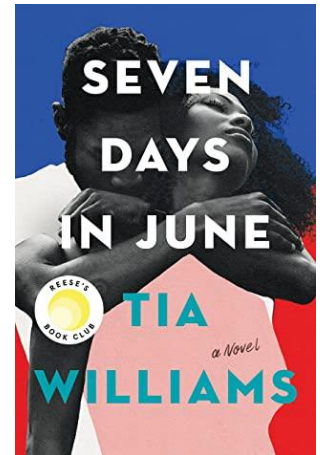
*Act Your Age, Eve Brown*  
by Talia Hibbert, Avon  
(2021)



*The Ex Hex* by Erin  
Sterling, Avon (2021)



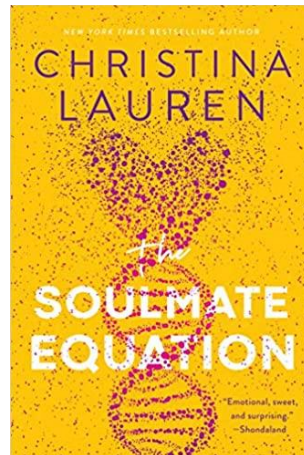
*Neon Gods* by Katee  
Robert, Sourcebooks  
Casablanca (2021)



*Seven Days in June* by  
Tia Williams, Grand  
Central Publishing  
(2021)



*It Happened One  
Summer* by Tessa Bailey,  
Avon (2021)



*The Soulmate Equation*  
by Christina Lauren,  
Gallery Books (2021)

*Appendix B Tables Corresponding with 'Images'*

Table 1

## The Nature of Front Cover Images

	<b>Photo</b>		<b>Illustration</b>		<b>Other</b>	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<b>2011</b>	8	80%	2	20%	0	0%
<b>2021</b>	1	10%	8	80%	1	10%
<b>Growth</b>		-87,5%		300,0%		∞

Table 2

## Human Representation in Front Cover Images

	<b>Couple</b>		<b>Single man</b>		<b>Single woman</b>		<b>None</b>	
	Number	Percent- age	Number	Percent- age	Number	Percent- age	Number	Percent- age
<b>2011</b>	2	20%	3	30%	2	20%	3	30%
<b>2021</b>	8	80%	0	0%	0	0%	2	20%
<b>Growth</b>		300,0%		-100,0%		-100,0%		-33,3%

Table 3

## Nudity in Front Cover Images

	<b>Nude</b>		<b>Dressed</b>	
	Number	Percent- age	Number	Percent- age
<b>2011</b>	5	71%	2	29%
<b>2021</b>	0	0%	8	100%
<b>Growth</b>		-100,0%		300,0%

Table 4

## Nature of the Background

	<b>Part of the image</b>	<b>Solid color</b>	<b>Gradient/texture/ pattern</b>	<b>Collage</b>

	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<b>2011</b>	3	30%	1	10%	4	40%	2	20%
<b>2021</b>	1	10%	8	80%	1	10%	0	0%
<b>Growth</b>		-75,0%		$\infty$		-75,0%		-100,0%

*Appendix C Tables Corresponding with 'Uses of Color'*

Table 5

Presentation of Representative Colors per Cover in HEX

	<b>Book title</b>	<b>Color 1</b>	<b>Color 2</b>	<b>Color 3</b>	<b>Color 4</b>	<b>Color 5</b>
<b>2011</b>	Lover Unleashed	2D61A6	EFEFFFD	23059	048ABF	8A8991
	Fifty Shades of Grey	212226	274659	567D8C	88B0BF	CEECF2
	Hot Head	F2A25C	F2600C	FEFFFF	590202	260101
	Just Like Heaven	8C182D	ADC0AD	294273	75B2BF	DFDFDF
	Chasing Fire	87191C	F2A71B	F28322	D94B2B	260101
	Kiss of Snow	183459	F66854	6EA3CF	593825	D9B6A3
	Call Me Irresistible	A61F2B	F2E205	F6E9D8	D9B991	8C2703
	Retribution	14029	27333	17A649	55A649	A6976A
	The Darkest Surrender	0BB3D9	331411	F2BC1B	D98B2B	A64826
	Dreams of a Dark Warrior	F21B42	DFDAD7	AC9D9A	8C7D7B	0D0D0D
<b>2021</b>	People We Meet on Vacation	04BF33	FFFFFFD	F28157	FDCDB9	D7A739
	The Love Hypothesis	072B59	FFFFFFF	3085A2	FFC9D9	F2B591
	One Last Stop	F2B6C1	A66F97	5A3473	FDFFDF	FDB90C
	The Spanish Love Deception	27282C	EB4F77	FFFCFA	F6E595	F08176
	Act Your Age, Eve Brown	A63F95	9E5729	76CDD7	FFFFFFF	BED95F
	The Ex Hex	1C777C	2CBFB1	F2B544	F29829	0D0D0D
	Neon Gods	101326	263173	0367A6	FFFDFF	6F489B
	Seven days in June	2E62A6	03A6A6	FEFFFF	595B5A	EEB1AC
	It Happened One Summer	034C8C	FFFFFFF	F2B705	F2BBA7	D90707
	The Soulmate Equation	BF0F82	F2B90C	FFFFF4	5D2250	BF2A2A

Table 6

The Averages of Value, Saturation, and Hue per Year Rounded to Two Decimals

	<b>Value</b>	<b>Saturation</b>	<b>Hue</b>
<b>2011</b>	65,58	58,04	118,26
<b>2021</b>	76,40	50,86	122,17
<b>Growth</b>		-12,4%	

Table 7

## Value per Color per Cover

	<b>Book title</b>	<b>Color 1</b>	<b>Color 2</b>	<b>Color 3</b>	<b>Color 4</b>	<b>Color 5</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>2011</b>	Lover Unleashed	65	100	35	75	57	66,4
	Fifty Shades of Grey	15	35	55	75	95	55
	Hot Head	95	95	100	35	15	68
	Just Like Heaven	55	75	45	75	87	67,4
	Chasing Fire	53	95	95	85	15	68,6
	Kiss of Snow	35	96	81	35	85	66,4
	Call Me Irresistible	65	95	96	85	55	79,2
	Retribution	25	45	65	65	65	53
	The Darkest Surrender	85	20	95	85	65	70
	Dreams of a Dark Warrior	95	87	67	55	5	61,8
<b>2021</b>	People We Meet on Vacation	75	100	95	99	84	90,6
	The Love Hypothesis	35	100	64	100	95	78,8
	One Last Stop	95	65	45	99	99	80,6
	The Spanish Love Deception	17	92	100	96	94	79,8
	Act Your Age, Eve Brown	65	62	84	100	85	79,2
	The Ex Hex	49	75	95	95	5	63,8
	Neon Gods	15	45	65	100	61	57,2
	Seven days in June	65	65	100	36	93	71,8
	It Happened One Summer	55	100	95	95	85	86
	The Soulmate Equation	75	95	100	36	75	76,2

Table 8

## Saturation per Color per Cover

	<b>Book title</b>	<b>Color 1</b>	<b>Color 2</b>	<b>Color 3</b>	<b>Color 4</b>	<b>Color 5</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>2011</b>	Lover Unleashed	73	6	98	98	6	56,2
	Fifty Shades of Grey	13	56	39	29	15	30,4
	Hot Head	62	95	0	98	97	70,4
	Just Like Heaven	83	10	64	39	0	39,2
	Chasing Fire	81	89	86	80	97	86,6
	Kiss of Snow	73	66	47	58	25	53,8
	Call Me Irresistible	81	98	12	33	98	64,4
	Retribution	98	98	86	56	36	74,8

	The Darkest Surrender	95	67	89	80	77	81,6
	Dreams of a Dark Warrior	89	4	10	12	0	23
<b>2021</b>	People We Meet on Vacation	98	1	64	27	73	52,6
	The Love Hypothesis	92	0	70	21	40	44,6
	One Last Stop	25	33	55	0	95	41,6
	The Spanish Love Deception	11	66	2	39	51	33,8
	Act Your Age, Eve Brown	62	74	45	0	56	47,4
	The Ex Hex	77	77	72	83	0	61,8
	Neon Gods	58	67	98	1	54	55,6
	Seven days in June	72	98	0	2	28	40
	It Happened One Summer	98	0	98	31	97	64,8
	The Soulmate Equation	92	95	4	63	78	66,4

Table 9

Hue per Color per Cover

	<b>Book title</b>	<b>Color 1</b>	<b>Color 2</b>	<b>Color 3</b>	<b>Color 4</b>	<b>Color 5</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>2011</b>	Lover Unleashed	214	240	208	197	248	221,4
	Fifty Shades of Grey	228	203	197	196	190	202,8
	Hot Head	28	22	180	0	0	46
	Just Like Heaven	349	120	220	191	0	176
	Chasing Fire	358	39	28	11	0	87,2
	Kiss of Snow	214	7	207	22	21	94,2
	Call Me Irresistible	355	56	34	33	16	98,8
	Retribution	158	146	141	112	45	120,4
	The Darkest Surrender	191	5	45	33	16	58
	Dreams of a Dark Warrior	349	23	10	7	0	77,8
<b>2021</b>	People We Meet on Vacation	135	60	16	18	42	54,2
	The Love Hypothesis	214	0	195	342	22	154,6
	One Last Stop	349	316	276	0	43	196,8
	The Spanish Love Deception	228	345	24	49	5	130,2
	Act Your Age, Eve Brown	310	24	186	0	73	118,6
	The Ex Hex	183	174	39	33	0	85,8
	Neon Gods	232	231	203	330	268	252,8
	Seven days in June	214	180	180	150	5	145,8
	It Happened One Summer	208	0	45	16	0	53,8

	The Soulmate Equation	321	45	60	313	0	134,04
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Table 10

Difference per Color Metric per Year Rounded to Two Decimals

	<b>Value</b>	<b>Saturation</b>	<b>Hue</b>	<b>Sum diff.</b>	<b>Av. diff.</b>
<b>2011</b>	82,25	82,78	241,15	406,18	135,39
<b>2021</b>	67,80	104,54	320,75	493,09	164,36

Table 11

Modulation of Color per Year

	<b>Full</b>		<b>Moderate</b>		<b>Low</b>	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<b>2011</b>	10	100%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>2021</b>	2	20%	5	50%	3	30%
<b>Growth</b>		-80,0%		∞		∞



Appendix D Graphic Representation of Hues

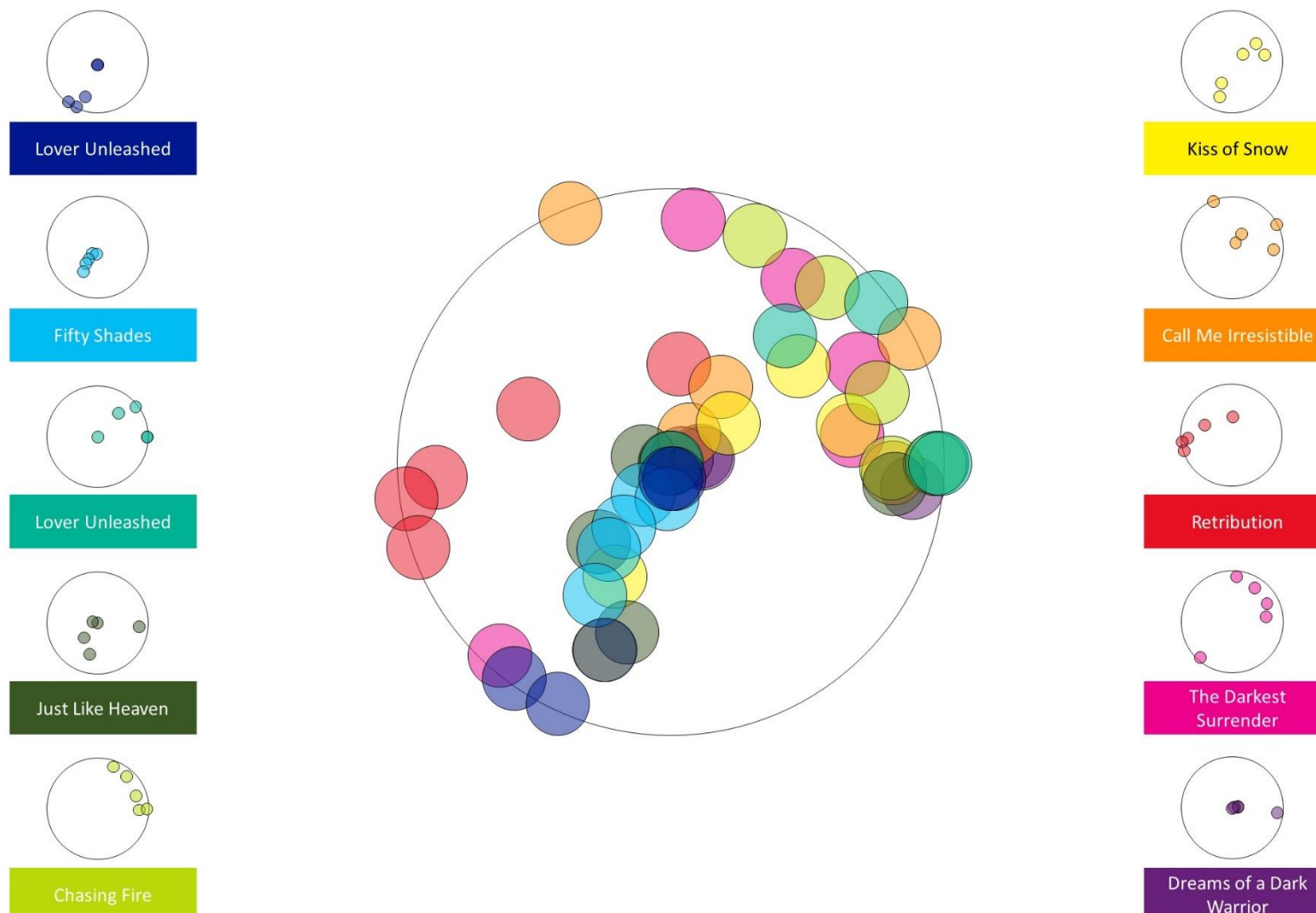


Figure 29 Hue Distribution in 2011

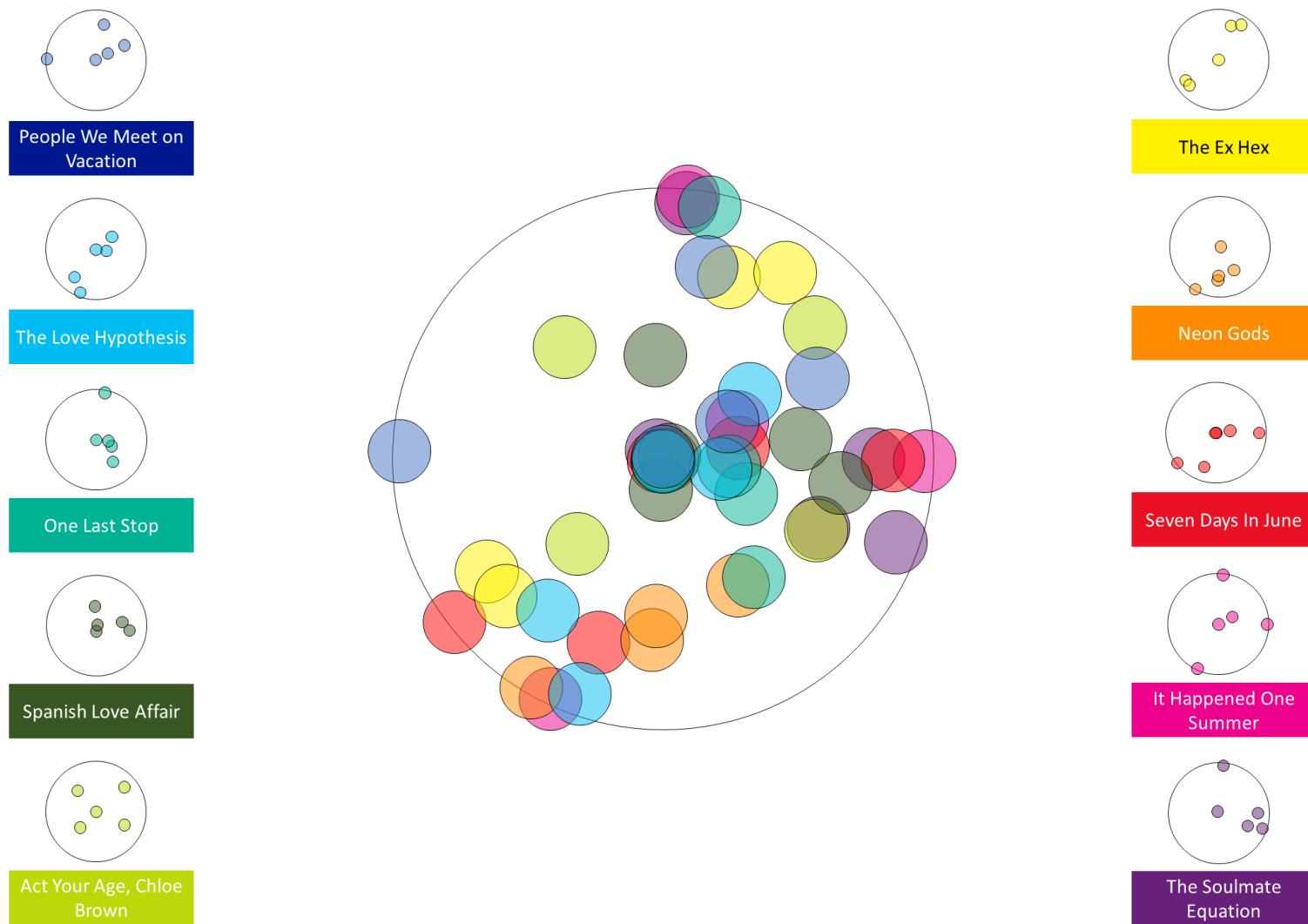


Figure 30 Hue Distribution in 2021

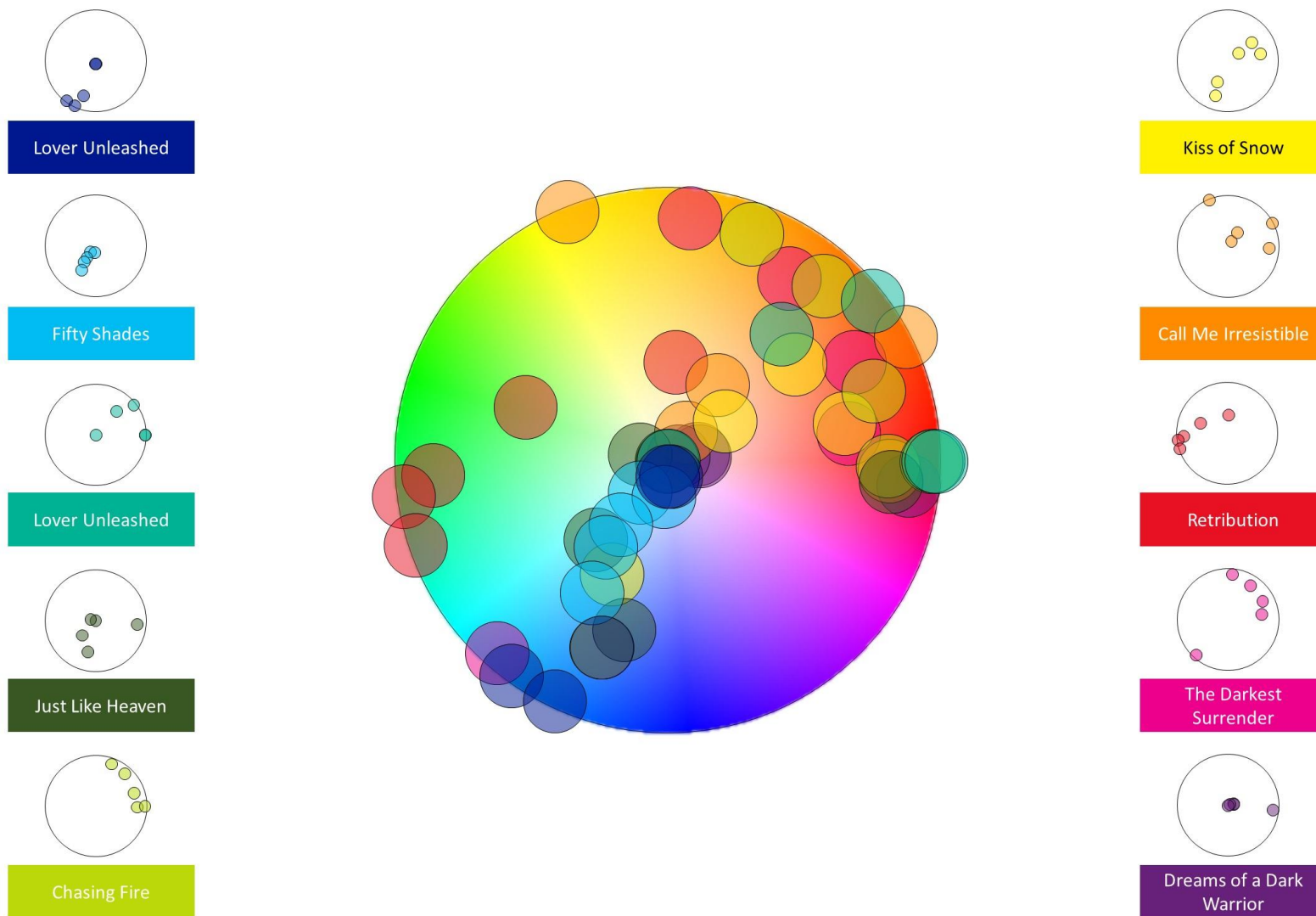


Figure 31 Hue Distribution in 2011 on Color Spectrum

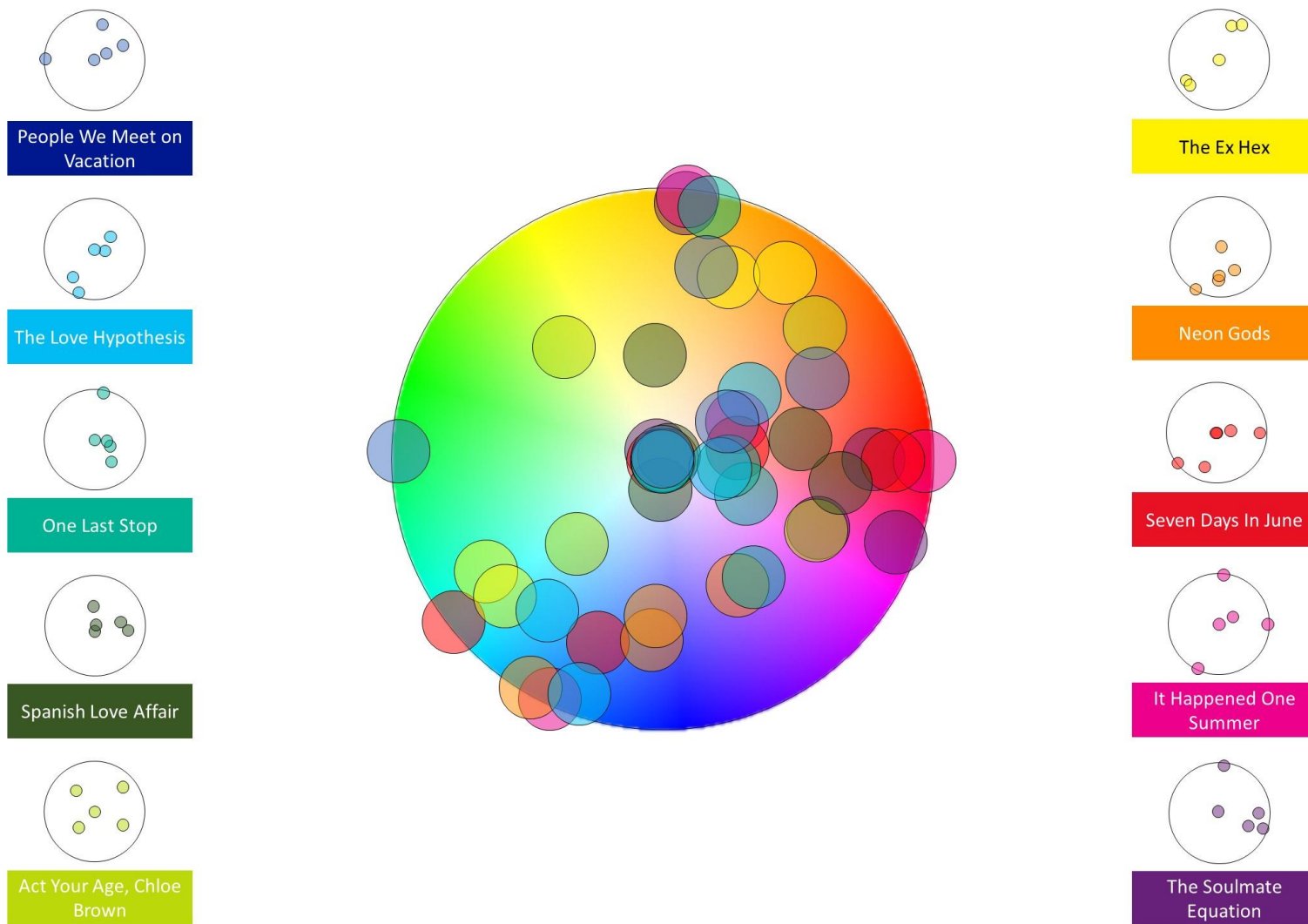


Figure 32 Hue Distribution in 2021 on Color Spectrum

*Appendix E Differences in Hue per Color per Cover*

2011 Hue difference

<i>Lover Unleashed</i>		c1	c2	c3	c4	c5	Average
	c1		26	6	17	34	
	c2			32	43	8	
	c3				11	40	
	c4					51	
	c5						
	<b>Sum</b>		26	38	71	133	268

<i>Fifty Shades of Grey</i>		c1	c2	c3	c4	c5	Average
	c1		25	31	32	38	
	c2			6	7	13	
	c3				1	7	
	c4					6	
	c5						
	<b>Sum</b>		25	37	40	64	166

<i>Hot Head</i>		c1	c2	c3	c4	c5	Average
	c1		6	152	28	28	
	c2			158	22	22	
	c3				180	180	
	c4					0	
	c5						
	<b>Sum</b>		6	310	230	230	776

<i>Just Like Heaven</i>		c1	c2	c3	c4	c5	Average
	c1		229	129	158	349	
	c2			100	71	120	
	c3				29	220	
	c4					191	
	c5						
	<b>Sum</b>		229	229	258	880	1596

<i>Chasing Fire</i>		c1	c2	c3	c4	c5	Average
	c1		319	330	347	358	
	c2			11	28	39	
	c3				17	28	
	c4					11	
	c5						372
	Sum		319	341	392	436	1488

<i>Kiss of Snow</i>		c1	c2	c3	c4	c5	Average
	c1		207	7	192	193	
	c2			200	15	14	
	c3				185	186	
	c4					1	
	c5						300
	Sum		207	207	392	394	1200

<i>Call Me Irresistible</i>		c1	c2	c3	c4	c5	Average
	c1		299	321	322	339	
	c2			22	23	40	
	c3				1	18	
	c4					17	
	c5						350,5
	Sum		299	343	346	414	1402

<i>Retribution</i>		c1	c2	c3	c4	c5	Average
	c1		12	17	46	113	
	c2			5	34	101	
	c3				29	96	
	c4					67	
	c5						130
	Sum		12	22	109	377	520

<i>The Darkest Surrender</i>		c1	c2	c3	c4	c5	Average
	c1		186	146	158	175	200,5

	<b>c2</b>			40	28	11	
	<b>c3</b>				12	29	
	<b>c4</b>					17	
	<b>c5</b>						
	<b>Sum</b>		186	186	198	232	802

<i>Dreams of a Dark Warrior</i>		<b>c1</b>	<b>c2</b>	<b>c3</b>	<b>c4</b>	<b>c5</b>	<b>Average</b>
	<b>c1</b>		326	339	342	349	
	<b>c2</b>			13	16	23	
	<b>c3</b>				3	10	
	<b>c4</b>					7	
	<b>c5</b>						357
	<b>Sum</b>		326	352	361	389	1428

2021 Hue difference

<i>People We Meet on Vacation</i>		<b>c1</b>	<b>c2</b>	<b>c3</b>	<b>c4</b>	<b>c5</b>	<b>Average</b>
	<b>c1</b>		75	119	117	93	
	<b>c2</b>			44	42	18	
	<b>c3</b>				2	26	
	<b>c4</b>					24	
	<b>c5</b>						140
	<b>Sum</b>		75	163	161	161	560

<i>The Love Hypothesis</i>		<b>c1</b>	<b>c2</b>	<b>c3</b>	<b>c4</b>	<b>c5</b>	<b>Average</b>
	<b>c1</b>		214	19	128	192	
	<b>c2</b>			195	342	22	
	<b>c3</b>				147	173	
	<b>c4</b>					320	
	<b>c5</b>						438
	<b>Sum</b>		214	214	617	707	1752

<i>One Last Stop</i>		<b>c1</b>	<b>c2</b>	<b>c3</b>	<b>c4</b>	<b>c5</b>	<b>Average</b>
	<b>c1</b>		33	73	349	306	
	<b>c2</b>			40	316	273	485,5

	<b>c3</b>				276	233	
	<b>c4</b>					43	
	<b>c5</b>						
	<b>Sum</b>		33	113	941	855	1942

<i>The Spanish Love Deception</i>		<b>c1</b>	<b>c2</b>	<b>c3</b>	<b>c4</b>	<b>c5</b>	<b>Average</b>
	<b>c1</b>		117	204	179	223	
	<b>c2</b>			321	296	340	
	<b>c3</b>				25	19	
	<b>c4</b>					44	
	<b>c5</b>						442
	<b>Sum</b>		117	525	500	626	1768

<i>Act Your Age, Eve Brown</i>		<b>c1</b>	<b>c2</b>	<b>c3</b>	<b>c4</b>	<b>c5</b>	<b>Average</b>
	<b>c1</b>		286	124	310	237	
	<b>c2</b>			162	24	49	
	<b>c3</b>				186	113	
	<b>c4</b>					73	
	<b>c5</b>						391
	<b>Sum</b>		286	286	520	472	1564

<i>The Ex Hex</i>		<b>c1</b>	<b>c2</b>	<b>c3</b>	<b>c4</b>	<b>c5</b>	<b>Average</b>
	<b>c1</b>		9	144	150	183	
	<b>c2</b>			135	141	174	
	<b>c3</b>				6	39	
	<b>c4</b>					33	
	<b>c5</b>						253,5
	<b>Sum</b>		9	279	297	429	1014

<i>Neon Gods</i>		<b>c1</b>	<b>c2</b>	<b>c3</b>	<b>c4</b>	<b>c5</b>	<b>Average</b>
	<b>c1</b>		1	29	98	36	
	<b>c2</b>			28	99	37	
	<b>c3</b>				127	65	145,5



	<b>c4</b>					62	
	<b>c5</b>						
	<b>Sum</b>		1	57	324	200	582

<i>Seven Days in June</i>		<b>c1</b>	<b>c2</b>	<b>c3</b>	<b>c4</b>	<b>c5</b>	<b>Average</b>
	<b>c1</b>		34	34	64	209	
	<b>c2</b>			0	30	175	
	<b>c3</b>				30	175	
	<b>c4</b>					145	
	<b>c5</b>						
	<b>Sum</b>		34	34	124	704	896

<i>It Happened One Summer</i>		<b>c1</b>	<b>c2</b>	<b>c3</b>	<b>c4</b>	<b>c5</b>	<b>Average</b>
	<b>c1</b>		208	163	192	208	
	<b>c2</b>			45	16	0	
	<b>c3</b>				29	45	
	<b>c4</b>					26	
	<b>c5</b>						
	<b>Sum</b>		208	208	237	279	932

<i>The Soulmate Equation</i>		<b>c1</b>	<b>c2</b>	<b>c3</b>	<b>c4</b>	<b>c5</b>	<b>Average</b>
	<b>c1</b>		276	261	8	321	
	<b>c2</b>			15	268	45	
	<b>c3</b>				253	60	
	<b>c4</b>					313	
	<b>c5</b>						
	<b>Sum</b>		276	276	529	739	1820

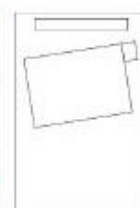
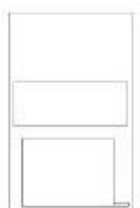
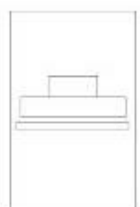
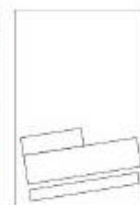
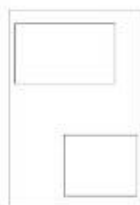
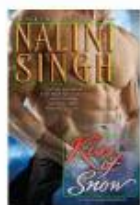
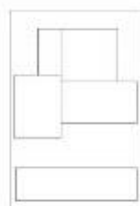
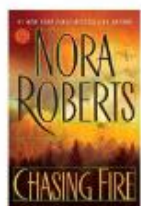
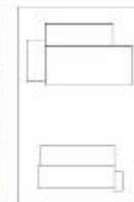
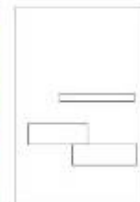
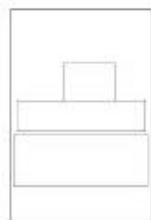
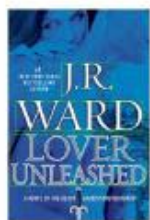
*Appendix F Assessment of Modulation per Cover*

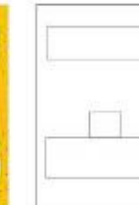
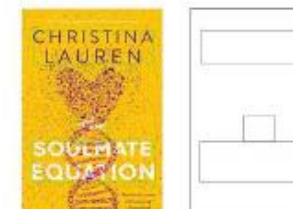
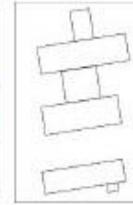
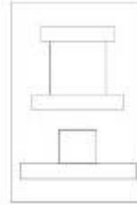
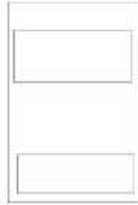
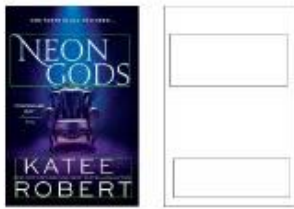
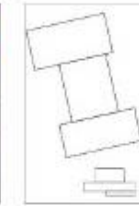
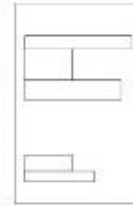
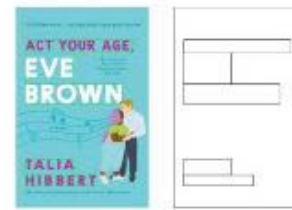
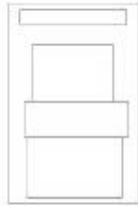
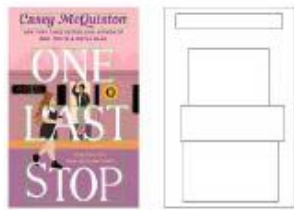
Table 12

## Modulation per Cover

	<b>Book title</b>	<b>Modulation</b>
<b>2011</b>	Lover Unleashed	Full
	Fifty Shades of Grey	Full
	Hot Head	Full
	Just Like Heaven	Full
	Chasing Fire	Full
	Kiss of Snow	Full
	Call Me Irresistible	Full
	Retribution	Full
	The Darkest Surrender	Full
	Dreams of a Dark Warrior	Full
<b>2021</b>	People We Meet on Vacation	Moderate
	The Love Hypothesis	Moderate
	One Last Stop	Low
	The Spanish Love Deception	Low
	Act Your Age, Eve Brown	Low
	The Ex Hex	Moderate
	Neon Gods	Full
	Seven days in June	Moderate
	It Happened One Summer	Moderate
	The Soulmate Equation	Full

*Appendix G Surface Indication Titles and Author Names*





*Appendix H Tables Corresponding with 'Text'*

Table 13

The Size of the Title and Author's Name as a Percentage of Cover

	<b>Book title</b>	<b>Title size</b>	<b>Author name size</b>	<b>Which is larger?</b>
<b>2011</b>	Lover Unleashed	23,2%	19,5%	Title
	Fifty Shades of Grey	2,9%	1,6%	Title
	Hot Head	9,6%	2,1%	Title
	Just Like Heaven	13,6%	22,8%	Author name
	Chasing Fire	15,1%	37,6%	Author name
	Kiss of Snow	16,8%	22,6%	Author name
	Call Me Irresistible	4,6%	16,8%	Author name
	Retribution	10,8%	27,0%	Author name
	The Darkest Surrender	2,7%	44,2%	Author name
	Dreams of a Dark Warrior	25,3%	19,9%	Title
<b>2021</b>	People We Meet on Vacation	26,6%	3,9%	Title
	The Love Hypothesis	22,4%	2,7%	Title
	One Last Stop	53,7%	5,8%	Title
	The Spanish Love Deception	39,0%	3,4%	Title
	Act Your Age, Eve Brown	18,0%	5,7%	Title
	The Ex Hex	32,2%	4,0%	Title
	Neon Gods	22,8%	16,7%	Title
	Seven days in June	20,8%	11,5%	Title
	It Happened One Summer	23,7%	9,4%	Title
	The Soulmate Equation	16,4%	11,4%	Title

Table 14

Average Size of the Title and Author's Name as Percentage of Cover

	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author name</b>
<b>2011</b>	12,5%	21,4%
<b>2021</b>	27,6%	7,5%
<b>Growth</b>	121,2%	-65,2%

Table 15

Proportion between Sizes of Titles and Names of Authors

	Author name > Title		Title > Author name	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<b>2011</b>	6	60%	4	40%
<b>2021</b>	0	0%	10	100%
<b>Growth</b>		-100,0%		150,0%

Table 16

Absolute Use of the Various Types in the Cover

	Serif		Sans-serif		Script		Total
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
<b>2011</b>	21	72,4%	6	20,7%	2	6,9%	29
<b>2021</b>	5	13,2%	22	57,9%	11	28,9%	38
<b>Growth</b>	-76,2%		266,7%		450,0%		

Table 17

Type Used in Titles

	Serif		Sans-serif		Script		Combination	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<b>2011</b>	8	80%	1	10%	1	10%	0	0%
<b>2021</b>	3	30%	2	20%	1	10%	4	40%
<b>Growth</b>		-62,5%		100,0%		0,0%		400,0%

Table 18

Type Used in Author Names

	Serif		Sans-serif		Script		Combination	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<b>2011</b>	8	80%	2	20%	0	0%	0	0%

<b>2021</b>	0	0%	8	80%	2	20%	0	0%
<b>Growth</b>		-100,0%		300,0%		200,0%		0,0%

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