Bridget Jones, Prince Charming, and Happily Ever Afters: Chick Lit as an Extension of the Fairy Tale in a Postfeminist Society

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“Speaking crudely, football and sport are ‘important;’ the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes ‘trivial.’ And these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction. This is an important book, the critic assumes because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room.” Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, 1929

“These books often have pastel covers with pictures of shoes or cocktails or both, and they usually have a single everywoman-type-heroine, complete with dieting woes and dating insecurities. And while it is true these books frequently follow some familiar conventions, many are receiving an ill-deserved reputation.” Laurel Osterkamp, “Chick Lit: Which Comes First, The Chick Or The Lit?” Chick Lit Chicks Forums, 2007

“But fairy tales can come true, and just like Jemima Jones, or Mrs. Ben Williams as she’s known outside of the glossy magazine where she now works, if we trust in ourselves, embrace our faults, and brazen it out with courage, strength, bravery, and truth, fate may just smile upon us too.” Jane Green, *Jemima J*, 1999

**Once upon a time…**

In the literary world, women’s literature has traditionally been excluded from the canon of prominent authors and texts. The history of literature has always been defined and categorized by splits between writers and women writers, between fiction and women’s fiction, between what is considered important, and what is important to women. While Woolf contends that any texts dealing with the feelings of women are typically demeaned and considered unimportant, the evolution of women’s literature has yet to come full circle—rather it has remained stagnant.

Osterkamp may be writing over seventy years after Woolf, but the message connoted through the diction remains the same: what is women’s literature, and why is it not important? In this paper, I address the issue of importance surrounding women’s literature by examining a ‘new’ addition to the literary realm entitled ‘chick lit.’ I argue that this genre serves as an extension of the fairy tale, and thus as an instruction guide for adult women, who while allegedly reaping the benefits of a postfeminist society, are trivialized and infantilized.

**What is Chick Lit?**

A way around the extensive question surrounding the significance and implications of women’s literature has been through the creation of a newly contrived style of writing deemed ‘chick lit.’ Marketed as a ‘for women, by women, about women’ genre, the chickerati (authors of chick lit) have benefited financially and professionally by writing about ‘the feelings of women in
a drawing-room’ (or maybe just the living room of a Manhattan apartment), and the ‘everywoman-
type-heroine, complete with dieting woes and dating insecurities.’ The genre has even been
inducted into the prestigious pages of the Oxford English Dictionary, which offers a simplistic
definition of the novels as “a type of fiction, typically focusing on the social lives and relationships
of young professional women, and often aimed at readers with similar experiences.” Despite the
popular belief depicting chick lit as a genre customized ‘just for women,’ the moniker itself has
less than empowering origins. Rather, the genesis of chick lit is marked with both satire and
sarcasm.

Semantically, the name of the genre itself remains questionable in that it joins two terms
with negative connotations: chick (the slang reference for a woman) and lit (the shortening of
“literature” to “lit” typically denotes frivolity or insignificance). While Helen Fielding’s 1996
novel *Bridget Jones’s Diary* is credited with sparking the genre, and granted the momentous honor
as being the first chick lit novel, the actual phrase was coined the previous year. First used by Cris
Mazza and Jeffrey DeShell in 1995, ‘chick lit’ was ironically used as the title for an anthology on
postfeminist fiction composed of “courageous, wry, honest, intelligent, libidinous and
unapologetic” texts (Mazza 18). The phrase was mockingly used the next year (1996) in an article
by James Wolcott, “Hear Me Purr,” referring to the girlish style of writing used by female
journalists in newspaper columns. Yet, the second coming of chick lit has managed to distort the
image both Mazza and DeShell originally contrived in the mid-1990s: “Somehow chick lit had
morphed into books flaunting pink, aqua, and lime covers featuring cartoon figures of long-legged
women wearing stiletto heels” (Mazza 18).

**Chick Lit Conventions**

Like any genre, the overwhelming majority of chick lit novels follow a fairly predictable
structure and plotline, which serves as a double-edged sword in that it both allows the reader to
easily recognize such texts, and pigeonholes certain characteristics of the texts. While the comprehensive genre of chick lit has proliferated into a variety of subgenres—including church lit, mommy lit, ladki lit, chica lit and sistah lit\(^1\)—I will be solely focusing on the archetype of chick lit spawned by Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. This means that the texts I have chosen to examine privilege a white, heteronormative, (roughly) middle-class existence and point of view—not only in terms of the heroines depicted in the texts, but also for the authors who have created them. Since this ‘prototype’ of chick lit is **not** considered a subgenre (and thus does not have a more unifying title like the subgenres previously mentioned), but rather *the genre*, my frequent references to chick lit point to this definition, which cannot be held as characteristic to all of the subgenres (based on my scope of research). The ‘recipe’ (below) for the archetypal chick lit novel is a culmination of my own observances while reading these novels, information obtained from online encyclopedia Wikipedia’s discussion of the genre, which I am using as an indicator of public perception and knowledge due to its easy accessibility on the internet, and from Chick Lit Books, a website\(^2\) boasting a ‘huge’ chick lit book database. I also reference a “Make Your Own Chick-Lit Novel!” recipe (meant to be satirical, yet accurately depicting common conventions) included in a 2003 issue of *Book* magazine in my summation.

In order to classify a specific novel as chick lit, the following criteria must be included:

- A ‘young’ female protagonist (typically post-graduate, mid-20s through early 30s)
- A posh urban setting, most frequently Manhattan, New York City or London—a Los Angeles or Philadelphia thrown in here and there
- An occupation based primarily in the communications industry i.e. publishing, advertising, public relations, journalism, fashion

\(^1\) Ladki lit, chica lit, and sistah lit refer to (respectively) Indian chick lit, Latina chick lit, and African American chick lit.

\(^2\) Chick Lit Books can be found at www.chicklitbooks.com.
- Problems in the workplace, which typically occupy a significant portion of the text, ranging from insufferable coworkers (usually other women), an infatuation with either the boss or a male coworker, or being stuck in a ‘dead end’ job (usually a given)
- Frequent romantic entanglements, but remains single throughout much of the text (and woefully laments such a status) until the ending
- Excessive compulsive behaviors i.e. obsessively spending money, strict dieting
- Eccentric mothers who represent foils to their ‘independent’ daughters

The Fairy Tale

Just as chick lit is formulaically structured based on the above characteristics, fairy tales have a similar recipe which allows the reader to roughly trace how the tale will progress. As in the criteria guidelines for chick lit mentioned in the previous section, I turned to a combination of my own knowledge regarding the now ‘Disneyfied’ genre, and to Wikipedia, a reflection of public perception and discernment. The use of stock characters demonstrates the ‘simplicity’ of the text, and its role as an agent of instruction, with a varied cast consisting of the female heroine (sometimes a princess) turned damsel in distress, prince charming, evil stepmothers, and ugly stepsisters. According to Stith Thompson, folktales are “a tale of some length involving a succession of motifs or episodes. It moves in an unreal world without definite locality or definite creatures and is filled with the marvelous. In this never-never land, humble heroes kill adversaries, succeed to kingdoms and marry princesses” (8).

By employing binaries of good and evil, beautiful and ugly, and weak and strong, such tales attempt to instill in the reader what it means to be a ‘good’ individual. These attempts at a superficial morality persuade the reader to align with the ‘beautiful princess’ rather than the ‘ugly stepsister.’ Equating beauty with benevolence is obviously a problematic notion of humanity, and one that persists in chick lit. While the ideal audiences for chick lit novels consist of women who are roughly the same ages as the heroines depicted in the texts, then the traditional audience for the
fairy tale is children, specifically girls. Even though the storylines deal with varying issues and problems, and only share hypothetical similarities, this can be credited to the fact that when women are older they desire different things than from when they are children—and ideally first introduced to the fairy tale form. Based on my own assumption that chick lit is meant to replace the fairy tale as women get older, then how do the standard conventions of the latter genre interact with the newer aspirations of professional success and financial independence?

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar connect the icon of the ‘glass coffin,’ associated with the fairy tale of “Snow White,” to themes of imprisonment and confinement. A brief background tells us that Snow White is placed into the glass coffin after her evil stepmother gives her a poisoned apple, and is believed to be dead. Yet, Gilbert and Gubar contend that Snow White’s (unconscious) confinement to the coffin merely serves to both emphasize her status as an object and an idealization: “For, dead and self-less in her glass coffin, she is an object, to be displayed and desired, patriarchy’s marble ‘opus,’ the decorative and decorous Galatea with whom every ruler would like to grace his parlor” (41). Not only does Snow White remain an “idealized image of herself” while in the coffin, but after the Prince first sees the beauty in her transparent sarcophagus, he “begs the dwarves to give ‘it’ to him as a gift” because he cannot live without seeing Snow White everyday, and will “honor and prize her as [his] dearest possession” (41). By reducing the human life resting inside the coffin to an ‘it,’ Snow White must then rely on her own stereotypically feminine attributes of “goodness, passivity, and docility” in order to escape (42). While Snow White may escape the prison of her ‘first’ glass coffin, she is ultimately placed before a second glass coffin—in her ultimate role as the Queen, she must sit before the looking glass (the second coffin) in order to communicate with the King. There may be a lack of glass coffins in contemporary chick lit novels, but this imprisoning force has merely been replaced with the
ideological construction of the ‘glass ceiling,’ a transparently concrete barrier meant to limit the potential of women in the workplace. While this ‘limit’ is imposed by a patriarchal system, I am offering the interpretation of a self-limiting phenomenon taking place in ‘working/career’ chick lit novels. Not only does the glass ceiling affect the heroines because of their gender, but their inability to perform in the workplace due to its primary role as a vehicle for romance further hinders their professional potential.\textsuperscript{3} Just as the construction of the ‘glass coffin’ turned ‘glass ceiling’ reveals a modern-day take on a fairy-tale convention, I offer a series of similar transpositions in the subsequent pages.

**Social Masquerading: The Use of Disguise and Masking of Social Status**

The chickerati implicitly use social masquerading to reveal the importance of both consumerism and social standing in the novels. For the purposes of this paper, I define social masquerading as a physical and emotional masking of the body, social class and status for the goal of perpetuating an improved image of oneself that is unlike the reality. Demonstrations of such social disguise are a common feature of fairy tales, stemming most notably from Cinderella. Just as Cinderella is transformed from a ‘plain’ servant girl into the belle of the ball through a few swishes of a magic wand and enchanting incantations, these authors orchestrate their own fairy tale-esque scenarios where the heroine must employ some form of materialism or consumerism to mask her shortcomings. In Sophie Kinsella’s *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, Becky Bloomwood is a journalist at *Successful Savings*, a job which ‘bores her to tears.’ Yet, despite her occupation, Becky is horribly in debt and compulsively shops to the point where her behavior is pathologized. Not only does she spend money that she does not have, but the bank statements, credit card bills and letters from various account executives and her bank’s manager are the only explicit manifestations of her ‘addiction.’ Such documents are placed at the beginning of each chapter, and

\textsuperscript{3} An idea by Juliette Wells, which will be expanded on later in the paper, and referenced throughout.
serve to remind both Becky and the reader that she is in a severe state of debt due to her ‘Moneyfolly,’ a fact easily forgotten due to her outward appearance and behavior. Her frequent avowals to cut back, make more money, and adopt weekend jobs (including a piece-meal attempt at making picture frames) all backfire as she drowns herself in material possessions the second something unsatisfactory happens in her life.

After losing her Saturday job at a boutique, and running into her childhood neighbor and his girlfriend (a reminder of her single status), Becky immediately turns to the power of her purse strings to alleviate her woes: “Twenty quid. I’ll buy myself a nice cappuccino and a chocolate brownie. And a couple of magazines. And maybe something from Accessorize. Or some boots… God, I deserve a treat, after today. And I need some new tights for work, and a nail file. And maybe a book to read on the tube” (Kinsella 135). This fragmented stream of consciousness epitomizes Becky’s compulsive shopping, and irresponsible lack of self control. Not only does Becky’s financial ruin remain hidden from the other characters in the novel, but since she is able to ‘dress the part’ of a successful twenty something, there is seemingly no cause for concern. For Cinderella, the solution to her life of servility comes in the form of a glass slipper; for Becky, salvation from financial ruin is offered to her through her new career as a financial expert on Morning Coffee (think Oprah). While Becky acts as a financial guru to the downtrodden individuals who call into the show with their money woes, and gracefully solves their financial troubles, she remains in a state of ‘danger’ due to her own indebted state. In this way, Kinsella depicts Becky’s spending as a form of ‘safe consumerism’—even though she is in a precarious position, she never faces consequences for her compulsive spending. There is no threat of eviction, no legal intercession; the most blatant and ‘humiliating’ materialization of Becky’s

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4 A disorder referring to one’s inability to make “rational or informed decisions about how [one] wants to use [their] money, but spends in order to achieve emotional goals,” thus causing money to become subjective (Van Slooten 221).
consumerism comes when all of her credit cards are denied at a store, and she is told that her account has been frozen. How does Becky—and thus Kinsella—deal with such a dilemma? By running home to her parents.

Once in the comfort of her childhood dwelling, Becky envisages dramatic scenarios involving her bank’s manager (Derek Smeath) showing up at her door, and frets that he will “send the bailiffs round” with “threatening men in leather jackets” (Kinsella 225). While her stomach may be “squeezed tight with fear,” (Kinsella 225) the chances of such an invasion actually happening are about as great as the amount in Becky’s bank account. When Mr. Smeath does confront Becky at the end of the novel, it is extremely anticlimactic and concludes with Becky promising that she will meet him at the bank the next afternoon, despite the fact that she has been ignoring his calls and letters for over six months. Not only does Kinsella conclude the novel by depicting a benevolent relationship between Smeath (money) and Becky, and presenting the reader with a final bank statement thanking Becky for her recent deposit, but the now-responsible heroine is also rewarded in the form of a handsome multi-millionaire entrepreneur. Since Becky’s problems “miraculously disappear,”” Kinsella suggests to the reader that there are no real consequences for such careless behavior and reckless spending (Van Slooten 219). Through disguise, Becky is able to manipulate those around her into seeing her for what she is not—a financially responsible woman—rather than for what she is—a ‘shopaholic’ who needs constant surveillance from Smeath and the other account executives, and later her new boyfriend.

“If Cinderella were alive today, she would not be waiting patiently for Prince Charming. She would be writing a tell-all book about her ugly stepsisters and wicked stepmother, taking care to position herself at the absolute center of their story. She would be dishing the dirt, wreaking vengeance and complaining all the way. Cinderella may have been too nice for that, but Lauren Weisberger is not.” –Janet Maslin, The New York Times, 2003

Lauren Weisberger’s The Devil Wears Prada, published in 2003, narrates the plight of Andrea (Andy) Sachs, a recent college graduate who lands a job as an assistant to Runway
magazine’s editor-in-chief Miranda Priestly (a character allegedly based on Vogue editor Anna Wintour). While Andy has the job ‘a million girls would die for’—a phrase reiterated throughout the novel intended to show the heroine how ‘lucky’ she is—she is merely biding her time at Runway until she can secure her dream job (not the one a ‘million girls would die for’) working at The New Yorker. Andy continually places herself in opposition to her leggy, model-esque coworkers, as evident through the description of the outfit she wears for her interview at Runway: “I […] managed to assemble a jacket and pants that did not match and in no way created a suit, but at least stayed put on my emaciated frame. A blue button-down, a not-too-perky ponytail, and a pair of slightly scuffed flats completed my look” (Weisberger 13). Andy’s simplistic style and naivety serves to secure the sympathy of the reader, who is able to relate to her ‘inferior’ position amongst her glamorous coworkers: “The heroine(s) of [The Nanny Diaries and] The Devil Wears Prada are variants of this rule: both gain our sympathy by being far more humane than their selfish employers and make mistakes only in interpreting their employers’ bizarre demands” (Wells 52). By equating the reader with the role of the protagonist, Weisberger allows the reader to become as much of an outside observer as Andy, since the entire first section of the novel is comprised of her perceptions of those around her. Not only do ‘fashiontastical’ descriptions run rampant throughout the text, but they also serve as a defining marker of the individual characters. Unlike Andy’s ‘scuffed’ and shabby look, her coworker Emily antithetically counters Andy’s lack of fashion sense with a look that is literally from the pages of a fashion magazine: “Emily, looking remarkably haggard and sloppy in a fitted but wrinkled sheer white t-shirt and hypertrendy cargo pants…her high heels were placed firmly on the glass coffee table, and a black lacy bra showed obviously through the completely transparent cotton of her shirt” (Weisberger 39). The in-depth description of Emily’s attire foreshadows the plethora of details given later in the novel regarding
dress and fashion. One of the greatest examples of fashion idealism is the “Beauty Closet” in the Runway headquarters, which is the equivalent to a child’s toy room, yet instead of Barbie dolls and Legos, the closet contains Jimmy Choos, leather skirts, and designer handbags.

While Andy at first resists the designer items in which her coworkers seemingly bathe themselves, she ultimately gives into the “limitless supply of designer clothes that Runway was just begging to provide for [her]” (121). She trades in her Gap and Banana Republic-comprised wardrobe for a “tweedy Prada skirt, black Prada turtleneck, and midcalf length Prada boots” (123) that she received from the expansive stock of the Beauty Closet. By dressing the part and resembling her coworkers, Andy convinces herself that she will better succeed at her job and increase her self-confidence in the workplace:

Twelve miserable long weeks of being looked up and down from hair to shoes each and every day, and never receiving a single compliment or even merely the impression that I had passed. Twelve horrifically long weeks of feeling stupid, incompetent, and all-around moronic. And so I decided at the beginning of my fourth month (only nine more to go!) at Runway to be a new woman and start dressing the part…Why fight it? I asked myself. Simply wearing their clothes wouldn’t necessarily mean I was a total sellout, would it? (121).

By compromising her self for the benefits of a job she does not even like, Weisberger seemingly implies that Andy will ultimately be ‘punished’ for her decision by subtly comparing her to the devil mentioned in the title of the novel (since she is, alas, now wearing Prada). Yet, by the novel’s finis, Andy quits her job at Runway as Miranda’s assistant, sells all of the designer clothes and accessories she accumulated during her time there (with the exception of a few items), and gets her work published in Seventeen Magazine. Out of all of the chick lit novels discussed in this paper, and encompassed under the umbrella of ‘working/career lit,’ Weisberger’s Prada most defies the standard conventions in terms of the space of the workplace. Andy’s entire life literally revolves around both her job and Miranda Priestly. Rather than strengthening her friendships and outside relationships, Andy’s bonds and ties actually suffer due to her job. By the end of Prada, Andy and
her long-term boyfriend have broken up, in large part due to her 24/7 job at the beck and call of Miranda, and also because of the transformation she has undergone from plain Andy to the Prada-wearing ‘Andrea.’

In this sense, Weisberger’s *Prada* is a direct refutation of Juliette Wells, who contends that “the world of work in chick lit is thus essentially window dressing: a backdrop to the real business of finding love” (55). Rather than finding love and romance in the workplace, Andy loses the boyfriend she already has due to her job’s consumption of her identity and energy. In this respect, Weisberger takes the reader on an antithetical journey. *Prada* is the only book of the four I am analyzing in this paper, in which the heroine begins the novel with a boyfriend, and then breaks up with him later; in the other three, the protagonists lament their single status, and ultimately conclude their storytelling in the arms of a handsome beau. Yet, while Weisberger may employ the character of Andy Sachs as an opposition to the ‘typical’ chick lit heroine, she simultaneously supports Wells’ argument regarding the workplace through her incorporation of ‘The Clackers.’ Andy first encounters these “leggy, Twiggy types” on the elevator ride during her interview: “Their lips never stopped moving, and their gossip was punctuated only by the sound of their stilettos clacking on the floor. *Clackers*, I thought” (13). These stereotypical embodiments of femininity i.e. stiletto-wearing gossips working at a fashion magazine are later depicted as fulfilling the ‘proper’ role of a worker, not through professional success in the workplace, but rather through their ‘labor’ of securing potential mates. Since *Runway’s* staff is composed primarily of women (with a gay man thrown in here and there), the ‘leggy’ Clacker types are forced to seek out love interests from the neighboring banking firm: “We [the *Runway* employees] didn’t share anything with them [the JS Bergman employees], not even an elevator bank, but it

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5 These ‘four’ refer to: Kinsella’s *Shopaholic*, Weisberger’s *Prada*, Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, and Green’s *Jemima J*. My later discussion of the television series *Sex and the City* is not included in this ‘canon.’
didn’t stop their rich bankers and our fashion beauties from checking each other out in the lobby” (125). Here Weisberger implies that the women not only dressed up and beautified themselves for their job, but also for the possibility that they would eventually meet a rich spouse on the way to work. While Andy does not participate in this blurring between business and pleasure, the ‘fashion beauties’ reinforce Wells’ discernment of the workplace as an agent of romance.

Just as Becky and Andy mask their bodies—and thus heighten their status—by wearing certain clothing, and working in jobs antithetical to their true selves (i.e. Andy wanting to work at *The New Yorker*, Becky giving financial advice), *Sex and the City’s* Carrie Bradshaw employs the icon of the stiletto in a similar fashion. Based off of Candace Bushnell’s novel by the same name, *SATC* tracks the lives of four friends who live and breathe the ‘conventions’ of chick lit. Living in Manhattan, constant romantic strife, and jobs spanning the fields of journalism, public relations, and art history, the series is literally chick lit come to life. In the season four episode, “Ring a Ding Ding,” Carrie comes to the horrific realization that she has spent over $40,000 on shoes alone. Upon such an epiphany, Carrie comes to the potential reality that she will “literally be the old woman who lived in her shoes.” Her lack of fiscal resources is seemingly masked by her copious collection of Manolo Blahniks, a brand which has become an icon of status and high fashion thanks to the frequent references to the design on the series. Carrie may end up as the old woman ‘living in her shoes,’ but until that point she is able to project a false class status and social position onto those around her who do not know about her indebted state, and instead judge her based on brand of footwear. Just as the glass slipper has become an icon of the ‘happily ever

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6 For the purposes of this paper, I am using the HBO television series *Sex and the City* as a chick lit text, rather than the actual novel of the same name. Not only does the novel not follow the standard structure of ‘chick lit,’ but according to a UIUC Instructor of English/Chick Lit, the novel is not considered part of the ‘chick lit canon,’ while the series is.

7 The exception to this ‘rule’ is the character of Miranda Hobbes, who is a corporate lawyer.
after,’ and refers to the elevation of poor Cinderella from an oppressed servant to a literal princess, the Manolo Blahnik has become synonymous with the ideals of female empowerment, success, and attractiveness promoted on the show. Yet, while the glass slipper works solely in favor of Cinderella, the Manolo (among others) has instead been the source of Carrie’s financial downfall.

**Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Self-Surveillance and Policing of the Body**

Like fairy tales, chick lit novels idealistically emphasize beauty, and the lengths to which one will go to achieve such perfection. Yet, while beauty is a common theme in both genres, the division between ‘natural beauty’ and ‘beauty work’ distinguishes between the two literary forms. According to Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff, this chasm is more clearly defined as those possessing “effortless beauty,” such as traditional romance heroines and the princesses/damsels in fairy tales, those who are beautiful but have been transformed from an ‘ugly duckling,’ and women who are both less physically attractive, but obstinate about defying the conventional demands of beauty. While the latter two categories refer to chick lit heroines, I will be focusing on a mixture of protagonists who have morphed into swans, as well as those who are considered less attractive by contemporary (as well as their own) beauty standards. One problem in dealing with the physical appearance and attractiveness of fictional personas lies in the discrepancy between the author’s pen and the image created in the mind of the reader as they peruse the pages. The reader must rely on the character’s own opinion of themselves in order to formulate any semblance of perception.

In *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, Fielding allows the reader intimate access to the heroine’s life through the diary format of the text. As Bridget recounts each detail of her life—sometimes including multiple entries per day—she begins each day by listing her weight, amount of alcohol she has consumed, how many cigarettes she has smoked, how many calories ingested, and another
form of ‘sinful’ behavior, ranging from the number of lottery tickets she has bought to how many minutes she has wasted on various tasks. Not only does Bridget list each of her ‘vices,’ but she then proceeds to morally rate herself based on the resulting quotient. If she has only smoked three cigarettes, then she deems her behavior as ‘v.g.’ (very good) whereas buying 12 lottery tickets warrants a ‘v.v. bad’ (very, very bad) (93). Her weight recording for the day (anything over 128 is a cause for concern, 131 pounds demands a comparison to Santa Claus), and her ability to keep her ‘corruptive’ behavior to a minimum, seemingly acts as a barometer for the amount of control she will have that day in her out-of-control life. Bridget begins her diary (which starts at the first of the year) with an elaborate listing of her New Year’s resolutions, in which she vows to “stop smoking,” “drink no more than fourteen alcohol units a week,” and “reduce circumference of thighs by three inches (i.e. 1 ½ inches each), using anticellulite diet” (3). This tactic of listing suggests a desire for control of not only what actually enters the body (i.e. calories, alcohol), but also of what adorns the heroine’s figure.

Before leaving for work in the morning, Becky pauses before the mirror and categorizes each piece of her outfit: “On the way out I pause in the hall to check my appearance in the mirror (Top: River Island, Skirt: French Connection, Tights: Pretty Polly Velvets, Shoes: Ravel) and reach for my coat (Coat: House of Fraser sale)” (Kinsella 138). This empirical listing suggests Becky’s need to reinforce her self-worth and value through the brands and items of clothing adorning her body. Wearing a French Connection skirt and River Island top allows her to possess and exert a sense of control nonexistent in her otherwise out-of-control life and indebted status. In this way, Becky not only performs a social masquerade for those she may encounter in her day (and who can recognize the brands of her clothing), but she simultaneously participates in her own ‘self-masking’ by emphasizing her chic clothing, and ignoring the piles of letters threatening to
freeze her accounts. For Jemima J (who will be discussed in the following section), the simple act of trying on fashionable outfits is a fulfilling testimony of the new woman she has become, the transformation from the ‘ugly duckling’ into the swan: “The trousers fit. The beautifully tailored jackets fit. The short, flippy skirts fit. The little silk T-shirts fit, more importantly, the little black dress fits. The camel suede shoes fit. The soft leather boots fit. And more to the point, I fit. And I cannot believe that the smart, sophisticated woman, grinning like a Cheshire cat in the mirror, is me. Me! Jemima Jones!” (Green 174). By coming to the conclusion that she now ‘fits’ because all of the items she has tried on in the store ‘fit,’ Jemima suggests that her identity and status is directly validated due to the outfits adorning her body. Like Becky and Jemima, Bridget must use her own way of listing to not only reinforce her self-worth, but also to determine the ‘value’ the impending day will hold; will it be a v.v. bad day, or a v. good day?

While Bridget seemingly bases each day on how much she weighs (which either increases or diminishes her physical attractiveness to men), or whether she has eaten too much, this obsessive policing does not just end once she records the numbers in her diary. Instead, such beauty work is a never-ending process that “requires endless self-surveillance, monitoring, dieting, purging, and work” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 497). The omniscient eye of Big Sister represents the notion that regulation and policing of the body are necessary evils. While this construct may be attributed to specific cultural and social standards, Big Sister (and thus an extension of the author) exists as an internalized monitor for the chick lit heroines. Continually listing what brand of clothing they wear, or how many calories they have consumed, allows contemporary heroines to instill a sense of self-guidance into their own lives. By possessing the ability to have total control over certain aspects of their lives and selves, the women are exhibiting their maturity and demonstrating how they have ‘grown up’ from the fairy tale heroines of yesteryear. Bridge Jones
probably would not have eaten that poisoned apple from the evil stepmother ala Snow White…and if she did there would have been a record of it.

**Somebody Save Me: Employment of the Damsel Distress and the Fairy Godmother**

Just as the traditional fairy tale would not be complete without a dashing young prince riding in on his white horse to save the heroine from destruction of some sort, the contemporary chick lit novel incorporates a similar pattern revolving around the ‘need’ to be saved. For Bridget Jones, the serious—yet strikingly handsome—Mr. Darcy (thanks, Austen) not only ‘saves’ her from falling into heartbreak after she catches her ‘fuckwit’ boss Daniel Cleaver (turned lover/part-time beau; hence a problem in the workplace and one of the chick lit genre conventions) cheating on her with a “bronzed, long-limbed, blonde-haired” American (153); but he also represents a paradigm of order, common sense and rationality in comparison to Bridget’s habitual faux pas and social misconduct. While hosting her very first dinner party, her attempts in the kitchen prove catastrophic, and it is Mark Darcy (along with Bridget’s friend Jude) who must seize control of the pots and pans (236). Later in the novel, Mark plays hero to Bridget’s mother after she decides to trade in her apron and her husband for a more ‘liberated’ lifestyle similar to her daughter’s. After she becomes romantically involved with Julio, her coworker who commits a time-share fraud and flees to Portugal, Mark (a literal white knight) pedagogically ‘rescues’ Mrs. Jones by helping her to return back to London into the ‘safe’ arms of her estranged husband, and later alerts the authorities regarding Julio’s whereabouts. In the novel’s sequel, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, Mark must employ his clout as a top barrister to rescue Bridget from a Thailand jail, where she has been detained for attempting to (unknowingly) smuggle drugs out of the country. These modern-day damsels in distress not only require the assistance of their (potential) love interests, but they must also rely on their own versions of the fairy godmother.
**Fairy Godmother:** What in the world did I do with that magic wand? I was sure...
**Cinderella:** Magic wand?
**Fairy Godmother:** That's strange. I-I always...
**Cinderella:** Then you must be...
**Fairy Godmother:** Your Fairy Godmother? Of course. Where is that wand? I... Oh! I forgot. I put it away.

[Literally pulls the wand from thin air]—Cinderella, 1950, Disney film version

In *Jemima J*, Jane Green recounts the plight of ‘plain Jane’ Jemima, a journalist at a local newspaper who wishes she was thin. Jemima introduces herself to the reader, and thus defines herself, based on her love of glossy fashion magazines and physical appearance: “So here I am now, at twenty-seven years old, bright funny, warm, caring and kind. But of course people don’t see that when they look at Jemima Jones. They simply see fat” (2). Jemima condenses her unhappy childhood, parents’ divorce, lack of familial love, and tendency to use food as a source of comfort into one brief paragraph, yet dedicates pages to her love of fashion magazines, and her history of fad dieting. In the beginning of the text, Jemima’s foil lies in Geraldine, her coworker: “[G]leaming blond hair in a chic bob, her tiny size 8 figure squeezed into the latest fashions, Geraldine may not have an ounce of talent, but the men love her, and the editor thinks she’s the biggest asset to the paper since, well, since himself” (7). According to Alison Umminger, even though Jemima actually has a real talent for writing (unlike Geraldine), she would “gladly trade her smarts and skills for the pretty packing that far surpasses talent or personality in securing both men and work” (242). Despite Jemima’s status as ‘poorer’ than Geraldine in terms of both beauty currency and occupational status, it is only after she begins having an online romance that she undergoes a complete physical transformation.

After meeting Brad, a Californian gym owner, online, Jemima reinvents herself as JJ,(an antithetical representation of herself) a television presenter who loves exercising. She even sends him a fake picture from *Cosmopolitan* of a model seated on a bicycle, claiming it is her (110). Yet,

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8 Quotation retrieved from the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com)
9 “God, I wish I were thin,” is the first line of the novel.
10 It should be noted that Jemima J and Bridget Jones share the same last name, and both obsess about their weight. Since Green is writing after Fielding, Jemima can be read as a response/reaction to the older Ms. Jones.
once the buff, blonde Brad decides that he wants to meet ‘JJ’ in person, Jemima must rely on the help of Geraldine to transform her into the beauty Brad believes her to be. Not only does Jemima begin working out twice a day, but Geraldine takes the newly svelte ‘JJ’ on an “expedition,” which includes a designer haircut (a ‘treat’ from Geraldine) and a new wardrobe of her very own set of size 8 clothes. After Geraldine pays for Jemima to have her ‘mousy’ brown hair changed into a “sheath of liquid gold,” Jemima nostalgically tells her friend, “‘I can’t believe everything you’ve done for me. Everything you’re doing for me. I honestly don’t know how to thank you’” (172). To this compliment, Geraldine exasperatedly rolls her eyes and claims, “‘This is the most exciting thing I’ve ever done. This is like the world’s biggest makeover, and trust me, I’m getting as much out of it as you. You,’ she says in a German scientist-type voice, ‘are my creation!’” (173). Not only does Geraldine place herself in the position of creator for Jemima’s newly fashioned and styled body, but Jemima openly acknowledges the role held by her former object of envy in transforming the once frumpy Jemima into the new, trendy JJ. Upon Jemima’s leaving England for Los Angeles (to meet Brad), Geraldine gives her a crash course in “airplane chic,” instructing her to wear black “stretchy” pants, a white shirt, and a black sweater to “loop casually” over her shoulders (185, 186). While Geraldine plays a minor role throughout the remaining prose (since Jemima is in California, while Geraldine remains in London), Jemima frequently phones her for moral support and advice, which Geraldine bestows upon her like any proper godmother.

While Jemima ultimately ends up marrying Ben, her English coworker whom she was secretly in love with prior to meeting Brad, it is only after she discovers that Brad has an ‘unhealthy obsession’ with his overweight assistant (how’s that for irony?). The subtitle of the text, “A novel about ugly duckling and swans,” is an overt homage to the simplistic children’s fable (and fairy tale in its own right) about the appearance of beauty out of ‘ugliness.’ As
discerned in the last of the opening quotes I have used, Jemima eventually realizes that ‘fairytales can come true,’ as evident through both of her metamorphoses from an ugly duckling into a swan, and from Ms. Jemima Jones into Mrs. Ben Williams. For Jemima, her ‘happily ever after’ comes in the form of a size 10 body, a handsome husband, and a job working at one of the glossy magazines she covets in the beginning of the prose. Yet, just as the trope of the ‘fairy godmother’ persists in chick lit, it only follows that an ‘ugly stepsister’ must similarly exist. In Bridget Jones, the ‘ugly’ stepsister materializes in the form of the “bronzed, long-limbed, blonde-haired” American, with whom Daniel cheats on Bridget. After stumbling upon the pair in the middle of an afternoon tryst, Bridget discovers the ‘bronzed’ beauty lying naked on a sun bed. Apparently disregarding her nude state, the woman instead turns to Daniel and snidely remarks, “‘Honey, I thought you said she was thin’” (153). The reader knows just how this comment will affect the overly weight conscious Bridget. In the next entry, Bridget begins the entry—per usual—with a recording of her weight (124 pounds), and then claims that “I’m falling apart. My boyfriend is sleeping with a bronzed giantess” (157). While the ‘bronzed giantess’ is not physically unattractive (as in Disney’s representation of the ugly stepsisters in Cinderella), her behavior and disregard for Bridget places her in the vilified realm of internal ugliness.

**Never Judge a Book by its Cover? The Physical Fragmentation of the Female Body**

“The names of these shows sound like they were spewed from some kind of Chick Lit Title Generator: Lipstick Jungle, Cashmere Mafia, Stiletto Assassin, Handbag Samurai, Push-up Bra SWAT Team, etc, etc. Add a pink cover, show a cartoon drawing of a woman from the knees down, and you are good to go.” User comment taken from “Jezebel” blog in response to a post regarding the television show Lipstick Jungle (based off of the book by Candace Bushnell); February 15, 2008.

While there is a significant emphasis placed upon appearances in the novels—both physically and socially—the actual packaging of these texts deserve their own analysis. Chick lit novels are widely recognizable due to their bright covers—usually in pink—and glossy images,
which intrigue bookstore browsers enough to at least flip through the novels. Stereotypical cover conventions include: the color pink (*maybe* a turquoise or bright purple) *somewhere*, a martini glass, stiletto heel, and a shopping bag. While this is a fair generalization based on the considerable number of chick lit novels that *do* feature such objects on their covers, the images that grace the faces of these novels are significant due to the fragmentation of womanhood they seemingly promote. The cover of Jane Green’s *Jemima J* (Appendix: Figure A) depicts the body of an overweight woman (presumably Jemima) from the waist down, adorned in a black mini skirt and black heeled sandals. ‘Jemima’s’ bare legs are the center of the cover and the focal point for the potential reader. Yet, the cover released in the UK (Figure B) presents the reader with an image of a pink tiered cake adorned with a bow constructed from a yellow measuring tape, which plays on stereotypical conventions in that not only do women like the color pink and enjoy eating sweets, but they love pink frosted sweets and desserts even more. Even though the curvaceous and slightly overweight female body stands in for the inanimate dessert, the cake is meant to represent a voluptuous female, as discernable through the pink frosted ‘excess’ hanging over the sides of the tape measure bow. Despite this ‘overweight’ representation of cake (and thus the female body, and Jemima J), the vertical lines on the treat hearken back to the age-old fashion tips (i.e. the school of ‘black is slimming’) passed on from mother to daughter, and are humorous in their obvious failings to ‘slenderize’ the image. While the US and UK novels may allow completely different images to grace their covers, the fragmentation and transubstantiation of the female body (i.e. into a curvaceous dessert) suggests a negation of wholeness, thus paralleling the fissured lives of the women depicted within the pages of the texts.

Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* reveals a similar discrepancy between the US and UK released covers. Yet, rather than both perpetuating notions of fragmentation, the US cover (Figure
C) depicts an overtly sexualized image while the UK (Figure D) face remains somewhat banal. This latter image simply portrays a profiled view of a woman holding a pen, with a pensive countenance.\footnote{The yellow lighting and shadowing of the cover somewhat obscures both the model and her actions i.e. it may appear as if she is smoking a cigarette rather than holding a pen, another behavior Bridget frequently engages in throughout the text.} A contextual reading places this cover model as an embodiment of Ms. Jones, presumably as she sits writing in the diary that the reader is about to embark on as they flip to the underlying pages. The simplicity of the image calls to mind cover representations of late eighteenth/early nineteenth century novels, particularly those by women authors such as Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte.\footnote{This similarity can be read as a purposeful decision on the part of Fielding since *Bridget Jones’s Diary* is a contemporary (rough) take on Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*.
} Unlike this ‘safe’ depiction of the female body, the US cover features a female face transposed onto a lined paper background (presumably Bridget’s ‘diary’). Rather than a whole human face, the cover merely depicts two eyes, a nose and a mouth adorned in red lipstick, which reveals the gendering of the face to the reader. This fragmentation of the female face is intensified by the ‘O’ shape of the mouth, resembling a woman performing oral sex. The overt shift from a ‘benign’ portrait of a seated woman to the impending performance of a ‘fellacious’ sex act on the covers suggests the abilities of ‘independent’ women ala Bridget Jones to ‘live like men’ in a now ‘equal,’ and thus postfeminist, society.

A chick lit anthology which I have relied on in my research, entitled *Chick Lit: The New Woman’s Fiction*, gives into the stereotypical (aforementioned) cover design of chick lit through its glossy, pink pastel face, curlicue font and purple writing. An individual woman stands in between the words ‘chick’ and ‘lit’ and is adorned in a mini skirt, tank top, heels and a ‘chic’ bag. Whether this excessive incorporation of ‘typical’ cover features is deliberately satirical, or merely a faux pas on the part of the editors is left to the discretion of the reader.
On March 20, 2008, I visited a local Borders Bookstore in Schaumburg (IL). Besides my own selfish, bibliophilic purposes for perusing the shelves and drinking coffee on a rainy evening, I was determined to not only judge the books by their covers, but to similarly evaluate the store displays for both chick lit and fairy tales/literature directed towards young girls. While there was not a display exclusively for chick lit novels, there was a table boasting books for the customer to “curl up with a good read.” Not surprisingly, nearly all of the pieces of prose (with the exception of two or three books) were novels ideally geared towards women. Of the four novels captured in the photograph I took of this display (Figure E), three of the four either depict a woman on the cover, have the word ‘woman’ in title, or is written by James Patterson, an author known for writing thrillers, yet whose book on the display is one of the few romances he has written. The idea of ‘curling up’ is itself a feminine construction, based on the oppressive essentialist notion that women should take up less space than men because they are (allegedly) physically ‘smaller.’

Unlike the indirect promotion of books towards women through the gendered rhetoric (i.e. ‘curl up), the girl displays in the children’s section blatantly revealed the ideal audience and reader. Racks of “My Little Pony” picture books were labeled ‘GIRL POWER,’ (Figure F) just in case titles such as “The Princess Promenade,” or the pink ponies, rainbows, and stars adorning the covers suggested that they were intended for boy readers. My favorite wall display consisted of what I deem ‘chicky lit’ due to its physical similarities to the stereotypical assumptions surrounding chick lit covers (Figure G). All of the covers in this chicky section had pink and purple covers (or white backgrounds with pink and purple font), and were fraught with two dominating ideologies surrounding conventional girlhood: being a princess and playing dress up. This idea of a physical masquerading through the act of dress up and pretend play parallels my

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13 I received permission from the store manager to take pictures of the displays.
14 Patterson taken from conversation with Border’s worker, but which I have also double-checked, and is available on ‘public’ encyclopedias such as Wikipedia.
argument regarding the social masquerading of chick lit heroines in their social status and class. From “Fancy Nancy” to “Princess Grace,” these books embodied the notion of chick lit as an extension of the ‘fairy tale,’ and as an instruction guide for the women who once consumed similar texts. The uncanny similarities between the covers and connotations of the images (i.e. “Fancy Nancy” suggests the importance of consumerism and brand culture) imply a gradual shift from Princess Grace to Bridget Jones.

_Hurrah for the Singletons? Placing Chick Lit Heroines in a Postfeminist World_

"To suggest that another woman's ostensibly literary novel is chick lit feels catty, not unlike calling another woman a slut -- doesn't the term basically bring down all of us?" Curtis Sittenfeld, _The New York Times_

Despite the bold pink covers and glossy depictions of shopping bags and fragmented bodies, the idea of feminism within the texts remains blurry and ambiguous. Gill and Herdieckerhoff contend that while feminism/feminist ideas are neither ignored nor blatantly attacked, they _are_ “simultaneously taken for granted and repudiated” (499). The duo attempt to decode this paradoxical relationship by discussing the experiences of the chickerati (they use Marian Keyes as an example) who grew up ‘in fear’ of being “‘told off’” by feminists, and “‘having everything pink taken out of [the] house.’” (499). The authors regard this phenomenon as a result of the ‘Big Sister’ mentality, a phrase which I have reappropriated to represent the internalized policing and surveillance wrought by the chick lit heroines (and thus the authors) over their own bodies.

While a majority of the heroines fail to self-identify as feminist, they are obviously reaping the benefits of Second Wave feminism that seemed to have sideswiped their mothers. This notion is particularly evident in Fielding’s _Bridget Jones_, when Mrs. Jones must be ‘returned’ to the safe space of the home after she attempts to start her own career and take on a lover, only to become involved in a criminal scenario. In this sense, I argue that the women living within the pages of the
discussed chick lit novels both believe themselves to be, and are depicted as, living in a
postfeminist society:

Instead, it [postfeminism] evokes the politics of the backlash. Second-wave feminism may have given
women more choices—as Natasha Walter\(^\text{15}\) says, they can now earn their own money, buy their own
drinks, live in their own flats—but it has not altered a romantic ideology which accords them value
only through reference to men. Therefore, Bridget Jones and her friends are confused, not liberated, by
the choices that are presented to them. In an attempt to counteract that confusion, they ultimately
spend as much, if not more, time obsessing about beauty practices, diet, and lifestyle as their
predecessors (Gamble 5)

Recalling the omniscient, internalized eye of ‘Big Sister,’ the heroines in the novels grapple with
‘the choices that are presented to them’ through excessive beauty work, and an intense policing of
the body. Because the fictional women living in these books are able to ‘live like men’ through
their financial (albeit somewhat irresponsible, ala Becky Bloomwood) independence, ‘corporate’
careers, and ability to engage in casual sex, they have seemingly forgotten about the ‘loose ends’
that still have not been resolved since the finis of the ‘Second Wave.’ Their status as the
“daughters of educated baby boomers,” and thus “direct beneficiaries of the women’s liberation
movement” has culminated in a shift from the previous, politicized feminist agendas, including
equal pay and equal work, to “lifestyle concerns” and the problem of having too much choice
(Harzewski 37). Yet, women still do not earn—on average—equal pay for equal work; the ‘glass
coffin’ turned ‘glass ceiling’ still exists in the workplace; by ignoring these issues in novels written
by women, and intended for women, it simply makes it easier for others to ignore them. If women
(i.e. the women in the novels as representations of the readers) do not care about matters directly
affecting them, then why should anyone else? Carol-Ann Farkas deems these heroines
‘transitional women,’ who “take certain rights for granted while still feeling much stress and
ambivalence about identity, sexual agency, and the attractions or perils of work, marriage, and
motherhood” (903). Umminger is less forgiving: “Women who now had the right to vote, to build

\(^{15}\) Walter is the author of *The New Feminism*, a source Gamble cites in her own text.
careers and identities of their own, were frittering away these advances in pursuit of eternal youth and thin bodies” (238). By accepting—and even embracing—their status as women living in a ‘postfeminist’ society, these chick lit heroines fail to self-identify as feminist even though they are direct products of feminism’s internalized backlash, and monitored by the eye of Big Sister.

While out to dinner with her girlfriends—and Tom, the token queer male friend—Bridget must shush Sharon from speaking too loudly about ‘emotional fuckwits’ lacking in commitment and maturity because “there is nothing so unattractive to a man as strident feminism” (Fielding 18). Even though feminism is considered a repelling “anaphrodisiac” (Whelehan 180) and ‘dirty word’ in this excerpt, Fielding should be lauded for even including the word within the pages. According to a search I conducted on Amazon (made possible by the ‘search inside’ feature), the word ‘feminist’ or ‘feminism’ appeared a total of zero times in Weisberger’s *The Devil Wears Prada*, Kinsella’s *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, and Green’s *Jemima J*. Yet, the word ‘diet’ appeared seven times in *Prada* and 18 times in *Jemima J*.

As previously mentioned, Juliette Wells contends that the primary story line of any chick lit novel is love and romance. Essentially, there is no such thing as ‘working/career lit’ (the archetypal genre of chick lit focused on in this paper) because the workplace serves primarily as a vehicle for the “real business” of finding romance and love, (55) or the elusive ‘happily ever after.’ Another reading of the novels divides the workplace into two distinct archetypes; one embodying the 1950s stereotype, the other its antithesis. The link between the workplace and the 1950s stereotype supports Wells’ contention of the workplace as a means of finding romance, and also manifests in the chick lit heroines’ lackadaisical attitude towards their jobs (i.e. Jemima’s going on the internet to chat with Brad while in the office). The idea that the workplace is the *antithesis* to the 1950s stereotype is evident through the portrayals of ‘tyrannical’ characters such as Miranda
Priestly. Modeled after male CEO prototypes, Miranda acts in a hyper-masculine (i.e. suggestions that she is an absentee mother) fashion, and must instill fear in her employees as a means of gaining respect. Based off of these two depictions of the workplace, there is no happy medium—there is only room for the extremes of stereotypical femininity and hyper-masculinity.

Yet, the lingering fear felt by the chick lit protagonists—and the reader—that they will become spinsters undermines the previous cries of ‘I am woman, hear me roar,’ and even ‘Girl Power!’ The backlash—outlined by Susan Faludi in *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*—suggests that not only has there been a recoil against feminism, but also an internalized backlash in the minds of the heroines, which is evident in the lives of the characters through their constant self-surveillance, and even in the lives of the reader—who must theoretically be guided by chick lit novels since they have outgrown their original agent of instruction and socialization—the fairy tale. Just as the conduct manual was used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to instruct and groom girls in the ways of proper womanhood, fairy tales and Disneyfied stories have seemingly ‘replaced’ these guides. In what can only be an ironic moment of reflexivity, Bridget is left speechless after Mark Darcy—whom she dislikes at this early stage of the novel (once again, thanks Austen)—asks her if she has read any good books lately. Not wanting to confess to reading *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, Bridget triumphantly (and falsely) proclaims she has read Faludi’s *Backlash*, only to find that Darcy actually has read the treatise and found it full of “special pleading” (13). Bridget’s explicit admission that she has not read the discourse—and her status as the ‘mother’ of chick lit novels—suggests that the backlash faced by this ‘new generation’ of women (Bridget and her ‘daughters’) points more so to an internalized struggle, rather than the recoil against career-minded women Faludi points to through her rhetoric.

And they all Lived Happily Ever After
“I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding…Alas! if the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard?…Let us leave it to the Reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body” Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, 1818 (36).

Based on my analysis of the aforementioned chick lit novels, I find the similarities between the fairy tale and the chick lit genre compelling. Not only do the texts share similar conventions (albeit updated in the latter genre), but even the language and buzz phrases remain the same. Stock conventions like ‘prince charming,’ ‘happily ever after,’ and the ‘damsel in distress’ have been reappropriated to fit the current social climate. Not only do such phrases appear in the actual chick lit novels, but they similarly manifest in both scholarly discourses and print media (i.e. newspapers, magazines) focusing on the genre. The Cinderella motif acts as a guiding force for many of the novels (most notably in *Jemima J*), and suggests that the reader can undergo their own ‘transformation’ from a servant (or overweight journalist) to a noble figure (married magazine editor) through exercise and a new wardrobe. This idea of the postfeminist Cinderella does not require a fairy wand or secret incantation (although a fairy godmother is *optional* ala Geraldine), and instead suggests that happiness and success can be achieved through a policing and maintenance of the body.

While I argue that chick lit is indeed an extension of the fairy tale, and thus another mode of socialization and instruction for the (presumably) women readers which reinforces ‘proper’ gender norms and desires, then what happens next? Do we denounce theses texts for infantilizing adult readers, and trying to pass off certain chick lit conventions (i.e. social masquerading) as innovative? Should we just refuse to purchase such prose, and write it off as ‘trash?’ The answer is no. While there are aspects of chick lit novels that promote antiquated ideas, such as the inevitable ‘happily ever after’ placing the heroine in the arms of ‘prince charming’ (or an investment banker), they do advocate certain merits of female empowerment. The frequent
employment of close friendship circles, and the rhetorical freedom of both the fictional heroine and
the author serve as depictions of strength and solidarity. Just as Jane Austen boldly contends in the
quotation used to introduce this section, the authors of such texts must unite for they are an
‘injured body.’ The public’s overwhelming perception that chick lit is ‘fluff’ and ‘silly’ due to its
cover design and simplistic ‘recipe’ (of genre) begs the question of whether Austen was ‘silly’
because of her emphasis on the drawing room, or whether Bronte ‘missed the boat’ because she
focused on women’s feelings and the plight of the worker (Jane Eyre as a governess). While
Austen blatantly defends the novel form in the middle of Northanger Abbey, it is time for the
chickerati to step forth and similarly defend the body of chick lit, ‘to the number of which they are
themselves adding.’ While such authors may not feel the need to defend their prose, and instead
argue that they are not writing for the critics but for their readers, the ideas that a book is ‘just’
chick lit, or that it is ‘just’ Helen Fielding will remain.
Figure E; Borders Bookstore display

Figure F; Border’s ‘Girl Power’ display
Figure G; Borders ‘chicky lit’ display

Chick lit novels on shelf (note the similarities in color to Figure G)
Image of a magic wand available for purchase in the children’s section at Borders

Another chick lit display on shelf featuring author Sophie Kinsella (Confessions of a Shopaholic)
Bibliography


