

# **CHICKLIT MOVIES:**

## **An Attempt of Showing Identity or Looking for Identity ?**

### **A Case Study on *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Confession of Shopaholic* And *Devil Wears Prada***

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#### **Abstract**

*Chick lit is a modern literature that achieves its success since the presence of *Bridget Jones's Diary* in a newspaper in the UK. Originally, the story is underestimated but extremely affecting many metropolitan women in the UK at the time. The influence and the fever spread throughout the world, especially America. Eventually, many chick lit piece of work become a great success and offer help to provide the identity for woman who live in big cities; those who are successful, fashionable, independent and single. This success also is supported by a rapid response from the film industry to sell the chick lit as the theme in their movies. Admittedly, these so called literary works that can be finished in one read are packed so enjoyable and entertaining. Yet, the question then appears when there is a shifting way and process of the metropolitan women in seeking their identity.*

#### **Introduction**

Chiclit is a phenomenon. It is like a power which distracts the conventional power of canon literature. It had been for ages that canon literature became important and valuable work. The one who studied literature but did not learn the canon ones would be regarded as 'unqualified' scholar. Therefore, the department of English Literature required the curriculum providing canon study for the students. Even though the words are so difficult because they were born in different era with the readers, students must comprehend them as worthwhile works. Sometimes, the teachers gave wrong 'doctrines' toward popular literature to the students. They always treated popular literature as 'cheap' ones, lack of quality and values, and inappropriate for intellectuals. So, the conventional students followed the instruction even they felt uncomfortable.

The presence of chick lit gave different nuance in the way people especially students of literature appreciates prose. It was born not only because of the boredom of the readers but also because of the influence of feminism, especially the third wave. Readers needed something real, the thing which made them relaxed and realize the real world. So far, they were not in their world. They were in their ancestor's world.

Then, the chick lit comes to give the 'fresh air'. The content and the way the author reveals the words are so different with the conventional prose the readers used to read. It is so light, something common in life, although does not omit philosophical view.

The success of chick lit has been used by the movie makers to make success in film industries. They use the story in chick lit to be filmed and gives the audiences the real description of the characters, setting and the plot. Mostly the movie explores the characters in chick it who are young, single, white, heterosexual, British and American women in their late twenties and early thirties, and living in metropolitan areas (Smith: 2).

Undeniable, this kind of movie gets a lot of success in market. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Confession of Shopaholic*, and *Devil Wears Prada* are the examples of the chick lit movies which are successful. Those protagonists are all women who have good job but unsettled. They change the job with various reasons; avoiding the boss, not her passion, and getting higher position in the society.

Of course, job is not the main or the only one problem in the story. Each story in the movie has its own problem in which the heroin must overcome. Searching Mr. Right, fixing broken heart, mending relationship, overcoming bad habit, shopping addiction are some other examples of the problem. That reality happens in the post modern women life. Therefore, in this writing I want to take it seriously to make the society especially the scholars realize the reality, although in the past, critics have been reluctant to take popular fiction seriously.

#### CHICK LIT PHENOMENA

Chick lit is a kind of prose in which woman takes a lot of roles in it. It is written by woman and made for woman (Smith: 2). There is usually a personal, light, and humorous tone in it. The plots usually consist of women experiencing usual life issues, such as love, marriage, dating, relationships, friendships, roommates, corporate environments, weight issues, addiction, and much more (wikipedia). According to professor Suzanne Ferris, chick lit often features hip, stylish, career-drive female protagonists, usually in their twenties and thirties. The women featured in these novels may be obsessed with appearance or have a passion for shopping. While according to Amy Sohn, the work is about women who can stand on their own two feet.

The last opinion is the proper one, I think, because chick lit has represented those women. It has inspired women around the world who live independently, in this case support their life by themselves, to be more confidence to stand on their feet. Chick lit has given clear description of free women who single, live in a big city and have their own job. This is the main formula of chick lit. So far, there is no chick lit that conveys settled happy house wife because it tends to the romance novel.

Most literary works express how happy a woman is if they find their true spouse and ended by marriage. Sometimes a novel also reveals a problem in marriage in which the heroin, finally, can cope the problem. Life is not as simple as that. Sometimes one must do 'long journey' to find their own destiny, and marriage is not the only destiny women want to reach.

The existence of chicklit is a phenomenon to represent how a happy single woman run their life. Even though the story tells much about being alone but this work does not leave the

humanity side. Being happy, sad, frustrated, even betrayed appears in this work. They also face some cultural conflicts because of their being. The heroin must face cultural demand especially from the older generation such as parents' demand of marriage, being settled and success, do the 'right thing' based on conventional way, and having good social life. This condition, sometimes, make the main characters confused in deciding their destiny at first. Bridget Jones always faces her mother match her to the right man, Andy Sach has to work in a prestigious place but not her passion, and Becky has to be a shopaholic before she meets her true lover. Of course, finally they find what they want.

Indeed, based on the fact it is England which proposed chick lit for the first time by *Bridget Jones' Diary*. It was published for the first time in 1996 before it turned into film in 2003. Both of the products got success in market. Then, the success of it encouraged other authors from other countries make the same work but in different background. It is not only taking American or European women who live in a big cities as the heroin but also reveals other women from other countries with their own background. Women who are still single in their thirties and live in a big city mostly have same problem even though they live in different countries, in which different culture. No matter in what continent they live: America, Europe, Australia, Asia, or Africa, being single in a very mature age giving its own problem.

This topic is really tempting to be explored. Later on, chick lit almost appears in whole countries around the world. To tell the truth, the success of chick lit makes most people realize that this condition exist. Being single in a success life financially faced by many women around the world. This phenomena is really something. Women who are single in a very mature age are not embrassed anymore to confess their condition.

Chick lit, like other literary movements, is a historically situated genre ( smith: 6). Like I revealed before that the genre comes from romance. Yet, it is not automatically deviated from the romance novel to the chick lit. Firstly it was short stories in a magazine before in turn to the thicker ones. According to Caroline J. Smith chick lit authors are not the ûrst women writers to connect their novelsto contemporary popular culture mediums. Women writers have a long history of connecting their ûction with consumer culture, and in some ways, chick lit novels are merely continuing that trend with their direct references to magazines, self-help books, romantic comedies, and domestic-advice manuals. In these ways, then, chick lit is linked to the literary traditions that preceded it. Yet, chick lit is fast becoming a new chapter in the history of the novel.

The late twentieth and early twenty-ûrst century has produced a cultural climate in which consumer culture plays an increasingly important rolein the production and distribution of popular ûction, allowing texts to travelmore easily than before (8).

From the idea, chick lit is not something completely new. Jane Austen had done it before.Jane Austen is often credited as being the creator of today s Chick Lit genre, and her stand for the validity of the British Gothic as a respectable genre rightly earns her some merit

with this charge (Stites: 11). She, as a woman, explored many sides of women in her era. She always exposed the different part of her heroin. The protagonist, in her novels, never shows the weak and very spoiled girl. She always presented the girls who is intellectual, more advance than other women, strong, tough, and well educated. It could be the very early feminism she proposed. Yet, this idea is truly match with the characterization in chick lit. The heroin in chick lit is also strong, tough, and well educated. The cultural background is different for sure. As a canon literature, Jane Austen's novels are more conventional in post modern view but it could be too advance for her era.

Even though it seems a new sub genre from romance that the characters mostly women, chick lit reveals more power in it. Indeed Austen had started the model long time ago by expressing how woman had different view from other women even though she still needed man, but in chick lit the authors do not only show the strength of woman but also showing the weak part of her.

Jenny Mochtar claimed that chick lit is a product of post feminism. This movement started in 1990s in which women do not demand the equal 'position' anymore. This movement is also called the third wave feminism. In this wave, women realize that they have the same chance in nurture but different position in nature. Feminism in this era got its boredom of being same in all thing with men. Women realize they need men, they need each other and support one another.

Therefore, the story in chick lit mostly talk about relationship; relationship between man and woman, relationship among friends, relationship between parents and their child, or relationship between boss and the employee. The relationship does not make any segmentation anymore. They are blended. Although story in chick lit mostly emphasizes to show the identity of the heroin but it does not oppose the opposite sex.

## CHICK LIT MOVIES

Long times before chick lit boomed and became a phenomenon, film industries had produced some movies based on novels. It started form classical movies such as *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Height* and *Les Miserables* to the modern ones such as Danielle Steel's works and John Grisham's novels. In some cases they are remade because of the beneficial reason. Sometimes it was remade because the movie makers wanted to repeat the success before, or sometimes it was remade in different version for instance *Sense and Sensibility* into *From Prada to Nada* and *Pride and Prejudice* into the *Modern of Pride and Prejudice*.

The new version was made to fulfil the emptiness of popular literature work which has worth idea. It means that many popular literature produced lack in quality. Then the idea to make more modern films based on the classic one comes to the alternative. They packaged the old version into the newest one as market commodities. Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas Frenz claimed that nowadays films represent "a central commodity of the postmodern culture."

They also view contemporary film as socially and culturally multi-functional. For Rushing and Frentz, films “reproduce as well as critique our biases, they are instruments of domination as well as visionary art, they both reaffirm and subvert the status quo. Films can reveal that which is odious to consciousness, but they can also repress it.” (Day: 10).

By that explanation, it assures the audience that in this era, movie has a lot of function. It is not merely as entertainment and getting money but also a media to express the critic to society.

Woman films had been also produced years before. *Little Woman*, *Pocahontas* and *Cinderella* are the examples of movie in which the protagonists are women. Film genres often have gender affiliations based on what issues the films seem to address. When the movie showed the heroine as the protagonist, the audiences are mostly women. These movies introduced woman into female world. Unfortunately, the critics think that those films are not serious ones. Like what Danya Day stated that traditionally, women-centered films do not seem as serious or worthwhile as the films addressed to their male counterparts (Day: 17).

Yet, in recent days, popular literature in which chick lit is one of it, becomes so emerge. Many critics concern about this because this phenomena get wider worldly. The chick lit movies produced many times, such as three movies that I want to analyze in this paper. In making this kind of movie, Day revealed in her thesis that there are three important points in woman-centered films. First, the woman’s film involves one or more women as the central protagonists. Second, these films deal with issues stereotypically associated with females, particularly emotional issues. Finally, the woman’s film typically portrays women through the repressive lens of patriarchal ideology (23). To tell the truth, I do not completely agree with the last point because there are some movies which have no connection with patriarchal ideology; and chick lit wants to break that thought.

Undeniable that the existence of feminism takes a big role in giving impact of women on the screen (44). Basically, the formula of chick lit in printed form is not different with chick lit in movie. The heroine is a young, professional, white, and middle-class heterosexual. She falls short of the cultural ideal in looks and is especially unhappy with the current state of her uncoupled life, but the author or filmmaker sets her on a course to happiness with the help of a close group of friends, intensive shopping, a variety of passing sexual experiences, and a frequently ironic view of the self. The story ends in a marriage or at least a promising relationship (Ferris and Young: 118)

## HEROIN IDENTITY THROUGH THE CHARACTERIZATION

Even though the story is taken from the book, chick lit novel and chick lit movie, for sure, have different method in presenting. Since chick lit novel has been born in post modern era, the story showed in it is unpredictable. For instance, in the end of the novel of *Compasion of Shopaholic*, Becky is still having problem with her debt because of her shopping habit and

cannot identify her relationship with Luke, while in the movie the ending is so clear. Becky finally finds the solution of her money debt and her relationship with Luke comes to happy one. Wells conveys that chick lit tell a story about a “heroine s search for an ideal romantic partner; her maturation and growth in self-knowledge, often aided by friends and mentors; and her relationship to conventions of beauty (Stites: 12).

It also happens in *Devil Wears Prada* and *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. Both of the movies have happy ending. Andy finally abandons her previous job in Miranda’s office to move to a smaller publication but it is her passion as a journalist and back to her previous boyfriend, and Bridget finally left her boss and choose Mark Darcy to be her spouse. None of the audiences exit the theatre with the question in their mind. Whole of them are satisfied with the ending. In this case, chick lit traced to the traditional romance which focuses on the love story, with an emotionally satisfying ending with the love story resolved at the climax (Harzewski: 37).

The process before the ending to the ending is the point that I want to observe. In what phase the turning point of the heroin which become the key of self identity. Most chick lit movies, firstly, show something elegant. Either it is their will or not, they are trapped in a glamorous condition seemingly. Becky is so gorgeous in shopping habit, Andy is cool as Miranda’s assistant, and Bridget tries to be in great shape in order to get her boss’ intention and she get it!

All of the description above state that all heroin in these chick lit movies show their identity in satisfying condition. Time goes by then finally they realize that they are mistaken. They have taken deceit choice. They choose the matter that physically amazing for someone else’s view. Being shopaholic makes Becky appreciated by higher class, being Miranda’s first assistant makes Andy feel like an important person, and being Daniel’s girlfriend makes Bridget feel accepted although in her ‘bad’ shape.

Those condition are temporary feeling before they finally realize that the current position are not their places. The next step appears in the movie, they try to find what is good for them. This process is the phase of searching identity. It is not easy to find the ‘true’ identity because they have to pass the period of rejection, confusion and betrayal before they come to the level of decision. They finally concious that ‘you do not have to fit into a certain size in order to be loved, but that until you see that for yourself love is not going to find you’; and according to Aubrey Curry that is a message all women could use, that all women can relate to (Curry:8).

The hard process the heroins must face is like questioning themselves: what kind of life they want to have, what type of person they hope to be their spouse or what sort of job they want to have. That analyses might be so fit with the theory of post modernism in which people always questioning all settled things. In chick lit movies, those questions will be described in a neat scene. The audiences, who mostly women, will also be asked to questioning themselves until finally they realize their existence. Individuals must now choose the kind of life they want to live. Girls must have alifeplan. They must become more reûexive in regard to every aspect of their lives, frommaking the right choice in marriage, to taking responsibility for their

own working lives, and not being dependent on a job for life or on the stable and reliable operations of large-scale bureaucracy which in the past would have allocated its employees specific, and possibly unchanging, roles (McRobbie:7).

## CONCLUSION

As a phenomenon, chick lit is successful in attracting people's attention especially women. The ones who rarely involve in literary world finally have the power to show their existence by exploring their real condition through chick lit. As literary work, chick lit is like a diary for women who live in big cities telling about their feeling, their condition, their thought and their destination. Being unconventional woman is not easy, but it happens in big cities. They must collide their thought and desire to conservative opinion such as marriage and having kids in young ages. Chick lit is like a breakthrough for them to break the 'myth'.

Chick lit is by and for women, but the success of chick lit is not only for women. Film makers really consider this condition as a commodity for larger audience even men. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Confession of Shopaholic* and *Devil Wears Prada* are the example of chick lit pioneer and they were successful either in written or motion picture form. As the product of intertextuality, the idea of chick lit in written form and film form is different. If in written one the writers have the style in entertaining the readers, in motion picture chick lit is like enlightenment for women to choose the real and the better choice. The moral values in the movie give more idea for the main characters to find their real identity.

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