and the embrace of human difference must be counted among [television’s] most salutary legacies. During the Cold War, through television, America became a more open and tolerant place’ (p. 2).

Along the way of making this argument, Doherty also overturns some of television history’s more tenacious myths. According to the author, it was not Nixon or Kennedy who set precedent for the modern visual presidency, but Eisenhower who truly inaugurated the medium for political address. Through Doherty, Eisenhower emerges as a precocious manager of early telegenic appeal.

The book’s powerful insights detract nothing from its entertainment value. Doherty does not spare one trope in the catalogue of poetic devices, and the resulting text is one rich in detail and which yet remains accessible to a broad audience. In addition to its list of achievements, the book also serves as an instruction manual on how to bridge the divide between academic and general readership. Superbly written and brimming with anecdotes that range from the tragic to the hilarious, Cool Medium has earned places on the library shelf as well as on the coffee table.

Ironically, the book’s rhetorical strength exposes its only limitation. At times, Doherty’s discussion may grow too descriptive for some, leaving impatient readers hungry for a more commanding analytic distance in the writing that might help to reign in some of the author’s more sprawling detail.

Academics will no doubt be frustrated by the book’s murky citation style, which does not always clearly distinguish between reference material and Doherty’s own assertions. The author’s rich and obscure references invite readers to peruse his sources, but the job quickly grows tedious as industrious readers are forced to dig through the book’s inefficient note structure.

These criticisms are incidental when weighed against the value of the book as a whole. Already an accomplished and prolific author, Doherty’s latest work ensures that he will make a significant contribution to the canon of television history. Cool Medium is as colorful as the postwar culture it helps us better understand.

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Romance novels, loved by thousands and spurned by thousands more, continue to attract a bad press. The recent Romance Writers’ Conference in
Melbourne was (yet again) reported as a matter of ripped bodices and steamy situations – for the clichés the authors are accused of employing are far outweighed by their critics’ artillery of leaden slugs. It’s a kind of war-sport. The suspects are herded together; thinly veiled misogyny sidles around the field; envy looks askance at sales and earnings; snobbishness obliterates rivals (‘literary unknowns’), and alarmism takes every opportunity to unsettle sense and judgment. What do we make, for example, of the estimate that, in the English-speaking world alone, ‘a romance novel is purchased every few seconds’? Just imagine! But hold on; it is one of the strengths of Juliet’s Flesch’s study that such a figure prompts further investigation, instead of mere tut-tutting. So don’t be shocked; even at 1 per 3 seconds, that’s far fewer romances than newspapers, after all.

Newspapers, though, tend to be owned, produced and editorialised by males, whereas the other form of fiction is famously the woman’s domain. Each configuration establishes a social standing, and each enables consumers to inhabit narratives for which we feel a need in our lives. In the case of romance, ‘He loves me (not)’ is the pleasurable doubt upon which the tale depends; in the case of the breakfast paper, the reader is assured of today’s facts by their appropriate modification of yesterday’s – thus producing the illusion of truth. Neither narrative, however, looks all that convincing when removed from its gendered cultural frame.

Perhaps for this reason, Flesch provides her subject – recent Australian popular romance – with a stronger frame than any historian I have come across. She shows the absurdity of clumping all romance novels together as indistinguishable products of anonymous uneducated women; she anatomises the recurrent ills of critics; she traces changing attitudes to sex, gender, race, class, nationality, etc. as depicted in the books. With signal success, she examines E. M. Hull’s *The Sheik* (1921) as an early and disturbingly influential example of the desert or ‘sand’ romance, in which the Wild Man/Native, who already has wealth, power, possessions, big shoulders and mighty fine looks, can’t rest content without raping the heroine and reducing her to a true (i.e., submissive) woman. There is much to be learnt, enjoyed, reproved by and made indignant about in this exhaustive reappraisal of a particular form of imaginative literature.

But here I enter a disagreement. My worry is not that Flesch has been too concessive to her romance novels, but that she has not treated them fully *enough*. ‘Whatever its literary merit, this cultural phenomenon warrants serious consideration’, she argues. Yes, indeed, but we can’t even know what the cultural phenomenon of popular romance *is* unless we assess, from book to book, its ‘literary merit’.
By this, I don’t mean giving it marks out of 20, or deciding that *Tangle of Torment* (1983) is ‘inferior’ to *Middlemarch* (1872). Down that slope lies cultural eugenics, whereas the real task is to see that these novels are part of our literature – they belong, that is, inside our written worlds. *All* these – Chaucer, Shakespeare, Ginsberg and the rest – are ‘fantasies’ in the broad sense of existing in our minds, desires and speculations, rather than among the solidities of daily life. The difference is that romance novels are likely to be set deeper in the territory of wish – but then, they have the frequent grace of recognising their own uncertainty: ‘He loves me (not)’.

So we shouldn’t allow ourselves to be scared by cries of ‘fantasy’ or ‘conventional’, ‘clichéd’, etc. All literature is all three of those, otherwise it could hardly come into being. Best to treat the romance-novel conventions (the first-sight, the happy ending, and so on) as we treat rhyme: a means of foretelling that future towards which the pattern of the dance is drawing us. And the richer the pattern, the more satisfying its execution and completion.

But this brings me to a second difference I have with the present discussion. Page 5 of *From Australia with Love* (the Dedication) defines ‘romance’ as ‘the great adventure of seeking and finding a life partner one loves and trusts’. Maybe, but actually, from the seventh word onwards, to my ears that sounds like marriage. The *finding* of a life partner may, I romantically suppose, be the culmination of romance, but if it is, then it is also, therein, its laying to rest. Having found the One one loves and trusts (to put out the bins, mention the overdraft, pick up the kids, and so on), the doubtfulness at the heart of romance, its ‘not’ in brackets, can be explored elsewhere, in such things as ordinary life, or (no less certain, no less meaningfully in brackets) death.

It is characteristic of this principled, thorough and witty book that it brings us to look in such deeper directions too.

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In the opening paragraphs of *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, David Hempton lists some attention-grabbing statistics. By the beginning of the twentieth century Methodism had grown from its first few followers in the 1730s to a membership of around nine million. It had gained at least 35 million adherents and had spread across six continents. By the mid-nineteenth century