# Saucy Books redefines romance novel culture with England’s first dedicated shop in Notting Hill



In the heart of Notting Hill, west London, a new literary haven has opened its doors, dedicated exclusively to romance novels. Saucy Books, England’s first romance-only bookshop, has quickly become a vibrant meeting place for readers, offering everything from brooding billionaires and queer awakenings to dragon riders and the classic enemies-to-lovers tropes. This unique space does more than sell books; it cultivates a community where enthusiasts share their passion for stories centred on love and connection.

The surge in romance novel sales nationally underscores the genre’s growing cultural and economic significance. Last year, the “romance and sagas” category hit record sales of £69 million, contributing significantly to the UK’s fiction revenue surpassing £1 billion for the first time. This rise is part of a broader trend, with romance fiction currently the fastest-growing genre worldwide, having generated over $1.44 billion in revenue and seeing a 52% sales increase in just one year. Especially popular is the “romantasy” subgenre—a blend of romance and fantasy—that has surged in part due to dedicated fan communities on platforms like TikTok.

Sarah Maxwell, the founder of Saucy Books and a former tech executive from Los Angeles, was driven by frustration when she realised established romance authors were barely represented on high street shelves despite romance constituting 20% of fiction sales. “I felt like I needed to do something,” she told The Guardian. Maxwell also highlighted the persistent sexism and snobbery that romantic fiction faces. She believes much of the dismissal stems from an inherent misogyny, where women’s interests in culture are undervalued. “These books are about the female perspective and female gaze when most media is through the male gaze,” she explained. To counter this, Saucy Books includes a dedicated “smut hut” space, designed to reclaim erotic literature’s narrative and celebrate female pleasure openly.

Inside the shop, the atmosphere is inviting and playful, with décor such as deck chairs and tiki parasols surrounding brightly painted shelves. Titles like *Swept Away*, *The Unhoneymooners*, and *The Friendship Fling* are displayed alongside thematic areas encouraging exploration of diverse romantic experiences. Jessica Roberts, a shop assistant, notes current trends such as the popularity of cowboy romances, with some customers showing their enthusiasm by donning cowboy boots. The shop also has ambitions to expand beyond sales into hosting author events, book clubs, and other community activities, turning the bookshop into a cultural hub for lovers of the genre.

Visitors from near and far have embraced Saucy Books as a cultural touchstone. On a recent afternoon, New Yorkers Rebecca Pollard and Haley Page browsed the shelves, with Pollard sharing a love for Sarah J Maas’s *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series, extolling it as an ideal entry point into romantasy. Pollard commented wryly that she often feels like a “cult leader” when introducing friends to the genre, an infectious enthusiasm that highlights the deep emotional connection many fans feel. Page expressed excitement about escaping into a “book boyfriend” fantasy while on holiday, a sentiment illustrating how romance novels provide both escapism and emotional resonance.

Despite the genre’s mass appeal, it still struggles against unfair stereotypes. Pollard dismisses derogatory labels like “fairy porn,” asserting that romance’s slower-burn storytelling deserves respect, especially given its focus on female pleasure and emotional complexity. She pointedly contrasts this with shows like *Game of Thrones*, where sex scenes centred on male perspectives are seldom criticised. As the romance market grows and gains visibility through venues like Saucy Books, such cultural biases may begin to erode.

The rise of romance-only bookshops is not unique to London. Inspired by pioneering stores like the Ripped Bodice in Los Angeles and the Book Lovers Bookshop in Edinburgh, the emergence of specialised romance bookstores marks a global movement towards recognising the genre’s cultural importance. These shops challenge the margins where romance has long been placed, propelling it into a more central position in literary culture and retail space. The trend is further supported by sales growth in related genres such as fantasy, with women under 35 driving much of the demand.

Romance readers are dispersed widely across the UK, with cities like Bristol, Edinburgh, Sheffield, and London among those showing the highest per capita purchases of romantic fiction. Leading authors like Colleen Hoover have dominated the romance charts, reflecting a vibrant market thirsting for stories that explore the multitude of human experiences through love and relationships.

Saucy Books stands as a testament to both the popularity and the transformative potential of romantic fiction. By creating a welcoming environment that elevates the genre and embraces its full spectrum—from tender love stories to bold eroticism—it invites readers to celebrate the diversity of love narratives while challenging the cultural prejudices that have long shadowed the genre.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/jun/28/we-need-to-reclaim-these-words-inside-saucy-books-englands-first-romance-only-bookshop-catering-to-record-levels-of-popularity), [[3]](https://www.swlondoner.co.uk/entertainment/24062025-saucy-books-londons-first-romance-dedicated-bookshop)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/jun/28/we-need-to-reclaim-these-words-inside-saucy-books-englands-first-romance-only-bookshop-catering-to-record-levels-of-popularity), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/jun/28/we-need-to-reclaim-these-words-inside-saucy-books-englands-first-romance-only-bookshop-catering-to-record-levels-of-popularity), [[4]](https://wordsrated.com/romance-novel-sales-statistics/), [[5]](https://authorlink.com/news-and-views/news/romance-and-fantasy-book-categories-soar-in-uk-and-us/)
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2. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/jun/28/we-need-to-reclaim-these-words-inside-saucy-books-englands-first-romance-only-bookshop-catering-to-record-levels-of-popularity> - This article discusses the opening of Saucy Books, England's first romance-only bookshop, in Notting Hill, London. The store has quickly become a popular destination for readers, fostering a community for romance enthusiasts. Despite some critics dismissing the genre as 'smut' or 'fairy porn', fans argue that these are well-crafted stories. The article also highlights the surge in popularity of romance novels, with sales reaching £69 million in 2024, contributing to UK fiction revenue surpassing £1 billion for the first time.
3. <https://www.swlondoner.co.uk/entertainment/24062025-saucy-books-londons-first-romance-dedicated-bookshop> - This piece reports on the opening of Saucy Books, London's first independent bookshop dedicated entirely to the romance genre, in Notting Hill. The shop aims to celebrate love stories and create a joyful space for book lovers. Founder Sarah Maxwell expressed her desire to build a shop that centres on pleasure, intimacy, and storytelling, making space for every kind of romantic. The store offers themed displays, exclusive gifts, and special editions, and plans to host author events and book clubs to foster connection and community. ([swlondoner.co.uk](https://www.swlondoner.co.uk/entertainment/24062025-saucy-books-londons-first-romance-dedicated-bookshop?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://wordsrated.com/romance-novel-sales-statistics/> - This article provides statistics on the sales of romance novels, highlighting that the genre generates over $1.44 billion in revenue, making it the highest-earning fiction category. It notes that romance reached over 39 million printed units sold over the last 12 months as of May 2023, with sales growing by 52% compared to the previous year. The piece also mentions that romance was the fastest-growing genre of fiction over this period, contributing to 66% of adult fiction growth in 2022. ([wordsrated.com](https://wordsrated.com/romance-novel-sales-statistics/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://authorlink.com/news-and-views/news/romance-and-fantasy-book-categories-soar-in-uk-and-us/> - This article discusses the surge in popularity of romance and fantasy book categories in the UK and US, driven by the rise of the 'romantasy' subgenre and the influence of TikTok's BookTok community. In the UK, sales of Romance & Sagas increased from £62 million in 2023 to £69 million in 2024, while Science Fiction & Fantasy saw a rise from £59 million to £83 million. The piece also highlights that women under 35 years old make up more than half of romantasy purchases. ([authorlink.com](https://authorlink.com/news-and-views/news/romance-and-fantasy-book-categories-soar-in-uk-and-us/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://press.aboutamazon.com/uk/news/books-and-authors/2024/7/amazon-books-spotlights-most-romantic-uk-cities-who-enjoy-reading-romance-this-valentines-day> - This press release from Amazon Books UK highlights the most romantic cities in the UK based on per capita romance book purchases. The top cities include Bristol, Edinburgh, Sheffield, Nottingham, Cardiff, Liverpool, Coventry, Glasgow, Southampton, Belfast, Newcastle, London, Leeds, Birmingham, and Manchester. The release also notes that Colleen Hoover dominated the list, taking the top spot for romance authors in all of the top 15 cities and having five books in the UK’s favourite 15 romance novels list. ([press.aboutamazon.com](https://press.aboutamazon.com/uk/news/books-and-authors/2024/7/amazon-books-spotlights-most-romantic-uk-cities-who-enjoy-reading-romance-this-valentines-day?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/romance-bookshops-romantic-fiction-novels-boom-b2697611.html> - This article discusses the global rise of romance-only bookstores, noting that since the opening of the Ripped Bodice in Los Angeles, other romance-only bookstores have blossomed across the US and Canada, numbering almost two dozen. In the UK, the first romance bookstore, Book Lovers Bookshop, opened in Edinburgh in 2024. The piece also mentions the influence of these bookstores on other booksellers to showcase romance novels, with many creating dedicated sections for the genre. ([independent.co.uk](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/romance-bookshops-romantic-fiction-novels-boom-b2697611.html?utm_source=openai))