

“CHICK-LIT” AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE WITHIN THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This paper represents “chick-lit” literature and its significance within the cultural context. Its main objective is to explore the genre’s significance for the research about popular literature, its relationship to literary and scholarly criticism, also as women’s reading and writing practices. The paper shows the most important characteristics of chick-lit fiction and its differences from other genres like conventional romances. It also highlights the strengths and limitations of the genre in reference to literary values and cultural standards. ‘Chick-lit’s incredible popularity as a cultural and literary phenomenon is further investigated by drawing upon several critical debates introduced by Lawrence W. Levine, Stuart Hall, John Fiske and Michel de Certeau.

Key Words- Chick-Lit, Women’s Writing, Literary Phenomenon, Incredible Popularity.

This paper considers chick-lit as a deeply contradictory genre of literature that generates highly polarized responses, thus as a site of continuous struggle between consent and resistance. To look at chick-lit either from a completely negative or positive perspective would be to oversimplify both the genre and therefore the issues associated with literature. Therefore, considering chick-lit’s both wide appeal to its readers and denunciation by literary critics as trivial fiction, and exploring the positions haunted in academic and popular discussions about the genre, the paper seeks to look at the polarized responses and therefore the questions chick-lit raises regarding literature, popular culture and contemporary socio-cultural realities of girls .

The genre of chick lit largely features single women in their twenties and thirties navigating their generation’s challenges of balancing demanding careers while in search of satisfying personal relationships. The tone of this fiction is typically light and humorous. The genre includes mainly formulaic stories about women living in urban centers with challenging careers often in publishing, marketing, television or journalism. As a genre of popular literature written for young urban women, the tremendous commercial success of the favored chick-lit fiction inevitably involves a critical assessment of its status within popular culture and literature.

The term chick-lit springs from the slang word “chick” for a girl and “lit” which is brief for literature. it’s usually related to young urban women’s culture: chick-lit books typically cover

the lives of recent , cosmopolitan, single women in their 20s and 30s who put great emphasis on their dating relationships, careers and shopping. Sarah Mlynowski and Farrin Jacobs define the genre as-often upbeat, always funny fiction about contemporary female characters and their everyday struggles with work, home, friendship, family or love. It's about observing life and finding the humor during a sort of situations and people.

The genre mainly depicts young women working in mainstream media, companies like publishing houses, glossy fashion magazines, PR firms etc. A number of the novels like Bridget Jones Diary take the shape of a diary. Others use the confessional sort of letters and e-mails, and therefore the intimacy of first-person narrative. Most are written during a self-deprecating, funny, first-person voice. Taken as an entire , these works offer the likelihood of a fruitful interrogation of the pictures of up to date women and their concerns in popular culture, while providing a source of amusement for his or her readers.

According to Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young, the publication of Helen Fielding's Bridget Jones Diary in 1998 within the USA marks the start of a trend in women's popular fiction referred to as chick-lit . Since the publication of Bridget Jones's Diary, chick-lit has been an increasingly growing popular cultural phenomenon and therefore the publishers discerned a profitable audience for confessional-style novels among women and created new brands of serials like Gossip Girl (2000--), The Princess Diaries (2000--), Shopaholic Series, also because the Nanny Diaries, The Botox Diaries and therefore the Dirty Girls Social Club. As Kate Zernike indicates, the genre has experienced amazing commercial success and has caused a "commercial tsunami" . Many chick-lit novels and short stories are published, translated into many languages and have become international bestsellers round the world within the last 20 years . Some writers and reviewers see these novels' roots within the heroine centered novels of the nineteenth century novels like Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre and Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey.

Indeed, Austen's Elizabeth, Emma and Elinor share many of an equivalent concerns as Fielding's Bridget on the extent of lifestyle . Fielding herself acknowledges that her book was inspired by Austen's Pride and Prejudice . However, chick-lit differs from those earlier novels by use of humor, self-deprecation and more open attitudes toward sex and material consumer items. Consistent with chick-lit novelist Melanie LaBrooy, chick-lit's greatest achievement is bringing humor into the contemporary women's scene ("Who's scared of Bridget Jones?"). Indeed, the difference between chick-lit novels and their literary precedents is that the ability of the fashionable protagonists to tease themselves. In reference to this aspect of chick-lit Fielding states: It's good for ladies to be ready to be funny about women and to not be afraid to be funny...Sometimes I've had people getting their knickers during a twist about Bridget Jones being a disgrace to feminism then on. But the purpose is, it's good to be ready to represent women as they really are within the age you're living...and tease ourselves without having a scare .

Chick-lit has this mocking attitude toward the authority of the normal literary fiction and its dominant culture generally. A quick check out these books' candy-colored covers, handwritten script-like titles, cartoon like illustrations and graphics also as their heavy marketing strategies lets the reader know that they're intended to be popular books,

distinguished from the literary ones. As a well-liked sort of women's fiction, chick-lit has been considered almost like traditional romances like Harlequin novels but chick-lit protagonists, as Bridget Jones of Fielding states, aren't like "the flawless women of romance fiction, waiting to be recognized by the right man, but women who make mistakes at work, sometimes drink an excessive amount of fail miserably within the kitchen.

In terms of desire, sexual agency and knowledge, chick-lit heroines seem to differ from the naive and innocent heroines of traditional romances. Unlike traditional romances, moreover, contemporary chick-lit doesn't always end in marriage and therefore the heroine's active social life outside her romantic relationship plays an equally significant role in her life. Read this manner, chick-lit are often seen as a up to date ironic critique and subversion of the traditional romances with the romantic ideal of a lady only related to a person in her life. Additionally, Anna Kiernan suggests that conventional romances are either aimed toward unemployed women being supported by men or women with low incomes. Chick-lit, on the opposite hand, is marketed to urban single woman with a spendable income. Chick Lit may be a comparatively new genre that's getting used to explain the books written by women about women and for ladies.

The plot explains during a humorous tone the evolution of an urban heroine while she experiences usual life issues, like love, marriage, dating, relationships, friendships, roommates, corporate environments, weight issues, addiction, and lots of more. Anyhow Chick Lit authors and fans ignore of these offensive adjectives as they know that women-writing has always been criticized. The renowned author Woolf explains the utter disregard for women's experiences in literature in her seminal work *An Area of One's Own* (1928) that critics assume that a specific book is critical because it deals with war and therefore the other particular book is insignificant because it deals with the emotions of girls during a drawing room, the scenes in battlefield are more important than a scene during a room. In fact, Chick Lit continues the gender debate regarding the values and themes of a completely unique.

However, today there's no denying that Chick Lit has carved a distinct segment for itself within the history of the planet literature. It is often said that male writers are a touch frightened of the recognition of the genre. It's recorded that over two million copies of *Bridget Jones Diary* are sold. There are various definitions, positive also as negative, available; but one point common to all or any such definitions is that all of them agree that these are the stories which the liberated urban women of the post-feminist era want to read..

The genre is really contemporary with the movements just like the third wave of Feminism and post-feminism. The famous Victorian novelist Austen is taken into account to be the most inspiration as Helen Fielding tells that her *Bridget Jones' Diary* is that the twenty-first century interpretation of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Chick Lit, therefore, is an umbrella term for a variety of works written by and for women, which includes both good and bad examples of the genre. Interestingly, some of the novels begin to openly pose themselves on being both educational and authentic.

The novels are easily recognizable not only because of their characteristic pastel covers but also due to the genre's repetitive formula. Reaching for the book the reader knows what to

expect. A heroine to identify with, a love plot, humor, and a happy ending are what the novels guarantee their fans. The genres' predictability and repetitiveness, the factors often used as the arguments for criticism, are, in fact, appealing to the readers.

Jacob's outline indicates that the construction of a heroine in Chick-lit is of great importance, being the decisive factor in assessing its value. It influences the way the readers perceive a novel as it is the heroine that a reader identifies with; it is her trials and tribulations that the reader wants to follow. In order to do so, a reader needs to find a heroine likable and credible, or at least realistic and colorful enough to evoke emotions and empathy.

One of the main differences between the female protagonists of Chick-lit and the ones of Harlequin romance novels is the former's tendency to fail, act unreasonably and, to put it simply, be imperfect. The departure from perfection is also reflected in the appearance of the heroines, who in the likeness of Austen's protagonists are beautiful but not too stunning and always anxious about their looks. Chick Lit heroines make individual choices such as career decisions; however, those choices can be restricted by society's norms and manners. Thus, choice in Chick Lit can be seen as individual from the corner of post feminism, and as collective from the standpoint of feminism. Due to media-driven popular culture and consumerism, the focus has shifted toward the individual. Moreover, celebrating femininity goes hand in hand with consumerism and therefore individualism. Femininity, sexuality, popular culture and consumerism are important themes in Chick Lit and they are presented from different points of views connecting the genre to feminism and post feminism.

Humor in Chick Lit draws on contemporary society, including feminism. On the basis of the Table above, the target of humor has shifted from feminism's collective group to post feminism's individual person. Chick Lit uses humor as a medium to deal with various matters concerning individual characters as well as groups of people. Accordingly, Chick Lit is associated with post feminist features and maintains a relationship with feminism. Chick Lit is connected to feminism through femininity and girl power.

The concept of girl power plays an important role when considering Chick Lit. In other words, women and girls are invited to celebrate their femininity and claim their independence as individuals. Genz and Brabon state that the girl power movement "contains an implicit rejection of many tenets held by second wave feminists – who stressed the disempowering and oppressive aspects of femininity in a male-dominated society" (76). The movement is characterized by female independence, individuality, and display of sexuality. In contrast with second-wavers these women do not mind to present themselves as sexual objects (77). Femininity is, thus, seen as empowering and linked to agency required to review gender roles. According to Naila Kabeer, the notion of agency can be explained as "the ability to define one's goals and act upon them". She continues that "agency is about more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring their activity, their sense of agency, or „the power within. In other words, agency includes planning and reasoning in addition to action. Genz states that "the feminist message of female agency and independence is restyled by the Girlie stance that conceptualizes a new woman who is self-assured and comfortable with her femininity and her sexual difference". Chick Lit heroines are characterized in these terms.



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