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# Tourists not welcome: perceptions of tourism in popular romance novels

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**ABSTRACT**

This article analyses a genre of novels – popular romance – whose potential for research on tourism remains underexplored. In the 1970s, concern over the damaging effects of mass tourism on the environment and way of life of local communities grew significantly. Popular romance fiction was not immune to the debate. As I try to show, these novels can be a vehicle for analysing popular perceptions of tourism. Authors address issues and themes such as overcrowding, over-commercialisation, the spectacularisation and commodification of culture, and the quest for authenticity. I read tourism in romance fiction through a class lens using Bourdieu's notion of taste and Urry's concept of the romantic gaze. Criticism of tourism serves the strategic idealisation of the heroine, a working- or middle-class girl, and distances her from her social peers. The negative portrayal of tourists seeks to differentiate her and the hero from the vulgar, superficial tastes of the masses. The novels offer alternatives to the (mass) tourism model that build nostalgically on notions of authenticity and individuality. However, the contradictions inherent in the model proposed show it to be an escapist fantasy when considered from the perspective of readership and class.

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## Introduction

In 1958, the German author Hans Magnus Enzensberger wrote that 'few things in our civilization … have been so thoroughly mocked and so diligently criticized as tourism' (1958/1996, p. 120). His words are as true today as they were then. From the late eighteenth century to the present time, criticism of tourism has used a 'litany of complaints' (Thompson, 2011, p. 123) that condemn this activity as vulgar, inauthentic, trivial, predictable, superficial, intrusive, and lacking taste (Gladstone, 2005; Kinsley, 2016; Nuñez, 1989; Sharpley, 1999). Although there are different types of tourists and homogenisation is a 'sin' (Pearce, 2005, p. 2), a 'caricature' (Crick, 1995) or 'construct' (McCabe, 2005) has tended to dominate popular perceptions and some academic accounts (Cohen, 1974; McCabe, 2005). Tourists have been stereotyped as ignorant, passive, irresponsible,

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fun-loving, hedonistic, and uncaring (Crick, 1995; Kinsley, 2016; McCabe, 2005). Disparaging comparisons have been frequent, some more original than others. A newspaper article from 1926 compares tourists to 'billiard balls' that the tourist company 'shoots' from one place to another in hurried tours (Robinson, 1926, p. 7). More recently, the phenomenon of overtourism has inspired new similes, with tourists being compared to a plague or horde of zombies invading cities (McEntee et al., 2022).

Popular culture is a 'valuable arena for understanding contemporary life and indeed contemporary tourism' (Long & Robinson, 2009, p. 98). Representations of tourists in novels, films, television series, documentaries, or video platforms help construct a more comprehensive picture of how tourists are perceived (Holden, 2005). In this article, I would like to focus on a genre of novels –the so-called 'category romances' – that remains underexplored from a tourism studies perspective.[1] Category romances are the sort of novels published by Harlequin and Mills & Boon, that is, happy-ending love stories usually between 185 and 190 pages long. Over the last twenty-five years, these books have been the object of increasing academic interest and cogent research in the fields of gender, ethnicity, race, and cultural studies.

Mills & Boon romances enjoy a wide readership. In the UK alone, the firm sells a book every 10 seconds, and over 700 new titles are released every year. Harlequin's sales are just as impressive, with a rate of over 1,200 titles published a year (Mills & Boon and Harlequin websites).[2] Some of these novels are worth analysing for the glimpses they provide into their social context. In the 1960s and 1970s, with the rise of international tourism, Mills & Boon romances set in foreign locales became very popular (McAleer, 1999, p. 258). The number of titles published, and the fact that some of the firm's best-selling authors repeatedly turned to writing these stories, testify to their appeal. The formula worked well: the heroine travels overseas, meets the hero, and falls in love with him. Conflict and misunderstandings are resolved in the last two pages of the novel, when he and she shower each other with mutual declarations of love. Before that occurs, tourism is one of the things that fills the heroine's time abroad (Snitow, 1979, p. 144). Often compared to guidebooks and marketed as armchair travel, these novels are sprinkled with information about tourist attractions, local customs, natural and historical sites worth visiting, scenic views, quiet corners off the beaten track, and regional food dishes.

Romance novels of this kind allow for a variety of approaches in tourism research, including destination image and tourism imaginaries. This article examines negative perceptions of tourism through a class lens. As upward-mobility stories in which the heroine marries into wealth, romances create fantasies of handsome rich men, refined elegance, luxurious houses, and, of course, attractive holidays, far from the package-tour crowds. In the novels, criticism of (mass) tourism serves to differentiate the female protagonist, a working- or middle-class girl, from the vulgarity and superficiality associated with the masses. More particularly, it contributes to idealising and individualising her, distinguishing her from those of her class. Unlike them, she has the poise, morals, and taste that make her eligible for marriage to the upper-class hero.

In the first part, I use Pierre Bourdieu's notion of taste and John Urry's concept of the romantic tourist gaze to articulate the critique of (mass) tourism. The quest for authenticity and the romanticisation of nature are some of the elements that emphasise class differences and the superior taste of the protagonists. Conversely, Bourdieu's concept

of distaste will serve to examine such issues as the camera gaze and some hedonistic forms of tourism (alcohol and sex). This section is followed by another that approaches tourism through the opposition between quality and quantity. Several novels discuss the Janus face of tourism and call attention to problems such as overcrowding, over-commercialisation, congested areas, and the decline in moral standards. The novels suggest an alternative tourism model that builds nostalgically on notions of authenticity and individuality. However, the contradictions inherent in this model show it to be an escapist fantasy when considered from the perspective of readership and class.

## Methodology

Although the general corpus of twentieth-century romances in which tourism is criticised is larger (73 novels), this article includes only a representative sample of 28 novels through which I show the most common objections made by authors. Tourism is related to vulgarity, hedonism, overcrowding, lack of authenticity, loss of local identity, commodification of the Other, exploitative practices, over-commercialisation, traffic congestion, and erosion of moral values.

All the novels are contemporary category romances, one of the most popular subgenres of romance fiction. Tourism and tourists appear in the background of a significant number of stories. Many of the references located were objective: tourists visit places, enjoy the views, they sunbathe, sit at cafes, buy souvenirs, etc. Other novels, however, are more critical of tourism, and some authors even adopt a militant stance in their oeuvre. It must be noted, in any event, that Mills & Boon romances are, first and foremost, love stories. Although the presence of negative comments is occasional, this should not diminish their importance. Rather, for a better understanding, the perspective must be reversed: from the 1970s onwards, the debate on the environmental and social impact of tourism had reached such intensity that it even seeped into the pages of a genre as escapist as romance.

To consider the social context of production and consumption, the analysis is restricted to: (a) romances by British authors, and (b) novels published in the second half of the twentieth century. Many (10) are set in Spain, which is explained by the fact that, from the 1960s onwards, this country became the favourite foreign destination for millions of British tourists. The rest of novels are set in Italy (5), Greece (4), Portugal, France, Morocco, Turkey, Mexico, Peru, Thailand, and the imaginary islands of St. Lerie in the Caribbean and Mahila in the Pacific. A variety of settings were chosen to show how the global expansion of tourism was affecting traditional as well as new destinations.

The period covers 1955–1996. Chronologically, it can be divided into three stages: (a) the 1950s and 1960s; (b) the 1970s, and (c) the 1980s and 1990s. In the first stage, negative views of tourism do not abound in the novels. When they appear, they usually concern the spectacularisation and commodification of local culture (Crick, 1995, p. 212). The 1970s mark a turning point in the evolution of tourism, when unrestrained development and irreparable damage to the environment led to widespread unease. To reflect this new context of environmental awareness, many of the novels selected for this study were published in the 1970s. Although the post-Fordist model of specialised or niche tourism gained favour in the 1980s and 1990s, the mass tourism model continued 'alive and well' in many places (Williams, 2004, p. 15; Williams & Shaw, 1998).

In 1990s Britain, the package tour remained 'as popular as ever' (Sharpley, 1999, p. 89), which is why this study includes novels published in the final decades of the century.

The corpus of romances is listed below in chronological order, with indication of setting:

1955 (1): Rosalind Brett, *A cottage in Spain* (Spain).

1965 (1): Elizabeth Hoy, *Who loves believes* (Italy).

1971 (1): Iris Danbury, *Summer comes to Albarosa* (Spain).

1972 (2): Margery Hilton, *Dear conquistador* (Peru); Kay Thorpe, *Olive island* (Greece).

1973 (3): Elizabeth Ashton, *The rocks of Arachenza* (Italy); Iris Danbury, *The silver stallion* (Spain); Charlotte Lamb, *Carnival coast* (France).

1974 (3): Iris Danbury, *A pavement of pearl* (Italy); Norrey Ford, *One hot summer* (Italy); Violet Winspear, *The noble savage* (Spain).

1976 (1): Violet Winspear, *The child of Judas* (Greece).

1980 (2): Charlotte Lamb, *Compulsion* (Caribbean island); Charlotte Lamb, *Seduction* (Greece).

1984 (1): Sue Peters, *Savage summer* (Pacific island).

1986 (1): Angela Wells, *Moroccan madness* (Morocco).

1987 (2): Jenny Ashe, *The surgeon from San Agustin* (Spain); Margaret Mayo, *Savage affair* (Spain).

1988 (1): Lee Stafford, *Yesterday's enemy* (Spain).

1990 (4): Jane Donnelly, *The jewels of Helen* (Turkey); Anne Weale, *Thai silk* (Thailand); Angela Wells, *Summer's pride* (Spain); Sally Wentworth, *Illusions of love* (Portugal).

1992 (1): Jessica Hart, *Poseidon's daughter* (Greece).

1993 (1): Kay Thorpe, *The Spanish connection* (Spain).

1994 (1): Anne Weale, *Tequila sunrise* (Mexico).

1995 (1): Charlotte Lamb, *Dark fever* (Spain).

1996 (1): Anne Weale, *Sophie's secret* (Italy).

## Social class, (dis)taste, and the romantic tourist gaze

Like other popular manifestations, Mills & Boon romances reflect the historical moment in which they are produced (Allan, 2021; Auchmuty, 1999). From a diachronic perspective, these novels may be regarded as 'historical documents' (Auchmuty, 1999, p. x) that mirror the changes in British society from the first decades of the twentieth century to the present. With the rise of mass tourism in the 1960s, romances set in foreign locations increased. Some of the publicity in the pages of Harlequin and Mills & Boon category romances from the late 1960s to the 1980s promised readers the 'thrill of armchair travel–anywhere from the majestic plains of Spain to the towering peaks of the Andes'

and 'from the bustle of an international capital to the paradise of a tropical island'. Spain, Italy, and Greece, some of the top destinations for British tourists, were among the favourite settings, but there were many other countries for romance readers to pick up from the shelf.

Class matters in tourism (Crick, 1989; Hampel & Tracey, 2017; Löfgren, 1999; Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Urry, 2002), and so it does in romance (Burge, 2021, p. 395). Since the nineteenth century, mass tourism and the package tour have been associated with the working and lower classes (O'Reilly, 2000; Urry, 2002). The resorts where they stayed were regarded as inferior places, hence 'tasteless, common and vulgar' (Urry, 2002, p. 16), and package holidays signified the antithesis to the curiosity, individualism, and initiative that moved the traveller. Romance novels set abroad offer the prospect of alternative holidays different to sun and beach breaks or the package tour, which was all that lower- or working-class readers could afford. These novels create a 'fantasy world' that has little in common with the everyday lives of readers (Radway, 1984, p. 60). Dreaming of holidays where the heroine gets to know the real country, discover its beautiful sights, and go off the beaten track in the company of a wealthy, handsome man is part of the escapist aim of romance. For only 20 pence (the price of the novels in the early 1970s), British women could armchair-travel to fabulous destinations in ways that were beyond their budget.

Anti-tourism, argues Fabian Frenzel, is 'often an attempt at distinction, at expressing one's class position in specific forms of cultural consumption that are valued more highly than others' (2016, p. 9). Criticism of tourism in romance novels reinforces class distinctions. Negative representations serve to strategically idealise the heroine over those of her class and to widen the gap between her and her social peers. Her experience in the other country differs from the functional, bodily enjoyment linked to the practice of mass tourism. In many romances, mass tourism is the space of vulgar excess: cramping crowds, noisy beaches, bars, nightclubs, loud music, garish neon signs, 'horribly commercialised places' (Mayo, 1987, p. 46), and mass-built tasteless architecture. Tourists are called an 'invading army' (Danbury, 1973, p. 133), swarms of ants (Donnelly, 1990, p. 95), and 'goldfish in bowls', 'goggling out of their air-conditioned buses' (Ford, 1974, p. 5). Many are sun seekers, or 'tourists of the lotus-eating variety' (Winspear, 1974, p. 66), who visit a country for the sole purpose of enjoying its lotus flower: the sun. They 'rarely see anything except the beach, the hotel swimming pool, [and] the cocktail bar', and never go outside the confines of their resorts (Danbury, 1973, p. 133).

In *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste* (1979), Bourdieu argues that tastes are, more than anything else, 'distastes', that is, 'disgust provoked by horror and visceral intolerance … of the tastes of others' (1984, p. 56). According to Bourdieu, taste is a marker of social class. High culture is synonymous with elitism and refined taste, whereas popular taste has no aspirations towards the aesthetic sublime and is more concerned with the functional. In a system where aestheticism is a sign of distinction and class superiority, the only use of the working class is to 'serve as a foil, a negative reference point, in relation to which all aesthetics define themselves' (1984, p. 57). The (working-class) ethos of quantity, mass consumption of material goods, corporeal pleasures, and the functional stands against the ethos of quality, refinement, distinction, and pure pleasure, which Bourdieu associates with moral excellence.

In romance novels, the heroine's quest for authenticity distinguishes her from the commonplace tastes of tourists.Very often she does not travel for leisure but is abroad for professional or family reasons. Sometimes, she works in the tourist business or is a tourist herself (in *Thai silk*, she is a backpacker, and in *Savage summer* she travels on her own in a caravanette), but she is not part of the tourist horde, as this would make her like them and would not emphasise the qualities that single her out for marriage into the elite. In *A pavement of pearl* (1974), a novel set in Sicily, she visits 'some of the lesser-known villages in the centre of the island, seeking the out-of-the-way corners where few tourists ever penetrated' (Danbury, 1974, p. 171). In *The child of Judas* (1976), she is 'shown the kind of places that only a real Greek would know about' (Winspear, 1976, p. 179). She is taken to restaurants and inns 'favoured not by the gregarious tourists but by local lovers' (Winspear, 1974, p. 42), where she tastes the local food. She wants to immerse herself, as travellers do, in the real culture and environment of the other country (O'Reilly, 2000, p. 18). She wants to mingle with the locals and 'get behind the façade the tourists see' (Hilton, 1972, p. 70). If the ethos of travelling is, according to James Buzard (1993), the immersion in the other culture, going off the beaten track, and having an individualised experience (Seeler, 2022, p. 187), the female protagonist comes closer to this ethos.

The novels reprove the transformation of ancient local rites into theatrical entertainment for tourists. According to historian Daniel J. Boorstin, tourism is a producer of staged truths. Shows for tourists are pseudo-experiences or 'pseudo-events' adapted to suit their expectations. Locals 'embellish' and 'spectacularise' their traditional dances, festivals, and rituals to avoid disappointing tourists. The result is a 'travesty', an imitation, which tourists prefer to authentic culture (Boorstin, 1962, p. 103). They are promised real experiences, but what they see are 'false fronts' (MacCannell, 1976, p. 95) where local traditions and ceremonies have a performative nature. Early romances published in the 1950s and 1960s basically criticise this. In *A cottage in Spain* (1955/1975), the female protagonist goes to a gypsy show attended by locals only in which a renowned flamenco dancer is the star. The fact that the next day she and her troupe are starting a season in Barcelona suggests that her performance in the city is 'entertainment manufactured for tourists' (Brett, 1955/1975, p. 64) and that her performance now may not be as spontaneous as it appears to be. In *Who loves believes* (Hoy, 1965), a romance set in Italy, one of the local women complains that old traditions are being adulterated and transformed with the sole purpose of attracting tourists.

The commodification of culture is denounced in later novels. The 'myth' of the exotic, primitive, native Other offered by the tourism industry (Craik, 1997, p. 115) as a promotional tool is accelerating the destruction of local communities and their traditional way of life. In *Thai silk* (1990), the female protagonist says that even the most remote places in Chiang Mai are showing the 'first signs of commercialisation' and that the embroidery on sale for tourists is fake: 'If all the hill tribe embroidery on sale in Chiang Mai were the genuine article, the hill women would have to be sewing non-stop for twenty-four hours a day!' (Weale, 1990, p. 40). The hero states that consumption of place and culture by global tourism is inevitable: the 'world no longer has room for primitive people untouched by civilisation. There's hardly a place on the globe out of reach of tourism' (p. 40). Authors express unease at how tourism is corrupting local culture. In *The rocks of Arachenza* (1973), the hero observes that an ancient religious pilgrimage in Sardinia is no longer 'genuine' and is 'degenerating into a

mere tourist attraction' (Ashton, 1973, p. 140). Economic motivations often underlie the transformation of religious and popular rites, which locals change to attract tourists to the villages and revitalise their economy.

Following Bourdieu, in *The tourist gaze* (2002) Urry sees the solitary contemplation of nature as a sign of distinction and the individual's superior taste. Urry pits the collective tourist gaze against the romantic gaze, which he connects with the 'more elitist –and solitary – appreciation of magnificent scenery' (2002, p. 78). The romantic gaze pertains to the middle-class elite, while the collective gaze is associated with mass tourism and the working classes.

The romantic gaze defines the heroine's experience. Readers escape through her into idyllic nature and into sites untrodden by tourists and untainted by tourism development. The real country lies in places whose traditions and landscapes remain untouched. The heroine explores its hidden corners, admires the beautiful scenery, enjoys the sight of impressive peaks and breath-taking ravines, walks along fragrant colourful gardens, discovers remote villages, or swims in splendid beaches unknown to tourists. Sometimes, the hero or some local character takes her to visit these places off the beaten track. Descriptions of nature through the heroine's perspective are detailed and the vocabulary employed is sensorial, sometimes even poetic. Her innate 'aesthetic disposition' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 32) towards the romantic contemplation of nature's beauty and grandeur evokes Bourdieu's notion of the 'pure gaze', which 'sets the aesthete apart from the common herd' (1984, p. 31). Bourdieu argues that social classes are distinguished one from another by the aptitude to appreciate beauty in 'objects already constituted aesthetically' (1984, p. 40). The heroine's taste for appreciating beauty stands her apart from the masses. She and the hero are characterised by their aesthetic sense, which is the 'sense of distinction' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 56).

The solitary contemplation of historical sites with no tourists around is also a romantic ideal. As a form of tourism that marks the 'distinction' and 'superior status' of the tourist (Bell, 2008, p. 298), heritage tourism is devalued when practised by the picture-taking mob. Boorstin's prophetic assertion that tourists 'go more and more, not to see at all, but only to take pictures' (1962, p. 117) is realised in some novels. In *The child of Judas* (1976), tourists seem more interested in taking pictures of themselves than of the places they visit. One of the local characters says that the Parthenon is best visited by moonlight, when the temple looks white: 'During the day it's rather dusty and grey, with so many tourists bumping into each other with their cameras. I am sure they take more pictures of each other than the celebrated ruins' (Winspear, 1976, pp. 140–141). In *Sophie's secret* (1996), a local character observes that all tourists in Venice want to take a picture of the Bridge of Sighs from the Bridge of Straw, and that 'one day it will break under the weight of so many people' (Weale, 1996, p. 53). In both passages, sightseeing prioritises the mere collection of visual images over the experience of cultural or historical immersion.

Distaste of the camera, an iconic symbol of the mass tourist gaze, includes its fetishistic visual consumption of places and people. Photographs of local Others have been regarded as a medium that exoticises and turns them into objects to be consumed (Ramamurthy, 2004, pp. 188–194). The camera gaze appropriates, frames, and constructs the Other, and represents the visual and ideological power over them (Urry, 2002, pp. 127–128). The camera lens 'intrudes' upon the lives of locals, who feel always gazed upon as if in a panopticon (Crawshaw & Urry, 1997, pp. 178–179). In *Carnival coast* (1973),

the residents of the harbour area of St. Hilaire, France, resent 'being photographed by foreign tourists, feeling that they [are] treated as animals in a zoo, used for background material' (Lamb, 1973, p. 90). In *Thai silk* (1990), the female protagonist also protests that some villages are 'becoming like human zoos' (Weale, 1990, p. 39). She distinguishes between travellers and tourists. The manners of the first and their respect for local culture are superior, she says, to the behaviour of tourists, even the moneyed ones: 'I've never seen a backpacker sitting on a Buddha to be photographed' (Weale, 1990, p. 24). The camera gaze here is the collective tourist gaze that transforms local people into picturesque Others, and private spaces into free attractions.

The 'vulgar' and 'corporeal' forms of entertainment of the working and lower classes (Obrador Pons et al., 2009, p. 5) are another element connected with distaste. Since the 1960s, holidays on the Mediterranean coast have become associated not only with sun, sea and sand leisure, but also, for a growing number of charter tourists, with sex and alcohol (Löfgren, 1999). In one romance novel, tourists are described as 'pathetic creatures who fill the hotels and the bars and drink cheap *cerveza* [beer] every night until they vomit' (Ashe, 1987, p. 13). Many seem to 'prefer the inside of bars to the attractions of nature, let alone culture' (Wells, 1990, p. 47). In *Yesterday's enemy* (1988), the local hero tries to prevent development plans in a small fishing village in Spain. He says he will not have it destroyed by mass tourism and by 'hordes of screaming singles whose idea of a good time is to drink themselves into near-oblivion and leap into bed with whoever is available' (Stafford, 1988, p. 24). Comments like this testify to the rise of nightlife tourism and the social and political unease, as reported in British newspapers of the late 1980s, over the wild behaviour of some British tourists abroad, particularly in Spain.

In contrast, the heroine's body typifies class tastes (Turner, 2007). Her manners, slimness, or delicate, elegant simplicity in dress are expressions of good taste. Her moral values also differentiate her from liberated female tourists who go on holiday to take sexual licence with local men (Vivanco, 2017). Female sex tourism can be dated from the 1960s. Many women travelled to exotic destinations to bring to life the fantasy of sex with attractive, virile local men. Early British, Scandinavian, and German tourists chose Spain, Italy, and Greece, while American and Canadian women went to Caribbean islands (Bauer, 2014, p. 22; De Alburquerque, 1999, p. 90).

In *Sophie's secret* (1996), these women are described as 'susceptible tourists who every year lost their hearts to Italian and Spanish waiters, [and] Greek boatmen' (Weale, 1996, p. 84). The heroine of Mills & Boon romances makes it clear that she is not this type of tourist and feels offended at the mere suggestion that she is one. In *Illusions of love* (1990), the male protagonist misunderstands a situation in which the heroine and his cousin are rolling on the floor and calls her a 'pick-up' and a 'cheap little slut' who will 'do anything in the name of holiday romance' (Wentworth, 1990, p. 28). In *Moroccan madness* (1986), we read that the behaviour of these female tourists has given the local youth the impression that northern European women are 'extremely free with their favours' (Wells, 1986, p. 10). These references to female sex tourism also blame the local men.

## Quantity vs. quality

Quality and quantity determine whether holidays are an elitist experience or a communal, standardised one. Mass and package tourism belong to the second type.

Their emphasis is on quantity (Nelson, 2013, p. 39). Bourdieu associates quantity with necessity and the functional, whereas quality is related to luxury, and privileges the manner in which something is done. The ethos of quality is inclusive of aestheticism. However, when the aesthetic is barbarously consumed by the masses, says Bourdieu (1984, p. 6), it turns into something ordinary and commonplace. The Fordist model of tourism linked to mass production, mass consumption, mass demand, and standardised goods (Jessop, 1992) caters for the necessity of millions of tourists. The rhetoric of excess is often employed to describe this type of tourism: mass and charter tourists 'inundate' places, they 'are everywhere', they 'arrive en masse' (Smith, 1989, p. 13); the huge number of tourists causes a harmful impact on culture and environment (Smith, 1989, p. 13); many tourists mean less quality (Crawshaw & Urry, 1997). In the novels, mass tourism's focus on quantity results in overcrowding, over-commercialisation, massive tourism development, and traffic congestion. Decline in moral standards is another consequence.

The Janus face of tourism is alluded to in several novels. While the benefits of tourism are acknowledged, its destructive potential is denounced. In *Summer comes to Albarosa* (1971), one of the characters, Paul Fernwood, is a firm defender of mass tourism. Unlike him, the female protagonist believes that standardised development spoils a place with the 'usual tourist paraphernalia of towering hotels and beach umbrellas and swimming pools' (Danbury, 1971, p. 112). Mr. Fernwood sees package tourism as the 'life-blood of the holiday industry'. What English tourists want when visiting Spain is a 'modern hotel down by the beach where they can swim when they choose, loll about in the sun, [and] join up with holiday acquaintances for a drink or two in the evening', something that Spain's climate guarantees (Danbury, 1971, p. 88). As Mr. Fernwood argues, sun, sea and sand tourism is what makes English tourists come to Spain in large numbers, not niche tourism.

In *Savage summer* (1984), tourism is said to be fundamental for the economy of the Hawaiian Islands. Without tourism, people would be 'much poorer … , culturally as well as financially'. However, the islands are rapidly changing and, in their 'crazy urge to 'develop' every square inch of land for commercial profit', the bulldozers are also flattening the folklore, culture, music, and art of the Hawaiian Islands (Peters, 1984, p. 36). Tourism, says another novel, only benefits the large developers: they 'move in, put up a lot of concrete' and force out the residents, or 'reduce them to a community of waiters and souvenir sellers' (Hart, 1992, pp. 74–75). Exploitative practices and the colonial subjugation of the local population are discussed in *Tequila sunrise* (1994), a novel set on the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico. Millions of pesos are 'being spent on drains to serve the influx of tourists' while the local children remain uneducated for lack of a teacher (Weale, 1994, p. 20). Powerful businessmen are 'exploiting the poor, using them to build and staff the rash of hugely profitable hotels and holiday complexes but not sharing the proceeds of tourism, not helping to provide education or better housing at the lowest level of society' (Weale, 1994, p. 34). In *Summer's pride* (1990), the hero says that the advent of tourists has 'brought prosperity and disaster hand in hand' to Spain. In several novels, the local hero opposes tourism development, as it spoils places and destroys their essence and uniqueness.

Tourism invasion is inevitably tied to the ruination of place. In *Dark fever* (1995), the heroine regrets that she has not been able to feel the atmosphere of the Alhambra

because of the excessive number of tourists, to which the hero replies that tourism 'kills the thing it comes to see' (Lamb, 1995, p. 87). As the heroine points out when recalling her trip: 'The more of us that travel, the more impossible it gets to enjoy the places we go to see!' (Lamb, 1995, p. 105). Venice is described as a 'madhouse' in summer (Weale, 1996, p. 81). Prices are higher in tourist areas. There may be more jobs, but also 'more discontent' (Lamb, 1980a, p. 21). Little towns lose their peace and charm once they are invaded by tourists. In *Olive island* (1972), tourism development has not yet affected the small fishing village on Corfu where the novel is set. Only one hotel has been built, so life still retains an element of calm and simplicity. This contrasts with the previous hotel at which the heroine formerly worked in Athens, where the pool was 'filled to overflowing by throngs of holidaymakers intent on making the most of all the many facilities provided in their package trip to the sun' (Thorpe, 1972, p. 6). The pastoral atmosphere of the village is, nevertheless, doomed to disappear. As the heroine notes, the simple mode of life in this part of the island cannot last forever: 'Next year there would be another [hotel], and in five the whole bay would have erupted into another holiday township' (Thorpe, 1972, p. 47). Progress and modernity, ironically represented by tourism development, will make the place lose its essence and singularity.

Tourist-crammed areas, and the attendant problem of traffic congestion, are mentioned in some novels. In *The Spanish connection* (Thorpe, 1993), the male protagonist complains about tourism saturation in Ronda during the summer, when the rate of visitors increases. He would like it if tourists were not allowed to drive into the town, as there are traffic queues across the bridge and frequent accidents. In high season, tourism and traffic congestion make 'hell' of places such as Athens and make it impossible to enjoy them (Lamb, 1980b, p. 21).

The relationship between tourism growth and the weakening of moral standards is suggested in *The rocks of Arachenza* (1973). In this novel set in Sardinia, an international company is developing a new project that is turning the land around Arachenza into a tourist resort. Although the male protagonist participates in the project because he thinks that 'change … is inevitable' (Ashton, 1973, p. 188), he regrets how it has affected the locals' mode of life: 'I know we are told the tourist trade is beneficial, the north-east coast was once barren and now has become a money-spinner, but prosperity and visitors are bringing in many less desirable things', such as a 'general lowering of standards, dishonesty, permissiveness and crime' (Ashton, 1973, p. 14). He would have liked everything to be as it was before tourism development changed it all. In *Thai silk*, the heroine considers female tourists sunbathing with bare breasts an offence to the customs of the locals on Koh Phi Phi. She compares the attitude of many tourists nowadays to that of past colonisers: 'Coming first for wealth and now for pleasure, Westerners were still a corrupting influence' (Weale, 1990, p. 109) who show neither interest nor respect for the mores of the indigenous population.

## Conclusion

This article has shown how popular romance fiction may complement the tourism literature and be a useful resource for delving further into perceptions of tourism. While the novels analysed reflect the social context of increasing concern about the impact of

tourism, issues of social class, as I hope to have demonstrated, are instrumental in how tourism and tourists are portrayed. Criticism of tourism has the function of differentiating the heroine from commonplace tourists and from her class peers. Anti-tourism feeling is articulated through several themes and topics, going from vulgarity, overcrowding, and exploitative practices to questions of authenticity and identity. The novels look utopically at an Arcadian past that includes natural landscapes unaltered by tourism development or by the presence of tourists. The heroine explores, and delights in, the country's scenery, with no trace of tourists around. Her quest for authenticity, respect for the Other's customs, and access to real culture make her travelling experience superior.

While this ideal relationship between hosts and guests stands as an alternative and appears to be the cure for some of the ills of (mass) tourism, yet, when considered from a class-based perspective, it seems flawed, as it can be enjoyed only by a privileged few. For the working-class women readers of romance, who are by far the greatest consumers of mass tourism and package holidays, the alternative tourism model represented by the hero and heroine is an unattainable fantasy. This model is inseparable from the romantic daydreaming that is at the core of the genre. In other words, enjoyment of the 'Garden of Eden' entails 'banishing' tourists, or 'writing them out' of it (Dann, 1999, p. 160). Ultimately, like marriage into wealth, the alternative tourism model proposed can be regarded as a built-in element that assists the novels' escapist aim. After all, no one dreams of romance with a handsome wealthy man in places spoiled by tourism development or overcrowded with tourists.

## Notes

1. Hsu-Ming Teo is one of the few scholars who has explored this issue, although briefly (2012, pp. 242–244). In her analysis of British sheik romances, she argues that the traveller/tourist dichotomy and the negative view of tourism are rooted in British notions of social class distinctions and differentiation. See also Vivanco (2017), González-Cruz (2021), and Pérez-Gil (2022).
2. The novels were published in Britain by Mills & Boon and in Canada and North America by Harlequin. In 1971, Harlequin bought Mills & Boon.

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