A Textual Analysis of Book Reviews of Critically Acclaimed & Chick Lit Novels, 1998-2008

by

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Abstract

This study explores the hierarchy of symbolic value between literary and genre fiction through a discourse analysis of book reviews of chick lit and critically acclaimed books published between 1998-2008 in leading review publications such as *The New York Times*, *Library Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and *Booklist*. Genre fiction is typically accorded less symbolic value than literary fiction, and, at times, distaste for genre fiction has lead to distaste for its audience. Evidence for these assertions can be found in the type of language employed in book reviews of chick lit and critically acclaimed novels, especially in the use of adjectives, opinion words, as well as terms used to describe writing techniques, characters, authors, and reading publics.

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Introduction

In *The City of Words*, a lecture broadcast on Canadian public radio in 2007 and later published as a book under the same title, Alberto Manguel argues that one of the by-products of the book industry's "set industrial model" in creating genre fiction is that it "trains" readers to expect a certain level of book:

> A large portion of the reading public is therefore trained to expect a certain kind of 'comfortable' book and, what is far more noxious, to read in a certain 'comfortable' way, looking for short descriptions, patterns of dialogue copied from television sitcoms, familiar brand names, and plots that may follow convoluted entanglements but never allow for complexity or ambiguity (131).

He elaborates, arguing that in addition to reader training in this model, authors are also being trained to produce certain types of work, aided by the editorial process:

> It infantilizes both writers and readers by making the former believe that their creations must be licked into shape by someone who knows better, and by convincing the latter that they are not clever enough to read more intelligent and complex narrations (134).

Manguel further argues that not only are readers and writers of genre fiction "infantilized," but that this process overall comes with a higher cost, that "high art" is less likely to be produced or created:

> The controller in Aldous Huxley's 1932 novel *Brave New World* explains these tactics succinctly: 'that's the price we pay for stability. You've got to chose between happiness and what people used to call high art. We've sacrificed the high art' (134).

While Manguel has used stronger language than some to make his points, he is not alone in arguing them: not only have others argued that genre fiction is formulaic and that many who read it have expectations of a certain type of read, but also that it is widely accepted that genre fiction is separate from "high art."

Ken Gelder has gone so far as to suggest that "popular fiction is best conceived as the opposite of Literature" (11). Gelder draws loosely from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, developing a definition

of high or highbrow cultural production as "indifferent to the buying and reading/viewing public, often openly contemptuous of the marketplace and demand for profit, underwritten by a sense of 'creativity' and 'originality', and using the language or discourse of 'art'" (13). Low cultural production, meanwhile, is "open to mass audiences and necessarily caught up in the logic of the marketplace, which means it remains conscious of its viewers/readers, and is determined to please them"(13).

Perhaps it is because of this distinction between high and low fiction that social hierarchies exist regarding reading choices. Writing in the *New York Times*, Curtis Sittenfeld (2005) reviewed Melissa Banks's *The Wonder Spot*: "[the] novel is highly readable, sometimes funny and entirely unchallenging; you're not one iota smarter after finishing it." Sittenfeld, after outlining a number of criteria, describes the book as being "chick lit," though she writes that the term may be insulting, especially given the book she was reviewing had a "literary" bend: "To suggest that another woman's ostensibly literary novel is chick lit feels catty, not unlike calling another woman a slut– doesn't the term basically bring down all of us?"

This distaste for chick lit is evident in scholarly literature on the genre. Stephanie Harzewski (2006) observes that, "As increasing numbers of titles are pigeonholed into this classification, showcased in bookstore displays titled 'It's a Girl Thing', this transatlantic media phenomenon has become the recipient of increased ire by women critics, fearful ... of frothiness becoming the only suitable form of literary expression" (30). Arguably, this literary backlash is part of the phenomenon noted by James English (2005) in *The Economy of Prestige*:

> Since 1980, when the National Book Critics Circle Award joined the Pulitzer and the NBA as a premier American fiction prize, not a single number-one bestseller has ever won any of these major awards. The 'blockbusters' have come to dominate the top-ten lists, while prizes have supported a more and more distinct hierarchy of symbolic value (331).

And yet, English notes, the logic behind these prizes is often commercial, though much less explicitly than the popular fiction production system.

This paper will explore the critical response to genre or popular fiction, looking at what English called the "hierarchy of symbolic value" that exists between one form of genre fiction, chick lit novels, and novels considered to be the "best" in their year of publication, acclaimed by critics

and thought of as literary. The first section reviews literature on popular fiction, reading, and book culture, giving further context to the argument that there is a distinction between genre or popular fiction and critically acclaimed literary fiction.

The second section of this paper presents a textual analysis of book reviews of over 246 titles published between 1998-2008, looking at reviews of titles identified by external sources, like scholars or journalists, as either chick lit or critically acclaimed literary fiction. I hypothesize that the language used in the book reviews of the chick lit novels will be notably different than the language used in the reviews of the critically acclaimed literary fiction titles. Furthermore, these linguistic differences will support the idea of a hierarchy of symbolic value: some books are valued more than others, and vice versa. Reasons for these differences will also be explored—for example, what is it that makes a novel considered "worthy" of literary status? Why are some books accorded this status and some not?

Most importantly, reviews will be analyzed for sentiments of a work's audience. Does the language used in reviews of one type of work reflect a distaste for that work's audience absent from reviews of the other type of work? It is expected that the Chick Lit reviews will contain more unfavorable opinion statements about the work's audience than the Critically Acclaimed reviews—and that the reverse will also be true. While this research will not determine whether reviews create or perpetuate these sentiments, that reviews contain them indicates that they may be widely held, particularly by those who control access to books, like booksellers and librarians.

Literature Review

Reading and Writing on a Mass Scale

Rolf Engelsing's theory of a "reading revolution" posits that slightly before the Industrial Revolution, there was a shift in reading practices (Hall 1996, 185). Leah Price (2004) explains: "Toward the end of the eighteenth century… the proliferation of new books gave rise to a model of 'extensive' reading—skimming and skipping, devouring and discarding—from which we have yet to emerge" (317). This skimming and skipping, this "extensive" reading, which Manguel thinks of as "unessential" and "mindless," is thought to facilitate less intellectual growth than more "intensive" reading.

In her work, Revolution and the Word: the Rise of the Novel in America, Cathy Davidson (2004) attributes the growth of mass readership to three major changes around the beginning of the nineteenth century: first, a rise in reading; second, improvement of distribution; and third, improvements in publishing technology.[1] She summarizes:

> In a synergistic fashion, at the same time that more and more people became readers of novels, more novels became available as distribution improved and, even more, as the capital-intensive nature of publishing technology, achieved by the mid-nineteenth century, required that a system of mass production and mass consumption replace the older system of book production for essentially a small group of readers (119).

John Brewer has linked eighteenth-century British novelist Samuel Richardson's success not to technological advances, but to the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695. This allowed for a climate in about the 1760s where there were more than thirty London periodicals, making it possible for one to become a professional writer (244). Writers then were "divided into two radically different camps. There were those who wrote to edify, amuse and instruct but who shunned monetary reward and there were those who wrote for money" (245). Clive Bloom confirms these disparate characterizations of authorship:

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[1] Clive Bloom offers a simple explanation for "new forms of rapid distribution": "railways" (2008, 32). Arguably, lending libraries can be included in new forms of distribution. Janice Radway adds "steamboats" to the list (22)

> …authorship before the last quarter of the nineteenth century fell mainly into two categories—either one was an anonymous hack producing broadsheets and chapbooks or one was an anonymous "lady" or "gentleman" whose interest in fiction might be serious but was essentially that of a dedicated amateur (this was no reflection on artistic competence)… (2008, 32-33).

Brewer argues this division introduced a "new hierarchy of literary endeavour" as it pertained to fiction (246). The tier of work considered better by writers like Johnson had an "emphasis on originality and novelty…" and this value system "underscored the special relationship that the author bore to his text" (246)—whether or not the intent behind it was to earn money or to edify its readers.

This sentiment holds today. Popular fiction, Ken Gelder writes, is a "kind of industrial practice… A writer's output— how productive he or she is, how much 'labour' he or she undertakes—is thus of prime importance"(15), rather than the focus on creativity and originality. Gelder quotes Sir Walter Scott, from the introduction to *The Fortunes of Nigel*, written in 1822:

> I do say it, in spite of Adam Smith and his followers, that a successful author is a productive labourer, and that his works constitute as effectual a part of the public wealth as that which is created by any other manufacture (15).[2]

Gelder observes that many popular fiction writers can be "incredibly prolific, churning out one, two, three or more novels a year and maintaining their output over long periods of time" (15). The emphasis for the popular fiction writer is not on a single work of originality, but rather on an overall body of work. Particularly when situated within a genre, popular fiction is not meant to be considered alone. Once finished reading a title, it is hoped that the reader is compelled "to go in search of the next example of the genre they happen to be reading" (41). As such, a characteristic of popular fiction is that it is meant to be "read quickly, sometimes in one sitting… 'I couldn't wait to get to the end' is a typical reader's sentiment" (37). This contrasts with serious fiction; Gelder quotes J. Hillis Miller: "Good reading… also demands slow reading" (37). In a statement that seems to support Manguel's argument about "training of readers," Cushman

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[2] Gelder comments: "It is worth noting, in passing, that all this is established well over a century before Adorno and Horkheimer begin to speak of a 'culture industry'"(15).

Schurman and Johnson note that standardization of writing leads to standardization of consumption. In this process, there is a sort of dumbing down of a work, streamlining a story to make it both easy and fast to read:

> As one critic remarked, appealing to a mass market involves "[streamlining] the aesthetic vehicle of… ideas to make it a common carrier so that the average man could ride along without effort." Charging that such streamlining takes the form of more simplistic writing with heavy reliance on dialogue, short sentences and paragraphs for fast reading, a predilection for formula to produce "more of the same" or an emphasis on sensation or sentiment for easy emotional thrills, critics aver that reading such fiction requires little skill or intellectual effort. As one sniffed, "Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money—not even their time" (xiii).

The notion that there are different reading practices for serious and popular fiction, that one is read while "at leisure," quickly, and the other "'seriously' and educationally," slowly, seems to be the root of the value scheme between popular and literary fiction. Not only that the writing itself has a different intent, but that these differences, somehow, affect the minds of the readers. By reading one, the readers is being enhanced; and by reading the other, one is diminished. Gelder writes of genre fiction and literature: "the former empties or 'vacates' the mind, while the latter is supposed to fill it up" (36).

Value & the Audience

Some have connected the distaste for popular fiction to Puritan ideals and a distaste for entertainment in general. As Victor Nell puts it, "Since the sixteenth century, Western views of the correct use of time and the sinfulness of worldly pleasure have been powerfully influenced by Protestantism and especially… Puritanism" (1988, 28). This may be especially true for reading. Even before the rise of reading on a mass scale, Richard Altick noted that "Protestantism … is a book religion. From the time it began to transform English life in the sixteenth century it laid emphasis upon the practice of private reading" (2002, 344). And connection to the scripture was especially important for Puritans (344-345). Nell summarizes:

> These values are also reflected in the modern conviction that pleasures must be earned by hard work and that the deepest pleasure is consequent upon suffering—for example, the exhilaration of the climber standing exhausted on

> the mountain peak, or the satisfaction of the reader who has just finished *Moby Dick* (28).

Other scholars have different explanations. Relatively more simply, Clive Bloom argues that anti-popular/mass sentiment is a subversion of pre-literacy class structures:

> The vast new pool of readers created by elementary education produced a huge new market for literary entertainment and printed information. These new readers from the working and lower middle classes wanted entertainment and escape above all. For their social 'betters' the literacy of these new readers was little more than a new illiteracy and thus the conceptual framework of literacy… subtly shifted to separate the classes. It made illegitimate much of mass public taste (32).[3]

Gelder traces the sentiment back to authors themselves. He writes that for the novelist Henry James, "the biggest threat to Literature's future was in fact popular fiction itself" (17). This fiction, for James, was absorbed by the "millions for whom taste is but an obscure, confused, immediate instinct"(18). Bloom continues this look at authors' distaste of mass culture, offering examples of a "cruel snobbishness" (10):

> By the 1880s, Thomas Hardy thought that the masses were mere 'machines' and by 1908, D.H. Lawrence was almost psychotic in his need to cleanse the world of them. 'If I had my way, I would build a lethal chamber as big as the Crystal Palace…'(10-11).

Gelder refers to this as "literary elitism" writing: "it is still not uncommon even today for high literary folk to think of readers of popular fiction as tasteless and sensuous (rather than tasteful and intellectual)" (18). Jonathan Franzen, author of the critically acclaimed *The Corrections* (2001), also wrote an essay for *Harper's* magazine in 1996. The essay complained: "the American 'mainstream' no longer seems interested in Literature and literary values"(Gelder 25). Franzen cites the appearance of writer Stephen King on the cover of *Time* magazine as an

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[3] This class structure and dislike of "mass" may be coloured by what Christine Pawley offers as a "Malthusian fear of 'population' that emerged in the aftermath of the French Revolution" (148).

example, arguing that "the dollar is now the yardstick of cultural authority, and an organ like *Time*, which long ago aspired to shape the national taste, now seems … to reflect it" (Gelder 25).

In a seemingly shocking twist, some years later, Oprah's Book Club, the largest book club in the world, selected Franzen's novel, *The Corrections* to be endorsed, bringing his work to the mainstream. Selection by Oprah "is a lead-pipe-cinch guarantee…[of] sales of about 750,000 copies," according to journalist Jonathan Yardley of the *Washington Post* (Gelder 25). Perplexingly, Franzen initially "refused to allow his novel… to be endorsed," which Yardley described as "a move so stupid as to defy comprehension"(Gelder 25). Gelder offers, however, that Franzen's decision was indeed comprehensible. "It rests upon Literature's ambivalence towards (or even downright disdain for) the marketplace" (25). Franzen was "keen to distance himself as much as possible from the culture of the 'blockbuster novel'" which is rooted in "exactly the thing with which popular fiction is most willingly affiliated: entertainment" (26).

Ted Striphas offers some background to Gelder's statements:

> In a series of interviews [Franzen] gave while on tour in the autumn of 2001, he expressed misgivings about having been brought into the Oprah's Book Club fold. He seemed troubled, first of all, by the allegedly mediocre company he and *The Corrections* henceforth would be compelled to keep as associates of the book club… Franzen elaborated on the reasons underlying this sense of conflict in an interview published in the *Oregonian*: "I feel like I'm solidly in the high-art literary tradition."… Franzen later claimed to have misspoken (130-131).

Indeed, it is helpful to note that it is authors who largely determine whether or not their work is meant to be popular or literary, presumably by the intention they have while writing. Bloom summarizes:

> Yet 'serious' fiction may also sell well, blurring the line between trash bestsellerdom and so-called quality bestsellerdom. And who better to decide what and what is not serious but the authors of such fiction. Thus, serious fiction is very often self-conscious and self-defining (2).

Blurring Boundaries

Others have not been so quick to dismiss Oprah's Book Club and its influence. In fact, in 1999, the National Book Foundation, which gives out the ostensibly literary National Book

Award, honored Winfrey "to the staggering success of the TV book club format" (English 34). James English writes that "far from shunning the Oprah club as a pseudo-prize and a threatening encroachment, the foundation saw it as an opportunity to bolster the television appeal of its own prize"(35). Along this vein, in 2003, similarly, Stephen King was awarded the National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters (Gelder 159). In his acceptance speech, King addressed the controversy in his being awarded the reward, and complimented the National Book Foundation Board:

> I salute [them], who took a huge risk in giving this award to a man many people see as a rich hack. For far too long the so-called popular writers of this country and the so-called literary writers have stared at each other with animosity and a willful lack of understanding… (as qtd. in Gelder 161)

There was backlash against the decision. Academic Harold Bloom wrote:

> The decision… is extraordinary, another low in the shocking process of dumbing down our cultural life… The publishing industry has stooped very low to bestow on King a lifetime award that has previously gone to the novelists Saul Bellow and Philip Roth…By awarding it to King they recognize nothing but the commercial value of his books, which sell in the millions but do little more for humanity than keep the publishing world afloat (as qtd. in Gelder 160).

In accepting her own award that year, author Shirley Hazzard responded to King's speech: "…I don't regard literature (which he spoke of perhaps in a slightly pejorative way) I don't regard the novel, poetry, language as written, I don't regard it as a competition" (162). Gelder writes that these remarks, "gently awkward and strangely tentative," seem to "disavow the very process that enabled her to win her award" (162). She had probably meant to suggest that "Literature is not, or should not be, a competitive activity"(162), which, of course, it is:

> Literary writers know only too well that they do and must routinely compete with their peers (for 'symbolic capital', etc.). But the disavowal may need to be made all the same, as if Literature must somehow be situated 'above' marketplace imperatives almost in spite of itself (162).

The Economy of Prestige looks at the rise of cultural prizes. In the past hundred years, the "stunning rise of [prizes in literature and the arts]… is one of the great untold stories of modern

cultural life"(English 1). The work is an attempt to draw attention to the complex history of prizes, and to add depth to part of the "standard wisdom of cultural prizes," which is that:

> …They have furthered the dilution of cultural or aesthetic value by commercial value; they have helped to bring about an ever closer alignment between the works recognized as "best" or "most important" and those which are simply the bestselling or most popular (329).

After all, "the modern ideology of art" is in opposition to an emphasis on "winners and losers"(2). Thus, the rise of prizes is, to some, "seen as one of the more glaring symptoms of a consumer society run rampant"(2-3). Prizes can be, and have been, seen as "not a celebration but a contamination of the most precious aspects of art"(3). Adopting a "cynical or mocking attitude" towards prizes and their proliferation is inadequate, as is the "mystified, essentially religious attitude toward culture that would shield artistic prizes… from the kind of scrutiny that deploys economic conceptualizations in a broader sense"(7). As Clive Bloom reminds us: "*All* contemporary culture has *some* relationship to mass culture, after attempting to detach itself from it or more successfully define itself within it" (50).

Recommending Books, Developing Readers

These observations, questioning cultural commerce, go hand-in-hand with relatively contemporary work on readership. Victor Nell's 1988 psychological text, *Lost in a Book*, questions the assumption that readers are "either lowbrow or highbrow" as are books, and that "trained and untrained minds to not share the same tastes"(4). Nell terms this the "elitist fallacy"(4). A distaste for mass culture invokes the assumption that masses are tasteless, and when audiences are studied, this seems to be not true. There is much overlap between reading groups—many who read literature also read popular fiction. In his research, Nell questioned a number of participants about their reading tastes, and asked them to arrange books/samples of texts in order of what they thought would be difficult, the best and what they would enjoy reading the most:

> … we have produced considerable evidence that for all our subject groups, as predicted, merit and preference rankings are inversely related. The close association that has been demonstrated between difficulty and merit rankings supports the notion that the value systems of many readers will be under the

> sway of Protestant Ethic convictions, such as that pain and virtue are constant companions (164).

Further, he noted that:

> For some groups—notably those with library science degrees—this conviction seems to be supplemented by a social pessimism which holds that mass taste is depraved and that literary-merit judgments may therefore be derived from a mirror image of mass taste (164).

Considered a landmark text on readership, Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* is an ethnography of the pleasure reading habits of a community of romance readers in a town Radway has disguised as "Smithton." The text has a notably feminist tone; Radway argues that for the group of romance readers she studied, "romance reading addresses needs created in them but not met by patriarchal institutions and engendering practices"(211). This is a very different take than that of Ann Douglas. Radway notes that in Douglas's "Soft Porn Culture," a scholarly article, "the coincidence of the romance's increasing popularity with the rise of the women's movement must point to a new and developing backlash against feminism"(19). Radway debunks, claiming that this assumption rests on "tenuous assumptions about the equivalence of readers and critics…"(20). Reading for these women is an entertaining habit to escape other pressures, rather than a passive consumption: "romance reading as a form of behavior operated as a complex intervention in the ongoing social life of actual social subjects"(7). Readers may actively dislike the books they are reading:

> …they often buy and read books they do not really like or fully endorse. As one reader explained, "Sometimes even a bad book is better than nothing." The act of purchase, then, does not always signify approval of the product selected (50).

David Hall cites Radway in establishing that: "it is a truism of the new reading history that readers remake the text" (184). He notes that "this has made problematic any and all arguments concerning popular culture as the mere passive reflection of a dominant culture" and that "it has rendered problematic the equation of texts and social levels" (184).

Similarly, Jonathan Rose calls upon Radway to criticize the work of some cultural historians. He writes that often in analyzing historical texts, many "overlook the possibility that these texts were politically innocuous"(329), and also that they rest on the assumption that readers agreed

with a text. He quotes James Smith Allen, dismissing Allen's claim that "the worldview of the novel may well have involved the beliefs of readers themselves" and refuting: "We cannot even assume that popular fiction does not offend its readers" (329), specifically calling on Radway's discussion of readers' reactions to sexual violence in romance novels:

> The reaction of one of those romance fans should serve as a salutary reminder to all cultural historians: one possible reader response is to toss the text in the garbage bin (329).

In light of this, it may be perplexing, then, that the role of the reviewer and bookseller can—and has—taken on a moral tone. Laura Miller has looked at bookseller's relationships to their customers in determining which books to make available to them. She notes that in the early twentieth century: "As part of their desire to spread a genteel culture, the regular bookseller… took pride in improving people's lives by introducing them to 'good' books"(2006, 57).[4] Alison Scott in an essay in *Scorned Literature* cites the Tulsa Public Library's stance on their collection development, which emphasizes books seen as educational:

> We believe that the library should serve a higher purpose than merely satisfying our patron's immediate cravings… We concluded that in pursuing the popular, we were losing sight of our mission (217-218).

Jesse Barrett, in an essay on Mickey Spillane, a popular mystery writer in the mid-twentieth century, quotes a book review in a US newspaper of one of Spillane's works, wherein the review is reluctant to endorse Spillane's work, as the reviewer identifies himself a "moral leader of the community":

> A few critics acceded to the publisher's careful balance of titillation and restraint by placing Spillane in the same chest of forbidden pleasures in which Victorians had stowed sensation literature and its more prurient cousin, pornography… "I can't recommend this because I am a serious literary critic and a moral leader of the community," the *Houston Post's* Carl Little confessed. "But, confidentially, I had a hell of a swell time" (2002, 7).

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[4] She questions the contemporary concept of "consumer sovereignty" as well: "Despite its democratic impulse, this ideology of consumer sovereignty merits skepticism. It overlooks the ways in which consumer choice is first, far from independent, and second, a rather thin basis of power"(67).

On Chick Lit

Some have argued that this element of moralizing has most strongly affected the romance genre. Alison Scott quotes Kay Mussell:

> Two centuries ago, critics and moralists argued against the proliferation of novels and lending libraries because novels were suspected of corrupting the morals of innocent young girls who were presumed to make up the bulk of the audience. Today, romances are shunned as trivial and attacked as unrealistic and subversive. Disdaining to read them, critics and reviewers have instead been satisfied to relegate them to the garbage heap of fiction—along with that other unfavoured literary genre—pornography—in a gesture of contempt that denies the validity of both the books and their readers." These novels are typically regarded by all except their readers with undistinguished derision and disdain and are dismissed as the worst sort of escapist trash (216).

"Chick Lit" has been chosen for research here in part because it is closely aligned with the genre of romance, which has, even within popular fiction, less cachet than other genres, like mystery. This is thought to be connected closely to wider notions about female sexuality, as women, far more than men, make up the bulk of the romance reading population. Janice Radway writes:

> …The struggle over the romance itself is part of the larger struggle for the right to define and to control female sexuality. Thus, it matters enormously what the cumulative effects of the act of romance reading are on actual readers (17).

Chick Lit, as a genre, developed out of the romance tradition, but with some noteworthy distinctions. In an essay from *The Cultural History of Reading*, Alex Feerst posits that the genre developed as a result of increased prosperity (which he links to 1980s government policies) and corresponding changes to lifestyle in the United States:

> The resulting localized prosperity led to distinct cultural formations. The word 'yuppie' entered the lexicon to reflect the young urban professionals, who occupied themselves with the pursuit of status, luxury goods, and the idea of an elite lifestyle, and whose milieu led to such literary subgenres as yuppie lit and chick lit (2009, 310).

Feerst further links Chick Lit to a rise in single women, specifically:

> With the percentage of single women in the United States reaching fifty-one in 2005, according to the census bureau, chick lit has emerged as a genre through which a growing and increasingly affluent and self-conscious group of readers has constructed its subjectivity (336).

The heroines in the books categorized as Chick Lit share important characteristics with Feerst's arguments. Chick Lit almost always is centered on an urban female protagonist. According to chick lit author Marian Keyes:

> They're almost always urban, the main character is usually a post-feminist character—she has a career and it's important to her, but she is also interested in a relationship and eventually children (as qtd in Scanlon, 2005).

In an article for *Library Journal*, Rebecca Vnuk (2005) puts it to librarians looking to expand their collections:

> The genre's aim of eliciting a response of 'I'm exactly like that' or 'That just happened to me!', has really struck a chord with women in their twenties and thirties who want to be reassured that they are not alone in screwing up their lives—or that screwing up doesn't preclude a happy ending (42).

Indeed, Feerst and Vnuk are but two of many who see Chick Lit's target audience as being very closely aligned to its protagonists. This is in contrast to other genre fiction: Radway writes that "romances are valued most for their ability to raise the spirits of the reader"(66), whereas Chick Lit seems to have an element of somehow assuring the reader. The emphasis in chick lit is not on finding a partner, but rather "self-definition." Though, frequently the heroine will find a "Mr. Right": "the quest for… the balancing of work with social interaction is given equal or more attention than the relationship conflict" (Harzewski 2006, 37). Jennifer Weiner, a Chick Lit author, has claimed that the heroines in Chick Lit have an "authenticity." Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young quote Weiner:

> I think that for a long time, what women were getting were sort of the Jackie Collins, Judith Krantz kind of books—sex and shopping, glitz and glamour, heroines that were fun to read about, but just felt nothing like where you were in your life (4).

Scanlon also quotes Weiner:

> I think the women who read the books are a lot like the women in them—young(ish), accomplished, but somewhat insecure, looking for fiction that serves as both entertainment and a road map… My theory is that my generation of women has more choices and options available than any generation in history, and that these choices are empowering but also terrifying. I think that novels, even the ones derided as light 'n fluffy, can help them think through their choices and make peace with their decisions.

Perhaps this is that element of a message, of guidance, has lead so many to claim emphatically that Chick Lit is not literary. Juliette Wells comments that "chick-lit novels–in their content, packaging, and promotion–do not claim to be literary rather than popular fiction." (2006, 64), and many have written of the genre with scorn. Patty Campbell writes of YA Chick Lit that plot lines serve to glorify "shallow materialism as the only way to acceptance" (2006, 489). She quotes Naomi Wolf to support her claim, though then softens: "even at its worst, chick lit is *fun*, a fact ignored by solemn critics like me…"(491).

Wells considers these arguments carefully, and writes that the genre often finds inspiration in literary works of the past, or the authors invoke them. She lists three authors as examples, who had referenced Edith Wharton, Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte (48-49), and then argues that though Chick Lit novels are not marketed as literary:

> The persistent appearance of literary women's authors names… in discussions of, and judgments about, chick lit suggests that many readers wish to case the genre as the descendent of literary, not popular, fiction (64).

Wells, mindful that "women's reading and writing have for centuries been trivialized," concludes that chick lit does not "deserve *literary* regard" (68). She does this in part through a discourse analysis, albeit brief, of two segments from a chick lit novel and a literary one—the first is from Helen Fielding's sequel to *Bridget Jones*, the second from Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*:

> He looked gorgeous in his work suit with the top buttons of his shirt undone. ¶ My master's colourless, olive face, square, massive brow, broad and jetty eyebrows, deep eyes, strong features, firm, grim mouth—all energy, decision, will—were not beautiful, according to rule; but they were more than beautiful to

> me: they were full of an interest, and influence that quite mastered me—that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his (63).

Wells uses these examples to explain that chick lit does not include the "richly descriptive or poetic passages" that serve as "the very bread and butter of literary novels, both historical and contemporary" (65). Fielding's "succinct, declarative statement" "passes by almost without our noticing," whereas Bronte's "invites us to savor and ponder her choice of words"(65). Chick Lit, thus, is recognizable for its succinct descriptions, ability to be read quickly (and not intended to be pondered), recent publication dates, and emphasis on female heroines living in urban areas and journeying towards self-acceptance.

Textual Analysis

On Method

Selection of Titles and Compilation of Reviews

Apart from its close alignment with the romance genre, Chick Lit has been chosen as an example of genre fiction as it is fairly current—both its demise and inception. Critics such as Vnuk (2005) assert that the publication of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* in 1998 marks the beginning of the Chick Lit genre in North America. This year was selected as the starting point for data collection. A list was compiled of 124 Chick Lit titles published between 1998 and 2008, taken from scholarly literature about Chick Lit (e.g. Ferriss and Young), articles in *Library Journal*, and websites devoted to the genre. For several of the titles, reviews could not be located. These titles were substituted, if possible, by locating reviews of books written by the same author, referencing the missing title (e.g., "In her follow up to *Cigarette Girl*"). The end result is a list of 121 titles.

A similar list of 126 critically acclaimed titles was compiled from the following sources: best fiction as selected by The *New York Times* for the years 1998-2008 in their "top ten" lists, and best fiction as selected by *Library Journal* for the years 1998-2008. Any collections of short stories were removed. There was one overlapping title on the lists of chick lit and critically acclaimed works: *All We Ever Wanted Was Everything*, published in 2008. In total, there were 246 distinct titles. A complete list of these titles can be found in the first appendix, Appendix A, including sources.

Reviews for each of these titles were collected from the *NoveList* database, throughout September 2009 (and into October). This is the primary electronic tool used by readers' advisory librarians in North American public libraries. *NoveList* is readily available from the websites of many public libraries in Ontario, including the website of the Toronto Public Library, where it was accessed for this research. It contains bibliographic data about fiction titles as well as reviews of those titles and other supplementary information about the book and the author.

Originally, it had been planned to locate three reviews of each title, which *NoveList* draws from sources like *Library Journal, Booklist, Publisher's Weekly,* and *Kirkus Reviews*. However, it was

quickly surmised that for many of the chick lit books, there were only two reviews, and for many of the critically acclaimed books, there were as many as five, with the majority of titles having about four reviews. For the critically acclaimed titles, a total of 480 reviews were located, and for the chick lit titles, a total of 361 were compiled.

Several of the *NoveList* reviews were not for the print version of each book, but rather for the audio version. In these cases, if possible, the correct review was located, mostly from an electronic version of the review source, but in some rare cases, from a bookseller, like Amazon.com.

Analysis and Categorization

Prior to analysis, Norman Fairclough's (2003) *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* and James Paul Gee's (2005) *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* were read, and provided a theoretical foundation. Texts on sentiment analysis were also referenced, like Pang and Lee's 2008 article "Opinion Mining and Sentiment Analysis," published in *Foundations and Trends in Information Retrieval.* And Cox and Fisher's 2009 article in the *Journal of Social, Evolutionary, and Cultural Psychology*, "The Texas Billionaire's Pregnant Bride: An Evolutionary Interpretation of Romance Fiction Titles," which was a textual analysis of romance novel titles, provided a sort of analytical model.

Almost all reviews served more than one purpose: not only to explain to the reader what the book was about, but also to offer an assessment. Many of the reviews could be split into two parts: synopsis and opinion.

Very few of the opinions were expressed similarly. While some opinions were expressed overtly (e.g., "tedious"), others were expressed with no ostensibly negative/positive words (e.g., "too many comic scenes that act as set-ups for punch lines"), and still others were expressed in a way where their order trumps their frequency (i.e., several positive words and then negative can be negative, e.g., "timely, provocative premise, it unfortunately isn't only Orpheus who goes astray"). Information researchers like Pang and Lee (2008) have noted that these issues are major challenges of sentiment analysis. This was brought into consideration when constructing an analytical framework.

All reviews were arranged in a spreadsheet. A sample from the spreadsheet can be found in Appendix B, and Table 1 below summarizes the data scheme. Each review was categorized as being favorable, unfavorable or neutral. In a few, rare, cases, the review would be categorized as "mixed"—when it expressed both favorable and unfavorable sentiments, strongly. The review was then split into two parts: the synopsis and the opinion, mostly to ease the analytical process. Opinion phrases were extracted and classified not according to whether or not they contained favorable or unfavorable words, but according to the sentiment they expressed. Separate columns were set aside for opinion phrases comparing the work to the work of another author (e.g., "verbal energy and narrative range of Saul Bellow's early fiction"), and for phrases about the "reader," or how a reader of the work would be affected (e.g., "readers cannot resist being drawn in").

Three columns were set aside for opinion statements relating to the aspects of the book, rather than the book overall. Statements about characters (e.g., "vividly drawn"), were in one; another contained thematic statements (e.g., "provocative themes of science, technology, history and religion"); the last, descriptions on the writing style (e.g., "low-key, slow-moving, but utterly engrossing prose style"). Another column contained statements regarding the tense of the review itself: the vast majority of reviews were written in third-person present: departures from this tense were noted (e.g., "will break your heart").

Two columns were set aside for statements about the author of each novel. Statements extracted pertained to the reviewer's opinion of the work, not statements about the author. For example, "Messud now evinces a higher level of sophistication" would be included, while: "Chilean-born" would not. Another column was set aside for statements about the book's audience (e.g., "Strictly for determined readers with a passion for international literature and a familiarity with Islam").

Table 1: Category Descriptions

Column Title	**Description**	**No. of Columns**
Review in	Publication (e.g., *Kirkus*)	1
Author	Author of book, not review	1
Type of Book	Literary/Chick Lit	1
Nature of Review	Favorable/Unfavorable/	1

	Neutral	
Length of Review	Number of characters of review	1
Review: Summary	Text of review	1
Review: Opinion	Text of review containing opinion statements	1
Opinion Keywords/Phrases	Opinion statements with favorable sentiment	3
Opinion Keywords/Phrases (esp. relating to readers)	Opinion statements with favorable sentiment mentioning a reader's response to the work	1
Compared to other authors	Comparisons to other authors	1
Opinion Keywords/Phrases	Opinion statements with unfavorable sentiment	3
Opinion Keywords/Phrases (esp. relating to "reader")	Opinion statements with unfavorable sentiment mentioning a reader's response to the work	1
Descriptions Relating Specifically to Characters	Opinion statements about characters	1
Identified Themes	Opinion statements identifying a theme	1
Prose/Narrative Description	Opinion statements identifying the writing style or a technical aspect of the novel	1
Review mention of reader (of review)	Departure in review from third-person?	1
Author Keywords or Phrases	Opinion statements relating expressly to author	2
Audience Keywords or Phrases	Statements identifying the audience of the reviewed book	1

Each review was then read and its opinion phrases categorized. In this thesis, findings will be presented in two ways: both in tallies of occurrences of types of phrases and in lists of most popular words. The most popular words were compiled using Analog X Keyword Extractor, a software originally intended for search engine optimization. The lists of most-common phrases were then cleaned using a form of data normalization based on the work of Cox and Fisher, with the intention of improving accuracy of counts. Most importantly, stop words have been excluded from these lists: these are words typically discarded by search engines, as they are thought to include minimal information. Examples of stop words: about, if, the, and, you, then.

It is expected that there will be much overlap between the words used in the Chick Lit and the words used in the Critically Acclaimed reviews. The reviews have the same sources, and are

serve the same purpose. Words like “book” and “reader” will be common. However, certain words will be relatively more common in reviews from one type of genre, or in favorable reviews over unfavorable ones (e.g., “recommended”). While common words will be addressed briefly at the beginning of the analysis, and will be retained in the lists, discussion will focus on differences in frequency on different lists.

Limitations

Removal of stop words, while necessary for seeing trends in the data on a word level, can be misleading. While efforts have been made to minimize misinterpretation (by categorizing specific sentences according to tone rather than strictly by wording), if and when taken out of context, two sentences with very different meanings can seem the same. For example, the statements: “doesn't quite get at the heart” and “gets at the heart,” are opposite, but with stop word removal, they would read similarly: “quite heart” and “heart.” Further, while some attempt was made to stem words—e.g., to amalgamate “readers” and “reader” into one entry on each list of most common words—there has been no attempt to group words themselves thematically. “Irrelevant” and “redundant” are quite close in meaning, but have been tracked separately, rather than collected to represent one type of criticism of a work.

The lists of most popular words presented here are usually the top 25 words, excluding stop words. This practice, while valid for the purposes of this research, excludes many words, and more Critically Acclaimed words than Chick Lit. As there were more of the Critically Acclaimed reviews, and as they were on average longer, it follows that there was a wider range of words used in the Critically Acclaimed reviews. However, it could be that the Critically Acclaimed reviews were simply more verbose: even if there were the same number of reviews and they were the same length, the Critically Acclaimed reviews may have called upon a wider vocabulary. Further research would be needed to determine.

The use of single words, isolated from their contexts, as a vehicle for assessing language is not ideal. Much effort has been made to mitigate this limitation by categorizing according to sentiment and by offering examples in context in discussion.

On a more fundamental level, all categorization was completed manually. The researcher decided what was and was not favorable, and some reviews may have been categorized

differently by another reader. Moreover, as most of the categorization was done manually, the possibility for human error may be higher than were the categorization done by machine.

Chick Lit has been used as the only type of genre/popular fiction under analysis. None of the word lists can be generalized to other genres: phrases like “Bridget Jones” will likely not be included in reviews of mystery, romance or science fiction novels, for example. However, it is believed that the sentiments expressed will not be entirely dissimilar, drawing from current scholarly literature. That said, as Chick Lit is closely aligned with the romance genre, sentiments may most closely align with those found in reviews of the romance genre, which is thought to be more disparaged than other genres. Reviews of other types of genre books, like mysteries, may not contain the same sort of audience statements at all. Feminist scholars like Radway have begun to discuss some of the underlying reasons for this, and further research looking at different critical responses to different genres would be valuable.

Results and Analysis

Reviews Overall

A much higher percentage of the critically acclaimed reviews were favorable: about 87%, compared to about 73% of the Chick Lit reviews. Table 2 shows opinions for all reviews, by genre.

Table 2: Reviews by Opinion and Genre

	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Mixed	Total
Chick Lit	263	72	23	3	361
Critically Acclaimed	419	30	20	11	480

This was not unexpected: as the critically acclaimed reviews are those chosen by critics as being the best, it follows that there would be more favorable reviews in that set than there would be in the Chick Lit. And, apart from the reviews being more favorable and there being more of them (about 120 more of them, though there were only five more titles), the critically acclaimed reviews were longer—they were, on average, about 300 characters longer than the Chick Lit reviews, as indicated in Table 3a.

Table 3a: Review Length, by Genre

	Critically Acclaimed	Chick Lit
Average Length of Review (number of characters)	1513.75	1240.01

Interestingly, the unfavorable reviews were a little longer than the favorable reviews, as shown in Table 3b, which may be attributed to their being so many fewer of them: the results may have been more easily skewed.

Table 3b: Review Length, by Opinion

	Favorable	Unfavorable
Average Length of Review (number of characters)	1399.7	1548.04

Reviews by Publication

The most popular reviews were from *Booklist*, *Kirkus*, *Library Journal*, and *Publishers Weekly*. *Publishers Weekly* and *Booklist* provided more reviews for Chick Lit novels than *Kirkus* and *Library Journal*, as data in Table 4 demonstrates. They were also quite likely to be favorable, especially when compared to *Kirkus*. About 30% of *Kirkus* reviews were unfavorable, compared to about 6% *of Library Journal, Publishers Weekly*, and *Booklist* reviews, as in Table 5.

Table 4: Review Count, by Publication and Genre

	Booklist	***Kirkus***	***Library Journal***	***Publishers Weekly***	***School Library Journal***	***Rendezvous***	***Magill Book Review***
Chick Lit	96	70	79	94	1	21	0
Critically Acclaimed	113	110	119	119	18	0	1
Total	209	180	198	213	19	21	1

Table 5: Reviews by Reviewers and Opinion

	Booklist	***Kirkus***	***Library Journal***	***Publishers Weekly***
Favorable	184	116	166	182
Unfavorable	14	53	12	19
Neutral	8	6	19	7
Mixed	3	5	1	5

This is in keeping with the reputations of the reviewers. In a 2009 article in the *Los Angeles Times*, written after an announcement about *Kirkus*'s closing, Meghan Daum explains:

> *Kirkus* … was notoriously harsh. Whereas *Publishers Weekly* often seems like a booster for the trade, and Booklist, another book industry magazine, usually manages to find something nice to say even about the most mediocre prose, *Kirkus* took no prisoners.

A *New York Times* article, written after the same announcement, corroborates, claiming that the voice of *Kirkus* was "reliably cantankerous" (Rich). Indeed: were reviews assigned degrees of favorability, many of the *Kirkus* reviews would have been categorized as "highly unfavorable." Consider the following examples:

Booklist:

> Ahern herself might be all of 22 years old, but she has realistically captured the ups and downs of a woman whose life has fallen apart and how she picks herself back up and moves on, one step at a time.

Publishers Weekly:

> Ahern's speed (she wrote the book in three months) and her youth do show—the wisdom in evidence owes much to Nicholas Sparks and Sophie Kinsella—and her prose is pedestrian. She boasts a natural storytelling talent, however, resulting in a compelling tale sparked by an unusual premise.

And *Kirkus*:

> Fluffy romance from the cute-as-a-button daughter of Ireland's Prime Minister. At the tender age of 22, film student Ahern pens her very first novel! ... Yes, the posthumous postings are meant to help Holly heal, to laugh again and love again, and to remind her always to walk on the sunny side of the street, cherishing her memories and the happy future ahead (come to think of it, only a 22-year-old could write a book like this) …

There are some similarities: all offer a criticism of the novel couched as a criticism of the author. However, with *Booklist*, her age is mentioned in a complimentary way—she is writing beyond her years. With the second review her "youth shows"—she is untested, romantic (referencing

Nicholas Sparks, a well-known author of romances targeted to a young audience), but she has promise, and her "pedestrian prose" is chalked up to her youth. However, in the *Kirkus* review, her youth serves as a reminder of why more young authors tend to be unsuccessful—the work is so that "only a 22-year-old could write a book like this." It is far more unfavorable than either review.

Words in Reviews

All Reviews: Most Common Words

Most common words, in reviews overall, are shown in Table 6. These are words from complete reviews, not simply words selected for opinion columns, or as audience statements, etc. The most common words in chick lit reviews tended to have a domestic tone, as indicated in the literature (e.g., "husband," "boyfriend," "family," "job"). Critically Acclaimed words contained some with a domestic theme (e.g., "family," "wife," "daughter," "son"), but many others did not (e.g., "war," "American," "death").

Table 6: Most Common Words In All Reviews

Chick Lit	Critically Acclaimed
her	his
novel	her
life	novel
friend	life
his	year
year	story
woman	family
love	world
job	love
mother	father
time	war
book	book
husband	man
story	characters
family	wife
readers	time
good	history
debut	young
lit	work
man	American
jane	mother

Table 7: Most Common Opinion Words, by Opinion

Favorable	Unfavorable
readers	readers
recommended	novel
novel	plot
highly	funny
characters	chick
story	lit
funny	character
lit	story
fiction	humor
prose	tale
chick	unfortunately
humor	time
narrative	dialogue
work	narrative
tale	ending
plot	life
life	fun
book	care
human	interest
fans	scenes
love	fans

boyfriend	daughter
chick	death
world	narrative
young	son

voice	work
moving	love
great	familiar
complex	find

As shown in Table 6 above, four words are in grey: these words are stop words and have been retained to demonstrate not only that the Chick Lit reviews contained more mentions of women than the Critically Acclaimed ones, but that the Critically Acclaimed reviews more frequently mentioned men/male characters. Also, while there was some mention of males, "his," in the Chick Lit reviews, they are not as prominent as mention of women "her" in the Critically Acclaimed reviews. "Mother" too ranks more prominently in the Chick Lit reviews than it does in the Critically Acclaimed, and while "father" is prominent in the Critically Acclaimed, it was not in the top Chick Lit review words.

"Chick" and "lit" both also feature on the Chick Lit word list: many of the chick lit reviews referenced the genre itself. Interestingly, "Jane" appears on the most common words list for the Chick Lit reviews. It is a relatively common author name (e.g., Jane Green) and also a character name (e.g., *See Jane Date)*. This gives some idea not only of how common the name itself is within the genre, but how common it is to have names in a review: many of the reviews contained not only mention of the characters, but several mentions of the author, or other, similar authors.

Most Common Opinion Words

The Table 7 list (e.g., "opinion words") excludes the reviews themselves, and is based on extractions from them. A great many of the opinion words mentioned readers: this is, in part, because phrases mentioning readers were paid special attention to in analysis (and were selected accordingly), but it is also largely due to the popularity of such a technique. As mentioned, almost all of the reviews were written in the third person. As such, statements like: "succeeds in winning the reader's sympathy" were commonly used to express opinions, over a more casual and less authoritative: "won my sympathy," or the more compelling: "will win yours."

"Chick" and "lit" again feature prominently, though more so in the unfavorable reviews than in the favorable ones. This is perhaps because there were fewer unfavorable Critically Acclaimed reviews, and many more favorable ones. "Recommended" and "highly" are also present on the favorable list: many favorable *Library Journal* reviews closed with the phrase: "recommended"

or “highly recommended.” Conversely, unfavorable *Library Journal* reviews either did not include any such statement, or if they did, one like: “recommended only for very large collections.”

“Work” features on both the most common word list (for the critically acclaimed) and on this most common opinion word list. It was used most often not to describe a character’s career, but rather in reference to the book itself, the author’s work. This was more common in the Critically Acclaimed reviews than in the Chick Lit reviews, supporting arguments that literary writers are seen as laboring more intensely.

“Human” also appears on the favorable word list: this was a very common word in the Critically Acclaimed reviews, largely in statements about the theme or author. An author was a “superb yarn spinner with a lot to say about the perversity of human nature” or had a “love for the human condition.”

With the unfavorable review words, there are a few seemingly favorable words—“funny,” “care,” “interest.” These were generally used in sentences like: “narrative voice is more predictable and less funny than she seems to think” and “difficult to care.”

Words like “plot,” “story,” “narrative” and “character” represent aspects of the novels that were commonly criticized or lauded. “Dialogue” is one that was more often criticized than praised: an author had a “tin ear for all dialogue”; a book had “cringe-inducing phonetic dialogue” or “great swathes of artificial, stilted dialogue.”

Most Common Opinion Adjectives

The Table 8 list was created after removing words like “book,” “story,” “novel” and “plot.” It attempts to offer an idea of kinds of traits that are worthy of acclaim. “Funny” appears at the top of each list. Apart from the above-offered use of the word “funny” in an unfavorable phrase, many unfavorable reviews contained favorable phrases about the book being funny—a book may have had “genuinely funny writing to counter the clichés,” yet the closing statement of the review read: “Momentum and humor almost win out against the obvious.” With the favorable reviews, phrases like: “Funny yet heartbreakingly sad” and “boisterous, funny, poignant, and erudite” included “funny” in a more straightforward way.

Table 8: Most Common Opinion Adjectives	
Favorable	**Unfavorable**
highly	funny
funny	unfortunately
witty	familiar
moving	shallow
great	ambitious
complex	light
compelling	romantic
literary	uneven
rich	amusing
beautifully	long
poignant	obvious
good	engaging
entertaining	sharp
vivid	clever
hilarious	thin
engaging	British
satisfying	dark
brilliant	tedious
heart	original
stunning	slow
smart	inevitably
powerful	dull
American	mildly
epic	modern
light	sadly

Table 9: Most Common Opinion Words, by Genre	
Chick Lit	**Critically Acclaimed**
reader	Reader
lit	novel
chick	recommended
funny	highly
novel	narrative
characters	story
wit	work
fans	prose
fun	human
humor	characters
recommended	fiction
read	life
Bridget	literary
heroine	tale
fiction	plot
book	history
story	complex
good	written
plot	compelling
tale	beautifully
entertaining	great
smart	rich
hilarious	love
engaging	voice
Jones	moving

"American" is listed on the favorable list, and "British" on the unfavorable. Many of the Critically Acclaimed reviews noted concept of a "great American novel" or an "American literary novel," e.g., "proves again that the American literary novel is not dead," "One of the most impressive American novels of recent years." All of the reviews were drawn from U.S. sources, which may be the cause for emphasis of that particular country. However, that the "great American novel" is mentioned in the reviews is noteworthy as it gives credence to English's notion of the prize existing against broader ideologies of art. Moreover, frequent mentions of the concept, particularly ones which express concern for its demise, may serve as evidence that within the literary community there is distress.

“British” meanwhile is not to do with British literature being treated unfavorably. Rather, many of the Chick Lit novels were imported from Great Britain, and some of them were deemed difficult for the North American market due to wording: “the British allusions may draw blanks” or “veddy British and brittle overall.” Still others were seen as being part of a larger trend, and were recommended as being: “appropriate for collections where British chick lit is popular.”

“Witty” and “wit” were very popular in Chick Lit reviews—both to describe writers or writing style, and characters themselves. “Fresh, witty and entertaining, rollicking fun,” “Witty puns, glittery silliness…provide both style and substance.” That “witty” is ranked so highly on the favorable review list demonstrates how often these words were used in the comparatively few favorable Chick Lit reviews.

“Ambitious” and “amusing,” like “funny,” may seem favorable—and were often included in favorable opinion statements in unfavorable reviews. A book would have some amusing writing, but would be largely tedious; a book would be ambitious but would fall short, or a writer would have had grand aspirations for an inappropriate subject, e.g., “inordinately ambitious.” Some works, more simply, were: “more sprawling than ambitious.” The word also appeared frequently in favorable reviews: however, it did not appear enough to rank on the most common list.

“Light” appears on both lists, however is higher on the unfavorable list. Favorably, books often “shed light” on a topic, e.g., “shines a harsh light on contemporary Portuguese society,” or, as with a Chick Lit review, will “satisfy those looking for a light women's lit fix” Unfavorably, reviews did necessarily dismiss novels for being “light fare,” but may use the phrase unfavorably, echoing that something light may be “short on nutrition but long on refreshment.” One review asked “And how light do you like your chick lit?”

“Engaging” also appears on both lists. In a favorable review, a work was: “marvelously intelligent and engaging”; in an unfavorable: “Literate and moderately engaging” but then digressed “to no discernible purpose, failing to either advance or deepen understanding.”

Otherwise, the review adjectives are intuitive: unfavorable reviews were largely “uneven,” “shallow,” “dull” or “tedious.” More importantly for this research, they were “familiar” and “obvious,” underscoring the concept that to be original is highly desirable. Indeed, while “original” appears on the list, it was used in phrases like “nary a truly dark or original moment.”

By Genre:

Most Common Opinion Words

In the list of most common opinion words by genre, Table 9, it is clear how frequently Chick Lit reviews referred to the Chick Lit genre. A book was: "saucy chick-lit." In some cases, the review frowned on the book in relation to the genre: "those looking for fun and flirty chick lit should look elsewhere," and in others, the genre and the book at once: "Chick lit sinks to a new low." Likewise, "Bridget" and "Jones" appear on the Chick Lit list, with "Bridget" ranking much higher than "Jones." These words refer to the genre's central title, and their presence—and ranking in relation to each other—demonstrate that the name was so common in reviews for the genre, reviewers often dropped the second word, mentioning only "Bridget." While a review for *Bridget Jones* itself situated novel as being part of a cultural phenomenon tracing to a television show, "hit TV show *Ally McBeal*," later reviews of books in the genre implied that if *Bridget Jones* was not the foundation of the genre, it was at least its landmark text. The *Publishers Weekly* review for *Milkrun* starts: "For readers who have not yet tired of the Bridget Jones genre"; the *Kirkus* review for *One Hit Wonder* starts: "Another Bridget Jones–esque romp—and a good one."

Some favorable Chick Lit reviews, like that for *Good in Bed*, not once reference the genre it has been identified in. Instead, it is "fresh," "unpredictable" and the author's "voice rings true," despite being, largely, about a woman's relationship with her weight and a man—common themes in Chick Lit works. Other titles are more actively disassociated from the genre: a review of *Maneater* is described as merely "masquerading as chick lit," while it really is a "scathing satire." The review for *Smothering* from *Publishers Weekly*, recommends the book in spite of its affiliation with the genre: "Though there's nothing new here, this debut is warm, tender and more substantive than most of its type." It "stands out from its fluffy chick-lit sisters with snappy humor." The novel is thus established as better than the rest of the genre, which relies on the assumption that the review's reader has read other chick lit books and found them lacking. Other favorable reviews claimed:

> While this novel may be part of the new "chick lit" genre, it's really better than most of the stuff that makes its way down the pipeline; more Nick Hornby than

> Bridget Jones and really more interesting and intelligent than a lot of the other chick-lit offerings.
>
> Franklin is a more down-to-earth, smart, and thoughtful heroine than that found in many of the books in this genre…
>
> A very enjoyable book that will give a badly needed boost to the intelligence quotient of the entire genre…

Words like: "funny," "fun," "humor," "entertaining" and "hilarious," as they appear on the Chick Lit list and not on the Critically Acclaimed suggest that these traits are more common to Chick Lit novels. Their lack of presence on the Critically Acclaimed list demonstrate that these qualities are not as prized as a work being "complex," "compelling," or "moving."

"History" ranks on the Critically Acclaimed list. Many of the Critically Acclaimed works were historically set; and very frequently during periods of war or civic turmoil. Works were described as a "full-scale historical epic," or "a serious, nuanced meditation on history, redemption, commerce, conscience and literary vocation, as well as a gripping read." In many cases, the book would be praised for being more than a great read: one was described as "a way to participate in history," one assumes because the writing is so lifelike that the reader would be absorbed into it.

"Love" is more common in the Critically Acclaimed reviews than the Chick Lit. While most of the Chick Lit works dealt, on some level, with romantic relationships, the Critically Acclaimed reviews often mentioned "love" in a more broad sense, and relating to a summary of the novel's theme. One book was about "simple need to love and be loved," another about "universal subjects of love and truth." An author was "more interested in raising questions about love and fidelity than in pat moralizing." Likewise, the Critically Acclaimed reviews more frequently mention technical terms like: "narrative," "prose," "voice" and "plot."

The Chick Lit reviews, though not as frequently mentioning "prose" or "narrative," also mention "plot" and "characters," and "characters" is more comparatively frequent. This reflects Jennifer Weiner's explanation of special weight being accorded to the heroine for the audience to identify with. Favorable reviews praised Chick Lit characters for being "charming" or "appealing." Unfavorable reviews derided them for being flat: "characters do not exist beyond their lines,"

"like most of the male characters, is a total jerk." Some comments were about the characters without using the word "character" at all: "Readers will feel: "a kinship with, or at least an understanding of, her heartfelt, sometimes desperate and embarrassing, and yet essentially honest behavior." "Fans" is also a top Chick Lit word.

Table 10: Most Common Favorable Opinion Words

Chick Lit	Critically Acclaimed
readers	Reader
lit	novel
chick	recommended
funny	highly
wit	history
fans	prose
fun	work
recommended	story
novel	human
humor	characters
characters	narrative
Bridget	fiction
fiction	life
heroine	literary
good	tale
entertaining	complex
smart	beautifully
book	written
story	rich
hilarious	compelling
engaging	great
Jones	love
just	world
popular	moving
collections	time
libraries	voice
public	brilliant
satisfying	humor
tale	plot
poignant	epic

Table 11: Most Common Unfavorable Opinion Words

Chick Lit	Critically Acclaimed
predictable	reader
plot	plot
characters	narrative
ending	story
readers	far
familiar	history
novel	bit
chick	novel
lit	like
just	dialogue
unfortunately	slow
silly	quite
lacks	length
tale	weight
thin	funny
book	uneven
story	slightly
contrived	rather
page	occasionally
time	unfortunately
dialogue	really
narrative	credibility
questionmark	disappointing
love	passages
far	author
romance	metaphysical
voice	elaborate
annoying	suspense
serious	perhaps
brittle	end

Most Common Favorable Opinion Words

The list of most common favorable opinion words, Table 10 above, is quite close to the list of most common opinion words. As so many of the reviews were favorable, this was expected. On the list of the most common favorable Chick Lit opinion words, again, "Chick" and "Lit" are quite high, with reviews like: "surprisingly mature, stands out from its fluffy chick-lit sisters." "Public" is again a term from *Library Journal* reviews: "recommended for public libraries." Likewise, "popular" and "collections" are most common in Library Journal reviews: "recommended for popular fiction collections."

With the list of Critically Acclaimed words, there are again terms like: "love," "complex," "compelling," "voice," "prose," "work" and "narrative." Adding to this, we see "epic," "life," and "world," and the self-defining "literary." "Epic," "life" and "world" imply a sense of breadth to the work—that their scope is large, which is in accordance with arguments that literary works are mind-expanding. "Epic" was commonly used to describe the book: "but on the evidence of its first installment, this is the epic Irish one" (in reference to the "great American novel"); "magical, epic in proportion." But "world" and "life" were also used to describe a theme or the author's writing: "authentic writing that delivers the world," "has mastered the world outside of our domestic and social circles, with each description reading as if he had pulled a scene from the landscape"; "managing, too, to subtly transform the struggle between into a life-or-death battle between reason and faith…," "noted that her goal was to describe 'daily life, the emotional life and especially the comedy it provides.'"

Most Common Unfavorable Opinion Words

Table 11 summarizes opinion words for unfavorable reviews. It was relatively more common for technical terms like "narrative" and "dialogue" to be used in unfavorable Chick Lit reviews, suggesting either that Chick Lit reviews were more faulted for technical reasons, or that they had weaker technical strengths, e.g., "too much narrative." Many of the unfavorable terms were removed, as they were also stop words. Phrases like: "not nearly often enough," "aren't enough to keep the action moving" and "somewhat out of tone," would have been seriously reduced. The above example, "too much narrative" would have become "narrative."

As "just" was not considered a stop word, it remains—perhaps because it can be an adjective as well as an adverb. In the chick lit unfavorable opinion words, it was almost always an adverb: a strength of the novel was "just not enough," or part of the work was "Just plain dopey." The word was also used favorably: "action and suspense just add to an already great book," and appears on that list as well. However it was relatively more common with the unfavorable terms.

"Predictable" was the most common criticism: "thinly drawn and even predictable," "predictable and boring." Conversely, "unpredictable" was used favorably: "unpredictable and impressive." "Lacks" was also common. A work "lacks any substance or style"; one reviewer commented that the work was similar to other chick lit works, with one notable exception: "boy version of Bridget Jones lacks the key ingredient: a sympathetic protagonist."

"Contrived" and "far" were also common. "Odd plot twists feel contrived" or the "hasty and contrived climax defies credibility." Something in the book, some aspect was taken "too far." Other times, "far" was part of a compound word: "far-reaching" "far-fetched." A character was "supposed to be funny, hip and cool but it is far off the mark."

"Questionmark" is here in grey. In a 2002 article by Pang, Lee and Vaithyanathan on sentiment classification of online movie reviews, question marks were identified as being associated with negative reviews. As Analog X discards punctuation, "questionmark" was entered after an instance of "?" in an opinion phrase.[5] The question mark in the reviews is often used to convey a sense of frustration on the part of the reviewer, or even bewilderment. One review asked of a character: "Will she ever shut up?." Another review asked the reader: "In this debut offering, you can see Jane date, but why would you want to?" The question mark was also used with Critically Acclaimed reviews. One questioned the protagonist's voice, noting that it somehow defied credibility: "would a businessman, even one who loves Dickens, write this well?"

"Credibility" appeared on the list of unfavorable Critically Acclaimed opinion words. An element of a work "stretches credibility"; "some plot elements seem played more for thematic resonance than narrative credibility." Both imply that credibility is somehow lacking, meaning

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[5] As a "?" in excel, the software used for this analysis, is the wildcard feature, searches for it return any value. This particular punctuation mark is more difficult to check—and there are more likely to be errors.

that it is a desirable quality. This does not necessarily mean that a work could not be imaginative. "Metaphysical" also appears on the unfavorable list, but its presence more demonstrates how small the pool of unfavorable opinion words was rather than that it represented an undesirable quality. While "writing drifts too far into metaphysical musings" or "surrealism is overwrought, the metaphysical dialogue strained," favorably a work could be "tenderly comic, wryly metaphysical, and hugely entertaining."

However, "length" and "slightly" were used more with unfavorable sentiments. A work was excellent except for its "slightly schematic nature," or that it "sags slightly under its own weight." "Length" was almost the flip side of something being "epic"—a work could be long, but it wasn't usually described with that specific word unless it was being described unfavorably: "very long, very overheated… Direct allusions and glancing references alike make clear that for much of its length," implying redundancy or tedium. More benignly, a work could have "unorthodox length."

By Review Type:

Most Common Favorable Words in Favorable Reviews, by Genre

While prior lists looked at favorable words in all reviews, or unfavorable words in all reviews, Tables 12 and 13 below look at favorable words in favorable reviews.

Table 12: Most Common Favorable Terms in Favorable Reviews, by Genre

Chick Lit	Critically Acclaimed
readers	readers
lit	recommended
chick	novel
funny	highly
wit	history
recommended	prose
fun	work
humor	story
fans	human
characters	characters
novel	narrative
Bridget	life
fiction	fiction
heroine	complex

Table 13: Most Common Favorable Terms in Favorable Reviews, by Genre, excluding technical words

Chick Lit	Critically Acclaimed
Lit	recommended
Chick	highly
Funny	history
Wit	human
recommended	life
Fun	complex
Humor	beautifully
Fans	rich
Bridget	tale
Fiction	literary
Heroine	compelling
Hilarious	moving
entertaining	great
Smart	world

hilarious	beautifully
book	rich
entertaining	tale
smart	literary
women	written
good	compelling
story	moving
engaging	great
genre	world
Jones	love
libraries	humor
public	plot
satisfying	brilliant
tale	vivid
poignant	voice
popular	time

Women	love
Good	humor
Engaging	plot
Jones	brilliant
Libraries	vivid
Public	time
Satisfying	stunning
Tale	epic
Poignant	detail
Popular	powerful
Love	American
Collections	best
True	portrait
Fresh	ambitious
Twist	just
New	family

They are very similar to previous lists, again noting that there were few unfavorable opinion statements. On the list of Critically Acclaimed words that excludes technical terms, Table 13, words like "readers," "novel," "prose" and "work" have been excluded. "Best" appears. This was most often used to describe the work in relation to the author's body of work, e.g., "her best book to date." "True" appears on the list of Chick Lit words. It was most often used in relation to a character's experiences or to the author's voice: "voice rings true as she flouts conventional wisdom."

Most Common Unfavorable Words in Unfavorable Reviews, by Genre

Table 14 below shows that there were too few common words to have a complete list of 25 unfavorable opinion words in unfavorable reviews—any other words did not appear more than once. Table 14 also shows that there are more Chick Lit words than Critically Acclaimed words, perhaps a reflection of the greater number of unfavorable Chick Lit reviews.

Chick Lit words included "substance," as in "not much substance" or: "As with a good latte, a little froth is fine--but substance is what satisfies." "Silly" also appeared on the list. A book was "really very silly," or "effervescent, silly debut: so eager to please…" "Desperate" appeared in relation to the characters: "bizarre reincarnation of the desperate women of, say, Edith Wharton, who had to marry to survive, but surely things have changed?"

"Labored" and "worth" appear on the Critically Acclaimed list. "Labored," which connotes that the novel is clumsy or cumbersome, was used intuitively: "labored mystery, resolved far too swiftly." A book's "worth" was questioned. While "worthy" was common in favorable reviews, in the unfavorable reviews, comments included "a short story's worth of incident floated on a prickly cushion of aphorism," and "packed more than a couple books' worth of observations into one." "Digress" was used in unfavorable reviews to express incoherence in a plotline: "digress to no discernible purpose" or "enormously overlong, elaborate tale, frequently interrupted by digressive analyses."

Table 14: Most Common Unfavorable Words in Unfavorable Reviews

Chick Lit	Critically Acclaimed
Readers	disappointing
Plot	reader
characters	ambitious
Ending	redundant
unfortunately	story
Novel	care
Write	digress
Familiar	funny
Story	human
Lacks	labored
Chick	narrative
Lit	repetitive
Tale	slow
Find	tale
Dialogue	uneven
questionmark	unfortunately
Funny	worth
Light	fails
Time	
Thin	
Silly	
substance	
debut	
contrived	
desperate	

"Unfortunately" was used both in Chick Lit and Critically Acclaimed reviews, and almost always in unfavorable ones. In a Critically Acclaimed work "billed by U.S. publishers as complex and challenging. Unfortunately, confusing and dull are closer to the mark"; in a Chick Lit, a writer "unfortunately slaps a silly romance into the middle of everything."

Techniques in Reviews

Mentions of Writing Technique, Character, Reader, by Opinion and by Genre

Writing Technique

To tally techniques used in reviews, phrases relating to certain techniques were categorized in separate columns, then counted. In several reviews, there were statements addressing a technical aspect of the novel. These were not necessarily favorable or unfavorable. A statement like "imagery ranging from the sublime to the grotesque" is a statement of the reviewer's opinion, but is not about the author, a character, nor offers a favorable or unfavorable opinion about the work as a whole. Other, more colorful examples include "pace of this quirky cool mystery never falters," "prose is workmanlike," or "uneven pace."

Phrases like these recall literary values. Even if they express an unfavorable sentiment—that the work is "unevenly paced"—they imply that a work should not be a hack job, that some skill should have been used while creating the work. And, as expected, there were more of these statements in the Critically Acclaimed reviews than in the Chick Lit reviews. Indeed, there were a great deal more, as displayed in Table 15, and many more in the favorable reviews than in unfavorable or neutral or mixed reviews.

Table 15: Mentions of Writing Technique

	Favorable	Unfavorable	Other	
Chick Lit	24	6	2	32
Literary	163	12	4	179
Total	187	18	6	211

Mentions of Character

Several reviews made mention of characters. While the vast majority described characters in terms of the plot ("Henry was smart and strong enough to survive"), in order to be included in the character description column, the character must be described in such a way that was a recommendation of the story, e.g., "vividly drawn." It was thought that there would be comparatively more focus on characters in the Chick Lit reviews, as characters, specifically heroines, play an important role. While there were a great deal, as shown in Table 16, there were more Critically Acclaimed mentions.

Table 16: Mentions of Character

	Favorable	Unfavorable	Other	
Chick Lit	69	23	2	94
Literary	169	10	12	191
Total	238	33	14	285

This may be due to higher recognition of skill of Critically Acclaimed authors over Chick Lit authors. Chick Lit reviews included phrases like: "worthy protagonist, complex enough to be compelling and ordinary enough to be believable," "characters are stereotypes," "smart, complex character to root for." Critically Acclaimed reviews included: "studded with superbly observed," "remarkably sympathetic and compelling, ardently observed," "perfectly hewn, a host of ancillary characters adds heft," and "obvious authorial surrogate." These types of comments were proportionately high in the neutral and mixed literary reviews.

Mentions of Reader

As most of the reviews were written in the third person, departures from this tense are noteworthy. They imply a strong sentiment on the part of the reviewer, as they are designed to invoke a more emotional response from the reader. In the Critically Acclaimed reviews, examples include: "we're treated to a comic saga" and "we owe it to ourselves to better understand." In Chick Lit, "We sympathize and agonize along with Alison" and "Don't hate yourself in the morning for reading this book and liking it." The directive "you" in the second Chick Lit example is more authoritative than the first person plural, "we." Table 17 details incidences of departures from the third person.

While Chick Lit novels are designed for recreational reading and deal with domestic themes, there were many more departures from the third person in the Critically Acclaimed reviews. These may have been inspired by the broader themes addressed in the Critically Acclaimed reviews, like those implied with "human" and "world." One reviewer wrote of an author studying "our vulnerability and our strength." Perhaps the breadth of these themes encourages departures from the formality of the critic's relationship to his audience, or rather, the reviewer wishes to pay respect to these themes by suppressing his authority.

Table 17: Mentions of Reader

	Favorable	Unfavorable	Other	
Chick Lit	18	5	1	24

Literary	64	6	3	73
Total	82	11	4	97

Mentions of Authors by Opinion and by Genre

Often, instead of making a statement about a work, a review may offer a favorable or unfavorable sentiment by phrasing it about the author. An unfavorable review of a Critically Acclaimed work ended: "Once again, sadly, Banks's reach has exceeded his grasp," a favorable review commented that an author "moves into new moral terrain." Sentences like these attribute the book's value to an author, and in them, the book and the author are almost seen as interchangeable. It is thought, if literary works are seen as the creative product of one author, that there will be more of these kinds of sentences in those reviews.

Table 18: Mentions of Author

	Favorable	**Unfavorable**	**Other**	
Chick Lit	84	23	9	116
Literary	293	20	12	325
Total	377	43	21	441

As shown in Table 18, there are more than three times as many favorable Critically Acclaimed reviews attribute book qualities to an author, and almost three times as many reviews overall. That said, some Chick Lit reviews do. In one, an author has "remarkable talent for deft comic writing." In Critically Acclaimed reviews, much of the praise is given to the author. One is "writing with subtle compassion and magical imagination."

Most Common Author Words

Table 19 provides a list of the most common opinion words in the author description columns (whereas Table 18 is a tally of those columns). The most common words in these author columns are not dissimilar from some of the other most common words: the Chick Lit list includes "humor," "chick" and "lit." The Critically Acclaimed list includes "work," "human," "life" and "literary."

However, the Chick Lit list also includes "trademark," "knack" and "pathos." Trademark, in light of arguments about the commercial nature of genre fiction, is a weighted term. An author has a "trademark uncanny ability to wring humor from clichés." The author is almost manufactured. "Knack" connotes a lack of skill. One has lucked into their "knack for finding the humor" or "knack for humor and whimsical plots." Pathos is more unusual, an author has an

"ability to find comedy, pathos and drama in ordinary lives," but conveys that these works are largely seen as being about emotional journeys.

The Critically Acclaimed list includes "master," "social" and "storytelling." "If some authors are masters of suspense, others postmodern verbal acrobats, and still others complex-character pointillists, few excel in all three arenas." "Social" is used mostly to highlight the scope of a work. One has a "perfect ear for the nuances of identity and social class," or one is a "discerning social observer."

Table 19: Most Common Author Words

Chick Lit	Critically Acclaimed
humor	writer
writes	human
Chick	life
Lit	novel
novel	story
trademark	humor
wit	master
real	characters
life	work
women	social
ability	just
comedy	great
author	fiction
voice	time
knack	literary
engaging	author
hands	complex
good	voice
pathos	sense
stories	history
music	storytelling
scene	detail
high	world
true	contemporary
celebrity	explores

Table 20: Most Common Author Mentions

Chick Lit	Critically Acclaimed
Bridget Jones's Diary	E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*
The Nanny Diaries	William Faulkner
Nick Hornby	Charles Dickens
	J.D. Salinger (*Catcher in the Rye*)
	The English Patient (Michael Ondaatje)
	Zadie Smith
	Don DeLillo
	Jacquelyn Mitchard
	Captain Corelli's Mandolin (Louis de Bernières)
	Willa Cather
	E.M. Forster
	Graham Greene
	Samuel Beckett
	Jane Austen

Table 20 above (Most Common Author Mentions) lists authors or works a work was most often compared to, or also described in reviews. Sometimes, a writing style was not being compared, but rather the book itself mimicked another author's premise, and this was given as a statement of fact rather than opinion (e.g., "structure pays homage to E.M. Forster's *Howards End*"). Again, in order to be included on this list, there needed to be at least one mention of an author. The Critically Acclaimed reviews have a much wider range, though mentions of *The Nanny Diaries* and *Bridget Jones's Diary* are very common in the Chick Lit reviews, more common than any one Critically Acclaimed mention.

Mentions of Audience

These sentences specified a group of people who would be suited to reading the book. If a statement offered "may appeal to fans of Rebecca Campbell and Sophie Kinsella" it was categorized as a mention of the audience instead of as a mention of another author, as its main purpose is to define an audience for the work, or to recommend to that specific audience. Results are shown in Table 21.

Table 21: Mentions of Audience

	Favorable	Unfavorable	Other	
Chick Lit	59	13	11	83
Literary	48	4	8	60
Total	107	17	19	143

There were more of these audience segmentations in the Chick Lit reviews than in the Critically Acclaimed, recalling that genre fiction is more concerned with its audience than literature. There were also a relatively high number of neutral/mixed reviews that defined an audience. These reviews offered little opinion of the book save that of who its audience would be (e.g., a "cheeky roman a clef" for "Magazine junkies who remember the original Jane").

In some cases, the audience was defined so that it excluded large potential groups of readers. In the Chick Lit reviews, one title was "ideal reading for women in their twenties and thirties who are still struggling to find their niches in life," another was "just right for fans of *America's Next Top Model*." While Chick Lit, as much genre fiction, is tailored to a very specific audience, at times, when a statement about the intended audience became so small, the review seemed unfavorable: "For readers who have not yet tired of the Bridget Jones genre."

Definitions in the Critically Acclaimed reviews could also be limited: “His new book will be bought and unread by the easily discouraged, read and reread by the cult of the difficult.” Or: “Strictly for determined readers with a passion for international literature and a familiarity with Islam.” Some indicated more that a select group would be affected differently by a certain work: “anyone who ever suffered the attention of bullies will have to take reading breaks,” “may seem familiar to fans of *Apocalypse Now*.” And other comments, in light of the values associated with literature, praised those who would enjoy the book: “for the literary-minded” and “Smart people will be enormously amused.”

Most Common Audience Words

Table 22 is a list of Most Common Audience terms, the second a list of “reader” terms—comment about how the reader will be affected or will receive a work. Statements like: “succeeds in winning the reader's sympathy” and “readers will enjoy some period ironies” were included.

Table 22: Most Common Audience Terms

Chick Lit	Critically Acclaimed
fans	readers
read	novel
lit	appeal
chick	find
women	literary
romance	enjoy
appeal	fans
enjoy	fiction
love	great
novel	people
Jane	teens
fiction	work
life	familiar
young	fantasy
genre	followers
attract	interest
Bridget	recommended
reach	small
men	admire
heroine	adult
clothes	appreciates
lives	audience
recommended	book
cover	critics
book	general

Table 23: Top Reader Opinion Comments

Chick Lit	Critically Acclaimed
readers	readers
enjoy	just
book	hold
entertaining	feel
find	characters
laughing	novel
sympathetic	quickly
character	attention
novel	narrative
story	unmoved
center	dark
cheering	history
clever	detail
deep	watching
down	world
female	engages
followed	great
friends	last
fun	work
good	recommended
heroine	heart
hooked	recent
just	undoubtedly
pages	tale
question	fascinating

Most Common Audience Words

Table 22 includes "fans" and "appeal" on both the Chick Lit and Critically Acclaimed lists. These were used in reference to fans of an author's, or fans of types of reads: "fans will not be surprised that Bellow," "a feast for fans of fantasy, historical novels, or simply fabulously engrossing reads." Chick Lit reviews included mentions of other authors: "attract fans of Helen Fielding, Jane Green, or Jennifer Weiner."

"Appeal" is a common verb used in the types of sentences offered above. "Will appeal most to readers who admire…" or "will appeal to readers of fantasy yearning for a bit more to think about than the usual fare offers."

With the Chick Lit terms, again "chick" and "lit" are quite prominent. "Women" and "Jane" are also present, as they have been on previous lists. "Jane" reference not only Jane Green the author, but also Harley Jane Kozak, another author, recommending the book to fans of that author's. "Women" here was used to describe the genre's readers: "Young women whose lives are in the same condition will be crazy about this book."

"Genre" references the genre, without necessarily using "chick," "lit" or "Bridget": "Fans of the genre won't be disappointed." "Young" is used to further define the genre's target demographic, "young women."

"Cover" and "clothes" were also common, though nowhere near as much so as the more common words. One book was described as a "must-have for fans of…'Girlie Crack' (shopping for clothes that cost more than what you make in a month)." "Cover" was used both to describe the book's cover and to describe the cover of a magazine: "this novel will most appeal to those most like Christine—critical of Hollywood but still reading *People* magazine from cover to cover" and "But Kinsella's name plus a bubblegum-pink cover will attract the fans." Both of these examples, for "clothes" and "cover," recall Feerst's argument that this genre developed to target more affluent urban women with specific consumption patterns. Both also have a moral tone, deriding that consumption. "Crack" implies an illicit drug addiction, one is being financially irresponsible. That the cover is "bubblegum pink" and that there's a "but" at the beginning of the clause demonstrates that the reviewer feels that these readers are not discerning. In the magazine example, these readers are hypocritical.

In the Critically Acclaimed reviews, “people,” “critics,” “followers” and “teens” are on the list. “Teens” are from the *School Library Journal* reviews. This journal targets school librarians, and recommends books accordingly, similar to *Library Journal’s* recommendations for libraries.

“People” was used to define an audience: “will mean a great deal to a great many people” or “Not for the action crowd, this is instead highly recommended wherever people read for substance.” “Critics” and “Followers” also defined an audience: “will likely find greater favor among critics than among general readers,” “followers of Murakami's work should approve.” While some of these audience definitions are comparatively narrow (“critics than among general readers”), none are undesirable states: a reader would, arguably, want to “read for substance.”

Most Common Reader Opinion Comments

The reader opinion comments are the closest indication of how a reviewer believes a reader will react to a work. Table 23 shows that the Chick Lit reviews contained words that stressed entertainment, like “cheering,” “laughing,” “fun,” “entertaining.” A book will have “readers cheering for the warm, witty, and lovable Solomon sisters,” or readers will be “rolling on the floor laughing.”

“Hooked” is not in relation to wanted to repeat the genre experience, but does connote a sense of wanting to read a book quickly, of being unable to complete other tasks. A story’s “lively pace and outlandish story will keep readers hooked.” Similarly, “pages” describes a behavior exhibited by hooked readers: “What happens next will have readers turning pages.” “Down” does as well: “Readers will down this fizzy "murder-tini" in one gulp.”

Critically Acclaimed words did not stress entertainment so much as move them. “Unmoved” was used to describe the state a reader would not achieve: “No reader will be left unmoved by this dramatic tale.” At the same time, readers would be hooked—but the word used here was “hold,” e.g., “likely to hold readers in thrall.”

The relatively rare use of “quickly” did not emphasize speed of reading, but rather: “Readers have to accept an especially fanciful premise but, as it quickly becomes obvious, acceptance presents no difficulty,” or how quickly a reader would become “engaged.” A book “engages the reader's intellect. Soon, however, the emotions are also engaged.”

Discussion

There were more Critically Acclaimed reviews than Chick Lit reviews; Critically Acclaimed reviews were longer. To a certain extent, this was expected—as reviewers are critics, it follows that reviews of books they like would be more widely available. However, the relative ease of finding reviews of the Critically Acclaimed titles, especially in comparison to locating Chick Lit reviews, underscores that there seems to be a consensus as to what or what is not critically acclaimed, or worthy of review.

The words used in Chick Lit reviews indicated relatively domestic themes in the work, e.g., "mother," "friend," "husband." While some of these words also appeared in the Critically Acclaimed reviews, there were also words like "war." In addition, there words describing women or traditionally female roles were more common in the Chick Lit reviews. This supports descriptions of Chick Lit as being a genre targeted to a predominantly female audience, and one which describes heroines navigating transformative periods in their domestic lives (i.e., balancing a career with motherhood). "Chick" and "lit" also appeared on the list of most common words in Chick Lit reviews, indicating the prevalence of references to the genre within the genre, supporting arguments that genres, as a whole, are self-referencing—the emphasis is not on a single work but rather on an overall body of work. While writers, especially prolific ones like Jane Green, are hardly anonymous hacks, their work is not usually considered to stand alone. Seminal works, like *Bridget Jones's Diary*, are situated as being part of a trend. Likewise, "Bridget" and "Jones" were also common opinion terms in the Chick Lit reviews.

While Critically Acclaimed works were widely compared to other literary texts, this was not to diminish the value of the text, but rather to compliment it. While Chick Lit comparisons to *Bridget Jones's Diary* sometimes carried a dismissive note ("recommended for libraries where Bridget Jones and her ilk are popular"), literary comparisons did not ("on a par with those of Cather, Steinbeck, Berry, and Hemingway").

Critically Acclaimed reviews made mention of a great American novel, underscoring James English's argument that recently, books receiving prizes and books considered the "most important" are becoming more closely aligned. Critically Acclaimed reviews were more likely to

describe a book as being an author's "work," indicating that the text is seen as quite closely connected to the author.

Words like "dialogue" and "prose" were used in expressing opinions for both Chick Lit and Critically Acclaimed reviews, as a common review technique was to select some aspect of the book to criticize or laud. Critically Acclaimed reviews contained more references to "narrative," "prose" or "voice," while Chick Lit works more often mentioned "characters." Characters were considered especially important in the Chick Lit genre, as the genre's audience was thought to desire relatable characters, principally, rather than in a genre like mystery, where an audience may be searching for suspense or a plot twist.

Favorable reviews of Critically Acclaimed works lauded reviews for being complex, compelling and moving. They were "epic" or "great," and reviews themselves were almost reverent, but also making mention of broad concepts like "love," "life" and "world." Reflecting arguments literary works are mind-expanding, favorable reviews, of which there were many, made claims like "This is important work." "History" was another popular word, and often books were described as being a "history" of something, as in "this is a meditation, a history of American slavery."

The language in Chick Lit reviews was notably different: they were praised for being fun, funny, witty, and hilarious, echoing theories that literature is meant to be read slowly, and chick lit very fast. Much of the praise for Chick Lit was couched in references to the genre: "better than most of the stuff that makes its way down the pipeline." At times, Critically Acclaimed works were praised in comparison to an author's previous body of work, or another author's work dealing with a similar subject, but not to the extent that Chick Lit works were compared to the rest of the genre.

Unfavorable reviews derided books for being familiar, obvious or someway redundant, underscoring that the ideal novel should be original, or exhibit creativity. "Predictable" was a common unfavorable opinion word, and "unpredictable" was used favorably. "Contrived" was also an unfavorable term, as was "far" as in "too far" or "far-fetched." Question marks were used in unfavorable Chick Lit reviews, and may be a common technique used in other reviews to indicate that a reviewer feels unfavorably. Critically Acclaimed works were criticized for lacking "credibility" and being "lengthy."

As there were so few unfavorable Critically Acclaimed reviews, there were many fewer unfavorable opinion terms in unfavorable reviews—too few to have a complete list. "Unfortunately" was used for both Chick Lit and Critically Acclaimed reviews. Chick Lit reviews indicated that a book lacked "substance," which can be seen as the flip-side of a book being too "entertaining," supporting Gelder's claim that genre fiction is seen as emptying the mind, in comparison to literature's filling it.

Many more phrases were found in the Critically Acclaimed reviews mentioning use of a writing technique, like "sublime imagery," and this was more common in the favorable reviews than the unfavorable ones. Considering that technical terms like "prose" were more common in the Critically Acclaimed reviews, this result was expected, however the extent to which technique was commented on in Critically Acclaimed reviews over Chick Lit reviews is noteworthy.

While characters are of primary importance in Chick Lit works, mentions of ways a character was created were again more common in Critically Acclaimed works. Phrases like "vividly drawn" instead of a mention of the character in synopsis, attributed skill to the author. Also more common in the Critically Acclaimed reviews were departures from the third person in review itself—phrases addressing the reader directly, e.g., "you will love this book," indicate strong sentiment on the part of the reviewer, but also are more colloquial.

In keeping with theories that authors of literary fiction are more connected to their work—that each work is a piece of art requiring much effort, as opposed to hastily written for quick consumption—there were almost three times as many phrases in the Critically Acclaimed reviews attributing the book's strengths to its author. These phrases, which included ones like "here, Smith has moved into new moral terrain," also were notable for the different kinds of words being used. It was common in Critically Acclaimed reviews for an author to be described as a "master" of their art. For the Chick Lit reviews, words like "trademark" and "knack" were more common, conveying the sense that a Chick Lit author either was commercial (as "trademark" suggests), or fell into their skill.

Many reviews offered recommendations to specific groups or audiences. These were more common in the Chick Lit reviews, in keeping with the characteristic of genre fiction to be more concerned with its audience. These statements often mentioned Chick Lit's predominantly female audience. In a favorable review, a book could be a "must-read for any woman who

struggles with body image, or for anyone who cares about someone who does," for example. Critically Acclaimed review audience statements included ones like "for all public and academic libraries that want to challenge their readers," or, "while its pace and intellectual depth may put off those more attuned to today's 'popular' genre…," which clearly put more value on readers who enjoy these works. Some Chick Lit reviews include statements which disparage the audience specific works would appeal to, rather than the work itself. "Does Kinsella sustain an entire novel with a 25-year-old writer addicted to clothes and makeup? Perhaps, if readers love clothes and makeup just as much." Frequently, the targeting of an audience in a Chick Lit review was so specific as to seem unfavorable.

Common terms describing readers included "hooked" for Chick Lit, and "engaged" for the Critically Acclaimed, again underscoring that genre fiction readers are seen as more passive, more entranced, than literary fiction readers.

Conclusion

Leah Price, in *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel,* wrote that reviews themselves changed the structure of the novel, and an audience's expectations of it:

> The conventions of the review shaped Victorian assumptions not only about how to read, but about the structure of literary texts. By alternating excerpts with plot summaries, they encouraged readers and writers to think alike of texts as accumulations of freestanding beauties strung together by longer stretches of narrative padding (2000, 139).

Reviews are depicted as having power—it the review that "shaped Victorian assumptions," and yet in this paper they are framed as reactionary, reflecting broader cultural constructs. Indeed, in reality, they may be more powerful than this. Many libraries and booksellers use reviews to decide which books to purchase or provide their patrons. While, recalling the work of Radway, we cannot be sure how a bookseller receives a review, it would be remiss not to consider that reviews have an impact. Not only do reviews reflect broader social constructs, in so doing, by virtue of their distribution, they may unquestioningly build or continue those same constructs.

Here, reviews have been analyzed for reflections of a social hierarchy explained in the first part of this work, and they have been found. Literary fiction has been considered separate from genre fiction, and little evidence has been found to refute this stance. The idea that some writers create works for principally commercial gain, and that some are artists, with little concern for their audience persists, but not necessarily in overt ways. While in Chick Lit reviews, little attention was paid to the skill or efforts required to create the product, this was not so for the Critically Acclaimed reviews. Likewise, more stress was placed on the role of the author in Critically Acclaimed reviews, rather than on the audience.

Frequent mentions to the genre itself in the Chick Lit reviews substantiate arguments that genres are self-referencing. That there were few such explicit references in the Critically Acclaimed reviews reflects that these works are seen as largely distinct from one another, and that an element of creativity or originality in their creation is prized. That said, Critically Acclaimed reviews did compare works to that of other authors, though from a wider range than similar mentions in the Chick Lit reviews, and many of the Critically Acclaimed reviews compared

works to their own author's existing body of work. These indicate that there is a sort of genre of literature itself— and that the cultural value of acclaiming works, of naming them the "best," is more standardized than may be accounted for.

Most importantly, the audience mentions found in the reviews not only reflected concepts that readers should or do read different types of works differently—literature or literary works slowly and carefully, and genre fiction quickly and voraciously, but some reviews were dismissive or praiseful of the audiences of certain works, rather than making a favorable or unfavorable statement about the work itself. These types of phrases, of wordings, uphold notions that entire groups may be either "infantilized" or intellectually expanded by reading a work or type of work. Moreover, these wordings run counter to current research on reading and readership, like that done by Victor Nell and Janice Radway, which highlight that readers remake texts.

This research, more than questioning the lack of attributing value to genre fiction, is valuable for its documenting and questioning of the attributing of value to literary fiction. James English's work has been mentioned. It should be noted that any claim that a reader may be improved or worsened by reading also fails to question current constructs of literature and literary worth. If the lack of value accorded to genre fiction is socially rooted, equally so is the valuing of literary fiction.

Earlier in this thesis, Harold Bloom's reaction to Stephen King's receipt of the National Book Award was mentioned. Bloom was quoted as saying that King's receipt was evidence that our cultural life was being dumbed down—but most importantly, that King's works "do little for humanity." The idea that genre fiction is not meant to enrich has been frequently questioned. However, the notion that literary fiction does somehow do much for humanity, especially given the production scale of it, has not been as thoroughly questioned. Drawing from English's documentation about the increased extent of prize-giving, as well as the number of titles acclaimed by critics during the time period of this research alone, the concept that literary fiction is separate from any economic realm and exists solely for the betterment of mankind seems, at best, questionable.

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Appendices

Appendix A: List of Chick Lit and Critically Acclaimed Novels

Chick Lit Titles

Title	Author	Year	Source
Room for Improvement	Ballis, Stacey	2006	Vnuk, R. "Summer Chick Lit"
20 Times a Lady	Bosnak, Karyn	2006	Vnuk, R. "Summer Chick Lit"
Back in the Game	Chamberlin, Holly	2006	Vnuk, R. "Summer Chick Lit"
Consider Lily	Dayton, Anne & May Vanderbilt	2006	Vnuk, R. "Summer Chick Lit"
Model Student: A Tale of Co-Eds and Cover Girls	Hazelwood, Robin	2006	Vnuk, R. "Summer Chick Lit"
Here Comes the Bride	Lyles, Whitney	2006	Vnuk, R. "Summer Chick Lit"
Pick Me Up	Rice, Zoe	2006	Vnuk, R. "Summer Chick Lit"
True Lies of a Drama Queen	Nichols, Lee	2006	Vnuk, R. "Summer Chick Lit"
Boy Meets Girl	Cabot, Meg	2004	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Every Boy's Got One	Cabot, Meg	2005	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
The Big Love	Dunn, Sarah	2004	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Smothering	French, Wendy	2003	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
The Journal of Mortifying Moments	Harding, Robyn	2004	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Devil May Care	McInnis, Sheri	2003	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Children of God Go Bowling	Olson, Shannon	2004	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Welcome to My Planet	Olson, Shannon	2001	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Good in Bed	Weiner, Jennifer	2001	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
In Her Shoes	Weiner, Jennifer	2002	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Rosie Dunne	Ahern, Cecelia	2005	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason	Fielding, Helen	2000	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Bridget Jones's Diary	Fielding, Helen	1998	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Jemima J: A Novel About Ugly Ducklings and Swans	Green, Jane	2000	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Guilty Feet	Harte, Kelly	2003	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Gossip Hound	Holden, Wendy	2003	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"

Lucy Sullivan is Getting Married	Keyes, Marian	1999	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Can You Keep a Secret?	Kinsella, Sophie	2004	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Confessions of a Shopaholic	Kinsella, Sophie	2001	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
To Be Someone	Voss, Louise	2001	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Something Borrowed	Giffin, Emily	2004	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
The Other Woman	Green, Jane	2005	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Diary of a Mad Bride	Wolf, Laura	2002	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Babyville	Green, Jane	2004	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Watermelon	Keyes, Marian	1998	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
I Don't Know How She Does It: The Life of Kate Reddy	Pearson, Allison	2002	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Little Earthquakes	Weiner, Jennifer	2004	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
P.S. I Love You	Ahern, Cecelia	2004	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Starting from Square Two	Lissner, Caren	2004	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
How To Meet Cute Boys	Kizis, Deanna	2003	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
The Devil Wears Prada	Weisberger, Lauren	2003	Vnuk, R. "Hip Lit for Hip Chicks"
Love Walked In	de los Santos, Marisa	2006	2006 Best Books, Library Journal
Thanks for Nothing, Nick Maxwell	Carbin, Debbie	2008	Library Journal Review
This Charming Man	Keyes, Marian	2008	Library Journal Review
The Smart One and the Pretty One	LaZebnik, Claire	2008	Library Journal Review
Catching Katie	Hatcher, Robin Lee	2004	Butler, T. "Chick Lit Sees the Light"
Sisterchicks Do the Hula	Gunn, Robin Jones	2004	Butler, T. "Chick Lit Sees the Light"
Practically Perfect	Fforde, Katie	2008	Library Journal Review
Names My Sisters Call Me	Crane, Megan	2008	Library Journal Review
A Mile in My Flip-Flops	Carlson, Melody	2008	Library Journal Review
Deep Dish	Andrews, Mary Kay	2008	Library Journal Review
Obsession, Deceit, and Really Dark Chocolate	Davis, Kyra	2007	Library Journal Review
Momzillas	Kargman, Jill	2006	NYTimes article
The Infidelity Pact	Karasyov, Carrie	2006	NYTimes article

Piece of Work	Zigman, Laura	2006	NYTImes article
All We Ever Wanted Was Everything	Brown, Janelle	2008	Best Books 2008, Library Journal
Mine Are Spectacular	Kaplan, J. & L. Schnurnberger	2005	NYTimes article
Love The One You're With	Giffin, Emily	2008	NYTimes article
Death by Chick Lit	Harris, Lynn	2007	Library Journal Review
Still Life with Husband	Fox, Lauren	2007	Library Journal Review
Remind Me Again Why I Need a Man	Carroll, Claudia	2007	Library Journal Review
Off the Record	O'Connell, Jennifer	2005	5 star review, chicklitbooks.com
Conversations with the Fat Girl	Palmer, Lisa	2005	5 star review, chicklitbooks.com
Beyond the Blonde	Flynn-Hui, Kathleen	2005	5 star review, chicklitbooks.com
The Secret Lives of Fortunate Wives	Strohmeyer, Sarah	2006	5 star review, chicklitbooks.com
The Breakup Club	Senate, Melissa	2006	5 star review, chicklitbooks.com
Fashionably Late	Kendrick, Beth	2006	5 star review, chicklitbooks.com
Falling Out of Fashion	Yampolsky, Karen	2007	5 star review, chicklitbooks.com
Do They Wear High Heels in Heaven?	Orloff, Erica	2005	4 star review, chicklitbooks.com
Everyone Worth Knowing	Weisberger, Lauren	2005	4 star review, chicklitbooks.com
True Hollywood Lies	Brown, Josie	2005	4 star review, chicklitbooks.com
Imaginary Men	Banerjee, Anjali	2005	4 star review, chicklitbooks.com
The Younger Man	Tucker, Sarah	2006	4 star review, chicklitbooks.com
Fashion Victim	Baker, Sam	2005	Library Journal Review
Sex, Murder, and a Double Latte	Davis, Kyra	2005	Library Journal Review
Dating Is Murder	Kozak, Jane	2005	Library Journal Review
Playing James	Mason, Sarah	2004	Library Journal Review
Confessions of a Super Mom	Hauser, Melanie Lynne	2005	Library Journal Review
Milkrun	Mlynowski, Sarah	2001	Library Journal Review
LA Woman	Yardley, Cathy	2005	Library Journal Review
Out of the Blue	Wolff, Isabel	2003	author mentioned in Vnuk article
Vince and Joy	Jewell, Lisa	2005	author mentioned in Vnuk article

Being Committed	Maxted, Anna	2005	author mentioned in Vnuk article
Simply Divine	Holden, Wendy	1999	author mentioned in Vnuk article
The Nanny Diaries	McLaughlin, E. & N. Kraus	2002	author mentioned in Vnuk article
The Dirty Girls Social Club	Valdes-Rodriguez, Anna	2004	author mentioned in Vnuk article
The Not So Perfect Man	Frankel, Valerie	2004	author mentioned in Vnuk article
Good Grief	Winston, Lolly	2004	author mentioned in Vnuk article
The Girls' Guide to Hunting and Fishing	Bank, Melissa	1999	author mentioned in Vnuk article
Secret Celebrity	Wolper, Carol	1999	Smith, C. *Cosmopolitan Culture and Consumerism in Chick Lit*
Getting Over It	Maxted, Anna	2000	Smith, C. Cosmopolitan Culture and Consumerism in Chick Lit
Sex and the City	Bushnell, Candace	1996	Smith, C. Cosmopolitan Culture and Consumerism in Chick Lit
Animal Husbandry	Zigman, Laura	1998	Smith, C. Cosmopolitan Culture and Consumerism in Chick Lit
One Hit Wonder	Jewell, Lisa	2002	Smith, C. Cosmopolitan Culture and Consumerism in Chick Lit
See Jane Date	Senate, Melissa	2001	Intro to Ferris & Young
Maneater	Grazer, Gigi Levangie	2003	Intro to Ferris & Young
Family Trust	Brown, Amanda	2003	Intro to Ferris & Young
Run, Catch, Kiss	Sohn, Amy	1999	Intro to Ferris & Young
A Connecticut Fashionista in King Arthur's Court	Mancusi, Marianne	2005	Harzewski in Ferris & Young
Carrie Pilby	Lissner, Caren	2003	Harzewski in Ferris & Young
Insider Dating	O'Connell, Jennifer	2003	Harzewski in Ferris & Young
Dress Rehearsal	O'Connell, Jennifer	2003	Harzewski in Ferris & Young
Satin Doll	Quinones, Karen E.	2002	Harzewski in Ferris & Young
American Idle	Holliday, Alesia	2004	Harzewski in Ferris & Young
The Accidental Diva	Williams, Tia	2004	Harzewski in Ferris & Young
Up and Out	Papa, Ariella	2003	Harzewski in Ferris & Young
The Sweetest Taboo	Matthews, Carole	2004	Harzewski in Ferris & Young
Elegance	Tessaro, Kathleen	2003	Harzewski in Ferris & Young
Wanderlust	Dyer, Chris	2003	Harzewski in Ferris & Young

A Certain Age	Janowitz, Tama	1999	Harzewski in Ferris & Young
Getting Over Jack Wagner	Juska, Elise	2003	Harzewski in Ferris & Young
Angels	Keyes, Marian	2002	Wells in Ferris & Young
Revenge of the Middle-Aged Woman	Buchan, Elizabeth	2003	Wells in Ferris & Young
Babyface	Gibson, Fiona	2004	Hewett in Ferris & Young
Amanda Bright@Home	Crittenden, Danielle	2003	Hewett in Ferris & Young
Waking Beauty	Friedman, Elyse	2004	Ummiger in Ferris & Young
A Love of My Own	Harris, Lynn	2002	Bibliography in Ferris & Young
Otherwise Engaged	Finnamore, Suzanne	2000	Bibliography in Ferris & Young
The Dim Sum of All Things	Keltner, Kim Wong	2004	Bibliography in Ferris & Young
Bling	Kennedy, Erica	2004	Bibliography in Ferris & Young
The Solomon Sisters Wise Up	Senate, Melissa	2003	Bibliography in Ferris & Young
Goddess for Hire	Singh, Sonia	2003	Bibliography in Ferris & Young
Love Monkey	Smith, Kyle	2004	Bibliography in Ferris & Young

Critically Acclaimed Titles

Cloudsplitter	Banks, Russell	1998	New York Times Best Books
The Poisonwood Bible	Kingsolver, Barbara	1998	New York Times Best Books
Preston Falls	Gates, David	1998	New York Times Best Books
Disgrace	Coetzee, J.M.	1999	New York Times Best Books
A Star Called Henry	Doyle, Roddy	1999	New York Times Best Books
Being Dead	Crace, Jim	2000	New York Times Best Books
The Human Stain	Roth, Philip	2000	New York Times Best Books
White Teeth	Smith, Zadie	2000	New York Times Best Books
Austerlitz	Sebald, W.G.	2001	New York Times Best Books
The Corrections	Franzen, Jonathan	2001	New York Times Best Books
John Henry Days	Whitehead, Colson	2001	New York Times Best Books
True History of the Kelly Gang	Carey, Peter	2001	New York Times Best Books
Atonement	McEwan, Ian	2002	New York Times Best Books
Middlesex	Eugenides, Jeffrey	2002	New York Times Best Books
Roscoe	Kennedy, William	2002	New York Times Best Books
Brick Lane	Ali, Monica	2003	New York Times Best Books
Drop City	Boyle, T. Coraghessan	2003	New York Times Best Books
The Fortress of Solitude	Lethem, Jonathan	2003	New York Times Best Books

The Known World	Jones, Edward P.	2003	New York Times Best Books
Gilead	Robinson, Marilynne	2004	New York Times Best Books
The Plot Against America	Roth, Philip	2004	New York Times Best Books
Snow	Pamuk, Orhan	2004	New York Times Best Books
War Trash	Jin, Ha	2004	New York Times Best Books
The Master	Toibin, Colm	2004	New York Times Best Books
Kafka on the Shore	Murakami, Haruki	2005	New York Times Best Books
On Beauty	Smith, Zadie	2005	New York Times Best Books
Prep	Sittenfeld, Curtis	2005	New York Times Best Books
Saturday	McEwan, Ian	2005	New York Times Best Books
Veronica	Gaitskill, Mary	2005	New York Times Best Books
Absurdistan	Shteyngart, Gary	2006	New York Times Best Books
The Emperor's Children	Messud, Claire	2006	New York Times Best Books
The Lay of the Land	Ford, Richard	2006	New York Times Best Books
Special Topics in Calamity Physics	Pessl, Marisha	2006	New York Times Best Books
Man Gone Down	Thomas, Michael	2007	New York Times Best Books
Out Stealing Horses	Petterson, Per	2007	New York Times Best Books
The Savage Detectives	Bolano, Roberto	2007	New York Times Best Books
Then We Came to the End	Ferris, Joshua	2007	New York Times Best Books
Tree of Smoke	Johnson, Denis	2007	New York Times Best Books
A Mercy	Morrison, Toni	2008	New York Times Best Books
Netherland	O'Neill, Joseph	2008	New York Times Best Books
2666	Bolano, Roberto	2008	New York Times Best Books
The Hakawati	Alameddine, Rabih	2008	Best Books 2008, Library Journal
The Wasted Vigil	Aslam, Nadeem	2008	Best Books 2008, Library Journal
All We Ever Wanted Was Everything	Brown, Janelle	2008	Best Books 2008, Library Journal
The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo	Larsson, Stieg	2008	Best Books 2008, Library Journal
The Given Day	Lehane, Dennis	2008	Best Books 2008, Library Journal
The Painter of Battles	Perez-Reverte, Arturo	2008	Best Books 2008, Library Journal
Home	Robinson, Marilynne	2008	Best Books 2008, Library Journal
Lavinia	Ursula K. Le Guin	2008	Best Books 2008, Library Journal
Cost	Robinson, Roxana	2008	Best Books 2008, Library Journal
Indignation	Roth, Philip	2008	Best Books 2008, Library Journal
Without a Backward Glance	Veitch, Kate	2008	Best Books 2008, Library Journal

Fieldwork	Berlinski, Mischa	2007	Best Books 2007, Library Journal
The Yiddish Policemen's Union	Chabon, Michael	2007	Best Books 2007, Library Journal
The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao	Diaz, Junot	2007	Best Books 2007, Library Journal
Orpheus Lost	Hospital, Janette Turner	2007	Best Books 2007, Library Journal
The Exception	Jungerson, Christian	2007	Best Books 2007, Library Journal
In the Country of Men	Matar, Hisham	2007	Best Books 2007, Library Journal
Be Near Me	O'Hagan, Andrew	2007	Best Books 2007, Library Journal
The Tenderness of Wolves	Penney, Stef	2007	Best Books 2007, Library Journal
The Year of Fog	Richmond, Michelle	2007	Best Books 2007, Library Journal
The Spanish Bow	Romano-Lax, Andromeda	2007	Best Books 2007, Library Journal
The Post-Birthday World	Shriver, Lionel	2007	Best Books 2007, Library Journal
The Broken Shore	Temple, Peter	2007	Best Books 2007, Library Journal
The Brief History of the Dead	Brockmeier, Kevin	2006	Best Books 2006, Library Journal
Every Visible Thing	Carey, Lisa	2006	Best Books 2006, Library Journal
The Stolen Child	Donohue, Keith	2006	Best Books 2006, Library Journal
The Dream Life of Sukhanov	Grushin, Olga	2006	Best Books 2006, Library Journal
Giraffe	Ledgard, J.M.	2006	Best Books 2006, Library Journal
The Road	McCarthy, Cormac	2006	Best Books 2006, Library Journal
A Dirty Job	Moore, Christopher	2006	Best Books 2006, Library Journal
Suite Francaise	Nemirovsky, Irene	2006	Best Books 2006, Library Journal
The Echo Maker	Powers, Richard	2006	Best Books 2006, Library Journal
Against the Day	Pynchon, Thomas	2006	Best Books 2006, Library Journal
The Greatest Man in Cedar Hole	Doyon, Stephanie	2005	Best Books 2005, Library Journal
Never Let Me Go	Ishiguro, Kazuo	2005	Best Books 2005, Library Journal
The Portrait	Pears, Ian	2005	Best Books 2005, Library Journal
Exposure	Stevenson, Talitha	2005	Best Books 2005, Library Journal
A Novel of Fame, Honor, and Really Bad Weather	Willet, Jincy	2003	Best Books 2003, Library Journal
The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time	Haddon, Mark	2003	Best Books 2003, Library Journal

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress	Dai Sije	2001	Best Books 2001, Library Journal
The Voyage of the Narwhal	Barrett, Andrea	1998	Best Books 1998, Library Journal
Jack Maggs	Carey, Peter	1998	Best Books 1998, Library Journal
The Archivist	Cooley, Martha	1998	Best Books 1998, Library Journal
Charming Billy	McDermott, Alice	1998	Best Books 1998, Library Journal
Enduring Love	McEwan, Ian	1998	Best Books 1998, Library Journal
Blindness	Saramago, Jose	1998	Best Books 1998, Library Journal
Caucasia	Senna, Danzy	1998	Best Books 1998, Library Journal
City of Light	Belfer, Lauren	1999	Best Books 1999, Library Journal
The Night Inspector	Busch, Frederick	1999	Best Books 1999, Library Journal
Cracks	Kohler, Sheila	1999	Best Books 1999, Library Journal
Fleur de Leigh's Life of Crime	Leslie, Diane	1999	Best Books 1999, Library Journal
History of Atlantic City	Reuss, Frederick	1999	Best Books 1999, Library Journal
The Jukebox Queen of Malta	Rinaldi, Nicholas	1999	Best Books 1999, Library Journal
The Abyssinian	Rufin, Jean-Christophe	1999	Best Books 1999, Library Journal
Tipping the Velvet	Waters, Sarah	1999	Best Books 1999, Library Journal
Ravelstein	Bellow, Saul	2000	Best Books 2000, Library Journal
The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay	Chabon, Michael	2000	Best Books 2000, Library Journal
Pilgrim	Findley, Timothy	2000	Best Books 2000, Library Journal
Bee Season	Goldberg, Myla	2000	Best Books 2000, Library Journal
Too Far Afield	Grass, Gunter	2000	Best Books 2000, Library Journal
English Passengers	Kneale, Matthew	2000	Best Books 2000, Library Journal
Buddha's Little Finger	Pelevin, Victor	2000	Best Books 2000, Library Journal
Mrs. Hollingworth's Men	Powell, Padgett	2000	Best Books 2000, Library Journal
A Small Death in Lisbon	Wilson, Robert	2000	Best Books 2000, Library Journal
No Bones	Burns, Anna	2002	Best Books 2002, Library Journal
Life of Pi	Martel, Yann	2002	Best Books 2002, Library Journal
Family Matters	Mistry, Rohinton	2002	Best Books 2002, Library Journal
The True Sources of the Nile	Stone, Sarah	2002	Best Books 2002, Library Journal
The Little Friend	Tartt, Donna	2002	Best Books 2002, Library Journal
Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell	Clarke, Susanna	2004	Best Books 2004, Library Journal

Birds Without Wings	de Bernieres, Louis	2004	Best Books 2004, Library Journal
The Confessions of Max Tivoli	Greer, Andrew Sean	2004	Best Books 2004, Library Journal
The Distance Between Us	Hamilton, Masha	2004	Best Books 2004, Library Journal
Cloud Atlas	Mitchell, David	2004	Best Books 2004, Library Journal
Little Children	Perotta, Tom	2004	Best Books 2004, Library Journal
The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse	Erdich, Louise	2001	Best Books 2001, Library Journal
Kissing the Virgin's Mouth	Gershten, Donna M.	2001	Best Books 2001, Library Journal
Silence in October	Grondahl, Jens Christian	2001	Best Books 2001, Library Journal
Empire Falls	Russo, Richard	2001	Best Books 2001, Library Journal
The Death of Vishnu	Suri, Manil	2001	Best Books 2001, Library Journal
The Feast of the Goat	Vargas Llosa, Mario	2001	Best Books 2001, Library Journal
My Life as a Fake	Carey, Peter	2003	Best Books 2003, Library Journal
The Great Fire	Hazzard, Shirley	2003	Best Books 2003, Library Journal
Evidence of Things Unseen	Wiggins, Marianne	2003	Best Books 2003, Library Journal
The Liberated Bride	Yehoshua, A.B.	2003	Best Books 2003, Library Journal

Appendix B: Extract of Data Analysis Spreadsheet

Book Title	Cloudsplitter	Every Boy's Got One
Review in	Library Journal	Booklist
Author	Banks, Russell	Cabor, Meg
Type of Book	Literary	Chick Lit
Nature of Review	Favorable	Unfavorable
Length of Review	867	997
Review: Summary	At first glance, aside from the setting, this massive novelized life of Abolitionist John Brown, told from the viewpoint of one of his sons, has nothing in common with Banks's book of outlaw excess, Rule of the Bone (HarperCollins, 1995). Yet both deal with single-mindedness, rebellion, and codes--except that Brown's versions of these are more honorable (he would have agreed with Dylan that "to live outside the law you must be honest").	In her signature mode, Cabot uses e-mails, journal entries, PDA logs, sales receipts, and boarding passes to tell an over-the-top tale of an elopement to Italy. Maid-of-honor Jane scribbles furiously in her travel diary about the heartless and unromantic best man, Cal. Cal punches the keys of his Blackberry, sending e-mail to groom Mark about madcap Jane. Bride Holly tosses notes to Jane about Mark's cute friend, and everyone is in a luggage-stuffed Toyota on the way to a picturesque Italian villa (not in tenth-grade study hall, as assumed).When the lack of *one* legal document prevents Holly and Mark from holy matrimony, it's Jane and Cal to the rescue as they race to the U.S. consulate in Rome, eight hours away, while Holly and Mark share their first bout of food poisoning from oysters. All the while everyone is scribbling, typing, e-mailing, and doodling.
Review: Opinion	This book has all the stark beauty of the Adirondacks setting and of Brown's religion, and the elderly, reclusive narrator's coming to terms with himself and his father is an achievement in its own right. Besides, like the works of Thomas Mallon and Thomas Gifford, this is not just a fine novel (and a wonderfully structured one at that) but a way to participate in history. Recommended, without hyperbole, for all collections	Uneven debut; not helped by talky style
Opinion Keywords/Phrases (combination of three columns)	Fine novel; has all the stark beauty; a way to participate in history; wonderfully structured; achievement; recommended; without hyperbole	Sometimes gruesome; sometimes giggly
Opinion Keywords/Phrases (relating to readers)		
Compared to other authors	Thomas Mallon and Thomas Gifford	
Descriptions		

Relating Specifically to Characters		
Identified Themes	Single-mindedness; rebellion; codes	Elopement; marriage
Prose/Narrative Description		
Review mention of reader (of review)		
Author Keywords or Phrases		
Audience Keywords or Phrases		