

## Romance Formula in Zoulfa Katouh's Novel *As Long As The Lemon Trees Grow*

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### ABSTRACT

*Romance formula is one of the genres that we often encounter around us. The novel As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow by Zoulfa Katouh is one of the novels that represent a romance formula. This research aims to analyze the romance formula in Zoulfa Katouh's As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow and to determine how the novel conforms to Janice A. Radway's theory of the ideal romance narrative structure. This research uses a qualitative approach with narrative analysis to examine the novel's conformity to Radway's 13 functions of the ideal romance. The result of this research shows that the novel As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow fulfills 13 functions of ideal romance, according to Janice A. Radway. The findings demonstrate how the characters' emotional journeys and the narrative progression align with Radway's theoretical framework. Additionally, the research highlights the cultural and social dynamics embedded in the romance formula, offering insight into how it reflects broader societal themes. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the adaptability and relevance of the romance genre in contemporary literature.*

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### KEYWORDS

Romance Formula; Narrative; Zoulfa Katouh; As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow; Janice A. Radway.

### ARTICLE LICENCE

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### 1. Introduction

Formula is a pattern or structure in a story that is used in a narrative to develop a story. Cawelti also mentions a literary formula is a structure of narrative or dramatic conventions employed in a great number of individual works (Cawelti, 1976). Formulas usually cover the entire process, from the introduction of the conflict to its resolution, in the appropriate order. Formulas themselves are also part of the culture produced by society and, simultaneously, can influence the culture itself. According to Cawelti, formulas are products of culture and, in turn, may influence culture because formulas become conventional ways of representing and relating specific images, symbols, themes and myths. The process by which formulas evolve, change and give way to other formulas is a cultural evolution with survival through audience selection. (Cawelti, 1976; Abbas et al., 2023; Rahman & Amir, 2019; Rahman et al., 2022). Over time, formulas can change depending on the development of the culture itself.

One of the formulas in a literary work is romance, some people argue that the romance genre is one of the easiest genres to write and read. In his book, Krentz writes that because the figurative language, allusions, and plot elements of the best-loved stories are so familiar and accessible, romance writers are often criticized for their lack of originality (Krentz, 1992). The romance genre is one of the stories that use everyday language so that many people can understand more quickly when reading romance. The simplicity of the language is what makes the romance genre have a wide appeal to various groups. The conflicts presented in romance are also very relatable to the readers, making them feel closer to the characters and the story. Romance is one of the most popular literary works. The authors of the romance genre understand the market very well because of the conflicts that are familiar to many people.

Ramsdell defined romance as a love story in which the central focus is the development and satisfactory resolution of the love relationship between the two main characters, written in such a way as to provide the reader with some degree of vicarious emotional participation in the courtship process (Ramsdell, 1999). In romance, a formula makes a work have a romance genre. In a work, there must be a plot and characters that make the story a romance work. As the quote above states, romance stories focus on the love relationship between two main characters. Unlike other genres, most romance stories have female characters as the main characters. However, the crucial defining characteristic of romance is not that it stars a woman but that its organizing action is the development of a love relationship, usually between a man and a woman (Cawelti, 1976; Abbas et al., 2024; Nahdhiyah et al., 2022; Junaid et al., 2024). When the plot starts with the two

main characters meeting, falling in love with each other, fighting obstacles together, and living happily ever after, the story can be said to have a romance genre. In addition, romance has a narrative structure that differs from other genres. The narrative structure in the romance genre refers to the transformation of the main character. Radway, in her book, says that there is a narrative structure of romance ideal (Radway, 1991).

From all the explanations above, the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* belongs to popular literature. *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* is the debut novel by Zoulfa Katouh that was first published in 2022. This novel is set against the backdrop of the civil war in Syria. It tells the story of Salama, the main character, who is a young pharmacist forced to volunteer at a hospital in Homs due to war conditions. In the course of the story, Salama struggles with personal trauma, the loss of loved ones, and the dilemma of whether she should stay in her Homs home or leave to fulfil her promise to her brother. In the middle of it all, she meets Kenan and finds a spark of hope and love that gives her the strength to carry on. Salama's meeting with Kenan became one of the crucial moments that brought a new color to Salama's life journey filled with sadness and conflict. With his loving attitude and optimism, Kenan offered Salama something she had never felt since the war began - hope and the possibility of happiness in the middle of despair. They find each other and fall in love in the midst of war, so they must fight together against the obstacles they face.

The researcher decided to study this novel because it combines elements of romance with more complex themes, such as trauma, loss, and struggle. This makes the plot unique in that although we are presented with more of the main character's trauma and the things she is going through, we can see the romance formula from the beginning of the story, and it fits Radway's narrative structures of Ideal Romance. This is interesting to study further. Another reason why the researcher chose this object is that the first of the two main characters have different traits despite having the same background problems. Salama is tough because of her job as a health worker, but at the same time, she has high empathy, so she is more concerned with others than herself. Full of trauma that makes him unable to distinguish reality from his hallucinations. Kenan, with his courage to fight back and is always optimistic so he becomes a symbol of hope for Salama. Finally, because this novel managed to attract the attention of many people, it received a rating of 4.49 from 12,965 people who reviewed it on goodreads.com. This novel is also very popular in many book communities on social media. It received a nomination at the Goodreads Choice Awards for Nominee for Readers' Favorite Young Adult Fiction (2022) and also received the Amazon Best Young Adult Books of the Year 2022 award. The hashtag #aslongasthelemontreesgrow trended on TikTok and also received starred reviews from critics. *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* has been translated into 21 languages and received various awards, including being shortlisted for Discover Book of the Year at The British Book Awards 2023. (mizanstore.com, 2023)

As one of the new popular literature, the researcher was interested in this novel and analyzed the romance formula that constructed *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* as an important part of creating a love development story using Janice A. Radway's ideal romance formula theory. The novel not only explores elements of romance, but also incorporates historical and cultural aspects that give depth to the narrative. By examining the love story in the context of Radway's framework, this research aims to highlight how the novel balances tropes of romance with unique storytelling elements. The protagonist's journey of love and self-discovery is central to the novel's emotional impact, making it an interesting case to analyze the romance formula. In addition, this study contributes to the broader discussion of how romance narratives continue to evolve in popular literature while still following a recognizable structure. Several previous studies about romance formulas supported this research (Muslimat et al., 2023; Junaid et al., 2025; Dalyan et al., 2024).

The first previous study that researches analyze is from Aisyah (2018) from Sunan Gunung Djati State Islamic University entitled *The Romance Formula in Nicholas Sparks' The Notebook Novel*. She analyzed the romance formula in *Nicholas Sparks' The Notebook* using Cawelti and Radway's theory. In addition, she also analyzes how myth can influence the romance formula in the novel by using Frye's theory. The results of this paper prove that the plot and characteristics of the characters in the novel use formulaic romance. Then the myth in the writing supports the romance pattern, which is summer.

Second, there is a thesis from Almfajar (2020) from Sunan Gunung Djati State Islamic University entitled *The Romance Formula Through Plot and Characterization in The Novel Me Before You By Jojo Moyes*. This paper still discusses the romance formula in the novel, but the theory used does not only use Cawelti's theory, but is also supported by Radway's theory. The romance formula in the novel *Me Before You* is slightly different from the usual formula, where usually male characters act as heroes who have strong physiques and saviors for female characters. However, in this story the situation is reversed, the male characters in this research are disabled after the tragedy of the collision. Even so, the results in this paper prove the existence of a romance formula even though the ending is not like a typical romance story.

Third, there is a journal entitled *The Lemon Trees and The Syrian Homeland: An Ecocritical Reading of Zoulfa Katouh's As Long As The Lemon Trees Grow* written by Latumeten and Nofansyah (2024). This journal analyzes the same novel that the researchers used, *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* by Zoulfa Katouh, from an ecocritical perspective, focusing on how the natural environment becomes the center of the narrative. The topic raised in this journal is indeed different from the theme that the author uses, but this journal has the same object so that the author can find out how other authors understand this object.

Fourth, there is *Romance in Annisa Nisfihani's Webtoon My Pre Wedding* a thesis written by Faza Auliadina Nuryawandhana (2020). This paper discusses the formulas and characteristics in popular literature as an entertaining work. With a comic from Webtoon entitled *My Pre Wedding* as its object. Faza uses Cawelti and Saricks' theories to support his research in the romance section, and Mario Saraceni's theory of digital comics.

Fifth, there is a thesis owned by Jannah (2020) from Sunan Gunung Djati State Islamic University entitled *The Construction of Cinderella Formula In Nicholas Sparks' The Notebook and Jane Austen's Pride And Prejudice*. This research discusses the construction of the Cinderella formula in Nicholas Sparks' *The Notebook* and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* with a focus on the characters' social backgrounds, conflicts, and narrative structures. Using the comparative literature method, this research found that both novels follow the pattern of the Cinderella formula although with certain differences. *The Notebook* adopts the "Male Cinderella" formula as the male character comes from a poor background, while *Pride and Prejudice* uses the traditional formula. The results show that the social background and character conflicts build the Cinderella formula in both stories, despite differences in narrative structure.

This research has significant differences with the previous studies mentioned above, especially in its focus and theoretical approach. Although the third previous study, the journal, uses the same object, namely the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, the topic raised in the journal centers on an ecocritical perspective with a focus on the natural environment as a narrative element. This is clearly different from this research, which examines the romance formula in the novel. Meanwhile, other studies that discuss romance formulas, such as those conducted by Yunita Setiani Aisyah (2018) and Almufajar (2020), use different objects and story contexts. None of the previous studies discussed the romance formula in the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*. This research is the first to examine how the romance formula is applied in the novel, using Janice A. Radways ideal romance formula theory.

## 2. Methodology

This research uses qualitative method to analyze the romance formula in the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* by Zoulfa Katouh. According to (Tracy, 2013) Qualitative research involves immersing oneself in a setting, like a meeting or festival, to observe and understand the context. Researchers focus on small details to interpret the situation and build broader insights about the culture. With data samples in the form of quotations from the novel itself. The data source in this research is the original document, namely the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* by Zoulfa Katouh.

In this research, the ideal narrative structure romance formula theory is used to understand how the elements of plot in *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* by Zoulfa Katouh align with or deviate from Janice A. Radway's theory namely: (1) The heroine's social identity is destroyed. (2) The heroine reacts antagonistically to an aristocratic male. (3) The aristocratic male responds ambiguously to the heroine. (4) The heroine interprets the hero's behavior as evidence of a purely sexual interest in her. (5) The heroine responds to the hero's behavior with anger or coldness. (6) The hero retaliates by punishing the heroine. (7) The heroine and hero are physically and/or emotionally separated. (8) The hero treats the heroine tenderly. (9) The heroine responds warmly to the hero's act of tenderness. (10) The heroine reinterprets the hero's ambiguous behavior as the product of previous hurt. (11) The hero proposes/openly declares his love for/demonstrates his unwavering commitment to the heroine with a supreme act of tenderness. (12) The heroine responds sexually and emotionally. (13) The heroine's identity is restored.

There are several qualitative data collection techniques, one of which is documentation (Creswell, 2009). Documentation can be in the form of journals, books and so on, and here the data will be taken from the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*. The researcher collecting data by reading the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, noting the parts of the text that relevant to the research, and understanding it by doing a depth reading the novel to identify romance formula of the story.

## 3. Result and Discussion

Based on the ideal narrative structure romance formula theory by Janice A. Radway, the narrative structure of romance, relates to change in female character personality. There is a list of thirteen logically related functions, explains

the heroine's transformation from an isolated, asexual, insecure adolescent who is unsure of her own identity, into a mature, sensual, and very married woman who has realized her full potential and identity as the partner of a man.

In the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* by Zoufka Katouh, the plot development between the heroine and the hero is illustrated in accordance with the ideal narrative structure romance formula theory. The plot development of the heroine and hero's romance is organized into thirteen functions of narrative structure as the ideal romance formula by Radway. In the very first story begins, the first narrative function is already visible. The explanation of the thirteen functions of narrative structure as the ideal romance formula in the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* will be explained one by one as follows.

### **3.1 The Heroine's Social Identity is Destroyed**

Radway explain in her book that as the initial function indicates, the ideal romance begins with its heroine's removal from a familiar, comfortable realm usually associated with her childhood and family (Radway, 1991). As explained earlier in the beginning of *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* Salama, the heroine, explains how the war has taken everything away from her.

#### **Data 1**

It didn't matter that I was eighteen years old. It didn't matter that my medical experience was confined to the words in my textbooks. All of that was remedied as the first body was laid out before me to be stitched up. Death is an excellent teacher.

In the last six months, I have participated in more surgeries than I can count and closed more eyes than I ever thought I would.

This wasn't supposed to be my life. (Katouh, 2022: 14)

It can be seen above that the heroine said that even though she was young and her medical experience was not perfect, she had to have surgery due to circumstances. She had countless surgeries, which shows that she was forced to grow up faster than she should have. Her traumatic experience not only took away her youth but also shook her social identity. As a young woman who previously had a normal life, she is now forced to adapt to a world of chaos and loss. Her once comfortable life with a family and structured education has now been replaced by fear, suffering, and responsibilities too great for her age. That her life shouldn't be like this suggests that her social identity has been shattered since the beginning of the story.

### **3.2 The Heroine Reacts Antagonistically to an Aristocratic Male**

After the heroine's social identity is destroyed, she will feel a sense of fear towards the hero. The problems posed for women by characteristically masculine behavior are highlighted early in the romantic narrative by function 2 and the frightened, antagonistic response of the heroine to the mere presence of an ambiguous man (Radway, 1991). In *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, the hero is one of the patients in her hospital who needs heroine's help. The heroine was grieving because she couldn't save one of her patients.

#### **Data 2**

A hand taps on my back. I ignore it. I don't even hear what the person is saying.

"Hey!" The tapping increases and borders on annoying. I'm grieving a boy I never knew, but who I let down.

"What?" I snap, turning around. It's a boy. My age or older. He's panting and shaking. His hands can't keep steady; they're running over his face and tawny curls; his green eyes are wild. He looks familiar and it takes me a second to realize it's the boy from yesterday, who was carrying a little girl in his arms. (Katouh, 2022: 61)

The heroine, overcome with grief after losing a patient, initially ignores the hero's attempts to get her attention. When the hero calls again the heroine unwittingly snaps at the hero, not out of dislike, but out of emotional exhaustion.

### **3.3 The Aristocratic Male Responds Ambiguously to the Heroine**

The aristocratic male in romantic stories often responds to the heroine with ambiguity, showing both affection and distance, which creates tension and uncertainty. Male reserve and indifference also become issues in the romance

because, if left untampered, they can hinder a woman from satisfying her most basic needs for relational and emotional nurturance (Radway, 1991). In *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, the heroine is forced to sleep at the hero's place because when the heroine wants to go home after doing surgery at the hero's house, which is operated on by the heroine, the situation outside is not safe. The next morning when the heroine is getting ready to go home, the hero responds ambiguously to the heroine's question.

### **Data 3**

"Why aren't you answering me?" I demand. He takes another sip and puts his mug on the floor.

"Didn't give me a chance there with your monologizing. It was too entertaining to stop." He grins.

"Glad you're enjoying this." I glare. He doesn't look fazed at all.

"Are you always like this?"

"This?" I repeat, raising an eyebrow.

"Panicky with a hint of control freak?"

"Most days."

"That's good," he says, still grinning, and I don't know if he's being sarcastic or not. He doesn't sound sarcastic. (Katouh, 2022: 92)

The quote explains the hero's ambiguous behavior towards the heroine. The hero responds to the heroine's question with a little joke plus a confusing smile. The hero also asks questions that make the heroine confused whether the hero is being sarcastic or not, guessing about his true intentions.

### **3.4 The Heroine Interprets the Hero's Behavior as Evidence of a Purely Sexual Interest in Her**

In many romance narratives, the heroine initially misinterprets the hero's actions, believing that his interest in her is purely physical rather than emotional. This misunderstanding often stems from the hero's ambiguous behavior, his reputation, or his inability to openly express his feelings. This chapter in *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* when the heroine asks the hero to tell her something fun, the hero tells her that he had a dream after watching one of his favorite movies that he would find my Sheeta which Sheeta is the heroine in the hero's favorite movie.

### **Data 4**

Made me want to tell my own stories. Create my own worlds. And I thought maybe—one day—I'd have my own adventure and meet my Sheeta."

He's been staring at me the whole time but I don't think he's seeing me. His eyes have taken on a dreamlike sheen, and I'm entranced by the peace his words have painted on his expression.

The world around us has gone silent, the breeze the only sound swishing between us. And just like that, my panic subsides and I wish we could stay here, sitting on the ground forever, surrounded by the sanctuary his words have created.

But then his gaze sharpens, and when he finally sees me, his cheeks are as pink as carnations. He's paler than I am and not very good at hiding his expressions. (Katouh, 2022: 127)

The quote above shows that when the hero talks about his dream, he always looks at the heroine. Although at first the heroine thinks that the gaze is not meaningful to her because the hero is fantasizing about his dream, but in the second gaze when the hero actually sees the heroine, his cheeks are red. Heroine interpreted the hero as unable to hide his expression because she might be the subject of his thoughts.

### **3.5 The Heroine Responds to the Hero's Behavior with Anger or Coldness**

The heroine's angry and cold response to the hero is a form of defense mechanism that allows her to protect herself from possible heartbreak while asserting her independence. In *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, the hero and heroine have different goals where the heroine chooses to leave Syria while the hero does not. This makes the heroine respond to the hero's actions with anger.

### Data 5

"I need to go home," I choke out, and stand, catching Kenan's jacket before it falls. I don't want to give it back yet; I need the feeling of security it's giving me to last a bit longer.

"I'm so sorry," Kenan whispers.

When I look at him, his pained eyes are still on me, and a thought awakens in my brain. My grief can be used to persuade him. Khawf smiles.

"Don't you see the reality, Kenan?" I keep my voice from trembling. "Torture. Death. This is happening. It will happen to you if you don't leave." "

Salama—" he begins, standing.

"No!" I shout, balling my hands into fists instead of shaking him. "Why isn't this getting through your head? Your siblings will never heal. You will die for a cause no one outside Syria cares about. Those YouTube comments are great, but no one is helping us. You'll rot in jail and be tortured for the rest of your life with no one to save you. Are you seriously leaving your siblings to the wolves? Do you even realize what's happening to the refugees in Europe?" (Katouh, 2022: 189)

In this quote, it shows that all this time, the treatment that the hero did to the heroine made her confused, causing unstoppable emotions and anger to peak. The hero could not see what the heroine felt, especially the danger that would threaten them. Heroine feels frustrated and responds to the hero's behavior with anger.

### 3.6 The Hero Retaliates by Punishing the Heroine

After the heroine responds to the hero with anger or coldness, the hero often retaliates by punishing her in some way. That such punishment is the result of hurt and disappointment at the heroine's supposed infidelity or lack of interest in him. It is, then, a sign of his love for her, not of his distaste (Radway, 1991). In *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* There are actually no significant quotes that show the hero punishing the heroine, but there is one quote that shows the hero punishing the heroine implicitly after the incident of the heroine getting angry with the hero.

### Data 6

He notes the tear tracks on my face, a realization unclouding in his eyes. "Salama," he says softly, and my eyelashes flutter. The way he says my name, pronouncing each vowel and consonant, even now makes me feel like flowers are growing in my veins.

"Yes?" I say, matching his tone.

He bites his lip. "Please take care of yourself."

I wrap my arms around my middle. "I am."

He smiles sadly. "Are you?"

His gaze dips from my sharp cheekbones to my bony wrists. I may have started seeing the colors, believing in Layla's and Kenan's words, but that has no power over my guilt. It's as if I'm being slowly poisoned. Finding happiness is merely treating the symptoms and not the cause of the disease that grows stronger by the minute. My stomach can't hold food down long enough, and I spend my nights either tossing helplessly to the nightmares or suffering from insomnia. The result is a frail body holding a brittle mind, waiting for a whisper of a catastrophe to fall apart. (Katouh, 2022: 191-192)

Here the hero does not ignore the heroine outright, nor is he cold. Instead, the hero is getting nicer and nicer but he still refuses the heroine's invitation to leave Syria. This is another act of punishing the heroine by tearing her feelings apart.

### 3.7 The Heroine and Hero are Physically and/or Emotionally Separated

This separation between the heroine and hero is the climax of their problems. This separation increases the tension, allowing both characters to confront their true feelings and deepen their emotional journey. In this chapter the heroine is once again angry with the hero for his decision to stay.

#### Data 7

"Is something wrong?" he asks.

There's a dull ache reverberating behind my eyes, threatening to spill the tears.

"What do you think, Kenan?" I whisper. Everything's written freely on my face for him to read.

He closes his eyes for a second, catching on to my thoughts. "Salama," he begins. His tone is low, almost choked. "I—you have to realize this is difficult."

I feel as if I'm standing on shaking ground. "You think it's easy for me to leave? My mother is buried here! My father too. My brother—" I stop, covering my face with my hands, forcing myself to take deep breaths.

Please, God, let him die. Let him find that peace.

Kenan is still staring at me with anguish when I look back at him.

"We are stripped from our choices, so we latch onto what will ensure our survival." I push away all my emotion. My voice comes out calculating and cold. "The world is not sweet or kind. The ones outside are waiting to eat us and pick their teeth with our bones. That's what they'll do to your siblings. So we do everything to make sure we and our loved ones survive. Whatever it takes. (Katouh, 2022: 197-198)

This passage marks the emotional climax of the heroine and hero's separation, both physically and ideologically, as their conflicting choices create distance between them. The heroine's anger and frustration come from her belief that survival depends on her leaving, while the hero struggles with the difficulty of leaving his home. Her emotions are raw, but instead of breaking down, she forces herself to be cold and detached as a defense mechanism, pushing through vulnerability for calculated reasons. The hero's reaction, sad and hesitant reveals his internal conflict as he recognizes her perspective but cannot bring himself to make the same choice. This moment intensifies their emotional distance, reinforcing the Heroine and Hero Physically and/or Emotionally Separated function, as they are not only separated in their decision making but also in their emotional responses. The harsh words of the heroine reflect her attempt to suppress grief and fear, while the silence of the hero shows his own struggle, making this separation a pivotal moment that forces them to confront their true feelings before any resolution can be reached.

### 3.8 The hero treats the heroine tenderly

Function 8 of the ideal romance is intriguing precisely because it is not structurally explained by the narrative at the time that it occurs. No action on the part of the hero or, for that matter, on the part of any other character can be said to cause or explain the magic transformation of his cruelty and indifference into tender care. The abrupt transformation simply takes place (Radway, 1991). No one can explain why the hero is suddenly so tender to the heroine. Of course, this function is in the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow*. Where at that time there was a chemical attack that hit their place of residence. Heroine is busy dealing with the victims who are arriving and hero is at his house.

#### Data 8

"Salama!" a voice shouts behind me, and I whirl around to see Kenan standing in front of the hospital doors, holding a makeshift cloth to his face. Alive. He lets out a deep breath I feel inside my soul.

My knees go weak with relief and I collapse on the steps. "Salama!" he shouts again, hurrying down to me. "Are you all right? Oh my God, please tell me you are."

He crouches beside me, removing the cloth from his mouth, and I fill my eyes with him. His bright green eyes, his beautiful, honest face.

"I'm fine," I whisper.

...

"The attack wasn't... it wasn't near where we are, but I had to come here to make sure you're alive," he says, and as if the energy has suddenly been siphoned out of him, he all but collapses beside me. He smells of smoke and remnants of the gas and lemons. My legs shake with weariness, my arms ache, and all I want is to lie here on these chipped steps and sleep forever (Katouh, 2022: 210)

This passage shows the function of Hero Treats Heroine Tenderly, as the hero, despite the previous conflict and emotional distance, suddenly shows deep care and concern for the heroine. Without a clear narrative explanation for his change, Kenan's urgency to find Salama and ensure her safety changes his usual attitude to one of tenderness. His relief at seeing Salama unharmed, the physical closeness as he crouches beside her, and the exhaustion that overcomes him as he ensures her safety all highlight an emotional breakthrough.

### **3.9 The heroine responds warmly to the hero's act of tenderness**

The heroine's response to the hero's tenderness marks a turning point in their relationship, as she begins to lower her emotional defenses and embrace his care. After seeing the hero approach, him to the hospital and the fact that he was fine, her initial reaction, collapsing in relief upon seeing him alive, demonstrates how much he means to her.

#### **Data 9**

He nods quickly, his hands hovering beside my head, steeling himself before he takes them back. Still, I can feel their warmth, the blood gushing through his veins. (Katouh, 2022: 210)

#### **Data 10**

"You're right. We will come back," he whispers, and I dare to glance up. I'm intoxicated by the way he's staring at me. So close, so kind, so beautiful.

A newfound need rises in me to touch his cheeks, to bring him closer and feel his stubble under my hands. To just forget all this pain.

His emerald eyes drop to my lips for a few seconds, and then he looks away.

"Salam," he whispers, and then he's gone.

Life comes back to the world, the leaves rustle. And I'm left yearning for more. (Katouh, 2022: 213-214)

This quote above (data 10) beautifully illustrates The Heroine Responds Warmly to the Hero's Act of Tenderness, as heroine not only accepts hero's kindness but also finds herself deeply moved by it. His gentle words and the way he looks at her stir emotions within her that she can no longer ignore. Instead of resisting his tenderness, she embraces it, even if only in thought, revealing her growing affection.

### **3.10 The heroine reinterprets the hero's ambiguous behavior as the product of previous hurt**

After everything that happened between the hero and heroine, up to where the heroine received the hero's warmth, finally the heroine told why the hero's ambiguous behavior as the product of previous hurt.

#### **Data 11**

"Since last July, I've been having... visions. Hallucinations, I guess"

He looks impressed and there's a glint of pride in his eyes. I peek at Kenan under my eyelashes and catch the surprise in his expression. "Visions?" he asks, and he glances a few feet from where Khawf stands. "You mean you're seeing things that..." He falters.

"Aren't real," I finish for him. "Mostly I see one person."

Khawf straightens his back and dusts off his suit. "Oh my God, are you going to introduce me?"



I ignore Khawf and continue. "Khawf. He's been in my life since Mama died. I fell pretty hard on my head that day and, I don't know, maybe a head injury coupled with my PTSD has affected the relationship between my brain's frontal lobe and sensory cortex, but I won't be sure until I can get checked."

Kenan looks stunned. "Khawf?"

I nod, throwing the plant away, and force my tone to stay calm. "He shows me memories. My regrets." I leave out the degree of trauma I feel after each one. He doesn't have to know all the details. I take a deep breath. "I've learned to live with it." I exhale. "Now you know." (Katouh, 2022: 240-241)

As heroine opens up about her struggles with PTSD and hallucinations, which causes Kenan to see the depth of his trauma. His shocked reaction suggests that he had not fully grasped the extent of his pain before, and this revelation changes his perception of his actions.

### **3.11 The hero proposes/openly declares his love for/demonstrates his unwavering commitment to the heroine with a supreme act of tenderness**

The fantasy's conclusion suggests that when she manages such trust, he will reciprocate with declarations of his commitment to her (Radway, 1991). In *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* hero declares his feelings by proposing to the heroine.

#### **Data 12**

He swallows hard and slips his hand into his pocket. When he opens his palm, a ring sparkles on it. "I want to marry you. If you'll have me."

...

Kenan bites his lip and says, "I thought you'd say something like that. Salama, you and I live our lives second by second. We might live to ride that boat to Syracuse. We might settle in Munich. We might learn German, paint our apartment in vibrant shades of color we haven't seen in Homs in a long time, and build a life. An amazing life. You'd become a pharmacist all the hospitals would trip over themselves to hire, and I'd draw our stories. We'd have our own adventures." He looks away bashfully, stumbling on his words. "We'd write a book. Together. But... we also might not survive these six days. We might be buried here. Anything can happen, and I don't want to wait anymore. No one knows the future. But I know how I feel. I know how you feel. So let's find our happiness here in Homs. Let's get married in our country. Let's make a home here before we make one somewhere else."

His words illustrate a universe of what ifs, mights, and maybes that feel possible. I want this universe so badly I feel its fire burning through me.

He holds the ring up and with hesitant eyes and blushing cheeks asks, "Salama, will you marry me?" (Katouh, 2022: 242-243)

Hero's proposal is not just a romantic gesture but a profound declaration of love, hope, and commitment in the face of uncertainty. By offering heroine a ring, he solidifies his devotion, expressing his desire to build a future together despite the chaos surrounding them.

### **3.12 The heroine responds sexually and emotionally**

According to Radway that commitment, the romance further insists, which also implies his need for her, is the condition for her free and uninhibited response (Radway, 1991). The heroine was surprised to hear that statement as well as happy and emotional.

#### **Data 13**

I stare at the ring and find that I don't care about whatever uncertainties lie in our future. All I know is that I love him and that even in the darkness surrounding us, he's been my joy. In the midst of all the death, he made me want to live.

The answer slips easily from my lips.

“Yes,” I whisper, wiping my tears away, feeling my heart glow. “Yes.” (Katouh, 2022: 243)

The heroine responds to these feelings with happiness. Her response is not hesitant or contradictory, but instinctive and full of emotion. This moment signifies her complete trust in hero and her willingness to embrace happiness despite the chaos around them.

### 3.13 The heroine's identity is restored

After the declaration of the hero's love for the heroine, and the acceptance of the heroine's identity slowly returns. The heroine again finds the meaning of life even though it means having to leave their home Syria.

#### Data 14

And in those final hours of our time in Homs, my bruised heart quietly heals. Cell by cell. (Katouh, 2022: 317)

This quote signifies the recovery of her identity, as she moves beyond survival and towards healing. Her heart, which has been burdened by trauma and loss, begins to mend, symbolizing her emotional transformation. This passage summarizes the conclusion of the novel, where Salama finds peace within herself despite the uncertainty that lies ahead.

## 4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis above, *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* uses a romance formula that is in accordance with Janice A. Radway's theory. The novel describes the emotional journey of the heroine, Salama, who experiences social identity destroyed before finally finding love and self-recovery. The presence of thirteen functions in the ideal romance formula, such as the transformation of the protagonist's social identity, the emotional tension with the male protagonist, and the resolution of their relationship through a declaration of love, shows that the novel maintains the basic structure of the romance genre.

What makes this novel different from conventional romances is the backdrop of war, which gives depth and complexity to the narrative. The themes of trauma and survival make this novel more than just a love story; it is also a reflection of human resilience in the face of extreme situations. Therefore, this research contributes to understanding how the romance formula can be applied in a broader context relevant to contemporary social issues. Therefore, *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* will not only appeal to romance readers, but also to those looking for a touching and meaningful story.

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