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## Chick Lit, a tool for female emancipation ?

Pauline Cagne

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## Mémoire

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Master

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Mention 2nd degré, Professeur des Lycées et Collèges

# Chick Lit, a tool for female emancipation?

Projet présenté par **Pauline CAGNE**

Sous la direction de **Mme Margaret Gillespie** (UFR Lettres, INSPE de  
Franche-Comté)

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# PREMIÈRE PARTIE

## Introduction

*“Have you heard about Chick Lit literature?”*

*“What?”*

This is the typical reaction I always get whenever I start mentioning my research topic.

So, what is Chick lit?

First of all, Chick Lit is the diminutive form of the term ‘Chick Literature’; it is a popular literature genre, which is often compared to romance novels because of the love story burgeoning in most stories. The books are written by women and aim at entertaining a female audience. The storyline often follows a strict, stereotyped pattern: the main character is generally a young white professional female, living in a big city like London or New York and working in a big company specialized in marketing, journalism or advertising. She will meet an inaccessible man and fall in love with him but eventually they will overcome the obstacles and deliver the readers the happy ending they were hoping for. A major characteristic of Chick Lit is that the stories take place in the contemporary society of the twenty-first century; thus there is a strong feeling of identification between the readers and the heroine, which makes the genre a special one. Nowadays the genre is a worldwide phenomenon even if it first started back in the 1990’s with novels by British and American writers such as Helen Fielding (*Bridget Jones’s Diary*, 1996) and Candace Bushnell (*Sex and the City*, 1996). Dated though they are, these are the titles most likely to ring a bell in the head of those unfamiliar with the genre, thanks to their onscreen adaptations as a movie saga and a series.

Chick Lit can be said to reflect post-feminist visions. Post-feminism is a complex term which can be roughly summarized as everything coming after the ‘traditional’ feminism of the 1960’s and 1970’s and aiming at individualizing and depoliticizing the women’s movement. It is difficult to clearly identify this notion because it embraces the evolution of feminist battles in the fight to guarantee women’s autonomy and freedom. Postfeminists believe that feminist goals such as the right to vote, the right to abort and so forth have been achieved. In a sense then, the ‘post’ in post-feminism implies a feminist legacy. But some scholars also contend that post-feminists do not want to be associated with feminists who are often depicted as violent or hateful towards men: here “post” posits post-feminism as an alternative vision of womanhood. There is a need in our current society to come back to more traditional values

and “more traditional femininity through domesticity, consumerism, romance, and motherhood”<sup>1</sup> and Chick Lit deals with most of these topics.

For my research, I wanted to focus more particularly on the British author Sophie Kinsella because I have read and enjoyed most of her books since my teenage years.

My analysis will be based on the first standalone novel in her career –for the time being, she has written nine standalones novels, while the ‘Shopaholic’ series comprises nine other novels focusing on Becky Bloomwood.

*Can You Keep a Secret*, published in 2003, has been on best-seller lists around the world and translated in dozens of different languages and ranked 97/100 on the Nielson Bookscan Top 100 books of all time 1998-2010 in the United Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> After a business trip in Glasgow where Emma Corrigan did not manage to make a deal with Glen Oil, a partnership company, we go aboard a turbulent flight. There, panic-stricken, she reveals all her unconfessed secrets - from the fact she falsified her CV to how she “was planning to go on a diet” (chapter 2, page 25)- to the enigmatic stranger sitting next to her... who happens to be her “mega-boss employer”. But slowly, their relationship will evolve into something else than just professional.

If we go back to the origin of the term “Chick Lit”, the word “chick” is connoted negatively and is on a par with the word “bitch”. In her thesis on the subject Vivian Ruiz explains:

To call a woman a “chick” is no better than calling her a “bitch,” a “nag,” or a shrew- all terms that equate a woman with an animal. In some ways, the derogatory of “chick” may be worse. The young of a chicken is not aggressive, threatening, intimidating, majestic or symbolic of strength and courage, like, for example, a bald eagle. A chick is quite the opposite: it is small, weak, fragile, harmless, domesticated, and inoffensive.<sup>3</sup>

It goes without saying that the term itself entraps women in a fixed and old-fashioned representation which opposes feminist and post-feminist views on the stance of women in the twenty-first century.

But even though the genre of Chick Lit tends to diffuse traditional values that on the whole are far less deprecating than the term chick could make us think, my research will

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<sup>1</sup> Michele M. Glasburgh. Chick lit: the new face of postfeminist fiction? A Master’s Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. November, 2006. <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:d58b2c21-2e3f-470f-a323-78e6e0a342ef>

<sup>2</sup> “Top-selling 100 books of all time”, *The Guardian*, 1 Jan. 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2011/jan/01/top-100-books-of-all-time#data> [last accessed 22/04/20].

<sup>3</sup> Vivian Ruiz. “Of Bridgets, Rebeccas, and Carries: Chick culture defines woman” Florida State University, 2011. <https://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu:183093/datastream/PDF/view> [last accessed 22/04/20].

focus on the following question: can Chick Lit be a tool of emancipation and empowerment of women for contemporary times? How does it inscribe itself within the post-feminist current?

I will begin my dissertation with a theoretical approach of what the genre is and how we can define it. Then I will explain and discuss my vision of the post-feminist movement and how Chick Lit can globally be a source of emancipation or not.

The second major part will focus on a literary approach where I will highlight the important points of Sophie Kinsella's life through the prism of post-feminist views and her novels. Finally, I will present the novel I have chosen to work on in depth, and stress the important points that make this novel a source of female empowerment thanks to its post-feminist characteristics.

# I. Theoretical context

## A) Understanding what Chick Lit literature is

### The hatching of a genre

First coined in a mocking way in 1995 by Cris Mazza and Jeffrey Deshell<sup>4</sup>, the term “Chick Lit” now refers to a specific literary genre whose first novel under this label was Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996). This women's literature flourished in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, before spreading worldwide.

However, this label of chick lit is still unknown for most people probably because of its relatively recent emergence (even though the question of its “modernity” is debatable in 2020), but more surprisingly because the category “Chick Lit” is inexistent in libraries or online bookstores despite the huge success of the novels that enter this genre.

For example, Sophie Kinsella's stories appear under the category “general and literary fiction” on the British website of W.H.Smith, “Contemporary fiction” on Amazon and Waterstones but confusingly enough, we can find Sophie Kinsella in the tab “women's fiction” and more particularly “women's chick lit” on the American website Barnes & Noble. The term ‘Chick Lit’ is consequently rarely connected to the books that could be labelled as such, without a doubt because it still triggers strong criticism.

The genre is the new generation of women's writing and differentiates itself from the other traditional genres such as romance or detective novels. But many assume that Chick Lit is similar to romance novels. According to the definition of Gustave Reynier, a romance novel comprises “one love, one obstacle, and a happy ending such as a marriage”<sup>5</sup> but in terms of Chick Lit, the love story, despite the happy ending, never ends in marriage because this is not what modern women aspire to anymore. The tone used is lighter than in the romance novel because of a major dose of humour and the whole focus is not put on the love story itself, but an important part of the plot sheds light on the professional life of the protagonist, her struggles and/or boredom in her job, we also have side characters playing a role in the story such as the friends or family of the heroine...

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<sup>4</sup> In the title of the edited anthology *Chick Lit: Postfeminist Fiction*. Eds. Cris Mazza, Jeffrey DeShell, and Elisabeth Sheffield. Carbondale, Ill.: FC2, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Gustave REYNIER. *Le roman sentimental avant l'Astrée*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1988, p. 302.

### A formulaic plot

Typically, Chick Lit is said to be formulaic that is to say, the plot usually follows a certain well-defined outline with features linked to the genre.

Set in a big urban city such as London for Sophie Kinsella's books—at least for most of the novels—, we follow the life of a young white woman after it has taken “a drastic turn for the worst which the heroine must then work her way out of.”<sup>6</sup> Despite her apparently glamorous job in the field of marketing, advertising, law or fashion, she struggles to gain recognition within the company.

This general plot can vary more or less but from my point of view, the drawing published by Anna Weinberg, in *Book Magazine*, July/August 2003, reproduced on the next page, even though it is based on stereotypes, appears to be quite accurate except for the “anxiety section” which I did not find particularly relevant to Sophie Kinsella's novels. I would rather say that Chick heroines experience minor life problems such as relationships with family members, co-workers, roommates and of course men.

If we take the example of Emma Corrigan in *Can You Keep a Secret*, we could tick the fact that she is a **young urban female who is a relatively low-level employee** in a marketing agency in **London**, which is a field similar to “advertising” suggested here in the drawing. About the “anxiety” section, I would not say that Emma psychologically suffers from such issues, but it is true that at the beginning of the novel, she is unhappy with her **sex life** (p.23 of the novel she explains that she does not “even *know* if [she has] a G spot”); she lies about her weight “I weigh 9 stone 3. Not 8 stone 3” (p.1) which enters in the category **body**; her **mother** is not **annoying** but their relationship is not as affectionate as she would like it to be (chapter 4, p.42-43).

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<sup>6</sup> Cathy YARDLEY, *Will Write For Shoes: How To Write A Chick Lit Novel*, 2006, New York: St. Martin's Press.

## Make Your Own Chick-Lit Novel!

1. START WITH ONE YOUNG URBAN FEMALE  
(who's a low-level employee in:)

2. CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

a) PUBLISHING	b) PUBLIC RELATIONS
c) ADVERTISING	d) JOURNALISM

-- add --

3. ANXIETY ABOUT ONE OR ALL THE FOLLOWING:

a) BODY	b) SEX LIFE
c) BIOLOGICAL CLOCK	d) ANNOYING MOTHER
e) EMOTIONALLY IMMATURE MEN	f) DYING ALONE
g) SHOPPING ADDICTION	h) INSUFFICIENT COLLECTION OF SHOES
i) NICOTINE ADDICTION	j) CRAPPY SALARY
k) EXCESSIVE ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION	
l) FINDING LOVE IN THE CITY OF:	
1. NEW YORK	2. MANHATTAN
3. GOTHAM	4. LONDON

-- Mix it all together --

4. ZANINESS ENSUES.  
Your book should look something like this:

YOUR TITLE HERE



YOUR NAME HERE

or

YOUR TITLE HERE



YOUR NAME HERE

Figure 1 Make Your Own Chick-Lit Novel!

The rest of the plot is tightly linked to the professional environment for it is also through work that the protagonist will encounter the man with whom she will conclude her Happy End. In addition to this, as Maureen Lynch Cook declared in her B.A. thesis *The Great Escape: Modern Women and the Chick Lit Genre*<sup>7</sup>:

When the couple unites in the last twenty pages of the novel, the heroine's life has somehow transformed during her journey to him. She usually has a new job, a better income, and has sometimes even improved her relationships with her family.

The notion of improvement reminds me of the typical bildungsroman or coming-of-age pattern to the extent we follow the heroine's development into a stage in her life when things

<sup>7</sup> Maureen Lynch COOKE. *The Great Escape: Modern Women and the Chick Lit Genre*, BA, Boston College, 2006. p.12. <https://dlib.bc.edu/islandora/object/bc-ir:102412/datastream/PDF/view> [last accessed 23/04/20].

appear more settled than at the beginning of the story and when she seems more fulfilled. This idea has been shared by Vivian Ruiz, based on Sarah Mlynowski and Farrin Jacobs's "See Jane Write: A Girl's Guide to Writing Chick- Lit":

According to Edward Quinn, bildungsroman is "a type of novel that focuses on the development of a character moving from childhood to maturity." It usually "charts a movement from innocence to knowledge" (36). ChickLit novels only partially fit the definition of bildungsroman because they rarely chart the interior voyage of its main character chronologically from childhood to maturity. Rather, these novels tend to focus on the life of the already grown-up heroine, who is usually in her 30s or approaching said age. Nevertheless, like the traditional bildungsroman narrative, they chart the main character's personal journey of inner growth from innocence to maturity or from inexperience to experience.<sup>8</sup>

But what are the limits of this formulaic plot? The consistency can act like a safe bet for readers, knowing how the story will unfold, they know that their expectations will be met through the pages of the book and they will not be frustrated. Also, we can quote again Vivian Ruiz<sup>9</sup> for whom "securing success is in fact the purpose of following a formula, [...] It also guarantees the genre's success by consistently appealing to a "regular audience"".

But the notions of mystery and suspense in Chick Lit stories are absent and enclose the imagination of the readers, which can eventually lead to predictability and boredom.

### Today's modern world

Another point differing Chick Lit from the traditional romance novel is the modernity of the settings in which the plot evolves. In popular romance fiction, the usual settings were the domestic spaces following the conventions stating that women's place was in the private sphere: "[...] bourgeois society defined women in terms of their relationships –specifically, their conjugal or familial relationships- because they were granted power within the "proper sphere" of the home [...]"<sup>10</sup> In traditional romance novels you would not find a working heroine in the public sphere, which was described as "the active and aggressive world of politics, the military services and commerce, for instance, where [men] could use their capacity for logical thought to best effect"<sup>11</sup>. On the contrary, women could only look up to

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<sup>8</sup> V. Ruiz op.cit., p.55

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Mary Poovey, "Persuasion and the Promises of Love (1983)" in *Women and Romance* edited by S.O. Weiser, 2001, New York University Press, p.269. <https://books.google.fr/> [last accessed 24/04/2020].

<sup>11</sup> Tinna Sif Sindradóttir, *Nineteenth Century Women Writers and the Challenge of Gender Roles: Feminist Heroines in the Novels of the Brontë Sisters*, 2015, University of Iceland, p.3. [https://skemman.is/bitstream/1946/21334/2/Tinna\\_Sif\\_BA\\_Essay.pdf](https://skemman.is/bitstream/1946/21334/2/Tinna_Sif_BA_Essay.pdf) [last accessed 24/04/20].

being the 'Angel in the House'<sup>12</sup> according to Victorian mores, thus staying in within the domestic sphere.

But, at the present time, the heroines have made their way out of the domestic sphere, in trendy big cities where everything is said to be possible because of the numerous opportunities that places New York or London offer. The protagonists are surrounded by what makes a megacity a megacity: millions of inhabitants, skyscrapers, big companies and institutes, stores... They are a real pole of globalization and exchanges, and chick authors do not hesitate to integrate a large number of names recalling this globalization in their narratives.

In order to make their stories as genuine as possible, writers add contemporary cultural references such as names of magazines, series, movies, food brands or clothing stores. These clearly put down roots on the year the novel has been written and can be an inconvenience to the extent that the books are not transportable into later decades and can easily appear outdated.

For example, in *Can you Keep a Secret* published in 2003, elements of popular culture are mentioned and hopefully these references are still understandable in 2020, at least for a readership aged under twenty: I personally know the magazine *Cosmo*, or the British soap opera *EastEnders* and even the American singer Madonna. But not everyone, beyond the English-speaking world will get these references and this can be problematic in terms of identification with the protagonist and the period depicted in the novels. For instance, I had to look on the web to find out who/what "Ben Hur" was or to listen to the song "Close To You" by the Carpenters mentioned in the same novel. But if we study the most recent novel of Sophie Kinsella, *I Owe You One* published in 2019 I found that these pop culture references were less common than in her previous standalones books; even though in chapter five, for example, there is a reference to the mobile application Instagram, that did not exist ten years ago, which shows that novels evolve with time.

The question of timed references has its limits when it comes to translating the stories into different languages and thus different cultures but also when it comes to persist in time: the trendy brands or TV shows will be different ten years after the publication of the novel, thus they will lose in authenticity and verisimilitude. The novels will then be as old fashioned as the brands referred to in the stories. To support this idea, I read a reference to "my

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<sup>12</sup> "The popular Victorian image of the ideal wife/woman came to be "the Angel in the House"; she was expected to be devoted and submissive to her husband. The Angel was passive and powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious, and above all--pure. The phrase "Angel in the House" comes from the title of an immensely popular poem by Coventry Patmore, in which he holds his angel-wife up as a model for all women." Lilia Melani, *The Angel in the House*, March 2, 2011, [http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/thackeray/angel.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/thackeray/angel.html) [last accessed 24/04/2020].

precious Blackberry” in chapter 1 of the novel *Undomestic Goddess* published in 2006, this mobile phone was at the time trendy but reading this extract in 2020 seemed a bit awkward and out-dated. Because of the references to a definite era, we can ask ourselves if Chick Lit novels have a shelf life-like most consumer products.

Besides, it should be noted that the genre of Chick Lit, even though still marketed today has made space on the shelves for a new phenomenon named “New Romance” in France<sup>13</sup> with series like “After” (Anna Todd) in 2014 or “Calendar Girls” (Audrey Carlan) in 2015. The particularity of these novels is the focus on sexual relationships which are described explicitly.

## B) Chick Lit is indivisible from the post-feminist movement

### What is post-feminism?

Post-feminism positions itself as a thorny notion which first emerged in the West during the 1970s and 1980s and whose meaning is difficult to grasp.

Even the correct spelling remains uncertain, wavering between “postfeminism” “post feminism” and “post-feminism” Semantically this neologism is composed of the prefix “post” signifying “after”, “posterior to”. One can say that post-feminism like post-modernism or post-colonialism is a concept which succeeds the original movement. In an attempt to offer a satisfying definition, Srijani Ghosh wrote:

The term “postfeminism” is usually used to imply that the project of feminism has ended, either because it has been completed or because it has failed. Genz<sup>14</sup> maintains that postfeminism is a more complex and helpful idea than many of its common usages suggest. She asserts that “the ‘post-’ signifies reliance and continuity<sup>15</sup>

I am deliberately choosing to write post-feminism with a hyphen because it symbolises the link with the movement of feminism, believing that post-feminism is not a backlash against original feminism, but its modern heir. The word “hyphen” itself comes from the Greek term “huphen” meaning “together”. I thus believe that feminism and post-feminism can work together and should not clash or enter into conflict. However, being an heir does not mean that it cannot offer different visions; that is why I have not decided to use the term “Postfeminism” with the prefix and the noun more directly connected, because of the

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<sup>13</sup> It appears that in the English-speaking world, there is no real name for the genre of stories involving a carnal relationship between a heroine and a man. These novels are put under the genre of romance, erotic romance...

<sup>14</sup> Stephanie Genz, *Postfemininities in Popular Culture*, 2009, London, England: Palgrave MacMillan.

<sup>15</sup> Srijani Ghosh, *From Chantilly Lace to Chanel: Commodity Worship in Chick Lit*, 2013, United States, Michigan State University Press. p.10 <https://d.lib.msu.edu/etd/2308/datastream/OBJ/View/> [last accessed 23/04/2020].

discrepancies between the two women's movements. There is however a wish to renew the image of women fighting for their rights in society while distancing themselves from the stereotypes of second wave feminists in order to be taken more seriously and assure legitimacy.

In the continuity of feminism, post-feminists claim their liberty, also a synonym of autonomy. They want their individual identities to be acknowledged, their personal choices and capacities accepted by everyone. The 1980s also saw the rise of Margaret Thatcher's neoliberalist policies in the United Kingdom in many ways echoing the values of post-feminism and arguably encouraging the rise of post-feminism. This geographical area is an important focus in this paper as it is where the British author Sophie Kinsella's novels are set, and the culture out of which they emerge. In her essay, Sarah Banet-Weiser offers this definition:

Indeed, postfeminism is enabled by a neoliberal capitalist context, where values such as entrepreneurialism, individualism, and the expansion of capitalist markets are embraced and adopted by girls and women as a way to craft their selves. Postfeminism is thus not only a shift from collective mobilization to an individual subjectivity, but the abandonment of feminist politics and the embrace of neoliberal capitalism.<sup>16</sup>

She mentions the "abandonment of feminist politics" but this is not the only element outdistanced by post-feminists. There is a desire to "to divorce [...] from the image of the unfeminine woman and anti-men sentiments."<sup>17</sup> This explains the feminine, pastel-coloured front covers of Chick Lit novels, as pink is seen as an empowering colour and not as a restraining stereotype, stating loud and clear a "Girl Power" attitude.

Girl Power is closely associated to pop culture such as media, series and music with the Spice Girls being the first girl band to claim they belong to this trend. In 2011 Beyoncé also asserted her stance with her song "Run the World (girls)" which echoes Elizabeth Anne Behm saying: "The girl power phenomenon presents females as powerful enough to rule their own lives and the world around them". I also would like to emphasize her definition of Girl Power, because for me she grasped the essential characteristics of this trend which is a way to advert and promote female power.

The term "girl power" is most often used to describe the presence of strong, confident, successful, and independent girls and women in popular culture products. To say that a woman has girl power is to say that she uncovers and uses her personal strengths to achieve her goals. [...] Unlike other popular culture and societal representations, girl power cultural

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<sup>16</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, "Postfeminism and Popular feminism" p.152-156 in *Feminist Media Histories*, Vol. 4 No. 2, Spring 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Mel Gray, Jennifer Boddy, *Making Sense of the Waves: Wipeout or Still Riding High?* 2010, Griffith University p.21.

products present an image of liberated women and girls who appear to be free from many of society's constraints in terms of female roles and standards.<sup>18</sup>

Post-feminists accept and embrace their femininity rather than rejecting it; on the contrary they use it as a cunning weapon and play with the codes of seduction which they have rediscovered through the prism of their own desires.

Another divergent point, taking its source in the neoliberalist context, is the enjoyment of both consumption and media consumption. Mass media shifted from depicting feminists as violent, unfeminine and full of hatred towards men to the depiction of the intrepid and liberated white middle class woman (I will not engage in a discussion about the limits of that representation of women in the worldwide media culture) who is in fact the symbol and voice of the post-feminist movement.

Suzanne Ferris and Mallory Young, scholars who have specialized in the study of Chick Lit, compare and contrast the main goals of each movement in a table:

<b>Feminism</b>	<b>Post-feminism</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reliance on political action</li> <li>- Resistance to patriarchy</li> <li>- Equality of gender</li> <li>- Rejection of femininity</li> <li>- Resistance to popular culture and consumerism resulting from it</li> <li>- Humour based on the difference between women's role in a patriarchal pattern, and women as independent people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rejection of violence and anger characterizing second wave feminism</li> <li>- Return to family values and gendered assumptions about women's place in society</li> <li>- Assertion of femininity and chosen sexuality</li> <li>- Embracement of media, pop culture and consumerism</li> <li>- Humour based on discrepancy between what is shown in media and real life, post feminists can laugh about themselves</li> </ul>

The link between post-feminism and Chick literature appears quite obvious even though the two notions were used for the first time in the book *Chick Lit: Postfeminist Fiction* by Cris Mazza and published for the first time in 1995. In this respect, Ghosh declared:

The chick lit genre is important in the current socio-historical context because it is a commentary on the rise of the "singleton" lifestyle, and is both a product of and a comment on postfeminism insofar as it provides insight into contemporary femininity, gender politics, and women's economic independence.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Anne Behm, *Where's the Power in Girl Power? : Images of Femininity and Feminism on Network Television*, 2003, United States, University of Southern California. <http://digitalibrary.usc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15799coll16/id/303518> [last accessed 23/04/2020]

<sup>19</sup> S. Ghosh, op. cit., p. 14.

The “comment on postfeminism” is obvious in Chick Lit stories to the extent that the heroine reminds us of the typical white woman depicted in the media: she is active, making choices of her own...Similarly, consumer society is omnipresent in the novels with direct naming of brands varying from clothes, food or magazines which also constitute the popular culture in which the protagonist is immersed. The specific humour used in these narratives sticks to the postfeminist model of laughing about oneself in comparison to the unreality given to view by media and magazines. The heroines acknowledge (and make fun of) their flaws and yet, this is not a reason for them to *chicken* out...

Speaking about humour, Ghosh stated:

This humour itself is a strategy which ties in with the escape aspect of chick lit. Chick lit's typical humour allows the reader to be lulled away from real-life anxieties and prevents any real resistance to the ideologies at work in real-life"<sup>20</sup>

I agree with the previous quotation, and I see humour as both a useful tool serving women and a limited tool making them neglect the real issues they are still facing nowadays. In a way, laughing eases the problematic situations that would deserve more attention and require more resistance.

This question enables me to discuss the next part of my chapter... Does Chick Lit, inscribed in this post-feminist context, give more space to women or on the contrary lead them to follow an already well-worn path?

*Reading and writing Chick Lit, a way to free women from their condition?*

Different visions can be offered of the way post-feminism empowers women. Post-feminism as I have mentioned before wants to give greater personal liberties than feminism permitted them to have, but there is a clear return of what some feminists would call “traditional thoughts.” In the twenty-first century, the choice is left to women if they want to revive the characteristics expected in patriarchy, such as being charming, devoted to housework and their family life. However the turning point of post-feminism is the notion of *choice* which is given to women. I am insisting on this point because as a general rule, they are no longer subjected to outside expectations coming from other people than themselves (of course my words should be treated cautiously and I do not wish to take sides on this thorny issue). If they so desire, women are willingly living a more traditional lifestyle and I personally claim my right to be an “angel in the house” in my household, but also I would like to shine as “the angel” in the work sphere.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.27.

As Maureen Cook<sup>21</sup> has stated, having the opportunity to take a book and dive into it allows readers to “leave behind the real world” full of routine issues, and pressure stemming from family or work...Reading is a genuine “alone time” or even “solitary act” which is offered to everyone, including women. Unlike in prior centuries, women can now enjoy the “autonomy that the act of reading provides.” The notion of autonomy resonates with the spirit of feminist struggles. Women do not have to rely on anyone else but themselves and their capacity to read and interpret the lines the way they want including with distance and humour. Cook also declared that “Reading evokes complicated emotions, both through the text and the act of reading itself” and it happens to be true for Chick Lit. These emotions, like frustration, happiness or laughter among others, are a tool of empowerment for these women who are free to *feel*. Most of the time, women are implicitly demanded to stay as impartial as possible, not letting their emotions and perceptions of life pervade the working and domestic spheres otherwise “they are judged as overly emotional and lacking emotional control, which ultimately undermines women’s competence and professional legitimacy.”<sup>22</sup>

We should keep in mind that a few decades earlier, women were largely kept out of the male-dominated publishing sphere and relegated to the inferior category of writing by and for women. In the words of Nathalie Rende:

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<sup>23</sup>

We can moderate this quotation because, even though it was without a doubt more difficult for women writers to be published, the nineteenth century in the United Kingdom saw the rise of noteworthy women writers such as the Jane Austen, the Brontë Sisters and George Eliot in addition to the modernist writer Virginia Woolf mentioned here. Besides, women were prolific writers of popular fiction and at the origin of the famous Gothic genre; Ann Radcliffe was the pioneer of Gothic fiction, and inspired Mary Shelley to write the mythical story of *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*.

Recently, women have gained space and prominence on the bookshelves of libraries and bookstores ... Even if we are not always aware that the writer behind the book is female.

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<sup>21</sup> M. Lynch Cook, op.cit.

<sup>22</sup>Abstract from J.S Smith, V.L Brescoll, E.L. Thomas, Constrained by Emotion: Women, Leadership, and Expressing Emotion in the Workplace. In: M. Connerley & J. Wu (eds) Handbook on Well-Being of Working Women. International Handbooks of Quality-of-Life. Dordrecht, Springer, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Nathalie Rende, *Bridget Jones, Prince Charming, and Happily Ever Afters: Chick Lit as an Extension of the Fairy Tale in a Postfeminist Society*, 2008. <https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/5439/Natalie%20Rende%20chick%20lit.doc.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y> [last accessed 29/04/2020].

Indeed, it is not rare to notice that female authors hide their true identities behind initials or pseudonyms: who would have guessed that J.K. Rowling alias Robert Galbraith was actually a woman? Literary genres are still gendered, it is still not easy for a woman to establish herself in the fields of detective novels or adventure.

Notwithstanding, in Chick Lit literature, being a feminine writer is a major characteristic strength: we must not forget that one definition given to the genre is “written by women authors, about contemporary women and for women readers.”<sup>24</sup> The readership wants to read something that one of them has written, the audience wants to feel that one of their peers has sensed the common issues of women living in a given generation. As a reader of Chick Lit, I strongly believe that a man who dared to write about women would not be as successful as the female counterparts, if not a complete failure either. That is another way to assert female power: Chick Lit has been a flourishing genre thanks to women...and their humour!

Yes, women can be funny too and both laugh about their conditions, as well as make other people laugh and to be able to reach these two points, one needs a certain degree of intelligence in order to twist the norms and play with them. Humour in these stories is most often tied with triviality and silly situations which is a way to play down the difficult challenges of readers' lives and enable them to escape through fun entertainment. It can also be found in a variety of different situations. For example, in chapter 16 of *Can You Keep a Secret*, Emma's friend Katie, introduces her new boyfriend but there has been a misunderstanding when Emma advised Katie to change her 'dating spot':

Wh- what? No. I don't believe it.

This is her new man? This is Phillip? But he has to be at least seventy! In a total blur, I shake his hand, which is dry and papery, just like Grandpa's, and manage to make a bit of small talk about the weather. [...]

'What exactly is the age gap between you two?'

'I'm not sure,' says Katie in surprise. 'I've never asked. Why?'

Her face is shiny and happy and totally oblivious. Has she not noticed how old he is? 'No reason!' I clear my throat. 'So ... er ... remind me. Where exactly did you meet Phillip again?'

'You know, silly!' says Katie, mock-chidingly. 'You suggested I should try somewhere different for lunch, remember? Well, I found this really unusual place, tucked away in a little street. In fact, I really recommend it.'

'Is it ... a restaurant? A café?'

'Not exactly,' she says thoughtfully. 'I've never been anywhere like it before. You go in and someone gives you a tray, and you collect your lunch and then eat it, sitting at all these tables. And it only costs two pounds! And afterwards they have free entertainment! Like

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<sup>24</sup> Yingru Lu, *Chick Lit: Themes and Studies, Comparative Literature: East & West*,(2014) 103-112, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/25723618.2014.12015464> [last accessed 22/04/2020].

sometimes it's bingo or whist ... sometimes it's a singsong round the piano. One time they had this brilliant tea dance! I've made loads of new friends.'

I stare at her for a few silent seconds.

'Katie,' I say at last. 'This place. It couldn't possibly be – a day care centre for the elderly?'

'Oh!' she says, looking taken aback. 'Erm ...'

Or in chapter 6, when Jack Harper, the CEO arrives and Emma's colleague presents him with the funny and embarrassing picture of the 'unknown bottom' of the company:

'Hey Jack,' says Nick, in a matey, lads-together voice. 'Just in case you don't think we have any fun, look up there!' He nods towards the picture of a photocopied, G-stringed bottom which has been up on the noticeboard since Christmas. 'We still don't know who it is ...'

*'... I had a few too many drinks at the last Christmas party ...'*

OK, now I want to die. Someone please kill me.

This humour is new in women's literature and is different from the traditional more serious romance novels.

In a French article entitled "S'affranchir, se valoriser... ce que désirent vraiment les femmes"<sup>25</sup> Sarah Sabsibo has written that "female consumers are expecting authenticity and are looking for representations that are more consistent with the reality." This sentence made special sense to me, to the extent that authors wish to depict women as genuine characters, who will be easy to identify with because the Chick Lit protagonists resemble the readership. This choice of portraying spontaneous and realistic characters with all their flaws is a way to accept women as human beings with flaws and foibles and stop depicting them as perfect commodities. *Can You Keep a Secret's* heroine is "size twelve but she'd like to be size ten" (p.257) and hides it, even from her boyfriend Connor, but at the end of the story she will be obliged to reveal all her secrets, including her weigh "I do not weigh anything like 135 pounds! I weigh ... about ... 128 ... and a half ..." and "... she has a Barbie bedcover." (p.259)

Moreover, Chick lit's main characters are around 25 years old and are represented as single women, without children. So they are depicted as women first, and not solely mothers or wives, they do not have their status through the possession of a children or a husband. They are not defined by their power or willingness to be fecund. In addition, they are working women, earning money solely by their work and thus able to fulfil their own desires.

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<sup>25</sup> Sarah Sabsibo « S'affranchir, se valoriser...ce que désirent vraiment les femmes » June 2019 <https://www.ladn.eu/media-mutants/feminites-prisma/que-desirent-vraiment-les-femmes/> [last accessed 23/04/2020].

Yet when it comes to the representation of contemporary women, Chick lit displays certain limits, as “it doesn’t provide a space for the reader to question her world.”<sup>26</sup>

Even though their social and ethnic background is not clearly mentioned, the main characters are always white English-speaking women with names such as Emma or Samantha.<sup>27</sup> This phenomenon might be explained by the fact that they are living in England, in London most often, thus an originally “white country” but this tends to spread old values and traditions, leaving behind the cosmopolitan and multicultural aspects of the British capital which boasts numerous different ethnic identities living alongside each other<sup>28</sup>. Another explanation might underline the ongoing differences between ethnicities, and the higher presence of white characters in Art, who suffer less from the stigmatisation. So the genre is still tightly linked with marketization and does not represent other ethnic groups.

This marginalization echoes the concept of intersectionality. Theorized in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a black feminist lawyer, intersectionality underlines the differences created within the gender in terms of race, social classes and sexuality. It insists on the disparate side of society, where women are subjected to different layers of discrimination simultaneously. Consequently, a criticism can emerge stating that within the genre of chick lit, subordination reigns over women who cannot identify with the typical white heroine and which has led to the point where the subgenres of Asian Chick Lit and Latina Chick have emerged such as *Amazing Grace* by Tara F.T. Serring (2010) and *Make Him Look Good* by Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez (2007). But in my opinion, this new trend stresses the differences and underlines the fact one heroine cannot be representative of all women because, every individual is different. Isn’t it the whole point of the post-feminist movement? So we can pose a further question: should we tackle Chick Lit as a global genre including Asian and Latina Chick Lit, or should we stick to the successful novels depicting White Western civilization?

As I mentioned earlier, all the heroines are working women but after reading *The Great Escape: Modern Women and the Chick Lit Genre* I came to realize that the type of work depicted is limited and the importance is laid on making money and doing business rather than helping others from an altruist perspective: why are the protagonists not working as doctors, teachers or even cooks? Altruistic jobs originally stem from more traditional

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<sup>26</sup> M. Lynch Cook. op.cit., p.54

<sup>27</sup> In the novels *Can You Keep a Secret* and *Undomestic Goddess* by Sophie Kinsella

<sup>28</sup> According to the latest government statistics, 40% of Londoners define themselves as “Asian, Black, Mixed or Other ethnic group”, and less than half the population, 45%, as White British. “Regional ethnic diversity”, <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/regional-ethnic-diversity/latest> , [last accessed 22/04/20].

depictions of women, when their only duty was to take care of her family and yet, here Chick lit heroines occupy more neoliberalist positions where money is the key, for example in *The Undomestic Goddess*, Samantha Sweeting is a top lawyer in a corporate law firm in the finance department, who thrives under pressure all the time in order to deal with the most cases possible.

If Chick Lit was that emancipatory why are they not working in stereotyped male positions such as engineers? The view of women in the work field remains narrow and does not allow for progressive ideas.

Equally, I would like to underline Nathalie Rende's statement on page 25 of her thesis *Bridget Jones, Prince Charming, and Happily Ever Afters: Chick Lit as an Extension of the Fairy Tale in a Postfeminist Society*

Because the fictional women living in these books are able to 'live like men' through their financial [...] 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.' [...] Yet, women still do not earn—on average—equal pay for equal work [...] by ignoring these issues in novels written by women, and intended for women, it simply makes it easier for others to ignore them.

Independence is clearly embodied in the characters but the inequalities are not, they are not mentioned at all, thus the stories do not raise awareness on issues faced by women in the twenty-first century, they even underestimate and accept them. So "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?"<sup>29</sup> The genre does not run the risk of exposing current issues and if objects of popular culture, which benefit from broad exposure do not compel the audience to fight for their conditions then what will? A possible answer to these questions might lie in the double-edged consequences of voicing such concerns: not all readers will agree with such progressive ideas and we can wonder if the authors and publishing houses would be prepared to lose readers, which would mean making less money.

In many ways, the values exposed in Chick Lit would seem to be at odds with feminist struggles. And during a discussion with a friend of mine who identifies as feminist, we came to the conclusion that Chick Lit stories are a perfectible emancipatory tool which should start by expanding its target audience: targeting women is not sufficient, it should be literature not only aimed at a female readership but at everyone.

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<sup>29</sup> N. Rende. op.cit., p.25.

## II. Literary context

### A) Getting to know more about Sophie Kinsella

As a parallel to the paragraph above and contrary to the common opinion, “the Queen of Chick Lit” is not really one... She would rather be defined by her humorous style than the notion of ‘Chick Lit. We might sense a feeling of depreciation of the genre when Kinsella retorted to Emily Laurence in 2014 in an article for *Metro*:

I'm fairly relaxed about the phrase "chick lit," partly because it's so nebulous. What does it even mean, exactly? No one seems sure. But I do think it's a shame to categorise a readership as all female before you even begin. I know I have some male readers, even if they hide the books behind sports magazines! So I'd prefer "romantic comedy" or the label I saw in a bookshop once: "wit lit."<sup>30</sup>

Madeleine—her real name—is one of the most famous and most successful of contemporary British writers. On her official website<sup>31</sup> we can read “Sophie Kinsella has sold over 40 million copies of her books in more than 60 countries, and she has been translated into over 40 languages.”

Born in 1969 in London, she grew up in society campaigning for women’s rights and emancipation. The era was troubled by social, political and cultural counter-revolutions in reaction to the Conservative government (Thatcherism) put into place by the “Iron Lady”. But Kinsella’s young years tend to stand more on the side of conservatism than rebellion. Education has been very important in Wickham’s life: her parents were teachers, she had a strict traditional education in all-girls schools until she studied Politics, Philosophy and Economy at Oxford University. Moreover, her husband, Henry Wickham followed the same traditional educational pattern as he is himself the headmaster of a boys-only private school. Single-sex education is a privileged form of teaching and in the United Kingdom it is associated with the independent sector, and success. For girls, it can also be a way to be educated in an environment free from male competition and gain assurance and independence. This feature can be found in the characters created by Sophie Kinsella for they all have highly skilled jobs which enable them to support themselves financially whether they are a lawyer, working in Advertisement Company or marketing agency.

Before being a writer Kinsella was a financial journalist but while commuting to go to work she read numerous paperbacks and realized that was what she wanted to do. Her very first novel *The Tennis Party* (1995) was published when she was 24 and was well received by the

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<sup>30</sup> Emily Laurence, ‘Sophie Kinsella talks feminism and the return of ‘Shopaholic’ 13/10/14 <https://www.metro.us/entertainment/sophie-kinsella-talks-feminism-and-the-return-of-shopaholic/tmWnjm---6dskl1HDjBIYc> [last accessed 20/04/2020].

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.sophiekinsella.co.uk/biography/>

critics. After a few other successful novels, Madeleine Wickham wanted to make a change in her writing style: she decided to take the pen name of Sophie Kinsella and published *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2000) which became a major bestseller. In an interview for Time Magazine with Andrea Sachs in 2010 she explained:

I didn't want to confuse my existing readers. I felt instinctively that this was a new, fresh voice and it should be under a different name. It was like I was starting again. So Sophie is my middle name, Kinsella is my mother's maiden name, and when I put them together, they just seemed to fit perfectly.<sup>32</sup>

In a way, this borrowing of her mother's name can be interpreted as a rejection of the patriarchal model, and seemingly highlights a matriarchal lineage instead. However, this question remains unresolved and leaves us wondering whether Sophie Kinsella would have had deliberately rejected the traditional system, bearing in mind her very conservative background. She continued writing different sequels of the famous Shopaholic but it was only in 2003, when she published a standalone novel *Can You Keep a Secret*, that she finally revealed her own secret: Sophie Kinsella was Madeleine Wickham.

In another interview with Meggin Leigh Doody published on the German website DW in 2016, the British writer described how different both 'writers' are and how their writing styles differ:

Well, I'm a bit schizophrenic with these two author names, but you know what, writing any book is about taking on a voice and a character, and has a different flavor. And I think the Madeleine Wickham books have the flavor of a bit more serious, drama issues, some comedy but that's not what they're really about.

Whereas the Sophie Kinsella books are fast, funny, all about comedy, very contemporary, somewhat silly, sometimes quite outrageous plots. So they have very much their own space. And when I switch from one to the other, I kind of step into those shoes, and I start to see the world through those eyes. It's just another extension of what I do, which is just finding voices and telling stories.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, the ambivalence of the name enables her to remain Madeleine Wickham, the 'normal' mother of five children living in England and aspiring to a peaceful life, whereas Sophie Kinsella is the successful writer of worldwide bestsellers travelling to promote the new novels, making public reading or even checking on movie sets while shooting the adaptations of some of her novels. To use her own terms, the "outrageous plots" coming from Kinsella's pen stress the point mentioned above and clash once again with the conservative education she has had.

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<sup>32</sup>Andrea Sachs, "Sophie Kinsella" 27/09/2019 <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2019622,00.html> [last accessed 20/04/2020].

<sup>33</sup>Meggin Leigh Doody, "Sophie Kinsella: 'A book should take you out of yourself'" 17/06/16 <https://www.dw.com/en/sophie-kinsella-a-book-should-take-you-out-of-yourself/a-19338711-0> [last accessed 20/04/2020].

All Kinsella's novels deal with contemporary themes and are tightly set in the time of writing which is a real point of attraction for the readership including myself. Her "ideas often come from real life but [she] build[s] on them", her inspiration comes from what she sees around her and herself.... In 2019, she revealed how she relates to her heroines:

I would say I put a little bit of myself in all my protagonists. I have many flaws so I can draw on lots of material," [...] "I take something that is real and make it a defining feature of the character. I write the thoughts I would have in that situation and I tend to do it in an instinctive way. I am not any one of them, but I relate to them all.<sup>34</sup>

In a press article published in 2019 on VirginMedia, Kinsella said: "I'm very clumsy. I've knocked water over journalists, I've tripped over. I once arrived at an interview and I hadn't done up my dress, which was completely open." The evocation of her "flaws" resonate with the typical Chick Lit character who is clumsy and authentic. An instance can be found in *Can You Keep a Secret*, Emma, panic stricken, reveals all her most intimate secrets to the stranger next to her in the plane, who happens to be the CEO of the company she is working for.

This is without a doubt rendered possible through the first-person narrative voice used in all the novels Kinsella writes. Even without wanting to, an element of subjectivity naturally shows through the 'I' of the writer whether it is past memories, experiences, opinions or ways of thinking. In addition, it is a more direct way to connect with the readership, it is as if the heroine were confessing to her friends, the audience.

However, even though Sophie Kinsella will turn fifty this year, her characters have barely aged and remain twenty or thirty something. Is it a way for her to stay young? Or is it a way to target a younger audience? In an interview with Hannah Stephenson in February 2019 for the website Irish News, she declared:

I do quite like the dynamic of somebody on the brink of life with horizons stretching ahead. And in terms of the workplace, I was a journalist, very much the junior in the corner watching the big ones. [...] I never went up the ranks or became the boss, so I find it quite easy to tap into that level of progression. It's an interesting stage because so much is still up for grabs.<sup>35</sup>

This quote echoes the character of Emma who is longing for a promotion after a year of being a marketing assistant. Kinsella's vision is hopeful and emancipatory and it seems

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<sup>34</sup>Rashmi Rajagopal Lobo. "Sophie Kinsella talks about her latest novel, I Owe You One" 22/03/2019 <https://www.indulgexpress.com/culture/books/2019/mar/22/sophie-kinsella-talks-about-her-latest-novel-i-owe-you-one-13553.html> [last accessed on 31/03/2020].

<sup>35</sup> Hannah Stephenson, 'Sophie Kinsella: 'It's how you feel inside that matters and I still feel about 27' Feb. 2019 <https://www.irishnews.com/arts/2019/02/14/news/sophie-kinsella-it-s-how-you-feel-inside-that-matters-and-i-still-feel-about-27--1550350/> [last accessed 12/01/2020].

obvious that after being “in the corner”, you only have space to get better and climb the ladder.

## B) Getting to know more about the novel

### Love at first sight on the bookshelves?

‘Don’t judge a book by its cover’ they say... But sometimes, the cover says a lot... Chick Lit novels can be considered as accessories, and the marketing around them is very important. Vivian Ruiz made a list of elements making a typical Chick Lit cover which happens to be quite true for the covers presented in my analysis:

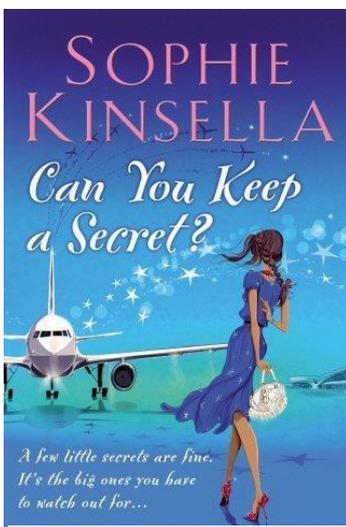
Chick-Lit book covers share a color palette based on purple, pink, red, white, black, and pretty much any pastel color in the spectrum (although pink and baby blue prevail). A quick survey of Chick-Lit covers reveals that favorite icons are commodities such as shoes, phones, purses, shopping bags, lipsticks, food (especially adorned cakes and cupcakes), and clothing items and accessories (dresses, skirts, and any kind of sparkling jewelry, particularly wedding rings, are favorites). [...] Other common icons that adorn the covers of Chick-Lit novels are skylines of famous big cities (New York, Seattle, and San Francisco stand out) and fragmented pictures of often Caucasian, faceless, skinny bodies showing bare legs, feet donning stilettos, and hands flaunting wedding rings.<sup>36</sup>

The use of such visual strategies with icons and colours associated with women, in a post-feminist time where clichéd femininity is asserted and claimed as powerful, contributes to the successful marketing of Chick Lit commodities. Moreover, the repetition and synchrony of the front covers visual helps reader to sport at the first glance said books from the other genres available on the shelves.

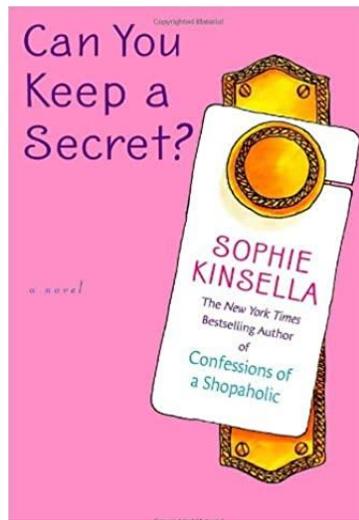
I have picked three different covers of *Can You Keep a Secret* from different publishing houses.

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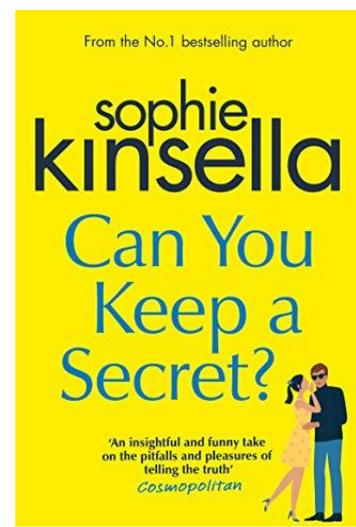
<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 57.



First UK edition, Blackswan, 2003.



First US edition, The Dial Press, 2004.



Latest UK edition, Transworld Publishers.

The first British edition bet on a blue-shaded cover with touches of white and pastel pink: the image is romanticized with the stars coming out of the plane, and the female figure depicted is the type of woman depicted in media.<sup>37</sup> She is Caucasian, tall and skinny, her dress is floaty, symbolizing lightness, not too short, nor too long but nevertheless a length which shows off her bare legs. The woman is holding what seems to be a fashionable white bag and most strikingly she is wearing red high heels (or stilettos if we want to borrow Ruiz's expression), a symbol of assertive femininity. It should be noted that we cannot see her face, which is probably a way to let women identify with the character: she does not have a face, which means it could be every reader's face. However, I do not think that this cover offers a good glimpse of the story, because it is just the beginning of the plot takes place in a plane even if, the story could not have taken place without that flight.

The second cover is the first edition of the novel in the United States, and it is completely different from the previous picture. Here, the candy pink background is gaudy and very simple. Nevertheless, similarly to the UK cover of 2003, the font used is fancy and reminiscent of women's curves thanks to the cursive and curvy letters. However, contrary to the typical scheme of Chick Lit covers, there is no depiction of fashion accessories nor a female character, but instead there is a doorknob with a do-not-disturb type of label. I do not see the relevance of this illustration for the plot, however I can draw a link with what I explained above, about how reading is a source of escapism for women. This kind of do-not-disturb sign might be a way to tell people not to disturb the reader while she is reading, because if we think logically, the front and back covers are what are seen by people facing the reader. But it is also the type of suggestive object we hang on hotel room, when we want to enjoy our privacy, which is reminiscent of romantic and/or illicit encounters.

<sup>37</sup> Supra p.15.

The last cover is strikingly more 'masculine': the bright yellow is mixed with a dark blue font and the curvy letters have been replaced by a more angular and simple type font. It seems like femininity has been replaced by a simpler and less superficial design. Perhaps this is a way to attract more readers, less based on gender specificities. The only drawing is small and situated on the right corner. It depicts both a woman and a man, physically close and miming the action of telling a secret. Their clothes blend into the colour pattern chosen and the faces remain enigmatic. However the woman sticks to the description made by Ruiz: Caucasian, stilettos, and bare skin; she is also, tellingly, looking up at the man.

Overall, there is no doubt, while looking at the covers, that the main protagonist will be a young woman, which explains undoubtedly why less men are keen on Chick Lit (without even mentioning the connotation of the term 'Chick') because of the difficulty of identifying with the heroine. Conversely that is why the genre is so successful to women, if the heroine was a man, fewer women would identify with him.

Finally, I would like to conclude this part on the front covers with a statement that appears to be true for all the six images I have discussed. The mention of the writer 'Sophie Kinsella' looks like a label, a brand which is a way to sell more. The emphasis is also made on the fact she is "the 1<sup>st</sup> New York Times Best-Seller" or "the No1 best-selling author".

Her books thus become commodities and part of a trend. The aim is to attract an already devoted readership after the success of Kinsella's *Confessions of a Shopaholic* as well as a new readership, who would discover the fiction of the British author. It should also be noted that economic success was at stake for both publishing houses and the author, because it was the first two tests of standalone novels, which left behind the famous shopaholic character Becky.

#### What about "inner beauty"?

I am now going to explain the plot of *Can You Keep a Secret*.

Emma Corrigan is a young woman of 25, typical of modern society: she lives in London with her flatmates and works as a marketing assistant in the Panther Cola Company but she is longing for a promotion to marketing executive. She is in a relationship with one of her colleagues, Connor and they appear to be "the perfect couple" (p.61) to her other colleague Katie. But it is not the case, Emma realizes she does not want to be with him anymore, that he does not fulfil her when she actually meets the perfect man for her.

Emma is not supported by many people around her: her parents focus all their attention on her successful cousin, she is bossed around at work by her boss and colleagues... It seems as if Emma is struggling to find her place in society, and be accepted for who she really is: she is not passionate about her job (“I still seem to do as much typing as before. And getting sandwiches and collecting dry cleaning” p. 4) nor is she happy with the man who seems to be Mr Right for her (“I don’t want to move in with Connor, says a tiny voice in my brain before I can stop it. No. That can’t be right. That cannot possible be right. Connor is perfect. Everyone knows that.” p.140). Instead, the heroine is just a young woman trying to find her happy place in a society full of diktats which hardly leave space for clumsiness and “complete loser[s]” (chapter 1 p. 5).

A few days after her shaky flight when she spilled all her secrets to the American man sitting next to her, the “big boss” of Panther is coming in London to check on the company. But Emma could not have been more shocked and mortified when she understands that the man sitting next to her in the plane, and who now knows all her most embarrassing secrets, is in fact Jack Harper, the founder of the company. She thinks he will fire her after she confessed in the plane that she falsified her résumé or that she has a secret code with her colleague to leave the office earlier to meet at Starbucks. But he does not fire her, on the contrary, Jack playfully teases Emma making her aware he does remember everything she said on the plane, but his attitude is benevolent as we have an example in chapter 6, p. 91:

Inside my head, my own voice from the plane is babbling away innocently. *'... just skimmed the back cover and pretended I'd read it ...'*

'Great Expectations,' says Jack Harper thoughtfully. 'What did you think of it, Emma?'

I don't believe he asked me that.

Slowly, their relationship evolves into something that goes beyond work, which pushes Emma to finally break up with her boyfriend Connor.

Emma being single, Jack asks her out, but the date does not go as expected, or at least, everything expected happens, which does not leave any space for spontaneity. Jack remembered everything Emma said about her perfect first date in the plane, and does not leave her the choice of drink or food, ordering for her himself.

'So,' I say, as all the waiting staff melt away. 'What shall we have to drink?' I've already eyed up the drink which that woman in gold has got. It's pink and has slices of watermelon decorating the glass, and looks absolutely delicious.

'Already taken care of,' [...]. 'I remember you telling me on the plane, your perfect date would start off with a bottle of champagne appearing at your table as if by magic.'

'Oh,' I say, quelling a tiny feeling of disappointment. 'Er ... yes! So I did.'<sup>38</sup>

She does not have any word to say, as he is certain his choices—based on what she confessed once—are what she wants right here, right now.

Suddenly I feel completely patronized. How does he know what I want? Maybe I just want fruit. Maybe I want nothing. He has no idea about me. None at all.

'I'm not hungry.' I push my chair back.

'Emma, I know you. You want it, really—'

'You don't know me!' I cry angrily, before I can stop myself. 'Jack, you may know a few random facts about me. But that doesn't mean you know me!'

'What?' Jack stares at me. '

If you knew me,' I say in a trembling voice, 'you would have realized that when I go out to dinner with someone, I like them to listen to what I'm saying. I like them to treat me with a bit of respect, and not tell me to "quit it" when all I'm doing is trying to make conversation ...' (p.180)

Emma then leaves the restaurant and later grants Jack a second chance.

After a family gathering organized by Panther Company, where Emma's family—including her arrogant cousin Kerry—unexpectedly shows up, Jack helps the heroine to finally confront her cousin, and unveil Kerry's true nature to her parents. This scene is a key moment in her life because she is finally able to relax and let go of the relational issues she had with her parents, and realize that they are proud of her no matter what.

The story continues with the protagonist being “totally, one hundred per cent in love” (p. 240) but one day, at work, everyone gathers to look at a TV interview starring Jack Harper (chapter 19, p. 257). The founder of the company was promoting the new project aiming at “ordinary, nothing-special girl[s]” which also happens to be Emma: he describes this “girl on the street” according to all the secret details she has confessed and quickly all her co-workers understood that she is the girl who inspired Harper. As a reader, we can sense the feeling of total shame and humiliation Emma is going through and feel extremely sorry for her.

My body is still reverberating with shock. I can barely form a coherent thought. I have never been so completely and utterly embarrassed in all my life.

That's the time when she, and the readers, come to the conclusion that Jack Harper exploited Emma solely for business purposes, and that she has been fooled (chapter 20 p.270):

As the realization hits me properly for the first time, a tear rolls down my cheek, swiftly followed by another one.

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<sup>38</sup> Chapter 13, p.174.

Jack used me.

That's why he asked me out to dinner. That's why he was so fascinated by me. That's why he found everything I said so interesting. That's why he was gripped.

It wasn't love. It was business.

But ultimately, Jack makes it up to Emma, and she finally has her happy-ending with Mr Right.

### C) In-depth analysis

Chick Lit novels, including *Can You Keep a Secret*, responds to a specific writing style. The most striking element in Kinsella's books is the first-person narrative voice and the internal focalization, which allow the reader to be entirely in the heroine's mind. We come to see everything through her eyes. I would even draw a parallel between Chick Lit and the diary style because both include the character's thought and feelings. The stream of consciousness renders this possible as we can see in this extract for example:

Oh God. Oh God. OK, it's slowing down now. It's ... it's better. Fuck. I just ... I just can't ... I ... I look at the American man, and he's grasping his seat as tightly as I am.

I feel sick. I think I might be sick.

Oh God. OK. It's ... it's kind of ... back to normal. (Chapter 2, p. 22)

It is like if we were inside Emma's head: through this device, it makes us live the life of someone else than ourselves, an experience which corresponds to the idea of escapism. It can also be interpreted as a form of confession, as if we were reading Emma's private diary and thus, it would place the reader in the shoes of a voyeur...which can sometimes feel awkward, because we do not want to know everything such as in chapter 3, where Emma has thoughts about cliché roleplay sex:

Oh my God. Is he going to start getting kinky? Does he want me to dress up in outfits and stuff? I wouldn't mind being a nurse, actually. Or Catwoman from Batman. That would be cool. I could get some shiny boots ... (p. 34)

The register of language used is not so formal and we can hardly find figures of speech in Chick Lit novel because the language used is Emma's, and thus more conversational. The sentences are often short and in spoken English. It is transcribed through the use of direct speech. This is doubtless one of the reasons why the genre is so castigated and declared as unworthy from a literary point of view. This form is used in conjunction with instances of what resemble epistolary form, adding further to the effect of authenticity. The novel actually begins and ends with a list written by the protagonist enumerating her secrets, and it is as if a piece of the real world has been put into the story.

Like for example, here are a few random secrets of mine, off the top of my head:

1. My Kate Spade bag is a fake.
2. I love sweet sherry, the least cool drink in the universe.
3. I have no idea what NATO stands for. Or even what it is. [...]

It really mimics real life as well as recreating a real world with which the readers can identify.

### The question of work in Emma's life

The main character reminds me of “the junior in the corner”<sup>39</sup> depicted by Sophie Kinsella in an interview for she is a marketing assistant but she has not been given any important duties, she is rather treated like the minion intern:

I've been at the Panther Corporation for eleven months as a marketing assistant, and until now all I've been allowed to do is type out copy, arrange meetings for other people, get the sandwiches and pick up my boss's dry-cleaning. (Chapter 1, p.3)

There is a clear subordination between Emma and her boss called Paul, who speaks to her badly and despises her, but she does not seem to mind it as in the novel there is no mention of annoyance towards him. On the contrary the only feeling she depicts after her conversations with Paul is “a twinge of humiliation”:

'What the fuck happened at Glen Oil? I had a very strange email from Doug Hamilton this morning. You poured a drink over him?'

I stare at him in shock. Doug Hamilton told Paul? But he promised he wouldn't!

'It wasn't like that,' I say quickly. 'I was just trying to demonstrate the many fine qualities of Panther Prime and I ... I kind of spilled it.'

Paul raises his eyebrows, not in a friendly way.

'All right. It was a lot to ask of you.'

'It wasn't,' I say quickly. 'I mean, it would have been fine, if ... what I mean is, if you give me another chance, I'll do better. I promise.'

'We'll see.' He looks at his watch. 'You'd better get on. Your desk is a fucking mess.'

'OK. Um, what time will my appraisal be?'

'Emma, in case you hadn't heard, Jack Harper's visiting us today,' says Paul, in his most sarcastic voice. 'But of course, if you think your appraisal's more important than the guy who founded the company—'

'I didn't mean ... I just ...'

'Go and tidy your desk,' says Paul in a bored voice. 'And if you spill fucking Panther Prime over Harper, you're fired.' (Chapter 5, p.65)

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<sup>39</sup> Supra p.20.

This conversation clashes with the notion of female empowerment because here Emma is in position of submission towards her hierarchy and she does not dare saying anything and show her discontent, but she does not even think that the situation is abnormal. Also she makes fun of her own clumsiness, and the situation as a whole which has the effect of minimizing the condescending way she is being spoken to and making it appear as if, somewhere along the line, she has not find her nice, and is not supposed to be in the public space in such a career, which seems different from her personality.

The reason why Emma prefers to stay quiet is because she is desperately longing for a promotion “I've got this secret little hope that if I do this well, maybe I'll get promoted” (Chapter 1, p.5). But she does not want a promotion for her own pride, and satisfaction, she actually does not seem to enjoy her job in the marketing industry: she wants to get promoted to show her family she is worthy and gain their approval. In fact Emma’s biggest secret might be that she is not an ambitious go-getting career woman, but actually a rather young woman who wishes to follow her heart more than her mind in order to reach happiness even if it does not make her a successful woman.

Career advancement! At the thought, I feel a familiar stab of longing in my chest. It would just show Dad I'm not a complete loser. And Mum. And Kerry. If I could go home and casually say, 'By the way, I've been promoted to Marketing Executive.' (Chapter 1, p.5)

It doesn't matter, because I'm going to get a promotion. Then Nev will stop making cracks about my career, and I'll be able to pay back Dad. Everyone will be really impressed – and it'll be fantastic! (Chapter 5, p. 57)

Work is then a way to gain a status, and the place where one can show one’s skills and one’s worth in society. But for Emma, it is also a means to support herself financially, she does not see work as a place of fulfilment, as she only see this position as a way to reimburse the “four thousand quid” she owes her dad.

Emma struggles to find her own path and a career that would excite her as “this is [her] third career in four years” (p. 9-10):

I don't know how other people manage their careers, I really don't. [...] My first job was in estate agency, and I only went into it because I've always quite liked looking round houses, plus I met this woman with amazing red lacquered nails at a career fair who told me she made so much money, she'd be able to retire when she was forty.

But the minute I started, I hated it. I hated all the other trainee estate agents. I hated saying things like 'a lovely aspect'. And I hated the way if someone said they could afford £300,000 we were supposed to give them details of houses costing at least £400,000, and then kind of look down our noses, like, 'You only have £300,000? God, you complete loser.'

So after six months I announced I was changing career and was going to be a photographer instead. It was such a fantastic moment, like in a film or something. My dad lent me the money for a photography course and camera, and I was going to launch this amazing new creative career, and it was going to be the start of my new life ... Except it didn't quite happen like that. I mean, for a start, do you have any idea how much a photographer's assistant gets paid?

Nothing. It's nothing. Which, you know, I wouldn't have minded if anyone had actually offered me a photographer's assistant's job.

This passage is interesting and leads to different interpretations. Emma finds the strength to take the decision of changing career when one does not suit her, and she actually follows her desires: she wanted to give a try to estate agency as she was enchanted by the promise of money, but her morals kept her from pursuing it. Then she finally found a path that fulfilled her heart, with the artistic profession of photographer but the reality of the labour market prevented her from continuing in this direction. Consequently, she went for an office job; simply because it was a job which would enable her to pay her father back.

### *A return to femininity*

To go back to the notion of post-feminism, one of its essential point is the return to physical femininity and Chick Lit heroines follow this point. An emphasis is placed on fashion, beauty items and media consumption such as women's magazines.

In *Can You Keep a Secret*, Jemima is the character who enjoys shopping, fashion and luxury products the most. She is characterized by the fact she is presented as a negative stereotype of regressive womanhood. She is always wearing fashionable dresses which emphasize her sexy curves as we can read in chapter 9 (p. 121): "I arrive home to find Lissy on her knees in the sitting room, helping Jemima into the tightest black suede dress I've ever seen." Her only goal is to find a husband, to "get a rock on [her] fingers", and for her, it can only be possible through her physical appearance which would then lead to "go on dates with city bankers, whose salary she always checks out before she says yes." (p. 37)

But Emma is not like her, and she wears jeans most of the time, and Jack describes her relationship to clothing in chapter 19 (p. 257): "She loves clothes but she's not a fashion victim,' Jack is saying on screen 'She'll wear, maybe, a pair of jeans.' " She embodies the modern active woman and the jeans echo notions such as freedom, comfort, but I also connect it with men's history when Levi Strauss created the blue jeans for miners during the American Gold Rush in 1849; thus jeans symbolise hard work and strength associated with masculinity. But now, women wear them too and benefit from the same values. Emma is for me a more genuine representation of the woman in *Western World*, which moves away from traditional sexist stereotypes.

Unfortunately, feminists would say, she has not been spared from some the clichés that women have to be attractive to get a man's attention or at least from the diktats that society imposes on women. She enjoys makeup and has a collection of beauty commodities:

“Now Jack’s staring incredulously at my open dressing-table drawer, crammed with makeup. ‘How many lipsticks do you have?’” (p.198). Besides, there are many different references to “lip gloss” “lipstick” “false eyelashes” or “mascara” to describe Emma’s flatmates, colleagues and herself. Kinsella then creates a female community belonging to the 21st century when fashion and beauty products are embraced and do not contribute to women’s objectification but to female empowerment. It is as if post-feminist feminine identity can only be reached through consumption which enables subjects to be self-confident and assured.

These two extracts show Emma getting ready for a date with Jack Harper:

“‘What are you going to wear?’ Her eyes narrow. ‘Where’s your outfit?’

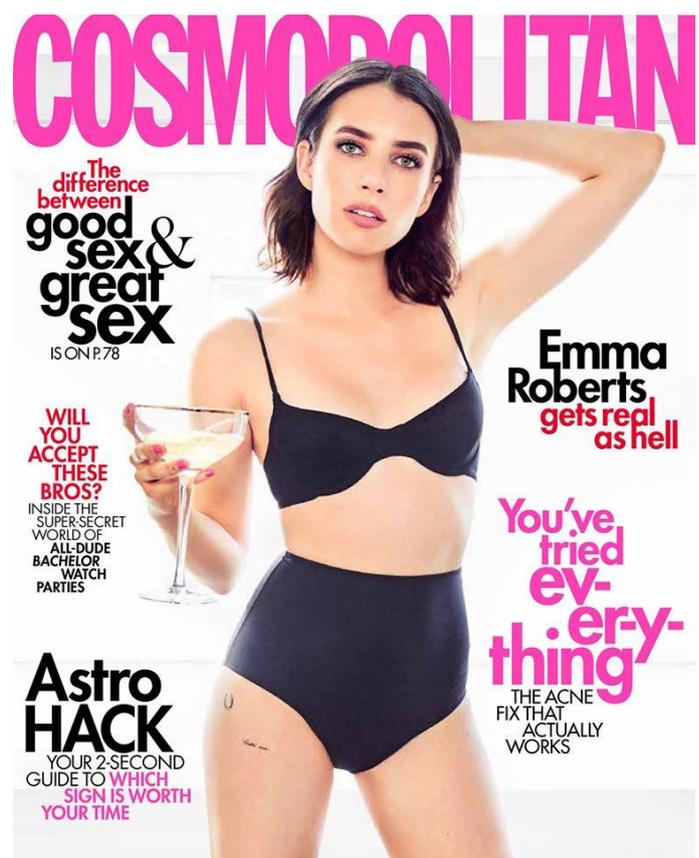
‘My black dress,’ I say innocently. ‘And my strappy sandals.’ I gesture to the back of the door, where my black dress is hanging up”. (Chapter 12, p.166)

“On Saturday morning I get up extra early, exfoliate all over, Immac under my arms, rub in my most expensive body cream and paint my toenails.[...] I choose my Gossard lacy bra and matching knickers, and my most flattering bias cut summer dress.” (Chapter 16, p. 215)

For both dates, she decides to wear a dress and I think we can consider this as a post-feminist choice: she usually wears trousers but she willingly decides to wear something sexier as a means to obtain what she desires, which is Jack, and more precisely, she is “ready for sex.” She is aware of her sexual worth and of her value as object of desire and play with it through the help of consumption (beauty products, varnish, lingerie...).

Sexuality is not a taboo topic anymore for post-feminists, on the contrary there has been a clear shift which continues to make its way in our current society thanks to women magazine such as *Cosmopolitan* which offers a sexuality section to its readership both on the website and in the magazines in British, American and even French editions amongst others.





*Cosmopolitan US edition: July 2019 and June 2019*

The magazine's front covers recall the formulaic pattern of Chick Lit front covers, with girly colours. We can see that the representation of women remains sexist and sexualized the two actress photographed wear the same outfit which is more or less a form of lingerie or underwear (even if it is not lacy or particularly revealing). The term "sex" is written on bold in both covers and does not shock the readership who is used to this 'untraditional' topic being discussed in media targeting women. Women have shifted from being sexually objectified to being a desiring sexual subject. This trend shows an evolution of how women tackle their sexuality and Gill Rosalind summed it up in 2007:

Where once sexualised representations of women in the media presented them as passive, mute objects of an assumed male gaze, today sexualisation works somewhat differently in many domains. Women are not straightforwardly objectified but are presented as active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Rosalind Gill, *Postfeminist media culture: elements of a sensibility*. European journal of cultural studies, 10 (2). 2007 pp. 147-166.

Chick Lit love stories always happen between a man and a woman, thus leaving no space for homosexuality, at least on the front stage. But in *Can You Keep a Secret*, there is an allusion to lesbian relations when Emma confesses at the very beginning of the novel: “I once had this weird lesbian dream about my flatmate Lissy.”

However, the rest of the story focuses on Emma’s desire for Jack Harper whom she finds “completely and utterly sexy” (chapter 16, p. 221). The traditional situation has been reversed and Jack, the man, is in position of desired subject in the eyes of the heroine who is in control of her desires and is not ashamed of saying it loud, at least through her narration... But in any case, she does not retain her feelings and sexual emotions.

‘I just want to have sex! Is that too much to ask?’ (Chapter 9, p.136)

“For the first time ever in my entire life, I’m totally, one hundred per cent in love! I spent all night with Jack at the Panther mansion. I woke up in his arms. We had sex about ninety-five times and it was just ... perfect.” (Chapter 18, p.241)

In chapter 9, Emma finally asserts her desires to her boyfriend Connor after months of dissatisfaction; she did not dare to tell him not to hurt his feelings, but at the end, her own feelings dominated. It should be noted that these are expressed outside marriage and that throughout the chapters, Emma has sexual activities with two different men, Connor her (ex) boyfriend, and Jack, her boss, without being questioned or disdained. A. Rochelle Mabry wrote in an article entitled “About a Girl: Female Subjectivity and Sexuality in Contemporary ‘Chick’ Culture”

[Chick Lit novels] do not focus solely on their female protagonist’s developing relationship with the “right” man but often portray the woman engaging in one or more sexual relationships (with varying degrees of success and pleasure) before she settles down with the right man. Thus, in these novels, sex becomes a way for the woman to explore her own identity and express her own desires, rather than merely part of a single romance narrative that emphasizes traditional gender roles.<sup>41</sup>

In our current society, women do not engage in one single relationship as they used to in romance novels, but they have several experiences, more or less fulfilling, before settling with “Mr Right.”

But here again, women are suffering from the social pressures expecting them to be SuperWomen and successful in everything they do. Emma loses her confidence when she arrives in a bedroom with Jack, she stresses over the fact of not to being good enough *for him*

I can’t quite believe how nervous I am about this. Maybe Jack knows loads of tricks. Maybe he’ll expect me to be really sophisticated. Maybe he’ll expect all kinds of amazing manoeuvres that I’ve never even heard of.

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<sup>41</sup> p.200 published in Suzanne Ferris, Mallory Young (Ed.), *Chick Lit: the New Woman’s Fiction*, New York, Routledge, 2005.

I mean ... I don't think I'm bad at sex.

You know. Generally speaking. All things considered.

But what sort of standard are we talking about here? I feel like I've been competing in tiny little local shows and suddenly I'm taking on the Olympics. Jack Harper is an international multimillionaire. He must have dated models and ... and gymnasts ... women with enormous perky breasts ... kinky stuff involving muscles I don't even think I possess.

[...] OK, just stop. This is getting ridiculous. I'll be fine. I'm sure I'll be fine. (Chapter 16, p. 223)

But finally, all things considered she regains her self-confidence which for me, shows her inner realization of empowerment

### *Feminism portrayed through the character of Jemima*

Emma lives with two flatmates, Lissy and Jemima, who is particularly interesting. Jemima is not her best friend because it is obvious they do not share much in common: "all she ever seems to do is have bits of her waxed and plucked and massaged, and go on dates with city bankers, whose salary she always checks out before she says yes. I do get on with Jemima. Kind of." (Chapter 3)

Jemima embodies hyper femininity as well as consumer society: she is fond of designer clothes, makeup, and beauty care.

"She's wearing pale pink jeans and a tight white top and as usual, she looks perfectly tanned and groomed" (p.37)

"Jemima's wardrobe is like a treasure chest. It's like a Christmas stocking. It's new, shiny, gorgeous clothes, one after another, all neatly folded and hung on scented hangers, like in a shop. All the shoes in shoe-boxes with Polaroids on the front. All the belts hanging neatly from hooks. All the bags are neatly lined up on a shelf." (Chapter 12, p.128)

"she says now, picking up her pink Louis Vuitton bag" "[...]brushing mascara onto her lashes" (p.38)

Emma does not dwell on consumption, on the contrary she buys her clothes second-hand at charity shops like "The Cancer research shop", but she cannot resist being attracted to all the wonders she finds in Jemima's closet as she is used to secretly borrowing one of her many items:

In the end, I go for this amazing new red top of Jemima's with slashed shoulders, over my own black DKNY chiffon trousers (£25 from the Notting Hill Housing Trust shop) and Jemima's silver high heels from Prada. And then, although I wasn't intending to, at the last minute I grab a little black Gucci bag.

This scene happened right before her first date with Jake, and Emma wanted to impress the multimillionaire and chose to 'disguise' herself with all the designer products which do not

even belong to her. But it should be noted that on the second date, she deliberately wore her own clothes, and not mind if Jake did not like her appearance.

This leads me to question the notion of feminism and post-feminism through the choice of outfit. On the one hand it seems that in this extract Emma enforces her post-feminist stance while apparently, like Jemima, enjoying many of the stereotypical women's accessories like the high heels, and the handbag (but does she actually enjoy them?). On the other hand, after initially faking her personality through her outfit at least, Emma chose to accept herself and not hide behind expensive 'label' commodities and appears less feminine than Jemima, thus her position approaches feminist ideas.

However, in chapter 20, Jemima comes across as a second-wave feminist herself when she advises Emma to get revenge over Jack, in a rather violet manner. Her flatmate uses revenge as a source of overcoming men, thus echoing violence and hatred towards men advocated by feminist political messages.

'You have to get your revenge!' She looks up and fixes me with a determined gaze. 'You have to make him pay.' [...] 'Scrape his car, shred his suits, sew fish inside his curtains and wait for them to rot ...' (p. 276)

These ideas are a legacy from her mother, whom we can be certain she belonged to the Second Wave movement

"How about a little massage oil?" And you rub it into his ... you know.' Her eyes sparkle. 'That'll hurt him where it counts!'

'Your *mother* told you this?' says Lissy.

'Yes,' says Jemima. 'It was rather sweet, actually. On my eighteenth birthday she sat me down and said we should have a little chat about men and women—'

Lissy is staring at her incredulously.

'In which she instructed you to rub chilli oil into men's genitals?'

'Only if they treat you badly,' says Jemima in annoyance. 'What is your *problem*, Lissy? Do you think you should just let men walk all over you and get away with it? Great blow for feminism.' (p. 277)

In this extract the contrast between education and attitudes is obvious, in the way the term mother is emphasised in Lissy's speech through the italics, we understand that the women of her family did not take part in feminist activism.

To conclude on this part, the relationship with Chick Lit and feminism is open and obvious, Kinsella does not reject it and includes it her stories and yet I regret the fact that feminism is dealt with through stereotypes and the negative image people retain of second-wave feminists

## Conclusion

Chick Lit clearly inscribes itself in post-feminism but not every reader is aware of this point. After my research into it, I realized that post-feminism is still a thorny issue which is not clearly defined, and is open to our own interpretation, perceptions and ideas. It shares common points with Girl Power to the extent that femininity is embraced, and a way to get what is desired. The marketing of the covers play on colourful girly images because many post-feminist women will love the design, reasserting female stereotypes.

In this context, the place of the woman in the society goes back to a more traditional situation where being married, having children and wearing sexy outfits are not marginalized anymore as it was during the Second Wave. However, women are also depicted as working women who manage to deal with their private life and their career even if sometimes both mix. The emphasis on consumption is highly present through the naming of different brands, cultural references or beauty items, which also adds to the realistic reproduction of the twenty-first century.

Sophie Kinsella's standalone novel has enabled me to highlight the main points of Chick Lit for it is for me the best example of this literary genre which merits further interest from scholars. These novels recreate the current world in which the readership lives and at the same time manage to take it away from their daily troubles through the help of internal focalization on appealing characters, a light humorous tone, and a happy ending.

Emancipation is depicted through the plot, for the heroines are often strong women, deciding their own lives whether for their career or love relationships: Emma changed jobs several times in her life, she changed boyfriends in the novel... The notion of changes is tied with the choice extolled by post-feminists where the individual is responsible of her/his own trajectory. And in the end of the story, she finally managed to get everything she wanted by staying truthful to her identity: she is promoted, she is in a relationship with the man she desires and most importantly she has changed mentally and is more blooming than ever: "It's amazing what a different person I am these days. It's as if I've been transformed. I'm a new Emma. Far more open than I used to be. Far more honest."

## SECONDE PARTIE : EXPLOITATION PÉDAGOGIQUE

## Introduction

Dans cette deuxième partie de mémoire, en français, je vais esquisser un projet pédagogique sur le thème de la Chick Lit afin qu'il soit exploitable avec des élèves du second degré.

J'ai choisi d'inscrire mon projet dans le cadre d'une classe de Troisième au collège, car la Chick Lit est un genre littéraire méconnu, bien que très populaire dans le monde anglo-saxon, qui nécessite un minimum de maturité pour en comprendre les enjeux.

La classe de 3<sup>ème</sup> est la dernière du cycle 4, qui vient finaliser les années collèges avant d'entamer le cycle Seconde du lycée. C'est une classe à examen avec le passage du Diplôme National du Brevet en fin d'année ; mais en ce qui concerne l'enseignement de l'anglais en Langue Vivante 1, il est attendu que les élèves valident le niveau A2 (« niveau intermédiaire ») dans les cinq compétences langagières<sup>42</sup> décrites par le *Cadre Européen Commun de Référence pour les Langues* (CECRL) mais aussi qu'ils atteignent le niveau B1 appelé « niveau seuil » pour au moins deux des compétences langagières.

De plus, nous devons inscrire nos enseignements dans le cadre du *Socle commun de connaissances, compétences et culture*. Toute éducation scolaire développe la « formation de la personne et du citoyen » du domaine 3 du socle, car les élèves doivent respecter les règles, apprendre à collaborer en collectivité... Ma séquence permettra de travailler les compétences liées au « Domaine 1 : les langages pour penser et communiquer » et plus précisément dans le cadre de l'anglais « Comprendre, s'exprimer en utilisant une langue étrangère » mais aussi « Comprendre, s'exprimer en utilisant les langages des arts et du corps » par le biais de l'enseignement de la littérature, de l'esthétique des premières de couvertures de roman et les extraits que nous étudierons en classe. En tant que professeur, nous devons aussi aider les élèves à adopter des automatismes méthodologiques qui leur permettront petit à petit à devenir des apprenants autonomes, ce qui correspond au « Domaine 2 : les méthodes et outils pour apprendre ». Enfin, la tâche finale qui sera une production écrite se situe dans le « Domaine 5 : les représentations du monde et l'activité humaine » où l'élève doit apprendre à « réaliser des productions de natures diverses, y compris littéraires et artistiques ».

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<sup>42</sup> Expression à l'oral en continu et en interaction, compréhension de l'oral et de l'écrit, expression écrite.

## A) La naissance d'un projet autour de la *Chick Literature*

Parfois appelée 'littérature de poulette' en français, la *Chick Lit* est un genre littéraire issu de la sphère anglophone qui est rapidement devenu très populaire dans le monde, mais il reste méconnu et très peu étudié par les scolaires. Les romans les plus à même d'être connus de tous sont *Le Journal de Bridget Jones* écrit par Helen Fielding (1996) et *Confessions d'une Accro au Shopping* de Sophie Kinsella (2000), car ils ont été adaptés au cinéma et ont connu un succès notoire. Les romans se concentrent essentiellement sur la vie de jeunes femmes, et c'est un sujet original qui permet de mettre en lumière les femmes de notre société autrement qu'en étudiant les droits des femmes, les femmes pendant la guerre mondiale ou encore le féminisme actuel avec l'émergence du mouvement #MeToo. Ce sujet d'étude a donc toute sa place dans l'objectif citoyen de la promotion de l'égalité des genres, et de la mise en valeur de la place de la femme dans l'ère contemporaine. Mais il contient aussi un objectif culturel phare qui est de découvrir un genre littéraire typiquement anglais issu de la culture populaire.

Cependant, travailler un tel genre littéraire en classe de troisième me paraît être un challenge, et il me semble qu'inscrire ce sujet d'étude dans un projet plus global serait un cadre plus rassurant en tant que professeur, mais aussi pour les élèves qui comprendraient davantage l'enjeu de leurs apprentissages. Pour cela, j'ai imaginé un projet collaboratif entre les différents professeurs de lettres et de langues du collège et le Centre de Documentation et d'Information : dans le cadre du mois de la littérature organisé au collège, chaque professeur pourrait étudier un genre littéraire spécifique avec une ou plusieurs de ses classes, afin que les élèves découvrent plusieurs genres littéraires différents dans plusieurs langues. Des expositions, des temps de lectures à voix haute d'extraits sur le temps de midi pourront être organisés, les professeurs pourront laisser des « coups de cœur » au CDI... Les élèves pourraient aussi décorer l'établissement avec des titres de romans affichés dans les couloirs, les salles de classe peuvent être rebaptisées avec des noms d'auteurs... Ce projet serait une façon d'élargir leur culture tout en ayant un rôle actif, les encourager à la lecture et leur montrer que parmi l'éventail littéraire immense qui s'offre à eux, il y'a sans aucun doute un genre qui les passionnera.

La tâche finale ferait partie intégrante du projet pluridisciplinaire organisé au sein du collège, et pourrait se conclure par un concours d'écriture : les deux meilleures productions de chaque classe (et de chaque discipline) seront sélectionnées pour ensuite être consultables au CDI par l'ensemble des élèves du collège. Une urne sera mise à disposition afin d'élire les trois histoires favorites de ce mois de la littérature au collège. De cette façon, les élèves des autres classes pourraient profiter de la lecture en langues étrangères des

productions de leur camarade, et les élèves qui auront à participer à la tâche finale, seront motivés par l'enjeu du concours.

## B) Cadrage et objectifs de la séquence

La séquence que je vais mettre en place s'intitule « *Discover Chick Lit* » et s'intégrera donc au projet pluridisciplinaire mentionné ci-dessus. Le niveau visé des activités langagières sera A2 qui tend vers B1 afin d'atteindre les objectifs de fin de classe de Troisième. Cette séquence s'inscrit dans la notion culturelle Langages, car son objectif principal est la découverte d'un genre littéraire et de ses conventions d'écriture.

Le scénario pédagogique doit amener les élèves à agir en tant qu'acteur social dans un environnement de communication le plus authentique possible, que ce soit à l'écrit ou à l'oral, dans le cadre de l'approche didactique actionnelle. Pour ce faire, la tâche finale s'articulera autour de cette consigne et sera à faire en groupe de deux ou trois élèves :

*Your school has organized the Month of Literature in order to make pupils discover different literary genres. We have also organized a writing contest:*

*Create the front cover of your Chick Lit novel and write an extract of your story to have a chance to be elected "best story of Collège xxxx 2021"*

Je pense que la collaboration pour ce projet est pertinente au vue de la difficulté de la tâche demandée. Certains élèves pourraient se sentir fortement découragés et non inspirés c'est pourquoi travailler ensemble et mettre à profit ses compétences, partager ses idées et apprendre à déléguer des tâches font partie des compétences citoyennes à acquérir.

Les éléments qui seront pris en compte dans l'évaluation de l'expression écrite de cette tâche finale seront la capacité à réinvestir les thèmes récurrents du genre de la Chick Lit tout en menant une narration interne, le respect du cadre usuel (une jeune femme active vivant dans une grande ville anglo-saxonne) et la méthodologie du dialogue en anglais. Concernant l'évaluation de la première page de couverture, les élèves seront évalués sur le visuel, la présence des éléments types : nom de l'auteur, titre du roman, images rappelant la féminité et couleurs vives.

Pour arriver à ce résultat, les élèves auront une tâche intermédiaire d'entraînement à l'expression écrite :

*Imagine the rest of the dialogue between Katie and Alex starting from the line ' 'Sure' I swallow. 'No problem'.'*

Voici les objectifs qui seront mis en place au sein de cette séquence :

<b>Objectifs culturels</b>	La <i>Chick Lit</i> et ses codes – Sophie Kinsella- la vie londonienne
<b>Objectifs lexicaux</b>	Les genres littéraires ( <i>drama, science-fiction, fantasy...</i> ) La destinée de l'héroïne ( <i>self-discovery, figuring out something, struggles, hopes...</i> ) La description physique ( <i>cheekbones, bangs, grumpy-looking</i> (et ses dérivés)) La mode ( <i>slim-fit coat, cap, scarf, label, vintage, flea market, heels...</i> ) Les mots introducteurs de dialogue ( <i>say, whisper, add, cry...</i> )
<b>Objectifs grammaticaux</b>	Révision des deux présents (présent simple et BE-ING pour la description) / Révision de la place de l'adjectif
<b>Objectifs phonologiques</b>	Les mots transparents ( <i>ironic, magazine, payment...</i> )
<b>Objectifs pragmatiques</b>	Réutiliser les codes du genre <i>Chick Lit</i> : savoir reproduire une <i>front cover</i> type ; savoir retranscrire les pensées du personnage ; savoir construire un dialogue
<b>Objectifs sociolinguistiques</b>	Utiliser un niveau de langue courant et le plus authentique possible afin de coller au genre de la <i>Chick Lit</i> (langage oral, contractions...)
<b>Objectifs méthodologiques</b>	Utiliser les stratégies de compréhension écrite (et orale)

### C) Description du déroulé de la séquence

Afin d'entrer dans le sujet de la littérature, j'ai choisi d'anticiper la séquence avec un travail sur les genres littéraires connus des élèves en incluant celui de la *Chick Lit* dans une fiche de travail que j'ai préparée. C'est une façon de faire le point sur leur savoir, et de montrer que chaque genre a des spécificités reconnaissables. ([Worksheet 1](#))

Puis, je commencerai la découverte de la *Chick Lit* avec un extrait intitulé « *What is Chick Lit ?* » tiré du guide *See Jane Write: A Girl's Guide to Writing Chick Lit* écrit par Sarah

Mlynowski et Farrin Jacobs (2006). Ce travail permettra de comprendre que ce genre littéraire est souvent vu superficiellement et donc de déconstruire ces clichés tout en comprenant qu'il s'agit d'un genre littéraire basé sur l'humour et mettant en scène une jeune femme moderne, en suivant ses déboires et petits bonheurs quotidiens qui l'a font évoluer et grandir dans sa vie. Pour ce faire, le document sera anticipé grâce au titre « *What is Chick Lit* » : les élèves seront capables de dire qu'il s'agit d'un genre littéraire grâce à l'activité précédente. Puis, nous travaillerons la compréhension globale du document avec les mêmes stratégies répétées au cours de l'année afin de déterminer le type de document, l'auteur, la date de publication et le sujet global. Aussi, il y aura un exercice de *matching* de vocabulaire avec des synonymes anglais afin de faciliter la compréhension du texte. Pour la compréhension détaillée, les élèves seront amenés à comprendre la différence entre les idées reçues et la réalité, ce qui permettra d'avoir à la fin du travail quelques ingrédients de base composant le genre de la Chick Lit. ([Worksheet 2](#))

S'en suivra le travail sur un extrait du roman de Sophie Kinsella *My Not So Perfect Life* (2017) que j'aurai anticipé avec une vidéo<sup>43</sup> de l'auteure faisant le résumé de l'intrigue.

La vidéo que j'ai choisie met en scène Sophie Kinsella, ce qui permet donc aux élèves de se faire une idée visuelle de l'auteure sur laquelle nous allons travailler tout au long de la séquence et d'autre part, cela met en valeur cette écrivaine britannique qui connaît un succès notoire. La vidéo est courte et le débit et l'accent britannique sont clairs à la compréhension. Afin d'anticiper la vidéo, je montrerai une capture d'écran de Kinsella ainsi que le titre de la vidéo qui n'est autre que le titre du roman, et demanderai aux élèves « *Guess who she is* » « *Make a hypothesis of what you're going to hear* ». Leurs hypothèses seront confirmées ou infirmées avec la compréhension globale. Lors de cette étape, les élèves devront comprendre l'essentiel de la vidéo : le but de celle-ci, le nom de l'auteure et de son nouveau roman, ainsi que l'identité du personnage principal. Dans la compréhension détaillée, j'ai mis l'accent sur la différence 'vie sur les réseaux sociaux versus vie réelle du protagoniste' : les élèves devront donc compléter les informations dans un tableau à double entrée. Enfin, il y aura un exercice d'écoute à trous afin de ne pas mettre de côté la dernière partie de la vidéo qui laisse l'intrigue en suspens. ([Worksheet 3](#))

Grâce à la vidéo, nous pourrions réviser et faire un point grammatical sur la place des adjectifs dans la phrase avec des occurrences comme « *her life is awesome* » « *she has an amazing job* » « *she's got a long, horrendous commute* ».

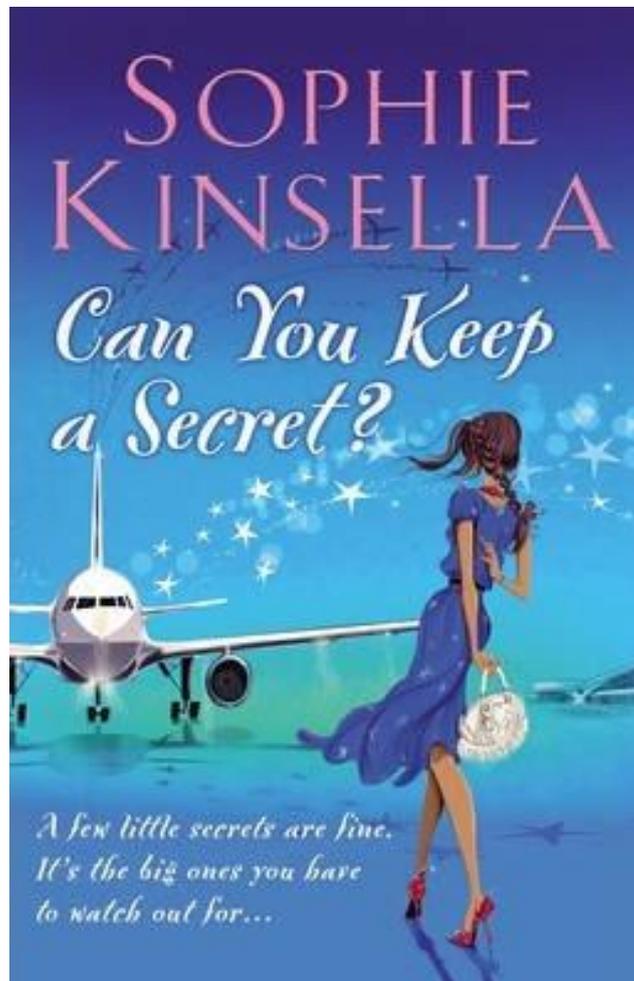
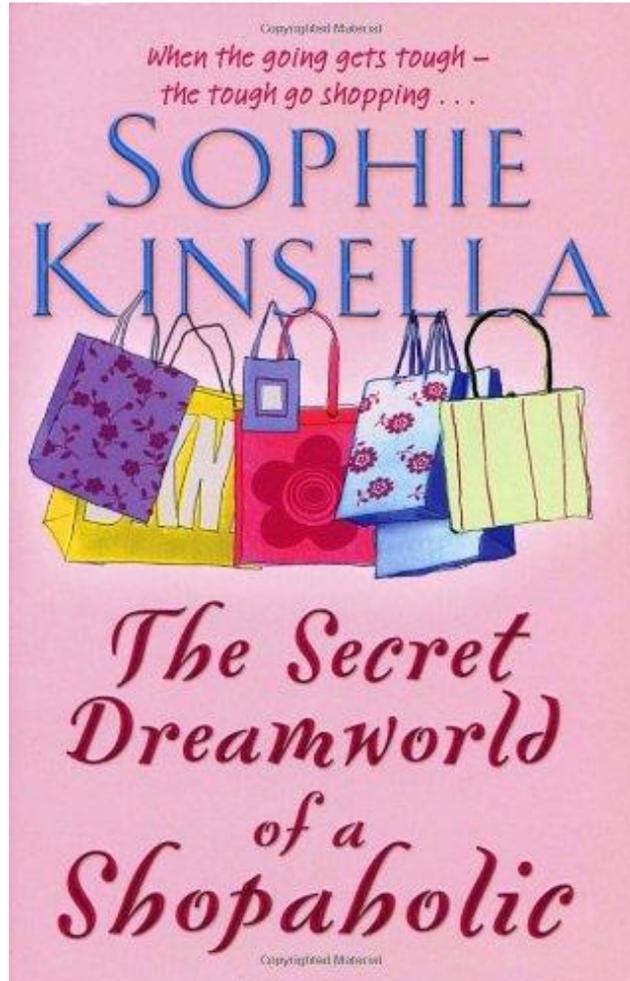
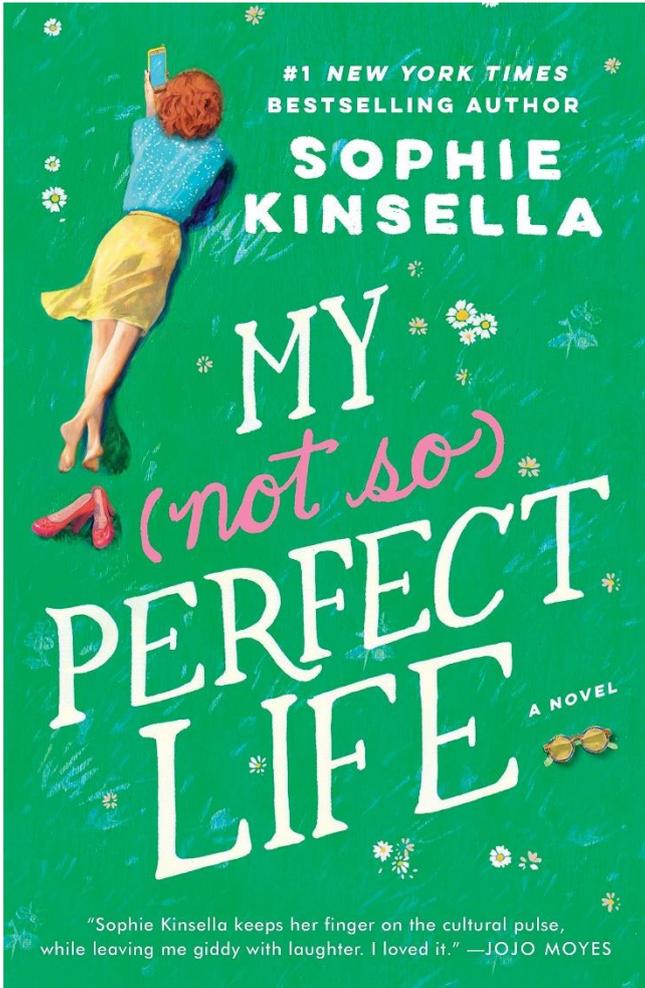
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<sup>43</sup> Penguin Books Australia, 2017 Jan. *My Not So Perfect Life*. [Video] YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2K8YICPiNM> [last accessed 28/04/2020].

Ayant eu un avant-gout de ce roman, je pense que travailler sur l'incipit de *My Not So Perfect Life* donnera peut-être envie aux élèves de lire le reste de l'histoire. De plus, l'intérêt de cet extrait est de soulever les différents thèmes de la vie quotidienne abordés dans la Chick Lit : le travail, la vie dans une grande ville (notamment Londres pour les romans de Kinsella), et les références à la mode/au style vestimentaire. De plus, cette première rencontre avec un extrait littéraire de Chick Lit permettra d'analyser la spécificité de la narration : le narrateur est interne et l'histoire est racontée à travers ses pensées et paroles, le langage est donc courant, voire familier, et des fantaisies peuvent être remarquées dans le texte (usage d'italiques, police différentes...). Les élèves travailleront sur une *worksheet* que j'ai préparée ([Worksheet 4](#)) ; j'ai voulu varier les types d'exercices afin de ne pas perdre la motivation des élèves les plus découragés à la lecture, et pour les guider au mieux afin d'éviter les contresens.

Ce document présente des occurrences de phrases affirmatives négatives et interrogatives conjuguées au présent simple : ce sera donc le moment de faire un point grammatical sur le présent simple, qui est le temps majeur des récits de Chick Lit par Sophie Kinsella. Même en classe de Troisième, il n'est pas inutile de revoir la formation des questions ou rappeler le -s de la troisième personne du singulier...

Nous pourrons ensuite faire une analyse visuelle des romans de Chick Lit. J'ai choisi de me concentrer sur trois couvertures différentes issues des romans de Sophie Kinsella afin de faire travailler la classe en trois groupes : *My Not So Perfect Life*, *Can You Keep a Secret* (2003) et *The Secret Dream World of a Shopaholic* (2000). Ils auront donc à compléter les colonnes d'un tableau basées sur des observations du visuel de ces couvertures. Le but est de comprendre que le design de la Chick Lit est très différent du design des livres d'horreur ou de fantasy par exemple, et que le visuel est basé sur des couleurs éclatantes, et des objets typiquement associés à la féminité (sacs de shopping, talons, robes et jupes...). Je serai aussi intéressée d'avoir leur impressions face à ces images délibérément « *girly* » et des idées sur la raison de tels choix visuels. ([Worksheet 5](#))



Dans un autre temps, nous travaillerons sur un second extrait du roman de Sophie Kinsella. J'ai choisi celui-ci car il permet d'introduire la forme du dialogue britannique et donc d'introduire un nouveau personnage et moment clé du roman : le premier rendez-vous (professionnel ?) entre l'héroïne et le Directeur Général de son entreprise. Les élèves seront donc amenés à comprendre que cet extrait mêle les thèmes vus précédemment du travail, de la description des vêtements, des pensées du narrateur mais aussi d'une rencontre qui semble faire chavirer l'héroïne.

J'ai didactisé l'extrait en ajoutant un paratexte pour comprendre rapidement la situation, et en enlevant des parties du texte original afin d'avoir l'essentiel de la scène de façon raccourcie. ([Worksheet 6](#))

Pour l'anticipation, nous pourrions simplement lire le paratexte et émettre des hypothèses à propos de l'identité d'Alex.

Pour la compréhension globale, je continue d'appliquer les mêmes stratégies que pour les documents de compréhension à savoir définir les personnages, le lieu et le moment de la scène. J'ai ajouté un exercice imagé afin de choisir la photographie qui correspond à l'histoire, ceci sera une aide visuelle pour les élèves afin d'imaginer la scène et donc profiter d'une escapade littéraire aux saveurs de fêtes de fin d'années. Je pense que c'est un bon moyen de montrer aux élèves que l'imagination, et la visualisation mentale des romans sont importantes, et ce qui donne le plaisir de lire.

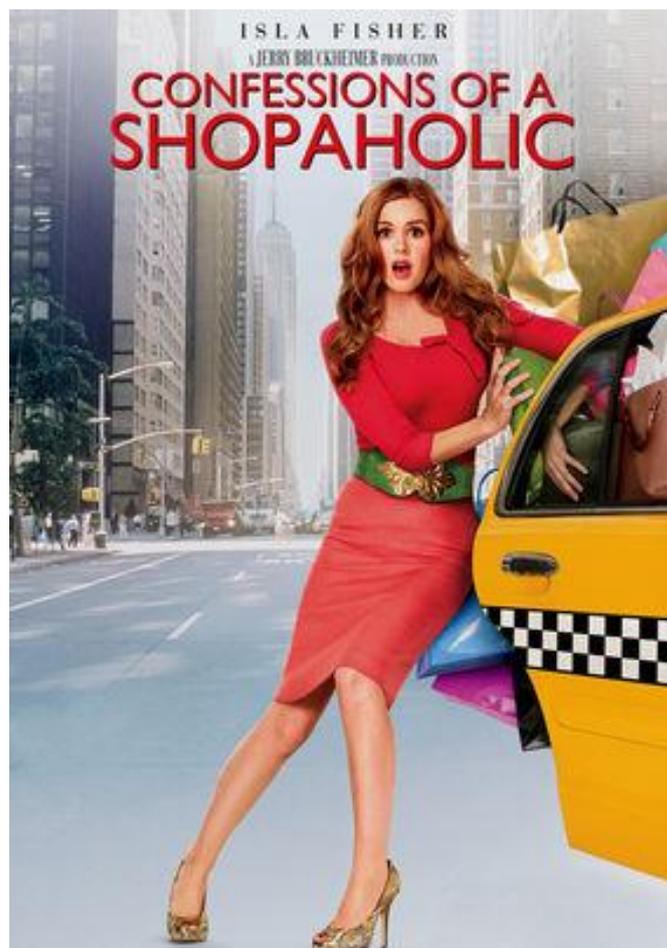
Pour la compréhension détaillée, je demanderai aux élèves de se concentrer quelques temps sur le vocabulaire : le champ lexical du travail, qui met en évidence la relation professionnelle entre les deux personnages, puis celui des parties du corps qui souligne l'attraction physique que ressent Katie pour Alex, enfin ils devront retrouver les synonymes des qualités énoncées par l'héroïne à propos de son employeur. Aussi, nous ferons le point sur le langage courant utilisé afin d'enrichir leur banque d'expressions informelles courantes qu'ils pourront réutiliser lors de leur tâche finale (« *I mean* » « *whatever* » « *Those (cheekbones)*. *That (smile)* » « *Oh God* » ...)

Ce texte sera notre support pour introduire la méthodologie d'écriture d'un dialogue en anglais. Il permet de montrer les différences de ponctuations, les retours à la ligne pour chaque changement d'interlocuteur, les adverbess et expressions de manière... Je pourrais donc aussi les aider à constituer une banque de verbes introducteurs comme « *say, laugh, add, whisper...* » qu'ils pourront réutiliser. A la suite de ceci, les élèves pourront s'entraîner dans le cadre de la tâche intermédiaire à imaginer la suite du dialogue entre les deux personnages. Nous pourrions ainsi faire le point sur l'acquis des compétences concernant la

méthodologie de construction du dialogue et la compréhension du genre de la Chick Lit (l'histoire doit être cohérente).

Enfin, le dernier document exploité de la séquence sera la bande annonce du film *Confession of a Shopaholic* (2009) afin de montrer aux élèves que le genre littéraire de la Chick Lit tend à se développer au cinéma. Changer de support sera aussi une source de motivation et d'intérêt pour les élèves après les compréhensions écrites. D'un point de vue didactique, ce travail sera l'occasion de rappeler les thèmes abordés dans la Chick Lit en étudiant une nouvelle histoire, afin de les inspirer pour leur tâche finale. Nous pourrions aussi faire un point phonétique sur la prononciation des mots transparents.

En guise d'anticipation, j'afficherai l'affiche du film<sup>44</sup> afin d'anticiper le type de document, réactiver le vocabulaire sur la mode avec les vêtements portés par Becky, recueillir les connaissances des élèves, et émettre des hypothèses sur ce que l'on va voir dans le prochain document grâce à la notion de « *Shopaholic* » que l'on analysera ensemble.



Movie poster *Confession of a Shopaholic*

<sup>44</sup> Unknown. Poster Confession of a Shopaholic. [Online Image] newonnetflix.uk <https://scdn.nflximg.net/images/0800/3910800.jpg> [last accessed 03/05/2020].

Les étapes sont similaires aux documents précédents : la compréhension globale se concentrera sur le personnage principal, le cadre de l'histoire et les thèmes du film apparaissant dans la bande annonce.

Afin de comprendre plus en détail la vidéo, les élèves se pencheront sur la narration du début qui vient rappeler la narration interne des romans. Puis ils relèveront les champs lexicaux de la mode/du shopping et de l'argent car l'intrigue tourne autour de ces deux thèmes : Becky a une passion addictive pour la mode et le shopping, ce qui va l'endetter. Ce qui nous mène à un exercice de vrai ou faux afin de déceler la compréhension des élèves sur l'activité professionnelle de l'héroïne.

Nous pourrions terminer le travail sur ce document audio avec un exercice de *matching* de mots en transcription phonétique. J'ai choisi des mots transparents qui sont souvent mal prononcés et qui méritent donc d'être travaillés. ([Worksheet 7](#))

# Identify different literary genres

Pick the genre corresponding to the right definition:

**SCIENCE FICTION / DETECTIVE STORY / GOTHIC STORY / FAIRY TALE**  
**BIOGRAPHY / PLAY / CHICK LIT / FANTASY**

---

A story with magical elements such as fairies, elves, giants and princesses. It always has a happy-end.



A story focusing on a detective solving a crime, a murder. There is an investigation and often suspense.



A story dealing with monsters, a gloomy atmosphere in an isolated place like a castle, a graveyard. It is often creepy.



A story set in the future, with an imaginative use of scientific and technologic innovations.



The true story of a person's life written by someone else.



A story involving magic, witchcraft and adventures often set in a fictional world.

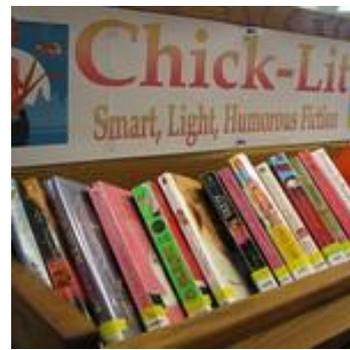


Form of literature written by a playwright, consisting of dialogue between characters, intended for theatrical performance.



A contemporary story often written by a woman and telling the story of a young urban woman facing life issues (difficulties at work, love story...). The tone is humorous.





## WHAT EXACTLY IS CHICK LIT?



Contrary to popular belief, chick lit is not all about shoes. Or clothes. Or purses. Yes, some chick lit characters enjoy their fashion collections, but if an interest in designer names is what made you pick up this book, maybe you should grab *Vogue* instead. Chick lit is also not about getting a guy. [...] The chick lit story is about the main character's road to self-discovery. Although there's usually a satisfying and uplifting conclusion, the ending is more about hope for the future than chasing Mr. Right.

So if it's not about shoes and guys, then what exactly is it? Well, chick lit is often upbeat, always funny fiction about contemporary female characters and their everyday struggles with work, home, friendship, family, or love. It's about women growing up and figuring out who they are and what they need *versus* what they think they want. It's about observing life and finding the humor in a variety of situations, exchanges, and people. [...] It's generally written by women for women. It's honest, it reflects women's lives today [...] and, well, it's hugely popular.

See *Jane Write: A Girl's Guide to Writing Chick Lit* by Sarah Mlynowski & Farrin Jacobs (2006)

### 1) Global comprehension

Type of document and date	Author(s)	Topic?

### 2) Vocabulary

Match the words to their synonyms:

- |                    |                       |                       |                                    |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Uplifting = upbeat | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Modern                             |
| Hope               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | To understand                      |
| Contemporary       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Optimistic                         |
| Struggles          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Battles                            |
| To figure out      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | desire, ambition                   |
| Self-discovery     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Understanding and knowing yourself |

### 3) Detailed Comprehension

a- Make a list of what Chick Lit is NOT:

b- So, what is Chick Lit? Complete the categories:

Character? (who)

Plot? (what is the story about?)

End?

c- Circle the adjectives corresponding to Chick Lit

Popular

Infamous

Sad

Funny

Realistic

**Oral Comprehension: My Not So Perfect Life**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2K8YICPi\\_NM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2K8YICPi_NM)

1) Global Comprehension

Who is speaking?	Topic of the video ?	Title of the book?   Name of the heroine?   Place?
------------------	----------------------	--

2) Detailed Comprehension: About the new book....

Life on social media (circle) 	Real life 

“Then, Katie \_\_\_\_\_ her job and she can’t \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ anymore. So back she goes to \_\_\_\_\_ in Sommerset which really is \_\_\_\_\_.”

## Chapter 1

First: it could be worse. As commutes go, it could be a lot worse, and I must keep remembering this. Second: it's worth it. I *want* to live in London; I *want* to do this; and commuting is part of the deal. It's part of the London experience, like Tate Modern.

(Actually, it's not much like Tate Modern. Bad example.) [...]

Anyway, my twenty-minute walk to the station is fine. Enjoyable, even. The grey December air is like iron in my chest, but I feel good. The day's begun. I'm on my way.

My coat's pretty warm, even though it cost £9.99 and came from the flea market. It had a

label in it, CHRISTIAN DIOR, but I cut it out as soon as I got home. You can't work where I work and have CHRISTIAN DIOR in your coat. You could have a genuine vintage Christian Dior label. [...]

But *not* CHRISTIAN DIOR.

It's as I get near to Catford Bridge that I start to feel a knot of tension. I *really* don't want to be late today. My boss has started throwing all sorts of hissy fits<sup>1</sup> about people "swanning in at all times," so I left an extra twenty minutes early, in case it was a bad day.

I can already see: It's a god-awful day. [...]

They've been having a lot of problems on our line recently, and keep cancelling trains with no warning. Trouble is, in London rush hour, you can't just *cancel trains*. What are all the people who were planning to get on that train supposed to do? Evaporate?

[...] Our office is a large pale building called Phillimore House. As I get near, I slow to a walk, my heart still pounding. My left heel has a massive blister on it, but the main thing is, I've made it. I'm on time. [...] The whole commute took an hour and twenty minutes in all, which actually could be worse—

<sup>1</sup> Hissy fit = when you are angry

*My Not So Perfect Life* by Sophie Kinsella (2017)

### 1) Global Comprehension:

Main character?	Place?	Time?
-----------------	--------	-------

Sum up the extract:

.....

**2) Detailed comprehension:**

a- Circle the elements mentioned in the extract:

Capital city • Driving • Workplace and boss • Short journey • Commuting • Fake  
luxury • Countryside

b- True or false? Justify with a line of the text.

T F The narrator is doing shopping.

.....

T F The narrator is going to work.

.....

T F The narrator is walking and taking public transportation.

.....

T F The narrator is late at work.

.....

c- The language used is:     Oral             Informal     Formal/Elevated

d- Quote typical expressions of the language used:

e- Why are some words in italics? Quote examples.

## ◆ Chick Lit front covers ◆

Observe the front covers and complete the table:

	Cover n°1	Cover n°2	Cover n°3
Title of the book			
Author			
Colors			
Illustrations			

■ List the common points:

■ What are your general impressions on the covers?

*In Chapter 5, during lunchbreak, Katie meets Alex in what looks like a Christmas Market...*

[...] I see Alex at once, standing by the mulled-wine stand. He's wearing a slim-fit coat, a purple scarf, and a gray hipster cap and holding two plastic glasses of mulled wine. [...] "Mulled wine?" He hands me a glass.

"Thanks!"

We clink the plastic and I feel a little exhilarated swoop inside. This is fun. Whatever "this" is. I mean, I can't quite work out if it's business or...not-business....Whatever. It's fun.

"So. To work." Alex drains his drink. [...] He brandishes his empty glass at me. "What do we think of the mulled wine?"

"Very good," I say truthfully.

"Whereas the merry-go-round..." He wrinkles his nose. "A little tragic, no?" [...] "We can't assess the merry-go-round unless we go on the merry-go-round," he says gravely. "After you." He gestures toward the horses, and I grin back.

"Well, OK!" [...]

He climbs up onto the horse next to mine and pays the attendant, who is a grumpy-looking guy in a parka. [...]

This is quite bizarre, sitting on a wooden horse, at eye level with a guy who in theory is my boss but doesn't feel like my boss [...].

He feels like fun. He feels like cleverness and irreverence and wit and charm [...]. He feels like the man I've been waiting to meet ever since I moved to London, ever since I wanted to move to London.

I surreptitiously run my eyes over him and a fresh wave of longing overcomes me. That knowing flash in his eye. Those cheekbones. That smile.

Then Alex leans over, breaking the mood. "Hey. Your hair's gone mad."

[...] My bloody, bloody bangs.

"It always does that," I say flushing. "It's awful."

He laughs. "It's not awful."

"It is. I should never have got bangs cut, but—" I stop dead. I can't exactly say, *But I wanted to look like a different person.*

"It's just a bit...the breeze..." He leans over from his wooden horse toward mine. "May I?"

"Sure." I swallow. "No problem."

Now he's gently tweaking my bangs. I'm fairly sure this is against company policy. Bosses aren't supposed to adjust hair, are they? [...]

Oh God, am I inventing all this? I can feel a spark here, I really can. But can he? I mean, I only met this guy yesterday. Now I'm on what might be a date—feels like a date—except he's my superior, and I don't know for sure what's going on....

[...]I want to freeze-frame this moment in my mind. Whirling around on a merry-go-round, with a gorgeous, funny guy...at Christmas...I mean, all I need is for a few snowflakes to fall and the scene will be perfect.

*My Not So Perfect Life* by Sophie Kinsella (2017)

### 1) Global Comprehension

People?	Place?	Time?
Precise their relationships		

Circle the image corresponding to the settings:



## 2) Detailed Comprehension

a- Highlight the sentences where work is mentioned.

b- With another colour, highlight the vocabulary related to the body.

c- Katie likes Alex: find the synonym in the text of these words.

Very handsome =.....

Intelligence =.....

Intelligent humour =.....

Romantic rendezvous = .....

d- Quote informal speech expressions:

## 3) Méthodologie : écrire un dialogue en anglais

Observe les dialogues : comment sont-ils construits ? Quelles sont les différences entre un dialogue français et anglais ?

**Oral Comprehension: Confessions of a Shopaholic**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYYCSEV-i1Y&t=4s>

1) Global Comprehension

Type of document ?	Heroine?  What is her problem?	Place(s) ?
--------------------	--------------------------------------	------------

•What does the movie deal with?

- Family issues
- Money problems
- Shopping and fashion
- Finding a job
- Going on holidays
- Social media

2) Detailed Comprehension

A- At the beginning of the video, who is the narrator?

.....

•What happened when she was 7?

.....

.....

B- Pick out words and expressions related to shopping and fashion.

.....

.....

.....

C- Pick out words and expressions related to money problems.

.....

.....

• Sum up the problem in one sentence.

.....

D- True or False? Justify.

T      F      Rebecca finds a job in a shoe shop.

.....

T      F      Rebecca lied on her résumé. She can't speak Finnish.

.....

T      F      Rebecca wrote an article about investment and women buying shoes.

.....

### 3) Pronunciation

Choose the word corresponding.

Confessions/ Credit card/ Payment /Debts /Ironic/ Magazine /Unique / Inspiring

/kən'fɛʃənz/ = .....

/ɪn'spaɪərɪŋ/ = .....

/'peɪmənt/ = .....

/dɛts/ = .....

/ju:'ni:k/ = .....

/aɪ'rɒnɪk/ = .....

/mægə'zi:n/ = .....

## Conclusion

Pour conclure cette partie didactique, j'ai imaginé une séquence de découverte de la *Chick Lit*, ce genre littéraire peu travaillé en classe et souvent méconnu bien que de nombreux films cultes sont issus de ces romans.

La séquence « *Discover Chick Lit* » sera un moyen d'élargir la culture littéraire anglophone des élèves de Troisième dans le cadre d'un projet pluridisciplinaire en collaboration avec d'autres classes. Le projet s'annonce comme une source de motivation car il est inscrit dans la réalité de l'élève, l'élève travaillera donc dans un but précis.

L'activité langagière majeure de la séquence est la compréhension et la production écrite mais j'ai tout de même inclus quelques documents permettant l'entraînement à la compréhension orale. Les activités proposées sont basées sur des documents authentiques issus de la sphère britannique pour la plupart, ce qui permet aux apprenants d'être plongés dans une langue employée couramment et donc utile lors de la vie quotidienne.

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## Résumé:

À travers l'étude des romans de l'auteure britannique Sophie Kinsella et plus particulièrement *Can You Keep a Secret* (2003), ce mémoire tente d'apporter des réponses concernant la qualité émancipatoire du genre littéraire de la Chick Lit sur les femmes dans un contexte post-féministe.

### *Mots-clés:*

Postfeminism, Chick Lit, emancipation, women, Kinsella, femininity.