

**Bridget Jones's Legacy:**  
**Gender and Discourse in Contemporary**  
**Literature and Romantic Comedy**  
**Adaptations**

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## Abstract

Romantic comedy adaptations based on bestsellers aimed at predominantly female readers have become more frequent in the fifteen years since the publication of *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) and the financial success of its adaptation (Sharon Maguire, 2001). Contemporary popular literature and films created specifically for women have emerged alongside the spread of neoliberalist and postfeminist discourses. This thesis offers a timely examination of bestselling adapted texts, including chick lit novels, a self-help book and a memoir, and their romantic comedy adaptations. While some of the books and films have received individual attention in academic writing, they have not been examined together as an interconnected group of texts.

This thesis is the first work to cohesively analyse representations of gender in mainstream bestsellers predominantly aimed at female readers and their romantic comedy adaptations published and released between 1996 and 2011. Through a combination of textual analysis and broader discursive and contextual analysis, it examines how these popular culture texts adapt and extend themes, characters, narrative style and the plot structure from *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Moreover, the thesis explores how they function as sites of the production and circulation of discourses. In doing so, the thesis accentuates wider surrounding discourses and how they contribute to, and are informed by, concepts about gender that circulate within the wider neoliberalist cultural climate.

By using an interdisciplinary approach and focusing on ten books and nine romantic comedies published and released over a time span of fifteen years, the thesis reveals intertextual influences across genre and media boundaries and discusses resulting changes in genre conventions over time. It draws attention to culturally and academically devalued popular literary and film genres produced for predominantly female consumers and argues that these texts deserve academic attention because they contribute to the fabric that constitutes contemporary reality.

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## Introduction

‘Again, the problem is not the desire to differentiate between forms of high art and depraved forms of mass culture and its co-optations. The problem is rather the persistent gendering as feminine of that which is devalued.’<sup>1</sup>

In 2001 Beryl Bainbridge, an author nominated five times for the Booker Prize, publicly called chick lit ‘a froth sort of thing’ and dismissed the topics it deals with as a waste of time.<sup>2</sup> Doris Lessing agreed with Bainbridge: ‘As people spend so little time reading it is a pity they perhaps can’t read something a bit deeper, a bit more profound, something with a bit of bite to it. It would be better, perhaps, if they wrote books about their lives as they really saw them, and not these helpless girls, drunken, worrying about their weight and so on.’<sup>3</sup> What Lessing did not realise was that Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary*<sup>4</sup> and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*<sup>5</sup> had become popular and started a new genre because they were understood by readers as being about ‘their lives and as they really saw them’. Both novels were celebrated for tapping into the Zeitgeist of the 1990s.

The financial success of *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and its sequel inspired numerous followers in the chick lit genre but also led to two equally influential romantic comedy adaptations. Romantic comedy blockbusters based on literature for women became increasingly popular. Both chick lit novels and romantic comedies are entertainment texts. Simon Frith argues that entertainment texts are judged on two levels: ‘One rests on an aesthetic judgement: entertainment (fun, of the moment, trivial) is being contrasted to art (serious, transcendent, profound). The other on a political judgement: entertainment (insignificant, escapist) is being contrasted with

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<sup>1</sup> Andreas Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other,” in *Studies in Entertainment. Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), p.196.

<sup>2</sup> Beryl Bainbridge quoted in John Ezard, “Bainbridge tilts at ‘chick lit’ cult: Novelist says Bridget Jones genre is just a lot of froth,” *The Guardian*, August 24, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Doris Lessing quoted in Ezard, “Bainbridge tilts at ‘chick lit’ cult.”

<sup>4</sup> Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (London: Picador, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (London: Picador, 1999).



news, with reality, with truth.’<sup>6</sup> On both levels entertainment texts are found wanting and dismissed as irrelevant. Richard Dyer notes that it ‘... is the capacity of entertainment to present either complex or unpleasant feelings ... in a way that makes them seem uncomplicated, direct and vivid, not ‘qualified’ or ‘ambiguous’ as day-to-day life makes them, and without intimations of self-deception and pretence.’<sup>7</sup>

As Bainbridge’s and Lessing’s comments have shown, entertainment texts, be it literature or film, are frequently dismissed for their simplicity when representing complex issues. It is assumed that ‘... entertainment is always *only* entertainment.’<sup>8</sup> This thesis seeks to question this assumption by analysing contemporary popular literature and its adaptations. It analyses how *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and its adaptation revived a well-known plot structure and a stereotypical female character and introduced themes and a narrative style that influenced literature for women and its romantic comedy adaptations. Moreover, popular culture texts can only simplify issues by drawing on already existing discourses and genre conventions and the thesis examines how the depiction of gender in the texts discussed here is influenced by dominant discourses and ideologies, or in other words, what people consider normal.

## Representation

Popular culture texts represent the world and people in it. The term representation suggests ‘... a process whereby a pre-existing given, whether it be a physical object or philosophical abstraction, is translated so that it can be comprehended and experienced by a recipient, an observer, an audience.’<sup>9</sup> However, a culture is about ‘shared meanings,’ which are always constructed.<sup>10</sup> They are created by people through interpretation and representation: ‘The meaning is *not* in the object or person or thing, nor is it *in* the world. It is we who fix the meaning so firmly that, after a while, it comes to seem natural and inevitable. The meaning is *constructed* by

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<sup>6</sup> Simon Frith, “Entertainment,” in *Mass Media and Society. Second Edition*, ed. James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (London: Arnold, 1997), p.160.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Dyer, *Only Entertainment* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p.23.

<sup>8</sup> Frith, “Entertainment,” p.160, emphasis in original.

<sup>9</sup> Christine Geraghty, “Representation and Popular Culture,” in *Mass Media and Society. Second Edition*, ed. James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (London: Arnold, 1997), p.265.

<sup>10</sup> Stuart Hall, “Introduction,” in *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 2003), p.1.

*the system of representation*. It is constructed and fixed by the *code*, which sets up the correlation between our conceptual system and our language system....<sup>11</sup> This is an ongoing process and meanings are always changing over time, so that ‘... codes operate more like social conventions than like fixed laws or unbreakable rules.’<sup>12</sup> Since signs and codes are shared within a culture, they can be easily read by anyone: ‘... the sum of these stock connotations equals a culture’s ideology, its elaborate lexicon of representation.’<sup>13</sup> Popular culture texts depend on these codes and conventions for their representations.<sup>14</sup>

Christine Gledhill points out that ‘... media forms and representations constitute major sites for conflict and negotiation a central goal of which is the definition of what is to be taken as ‘real’, and the struggle to name and win support for certain kinds of cultural value and identity over others.’<sup>15</sup> It is a struggle about what counts as culturally significant and Gledhill argues that this struggle is always gendered.<sup>16</sup> Andreas Huyssen explains that mass culture has been gendered female since the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Using the example of Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*,<sup>18</sup> Huyssen illustrates that the woman in nineteenth century literature is positioned as a reader of inferior, meaning subjective and emotional, literature that focuses on domestic narratives. In contrast, the man is exemplified in the figure of the author of authentic, objective and ironic literature.<sup>19</sup> Huyssen argues that popular texts are persistently devalued by being gendered as feminine.<sup>20</sup> He ends his essay on a positive note, convinced that the visible and public presence of women artists and as producers of mass culture has led to changes that made the gendering of popular culture texts obsolete.<sup>21</sup> However, the quotes by Bainbridge and Lessing at the beginning of this

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.21, emphasis in original.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.64.

<sup>13</sup> Robert B. Ray, “The Field of “Literature and Film”,” in *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2000), p.41.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.39.

<sup>15</sup> Christine Gledhill, “Genre and Gender: The Case of Soap Opera,” in *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 2003), p.348.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.349.

<sup>17</sup> Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other,” p.191.

<sup>18</sup> Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*. Trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Penguin, 2003 [1857]).

<sup>19</sup> Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other,” p.190.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.196.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.205.

introduction illustrate that popular literature written by and for women is still dismissed.

By analysing popular culture genres produced for predominantly female consumers, this thesis seeks to counteract this bias and show that ‘... popular culture provides images and figures which its audiences can identify with and emulate. It thus possesses important socializing and enculturating effects via its role models, gender models, and variety of subject positions which valorize certain forms of behaviour and style while denigrating and villainizing other types.’<sup>22</sup> Gender in particular is constructed through representations and is as a result ‘... never given but varies according to specific cultural and historical settings, and ... its meaning is subject to ongoing discursive struggle and negotiation....’<sup>23</sup> Thus, the thesis seeks to contribute to adaptation studies, popular culture studies and feminist media studies by analysing popular literary and film genres that are frequently dismissed as mere entertainment. The chosen texts were published and released over the time span of fifteen years, beginning with *Bridget Jones Diary* by Helen Fielding published in 1996 and ending with the adaptation *I don’t know how she does it* (Douglas McGrath) released in 2011. The thesis explores why *Bridget Jones’s Diary* became such a success that themes, characters, plot structures and narrative style introduced and revived in the novel and its adaptation influenced subsequent literature and adaptations aimed at predominantly female readers and viewers. It analyses how the books and films discussed in this thesis adapt and expand on topics and rely on characters and narrative structures introduced in Fielding’s novel. Eight of the ten books chosen are chick lit novels, one is a self-help book and one is a memoir. The adaptations are all romantic comedies. By including a self-help book and a memoir in the analysis, the thesis reveals that elements present in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* influenced non-fiction books and thus crossed genre boundaries. By also taking the wider context into account, the thesis argues that these texts are part of wider dominant discourses and intertextual influences, which shape the mediation of gender roles.

Chick lit as a genre has generated a lot of academic interest over the last fifteen years. It has been discussed, for instance, as a continuation of other genres. Kerstin

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<sup>22</sup> Douglas Kellner, “Popular Culture and the Construction of Postmodern Identities,” in *Modernity and Identity*, ed. Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p.150.

<sup>23</sup> Liesbet van Zoonen, “Feminist Perspectives on the Media,” in *Mass Media and Society. Second Edition*, ed. James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (London: Arnold, 1997), p.43.

Fest focuses on the figure of the working woman and compares the contemporary incarnation in chick lit novels with working women in nineteenth century novels, concluding that professional success is linked to a loss of femininity and thus depicted as a threat to the heroine in both kinds of novels.<sup>24</sup> Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff argue that chick lit novels combine feminism and femininity through a grammar of individualism. By comparing the genre to romance novels, they note that the female protagonists are now presented as active desiring sexual subjects.<sup>25</sup> Juliette Wells stresses that the main aim of chick lit is entertainment. As such, the novels are not multi-layered enough to allow divergent interpretations. Wells concludes that chick lit is not literature and should not be judged as such.<sup>26</sup>

Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young celebrate chick lit as contemporary women's literature. They argue that it has a lot of potential and therefore needs to be studied.<sup>27</sup> The various contributions to their anthology *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction* examine different aspects and subgenres of the genre. Elizabeth Hale, for instance, argues that nineteenth century literature about governesses is the literary predecessor of chick lit about nannies.<sup>28</sup> A. Rochelle Mabry compares the genre with previous women's writing and concludes that it is just as conservative but has potential because it can include different experiences in women's lives.<sup>29</sup> Sushana Kasbekar also argues that chick lit should not be dismissed as mere entertainment because it reveals challenges women face in their daily lives and shows them in all their

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<sup>24</sup> Kerstin Fest, "Angels in the House or Girl Power: Working Women in Nineteenth-Century Novels and Contemporary Chick Lit," *Women's Studies: An inter-disciplinary journal* 38:1 (2008): p.45.

<sup>25</sup> Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff. "Rewriting the romance: new femininities in chick lit?," *Feminist Media Studies* 6.4 (2006): p.499.

<sup>26</sup> Juliette Wells, "Mothers of Chick Lit? Women Writers, Readers, and Literary History," in *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, ed. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p.66.

<sup>27</sup> Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young, ed. *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p.13; see also Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young, "Chicks, Girls and Choice: Redefining Feminism," *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue* 6 (2006): p.93.

<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Hale, "Long-Suffering Professional Females: The Case of Nanny Lit," in *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, ed. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p.104.

<sup>29</sup> A. Rochelle Mabry, "About a Girl: Female Subjectivity and Sexuality in Contemporary 'Chick' Culture," in *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, ed. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p.205.

complexities. She thinks that the genre will survive because it offers readers positive images of women.<sup>30</sup>

The international success of the genre has resulted in an examination of chick lit novels as a global phenomenon. Jenny Mochtar, for instance, compares British with Indonesian chick lit novels, concluding that the latter were influenced by translations of British chick lit but remain culturally specific. While they also focus on the notion of beauty as defined in Western cultures, it is understood as God given.<sup>31</sup> Pamela Butler and Jigna Desai highlight in their analysis of South Asian American chick lit that these novels produce transnational racialized feminine subjects embedded in neoliberalism, heteronormativity and racism. They argue that chick lit can forward critical race and transnational feminist critique.<sup>32</sup>

Unlike chick lit, the romantic comedy has a long history and has been the focus of an abundance of academic research.<sup>33</sup> The adaptations analysed in this thesis are all romantic comedies released between 2001 and 2011. These contemporary romantic comedies have also received academic attention, either as part of larger trends or by focusing on subcategories. The term chick flick is frequently used to refer to these films. Ferris and Young employ it to express the affinity between contemporary romantic comedies and chick lit novels. They argue that they are part of a chick culture, which they define as a growing media presence of women and an increased interest in women's lives.<sup>34</sup> They explain that the use of the term chick flick is typical

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<sup>30</sup> Sushana Kasbekar, "From Jane Austen to Sophie Kinsella. Chick Lit Communication Today," *The 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Language and Communication: Current Issues and Future Directions in Media, Communication and Language*, 2012, p.175.

<sup>31</sup> Jenny Mochtar, "Beautiful Body and Femininity in Five British and Indonesian Chick Lit," accessed February 02, 2014, <http://puslit2.petra.ac.id/eportfolio/artefact/file/download.php?file=144535&view=11604>.

<sup>32</sup> Pamela Butler and Jigna Desai, "Manolos, Marriage, and Mantras. Chick-Lit Criticism and Transnational Feminism," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 8:2 (2008): p.2 and p.27.

<sup>33</sup> See for example Peter William Evans and Celestino Deleyto, ed. *Terms of Endearment. Hollywood Romantic Comedy of the 1980s and 1990s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998); Wes Gehring, *Romantic vs. Screwball Comedy. Charting the Difference* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2002); Frank Krutnik, "The Faint Aroma of Performing Seals: The "Nervous" Romance and the Comedy of the Sexes," *The Velvet Light Trap* 26 (1990): pp.57-72; Steve Neale, "The Big romance or Something Wild?: romantic comedy today." *Screen* 33:3 (1992): pp.284-299.

<sup>34</sup> Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young, "Introduction. Chick flicks and chick culture," in *Chick Flicks. Contemporary women at the movies*, ed. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young (New York: Routledge, 2008), p.2.

for third-wave feminism because it is an example for how terms that were considered unacceptable by previous generations are now reclaimed.<sup>35</sup>

While Ferris and Young celebrate the potential they see in chick flicks, Angela McRobbie argues that the films need to be analysed because they construct a new gender regime by celebrating freedom and choice but suggest specific life choices for women that often mean a return to traditional gender roles.<sup>36</sup> Diane Negra also analyses chick flicks and concludes that the films strongly suggest women should downsize their ambitions or leave the workplace altogether because the female protagonists realise that a career is meaningless unless it is accompanied by having a family.<sup>37</sup>

Most of the films discussed in this thesis have also been analysed individually in previous research. Shelley Cobb, for example, analyses *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Sharon Maguire, 2001) as an adaptation and concludes that Bridget exists as a postfeminist icon outside of the novels.<sup>38</sup> With the exception of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, however, none of the films discussed in this thesis have been analysed as *adaptations*. Danielle Todd, for instance, merely briefly compares the film *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (P.J. Hogan, 2009) to the novel in order to make her point. She concludes that it does not criticise consumer culture because the protagonist does not have to take responsibility for her actions.<sup>39</sup> *The Devil Wears Prada* (David Frankel, 2006) has been analysed as a fashion film<sup>40</sup> or a womance, meaning a film that foregrounds the relationships and conflicts between women in the film.<sup>41</sup>

While McRobbie and Negra use the term chick flick as a substitute for romantic comedy, Ferris and Young define chick flicks ‘... in the broadest sense, ...

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>36</sup> Angela McRobbie, “Postfeminism and Popular Culture. Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime,” in *Interrogating Postfeminism*, ed. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), p.38.

<sup>37</sup> Diane Negra, *What a Girl Wants? Fantasizing the reclamation of self in postfeminism* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.18.

<sup>38</sup> Shelley Cobb, “Adaptable Bridget. Generic Intertextuality and Postfeminism in *Bridget Jones's Diary*,” in *Authorship in Film Adaptation*, ed. Jack Boozer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), p.283.

<sup>39</sup> Danielle Todd, “The Shopaholic, Consumer Culture, and Identity,” *HOHONU* 10 (2012): pp.55-58.

<sup>40</sup> See for example Hilary Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema: Girly Films, Chick Flicks, and Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp.134-146.

<sup>41</sup> Alison Winch, *Girlfriends and Postfeminist Sisterhood* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.90 and pp.106-107.

as films that give women pleasure.<sup>42</sup> Samantha Cook argues that chick flicks combine aspects of the woman's film with melodrama and focus on emotions and suffering.<sup>43</sup> Romantic comedies, on the other hand, are directed at male and female audiences. While chick flicks can be romantic comedies, romantic comedies are not necessarily chick flicks.<sup>44</sup> Since the term chick flick has differing and inconclusive definitions, the term romantic comedy will be used throughout the thesis. All of the adaptations discussed here include romantic relationships and some of the films are explicitly aimed at a male and female audience, making the more inclusive term romantic comedy more suitable.

This brief and by no means exhaustive overview over previous research has shown that chick lit and contemporary romantic comedies are of current interest in academia. However, while the individual books and films discussed in the following chapters have received previous attention, they have never been analysed as a group of bestselling adapted texts and their adaptations. By grouping the texts together, this thesis explores the influence of *Bridget Jones's Diary* and its adaptation on books published for a predominantly female audience and their romantic comedy adaptations. It examines how these popular texts adapt and expand on topics introduced in Fielding's novel and its adaptation and thus reflect dominant discourses in their depiction of gender roles. It is therefore situated in the field of adaptation studies and is part of the contemporary interest in adaptations *as* adaptations.<sup>45</sup>

## Adaptation

Kathleen Murray argues that there is no general theory of adaptation. Rather, every theorist uses their own unique approach which is tailored to the specific texts they analyse.<sup>46</sup> There are two major approaches in adaptation studies: The fidelity approach and the intertextuality approach. The fidelity approach focuses on the links

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<sup>42</sup> Ferriss and Young, "Introduction. Chick flicks and chick culture," p.17.

<sup>43</sup> Samantha Cook, *The Rough Guide to Chick Flicks* (London: Rough Guides, 2006), p.vi.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>45</sup> Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, *Screen Adaptation. Impure Cinema* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.15.

<sup>46</sup> Kathleen Murray, "To Have and Have Not. An Adaptive System," in *True to the Spirit. Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, ed. Colin MacCabe et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.93.

between the adapted text and the adaptation. The first adaptation study by George Bluestone originally published in 1957 falls into this category because Bluestone measured the success of a film by its closeness to the novel. He notably compared the screenplay of the film to the novel and thus reduced it to its written form, showing a clear bias towards the written word over the visual medium film.<sup>47</sup> While later adaptation studies analysed film as a visual medium, they often included a comparison that revealed the underlying biased assumption that literature is high culture while film is considered a culturally inferior mass product. This bias has been persistent. Dudley Andrew, for instance, argues that films appropriate the meaning of a novel into the predominant ideology of their time. Instead of comparing films to the 'original', he argues that one should consider them acts of discourse and take their historical context into account.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, he refers to the literary text as 'the original', and argues that it has a transcendental relationship with any film it ever inspired, thus implying a hierarchy between the texts.<sup>49</sup>

In the edited collection *True to the Spirit* Colin MacCabe argues that adaptation is not a copy or a substitution of a literary text but rather the production of a new dimension. As a result, film and novel combined produce an ideal construct which is greater than the sum of its parts.<sup>50</sup> The contributions to the anthology are an attempt to re-define fidelity and read adaptations in a way that the novel and film illuminate each other.<sup>51</sup> Dudley Andrew reintroduces fidelity by defining it as the lifeline that links adaptations to their source texts and declares that it is a creative transformation because it adds a new dimension to the film adaptation. As this thesis seeks to explore the influence of discourses across media and genre boundaries, the fidelity approach and its focus on the link between two texts is unsuitable. In addition, the question of

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<sup>47</sup> George Bluestone, *Novels into Film* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp.viii-ix. Ella Shohat explains that prejudices towards cinema can be traced back to biblical times and are based on a preference of the holiness of words over the image. She argues that the idea that the image is inferior and almost sacrilegious is still the underlying reason for prejudices about visual media. See Ella Shohat, "Sacred Word, Profane Image. Theologies of Adaptation," in *A Companion to Literature and Film*, ed. Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp.23-24.

<sup>48</sup> Dudley Andrew, "Adaptation," in *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p.37.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>50</sup> Colin MacCabe, "Introduction. Bazinian Adaptation: *The Butcher Boy* as Example," in *True to the Spirit. Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, ed. Colin MacCabe et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.7.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.



fidelity is more pertinent for adaptations of classic literature into film.<sup>52</sup> By choosing equally dismissed popular literary and film genres for this study, fidelity discussions become obsolete.<sup>53</sup>

The second dominant approach in adaptation studies is the intertextual approach. Intertextuality is a concept first introduced by Roland Barthes in 1977<sup>54</sup> and then further developed in the 1980s by Julia Kristeva, who was strongly influenced by the writings of Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin. Intertextuality is based on the notion that there is no distinguishable origin or source text because all texts are linked with each other: 'The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused, with some origin of the text: to try to find the 'sources', the 'influences' of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*: they are quotations without inverted commas.'<sup>55</sup> According to Bakhtin, texts are situated in history and society and every text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations so that every text becomes the absorption and transformation of another.<sup>56</sup> Based on this idea, Kristeva defines intertextuality as the '...transposition of one (or several) sign-system(s) into another; ... If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality), one then understands that its 'place' of enunciation and its denoted 'object' are never single, complete and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated.'<sup>57</sup> The meaning of a book or a film is thus never fixed but depends on its interplay with other texts.

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<sup>52</sup> Imelda Whelehan and Deborah Cartmell, "Introduction – Pulping Fictions," in *Pulping Fictions: Consuming Culture Across the Literature/Media Divide*, edited by Deborah Cartmell, I.Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye and Imelda Whelehan (London and Chicago: Pluto Press, 1996), p.2 and Derek Paget, "Speaking out: The transformations of *Trainspotting*," in *Adaptations. From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, ed. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p.131.

<sup>53</sup> Chapter 2, for instance, explores how negative reviews of the adapted texts led to changes in the adaptations, deliberately distancing the films from the novels.

<sup>54</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.160.

<sup>56</sup> Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

<sup>57</sup> Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.111. Gerard Genette describes the same concept by using the image of the palimpsest: He considers every text to be like the writing on an old used parchment on which the texts written before always shine through the new text. See Gerard Genette, *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997 [1982]), pp.398-399.

Brian McFarlane also argues that fidelity discussions are unproductive because they are based on the wrong assumption that a book has only one meaning which can then be compared to the film. Instead, he prefers to treat the source novel as just one influence on the film. If texts are always influenced by other texts then there is no original and the adaptation becomes a text in its own right.<sup>58</sup> Robert Stam explains that fidelity to a book is not just impossible for a film but more importantly it is undesirable because films are a multitrack medium.<sup>59</sup> For Stam the adaptation of a book is one possible reading of a novel and texts form an intersection of textual surfaces, meaning they are all interlinked with each other, a concept he calls intertextual dialogism and defines as the entire matrix of communicative utterances of a culture within which every text is situated. As a result, there is no point of origin and texts are part of an endless cycle of recycling, transformation and transmutation.<sup>60</sup>

For Julie Sanders adaptations and appropriations are enjoyable because of their link to the 'source text' or 'original': '... it is the very endurance and survival of the source text that enables the ongoing process of juxtaposed readings that are crucial to the cultural operations of adaptation, and the ongoing experiences of pleasure for the reader or spectator in tracing the intertextual relationships.'<sup>61</sup> She considers the combination of familiar aspects and expectations with surprising changes the main appeal of adaptations and appropriations.<sup>62</sup> Thus, infidelity is essential to the process<sup>63</sup> and adaptation studies should therefore not be about judging adaptations for their fidelity to the adapted text, '... but about analysing process, ideology, and methodology.'<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Brian McFarlane, *Novel into Film. An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.21.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Stam, "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation," in *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), p.56.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64. Stam further develops this idea by drawing on the biological definition of the term adaptation. He argues that an adaptation is the mutation of a novel into another form in order to survive in culture. See Robert Stam, "Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation," in *Literature and Film. A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, ed. Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p.3.

<sup>61</sup> Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p.25.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

According to Linda Hutcheon, the process of adaptation is also a ‘... repetition, but repetition without replication.’<sup>65</sup> Adaptations have to include change so that questions of fidelity become obsolete and adaptations are not inferior texts. Instead, ‘... an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary.’<sup>66</sup> Hutcheon’s terminology is particularly useful because it expresses this lack of hierarchy: She uses the term ‘adapted text’ instead of the rather evaluating ‘source text’ or ‘original’ for the literary text.<sup>67</sup> This thesis has an interdisciplinary approach, treating the books and films analysed here as texts in their own right. In order to stress this non-hierarchical approach, Hutcheon’s terminology will be used throughout the thesis and the books will be referred to as adapted texts.

Genre conventions and previous adaptations are a further very important intertextual influence on adaptations. Sarah Cardwell proposes to consider adaptations as the gradual development of a meta-text which is influenced by its source text as well as all other previous adaptations.<sup>68</sup> She explores how British adaptations of classic novels contribute to the genre of classic-novel adaptations and by establishing genre conventions and certain expectations they influenced subsequent adaptations.<sup>69</sup> Christine Geraghty argues that by working with or against genre conventions, adaptations shape and transform generic frameworks.<sup>70</sup> She also points out that references to a genre greatly influence the production process of an adaptation as well as its reception<sup>71</sup> and that changes during the adaptation process are necessary so that the films fit into well-established patterns of iconography and narrative.<sup>72</sup> One of the aims of this thesis is to explore how genre conventions influence the representation of gender in the adapted texts and the adaptations. It argues that these conventions cross media and genre boundaries and that the adapted texts and adaptations heavily rely on the readers’ and viewers’ familiarity with popular genre conventions.

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<sup>65</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), p.7.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xiii.

<sup>68</sup> Sarah Cardwell, *Adaptation revisited. Television and the classic novel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p.25.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.77.

<sup>70</sup> Christine Geraghty, *Now a Major Motion Picture. Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), p.8.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p.196.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p.104.

Taking the importance of genre and intertextuality into account, this thesis focuses particularly on Francesco Casetti's notion that '... both film and literature can also be considered as *sites of production and circulation of discourses*; that is, as symbolic constructions that refer to a cluster of meanings that a society considers possible (thinkable) or feasible (legitimate).'<sup>73</sup> Texts are the symbolic productions that refer to meanings in a society in order to express issues and ideas in it. For Casetti adaptation is not a re-writing or a re-reading of a text but rather '... the *reappearance, in another discursive field, of an element (a plot, a theme, a character, etc.) that has previously appeared elsewhere*.'<sup>74</sup> Consequentially, an analysis needs to explore links between utterances in order to expose discursive groups and give an account of a network of discourses. Since adaptation is thus a re-contextualization, fidelity becomes irrelevant and the concept of faithfulness is not so much a question of common elements the texts share but rather if the texts re-propose homologous or similar communicative situations.<sup>75</sup> Thus, every adaptation is a displacement in time and space and as a result it is necessary to analyse the conditions and modes of existence of the text. In other words, an analysis has to take overlapping discourses and the contexts of adapted texts and adaptations into account.<sup>76</sup> Drawing on Casetti, this thesis examines the adapted texts and adaptations as sites on which '... every society experiments with values, meanings, and systems of relations – in other words, what it deems visible, thinkable, shareable.'<sup>77</sup> It explores how the books and films analysed here are influenced by and in turn contribute to dominant discourses in society and how these discourses influence the depiction of gender roles.

The term discourse is a linguistic term. Discourse analysis is based on the concept that language is constructive, meaning discourse is built with already existing building blocks selected from a number of different possibilities and constructs reality so that the world is a mediated construct: '... in a very real sense, texts of various kinds

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<sup>73</sup> Francesco Casetti, "Adaptation and Mis-adaptations. Film, Literature, and Social Discourse," in *A Companion to Literature and Film*, ed. Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p.82, emphasis in original.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., emphasis in original.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.86.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp.88-89; see also for example Andrew, "Adaptation," p.37; Will Brooker, "Batman. One Life, many faces," in *Adaptations. From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, ed. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p.197. Geraghty, *Now a Major Motion Picture*, p.4; Hutcheon, *Theory of Adaptation*, p.142; Stam, "Beyond Fidelity," p.75; Stam, "Introduction," p.3 and p.41.

<sup>77</sup> Casetti, "Adaptation and Mis-adaptations," p.90.

construct our world.’<sup>78</sup> At the same time, discourses determine the meaning of a text by connecting it with other texts:<sup>79</sup> ‘The book is not simply the object that one holds in one’s hands; and it cannot remain within the little parallelepiped that contains it: its unity is variable and relative. As soon as one questions that unity, it loses its self-evidence; it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse.’<sup>80</sup> Michel Foucault argues that the meaning of a book is determined by the discourses it is part of, a notion that applies to films as well. Thus, texts become meaningful through their connections with other text and by drawing on extra-textual discourses.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, discourses are ‘... groups of related narratives in terms of which men and women have projected the “natural” course of their lives. Discourses are not simple sets of prescriptions; rather than dictating particular beliefs or behaviors, they provide sets of terms in which differing thoughts might be formulated. Discourses produce many variations but at the same time exclude others entirely.’<sup>82</sup> As a result, discourses produce social reality by giving meaning to social interactions.<sup>83</sup> By analysing the representation of gender in popular culture texts, this thesis aims to explore dominant discourses, how they influence these representations and thus gain an insight into contemporary notions about gender.

Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan point out that adaptation is at the margin of literature and film studies but should be inclusive.<sup>84</sup> The thesis seeks to offer an interdisciplinary inclusive study by analysing both the adapted texts and the adaptations as texts in their own right. Using this approach allows an examination of how themes, plot structures and characters introduced in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* are adapted and extended in subsequent books and their adaptations. The thesis explores how the texts are influenced by dominant discourses across genre and media boundaries, illustrating that the adaptation process is not limited to a change in

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<sup>78</sup> Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p.58.

<sup>79</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2011 [1969]), pp.25-26.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>81</sup> Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy, *Discourse Analysis. Investigating Processes of Social Construction* (Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002), p.4.

<sup>82</sup> David R. Shumway, *Modern Love. Romance, Intimacy, and the Marriage Crisis* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2003), p.3.

<sup>83</sup> Phillips and Hardy, *Discourse Analysis*, p.3; see also Gill, *Gender and the Media*, p.59.

<sup>84</sup> Cartmell and Whelehan, *Screen Adaptation*, p.128.

medium. Instead, this thesis argues that the texts analysed here are interconnected with each other by their common themes and how they develop and adapt these themes is in turn shaped by dominant discourses. Thus, popular texts are strongly influenced by the time and the dominant ideologies they are created in.<sup>85</sup> The purpose of this thesis is to address such questions as: How do the texts adapt and expand on elements introduced in *Bridget Jones's Diary* and its adaptation? How do they reflect, contest and negotiate contemporary dominant discourses and how do these discourses influence the mediation of gender in the books and films? How does the context, such as the reception of the adapted texts and the production context of the adaptations, influence changes made during the adaptation process? In order to understand the discourses that influenced the texts analysed in this thesis it is necessary to first define the broader ideological context in which they are situated.

## Contexts

There is a consensus in contemporary adaptation studies that adapted texts and adaptations are formed by their context which therefore has to be taken into account in an analysis.<sup>86</sup> The texts analysed in this thesis are chick lit novels, a self-help book, a memoir and romantic comedies. These genres are generally understood to be aimed at predominantly female consumers and the focus of the thesis is on how the texts mediate dominant discourses about gender roles. Therefore, the spread of neoliberal concepts, changes in feminist thought and the increasing importance of postfeminism form the wider context for these texts. The following section gives a brief overview of these highly contested terms and how they are employed to make sense of contemporary representations of gender, particularly women.

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<sup>85</sup> Imelda Whelehan, "Adaptations. The contemporary Dilemmas," in *Adaptations. From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, ed. Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p.12.

<sup>86</sup> See for example Andrew, "Adaptation," p.37; Brooker, "Batman. One Life, many faces," p.197; Casetti, "Adaptations and Mis-adaptations," p.83; Geraghty, *Now a Major Motion Picture*, p.4; Hutcheon, *Theory of Adaptation*, p.142; Stam, "Beyond Fidelity," p.75; Stam, "Introduction," p.3 and p.41.

The term neoliberalism originally referred to an economic model that became popular in the US and Great Britain during the 1980s.<sup>87</sup> It is ‘... a mode of political and economic rationality characterized by privatization, deregulation and a rolling back and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision...’<sup>88</sup> and is based on entrepreneurial values such as competitiveness, self-interest and decentralization.<sup>89</sup> Neoliberal governments prioritise profit and an unregulated market over the social good which has resulted in privatisation and the decentralisation of state power.<sup>90</sup> Neoliberalism has spread as a mode of thinking from the economy to the individual and has thus become an ideology: ‘Ideologies are systems of widely shared ideas and patterned beliefs that are accepted as truth by significant groups in society.’<sup>91</sup> The rise of neoliberalism as an ideology is linked to changes in the concept of the individual.

Postmodernity, or to use Zygmunt Bauman’s term ‘liquid modernity,’ is characterised by a state of constant change.<sup>92</sup> The individual does not have prescribed roles anymore and identity is ‘... increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions.’<sup>93</sup> Even human relationships remain superficial and are subject to constant change.<sup>94</sup> As a result, identity has to be chosen and constructed.<sup>95</sup> Identity creation has become a political project and the individual is more important than society and the collective good.<sup>96</sup> In a neoliberalist society the individual is supposed to be an entrepreneurial actor who acts rationally, calculating and self-regulating without the need for state control.<sup>97</sup> The fixed predefined image of

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<sup>87</sup> Manfred B. Steger and Ravi K. Roy, *Neoliberalism: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p.11.

<sup>88</sup> Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, “Introduction,” in *New Femininities. Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, ed. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.5.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12; see also Lisa Duggan, *The twilight of equality?: Neoliberalism, cultural politics, and the attack on democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), p.11.

<sup>90</sup> Steger and Roy, *Neoliberalism*, p. 11.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love. On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2003), pp.viii-xii.

<sup>93</sup> Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity?’” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage publications, 1996), p.4.

<sup>94</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Love*, pp.viii-xii.

<sup>95</sup> Kellner, “Popular Culture,” p.153.

<sup>96</sup> Winch, *Girlfriends and Postfeminist Sisterhoods*, p.2.

<sup>97</sup> Rosalind Gill and Jane Arthurs, “Editors’ Introduction: New Femininities?” *Feminist Media Studies* 6:4 (2006): p.445 and Rosalind Gill, “Culture and Subjectivity in Neoliberal and

an individual has thus been replaced by an ethic of individual self-fulfilment.<sup>98</sup> Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim note that it is not an entirely positive concept: ‘Individualization is a compulsion, albeit a paradoxical one, to create, to stage manage, not only one’s own biography but the bonds and networks surrounding it and to do this amid changing preferences and at successive stages of life, while constantly adapting to the conditions of the labour market, the education system, the welfare state and so on.’<sup>99</sup> The rise of neoliberal ideology and the changes in the perception of the individual have had gendered consequences and are mirrored in changes in feminist thought.

Second wave feminism was a collective movement trying to achieve political and economic changes for women through activism.<sup>100</sup> Since the 1980s however, the priorities of feminists have slowly changed. Rosalind Delmar, for instance, challenges the idea that there are obvious definitions of feminism and suggests we think of a plurality of feminisms instead. She notes that the 1970s movement broke apart because it was based on the assumption that all women shared the same experiences and reacted to them in the same way.<sup>101</sup> Shelagh Young also notes that second wave feminism alienated numerous women by creating alternative frameworks to organize female subjectivity. These frameworks suppressed women who enjoyed displaying and living out their femininity so that feminism mimicked patriarchal structures by judging women by their appearance.<sup>102</sup> Young suggests we instead embrace the postmodern feminist belief in an unstable self as a work in progress because it allows room for different kinds of feminisms.<sup>103</sup> Rita Felski points out that these changes in feminist thinking are influenced by postmodern thought which exposed the idea of a

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Postfeminist Times,” *Subjectivity: International Journal of Critical Psychology* 25:1 (2008): p.443.

<sup>98</sup> Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization. Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), pp.22-23.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4; see also Kellner, “Popular Culture,” p.158.

<sup>100</sup> See for example Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (New York: Harper Collins, 1970) and Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin, 1963), p.323 and pp.327-330.

<sup>101</sup> Rosalind Delmar, “What is Feminism?” in *What is Feminism?*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp.9-11; see also Rita Felski, *Doing Time. Feminist theory and postmodern culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000), p.182.

<sup>102</sup> Shelagh Young, “Feminism and the Politics of Power. Whose Gaze is it anyway?” in *The Female Gaze. Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*, ed. Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment (London: Women’s Press, 1988), p.183.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p.185.



single common femaleness as a metaphysical illusion produced by a phallogocentric culture.<sup>104</sup>

Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake declare the focus on multiplicity and diversity the central aspect of third-wave feminism. They explain that its aim is to develop modes of thinking that come to terms with multiple and constantly shifting modes of oppression. Thus, third-wave feminism is lived messiness because feminists have to live in a constant tension between striving for individual success and identities formed in consumer culture, on the one hand, and subordinating the individual to the cause and being informed by politics that reject consumer culture, on the other hand.<sup>105</sup> According to Heywood and Drake, third-wave feminists have despite their differences in opinion a common ground, namely the struggle to negotiate individualism's powerful seductions and betrayals.<sup>106</sup> In their article in the same anthology, Heywood and Drake point out that third-wave feminism embraces difference and multiple voices with the aim to make the political personal again by living their political convictions.<sup>107</sup>

Following neoliberalist logic, third-wave feminists aim at advancing politics through self-definition and by offering women different femininities they can embody. The plurality of different femininities supposedly breaks open oppressive ideas about gender.<sup>108</sup> Shelley Budgeon criticises, however, that this does not work because there are no feminist femininities. She points out that by focussing on the individual, third-wave feminism merely reduces politics to the right of self-expression.<sup>109</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser also criticises that the strong focus on identity and the rhetoric of choice mean that representations of individual success and media presence are understood as a

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<sup>104</sup> Felski, *Doing Time*, p.182.

<sup>105</sup> Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, "Introduction," in *Third Wave Agenda. Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*, ed. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p.8.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11,

<sup>107</sup> Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, "We Learn America like a Script: Activism in the Third Wave; or, Enough Phantoms of Nothing," in *Third Wave Agenda. Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*, ed. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p.52.

<sup>108</sup> Shelley Budgeon, "The Contradiction of Successful Femininity: Third-wave Feminism, Postfeminism and 'New' Femininities?," in *New Femininities. Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, ed. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.282-283.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p.287.

proof for social change.<sup>110</sup> Empowerment is defined as media visibility and market demographic. It can supposedly be achieved by identifying with empowered characters in the media and through shared consumption.<sup>111</sup>

The term postfeminism is also used to describe these concepts. It was coined by the media in the 1980s who identified it as a new movement.<sup>112</sup> One definition understands the term as the contemporary form of feminism. For Ann Brooks, for instance, postfeminism is the critical engagement with earlier feminist political and theoretical concepts and strategies.<sup>113</sup> She argues that it is the result of postmodernism opening up feminism to the idea of difference and its focus on the possibility of change.<sup>114</sup> Ann Braithwaite suggests that postfeminism is feminism today and consists of a renewed focus on seemingly traditional definitions of femininity, an emphasis on individual lifestyle choices and personal pleasure provided by consumer culture. It is a new way to talk about changes in feminist thinking towards multiplicity and plurality.<sup>115</sup> Fien Adriaens and Sofie von Bauwel explain that ‘Postfeminism is not defined in collective terms, but in individual ones. Individual rights are valued higher than those of community.’<sup>116</sup> They understand postfeminism as an adjustment to actual social contexts and a new form of empowerment because it enables women to be simultaneously feminine, attractive and a feminist.<sup>117</sup> Hilary Radner argues that postfeminist culture developed from what she refers to as neo-feminism. She explains that neo-feminism developed along-side second wave feminism and catered to the needs of women who embraced their femininity. She defines neo-feminism as a set of practices and discourses that focus on individual women acting on their own and

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<sup>110</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, “‘What’s Your Flava? Race and Postfeminism in Media Culture,” in *Interrogating Postfeminism*, ed. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), p.212.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p.216.

<sup>112</sup> Sarah Gamble, “Postfeminism,” in *The Icon Critical Dictionary of Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. Sarah Gamble (Cambridge: Icon Books Ltd., 1999), p.44; see also Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, *Interrogating Postfeminism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 19; Elaine J. Hall and Marnie Salupo Rodriguez, “The Myth of Postfeminism,” *Gender and Society* 17:6 (2003): p.879.

<sup>113</sup> Ann Brooks, *Postfeminisms. Feminism, cultural theory and cultural forms* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p.4.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.16-18.

<sup>115</sup> Ann Braithwaite, “The Personal, the Political, Third-Wave and Postfeminisms,” *Feminist Theory* 3:3 (2002): pp.341-342.

<sup>116</sup> Fien Adriaens and Sofie von Bauwel, “Sex and the City: A Postfeminist Point of View? Or How Popular Culture Functions as a Channel for Feminist Discourse,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 44:1 (2011): p.12.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

whose fulfilment is independent from what happens to other women. Identity is understood as a process of becoming and selves are subjects to multiple and on-going processes of revision, reform and choices.<sup>118</sup>

For others postfeminism is anti-feminist. L.S. Kim defines postfeminism as a ‘cultural material backlash’.<sup>119</sup> Susan Faludi defined ‘backlash’ as an acute animosity towards women fighting for their rights.<sup>120</sup> Part of the backlash is a focus on private matters and old myths about women are marketed in the media as new truths which are ‘proven’ by the reproduction of very selective data.<sup>121</sup> The backlash also stresses the importance of consumption and the fashion industry to counteract feminist ideals of women thinking and deciding for themselves.<sup>122</sup> Mass media promote these ideas by using feminist rhetoric to effectively spread anti-feminist and sexist messages. Moreover, the problems women encounter are dismissed as personal ills unrelated to social pressures and the suggested cure is individual success which is achieved by fitting into the universal standard by physically changing themselves or consuming the right products.<sup>123</sup> Angela McRobbie argues that postfeminism is a form of backlash, an active process by which feminist gains are undermined and in which feminism is only evoked to prove that it has become obsolete because equality has supposedly been achieved.<sup>124</sup>

Rosalind Gill defines postfeminism as a sensibility and argues that it underlies an increasing number of media texts. These texts depict femininity as a bodily property, meaning that while a woman’s body is a source of power, it needs constant monitoring, discipline and remodelling in order to conform to ever-narrower notions of female attractiveness. Thus, the male judging gaze is replaced by a female self-policing gaze.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, social ills are framed as individual exceptions and every

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<sup>118</sup> Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, pp.2-7.

<sup>119</sup> L.S. Kim, ““Sex and the Single Girl” in Postfeminism. The *F* Word on Television,” *Television and New Media* 2:4 (2001): p.321.

<sup>120</sup> Susan Faludi, *Backlash. The Undeclared War Against Women* (London: Vintage, 1992), p.9.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p.94.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p.371.

<sup>124</sup> McRobbie, “Postfeminism and Popular Culture,” p.28; see also Imelda Whelehan, *Overloaded. Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism* (London: The Women’s Press, 2000), p.3.

<sup>125</sup> Rosalind Gill, “Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10 (2007): pp.148-149; see also Kathleen Karlyn Rowe, *Unruly Girls*,

aspect of everyday life is refracted through the idea of personal choice and self-determination. Gill points out that this logic is flawed because it does not explain why everybody makes the same choices.<sup>126</sup>

The overlaps in definitions of third-wave feminism and postfeminism illustrate that both are firmly embedded in neoliberalist ideology. Both participate ‘... in the discourses of capitalism and neo-liberalism that encourage women to concentrate on their private lives and consumer capacities as the sites for self-expression and agency.’<sup>127</sup> Issues and problems women face on a daily basis are no longer considered the result of structural and institutionalised discrimination. Collective action with the aim of changing structural oppression has been replaced by the focus on individual success.

Individual women are considered fully responsible for their own welfare and are called upon to gain empowerment through personal economic success: ‘... both [neoliberalism and postfeminism] appear to be structured by a current of individualism that has almost entirely replaced notions of the social or political, or any idea of the individual as subject to pressures, constraints or influence from outside themselves.’<sup>128</sup> Rosalind Gill argues that the subject of neoliberalism ‘... bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism.’<sup>129</sup> According to Kati Kauppinnen, the discourse of postfeminist self-management seems to evoke a feminist ethos but really follows the logic of neoliberal governmentality: ‘While evoking a sense of feminist engagement, it seeks to bring about a femininity that, stimulated by a feeling of self-confidence and enthusiasm, will form itself into a version of the entrepreneurial subject of neoliberalism.’<sup>130</sup> Both Kauppinnen and Gill argue that neoliberal governance is gender specific, meaning predominantly aimed at women, and Gill wonders if neoliberalism is therefore always already gendered.<sup>131</sup>

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*Unrepentant Mothers. Redefining Feminism on Screen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), p.26 who describes postfeminism as ‘more a cultural condition than a movement’.

<sup>126</sup> Gill, “Postfeminist media culture,” pp.153-154.

<sup>127</sup> Stéphanie Genz, “Third Way/ve: The politics of postfeminism,” *Feminist Theory* 7:3 (2006): pp.337-338.

<sup>128</sup> Gill, “Culture and Subjectivity,” p.443.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Kati Kauppinnen, “At an Intersection of Postfeminism and Neoliberalism: A Discourse Analytical View of an International Women’s Magazine,” *Critical Approaches To Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines* 7:1 (2013): pp.95-96.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*; see also Gill, “Culture and Subjectivity,” p.443.

Thus, neoliberalist ideology, third-wave feminism and postfeminist sensibility are the ‘discursive climate’<sup>132</sup> in which the texts this thesis focuses on were created. Media texts draw on their larger ideological context to conceptualise characters and narratives. Postfeminism in particular has become a framework, a shorthand and works as an interpretive grid: ‘... the postfeminist perspective already is operating as a frame that people use to understand what happens around them. Because frames exist in the world of language and symbols, whether it reflects current public opinion almost matters less than the existence of the postfeminist argument as an “ideological package”....’<sup>133</sup> Postfeminist and neoliberalist terms and concepts have become pronounced features of popular discourse.<sup>134</sup> This thesis explores how the mediation of gender roles in the texts analysed here is influenced by interrelated discourses and how these fit into the wider ideological context. The following section gives an overview over the structure of the thesis and individual chapters.

## **Method and chapter outline**

The thesis is divided into four chapters. Each chapter focuses on a group of adapted texts and adaptations that expand on one or more topics introduced in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. It analyses how the texts adapt themes, characters, narrative style and plot elements and how this process of adaptation is shaped by dominant discourses and contextual influences. The chapters connect adaptation studies, popular culture studies and feminist media studies to provide an examination of contemporary popular literature and film produced for women in order to present an understanding of how these texts mediate gender. By combining textual analyses of the novels and the films with broader discursive and contextual analyses, the chapters highlight the centrality of neoliberalist discourses, the reception and production context and genre conventions for the representation of gender. The texts analysed in this thesis were

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<sup>132</sup> Kinneret Lahad, “The Single Woman’s Choice as a Zero-Sum Game,” *Cultural Studies* 28:2 (2014), p.241.

<sup>133</sup> Hall and Rodriguez, “The Myth of Postfeminism,” p.899; see also Linda Mizejewski, “Dressed to Kill: Postfeminist Noir,” *Cinema Journal* 44:2 (2005): pp.122-123.

<sup>134</sup> Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, “In Focus: Postfeminism and Contemporary Media Studies,” *Cinema Journal* 44:2 (2005): p.107.

chosen because the adapted texts are all bestsellers, adapt elements from *Bridget Jones's Diary* and offer insights into contemporary discourses.

Whiteness is present as an undertone of this thesis. In terms of race representation in popular literature and mainstream film, women of colour still remain marginalised. In his study of whiteness in the mainstream media, Richard Dyer notes that notions of whiteness have been coupled with ideals of femininity throughout the history of visual culture.<sup>135</sup> The books and films examined here all relate in some way to feminine ideals. Whiteness is therefore an unavoidable aspect of these books and films, in which notions of ideal femininity are represented by protagonists who are white, slim, pretty and affluent.

The chapters begin with a short introduction and are then divided into two parts. In the first part the books are analysed together followed by an analysis of the films in the second part. This structure underlines my approach of considering both the books and the films as sites for discourses. Separating the adapted text from the adaptation also prevents direct comparisons. Moreover, the structure allows me to highlight how the medium of the texts as well as their respective genres influence the representation of gender. The second part of each chapter also includes a textual analysis of the critical reception of the books and the production contexts of the films when it serves to explain particular changes in the adaptation.

The first chapter explores why the novels *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* by Helen Fielding sparked the birth of a new genre in women's writing. It begins with an introduction to literary predecessors to illustrate that Fielding's combination of aspects of the romance novel and feminist bestsellers created a literary hybrid that perfectly represented the Zeitgeist of the 1990s. Based on a textual analysis of the original column, interviews with the author and articles, it argues that the reception of and reaction to *Bridget* changed the author's approach to her character and led to changes in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*. Moreover, the novels' focus on Bridget's everyday life introduced topics and a narrative style that together with the revived plot from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* influenced subsequent literature for women. The second part of the chapter examines how Fielding's changed attitude towards the main character shaped her depiction in the adaptation. Both *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Sharon Maguire, 2001) and *Bridget Jones:*

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<sup>135</sup> Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp.122-124.

*The Edge of Reason* (Beeban Kidron, 2003) revive elements of the screwball comedy but restrict the mishaps to the woman, thus creating the stereotype of the endearingly incompetent romantic comedy heroine. Moreover, the films incorporate elements of internationally successful British romantic comedies and the TV adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, most notably the silent male protagonist. The films were two of the first millennial women's blockbusters, and the thesis argues that the financial success of the novels as well as the adaptations influenced subsequent chick lit novels, a self-help book, a memoir and their romantic comedy adaptations.

The second chapter focuses on chick lit novels and their adaptations that adapt and expand on the importance of the workplace in a woman's life, a topic introduced in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. The first part explores how *Confessions of a Shopaholic*,<sup>136</sup> *Shopaholic Abroad*,<sup>137</sup> *The Nanny Diaries*<sup>138</sup> and *The Devil Wears Prada*<sup>139</sup> implement the postfeminist key concepts identity, choice and consumption in the context of the workplace. While the novels explore these concepts, they also include aspects that either explicitly or implicitly criticise and contest the postfeminist trope of free choice. In addition, the textual analyses of the novels illustrate that they rely heavily on the romance plot structure revived by the Bridget Jones adaptations in order to minimise the role of the male love interest and focus instead on the first person narrators. The second part of the chapter argues that the adaptations were facilitated by a strong focus on marketability and an interest in insider perspectives. The following textual analysis of the films explores how negative book reviews led to significant changes in the depiction of the female protagonists in *The Devil Wears Prada* (David Frankel, 2006) and *The Nanny Diaries* (Robert Pulcini and Shari Springer Berman, 2007), while *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (P.J. Hogan, 2009) was strongly influenced by the economic crisis. Moreover, the first two films rely heavily on viewers' familiarity with the romance plot to reduce the time spent on the couple and instead focus on the protagonists' identity formation choosing suitable careers, while *Confessions of a Shopaholic* renews its focus on the romance plot.

The third chapter begins with an introduction to the therapeutic discourse and self-help, a theme prominent in the Bridget Jones novels. The first part of the chapter

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<sup>136</sup> Sophie Kinsella, *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (London: Black Swan, 2000).

<sup>137</sup> Sophie Kinsella, *Shopaholic Abroad* (London: Black Swan, 2001). As the adaptation draws on both novels, the chapter analyses both adapted texts together.

<sup>138</sup> Nicola Kraus and Emma McLaughlin, *The Nanny Diaries* (London: Penguin, 2002).

<sup>139</sup> Lauren Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada* (London: HarperCollins, 2003).

argues that this discourse has become increasingly influential because it is intertwined with neoliberalist and postfeminist concepts. This is followed by a textual analysis of *he's just not that into you*<sup>140</sup> illustrating how the book is typical for the self-help genre because a male expert prescribes specific behaviour based on traditional gender roles to his female readers. In contrast, the novel *The Jane Austen Book Club*<sup>141</sup> offers an alternative to authoritative male experts in the form of communal bibliotherapy. The book focuses on a group of friends who work through their relationship problems by reading and discussing Jane Austen's novels. Drawing on Anthony Giddens, the second part of the chapter explores how the multi-protagonist romantic comedy adaptations use different plot lines to depict the competing concepts of ideal and confluent love.<sup>142</sup> The textual analysis of *He's Just Not That Into You* (Ken Kwapis, 2009) illustrates how the film employs its multiple story lines to offer viewers alternatives to the simplistic advice provided in the adapted text. In contrast, the different plot lines in *The Jane Austen Book Club* (Robert Swicord, 2007) celebrate monogamous relationships based on intimacy as the inevitable ideal. Both films rely strongly on well-known and easily identifiable character types and plot elements from *Bridget Jones's Diary* to be able to tell numerous stories in a limited time span.

The books analysed in the fourth chapter return to female protagonists in their thirties and explore women's lives after marriage as alternatives to Bridget's single life. Using textual analysis, the chapter examines how *I don't know how she does it*<sup>143</sup> is firmly embedded in discourses about motherhood circulating around the 1990s. As a result, the author is unable to imagine a progressive ending for the protagonist and instead falls back on one of postfeminism's master narratives, namely 'retreatism.'<sup>144</sup> In the memoir *Eat Pray Love* Liz Gilbert escapes societal pressures to have children by embarking on a spiritual journey that is firmly embedded in neoliberalist notions of selfhood.<sup>145</sup> The second part of the chapter explores the importance of the lead actresses Sarah Jessica Parker and Julia Roberts for the plot and marketing of the films. The chapter argues that changes in discourses about motherhood, Parker's star persona

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<sup>140</sup> Greg Behrendt and Liz Tuccillo, *He's Just Not That Into You* (London: Element, 2004).

<sup>141</sup> Karen Joy Fowler, *The Jane Austen Book Club* (London: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>142</sup> See Anthony Giddens *The Transformation of Intimacy. Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p.58.

<sup>143</sup> Alison Pearson, *I Don't Know How She Does It* (London: Vintage, 2003).

<sup>144</sup> Negra, *What a Girl Wants?*, p.5.

<sup>145</sup> Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat Pray Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).



and the success of screenwriter Aline Brosh McKenna enabled a different tone and ending for *I Don't Know How She Does It* (Douglas McGrath, 2011). A textual analysis of the film examines how it uses filmic techniques to ridicule and dismiss numerous issues and societal pressures about motherhood raised in the novel. The final part of the chapter examines book reviews to illustrate that Julia Robert's star persona perfectly embodies the likeable narrator of the memoir and that *Eat Pray Love* (Ryan Murphy, 2010) was marketed as a star vehicle. The film's focus has shifted from a search for spiritual bliss to a search for the right kind of relationship. All four texts analysed in this chapter celebrate the female protagonists and reward them with supportive men.

Like this thesis, my fascination with adaptations of contemporary popular literature began with Bridget Jones. Having read the novels and thoroughly enjoyed what I perceived to be a hilarious fictional narrator, I was somewhat puzzled when she came to life in the adaptation. The changes between the two kinds of texts seemed too radical to be simply dismissed as the result of a change in medium or personal choices by producers, directors and screenwriters. While studying for a Master degree in Gender and Media, I also realised that the film version of the character strongly resonated with my younger fellow students. Their reaction further convinced me that the changes in the adaptation were linked to wider cultural phenomena which were worth studying.

When I began working on my thesis, the fact that the texts were produced for a predominantly female audience and that almost all of the books were written by women was not particularly important to me. However, the frequently dismissive reactions I encountered when discussing my topic with people, both within and outside of academia, soon made me wonder if it was a symptom of a general dismissal of women's culture. This thesis is an attempt to counteract this bias. By taking chick lit novels, self-help books, memoirs and romantic comedies seriously, I intend to show that these texts are not just the results of but also actively shape dominant discourses and thus contribute to the fabric that constitutes contemporary reality.

# 1. Chapter

## *Bridget Jones's Diary* and the Birth of a New Genre

‘As popular culture reworks concerns and anxieties of the contemporary era in powerful and appealing ways, it is therefore an active participant in the formation and changing of the body of contemporary cultural practices, and a site of identity formation and evolution. Chicklit can thus be viewed as far more than a form of trivial entertainment: it is a powerful means of disseminating discourses of modern identity.’<sup>146</sup>

*Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) by Helen Fielding is usually considered as the founding text of chick lit. Even though it was not the first novel of its kind, its financial success marked it out as exceptional and it inspired numerous followers.<sup>147</sup> Tamar Jeffers McDonald explains that ‘We identify genres by the kind of images found in them and, in turn, these images then become laden with a symbolism dependent on their genre: they become icons....’<sup>148</sup> Bridget became such an icon, a representative for a generation of women: ‘Suddenly Bridget Jones is being feted as the Everywoman of the 90s. She is post-feminism's first icon: the kooky kind of chick who's grown-up enough to know that Third World debt's more significant than her cellulite, but girlie enough to admit she'd still choose thinner thighs over world peace, if it would get her

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<sup>146</sup> Katarzyna Smoczyńska, *The World According to Bridget Jones. Discourses of Identity in Chicklit Fictions* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007), p.23.

<sup>147</sup> *Bridget Jones's Diary* sold over 15 million copies worldwide and was published in 40 countries. See Joshua Farrington, “Bridget Jones cover revealed,” *The Bookseller*, July 24, 2013, accessed November 29, 2015, <http://www.thebookseller.com/news/bridget-jones-cover-revealed>.

<sup>148</sup> Tamar Jeffers McDonald, *Romantic Comedy. Boy Meets Girls Meets Genre* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2007), p.11.

a man.’<sup>149</sup> This chapter explores how Bridget Jones became a prototypical heroine for the chick lit novel but also the romantic comedy, arguing that this happened because the novels and the adaptations combined aspects of previous genres to create a new literary genre and revive the romantic comedy.

Bridget Jones was not the only icon in the late 1990s who embodied the general shift in the representation of women. She had an US American counterpart in Ally, the protagonist in the TV programme *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002) and both characters were frequently compared and discussed together. The similarities between the two characters were so pronounced that Michiko Kakutani even wrote her book review for *Bridget Jones’s Diary* in the form of a letter from Ally to Bridget.<sup>150</sup> Ally was, like Bridget, frequently criticised for being frazzled and self-absorbed. Both were considered ‘archetypes of single womanhood’ but at the same time criticised because ‘... they are little more than composites of frivolous neuroses.’<sup>151</sup> Some critics were dismissive. Margaret Carlson wrote, for example: ‘If only she would find a life. And a brain.’<sup>152</sup> Rowan Pelling referred to the Bridget-as-a-social-type phenomenon as ‘... the dread “that’s me” virus which turned a generation of intelligent women into self-proclaimed disaster zones.’<sup>153</sup> Grace Bradberry predicted that the financial success of the novel and its sequel would guarantee their lasting influence on the book market. She also linked this development in popular culture to the emergence of a new feminism which ‘... now celebrates the possibility of battling for equality while wearing strappy sandals.’<sup>154</sup>

The notion that Bridget Jones embodies a postfeminist icon has been frequently discussed. Angela McRobbie, for instance, argues that *Bridget Jones’s Diary* was the result of a general shift in feminism in the 1990s. Women began to focus on themselves as individuals instead of being a part of a larger group. They understood their problems and potential solutions on individual terms and did not strive for social

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<sup>149</sup> Decca Aitkenhead, “Bridget Jones: Don’t Ya Just Love Her?” *The Guardian*, August 08, 1997.

<sup>150</sup> Michiko Kakutani, “It’s Like Really Weird: Another Bad-Luck Babe,” *The New York Times*, May 26, 1998.

<sup>151</sup> Gina Bellafante, “Want To Know What Today’s Chick Young Feminist Thinkers Care About? Their Bodies! Themselves!” *Time* 151:25 (1998): p.56.

<sup>152</sup> Margaret Carlson, “Now isn’t that the truth?” *Time* 151:22 (1998): p.40.

<sup>153</sup> Rowan Pelling, “You’ve only got yourself to blame, Bridget Jones,” *Daily Mail*, April 06, 2000.

<sup>154</sup> Grace Bradberry, “Where have the real heroines gone?” *The Times*, May 11, 1999.

change on a structural and institutional level anymore. For McRobbie, Fielding's novel is thus a postfeminist text in the sense of being antifeminist because it evokes feminism in order to show that equality has been achieved and feminism in the form of collective action is no longer needed.<sup>155</sup> Shelley Cobb also argues that *Bridget Jones's Diary* is inextricably linked to postfeminist popular culture.<sup>156</sup> Novels can function as myth makers because their characters can transcend their novel by entering public consciousness, meaning people recognise them without having read the novel.<sup>157</sup> Cobb argues that Bridget became synonymous with single women and consequently screenwriters adapted a phenomenon and not a text: "This understanding of Bridget as an occasion for feminine identification in cultural discourse has created a Bridget who "exists" and functions transtextually as a distinct but malleable image of contemporary womanhood, a postfeminist icon of the late twentieth century."<sup>158</sup> Stéphanie Genz points out that the diary format internalises Bridget's individual struggles. She argues that Bridget became an icon, meaning a recognisable emblem of a particular kind of femininity, a constructed point of identification for all women because she deals with the demands of a postfeminist society. Her constant state of confusion and self-doubt are typical for contemporary women who struggle to find a personal space in contradictory times and who strive to achieve a unity between being a feminist and feminine.<sup>159</sup>

This chapter seeks to lay the foundation for the following chapters by exploring in detail why Bridget Jones became such a popular character that topics, plot elements, characters and narrative style in Fielding's novels influenced the books and their adaptations discussed in this thesis. The first part of this chapter examines how the column and the novel are both examples of larger trends in women's writing. It argues that Fielding created a new literary genre by combining elements from previous women's writing to create a new yet familiar genre more suitable for her readers' changed needs. Typical of popular literature in the 1990s, the novels introduce

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<sup>155</sup> McRobbie, "Postfeminism and Popular Culture," p.28.

<sup>156</sup> Cobb, "Adaptable Bridget," p.283.

<sup>157</sup> André Bazin, "Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest," in *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), p.23.

<sup>158</sup> Cobb, "Adaptable Bridget," p.283.

<sup>159</sup> Stéphanie Genz, "Singled Out: Postfeminism's "New Woman" and the Dilemma of Having it All," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 43:1 (2010): p.101-103; see also Gill, *Gender and the Media*, p.227 and Adriaens and von Bauwel, "Sex and the City: A Postfeminist Point of View?," p.9 and p.14.

everyday topics, such as the workplace and self-help, which have influenced later writing for women. The chapter examines how the reception of the character changed Fielding's opinion about Bridget and led to changes in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (1999). It argues that Fielding's novels have become very successful because they celebrate a flawed character.

The second part of this chapter examines how Fielding's changed perspective towards her character also influenced the adaptations. Moreover, it explores other influences on the films and demonstrates that they combine elements of the screwball comedy, the woman's film, TV programmes and internationally successful British films. The films introduce and celebrate an endearingly incompetent and clumsy heroine and revive the plot from *Pride and Prejudice*, two elements that have strongly influenced the books and films discussed in the remainder of the thesis.

## 1.1. From column to novel

According to Carolyn G. Heilbrun it is difficult to imagine completely new narratives so that even innovative texts are still based on their predecessors.<sup>160</sup> Women's writing has always been connected to women's history and societal changes.<sup>161</sup> The feminist movement affected popular literature and became part of popular culture.<sup>162</sup> Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley argue that there is no feminist position outside of popular culture and popular culture texts have partly constituted second-wave feminism.<sup>163</sup> The consciousness raising novel, for instance, became very popular in the 1970s. The protagonists in these novels typically went through a process of understanding how their private lives are influenced by societal structures and ideologies. Thus, the books offered narratives that explained the feminist slogan that the personal is political. By offering their readers a fictionalised process of awakening, these novels helped them to understand their own personal problems as the results of bigger social ills and gender inequality.<sup>164</sup> During the 1990s postfeminism became the dominant ideology and the first part of this chapter explores how *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* were a reaction to the changes in women's lives and inspired chick lit as a genre filling a literary gap.

People use genres on a daily basis to decide if they want to read a book or watch a film or TV programme. The most general definition of a genre is that it is a contract of conventions between the reader or viewer and the creator of the text<sup>165</sup> or in other words: 'A set of common codes and assumptions [that] underlie production parameters and viewer expectations.'<sup>166</sup> Thus, the creators know what the readers or

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<sup>160</sup> Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (London: The Women's Press Limited, 1989), p.37.

<sup>161</sup> Joannou Maroula, *Contemporary Women's Writing. From The Golden Notebook to The Color Purple* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.191.

<sup>162</sup> Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley, "Popularity Contests: The Meanings of Popular Feminism," in *Feminism in Popular Culture*, ed. Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2006), p.15.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>164</sup> Lisa Maria Hogeland, *Feminism and its Fictions. The Consciousness-Raising Novel and the Women's Liberation Movement* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p.ix.

<sup>165</sup> Jean Radford, "Introduction," in *The Progress of Romance. The Politics of Popular Fiction*, ed. Jean Radford (London and New York: Routledge, 1986), p.8.

<sup>166</sup> Gina Marchetti, "Action-Adventures as Ideology," in *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America*, ed. Ian Angus and Sut Jhally (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p.187.

viewers expect and label their texts as part of a particular genre to help them identify what ‘kind of gratifications’ they can expect from them.<sup>167</sup> The emergence of a genre is linked to the specific psychological needs of its readers and viewers.<sup>168</sup> Berger argues that genres speak to different needs in people so that they can help them deal with specific psychological challenges in their lives: ‘As particular genres evolve they also generate and reinforce certain values and beliefs ....’<sup>169</sup> According to Gina Marchetti, genre is always linked to dominant ideologies:

‘Particular genres tend to be popular at certain points in time because they somehow embody and work through those social contradictions the culture needs to come to grips with and may not be able to deal with except in the realm of fantasy. As such, popular genres often function in a way similar to the way myth functions – to work through social contradictions in the form of a narrative so that very real problems can be transposed to the realm of fantasy and apparently solved there.’<sup>170</sup>

Genres are influenced by their context and their conventions are shaped by every new text and every new reading of a text.<sup>171</sup> In order to appeal to audiences, generic conventions and narrative formulas draw on contemporary beliefs and values and more importantly, change with them.<sup>172</sup> Thus, changes in genres mirror societal changes so that analysing them allows us to draw conclusions about predominant ideologies at a certain moment in time and changes in society.<sup>173</sup>

Helen Fielding created Bridget for a column. In 1995 she was asked to write a column for *The Independent* about her experience as a single woman living in London. She thought writing about herself would be too personal and instead decided to use a comic character she had created for a sitcom.<sup>174</sup> The column was part of a trend at the time: female journalists wrote about their failures at work and in their private lives in

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<sup>167</sup> Arthur Asa Berger, *Popular Culture Genres. Theories and Texts* (Thousand Oaks and London: Sage Publications, 1992), p.4.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p.73.

<sup>170</sup> Marchetti, “Action-Adventures as Ideology,” p.187.

<sup>171</sup> Helen Carr, “Introduction: Genre and Women’s Writing in the Postmodern World,” in *From My Guy to Sci-Fi. Genre and Women’s Writing in the Postmodern World*, ed. Helen Carr (London: Pandora Press, 1989), p.7.

<sup>172</sup> Krutnik, “The Faint Aroma of Performing Seals,” p.9.

<sup>173</sup> Radford, “Introduction,” p.9.

<sup>174</sup> Helen Fielding, “Me and Mrs Jones,” *Sunday Times*, November 21, 1999.

columns published in various newspapers.<sup>175</sup> Kathryn Flett Flanagan, for instance, wrote for *The Observer*,<sup>176</sup> Emily Barr for *The Guardian*<sup>177</sup> and Anna Blundy for *The Times*.<sup>178</sup> Jojo Moyes argues that this trend was the result of the increasing popularity of confessionals: ‘The confessional is the modus operandi of our time, in which the distinctions between the public and private spheres have become blurred. We are not unsettled when we hear about Ms Writer’s sexual failures, despite her being a total stranger, because we have heard it all many times before: on television, in the problem pages of magazines, in the tabloids’ kiss-and-tell.’<sup>179</sup> Moyes criticises these columns for focusing only on women’s failures. Fielding’s fictional character was part of this trend and because of the first-person narration and the diary format, readers reacted to her as if she was a real person.

Fielding herself confessed in an interview in 2006 that she had never expected the column to continue for several years: ‘I thought they’d ditch it after six weeks. Then I started getting all these letters. It became really popular. And it just snowballed from there.’<sup>180</sup> *The Independent* only published very few of these letters from fans but this sample illustrates that readers enjoyed engaging with the characters: One fan of the column, for instance, proposed to Bridget<sup>181</sup> and another reader offered to console Mark Darcy should Bridget accept the proposal.<sup>182</sup> Bridget’s fake interview with Colin Firth was published on the 29<sup>th</sup> March 1997 and ended with an editor’s note: ‘Bridget Jones has been sacked.’<sup>183</sup> A fan immediately responded with a letter, defending Bridget’s interview technique and demanding her reinstatement as an interviewer.<sup>184</sup>

A column is published on a weekly basis and is strongly based on current events. While the original column included recurring characters, Fielding confessed

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<sup>175</sup> Jojo Moyes, “Self-deprecation is the New Lassism,” *The Independent*, August 16, 1997.

<sup>176</sup> See for example Kathryn Flett Flanagan, “Kathryn Flett Flanagan throws caution to the wind, water and mountain and has her new flat Feng Shuied,” *The Observer*, June 16, 1996.

<sup>177</sup> See for example Emily Barr, “The other half: equality finds a new cornerman,” *The Guardian*, November 28, 1996.

<sup>178</sup> See for example Anna Blundy, “The Moderns,” *The Times*, April 06, 1996.

<sup>179</sup> Moyes, “Self-deprecation is the New Lassism.”

<sup>180</sup> Fielding quoted in Dave, October 10, 2006, “Helen Fielding Is Not Bridget Jones,” *Powell’s Books*, accessed March 03, 2014, <http://www.powells.com/blog/interviews/helen-fielding-is-not-bridget-jones-by-dave/>.

<sup>181</sup> T. Turkson, “Letter: Beloved Bridget,” *The Independent*, September 04, 1996.

<sup>182</sup> Carol-Ann Hodgson, “Letter: Marvellous Mark,” *The Independent*, September 07, 1996.

<sup>183</sup> Helen Fielding, “Bridget Jones’s Diary,” *The Independent*, March 29, 1997, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://bridgetarchive.altervista.org/index1997.htm>.

<sup>184</sup> Ann Bossingham, “Save Bridget!” *The Independent*, March 31, 1997.



that she decided on a weekly basis what would happen to Bridget without planning further ahead: ‘Massive, well thought out masterplans to create the character Bridget Jones: 0.’<sup>185</sup> Her lack of planning is most apparent in the interchangeability of Bridget’s friends. At the beginning of the column Bridget has two friends, Jude and Tina.<sup>186</sup> Jude is the angry feminist and coins the term “fuckwit-age” and Tina is devastated because her boyfriend Richard left her when she asked him to go on holiday with her. By April, Sharon has turned into the angry feminist.<sup>187</sup> In June Jude has been left by Richard and Sharon and Tina share the same opinions.<sup>188</sup>

The original column also contained numerous references to current events and some entries only make sense within the context. The column published on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 1996, for instance, begins with this now seemingly cryptic entry:

### **Friday 22 March**

*9st 2; alcohol units 2 (vg); cigarettes 7 (vg); Instants 1 (vg); beefburgers 5.*

**8pm:** Never having been particularly keen on beef in the past, suddenly find self desperate for beefburgers. Sure one more little quarter pounder can’t hurt?<sup>189</sup>

The humour in this passage only becomes apparent when its context is taken into account. Bridget’s desperate longing for beef burgers is a reaction to a report by the British health authorities, released on the 21<sup>st</sup> March. According to the report, 10 people in the UK had been infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), also known as mad cow disease, through the exposure to beef.<sup>190</sup> Thus, for readers at the time Bridget’s ‘inexplicable’ desperation to eat beef burgers was a reaction to the

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<sup>185</sup> Fielding, “Me and Mrs Jones.”

<sup>186</sup> Helen Fielding, “Bridget Jones’s Diary,” *The Independent*, August 08, 1995, accessed December 15, 2015, <http://bridgetarchive.altervista.org/index1995.htm>.

<sup>187</sup> Helen Fielding, “Bridget Jones’s Diary,” *The Independent*, April 04, 1995, accessed December 15, 2015, <http://bridgetarchive.altervista.org/index1995.htm>.

<sup>188</sup> Helen Fielding, “Bridget Jones’s Diary,” *The Independent*, June 28, 1995, accessed December 15, 2015, <http://bridgetarchive.altervista.org/index1995.htm>.

<sup>189</sup> Helen Fielding, “Bridget Jones’s Diary,” *The Independent*, March 27, 1996, accessed December 16, 2015, <http://bridgetarchive.altervista.org/index1996.htm>.

<sup>190</sup> “Dorrell BSE Statement – Full Text,” *Press Association*, March 20, 1996.

news that they were bad for her and that she should not be eating them at all. The character's behaviour is contradictory and irrational throughout the column and her sudden interest in food that might kill her fits into this pattern.

Such topical passages were not included in the novels and Fielding added overall plots. The plot of *Bridget Jones's Diary* is based on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.<sup>191</sup> Bridget meets Mark Darcy at a Christmas party at her parents' house where he rejects her. She works for a publishing company and begins an affair with her boss Daniel Cleaver. When Daniel cheats on her, she quits her job and finds a new job at a television studio, where she quickly becomes well-known for her quirky interview technique. In the meantime her mother begins an affair with the younger Portuguese man, Julio. He embezzles her money and steals from her friends. When Mark finds out about this, he retrieves the money and ensures that Julio is arrested. He and Bridget then clear up all the misunderstandings that have kept them apart and become a couple.

The second book continues their story and is based on Austen's *Persuasion*.<sup>192</sup> Bridget is insecure about her relationship with Mark and instead of discussing her feelings with him, she talks to her friends. They encourage her to break up with Mark after she sees him meeting Rebecca. At a party Bridget overhears Mark talking to Rebecca and realises that they broke up over a misunderstanding and because she listened to advice instead of communicating with him. She then decides to go on holiday with her friend Shazzer to Thailand, who befriends a man on the plane and has a holiday affair with him. After someone breaks into their hut at the beach, the man lends them money for a return flight and a bag. At the airport in Thailand, Bridget is arrested for smuggling drugs that were hidden inside the bag. She is imprisoned but Mark negotiates her release. Back in England she is fired from her job and receives a bullet, which turns out to be from her builder. Mark offers to stay with her until they have found out who is threatening to kill her and eventually they discuss their feelings for each other. In the end Bridget receives two job offers, one from her previous employer offering her her old job back but under better conditions and another one from a newspaper to do more freelance interviews for them.

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<sup>191</sup> Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Penguin, 1996 [1813]).

<sup>192</sup> Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (London: Penguin, 2003 [1816]).

According to Julie Sanders, adaptations and appropriations create pleasure in readers and viewers because they allow them to ‘... participate in the play of similarity and difference perceived between the original, source, or inspiration to appreciate fully the reshaping or rewriting undertaken by the adaptive text.’<sup>193</sup> As a result, a lot of adaptations rely on what she refers to as the canon, meaning texts ‘... which by their very nature depend on a communality of understanding. These forms and genres have cross-cultural, often cross- historical, readerships; they are stories and tales which appear across the boundaries of cultural difference and which are handed on, albeit in transmuted and translated forms, through the generations.’<sup>194</sup> Austen’s novels, like Shakespeare’s plays, are part of the literary canon and therefore ‘... a reliable cultural touchstone, a language ‘we all understand’.’<sup>195</sup> By using Austen’s plots in her novels, Fielding creates additional pleasure for her readers, allowing them to ‘... trace the intertextual relationship.’<sup>196</sup>

While the plot was changed significantly in order to create connection with Austen’s novels, the writing was strongly influenced by the column’s style. The time restrictions when writing the column meant that Fielding often used strongly abbreviated and eclipsed wordings, which she kept, particularly in the first novel (e.g. ‘V. depressed. Going shopping’<sup>197</sup>) which also created the impression of a private diary, involving ‘... the reader in a voyeuristic relationship with the protagonist.’<sup>198</sup> Moreover, by using the same style in the novel, Fielding evoked the epistolary novel tradition. Alison Case explains that the book follows the novelistic conventions of what she calls feminine narration. Case defines feminine narration as a type of narration used by female narrators in British novels from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was typically used in epistolary novels and novels written in the form of a diary. The narrator in these novels is excluded from shaping her experience into a coherent and meaningful story because she witnesses and presents her experience as it happens in a raw and unmediated form.<sup>199</sup> According to Case, *Bridget Jones’s Diary* belongs into

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<sup>193</sup> Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, p.45.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p.52.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>197</sup> Fielding, *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, p.31.

<sup>198</sup> Imelda Whelehan, *Helen Fielding’s Bridget Jones’s Diary. A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Continuum, 2002), p.22.

<sup>199</sup> Alison Case, “Authenticity, Convention, and *Bridget Jones’s Diary*,” *Narrative* 9:2 (2001): p.176.

this narrative tradition because Bridget is merely a witness of her own life. Her frequent lack of insight into what is happening and her inability to make sense of her own previous actions are a source of humour in the novel but also reduce her to a chronicler of her own life.<sup>200</sup> Her appeal as a character is based on readers' familiarity with this form of narration: '... her relationship to her story and her life, and our relationship to her as a narrator, mirrors the lack of narrative and material agency we have come to expect from fictional women.'<sup>201</sup>

While the style of the novel and its format links it to the epistolary novel tradition, the plot and the romantic hero were both adapted from the romance novel. Romance novels have been one of the most popular genres from the beginning of the rise of the novel in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first bestseller, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, first published in 1740,<sup>202</sup> was a romance novel.<sup>203</sup> Regis defines the genre as '... a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines.'<sup>204</sup> At first the genre was aimed at a general audience and its contemporary association with female writers and readers only developed over time. During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century writing was considered a male activity and unfeminine so that the first female writers were often believed to be neurotic.<sup>205</sup> As a result, they were expected to apologise for their work and '... women who did *not* apologize for their literary efforts were defined as mad and monstrous: freakish because "unsexed" or freakish because sexually "fallen."<sup>206</sup> During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century the novel developed into a mass product. The growing demand for more novels resulted in a diversification of genres which also became gendered. Female authors often chose to write about domestic life and relationships as a response to critics' claims that their writing was inferior. They presented '... their writing as an extension of their feminine role, an activity that did not detract from their womanhood, but in some sense

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p.180.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p.181.

<sup>202</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, ed. Peter Sabor (London: Penguin, 1980 [1740]).

<sup>203</sup> Pamela Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p.66.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>205</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1980), p.60.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p.63 (emphasis in original).

augmented it.<sup>207</sup> Their efforts resulted in a trivialization of women's writing by male critics<sup>208</sup> but also forged a link between women writers and genres like the romance and domestic novels. The link was strengthened over time, as was the prejudice by critics who considered the domestic nature of the genres inferior to literary genres focussing on other topics, mainly written by male authors.<sup>209</sup>

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the romance novel became very popular and attracted the attention of feminist critics. The publishing house, Mills and Boons, established in 1908 in Great Britain, began to prosper in the 1930s once it specialised in romance novels. Meanwhile Harlequin Books in Canada began as a paperback reprint house but soon focused on reprinting and selling Mills and Boons romance novels in North America and eventually acquired the British publishing house in 1971. In 1980 Simon and Schuster founded Silhouette Books to profit from the interest in the romance genre and were so successful that in 1984 Harlequin bought the company.<sup>210</sup> The romance novels published by these three main publishing houses were typically easy to read because they used similar imagery<sup>211</sup> and followed a formula.<sup>212</sup> The increasing influence of second wave feminism and the expansion of the feminist movement led to criticism of the romance novel in the 1970s.<sup>213</sup> The continued popularity of the genre and a growing interest of feminists in popular culture in the 1980s resulted in a growing interest in romance novels and their readers. Two of the most well-known analyses of the genre and its readers are Tania Modleski's

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<sup>207</sup> Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own. From Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* (London: Virago Press, 1999), p.85.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p.86 and Gilbert and Gubar, p.64.

<sup>209</sup> As Regis points out, the prejudice towards women's writing and the romance in general has become so great that even undisputed canonical texts such as the aforementioned *Pamela* by Richardson but also Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* are never identified as romance novels. Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p.23.

<sup>210</sup> Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, p.156.

<sup>211</sup> Jeanne Dubino, "The Cinderella Complex: Romance Fiction, Patriarchy and Capitalism," *Journal of Popular Culture* 27:3 (1993): p.114.

<sup>212</sup> Pamela Regis argues that this accusation is based on the wrong equation of formula with genre. Formulas are part of genres but are used in a variety of ways in genre texts. Regis explains that the equation of formula and genre allows critics to accuse romance novels of being formulaic and dismiss the entire genre without taking a closer look and denying its link to literary writing. See Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, pp.23-25.

<sup>213</sup> Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, pp.3-4.

*Loving for a Vengeance*<sup>214</sup> and Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance*.<sup>215</sup> Both authors analysed romance novels and Radway combined her analysis with ethnographic research of romance novel readers. They reach the conclusion that the narratives in romance novels were popular because they spoke to real tensions and problems in women's lives.

Romance novels in the 1980s offered their readers an independent heroine who had to face hostile and sometimes even violent reactions from men. She re-interpreted these hostilities as the result of a deep love and the heroes frequently changed as a result of their infatuation with the heroine, putting her in a position of power over him.<sup>216</sup> Radway and Modleski criticise the genre for teaching women to interpret men's hostile and at times even violent behaviour as the result of their love and thus accept ill-treatment, encouraging readers to change their perspectives on their situations instead of changing the situations themselves.<sup>217</sup> However, Alison Light argues that this fantasy helped readers because it offered women a resolution in which submission and repression, a situation a lot of women had to face at that time in their private lives, could be managed by being interpreted as the result of love. Thus, romance novels in the 1980s offered a control of the uncontrollable in the realm of fantasy and helped women to cope with inequalities in their heterosexual relationships.<sup>218</sup>

As Modleski, Radway and Light have shown,<sup>219</sup> romance novels were popular during the 1970s and 1980s because they helped their predominantly female readers '... to work through social contradictions in the form of a narrative so that very real

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<sup>214</sup> Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance. Mass-produced fantasies for women* (New York and London: Routledge, 1982).

<sup>215</sup> Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance. Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (London and New York: Verso, 1987).

<sup>216</sup> Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, p.45.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., pp.36-37 and Radway, *Reading the Romance*, p.151; see also Dubino, "The Cinderella Complex," p.109 and p.116. Modleski and Radway have been criticised for their attempt to rescue women from their interest in romance novels. Cora Kaplan argues that romance readers do not need to be rescued because their interest in the genre is not simply a sign of their subordination to patriarchal society. Rather, it is a part of their humanity because fantasising is part of a healthy psychic life. See Cora Kaplan, "The Thorn Birds: Fiction, Fantasy, Femininity," in *Sea Changes. Essays on Culture and Feminism*, ed. Cora Kaplan (London and New York: Verso, 1986), p.127.

<sup>218</sup> Alison Light, "'Returning to Manderley': Romance Fiction, Female Sexuality and Class," *Feminist Review* 16 (1984): p.22.

<sup>219</sup> Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, pp.36-37, Radway, *Reading the Romance*, p.151 and Light, "'Returning to Manderley'", p.22.

problems can be transposed to the realm of fantasy and apparently solved there.’<sup>220</sup> Women had officially gained rights and reached equality but still had to interact with people who expected them to fulfil their traditional roles, particularly within heterosexual relationships. Romance novels addressed these issues in their fictional narratives and helped women who read the novels to deal with the realities of a patriarchal society.<sup>221</sup> As women’s situations and experiences changed during the 1990s, romance novels became less popular because they did not suit women’s needs anymore. Their situations and romantic relationships were changing leaving a literary gap that would be filled by *Bridget Jones’s Diary*.

According to Nick Bentley, the 1990s were ‘... the decade of popular postmodernism in that its fascination with parody, pastiche, retroism, a knowing self-awareness of previous forms and its general scepticism towards grand narratives seemed to become the prevailing attitude in the popular culture of the period.’<sup>222</sup> Fielding’s choice to update the plot of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* and occasionally mock it is therefore typical for the period and as mentioned above contributed to the pleasure of reading it. Moreover, the 1990s were marked by a strong interest in the everyday and the celebration of normality.<sup>223</sup> The diary format allows Fielding to give a detailed account of Bridget’s life, including her work and her interactions with friends and family.<sup>224</sup> The detailed descriptions of everyday acts was typical for popular literature in the 90s and spoke to a new generation of women.

The generation of women who were in their 30s during the 1990s had grown up with the gains of second wave feminism and the promise that they could have it all. At the same time feminist ideas shifted from collective action towards a focus on individualism and embracing the feminine.<sup>225</sup> Peggy Orenstein describes the situation in the late 1990s as a state of flux: ‘Old patterns and expectations have broken down,

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<sup>220</sup> Marchetti, “Action-Adventures as Ideology,” p.187.

<sup>221</sup> Light, ““Returning to Manderley,”” p.22; Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance*, p.43.

<sup>222</sup> Nick Bentley, “Introduction: mapping the millennium: themes and trends in contemporary British fiction,” in *British Fiction of the 1990s*, ed. Nick Bentley (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p.4.

<sup>223</sup> Alwyn W. Turner, *A Classless Society. Britain in the 1990s* (London: Aurum Press, 2013), p.516.

<sup>224</sup> Fielding, *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, for example pp.215-216 and pp.106-107.

<sup>225</sup> Emilie Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc. Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp.2-3.

but new ideas seem fragmentary, unrealistic, and often contradictory.<sup>226</sup> While women in the 1990s had more opportunities than the previous generation, an abundance of choice led to confusion and they did not know ‘...how to take advantage of them in a way that also acknowledges our parallel desires for marriage, motherhood, and an otherwise fulfilling life outside the office.’<sup>227</sup> This uncertainty about changed roles and opportunities led to a lot of confusion and insecurity.

Bridget Jones embodies this generation of women. She has a successful job and is independent but at the same time longs for a stable relationship. Fielding thus humorously explores contradictions women faced at the time through her character. Moreover, Bridget does not openly discuss feminism or gender inequality, which is also typical for popular literature in the 90s. According to Turner, ‘... a substantial section of the country had reached some sort of compromise during the 1990s, in a spirit if not of liberation then at least of relaxation; responsibility had been abandoned in pursuit of simple pleasures and gratification.’<sup>228</sup> The novel reflects this focus on trivialities by frequently including detailed descriptions of Bridget’s day, such as an enumeration of Bridget’s activities in the morning.<sup>229</sup> In the section ‘Tuesday 6 June,’ for instance, she repeatedly tries to do some work and writes down her earnest intentions but is then constantly distracted by thoughts about Daniel and her nails.<sup>230</sup> The fact that she writes what is happening, either while it is happening or shortly after but in so much detail that it would be impossible to happen simultaneously, also contributes to the comedy of the novel.

The frequent use of irony in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* links it back to realistic women’s fiction written between 1969 and 1988. Nancy Walker argues that, similar to romance novels, these books deal with issues relevant for women at the time. Unlike romance novels, however, these books employ irony. The use of irony and a personal voice undermine the male authoritative voice often used in literary works and stress the link between the personal and political. In addition, irony subverts forms of authority and exposes structures of women’s oppression as arbitrary, implying that

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<sup>226</sup> Peggy Orenstein, *Flux: Women on Sex, Work, Love, Kids, and Life in a Half-Changed World* (New York: Knopf, 2001), p.4.

<sup>227</sup> Lia Macko and Kerry Rubin, *Midlife Crisis at 30. How the Stakes Have Changed for a New Generation – And What to Do about It* (Emmaus: Rodale, 2004), p.87.

<sup>228</sup> Turner, *A Classless Society*, p.79.

<sup>229</sup> Fielding, *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, pp.91-93.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.143-145.



they could be changed. Walker argues that an interplay of irony and fantasy is what makes the realistic women's fiction she analyses literature, '... for it is the purpose of irony to cast doubt on assumed meaning and of fantasy to reformulate meaning in accordance with new reality – an alternate world which, once imagined, becomes a possible, a potential place to live.'<sup>231</sup>

The use of irony has become typical for postfeminist texts because it is the result of a double discourse central to postfeminism: 'Irony has to do with doubleness, layers of meaning, which are even more pronounced in a recycled image culture.'<sup>232</sup> It opens texts up for a variety of readings<sup>233</sup> and allows popular culture texts to depict contradictory ideas and postfeminist ambivalence.<sup>234</sup> Fielding employs irony to ridicule societal expectations women are exposed to on a daily basis and to show that Bridget's worries are unfounded. In one frequently cited passage, for instance, Bridget compares personal grooming for a date to being a farmer.<sup>235</sup> She is clearly dissatisfied with the laborious process but the novel does not offer an alternative but merely exposes Bridget's concerns as unfounded. When she finally reaches the weight she has been trying to reach for years (8st 7), for example, all her friends tell her that she looks drawn and tired.<sup>236</sup> Bridget realises that her dieting was a waste of time: 'I feel like a scientist who discovers that his life's work has been a total mistake.'<sup>237</sup> Even this personal insight, however, is short-lived and she begins counting calories again only three days later.<sup>238</sup> Thus, while the novel uses irony to explore tensions and contradictions in women's lives and the effects these have on them, it does not offer any resistance or solutions.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Nancy A. Walker, *Feminist Alternatives. Irony and Fantasy in the Contemporary Novel by Women* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), p.190.

<sup>232</sup> Yvonne Tasker, "Enchanted (2007) by Postfeminism. Gender, Irony, and the New Romantic Comedy," in *Feminism at the Movies. Understanding Gender in Contemporary Popular Cinema*, ed. Hilary Radner and Rebecca Stringer (New York: Routledge, 2011), p.73.

<sup>233</sup> Adriaens and von Bauwel, "Sex and the City: A Postfeminist Point of View?," p.9 and p.14.

<sup>234</sup> Cobb, "Adaptable Bridget," p.290.

<sup>235</sup> Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, p.30.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.106-107.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, p.108.

<sup>239</sup> Imelda Whelehan, "Did Bridget Jones really liberate us?" *Herizons* 16:1 (2002): p.26; see also Jessica Lyn Van Slooten, "A Truth Universally (Un)Acknowledged: *Ally McBeal*, *Bridget Jones's Diary* and the Conflict between Romantic Love and Feminism," in *Searching the Soul of Ally McBeal*, ed. Elwood Watson (Jefferson: McFarland, 2006), p.42; Smoczyńska, *The World According to Bridget Jones*, p.26.

This is a departure from the women's writing analysed by Walker. Those novels use irony to expose oppression but combine it with fantasy, imagining alternatives and solutions.<sup>240</sup> In contrast, fantasy in Fielding's novels serves to imagine the perfect career and romantic endings for Bridget in the tradition of romance novels: 'There is a recognition, albeit subtextually, that feminism did not solve the problem of how to conduct heterosexual relationships in the framework of notional equality, and chicklit's 'sisterhood' continually teeters between the potential empowerment of narratives which tell it as it is, and the longing for the comfort and nurturance embodied in the classic romance.'<sup>241</sup> Romance as a discourse is very important and still present today because it adapts. Chick lit is one of these adaptations.<sup>242</sup> The unique combination of irony to expose societal pressures and contradictory expectations which are magically resolved by romantic fantasies created a new genre because *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* addressed their readers' worries and fears, while at the same time offering them the reassurance of traditional romance fiction.<sup>243</sup>

The combination of irony with romantic fantasy also allows both novels to provide a dialogue between cultural myths and feminist ideologies. In the sequel *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, for instance, Bridget discusses her relationship with Mark with her mother. The latter urges her to go back to him and Bridget mentions feminism as one of her objections: 'But if you're a feminist you shouldn't need a ...'<sup>244</sup> Bridget's mother dismisses these concerns. Their conversation takes place in a shop where Bridget gets 'her colours done,' an activity whose sole purpose is to heighten her attractiveness for men. Bridget's seemingly feminist objections are dismissed as irrelevant for her private relationship with Mark. Her mother's solution is to focus on making Bridget pretty again so she can win Mark back.<sup>245</sup> General feminist issues are declared irrelevant. Instead, the two characters focus on solving Bridget's personal problems with Mark and her work. The solution suggested by her mother is confidence and improving her looks. This focus on personal development is

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<sup>240</sup> Walker, *Feminist Alternatives*, p.190.

<sup>241</sup> Imelda Whelehan, "High Anxiety: Feminism, Chicklit And Women In The Noughties," *Diegesis. Journal of the Association for Research in Popular Fictions* 8 (2004): p.10.

<sup>242</sup> Gill and Herdieckerhoff, "Rewriting the romance: new femininities in chick lit?" p.493.

<sup>243</sup> Whelehan, "High Anxiety: Feminism, Chicklit And Women In The Noughties," pp.8-10.

<sup>244</sup> Fielding, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, p.374.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.375-376.

typical for postfeminist texts which focus on individual and not collective achievements<sup>246</sup> and also make the individual responsible for her own success.<sup>247</sup>

As a result of these notions, Bridget also has to learn to take full responsibility for her life and become self-sufficient. In *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, for instance, Bridget's friends encourage her at the beginning of the novel to end her relationship with Mark. They use various and contradictory self-help manuals as references to persuade Bridget that she should break up with Mark and their main motivation seems to be that they do not want to lose their friend to a romantic relationship. After Bridget sees Mark getting out of a cab with Rebecca, Jude and Shazzer convince her to tell Mark off on the phone instead of listening to him, essentially ending the relationship. They then cheer and laugh when she is finished, suggesting that the main aim of their advice was to be entertained.<sup>248</sup> Her community of single friends is thus branded as unreliable and selfish. Bridget has to become self-reliant and work out her problems within her relationship with Mark, suggesting that heterosexual romantic relationships are the only time women should give up their self-reliance and independence.

The neoliberalist focus on the individual also results in a celebration of the new protagonist Fielding created. Heroines in romance novels were usually beautiful, confident and strong minded. In contrast, the imperfect and insecure Bridget resonated with her readers. In an article published in *The Sunday Times* Fielding explains that she met women all over the world in the course of her book promotion tour and realised that '... they most relate to the massive gap between the way women feel they're expected to be and how they actually are.'<sup>249</sup> As a result, she goes out of her way in the sequel to show that Bridget's clumsiness and incompetence make her unique and are the secret of her professional and romantic success. In *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* Bridget is first fired by *The Independent* as a freelance writer after her interesting interview with Colin Firth and her failure to write it up on time, and then her boss Richard Finch fires her in a drug induced fit. However, at the end of the novel Bridget has been offered more freelance interviews because her unique style was

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<sup>246</sup> Aedrians and Bauwel, "Sex and the City: A Postfeminist Point of View?" p.12.

<sup>247</sup> Kauppinnen, "At an Intersection of Postfeminism and Neoliberalism," pp.95-96 and Gill, "Culture and Subjectivity," p.443.

<sup>248</sup> Fielding, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, p.134.

<sup>249</sup> Fielding, "Me and Mrs Jones."

popular with readers.<sup>250</sup> Moreover, she receives a letter from the Chief Executive of the production company she worked for, telling her that she was responsible for the majority of ideas for the programme *Good Afternoon!* and he also offers her a freelance position.<sup>251</sup> This ending strongly suggests that Bridget's previous self-doubts about her professional expertise were unfounded. Her clumsiness and unprofessional behaviour are celebrated as authentic and unique.

While Whelehan criticises the novel for being self-indulgent because it celebrates Bridget's failings,<sup>252</sup> one could also argue that readers loved Bridget because she maintains a positive outlook on life despite her failings and because she deals with societal pressures in a creative way. In the first novel she mixes diets to suit her fancy<sup>253</sup> and in the second novel she and her friends choose the self-help book that best suits their opinions.<sup>254</sup> Moreover, Bridget's professional success is clearly a fantasy but offers readers the reassurance that they can be themselves. As a result of this strong focus on and celebration of the female protagonist, the function of the hero has also changed. In romance novels the hero's love for the female protagonist would overwhelm him and inspire him to change in order to be with her. In contrast, the hero in chick lit had been reduced to a shadowy figure that merely serves to love the heroine not just despite but because of her imperfections. In order to do so, the hero witnesses the heroine's embarrassing behaviour, a plot device that became typical for chick lit novels.<sup>255</sup>

At a dinner party, for example, Bridget offends Mark's lawyer colleagues sitting at their table with her opinion about the Tory party: 'The point is you are supposed to vote for the principle of the thing, not the itsy-bitsy detail about this per cent and that per cent. And it is perfectly obvious that Labour stands for the principle of sharing, kindness, gays, single mothers and Nelson Mandela as opposed to braying bossy men having affairs with everyone shag-shag-shag left, right and centre and going to the Ritz in Paris then telling all the presenters off on the *Today* programme.'<sup>256</sup> Even though this speech is rather tactless and personally insulting to

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<sup>250</sup> Fielding, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, p.412.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.411-412.

<sup>252</sup> Whelehan, "Did Bridget Jones really liberate us?" p.28.

<sup>253</sup> Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, p.74.

<sup>254</sup> Fielding, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, p.72.

<sup>255</sup> Wells, "Mothers of Chick Lit?," p.52.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58

the majority of the people sitting at their table, Mark merely laughs and admits that they cannot argue against her point.<sup>257</sup> The section suggests that Bridget has unique opinions about politics and Mark loves her because she is different.

The strong focus on Bridget also reduces the role men play in her life, a feature that would become typical for chick lit novels.<sup>258</sup> Mark is characterised as the undoubted and perfect hero of the novel. His name immediately evokes Austen's Mr Darcy which is further strengthened by Bridget's first description of him: 'It struck me as pretty ridiculous to be called Mr Darcy and to stand on your own looking snooty at a party. It's like being called Heathcliff and insisting on spending the entire evening in the garden, shouting 'Cathy' and banging your head against a tree.'<sup>259</sup> By referencing two popular novels, namely Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*,<sup>260</sup> Fielding explicitly links her own novel to their writing but also slightly mocks their writing style. She seems to tell the reader that these stories are outdated and do not apply to modern women and men anymore. At the same time, however, she recreates the same hero and romance plot, fulfilling readers' needs for this kind of story. By making this connection, Mark is from the beginning singled out as the right man for Bridget. The first novel ends with a parody of the hero in romance novels and action films: 'I looked out of the window and nearly jumped out of my skin. There was Mark Darcy slipping, lithe as a whippersnapper, across the lawn and in through the French windows. He was sweating, dirty, his hair was unkempt, his shirt unbuttoned. *Ding-dong!*'<sup>261</sup> Mark begins as a modern version of Mr Darcy and ends as an eroticised parody of a romantic hero explaining Bridget's physical attraction to him. In *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* Mark changes and shows his vulnerable side. He tells Rebecca in the end that he needs Bridget because she livens up his life,<sup>262</sup> thus reasserting again that it is Bridget's imperfection (in contrast to the slim,

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> See Stephanie Harzewski, "Tradition and Displacement in the New Novel of Manners," in *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, ed. Suzanne Ferris and Mallory Young (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p.38 and Katarzyna Smyczyńska, "Commitment Phobia and Emotional Fuckwittage: Postmillennial Constructions of Male "Other" in Chicklit Novels," *Diegesis: Journal of the Association for Research in Popular Fictions* 8 (2004): p.33.

<sup>259</sup> Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, p.13.

<sup>260</sup> Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (London: Penguin, 2003 [1846]).

<sup>261</sup> Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, p.303, emphasis in original.

<sup>262</sup> Fielding, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, p.404.

intelligent and not in the least embarrassing Rebecca) that make her a suitable partner for Mark.

Katarzyna Smoczyńska argues that the reduced role of the male hero and the ambivalence in chick lit novels about men in general ‘... reiterates the supposed contemporary crisis of masculinity and may lead to an assumption that a truly positive male model must remain an abstract dream in women’s lives.’<sup>263</sup> However, I would like to argue that the main reason for the reduced time spent on the hero is that chick lit novels focus very strongly on the female protagonist and narrator. The novels are their stories. While they still need men to validate themselves and consider romantic relationships essential for their lives, the men are reduced to a function. Moreover, the extremely embarrassing moments Bridget has to endure stress that no matter how flawed and imperfect she is, there is a man who loves her not despite but because of her imperfections which make her a unique individual. By celebrating a flawed heroine readers can identify with, the novels offered women a reassuring fantasy at a time when they were confronted with contradictory images and ideals: ‘... women recognised within [the books’] irony their own experiences of popular culture, and especially the tensions between the lure of feminist politics and the fear of losing one’s femininity.’<sup>264</sup>

Thus, *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* were influenced by the cultural climate in the 1990s. The financial success of the novels (the first one alone sold over 15 million copies worldwide and was published in 40 countries)<sup>265</sup> inspired the next generation of women writers. The novels combine postfeminist irony with romantic fantasy by celebrating a flawed and insecure protagonist and suggest that her mishaps and her incompetence are her best assets, leading to a successful career and a stable relationship. The focus on Bridget’s everyday actions and thoughts was typical for the period and introduced various topics to the literary genre of chick lit, that would be further expanded in later books. The unique combination of several literary traditions, a focus on the everyday life and humour with a postfeminist protagonist guaranteed the novels’ success and strongly influenced the adaptations, as the second part of this chapter will illustrate.

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<sup>263</sup> Smoczyńska, “Commitment Phobia and Emotional Fuckwittage,” p.33.

<sup>264</sup> Whelehan, *Overloaded*, p.151.

<sup>265</sup> Farrington, “Bridget Jones cover revealed.”

## 1.2. From novel to film

Since the rise of conglomerate Hollywood, production companies have been strongly profit oriented which has influenced the choice of films made.<sup>266</sup> The marketability of a film has become a deciding factor and Hollywood movies are increasingly treated like products that need to be sold to consumers.<sup>267</sup> Films aimed at predominantly male viewers are often accompanied by fan articles and merchandise or appeal to women as well, thus generating a large audience and opening up opportunities to maximise profit. In order to minimise the financial risk of films aimed at a predominantly female audience, these films are therefore increasingly often based on ‘... an already established fan base, whether through its star, its genre or its relations to previously successful material circulated through other media forms.’<sup>268</sup> Genre is a way how a film can be promoted and categorised.<sup>269</sup> It standardises production and helps predict markets by offering audiences what they want to see, thus ‘... inducing a kind of ‘brand loyalty’.’<sup>270</sup> At the same time, however, genre categories have to be flexible to allow for new angles and keep viewers interested: ‘... genres cannot exist by mere repetition and recycling past models, but have to engage with difference and change, in a process of negotiation and contest over representation, meaning and pleasure.’<sup>271</sup> Romantic comedy adaptations of popular novels became popular because they rely on existing fan bases<sup>272</sup> and offer new angles on romantic comedies.

*Bridget Jones's Diary* (Sharon Maguire, 2001) and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (Biban Kidron, 2004) were two of the first millennial women's blockbusters

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<sup>266</sup> Ashley Elaine York, “From Chick Flicks to Millennial Blockbusters: Spinning Female-Driven Narratives into Franchises,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 43:1 (2010): p.5 and Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, p.117.

<sup>267</sup> John Lewis, “Following the Money in America's Sunniest Company Town. Some notes on the political economy of the Hollywood blockbuster,” in *Movie Blockbusters*, ed. Julian Stringer (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp.65-66; see also Julian Stringer, “Introduction,” in *Movie Blockbusters*, ed. Julian Stringer (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p.5.

<sup>268</sup> Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, p.117; see also York, “From Chick Flicks to Millennial Blockbusters,” p.3.

<sup>269</sup> Geraghty, “Representation and Popular Culture,” p.8.

<sup>270</sup> Gledhill, “Genre and Gender,” p.354.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, p.364.

<sup>272</sup> Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, p.118.

or in Hillary Radner's words female oriented event films.<sup>273</sup> Such films draw on already established fan bases generated by, for instance, previous publications or the casting of stars.<sup>274</sup> Simone Murray argues that 'Mainstream audiences have come to self-identify not so much as booklovers *or* cineastes ...; rather, audiences' behaviours mark them as enthusiasts for highly specific sub-genres of content – avid consumers willing to pursue their tastes across media in format-agnostic manner. In such a context, the specific medium in which a successful property first appears matters less than the scale of that success and the potency of the brand-audience attachment it generates.'<sup>275</sup> Bridget Jones had become a postfeminist icon and her appeal surpassed media boundaries.<sup>276</sup> BBC1, for instance, launched a programme about self-confessed Bridget Joneses<sup>277</sup> and terms coined by Fielding were used by other journalists,<sup>278</sup> making the novels ideal adapted texts. This section argues that the adaptation *Bridget Jones's Diary* became so successful because it combined elements from screwball comedies, the woman's film and international British blockbusters with elements from television programmes to create a romantic comedy that celebrates a new kind of female protagonist. Furthermore, Bridget's iconic status as the prototypical singleton led to a repetition of the courtship narrative in the second film.

Millennial women's blockbusters rely on genres and story elements that are recognisable and have a wide appeal, such as the romantic comedy.<sup>279</sup> Like other popular culture texts, romantic comedies are firmly embedded in their cultural and ideological context. As a result they have adapted to and engaged '... with the shifting priorities and possibilities of intimate culture and with the broader cultural, social and

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<sup>273</sup> York, "From Chick Flicks to Millennial Blockbusters," p.4 and Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, p.120.

<sup>274</sup> Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, p.117; see also York, "From Chick Flicks to Millennial Blockbusters," p.10.

<sup>275</sup> Simone Murray, *The Adaptation Industry. The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), p.43.

<sup>276</sup> Cobb, "Adaptable Bridget," p.283.

<sup>277</sup> Aitkenhead, "Bridget Jones: Don't Ya Just Love Her?"

<sup>278</sup> Katherine Viner, for example, writes about the phenomenon of the singletons, using the terms 'fuckwittage' and 'smug marrieds' to discuss societal changes. See Katharine Viner, "On the Phenomenon of the Singletons," *The Guardian*, September 11, 1997. Rebecca Tyrrel declares 1998 the 'year of the Smug Married', while Lina Saigol uses the term 'smug marrieds' in her article about the distribution of money after divorce. See Rebecca Tyrrel, "Welcome to the Age of Smug Marrieds," *The Evening Standard*, December 22, 1997 and Lina Saigol, "Get a fair share if you split," *The Guardian*, December 06, 1997.

<sup>279</sup> York, "From Chick Flicks to Millennial Blockbusters," p.10.



economic spheres that organise its forms and meanings.<sup>280</sup> Romantic comedies incorporate cultural change attesting ‘... not only to the genre’s resilience but also to its flexibility to adapt to historical change.’<sup>281</sup> Screwball comedies in the 1930s and 40s established the formula that love is the correct path for women and marriage is their ultimate goal.<sup>282</sup> In contrast, during the 1950s and 1960s ‘romance and courtship become increasingly displaced by an emphasis upon sex and seduction.’<sup>283</sup> These ‘sex comedies’ were a reaction to increasingly open discussions of sexuality and their main premise was that the male protagonist had to be convinced of the benefits of monogamy.<sup>284</sup> The nervous romances in the 1970s were a reaction to feminism because they frequently focused on nervous and confused men who were in relationships with cold and distant women, whereas romantic comedies in the 1980s re-asserted and reclaimed former conventions of the genre, going back to traditional relationship models present in romantic comedies from the 1930s and 40s.<sup>285</sup> Romantic comedies in the 1990s, particularly the very successful romantic comedies by Nora Ephron, represented a regression by returning to the premise that sex is only important to men.<sup>286</sup> *Bridget Jones’s Diary* revives aspects of the screwball comedy, most notably the clumsy heroine, and the film’s success influenced romantic comedy genre conventions of the 2000s.

The international success of previous British romantic comedies paved the way for the adaptation. *Bridget Jones’s Diary* was strongly influenced by the two internationally successful British films *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Mike Newell, 1994) and *Notting Hill* (Roger Michell, 1999). Both films were written and produced by Richard Curtis who also co-wrote the screenplays for *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and

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<sup>280</sup> Frank Krutnik, “Love Lies: Romantic Fabrication in Contemporary Romantic Comedy,” in *Terms of Endearment. Hollywood Romantic Comedy of the 1980s and 1990s*, ed. Peter William Evans and Celestino Deleyto (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p.16.

<sup>281</sup> Peter William Evans and Celestino Deleyto, “Introduction: Surviving Love,” in *Terms of Endearment. Hollywood Romantic Comedy of the 1980s and 1990s*, ed. Peter William Evans and Celestino Deleyto (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p.3).

<sup>282</sup> Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p.145.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, p.169.

<sup>284</sup> Krutnik, “The Faint Aroma of Performing Seals,” pp.60-61.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.69-70; see also Neale and Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy*, pp.171-172 and Krutnik, “Love Lies,” pp.19-20.

<sup>286</sup> Tamar Jeffers McDonald, “*Homme-Com*. Engendering Change in Contemporary Romantic Comedy,” in *Falling in Love Again. Romantic Comedy in Contemporary Cinema*, ed. Stacey Abbott and Deborah Jermyn (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), p.152.

*Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*. Both *Four Weddings and Notting Hill* focus on a middle-class male protagonist (both played by Hugh Grant), surrounded by a group of quirky friends and who falls in love with a woman who is marked by silence and nationality. The female protagonists in the films, Carrie (Andie MacDowell) and Anna (Julia Roberts), are American and have very few lines. In *Notting Hill* the silence between the protagonists is even constructed as a form of peace, suggesting that Will offers Anna a heaven from her hectic, and presumably noisy, life as a Hollywood star. The film includes Ronan Keating's song 'When you say nothing at all,' celebrating silence as proof for mutual compatibility. Bridget (Renée Zellweger) follows in this tradition by also being middle-class, surrounded by a group of quirky but loving friends and eventually begins a relationship with the very silent Mark, played by Colin Firth.

Colin Firth had become well-known in Britain through his role as Mr Darcy in the BBC miniseries, *Pride and Prejudice* (Simon Langton, 1995), which also influenced the novel and the adaptation. Fielding created Mark Darcy with Colin Firth's performance of Mr Darcy in mind<sup>287</sup> and Firth portrayed his character in both *Bridget Jones* adaptations in a very similar way, even letting his sideburns grow to the same length. Mark Darcy is cold and distant and his behaviour forms a very strong contrast to Bridget's clumsiness. Firth also embodies what Ritrosky-Winslow terms the new man in 1990s British cinema: He is sensitive, loving and caring.<sup>288</sup> In the miniseries Mr Darcy cares so much about Elizabeth that he goes to great lengths to secure her happiness by helping her sister, Lydia. His emotions and his good deeds, however, are hidden from most people and only his friends and Elizabeth know this side of him. Mark Darcy behaves similarly chivalrously in the sequel, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* when he rescues Bridget from a life sentence in Thai prison but does not tell her because he believes that she is in a relationship with Daniel (Hugh Grant).

In addition, Andrew Davies, who wrote the script for *Pride and Prejudice*, also collaborated with Fielding and Curtis on the screenplay for the adaptation. His influence is most apparent in the plot of the film. Deborah Cartmell points out that the

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<sup>287</sup> "Bridget's choice: Bad-boy Grant or Firth's brooder: In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Colin Firth plays a character modelled on himself," *The Vancouver Sun*, April 06, 2001.

<sup>288</sup> Madelyn Ritrosky-Winslow, "Colin & Renée & Mark & Bridget. The Intertextual Crowd," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 23:3 (2006): p.243.

plot of *Pride and Prejudice* is based on Shakespeare plays.<sup>289</sup> She argues that Austen's novel is part of '...a long tradition of literary texts that explore the paradoxical closeness of the conditions of love and hate ...'<sup>290</sup> These literary texts '... begin with a man and a woman expressing detestation for each other and end with their marriage, a classic formula for Hollywood comedies.'<sup>291</sup> Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan explain that this plot structure influenced screwball comedies in the 1930s and 1940s: 'Most importantly, the central couple commence the story as adversaries; their overt repulsion conceals to each other and themselves a covert attraction. *Pride and Prejudice* provides a formula for a specific type of romantic comedy: a couple vehemently arguing at the beginning of the film is normally a signal to the audience that they will end up married.'<sup>292</sup> *Bridget Jones's Diary* revives this plot structure by showing Bridget and Mark's initial mutual dislike.

When the couple meets for the first time, Bridget expresses her reaction in a voice over: 'Huh, ding-dong. Maybe this time Mom had got it right.' While she thinks this, the camera slowly pans towards Mark. The audience shares Bridget's point of view and only sees him from behind. When her mother pulls her over to him and he turns around to face them, Bridget's voice over says: 'Maybe this was the mysterious Mr Right I've been waiting my whole life to meet.' The moment is accompanied by romantic background music. When the music stops, the camera pans downwards, following Bridget's gaze and revealing Mark's reindeer jumper. The sight is accompanied by Bridget's comment: 'Maybe not.' Later on in the scene Bridget overhears Mark telling his mother that he is not interested in a blind date, '... particularly not with some verbally incontinent spinster who smokes like chimney, drinks like a fish and dresses like her mother.' Thus, by adapting the plot of the novel, which in turn was an adaptation of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the film also revives the plot structure typical for screwball comedies.

Fans loved Bridget because she was flawed and clumsy, yet still good at her job and appealing to men. The adaptation of the first novel is based on the same premise and stresses that Bridget's clumsiness and endearing incompetence make her attractive, resurrecting the female protagonist typical for screwball comedies.

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<sup>289</sup> Deborah Cartmell, *Screen Adaptations: Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice* (London: Methuen, 2010), p.26.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Cartmell and Whelehan, *Screen Adaptation*, p.93.

According to Wes Gehring, the heroine in screwball comedies ‘... is either pleasantly potty to begin with or merely assumes that comic role to better control the situation, the male is just as likely to become a screwball as a result of female shenanigans.’<sup>293</sup> She is often illogical and as a result better equipped for the world and its challenges. Screwball comedies contain an emphasis on insults and verbal violence and the friction between the protagonists is the driving narrative force. The woman’s energy often overturns the man’s former life and his bookish knowledge is replaced by the instinctive genius of the woman: ‘Here the films do not content themselves with just mocking the man, seeking to deflate his self-regard, but more importantly display the need for his rescue from arid and sexless pursuits.’<sup>294</sup> The adaptations celebrate Bridget’s warm-heartedness, her endearing incompetence and show that her professional and romantic success is the direct result of these attributes even more than the adapted texts.

Bridget’s superiority as a romantic partner is established through comparisons with other women. This technique was already used in the miniseries *Pride and Prejudice* in which Elizabeth is frequently contrasted with the rich, sophisticated and seemingly more suitable Caroline Bingley. The juxtaposition of the protagonist with a more secure, perfect woman has become a common plot device in postfeminist romance films because it serves to make the heroine more endearing.<sup>295</sup> Both Bridget Jones adaptations employ the same plot device to characterise Bridget as Mark’s ideal partner, by contrasting her with other women in order to suggest that Bridget is more authentic and consequently a better partner. In the first film she is contrasted with Mark’s colleague Natasha (Embeth Davidtz). Bridget and Daniel go on a mini-break and meet Mark and Natasha who happen to be staying in the same hotel. Both couples row boats on a lake but while Bridget laughs at Daniel’s mock recital of poetry and rows her own boat, Natasha is reading files about a case and Mark is rowing their boat. When Bridget bursts out laughing because Daniel has fallen into the water, a close up on Mark’s face shows that he envies her fun. Natasha dismisses Daniel and Bridget’s behaviour as childish but Mark longingly looks at Bridget. By contrasting her carefree behaviour with Natasha’s stiff demeanour, the film celebrates Bridget.

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<sup>293</sup> Gehring, *Romantic vs. Screwball Comedy*, p.37.

<sup>294</sup> McDonald, *Romantic Comedy*, p.27.

<sup>295</sup> Michele Schreiber, *American Postfeminist Cinema. Women, Romance and Contemporary Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp.44-45.



Figure 1: Free spirited Bridget



Figure 2: Prim lawyer Natasha

In addition, the film suggests that Bridget's incompetence at work makes her lovable and exceptional at what she is doing. In a much discussed scene Bridget is supposed to slide down a fireman's pole but misses her cue. She at first climbs back up again, not realising that she is on live television. When her boss shouts at her to slide down, she lets go and falls on the camera, resulting in a live broadcast of a close-up of her bottom. Even though the experience is humiliating for Bridget, Mark mentions that it caught his attention when he tells her that he likes her the way she is. Her clumsiness makes Bridget noticeable and distinguishes her from other women. Like the screwball heroine, it also appeals to the male protagonist because her behaviour promises an entertaining and exciting life.<sup>296</sup>

Her lack of interest in current affairs makes her a relatable reporter because she focuses on private elements instead. Bridget's interview with the couple Kafir Aghani and Eleanor Ross Heaney begins with a close-up on Mark's face who explains that Eleanor has struggled for years to save her husband from extradition. Bridget is gazing into Mark's eyes and merely replies 'Right' when he stops talking. She seems to be thinking more about Mark than the actual case. She also completely ignores the wider human rights issues the case evoked and instead asks Eleanor: 'Did you fancy Kafir the first time that you saw him?' The interviewees laugh and the scene cuts to the *Sit up Britain* office in which Richard, Bridget and her colleagues are watching the tape. Richard is also laughing about the question, while Bridget nervously mouths her own lines. The scene cuts back to a close up of the TV screen. Bridget is wrapping up the interview: 'This has been Bridget Jones for *Sit up Britain* with, let's face it, a bit of a crush now, actually.' Finch is laughing again and concludes: 'Bridget Jones. Already a legend.' Her warmth is symbolised by her focus on the couple's relationship,

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<sup>296</sup> Gehring, *Romantic vs. Screwball Comedy*, p.37.

ignoring the legal aspects of the case and the larger issues it raised. Thus, like in the books, her focus on private relationships and her endearing incompetence are celebrated as her best qualities in the film.

*Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* even goes further to celebrate Bridget. She is contrasted in the film with Mark's colleague Rebecca (Jacinda Barrett) but is so lovable that even Rebecca falls in love with her. After Bridget is arrested at the airport in Thailand for smuggling drugs, she befriends the Thai women in her cell by sharing her Wonderbra and teaching them the lyrics to Madonna's 'Like a Virgin,' suggesting that popular culture and consumption links these women across cultural and economic divides,<sup>297</sup> but also that Bridget's inherent charm works in every situation.

Both films also include scenes in which Bridget triumphantly asserts herself. When she quits in the novel and Daniel complains how difficult the situation has been for him, Bridget almost gives in and is only saved by Perpetua, who bursts into the office telling Daniel off.<sup>298</sup> In the film Perpetua also supports her, but Bridget is the one who confronts Daniel in front of all her colleagues, insults him and walks out while Aretha Franklin's 'Respect' is playing in the background. Even more so than the novels, the film stresses that Bridget is independent and successful. Bridget repeats her self-assertive speech in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*. Daniel's courtship is a very detailed repetition of his behaviour in the first film. He recites poetry to Bridget while they are on a boat in Thailand. When they go back to his hotel room they are about to sleep with each other and he discovers that Bridget is wearing her 'giant panties' again. They are then interrupted by a prostitute Daniel had ordered earlier in the day, prompting Bridget to reject him. The similarity to the equivalent scene in the first film is further emphasised by Aretha Franklin's song 'Think' playing in the background.

In the novel Bridget's moments of embarrassment are mediated through language, either by her saying something embarrassing or by her describing her embarrassing actions. In the adaptations her embarrassment is visualised and mainly caused by her own body. The body as spectacle is part of a figure which Kathleen Rowe calls the unruly woman. She describes the unruly woman as excessive in her

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<sup>297</sup> The Thai women in this scene tell Bridget about their negative experiences with men, suggesting that the mistreatment and exploitation they suffered from led to their imprisonment. Director Beeban Kidron explored this topic in her documentary *Hookers Hustlers Pimps and Their Johns* (1993) about New York's prostitute scene in the early 1990s.

<sup>298</sup> Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, pp.203-204.

behaviour and having a body that is frequently out of control.<sup>299</sup> ‘Her body is excessive or fat, suggesting her unwillingness or inability to control her physical appetites.’<sup>300</sup> The unruly woman can be a figure of resistance if she makes a spectacle of herself through her excessive behaviour.<sup>301</sup> Bridget’s clumsiness and weight indicate that she is intended to be an unruly woman in the film. However, while her body is a source of comedy for the viewer, it is a source of extreme embarrassment for Bridget.

Her figure is compared to the Hollywood beauty ideal excessive. While both Daniel and Mark are clearly interested in Bridget despite her weight, her body is deliberately depicted in unflattering ways in the film. Even though actress Renée Zellweger only ‘fattened up’ to an average weight, she is wearing costumes that are too tight and make her appear overweight. She is also physically contrasted with other actresses who embody the Hollywood ideal of the underweight woman. The actresses who play Natasha and Lara in the first film and Rebecca in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* are very thin and their costumes and hairdos accentuate their thinness. Both Natasha and Lara have short spiky hair, emphasising their taciturn personalities but also their angular faces, particularly drawing attention to their cheekbones. At the lawyer banquet, Rebecca wears a loose and flowing dress that accentuates her slender figure and reveals her prominent collar bones while Bridget is wearing a golden dress that is so tight that she has to twist her legs in order to walk up the stairs.

Moreover, Renée Zellweger, who is usually a very thin actress, had to go on a special diet in order to play the normal-weight character. Her weight gain was frequently discussed in the media as was her reported unhappiness with her looks.<sup>302</sup> Zellweger lost the weight again immediately after filming ended and was reported to only be interested in the sequel if she would not have to gain weight for it.<sup>303</sup> The *Daily Mail* even used her weight loss right after the film as a topic for discussion. The piece entitled ‘Bridget Jones or Bridget Bones,’ for instance, consists of people’s comments

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<sup>299</sup> Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman. Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), p.31.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> See for example “Renée makes it big for Bridget,” *Evening Herald*, April 13, 2001 and Rachel Mainwaring, “Now it’s Bridget Bones! Renée will only return to blockbuster role if she’s slim.” *Wales on Sunday*, November 11, 2001.

<sup>303</sup> Mainwaring, “Now it’s Bridget Bones!” and Oliver Poole, “Renée says yes to Bridget sequel – if she can stay slim. Zellweger given assurances she won’t have to pile on the pounds,” *Sunday Telegraph*, April 15, 2001.

on Zellweger's weight.<sup>304</sup> According to Dyer, actors become stars because their images play on and magically resolve ideological contradictions of our time.<sup>305</sup> By playing Bridget Jones but losing her weight immediately afterwards, Renée Zellweger fulfils this function. She resolved the ideological contradictions surrounding women's weight by playing a normal weight character in the film but immediately losing her weight to embody yet again the Hollywood beauty ideal at the premiere of the film.<sup>306</sup>

Like the novels, the film also strongly focuses on Bridget and uses filmic techniques to stress that this is her story. Inspired by the TV show *Ally McBeal*, *Bridget Jones Diary* also visualises her thoughts and fantasies. When Daniel overhears her having a private telephone call at work, Bridget pretends to be on the phone with a well-known author. Daniel points out to her that the author is dead and Bridget's thought appears in writing on the screen: 'Fuuuuuuuuuck!' Similarly, when Daniel flirts with her for the first time, Bridget expresses her thoughts in a voice-over: 'Mustn't read too much into it, though.' This is immediately followed by a visualisation of her contradictory thoughts in form of a fantasy sequence in which she imagines Daniel giving a speech at their wedding, referring to the messages as the starting point of their relationship.

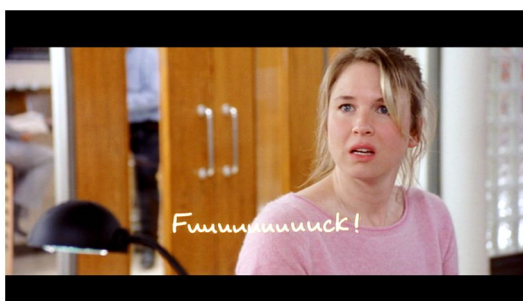


Figure 3: Bridget's thoughts

The voice-over narration throughout the film is in the tradition of the women's film.<sup>307</sup> In her discussion of five British woman's films from the 1980s Justine King notes that the protagonists in these films frequently address the audience. She

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<sup>304</sup> "Bridget Jones or Bridget Bones," *Daily Mail*, April 26, 2001.

<sup>305</sup> Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1998), pp.160-161; see also Rowe, *The Unruly Woman*, p.59.

<sup>306</sup> Lynne Kelleher, "It's Bridget Bones. Stars' concern over actress Renée's weight loss," *The Mirror*, April 28, 2001.

<sup>307</sup> Mabry, "About a Girl," p.195.



acknowledges that the direct address is conventionally considered ‘... a defamiliarizing device which disrupts the process of identification between protagonist and spectator by continually emphasizing the act of spectatorship and the fictionality of the world laid out before us.’<sup>308</sup> However, King argues that voice-over narration has a far more radical potential in the context of the woman’s film: ‘It completely precludes the possibility of passive spectatorship or spectatorial voyeurism and in fact functions to heighten our complicity with the female protagonist with whom we share a private joke (being aware of the intermediary presence of the camera) of which the other characters are apparently oblivious.’<sup>309</sup> Thus, the use of audio-visual techniques in the adaptations, like voice-over narration, writing that appears on the screen and fantasy sequences, establishes a close relationship between the viewer and Bridget and emphasizes ‘that this is *her* story.’<sup>310</sup>

The woman’s film also ‘... places at the center of its universe a female who is trying to deal with the emotional, social, and psychological problems that are specifically connected to the fact that she is a woman. These problems are made concrete by various plot developments, and since they are often contradictory, they are represented in the story as a form of choice the woman must make between options that are mutually exclusive.’<sup>311</sup> Romantic comedy is one of the most popular postfeminist genres<sup>312</sup> and one of the reasons is that the films focus on women’s lives and the choices they have to make. Having to make choices is typical in a neoliberalist society: ‘Choice refers to the action of selecting between different proposals.’<sup>313</sup> Typical for romantic comedies, Bridget’s options are reduced to choosing the right man and both adaptations focus on the courtship narrative.

A renewed demonization of spinsterhood and celebration of marriage are typical for postfeminist popular texts.<sup>314</sup> While Fielding wanted to offer a different and

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<sup>308</sup> Justine King, “Crossing Thresholds: The Contemporary British Woman’s Film,” in *Dissolving Views. Key Writings on British Cinema*, edited by Andrew Higson (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 1996), p.227.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Mabry, “About a Girl,” p.195.

<sup>311</sup> Jeanine Basinger, *A Woman’s View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930–1960* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1995), pp.505-506.

<sup>312</sup> Karlyn, *Unruly Girls, Unrepentant Mothers*, p.35.

<sup>313</sup> Matthew Eagleton-Pierce, *Neoliberalism. The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p.20.

<sup>314</sup> Suzanne Leonard, ““I Hate My Job, I Hate Everybody Here”. Adultery, Boredom, and the “Working Girl” in Twenty-first-century American Cinema,” in *Interrogating Postfeminism*,

more positive version of single life in her novels,<sup>315</sup> the first film dwells in length on Bridget's misery when she is alone. After she breaks up with Daniel, she is lying on her couch watching *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987). The scene frequently cuts between the television screen and a close up on Bridget's face. The first shot of the screen shows Glenn Close's character tell her lover that she is 36 years old and that it is her last chance to have a child. It then cuts to a close up on Bridget's face looking sad and distressed, which is followed by a scene at the end of *Fatal Attraction* in which Glenn Close suddenly appears out of a bath tub. When it cuts back to Bridget we see her getting a fright and that she is smoking a cigarette, presumably to calm her upset nerves. The camera cuts back to Glenn Close's death scene in which she slides slowly back into the tub after having been shot. Bridget's calm reaction implies that she is familiar with the ending and she changes the channel to a nature programme. Two lions are having sex and a male narrator explains that the male lion leaves the lioness after coitus. This information is inaccurate since lions live together in prides consisting of several females and a few males. Bridget turns her head away from the screen and the voice-over of the programme slowly fades out. She is smoking and seems to think about what she has just watched.

Both the nature programme and the scenes from *Fatal Attraction* are a comment on Bridget's situation. Taken together they imply that Daniel's behaviour is typical for a man because it is biologically motivated and that Bridget might share Glenn Close's fate if she does not find a man soon. The protagonist in *Fatal Attraction* is one of two stock types Susan Faludi identified in films about career women in the 1980s, namely the coldly calculating careerist. The other stock type is the depressed spinster and Bridget lying on her couch looking depressed seems to be the reincarnation of this second stereotype.<sup>316</sup> This is quite a significant change from the novel because the film strongly suggests that Bridget's '... life is not complete without finding that significant other person.'<sup>317</sup>

The adaptation introduces Bridget's quest for romance as its main theme right from the beginning in the scene that accompanies the title credits. She has returned home from the Alconburry's Turkey curry buffet where Mark Darcy insulted her.

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ed. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), p.102; see also Schreiber, *American Postfeminist Cinema*, p.12.

<sup>315</sup> Fielding quoted in Dave, "Helen Fielding Is Not Bridget Jones."

<sup>316</sup> Faludi, *Backlash*, p.194.

<sup>317</sup> Gehring, *Romantic vs. Screwball Comedy*, p.68.

Bridget explains in a voice-over that overhearing the insult was the turning point and she decides that she does not want to turn into Glenn Close from *Fatal Attraction*. We then see her lying on her couch wearing wide red pyjamas and smoking. Her voice-over is replaced by the song ‘All by Myself’ by Celine Dion and the names of the lead actors fade in and out next to Bridget. We then see her watching *Frasier* and walking over to check the messages on her answer phone. When she hears that she has none she walks out of the picture but blends back into the scene again, which suggests that she spends a lot of time sitting on her couch in her pyjamas. She is now drinking a glass of wine and slowly begins to move along to the music. The long shot changes to a medium shot of her emptying her wine glass in one big gulp. Her facial expression is tense while she drinks, suggesting that her drinking is the result of unhappiness rather than enjoyment of the wine. Bridget pretends to play an instrument to accompany the song and begins to sing along with her eyes closed.

Her posture is at first slumped forward and she seems limp in her movements. Her face expresses sadness and she nearly cries when she sings the chorus but then becomes more animated when she pretends to sing louder and makes big arm gestures. When she then plays air drums she looks very animated and the scene cuts back to a long shot in order to show her whole body moving to the music. This is followed by a medium shot showing her strongly animated face, which is followed by another long shot, in which she kicks in the air and the title blends in next to her. She seems to be reaching out to the viewer. The scene and the song fade out and Bridget explains again in a voice-over that she decided to take control of her life by starting a diary. Her increasingly animated movements throughout the song seem to be gestures of defiance towards her single life. They imply that she is about to get more active in her pursuit of men.

Bridget’s decision to ‘take action’ by writing a diary reflects aspects of a postfeminist sensibility. In a postfeminist climate people can choose who they want to be so that empowerment is merely a decision.<sup>318</sup> In postfeminist media culture the key to becoming independent is self-surveillance and discipline.<sup>319</sup> Bridget’s diary is a form of self-surveillance which will supposedly allow her to remodel her inner life. By writing down her story she gives meaning to her life, her pursuit of men and creates

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<sup>318</sup> Gill, *Gender and the Media*, pp.260-261.

<sup>319</sup> Gill, “Postfeminist media culture,” p.156.

her 'choice biography.'<sup>320</sup> Thus, the purpose of writing her diary is to record her search for a man. Since the adaptation is the visualisation of this diary, it identifies its own purpose in this scene: It is a chronicle of Bridget's quest for love.

The enormous financial success of *Bridget Jones Diary* (it grossed over 210 million Dollars worldwide<sup>321</sup>) meant that the sequel *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* tried to emulate this success. According to York, millennial women's blockbusters are also high concept, meaning the storylines can easily be summarised and reproduced with slight changes.<sup>322</sup> The plot of the sequel is an example, because it simply repeats Bridget's quest for love. After an unsuccessful dinner party, Bridget breaks up with Mark because she thinks he cannot stand up for her. Bridget is asked to co-host a traveling show with Daniel Cleaver and accompany him to Thailand. Her friend Shazzer (Sally Phillips) offers to go along with her. Daniel tries to seduce Bridget but she eventually rejects him. Shazzer meets Jed (Paul Nicholls) on the flight to Thailand and has an affair with him. When his parting gift does not fit into her suitcase, Bridget offers to take it and is arrested for smuggling drugs at the airport. Mark rescues her from prison but hides his real involvement from her. When Bridget returns home her friends tell her that Mark did everything he could to get her out of prison. She rushes to declare her love to him and he proposes.

Even though Bridget is in a relationship with Mark at the beginning of the film, she is still clearly marked as a single woman. Her isolation and distance to Mark are highlighted through frequent silences and by his reactions to her behaviour. The most telling change from the novel is his reaction at the lawyer dinner. In the novel Mark reacts positively to her simplistic views on politics.<sup>323</sup> In the film, however, the dinner is a prolonged public humiliation for Bridget, reminiscent of her speech at the literary party in the first film.

Right from the beginning of the scene Bridget is characterised as different by her costume. While the other women wear elegant dresses in subdued colours, Bridget wears a shiny golden dress which is too tight. Mark introduces her to a group of his fellow lawyers and the editing of the scene serves to further emphasise Bridget's isolation. The scene cuts between the different people in the group but Bridget is the

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<sup>320</sup> Compare Gill, *Gender and the Media*, pp.260-261.

<sup>321</sup> Box Office Mojo, "Bridget Jones's Diary," accessed December 06, 2015, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=bridgetjonessdiary.htm>.

<sup>322</sup> York, "From Chick Flicks to Millennial Blockbusters," p.11.

<sup>323</sup> Fielding, *The Edge of Reason*, pp.54-59.

only one who appears by herself in the frame. Mark is standing next to Rebecca and the other members of the group are Horatio and his wife. Even when the camera focuses on Bridget she is surrounded by couples or groups of people.



Figure 4: Rebecca and Mark



Figure 5: Bridget surrounded by couples

She is also isolated from the people around her by her opinions. She disagrees with Horatio and defends homeless people. While she is talking, the scene cuts to a medium shot of Rebecca and Mark. Rebecca smiles at the people in their group, seemingly charmed by Bridget's words. Mark, however, looks down in apparent embarrassment. Bridget then insults Horatio's political views in particular and Tory voters in general: 'Honestly. This is the sort of rubbish you'd expect from some fat, balding Tory home counties upper middle-class twits.' The background music stops during her speech and the scene cuts to a group of men who physically fit the insulting description Bridget has just given of Tory voters. It cuts back to Bridget who flushes, screws up her face and forces an unconvincing laugh. No one joins in or even returns a smile, making her embarrassment rather extreme.

By depicting Bridget as isolated within her relationship at the beginning of the film, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* implies that a relationship is not enough because only marriage can really change her status. Promoting marriage is typical for romantic comedies because '... the genre has a firmly ingrained conservatism, for it pushes toward and seeks to legitimize a *sanctioned* heterosexual union – marriage.'<sup>324</sup> It mythologizes marriage as a woman's '... greatest achievement and the producer of the greatest happiness.'<sup>325</sup> In the sequel marriage is also romanticised at the end when Bridget and Mark attend her parents' renewal of their marriage vows. After the ceremony the guests walk out of a church in a rural area. The surrounding hills and

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<sup>324</sup> Krutnik, "The Faint Aroma of Performing Seals," p.62.

<sup>325</sup> Leonard, "'I Hate My Job, I Hate Everybody Here,'" p.102.

the church itself are covered in snow and the dreamlike colour setting makes the scene appear like a fairy tale ending. Bridget catches the bridal bouquet but clumsily slips on the ice. The camera does not follow her fall, so that she momentarily disappears out of the frame. Her arm then re-appears, triumphantly holding up the flowers. With Mark's help she stands up again, smiling at the crowd who are clapping in the background. They seem to celebrate her for her achievement, which consists of finding a man who is willing to marry her.

As this analysis has shown, both adaptations were influenced by the success of the novels but also by their context. They combined elements of the woman's film with techniques from *Ally McBeal* to stress that both films are Bridget's story, celebrating an incompetent and clumsy yet loveable protagonist. Typical for a romantic comedy, both films reduce her story to her romantic quest for the right partner. Nevertheless, her partners are reduced to silence and their main function is to love Bridget because of her flaws. The films resurrect the clumsy screwball heroine and turn her into an endearingly incompetent postfeminist icon. Moreover, the adaptations were two of the first millennial woman's blockbusters and capitalized on the success of the novels but even more so on Bridget's popularity as a character.

The analyses in this chapter have shown that both the novels and the films combine aspects of their predecessors to create something new, yet sufficiently familiar to appeal to female consumers. All four texts focus strongly on an clumsy but endearing female protagonist and celebrate her, suggesting that she is unique and lovable because of her flaws. The role of the male protagonist is reduced to silent witness of her mishaps and admirer of her endearing incompetence in order to further stress that these novels and films are about Bridget. Both books and films include descriptions and scenes from Bridget's everyday life, introducing the topics work, self-help, motherhood and spirituality, that were adapted and extended in subsequent books and films analysed in this thesis. The financial success of the novels and the general interest in Bridget as a character made Fielding's novels the ideal adapted texts for two of the first millennial woman's blockbusters. The following chapter analyses adapted texts and adaptations that focus on the topic of the workplace and the importance of the right kind of employment. A contextual analysis will show that the themes explored in the chick lit novels made them ideal adapted texts for millennial woman's blockbusters.

## 2. Chapter

### Identity, Choice and Work:

#### *Confessions of a Shopaholic, The Devil Wears*

#### *Prada and The Nanny Diaries*

‘Something wants there to be a flow of narrative and expository material from one form to another: what? One important, truly general answer to this question is: the market. This has always been the case, throughout the history of the cinema within a historical era which is that of the commodity; it is now even more markedly the case, as the logic of the market and of the media commodity shifts into satellite, cable, ‘electronic superhighway’ mode, with its ever-increasing need for ‘product’.’<sup>326</sup>

As outlined in the introduction, literature and film are sites of production and circulation of discourses.<sup>327</sup> They engage with and draw on meanings in a culture and at the same time reproduce these meanings. Adaptation is thus not a re-writing or a re-reading but the reappearance of an element in another discursive field.<sup>328</sup> The previous chapter illustrated that *Bridget Jones’s Diary* started a new literary genre and its adaptation created a new kind of romantic comedy heroine because they combined elements of previous genres that fit into the cultural climate of postfeminism at the time. Moreover, the books and to a lesser extent the films introduced various topics from everyday life. This chapter explores how the next generation of chick lit novels

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<sup>326</sup> John O. Thompson, “‘Vanishing’ Worlds: Film Adaptation and the Mystery of the Original,” in *Pulping Fictions: Consuming Culture Across the Literature/Media Divide*, ed. Deborah Cartmell, I.Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye and Imelda Whelehan (London and Chicago: Pluto Press, 1996), p.12.

<sup>327</sup> Casetti, “Adaptation and Mis-adaptations,” p.82.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

and their adaptations were influenced by the changes implemented by *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (novels and adaptations respectively).

According to Turner, '... a celebration of normality in a democratisation of culture ... was one of the more pronounced features of the [1990s] and one of its key legacies.'<sup>329</sup> The Bridget Jones novels and films included aspects of Bridget's everyday life, particularly descriptions of her mishaps at work.<sup>330</sup> This chapter explores how the next generation of chick lit heroines expands on the topic of the workplace and the importance of the right kind of employment for a woman's happiness. The representation of gender in the texts discussed in this chapter is strongly influenced by the postfeminist key concepts of identity, choice and consumption and how they relate to the workplace. The first part of the chapter analyses the four novels *Confessions of a Shopaholic* and *Shopaholic Abroad* by Sophie Kinsella,<sup>331</sup> *The Nanny Diaries* by Nicola Kraus and Emma McLaughlin and *The Devil Wears Prada* by Lauren Weisberger. The analyses examine how the identity of the protagonists is linked to consumption and the right choice of employment. Typical for chick lit novels, the books celebrate the female protagonists and rely on the readers' familiarity with romantic conventions to reduce the role of the male love interest to a minimum.

The second part of this chapter analyses *The Devil Wears Prada* (David Frankel, 2006), *The Nanny Diaries* (Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini, 2007) and *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (P.J. Hogan, 2009). It explores how the critical reception of the novels inspired changes in the adaptations and argues that the films focus more strongly on women's responsibility to create their own identities by making the right choices. Like the adapted texts, two of the films rely on genre conventions of the romantic comedy to reduce the romance plot to a minimum, allowing the films to focus on the development of the female protagonists instead. The return to a focus on the romance plot in *Confessions of a Shopaholic* is the result of contextual influences.

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<sup>329</sup> Turner, *A Classless Society*, p.516.

<sup>330</sup> The most well-known example is the passage in which Bridget is asked to slide down a fireman pole: Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, pp.221-223.

<sup>331</sup> The adaptation *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (P.J. Hogan, 2009) combined elements of both novels which is why the first two novels in the *Shopaholic* series are analysed together.



## 2.1. Underling lit, or where not to work

The texts in this chapter were grouped together because of the time of the novels' publication and the topics they focus on. All four novels were published a few years after *Bridget Jones's Diary* and became bestsellers. The first-person narrators are all young women in their early to mid-twenties and therefore appear to be the next generation of Bridgets. Moreover, the four novels expand the theme of the workplace by focussing '...on young women, usually recent college graduates from comfortable and cultured backgrounds, and their uneasy entrance into the culture of the professional workplace.'<sup>332</sup> Elizabeth Hale argues that these novels form a subcategory of the chick lit genre that she refers to as underling lit or assistant lit.<sup>333</sup>

The diversification of chick lit into subgenres is itself a symptom of a general trend towards diversity in texts for and about women and a result of a change in feminist thinking. Third-wave feminism embraced diversity as a reaction to the exclusions second wave feminism created. According to Rosemarie Tong, diversity is simply part of reality for third-wave feminists.<sup>334</sup> As a result, third-wave feminism is '... not so much interested in getting women to want what they *should want*, as responding to what women say they want...'<sup>335</sup> Ann Brooks attributes this interest in diversity to postfeminism, which she understands as a successor of feminism because it is representing a '... conceptual and theoretical diversity and encapsulating a range of diverse political and philosophical movement for change.'<sup>336</sup> Chick lit is a reaction to this interest in diversity: '... the increasing diversification of the genre speaks to the desire for more comprehensive representations of women's experiences and also complicates the task of generalizing about or finding a single term to suit these novels.'<sup>337</sup> Consequently, reviewers, critics and academics frequently group novels into subgenres, based on additional topics that are more important than the romance

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<sup>332</sup> Hale, "Long-Suffering Professional Females," p.17.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought. A more comprehensive introduction* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2009), p.285; see also Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc.*, p.27.

<sup>335</sup> Tong, *Feminist Thought*, p.288, emphasis in original.

<sup>336</sup> Brooks, *Postfeminisms*, p.10.

<sup>337</sup> Cheryl A. Wilson, "Becky Bloomwood at the V&A: Culture, Materialism, and the Chick Lit Novel," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 45:1 (2012): p.216.

plot. In this chapter the novels are grouped together because of their focus on the importance of work for the identity creation of the protagonists.

All four novels function as narrativisations of the protagonists' identities. Identities are firmly embedded in the culture in which they are produced and people can only form their identities by using the tools provided by in this culture.<sup>338</sup> Individualism as a part of neo-liberalist ideology is the result of an erosion of old structures. It created a pressure on individuals to structure their own lives and emancipatory politics gave way to life politics.<sup>339</sup> Douglas Kellner explains that since modernity, there has been an overall awareness that identity is chosen and constructed: '... the postmodern self accepts and affirms multiple and shifting identities. Identity today thus becomes a freely chosen game, a theatrical presentation of the self, in which one is able to present oneself in a variety of roles, images, and activities, relatively unconcerned about shifts transformations, and dramatic changes.'<sup>340</sup> In a neo-liberalist society the concept of identity has become a process of becoming and the self is the subject of multiple and on-going processes of revision, reform and choices.<sup>341</sup> It is a reflexive project that consists of 'coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives'.<sup>342</sup> People have to create their selves by choosing from a variety of different lifestyle choices.<sup>343</sup>

Postfeminist ideology is characterised by the same belief in individuality, empowerment and free choice.<sup>344</sup> This notion is markedly different from second wave feminism, during which authors like Susan Faludi, exposed how the lives of individual women were influenced by institutionalised oppression.<sup>345</sup> The rise of neo-liberalist ideology, however, shifted the focus from the group to the individual. Choice is a central term in postfeminist texts, which often focus on individuals who can change their lives by making the right choices. All three protagonists in the novels discussed in this section struggle with employment situations that clash with their personalities.

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<sup>338</sup> Budgeon, "The Contradiction of Successful Femininity," pp.282-283.

<sup>339</sup> See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p.14 and McRobbie, "Postfeminism and Popular Culture," pp.35-36.

<sup>340</sup> Kellner, "Popular Culture and the Construction of Postmodern Identities," p.158.

<sup>341</sup> Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, p.6.

<sup>342</sup> Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p.5.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52; see also Smyczyńska, *The World According to Bridget Jones*, p.21.

<sup>344</sup> Gill, "Postfeminist media culture," p.153.

<sup>345</sup> See Faludi, *Backlash*.

They have to replace them with workplaces that suit their identities. However, each novel also contains passages that question or even contest the postfeminist notion of free choice and that people are solely responsible for their actions.

### **2.1.1. Consuming identities in Confessions of a Shopaholic**

*Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2000) and *Shopaholic Abroad* (2001) by Sophie Kinsella are narrated by the main protagonist Rebecca Bloomwood. Becky is a shopaholic and has to negotiate her addiction and her resulting debt with different jobs. In the first novel she works as a financial journalist but finds a job in the end as a financial adviser on a morning show, allowing her to combine her knowledge about finance with her passion to help people. In the second novel she considers moving with her boyfriend Luke to the US. While she is shopping and going to interviews in New York, her debts are publicly revealed in the tabloid newspapers in England. She is exposed as a fraud, loses her job on the morning show and Luke distances himself from her. In the end she auctions off all her possessions to pay off her debt and becomes a personal shopper at Barneys in New York, where Luke joins her and proposes.

In the two *Shopaholic* novels Becky creates her identity through consumer choices. Srijani Ghosh explains that consumer choices reflect people's personality and that Becky repeatedly buys things in order to create a new self.<sup>346</sup> According to Fred Davis, clothes can be used to locate yourself '... symbolically in some structured universe of status claims and lifestyle attachments.'<sup>347</sup> In addition, goods have a cultural-value or sign-value attached to them: 'The consumer, then, has the power to construct the identity she wants to assume utilizing the wide range of commodities that are loaded with this sign-value. So, basically what is consumed is more of the

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<sup>346</sup> Srijani Ghosh, "Res Emptito Ergo Sum: Fashion and Commodity Fetishism in Sophie Kinsella's *Confessions of a Shopaholic*," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 46:2 (2013): p.378; see also Jessica Lyn Van Slooten, "Fashionably Indebted: Conspicuous Consumption, Fashion, and Romance in Sophie Kinsella's Shopaholic Trilogy," in *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, ed. Suzanne Ferris and Mallory Young (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p.224.

<sup>347</sup> Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture and Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p.4.

sign-value of a commodity rather than its use-value.<sup>348</sup> Thus, the shopaholic novels are deeply embedded in discourses about identity creation through consumption and they do not criticise the process.

Rather, the novels suggest that Becky fails because she takes this process too far. A single item completely changes her perception of her self, so that instead of expressing merely an aspect, Becky bases her entire identity on a single item of clothing or accessory.<sup>349</sup> At the beginning of the first novel, for instance, she tries on a new scarf: 'There is no question. I have to have it. It makes my eyes look bigger, it makes my hair cut look more expensive, it makes me look like a different person. I'll be able to wear it with everything. People will refer to me as the Girl in the Denny and George scarf.'<sup>350</sup> Thus, Becky can use an item of clothing to completely change her identity so that she can seemingly escape her worries by simply becoming a different person through consumption.

Katarzyna Smyczyńska argues that consumption is often portrayed positively in chick lit novels because choosing an item can give protagonists a sense of power.<sup>351</sup> In a postfeminist climate self-fulfilment can be achieved through the consumption of the right goods.<sup>352</sup> Throughout the novels consumption is celebrated by describing Becky's purchases in great detail. For Ghosh and Cheryl A. Wilson the novels are compensatory literature, meaning that readers can through the detailed descriptions participate in Becky's shopping sprees without having to spend any money.<sup>353</sup> In the first novel, for instance, Becky wants to buy a cardigan as a present for her flatmate and ends up buying one for herself describing it as 'The most perfect, soft, dove-grey angora cardigan, with little pearly buttons.'<sup>354</sup> By describing the products she buys in such detail, the books provide readers with a safe outlet for their consumerist fantasies.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Jenny Mochtar, "The Commodification of the Body in Sophie Kinsella's *Confessions of a Shopaholic* and Alberthiene Endah's *Cewek Matre*" (Diss. Petra Christian University, 2006), p.6.

<sup>349</sup> Van Slooten, "Fashionably Indebted," p.224.

<sup>350</sup> Kinsella, *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, p.22.

<sup>351</sup> Smyczyńska, *The World According to Bridget Jones*, p.157.

<sup>352</sup> Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, p.6.

<sup>353</sup> Ghosh, "Res Emptito Ergo Sum," p.391 and Wilson, "Becky Bloomwood at the V&A," p.217.

<sup>354</sup> Kinsella, *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, p.67.

<sup>355</sup> Van Slooten, "Fashionably Indebted," p.219.

The descriptions also serve to forge a bond with the reader because Becky does not just describe the items she buys but also how she justifies the purchases: ‘You see, the thing is, I’ve been looking for a nice grey cardigan for ages. Honestly, I have. ... Look at it another way – what’s forty-five quid in the grand scheme of things? I mean, it’s nothing, is it?’<sup>356</sup> Through these frequent inner dialogues directed at the reader the novels recreate not just the positive feelings shopping evokes but also the guilt and considerations that are part of buying consumer products. Maggie Andrews and Mary M. Talbot explain that they use the term consumer culture ‘... because in very many ways the act of consumption for women brings them into participation in a culture: a community of other consumers.’<sup>357</sup> Using Becky’s consumption, the books create a bond between the protagonist and the reader by uniting both in a community of consumers that is marked by positive but also negative experiences.

For Becky the experience of consumption is even a basic human need and inescapable. She describes her feelings after buying a scarf in the following words: ‘That moment. That instant when your fingers curl round the handles of a shiny, uncreased bag – and all the gorgeous new things inside it become yours. What’s it like? It’s like going hungry for days, then cramming your mouth full of warm buttered toast. ... It’s like the better moments of sex. Everything else is blocked out of your mind. It’s pure, selfish pleasure.’<sup>358</sup> Her comparison of shopping with food and sex illustrate the effect shopping has on Becky and defines the activity as a basic human need. In the second novel Becky is overwhelmed at a sample sale: ‘In front of me a whole line of heads whips around. There’s a collective intake of breath – and then it’s like a tidal wave of girls, all heading towards me. I find myself running towards the door, just to avoid being knocked down – and suddenly I’m in the middle of the room, slightly shaken, as everybody else peels off and heads for the rails.’<sup>359</sup> The urge to shop that Becky and the other women feel is described like a force of nature that cannot be withstood.

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<sup>356</sup> Kinsella, *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, p.67.

<sup>357</sup> Maggie Andrews and Mary M. Talbot, “Introduction: women in consumer culture,” in *All the World and Her Husband. Women in Twentieth-Century Consumer Culture*, ed. Maggie Andrews and Mary M. Talbot (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), p.3.

<sup>358</sup> Kinsella, *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, p.34.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.168-169.

In neo-liberalist societies women are constantly called on to self-manage and self-discipline<sup>360</sup> but when Becky realises the extent of her debts and attempts to reign in her shopping addiction she fails. The novels criticise the belief in free choice and the complete autonomy of the individual by showing that choice is merely an illusion because we do not have the option to refuse to choose anymore: ‘The right to choose has become an obligation to choose.’<sup>361</sup> The novels suggest that consumer culture makes it very difficult if not even impossible for Becky to escape consumption. When she decides to cut back in order to save money, she goes to a museum only to realise that cultural artefacts have been commercialised and turned into commodities, which Becky promptly consumes in the museum shop: ‘Oh. But I am not supposed to be buying anything today, am I? Damn. This is awful. ... Christmas shopping! I can do all my Christmas shopping here! I know March is a bit early – but why not be organized?’<sup>362</sup> The contradictions of consumer culture are also exposed on pages 45 and 46, which juxtapose two letters from a store addressed to Becky. Both letters were sent on the same day and while the first one asks her to pay her bill – ‘Our records suggest that we have not received payment for your latest Brompton Gift Card bill.’<sup>363</sup> – the second letter begins with ‘There’s never been a better time to spend!’ in bolt print, offering her bonus points for her next purchase.<sup>364</sup>

In addition, the process of creating new selves through consumption has become a necessity and unavoidable. Becky’s shopping is a symptom for her insecurity and her conviction that she needs to create interesting identities for herself in order to be accepted. In *Shopaholic Abroad*, for instance, Becky has a job interview with people from a US television network. She dismisses Luke’s advice: ‘“Just be yourself”, Luke keeps saying. But frankly, that’s a ridiculous idea. Everyone knows the point of an interview is not to demonstrate who you are, but to pretend to be whatever sort of person they want for the job. That’s why they call it ‘interview technique’.’<sup>365</sup> Becky is of course right. Universities and job agencies offer interview training courses and bookshops are filled with advice literature on the topic. The novel

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<sup>360</sup> Gill, “Postfeminist media culture,” p.156.

<sup>361</sup> Matthew Eagleton-Pierce, *Neoliberalism. The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p.23; see also Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London and New York: Verso, 1996 [1968]), p.141.

<sup>362</sup> Kinsella, *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, p.99.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, p.46.

<sup>365</sup> Kinsella, *Shopaholic Abroad*, p.173.

does not question this premise but ridicules the process by describing how Becky creates a completely exaggerated self. She attempts to appear typically British and invents the old English custom of ‘turning the tea cake.’<sup>366</sup> Everyone Becky meets in New York seems to be performing a superficial persona. She tries to adapt by creating an even more inventive identity because she feels the need to fit into an environment that seems bigger and better than England. This cannot work out, however, because Becky is not familiar with this specific procedure. The identity she constructs is too fake. Becky is exposed as a fraud and US TV producers immediately lose interest in her. The novel suggests that true identity in the US does not matter. Becky’s construction of Englishness is not criticised and she is only rejected because her lies are exposed as such. The novel implies that creating a fake identity is acceptable, even necessary for certain jobs, as long as the illusion can be maintained.

Following in Bridget’s footsteps, however, Becky has to realise that the key to happiness is accepting herself the way she is. When the US media and later on her British employers turn their backs on Becky the media in general are exposed as unscrupulous and superficial institutions. The novels suggest that Becky does not fit into these places because they require the creation and maintenance of a fake identity. Thus, Becky has to find a workplace that suits her personality in order to be happy. The idea that the workplace needs to suit an individual developed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century: ‘The worker is an individual in search of meaning, responsibility, a sense of personal achievement, a maximized ‘quality of life’, and hence of work. Thus the individual is not to be emancipated *from* work, perceived as merely a task or a means to an end, but to be fulfilled *in* work, now construed as an activity through which we produce, discover, and experience our selves.’<sup>367</sup> Choosing the right workplace, therefore, becomes one of the choices that is essential for the development of the self and is the most important choice Becky has to make. Once she has chosen the right job and the right environment for herself at the end of the second novel, namely working as a personal shopper at Barneys in New York, she will supposedly be happy.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* focus strongly on the first person narrator and stress that this is her story. As a result, the male protagonists are reduced to their

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<sup>366</sup> *ibid.*: p.179.

<sup>367</sup> Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul. The shaping of the private self* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp.102-103, emphasis in original.

functions as love interests in Bridget's life. In the second generation of chick lit discussed in this chapter the role of the male love interest is further reduced and formulised. He is often only sketchily characterised and becomes 'a shadow presence or a pleasingly pat background figure.'<sup>368</sup> Smyczyńska argues that this lack of representation means that the love interest remains a very ambiguous figure, suggesting that the perfect partner might not actually exist.<sup>369</sup> The novels remain '...openly ambiguous about his actual value in women's lives.'<sup>370</sup> I argued in the first chapter that reducing the role of the male protagonist frees up narrative space in the novels that is used to focus on the female protagonists. *Confessions of a Shopaholic* further illustrates this point. It relies on a reader's familiarity with genre conventions of the romance novel and the plot structure of *Pride and Prejudice* revived by the Bridget Jones adaptations for the romance plot.

Luke is only discernible as the hero of the novel because readers are already familiar with the premise from romance novels that the most eligible, handsome, intelligent and successful bachelor, whom the heroine dislikes for no apparent reason, has to be her love interest.<sup>371</sup> The 'fights' Becky picks with Luke, for instance, are often arbitrary. When Luke realises that Becky has not read the latest newspapers yet, he tries to spare her public humiliation by sending his employee Alicia away and explaining a recent development to Becky, but she is angry about his behaviour.<sup>372</sup> Moreover, his change at the end of the first novel, while typical for romance plots, is completely out of character. On a TV show Becky accuses one of Luke's clients of essentially tricking people out of their money. Even though Luke owns a very successful PR company and might lose clients as a consequence of his actions, he publicly agrees with Becky.<sup>373</sup> His change in opinion is very unrealistic and only makes sense within the genre conventions of the romance novel adopted by chick lit novels, because he has to change in order to be compatible with the female protagonist.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Stephanie Harzewski, "Tradition and Displacement in the New Novel of Manners," in *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, ed. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p.38.

<sup>369</sup> Smyczyńska, "Commitment Phobia and Emotional Fuckwittage," p.33.

<sup>370</sup> Smyczyńska, *The World According to Bridget Jones*, p.56.

<sup>371</sup> Compare Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, pp.31-33.

<sup>372</sup> Kinsella, *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, pp.25-27.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, p.284.

<sup>374</sup> Compare Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, pp.36-37.



By reducing the role of the romantic hero, *Confessions of a Shopaholic* can focus in detail on Becky and celebrate her as unique. Detailed descriptions of Becky's shopping addiction contest the postfeminist notion of free choice and illustrate that her addiction is the result of living in a consumer society, in which identity creation through consumption has become a necessity and consumption has therefore become inescapable. Constant identity creation is therefore not criticised as such but depicted as a normal part of life in the novels. In the end Becky accepts her flaw and turns it into a career by choosing a satisfactory workplace that suits her individual interests and needs. Thus, like Bridget, Becky is a flawed but loveable protagonist who finds happiness by accepting herself and is rewarded with a man who loves her the way she is, a theme that is also explored in the novel analysed in the following section.

### **2.1.2. Workplace exploitation in *The Nanny Diaries***

The protagonist in the *The Nanny Diaries* (2002) by Nicola Kraus and Emma McLaughlin is also in a work environment that does not suit her. Nan studies child development in New York and finances her studies by working part-time as a Nanny. She begins a new job looking after Mrs X's son Grayer. In the course of the novel Nanny is increasingly overwhelmed by the demands of the job and is drawn into the lives of the Xs. After her graduation Nanny joins the Xs on a trip to Nantucket where Mrs X fires her. Nanny records a message for Mrs X on the nanny cam urging her to spend more time with her son and then leaves.

The characters in the novel are seemingly dis-individualised in order to make the narrative generalizable. The protagonist and first-person narrator is Nan, which is short for Nanny. Her name reduces her right from the beginning of the novel to her function in a part-time job but also implies that her story, or at least elements of it, is a story shared by many Nannies. Unlike Becky, who has already been working for a few years at the beginning of *Confessions*, Nan is in her third year of a degree in child development. She merely works part-time as a nanny to finance her studies. Her employers are Mr and Mrs X. The use of x, used in math equations as a variable, for the mother and father of Nan's charge, Grayer, universalises them and suggests that they are prototypes of rich New Yorkers. In addition, if a woman was involved in a

scandal, she was referred to as Madame X in order to keep her identity hidden from the public. Thus, when Nan refers to her employer as Mrs X she evokes the idea that the story will contain a scandal about wealthy New York socialites.

In contrast to the adults, Grayer has two names linked to the people who gave them to him. His parents named him Grayer, an unusual and somewhat pretentious name, because they expect him to succeed in life and be 'better' than an average child. Nan chooses the nickname Grover for him, naming him after a character from Sesame Street in an effort to bond. His nickname stresses that he is still a child and that Nan is the only one who accepts this. The choice of names also suggests that while the adults are up to a certain degree exchangeable types, the child is an individual and unique.

The male protagonist is also characterised by the name Nan gives him and is even more explicitly reduced to the stereotype of the romantic hero. HH stands for Harvard Hottie, explaining his eligibility by implying that he comes from a wealthy family, is well educated and attractive. At their first meeting he also gets along with Grayer further proving his suitability for Nan.<sup>375</sup> Typical for a chick lit novel, HH witnesses her in embarrassing moments, such as when she is dressed as a Teletubby.<sup>376</sup> Moreover, while Nan is unable to confront any of the women in the book, she is very articulate when she reprimands HH on the same pages for not interfering when his friends harassed and insulted her in a bar.<sup>377</sup> After they are a couple he balances Nan's anger about the X's by listening to her as well as calming her down when she is angry because he did not tell her that Mrs X used to be Mr X's mistress.<sup>378</sup> While Nan's behaviour in the courtship stage of their relationship is acceptable because she honestly points out HH's mistakes, it is also exaggerated once they are a couple, allowing him to balance her irrational behaviour.

Nan's identity is right from the beginning defined by her expertise in child care. The book begins with a prologue in which she attends a job interview. Nan describes this interview as a routine in which both her and the mother play their roles and follow a dialogue in the form of an encoded script. By mentioning 'Nanny facts,' she proves her expertise, explains general rules and promises the reader an insider view into the job and the lives of her rich employers.<sup>379</sup> The passage also implies that

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<sup>375</sup> Kraus and McLaughlin, *The Nanny Diaries*, pp.42-43.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.72-73.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, p.216.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.1-11.

Nan is taking on the role as a Nanny in order to conform to the expectations her future employer has of her.

Nan refrains from directly describing herself and is mainly characterised in contrast to Mrs X. Throughout the book she is the only one who can deal with Grayer competently and give him the love and support he needs. Her seemingly intuitive knowledge about Grayer is juxtaposed with Mrs X's hypocrisy and the cold unrealistic demands of a highly paid consultant. Mrs X has a bookshelf filled with literature about raising children but refuses to spend time with her son<sup>380</sup> and the consultant wants Nanny to teach a four year old Latin even though, as Nan notes, he is under a lot of stress because his parents constantly fight with each other.<sup>381</sup> Thus, she combines professional knowledge about children with a nurturing personality enabling her to care for Grayer.

While she is competent at her job, however, Nan is unable to deal with her workplace because of her immaturity and inability to accept differences in values which are expressed in different life style choices. She is shocked, for instance, when she learns that Mrs X is not Mr X's first wife.<sup>382</sup> In her comparison of *The Nanny Diaries* with Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*<sup>383</sup> Elizabeth Hale points out that governesses and nannies have an in-between position in the households they work in. Nan is not like other servants because her ethnicity and educational background distinguish her from servants and most other nannies. Nevertheless, she is not a member of the family but only an employee. As a result, she is unable to behave appropriately and crosses boundaries in the household.<sup>384</sup> When Mr X's new mistress hides her underwear in the flat, Nan spends hours searching for it and even enlists the help of her friends, breaking the X's trust by letting strangers into their home and getting involved in something that is clearly none of her business.<sup>385</sup>

In the end Nan records two messages with the Nanny cam which illustrate that she can stand up for herself but does not do so because she has different priorities. Right from the start, *The Nanny Diaries* aligns itself with the tradition of former self-reflexive literature about nannies and links Nan to other literary nannies. Each chapter

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid., p.59.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., pp.177-179.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., p.216.

<sup>383</sup> Anne Brontë, *Agnes Grey* (London: Penguin, 2007 [1847]).

<sup>384</sup> Hale, "Long-Suffering Professional Females," p.105.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., pp.135-137.

is prefaced with a quotation about nannies from popular and acclaimed novels, such as *Mary Poppins*<sup>386</sup> and *Jane Eyre*.<sup>387</sup> After confronting Mrs X with the help of a hidden Nanny cam, Nan deletes her first aggressive message and replaces it with a plea to the Xs to take better care of their son.<sup>388</sup> Nan refers to her actions as leaving with grace and the novel implies that this is the only possible ending. Unlike in *Mary Poppins*, it is unclear if Nan's presence had any impact on the Xs's family life. Instead, the novel celebrates the narrator as she is. The second message implies that despite being treated badly by Mrs X, Nan remains the same person and her priority is Grayer's well-being. Her different values, however, prevent her from understanding the Xs's lifestyle and in the end she is forced to leave an unsuitable environment.

Throughout the narrative Nan has little control over her situation, so that the novel criticises the notion of free choice. Nan repeatedly insists that she cannot quit because if she chose to leave her employment Grayer would suffer: 'It's four A.M. and I've been writing for forty-eight straight hours, which is significantly less time for my thesis than I allotted myself. But, short of leaving Grayer to care for himself in the apartment, I didn't really have a choice.'<sup>389</sup> In addition to her emotional attachment to her charge, Nan also depends on the job for financial reasons because she needs to earn a living. Moreover, the novel explores how her employer manipulates her into compliance. Nan is very young and often unable to stand up for herself. When she tries, however, she is repeatedly silenced.<sup>390</sup> When Nan wants to follow the Xs to their holiday destination so she can attend her graduation ceremony first, Mrs X makes a different arrangement for her and merely leaves the instructions on her answering machine, preventing Nan from objecting.<sup>391</sup> She seems at the whim of her employer and unable to make her own decisions.

A look at the minor characters in the novel further reveals the dependent position nannies are in. Mary Romero uses *The Nanny Diaries* as a starting point for her discussion of workplace exploitation immigrant women working in domestic jobs face in the US. She acknowledges that chick lit aims at entertaining its readers but still criticises the novel for contributing to the erasure of immigrant women in public

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<sup>386</sup> P.L. Travers, *Mary Poppins* (London: HarperCollins, 2010 [1934]).

<sup>387</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London: Penguin, 2006 [1847]).

<sup>388</sup> Kraus and McLaughlin, *The Nanny Diaries*, pp.301-305.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, p.226.

<sup>390</sup> Compare Hale, "Long-Suffering Professional Females," p.114.

<sup>391</sup> Kraus and McLaughlin, *The Nanny Diaries*, p.247.

discourse. Instead of focusing on their plight, the book offers a voyeuristic insight into the life of the rich.<sup>392</sup> While the novel's main focus is undoubtedly on Mrs X and Nan's fascination with her, the numerous minor characters do address the exploitative conditions women, particularly immigrants, have to deal with. The novel also clearly shows the differences between these women depending on their countries of origin. The English au pair, Lizzie, for instance, is in charge of the household and is even in a relative position of power over her employer because the latter is a drug addict. Despite the perks of her situation, such as having an entire apartment for herself, she is unable to lead her own life as she has to provide constant care not just for the child but also for the mother.<sup>393</sup>

Immigrants working in domestic roles are even more dependent on their employers and exposed to abuse and exploitation. Nan meets Sima and includes her story, which she presents as a typical example: Sima is very well educated and had to leave her family behind in order to earn money as a nanny.<sup>394</sup> She is ill-treated by her employer and physically abused by her charge Darwin. At his birthday party the latter attempts to set her on fire. When she tries to counteract his aggressions, she is fired, which also means that she loses her work visa and has to return to her home country. Mrs X's maid Connie is also in a position of dependence and has to stay over the weekend with Grayer and Mrs X, when the latter suffers an emotional breakdown, even though this means that she has to leave her own children with family.<sup>395</sup> She is fired when Mrs X takes her anger about her marital problems out on her.

Thus, far from ignoring the realities of exploitative working conditions, *The Nanny Diaries* exposes them and suggests that these women cannot choose freely because of their financial dependence. And even privileged women, like Nan, are limited in their choices by financial and emotional considerations. The novel also explores how working in the service industry can reduce people's identities to their job description, thus showing that postfeminist ideas of identity creation through free choice and consumption are clearly limited to privileged people who do not need to work for financial reasons. The romance plot in the novel is based on the plot structure revived in *Bridget Jones's Diary* and Nan's love interest is reduced to a stereotype in

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<sup>392</sup> Mary Romero, "Nanny Diaries and other Stories: Immigrant Women's Labor in the Social Reproduction of American Families," *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 45 (2013): p.187.

<sup>393</sup> Kraus and McLaughlin, *The Nanny Diaries*, pp.203-210.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.172-173.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.164-165.

order to free narrative space. The novel can focus on Nan's development as a character and the details of her employment, allowing the book to further explore the importance of the right workplace for a woman's happiness. As a result of these detailed descriptions, the book also provides an insight into the private lives of New York socialites, which contributed to its success. The following section analyses a novel that provides an insider view into an industry.

### **2.1.3. Evil ambition and childish incompetence in *The Devil Wears Prada***

*The Devil Wears Prada* (2003) by Lauren Weisberger also offers its readers a voyeuristic insight by being set in the fashion industry, and contains the same clash of values between a middle-class narrator and an environment defined by wealth. The first-person narrator Andrea Sachs is dreaming of becoming a writer but settles first for a job as the assistant of Miranda Priestly, editor in chief of the fashion magazine *Runway*. Miranda's personality and the demands of the job take over her life and she begins neglecting her boyfriend, family and friends. When Andy accompanies Miranda to the fashion week in Paris, she finally breaks under the constant stress and insults her boss in public. Andy then returns home where she begins writing for magazines.

Right from the beginning Andy is characterised as an aspiring intellectual. She dreams of writing for *The New Yorker*, her best friend Lily studies Russian Literature and her boyfriend Alex is an idealist teacher who wants to make a difference in the lives of underprivileged children. Her background is used to explain Andy's complete inability to show any interest in or even respect for the fashion industry. The first person narration remains throughout condescending towards the fashion industry, Andy's boss Miranda and her colleagues. Her attitude is the result of an unrealistic and naïve sense of entitlement and prevents her from doing her job well. She expects her employer to be kind and respectful towards her, completely ignoring the fact that her own attitude towards the magazine, her job and her employer is very disrespectful. Instead of washing Miranda's dishes, for example, she wipes them down with a napkin because she does not want to be seen doing menial tasks, clearly considering herself

above them.<sup>396</sup> Thus, unlike Becky and Nan who were experts in their respective fields, Andy does not even attempt to do a good job. Instead, the entire narrative focuses on her rejection of her surroundings.

Throughout the novel Andy constructs her identity in opposition to her boss and her colleagues, dismissing fashion repeatedly and even demonising Miranda. She determinedly ignores any goodwill in anyone. When her colleagues, for instance, help her prepare for the fashion shows in Paris she is ungrateful and describes their actions with contempt.<sup>397</sup> By referring to the fashion assistants as clackers she even dehumanises them and reduces them to the sound their shoes are making.<sup>398</sup> Andy also frequently mocks Miranda's first assistant and her colleague Emily because she neither understands her attitude and her admiration for Miranda nor does she respect her hard work: 'It was clear that Emily was deeply invested in Miranda, in *Runway*, in all of it, but I just couldn't understand why.'<sup>399</sup> Her lack of understanding also means that the reader, who only has Andy's point of view, does not receive an explanation either. She is even quite vicious towards Emily. When the latter saves her from Miranda's anger, Andy's mental response is: 'Miracle of miracles! The Perfect One had spoken, and in my defence, no less.'<sup>400</sup> It seems a particularly harsh insult considering that it was Andy who made yet another mistake. Her behaviour suggests that the highly competitive environment of fashion publishing does not allow any room for friendships between women.

Instead of using the opportunity to learn from Miranda, Andy insists that her demands are unrealistic and that she mistreats her employees. When her colleague Emily tries to explain Miranda's behaviour and tells Andy to just accept her as she is, the latter cannot because it does not correspond with her own (one might add naïve) expectations of how an employer should behave. Even in one rare moment in which Andy admits that Miranda is an excellent editor, she immediately questions her behaviour towards her employees: 'Miranda was, as far as I could tell, a really fantastic editor. ... What it hadn't yet done was convince me that any of this gave her a right to treat people the way she did.'<sup>401</sup> One has to read between the lines to realise that

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<sup>396</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p.151.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.316-319.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, p.188.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, p.227.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, p.201.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.226-227.

Miranda simply expects the same dedication and excellence from her employees that she brings to the job. Janet Brennan Croft points out that Miranda's inability to give detailed descriptions of her tasks and to refuse to be bothered with them is merely how she prevents having her time wasted, since her time is indeed more valuable than Andy's even if the latter disagrees with this view.<sup>402</sup>

At the end of the novel this carefully constructed identity is threatened when Miranda is pleased with Andy's decision to stay with her in Paris instead of going home to see her friend Lily, who is in a coma after having caused a car accident: 'It is absolutely the right thing to do, and I appreciate that you recognise that. ... I'll be much more willing to help you get where you'd like to go now that you've demonstrated that you are committed. ... You remind me of myself when I was your age.'<sup>403</sup> By identifying her own ambition in Andy, Miranda shows her an image of herself that Andy cannot bear. The last phrase of her speech resonates in Andy's head and she is so appalled by the comparison that she snaps and insults Miranda in public. The triumphant tone in which she narrates her rude behaviour clearly suggests that Andy is choosing the right kind of identity for herself by rejecting Miranda and the world of fashion: 'I felt a smile break through the headache and nausea when I realized that I'd rendered her momentarily speechless. ... And before she could respond, I hitched my bag higher up on my shoulder, ignored the pain that was searing from heel to toe, and strutted outside to hail a cab. I couldn't remember feeling better than that particular moment. I was going home.'<sup>404</sup> Evoking the idea of home implies that Andy will return to a place where she belongs.

The ending suggests that Andy is supposedly superior because she prioritises her family and friends over 'unhealthy' ambitions. Diane Negra identifies retreatism as one of postfeminism's master narratives '... which operates as a powerful device for shepherding women out of the public sphere.'<sup>405</sup> Coming back to oneself is in these narratives a process of coming home.<sup>406</sup> The novel seems to fit into this kind of narrative because Andy's return home to her parents and her friends is narrated as the right decision. The positive reactions of her family and friends serve to further validate

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<sup>402</sup> Janet Brennan Croft, "Psyche in New York: *The Devil Wears Prada* updates the Myth," *Mythlore*, 30:3/4 (2012): p.63.

<sup>403</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p.368.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, p.372.

<sup>405</sup> Negra, *What a Girl Wants?*, p.5.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*



Andy's return home as the only right thing to do. Thus, the novel dismisses ambition and even demonises the trait. In her attempt to distance herself from Miranda, Andy also seems to have given up her ambition to write for *The New Yorker*. Instead, she fictionalises her own experiences in short stories for teen magazines.

Reading between the lines, however, reveals that Andy despite her ambitious streak does not have the strength and determination it would take for her to become as successful and powerful as Miranda. Andy is incompetent, unable to focus on a long-term goal, unwilling to do what it takes and incapable of taking responsibility for her own actions. Miranda's path of hard work driven by ambition is impossible for her and she begins to write what Kerstin Fest dismisses as 'domestic little stories'.<sup>407</sup> Fest argues that chick lit draws the conclusion that women do not belong into the public sphere and cannot balance work with their private lives. However, I would argue that *The Devil Wears Prada* offers with Miranda as example of a very successful woman who is happily married and looks after two daughters while being an expert at her job. In addition, Andy does not decide to stop working in the end but begins a career as a writer and her failure as Miranda's assistant suggests that this will be a more suitable career path for her.

Hence, like the other novels discussed in this chapter, *The Devil Wears Prada* also questions the notion of free choice. Andy begins working for a fashion magazine because she considers it a first step on her way to *The New Yorker*. Throughout the novel she repeatedly claims that she does not have a choice when her job increasingly takes over her life. She lets Lily down, for example, in the search for a flat and is not even able to answer her phone because Miranda is watching her. While Andy acknowledges that her behaviour is wrong, she also thinks that she does not have a choice: 'It really wasn't fair to send her all over Manhattan in search of an apartment we could both share when I wouldn't even take her phone calls, but what choice did I have?'<sup>408</sup> Her denial can be interpreted as immaturity because she refuses to take responsibility.

However, the first-person narration gives the reader an insight into Andy's thoughts and exposes the pressure she is under. Andy forgets a task Miranda has given her because she is worried about Lily's phone call. Miranda's reaction is described in

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<sup>407</sup> Fest, "Angels in the House or Girl Power," p.60.

<sup>408</sup> Weisberger, *The Devil Wears Prada*, p.201.

detail: “Is there a particular reason why you’re still sitting there instead of doing your job? Is this your idea of a joke? Did I do or say something to indicate that I wasn’t entirely serious? Did I? Did I?”<sup>409</sup> By questioning Andy’s behaviour instead of merely repeating her demand, Miranda ridicules Andy in front of her co-workers. The repetition of the questions seems on the one hand almost childish but on the other hand forceful, because there is only one possible answer. Miranda forces Andy not just to apologise but suggests that her behaviour is absolutely impossible. Her words are followed by a vivid description: ‘Her blue eyes were bulging out of her face, and although she hadn’t fully raised her voice yet, of course, she was coming awfully close.’<sup>410</sup> Miranda is furious and her slow approach towards Andy seems threatening. The description explains Andy’s fear of Miranda, the pressure she feels under and that young people entering the workforce are exposed to the whims of their employers. The book suggests that young employees have to put up with inhumane and isolating conditions of the corporate workplace if they want to succeed in that environment.

Even the choice of clothing as an expression of one’s identity is limited. Wearing designer clothes is part of the workplace and Andy’s initial refusal to change her wardrobe reflects her rejection of her surroundings: ‘wearing Nine West instead of Manolos and jeans they sold in Macy’s junior department but not anywhere on Barney’s eighth floor of couture denim heaven had been my own attempt to show everyone that I wasn’t seduced by all things *Runway*.’<sup>411</sup> By wearing her usual clothes, Andy clings to the identity she creates for herself in opposition to the fashion industry. However, the novel also exposes the limitations of this idea of free choice expressed through clothing by pointing out that most work places have a dress code. When Andy eventually does wear designer clothes she conforms to her surroundings. Clothes are visual metaphors for identities<sup>412</sup> and serve to further highlight Andy’s reluctant adaptation and eventual rejection of her workplace.

Andy does not fully return to her old life because her experience at *Runway* changed her. As in the other novels, the love interests in *The Devil Wears Prada* have a very reduced role. They represent different lifestyles and Andy’s rejection of both of them in the end reflects the change she has gone through. Alex represents middle-

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid., pp.200-201.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., p.132.

<sup>412</sup> Davis, *Fashion, Culture and Identity*, p.25.

class values, idealism and the love and affection of her family and friends but also her past. They are already a couple at the beginning of the novel so that they cannot embark on the courtship narrative typical for chick lit novels. Instead, the author Christian embodies the stereotypical chick lit hero. He writes bestsellers, is rich and attractive, in short the most eligible man in the novel. While Alex and his difficulties teaching underprivileged children serve to put Andy's tasks and worries into perspective, Christian is part of the seduction of the superficial fashion world. The shift in focus away from the romance plot allows the novel to subvert the typical romance narrative when Andy rejects both men in the end because they are unsuitable for the life she wants to lead.

Reducing the romance plot allows the novels discussed in this chapter to focus on key concepts of postfeminism and celebrate independent women who embrace their femininity. Fest explains that the workplace is not the scene in which the protagonist reaches maturity but rather a contested site on which she has to defend values traditionally considered feminine, like empathy, tenderness and sensitivity. She argues that in these novels the protagonists have to choose between 'true femininity' and career success.<sup>413</sup> Gill also criticises that these choices are problematic because the protagonists use '... their empowered postfeminist position to make choices that would be regarded by many feminists as problematic, located as they are in normative notions of femininity.'<sup>414</sup> This reading, however, is based on a biased definition of career success because it automatically excludes the careers chosen by the protagonists in these novels. In the *Shopaholic* series Becky combines her typically feminine traits and interests and turns them into a career as a personal shopper. Nan enjoys and will continue working in education. Andy is not determined enough to follow in Miranda's footsteps and instead embarks on the career she initially wanted for herself, namely writing.

Dismissing and invalidating these career choices because they are burdened with prejudices about supposedly feminine domains means reproducing these prejudices. An alternative interpretation is to read the novels as a celebration of individuals that have the courage to choose careers that suit their own personal needs. This convention has contributed to the success of chick lit as a genre at a time when

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<sup>413</sup> Fest, "Angels in the House or Girl Power," p.60.

<sup>414</sup> Gill, "Postfeminist media culture," p.162.

women are continuously overwhelmed with unrealistic and unattainable identity positions and institutional structures that encumber combining successful careers with a fulfilling private life. The role of the male protagonists and the romance plot are reduced to the formula revived in *Bridget Jones's Diary* opening up narrative space, which allows the novels to expand on the importance of the right employment in a woman's life. Detailed descriptions of the protagonists' experiences offer insider views into the lives of a flawed but amusing individual, New York Socialites and the fashion industry. Moreover, the next generation of chick lit discussed in this chapter follows in Bridget's footsteps by celebrating its flawed female protagonists, an attitude that was not necessarily shared by the novels' critics but was fully embraced in the adaptations, as the following section illustrates.

## 2.2. Secrets, confessions and choosing an identity

In order to understand changes made during the process of adaptation, it is crucial to consider the context of both the adapted text and the adaptation.<sup>415</sup> ‘The process [of adaptation] must also be considered “sociologically,” as the interplay between the norms or conventions of two semiotic systems and the contexts in which both [texts] are located.’<sup>416</sup> Thus, it is important to take public discussions of the novels in form of book reviews and newspaper articles but also the industrial context of the films into account. The financial success of *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (2001)<sup>417</sup> and later on *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2006)<sup>418</sup> and *Sex and the City* (Patrick King, 2008)<sup>419</sup> proved that films aimed at a predominantly female audience could be financially lucrative.<sup>420</sup> These films all draw on pre-existing material that has already generated a fan base. This chapter further explores this trend and argues that the subject matter of the novels and the publicity they generated facilitated the production of their adaptation.

All four novels discussed in this chapter were international bestsellers and translated into numerous languages. *The Nanny Diaries* spent 42 weeks on *The New York Times* bestseller list,<sup>421</sup> sold over 800.000 hardcover copies and has been translated into 29 languages.<sup>422</sup> The novels in the *Shopaholic* series are worldwide

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<sup>415</sup> Andrew, “Adaptation,” p.37. In his analysis of Batman adaptations Will Brooker argues that the time and social context of adaptations can even be more important than the adapted text. See Brooker, “Batman. One Life, many faces,” p.197.

<sup>416</sup> R. Barton Palmer, “The Sociological Turn of Adaptation Studies. The Example of *Film Noir*,” in *A Companion to Literature and Film*, ed. Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p.272; see also Stam, “Beyond Fidelity,” p.75.

<sup>417</sup> *Bridget Jones’s Diary* grossed \$281,929,795 worldwide. See Box Office Mojo, “Bridget Jones’s Diary,” accessed December 06, 2015, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=bridgetjonesdiary.htm>.

<sup>418</sup> *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* grossed \$262,520,724 worldwide. See Box Office Mojo, “Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason,” accessed December 06, 2015, <http://www.boxoffice Mojo.com/movies/?id=bridgetjones2.htm>.

<sup>419</sup> *Sex and the City* grossed \$415,253,641 worldwide. See Box Office Mojo, “Sex and the City,” accessed October 19, 2016, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=sexandthecity.htm>.

<sup>420</sup> See York, “From Chick Flicks to Millennial Blockbusters,” p.5.

<sup>421</sup> The hardcover edition spent 31 weeks on *The New York Times* bestseller list (between March 2002 and April 2003) and the paperback edition 11 weeks (between April 2003 and June 2003). See “The New York Times Bestseller List,” *The New York Times*, March 2002 – June 2003.

<sup>422</sup> Michael Fleming, “‘Nanny’ duo books \$3 mil,” *Daily Variety*, September 27, 2002.

bestsellers and have been translated into 34 languages.<sup>423</sup> And *The Devil Wears Prada* was translated into 37 languages and spent 24 weeks on *The New York Times* bestseller list.<sup>424</sup> The financial success of the authors was a frequent topic discussed in the media. Several journalists reported rumours about a six-figure advance Weisberger supposedly received for her novel and an equally high amount for the film rights<sup>425</sup> while Miramax reportedly paid half a million US dollars for the film rights of *The Nanny Diaries*.<sup>426</sup>

The novels also generated media interest by their promise to reveal secrets and confessions.<sup>427</sup> Writing about feminist confessionals, Rita Felski explains that ‘... the confessional text makes public that which has been private, typically claiming to avoid filtering mechanisms of objectivity and detachment in its pursuit of the truth of subjective experience.’<sup>428</sup> She expounds that the feminist confessional ‘... explicitly seeks to disclose the most intimate and often traumatic details of the author’s life and to elucidate their broader implications.’<sup>429</sup> While the feminist confessional aimed at exposing discrimination on an institutional and societal level through the example of individual women,<sup>430</sup> the main aim of chick lit novels, like *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, is to entertain readers with insights into people’s lives. The novels discussed in this chapter further expand on this theme by offering insider perspectives into the lives of the rich (*The Nanny Diaries*), the fashion industry (*The Devil Wears Prada*) and a flawed but amusing individual (*Confessions of a Shopaholic*). This section argues that the media interest in the topics discussed in these novels in combination with the industrial context and a promise of an already existing fan base consisting of their readers facilitated the production of the adaptations.

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<sup>423</sup> Jane Wardell, “Sophie Kinsella can’t resist shopaholic adventures,” *Associated Press International*, October 08, 2004.

<sup>424</sup> The figure refers to the hardcover edition of the novel. See “The New York Times Bestseller List,” *The New York Times*, May – October, 2003.

<sup>425</sup> Elizabeth Spiers, “When personal assistants attack!” *Salon.com*, April 24, 2003; see also Kate Betts, “Anna Dearest,” *The New York Times*, April 13, 2003.

<sup>426</sup> Alona Wartofsky, “East Side Story; After ‘The Nanny Diaries,’ The View From the Penthouse is Greener Than Ever,” *The Washington Post*, July 01, 2002.

<sup>427</sup> See for example Chris Black, “Scandal, they wrote,” *The Sun Herald* (Sydney), June 08, 2003 and Janet Maslin, “Elegant Magazine, Avalanche of Dirt,” *The New York Times*, April 14, 2003.

<sup>428</sup> Rita Felski, “On Confession,” in *Women, Autobiography, Theory. A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p.83.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, p.85.

### 2.2.1. Everybody loves fashion - *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006)

*The Devil Wears Prada* was the last book to be published of the four novels discussed in this chapter but the first one to be adapted. The main reason for this is its link to the fashion industry. Several reviewers identified the novel as part of a publishing trend, that Chris Black refers to as ‘the tell-all novel that defrocks the fashion world.’<sup>431</sup> These novels draw on the increasing interest in fashion which is also characterised by schadenfreude: ‘These books could be seen as a totem of our new love-hate relationship with fashion, so perfectly airbrushed from afar, yet seriously flawed when examined under a microscope. And filled with the kind of puffed-up individuals who take themselves far too seriously.’<sup>432</sup> The author of the novel Lauren Weisberger worked as Anna Wintour’s assistant at *Vogue*. While Weisberger denied that the novel was about her own experiences working for Wintour, most critics did not believe her. In an interview, for instance, Weisberger stresses: “‘The first thing that people need to understand is that I am not the Andrea character and Anna Wintour is not the Miranda character,” Weisberger says. “I was never as cynical as Andrea is. In fact, I like to think that Andrea starts a little wowed by the world before she starts to back pedal.”<sup>433</sup> Nevertheless, Elizabeth Spiers introduces the novel as ‘... a breezily written, thinly veiled roman à clef about the year [Weisberger] spent at *Vogue* as power editor Anna Wintour's assistant’.<sup>434</sup> Kate Betts also does not hide her scepticism: ‘Weisberger's “fictional” portrait of Miranda sounds many of the notes familiar to readers of the gossip pages that trade in prima donna outrageousness.’<sup>435</sup>

Moreover, the book was published at a time of an increased general interest in fashion. Radner explains that the TV programme *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) created an interest in high fashion by ‘...cultivating a viewer sensibility receptive to and

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<sup>431</sup> Black, “Scandal, they wrote;” see also Eva Friede, “The chic in chick lit: Popular fashion fiction is hot. Novels about designers, magazine editors and shoppers are burning up the best-seller lists,” *Edmonton Journal* (Alberta), August 19, 2003.

<sup>432</sup> Black, “Scandal, they wrote.”

<sup>433</sup> Weisberger quoted in Pauline Millard, “Just tell-all and sell-all,” *Ottawa Citizen*, August 03, 2003.

<sup>434</sup> Spiers, “When personal assistants attack!”

<sup>435</sup> Betts, “Anna Dearest.”

interested in films that featured designer clothing.<sup>436</sup> According to Radner, *The Devil Wears Prada* is a fashion film, meaning that fashion is another character in it.<sup>437</sup> Pamela Church Gibson argues that ‘...the luxury brands now do not serve simply to adorn those who have – or aspire to possess – celebrity status either on screen or on the red carpet. Now, they can be seen themselves ‘performing’, and they can even do so independently of the human body, fêted *as and for themselves*, starring alone on screen...’<sup>438</sup> By celebrating fashion and making it a central element in the film, fashion films partly serve to fill the void left when the TV programme *Sex and the City* ended.<sup>439</sup>

The *Devil Wears Prada* is associated with *Sex and the City* through its costume designer Patricia Field, who also designed the costumes for the TV programme. Field explains that ‘Sex and the City had a huge influence on the fashion industry .... It opened up the world of fashion to everyday people.’<sup>440</sup> The importance the producers of *The Devil Wears Prada* attributed to fashion is reflected in the clothing budget Field was allocated: US\$100,000. This was, however, insufficient and Field drew on her connections with the fashion world to organise additional clothing. Melissa Whitworth estimates the worth of the clothes designers made available for the film at US\$1 million.<sup>441</sup> For Field ‘... the main thing was to make a movie that was fashion, not a movie about fashion.’<sup>442</sup> Her attitude was shared by the director David Frankel and cinematographer Florian Ballhaus, who had both worked with Field on the last season of *Sex and the City*.<sup>443</sup> Both were also convinced of the importance of the clothes and it influenced their perspective on the film: ‘A little bit of the pleasure of seeing the movie is just seeing the clothes, so we were at great pains to light them well and get the colors right.’<sup>444</sup> The quotations used in this section were taken from interviews published as part of the promotion for the film and further illustrate public interest in

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<sup>436</sup> Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, p.137; see also Pamela Church Gibson, *Fashion and Celebrity Culture* (London and New York: Berg, 2012), p.74.

<sup>437</sup> Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, p.134.

<sup>438</sup> Church Gibson, *Fashion and Celebrity Culture*, p.17, emphasis in original.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, p.74.

<sup>440</sup> Field quoted in Melissa Whitworth, “The Devil has all the best costumes. ‘Sex and the City’ stylist Patricia Field talks to Melissa Whitworth about dressing Meryl Streep for her latest power-woman role in ‘The Devil Wears Prada,’” *The Daily Telegraph*, September 06, 2006.

<sup>441</sup> Whitworth, “The Devil has all the best costumes.”

<sup>442</sup> Field quoted in Whitworth, “The Devil has all the best costumes.”

<sup>443</sup> John Calhoun, “Slaves to Fashion,” *American Cinematographer* 87:7 (2006): p.55.

<sup>444</sup> Frankel quoted in Calhoun, “Slaves to Fashion,” p.55.



its focus on fashion. The film adopts the basic plot of the novel (Andrea Sachs begins working at a fashion magazine but eventually rejects this world and leaves) but includes significant changes which result in a different tone, as the following analysis will show.

In addition to being a spectacle, fashion also functions as a visual metaphor for identity in *The Devil Wears Prada*.<sup>445</sup> In the opening sequence Andy (Anne Hathaway) is characterised through her clothes as the girl-next door and through cross-cutting contrasted with fashionable New York women. While the latter put on make-up and accessories, Andy takes a shower, puts on a baggy sweater and reads her old articles in preparation for a job interview. The contrast between the mise-en-scène of Andy's flat and the flats of the fashionable women also stresses that it is not just about the clothes, but that they represent an essential difference in lifestyle and values. Andy's crowded but cosy apartment is contrasted with their fashionable, meaning fairly empty, sterile apartments. The difference includes even the boyfriends. When one of the fashionable women kisses her attractive boyfriend goodbye he does not even wake up. Andy kisses Nate (Adrian Grenier), who looks dishevelled and is reading a newspaper but also wishes her good luck for her job interview.

The sequence also implies Andy's seriousness and complete lack of interest in fashion. The visualisation of so many of her attributes is necessary because film is a visual medium with time limitations. At the beginning Andy is still wearing her own clothes and is incompetent at her job. She fails to answer the telephone correctly and cannot spell the name of a famous designer. Her first hectic weeks are summarised in a sequence of shots in which we see her (literally) running errands for Miranda (Meryl Streep). She looks harassed, clearly out of her depth, and is unhappy with the way Miranda treats her. When she is chastised after failing to find a pilot who would fly Miranda home during a hurricane, Andy talks to Nigel (Stanley Tucci), *Runway*'s art director and complains that Miranda does not treat her with enough respect. Nigel does not accept her whining, turns the blame back on her and instead tells her to stop victimising herself.<sup>446</sup> Following postfeminist ideology, he urges Andy to take responsibility for her own behaviour by admitting that she does not try hard enough to do a good job: 'Andy. Be serious. You are not trying. You are whining. ... Wake up,

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<sup>445</sup> Compare Davis, *Fashion, Culture and Identity*, p.25.

<sup>446</sup> Alison Winch, "'We can have it all'. The girlfriend flick," *Feminist Media Studies* 12:1 (2012): p.74.

six. She is just doing her job.’ By defining her by her clothes size, Nigel implies that she does not fit into the super skinny fashion world and that it is proof for her lack of commitment, because weight in the world of *Runway* can and should be controlled.

Alison Winch argues that this scene urges Andy to embrace her victim status, meaning exposing her body to a harmful diet in order to conform to her surroundings, ‘...to the point where it feels like empowerment.’<sup>447</sup> After her conversation with Nigel Andy decides to change by having a make-over, a development that is already foreshadowed by the choice of actress for the role. Radner points out that stars in romantic comedies become famous for creating ‘... a specific persona across a number of genres (including interviews and photographs).’<sup>448</sup> Anne Hathaway was at the time of the film’s shoot already well-known for her role in *The Princess Diaries* (Garry Marshall, 2001). In the film she played a naïve and inexperienced girl-next-door who releases her full potential after a make-over. By casting the actress in a similar role, the film already prepares the audience for the substantial change in character through a make-over. According to Negra, a make-over is the coming into being ritual of a woman, not so much in the sense of a change in but rather as ‘... a revelation of the self that has “been there all along.”’<sup>449</sup> Andy’s seemingly superficial change releases a competent and ambitious self.<sup>450</sup>

Since modernity the self has become a reflexive project that needs to be constantly improved.<sup>451</sup> In postfeminist texts the concept of identity is a process of becoming,<sup>452</sup> and make-overs have become increasingly popular because they are based on the notion that people are flawed but can be fixed with the help of professionals.<sup>453</sup> Brenda R. Weber argues that ‘... appearance in the twenty-first century functions as an indicator of professional competence and ability, and in an increasingly globalized economy where neoliberal subjects circulate the globe, such

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<sup>447</sup> Winch, *Girlfriends and Postfeminist Sisterhood*, p.106.

<sup>448</sup> Radner, *Neo-feminist Cinema*, p.88.

<sup>449</sup> Negra, *What a Girl Wants?*, p.124; compare Brenda R. Weber, *Makeover TV. Selfhood, citizenship, and celebrity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p.7.

<sup>450</sup> Tamar Jeffers McDonald, *Hollywood Catwalk. Exploring Costume and Transformation in American Film* (London and New York: J.B. Tauris, 2010), p.186.

<sup>451</sup> Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p.52; see also Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul. The shaping of the private self* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p.208.

<sup>452</sup> Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, p.6.

<sup>453</sup> Gill, “Postfeminist media culture,” p.156.

appearance-based citizenship is critical for business success.<sup>454</sup> Andy also has to change her physical appearance to become a good employee.

After her make-over Andy enters the office in her new outfit and throws her hair back. The film then cuts to Emily and her colleague (Giselle Bündchen) staring at her open-mouthed. Andy's first action in her new clothes is to answer the phone in a very professional manner and she is even able to enumerate the designers whose clothes she is wearing. In the next scene she picks up her boyfriend Nate after work. Once he recognises her, the camera cuts back to Andy and slowly tilts upwards, mimicking Nate's gaze. His positive reaction to her new outfit indicates that everyone appreciates fashion. Madonna's song 'Vogue' playing in the background of the scene links it to the following one, in which Andy goes to work. Match cuts show her in different outfits and imply that her change is permanent. She also prepares the office calmly and competently for Miranda. Changing her appearance has released Andy's competent inner self but also a sudden expertise in fashion which turn her into a valuable employee.



Figure 6: Andy after her make-over

A further change inspired by the film's link to the fashion industry is that it is celebrated in the film. In contrast to the book, Andy develops an interest in fashion. She admires a dress Nigel is holding while she is in the middle of a call with her friend Lily. Instead of finishing her promise to try to get away from the benefit as quickly as possible, she ends the conversation abruptly to take a closer look: 'Oh, please believe me, I will. This is the last thing that I wanna ... [to Nigel] Oh, I love that. [To Lily on the phone] Er, I'll call you the second I'm leaving, ok? [Hangs up and simultaneously talks to Nigel] Will it fit me?' Her change in attitude to fashion is most apparent in a

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<sup>454</sup> Weber, *Makeover TV*, p.25.

montage of scenes in Paris. Andy accompanies Miranda to fashion shows and the montage shows famous designers, models dressed in fabulous clothes and parties after the shows. The flashlights of numerous cameras serve to highlight the importance and the glamour of the scenes and the people. Andy is watching the shows in the background with an enraptured face, suggesting that she understands the appeal of fashion. The film conveys the message that every woman, no matter how serious she is, is eventually seduced by the glamorous world of fashion.



Figure 7: Andy at a fashion show in Paris

The general interest in fashion is further illustrated in a scene with Andy's friends. When Andy meets her friends after her make-over, Lily (Tracie Thoms) first ridicules fashion, but immediately grabs the designer bag Andy gives her as a present: '[Lily stretches out her arms] Gimme, gimme, gimme! ... This bag is at nineteen hundred dollars. I cannot take this from you.' While she utters these words, she is shifting all her things from her old into the new designer bag. The contradiction between her words and her actions expose Lily as a hypocrite but the scene also implies that all women love fashion and only ridicule it if they do not have access to it. In accordance with postfeminist ideology, the film codifies and essentialises femininity and suggests that all women are bound together by a common set of desires.<sup>455</sup> While Lily packs, Doug (Rich Sommer), a character that does not appear in the novel, explains that: 'An accessory is merely a piece of iconography used to express individual identity.' Lily adds, clutching the bag to her chest and swaying from side to side in a childlike movement, that it is also 'preeetty.' While this exchange is clearly gendered (a man's appreciation of fashion is intellectual and rational, while a

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<sup>455</sup> See Negra, *What a Girls Wants?*, p.12.

woman's interest in it is superficial and childish), it further indicates that the interest in fashion is universal.

The adaptation even includes two scenes in which characters explain the appeal and importance of fashion to Andy and the audience. In the novel Andy is unable to understand the importance of fashion and treats the entire industry with contempt. In the film Nigel refers to designers as 'some of the greatest artists of the century' and declares that fashion is greater than art because people live their lives in it. When Andy laughs at a run through because she cannot see the difference between two belts, Miranda chastises her. She explains that the sweater Andy is wearing is the result of decisions people like her made years before its production, implying that 'Fashion reflects the spirit of the age (*zeitgeist*). As such, it inescapably influences all areas of our life.'<sup>456</sup> The message is clear: the fashion industry influences people's lives and creates numerous jobs and profit.

A further change in the adaptation was caused by the negative reactions to the first-person narrator. Reviewers frequently criticised Andy as a narrator: 'And her book's sour, sarcastic, self-involved heroine is too much of a pill to be endearing.'<sup>457</sup> Or: 'All just fine, except Andrea also has an unbecoming superiority complex and is just as much a snob as the snobs she is thrown in with.'<sup>458</sup> Rachel Cooke even considers the book a 'wasted opportunity' and laments that Andy does not get even with her boss but instead does what is considered morally superior when she throws away an insulting photo shopped picture of Miranda.<sup>459</sup> Betts harshly criticises Andrea for not learning anything from her experience working for 'one of the great editorial franchises in a business that exerts an enormous influence over women.' Betts, who also worked for *Vogue*, points out that the novel does not explain anything about the isolation and pressure of Miranda's job and the decisions she has to make in order to remain in her position of power.<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> Evelyn Gick and Wolfgang Gick, "Why the Devil Wears Prada: The Fashion Formation Process in a Simultaneous Disclosure Game Between Designers and Media," *Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies Working Paper Series #147* (Harvard University, 2007), p.2.

<sup>457</sup> Maslin, "Elegant Magazine, Avalanche of Dirt."

<sup>458</sup> Betts, "Anna Dearest."

<sup>459</sup> Rachel Cooke, "Great title, but where's the fashion director who looks like a Triffid? The Devil Wears Prada by Lauren Weisberger," *The Observer*, September 28, 2003.

<sup>460</sup> Betts, "Anna Dearest."

Four script writers tried to write the screenplay for the adaptation and failed when the job was finally offered to a woman. Aline Brosh McKenna took this criticism seriously,<sup>461</sup> changing the character of the main protagonist, the film's depiction of her and the plot significantly. The adaptation keeps a distance to the protagonist, which according to one reviewer also resulted in a funnier film,<sup>462</sup> showing that questions of fidelity do not apply to adaptations of contemporary popular literature.<sup>463</sup> While the entire novel is written in first-person narration and only offers the reader Andy's perspective, the film does not include any of the techniques typical for women's films, such as voice overs or fantasy sequences, to reproduce this closeness. Instead, the film follows Andy but keeps its distance, seemingly offering a more neutral view of her abilities and choices.

While Andy in the novel never acknowledges that she has a choice and detailed descriptions of the pressures she experiences contest the idea of free choice, the film includes the decidedly postfeminist message that everybody can choose and is therefore fully responsible for their actions. In order to convey this idea explicitly, the film plot departs significantly from the novel. At a benefit Andy manages to remember a name Miranda's first assistant Emily (Emily Blunt) forgot. Miranda is impressed and offers to take Andy to Paris instead of Emily (in the novel Emily was prevented from going because of an illness). While Emily breaks her leg before Andy tells her that she has taken her place on the trip to Paris, suggesting that she would not be able to go anyway, this happens after Andy has made up her mind to go with Miranda to Paris.

In Paris Andy is shocked when Miranda destroys Nigel's dream in order to keep her position as the editor of *Runway* but Miranda points out that Andy did the same to Emily. She tells Andy explicitly what was merely implied in the novel, namely that these decisions are necessary if she wants to get a powerful job in the competitive publishing industry. Confronted with this insight, Andy decides that it is not the kind of life she wants to lead. Thus, Andy realises how competitive and ambitious she is but also that her ambition does not lie in fashion.<sup>464</sup> Thus, unlike in the novel, the film shows that Andy has indeed the ability and the ambition it takes to follow in Miranda's footsteps but consciously rejects this choice.

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<sup>461</sup> Susan Dominus, "If Cinderella Had a BlackBerry," *The New York Times Magazine*, August 25, 2011.

<sup>462</sup> David Denby, "Dressed to Kill," *The New Yorker*, July 10, 2006.

<sup>463</sup> Whelehan and Cartmell, "Introduction – Pulping Fictions," p.2.

<sup>464</sup> Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, p.145.

Andy's two love interests are less of a contrast in the film than in the novel. One reason is the time limitation of the film which does not allow for a lengthy character development because of its focus is on the female protagonists. Thus, the two men are mainly characterised visually by their clothes and their surroundings. Andy's boyfriend Nate is no longer an idealist teacher. He works as a sous-chef in a restaurant and while his clothes and his slightly shabby appearance suggest his disinterest in the world of fashion, he is not a contrast to Andy's new life anymore. This change can be explained by the film's aim to avoid criticising the fashion industry. In addition, Nate is visibly impressed by Andy's new outfits and even states explicitly in a fight with her that he does not mind Andy's new interest but that he resents that she does not take responsibility for the choices she makes.

Christian (Simon Baker), who has even less screen time than Nate, is characterised by affiliation with the world of fashion. Andy meets him at the party of a designer where he wears a bright green jacket and a colourful scarf. When they meet again in Paris at a fashion show, he clearly enjoys the attention and poses for the cameras. He also functions as a facilitator for the plot by revealing a coup against Miranda which teaches Andy that she cannot trust anyone in the impersonal corporate world. According to the genre conventions of a romantic comedy Andy has to develop in the film<sup>465</sup> and find a man. Since Christian is undoubtedly a negative character, convention dictates that she has to be re-united with Nate. The reconciliation is lukewarm at best when both discuss the possibility of resuming their relationship over a cup of coffee and do not even kiss at the end. The film does not end with this (un)romantic scene however. Instead, it is followed by a scene in which Andy walks along the streets of New York and sees Miranda getting into her car. Thus, the relationship between the two women is clearly the main focus of the film and the love relationship merely the result of genre conventions.

While Miranda in *The Devil Wears Prada* represents an identity position Andy eventually rejects, the film offers a more balanced view of this charismatic and strong character than the novel. She still makes unreasonable demands and has a self-centred view of the world (when Miranda asks Andy to find someone to fly her out of a hurricane, she refers to the weather as 'drizzle'). However, Meryl Streep acts these demands out in a very specific way. In the passage in the novel discussed above, Andy

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<sup>465</sup> Croft, "Psyche in New York," p.67.

describes Miranda's reaction when she fails to remember a task from her own very biased perspective. Miranda seems to be hysterical, unreasonably angry and humiliates Andy in front of her colleagues. In contrast, Streep utters her demands and reprimands almost in a whisper, giving her character a forceful quiet authority. Without Andy's constant commentary, Miranda's demands do not sound so unusual anymore so that the film offers a more objective view on Miranda and the fashion industry,<sup>466</sup> allowing the viewers to decide for themselves if and how they want to judge Miranda's actions.



Figure 8: Miranda showing her vulnerable side

In her comparison of the Psyche myth with *The Devil Wears Prada*, Croft argues that Miranda is Andy's mentor as well as seducer for a life of power<sup>467</sup> and the film suggests that this life comes at a high cost. In the novel Miranda might be unpleasant but she leads as far as Andy (and therefore the reader) knows a harmonious private life. In the film, however, Andy witnesses first a fight between Miranda and her husband. The latter reprimands Miranda for being late for a date with him but also mentions that people are judging him because he has to wait for his famous wife, suggesting that the real reason for his anger is her success. Her husband eventually files for divorce and Miranda looks very vulnerable when she tells Andy about it. She wears a grey dressing gown instead of her usual fashionable clothes and no make-up, suggesting that those items are part of a persona which is necessary for her job but that once they are removed she is just as fragile as other people.<sup>468</sup> When she speaks, her voice is at first hesitant and she seems confused about what to say. Miranda then tells

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid., p.57.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., p.65.

<sup>468</sup> See also Claire Jenkins, "Devils and Monsters: Hollywood's representation of the working mother in *The Devil Wears Prada* and *Monster in Law*," paper presented at *(M)other Trouble* (Birkbeck College, University of London, May 30-31, 2009), p.11.



Andy about the divorce and that she is worried about the reaction of the press, imagining potential headlines in the tabloids, like: ‘The Dragon Lady - Career obsessed snow-queen drives away another Mr Priestly.’ Thus, the film implies that it is her power and success that drives her husband away and that men do not want to be with women who are more powerful than they are.



Figure 9: Andy at the office of the *New York Mirror*

Claire Jenkins considers this change in the plot as indicative of Hollywood ideology, which ‘... necessitates feminine emotion and explicit maternal concern.’<sup>469</sup> However, showing Miranda as unhappy and frail also makes Andy’s eventual rejection of this life not only understandable but unavoidable. She is also rewarded for her choice by finding the ideal workplace in the end. She has an interview at the *New York Mirror* whose offices are a stark contrast to *Runway*’s offices. The mise-en-scène of both places mirrors the contrast between the two different flats and life-styles from the beginning of the film. Like Andy’s flat, the office of the *New York Mirror* is messy and cluttered. The employees are hidden behind piles of paper, suggesting that words are more important than people and her boss is the opposite of Miranda because he greets her with a warm handshake. Thus, while Andy’s experience at *Runway* changed her and has made her more confident and competent (as reflected in her now stylish wardrobe), the messy office recalling Andy’s flat at the beginning implies that she has returned to her own values and has found the right place for her. The film ends with this scene, suggesting that Andy’s real achievement is that she makes her own choices. Like the adapted text, the film focuses strongly on the importance of the workplace in

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<sup>469</sup> Ibid.

a woman's life. Maturity for the modern woman is not to find the right marriage partner but to find the right job and to take responsibility for one's choices.<sup>470</sup>

Negra argues that the film follows postfeminist logic by showing that having it all is impossible.<sup>471</sup> It deviates in this from the novel, in which Miranda did have it all even if she was according to Andy's highly biased opinion hysterical. Negra also observes that many contemporary postfeminist chick flicks contain an adjusted ambition narrative in which the protagonist realises that the corporate world is not the right place for women because they are unable to make the decisions it takes to succeed in it. Instead, they need to downsize their ambitions and leave.<sup>472</sup> Julia A. Spiker also interprets Andy's decision to leave the highly competitive world of fashion as a fear to succeed: 'It is argued that the characters of Miranda and Andrea symbolize two different societal models of female power. Miranda wants power and she is not afraid to succeed. She knows what she wants and she is smart enough to get it. Andrea represents the struggle many women face. She wants to succeed but she is afraid of claiming power and recognition. She wants everyone to like her.'<sup>473</sup> However, another interpretation for this ending is that romantic comedy heroines have to appeal to their viewers. By offering a protagonist who seemingly adjusts her ambitions, the film normalises her and facilitates identification for female viewers.

The adaptation offers an insight into the fashion industry and thus capitalizes on an interest in the topic. Negative reviews of the first-person narrator resulted in a distance to Andrea in the film. Despite the lack of techniques like voice-over narrations and fantasy sequences, the adaptation still focuses strongly on Andrea and her identity creation through choosing employment that suits her character and her personal needs. The romance plot and the role of the male protagonists are reduced to a minimum allowing the adaptation to fulfil the genre expectations of a romantic comedy while at the same time focusing on the female protagonists and the importance of the workplace in a woman's life, a theme that is further explored in the adaptation discussed in the next section.

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<sup>470</sup> Croft, "Psyche in New York," p.67.

<sup>471</sup> Diane Negra, "Quality Postfeminism? Sex and the Single Girl on HBO," *Genders Online Journal*, 39 (2004): p.12.

<sup>472</sup> Negra, *What a Girl Wants?*, p.18 and p.88; see also Rowe Karlyn, *Unruly Girls, Unrepentant Mothers*, p.95.

<sup>473</sup> Julia A. Spiker, "Gender and Power in the Devil Wears Prada," *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology* 2:3 (2012): p.19.

### 2.2.2. An anthropological case study - *The Nanny Diaries* (2007)

The protagonist in the adaptation *The Nanny Diaries* also has to choose the right employment. While *The Devil Wears Prada* gives an insight into the fashion industry, *The Nanny Diaries* exposes the lives of New York socialites. Dawn Fallik explains in her review of *The Nanny Diaries* that ‘... there’s a naughty deliciousness in peeking into someone else’s life.’<sup>474</sup> The novel begins with a note to the reader, mentioning that both authors have worked for more than thirty New York families and that their experiences inspired the story of the novel. This is followed by a disclaimer that they did not portray any actual people or events. Hephzibah Anderson points out that the disclaimer only increases people’s interest in the novel because they will not believe that all the characters are invented.<sup>475</sup> In the article ‘“Who, Moi?” Mummies Ask On Park Ave,’ published in *The New York Times*, Alex Kuczynski reports that people speculated about the identity of Mrs X.<sup>476</sup> According to Karen Heller the novel allows its readers to feel schadenfreude:<sup>477</sup> ‘Part of the considerable appeal of “The Nanny Diaries” is this voyeuristic peek into the presumably magnificent lives of the elite. ... We love watching rich people behave badly because they do everything in excess -- and because it allows us to feel superior.’<sup>478</sup> An insight into people’s lives is particularly enticing if they are glamorous and rich. Thus, the novel’s appeal lay in its promised revelations about the lives of rich New Yorkers and, as a result, the adaptation foregrounds this topic.

After graduating from college, Annie (Scarlett Johansson) cannot decide what she would like to do with her life. She meets Mrs X (Laura Linney) and her son Grayer (Nicholas Art) by accident in the park and is offered a job as a live-in Nanny. Annie accepts in order to postpone making career decisions. She meets the X’s neighbour HH (Chris Evans) and they begin to date. Meanwhile, Annie becomes attached to

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<sup>474</sup> Dawn Fallik, “Do-Good Nanny Could Use a Backbone Transplant,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 10, 2002.

<sup>475</sup> Hephzibah Anderson, “Novel of the week. The Nanny Diaries Nicola Kraus and Emma McLaughlin,” *New Statesman*, March 18, 2002; see also Alex Kuczynski, ““Who, Moi?” Mummies Ask on Park Ave,” *The New York Times*, March 10, 2002.

<sup>476</sup> Kuczynski, ““Who, Moi?””; see also George Epaminondas, “The nannies vs park avenue,” *The Sun Herald* (Sydney), May 05, 2002.

<sup>477</sup> Karen Heller, “A spoonful of vinegar. Two former nannies have given Manhattan’s elite some bitter medicine in their satire about family life on Park Avenue. But the book can be delicious fun for others,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 17, 2002.

<sup>478</sup> Wartofsky, “East Side Story.”

Greyer and learns to look after him. When she accompanies the family on a holiday, Mr X (Paul Giamatti) sexually harasses her and Mrs X fires her. Back in New York, Annie leaves an angry message on the nanny cam and leaves. She has made up her mind to do a Master degree in Anthropology. The voice over narration that accompanied the entire film reveals that the Xs are a case study for her admissions essay.

The film begins with a travelling shot that moves from dioramas depicting child rearing scenes from around the world to dioramas of people from the Upper East Side in New York. The dioramas promise an unsympathetic depiction of these people: The Upper East Side families are divided into different dioramas by gender and the film's protagonist Annie tells the viewer in a voice over that they practise gendered behaviour. She explains the behaviour depicted in the diorama of women from the Upper East Side in anthropological terms: a Botox injection becomes a body mutilation ritual, a massage at a spa is a sacred meditation and a woman throwing up into a toilet is referred to as a fasting ritual. The third diorama shows nannies from different ethnical backgrounds with their charges (all Caucasian) and indicates that it is not a family who raises the child but a nanny.

Annie is introduced as one of these nannies in a still of her standing in a child's bedroom shouting at a teddy bear. She is a very different character from Nan in the novel. At her graduation ceremony she is characterised as clever (she receives an honours degree in business with anthropology as her minor) and clumsy (she stumbles when she is about to collect her certificate). After the ceremony she is also unable to tell her mother Judy (Donna Murphy) that she does not want to work for a business corporation. Scarlett Johansson expresses Annie's weakness and childish inexperience through her body posture. Throughout the film Annie's raised shoulders convey the impression that she shrinks in on herself, illustrating her insecurity and inability to stand up for herself.

Casting Johansson for the role creates an interesting contrast and foreshadows a change in the main character. On the one hand, she uses extremely submissive body posture and childish gestures for Annie. On the other hand, the actress had been named 'Sexiest Woman Alive' by the men's magazine *Esquire* which established her status

as a sex symbol in 2006, one year before the release of *The Nanny Diaries*.<sup>479</sup> Johansson's off-screen persona creates the expectation in the viewer that Annie's insecurity and somewhat boring looks are merely superficial and that they hide her real confident, clever and sexy self, which will be revealed at the end.

The film visualises the postfeminist idea that women can choose between different identity positions and that Annie has to create her identity by making the right choices. When Annie is asked at a job interview at Goldman Sachs 'Who is Annie Braddock,' she is unable to answer the question and flees the office. In a postfeminist climate identity is a matter of self-definition and people are expected to provide a narrative of their lives on demand,<sup>480</sup> as in the scene in the interview. Annie's inability



Figure 10: Annie considers a possible identity

to define herself at the beginning suggests her immaturity but also that she has to learn to create a self in the course of the film by making the right choices. Annie sees different women walking along the street and the film visualises her fantasies by turning them into dioramas representing potential identities. She muses about these identities but is unable to simply adopt them, suggesting that she has to find her own way. Shortly after, she meets Mrs X in Central Park and Annie characteristically fails to make herself heard. Mrs X misunderstands her and thinks her name is Nanny. While the novel reduced Nan to her job position in order to make her experience appear more universal, Annie has a name in the film to signify her individuality. When she accepts Mrs X's job offer and her new name 'nanny,' however, she gives up her individuality and decides to put the search for her identity on hold. Her decision is visualised in a

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<sup>479</sup> A.J. Jacobs, "Scarlett Johansson Is the Sexiest Woman Alive, 2006," *Esquire*, October 31, 2006.

<sup>480</sup> Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p.5.

special effect, in which she steps out of her body, seemingly leaving her real self behind. She is not just aware but even embraces the fact that her decision means putting her own life on hold and postponing to take responsibility. This change from the novel is necessary because the protagonist in a romantic comedy has to develop by changing her character and/or her attitude.<sup>481</sup>

In order for Annie to learn who she is and what she wants, she has to be insecure at the beginning of the film. Her naivety and inexperience are visualised in a dream sequence. Annie has just decided to take the job as a nanny and when she has qualms about her complete lack of experience in childcare, she is in her own words ‘confident that I’d magically find my way.’ With these thoughts she falls asleep. In her dream she is wearing her grey business suit and runs towards the Goldman Sachs building in which she had her interview in an earlier scene. Her mother, dressed in a nurse outfit, is calling her and business men and women dressed in grey are approaching her from the other side. She seems trapped between the two. A red umbrella comes floating towards Annie. She takes it and flies away with it, escaping her responsibilities represented by the business people and her mother, who calls after her: ‘Get your feet on the ground, young lady.’ Annie is flying over the New York City scape which is covered in a pink purple glow giving it a magical and dreamlike quality. When she flies towards the Upper East Side, banners appear on houses saying ‘upper east side moms [heart] Annie.’ Evoking *Mary Poppins* (Robert Stevenson, 1964) in this scene characterises Annie as childlike and naïve. Her dream further illustrates that being a nanny will allow her to escape all her responsibilities.

By showing Annie’s conflict with her ambitious mother, the film visualises the pressure young people are under to choose not just their jobs but their identities: ‘The self is not merely enabled to choose, but obliged to construe a life in terms of its choices, its powers, and its values. Individuals are expected to construe the course of their life as the outcome of such choices, and to account for their lives in terms of the reasons for those choices.’<sup>482</sup> The necessity to choose also causes a lot of anxiety because people worry if they made the right choices.<sup>483</sup> Annie’s dream expresses her anxiety and at the same time shows that her decision to work as a nanny for a year is a refusal to make the kind of choices that would define her as an individual. However,

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<sup>481</sup> Croft, “Psyche in New York,” p.67

<sup>482</sup> Rose, *Governing the Soul*, p.227; see also Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p.81.

<sup>483</sup> Kellner, “Popular Culture and the Construction of Postmodern Identities,” p.142.

the film strongly suggests that choosing one's identity can only be postponed and not avoided.

Moreover and unlike Nan, who is an expert in childcare, Annie is very incompetent at her job and only manages to bond with Grayer after HH helps her. This is according to Hannah Hamad typical for contemporary popular cinema because '... the currency of fatherhood as a defining component of ideal masculinity has emerged as a dominant cultural trope of postfeminism, and a structuring paradigm of mediated masculinity.'<sup>484</sup> Part of this trope is that men take on roles traditionally held by women and thus undermine their agency.<sup>485</sup> Even though Annie is in charge of Grayer, she can only bond with him because HH helps her.

In addition, she is also frequently characterised as a child herself. At Grayer's birthday party she sits next to him and both of them have the exact same sulking body posture, wear dark, festive looking clothes and silly party hats. When Grayer is ill Annie's mother has to come by and hold him while Annie watches helplessly. Annie is also strongly inspired by Bridget Jones, who is the prototype of endearing incompetence and clumsiness. In their first meeting, HH catches Annie in an embarrassing position. Grayer has pulled her pants down and locked her out of the flat. She has dropped her bag and forgotten the pram in the elevator. Her first view of HH is in form of a subjective shot. The camera is upside down and shoots through her legs. It then cuts to a close up of Annie's bottom and exposed underwear, mirroring the bottom scene in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. HH later on admits that seeing her like that immediately fascinated him.



Figure 11: Endearingly incompetent Annie



Figure 12: Meeting Mr Right

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<sup>484</sup> Hannah Hamad, "Hollywood Fatherhood: Paternal Postfeminism in Contemporary Popular Cinema," in *Postfeminism And Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Nadine Müller and Joel Gwynne (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.99.

<sup>485</sup> *Ibid.*, p.102.

The relationship between Annie and HH relies strongly on viewers' familiarity with conventions of the romance plot in order to reduce it to a minimum. HH is like in the novel defined by his looks (he is played by Chris Evans) and his social status. When he introduces himself in the first scene in which he meets Annie, his words are drowned out by Annie's voice over, stressing that he is not important as a character but merely embodies the function of the love interest. His calm confidence is contrasted with Annie's childlike enthusiasm and clumsiness and his interest in the flawed heroine offers viewers a reassuring romantic fantasy. The formula used for the development of a romantic relationship is reduced to an absolute minimum in the film: HH is smitten at first sight by Annie's endearing incompetence. On their first date in a scene that lasts less than two minutes the couple goes through an entire romance plot while sitting on the steps of the closed Museum of Natural History: Annie misjudges him as snobbish but he tells her that being raised by nine nannies, sent off to boarding school and then to Harvard is not as great as it sounds; he also proves that he is not superficial because he explores New York and knows a good restaurant in Harlem; Annie is chastised and eventually realises his true value so that they can commence their relationship. Reducing the romance plot to the bare formula allows the film to be classified as a romantic comedy while focusing on different topics, such as the protagonist's search for her identity.



Figure 13: Annie confronts the Upper East Side Moms

Part of Annie's learning process is that she stands up for herself. After she is fired and sees how little Mrs X has paid her, she has, in her own words, 'the most important confrontation of my life' with the nanny cam in Grayer's room. The film does not show her speech while she records it. Instead, Mrs X shows the tape at a meeting of the parents' society with the intention of exposing Annie as a bad nanny.



Through a montage technique the two scenes are blended into one and it looks as if Annie was in the same room with the Upper East Side mothers addressing them directly. The inclusion of this confrontational scene was a result of reviewers' reactions to the novel. Nan was criticised for complaining to her family and friends but never actually standing up for herself and deleting her 'one great rant to the Nannycam.'<sup>486</sup> Co-director and writer of the adaptation Shari Springer Berman explained the added confrontation between Nan and Mrs X at the end of the film as a result of a change in medium: 'My co-director/writer (Robert Pulcini) and I felt as a cinematic experience, you had to give the audience a little more than the book gave (at the end). It worked really well in the book, but we felt like in a movie people would have felt really cheated.'<sup>487</sup> Influenced by the criticism in the reviews, a montage technique is used to allow Annie to confront Mrs X and the other Upper East Side mothers in the end, offering viewers the satisfaction the book denied them.<sup>488</sup>

However, only the part of the recording in which Annie addresses the mothers is confrontational. When she talks to Mr X the scene changes to a close up of the monitor on which the women are watching her, creating a distance. It is also unclear if he will actually see the tape. It then changes again to a shot of Annie sitting in Grayer's room. This part is not filmed through the nanny cam anymore and the camera zooms slowly in on her. She looks down while she explains that she does not wish the Xs harm but merely wants them to be better parents for Grayer. While her body posture in the previous scenes was aggressive towards the nanny cam and Mrs X, it is now relaxed and non-confrontational. The close up on her face and the dimmed lighting of the scene suggest intimacy and Annie's emotional attachment to Grayer. These differences in how Annie's reprimands are visualised imply that mothers are mainly, if not solely, responsible for raising their children and therefore the main target for criticism, a point I will explore in more detail in chapter 4.

At the end, Annie's voice over narration reveals that the film is the visualisation of her admissions essay for her application for a graduate course in anthropology. The Xs are part of the human subspecies of the Upper East Side family and serve as her case study. Her experience has helped Annie to return to her life by

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<sup>486</sup> Fallik, "Do-Good Nanny Could Use a Backbone Transplant."

<sup>487</sup> Shari Springer Berman quoted in "TWC's sneak peek at 'Diaries'" *Daily Variety*, August 16, 2007.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid.

studying a postgraduate degree in Anthropology and her new identity is visualised in a diorama of herself titled with her own name. Her life is not as determined yet as the lives of the women she saw at the beginning of the film. They were all reduced to one role and described in detail in a museum brochure. In contrast, a close up of Annie's description reads:

RESIDENCE: Lynnette's Couch

OCCUPATION: Grad Student

ANNUAL INCOME: Not Relevant

MARITAL STATUS: Happily Dating

Nevertheless, her outlook towards a romanticised New York skyline in the same pastel pink and purple colours as in her dream, accompanied by the song 'Freedom' by George Michael playing in the background, indicates that Annie will be fine because she has matured, meaning she is ready to make her own choices and create an identity.

Thus, while the novel exposed the whims of rich New Yorkers to draw attention to exploitative working conditions and the limited choices of the protagonist, the film fully embraces the postfeminist notion of identity creation through free choice, focusing in particular on choosing the right kind of employment. Like Andrea in *The Devil Wears Prada*, Annie matures into a postfeminist subject by taking responsibility for her life, meaning making choices that define her as a person. In order to focus on her development, the adaptation reduces the romance plot to its basic formula and the male protagonist to the role of her admirer and supporter. The next section examines how the financial crisis inspired a return to a focus on romance in the adaptation *Confessions of a Shopaholic*.

### **2.2.3. Love cures addictions - *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2009)**

*Confessions of a Shopaholic*, like *Bridget Jones's Diary*, offered readers an insight into the private life of an individual. The change in title of Kinsella's first novel in the Shopaholic series shows the importance publishers attributed to the theme of confession. The novel was first published in 2000 under the title *The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic* and then republished in 2001 as *Confessions of a Shopaholic*. The original title promised revelations but also referred to a dream world,

implying that they might not necessarily be real. The second title, however, assures readers that the book will expose the sins and bad habits of an individual, satisfying their voyeuristic needs. Moreover, the success of *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) and the film *Sex and the City* (2008) and their lavish depictions of fashion and consumption further paved the way for the adaptation of *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, directed by P.J. Hogan and released in 2009.

Rebecca Bloomwood (Isla Fisher) is addicted to shopping and has to face her debts when she loses her job. She has always been interested in fashion and would like to work for the fashion magazine *Allette*. When she does not get the job, she decides to try working at another magazine that belongs to the same publishing group with the aim of eventually working for the fashion magazine. She attends an interview with the editor of *Successful Savings* Luke Brandon (Hugh Dancy) but soon reveals that she does not know anything about finance and embarrasses herself in front of him. She then writes a fashion piece for *Allette* but sends it by accident to Luke. He misinterprets it as a metaphor and hires her. Becky's column becomes very successful and she and Luke start to date. When both appear on a TV show, however, a debt collector publicly reveals Becky's lies and Luke leaves her. She auctions off all her belongings to pay her debts, while Luke founds his own magazine. He is impressed with Becky's change and they become a couple again.

Alison Cole argues that chick lit novels are ideal for film adaptations because of the '... highly aesthetic nature of the works, which originates largely from the amount of material goods to which the reader is exposed over the course of the novel.'<sup>489</sup> The detailed descriptions of the consumer goods Becky buys in the novel can easily be turned into a visual spectacle in the film, making it an ideal adapted text. Patricia Field also designed the costumes for *Confessions of a Shopaholic* and its link to the fashion world was exploited in order to create media interest prior to its release.<sup>490</sup> The online retailer Bluefly, for instance, co-ordinated their marketing campaign with the release of the film to increase their sales. The film's official homepage was integrated on Bluefly's homepage, which contained information about

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<sup>489</sup> Alison Cole, "Can't Afford the Manolos? Buy the Book!: Chick Lit and Contemporary Consumerism" (paper presented at the Undergraduate Research Symposium, Colby College, Waterville, Maine, 2007), p.4.

<sup>490</sup> Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, p.139.

the film's designer and allowed customers to shop for the same clothes Becky is wearing in the film.<sup>491</sup>

Right from the beginning the visual display of fashion in the adaptation celebrates consumption by turning it into a spectacle. Rebecca's fascination with shops and consumer goods ('shiny things') is traced back to her childhood. The first scene begins with a close up on shoes that slowly come into focus and are then moved out of the frame. It is followed by a travelling shot that shows in a bird's eye shot girls trying on different kinds of very colourful shoes. They are also wearing colourful clothes and are surrounded by brightly coloured wrapping paper. Becky narrates in a voice over that there were real prices buying you 'shiny things' that did not last very long and mom prices that got you 'brown things' when she was a little girl. When she mentions the latter, the camera moves over brown rather solid looking shoes. It cuts to Becky's face who unhappily looks down at them.



Figure 14: 'Shiny things'

Later on in the scene Becky's voice over explains that shop windows were for her a window to a different world: 'A dreamy world, full of perfect things. A world where grown up girls got what they wanted.' While she says this the camera pans from the back of little Becky's head to a shop window displaying a pair of pink high heels. The film cuts to a shot from inside the shop and shows how she is drawn to the window and stares at the shoes. In the next scene she is in the shop looking at women trying on dresses and dancing in them. Little Becky is mimicking their movements and looks happy. The entire memory is in slow motion and Ric Ocasek's song 'Emotion in

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<sup>491</sup> "Bluefly Launches Marketing Campaign to Support Release of 'Confessions of a Shopaholic' Film," *Health and Beauty Close-up*, January 14, 2009.

Motion' playing in the background underlines its dreamlike magical quality and stresses the emotional impact shopping has on Becky from an early age.

Becky's voice over narration continues and mentions that she wanted a credit card when she was a child. She adds that she now has twelve. Credit cards are thus the introduction to the present. Becky as a grown up woman enters the scene in a long shot accompanied by the fast-paced song 'Uncontrollable' by Adrienne Bailon, already foreshadowing that Becky's consumption is an uncontrollable addiction. She is dressed in fashionable clothes, wears a lot of accessories and walks towards the camera like a model on a catwalk. In her voice over she introduces herself, briefly mentioning her occupation, and then itemises her clothes, adding which credit card she used for the purchase.

The travelling shot follows Becky's movements so that we see her like she sees herself, as a reflection in shop windows. She exclaims in a happy childlike voice that her bag is Gucci and swings it on her arm, showing that she has retained a childlike pleasure in owning expensive fashion items. In the next scene she explains that stores make her happier than men do because they treat women better and because products are exchangeable and smell better. Her words are accompanied by a scene inside a store. Becky dances, kisses a mannequin and hugs a shop assistant. The entire scene is yet again in slow motion, giving it the same dream-like quality her childhood memory had, indicating that Becky is still firmly caught up in the idealised fantasy world of consumption she created as a child.

However, *Confessions of a Shopaholic* is part of what Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker call recessionary media culture triggered by the global financial crisis. In these texts '...the postfeminist female consumer is placed as an icon of excess as much as admiration, an emblem of the boom and a symptom of its short-term financialism.'<sup>492</sup> Thus, even though the film visually celebrates consumption, excessive consumption for its own sake is pathologised as an addiction. Becky's extremely happy face at the end of the scene in which she runs out of the shop carrying several bags fades into a close up of her worried face staring at her credit card bill. Reality catches up with her and we learn that she spends more money than she has, that she is unable to take responsibility for it (she thinks someone stole her card) and

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<sup>492</sup> Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker, "Introduction. Gender and Recessionary Culture," in *Gendering the Recession. Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity*, ed. Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), p.4.

that she is in fact addicted because she does not even remember what she bought. The depiction of Becky's consumption as an addiction is part of a trend Miranda Joseph identifies in contemporary media culture: '...the current norm for women, across class and racial differences, is *incompetence* with regard to personal finances.'<sup>493</sup> Becky is in the film indeed unable to deal with her financial situation. She embodies the stereotype of the emotional and irrational woman shopper, who is characterised as mentally ill and weak.<sup>494</sup> Luke, the rational economic man, is the counterpart to Becky's emotional and irrational woman shopper.<sup>495</sup> The film suggests that in order to take charge of her life, Becky has to replace her own values with Luke's and her consumption with a romantic relationship.

Unlike *The Devil Wears Prada* and *Nanny Diaries*, which focus on the protagonists' relationships with their bosses and young women's search for identity, *Confessions of a Shopaholic* focuses on the development of the romantic relationship between Becky and Luke. Issues about Becky's identity and her choices are closely linked to this relationship. The shift in focus is also the result of the time the film was made in. The financial crisis caused economic insecurities and doubt. Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim explain that 'Love is our alternative to doubt: it is the place we hope to find security.'<sup>496</sup> In an increasingly insecure and unregulated world '... people seek a loving relationship as a place in which to hide from an inimical world.'<sup>497</sup> Thus, the return of this romantic comedy to the romance plot is a reaction to the insecurities caused by the financial crisis. Becky is unemployed, confused and suffers from an addiction and the adaptation suggests that a romantic relationship is all she needs to fix her life.

Luke gives her a job and even creates her writing persona 'The Girl in the Green Scarf' for her. After facing her bills and realising the full extent of her debts, Becky gets drunk and writes a fashion article for *Allette* magazine where she would like to work and a rude letter to Luke. She mixes up the letters and Luke receives the

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<sup>493</sup> Miranda Joseph, "Gender, Entrepreneurial Subjectivity, and Pathologies of Personal Finance," *Social Politics* 20:2 (2013): p.254.

<sup>494</sup> Jennifer A. Sandlin and Julie G. Maudlin, "Consuming pedagogies: Controlling images of women as consumers in popular culture," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 12:2 (2012): pp.180-181.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

<sup>496</sup> Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *The Normal Chaos of Love*, trans. Mark Ritter and Jane Wiebel (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p.192.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

fashion piece. He interprets it as a metaphor for the principles of security investment. In the novel Becky combines her knowledge about finance, acquired by working for a financial magazine for several years, with her interest in fashion but in the film she has no prior knowledge in finance. Rather, her expertise and even her writing persona are Luke's invention.

He hires Becky and she becomes his pupil and even puppet. Luke takes her to a press conference and forces her to stand up and ask provocative questions. He tells her exactly what she is supposed to say and Becky even accidentally repeats his aside comment, showing that she does not think for herself at all. The only sentence she adds on her own accord is 'Is that true?' While she asked Luke's provocative questions in a confident loud voice, she utters her own question in a quiet weak voice, betraying her naïve surprise that a business man would steal from his company. Like Bridget, her naivety and warmth distinguish Becky from career women like Alicia who have been corrupted by the corporate publishing world. Even the Finnish business man, whom she slaps in the face to cover up her inability to speak Finnish, likes her, suggesting that Becky's natural charm appeals to everyone and even makes unusually rude behaviour appealing. Like in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Becky's flaws are turned into strengths and do not need to be explained because they have become a part of genre conventions of romantic comedies.

Nevertheless, the film implies that Becky is out of control and needs Luke's help to become a fully functional person. Her lack of control is exemplified by her shopping addiction, but also when they dance together. Becky moves around wildly and even hits Luke repeatedly in the face, invoking Isla Fisher's previous role as crazy Gloria in *The Wedding Crashers* (David Dobkin, 2005). Once he leads her with a firm arm, however, they dance harmoniously. The film also contains numerous instances of slapstick comedy, like the dancing scene, showing that Becky's body is out of control. She frequently screams and shouts when she is surprised or clumsy. Moreover, there is a marked discrepancy throughout the film between how people see Becky and her real self. In the scene at a banquet, for example, Luke ironically praises her honesty as her best quality while Becky constantly lies to him and everybody else. The scene cross-cuts between Becky trying to get a drink in the kitchen and the people sitting at her table and talking about her. It directly contrasts their opinion of her with Becky's actions. After Luke says that she is difficult to ignore, for example, the film cuts to Becky who is trying to get a drink but is completely ignored by the kitchen

staff. The adaptation suggests that Becky has to become the woman Luke already sees in her.



Figure 15: Becky is out of control

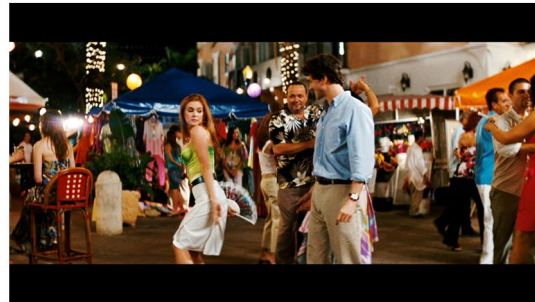


Figure 16: Becky's dancing skills

In the adapted texts Becky has to accept her love for consumption and choose a suitable job in order to be happy but in the adaptation Becky has to change. She can only be happy if she turns into Luke's ideal woman. At the beginning of the film, Becky refuses to identify herself in terms of her relationship with other people and instead defines herself as the owner of items.<sup>498</sup> After a conversation with her father, however, she realises that people are more important and decides to change her life. She sells her things, adopts Luke's values and turns into the idealised person he imagined her to be at the beginning of the film. She even turns down her dream job because it would require her to lie to her readers. In the novel shopping and her interest in fashion are a part of Becky's personality and she even turns them into a career. In the film her interest is dismissed as a mere addiction<sup>499</sup> and the protagonist does not create her identity through consumer choices anymore but through her romantic relationship.

Once she has found love, everything magically falls into place. By defining herself through her love to Luke she does not need to excessively buy things anymore. After being exposed as a liar on television, she has also lost her job but typical for 'current cultural texts'<sup>500</sup> in the recessionary era the film does not dwell on it, '... preferring instead to privilege a narrative of unequally gendered economic impact that is contiguous with postfeminist rhetorics of female agency and choice.'<sup>501</sup> She reveals in a voice over at the end of the film that she now writes the column of Luke's new

<sup>498</sup> Ghosh, "Res Emptito Ergo Sum," p.384.

<sup>499</sup> Todd, "The Shopaholic, Consumer Culture, and Identity," p.56.

<sup>500</sup> Negra and Tasker, "Introduction. Gender and Recessionary Culture," p.20.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid.



magazine, implying that it was her decision to support him with his new business and not financial necessity. Thus, she shows no ambition on her own behalf whatsoever but rather helps Luke by becoming nurturing and feminine.<sup>502</sup> The film suggests that romantic love is the solution to problems produced by a profit-driven mass-culture<sup>503</sup> and that Luke saves Becky from her addiction by offering her his value system and a new identity. Once she defines herself through her relationship with him instead of through the consumer goods she purchases, she is miraculously cured.

*Confessions of a Shopaholic* uses voice over narration and fantasy sequences to mimic the intimacy created by the first person narration of the adapted texts, offering a voyeuristic insight into Becky's life. Moreover, the film is strongly influenced by its context. On the one hand, it has been inspired by fashion films like *The Devil Wears Prada* and *Sex and the City* and visually displays consumption extravagantly. On the other hand, the film was produced in the aftermath of the financial crisis resulting in changes in the plot. Instead of accepting her love for shopping, Becky in the adaptation replaces consumption with a heterosexual relationship. Unlike in the other two films discussed in this section, her romantic relationship with Luke is more important for Becky's identity and even her new employment at the end of the film is the result of this relationship.

The novels and films discussed in this section further expand on the theme of the workplace introduced in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. The protagonists in the adapted texts are young and struggle in their respective jobs. In the end they all leave unsuitable employment and choose alternatives that suit their needs as individuals. The focus in the novels is on the first-person narrators and their struggles at work. As a result, the romance plot and the love interests are reduced to the basic plot structure revived in Fielding's novel and its adaptation. The protagonists need to leave unsuitable employment behind in order to lead happy lives and relationships are merely a bonus. In the course of these narratives, the novels offer voyeuristic insights into the private life of a funny individual, New York socialites and the fashion industry. The media interest in fashion, the life of the rich and detailed descriptions of consumer goods made the novels the perfect adapted texts for millennial women's blockbusters.

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<sup>502</sup> Negra, *What a Girl Wants?*, p.18 and p.21.

<sup>503</sup> Kristen Hatch, "Girl Meets Boy. Romantic Comedies After Feminism," in *Popping Culture*, ed. Murray Pomerance and John Saheris (Pearson Education, 2010), p.72.

As a result, the adaptations focus on and expand these themes. The interest in the fashion industry facilitated the adaptation of *The Devil Wears Prada* and the film's success also inspired the visually stunning depiction of consumer goods in *Confessions of a Shopaholic*. The voice over narration in *The Nanny Diaries* defines the film as an anthropological case study of New York socialites. In *The Devil Wears Prada* and *The Nanny Diaries* choosing the right workplace is essential for the protagonists' happiness and identity and the films also reduce the romance plot to a minimum. In contrast, *Confessions of a Shopaholic* returns to the romance plot, offering love as an antidote to consumption and insecurities caused by the financial crisis. Thus, the texts discussed in this chapter further explore the importance of the workplace in women's lives and rely on the plot structure and characters established in *Bridget Jones's Diary* and its adaptation. The following chapter examines the therapeutic discourse, present in Fielding's novels in the form of self-help literature, and analyses how it influences the depiction of love in a self-help book, a novel and their multi-protagonist adaptations.

### 3. Chapter

## Therapeutic Culture and Confluent Love:

### *He's Just Not That Into You and*

### *The Jane Austen Book Club*

'In our world of rampant 'individualization' relationships are mixed blessings. They vacillate between sweet dream and a nightmare, and there is no telling when one turns into the other. ... In a liquid modern setting of life, relationships are perhaps the most common, acute, deeply felt and troublesome incarnations of ambivalence. This is, we may argue, why they are firmly placed at the very heart of the attention of liquid modern individuals-by-decree and perched at the top of their life agenda.'<sup>504</sup>

A key development in modernity is the strong focus on the individual which also resulted in the rise of the therapeutic discourse and a shift in discourses about love. In both *Bridget Jones's Diary* and even more so *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* the therapeutic discourse is present in the form of self-help books. In the first novel '... Bridget's peers turn to manuals as if to find a code of behaviour that explains their own sense of failure and gives a means of overcoming it.'<sup>505</sup> The diary format in itself is a form of self-discipline and it chronicles Bridget's constant attempts to improve herself.<sup>506</sup> At the same time, the characters use self-help manuals to help them navigate their relationships and justify the decisions they would like to make, as the following passage illustrates:

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<sup>504</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Love*, p.viii.

<sup>505</sup> Whelehan, *Helen Fielding's Bridget Jones's Diary*, p.42.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, p.40.

‘Eventually the three of us worked out a strategy for Jude. She must stop beating herself over the head with *Women Who Love Too Much* and instead think more towards *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, which will help her see Richard’s behaviour less as a sign that she is co-dependent and loving too much and more in the light of him being like a Martian rubber band which needs to stretch away in order to come back. “Yes, but does that mean I should call him or not?” said Jude. “No,” said Sharon, just as I was saying, “Yes.”’

In this quote Bridget and her friends use self-help books to make sense of their dating experiences and to plan future behaviour. The advice given in the books is unclear, open to interpretations and therefore has to be discussed. This chapter explores the importance of the therapeutic discourse in more detail, its influence across genres and how it interacts with two different discourses about love.

The first text analysed is the self-help book *he’s just not that into you* (2004) by Greg Behrendt and Liz Tuccillo. By including a self-help book as a case study, this chapter examines the wider context of the topic of self-help introduced in the Bridget Jones books and films. The book is a typical example for self-help books about relationships because it is based on essentialist ideas about gender and represents contemporary contradictory concepts of love by reducing complex relationships to a basic formula. Its main message is based on the same theme present in chick lit novels, namely that women deserve a man who loves them the way they are. The second book discussed in this chapter is the novel *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2004) by Karen Joy Fowler which examines the therapeutic discourse in form of bibliotherapy. Jane Austen’s novels are depicted as a source of relationship advice that needs to be extracted in discussions with friends and Austen is even elevated to the status of a contemporary love guru.

The second part of the chapter analyses the adaptations and argues that the focus shifts from the therapeutic discourse to discourses about love because of a change in medium and genre. Both adaptations are multi-protagonist romantic comedies and the analyses of *He’s Just Not That Into You* (Ken Kwapis, 2009) and *The Jane Austen Book Club* (Robin Swicord, 2007) argue that this subgenre of the romantic comedy is particularly suitable to reproduce contradictory discourses about love. By including a variety of characters and subplots based on these contradictory discourses, the films offer viewers diverse identity positions and happy endings and

thus appeal to a potentially wide audience. While the focus has shifted on discourses about love during the adaptation process, the films nevertheless retain elements of the therapeutic discourse. The following section gives an overview over the development of the different discourses discussed in this chapter.

### 3.1. The therapeutic discourse and love

Contemporary self-help literature can be traced back to the emergence of New Thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which focused on the spirit or mind power. Followers believed that people could learn how to effectively use their minds to communicate their wishes to God in order to have them fulfilled. The legacy of this school of thought was the belief that people had the potential to change and become whoever they wanted to be.<sup>507</sup> Authors writing about self-help frequently trace the genre's focus on improving the self back to Puritan thought and consider this attitude therefore typical for US culture.<sup>508</sup> Puritans believed that good behaviour during your life would lead to otherworldly rewards. They wrote religious manuals defining good behaviour and Christian goodness and these manuals are often considered the predecessors of self-help literature.<sup>509</sup> However, the publication of *Self-Help* by Samuel Smiles in England in 1859 shows that this kind of thought was not limited to the US. In the book Smiles attributes what Steven Starker would call Puritan logic to the English character: 'The spirit of self-help, as exhibited in the energetic action of individuals, has in all times been a marked feature in the English character, and furnishes the true measure of our power as a nation.'<sup>510</sup> Thus, the focus on self-improvement was a widespread phenomenon during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and led to the rise of therapeutic culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This development was the result of the increasing importance of the new disciplines psychology, specifically psychoanalysis and psychiatry, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sigmund Freud started the movement of psychoanalysis after he cured his own neuroses through self-analysis in the years 1895-1899. Freud considered dreams a gateway to the unconscious, analysed his own dreams and wrote his highly influential work *The Interpretation of Dreams*.<sup>511</sup> His book is a manual for dream analysis and based on the idea that psychoanalysis is an essential part of human

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<sup>507</sup> Steven Starker, *Oracle at the Supermarket. The American Preoccupation With Self-Help Books* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989), pp.20-25.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.13-14; see also Wendy Simonds, *Women and Self-Help Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), p.4.

<sup>509</sup> Starker, *Oracle at the Supermarket*, pp.13-14.

<sup>510</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help. The art of achievement illustrated by accounts of the lives of great men* (London: Sphere Books Ltd, 1968), p.13.

<sup>511</sup> Reuben Fine, *A History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp.26-31.

psychology and can therefore theoretically be used by anyone to gain an insight into their unconscious.<sup>512</sup> The foundation of the International Psychoanalytical Association in 1910 and a number of periodicals and journals about psychoanalysis provided a forum for Freud's ideas and helped spread them beyond Europe.<sup>513</sup> The increasing popularity of psychoanalysis and psychology in general intensified the focus on the self and led to an inward turn.<sup>514</sup>

During the First World War former structures collapsed, people became increasingly insecure and they turned to the new sciences of psychiatry and psychology, which promised new sources of guidance.<sup>515</sup> Particularly behavioural psychology, the primary paradigm in psychology after the First World War, is based on the idea that everyone can be trained to become anything they want to be.<sup>516</sup> Behaviour modification can be achieved through self-analysis and self-help: 'For it now becomes possible to think of all forms of social behaviour, successful and unsuccessful, not as expressions of some inner quality of the soul, but as learned techniques or social skills. And what is learned can be re-learned.'<sup>517</sup> The popularity of the new disciplines also influenced popular culture texts which disseminated concepts of psychoanalysis, particularly the importance of revealing one's hidden self.<sup>518</sup>

The therapeutic discourse has become one of the most influential discourses in popular culture because it is a reaction to different aspects of modernization. Traditional moral codes and symbols were worn out by the effects of modernization which resulted in insecurity about the right kind of behaviour: 'The decline of tradition can be interpreted as the erosion of a system of meaning through which people make sense of their lives. Such a system of meaning not only links people to an accepted way of doing things, it also helps situate the self within a wider sense of purpose.'<sup>519</sup> This development was accompanied by a process of rationalisation. Anything that

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid., p.68.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid., pp.76-77.

<sup>514</sup> Micki McGee, *Self-Help, Inc. Makeover culture in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.77.

<sup>515</sup> Starker, *Oracle at the Supermarket*, pp.42-43.

<sup>516</sup> Rose, *Governing the Soul*, p.230.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid., p.237.

<sup>518</sup> Dana Becker, *The Myth of Empowerment. Women and the Therapeutic Culture in America* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), p.89.

<sup>519</sup> Frank Furedi, *Therapy Culture. Cultivating vulnerability in an uncertain age* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p.86.

could not be subjected to empirical observation was considered irrational, which also resulted in the increasing faith in science.

The therapeutic discourse has scientific but also religion-like qualities and is therefore ideal to replace former religious and moral guidance by telling people how to behave appropriately.<sup>520</sup> Moreover, it is not limited to one cultural background: ‘Thus this ethic transcends the modern chasm between science and religion and offers to those from culturally diverse faith and nonfaith communities a religion-like system of collective meaning.’<sup>521</sup> This development is often interpreted in resulting in more freedom for the individual: ‘What is heralded, ultimately, by this development is the end of fixed, predefined images of man. The human being becomes ... a choice among possibilities, *homo optionis*.’<sup>522</sup> For James L. Nolan this is a reaction to the structural pluralism, meaning the division of private and public life that was part of the process of modernization. The therapeutic discourse reintegrated these spheres by offering people advice through experts for their conduct in private life.<sup>523</sup>

According to Nikolas Rose, the rise of the expert is the result of increasingly liberal democratic policies. These do not allow states direct interventions into individual lives anymore. Expertise has therefore become increasingly important because it fills this gap and allows the state to influence people’s private lives: ‘It achieves its effects not through the threat of violence or constraint, but by way of the persuasion inherent in its truths, the anxieties stimulated by its norms, and the attraction exercised by the images of life and self it offers to us. The citizens of a liberal democracy are to regulate themselves; ....’<sup>524</sup> As a result, ‘... the self becomes a site of labour as well as governmentality.’<sup>525</sup>

However, people cannot supposedly manage their lives anymore and are in need of constant professional guidance: ‘The conduct of routine forms of social interaction are frequently represented as difficult and complicated. ... The belief that the conduct of everyday encounters requires special skills has created an opportunity

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<sup>520</sup> James L. Nolan, *The Therapeutic State. Justifying Government at Century’s End* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998), p.17.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>522</sup> Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, p.5.

<sup>523</sup> Nolan, *The therapeutic State*, p.18.

<sup>524</sup> Rose, *Governing the Soul*, p.10.

<sup>525</sup> Laurie Oullette and Julie Wilson, “Women’s Work,” *Cultural Studies* 52:4-5 (2011): p.556; see also Furedi, *Therapy Culture*, p.95.



for the 'expert' to colonise the realm of personal relations.'<sup>526</sup> Frank Furedi questions the positive interpretation of therapeutic culture. He argues that the discourse is based on the idea that people cannot emotionally cope with a growing range of encounters.<sup>527</sup> For him therapeutic culture is not so much about self-fulfilment but rather the continuous promotion of self-limitation because it defines the self as fragile and weak and insists that people need constant intervention by therapeutic experts in order to cope with their emotions.<sup>528</sup> These experts manage people's lives by providing them with a specific language: 'Therapeutic language allows us to understand ourselves through self-creation rather than through the pursuit of truth. It gives us new metaphors and new words to describe and reinterpret ourselves.'<sup>529</sup> The vocabulary of therapeutics has become a part of daily life and cultural imagination.<sup>530</sup>

Self-help books are one form in which experts explicitly share their wisdom with individuals. An increase in the number of single households since the 1960s generated a new and very productive consumer market for the genre.<sup>531</sup> During the 1970s the baby-boom generation grew up and an increasing number of singles began to focus on their appearance to attract partners and succeed at work. A flood of pop psychology books spread ideas of self-actualisation and the necessity of economic success for personal happiness. An ongoing reassessment and improvement of the self became necessary<sup>532</sup> and led to a mass demand for counselling and self-help literature during the 1970s.<sup>533</sup> Since professional help was now theoretically available in the form of therapies, people did not want to burden their friends with their problems anymore. Self-help filled the need for advice given in a private setting formerly offered by friends and families and provided its readers with the means to improve themselves with the help of an affordable expert opinion.<sup>534</sup> Self-help books have been available on an extensive range of topics and most of these topics are not gender specific. Self-help books about relationships, however, are mostly aimed at women.

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<sup>526</sup> Furedi, *Therapy Culture*, p.98.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>529</sup> Nolan, *The therapeutic State*, p.285.

<sup>530</sup> Furedi, *Therapy Culture*, p.1.

<sup>531</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good. 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (London: Pluto Press, 1979), pp.316-317.

<sup>532</sup> Starker, *Oracle at the Supermarket*, p.146; see also Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good*, p.273.

<sup>533</sup> Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good*, pp.329-330.

<sup>534</sup> Simonds, *Women and Self-Help Culture*, p.58.

In her research on self-help literature and its readers, Wendy Simonds argues that for women self-hood always involves relationships with other people, which is why self-help books specifically aimed at women tend to focus on their relationships with others.<sup>535</sup> Janice Peck explains this as the result of gender socialization, ‘... whereby females are assigned more responsibility for emotional and relational work, and, because of their subordinate status, are taught to seek and accept (male) help for their problems.’<sup>536</sup> Dana Becker argues that this relational discourse, that represents women as ‘naturally affiliative beings and emotionally available, nurturing caretakers,’ is harmful because women are expected to do the main part of emotional work in the family.<sup>537</sup> In a culture in which self-actualisation is an imperative, this leads to double pressure: ‘Currently, the empowerment and relational discourses are intertwined; psychological woman expects herself to “be her own person” as well as to be emotionally available to those she loves.’<sup>538</sup> Self-help literature about relationships is often aimed at female readers because it is based on the assumption that women are in charge of their relationships and emotional work.

The therapeutic discourse or, using Eva Illouz’s terminology therapeutic ethos, strongly influenced ideas about relationships: ‘Since it locates the original reason for romantic failure in circumstances beyond the control or even awareness of the subject, experts of the psyche become necessary. Experts become the intermediaries between the different parts of our divided selves, thus partially discharging us of responsibility. But at the same time, the therapeutic ethos fully reinforces and extends the credo of the Protestant ethic by making one responsible even for one’s emotional destiny.’<sup>539</sup> Thus, routine social interactions now require professional help<sup>540</sup> and love is often portrayed as harmful to the self: ‘Paradoxically, although love is depicted as the supreme source of self-fulfilment, it is also depicted as potentially harmful because it threatens to subordinate the self to another. That is why passionate feelings of love towards another person are often perceived as destructive and dangerous.’<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>535</sup> Ibid., pp.4-5.

<sup>536</sup> Janice Peck, “TV Talk Shows as Therapeutic Discourse: The Ideological Labor of the Televised Talking Cure,” *Communication Theory* 5:1 (1995): p.60.

<sup>537</sup> Becker, *The Myth of Empowerment*, p.7.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid.

<sup>539</sup> Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia. Love and the Cultural contradictions of Capitalism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), p.201.

<sup>540</sup> Furedi, *Therapy Culture*, p.98.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid., p.32.

Passionate feelings are typical for romantic love and the growing influence of the therapeutic discourse facilitated the shift from romantic to confluent love in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Romantic love had been the dominant paradigm of love since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and became the dominant discourse of love as a result of capitalism and individualism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>542</sup> Romantic or ideal love is based on the notion that there is one ideal partner for everyone and that the relationship with this perfect partner should last forever. The romantic narrative focused on the couple overcoming obstacles during the courtship which culminated in marriage.<sup>543</sup> Changes in society in the 1960s and experimentations with intimacy outside of marriage resulted in the new term 'relationship.'<sup>544</sup> Love was increasingly understood '... as sharp, short and shocking episodes, shot through by the *a priori* awareness of brittleness and brevity.'<sup>545</sup> In this new climate of 'liquid love' commitments are meaningless, relationships cease to be trustworthy and are therefore unlikely to last.<sup>546</sup> The focus has shifted from one perfect relationship to a plurality of special relationships, or in Anthony Giddens' terms from the concept of ideal love to the concept of confluent love. Changing partners has become acceptable and the new relationship model is the pure relationship: 'It refers to a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only insofar as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it.'<sup>547</sup> The pure relationship can be terminated by either partner at any time and commitment is based on the creation of trust through intimacy.<sup>548</sup> 'Intimacy means the disclosure of emotions and actions which the individual is unlikely to hold up to a wider public gaze.'<sup>549</sup> Because intimacy is not a given anymore, couples need to work on their relationships to attain and maintain

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<sup>542</sup> Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, pp.39-40 and Shumway, *Modern Love*, pp.18-19.

<sup>543</sup> Shumway, *Modern Love*, p.21; see also Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p.45.

<sup>544</sup> Shumway, *Modern Love*, p.25.

<sup>545</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Love*, p.5.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xiii.

<sup>547</sup> Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p.58. Bauman uses the term 'virtual relationship' to describe the same phenomenon. See Bauman, *Liquid Love*, p.xii.

<sup>548</sup> Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p.137.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*

them.<sup>550</sup> Thus, confluent love complies with the focus on the self and self-improvement typical in therapeutic discourse.

Since the 1960s self-help books about relationships have been written in the discourse of intimacy and are based on the idea that people need expert advice to cope with their relationships. Self-help books about relationships therefore focus on how people can be fixed or how they should behave in order to build functioning new relationships.<sup>551</sup> David R. Shumway argues that the notion of intimacy as a necessary basis for relationships is primarily distributed through self-help books as the result of the assumed importance of the expert in therapeutic culture. This marks a shift in genre because the discourse of romance was mainly distributed in fictional narratives. However, Shumway argues that both kinds of texts function in the same way: ‘In other words, like the fictional narratives of the discourse of romance, [self-help] books work primarily by providing terms, images, and stories by which love is understood, relationships are constituted, and lives are forecast.’<sup>552</sup> The following analysis of a self-help book and a novel will show how these different kinds of books depict contradictory discourses about love and how these depictions are influenced by the therapeutic discourse.

### **3.1.1. Introducing the male expert - *he’s just not that into you***

In their study of ten bestseller self-help books published between 1988 and 1998 Toni Shindler Zimmerman et al. explain that very few US Americans want to return to former gender roles but are not yet sure how to deal with changed roles and form functioning relationships.<sup>553</sup> This has led to an increased uncertainty about how to behave and how to interpret the behaviour of others. As the quote at the beginning of this chapter has shown, this theme has been explored in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. Bridget and her friends use self-help books as a source of relationship advice because they are uncertain about how to behave in relationships with men. Levine identifies

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<sup>550</sup> Shumway, *Modern Love*, p.25.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, p.136.

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.*, p.153.

<sup>553</sup> Toni Shindler Zimmerman, Kristen E. Holm and Shelley A. Haddock, “A Decade of Advice for Women and Men in the Best-Selling Self-Help Literature,” *Family Relations* 50:2 (2001): p.124.

confusion as the main reason for people's striving for simplicity: 'Confusion can lead to helplessness, and helplessness breeds a desire for quick fixes – anything to get our bearings.'<sup>554</sup> In order to deal with this confusion, people turn to self-help books because they offer them explanations for and solutions to their problems.<sup>555</sup> *He's just not that into you* (2004) by Greg Behrendt and Liz Tuccillo is part of a range of self-help books promising their readers simple solutions by reducing complex relationships to simplistic formulas and prescribing behaviour based on essentialist ideas about gender.

Some of the most well-known examples for self-help books about relationships offer the most simplistic worldviews. In *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (1992) John Gray uses a planetary metaphor to express its main idea that men and women are essentially different creatures.<sup>556</sup> According to Gray, this difference is universal and eternal and the reader is offered strategies for dealing with 'Martians' or 'Venusians' respectively. While Gray's books is aimed at both male and female readers, other bestsellers stress that women can take complete charge of relationships. *The Rules* (1997) and its sequels by Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider, for instance, is also based on the essentialist premise that men (and by inference also women) are all the same.<sup>557</sup> The authors encourage women to manipulate men into reacting in specific ways by following an extensive and non-negotiable set of rules. *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man* (2009) is another more recent example. The author Steve Harvey explains that the book is a 'playbook of sorts' offering women insights into male thoughts and guidelines for their own behaviour that will supposedly allow them to find and lead fulfilling relationships.<sup>558</sup> These books are aimed at a predominantly female readership because they are based on the assumption that women do most of the emotional work in a relationship.

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<sup>554</sup> Robert Levine, *The Power of Persuasion. How We're Bought and Sold* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2003), p.144.

<sup>555</sup> Simonds, *Women and Self-Help Culture*, p.119; see also Sandra K. Dolby, *Self-Help Books. Why Americans Keep Reading Them* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), pp.4-5 and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *The Normal Chaos of Love*, p.118.

<sup>556</sup> John Gray, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus. The Definite Guide to Relationships* (London: Element, 1992).

<sup>557</sup> Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider, *All the Rules. Time-tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1997).

<sup>558</sup> Steve Harvey, *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man* (New York: Amistad, 2009), p.5.

In *he's just not that into you* (2004) Greg Behrendt explains in 11 chapters that if a man behaves in a certain way it is a sign for his disinterest in a woman. Each chapter explains one of these behaviours with the use of fictional letters by women, anecdotes and explanations by Behrendt and co-author Liz Tuccillo, followed by a tongue-in-cheek exercise at the end.<sup>559</sup> The book is itself the adaptation of a sentence used in an episode of *Sex and the City* (1998-2004). Liz Tuccillo relates the book's genesis in her part of the introduction. It began as a piece of advice Greg Behrendt, a guest consultant on the show, gave a staff writer for *Sex and the City*. She explains that the women at the meeting were intrigued by the simplicity of his advice and decided to use the sentence in the fourth episode of season six 'Pick-A-Little, Talk-A-Little.'<sup>560</sup> Self-help books typically begin by defining a syndrome or a problem,<sup>561</sup> which in the case of self-help books about relationships is that women are in unhappy relationships or unable to find the right man. In an increasingly complex and complicated world people search for shortcuts to help them make decisions and trusting in figures of authority is the most effective of these shortcuts.<sup>562</sup> The written word is also often already considered as an authority and is consequently taken more seriously. Simonds identified this as one of the reasons why people prefer seeking advice from self-help books instead of friends. The fact that the book was published adds authority to its content because readers assume that '... if something were not well-researched, genuine, or expertly presented, it would not have been selected for publication.'<sup>563</sup> Moreover, in a therapeutic cultural climate people have become used to seeking advice from experts. Authors of self-help books therefore typically establish themselves as experts at the beginning of the book. They do so either by mentioning academic credentials or by relating their own personal experiences, explaining how these turned them into experts about the issue their book deals with.<sup>564</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> Chapter 6, for example, is titled 'He's Just Not That Into You If He Only Wants to See You When He's Drunk' and ends with a 'calendar' on page 96 consisting of squares with clowns in them. The reader is supposed to colour in the noses of the clowns for every day the man is drunk when they meet. See Behrendt and Tuccillo, *he's just not that into you*, pp.87-96.

<sup>560</sup> "Pick-A-Little, Talk-A-Little," *Sex and the City*, season 6, episode 4. July 13, 2003 (USA: HBO).

<sup>561</sup> Dolby, *Self-Help Books*, pp.4-5; see also Deborah Cameron, "A self of the shelf? Consuming women's empowerment," in *All the World and Her Husband. Women in Twentieth-Century Consumer Culture*, ed. Maggie Andrews and Mary M. Talbot (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), pp.212-213.

<sup>562</sup> Levine, *The Power of Persuasion*, p.31.

<sup>563</sup> Simonds, *Women and Self-Help Culture*, p.59.

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid.*, p.120.

By telling the story about how Behrendt gave his advice to a fellow writer for *Sex and the City*, Tuccillo has already introduced him as the recognised authority on the subject. Behrendt further expands this claim by relating his own personal experience:

‘Look, I am not a doctor, neither real nor imagined. But I am an expert that should be listened to because of one important thing: I’m a guy – a guy that has had his fair share of relationships and is willing to come clean about his behaviour in them. Because I’m a guy, I know how a guy thinks, feels, and acts, and it’s my responsibility to tell you who we really are. I’m tired of seeing great women in bullshit relationships.’<sup>565</sup>

In this section he adopts the role typical for self-help authors of a ‘crusader of sorts’ who helps others by sharing his insights.<sup>566</sup> His expertise is based on his own personal experience as well as his previous behaviour towards women. Self-revelation is a technique frequently employed by self-help authors because it validates their ideas, helps them create intimacy and built up trust with their readers.<sup>567</sup> Behrendt repeatedly confesses his own bad behaviour towards women but excuses it by implying that it was the result of his lack of interest in these women. Exposing one’s own flaws is disarming and people will perceive such a person as more trustworthy.<sup>568</sup> Moreover, Behrendt writes that his behaviour changed completely once he met a woman he was genuinely interested in, turning his own life story into evidence for his ‘truth.’ He suggests that women will solve their relationship problems as soon as they accept the ‘truth’ he offers them.

In order to offer simple solutions and simplify complex relationships, self-help authors use generalisations and labels: ‘Self-help books for women are filled with labels that authors have applied to people in their attempts to codify behavior.’<sup>569</sup> Behrendt repeatedly stresses that all men are the same. In his response to a fictional letter, for instance, he uses himself as an example and explains that all men are like him and that there are no exceptions: ‘I’m a dude. If I like you, I kiss you. ... I’m a

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<sup>565</sup> Behrendt and Tuccillo, *he’s just not that into you*, p.6.

<sup>566</sup> Simonds, *Women and Self-Help Culture*, p.125.

<sup>567</sup> *Ibid.*, p.121; see also Dolby, *Self-Help Books*, p.123.

<sup>568</sup> Levine, *The Power of Persuasion*, p.53.

<sup>569</sup> Simonds, *Women and Self-Help Culture*, p.175.

guy. That's how it works. No ifs, no ands, and clearly no buts.<sup>570</sup> He even claims that men who behave differently are so rare that '... they should be considered urban legends.'<sup>571</sup>

The subtitle *The no-excuses truth to understanding guys* expresses a further strategy employed in the book to strengthen Behrendt's argument. The book includes fictional letters written by women who frequently provide alternative interpretations for male behaviour. Behrendt dismisses these interpretations as mere excuses and stresses repeatedly that every situation can be explained by referring to his interpretation of men's behaviour. His is the only right interpretation and once the reader accepts this, Behrendt promises that she will find the right man: 'Part of the self-help book's promise is that if readers can *understand* and accept the author's view of the problem – her or his jargon, subdivision, typifications, and classifications – then they will be able to gain *control* over the problem as it manifests itself in their lives.'<sup>572</sup> The main technique used to convey this message is by '... providing terms, images, and stories by which love is understood, relationships are constituted, and lives are forecast.'<sup>573</sup> Narratives are a typical strategy within the therapeutic discourse: 'As a narrative strategy, therapeutic discourse projects stories as case histories, including the possibility of carrying both personal and social implications.'<sup>574</sup> Thus, in addition to expert advice, Behrendt and Tuccillo offer a variety of narratives which provide readers with identity positions through which they can experience the benefit of adopting the book's advice.

The co-author Liz Tuccillo is the main source of identification for the reader. In her introduction she describes how she and the other writers for *Sex and the City* gradually came to understand and appreciate Behrendt's opinion. Their reactions changed from shock and outrage about his generalisations and simplifications to understanding and gratitude for Behrendt's 'truth.'<sup>575</sup> In the first chapter, for instance, Behrendt suggests that women should never initiate a relationship by asking men out.

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<sup>570</sup> Behrendt and Tuccillo, *he's just not that into you*, p.61.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

<sup>572</sup> Simonds, *Women and Self-Help Culture*, p.138; see also Cameron, "A self of the shelf?," p.216.

<sup>573</sup> Shumway, *Modern Love*, p.153.

<sup>574</sup> Mimi White, *Tele-Advising. Therapeutic Discourse in American Television* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p.178; see also Shumway, *Modern Love*, p.26.

<sup>575</sup> Behrendt and Tuccillo, *he's just not that into you*, pp.1-4.



In her section ‘Here’s why this one is hard’ Tuccillo expresses her resistance to and anger about Behrendt’s traditional and stereotypical ideas about gender roles, and in doing so pre-empts objections the reader might have to these suggestions. This pre-persuasion is effective because people perceive information to be more trustworthy if the author presents both sides of an argument.<sup>576</sup>

Moreover, she identifies herself as a contemporary modern woman: ‘But now Greg is telling us that in this situation, we are supposed to do absolutely nothing. The guys get to pick.’<sup>577</sup> By using ‘we’ and ‘us’ she creates a group identity including the reader. She explains how she prefers to behave but then admits that she is still single. Tuccillo asserts that following Behrendt’s advice has made her feel better about herself and men: ‘Since I’ve been implementing Greg’s handy-dandy “he’s just not that into you” philosophy, I’ve been feeling surprisingly *more* powerful.’<sup>578</sup> The change of pronoun from second person plural (‘we’) to first person singular (‘I’) in this section indicates that this is only her personal insight based on her own experience after she took Behrendt’s advice. At this point of the section, however, the reader has already been strongly encouraged to identify with her, suggesting that the change of opinion she went through is a change the reader could achieve as well by accepting Behrendt’s ‘truth.’

This message is re-enforced through a variety of different short narratives. Each chapter includes several letters in which women ask Behrendt to explain a man’s behaviour. He then answers these letters by addressing the women directly but renames them using their problems to do so (e.g. ‘Hey, Crazy Long Distance!’ and ‘Dear Slumber Party’).<sup>579</sup> By renaming the women using insulting terms, Behrendt asserts his authority over them, showing that within the therapeutic discourse people depend so much on advice that experts can misuse their power. His condescending tone further belittles the women’s explanations for men’s behaviour. Moreover, the anecdotes in the letters are very short so that there is no room for lengthy explanations or background stories. It suggests that all these cases are very similar and simple.

Since relationships can thus be reduced to very simple formulas, potential issues can also be solved with one general solution. In the section ‘This is what it

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<sup>576</sup> Levine, *The Power of Persuasion*, p.53.

<sup>577</sup> Behrendt and Tuccillo, *he’s just not that into you*, pp.21-22.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.22-23, emphasis in original.

<sup>579</sup> *Ibid.*, p.30 and p.64.

should look like' in the third chapter, for instance, Behrendt writes about three men who behaved in the exact way he predicted. The paragraph consists of only three and a half lines which means that each 'narrative' is reduced to one or two sentences: 'My friend Jeff met a girl out of town and went and visited her the next weekend and never stopped visiting her until he moved in with her. It's really that simple. *It's almost always that simple.*'<sup>580</sup> While the letters written by women offer negative examples for the wrong kind of behaviour, the book also includes narratives about the supposedly right kind of behaviour.

When used in a self-help book, narratives become rhetorical devices that allow the authors to make their point and teach their lesson.<sup>581</sup> Moreover, in her study of self-help readers Simonds found that the mere act of reading about their personal dilemmas in print was empowering for readers because it reassured them that their problems were surmountable and that they were not the only ones who suffered from a particular issue.<sup>582</sup> Deborah Cameron also argues that self-help books implement a normalising discourse, meaning they reassure readers that their problems are normal. Understanding these problems is for readers already a form of empowerment. In addition, readers recognize themselves in the anecdotes and not the overall arguments of the book.<sup>583</sup> Self-help books therefore offer fictional or real life narratives as examples for the right kind of conduct.<sup>584</sup>

The case study or case history as a narrative form is the result of the rise of the discourse of intimacy.<sup>585</sup> Case histories function like 'troubles talk' because they create an intimate relationship between the book and the reader.<sup>586</sup> Each chapter of *he's just not that into you* contains a short paragraph entitled 'This is what it should look like,' in which Behrendt or Tuccillo share stories of people who followed Behrendt's rule and are now in happy relationships. This is followed by another section entitled 'Greg, I get it!' These sections are supposedly written by women, identified by their name and age, who have successfully implemented Behrendt's

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<sup>580</sup> Ibid., p.55, emphasis in original.

<sup>581</sup> Dolby, *Self-Help Books*, p.114.

<sup>582</sup> Simonds, *Women and Self-Help Culture*, p.77.

<sup>583</sup> Cameron, "A self of the shelf?," p.216.

<sup>584</sup> See for example Smiles, *Self-Help*.

<sup>585</sup> Shumway, *Modern Love*, p.26.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid., p.152. The term "troubles talk" Shumway uses here was coined by Deborah Tannen. See Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (London: Virago, 1992), p.53.

advice. Nessa, age 38, for instance, recalls how she was in a relationship with a man with whom she got drunk every time they met.<sup>587</sup> She concludes her story with: ‘Normally I would just stay quiet and see how it all turned out, but this time I got up the nerve to say something.’<sup>588</sup> The word ‘normally’ at the beginning of the sentence suggests that hearing Behrendt’s advice on the subject made her question her own behaviour and encouraged her to change it. By combining several very similar stories into one chapter the book suggests that women follow similar and often negative behaviour patterns which are the cause of their failed relationships with men. Nessa’s story is only one of several very similar narratives in chapter 6, titled: ‘He’s Just Not That Into You If He Only Wants To See You When He’s Drunk.’<sup>589</sup> At the same time, these examples also try to convince readers that listening to Behrendt will allow women to change their negative behaviour patterns and improve themselves and their relationships.

Typical for self-help books about relationships, *he’s just not that into you* is also based on the idea that women are solely responsible for their relationships. Shindler Zimmerman et al. found that the self-help books they analysed contained both traditional as well as progressive ideas about gender. However, the progressive ideas were restricted to women and none of the books attempted to empower men, meaning none of them suggested that men should change their behaviour.<sup>590</sup> *He’s just not that into you* is typical for these kinds of books because it offers simplistic relationship advice for women and suggests that they are solely in charge of their relationships and that they are therefore solely responsible for their emotional well-being. If they are ill-treated by men, they have only themselves to blame because they stayed with someone who is not interested enough in them.

The book even suggests that women have no right to be angry about being ill-treated. Nikki, the only woman in the book who is really angry about her ex-boyfriend’s bad behaviour, is ridiculed by the tone of her own narrative. Her objections are dismissed as childish and even psychotic.<sup>591</sup> The inclusion of several of her letters also implies that she invited ill-treatment by repeatedly rejecting Behrendt’s superior

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<sup>587</sup> Behrendt and Tuccillo, *he’s just not that into you*, p.94.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid., pp.87-96.

<sup>590</sup> Shindler Zimmerman, Holm and Haddock, “A Decade of Advice for Women and Men,” pp.130-131.

<sup>591</sup> Behrendt and Tuccillo, *he’s just not that into you*, p.123.

advice. Behrendt never blames men or even chastises rude and selfish behaviour. In his own story in the introduction of the book he unapologetically admits that he treated women badly but explains his behaviour by his lack of interest in them. Men are blameless and it is the responsibility of women to find a way to understand them, work and live around them.<sup>592</sup> While this puts women under double pressure, it also promises them ‘... that we can gain complete control over whatever happens to us; we simply have to elect to begin the process of change that will inevitably mean a better life.’<sup>593</sup> Thus, like chick lit novels that celebrate their independent female protagonists, this emphasis on self-reliance can be empowering for female readers because the book assures them that they are in control of their lives and happiness.

Moreover, the message of the book further explores a point made repeatedly in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, its sequel and their adaptations, namely that women need to find a man who loves them despite or even because of their imperfections. *He's just not that into you* is a manual that tries to help women analyse the behaviour of men in order to find out if they are really interested, suggesting that every woman deserves to be with a man who loves her the way she is. Behrendt stresses at the end of the book that it is important to believe in the existence of this ideal partner. The reader is supposed to join him in his conviction and break up with unsuitable partners immediately so as to make room for the potentially right one.<sup>594</sup> Feelings of loneliness are dismissed because in therapeutic culture the individual is supposed to be self-reliant and any suggestion of a need for other people is considered a weakness that needs to be overcome. The book promises women ideal love, which is also the necessary motivation for them to keep entering new relationships.<sup>595</sup> This, however, is only possible in a society in which confluent love is the dominant discourse, meaning that it has become acceptable to have multiple partners and even be single (in between relationships).

As the analysis has shown, *he's just not that into you* is deeply embedded in the therapeutic discourse. It suggests that women can improve their lives and their relationships by following the advice of an expert. This advice is based on his belief

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<sup>592</sup> Simonds, *Women and Self-Help Culture*, pp.224-225.

<sup>593</sup> *Ibid.*, p.199.

<sup>594</sup> Behrendt and Tuccillo, *he's just not that into you*, p.173.

<sup>595</sup> María del Mar Azcona Montoliu, “Love is a Many-Person'd Thing: Multi-Protagonist Tales of Contemporary Desire,” *BELLS – Barcelona English Language and Literature Studies* 17 (2008): p.9.

in ideal love but is only practicable because of the dominant concept of the pure relationship that can be ended as soon as it becomes unsatisfactory. Case studies of women's and men's behaviour serve to illustrate the expert's 'truth' and offer points of identification for the reader. Thus, the self-help book creates a feeling of belonging to a community of people with the same problems and concerns.<sup>596</sup> In the case of self-help readers this community searches for guidance about relationships in the form of a self-help book written by an expert. The following section will explore how a different community, based on the devotion to Jane Austen, uses Austen's novels as a source for relationship advice.

### 3.1.2. Bibliotherapy and Austen - *The Jane Austen Book Club*

The re-kindled interest in the English novelist Jane Austen (1775-1817) and her writing was caused by a big media surge of Austen adaptations in film and on television during the 1990s.<sup>597</sup> Fielding's novels reflected this interest in their plots: They are based on two of Austen's plots and Bridget enjoys watching the BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*.<sup>598</sup> Austen's popularity is also reflected in the number of book titles that include her name. Harper Collins has commissioned a series of Austen retellings in a contemporary context<sup>599</sup> and her novels and the author herself are even transposed into different genres. Stephanie Barron turns Jane Austen into a detective in her book series, which is marketed as 'Jane Austen Mysteries,' and *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*<sup>600</sup> illustrates that the need for Austen is so great that her work can be changed significantly: 'The fact is that people are no longer very particular about how or where they get their Austen, or what Austen it is they get.'<sup>601</sup>

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<sup>596</sup> Simonds, *Women and Self-Help Culture*, p.43; see also Cameron, "A self of the shelf?," p.217.

<sup>597</sup> Claire Harman, *Jane's Fame. How Jane Austen Conquered the World* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2009), p.7.

<sup>598</sup> Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, pp.246-247.

<sup>599</sup> Viv Groskop, "Emma by Alexander McCall Smith review – exhausting and implausible," *The Guardian*, November 24, 2014.

<sup>600</sup> Seth Grahame-Smith, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2009).

<sup>601</sup> Harman, *Jane's Fame*, p.265.

One of the reasons that Austen is still so popular with contemporary readers is ‘That sense of Austen being for us and for our time....’<sup>602</sup>

*The Jane Austen Book Club* (2004) by Karen Joy Fowler is one of a wide range of books that evoke Jane Austen and her work in their titles as well as their narratives. The book is part of the therapeutic discourse and illustrates bibliotherapy as a source of relationship advice. Like in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, this advice needs to be extracted and discussed by a community of friends. It follows the lives of six people who decide to form a book club and re-read Austen’s novels over the course of six months. The protagonists are loosely based on Austen’s heroines and each chapter focuses on one of them, exploring their past in flash backs of defining moments in their lives. Sylvia’s husband Daniel has asked her for a divorce and her best friend Jocelyn suggests the book club as a distraction. Another member is their mutual friend Bernadette who has been married numerous times and is single at the beginning of the novel. Sylvia’s gay daughter Allegra joins mainly to support her mother through her divorce. The youngest member of the group is Prudie, a married high school teacher in her late twenties who takes her devotion to Austen very seriously. On a whim Jocelyn invites the only male member of the club, Grigg, after meeting him in a hotel, where she is attending an event for dog breeders and he is attending a science fiction convention. Reading and discussing Austen’s books over the course of several months becomes a source of guidance for their own relationships and at the end of the novel all protagonists have either embarked on a new relationship or renewed their already existing ones.

The novel begins with a short introduction of the characters by an unknown narrator who remains unidentified throughout the book. Brandy Foster explains that ‘It is not so much that Austen is encountered everywhere; it is that so many different Austens are encountered.’<sup>603</sup> The novel is very conscious of different versions of Austen and begins with the statement: ‘Each of us has a private Austen.’<sup>604</sup> In the following paragraphs each of the protagonists is characterised by their version of Austen, reflecting their own attitudes towards life. Bernadette’s Austen, for example, is ‘a comic genius.’<sup>605</sup> Bernadette is the oldest member of the club and is always happy and positive so that her opinion of Austen reflects her own character. A lack of Austen

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<sup>602</sup> Ibid., p.272.

<sup>603</sup> Brandy Foster, “Pimp my Austen: The Commodification and Customization of Jane Austen,” *Persuasions On-Line* 29:1 (2008).

<sup>604</sup> Fowler, *The Jane Austen Book Club*, p.1.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

even means that a character cannot be characterised: ‘None of us knew who Grigg’s Austen was.’<sup>606</sup> Jocelyn’s ‘Austen wrote wonderful novels about love and courtship, but never married.’<sup>607</sup> Jocelyn, who is also not married, organises the book club and the unnamed narrator who seems to be part of the group but at the same time is not one of the characters, suspects that Jocelyn wants to distract Sylvia from her impending divorce. Thus, reading Austen’s novels is introduced as a means for Sylvia and the other characters to cope with changes in their lives. Therapeutic culture asserts that people cannot cope with this emotional stress by themselves anymore and need the guidance of an expert.<sup>608</sup> By suggesting that the expert is Jane Austen and that people can access her wisdom by reading and discussing her novels, *The Jane Austen Book Club* promotes bibliotherapy as a strategy to cope with life.

Bibliotherapy is based on the concept that narratives offer readers positive or negative examples and facilitate self-discovery if readers actively engage with the characters. Jonathan Bate and Andrew Schuman explain that the idea goes back to Aristotle’s concept of catharsis: ‘... poetry and drama play out dangerous emotions and dark desires within the safe space of fiction. The process is not inflammatory but therapeutic, effecting a purgation of unhealthy emotions.’<sup>609</sup> They also argue that the ‘reading cure’ predated the ‘talking cure’ of Freud’s psychoanalysis: ‘In the 19th century, publishers produced numerous poetic anthologies and “daybooks”, specifically marketed to help Victorians to pace and steady themselves in an increasingly busy world. Reading was also a key element of the so-called “moral management” of more enlightened Victorian lunatic asylums ....’<sup>610</sup> Today bibliotherapy is used by therapists as a supplement to psychotherapy. The *Salem Press Encyclopedia* offers the following definition, illustrating the parallels between bibliotherapy and reading self-help books:

‘Having the same emotions and experiences as a character in a book allows readers to realize their conditions are not unique, but that other people have felt the same way or lived through the same problems. Catharsis occurs when a reader feels as though he or

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<sup>606</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>608</sup> Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia*, p.201 and Furedi, *Therapy Culture*, p.98.

<sup>609</sup> Jonathan Bate and Andrew Schuman, “Books do furnish a mind: the art and science of bibliotherapy,” *Lancet* 387 (2016): p.742.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid.

she has experienced something through the character, thereby allowing repressed emotions to surface from his or her unconscious and be purged. This new insight gained by the reader is a crucial element of **bibliotherapy**, and it becomes a useful tool for healing. In educational settings, reading of and discussing a character who overcomes personal problems can be a valuable learning tool.<sup>611</sup>

Shumway explains that identification with characters is the key to the cathartic effect of literature and that it is based on the cognitive attitude of ‘suspension of disbelief’: ‘The reader or viewer knows that what he or she is experiencing is “only a story,” but the full experience of the narrative depends on a temporary forgetting of this knowledge. If the story is successful, most readers or viewers will not merely comprehend the words or images but also live with and through the characters for the duration of the narrative.’<sup>612</sup> Doing so is assumed to help people gain an insight into their own emotions and help them understand their own behaviour.

Despite the fact that therapists apply bibliotherapy, there is no scientific proof for the effectiveness of the technique. Studies of the phenomenon have led to inconclusive results.<sup>613</sup> Nevertheless, the idea that reading novels can help people overcome personal problems is firmly embedded in contemporary popular culture and is further promoted through the publication of personal narratives by people who have found that reading has made a difference in their lives.<sup>614</sup> *The Novel Cure. An A-Z of Literary Remedies* by Ella Berthoud and Susan Elderkin published as a hardcover edition is a recent example.<sup>615</sup> The authors define the book as a medical handbook

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<sup>611</sup> Kay Castaneda, “Bibliotherapy,” in *Salem Press Encyclopedia* (Research Starters, EBSCOhost, 2013), emphasis in original.

<sup>612</sup> Shumway, *Modern Love*, p.20.

<sup>613</sup> See for instance the following meta-analyses which both found only modest evidence to support the efficacy of bibliotherapy: Robert A. Gould and George A. Clum, “A meta-analysis of self-help treatment approaches,” *Clinical psychology review* 13.2 (1993): pp.169-186 and Timothy R. Apodaca and William R. Miller, “A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of bibliotherapy for alcohol problems,” *Journal of clinical psychology* 59: 3 (2003): pp.289-304.

<sup>614</sup> Bate and Schuman, “Books do furnish a mind,” p.743. Examples include: Samantha Ellis, *How to be a Heroine* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2014), in which the author links important life decisions to the novels she has read and what she learned from their heroines, and W.B. Gooderham, “Reading your way out of depression,” *The Guardian*, January 18, 2010, in which Gooderham explains how a book by Saul Bellow helped him overcome his depression.

<sup>615</sup> Ella Berthoud and Susan Elderkin, *The Novel Cure. An A-Z of Literary Remedies* (Edinburgh and London: Canongate, 2013).



‘with a difference’ and suggest literature for a wide variety of ailments.<sup>616</sup> The popularity of bibliotherapy has also resulted in the creation of the Bibliotherapy Foundation, whose founders Paula Byrne and Jonathan Bate advertise their poetry anthology on their website ReLit: ‘This little book offers everyone one of the oldest of all remedies for stress: the reading of poetry.’<sup>617</sup> Following the same trend, Fowler’s novel suggests that Austen’s work is an ideal source for therapy.

Reading Austen in order to cope with emotional problems is not a new concept. Claire Harman explains that Austen’s novels were popular reading for men at the front in the First World War. Moreover, the ‘... therapeutic potential of Austen’s novels in wartime was recognised on a wider scale when they were chosen as ‘salubrious reading for the wounded’ and prescribed as an aid to convalescence for the most severely shell-shocked soldiers.’<sup>618</sup> The characters and the narrator in *The Jane Austen Book Club* also stress repeatedly that only Austen’s novels are fit for this purpose. In the prologue the narrator reproduces the reasons Jocelyn gives for starting the book club: ‘It was essential to reintroduce Austen into our life regularly, Jocelyn said, and let her look around.’<sup>619</sup> In the epilogue Grigg suggests that they should continue the book club with a different author but the narrator explains that this would not work: ‘We’d let Austen into our lives, and now we were either married or dating. Could O’Brian have done this? How?’<sup>620</sup> The narrator questions the suggestion and implies that only Austen could have created this result because, unlike self-help books that offer rules for behaviour which supposedly lead to successful relationships, Austen’s novels offer their readers an escape from their contemporary lives.

Their escapism is often regarded as the main appeal of Austen’s novels and her fans are typically depicted as refugees from the battle of the sexes: ‘Their turn to Austen is not a statement about traditional British values, nationalism, or nostalgia, but rather a commentary about courtship in contemporary society, as characters express their frustrations with dating and relationships.’<sup>621</sup> John Wiltshire explains that

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<sup>616</sup> Ibid., p.1. Too much confidence, for instance, can be cured by reading *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius (p.92), while *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* by Agatha Christie is offered as a coping strategy for the flu (p.172).

<sup>617</sup> ReLit, “What we do,” accessed April 05, 2016, <http://relit.org.uk/what-we-do/anthology>.

<sup>618</sup> Harman, *Jane’s Fame*, p.183.

<sup>619</sup> Fowler, *The Jane Austen Book Club*, p.1.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid., p.249.

<sup>621</sup> Marily Francus, “Austen Therapy: *Pride and Prejudice* and Popular Culture,” *Persuasion On-Line* 30:2 (2010). One of the most explicit examples is the ITV miniseries *Lost in Austen*

Austen ‘... signals distance from the contemporary. Both those who say they love Jane Austen and those who dislike ‘her’ intensely often predicate their assessments on this supposed remoteness from the harassments and incitements of modern urban life.’<sup>622</sup> Margaret Drabble also argues that Austen offers readers ‘... a world of limited choice. A distant, static world of being rather than doing, where careers hardly feature; where professional success is a side issue; where competition is so regulated by convention that it cannot dominate behaviour; where ambition is curtailed and failure managed.’<sup>623</sup> Thus, it is generally assumed that Austen’s novels provide a safe haven from the complexities of modern life and its constant demand on people to make life choices.

I would like to suggest that another reason why Austen’s novels in particular are currently so popular is that they fit into the therapeutic discourse. While introspection and a focus on self-discovery form the basis of the therapeutic discourse, not all emotions are equally valued: ‘Emotions that assist the project of self-fulfilment tend to be presented in a positive light, whilst those feelings that bind the individual to others are regarded with suspicion. ... Emotions, especially strong ones, are systematically treated as pathologies and addictions that require the therapeutic intervention.’<sup>624</sup> Illouz argues that this development is the result of a long tradition to view romantic passion as a sickness that should be cured: ‘What the therapeutic ethos proposes to cure us of is anything in the psyche that escapes or subverts rational self-control.’<sup>625</sup> Because love is such a powerful emotion, it is thus often portrayed as harmful for the self.<sup>626</sup>

Austen’s novels fit into these discourses because her heroines all choose their husbands after careful and *rational* examination, even taking economic considerations into account. In contrast, other famous novelists from Austen’s time, like the Brontë sisters, celebrated passionate love even if it inevitably ended in disaster.<sup>627</sup> While these novels still remain popular today, their authors do not have the same status of a

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(Dan Zeff, 2008). The protagonist Amanda is unhappy with her unromantic boyfriend and physically escapes from her modern life into the world of *Pride and Prejudice*.

<sup>622</sup> John Wiltshire, *Recreating Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.10.

<sup>623</sup> Margaret Drabble, “Portrait of a Lady,” *New Statesman*, June 21, 2010, p.42.

<sup>624</sup> Furedi, *Therapy Culture*, p.31.

<sup>625</sup> Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia*, p.293.

<sup>626</sup> Furedi, *Therapy Culture*, p.32.

<sup>627</sup> See for example *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë.

relationship expert as Austen does. In Austen's novels characters who succumb to passionate love are punished for their irrational behaviour: 'Unhappy marriages and ill-matched partners then result from those courtships in which the appearance and expectation of love was allowed to take precedence over rational understanding.'<sup>628</sup> In *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, Lydia Bennet falls in love with Wickham. They marry because Mr Darcy bribes Wickham but soon become indifferent to each other. The couple leads a restless life accumulating debts.<sup>629</sup> In *Sense and Sensibility* Marianne Dashwood falls passionately in love with Willoughby, who marries another woman for her money. Marianne is distraught and almost dies from an illness brought on by her unhappiness.<sup>630</sup>

Austen's novels can be interpreted as valuing rationality over passion and thus suit the contemporary idea that people should be in charge of all aspects of their lives, including their emotions. The author is treated like a relationship guru and her characters are interpreted as examples for the right or wrong kind of behaviour in relationships. Her main protagonists do not succumb to passion but instead choose their partners after rational and sensible examination, for which they are rewarded with happiness in marriage. Using Austen's characters as examples for right or wrong behaviour is a theme that is also explored in self-help books. In *Jane Austen's Guide to Dating* by Lauren Henderson<sup>631</sup> and *The Jane Austen Guide to Happily Ever After* by Elizabeth Kantor,<sup>632</sup> for instance, various characters and subplots from Austen's novels are used as case studies to explain good and bad behaviour on dates and in relationships.

In *The Jane Austen Book Club* Austen is also celebrated as a modern relationship guru when Sylvia's daughter Allegra combines quotations from her novels with a Magic 8-ball so that the characters can directly ask for Austen's advice. Allison Thomson concludes in her analysis of Austen fans that they use artefacts connected to the author to '... actively shape the reception of their own particular Austen as well as put their own interests and personalities on display by reference to

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<sup>628</sup> Mary Evans, "'Falling in Love with Love is Falling for Make Believe' Ideologies of Romance in Post-Enlightenment Culture," *Theory, culture & society* 15: 3 (1998): p.266.

<sup>629</sup> Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, pp.365-366.

<sup>630</sup> Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 [1811]), p.237.

<sup>631</sup> Lauren Henderson, *Jane Austen's Guide to Dating* (New York: Hyperion Books, 2005).

<sup>632</sup> Elizabeth Kantor, *The Jane Austen Guide to Happily Ever After* (Washington: Regnery, 2012).

her.<sup>633</sup> The book club members use the artefact Allegra created in the same way when they ask it for advice but also re-assert that they are responsible for their own lives and need to make their own decisions. Jocelyn, who has been thinking about starting a relationship with Grigg, is still uncertain about dating a younger man, especially since he reads science-fiction. She asks the Magic 8-ball and receives the following answer: 'It is not everyone who has your passion for dead leaves.'<sup>634</sup> Allegra interprets it for her and suggests that Jocelyn should take a chance. Allegra's interpretation is also a personal reading of the quotation, because throughout the book Allegra enjoys taking risks.

Thus, while Austen's words serve as a source of advice, it is still up to the reader if she wants to follow it. The quote from *Bridget Jones's Diary* in the introduction to this chapter illustrated that Bridget and her friends have to interpret the advice given in self-help books, meaning relationship advice needs to be discussed with friends and it is up to the individual woman if she wants to follow the offered advice. This theme is expanded on in *The Jane Austen Book Club*. Jocelyn has to decide if she wants to join in Allegra's reading and initiate a relationship with Grigg. The fact that Austen's words are interpreted according to the characters' needs is most obvious when Sylvia asks if her ex-husband Daniel can join the club. The first answer given by the Magic 8-ball is 'My good opinion once lost is lost forever.'<sup>635</sup> But Sylvia does not like the answer and shakes the ball again: 'When I am in the country, I never wish to leave it; when I am in town, it is pretty much the same.'<sup>636</sup> As this is inconclusive, Sylvia has to decide what it means and chooses that Daniel can stay. The authors of self-help books declare that readers *have to* follow their advice in order to find happiness in their relationships. In contrast, Austen's advice is subject to interpretation so that the novel replaces the absolute authority of one expert with interpretations reached in a communal effort.

In the novel reading Austen for advice can only function as therapy because the women help each other to interpret her words. Furedi argues that the therapeutic discourse alienates people from each other: 'Through a world-view that advocates the realisation of individual autonomy through the pursuit of self-expressions and self-

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<sup>633</sup> Allison Thompson, "Trinkets and Treasures. Consuming Jane Austen," *Persuasion On-Line* 28:2 (2008).

<sup>634</sup> Fowler, *The Jane Austen Book Club*, p.234.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*, p.240.

<sup>636</sup> *Ibid.*

realisation it legitimises the estrangement of people from one another.<sup>637</sup> *The Jane Austen Book Club* contests this notion with a communal form of therapy. While Austen is also celebrated as an expert, the advice needs to be deciphered by a community of her readers and applied to the specific circumstances of the individual book club members. Moreover, this communal therapy based on Austen's works is clearly gendered. Women are able to help themselves and each other through reading and interpreting Austen's works and are capable of change and emotional insight. In contrast, Daniel has to seek the help of a counsellor, meaning he has to pay for professional help.<sup>638</sup> While he needed the advice of a counsellor to understand his feelings, Sylvia has a community of Austen fans to help her through her divorce.

The novel uses various literary means to create a sense of community between the characters and also include the reader in it. After introducing the main characters in the prologue, the narrator begins the last paragraph with the words 'The six of us...'<sup>639</sup> The narrator seems to be a member of the group but not an identifiable character. This ambivalence remains throughout the novel. In most of the chapters the narrative remains a third person narration focusing on one of the characters. However, by frequently using pronouns like 'we,' 'us' etc. the narrator creates the impression that she is a friend or even a member of the group. In addition, the reader seems included in the 'we' and 'us' and is further drawn into the group which can facilitate identification with the diverse members.

The same effect is also created when the narrator describes collective reactions from the women in the group. In the second chapter, for instance, Grigg compares Austen's novels with *The Elinor Show* and then criticises the plot of *Sense and Sensibility*. The narrator interjects in brackets: 'That stern moment of silence utterly lost on him! What would it take?'<sup>640</sup> The exclamation mark expresses a mixture of shock and strong disapproval and the sentence presents the characters' previously described reactions. By expressing these thoughts in indirect speech they can be attributed to all the female characters, but also potentially to the reader's reaction to Grigg's blunder. While the book suggests that Austen's novels can be a source of

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<sup>637</sup> Furedi, *Therapy Culture*, p.146.

<sup>638</sup> Fowler, *The Jane Austen Book Club*, p.232.

<sup>639</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>640</sup> Fowler, *The Jane Austen Book Club*, p.51.

guidance for their readers, it also draws attention to the fact that the gendering of these fans is a recent phenomenon.

The novel has a 'Reader's Guide' that includes various reactions people have had over the years to Austen's novels and the quotations illustrate that they were not just appreciated by female readers.<sup>641</sup> Rather, the gendering of Austen's novels is a current phenomenon. *The Jane Austen Book Club* shows that this prejudice towards the author deprives men from the mutual support provided within a community of her fans. Grigg exemplifies that men can benefit just as much from reading Austen as women do. Because he approaches Austen's novels with interest and impartiality he is able to benefit from the discussions. The book also suggests that any prejudice towards certain genres and their readers are misguided and limiting. Jocelyn's main objection to Grigg as a potential partner (apart from his age) is his interest in science fiction literature. She assumes that the novels are not about real people, meaning that they do not contain characters she could identify with. Once she has read the books Grigg gave her, she realises her mistake. In order for readers to benefit from reading a novel, it has to contain characters readers can identify with and *The Jane Austen Book Club* argues that Austen's novels contain such characters.

The novel itself also offers six very different characters as possible sources of identification for the readers. Using a 'multiplication of the feminine through the multi-voiced text' is one of the main features of chick lit and by no means new to literature by, for and about women.<sup>642</sup> Nancy Walker notes about the feminist bestsellers of the 1980s that their frequent use of multiple perspective narratives mirrored the divided self of women at the time.<sup>643</sup> In contemporary literature, using a variety of characters serves a different function. The shift in feminist thought to third-wave feminism and the emergence of postfeminism resulted in the idea that women are diverse, complex and cannot be simply grouped together.<sup>644</sup> The representation of women in contemporary media texts supposedly reflects this diversity by offering a variety of identity positions for women to choose from in order to appeal to a

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<sup>641</sup> Ibid., pp.258-283.

<sup>642</sup> Imelda Whelehan, "Remaking Feminism: Or Why Is Postfeminism So Boring?" *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 9:3 (2010): p.167.

<sup>643</sup> Walker, *Feminist Alternatives*, p.113.

<sup>644</sup> See for example Heywood and Drake, "Introduction," p.8; Brooks, *Postfeminisms*, p.210; Tong, *Feminist Thought*, pp.284-285; Amber E. Kinser, "Negotiating Spaces For/Through Third-Wave Feminism," *NSWA Journal* 16:3 (2004): p.133; Budgeon, "The Contradiction of Successful Femininity," p.283.

potentially wide audience.<sup>645</sup> This ‘diversity’ is, of course, limited to white, affluent and usually heterosexual women and while *The Jane Austen Book Club* includes Allegra, a lesbian as one transgression from this norm, almost all the female protagonists fit this description. Each character functions as a potential point of identification and the novel explores different concepts of love through their stories.

Austen’s novels are romance stories based on the concept of ideal love. Her heroines need to find the right partner because they will have to spend the rest of their lives with him. While updating the characters and the narratives, Fowler added subplots based on confluent love to her novel. In the subplot about Sylvia and Daniel, for example, Fowler shows that marriage is not the absolute happy ending anymore. Daniel leaves Sylvia after years of marriage when he has formed a more satisfactory relationship with someone else. After they have been apart for several months, he realises that he still loves her and asks her to forgive him and take him back. Thus, contemporary relationships are complex and do not follow the simple plot structure of the romance culminating in a happy ending anymore.

Instead, *The Jane Austen Book Club* explicitly explores the idea of different kinds of happy endings. At the end of the fifth chapter Prudie asks Bernadette if she still believes in a happy end. The latter answers: ‘Oh my Lord, yes. ... I guess I would. I’ve had about a hundred of them.’<sup>646</sup> Her words make Sylvia wonder what a happy end really is and if one might even have had one without noticing. Bernadette’s life serves as a case in point. She tells Prudie that she likes to get married because: ‘Courtship has a plotline. But there’s no plot to being married. Just the same things over and over again.’<sup>647</sup> Every man Bernadette married brought out a different part of herself and after a while she would miss the other parts of her personality, at which point she would end the relationship. The character perfectly embodies the contradicting ideas about love in contemporary culture because she has pure relationships, which she ends as soon as they do not make her happy anymore. Nevertheless, she still enters every new relationship convinced that ‘... this was the one that would last.’<sup>648</sup> Like in *he’s just not that into you*, the belief in ideal love is the necessary motivation to keep embarking on new pure relationships.

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<sup>645</sup> Banet-Weiser, “What’s Your Flava?”, p.216.

<sup>646</sup> Fowler, *The Jane Austen Book Club*, p.243.

<sup>647</sup> *Ibid.*, p.193.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibid.*, p.196.

Both books discussed in this section expand the theme in *Bridget Jones's Diary* that people are unable to cope with their relationships on their own and need advice through self-help books and discussions with friends. In the self-help book analysed in this chapter a male expert provides authoritative advice and does not accept any alternatives to his 'truth.' In *The Jane Austen Book Club* the advice comes in form of novels written over two hundred years ago. Their message has to be deciphered and applied to specific circumstances in a communal effort. In both cases the advice is primarily aimed at women, representing the notion typical for therapeutic discourse that women are in charge of relationships and emotional work.

Both texts assume that the reader is familiar with the concept of confluent love and pure relationships, suggesting that people should end unsatisfactory relationships and embark on new ones. Faith in ideal love is the necessary motivation to continue this cycle. By offering readers narratives to immerse themselves in and characters to identify with, both books suggest that reading is one of the forms of guidance available to women in a culture that presupposes that they are in need of guidance. At the same time, the books suggest that women deserve partners who love them the way they are and that they are capable of change, containing a potentially empowering message for their predominantly female readers. The analyses of the adaptations in the next section will show, that while both films retain elements of therapeutic culture, the focus shifts towards the negotiation of concepts of love.



### 3.2. The multi-protagonist romantic comedy

Multi-protagonist films focus on various characters who are equally important and the genre became more common during the 1980s.<sup>649</sup> The enormous financial success of *Love Actually* (Richard Curtis, 2003)<sup>650</sup> inspired multi-protagonist romantic comedies depicting several couples played by an all-star cast, like *He's Just Not That Into You* (2009) and *Valentine's Day* (Gary Marshall, 2010). As mentioned in the previous chapters, films aimed at a predominantly female audience have to appeal to a large audience in order to be produced.<sup>651</sup> Telling numerous stories focusing on a variety of different characters allows multi-protagonist romantic comedies to offer viewers diverse identity positions and include a variety of perspectives, appealing to a potentially wide audience.

María del Mar Azcona Montoliu argues that the increase in multi-protagonist romantic comedies also reflects a change in society: ‘... the intimate panorama they reveal is one filled with discordant voices, discourses and practices – a very apt reflection of the turmoil of voices representing the confusion surrounding intimate matters in contemporary societies.’<sup>652</sup> By shifting the focus from one couple to several, these films can depict contradictory discourses about love. Drawing on Shumway, Montoliu explains that while ‘... romantic love promises passion, adventure and intense emotion, the discourse of intimacy replaces them by commitment, deep communication, friendship, satisfactory sex life and the right degree of autonomy.’<sup>653</sup> Despite these changes, Montoliu asserts that the films still include ideas about one special person, allowing people to switch between the two concepts according to their own situation. While confluent love is reassuring because it normalises changes in relationships, ideal love is a necessary motivation for people to keep entering into new relationships.<sup>654</sup>

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<sup>649</sup> María del Mar Azcona, *The Multi-Protagonist Film* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p.2.

<sup>650</sup> The film grossed \$246,942,017 worldwide with a budget of \$40 million. See Boxoffice Mojo, “Love Actually,” accessed April 06, 2016, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/search/?q=love%20actually>.

<sup>651</sup> Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, p.117; see also York, “From Chick Flicks to Millennial Blockbusters,” p.3.

<sup>652</sup> Montoliu, “Love is a Many-Person’d Thing,” p.3.

<sup>653</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>654</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.

Both *He's Just Not That Into You* and *The Jane Austen Book Club* are part of this trend. Using a number of different subplots, the adaptations depict seemingly contradictory concepts of love and offer alternative happy endings, thus appealing to a potentially wide audience. In order to be able to tell the stories of several couples in a limited amount of time, both adaptations rely on the plot structure and the clumsy but endearing female protagonist celebrated in *Bridget Jones's Diary* and its sequel. While the films comply with the conventions of romantic comedies and focus on relationships, the influence of the therapeutic discourse is reflected in their insistence that women are in sole charge of their relationships.

### 3.2.1. Adapting self-help – *He's Just Not That Into You* (2009)

Adaptations of self-help books are comparatively rare. An early example is *Sex and the Single Girl* (Richard Quine, 1964) based on the book with the same title by Helen Gurley Brown.<sup>655</sup> Within the last fifteen years there have been a number of films based on a variety of self-help literature. Examples include *What to expect when you're expecting* (Kirk Jones, 2012), based on a self-help book about pregnancy by Heidi Murkoff,<sup>656</sup> *Mean Girls* (Mark Waters, 2004), based on a mixture of a sociological study and a self-help book offering parenting advice<sup>657</sup> and *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days* (Donald Petrie, 2003), based on the self-help comic *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days. The Universal Don'ts of Dating*.<sup>658</sup> Using a self-help book as an adapted text seems at first a puzzling choice, since narrative is often the chief element film and novel have in common and can easily be transferred from one medium to the other.<sup>659</sup> Self-help books, however, do not have an overall narrative and often do not even have characters. The previous analysis of the adapted text *he's just not that into you* has also shown that the narratives the book includes are very short and often

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<sup>655</sup> Helen Gurley Brown, *Sex and the Single Girl* (New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1962).

<sup>656</sup> Heidi E. Murkoff and Sharon Mazel, *What to Expect When You're Expecting* (New York: Workman Publishing, 1984).

<sup>657</sup> Rosalind Wiseman, *Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping your daughter survive cliques, gossip, boyfriends and the realities of Girl World* (London: Piatkus, 2002).

<sup>658</sup> Michele Alexander and Jeannie Long, *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days. The Universal Don'ts of Dating* (New York: Bantam Book, 1998).

<sup>659</sup> McFarlane, *Novel into Film*, p.12.

consist of a few sentences. Nevertheless, the self-help books mentioned as well as the one analysed above have all been adapted into film.

In order to understand the appeal of self-help literature as an adapted text, it is necessary to combine the notion of the millennial women's blockbuster with the results of Wendy Simonds's and Paul Lichterman's studies of self-help readers. As mentioned in the previous chapters, millennial women's blockbusters or female oriented event films focus on material that already has an existing fan base.<sup>660</sup> The book *He's just not that into you* made its authors famous. It was widely publicised and the authors appeared on numerous talk shows.<sup>661</sup> Behrendt wrote a sequel and even had his own talk-show for a year.<sup>662</sup> Thus, the title, which had already been part of an episode of *Sex and the City*, became a part of popular culture. In her study of self-help readers Simonds found that readers selected only those aspects of the books that were useful to them.<sup>663</sup> Lichterman's results confirmed that readers rarely remembered more than the main message of a self-help book.<sup>664</sup> Moreover, this message was usually conveyed in the title, reducing the collective memory of a self-help text to no more than one sentence in most cases. Thus, the adaptation *He's Just Not That Into You* simply evokes the adapted text by using the same title. Since the film thus does not have to reproduce narratives or characters from the book, the adaptation can question the simplistic message of the adapted text. As a multi-protagonist romantic comedy the film can appeal to a potentially wide audience by depicting contradictory discourses about love through the use of multiple protagonists.

The main couple in the film is Gigi (Ginnifer Goodwin) and Alex (Justin Long). After her date with Conor (Kevin Connolly), Gigi is determined to meet him again. She goes to a bar in the hope of casually running into him but instead meets his friend Alex, who manages the bar. He tells her that a man who does not treat a woman well is simply not interested in her. The next day Gigi shares her insight with her

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<sup>660</sup> York, "From Chick Flicks to Millennial Blockbusters," p.3 and Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, p.117.

<sup>661</sup> Justin Ellis, "Female into-ition. A new advice book purports to give women an edge when it comes to understanding the male of the species (as if they needed one)," *Portland Press Herald*, February 14, 2005.

<sup>662</sup> Guy McPherson, "How to get out of relationships. Greg Behrendt: Likely the most successful advice expert/comedian around," *The Vancouver Province*, November 15, 2007.

<sup>663</sup> Simonds, *Women and Self-Help Culture*, p.77.

<sup>664</sup> Paul Lichterman, "Self-help reading as thin culture," *Media, Culture and Society* 14:3 (1992): p.429.

friends Beth (Jennifer Aniston) and Janine (Jennifer Connelly) at work. Beth, who has been in a relationship with Neil (Ben Affleck) for seven years hoping he would eventually propose, confronts him and breaks up with him when he refuses to marry her. Meanwhile, Janine is busy overseeing the construction works in the house she bought with her husband Ben (Bradley Cooper), while he is falling in love and starting an affair with Anna (Scarlett Johansson). Meanwhile Gigi repeatedly asks Alex for relationship advice and they gradually become friends. At a party Gigi misreads Alex's behaviour and tries to kiss him. He gets angry with her and she leaves in tears. Alex realises that he is in love with Gigi and declares his love to her.

At her sister's wedding Beth's father has a heart attack. Beth and her sisters take care of him, when Neil appears to help Beth with the chores. She realises that she gave up a great relationship with a supportive boyfriend and asks Neil to come back. After he has returned, Neil proposes to Beth. In the meantime Ben tells Janine that he is having an affair. At first, she is trying to fix the relationship but leaves him when she realises that he has lied to her repeatedly. Anna has also realised that Ben is a coward and merely uses her. She breaks up with him and tries to find consolation in a relationship with Conor, who has been in love with her for a long time. When he proposes to move in together, Anna confesses that she does not love him. Conor meets Anna's friend Mary and they bond immediately.

Ideal love is a typical component of Hollywood romantic comedies. It consists of what Shumway calls the fairy-tale version of romance, in which love is tested against a series of obstacles.<sup>665</sup> Gigi and Alex have more screen time than any of the other five couples in the film<sup>666</sup> and both are typical romantic comedy protagonists. Their narrative follows the plot structure of *Pride and Prejudice* revived in the first Bridget Jones novel and its adaptation: boy meets girl, they dislike each other but realise in the end that they are meant for each other. Relying on well-known plot structures and even stereotypes is necessary for multi-protagonist romantic comedies: 'Since the number of characters in a movie reduces the amount of time that the movie

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<sup>665</sup> Shumway, *Modern Love*, p.43.

<sup>666</sup> Gigi and Alex have with 41:15 minutes almost twice as much time on screen as Ben and Janine with 25:46 minutes. Beth and Neil have 19:54 minutes and Anna and Ben 13:44 minutes. Anna and Conor's relationship develops and ends within only 7:59 minutes, while Mary and Conor meet and fall in love 1:22 minutes. The plot between Mary and Conor relies heavily on genre conventions so that the film can reduce the courtship to an absolute minimum.

can devote to any single character, the film may indulge in a tendency towards stereotyping, while the use of stars may, somehow, counteract this process with the amount of information that the star personae bring with them.<sup>667</sup> Gigi is played by Ginnifer Goodwin who brings her nice girl-next-door persona to the character. Gigi has an unspecified job and occasionally goes out on dates, after which she obsesses over the man she just went out with.

Thus, she is the embodiment of the kind of woman Behrendt wants to help: the desperate woman who wastes her time obsessing about men who are just not interested in her.<sup>668</sup> After her date with Conor, Gigi checks her messages every five minutes, even while she is talking to a friend. In addition, she and her married friend Janine discuss the date by interpreting ‘signs’ Conor supposedly sent out and they both enjoy the process. Nevertheless, the constant repetition of the same questions and remarks exposes this past-time as a pointless obsession. Moreover, the viewer already knows at this point that Conor is himself obsessed with Anna. By visualising the kind of behaviour that was implied in the letters in the self-help book and showing the viewer that Gigi’s hopes are futile since Conor is in love with someone else, the film forcefully depicts the message of the book, namely that it is a waste of time obsessing over men who are simply not interested.

In order to facilitate identification and normalise her, Gigi follows the same behavioural pattern as Bridget. She also commits a few blunders and embarrasses herself in front of her later love interest. When she determinedly tries to stalk Conor at his favourite bar, she meets Alex and offers him a ridiculous reason for her being there. Alex calmly exposes her excuse as a lie and Gigi shamefacedly admits her real motives. Alex is characterised as an unfeeling man who uses women for sex. He is the personification of Greg Behrendt before he met his wife and as such is marked as a relationship expert right from the beginning. Like Behrendt, he first explains his expertise by the fact that he is a man and that he has treated women badly when he was not really interested in them. When Gigi and Alex meet again later in the film he further explains that his knowledge is based on his observations of people while working in his bar. Thus, the film also offers an expert but his advice is personal. While the self-help book was written with a large readership in mind, Alex merely

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<sup>667</sup> Azcona, *The Multi-Protagonist Film*, p.17.

<sup>668</sup> See the introduction in Behrendt and Tuccillo, *he’s just not that into you*, pp.6-7.

shares his ‘wisdom’ with Gigi in the context of a slowly developing friendship. His expertise and his help are informal. Moreover, he is proven wrong in the end, so that the film also contests expert knowledge.

Adaptations can work with or against genre conventions and thus shape and transform generic frameworks.<sup>669</sup> These frameworks, however, also often serve to legitimise plot twists or character changes. After Alex rejects Gigi’s advances, she tells him that he will never be able to have a real relationship if he keeps women at a distance. He then changes radically and his change only makes sense within the conventions of a romantic comedy. Alex constantly checks his phone and leaves an embarrassing message on Gigi’s answering machine, thus, repeating Gigi’s behaviour at the beginning of the film after her date with Conor. In Alex’ case, however, these actions are very strongly out of character and only make sense because they are framed in a specific genre. Male protagonists in romantic comedies typically change to a great extent in order to become the right partner for the female protagonist. Thus, when Alex behaves completely out of character, this is attributed to his love for Gigi. Moreover, he promises to become dependable and reliable, meaning the kind of man that is right for her.



Figure 17: Selfish husbands



Figure 18: In contrast: the supportive boyfriend

Beth and Neil’s story also includes a man who will change for the woman he loves. Gigi shares Alex’s explanation for men’s behaviour and his opinion that men do not change with her co-workers Beth and Janine. Beth draws the conclusion that her boyfriend of seven years Neil will not marry her and breaks up with him. When Beth’s father, however, has a heart attack Beth is looking after him and is increasingly annoyed about the selfish and childish behaviour of her brothers-in-law. After bringing

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<sup>669</sup> Geraghty, *Now a Major Motion Picture*, p.8.

her father food, Beth walks past the living room and a wide shot shows her three brothers-in-law watching a football game. The room is badly lit and the table is littered with food wrappers and empty beer bottles. All three ignore her when she asks them if they had the chance to buy food. She then walks into the kitchen where she sees Neil doing the dishes. In contrast to the living room the kitchen is clean and brightly lit so that the different *mise-en-scènes* highlight the different kinds of men and their behaviour in relationships.

The selfish behaviour of her brothers-in-law sitting in a dark living room suggest that entering a marriage might result in a return to traditional gender roles. Her sisters' husbands do not help with the chores and expect their wives and even Beth to clean up after them. In contrast, Neil, who considers marriage antiquated and unnecessary, does the dishes, the laundry and the shopping without being asked. Thus, his aversion to marriage can be interpreted as part of his progressive attitude towards gender roles and relationships so that the film offers an alternative explanation for Neil's refusal to marry, contradicting the simplistic view of men offered in the adapted text. Moreover, this subplot also contains a warning that it can be quite harmful to listen to generalised advice, like the one offered in self-help books, because Beth breaks up with a supportive boyfriend after listening to Gigi. As soon as the film has made this point, however, it returns to the romance formula and Neil completely changes his mind by proposing to Beth, offering yet another complete character change that is only believable within the context of a romantic comedy.

These two subplots show that *He's Just Not That Into You* includes the discourse of ideal love because it is typical of the genre. Nevertheless, as a multi-protagonist film, it also includes subplots based on the idea of confluent love. Montoliu argues that multi-protagonist romantic comedies portray a different kind of love than the one typical of romantic comedies focusing on only one couple: 'Instead of emphasizing the power of love to create an immutable and everlasting bond between two individuals, these texts portray love as a force that fades out and eventually disappears.'<sup>670</sup> The relationship between Janine and Ben is an example. The married couple has drifted apart and Ben eventually begins an affair with Anna. In the adapted text Behrendt repeatedly stresses that men are cowards who will go to great lengths to avoid telling a woman that they are not interested in her. Ben is the personification of

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<sup>670</sup> Montoliu, "Love is a Many-Person'd Thing," p.6.

this cowardice. He tells Anna that he only married Janine because she gave him an ultimatum and he caved in. He even sleeps with his wife while Anna is hidden in the cupboard because he cannot bring himself to tell Janine that he does not love her.

While Ben cannot leave the marriage, Janine becomes increasingly desperate. The film is ambiguous about how much responsibility the two characters have for the failure of their marriage. On the one hand, Janine is ready to take the blame by admitting that she cornered Ben into marrying her. Janine's perfectionism could either be the reason why she does not see what is happening in her marriage or a coping strategy. Ben, on the other hand, is so caught up in his lies that he cannot be himself with anyone anymore. He even lies to his friend Neil about the state of his marriage. Janine is the one who eventually ends the marriage. Like in the adapted text and typical for therapeutic culture, the film also suggests that the woman has to take care of herself by taking charge of or ending an unsatisfactory relationship.

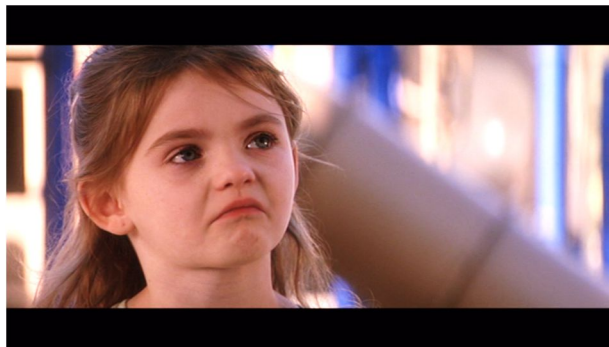


Figure 19: Gigi learns an early lesson about men

In doing so she can only rely on herself and (male) experts. The focus on the expert as a necessary source of guidance in therapeutic culture is the result of a suspicion towards former relationships and support networks: ‘... one of the justifications for the therapeutic relationship is the claim that problems of the emotion stem from family-based pathologies, which cannot be solved through ties of kinship and friendship.’<sup>671</sup> Thus, in therapeutic culture people seemingly need expert help because advice given by family and friends is supposedly unreliable. In the adapted text both Behrendt and Tuccillo repeatedly emphasizes that excuses women make for men and offer to each other as consolation can be harmful. The film visualises this suspicion and provides a background story for this behaviour. In the first scene Gigi’s

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<sup>671</sup> Furedi, *Therapy Culture*, p.75.



voice-over narration tells the viewers about her first crush. The scene shows a small boy walking towards a small girl playing in a sandbox. He then pushes her over and insults her. In the next scene the little girl is crying while she tells her mother what happened. The latter reassures her that the boy was only mean to her because he liked her. Gigi's voice-over then tells the viewer that this incident all little girls supposedly go through is the beginning of women's relationship problems. By letting Gigi's mother teach her this pattern of finding excuses for mean boys, the scene implies that women do not know much about men and pass their wrong and even harmful knowledge on to the next generation.

The scene is followed by a montage of scenes in which different women are reassured by one or several of her friends after a man she has met fails to contact her. The editing of the montage sequence serves to ridicule the excuses women offer each other. In one of the scenes, for example, a woman provides the following explanation: 'Trust me, it's because he is just getting out of a serious relationship.' This is immediately followed by another woman telling her friend: 'Trust me, it's because he has never had a serious relationship.' The parallelism between the two utterances exposes the excuses as formulaic and accordingly insincere and meaningless. The use of 'trust me' at the beginning of the sentences is ironic because these contradictory messages can clearly not be trusted. Thus, the film begins with the same message as the book, namely that listening to excuses offered by your female friends is potentially harmful for women. Instead, women have to learn to ignore this advice and either listen to a male expert or rely on themselves. Beth decides to take Neil back without discussing her decision with any of her friends and once Janine and Anna have ended their respective relationships with Ben they are free to focus on themselves by embarking on a journey of self-discovery.

What is really remarkable about Janine and Anna's decisions is that the film marks them explicitly as *happy endings* and as a valid alternative to finding the perfect partner. In the end Gigi's voice-over connects the different narratives by stating that they all end happily. The montage of these endings combines traditional happy endings with a new kind of happy ending that can only be understood as such within the discourse of therapeutic culture. We see Beth and Neil getting married on a boat, Conor picking Mary up at her office and Gigi and Alex giving a party together. In between, though, we also see Janine hanging up a new mirror in her flat, suggesting that she continues her life by herself. In the interviews accompanying the credits both

Janine and Anna declare that they will embark on a journey of self-discovery and presumably form new relationships on the way. In therapeutic culture, women focusing on themselves and their personal development has become a viable alternative to relationships.

This option is gender specific and the film suggests that men are incapable of self-improvement. In a scene at the end, Ben is shopping again in the supermarket and lets an attractive woman skip the line. The scene is a repetition of the one in which he met Anna, suggesting that Ben is trapped in his behaviour pattern and is unable to change. In his interview he also does not mention any plans for his future. Even though women are supposedly solely responsible for happiness in relationships and have to protect themselves from being mistreated by men, they do at least have the option to improve themselves and learn from their mistakes, an option that the film suggests men do not have. This is a potentially empowering message for female viewers and expands the notion of happy ending common in romantic comedies.



Figure 20: Neil faces societal pressures

The film further expands genre conventions by including scenes in which men discuss relationships and address issues they have to face. While the female characters spend a total of 15:51 minutes discussing their relationships with each other, the male characters only have 3:52 minutes together. Nevertheless, including these, albeit short, conversations allows the film to offer a seemingly more complex and balanced picture of relationships. Moreover, Ben explains his decision to marry Janine: ‘You’re a dick if you date a girl for too long and don’t marry her. Then you marry her and then you’re an asshole for marrying her before you were ready.’ Even though the sympathy of the film clearly lies with Janine and Anna, this scene offers an insight into the pressures society puts on men to conform to the role of ‘the good guy.’ Ben’s discomfort with

this role is visualised by his constant attempt to loosen his shirt collar which symbolises his suffocating marriage. The same social pressures are visualised in the *mise-en-scène* of the scene in which Beth confronts Neil. Beth tells him that she cannot continue their relationship if he will not marry her and leaves the room. He remains staring at a painting that has the word ‘should’ written repeatedly on the canvas, visualising societal pressure to get married. The film tries to offer a balanced account of gender roles by including scenes focusing on men, thus widening its appeal to male viewers.<sup>672</sup>

The same result is achieved by including different kinds of relationships. It combines the fantasy ending of the ideal love in which a man changes for the woman he loves with a more realistic depiction of relationships in constant flux. Both kinds of endings are summarised under the main aim of the film, namely reminding the viewer of the concept of ideal love in order to give them a motivation to embark on new relationships.<sup>673</sup> Gigi sums it up in the final scene of the film as even another version of a happy ending: ‘Or maybe the happy ending is this: knowing that through all the unreturned phone calls and broken hearts, through all the blunders and misread signals, through all the pain and embarrassment, you never ever gave up hope.’ The hope the film is selling in its main narrative is for the fairy tale happy ending.

Nevertheless, *He’s Just Not That Into You* also depicts narratives about confluent love in which the female protagonists decide to exchange an unsatisfactory relationship with a man for self-discovery. While the adaptation questions the authority of male expertise and also contradicts the main message of the adapted text, it is thus still firmly embedded in the therapeutic discourse and its focus on the individual. The film strongly suggests that women are in charge of their lives and able to protect themselves from potentially harmful relationships. By including two story lines that replace a romantic relationship with self-discovery, the adaptation celebrates its female protagonists and offers the same encouraging message and celebration of women that contributed to the success of *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. Moreover, the

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<sup>672</sup> In the same spirit Bradley Cooper, Kevin Connolly and Justin Long starred in a short clip posted on YouTube. They enact typical romantic comedy clichés and assure male viewers that *He’s Just Not That Into You* is different from typical romantic comedies because it does not contain these clichés so that men will enjoy it too. See YouTube, “10 Chick Flick Cliches You Will NOT See In He’s Just Not That Into You,” posted January 29, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7IHJ7XkYAO>.

<sup>673</sup> Compare Montoliu, “Love is a Many-Person’d Thing,” p.9.

adaptation relies on the romance formula in order to tell multiple stories and endearing but clumsy female protagonists to save time on characterisation, while including conversations between the male protagonists in order to add male perspectives. The ambiguous and contradictory discourses present in the film make it suitable for a mainstream audience because viewers can pick and choose which message they want to focus on. The following section examines the importance of intimacy achieved by reading Jane Austen's novels.

### **3.2.2. The creation of intimacy – *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007)**

As mentioned above, the contemporary interest in Austen was caused by a proliferation of film and television adaptations of Austen's novels in the 1990s. Further examples include the adaptation *Sense and Sensibility* (Ang Lee, 1995) and the semi-fictional biographical film *Becoming Jane* (Julian Jarrold, 2007). The interest in Jane Austen, her novels and anything related to her is so great that even books that merely loosely refer to her are adapted. The adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Burr Steers), for instance, was released in 2016. *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007) is part of this trend and was released merely three years after the novel's publication. The adaptation directed by Robin Swicord is also based on the notion that Austen's novels are a source of relationship advice and serve as an antidote to modern life. Moreover, the creation of intimacy is necessary for long-term relationships and reading Austen's novels can be a way of achieving this intimacy.

Bernadette (Kathy Baker), Sylvia (Amy Brenneman), her husband Daniel (Jimmy Smits) and their daughter Allegra (Maggie Grace) attend the funeral of Jocelyn's (Maria Bello) dog. Bernadette suggests starting a book club to distract Jocelyn from her loss. A few days later Daniel tells Sylvia that he has been having an affair and asks her for a divorce. Sylvia is devastated and Jocelyn and Allegra try to comfort her. Meanwhile, Jocelyn attends a conference for dog breeders where she meets Grigg (Hugh Dancy) in the hotel bar. While he is clearly interested in her, Jocelyn considers him a possible distraction for Sylvia. Bernadette meets Prudie (Emily Blunt) while they are both waiting in line at the cinema for a Jane Austen adaptation. They begin discussing Austen's novels and their own relationships and

Bernadette invites Prudie to join the book club. While reading Austen's novels, the characters reconsider their own relationships. Jocelyn accepts that she has fallen in love with Grigg and initiates a relationship with him. Prudie overcomes the temptation to sleep with one of her high school students (Kevin Zegers), returns to her husband (Marc Blucas) and they bond over reading *Persuasion* together. Allegra realises that she cannot trust her girlfriend Corinne (Parisa Fitz-Henley) and breaks up with her. Daniel confesses to Sylvia that he misses her and wants her back and they renew their relationship. By the time the book club meets a year later, Bernadette has married for the seventh time.

*The Jane Austen Book Club* begins with a quotation from *Pride and Prejudice*: 'Is not general incivility the very essence of love?' It introduces the typical romance plot based on the idea that two people in love will be rude to each other before they realise that they belong together. The quotation appears on a black screen and is accompanied by white noise. Different voices become distinguishable and we hear parts of conversations, ringing mobile phones and typical urban noises, like car engines. The volume of the noises increases while the quotation slowly fades out, suggesting that Austen's wisdom is drowned in the activities of everyday modern life. The sequence changes into a montage of scenes showing different people struggling with modern technology in Sacramento. Some of the people are the main protagonists of the film, others do not appear again. Typical for multi-protagonist romantic comedies, '... the intimate panorama offered by these narratives is often filled with discordant voices, perspectives, and practices – a very apt reflection of the turmoil and confusion that characterize interpersonal relationships in contemporary society.'<sup>674</sup> Their incompetence in the use of modern technology, on the one hand, makes their attempt to escape from modern life into Austen's world understandable but is, on the other hand, also a sign of endearing incompetence.

As illustrated in the previous chapters, endearing incompetence and clumsiness have become a characteristic of the female protagonist in romantic comedies. *The Jane Austen Book Club* draws on this theme by introducing the main characters in embarrassing scenes. Jocelyn almost falls off a treadmill in the gym because she pushes the wrong buttons, while Prudie triggers the alarm when she leaves a lingerie shop and is mortified when the shop assistants reveal her newly bought underwear in

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<sup>674</sup> Azcona, *The Multi-Protagonist Film*, p.101.

public. Bernadette is hit on the head by a man standing too close to her in her yoga class, Sylvia drops her bag at the security check at the entrance to the library she works in and Allegra has to crawl under her car to retrieve a parking ticket. Like *He's Just Not That Into You*, the film also attempts to give a more balanced view of the female and male protagonists and therefore extends the clumsiness to men. Daniel's credit card, for instance does not work when he tries to pay for his fuel at a service station. Thus, he is made more accessible and likable by being equally clumsy and inept as the female characters.

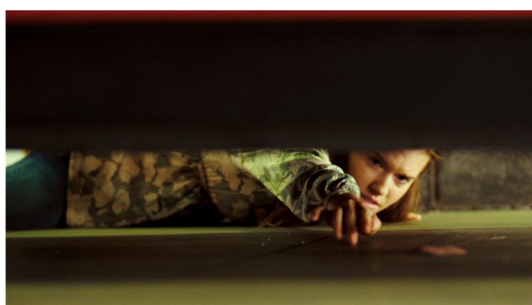


Figure 21: Allegra retrieves her parking ticket



Figure 22: Prudie's underwear is revealed in public

The montage sequence at the beginning of the film is typical for multi-protagonist films because they often show that the main characters are linked with each other in a complex network. Wendy Everett explains that the notion of people being connected in networks is not new. However, 'What is new about today's understanding of networks, and what makes it impossible to approach them with simple linear graphs (in mathematics or physics) or with straight forward linear narratives (in films or novels), is the recognition of their essential complexity.'<sup>675</sup> The characters are linked in the montage sequence by their mishaps but also by the fact that they all live in Sacramento. The first scenes show streets, houses and a highway sign which identifies the setting. The city as a setting functions as '... a privileged site of modernity and change.'<sup>676</sup> Thus, while it also indicates the complexity of modern city life, the film makes an effort to stress that despite the size of the city people are linked through their relationships with each other. It attempts to reproduce the intimacy often associated with Austen's novels that focused on a few families in

<sup>675</sup> Wendy Everett, "Fractal films and the architecture of complexity," *Studies in European Cinema* 2:3 (2005): p.162.

<sup>676</sup> *Ibid.*, p.167.

confined settings. Bernadette explicitly expresses this notion when she realises that she knows two of Grigg's sisters: 'The world is an English village.' Thus, the film recreates the same intimate social sphere typical for Austen's novels and also focuses on the characters' romantic relationships.

Like the books and the film discussed so far, *The Jane Austen Book Club* also combines two concepts of love with each other and exemplifies them through the subplots of the different couples. Jocelyn and Grigg's story follows the plot structure of *Pride and Prejudice* promised in the quotation at the beginning of the film. The roles between them are at first reversed and Grigg seems feminised. When he meets Jocelyn for the first time, he embarrasses himself in front of her by trying to drink a candle. His interest in science fiction as well as his tight cycling clothes and elaborate safety equipment visually characterise him as a clumsy geek. In the course of the film, however, Grigg gradually changes into the typical romantic comedy hero. This change is foreshadowed by the choice of actor. In *Ella Enchanted* (Tommy O'Haver, 2004) Hugh Dancy played Prince Charmont who is weak and ignorant at the beginning of the film but eventually reasserts himself as the hero and convinces Ella (Anne Hathaway) of his merits. His role in *The Jane Austen Book Club* is based on the same development.

Grigg changes into the typical romantic comedy hero once he reveals to Jocelyn that he is wealthy. His love for science fiction books and his peculiar appearance in his cycling outfit become harmless eccentricities of a rich man. Once the roles are reversed, Grigg behaves more and more assertively while Jocelyn becomes increasingly quiet: 'In many romantic comedies the hero is a catalyst for the heroine, propelling her into a journey involving difficult lessons and emotional growth, with the ultimate reward of future mutual happiness .... Commonly the hero is the adversary for the heroine, challenging her values and even her lifestyle ....'<sup>677</sup> Grigg chastises Jocelyn for her prejudices towards science fiction literature and criticises her meddling in Sylvia's life. His change culminates at the end of the film. After she has read the books Grigg gave her, Jocelyn drives to his house and waits for him. She looks dishevelled and is talking incoherently while Grigg remains calm and in control of the situation. Jocelyn tells him that he was right about the books he gave her and he initiates their first kiss by pulling her towards him. Thus, even though the

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<sup>677</sup> Claire Mortimer, *Romantic Comedy* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), p.45.

relationship contains variations from the traditional romance plot in the beginning, it suggests that in the end the two protagonists will return to traditional gender roles. While this narrative is based on the typical romance plot culminating in the promise of ideal love, the film also includes subplots about pure relationships.

The main relationship based on the idea of confluent love is Sylvia and Daniel's marriage. María del Mar Azcona argues that multi-protagonist romantic comedies question the definitive nature of marriage.<sup>678</sup> The film includes a scene in which Sylvia and Daniel finalise their divorce, to stress that they did not just have temporary marital problems but completely ended their marriage. In order to better understand this subplot, it is useful to draw on Alex Hobbs's research about another subcategory of the romantic comedy, namely films that focus on older couples. Hobbs explains that older actors have been present in romantic comedies for quite some time but were always men paired with significantly younger women. Recently, however, films focusing on relationships between partners who are both older have become more common.<sup>679</sup> Hobbs explains this newfound interest as the result of financial considerations: 'Of course, America is an aging society and with scientists reporting that the majority of Americans will live longer, it makes sense that Hollywood should take advantage of what is known as the gray dollar and provide films that reflect an older audience.'<sup>680</sup> Hobbs explains that in traditional romantic comedies it is the man who has to realise that he needs a woman. In romantic comedies focusing on older couples, however, it is the women who have to be convinced of the merits of a relationship.<sup>681</sup>

In *The Jane Austen Book Club*, Sylvia has to be convinced of taking Daniel back. Even though the film shows in various emotional scenes that Sylvia is very sad about the divorce, like Bridget, she has a well-functioning support network consisting of family and friends who immediately take care of her. Her daughter Allegra moves back in with her to help. In contrast, Daniel seems lost. When he comes to Sylvia's house to mow the lawn, he tells her that his children do not want to talk to him anymore. He is isolated from his family and Sylvia rejects his attempts to take care of

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<sup>678</sup> Azcona, *The Multi-Protagonist Film*, p.106.

<sup>679</sup> Alex Hobbs, "Romancing the Crone: Hollywood's Recent Mature Love Stories," *The Journal of American Culture* 36:1 (2013): pp.42-43; see also Deborah Jermyn, "Unlikely Heroines? 'Women of a certain Age' and Romantic Comedy." *CineAction* 85 (2011): p.26.

<sup>680</sup> Hobbs, "Romancing the Crone," pp.42-43.

<sup>681</sup> Hobbs, "Romancing the Crone," p.50.



her like he used to. Typical of this subgenre, the gender roles are reversed: 'In these power dynamics, it is the men who are more dependent than the women; the suggestion is that men do not do well without a suitable woman in their lives.'<sup>682</sup> In the book club's final meeting in which they discuss *Persuasion* Daniel joins them. Unlike in the novel, he has actually read *Persuasion* and explains his own feelings for Sylvia in the guise of discussing Wentworth's behaviour towards Anne. Bernadette hints that a well-written letter might be a good idea and he writes to Sylvia.

Despite the quite common film convention to have letters read out loud in voice-overs, the film only shows Sylvia reading it. In the novel, Daniel explains his behaviour and admits his mistakes while the film does not allow the male protagonist this emotional openness. Rather, he explains it indirectly through the lens of Austen's characters. Like the two books and the film discussed so far and typical of the therapeutic discourse, it is again the woman who is in charge of the relationship. Sylvia has the power to accept or reject Daniel. In the film she goes through various emotional stages after her divorce (shock, depression, anger) but in the end she is the one who has coped with the situation and is able to move on. One of the reasons why she can do so is that she has her friends to talk to, but also because she can work through her feelings by discussing Austen.

The film visualises the effects of bibliotherapy in the scene in which the book club discusses *Mansfield Park*.<sup>683</sup> Sylvia defends the main protagonist Fanny Price who is often considered bland and boring. In her defence, Sylvia clearly identifies with the character, attributing her own qualities to Fanny. Getting angry supposedly on Fanny's behalf allows Sylvia to express her own anger about not feeling valued enough. Reading Austen's novels and discussing them in a group helps the characters live through and make sense of their own emotions.

The film even explicitly visualises the idea of Austen as a source of guidance for relationships. Prudie and her husband Dean have drifted apart. As mentioned above, multi-protagonist films have a tendency towards stereotyping<sup>684</sup> and Prudie and Dean are characterised as stereotypical opposites. Prudie teaches French, reads literature and takes notes about her readings. She is supposedly more cultural, intellectual and better educated. In contrast, Dean enjoys watching sports, playing

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<sup>682</sup> Ibid.

<sup>683</sup> Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (London: Penguin, 2012 [1814]).

<sup>684</sup> Azcona, *The Multi-Protagonist Film*, p.17.

video games and thinks Austen is the capital of Texas. Unhappy in her unsatisfactory marriage, Prudie is tempted by Trey, one of her high school students. Even the temptation is linked to Austen's novels. She only begins to seriously consider sleeping with Trey after she helps him rehearse for a school play. She tells him about *Mansfield Park* and when he says that he knows the book, a close-up on Prudie's face shows that she is pleasantly surprised. Thus, her estrangement from her husband seems based on Dean's disinterest in literature.



Figure 23: Austen speaking through traffic lights

Prudie arranges to meet Trey at a motel but has doubts when she is about to cross the street to join him. Her doubts are visualised in the film when the traffic light flashes the words 'what would Jane do?' The scene cuts to a close up of Prudie, looking confused and hesitant. The song in the background is 'Save me' by Aimee Mann and at first it seems to refer to Trey who is waiting for Prudie on the other side of the road to save her from her unhappiness. However, the camera then cuts back to the traffic light which switches to flashing 'Don't walk' in red. In combination with the background music the scene implies that Austen's advice saves Prudie from ruining her marriage, because it seemingly favours rational decisions over short-lived passion. It also encourages the creation of intimacy as a basis for stable long-term relationships: 'The discourse of intimacy makes emotional closeness, rather than passion, its Holy Grail.'<sup>685</sup> In the film reading Austen can create this emotional closeness. When Prudie returns home, she asks Dean to read *Persuasion* with her. Contemporary relationships change over time and the film suggests that couples need to work on their relationships by sharing each other's interests. Passionate relationships can only last if they are complemented with intimacy.

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<sup>685</sup> Shumway, *Modern Love*, p.3.

McDonald argues that romantic comedies have de-emphasised the importance of sex in relationships since the 1980s. Sex has become an immature phase couples have to go through on their way to love.<sup>686</sup> She argues that these films have implied the unimportance of sexual fulfilment for women and that this resulted in an increase in *homme-coms* to fill this gap.<sup>687</sup> In contrast, *The Jane Austen Book Club* is typical for films focusing on older women which often show that the female protagonists ‘... deserve and in fact need a sexual identity to be complete mature individuals.’<sup>688</sup> When Sylvia and Daniel reunite in the end, Allegra surprises them kissing in the garden.

Typically for romantic comedies, the film also pairs up every one of the main characters<sup>689</sup> so that even independent women, like Jocelyn and Bernadette are in relationships in the end. While the film stresses the importance of sexual fulfilment for women, the younger protagonists illustrate that sexual attraction alone is not enough. As mentioned above intimacy based on shared interests is necessary for a long-term relationship. Allegra’s relationships, for instance, are highly sexualised and eroticised. When Corinne asks Allegra to tell her a secret, the two are in the bathroom together. Corinne is taking a bath while Allegra shaves her leg. The dimly lit scene and the story Allegra tells her creates intimacy between the two characters. The relationship, however, fails because Corinne refuses to share her writing and Allegra eventually finds out that Corinne betrayed her trust. Thus, literature can be the basis for lasting relationships, if it is the right kind of literature (Corinne’s stories are rejected). In *The Jane Austen Book Club* Austen’s novels are depicted as the kind of literature that can connect people because they seem to celebrate rationally chosen relationships over short-lived passionate infatuations.

While the film includes one typical subplot about ideal love, it focuses on pure relationships based on a shared intimacy which is created by reading the right kind of literature. By including comparatively older female protagonists, the film also transforms generic frameworks. Independent mature women have to be convinced of the merits of a relationship. At the same time, the film also stresses the importance of sexuality in the protagonists’ life but cautions that it only leads to fulfilling relationships if it is combined with intimacy. Thus, while *The Jane Austen Book Club*

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<sup>686</sup> McDonald, “*Homme-Com*,” p.150.

<sup>687</sup> *Ibid.*, p.152.

<sup>688</sup> Hobbs, “Romancing the Crone,” p.46.

<sup>689</sup> Gehring, *Romantic vs. Screwball Comedy*, p.79.

includes elements of bibliotherapy, its focus has shifted strongly to the depiction of relationships.

As this analysis has shown, the books and films examined in this chapter further expand the themes of self-help and friendship from *Bridget Jones's Diary* while being firmly embedded in the therapeutic discourse and contemporary discourses about love. The focus of the texts shifts with a change in medium. Therapeutic culture is the predominant discourse in the books. Self-help is explicitly written to offer its readers advice on a certain topic while novels aim to entertain. Nevertheless, both books suggest that women are in charge of their romantic relationships and deserve to find a man who loves them just the way they are. The different books acknowledge the confusion women feel about relationships and offer solutions typical of their respective genres. In *he's just not that into you* the male expert uses rhetoric and the genre conventions of self-help writing to convince the reader of his 'truth.' *The Jane Austen Book Club*, on the other hand, suggests that the characters can gain access to Jane Austen's supposedly timeless wisdom about relationships by reading her novels. This wisdom has to be extracted and interpreted in a communal effort. Both books also depict confluent love but firmly proclaim their belief in ideal love as a necessary motivation for people to embark on new relationships.

Typical for the genre of romantic comedies, the multi-protagonist romantic comedy adaptations focus on discourses about love. Both films combine typical romance plots with plots showing relationships changing and even ending. *He's Just Not That Into You* promises ideal love and at the same time transforms genre conventions by declaring self-discovery as a viable alternative to a romantic relationship for women. *The Jane Austen Book Club*, on the other hand, focuses on the idea of the pure relationship based on the creation of intimacy. Reading Jane Austen can be a means to create emotional closeness. Both adaptations include the perspectives of male protagonists and different narratives in an attempt to appeal to a wider audience.

Thus, analysing these seemingly very different books and films together has shown how the popular genres of self-help books, novels written for women and multi-protagonist romantic comedies expand on themes from *Bridget Jones's Diary*. In all four texts women are celebrated and in control of their lives and their romantic

relationships. Even if men betray or leave them, women are able to cope either by being self-reliant or with the help of a well-functioning support network consisting of family and friends. The following chapter examines how a chick lit novel, a memoir and their adaptations explore alternative lives of women in their thirties and expand on the topics motherhood and spirituality.

## 4. Chapter

### Motherhood, Spirituality and Love

#### *I Don't Know How She Does It and*

#### *Eat Pray Love*

'To create a family with a spouse is one of the most fundamental ways a person can find continuity and meaning in American (or any) society. ... But what if, either by choice or by reluctant necessity, you end up not participating in this comforting cycle of family and continuity? ... You'll need to find another purpose, another measure by which to judge whether or not you have been a successful human being.'<sup>690</sup>

The books and films discussed in this thesis so far have expanded on topics from *Bridget Jones's Diary* and adapted the female protagonist. The second chapter focused on chick lit about young women entering the workforce while *The Jane Austen Book Club* analysed in the third chapter included mature female protagonists. This chapter returns to books narrated by women in their thirties. Fielding wanted to offer an alternative to the stereotype of the spinster by creating a happy singleton. In contrast, the narrators in the books discussed in this chapter are in their mid-thirties and already have what Bridget is searching for, a partner and children or the prospect of children, at the beginning of the books and films.

The protagonists in *I don't know how she does it* (2003) by Allison Pearson and *Eat Pray Love* (2006) by Elizabeth Gilbert are both married at the beginning of the books but go through transitional periods in their lives. The first part of this chapter examines how the first-person narrators deal with the life choices they have made and

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<sup>690</sup> Gilbert, *Eat Pray Love*, pp.99-100.

the resulting societal pressures. *I don't know how she does it* is firmly embedded in discourses about motherhood in the 1990s and concludes that women can only maintain high powered careers for a limited amount of time because these are too stressful and interfere with their self-fulfilment. In contrast, Elizabeth Gilbert embarks on a spiritual journey triggered by her traumatic divorce. The memoir combines a travel narrative with a religious awakening while remaining firmly embedded in neoliberal discourses.

The second part of the chapter examines the importance of the leading actresses and marketability for the two adaptations. The analyses of the films illustrate that the star personas of the lead actresses resulted in significant plot and character changes. A textual analysis of the critical reception of the adapted text and changes in discourses about motherhood serve to explain the substantial change in tone of the adaptation *I Don't Know How She Does It*. Followed by a textual analysis of the film, this chapter argues that the star persona of lead actress Sarah Jessica Parker, the personal success of screenwriter Aline Brosh McKenna and genre conventions result in a different outlook on the combination of career and family and a utopian ending. Lastly, the textual analysis of the critical reception of Gilbert's memoir illustrates that the personality of the author was the main reason for its success and that Julia Roberts's star persona perfectly embodied the necessary qualities. The chapter argues that the focus has shifted from spirituality and a search for God to relationships, so that in the adaptation *Eat Pray Love* religion is essentially replaced with romantic love.

## 4.1. Having it all – women in their thirties

The adapted texts discussed in this section are narrated by two female protagonists who seemingly have it all at the beginning of the books. Both books examine alternative lives to the single life led by Bridget and the resulting struggles for women in their thirties. By including a memoir, this chapter also illustrates that the style and plot structure of *Bridget Jones's Diary* have become so well-known, that even a non-fictional text was influenced by it. *I don't know how she does it* is firmly embedded in discourses about motherhood in the 1990s, while *Eat Pray Love* offers spirituality as an alternative. Both books follow two female first-person narrators in their thirties through transitional periods in their lives in which they question the choices they made.

Middle age is usually defined as the time period beginning at age 35-40 and ending at age 65<sup>691</sup> and a midlife crisis is commonly expected for people in their early 40s and 50s.<sup>692</sup> The protagonists in the two books discussed in this chapter are both in their early thirties when they go through a period of transition or midlife crisis, which is ‘... broadly defined as a stressful or turbulent psychological transition...’<sup>693</sup> Lia Macko and Kerry Rubin argue that women’s midlife crises begin earlier because major life events, such as career success, marriage and having children, used to be spread out over years but now ‘... all of these milestones and life-altering choices are converging at the same time – right around age 30.’<sup>694</sup> In a neoliberalist society ‘... individual fulfilment has come almost to represent a social responsibility.’<sup>695</sup> As a result, women are increasingly expecting more from themselves and their lives: ‘Currently, the empowerment and relational discourses are intertwined; psychological woman expects herself to “be her own person” as well as to be emotionally available to those she

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<sup>691</sup> Joan Mathews Jacobson, *Midlife Women* (Boston and London: Jones and Bartlett Publishing, 1995), p.1.

<sup>692</sup> Elaine Wethington, “Expecting stress: Americans and the “midlife crisis”,” *Motivation and Emotion* 24.2 (2000): p.86.

<sup>693</sup> Sue Shellenbarger, *The Breaking Point. How Today's Women Are Navigating Midlife Crisis* (New York: Owl Books, 2005), p.6.

<sup>694</sup> Macko and Rubin, *Midlife Crisis at 30*, p.13, emphasis in original.

<sup>695</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.



loves.<sup>696</sup> The narrators of the two adapted texts face these contradictory expectations and are examples of a generation Macko and Rubin term ‘the women of Gen-X/Y.’<sup>697</sup>

These women grew up with the gains of second wave feminism and the promise that ‘having it all’ was an achievable goal. In their thirties they realised that this is in fact not possible: ‘For a generation of independent women used to solving their own problems, panic sets in upon realizing that some roadblocks are *systemic* and, in many cases, beyond any individual’s capacity to overcome on their own.’<sup>698</sup> The problem, Macko and Rubin argue, is caused by a discrepancy between belief and reality. While personal values, such as the importance of getting married and having children, have remained traditional, this generation of women does not know how to combine them with their career ambitions and successes<sup>699</sup> which leads to an inevitable crisis: ‘No matter what she does – whether she is single or married, avidly pursues a career or scales back, has children or does not – the contradiction between a woman’s vision of equality and the tug of tradition will get her right in the gut.’<sup>700</sup> Having to face limitations, women in a midlife crises frequently become anxious about their future but also begin questioning their life decisions.<sup>701</sup> The narrators in the two adapted texts discussed in this chapter both have to face societal pressures that force them to reconsider their priorities in life.

#### **4.1.1. Discourses about motherhood - *I don’t know how she does it***

Allison Pearson’s novel *I don’t know how she does it* (2003) explores what happens after marriage, a theme that is represented in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* by Bridget’s married friend Magda and her husband Jeremy. Bridget mocks but at the same time longs to become a smug-married like Magda, who seems to have what Bridget wants, a husband and children. In the course of the novel, Bridget learns that Jeremy cheated on her friend and she questions the notion that marriage is the ultimate

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<sup>696</sup> Becker, *The Myth of Empowerment*, p.7.

<sup>697</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

<sup>698</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59.

<sup>699</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24.

<sup>700</sup> Orenstein, *Flux*, p.97.

<sup>701</sup> *Ibid.*

happy end, she imagined it to be.<sup>702</sup> *I don't know how she does it* expands on this theme by exploring marriage and motherhood in more detail, focusing particularly on how the latter fundamentally changes a woman's life. The novel was celebrated as the first successful mommy lit novel and thus inspired a subgenre of chick lit.

Kate Reddy, the protagonist in *I don't know how she does it* by Allison Pearson, began her life in a newspaper column in *The Daily Telegraph*.<sup>703</sup> In an interview Pearson explained that in September 2000 she attended a conference at the London Business School on work-life balance where she met and talked to business women: 'I got all their business cards and eventually interviewed 40 of them. One woman said, in her firm you get more sympathy if you come out as a coke addict than a mother, because cocaine addiction is treatable.'<sup>704</sup> She used the experiences gathered in the interviews for her novel about a highly successful career woman and as a result it was perceived as authentic.<sup>705</sup> While the honest account of a mother's life was by no means new,<sup>706</sup> Pearson's novel was part of a cultural shift towards a growing interest in confessional accounts by mothers about their ambivalent feelings.

In 2001 Rachel Cusk published *A Life's Work* which explored the difficulties of having her first child and the ambivalence she felt about the changes in her life.<sup>707</sup> Betty Holcomb's *Not Guilty* researched the lives of US American working mothers and exposed common beliefs about motherhood as myths.<sup>708</sup> Pearson's fictional narrative is part of this trend. She attempted to follow in Fielding's footsteps by using irony and humour and as a result the novel was celebrated as the first of a new subgenre of chick lit: Mummy Lit or mumlit.<sup>709</sup> Whelehan argues that the more anguished tone

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<sup>702</sup> Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, p.132.

<sup>703</sup> See June Picardie, "Kate Reddy's big dilemma. Justine Picardie on the stresses of being a superwoman," *The Daily Telegraph*, June 29, 2002; Judy Stoffman, "Working mom's Oscar Wilde," *Toronto Star*, October 13, 2002; Kate Betts, "Your Family and How It Works," *The New York Times*, October 06, 2002.

<sup>704</sup> Pearson quoted in Stoffman, "Working mom's Oscar Wilde."

<sup>705</sup> See for example Picardie, "Kate Reddy's big dilemma."

<sup>706</sup> Maeve Haran's novel *Having It All*, published in 1991, for example, follows the lives of four career women reaching the conclusion that working mothers need a better work-life balance. See Maeve Haran, *Having It All* (London: Penguin, 1991).

<sup>707</sup> Rachel Cusk, *A Life's Work: on becoming a mother* (London: Fourth Estate, 2001); see also Anne Enright, *Making Babies* (London: Vintage, 2004).

<sup>708</sup> Betty Holcomb, *Not Guilty! Good News for Working Mothers* (New York: Touchstone, 2000).

<sup>709</sup> Heather Hewett, "You Are Not Alone: The Personal, the Political, and the 'New' Mommy Lit," in *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, ed. Suzanne Ferris and Mallory Young (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) and Anne Kingston, "Bridget's legacy: Mumlit's chic, but what is it saying?" *National Post*, October 26, 2002.

of this subgenre and the fact that it addresses women's disillusionment about men and heterosexual relationships situates it in the tradition of early feminist writings and criticism which offered more authentic images of women.<sup>710</sup> The following analysis of the book examines how the narrative focuses on Kate's suffering. Moreover, the book is firmly embedded in discourses about motherhood and myths about career women during the 1990s which strongly influenced the ending.

Motherhood only became a dilemma once it had become a choice. After the Second World War, it underwent a '... transformation in conception of motherhood from a lifelong status to a role and identity that could be taken on, thrown off, or combined with other identities.'<sup>711</sup> At the same time, the ideology of intensive mothering evolved, which '... is a gendered model that advises mothers to expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children.'<sup>712</sup> It developed from attachment theory formulated by John Bowlby. After observing children and their development, Bowlby concluded that '... what is believed to be essential for mental health is that an infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother-substitute – one person who steadily 'mothers' him) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment.'<sup>713</sup> As the quotation shows, Bowlby did not actually argue that it *had* to be the child's mother. Rather, he defined the most important person in a child's life as the person 'who feeds and cleans him, keeps him warm, and comforts him' which at the time of his writing was usually the mother of the child.<sup>714</sup> Nevertheless, his theory was frequently used as 'proof' that it was essential for a child's development that the *mother* stayed at home to look after it. The increasing importance of the concept of intensive mothering has resulted in a double bind. Even though it is acceptable for mothers to pursue a career, this has to be in addition to their family duties: 'If you are

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<sup>710</sup> Imelda Whelehan, *The Feminist Bestseller. From Sex and the Single Girl to Sex and the City* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.196.

<sup>711</sup> Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe 1890-1970. The Maternal Dilemma* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.220.

<sup>712</sup> Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), p.x.

<sup>713</sup> John Bowlby, *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, ed. Margery Fry (London: Penguin, 1965), p.13.

<sup>714</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

a good mother, you *must* be an intensive one. The only “choice” involved is whether you *add* the role of paid working woman.’<sup>715</sup>

As a result of these changes in perception, the working mother became a successful ‘superwoman’ in the 1990s: ‘Effortlessly juggling home and work, this mother can push a stroller with one hand and carry a briefcase in the other.’<sup>716</sup> At the beginning of *I Don’t Know How She Does It*, the protagonist Kate Reddy seems to be such a superwoman who manages her life well. In the course of the novel, however, Kate’s first-person narration reveals the toll her constant struggle to combine a career as a fund manager with her family life has taken on her. She becomes increasingly unhappy and is unable to enjoy time with her children Emily and Ben. When her husband Richard leaves her because he cannot cope with her outbursts anymore, Kate decides to leave her job in order to spend more time with her family.

Kate’s life is introduced right from the beginning as an effort in juggling. The book begins with a definition of the word ‘juggle’ from the Concise Oxford Dictionary. The definition is followed by a traditional children’s song and both prepare the reader for the following narrative. The song is very repetitive and consists of only a few words. The second stanza describes crying babies on a bus and the mothers react to them in the third stanza, trying to hush their cries. The fact that each stanza ends with the line ‘All day long’ and the use of the plural for mothers and children suggest that this is a universal and repetitive pattern women act out every day. The song is also merely referenced as ‘Trad.,’ implying that it is timeless, universally applicable and well-known. At the same time, however, it also explains this kind of behaviour, namely women as mothers, as part of traditional gender roles. The combination of a dictionary excerpt with a children’s song reflects Kate’s contradictory roles. On the one hand, she is a professional who manages her career and her family life. On the other hand, her efforts are repetitive and the problems recurrent.

Despite the tribulations Kate has to go through on a daily basis, she is not a very likeable character. One of the reasons is that she has serious control issues so that the reader is occasionally tempted to blame her for the stress she causes for herself and others or for making it worse by being inflexible. Judith Warner retraces these tendencies to the Reagan era, during which feminism as the equivalent of

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<sup>715</sup> Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, p.131, emphasis in original.

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid.*, p.132.

empowerment was reduced to the idea of control, which in a neoliberalist society turned into self-control.<sup>717</sup> Furthermore, motherhood is a very destabilising experience for women and a loss of control during and after pregnancy is often frightening. They react to these anxieties and fears by trying to enforce control on themselves and their environments.<sup>718</sup> The need to regain control has also led to the development of what Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels have termed new momism: ‘... a set of ideals, norms, and practices, most frequently and powerfully represented in the media, that seem on the surface to celebrate motherhood, but which in reality promulgate standards of perfection that are beyond our reach.’<sup>719</sup> Judith Warner refers to this concept as Mummy Mystique. She compares it to the feminine mystique and explains that it is equally limiting for women because it consists of ‘... a web of beliefs, so close to the bone as to be indiscernible, that blocks women from thinking their way out of the culture of motherhood that so fatigues them.’<sup>720</sup> Typical for a neoliberalist society, choice is the central trope in new momism and the Mommy Mystique because it forestalls potential societal critique and argues that people are solely responsible for their fate.<sup>721</sup>

The novel also foregrounds this concept when Kate is implicitly blamed for causing her own problems by being too controlling. When her nanny Paula gives Ben a new haircut, for example, Kate is angry because it is not the kind of cut she would have chosen.<sup>722</sup> On the way to the airport she is getting increasingly anxious because she does not trust her driver to choose the quickest route. In order to calm herself down she has to focus on solving another ‘problem’ in her life: ‘Close eyes and concentrate on calming down. Things will feel much more under control if I make efficient use of the time: call Kwik Toy (“Round the Clock Fun!”) on mobile to complain about no-show of vital Christmas presents.’<sup>723</sup> Unable to control the traffic and her driver, Kate needs to focus on another trivial issue in her life.

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<sup>717</sup> Judith Warner, *Perfect Madness. Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety* (London: Vermilion, 2006), p.46.

<sup>718</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>719</sup> Susan J. Douglas and Meredith W. Michaels, *The Mommy Myth. The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women* (New York: Free Press, 2004), pp.4-5.

<sup>720</sup> Warner, *Perfect Madness*, p.32. Compare Friedan’s definition of the feminine mystique: ‘The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity.’ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, p.38.

<sup>721</sup> Warner, *Perfect Madness*, pp.32-33.

<sup>722</sup> Pearson, *I Don’t Know How She Does It*, p.13.

<sup>723</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

Trying to enforce her control on others seems to mainly function as a coping mechanism since her actions often do not have any or sometimes even a negative effect on her life. Yelling at the customer service employee on her phone will not speed up the delivery of her parcels. Kate's worries are also completely unfounded so that her outbursts create stressful situations for herself and others for no reason. At the end of this passage she arrives early at the airport and the information is given in the typical chick lit style for irony. In the previous section she has just been insulted by the customer service employee, leaving the situation on the phone and her anger unresolved. This is followed by the neutral information: '9.17 am: Arrive at Heathrow with time to spare.'<sup>724</sup> While irony served in the previously discussed books to ridicule the protagonists and seems to serve the same function in this passage, it is difficult to laugh at Kate because her reactions are verbally aggressive and cause a number of people discomfort and stress. The use of irony in this novel merely seems to emphasise the futility of her anger, suggesting that it is a waste of her energy and unfair to the people around her.

Kate's perfectionism and her competitiveness serve her well in her job but lead to frictions and conflicts at home. Sharon Hays explains that mothers face a contradiction in contemporary culture between the ideology of the rationalised marketplace, in which ambition and competition are necessary to survive, and the ideology of intensive mothering, characterised by self-sacrifice.<sup>725</sup> It is impossible to combine these two ideologies and Kate shows how difficult it is to keep her separate lives apart. When Richard tells her, for instance, that he made pesto, Kate is immediately jealous because she does not have the time to make it herself.<sup>726</sup> She begins a fight with him that at first seems to be about Richard's insufficient support with household chores. At the end of the chapter, however, Kate lists 'Buy pine nuts and basil to make own pesto, cookery crash course' in her to-do list, showing that her anger is the result of her competitive nature.<sup>727</sup> Thus, Kate's problems are frequently presented as self-induced making it difficult for the reader to fully sympathise with her.

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<sup>724</sup> Ibid.

<sup>725</sup> Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, p.154.

<sup>726</sup> Pearson, *I Don't Know How She Does It*, p.87.

<sup>727</sup> Ibid., p.90.

As a result of her controlling nature, Kate often does not allow Richard to ease her workload. In most families, fathers still do a lot less chores and childcare is still predominantly women's responsibility.<sup>728</sup> Susan Maushart points out that mothers often contribute to this unequally divided workload by functioning as gatekeepers.<sup>729</sup> On the one hand, Richard clearly does not help Kate as much as he should. She often has to remind him to do things, meaning she can delegate tasks to him but it is still indirectly her responsibility to ensure that they get done: 'They could give you good jobs and maternity leave, but until they programmed a man to notice that you were out of toilet paper the project was doomed. Women carry the puzzle of family life in their heads, they just do.'<sup>730</sup> When Richard forgets to pack the children's wellies for a holiday in Wales, for instance, he accuses Kate of exaggerating. Kate then offers the reader the biological explanation that it is impossible for men's brains to remember more than three things at a time, giving him an excuse and at the same time undermining her own reaction.<sup>731</sup> In her book *Delusions of Gender* Cordelia Fine gathers evidence from numerous psychological and neurological studies and shows that gender identity is learned from a very early age on and that there is in fact no proof whatsoever for gendered behaviour being the result of biological or neurological factors. Nevertheless, these myths have a long tradition and prevail in popular culture texts,<sup>732</sup> such as the one discussed here. Warner explains that this return to essentialist ideas about gender allows women to cope with unsupportive husbands and partners.<sup>733</sup>

While the novel reproduces these myths about motherhood, it also attempts to counteract others. New momism, for instance, proclaims that motherhood is pure joy, making it difficult for women to admit that they are struggling and unhappy.<sup>734</sup> Lisa Baraitser and Imogen Tyler point out that career women spend a lot of their energy on hiding their mothering for fear of discrimination in the workplace.<sup>735</sup> On a narrative level Kate also lives this myth and hides the effort she is making on a daily basis.

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<sup>728</sup> Susan Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood* (London: Pandora, 1999), p.196; compare also Warner, *Perfect Madness*, p.249 and Cordelia Fine, *Delusions of Gender. The Real Science Behind Sex Differences* (London: Icon, 2010), p.80.

<sup>729</sup> Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood*, p.196.

<sup>730</sup> Pearson, *I Don't Know How She Does It*, p.190.

<sup>731</sup> *Ibid.*, p.128.

<sup>732</sup> Fine, *Delusions of Gender*, pp.xxii-xxvi.

<sup>733</sup> Warner, *Perfect Madness*, p.246.

<sup>734</sup> Douglas and Michaels, *The Mommy Myth*, p.167.

<sup>735</sup> Lisa Baraitser and Imogen Tyler, "Talking of mothers," *Soundings* 44 (2010): pp.118-119.

When she explains her lateness at work, for instance, she cannot mention that her children kept her awake at night or that her nanny was late. Instead, she offers her boss what she calls a 'Man's Excuse': the car broke down or she was stuck in traffic.<sup>736</sup> She also explains that employers expect women to pretend that having children has not changed their lives. After her first child's birth her boss called Kate into his office and made it quite clear that he questioned her commitment to the job. Kate explains that if she wanted to keep her job, she had to pretend that nothing had changed and that the baby would not make a difference in her life.<sup>737</sup>

By giving the reader a personal insight into her life, however, the book itself strongly attacks this myth. Kate explains in chapter 32 'I went back too soon' and that she divides her life into 'Before Children' and 'After Children' to express the fundamental change she went through.<sup>738</sup> She also addresses the issue that Maushart calls 'the mask of motherhood.' Maushart argues that the identity crisis a lot of mothers go through after the birth of their first child is caused by a discrepancy between expectations and real experiences, between what society tells women to feel and what they really do feel.<sup>739</sup> There is a silence about motherhood, not just in scholarship and public discourses but also between different generations of women.<sup>740</sup> As a result, women who become mothers are unprepared for the changes motherhood entails and feel guilt, resentment and anxiety.<sup>741</sup> In this chapter, Kate repeats the phrase 'I didn't know' five times, stressing that she was unprepared for the extreme experience of motherhood, which was for her like a rebirth: 'I didn't know. How can you? That this new life will be almost as strange to you as it is to them. Mother and baby: newborns both.'<sup>742</sup> Kate concludes the chapter with a very clear statement destroying a dominant myth about motherhood: '... the old Kate, the one Before Children, never returned. But she did a great impersonation of being back and maybe only a mother could have seen through her disguise.'<sup>743</sup>

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<sup>736</sup> Pearson, *I Don't Know How She Does It*, p.17.

<sup>737</sup> Ibid., p.279.

<sup>738</sup> Ibid., pp.278-279.

<sup>739</sup> Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood*, p.xi.

<sup>740</sup> Ibid., p.xx.

<sup>741</sup> Ibid.

<sup>742</sup> Pearson, *I Don't Know How She Does It*, p.278; compare Cusk, *A Life's Work*, pp.50-51 and Enright, *Making Babies*, pp.37-38.

<sup>743</sup> Pearson, *I Don't Know How She Does It*, p.282.



The idea of impersonation, of pretending to be someone she is not, is present throughout the novel. Kate repeatedly has to fake things in order to live up to ridiculously high societal expectations and her own perfectionism. She signs up for the PTA meeting so she can pretend ‘that I’m like any other mother,’<sup>744</sup> squashes a pie<sup>745</sup> and pretends she made jam for Emily’s school.<sup>746</sup> Her habit of faking a life is one of the main reasons why she decides in the end to quit her job. The ending is frequently forecast in the narrative and was even implied in the definition of the term ‘to juggle’ at the beginning of the novel: ‘The term “the juggled life” suggests an existence characterized by ceaseless activity, awareness, and concentration, in which the real “trick” lies in maintaining the illusion of effortlessness.’<sup>747</sup> At the same time, however, juggling also implies that it cannot continue forever because sooner or later the juggler will tire out.<sup>748</sup> Under these conditions women will inevitably hit the breaking point, ‘... a juncture when keeping up old values, goals, and dreams no longer seems worth the effort.’<sup>749</sup> This breaking point is triggered in the novel when Kate’s husband Richard leaves her while she is on a business trip.

The entire narrative is constructed to prepare the reader for this ending. Kate’s habit of being controlling about small things, the constant repetition of their arguments and Richard’s reactions make his decision to leave her understandable. Typical for a midlife crisis, Kate re-considers her values in life<sup>750</sup> and decides that her husband and her children are more important to her than her career. Douglas and Michaels explain that this kind of choice is merely an illusion because the media strongly suggest that the only enlightened choice is to become a mother and devote one’s life to the task. Women are defined first and foremost through their relationship with their children. If they want to have careers, they have to prove that they can do it all.<sup>751</sup> Even if they succeed they are expected to ‘realise’ after a few years that work is not the right choice: ‘The mythology of the new momism now insinuates that, when all is said and done,

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<sup>744</sup> Ibid., p.220.

<sup>745</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>746</sup> Ibid., p.255.

<sup>747</sup> Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood*, p.200.

<sup>748</sup> Ibid.

<sup>749</sup> Shellenbarger, *The Breaking Point*, pp.38-39; see also Macko and Rubin, *Midlife Crisis at 30*, p.39.

<sup>750</sup> See Shellenbarger, *The Breaking Point*, p.39.

<sup>751</sup> Douglas and Michaels, *The Mommy Myth*, p.22; see also Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, p.131 and Negra, *What a Girl Wants?*, p.5.

the enlightened mother chooses to stay home with the kids.<sup>752</sup> The novel follows this ideology of new momism and uses various techniques to make Kate's choice seem inevitable.

In addition to the detailed descriptions of Kate's control issues and the obstacles she faces in the workplace, the novel includes other women as further examples that it is impossible to combine a full-time career with having children over a prolonged period of time. In chapter 10 Kate has invited mothers from her ante-natal class to Ben's birthday.<sup>753</sup> Only three of the original group of nine still have jobs. These women's stories offer different reasons why women give up their careers. Judith had an unreliable nanny and decided she loved her son too much to trust somebody else with his care. Her friend Karen tried to do her job in four days a week but her boss would not allow it. Alice's partner left her when she brought their sons into their bed just so she could hold them. Thus, insufficient support from care providers and partners as well as inflexible work places made these women decide to quit their jobs.<sup>754</sup> However, Kate stresses that they did not give up: 'Giving up sounds like surrender, but these were honourable campaigns bravely fought and not without injury. Did my fellow novice mothers give up work? No, work gave them up, or at least made it impossible for them to go on.'<sup>755</sup> By positioning these stories early on in the narrative, readers are already prepared for Kate's decision to leave her career behind.

The novel does not end with Kate quitting her job. Rather, she has moved to the countryside and has found a new cause in life: saving the dollhouse factory her sister works at from bankruptcy. This kind of happy ending was also popular in romantic comedies at the time. Negra criticises these films because they are based on the key premise that having it all is an impossible concept that needs to be abandoned by female protagonists. She explains that most of the films she writes about show

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<sup>752</sup> Douglas and Michaels, *The Mommy Myth*, p.23.

<sup>753</sup> Pearson, *I Don't Know How She Does It*, pp.97-103.

<sup>754</sup> See Pamela Stone and Meg Lovejoy, "Fast-Track Women and the "Choice" to Stay Home," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 596 (2004): pp.62-83. Stone and Lovejoy interviewed 43 women who had left the workforce. They found that the main reasons for the women's decision were demanding and inflexible employers, their love for their children and a lack of support from their husbands. The women who participated in the study couched their reasons in a language of personal choice but the researchers suggest that these 'choices' were inevitable under the circumstances. Stone and Lovejoy point out that the women in the interviews (like their fictional counterparts in *I don't know how she does it*) come from privileged backgrounds and were therefore able to give up work.

<sup>755</sup> Pearson, *I Don't Know How She Does It*, p.103.

women who choose marriage and matrimony over their careers.<sup>756</sup> *I don't know how she does it* is firmly embedded in discourses about motherhood from the 1990s and was influenced by popular culture texts at the turn of the century but also by decisions real women made: 'In the most extreme versions of the story line, moms who drop out of the workforce are not just exhausted and stressed. They are celebrated. Motherhood is once again promoted as a "calling" for women, a job that is done best when it is done fulltime. Chucking it all is now chic.'<sup>757</sup> In the novel's attempt at a compromise Kate seems to have found a downsized seemingly more parent friendly part-time occupation.

What is remarkable about this ending is that the author is a successful journalist who is married and has two children. In the acknowledgement Allison Pearson thanks her husband for helping with the chores and childcare while she was writing her novel.<sup>758</sup> Despite a supportive husband and her own ability to combine work with family life, Pearson was unable to imagine the same life for her protagonist. Instead, she wrote a narrative that is firmly embedded in discourses about motherhood and working mothers at that time. Her protagonist goes through a transitional period in her life and her decision to leave her career behind is typical for the depiction of women in media during the late 1990s and early 2000s. The following section examines how the narrator in *Eat Pray Love* rejects motherhood in favour of spiritual self-discovery.

#### **4.1.2. Spiritual individualism – *Eat Pray Love***

*Eat Pray Love* (2006) by Elizabeth Gilbert is a memoir. By including a best-selling memoir, this chapter illustrates that themes, the narrative style and even the plot structure introduced in *Bridget Jones's Diary* have crossed genre boundaries and influenced a non-fiction book. *Eat Pray Love* also explores a woman's life after marriage. Unlike Kate, however, Liz does not have any children and her decision not to become a mother results in a divorce. Once Liz has rejected motherhood, she needs to find a different purpose for her life. Embarking on a spiritual quest is a typical

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<sup>756</sup> Negra, "Quality Postfeminism?" p.6.

<sup>757</sup> Holcomb, *Not Guilty!*, pp.48-49; see also Stone and Lovejoy, "Fast-Track Women and the "Choice" to Stay Home," p.63 and Macko and Rubin, *Midlife Crisis at 30*, p.53.

<sup>758</sup> Pearson, *I Don't Know How She Does It*, p.357.

reaction to midlife crisis: ‘The common midlife crisis stereotype sends people fleeing to a mountaintop, seeking out a guru, or joining a convent in a quest for spiritual meaning.’<sup>759</sup> Written in the tradition of travel memoirs, Liz’s search for religion and new meaning in her life is also a quest for herself and is as such firmly embedded in neoliberalist concepts of the self. Moreover, the narrative style and the plot structure of the romantic sub plot are influenced by chick lit conventions. The book is divided into three parts. In the first part Liz has travelled to Italy to learn Italian, enjoy the local food and recover from a harrowing divorce. The narrative in Italy is interspersed by passages about her divorce, her descent into depression and her newfound spirituality that inspired her trip. In the second part Liz travels to India and stays in an Ashram for three months. She meditates, prays and has transcendental experiences. In the third part of the book she travels to Bali to meet a medicine man who offered to teach her Balinese meditation. She befriends locals and other travellers and eventually meets and falls in love with the Brazilian Felipe, thus finding a balanced life between devotion and earthly pleasure.

Like the chick lit novels and the self-help book discussed in this thesis so far, *Eat Pray Love* was also part of literary trends at the time of its publication. During the 2000s spiritual writings and ‘self-discovery lit’<sup>760</sup> became increasingly popular with readers.<sup>761</sup> This literature has its roots in the feminist consciousness raising novels. However, while those books explored women finding themselves by rebelling against conventions and pushing boundaries,<sup>762</sup> contemporary self-discovery lit focuses on discipline.<sup>763</sup> Moreover, the memoir is part of the contemporary trend of the American neoconfessional in which the focus is on revealing personal pain.<sup>764</sup> The genre ‘... represents a gendered sphere in which tolerances around nonnormative life stories are

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<sup>759</sup> Shellenbarger, *The Breaking Point*, p.165.

<sup>760</sup> Emma Brockes, “Eat, Pray, Cash In. First a publishing sensation, now a Hollywood film, Elizabeth Gilbert’s spiritual journey has plenty of followers. But does enlightenment come at a price?” *The Guardian*, August 14, 2010.

<sup>761</sup> Sarah T. Williams, “America is getting a read on religion. A growing interest in spirituality is fuelling big sales and more marketing of an onslaught of new books on religious subjects,” *Star Tribune*, May 21, 2006.

<sup>762</sup> See for example Erica Jong, *Fear of Flying* (London: Vintage, 1998).

<sup>763</sup> Brockes, “Eat, Pray, Cash In.”

<sup>764</sup> Leigh Gilmore, “American Neoconfessional: Memoir, Self-help, and Redemption on Oprah’s Couch,” *Bibliography* 33:4 (2010): p.659.

negotiated.<sup>765</sup> *Eat Pray Love* combines aspects of these two traditions by showing how Liz overcomes personal suffering through a disciplined search for God.

At the beginning of the book Liz feels extreme guilt. Like Kate, she is married, in her early thirties and suffers under societal pressures to embark on the next step: motherhood. Diane Negra argues that US American life is full of anxieties and uncertainties which led to a focus on ritualizing family life. As a result, ‘... in a hypermatrimonial, hypernatalist culture, motherhood is presented as the next normative plateau of temporal intensity and cultural celebration.’<sup>766</sup> The pressure Liz feels to follow the different steps of a pre-determined life narrative are vividly expressed in her writing: ‘But I was supposed to want to have a baby. I was thirty-one years old. My husband and I ... had built our entire life around the common expectation that, after passing the doddering old age of thirty, I would want to settle down and have children.’<sup>767</sup> Age is used as the determining factor to embark on the next step in their marriage, namely having children.

These expectations are so strong that Liz has been trying to get pregnant for a few months at this part in the narrative even though she is clearly relieved every time she has her period: ‘*Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you for giving me one more month to live....*’<sup>768</sup> Instead of questioning the societal expectations that make her do something she equates with death, however, both she and her husband ‘... knew there was *something wrong with me.*’<sup>769</sup> In *I don’t know how she does it* Kate compared giving birth to being re-born.<sup>770</sup> Hence, Liz’s fear that becoming pregnant will mean the end of her life as she knows it, seems well-founded. Liz explains that societal norms expect people to settle down, have families and define themselves through the relationships in their lives. If people do not want to conform to these expectations, like Liz, ‘You need to find another purpose, another measure by which to judge whether or not you have been a successful human being.’<sup>771</sup> Liz’s purpose in life becomes her search for God.

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<sup>765</sup> Ibid., p.674.

<sup>766</sup> Diane Negra, “Time Crisis and the New Postfeminist Heterosexual Economy,” in *Hetero. Queering Representations of Straightness*, ed. Sean Griffin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), p.176.

<sup>767</sup> Gilbert, *Eat Pray Love*, p.10.

<sup>768</sup> Ibid., p.11, emphasis in original.

<sup>769</sup> Ibid., p.12, emphasis in original.

<sup>770</sup> Pearson, *I Don’t Know How She Does It*, p.278.

<sup>771</sup> Gilbert, *Eat Pray Love*, p.100.

Leigh Gilmore explains that authors of confessionals in memoirs and self-help have to become ‘... the explainer and celebrity endorser of “universal laws and truths.” ... Each guru repackages pain, sorrow, and blank dissatisfaction in such a way that his or her autobiography comes to sound a lot like everyone else’s ...’<sup>772</sup> Liz’s narrative is based on the same principle. Following her on her spiritual journey is appealing to a wide readership because Liz practices Yoga, which she does not define as part of a particular religion but as a technique to get closer to God: ‘You may use your Yoga – your disciplined practices of sacred union – to get closer to Krishna, Jesus, Muhammad, Buddha or Yahweh.’<sup>773</sup> In chapter 70 she even explains explicitly that the path to God does not really matter, as long as the seeker is sincere.<sup>774</sup> She encourages people to create their own patchwork religion by picking and choosing metaphors, rituals and teachers from different religions: ‘I think you have every right to cherry-pick when it comes to moving your spirit and finding your peace in God.’<sup>775</sup>

Moreover, the religious teaching of Yoga, as explained by Liz, fits perfectly into the ideology of individualism in the US. Its aim is to experience one’s own divinity and to hold on to it to become content and peaceful: ‘The Yogis, however, say that human discontentment is a simple case of mistaken identity. ... We have failed to recognize our deeper divine characters. We don’t realize that, somewhere within us all, there does exist a supreme Self who is eternally at peace. That supreme Self is our true identity, universal and divine.’<sup>776</sup> Thus, Liz’s search for God can be understood in individualist terms as a search for herself. Her definition of her spiritual quest is part of what Paul Heelas refers to as the spiritual revolution.

Heelas argues that western societies are experiencing a shift from religion to spirituality: ‘... rather than the religious giving way to the secular, the religious (for God) is giving way to the spiritual (for life). ‘Religion’ can be defined in terms of obedience to a transcendent God and a tradition which mediates his authority: *spirituality* as experience of the divine as immanent in life.’<sup>777</sup> Spirituality focuses on

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<sup>772</sup> Gilmore, “American Neoconfessional,” pp.672-673.

<sup>773</sup> Gilbert, *Eat Pray Love*, p.128.

<sup>774</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.215-219.

<sup>775</sup> *Ibid.*, p.218.

<sup>776</sup> *Ibid.*, p.128.

<sup>777</sup> Paul Heelas, “Chapter 17: The Spiritual Revolution: from ‘religion’ to ‘spirituality’,” in *Religion in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations*, ed. Linda Woodhead, Christopher Partridge and Hiroko Kawanami (London: Routledge, 2001), p.358, emphasis in original.

the here and now, on realizing one's true inner life.<sup>778</sup> Unlike traditional Christian religious practices, which focused on preparing the soul for the afterlife, spiritualities offer people various ways to find God within themselves.<sup>779</sup> It is noteworthy that Heelas's use of the plural form 'spiritualities' already indicates that this kind of thinking is part of various new schools of thought, often based on westernised interpretations of Eastern religions. In Liz's narrative, Eastern religions also seem interchangeable. When Liz arrives in Bali, for instance, she begins practising Balinese meditation, which she explains as 'sit still and smile.'<sup>780</sup> Thus, the book evokes the impression that non-Western religions and their practices are all equally vague and can be used to achieve closeness to God without having to practise all traditional religious rituals.

This point of view is typical for writings about Eastern religions, particularly Buddhism: '... the focus is on the individual self, it is the individual who experiences the crisis of European and American culture as a hollowing-out of the self, and it is to the individual (not social or political entities) that possible renewal of the culture is directed.'<sup>781</sup> Slavoj Žižek argues that 'Western Buddhism' has become popular because it does not interfere with neoliberalist and capitalist realities but rather helps people to cope with them. It is useful to quote him in full:

'... although "Western Buddhism" presents itself as the remedy against the stressful tension of the capitalist dynamics, allowing us to uncouple and retain inner peace and *Gelassenheit*, it actually functions as its perfect ideological supplement. One should mention here the well-known topic of "future shock," i.e. how, today, people are no longer psychologically able to cope with the dazzling rhythm of technological development and the social changes that accompany it – things simply move too fast. ... The recourse to Taoism or Buddhism offers a way out of this predicament which definitely works better than the desperate escape into old traditions: instead of trying to cope with the accelerating rhythm of technological progress and social changes, one should rather renounce the very endeavor to retain control

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<sup>778</sup> Ibid., p.362.

<sup>779</sup> Ibid., p.372.

<sup>780</sup> Gilbert, *Eat Pray Love*, p.245.

<sup>781</sup> Lawrence Normand, "Introduction," in *Encountering Buddhism in Twentieth-Century British and American Literature*, ed. Lawrence Normand and Alison Winch (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.14.

over what goes on, rejecting it as the expression of the modern logic of domination – one should, instead, “let oneself go,” drift along, while retaining an inner distance and indifference towards the mad dance of this accelerated process, a distance based on the insight that all this social and technological upheaval is ultimately just a non-substantial proliferation of semblances which do not really concern the innermost kernel of our being ...’<sup>782</sup>

Thus, Buddhism but also the Yoga Liz practises, fits into this description because neither requires believers to go through a fundamental change in their lives and is compatible with an individualist life style.

Like most of the books discussed in this thesis, Liz’s individuality is also celebrated and even declared divine. The main message Liz learns is that God dwells within you as you. Illouz remarks that ‘There is now a broad consensus that the “life story” constructed and communicated by autobiography is articulated in culturally prescribed narrative structures.’<sup>783</sup> Even though the book is a memoir, Liz uses the narrative structure and style typical for chick lit novels to tell readers about the divinity of the self. Liz decides to live in silence during her stay at the Ashram and romanticises the image of herself at first in a similar style in which Kinsella’s Becky Bloomwood imagined her different identities: ‘I will be so silent that it will make me famous. I imagine myself becoming known as That Quiet Girl.’<sup>784</sup> The narrative takes on an ironic twist, when Liz is assigned the role of key hostess the following day, requiring her to greet new arrivals at the Ashram. Irony is a common narrative device in chick lit and serves to slightly mock the often self-centred narrator. In this memoir the difference in genre leads to a different interpretation of this incident. The irony becomes the result of a God teaching Liz the lesson that “God dwells within you, as you.” *As you*.<sup>785</sup> Like chick lit novels, *Eat Pray Love* reassures women that they merely have to be their true self in order to be a valuable person but it enforces this idea by interpreting it as a message from God.

Liz learns a further lesson that suits her own culture, specifically US American work ethic. She explains that ‘Americans work harder and longer and more stressful hours than anyone in the world today. ... Americans don’t really know how to do

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<sup>782</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp.12-13.

<sup>783</sup> Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia*, p.155.

<sup>784</sup> Gilbert, *Eat Pray Love*, p.200.

<sup>785</sup> *Ibid.*, p.201, emphasis in original.



*nothing*.<sup>786</sup> This work attitude is juxtaposed in the first part of the book with Italian culture, in which ‘*Bel far niente*,’ the art of doing nothing, is a cherished ideal.<sup>787</sup> While temporarily embracing this attitude is part of Liz’s search for pleasure and a necessary step to overcoming her depression, she eventually rejects it and replaces it with the notion that happiness is the result of an effort: ‘You have to participate relentlessly in the manifestations of your own blessings.’<sup>788</sup> Her improvement suggests that it was necessary for her to find joy in life again but at the same time that this can only be a temporary state. It is therefore replaced by ‘Diligent Joy,’ turning happiness into a goal that can be achieved through making a personal effort.<sup>789</sup>

Part of Liz’s individualism is also self-sufficiency. Ruth Williams reads her search for her self as an attempt to reclaim selfishness.<sup>790</sup> Rebecca Traister criticises this condemnation of single women as selfish because they look after themselves. She points out that it is ‘... important to remember that the very acknowledgement that women *have* selves that exist independently of others, and especially independent of husbands and children, is revolutionary.’<sup>791</sup> In chapter 22 in Italy Liz tells the reader that she has continuously had boyfriends since she was fifteen and disappears into the person she loves: ‘If I love you, you can have everything. ... If I love you, I will carry for you all your pain, I will assume for you all your debts (in every definition of the word), I will protect you from your own insecurity, I will project upon you all sorts of good qualities that you have never actually cultivated in yourself and I will buy Christmas presents for your entire family.’<sup>792</sup> Thus, by ‘being selfish,’ by deciding to leave her marriage behind and not to have children, Liz is the typical neoliberalist subject who puts herself before others and values individual fulfilment over relationships. This concept is yet again supposedly sanctioned by God when Liz explains that the quest for your own happiness benefits the world at large: ‘The search for contentment is, therefore, not merely a self-preserving and self-benefiting act, but also a generous gift to the world. Clearing out all your misery *gets you out of the way*.’

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<sup>786</sup> Ibid., p.64.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid.

<sup>788</sup> Ibid., p.272.

<sup>789</sup> Ibid., p.273.

<sup>790</sup> Ruth Williams, “*Eat, Pray, Love: Producing the Female Neoliberal Spiritual Subject*,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 47:3 (2014): p.617.

<sup>791</sup> Rebecca Traister, *All the Single Ladies* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2016), p.134.

<sup>792</sup> Gilbert, *Eat Pray Love*, p.68.

You cease being an obstacle, not only to yourself but to anyone else. Only then are you free to serve and enjoy other people.’<sup>793</sup> Individualism and the focus on personal pleasure and self-improvement are sanctioned and even encouraged by the spirituality Liz advocates.

Moreover, Liz’s status as a traveller positions her outside society and allows her to escape its pressures and limitations. Travel narratives are particularly suitable for non-normative life stories: ‘Whatever the label, all writers of travel point to the effect that geographic, physical movement has on traveler’s knowledge of the world and knowledge of the self. ... Travel thus provides a way of plotting the life of the author in a travelistic autobiography; it becomes the organizing factor for the life recounted, the sites visited and the flows of travel shaping the life and the stories that are told.’<sup>794</sup> *Eat Pray Love* is also clearly structured by the places Liz visits in her quest to find spirituality. The title represents the three parts of the book linked to different places and different stages in Gilbert’s healing process. In the first part ‘Eat’ Liz travels to Italy after her divorce to learn Italian and how to enjoy life in the form of Italian food. In the second part ‘Pray’ she travels to an Ashram in India to find God. And in the third part ‘Love’ she finds a way to balance her worldly life with her spiritual aspirations in Bali. The first person narration is not just typical for women’s writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but also part of a tradition in travel writing.

Travel writing by women was very popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the British colonial context but also has a tradition in the US. Susan L. Robertson, for instance, analyses antebellum (pre-civil war) American women writers and argues that the US ‘... is a nation of hitchhiking, of greyhound buses and cars, a nation characterized by movement and travel ....’<sup>795</sup> Sara Mills explains that women authors could only travel and write as gendered individuals. As such, they were restricted by rules and roles which they had to negotiate or reject. A number of travel accounts were also written in form of letters or diaries and she sees this as a ‘... discursive tendency towards autobiography.’<sup>796</sup> The reception of this writing also greatly differed from travel writing by men: ‘Women’s travel writing is almost invariably described by critics in

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<sup>793</sup> Ibid., p.273, emphasis in original.

<sup>794</sup> Susan L. Robertson, *Antebellum American Women Writers and the Road. American Mobilities* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), p.10.

<sup>795</sup> Ibid., p.169.

<sup>796</sup> Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference. An analysis of women’s travel writing and colonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp.103-104.

terms of exceptional individuals: each travel writer is written about in terms of her strong personality which is manifested in the text.<sup>797</sup> *Eat Pray Love* is part of this tradition, because it strongly focuses on Liz and her experiences.

Liz identifies herself as a traveller and outsider when she finds a word that best describes her: ‘The *antevasin* was an in-between. He was a border-dweller. He lived in sight of both worlds, but he looked towards the unknown. And he was a scholar.’<sup>798</sup> During her travels Liz dives into other cultures to experience them but does not become a part of them. Even before her divorce, Liz’s lifestyle as a travel writer marked her as unconventional but she was still always rooted through her relationship with her husband. When she breaks free from this relationship, she embarks on an unconventional journey but knows right from the outset that she will have to return to her old life: ‘Eventually I may have to become a more solid citizen again, I’m aware of this.’<sup>799</sup> Her travelling becomes a break from real life which she will take up again once she has found herself and God. Mullen argues that these escapes into spirituality have to be temporary: ‘To toy with the idea of a nonmaterialist culture is romantic and entertaining. To act upon this idea for ourselves, however, is downright un-American.’<sup>800</sup> As a result, Liz will return to her own culture and a version of her old life. Liz’s spiritual journey and her search for her self culminate in finding true happiness and anchoring herself again in a heterosexual relationship. The book suggests that Liz’s more balanced outlook on life has prepared her for a different and more suitable man.

Even though the book is a memoir based on real events, the narrativisation of the love story follows the genre conventions of chick lit novels and romantic comedies. The hardships and the terror of her divorce, even her deep depression and the fact that she was suicidal are told in retrospect, interspersed in the first part of the book alternating with moments of pleasure she finds in the Italian language, culture and food, thus keeping the overall tone of the memoir light. Jennifer Egan criticised the author for sacrificing the seriousness of her situation in order to keep readers entertained: ‘... the book lists into the realm of magical thinking: nothing Gilbert touches seems to turn out wrong; not a single wish goes unfulfilled. What’s missing

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<sup>797</sup> Ibid., p.112.

<sup>798</sup> Gilbert, *Eat Pray Love*, p.214.

<sup>799</sup> Ibid., p.101.

<sup>800</sup> Eve L. Mullen, “Orientalist Commercialization: Tibetan Buddhism in American Popular Film,” *Journal of Religion and Film* 2:2 (1998): p.2.

are the textures and confusion and unfinished business of real life, as if Gilbert were pushing these out of sight so as not to come off as dull or equivocal or downbeat.<sup>801</sup> While Egan's criticism seems appropriate for a memoir, the book does not really work as one. Rather, it is more similar to a chick lit novel by dealing with serious issues in an upbeat tone and focusing on positive aspects in the protagonist's life. Even the narration of her love story in the end follows chick lit and romantic comedy conventions.

Illouz found in her research that popular culture provides people with narratives they use to describe romantic feelings and relationships.<sup>802</sup> She notes that in the accounts she collected as part of her research '... the romantic self "authors" its most memorable romantic experiences by mimicking the intensely ritualized temporal structure of mass media love stories.'<sup>803</sup> Even though Liz's story is autobiographical, she follows narrative conventions of a love triangle typical for chick lit novels and romantic comedies when she narrates her first meeting with Felipe. When they meet at a bar, Liz is first attracted to another man: 'Oh, I really liked this guy. Right away I really liked him. He was very good-looking, in a kind of Sting-meets-Ralph-Fiennes's-younger-brother sort of way.'<sup>804</sup> This detailed and very flattering description characterises Ian as very attractive. However, he does not show any enthusiasm to remain in contact with her.<sup>805</sup> While Ian's presence dominates this section and Liz only mentions Felipe in an afterthought, readers familiar with chick lit and romantic comedy conventions already know that Liz's immediate interest in the interesting and exciting Ian mark him as an unsuitable partner. Felipe, who at first remains in the background, but reliably takes care of her by driving her home, will turn out to be Liz's true match. Thus, even though the book is a memoir, its tone and narrative structure are influenced by chick lit conventions and Liz's search for God remains firmly embedded in discourses about individualism.

The two books discussed in this chapter focus on two protagonists who are like Bridget in their thirties but are in different stages of their lives. Kate juggles a

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<sup>801</sup> Jennifer Egan, "The Road to Bali." *The New York Times*, February 26, 2006, accessed September 15, 2006, [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/26/books/review/the-road-to-bali.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/26/books/review/the-road-to-bali.html?_r=0).

<sup>802</sup> Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia*, p.4.

<sup>803</sup> *Ibid.*, p.169.

<sup>804</sup> Gilbert, *Eat Pray Love*, p.280.

<sup>805</sup> *Ibid.*, p.281.

successful career with marriage and motherhood. Her decision to leave her job behind and become a full-time mother, with the promise of a part-time cause to keep her occupied, is firmly embedded in discourses about motherhood in the 1990s and the ideology of intensive mothering. In contrast, Liz escapes societal pressures to become a mother by travelling and embarking on a quest for God. Her spirituality is firmly embedded in neoliberalist concepts of identity and self. While *I don't know how she does it* was the first mommy lit novel and thus started a new subgenre of chick lit, Gilbert's memoir is written in the style and tone of Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*. The following section analyses the adaptations, arguing that the choices of main actresses and changes in discourses and genre conventions led to different narrative trajectories and tones in the films.

## 4.2. Stars, marketing and adaptations

In order to generate enough profit, films aimed at a predominantly female audience have to be about topics that will allow them to ‘... benefit from “unaided awareness,” through a highly visible star, previous exposure in another medium, such as television or novels, and various consumer oriented tie-ins that will enable the project to gain the support of other industries....’<sup>806</sup> The first chapter argued that Bridget’s popularity as a character contributed to the success of the adaptations, while the second chapter illustrated that the adaptations examined in it capitalized on an interest in voyeuristic insights into a character’s life, the lives of New York socialites and the fashion industry. The multi-protagonist romantic comedies analysed in the third chapter offered a variety of identity positions and narratives to widen their appeal. This section examines the importance of stars and commercial tie-ins for the marketability of the adaptations *I Don’t Know How She Does It* and *Eat Pray Love*.

A decrease in divorce rates during the 2000s resulted in an increase in films about married relationships, which elongated the careers of female stars associated with the romantic comedy genre, such as Sarah Jessica Parker and Julia Roberts.<sup>807</sup> Simon Frith explains that it is unclear why stars become stars. The public develops an interest in stars and the entertainment industry relies on this interest to generate profit. Frith argues that the entertainment industry is not really a calculating culture industry: ‘It has to be seen, rather, as an industry organized around the *fickleness* of the public. ... What matters is to make as much money as possible out of what does work, and in the end stars matter so much to the entertainment industry because they are the only *tangible* evidence of what the public does want.’<sup>808</sup> While chapter 2 has already shown that stars are not the only aspect films can rely on to entice a large audience, they are nevertheless important for the marketability of a film. Furthermore, this chapter examines how star personas can contribute to changes made in the process of adaptation.

The first part of this section explores how Parker’s star persona was essential for a change in tone in the adaptation of *I don’t know how she does it*. Moreover,

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<sup>806</sup> Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, pp.170-171.

<sup>807</sup> Betty Kaklamanidou, *Genre, Gender and the Effects of Neoliberalism. The new millennium Hollywood rom com* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), p.95.

<sup>808</sup> Frith, “Entertainment,” p.165.

changes in discourses about motherhood and the personal experience of successful screenwriter Aline Brosh McKenna enabled a different ending for the film. The second section shows that Roberts's immediate interest in Gilbert's memoir facilitated its adaptation. The marketing of the film relied heavily on Roberts's star power but also on a synergised media campaign and themed consumer goods to create an interest in the adaptation in advance of its release. In addition, the film's focus has shifted from spirituality to relationships, thus returning to the well-known formula typical for romantic comedies.

#### **4.2.1. The possible happy end - *I Don't Know How She Does It* (2011)**

Kate in the novel *I don't know how she does it* was frequently compared to Bridget, as for example in the headlines 'Kate Reddy is Bridget with brains'<sup>809</sup> or 'a working mom's Bridget Jones'<sup>810</sup> and she was even declared 'the newest chick-lit archetype.'<sup>811</sup> Reviewers repeatedly stressed the authenticity of the character<sup>812</sup> and the novel was celebrated as a text that told the truth about motherhood by exploring and expressing feelings real mothers have. Kate Betts, for instance, describes the book in *The New York Times* as a 'sharply observed, sometimes painfully sad story about the sordid disparity between the ideal and the reality of "having it all."<sup>813</sup> Pearson also pointed out in interviews that her readers strongly identified with Kate Reddy: 'Pearson says what she hears from women readers is "the universal yelp of recognition."<sup>814</sup>

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<sup>809</sup> Adam Begley, "Kate Reddy is Bridget with brains, a woman-not a girl-who knows better," *New York Observer*, October 07, 2002.

<sup>810</sup> Jocelyn Noveck, "New cultural icon? Kate Reddy is a working mom's Bridget Jones," *Associated Press International*, November 21, 2002; see also Joan Smith, "Pull yourself together, woman; big house, big salary, big fuss," *The Independent*, July 06, 2002 and Kingston, "Bridget's legacy: Mumlit's chic, but what is it saying?"

<sup>811</sup> Betts, "Your Family and How It Works."

<sup>812</sup> Elizabeth Payne, "Having it all," *Ottawa Citizen*, October 26, 2002 and Eileen Travers, "A working mom's ragged life: British novel has struck a chord. The whole point of *I Don't Know How She Does It* is, in fact, that she doesn't," *The Gazette*, December 21, 2002.

<sup>813</sup> Betts, "Your Family and How It Works."

<sup>814</sup> Stoffman, "Working mom's Oscar Wilde," see also Roxanne Roberts, "The Whole Mom Catalogue; A Hot New Novel Addresses Career Mothers. It's Total Fiction," *The Washington Post*, November 12, 2002.

The financial success of the novel, selling more than 4 million copies,<sup>815</sup> inspired other Mumlit and honest accounts about women's lives. Literary successors cover a wide range of topics and genres and differ in tone. In the bestselling anthology *The Bitch in the House*,<sup>816</sup> for instance, 26 '... mothers and wives rage about their exhaustion and their unfulfilled expectations.'<sup>817</sup> In contrast, *The Mummy Diaries* by Rachel Johnson explores the life of a supposedly stay-at-home mother living in Notting Hill (the narrator insists on referring to herself as a stay-at-home mother even though she works part-time) in a humorous and light tone.<sup>818</sup>

The interest in confessions about motherhood spread during the 2000s to internet blogs and parenting forums, such as Mumsnet, Netmoms and The Bump, which became a source for parenting advice and online community support.<sup>819</sup> These new media outlets offered a platform for mothers to exchange their experiences. Lori Kido Lopez, for example, argues that 'mommy blogs' have radical potential because the honest stories of mummy bloggers differ from the idealised image of motherhood promoted in the media and are thus '... beginning to expand our notion of motherhood, women bloggers and the mother's place within the public sphere. In this sense, showing the ugly side of motherhood has the potential to be liberating and beneficial for all women.'<sup>820</sup> While Claire Madge and Henrietta O'Connor show in their research that the particular community of new mothers on babyworld.co.uk reproduced traditional gender roles and ideas about mothering,<sup>821</sup> Sarah Pederson and Janet Smithson argue that the UK parenting blog Mumsnet created a space in which users

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<sup>815</sup> Dylan Jones, "Men who juggle School runs, nappies, long hours at work," *The Times*, September 03, 2011.

<sup>816</sup> Cathy Hanauer, ed. *The Bitch in the House: 26 Women Tell the Truth about Sex, Solitude, Work, Motherhood, and Marriage* (London: Harper Collins, 2003).

<sup>817</sup> Kingston, "Bridget's legacy: Mumlit's chic, but what is it saying?"

<sup>818</sup> Rachel Johnson, *The Mummy Diaries. Or How to Lose Your Husband, Children and Dog in Twelve Months* (London: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>819</sup> Clare Madge and Henrietta O'Connor, "Parenting gone wired: empowerment of new mothers on the internet?" *Social & Cultural Geography* 7.02 (2006): p.205; see also Emma Barnett, "Web is top source of parenting advice say British mums," *The Telegraph*, May 14, 2012 and Meghan Casserly, "Moms Connect On The Internet," *Forbes*, June 08, 2009, accessed February 14, 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/2009/08/06/mothers-online-blogs-forbes-woman-time-community.html>.

<sup>820</sup> Lori Kido Lopez, "The radical act of 'mommy blogging': redefining motherhood through the blogosphere," *New media & society* 11:5 (2009): pp.743-744.

<sup>821</sup> Madge and O'Connor, "Parenting gone wired," p.214.



could live out new femininities.<sup>822</sup> Overall, blogs and internet forums contributed to a change in discourses about motherhood during the 2000s.

E. Ann Kaplan points out that ‘... women, like everybody else, can function only within the linguistic, semiotic constraints of their historical moment – within that is the discourses available to them.’<sup>823</sup> The same applies to media texts. As discussed in the first part of this chapter, the novel *I don't know how she does it* by Allison Pearson and its ending were very much the result of discourses about motherhood in the 1990s. These discourses changed over the next decade and this section explores how the adaptation *I Don't Know How She Does It* directed by Douglas McGrath and released in 2011 represents these changed discourses about motherhood in a genre appropriate way. It will also explore how the choice of screenwriter and lead actress influenced the tone of the film.

Richard Dyer notes that stars are representative of societal types:<sup>824</sup> ‘The star phenomenon depends upon collapsing the distinction between the star-as-person and the star-as-performer. This does not usually mean that the incidents of a film's scenario are taken to be actual incidents in the star's life but rather that they reveal or express the personality or type-of-person of the star.’<sup>825</sup> Sarah Jessica Parker's star persona changed over the years and Deborah Jermyn argues that the actress uses an intimate and confessional tone in her interviews to dispel potential conflicts between her former role as Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) and her new role as a mother: ‘Parker, then, is something of a poster-girl for “having it all”, but in her magazine confessionals she indicates the juggling act this necessitates and, underlining her apparent modesty and “authentic” awareness of the privileges stardom brings, often describes herself as “lucky” for getting there.’<sup>826</sup> Parker as the supermom who can handle everything is therefore the embodiment of the changed Kate Reddy. The cheerful tone of the film is in stark contrast to the often serious and complaining tone of the novel but typical for a romantic comedy whose main aim is to entertain its

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<sup>822</sup> Sarah Pederson and Janet Smithson, “Mothers with attitude—How the Mumsnet parenting forum offers space for new forms of femininity to emerge online,” *Women's Studies International Forum* 38 (2013): p.97.

<sup>823</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation. The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p.16.

<sup>824</sup> Dyer, *Stars*, p.47.

<sup>825</sup> Dyer, *Only Entertainment*, p.65.

<sup>826</sup> Deborah Jermyn, “Still something else besides a mother? Negotiating celebrity motherhood in Sarah Jessica Parker's star story,” *Social Semiotics* 18:2 (2008): p.170.

viewers. Complex problems mentioned in the novel are also simplified and the adaptation offers simple solutions.<sup>827</sup> Kate has become a supermom in the process of adaptation who solves all her problems with a can-do attitude.

Kate (Sarah Jessica Parker) is a financial analyst, married to Richard (Greg Kinnear) and has two children, Emily (Emma Rayne Lyle) and Ben (Julius Goldberg). Their already hectic lives become even more complicated when Kate lands a new fund and has to travel repeatedly to New York to work on the project. While the film shows the difficulties Kate faces, she manages everything cheerfully and is rewarded in the end. Her project is a success, her husband Richard promises to help more with household chores and Kate is able to convince her boss Clark (Kelsey Grammer) to allow her more time with her family.

In the adaptation Kate's attitude is the key to her success. Douglas and Michaels explain that the media coverage of celebrity moms in the 1980s created the image of mothers as extremely cheerful and capable of handling their careers and families,<sup>828</sup> implying that unhappiness was the result of an individual failure: 'The "you *can* have it all" ethos of these pieces made the rest of us feel like failures while dramatizing that we could do it all if we just had the right attitude.'<sup>829</sup> Kate is right from the beginning introduced by her friend Alison (Christina Hendricks) as the supermom who can do it all. Alison tells viewers that Kate can handle any task life throws at her. The title appears on screen and when the film cuts back to Alison she introduces the story: 'For all of us moms there comes the time when you almost don't pull it off and for Kate that was those three months last winter.' Despite the seemingly serious topic, Alison is beaming at the camera and the 'almost' in her sentence already suggests that Kate will eventually manage the situation, reassuring the viewer right from the start that the film will have a happy ending. Unlike in the novel, in which Kate was angry most of the time, Sarah Jessica Parker is constantly smiling. This change in character is partly a reaction to the critical reception of the novel.

Kate in the adapted text was often criticised for causing her own problems: 'In that sense, her burdens seem self-imposed from the beginning. This is more a novel about the tyranny of affluence than the problem of combining work and

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<sup>827</sup> Compare Dyer, *Only Entertainment*, p.23.

<sup>828</sup> Douglas and Michaels, *The Mommy Myth*, p.119.

<sup>829</sup> Ibid.

motherhood.<sup>830</sup> Even critics who praise her point out that her problems are frequently self-induced: ‘Her version of the beleaguered heroine struggles with the world she has made, not the world she aspires to -- or the world as she finds it.’<sup>831</sup> In contrast, Kate in the film solves every problem with cheerfulness and natural charm. When their nanny Paula (Jessica Szor) is late again and Richard suggests that it might not be so bad if Paula would quit, Kate tells him: ‘Frankly, at this point it would be easier if you left.’ This sentence also appears in the novel but at the end of a paragraph and because there is no answer to it, it seems like harsh and unfair criticism. In the film a medium shot on Richard shows that he is taken aback by Kate’s comment. This is immediately followed by a medium shot of Kate reaching out to him and telling him with a smile: ‘You know what I mean.’ She moves sideways and seems to shrug, indicating that she was merely joking so that a potentially serious situation is defused by her charm.

Like the novel, the film also suggests that women who want careers have to ‘do it all.’<sup>832</sup> Unlike the novel, however, the cheerful tone of the film ignores the price Kate has to pay when she unquestioningly takes on the responsibility to manage everything. When she gets the important account with Jack Ablehammer (Pierce Brosnan), for instance, Kate is worried about Richard’s reaction. She tells him at her daughter Emily’s birthday party amidst the chatter of children: ‘I’m really sorry but New York liked my idea for the retirement fund.’ When Richard told her about landing a big project he did not apologise for it. When they discuss it later while they clean up together, Kate constantly interrupts his worries and reassures him that *she* will take care of everything. She clearly feels guilty about her success at work and thinks she can only accept the new challenge if she manages it and ensures that it will work out. ‘More often than any of us is comfortable admitting, mothers earn the right to work for pay by foregoing not only leisure, friendships, and community involvements but even basic, physical needs – especially sleep.’<sup>833</sup> The film, however, does not depict her sacrifices. Instead, a montage of scenes shows Kate spending time with her children, smilingly handling everything and even making time to watch an old film with Richard. The montage sequence is accompanied by the song ‘Move to the Beat’

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<sup>830</sup> Smith, “Pull yourself together, woman.”

<sup>831</sup> Betts, “Your Family and How It Works.”

<sup>832</sup> Douglas and Michaels, *The Mommy Myth*, p.22; see also Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, p.131.

<sup>833</sup> Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood*, p.206.

that includes the line ‘You’re looking at the queen of multi-tasking,’ further creating the impression that Kate has everything under control.

While the novel was celebrated for exposing myths about motherhood by expressing worries real mothers have, the film exaggerates and ridicules them through the use of special effects and filmic techniques. The ideology of intensive mothering, for instance, holds women responsible for everything that happens to their children as well as the children’s future behaviour. As a result, they feel guilt and anxiety about making mistakes that might ruin their children’s lives.<sup>834</sup> In the film these worries are ridiculed. While Kate disturbs a store-bought cake to make it look homemade for Emily’s bake sale her exaggerated worries are visualised. The scene cuts from a medium shot of Kate in her kitchen to a news flash. The screen is divided into two parts. On the right we see Kate in her kitchen. On the left a news anchor tells the audience that ‘Friends traced the start of Emily’s mental problems to a school bake sale, where her mother, a shadowy presence in her life, humiliated her in front of her classmates.’ During her speech the headline on the screen reads: ‘Convicted Mother’ and the news ticker at the bottom of the screen proclaims: ‘Child psychologists say that lack of home cooked meals linked to higher rates of juvenile delinquency, increased drug use and low life expectancy.’ The news flash clearly ridicules scaremongering in the media and the notion that intensive mothering is necessary to raise healthy law-abiding children.



Figure 24: News flash visualising Kate’s worries

The following scene showing one of Kate’s childhood memories, however, validates her efforts. The scene is accompanied by Kate’s voice over: ‘I still remember

<sup>834</sup> Warner, *Perfect Madness*, p.97.

the looks I got in 1974 when my mother sent me to the school bake sale with two cans of sliced peaches.’ While she is talking, a girl is walking towards a table. She is looking down, seemingly ashamed of herself. The scene is accompanied by eerie background music, culminating in a crescendo when Kate lifts the cans into the frame, underlining the horror of this moment. This is followed by a medium shot of the two women at the bake sale. The woman on the right is visibly shocked and stares at the cans open-mouthed. Even though this memory has not mentally crippled her or ruined her life, Kate still vividly remembers it suggesting that it was a very disappointing moment in her life.<sup>835</sup>

Moreover, Richard appears in the kitchen and further validates Kate’s worries and consequentially her exaggerated behaviour. He first dismisses her concerns about the bake sale and its importance for Emily but when Kate explains that she does not want Emily to feel different from other children ‘because her mother has to travel for work,’ he admits that those are nice things to worry about. He further re-enforces the message of this scene that even though Kate’s potential failure at the bake sale would not ruin Emily’s life, it could still have a profound impact on her. The background music in this part of the scene is cheerful to ensure that the tone remains light even though it deals with potentially serious issues and feelings of guilt women have to deal with. In addition, Kate’s answer suggests that it is not the fact that she works which causes her guilt, but her particular situation in which she has to travel a lot for work. As mentioned above, Alison also introduced the film as reflecting on a particularly difficult time in Kate’s life, meaning that normally she manages her life well. Thus, the adaptation is careful not to criticise working mothers in general.

Instead, it emphasises the importance of work in women’s lives. In doing so, it draws on a conflict referred to as the mommy wars, meaning a supposed rivalry between working mothers and stay-at-home-moms reported in the media.<sup>836</sup> While stay-at-home mothers are usually celebrated as better mothers, the film ridicules them by depicting them as stereotypes. Kate introduces ‘the momsters’ Wendy Best (Busy

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<sup>835</sup> This scene has been significantly changed from the adapted text. In the novel Kate’s mother did not work while her children were still in school. Instead, Kate watched another child bring two tins of peaches to a bake sale. Her mother’s friend explained to her that the child’s mother did not make an effort. By turning this memory into a personal experience, it is Kate’s feelings that have been hurt, and by distressing the pie she seems to avoid the mistakes her mother made. See Pearson, *I Don’t Know How She Does It*, p.4.

<sup>836</sup> Douglas and Michaels, *The Mommy Myth*, p.12.

Philipps) and Janine (Sarah Shahi) to the viewer when they meet at the bake sale. Whenever Kate introduces a new character, the film stops with a ping noise and the information she gives in the voice over is humorously accentuated in comments that appear in handwriting on the screen. Alison is introduced as Kate's friend who is also a working mother but not as competent as Kate at handling her career and her motherhood (she brings unset Jell-O). When the Momsters' literally enter the scene, the background music picks up in pace to match their slow motion walk. Kate introduces them as 'the most terrifying creatures in captivity.' Meanwhile Wendy is flicking her hair and Janine is licking her lips. When they finally meet they exchange meaningless pleasantries but very quickly run out of things to say to each other.



Figure 25: 'The most terrifying creatures in captivity.'

This introduction scene is followed by the first of several interludes in which Wendy is also giving an interview. While Alison is interviewed standing in the street or sitting at a table presumably in the law firm where she works, Wendy is always interviewed on a cross trainer in the gym. In some of the interviews her personal trainer is standing next to her monitoring her exercises and smiling at her answers. In the first interview Wendy also explains that she decided to stay at home because she wanted to raise her children herself, implying that she is a better mother than Kate. However, in another interview about 39 minutes into the film she enumerates her daily routine which consists of dropping her children off at school, spending six hours at the gym and then picking them up again. Compared to Kate's hectic life, Wendy's life seems

very empty. She is reduced to the stereotype of the sexualised, constantly exercising yummy mummy who is able to cope with her life because she is rich.<sup>837</sup>

The novel's focus on Kate's constant struggles to combine career and family life made the ending seem inevitable. Pearson herself considered it the only realistic solution to her story: "I don't see her stopping for any length of time. I just see her as stopping for a breath of air," says Pearson. "It was the only realistic ending. England has the longest working hours in Europe - you can't do it all."<sup>838</sup> As pointed out above, at the time the book was published, Pearson's narrative was still firmly embedded in discourses about motherhood in the 1990s. By the time the film was made these discourses had been changed by accounts of women in literature and discussions on the internet which counteracted some myths about motherhood. These changes in discourses about working mothers allowed the screenplay writer Aline Brosh McKenna to use her own personal experience to write a different ending for the adaptation.

In an article published before the release of the film, Susan Dominus explains that McKenna has created a niche within the genre of romantic comedies for herself. Her breakthrough came when she successfully wrote the screenplay for *The Devil Wears Prada* and her films all focus on women in whose lives careers play a more important role than love. The article also includes a personal story during the production of *I Don't Know How She Does It*. McKenna had to leave a work meeting in which they discussed the ending of the film so she could catch her flight home to her family. Her boss asked her to stay but she said no and set boundaries for herself.<sup>839</sup> McKenna's success as a screenwriter lies in her ability to know that "... her audience no longer wants love to triumph over all; the new fantasy is that women triumph over the struggle to have it all. "We weren't trying to make, 'I Don't Know How She Doesn't Do It,'" Ms. McKenna said. "She does it."<sup>840</sup> Drawing on her own personal experience, McKenna was able to write a different ending in which Kate sets boundaries for herself and can still keep her job.

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<sup>837</sup> Compare Jo Littler, "The Rise of the "Yummy Mummy": Popular Conservatism and the Neoliberal Maternal in Contemporary British Culture," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 6 (2013): pp.230-231.

<sup>838</sup> Pearson quoted in Stoffman, "Working mom's Oscar Wilde."

<sup>839</sup> Dominus, "If Cinderella Had a BlackBerry."

<sup>840</sup> McKenna quoted in Dominus, "If Cinderella Had a BlackBerry."

In order to do so, the film offers a utopian feminist solution for Kate's problems by showing that the men in her life change. When her boss Clark asks her to travel to Atlanta to meet with a client on the weekend, she tells him that she is unavailable: 'Look, I've given everything I have to this job and I love it, I do. But I can't dump my family at a moment's notice anymore. I won't do it. If what I have to give is not enough for you, then fire me. But I won't quit. I will not, I cannot give up.' Her boss allows her to postpone the trip until Monday and Kate rushes to the playground at her children's school to build a snow man. When she tells Richard about taking a stand in front of her boss, he promises to take on more responsibility in the house. He makes his intentions clear by showing her a to-do list, implying that he is ready to become more like Kate, who has been making lists throughout the film. Thus, the film suggests that women can change their life styles and lead successful and fulfilling lives if men change as well. This change needs to take place on a domestic level by the men in their private lives (Richard) but also has to happen on a larger socio-economic level by their employers (Clark and Ablehammer).

However, typical for a postfeminist text, this concession only happens on an individual level as a reward for a hard-working and undemanding employee. Throughout the film Kate never asks for help. She takes full responsibility at home and at work. When Ablehammer chooses her proposal she thanks him over and over again but does not demand to be included in the dinner after her presentation. Rather, it seems up to the grace of men to look after her and she is merely grateful if they decide to do so. Moreover and like McKenna herself,<sup>841</sup> Kate can only have different rules because she is so successful at her job. After Kate has left the office, her boss Clark tells her colleague and rival (played by Seth Meyers): 'Bunce, wipe that smirk off your face. You land a major fund with Jack Ablehammer, we talk about relaxing your schedule, too.' By stressing that Kate only received this concession because she secured a major fund, she is clearly marked as an exception.

The idea of Kate being exceptional is central to the entire film. Laura Mattoon d'Amore argues that the image of the supermom juggling career and children can be traced back to the first superheroines in comic books: 'The supermom describes women who straddle the public and private spheres, and infers that doing so requires

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<sup>841</sup> See Dominus, "If Cinderella Had a BlackBerry."



superhuman capacities.<sup>842</sup> The film stresses Kate's exceptionalism by contrasting her with stereotypical female characters who all fail in some aspects of their lives. Wendy, the stay-at-home mother, has to spend hours at the gym because she does not have anything fulfilling to do with her life. Single mother Alison fails at her household chores and Kate's assistant Momo is so focused on her career that she is incapable of emotions. Even the title of the film suggests that only Kate knows how to do it. On the DVD cover the words 'know how she' are pink while the remainder of the title is blue, already implying that this one woman has the necessary know-how to combine a family with a career.



Figure 26: *I Don't Know How She Does It* DVD cover<sup>843</sup>

The dreamlike quality of the final scene with her, Richard and the children also implies that it is nothing but a romantic utopian fantasy.<sup>844</sup> Kate and Richard stand on the playground in front of the children's school and are surrounded by happy children. Both are gazing into each other's eyes and the love declaration at the end of a typical romantic comedy is replaced by a list that represents Richard's change. By romanticising this scene with the falling snow and the laughing children in the

<sup>842</sup> Laura Mattoon d'Amore, "The Accidental Supermom: Superheroines and Maternal Performativity, 1963-1980," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 45:6 (2012): p.1226.

<sup>843</sup> Amazon.com, "I Don't Know How She Does It, DVD," accessed December 02, 2016, [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Dont-Know-How-She-Does/dp/B0064OUGAK/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=dvd&ie=UTF8&qid=1480175714&sr=1-1&keywords=i+don%27t+know+how+she+does+it](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Dont-Know-How-She-Does/dp/B0064OUGAK/ref=sr_1_1?s=dvd&ie=UTF8&qid=1480175714&sr=1-1&keywords=i+don%27t+know+how+she+does+it).

<sup>844</sup> The scene is very similar to Richard Curtis's use of snow to create a romantic atmosphere at the end of both *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*.

background, the film offers a new ending in a very stereotypical form, not just allowing but even encouraging the viewers to read it as an unrealistic fantasy.



Figure 27: Romanticised happy end

Thus, while the film does show that men need to change in order to enable women to lead a fulfilling life, it also suggests that this change only happens on an individual level. Kate is the individual who can do it all because she takes responsibility for everything that needs to be done and remains cheerful about any mishap or problem that comes her way. The anger palpable in the novel has been replaced by happiness and gratefulness. Once women are in a position of power, they can help each other, just like Kate does by being an understanding boss when Momo makes mistakes during her pregnancy. However, this change also remains on an individual level and does not include wider structural changes.

Like *Bridget Jones's Diary*, its sequel and even more so their adaptations, *I don't know how she does it* celebrates a clumsy but endearing protagonist whose most important quality is that she remains cheerful despite all her mishaps. Changes in the plot are the result of Sarah Jessica Parker's star persona and the personal experience of screenwriter Aline Brosh McKenna. These changes also reflect developments in discourses about motherhood and work that enabled this narrative to be told. The final part of this chapter discusses how the strong focus on the female protagonist embodied by Julia Roberts led to plot changes that resulted in a shift in focus from a spiritual search to relationships in the adaptation *Eat Pray Love*.

#### 4.2.2. Love trumps religion - *Eat Pray Love* (2010)

The success of Elizabeth Gilbert's memoir was part of an increasing interest in spirituality. In a consumerist society any new trend is accompanied by a range of consumer products and the novel *Eat Pray Love* inspired a variety of such products, like jewellery and themed travel, promising people that they too could have Liz's spiritual epiphanies by consuming the right merchandise.<sup>845</sup> The potential of a film aimed at a predominantly female audience for movie tie-ins has become an important factor in the decision if it will be produced: 'Female-oriented films must target a demographic that is likely to consume the kinds of goods that create desirable media synergies and that will ensure that a film "opens big."<sup>846</sup> As a result, '... movie merchandising, once the domain of films for teens and kids, has matured for the adult female audience.'<sup>847</sup> Thus, the potential of *Eat Pray Love* for product tie-ins was part of its appeal as an adapted text.

In order to generate a pre-release interest in the film and thus built excitement and guarantee a big opening weekend, Sony collaborated with the perfume brand Fresh, for instance, and even the Home Shopping network: 'The result of the unique marketing alliance? A 72-hour "Love" event featuring one day of product for each section of the film, interspersed with clips, interviews with the filmmakers, and gushing endorsements from the on-air hosts. "I just wish the movie was opening tomorrow," one saleswoman chirped after a clip from "Love" was shown. Then she moved on to selling Italian sheets.'<sup>848</sup> The main aim of this collaboration was not the direct profits from the sales of the products but rather to get '...messages out about the movie that money cannot buy.'<sup>849</sup> A strong focus on marketing campaigns has become typical for Hollywood films<sup>850</sup> and necessary to generate enough interest in a

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<sup>845</sup> Melissa Whitworth, "Eat Pray Love – the book that started it all. Millions relate to one woman's 'bathroom floor moment'," *The Telegraph*, August 27, 2010, accessed September 15, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/starsandstories/7967608/Eat-Pray-Love-the-book-that-started-it-all.html>.

<sup>846</sup> Radner, *Neo-Feminist Cinema*, p.170.

<sup>847</sup> Bryan Alexander, "Eat, pray, shop! Movie merch grows up," *The Hollywood Reporter*, August 13, 2010, accessed September 15, 2016, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/eat-pray-shop-movie-merch-26637>.

<sup>848</sup> Ibid.

<sup>849</sup> Ibid.

<sup>850</sup> Brockes, "Eat, Pray, Cash In."

film to guarantee its financial success, and Sony successfully build a momentum before the release of the adaptation.

*Eat Pray Love* begins with Elizabeth Gilbert (Julia Roberts) realising that she and her husband Steven (Billy Crudup) do not have anything in common anymore. While they are getting divorced, Liz begins a relationship with the young actor David (James Franco) but their relationship fails as well. Emotionally exhausted, Liz decides to travel to Italy to learn Italian. After three months of enjoying Italian food and exploring Italian cities, she travels on to India in order to practice meditation. In India she befriends a young Indian girl (Rushita Singh) and Richard from Texas (Richard Jenkins) who help her get over her divorce. Liz then travels on to Bali where she learns to practice Balinese meditation and meets and falls in love with the Brazilian expat Felipe (Javier Bardem).

In contrast to Kate and like Bridget, Liz Gilbert, who is also the first-person narrator in her memoir, was frequently considered the reason for the book's success: 'Gilbert is instantly likeable as a narrator: she's warm, funny and, as she says, can make friends with anyone, anywhere. That included her readers who have become cult-like devotees.'<sup>851</sup> Johanna Leggatt, for instance, felt a personal connection with the author: 'At the end of *Eat Pray Love* I didn't want to go to the places Gilbert visited, as much as I wanted to phone her. This is surely, one of the greatest compliments a writer of such a highly personal memoir can hope to receive.'<sup>852</sup> Rachel Cusk describes the tone of the book as '... a kind of literary incarnation of the "best friend",' a style, she writes, typical for the chick lit genre.<sup>853</sup> Moreover, some reviewers liked the upbeat tone of the book and that the narrative is an accessible description of her spiritual development: 'Without getting all serious and preachy -- without renouncing all worldly pleasures -- she devotes herself to an intense spiritual practice, one that doesn't seem so foreign or alienating as to be out of reach to the rest of us.'<sup>854</sup> Hence, the success of the memoir is based on the character of Liz Gilbert as constructed in her

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<sup>851</sup> Whitworth, "Eat Pray Love – the book that started it all;" see also Egan, "The Road to Bali."

<sup>852</sup> Johanna Leggatt, "Familiar mantra that hits the right nerve," *The Sun Herald*, June 04, 2006.

<sup>853</sup> Rachel Cusk, "Eat, Pray, Love by Elizabeth Gilbert. Millions of women have fallen for Elizabeth Gilbert's memoir of self-discovery. Why, asks Rachel Cusk, as *Eat, Pray, Love* opens as a Julia Roberts blockbuster," *The Guardian*, September 25, 2010.

<sup>854</sup> Grace Lichtenstein, "Heart and Soul," *The Washington Post*, February 12, 2006; see also Whitworth, "Eat Pray Love – the book that started it all."

personal narrative. While Sarah Jessica Parker was chosen to change the tone of the film, the leading actress for *Eat Pray Love* had to embody the friendly but also approachable Liz Gilbert.



Figure 28: *Eat Pray Love* film poster<sup>855</sup>



Figure 29: *Eat Pray Love* DVD cover<sup>856</sup>

The book was released in 2006 and Julia Roberts was interested in the material right from the beginning, announcing in the same year that she would play the lead role in the adaptation.<sup>857</sup> Paul McDonald explains that ‘... star names don’t just designate, they describe a collection of meanings. ... In Hollywood stardom, names alone are enough to bring to the screen rich collections of pre-conceived ideas about a performer.’<sup>858</sup> According to McDonald, Julia Roberts’s star persona is ‘at once exotic and yet commonplace’<sup>859</sup> and represents a ‘brand of feisty sweetness.’<sup>860</sup> Hence, her star persona make Roberts the perfect choice for the lovable Liz. McDonald also argues that Roberts attracts a large audience, particularly if she stars in a romantic

<sup>855</sup> IMP Awards, “Eat, Pray, Love Movie Poster,” accessed December 02, 2016, [http://www.impawards.com/2010/eat\\_pray\\_love\\_ver2\\_xlg.html](http://www.impawards.com/2010/eat_pray_love_ver2_xlg.html).

<sup>856</sup> Amazon.co.uk, “Eat, Pray, Love, DVD,” accessed December 02, 2016, [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Eat-Pray-Love-James-Franco/dp/B0033AGJ5Y/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=dvd&ie=UTF8&qid=1480175751&sr=1-1&keywordds=eat+pray+love](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Eat-Pray-Love-James-Franco/dp/B0033AGJ5Y/ref=sr_1_1?s=dvd&ie=UTF8&qid=1480175751&sr=1-1&keywordds=eat+pray+love).

<sup>857</sup> “Julia Roberts lined up for “Eat, Pray, Love,” *Agence France Presse – English*, October 11, 2006.

<sup>858</sup> Paul McDonald, *Hollywood Stardom* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p.50.

<sup>859</sup> *Ibid.*, p.254.

<sup>860</sup> *Ibid.*, p.256.

comedy.<sup>861</sup> The promotional material for the film heavily relies on Roberts as the main performer. Various film posters and later on the DVD cover all depict her name in large print either at the top or over the title, so that it appears almost as important as the title itself. No other actors are mentioned, even though the cast includes Javier Bardem and James Franco. This strong focus on the female protagonist is typical for the romantic comedy adaptations discussed in this thesis and has led to changes in the plot structure of the adaptation *Eat Pray Love*.

In accordance with genre conventions of the romantic comedy, the focus of the film has shifted from a spiritual search for a divine self to the search for a suitable partner. While Liz embarks on a new relationship at the end of the book as well, the majority of her narrative deals with her personal insights and spiritual epiphanies. Finding a man in the end merely seems like a reward for her hard spiritual work. The adaptation *Eat Pray Love*, on the other hand, shifts the focus completely on Liz's relationships with men, exemplifying that '... romantic love is gaining ever greater significance as a 'secular' religion.'<sup>862</sup> Ulrich Beck and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim argue that romantic love has become increasingly important in increasingly complex societies because it promises '... a chance of being authentic in a world which otherwise runs on pragmatic solutions and convenient lies. Love is a search for oneself, a craving to really get in contact with me and you, ... longing for a home and trust to counteract the doubts and anxieties modern life generates.'<sup>863</sup> It has been elevated to the status of a religion: 'Both hold out the promise of perfect happiness, to be achieved along similar lines. Each offers itself as a way of escaping from the daily grind, giving normality a new aura ....'<sup>864</sup> Love has become a dominant secular religion because it is non-traditional and does not depend on figures of authority. Rather, lovers open up new realities and create a new world together as a couple by getting to know each other.<sup>865</sup> Thus, in an individualised society love has become a structuring force. *Eat Pray Love* is based on this concept and like Bridget, Liz has to find a relationship that allows her to be herself and a man who accepts and loves her the way she is.

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<sup>861</sup> Ibid., p.260; see also Kirk Honeycutt, "Eat Pray Love – Film Review," *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 14, 2010, accessed September 15, 2016, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/eat-pray-love-film-review-29869>.

<sup>862</sup> Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *The Normal Chaos of Love*, p.173.

<sup>863</sup> Ibid, p.175.

<sup>864</sup> Ibid.

<sup>865</sup> Ibid., pp.175-177.

The importance of relationships in people's lives is introduced right at the beginning of the film. Several bird's eye shots show different landscapes in Bali. Liz narrates in a voice over that her friend Delia (Viola Davis), a psychologist, was asked to provide psychological counselling to Cambodian refugees, boat people, and was daunted by the task. Images of the countryside alternate with images of Liz cycling. When she finally arrives at a house, she reveals that the Cambodian refugees only wanted to talk about their relationships. Liz comments that this is what people are like. She then reveals that she is about to meet the 9<sup>th</sup> generation medicine man Ketut (Hadi Subiyanto) but is only interested in asking him about her relationships: '... and what do I want to ask him about? Getting closer to God? Saving the world's starving children? Nope. I wanna discuss my relationship.'

The shift in focus in the adaptation is also represented in a changed structure. The memoir is divided into three parts which correlate to the three countries to which Liz travels and the things she learns in each of them. The film, on the other hand, is divided into four parts, which are each between 30 and 38 minutes long. As a result, her relationships with her husband Steven and boyfriend David have an entire part in the overall story instead of merely appearing in flashbacks that interrupt the main narrative about Italy in the book. Expanding her backstory illustrates Liz's despair in her marriage, elaborates on the unsuitability of both partners and justifies her decision to travel. The first part shows that both Steven and David are wrong for Liz because she loses herself in the relationships with them. Both are also cruel to her, justifying her decision to leave them.

Liz's husband is introduced at a party. We can hear Steven talking off screen before the camera moves towards him standing next to Liz. He is telling another party guest that he spellchecks all of Liz's writing, deliberately putting her down in front of others. On their way home, Liz suggests that he could travel with her for a work assignment so that they could spend time together. Steven does not answer and instead tells her that he wants to return to University. Liz's unenthusiastic reaction to his idea suggests that he is in the habit of changing careers. Moreover, Steven is mentally unstable during the divorce proceedings. At a meeting with Liz and her lawyer he declares that he will represent himself because he studied law for a year. He then starts singing a 'song,' that consist of him screaming repeatedly 'quitter' at Liz. Thus, Steven is characterised as immature, unreliable and unreasonable, justifying Liz's decision to leave him.

She then embarks on a relationship with David, a young actor who is in a play Liz has written. The moment in which they are falling in love is highly romanticised: David is surrounded by a yellow light, which does not seem so unusual, since he is on stage performing in Liz's play. While the actress next to him explains in her monologue that she disappears into the person she loves, a close-up on Liz's face shows her illuminated and surrounded by the same yellow light. The lighting surrounding her suggests that the words spoken by the actress on stage are a comment on what is happening to Liz at that moment, namely that she is falling in love with David. While the light seems to connect Liz and David, the explanation given by the actress already prepares the audience that David is not the right man for Liz because, just like Steven, he prevents her from being herself. The film employs the same narrative device later on to explain the gradual degeneration of their relationship. A scene in which David is shouting at a crying Liz is interrupted by cuts to another scene in which Liz is reading from one of her texts to an audience, explaining why they have drifted apart. This technique is very effective since it allows the film to compress Liz's emotional turmoil into a few minutes and depict the degeneration and unavoidable failure of two relationships in a very short time. Moreover, these emotional scenes allow actress Julia Roberts to demonstrate her range of acting skills but also stress on a narrative level that Liz cannot be happy in relationships with men who prevent her from being herself.

In order to become her true self, Liz seemingly goes through the same spiritual process as in the memoir. The adaptation, however, remains very vague about her development. Her spiritual beliefs are not explained but rather depicted in form of stereotypes and linked to her relationships. Before she leaves for her travels, she explains to her friend Delia that she '... will spend three months at the Ashram of *David's* Guru' (emphasis added). When Delia asks her about her relationship with David, a medium shot on Liz shows her averting her eyes. The scene then cuts to a fight between the two, implying that her decision to leave is in fact not the result of a spiritual yearning but rather because she wants to escape an unhealthy relationship. Even in India, her inner struggles with meditation are not overcome by rigorous discipline but miraculously after she says goodbye to her husband and forgives herself.

This development draws on two dominant beliefs in US culture: the power of individuals to be solely responsible for their own happiness and the sudden transformative power of spiritual epiphany. When Liz tells Richard that she is waiting



for her husband to forgive her after the divorce, Richard retorts that she only has to forgive herself to be able to move on. Like Kate, Liz is supposedly in sole charge of her happiness. She imagines a conversation with her husband, says goodbye to him and is released from her guilt. The notion that ‘enlightenment’ is achieved suddenly and completely is typical for ideas about spirituality in US culture.<sup>866</sup> It is very similar to ‘... the belief in “insight” in the early days of psychotherapy. At that time it was felt that a patient worked with a problem until he suddenly achieved insight into its structure and meaning. He then had a profound emotional experience ... and the problem was solved.’<sup>867</sup> The scene described above follows the same logic. Liz just has to forgive herself and let go of her previous relationship in order to move on. She is then ready to learn the final lesson that God dwells within her when she is chosen to work as a hostess during a retreat. Her new-found spiritual serenity and maturity are exemplified in a stereotypical encounter with an animal. In her final scene in India she is writing up her experiences when an elephant approaches her. Liz touches the elephant and the encounter implies that Liz is now in tune with nature.

Throughout the film Liz’s spirituality is represented in a highly stereotypical way. In his comparison of images depicting Buddhism and Islam, Thomas A. Tweed argues that ‘Since the late 1950s, the prevailing image of Buddhist practice has been the solitary meditator, eyes half closed, sitting in the lotus position.’<sup>868</sup> This image is the result of how Buddhism came to the US and Britain in 1900. The religion spread mainly through translations of old Buddhist scriptures which were interpreted in a distorted way: ‘... the Buddha was imagined as being like Jesus in his historicity and reforming impulse, his morality, compassion and sanctity; the truths of Buddhism, like those of Protestant Christianity, could be found in a few founding texts of the tradition, and spiritual advancement was to take place in an individual’s inner experience not through priests or corrupt institutions.’<sup>869</sup> The image of Buddhists practising their religion and reaching a higher spiritual level on their own is an inaccurate representation of real Buddhists who take part in numerous communal rituals but suits

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<sup>866</sup> Lawrence LeShan, *How to Meditate. A Guide to Self-Discovery* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1974), p.27.

<sup>867</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>868</sup> Thomas A. Tweed, “Why are Buddhists so nice? Media representations of Buddhism and Islam in the United States since 1945,” *Material Religion* 4:1 (2008): p.91.

<sup>869</sup> Normand, “Introduction,” p.2.

the tendency in neoliberalist societies to celebrate the individual's independence from authorities.<sup>870</sup>

While the film shows that Liz participates in group practices, she is clearly uncomfortable in these settings. When she goes to a gathering of worshippers in New York with David she looks around and does not join in the group chant. Later at the Ashram in India she cannot follow the pace, is unable to chant the right words and even falls asleep. Even when she meditates with others in the meditation camp she jealously watches her roommate instead of focusing on the meditation. After her stereotypical spiritual epiphany, however, she is able to meditate but does so on her own. In Bali, she is sitting in the lotus position with her eyes closed, embodying the solitary meditator described by Tweed.

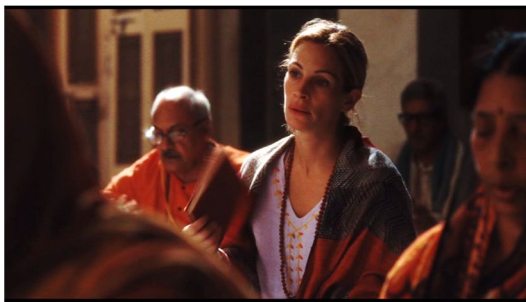


Figure 30: Liz at the communal morning chant

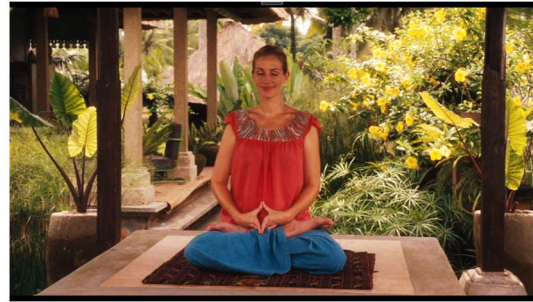


Figure 31: Liz embodies the solitary meditator

Moreover, the film completely dismisses the spiritual journey and even mocks spiritual seekers in scenes with Liz's roommate Corella (Sophie Thompson). When Liz meets her for the first time, Corella is in silence and gestures to Liz seemingly greeting her. As soon as Corella has left the room, Liz asks her teacher Swami Shivananda (Michael Cumpsty) what the gestures mean and he immediately confesses that he does not know. This scene ridicules not just Corella's actions but also the assumption that spiritually minded people can communicate without words. Furthermore, when Corella begins to talk again, her words clearly express her complete disinterest in spiritual accomplishments. She tells Liz that being in silence was a very dull experience but eagerly reassures her that it is very rewarding because it works like a face-lift. Thus, her silence seems to have had no effect on her mind and

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<sup>870</sup> Tweed explains that images of Muslims usually depicted groups of men praying together in a mosque. The individual was lost in the crowd, which was a menacing image in the individualistic US American culture. See Tweed, "Why are Buddhists so nice?" p.91.

spiritual development but merely on her facial muscles, reducing the Ashram to an alternative and exotic spa. It is merely another stop on Liz's journey to her ideal partner.

The countries and cultures in *Eat Pray Love* are also carefully constructed from well-known stereotypes. When Liz walks through the streets of Rome, for instance, she passes a group of men who chase women down the street, harassing them with 'compliments.' In the book Liz devoted an entire passage to this stereotype, explaining that this kind of behaviour does not take place in the streets of Rome anymore.<sup>871</sup> Yet, five years after the book was published, the film resurrects the stereotype because viewers will be familiar with it. The sense of familiarity is further created by showing Liz meet women in different cultures who are like her: 'Ideas of sameness are usually based on shared subjectivity, on thinking and valuing similarly.'<sup>872</sup> In Italy she meets Sofi (Tuva Novotny), a Swedish woman who shares her love for the Italian language. In India Tulsi begins a conversation with her using the following remark: 'Is there anything skinnier in the world than an Indian teenage boy?'<sup>873</sup> Letting Tulsi make a comment that one would typically make about a culture that is not one's own distances her from her own culture and suggests that she shares Liz's outsider status. And finally in Bali Liz bonds with Wayan (Christine Hakim) over their divorces, even though their situations are materially different.

Moreover, all the people Liz meets during the film emphasise that a heterosexual relationship is essential for a woman's happiness. It thus suggests that '... the themes, pleasures, values and lifestyles commonly associated with postfeminism are somehow universally shared, and perhaps more significantly, universally accessible.'<sup>874</sup> In Italy she spends time with her Italian friends who are all in happy relationships. While preparing a thanksgiving dinner, Giovanni's (Luca Argentero) mother (Lidia Biondi), a character that does not appear in the book, first tells her son that Liz must be a lesbian since she does not have a man. When both Sofi and Maria (Elena Arvigo) defend Liz's decision to be single (while Liz remains

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<sup>871</sup> Gilbert, *Eat Pray Love*, pp.70-71.

<sup>872</sup> Margaret R. Miles, *Seeing and Believing. Religion and Values at the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p.68.

<sup>873</sup> In the memoir a similar sentence is part of a description of an Indian teenager: 'if there is anything in this world skinnier than an Indian teenage boy, I'd be afraid to see it.' See Gilbert, *Eat Pray Love*, p.133.

<sup>874</sup> Justine Ashby, "Postfeminism in the British Frame," *Cinema Journal* 44:2 (2005): p.127.

notably silent) Giovanni's mother calls Liz's travels stupid and says that she should instead settle down and get married. Giovanni tells her to stop but her comment remains uncontested. Instead of commenting on it, Liz changes the topic of the conversation. Throughout the scene she remains quiet and smiles with an effort, suggesting that these words hurt her, but also that she cannot argue with this attitude because she might agree with it.

By the time the fourth part in Bali begins the viewer is thus already prepared for Liz to find happiness in form of a relationship. Like in the book, the happy ending is delayed by a very short version of the love triangle. Liz meets Felipe when he runs her off the road after which she immediately takes a dislike to him. When she meets him again at a bar, she ignores him and shows interest in the younger Australian Ian (David Lyons). They drink, dance together and go to the beach where Ian takes off all his clothes to go for a swim. Ian represents youth, excitement but also careless enjoyment. Liz rejects him, deciding that this is not the kind of relationship she wants again. On her way back to the bar she meets Felipe carrying her shoes. He offers to drive her home and the next day brings her a cure for her hangover.

Thus, Felipe is characterised as loving and caring in contrast to the previous men in Liz's life. His backstory reveals that he raised the children while his ex-wife pursued her career. He is in Liz's words 'a good feminist husband' which makes him the perfect match for her. As in *I Don't Know How She Does It*, however, this domestic perfect man is constructed as an exception. When his son (T.J. Power) leaves at the end of his visit, Felipe cries and kisses him on the mouth. His emotional behaviour in this scene serves to emphasise that he is Brazilian. This ambivalence is typical for mainstream romantic comedies. By offering a progressive male lead but stressing his cultural distance, the film leaves it up to viewers to decide if they want to interpret him as a positive role model or if they prefer to dismiss his behaviour as the result of his cultural background.

Following the conventions of a romantic comedy, the couple has to fight before they can be reunited in the end. When Felipe wants to travel to an island together, Liz seems to feel pressured and shouts at him: 'I don't have to love you to prove that I love myself.' Her reaction only makes sense in the context of a romantic comedy because they have to fight about something. Liz is supposedly worried that she will lose her balance if she embarks on a serious relationship with Felipe. In the memoir, Liz found balance between her spiritual life and worldly pleasures but, as mentioned

above, Liz does not have any spiritual balance in the film. Janani Subramanian and Jorie Lagerwey suggest that Liz has to find the balance between her autonomous self and herself as part of a heterosexual couple.<sup>875</sup> Reading Liz's outburst as a defence of self-love, also explains why she has to change her mind. While Liz disappeared into the men in her life at the beginning of the film, meaning she completely lost herself, she has now supposedly reached the other extreme by being single, namely complete self-centredness, which is just as unacceptable in romantic comedies. In order to embark on a new and healthy relationship she needs to find a balance between self-negation and self-centredness to become a complete and fulfilled human being. Thus, in an individualist society love is equated with personal happiness and a successful relationship has to include an affirmation of the self.<sup>876</sup>

In the two adaptations discussed in this chapter, the main protagonists have loving and caring men in their lives who are capable of change. The films also stress that these kinds of men are necessary to allow women to lead happy and fulfilled lives. Nevertheless, both films offer different strategies to undermine their message by either stressing that this behaviour is an exception, by visualising it as a utopian fantasy or by culturally othering the male protagonist. Typical for romantic comedies, the films thus remain ambivalent about the different male roles they offer, allowing the viewers to decide for themselves if they want to consider the changes as valid options or as mere escapist but essentially unrealistic fantasies.

As these analyses have shown, marketability and the actresses portraying the main protagonists play an essential part in the making of these adaptations. Sarah Jessica Parker's star persona resulted in the positive tone of *I Don't Know How She Does It*, turning the adaptation into a celebration of a chaotic but lovable woman who has the necessary know-how to combine motherhood with a high powered career. The marketing of *Eat Pray Love* relied strongly on Julia Roberts's star power and the marketability of spiritual consumer products. The focus of the adaptation has shifted from spiritual enlightenment to romance, allowing Roberts to exhibit her skills as an actress in additional emotional scenes but also stressing on a narrative level that Liz can only be happy with a man who loves her the way she is.

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<sup>875</sup> Janani Subramanian and Jorie Lagerwey, "Food, Sex, Love, and Bodies in "Eat Pray Love" and "Black Swan"," *Studies in Popular Culture* 36:1 (2013): p.9.

<sup>876</sup> Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia*, p.30.

The texts in this chapter explore alternative lives to Bridget's single life. Both first-person narrators in the books deal in different ways with societal pressures. While Kate struggles to combine motherhood with a career, Liz rejects motherhood in favour of spiritual self-discovery. Both books are influenced by their context and predecessors. *I don't know how she does it* is strongly affected by myths about motherhood in the 1990s and Liz's spiritual journey remains firmly embedded in the neoliberal ideology of individualism. Even though *Eat Pray Love* is a memoir, the book draws on the narrative style, plot elements and tone established in *Bridget Jones's Diary* and subsequent chick lit novels. While *I don't know how she does it* is the first mommy lit novel, *Eat Pray Love* has inspired spiritual travel and a range of themed consumer products.

Commercial tie-ins and the interest of lead actresses Sarah Jessica Parker and Julia Roberts facilitated the production of the adaptations. The star power of the actresses led to changes in tone and the plots and is also reflected the marketing of the films. Parker's star persona, the personal experience of screen writer, Aline Brosh McKenna, and changes in discourses about motherhood resulted in a different tone and ending for the adaptation *I Don't Know How She Does It*. The film celebrates the can-do attitude of an individual woman and offers a utopian resolution in the end. Typical of a romantic comedy, the focus in the adaptation *Eat Pray Love* has shifted from finding spiritual fulfilment to celebrating the importance of the right heterosexual relationship for a woman's happiness. Throughout the film Liz's actions and her spiritual development are closely linked to her relationships with men, so that her self-discovery is merely a preparation for a more successful romantic relationship. Thus, like all the books and films discussed in this thesis, the texts analysed in this chapter also celebrate flawed but endearing protagonists. Both Kate and Liz are rewarded in the end with men who love them the way they are and offer them the support they need to lead happy and successful lives.

## Conclusion

‘What I have in mind is the capacity of entertainment to present either complex or unpleasant feelings (e.g. involvement in personal or political events; jealousy, loss of love, defeat) in a way that makes them seem uncomplicated, direct and vivid, not ‘qualified’ or ‘ambiguous’ as day-to-day life makes them, and without intimations of self-deception and pretence.’<sup>877</sup>

It is worth repeating Richard Dyer’s quotation here because it stresses again the importance of entertainment texts. This thesis has shown that the books and films analysed here address uncertainties, issues and societal pressures in women’s lives by adapting and extending themes, characters, narrative style and the plot structure revived in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and its adaptation. Moreover, it argues that popular literature and film are firmly embedded in contemporary discourses and influenced by the larger ideological context of neoliberalism and postfeminism. The strong focus on the individual and an interest in the everyday has led to the emergence of chick lit as a new literary genre and a new romantic comedy heroine.

The first chapter argued that the financial success of *Bridget Jones’s Diary* was largely the result of Bridget’s popularity as a character. As a result, the sequel *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* and both adaptations focus on this aspect and celebrate Bridget by depicting her flaws and mishaps, suggesting that she is a lovable and endearing person *because* of her imperfections. This theme is adopted by all of the books and films analysed in this thesis. They focus strongly on their female protagonists or, in the case of the self-help book, women in general and their ability to take charge of their lives and their romantic relationships. The female protagonists are all flawed in the novels and clumsy in the films. Even though some of the novels and films do not foreground the romance plot, almost all protagonists find the right man, meaning a man who loves them the way they are, in the end. This theme even

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<sup>877</sup> Dyer, *Only Entertainment*, p.23.

crosses genre boundaries into non-fiction. In the self-help book analysed in the third chapter women are reassured that they deserve men who love them despite their imperfections, and even Elizabeth Gilbert's memoir reflects this notion when she ends the book with finding a man who suits and supports her new life style.

In the films this theme is visually explored in slapstick scenes, in which the female protagonists are repeatedly shown in clumsy and embarrassing situations. The male protagonists witness their mishaps and fall in love with them not despite but, just like Mark Darcy in the adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, because of their flaws. It is these imperfections, the books and films suggest, that make the protagonists unique. Thus, the texts analysed in this thesis offer their female readers and viewers the reassuring fantasy that the right man is out there for every imperfect woman.

The celebration of the female protagonists also results in the active silencing of men. In the chick lit novels men rarely speak for themselves and are always narrated from the point of view of the female narrator. Even in the self-help book written by a man the author offers instructions to his *female* readers, implying that they have the sole agency in romantic relationships. Like in the Bridget Jones adaptations, men are also reduced to a plot element or actively silenced in the adaptations *The Devil Wears Prada* and *The Nanny Diaries*. While the other adaptations are all centred on romance plots in which men change for the woman (two of the subplots in *He's Just Not That Into You* and one in *The Jane Austen Book Club*) or are necessary for their happiness (*Confessions of a Shopaholic*, *I Don't Know How She Does It* and *Eat Pray Love*), the female characters remain the focal point of these films. The women remain in charge and decide about the fate of their relationships. In a still largely misogynist media climate in which women are belittled and objectified, these genres aimed at female readers and viewers, offer a safe and reassuring haven by depicting women who have control over their lives and relationships, have the option to improve themselves and men who solely exist to reassure and love them, not just despite but because of their imperfections.

The adaptation *Bridget Jones's Diary* was one of the first millennial women's blockbusters and illustrated the increasingly important role of marketability for adaptations based on books for women. By being adaptations, the films already draw on an existing fan base, namely the readers of the adapted texts. The contextual analyses, including book reviews and the industrial context examined in the four chapters of this thesis, focused on different aspects of this development. The



adaptations based on Fielding's novels discussed in the first chapter capitalized on the popularity of Bridget as a character. The texts analysed in chapter two offer voyeuristic insights into the fashion industry, the lives of New York socialites and the life of a flawed and amusing individual. The multi-protagonist adaptations examined in the third chapter depict contradictory discourses about love and offer a variety of identity positions by combining multiple storylines to widen their appeal, while the fourth chapter explored the importance of female stars and their star personas for the marketability of and plot changes in the adaptations.

By analysing a variety of adapted texts and adaptations aimed at female readers and viewers this thesis has examined how *Bridget Jones's Diary* and its adaptation did not just introduce certain themes to literature and film that were then adapted but also a specific writing style which influenced subsequent texts across media and genre boundaries. The first chapter illustrated that readers identified with Bridget as a narrator, an identification facilitated by the diary format of the novel. The chick lit novels and the memoir are all told in first-person narration and use various other techniques to create a sense of community and shared experiences, such as plural pronouns which seemingly include the reader (*The Jane Austen Book Club*). Even the self-help book contains personal narratives from the female co-author and fictional women to reassure readers that they are not alone with their problems. Some of the adaptations also employ techniques from the woman's film in order to mimic the closeness to the main protagonist. Voice over narrations, fantasy sequences and memories are frequently used to give viewers an insight into the minds of the characters. In contrast, the refusal to use these techniques in *The Devil Wears Prada* distances the film from the unpopular narrator in the novel. By using these narrative and filmic techniques, the books and films discussed in this thesis offer readers and viewers a sense of community.

Analysing adapted texts and adaptations ranging over the course of fifteen years shows that the adaptation process is neither linear nor a mere translation from adapted text to adaptation. Chick lit novels and also the memoir analysed here rely on the romance plot originating from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and revived in the Bridget Jones novels and films, to reduce the love stories and the role of the male protagonist to an absolute minimum, thus freeing narrative space to explore other topics. Two of the films (*The Nanny Diaries* and *The Devil Wears Prada*) use the same technique to free narrative space and focus on the protagonists' identity creation by

choosing the right employment while the multi-protagonist romantic comedies have to rely on these conventions to be able to combine numerous subplots. The remaining adaptations all focus strongly on the protagonists' romantic relationships, stressing that these are necessary for a woman's happiness but also promising that the perfect man is out there. By sharing narratives and stereotypical characters, the texts are also connected to each other beyond the adapted text and adaptation pairing. In addition, the analysis of book reviews and changes in discourse has shown that fidelity to the adapted text is unnecessary and in some cases, such as *The Devil Wears Prada* and *I Don't Know How She Does It*, deliberately avoided.

By using an intertextual discursive approach and analysing both the adapted texts and adaptations as texts in their own right, this thesis has argued that the popular culture texts analysed here function as sites of the production and circulation of discourses about gender and therefore reflect, but also contribute, to changes in these discourses. Analysing these contemporary texts as a group has revealed that the process of adaptation is strongly influenced by dominant discourses embedded in neoliberalist ideology and values. These dominant discourses influence a variety of texts across genre and media boundaries. The neoliberalist focus on the individual is represented in the celebration of the female protagonists in the books and films. The first chapter examined Bridget as a representative of postfeminism. The postfeminist key concept of identity creation through choice was further explored in the second chapter by analysing chick lit novels and their adaptations that focus on the choice of employment. The third chapter argued that changes in discourses about love are intertwined with the therapeutic discourse and illustrated how these discourses influence a self-help book, a novel and their multi-protagonist romantic comedies. The fourth chapter analysed how changes in discourses about motherhood have led to plot changes in the adaptation of *I Don't Know How She Does It*, while spiritual development remains firmly embedded in neoliberalist ideology in a memoir and its adaptation.

By focusing on genres aimed at a predominantly female audience, the thesis argues that discourses and the wider ideological context of neoliberalism result in narratives and the depiction of ideal women and men that are not restricted to specific genres. The focus on flawed individuals resulted in the reappearance an updated version of the screwball comedy heroine and the revival of the plot from *Pride and Prejudice*. Using this well-known romance plot also allowed some books and films to

reduce it to a minimum in order to focus on the female protagonists. Genre conventions, narratives and stereotypical main protagonists have spread from chick lit to romantic comedies, to self-help books and even memoirs.

This thesis has contributed to adaptation, popular culture and feminist media studies by analysing a group of adapted texts and adaptations aimed at predominantly female readers and viewers. While this research has included the reception of the adapted texts and the production context of the adaptations, further work is needed in this area. Simone Murray's book *The Adaptation Industry* focuses on the industrial context of adaptations, arguing that it is as important as the ideological context, but remains very general.<sup>878</sup> The thesis also uses textual, discursive and ideological analysis and therefore can only discuss the ideal reader and viewer of these books and films as implied in the texts. How readers and viewers consume and make sense of these texts is beyond the scope of the methods used in this thesis and needs to be explored in future research projects. An ethnographic study of chick lit readers, like Janice Radway's study of romance readers, could explore if they identify with the protagonists and their problems.<sup>879</sup> More work is also needed on the impact romantic comedies have on people's perceptions of love and how this influences their relationships. Eva Illouz's research illustrated how couples drew on the romance narrative as depicted in advertisements and films to narrate their own relationships and it would be interesting to see if this has changed since her book was published in the late 1990s.<sup>880</sup>

The potential influence of films in general and romantic comedies in particular on their viewers is increasingly researched in the social sciences. Veronica Hefner and Barbara J. Wilson, for instance, combined a content analysis of contemporary romantic comedies with a large scale survey of undergraduate students. They found that participants who watched the films in order to learn about relationships endorsed romantic ideals more than participants who did not watch the films to learn.<sup>881</sup> The edited collection *The Cinematic Mirror for Psychology and Life Coaching* is based on the concept that cinema reflects and shapes life and the contributions to the anthology

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<sup>878</sup> Murray, *The Adaptation Industry*.

<sup>879</sup> See Radway, *Reading the Romance*.

<sup>880</sup> Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia*.

<sup>881</sup> Veronica Hefner and Barbara J. Wilson, "From love at first sight to soul mate: The influence of romantic ideals in popular films on young people's beliefs about relationships," *Communication Monographs* 80:2 (2013): pp.150-175.

offer suggestions on how to use this in a therapeutic context.<sup>882</sup> The website *cinematherapy.com* is a further example for this approach.<sup>883</sup> Thus, while psychology is already embracing the importance of romantic comedies for people's understanding of love and romantic relationships, film studies, culture studies and audience studies still need to explore this field of interest.

In addition, this thesis has focused on books and films aimed at female consumers. It would be interesting to expand the focus on popular books and films with male protagonists aimed at predominantly male or male and female consumers and analyse how these texts reflect and reproduce dominant gendered discourses. Hannah Hamad's article "Hollywood Fatherhood: Paternal Postfeminism in Contemporary Popular Cinema" examines postfeminist masculinity in Hollywood films but restricts the analysis to the depiction of fatherhood.<sup>884</sup> Ananya Mukherjea argues that casting a vampire as the hero in vampire-human romances allows these texts to celebrate old-fashioned masculinities.<sup>885</sup> Their research could be expanded to adaptations and analyse how texts, such as Dan Brown's highly successful and male centred Robert Langdon novels and their adaptations,<sup>886</sup> are influenced by dominant neoliberalist and postfeminist discourses.

Most of the books discussed in this thesis have sequels, demonstrating the adaptability of the characters and story lines. Lauren Weisberger published the sequel *Revenge Wears Prada* in which she offers readers the romantic happy end the first novel withheld when Andy and Alex become a couple again.<sup>887</sup> In *The Nanny Returns* Nan faces her past when she meets Grayer and helps him force his mother to look after his younger brother.<sup>888</sup> Sophie Kinsella's Shopaholic series now consists of 8 novels, following Becky Bloomwood through marriage, pregnancy and in her latest adventure

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<sup>882</sup> Mary Banks Gregerson, ed. *The cinematic mirror for psychology and life coaching* (New York: Springer, 2010).

<sup>883</sup> Birgit Wolz, "cinematherapy.com," accessed November 16, 2016, <http://www.cinematherapy.com/>.

<sup>884</sup> Hamad, "Hollywood Fatherhood."

<sup>885</sup> Ananya Mukherjea, "My Vampire Boyfriend: Postfeminism, "Perfect" Masculinity, and the Contemporary Appeal of Paranormal Romance," *Studies in Popular Culture* 33:2 (2011): pp.1-20.

<sup>886</sup> See for example Dan Brown, *Angels and Demons* (London and New York: Corgi, 2000) or his most recent novel *Inferno* (London and New York: Corgi, 2014) and their adaptations *Angels and Demons* (Ron Howard, 2009) and *Inferno* (Ron Howard, 2016).

<sup>887</sup> Lauren Weisberger, *Revenge Wears Prada* (London: HarperCollins, 2013).

<sup>888</sup> Nicola Kraus and Emma McLaughlin, *Nanny Returns* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009).

to a rescue trip to Las Vegas.<sup>889</sup> Greg Behrendt co-wrote another book based on the same premise as *he's just not that into you*,<sup>890</sup> and Elizabeth Gilbert muses in *Committed* about marriage when she realises she has to marry Felipe if they want to create a life together in the US.<sup>891</sup> The sequels benefited from the success of the first novels but even more so from the success of the adaptations to generate sales. The changes made in the sequels were sometimes influenced by the adaptations. Lauren Weisberger, for instance, distances herself from Andy by writing the entire sequel in the third person.

As I am writing this concluding chapter and twenty years after the publication of *Bridget Jones's Diary* the third Bridget Jones film has just finished its release in cinemas. The film follows but is not based on Fielding's third book *Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy* published in 2013<sup>892</sup> and both sequels demonstrate Bridget's resilience and adaptability as a character. Following the success of mommy lit novels, *Mad About the Boy* explores Bridget's life after marriage and her struggles as a widow and single mother. The book follows the same plot structure as *Bridget Jones's Diary*: Bridget is going out with a fun but essentially unsuitable man and eventually replaces him with a silent but responsible one. In the film *Bridget Jones's Baby* (Sharon Maguire, 2016) Bridget is pregnant but does not know who the father is. The film follows her turbulent pregnancy and focuses on the rivalry between Mark (Colin Firth) and Jack (Patrick Dempsey), thus including elements of a bromance.

Like its predecessors, *Bridget Jones's Baby* was highly anticipated by and popular with fans<sup>893</sup> but frequently criticised in reviews. Jo Piazza, for example, explains that Fielding's character was an inspiration for her to write what she refers to as 'lady lit' and that she was really looking forward to the latest Bridget Jones film but was disappointed because she had expected the character to be more grown up.<sup>894</sup> Meanwhile the film critic for *The New Yorker* Anthony Lane has been awaiting the

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<sup>889</sup> Sophie Kinsella, *Shopaholic to the Rescue* (London: Black Swan, 2016).

<sup>890</sup> Greg Behrendt and Amiira Ruotola-Behrendt, *It's Called a Breakup Because It's Broken: The Smart Girl's Breakup Buddy* (New York and London: Harper Element, 2006).

<sup>891</sup> Elizabeth Gilbert, *Committed. A Love Story* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2010).

<sup>892</sup> Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2013).

<sup>893</sup> The film grossed over 211 million US dollars. See Box Office Mojo, "Bridget Jones's Baby," accessed December 10, 2016, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=bridgetjonesbaby.htm>.

<sup>894</sup> Jo Piazza, "I Think I Hate *Bridget Jones's Baby*. Time to grow up Bridge," *Elle*, March 28, 2016.

film with ‘a dark dread’.<sup>895</sup> It was followed by the hastily written novelization *Bridget Jones’s Baby: The Diaries*, released in October 2016, which narrates Bridget’s mishaps during her pregnancy.<sup>896</sup> Unlike its predecessors, the film *Bridget Jones’s Baby* is not an adaptation but is instead followed by a novelisation, demonstrating that Bridget as a character has transcended her novels and continues to adapt to contemporary trends. Thus, like the books and adaptations analysed in this thesis, the sequels were influenced by changes and trends in literature and film.

Female oriented big budget films are still rare and are not as successful as big budget blockbusters such as superhero films. *Bridget Jones’s Baby*, for instance, is merely on rank 31 for 2016 and ‘only’ grossed US\$211 million worldwide.<sup>897</sup> Nevertheless, adaptations based on literature by women with strong female protagonists are produced on a regular basis and include a variety of genres. Examples include the romantic comedies *One for the Money* (Anne Robinson, 2012) based on the chick lit novel with the same title by Janet Evanovich,<sup>898</sup> *Think Like a Man* (Tim Story, 2012) based on the self-help book *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man* by Steve Harvey,<sup>899</sup> the romantic drama *Me Before You* (Thea Sharrock, 2016) based on the romance novel *Me Before You* by Jojo Moyes,<sup>900</sup> the psychological thriller *Gone Girl* (David Fincher, 2014) based on Gillian Flynn’s thriller novel *Gone Girl*<sup>901</sup> and the mystery thriller drama *The Girl on the Train* (Tate Taylor, 2016) based on Paula Hawkins’s novel with the same title.<sup>902</sup> Like the texts analysed in this thesis, these adaptations are also part of the wider neoliberal and postfeminist context. In order to understand how the adapted texts and adaptations include as well as contest contemporary notions of gender one must continue to analyse these texts, the reception of the adapted texts, the industrial context of the adaptations and their surrounding discourses.

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<sup>895</sup> Anthony Lane, ““Eight Days a Week” and “Bridget Jones’s Baby”,” *The New Yorker*, September 26, 2016.

<sup>896</sup> Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones’s Baby: The Diaries* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2016).

<sup>897</sup> Box Office Mojo, “2016 Worldwide Grosses,” accessed December 10, 2016, <http://www.boxoffice mojo.com/yearly/ chart/?view2=worldwide&yr=2016&p=.htm>.

<sup>898</sup> Janet Evanovich, *One for the Money* (New York: Scribner Book Company, 1994).

<sup>899</sup> Steve Harvey, *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man* (New York: Amistad, 2009).

<sup>900</sup> Jojo Moyes, *Me Before You* (London: Penguin, 2012).

<sup>901</sup> Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2012).

<sup>902</sup> Paula Hawkins, *The Girl on the Train* (London: Doubleday, 2015).

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## Filmography

“Pick-A-Little, Talk-A-Little.” *Sex and the City*, season 6, episode 4. July 13, 2003.  
USA: HBO.

*Ally McBeal*. TV Series. US: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1997-2002.

*Angels and Demons*. Directed by Ron Howard. USA: Imagine Entertainment, 2009.  
Film.

*Becoming Jane*. Directed by Julian Jarrold. UK/Ireland: HaWay Films, 2007. Film.

*Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*. Directed by Beeban Kidron. UK: Working Title,  
2004. Film

*Bridget Jones’s Baby*. Directed by Sharon Maguire. UK/US: Working Title, 2016.  
Film.

*Bridget Jones’s Diary*. Directed by Sharon Maguire. UK: Working Title, 2001. Film.

*Confessions of a Shopaholic*. Directed by P.J. Hogan. USA: Touchstone Pictures,  
2009. Film.

*Eat, Pray, Love*. Directed by Ryan Murphy. USA: Plan B Entertainment, 2010. Film.

*Ella Enchanted*. Directed by Tommy O’Haver. US/Ireland/UK: Columbia Pictures,  
2004. Film.

*Fatal Attraction*. Directed by Adrian Lyne. US: Jaffe/Lansing Productions, 1987.  
Film.

*Four Weddings and a Funeral*. Directed by Mike Newell. UK: Polygram filmed  
Entertainment, 1994. Film.

*Gone Girl*. Directed by David Fincher. US: Regency Enterprises, 2014. Film.

*He’s Just Not That into You*. Directed by Ken Kwapis. USA: Flower Films, 2009.  
Film.

*Hookers Hustlers Pimps and their Johns*. Directed by Beeban Kidron. UK:  
Wonderland Films, 1993. Documentary film.

*How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*. Directed by Donald Petrie. USA: Paramount Pictures,  
2003. Film.

*I don’t know how she does it*. Directed by Douglas McGrath. USA: The Weinstein  
Company, 2011. Film.

*Lost in Austen*. Directed by Dan Zeff. UK: ITV, 2008. TV miniseries.

*Love Actually*. Directed by Richard Curtis. UK: Working Title, 2003. Film.

*Mansfield Park*. Directed by Patricia Rozema. UK: HAL Films, 1999. Film.

*Marry Poppins*. Directed by Robert Stevenson. US: Walt Disney Productions, 1964. Film.

*Me Before You*. Directed by Thea Sharrock. USA: New Line Cinema, 2016. Film.

*Mean Girls*. Directed by Mark Waters. USA: M.G. Films, 2004. Film.

*Notting Hill*. Directed by Roger Michell. UK: PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, 1999. Film.

*One for the Money*. Directed by Julie Anne Robinson. USA: Lakeshore Entertainment, 2012. Film.

*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. Directed by Burr Steers. UK/US: Cross Creek Pictures, 2016. Film.

*Pride and Prejudice*. Directed by Simon Langton. UK: BBC, 1995. TV mini-series.

*Sense and Sensibility*. Directed by Ang Lee. US: Columbia Pictures, 1995. Film.

*Sex and the City*. Directed by Michael Patrick King. USA: HBO Films, 2008. Film.

*Sex and the City*. USA: HBO, 1998-2004. TV programme.

*Sex and the Single Girl*. Directed by Richard Quine. US: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1964. Film.

*The Devil Wears Prada*. Directed by David Frankel. USA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 2006. Film.

*The Girl on the Train*. Directed by Tate Taylor. USA: DreamWorks Pictures, 2016. Film.

*The Jane Austen Book Club*. Directed by Robin Swicord. USA: Sony Pictures Classics, 2007. Film.

*The Nanny Diaries*. Directed by Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini. USA: The Weinstein Company, 2007. Film.

*The Princess Diaries*. Directed by Garry Marshall. USA: Walt Disney Pictures, 2001. Film.

*The Wedding Crashers*. Directed by David Dobkin. USA: Tapestry Films, 2005. Film.

*Think Like a Man*. Directed by Tim Story. USA: Rainforest Films, 2012. Film.

*Valentine's Day*. Directed by Gary Marshall. USA: New Line Cinema, 2010. Film.

*What to Expect When You're Expecting*. Directed by Kirk Jones. USA: Alcon Entertainment, 2012. Film.