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Stylistic Analysis of Recent Chick Literature“

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I confirm to have conceived and written this Master thesis in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the bibliographical references, either in the footnotes or within the text. Any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are truthfully acknowledged and identified in the footnotes.

HINWEIS

Diese Diplomarbeit hat nachgewiesen, dass die betreffende Kandidatin befähigt ist, wissenschaftliche Themen selbstständig sowie inhaltlich und methodisch vertretbar zu bearbeiten. Da die Korrekturen der Beurteilenden nicht eingetragen sind und das Gutachten nicht beiliegt, ist daher nicht erkenntlich mit welcher Note diese Arbeit abgeschlossen wurde. Das Spektrum reicht von sehr gut bis genügend. Die Habilitierten des Instituts für Anglistik und Amerikanistik bitten diesen Hinweis bei der Lektüre zu beachten.

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1. Introduction

This diploma thesis deals with a relatively recent genre of literary fiction – frequently described as literature written by women for a female audience – so-called chick lit. Chick lit books often deal with a woman in her twenties or early thirties who throughout the story struggles to find the man of her dreams and in the end all her problems are resolved and the protagonist happily finds ‘Mr. Right’. For that matter, chick lit is sometimes criticised for being low literature, only serving the purpose of cheap entertainment. Elizabeth Merrick, the editor of the book *This Is Not Chick Lit*, even claims that ‘chick lit shuts down our consciousness. Literature expands our imaginations’ (Merrick, introduction, p. ix), meaning that chick lit books only ever present a stereotyped world view and are, if at all, a dumb time filler. (High) literature, on the other hand, uses artistic language and complicated plot and/ or time structures that require the reader’s full attention and mental participation. Ken Gelder takes a similar stand and juxtaposes popular fiction with literary fiction or Literature,¹ as he refers to it, in his treatise *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field*. By Literature, he means the works of authors such as Jane Austen, George Elliot, James Joyce, Toni Morrison or Salman Rushdie. Gelder argues that ‘Literature deploys a set of logics and practices that are different in kind to those deployed in the field of popular fiction’ (Gelder, 12). Whereas Literature calls on the ‘language of art’, popular fiction rarely uses artistic language. It is much more concerned with pleasing a mass audience and valuing ‘conventions over originality’ (Gelder, 13) Therefore, chick lit as a form of popular fiction is largely linked to commerce and entertainment and mostly neglected by critics, for they see little artistic merit in it.

I personally was first introduced to this rather new genre of popular fiction while after attending a course on contemporary literature at the University of Manchester in 2004, where I became aware that chick lit is more than popular fiction written for the mere entertainment of a female audience.

¹ Cf. Gelder, 11. Gelder refers to high literature as Literature (with a capital L), as opposed to literature as a general field of writing.

Then, in the weekend supplement of the *Financial Times*², I came across an article that spanned the concept of chick lit even further and illuminated what comes after chick lit's heyday – the celebration of *mummy lit*. The terminology of both 'chick lit' and 'mummy lit' shall be discussed later on in this thesis for now the effect of reading the above-mentioned article is of central interest. I began thinking of exploring the exciting topic of chick lit and actually writing a thesis about it that would not only consist of plain plot analysis but rather investigate chick lit novels on a stylistic basis. Do chick lit novels engage euphemisms? What are the most prominent metaphors and what do they stand for? How are the characters described and what are the major distinctions between the male characters in chick lit novels? What is chick lit's particular style – both on a narrative as well as visual basis?

Overall, I was surprised that when presenting my topic for analysis to my colleagues, many of them were not at all familiar with the term chick lit, let alone mummy lit. That is why, in the first section of this thesis, a brief introduction into the terminology that is relevant for understanding the topic as well as the analysis of the novels shall be given.

Speaking of this, it shall also be mentioned what the novels of interest are going to be. The first novel of analysis probably does not require a too detailed introduction, as many people are familiar with it anyway: *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding. First published in the UK in 1996 it became an almost immediate success and today is referred to as the forerunner of the chick lit genre and as the prototype of chick lit, to which many novels are still compared. The story, made up entirely of diary entries, relates one year in the life of Bridget Jones, a career-minded woman working in the publishing industry, who starts an affair with her boss. But she keeps running into Mark Darcy, a successful lawyer, whom she has known since she was a child and thus begins to struggle with her emotional entanglement. While fighting the obstacles of love, she is also very much concerned with her way of living, as she is convinced that she drinks and smokes too much, all of which she wants to get rid of over the year, along with losing a bit of weight.

² Cf. Berwick, Isabel. "Mummydom's the word in chick-lit land".

Additionally, her family faces a crisis as her mother starts a relationship with a much younger man, but fortunately Bridget has three very close friends who always help her out of her predicament.

The second novel of investigation is Sophie Kinsella's *Shopaholic & Baby*, the fifth novel of the successful 'Shopaholic' series. The story revolves around the life of Becky Brandon (née Bloomwood) – a personal shopper and self-proclaimed shopaholic – who is married to Luke, owner of a PR company. The novel starts with the reader being informed that Becky is expecting a baby and basically the whole story is set around this topic. While Luke is at business meetings, Becky is left alone to do some shopping for the baby and keep doctor's appointments. However, in the course of time, not only are they unable to get their dream house but – possibly because of the hormonal imbalance – Becky suspects Luke of having an affair and their perfect relationship seems to start crumbling.

Finally, the third novel of analysis is *Motherland* by Maria Beaumont. Fran Clarke, the heroine of the story, used to have a fabulous career as a voiceover artist and used to be in love with her husband. But that was before she had kids. Now she suffers from post-natal depression and turns to drinking to drown her sorrows. Her husband abandons her more and more (first mentally, then physically) and starts having an affair. As a 'part-time' single mother, Fran has to fight the bitchy mothers at her children's school, none of which does her self-confidence any good. Moreover, she is supposed to go back to work but is far too scared of failing. Ultimately, it is her two best friends who are able to help her out of her misery.

The discussion of the novels will be the major part of this thesis, whereupon Sara Mills' *Feminist Stylistics* will form the basis for the analysis, as I shall explain later on.

2. What is Chick Lit? – A Definition

Chick lit is a recent genre in literary fiction and it most often 'features books written by women and focusing on young, quirky, female protagonists', as Paul McFedries explains on www.thewordspy.com. Other definitions include *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* that classifies chick lit as being

books about young women and the typical problems they have with men, sex, losing weight etc, especially books written by women for women to read - used humorously. (LDOCE online)

From a more critical or rather sceptical point of view, the following quote by Elizabeth Merrick may prove useful:

Chick lit is the daughter of the romance novel and the stepsister to the fashion magazine. Details about race and class are almost always absent except, of course, for the protagonist's relentless pursuit of Money, a Makeover, and Mr. Right. (Merrick, introduction, p. vii-viii)

Although actually a quite accurate description of what chick lit is and what it is about, this example has an insulting tone about it. It is obviously true that chick lit novels are most often romantic tales and maybe also sometimes superficial, as regards the heroine's fascination for consumer goods and a designer wardrobe. But there is much more to be discovered than what appears on the surface, which I hope I can manage to show in this thesis.

Generally speaking, the term chick lit is composed of the word 'chick', which is a quite politically incorrect slang term for 'woman' and described in the first edition of the *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* as an informal term referring to 'a young woman' (Pearsall, 299), and 'lit' which denotes the abbreviated form of 'literature'.³ Thus, according to this dictionary, chick lit is 'literature which appeals to young women' (Pearsall, 299).

³ Cf. Pearsall, 1022.

However, it is not entirely clear when the term chick lit actually appeared for the first time and who the initiator of this wholly new term and concept was. Some critics claim that it was James Wolcott who, in his article “Hear Me Purr: Maureen Dowd and the Rise of Postfeminist Chick-Lit” published in 1996 in *The New Yorker*, was the first to use chick lit to define a new trend in writing. His article deals with the rise of female newspaper columnists at the time – Maureen Dowd is a co-worker of Wolcott’s – which also helped Helen Fielding (*Bridget Jones’s Diary*) and Candace Bushnell (*Sex and the City*) to unexpected success. For clarification, both books originated from newspaper columns. Interestingly though, it should have been a man, of all people, to come up with this term for a new rather female-biased literary form. For that reason, Cris Mazza argues that Wolcott actually only reused what she and her co-editor had already ‘invented’ in 1995 when their anthology *Chick-Lit: Postfeminist Fiction* was published. Though the term chick lit was used ironically at that time, Mazza was still surprised that ‘ten years later [their] tag would be greasing the commercial book industry machine’ (Mazza, 18)

Many critics claim that chick lit is a particularly 1990s phenomenon, with the (re)adaptation of the term ‘chick’ to new and ironic connotations. Imelda Whelehan in the discussion about chick lit states that

Of course, chick lit inevitably emerges from the legacy of feminism, its writers are a generation of women too young to be in the vanguard of the 1970s, and yet aware enough to have absorbed the cultural impact of *The Female Eunuch* and *Fear of Flying*.⁴ (Whelehan, *BJD*, 67)

Admittedly, most chick lit authors are a similar age (around thirty) as their protagonists in the novels and therefore may feel that feminism does not address their thoughts and needs. Radically speaking, they may even think that feminism had oppressed women by depriving them of the pleasures of celebrating femininity, in the form of dressing up and wearing makeup.

⁴ These books by Germaine Greer and Erica Jong, respectively are two very well known exponents of the 1970s feminist movement; both deal with women’s sexual liberation.

From the 1980s onwards, there was a sense of feminism being a potential restriction of women's choices, as it was seen as anti-sex and anti-glamour. The possibility arises that feminism may have gone too far, radically separating men and women and driving a wedge into their relationship.

So by the time the 1990s arrived, women had shaken off feminism's extremeness and returned to their 'essential' femininity⁵ – a concept which has come to be known as post-feminism. Angela McRobbie understands post-feminism 'to refer to an active process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s come to be undermined' (McRobbie, 254). It is often claimed that post-feminism is about the 'new woman', who does not necessarily refer to herself as being a strong feminist and in addition, does not fight (or have to fight) for equal rights anymore. The 'new woman' fights for a 'normal' life, consciously choosing her way of living that can either embrace or abandon feminist principles. Therefore, Sarah Gamble defines post-feminism as referring to 'a distinct group of mostly young British and American feminists who have attacked feminism in its present form as inadequate to address the concerns and experiences of women today' (Gamble, 298) and thus accentuating the need for reforming traditional feminist ideas to make them fit into contemporary surroundings.⁶ However, as McRobbie argues,

young women are [...] now "dis-embedded" from communities where gender roles were fixed. And, as the old structures of social class fade away [...], individuals are increasingly called upon to invent their own structures. (McRobbie, 260)

She furthermore claims that these so-called 'self-monitoring practices', such as diaries or self-help guides, act as replacements for formerly structured pathways.⁷

⁵ Cf. Whelehan, *BJD*, 67-69.

⁶ Cf. Benstock, 253.

⁷ Cf. McRobbie, 260f.

Whelehan similarly argues that feminism in general used to support the widespread view of the sexes being totally different and failing to communicate, as they did not bother recognising each other's differences. In this sense, "Chick lit" underscores this concept of emotional separatism, and is marketed as appealing primarily to women [...] in a new form of literary separatism' (Whelehan, *BJD*, 68), as it is being aimed almost exclusively at women with their main (female) characters standing in their own way at the prospect of a perfect relationship.

2.1 Development of Chick Lit – New Sub-Genres

Despite being a relatively recent genre, chick lit has already encountered great success in popular fiction. Though it is hard to determine when the era of chick lit started – as we have seen in the previous paragraph – as well as which authors were its predecessors, it is generally acknowledged that it was Helen Fielding, whose novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* paved the way for a new literary genre.⁸ Since then, chick lit has grown and put forth several sub-genres or categories such as 'mummy lit', 'lad lit' and even 'church lit'. The range of the varieties and variations chick lit has put forward is almost innumerable and it is inevitable that the list will be extended in the time yet to come. Ferriss and Young in their anthology *Chick Lit: the New Woman's Fiction* introduce and explain a number of these new sub-categories of chick lit. What is of central interest for my thesis is the expression 'mummy lit' or 'mom lit', as one of the novels I am going to discuss may be tagged as being an exponent of mummy lit.⁹ The chicklitbooks.com website defines mummy lit as being a sub-genre dedicated to every little detail evolving around motherhood, including pregnancy, parenting and all the ups and downs that come along with it.¹⁰

⁸ Cf. Whelehan *Bestseller*, 173f.

⁹ Cf. *Motherland* by Maria Beaumont.

¹⁰ Cf. <<http://chicklitbooks.com/sub-genres/mom-lit/>>.

Isabel Berwick in the *Financial Times* article states that 'mummy-lit is where chick-lit goes to grow up, get married, have a child (or three)' which forces the heroine of these novels '[to swap] sex and shopping for babies and baking'. In Ferriss and Young's anthology, a whole chapter is dedicated to mummy lit and Heather Hewett in her article "You Are Not Alone: The Personal, the Political, and the 'New' Mommy Lit" explains that the novels often feature fallible but likeable narrators

who, although overwhelmed by diapers, lack of sleep, and incompetent husbands, managed to survive the self-transformation into motherhood without losing their sense of humour. (Hewett, 119f)

Similarly to chick lit, the plot of mummy lit books centre around a female protagonist but this time the heroine is not on the search for Mr. Right or shoes and other consumer goods as her object of desire, but instead she struggles with her new role as a mother (and wife). I will go into greater detail about mummy lit later on in this thesis, when Maria Beaumont's novel *Motherland* will be discussed.

Let us return to the other sub-categories chick lit has generated. For many critics, chick lit has always been a firstly and foremostly female domain with no transgression whatsoever. But with the adaptation and development of chick lit, a sub-genre was born that ruptured the formerly untouched boundaries of gender: lad lit (or dick lit, as a reference to 'chick' lit).¹¹ Its potential readers and buyers are primarily young men. The legitimate question now is why lad lit is actually classified under the genre of chick lit. On the chicklitbooks.com website it is clarified that lad lit is similar in tone to chick lit and thus falls into the same category. The protagonists in lad lit novels often experience troublesome dating scenarios, as well as love and family issues, which overlaps with chick lit's main interests. Amongst its most successful authors is Nick Hornby, along with American novelists Scott Mebus and Eric Jerome Dickey.¹²

¹¹ Cf. Ferriss & Young, 6f.

¹² Cf. <<http://chicklitbooks.com/sub-genres/lad-lit/>>.

The last sub-category of chick lit I would like to briefly introduce is that of Christian chick lit, or simply church lit. This relatively recent 'genre' has already experienced great successes within the chick lit world. The chicklitbooks.com website refers to church lit as being closely related to traditional chick lit, having the same topics of interest, such as dating, working and dieting. The only difference is that the heroine all the while remains loyal to her Christian faith.¹³ Yet Ferriss and Young in their introduction to *Chick Lit: the New Woman's Fiction* reuse a quote from Tara Gelsomino, a columnist on romantictimes.com, who asks 'Can church lit girls be as devoted to their Prada as they are to their prayer beads?' (Gelsomino quoted in Ferriss and Young, 6). Of course, this question immediately comes to mind when one thinks about chick lit's emphasis on consumerism and also sexual interests, which naturally clashes with Christian values. Indeed, it seems that both readers and writers do not share the fear of this noticeable dichotomy, with the result that church lit also expands into the subject of mummy lit 'with faith-biased versions' (Ferriss and Young, 6) of it. This paragraph makes clear that the boundaries of some sub-genres of chick lit are often blurred and that it is sometimes hard to actually draw a dividing line.

Let us further explore, traditional chick lit novels were seen as novels written by women for a female audience with the main characters being white, single, urban professionals in their late 20s or early 30s. While successful in her job, the heroine stumbles from one disappointing affair to another, for which she is then comforted by her female and/ or gay friends. Clearly, this imperfect lifestyle and flawed personality of the character evokes the reader's compassion with the pitiful creature while at the same time, the readers identify with the heroine. It therefore becomes clear is that the character's self-depreciation is not only humorous and entertaining, it also raises the awareness that the readers are fallible like them.¹⁴

¹³ Cf. <<http://chicklitbooks.com/sub-genres/christian-chick-lit/>>.

¹⁴ Cf. Ferriss, 3-4.

While the above-mentioned characteristics could be said to be partly true for *Bridget Jones's Diary*, with the development of other sub-genres of chick lit the themes were also adapted so that in Sophie Kinsella's novel *Shopaholic & Baby*, the central theme is not the search for Mr. Right (as Becky Bloomwood, the main character, has already found the man of her dreams) but rather more 'down-to-earth' issues such as shopping for a pram or looking for a suitable obstetrician – all of course depicted in an exaggerated manner. Even more drastically, in Maria Beaumont's *Motherland* the heroine suffers from post-natal depression, which makes this novel quite serious in topic but still funny and light-hearted in tone.

2.2 Understanding 'Feminist Stylistics'

In the following paragraph, I will introduce a theoretical framework on which the discussion of the novels is primarily built. I shall concentrate on the first edition of Sara Mills' book *Feminist Stylistics*, which was published in 1995.¹⁵ In the glossary of this book, she defines the term as 'a form of politically motivated stylistics whose aim is to develop an awareness of the way gender is handled in texts' (Mills, 207) Looking separately at the two terms – 'feminist' and 'stylistics' – it has to be said that feminist ideas or feminism in general is truly hard to define, as there are numerous different aspects and approaches to this topic, which would probably require its own thesis. For my purpose it should suffice to say that feminists in general feel that women in patriarchal societies are often oppressed and discriminated against and that men and women are treated quite differently. This does not mean that all men benefit from these societal structures, as there are also men who are oppressed. But feminism is aimed at 'changing the social structure to make it less oppressive to women, and, for that matter, to men.' (Mills, 4) On a linguistic level, feminists' goal is to illustrate how differently gender is treated in texts and how language favours men over women.

¹⁵ Please note: for reasons of simplicity, all references labelled 'Mills' refer to the book *Feminist Stylistics*, unless otherwise indicated.

Taking a quote from Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short, they deepen this statement and claim that

in general, literary stylistics has, implicitly or explicitly, the goal of explaining the relation between language and artistic function. The motivating questions are not so much *what*, as *why* and *how*. From the linguist's angle, it is '*why* does the author here choose to express himself [*sic*] in this particular way?'. From the critic's viewpoint it is '*how* is such-and-such an aesthetic effect achieved through language?' (Leech and Short quoted in Mills, 5)

Thus what the field of stylistics deals with, according to Mills, is why an author decides to use a particular way of expressing himself/ herself over another and how specific effects are achieved through language.¹⁶

3. Theoretical Framework – Sara Mills' *Feminist Stylistics*

As I have touched upon before, what Mills and the field of feminist stylistics is concerned with is analysing the point of view, agency, metaphor and transitivity in a text and thus showing how closely related they are to matters of gender. Moreover, feminist stylistics aspires to reform the way gender is represented in texts or at least draw attention to the problem of misrepresentation of either men or women.¹⁷

In this sense, what I am going to do is to use linguistic or language analysis to examine the texts at hand in regard to gender-specific principles. To do that, I adapt Mills' three-part model based on the 'analysis at the level of the word', the 'analysis at the level of the phrase or sentence' and the 'analysis at the level of discourse'.

In the following paragraphs, the three levels are introduced and the extent these categories are relevant for the discussion of chick lit novels is investigated.

¹⁶ Cf. Mills, 4f.

¹⁷ Cf. Mills, 1.

3.1 Analysis at the Level of the Word

The use – or rather the misuse – of individual words is dealt with in this first chapter of analysis. Through the use of generic nouns or pronouns a certain negative effect is achieved in the view of women. The same applies to terms of address along with the negative description of women in certain texts, which end in language-based sexism. When dealing with this, we have to raise questions such as

to what extent our perception of the world, and what we understand 'natural' sex roles to be, is in fact influenced by the language we speak. [...] We need to consider whether language just 'reflects' the world (i.e. just 'puts names' on things which self-evidently exist without language), or whether there is a case to be made for language affecting the way we perceive the world (i.e. things which our language names become more 'evident' than things which our language does not name). (Mills, 83)

In favour of the second position, the linguist Edward Sapir together with psychologist Benjamin Lee Whorf postulated a hypothesis on the grounds of the above-quoted, so-called linguistic determinism. The theory suggests that different language patterns result in different viewpoints that societies have of the world. Moreover, it is claimed that 'the language of a culture shapes the way its speakers see the world.' (Mills, 84)

In the textbook *Language and Gender*, a practical example is given that supports the theory of Sapir and Whorf. In the English language there are eleven basic words for colours (white, black, red, green, yellow, blue, brown, purple, pink, orange and grey). Colours such as beige (a form of brown) are not included in this list, as they are incorporated into one of the given eleven colours. On the other hand, some New Guinean languages have only two terms to refer to 'colours': dark and light. Such an example makes clear that speakers of varying languages use these languages differently depending on what appears useful and effective within their society.¹⁸

¹⁸ Cf. Goddard & Patterson, 6.

Linguistic determinism could be said to be composed of two stages. The first and fairly easily comprehensible stage is that speakers name the world differently according to what is most relevant to their way of living. The aforementioned colour example underscores this view. The second stage of linguistic determinism, however, 'argues that language *produces* our perception of the world.' (Mills, 84) According to this viewpoint, our thoughts are influenced by the language of our community, leading to our idea of 'reality' being narrowed due to the linguistic forms available. As a result, two languages can never actually be so similar as to be representing the same social reality.

Thus, according to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, if a speech community does not have a pre-formed way of expressing a certain concept, it follows that members of that community do not have that concept as part of their readily available knowledge about the world. (Mills, 84)

To explore this concept further, when people acquire language, they obtain ways of thinking – a conceptual system – which just feels 'normal' or natural to them without their consciously noticing. These ways of thinking, particular to every society, get mixed up when bilingual speakers use both their available languages, for example. The sets of concepts from one language are intermingled with the concepts of another language, leading to lexical gaps when an idea in one language does not have an equivalent in another.¹⁹

From a feminist viewpoint, these lexical gaps in a language can lead to sexism, as there are terms that obviously address males for which there might be no female equivalent. Mills gives the example of the terms 'chairperson' and 'spokesperson'. It would be very desirable for these gender-neutral terms to be used for both sexes, but instead the terms 'chairman' and 'spokesman' remain in the habitual language use, whereas the neutral terms are used to refer to women.

¹⁹ Cf. Goddard & Patterson, 6.

Feminists usually understand this usage as society favouring the male over the female. The following chapter will go into greater detail concerning the use of generic forms as a form of sexist language.²⁰

3.1.1 Generic Forms

The discussion of 'politically correct' language has been going on for several years now but the male is still generically widely viewed as the norm or the universal, whereas the female is seen as the nonstandard or individual. In linguistic terms, the male is presented as the unmarked form and the female as the marked form. Therefore, I will consider generic forms as an example of sexist language.²¹

According to Mills, the generic pronouns 'his' and 'he' are frequently used not sex-specifically but generically, which means that in a sentence like 'Conversation between me and the taxi driver had rather dried up as we drove to the new address. I'm sure [*he*] thought I was a prostitute or something.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 218, *my emphasis*), the pronoun should refer to both male and female taxi drivers, although it grammatically refers to the singular male taxi driver.

Gender-specific pronouns are largely used to depict people from stereotypically male and female working domains. Whereas doctors, scientists and taxi drivers are generally labelled as male, secretaries and models are said to be female. The same subjective labelling occurs when the sex of a person is unknown, as we then mostly assume that the person is male. In this case, it was desirable to use non-sex-specific pronouns, like 'he or she' or 'they', so as not to risk the accusation of having stereotypical ideas of male and female professions.²²

²⁰ Cf. Mills, 85.

²¹ Cf. Mills, 87ff.

²² Cf. Mills, 88.

Sexist language can also be found when looking at generic nouns. For clarification, when talking about humanity, the term 'mankind' is often used and research has shown that people normally do not understand it as a term that refers to both men and women but rather as gender-specifically male.²³

Similarly, this problem occurs in sayings like 'men in white coats' or the popular phrase 'Der kleine Mann', used by Austrian politicians.²⁴ As these are fixed phrases, readily available in our vocabulary, they are rarely altered to non-sexist language, as this is a difficult or even hopeless task. Replacing 'men in white coats' with 'women in white coats' would seem a bit odd, unless the saying was meant to be funny or ironical.²⁵

On the other hand, today some terms that were originally male-specific are now used to refer to women as well. Especially in America, the term 'guy' – formerly depicting a man – nowadays includes females as well. The saying 'you guys' may be used in reference to a group of women *and* men, men alone but also women alone. A number of feminists, however, feel that this term still refers to males only because of its history and refuse to be included in any idioms that were originally male-specific.²⁶

3.1.2 'Women as the Marked Form'

A further argument in the discussion of feminist stylistics is the notion of the female form seen as the marked term, whereas the male is seen as the unmarked term. This can often be found in different affixes used for the female term, such as 'lady writer', as if the term 'writer' was per se the male form. Mills argues that other affixes like '-ess', '-ette' or '-enne' substantiate this theory. Etymologically speaking, some of these affixes are diminutive forms of the male form, as '-ette', for example, is usually referred to as meaning 'smaller than' or 'less than'.

²³ Cf. Mills, 89.

²⁴ For me, this phrase could be compared to the English 'man in the street', referring to ordinary people.

²⁵ Cf. Mills, 91.

²⁶ Cf. Mills, 93.

This devaluation may lead to women viewing themselves in a negative or stereotyped way. Using the generic noun may furthermore cause women to feel that they are not being addressed. For this reason, Mills – as an assured feminist – proclaims gender-free or anti-sexist language as a means to ‘demonstrate an acceptance of the validity of women’s experiences and contributions.’ (Mills 95) She argues that by using ‘he or she’ in a written text, this statement not only functions as a piece of information, but also demonstrates a particular attitude and that the person is critical of the stereotypical views of the sexes.

Another aspect that deals with gender-specific terms is how some female terms have a strong derogatory or insulting tendency which the male forms do not have. Mills presents a list of opposing pairs – one being male-specific, the other one being female-specific – where the female form has gained connotations different from its male equivalent. If we compare, for example, the terms ‘master’ and ‘mistress’ or ‘sir’ and ‘madam’, the male form is clearly associated with prestige and power, whereas the female term has additionally acquired (to its core meaning) a non-prestigious and even sexual meaning. A similar depreciation of the female form can be found in the opposing pair ‘lord’ and ‘lady’. Whereas the male term denotes power and status, retaining its position and positive connotations, the female form ‘lady’ is used to refer to any adult female. Moreover, the term ‘lady’ can be used for building compound words, like ‘court lady’ but also ‘cleaning lady’, which clearly is impossible to use for the male term (‘cleaning lord’).

Another order that for Mills testifies to sexism, is the female form following the male form in binary terms. ‘Brothers and sisters’ or ‘Mr and Mrs’ are just two of them. Thus, feminists often feel insulted by this semantic derogation of women and by the fact that the male form almost always precedes the female form, which they perceive as a privileged position, as elements coming first in an enumeration are said to be the most important information-wise.²⁷

²⁷ Cf. Mills, 110-114.

For Mills and other feminists who have a similar opinion on the topic of gendered language and how gender-free language might be achieved, the given facts are the main focus of interest. In chick lit, on the other hand, it is not necessarily a conscious choice to 'favour' the male form in, for example, an enumeration – this is just a specified language matter. Moreover, it is simply not chick lit's goal to reform language in the sense of achieving a gender-free language. One might even claim that the gendered language of chick lit prefers women through their superior presence and portrayal.

3.1.3. Euphemisms and Taboo Words

A subject matter that goes along with female discrimination, similar to that encountered in the previous paragraph, are euphemisms and taboos. Abrams defines the term 'euphemism' as

An inoffensive expression used in place of a blunt one that is felt to be disagreeable or embarrassing. Euphemisms are used frequently with reference to such subjects as religion [...], death [...], bodily functions [...], and sex [...]. (Abrams, 83)

At first glance, euphemisms do not seem to have a bad quality about them but I will provide an example further down that does have an offensive character. Before that, I will analyse some taboo words that often discriminate against women or the female body more so than against men.

From a feminist viewpoint, there are different degrees or varying acceptances of taboo words used for male and female terms. Mills investigated the distinct use of terms describing sexual organs of both men and women. Naturally, there are the clinical words that denote the female genitalia, 'vagina' and 'vulva' but every so often whimsical terms like 'tunnel of love' or evasive terms like 'down below' or 'women's parts' are used instead.

This matter gets especially quirky when parents teach their daughters names for their own sexual organs. While boys' organs get joking names like 'willy' or 'John Thomas', 'girls and women do not have a familiar term that they can use in public and be assured that it will not cause offence.' (Mills, 104)

Generally speaking, there is a greater acceptance in the first place of males using tabooed words than there is for females. And many words that refer to female genitalia have become sexualised terms that are viewed from a male perspective. Words such as 'quim' or 'pussy' are never actually used by a woman herself to refer to her own body. Moreover, what is remarkable to see is that these terms not only denote female sexual organs, they are also used to refer to the woman herself, which makes these sexual terms define the whole person.

However, chick lit novels do not seem to share these ideas presented by Mills regarding females talking less about tabooed subjects and being less accepted when doing so. As Juliette Wells states in her article: 'A chick-lit novel without a few satisfying – or, alternatively, ridiculous – sex scenes is hard to find.' And 'chick lit's characters certainly talk and joke about sex and genitals.' (Wells, 50) Yet the narrations are never extensive nor graphic and most often told matter-of-factly or to achieve a certain humorous effect.

In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, for example, Bridget very light-heartedly and unconcernedly uses the term 'shag' in an instance where she is totally annoyed by her mother Pam, who, for the umpteenth time, urges her to meet Mark Darcy whom she herself is quite fond of:

I don't know why she didn't just come out with it and say, 'Darling, do shag Mark Darcy over the turkey curry, won't you? He's very rich.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 12)

This is one example that demonstrates that it is an accepted move for female characters in chick lit novels to use the word 'shag' without being forced to use a euphemism for it.

Another instance, on the other hand, substantiates Mills' theory of the power of taboos over one particular area of women's lives: menstruation.

Hardly any other physical state has generated so many euphemisms and has such a distracting feel to it as being something dirty and overtly negative. Euphemisms such as 'the wrong time of the month' or 'red flag is up' are evidence of potential danger. However, although Bridget and her friends openly discuss their sex life, there is no single record of menstruation being mentioned. This might come as a surprise given that Bridget is so fond of listing and cataloguing things. Even when she confesses to her diary after having had sex with Daniel Cleaver

I am in love. I am also now between one and all of the following:

- a) Back on thirty a day.
- b) Engaged.
- c) Stupid.
- d) Pregnant. (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 111-112)

it is only briefly mentioned that she is two days late.²⁸ In any case, not elaborating on when she gets her period seems a bit odd after the horrors of a possible pregnancy.²⁹

The same applies to *Shopaholic & Baby* and *Motherland*. Although the heroines from both novels do not flinch when discussing tabooed subjects in general they never mention their menstruation, not even as a euphemism.

²⁸ Cf. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 117.

²⁹ Cf. Whelehan, *BJD*, 50.

3.2 Analysis at the Level of the Phrase or Sentence

In this second section of analysis, the focal point will be the observation of the meaning of a whole phrase or sentence, as opposed to looking at words in isolation. With the latter, we often encounter the problem of having a certain view in mind of what the word could mean, so that we interpret it in particular (negative) ways. When looking at a whole phrase, however, we do not isolate certain words but see the words in relation to their context, as well as their co-text (words with which they co-occur) so that

the way that meaning takes place often involves the process of meaning-production not being accessible at the literal level of the individual words of which the sentence is composed.
(Mills, 128)

So in order to make sense of phrases and sentences, some background knowledge is needed and it is not sufficient to solely focus on the simple literal meaning of the words that the phrase is composed of for the interpretation of its meaning.

3.2.1 Ready-Made-Phrases

There are a number of instances where the analysis of a whole phrase is much more valuable than looking at the single words in isolation. According to Mills, ready-made-phrases can be classified under the category of a phrase analysis. Although they seem preconstructed and sacrosanct, Mills shows that there is still room for alteration when it comes to the extermination of sexist meanings of phrases. From a feminist viewpoint, phrases like 'A woman's place is in the home' are clearly unacceptable as they denote the woman's inferiority and exploitation as not having the chance to contribute to any societal concerns, as she is bound to the home (doing the housework, looking after the children, etc.).

However, Mills shows that in the course of the Women's Movement, feminists subverted this phrase and came up with new and revised slogans like 'A woman's place is in her union' or 'A woman's place is in the struggle', which obviously have much more liberal and positive connotations. Mills therefore demonstrates that ready-made-phrases are not necessarily impossible to tackle.³⁰

3.2.2 Metaphors

Another phenomenon that can be analysed at the level of the phrase is metaphors. Sara Mills argues that although one might locate metaphors under the category of word analysis, they actually work on the level of the phrase, as 'metaphors are better regarded as systems of belief than as individual things' (Black quoted in Mills, 136). On a very basic level, the concept of a 'metaphor' can be described as 'a word or phrase which establishes a comparison or analogy between one object and idea and another.' (Goddard & Patterson, 117) A distinction has to be made between metaphors that are preconstructed – so-called 'dead' metaphors – and others that imply a lesser degree of preconstruction or none at all. In the case of dead metaphors, the analysis will be less extensive and open for discussion than other metaphors that do not have fixed connotations. Mills argues that a great number of metaphors (especially dead metaphors) work on the basis of reinforcing stereotypical knowledge, which in feminist terms might cause sexist connotations. She gives the examples 'That man is a wolf' and 'Sally is a block of ice' (Mills, 136), arguing that meaning-wise, they both refer to male and female sexuality.

Generally speaking, when analysing the meaning of a metaphor, the reader uses his or her background knowledge as the basis for interpreting what is meant by a particular saying.

³⁰ Cf. Mills, 128-131.

However, this may lead to metaphors being seen in a particularly stereotyped sense, as we often draw back on (conservative) stereotypical knowledge about the world. But let us return to the above-cited example: On a metaphorical level, the first sentence can be interpreted as the man hunting women in the same way as a wolf follows its prey. Its meaning clearly is that said man regularly changes partners and can therefore be depicted as sexually active. Indeed, male sexuality is commonly referred to through metaphors of animal behaviour (sex as an instinctual behaviour). On the other hand, sexuality – on a metaphorical level – is often portrayed in terms of heat or lack of heat. This comparison works for both sexes and can also be applied to the second example Mills gives ('Sally is a block of ice'). However, when a woman is described in such a negative way in terms of lack of heat, it is commonly assumed that she is a cold person not only on an emotional level but also on a sexual level, meaning that she may be uninterested in sex to a certain extent. Mills argues that

although this double meaning is possible, if it were used to describe a man, it would be interpreted only at an emotional level and not at a sexual level. (Mills, 137)

I will take a closer look later on in the analysis of the novels at the effects of metaphors and whether they work on a stereotypical level in chick lit as well.

3.2.3 Ideology

Many feminists argue that women especially are very much affected by the impacts of ideology. Generally speaking, ideology can be seen as something heterogeneous or not unitary, but rather negotiated by individual agents. In forming an ideology, people actively take part in confirming or rejecting a certain system of belief.

Mills states that

an ideology, in this view, is a sequence or set of statements which have certain conceptual links, but which individual subjects will negotiate, affirm, and/ or resist. (Mills, 149)

This is a crucial point in the analysis of language, as language items or statements are not supposed to be seen as having just one undisputed meaning shared by all readers.

For Mills, romantic love and emotion is one particular area where women's lives are greatly affected by an ideology. She argues that particularly in Mills & Boon³¹ romances, the ideology of romantic love is the central theme and is seen as 'the most important element in a woman's life [...] where women are literally taken over by passionate feelings.' (Mills, 149) This has almost become a 'universal truth' in our culture so that it is difficult to alter this concept in any way. Moreover, 'the notion of who is in control is central to this ideological gender difference, since women are generally represented as passive "recipients" of love and men are represented as "agents".' (Mills, 150) First of all, I would like to draw a clear dividing line between chick lit novels and romance novels, as for me, the latter play much more with gender roles and stereotypical behaviour of men and women. Secondly, romance novels could to a certain extent be compared to sex books, as they often show pornographic elements. Moreover, in romances the heroine is actually described as passive rather than actively controlling her fate or as Jane Ussher puts it: 'She may want sex, but within the codes of romance, she can have it only if she is seduced.' (Ussher, 44)

Frankly speaking, at first glance, chick lit authors seems to play with the concept of stereotypical gender ideologies, much in the same way as do writers of romance novels, as chick lit's main theme is often the heroine waiting for her prince to come and live happily ever after. But they do so on a completely different level.

³¹ Mills & Boon is a British publishing house for romance novels.

In chick lit, the heroine is rarely actually subordinate to her male counterpart, neither on a private nor on a professional level. Authors of chick lit often depict their heroines as successful working women, who openly gossip about their sexual escapades. This view is also shared by Ferriss, who points out that 'rather than presenting their protagonists as subordinate to male advances, chick-lit authors present women as sexual agents. They give their female protagonists a number of sexual partners and experiences.' (Ferriss, 10) In conclusion, one could argue that though Mills' theory may be true for romance novels, women in chick lit novels are not so much victims of gender-specific ideologies.

3.3 Analysis at the Level of Discourse

The last point of analysis deals with the overall unit of textual analysis, namely that of discourse. Mills claims that discourse often does not find its way into a stylistic analysis, as many critics feel that it is not actually a linguistic matter but rather deals with larger structures of individual items that make up a whole. What is even more crucial is the study of the effects of these larger units on the reader, which means how the text is constructed and how the reader decodes what is written.³²

In Abrams' terms, discourse analysis

concerns itself with the use of language in a running discourse, continued over a sequence of sentences, and involving the interaction of speaker (or writer) and auditor (or reader) in a specific situational context, and within a framework of social and cultural conventions. (Abrams, 66)

According to the linguists Gillian Brown and George Yule, there are 'three aspects of the process of interpreting a speaker's/ writer's intended meaning in producing discourse.' (Brown & Yule quoted in Mills, 131)

The first aspect is trying to find out what the speaker's/ writer's intention is. Secondly, using one's general knowledge, one is trying to figure out facts about the world as well as knowledge one assumes is required in a particular situation in order to understand what has been said/ written. Finally, the third aspect is establishing the inferences that need to be made. In Mills' terms, 'there is an assumption that the audience of a text will share certain information or knowledge with the producer of the text.' (Mills, 131) On the other hand, this information can be as simple and obvious as the given fact that rooms have walls and doors, for example. On the other hand, information can be more ideologically motivated. In other words, when texts address a female audience or raise gender-specific questions, presupposed patterns of background knowledge come into force.

³² Cf. Mills, 159.

Mills gives the example of a letter to the editor entitled 'Give jobs back to our menfolk' (Mills, 132), which she argues only makes sense in conjunction with a certain presupposed background knowledge. The overall assumption clearly is that it is the men who have the jobs and the women who take jobs away from them.³³

A similar access to 'who is addressed and in what way?' could be dedicated to chick lit as well. Of course, there are numerous incidents on which to base this theory, such as the overall appearance of today's chick lit novels – its covers. Isabel Berwick in her newspaper article points out that in actuality 'the book covers scream "girls' fiction" – what man would pick up a book with a pastel cover?'³⁴ The topic of book covers will be further discussed later on; for now it should suffice to say that authors of chick lit, along with their publishers, consciously choose to mainly address women via their pastel book covers as a particular form of marketing strategy.

A more camouflaged illustration of how women could be said to be privileged (in terms of chick lit novels) is when looking at book reviews. It may come as no surprise that websites dedicated to chick lit novels are primarily run by women.³⁵ However, having a look at the book covers and the publisher's websites for some more professional opinions, we get the exact same image. It is firstly and foremostly women writers of all different kinds of print media who share their view with the addressed female audience.³⁶

There is only one prominent exception: On the original cover of the first edition of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, one finds a statement by Nick Hornby claiming that 'Helen Fielding is one of the funniest writers in Britain and Bridget Jones is a creation of comic genius.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, front cover) One could argue that this is a coincidence and that it is just the acknowledging declaration of a fellow writer.

³³ Cf. Mills, 131-133.

³⁴ Berwick, Isabel. "Mummydom's the word in chick-lit land".

³⁵ Cf. websites such as <<http://chicklitbooks.com/>> or <<http://www.trashionista.com/>>.

³⁶ I searched the websites of the three publishing houses but unfortunately was unable to find any significant reviews for Maria Beaumont's *Motherland*.

But on the other hand, when *Bridget Jones's Diary* was published, the genre of chick lit had not yet been 'developed' and the distinctions between literature written for women and literature written for men was still much more blurred. For that matter, it could be argued that chick lit may work against Mills' theory, as it mostly speaks to a female audience, while men are almost completely excluded.

Other notions that Mills argues are crucial for doing a stylistic analysis on the discourse-level shall be discussed on the following pages. I mainly concentrated on the presentation of characters, as well as on focalisation.

3.3.1 Characters

In her book *Feminist Stylistics*, Sara Mills reminds her readers that when doing an analysis of characters, it is crucial to not humanise a character's role, as 'characters are made of words' (Mills, 160). The words that make up a character in a novel, for example, are just a set of textual elements that the reader has learned to construct into an interpretation by using his/her knowledge of previous texts and analyses of character presentation. This 'literary competence' is the key element in reading literature, or as Jonathan Culler puts it: 'reading literature is largely a question of learning a set of conventions in order to decode texts' (Culler quoted in Mills, 160).

What is more, the reader often reverts to information s/he already has adopted from previous readings, mostly on the level of stereotypes. This mainly applies when characters in a text are only briefly described, in which case of which the reader fills the gaps by referring to his/her existing (stereotypical) knowledge.

As Mills recaptures, Batsleer *et al.* in their book *Rewriting English* claim that male characters are mostly introduced with a description of their head, in other words, their eyes and hair colour, whereas female characters are often portrayed with respect to their legs and other parts of their bodies.

Generally speaking, the bodily description of the female character serves the purpose of establishing sexual attractiveness and availability. With the male characters, on the other hand, through the portrayal of their heads in particular and their overall appearance in general, the establishment of trustworthiness or strength dominates.³⁷ The very same principle applies on the opposite level of devaluating a character, as in an example from *Bridget Jones's Diary* where Bridget's mother Pam is overly enthusiastic about Bridget meeting Mark Darcy, a successful lawyer with 'masses of money' who recently got divorced, but which leads Bridget to the following assumption: 'Oh God. Not another strangely dressed opera freak with bushy hair burgeoning from side-parting' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 9). As is also indicated in the example above, male characters tend to be described in terms of their occupation, while female characters are often referred to in the context of their relations with other people, which is obviously reflected in the surname of their husbands but also in statements like 'Fran Clarke, mother of two'. Sara Mills even goes as far as to say that 'women have relationships and men have jobs' (Mills, 163). I would not necessarily agree with this rather radical statement; as we will see in the later chapters, most of the female characters in the chick lit novels I chose for this thesis have an occupation and are not always only talked about with regard to their family. Similarly, Mills elaborates on a theory from Joanna Russ that female attributes are often based on stereotypes of what women are like. The female characters are

concerned with emotion rather than action, relegated to the private sphere rather than the public sphere, seen as the appendages of males rather than characters in their own right. (Mills, 170)

This statement clearly is debatable and could possibly be said to have been true for 19th century literature but with recent chick literature, the above-mentioned theory is too narrow-minded. Of course, some elements can still be found in current literature but not exactly in the same extremes.

³⁷ Cf. Batsleer, 70ff & Mills, 160-163.

Although female characters in popular fiction of a post-feminist era are often portrayed as 'traditional' women in a sense that regardless of their wish to be independent they are still longing to find Mr. Right, they are never actually tagged 'appendages' of their male counterparts.

3.3.2 Focalisation / Narrative Situation

One typical characteristic of a chick lit novel is its specific use of narrative technique. Although numerous chick lit novels are written in a third-person point of view, many of the most popular novels are a first-person narration. Generally speaking,

In first-person narration, the first-person pronoun refers both to the narrator (narrating I or narrating self) and to a character in the story (experiencing I). If the narrator is the main character of the story s/he is an I-as-protagonist; if s/he is one of the minor characters s/he is an I-as-witness. (Jahn, N3.3.2.)

I would argue that in the three novels I chose for analysis in this thesis, all the main characters clearly are 'I-as-protagonist' narrators, as the stories are told from their point of view only. Yet there are also some prototypical elements used, such as the insertion of bank statements in *Shopaholic & Baby*, which add to the special tone of chick lit novels. Juliette Wells in her essay "Mothers of Chick Lit? Women Writers, Readers, and Literary History" argues that chick lit authors often draw narrative techniques from traditional literary models:

The immediate, informal style of chick-lit narration is reminiscent of the epistolary form popular among the eighteenth-century novelists such as Frances Burney, as well as of the stream-of-consciousness technique pioneered by Virginia Woolf and other modernists, which gives the reader the sense of being inside the mind of each character and watching her or his perceptions unfold [...] (Wells, 67)

What is crucial in a first-person narration is that the reader can, on the one hand, identify more with the heroine of a novel but on the other hand, s/he is forced to be suspicious, as first-person narrators are usually unreliable and the reader is exposed to the heroine's completely subjective viewpoint.³⁸ But as Whelehan rightly points out: 'Then again, third person writing only allows us the *illusions* of a more objective vision of things'. (Whelehan, *BJD*, 24) One of the reasons why so many chick lit writers use the first-person voice in their works is that it both strengthens the heroine's voice and enhances the reader's opportunity to identify with her.³⁹

4. Judging a Book by its Cover

One characteristic that most recent chick lit novels probably have in common is their easily recognisable exterior. Before even opening a book and reading a few lines, one can detect whether you are dealing with chick lit or not by just having a look at the book's cover, or as Gérard Genette puts it: 'Die bloße Farbwahl kann bereits sehr nachdrücklich auf einen bestimmten Büchertypus verweisen.' (Genette, 30) Usually set up in pastel colours with images of modern consumerism, chick lit books have often been criticised for having a 'fashion-conscious exterior with inferior literature' (Harzewski, 35). Moreover, some critics have devalued chick lit for a similar reason, stating that the novels in question mostly appeal to women who are obsessed with shopping, make-up and other unimportant things in life. This critique can also said to be true for feminists, who have often condemned fashion and consumerism in general as debilitating femininity. But Ferriss and Young in their introduction to *Chick Lit* revive a statement by Elizabeth Wilson arguing that

³⁸ Cf. Whelehan, *BJD*, 24.

³⁹ Cf. Mabry, 196.

while feminists with one voice condemn the consumeristic [sic!] poison of fashion, with another they praise the individualism made possible by dress. (Wilson quoted in Ferris, 11)

In a broad sense, the presentation of glossy covers, with lipstick, handbags or high-heeled shoes in the foreground, may to some extent also appeal to feminists, as some of them have always claimed that fashion is a way of expressing identity. Without any doubt, the pastel covers that so characteristically scream 'chick lit' are a huge part of the marketing strategy for chick lit novels and as their enormous success shows, they appeal to its readers. As Harzewski says '[They] participate in a feedback loop with fashion trends, as pink for several seasons has been the new black' (Harzewski, 35). The cover art of chick lit books has almost developed into a visual representation of a whole genre of literature. Today, many bookstores have installed separate chick lit display areas, shimmering in pink and purple, which not only makes 'the books easy for the potential reader to identify but also visually represents the hip young protagonist within the covers with whom the reader is meant to identify.' (Mabry, 194) In the detailed discussion of the novels' covers later on, I will show how what appears on the outside can be taken for what you get inside. In other words, how the cover of a novel can be said to be a depiction of the novel's story.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Please find the images of the covers of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Shopaholic & Baby* and *Motherland* in the appendix.

5. Analysis – Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary*

As I have already indicated on previous pages, I am going to do a stylistic analysis of the novel on the basis of Sara Mills’ three-part model ‘analysis at the level of the word’, ‘analysis at the level of the phrase or sentence’ and ‘analysis at the level of discourse’. However, I will start off with the analysis on the discourse level, as in my view it enhances comprehension on both content and context level. First of all, however, I will give a brief introduction of the author and the novel (especially the period of time it is set in) to enhance the understanding of the following analysis.

5.1 The Author

Helen Fielding was born in 1959 in Morley, West Yorkshire, went to Wakefield Girls’ High School and later graduated from St. Anne’s College, University of Oxford, with an English degree. After taking on a BBC traineeship, she worked as a television journalist for several years before writing her first novel *Cause Celeb*, which was published in 1994. Yet it was not until the secret of the authorship of the hugely successful *Independent* column “Bridget Jones’s Diary” was revealed that Fielding became a widely acclaimed and celebrated author.

It has often been claimed that the character of Bridget Jones is actually based on Fielding herself, which the diary format might suggest. In fact, Fielding denies that Bridget is meant to be her but instead admits that two friends of hers served as a model for the characters of Bridget’s friends Jude and Sharon (Shazzer) in the novel.⁴¹

⁴¹ Cf. Whelehan, *BJD*, 11-14 & <<http://www.panmacmillan.com/>>.

5.2 The Novel

The novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* was first published in the UK in 1996 and has since been translated into over 30 languages, which was a bit of a surprise success for Fielding, as she states

It wasn't the first novel to feature the life and loves of a single woman about town, yet it would go on to inspire many an imitator and eventually a new "genre" of its own. (Whelehan, *BJD*, 15)

Especially in the 1970s and 1980s, first-person narration was quite common amongst feminist writers, but the character of Bridget was often seen as a 'prototype' for a whole generation of women searching for a new (and maybe better) lifestyle. Another reason why so many readers can identify with the heroine are her very familiar, down-to-earth problems and fears, in which some readers recognise themselves.

When *Bridget Jones's Diary* arrived, there seems to have been a break away from feminist writings of the 1970's and 80's to a writing style that reflected the tastes of popular culture and lifestyle. The following quote by Fielding has been taken from Whelehan. It shows quite impressively how accurately Fielding has captured the zeitgeist of the 1990's, a time when being single would not mean a complete downfall for a woman yet still was not quite socially accepted.

I've talked to women all over the place at book signings – Japan, America, Scandinavia, Spain – and what they most relate to is the massive gap between the way women feel they're expected to be and how they actually are. These are complicated times for women. Bridget is groping through the complexities of dealing with relationships in a morass of shifting roles, and a bombardment of idealised images of modern womanhood. It seems she's not the only one who's confused. (Fielding quoted in Whelehan, *BJD*, 17)

This quote can also be substantiated by a statement from Sharon, one of Bridget's friends, who says that 'We women are only vulnerable because we are a pioneer generation daring to refuse to compromise in love and relying on our own economic power' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 21). In this sense, *Bridget Jones's Diary* could be referred to as post-feminist writing.

5.2.1 The Cover

Unlike its successors, the original cover of both the paperback and the hardcover edition of *Bridget Jones's Diary* has nothing at all in common with pastel coloured, glossy magazine-style chick lit novels of today.

The cover of the original version of Helen Fielding's novel shows the blurred picture of a woman in dusky, almost sepia tinted colours. One can see the side view of the woman's face but although she is seemingly attractive, one cannot identify her hair colour or any other details. The woman might be reading a book (or maybe a fashion magazine) while holding what most likely is a cigarette. The fashion magazine could be a hint towards Bridget's own habits of skipping through glossy magazines, as is often referred to in the story. 'Find self [...] frantically reading *Hello!*' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 78) or 'Thought this might be the perfect time to do the Feng Shui so went out and bought *Cosmopolitan*' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 262), a habit Bridget delicately sums up as 'I am a child of *Cosmopolitan* culture' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 59). On the one hand, this refers to her independence and success in her professional life, but on the other hand, it has to be seen as a downfall, for Bridget often compares herself to the super-attractive women in the magazines. Naturally, this leads to a dissatisfaction with herself, for which she then consults self-help books, which could be the second way of interpreting the picture of the novel's book cover –

the woman on the cover being Bridget reading what would most likely be one of her own favourites such as *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*.⁴² Another aspect of the cover picture is the woman holding a cigarette. Again, if the woman in the picture was Bridget, it would not be surprising to see her smoking, as although in her 'New Year's Resolutions' she mentions that she will stop smoking, we learn otherwise in the course of the story. Generally speaking, it is not all that absurd to believe that the picture on the cover could actually be Bridget herself, as we are dealing with a diary, which is indeed a pretty private matter so that it is much more obvious having a picture of oneself on the front page rather than of some stranger.

5.2.2 Arrangement of Chapters

As far as the external textual structure is concerned, the novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* is divided into twelve chapters, after the twelve months of the year, excluding a kind of preface – Bridget's 'New Year's Resolutions'. This is a two-sided list of things Bridget wants to enhance or get rid of. On the 'I will not' side, she primarily lists things that deal with money (wasting it), men (falling in love with 'dysfunctional' men), drinking (more than a given amount) and smoking. On the 'I will' side then, these matters are basically repeated the opposite way round. Additionally, the actual chapters are all named after what has been most important for Bridget in a particular month, respectively how she felt and what her innermost feelings were.⁴³

The story itself is told in chronological order, with each entry beginning with the day it is written and then, mostly with either the insertion of Bridget's vital statistics and/ or the time. Hence the diary form offers a tidy structure, which makes it easy for the reader to follow the events.

⁴² This self-help book by John Gray is mentioned several times in the novel.

⁴³ Cf. Chapter March is called 'Severe Birthday-Related Thirties Panic', whereas chapter July is simply named 'Huh' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, table of contents).

However, what remains to be said is that a diary not only serves the purpose of recording events but also has a confessional function.⁴⁴ The following pages will explore how Bridget's diary offers a close insight into her character.

5.3 Analysis at the Level of Discourse

My analysis on the discourse level mainly focuses on the presentation of the characters in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, as well as its focalisation. Contrary to Mills' theory of female characters often being depicted as weak and suppressed,⁴⁵ we find several strong-minded women in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. What the novel does offer on the other hand is a fairly stereotyped view of characteristically male and female attributes (on Bridget's part).

5.3.1 Characters

Generally speaking, the reader is not introduced to the physical appearance of any of the characters in any greater detail. This is obvious, as Bridget herself has known the people around her for a while and it would make no sense at all to describe the way one character or another looks in her diary. Apart from Bridget's character, into which the reader obviously gains the most insight, the other characters are mostly presented as stock types.⁴⁶ The characterisation of Bridget therefore is evidently more explicit and far more detailed than the depiction of the other characters.

One exception is the romantic hero Mark Darcy, who is characterised by Bridget on account of a sweater he is wearing on their first encounter:

⁴⁴ Cf. Whelehan, *BJD*, 22f.

⁴⁵ Cf. Mills, 160-163 & 170.

⁴⁶ Cf. Whelehan, *BJD*, 25.

He turned round, revealing that what had seemed from the back like a harmless navy sweater was actually a V-neck diamond-pattern in shades of yellow and blue – as favoured by the more elderly of the nation's sports reporters. (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 13)

The second time they meet is at a formal publishing party, where Bridget is overwhelmed by running into Mark Darcy because this time he is 'without the Frank Bough⁴⁷- style diamond-patterned sweater' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 100). From this, Bridget comes to think about 'how much difference the presence or absence of a diamond-patterned sweater can make to someone's attractiveness' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 103), demonstrating her superficial and fashion-obsessed character.

Drawing from this example, one gets the impression that Fielding very much relies on cultural stereotypes or things the majority of readers just 'know' such as the meaning of objects like clothes or other consumer goods. The prejudice of judging a character on the grounds of what s/he wears or what books s/he reads, is central to *Bridget Jones's Diary* and ingeniously played with by Helen Fielding.⁴⁸

5.3.1.1 The Women

Bridget Jones

Bridget is the writer of the diary and thus quite naturally the main character of the story. As we are dealing with a first-person-narration, more precisely a diary, it is the reader who actually draws Bridget's character from what she writes down in her diary.

In Whelehan's view, this is a quite negative picture:

⁴⁷ Frank Bough is a British television presenter of mostly sports programmes. Stereotypically speaking, sport reporters are often said to wear diamond-patterned sweaters.

⁴⁸ Cf. Whelehan, *BJD*, 49.

Bridget's character is largely developed through the reader's recognition of her responses to shifts in trends and self-help mantras; she is quirky enough, but as a romantic heroine she often represents the frustration and longings of her readers. (Whelehan, *BJD*, 26)

From this quote one might conclude that Bridget has a very shallow and dull personality, as she mostly focuses on what she reads in magazines or self-help books, thus having low self-confidence and troubles being satisfied with herself. Of course, a lack of self-esteem can said to be true, as Bridget actually derives a lot from books like *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* or *Goddesses in Everywoman* and the like.⁴⁹ Bridget apparently suffers from low self-confidence, as she thinks that she is fat and ugly: 'I feel ashamed and repulsive. I can actually feel the fat splurging out from my body.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 18) Bridget is apparently not content with herself, as she not only hates the way she looks but also the way she acts and behaves, which she thinks is the reason for Daniel Cleaver cancelling their first date at the last minute: 'He will clearly by now have got off with thin American person called Winona who puts out, carries a gun and is everything I am not.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 39). Another thing that annoys Bridget is her age and the fact that some people think she looks older than she actually is, to which Bridget remarks: 'Have reached the age when men of my own age no longer find their contemporaries attractive.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 148) Therefore, it is crucial to Bridget to change both her appearance and her personality completely. In order to achieve that, 'Bridget begins by listing all her New Year's resolutions, then spends the rest of the year breaking them.' (Whelehan, *BJD*, 15) She uses her diary to keep records of what and how much she eats but although she wants to be slim, she loves eating unhealthy food. So, she is regularly not ambitious enough to actually pursue her goals: '7.30 a.m. Hunger pangs force self out of bed. Make coffee, consider grapefruit. Defrost chocolate croissant.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 92)

⁴⁹ Two actually existing self-help books by John Gray and Jean Shinoda Bolen, respectively, which are repeatedly mentioned in *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

Funnily though, Bridget is constantly looking for apologies and excuses when she is eating/ drinking/ smoking too much. On her birthday, for example, the vital statistic reads:

9st, alcohol units 9*, cigarettes 42*, calories 4295*. *If can't splash out on birthday, when can I? (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 82)

In another entry Bridget records:

9st 3 (still in very good cause), alcohol units 3 (v.g.), cigarettes 32 (v.v. bad, particularly since first day of giving up), calories 1800 (g.), [...] minutes spent imagining Daniel begging me to come back 90 (excellent). (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 189)

The declarations in parenthesis are all evidence of a quite weak personality, not being able to, or rather refusing to accept herself as she is. For that reason, Bridget is on the constant search for a role model, mostly regarding her looks. Several times within the story, she refers to the actresses Joanna Lumley and Susan Sarandon⁵⁰, two successful and good-looking women apparently worth emulating, as they have nothing in common with what Bridget fears about turning thirty:

[When] you will suddenly, without warning, grow a big fat crimplene dress, shopping bag, tight perm and face collapsing in manner of movie special-effect, and that will be it. Try to concentrate hard on Joanna Lumley and Susan Sarandon. (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 78)

As has been briefly mentioned above, Bridget cares a lot about her looks and overall appearance and thus how other people see her. This statement conforms to what Sara Mills in her *Feminist Stylistics* argues about female characters often being described in terms of their looks and their sexual availability.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Cf. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, p. 20, 61, 78.

⁵¹ Cf. Mills, 162.

In the 'virtual discussion' between Daniel Cleaver, Bridget's boss, and herself about the length of her skirt – or absence altogether, as Daniel puts it: 'You appear to have forgotten your skirt. [...] Staff are expected to be fully dressed at all times.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 23) – it is made clear that Daniel exploits his superior position by making this remark. The irony of this statement clearly lies in the seemingly serious tone and the instructional command. On the other hand, Bridget does not seem to be insulted but instead is 'v.⁵² much enjoying being sexually harassed by Daniel Cleaver.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 25) Generally speaking, from a feminist point of view, Bridget is far from being a 'traditional' feminist, as although she wants to be independent, she is constantly looking for someone who can protect her 'using very traditional sexual dichotomies (e.g. John Gray's *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*).' (Gamble, 145)

Some idealists might see such a woman as a troubling role model, but who are they kidding? I mean, we really do act like that. Bridget Jones is a fair compromise between the '70s-style feminist and the '50s-era debutante -- the '90s woman. (Lisa Habib)⁵³

From the above statement, one can conclude that although Bridget and her friends see themselves as free and independent women, they have learned that feminism in the style of the 1970s is no longer en vogue and that it has to be adapted to the lifestyle of the 1990s, hence referred to as post-feminism, as 'after all, there is nothing so unattractive to a man as strident feminism.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 20) Or as Angela McRobbie puts it 'Indeed it seemed in the very nature of feminism that it gave rise to dis-identification as a kind of requirement for [post-feminism's] existence' (McRobbie, 257). For that matter, although Bridget and her friends lead a financially secure and independent life, they still want to be personally secured by finding the right man who can fulfil their needs.

⁵² The abbreviation v. stands for 'very'.

⁵³ Habib, Lisa. "Bridget Jones' Is Today's Everywoman, Role Model Or Not, And We Like Her Like That".

However, there is a discrepancy between what Bridget is like and what she actually wants to be. One of Bridget's worst qualities is the fact that she constantly feels sorry for herself. This is reflected in various instances, such as the marital problems her parents face which make Bridget come to the conclusion that she is the victim of a broken home: 'I suddenly realize everything has shifted and now I am looking after my parents instead of them looking after me, which seems unnatural and wrong.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 72) This goes along with Bridget's self-centredness of rarely being there for others but herself always in need of a friend's advice when she is in trouble. She does not even wish her friends a relationship while she is still single, for 'if you are single the last thing you want is your best friend forming a functional relationship with somebody else. (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 105) Bridget fears that her friends might then not spend as much time with her anymore, when they are busy acting 'smug'. Instead, they should remain single and thus loyal to Bridget for as long as she wants them to – if necessary until the end of their days:

Exes should never, never go out with or marry other people but should remain celibate to the end of their days in order to provide you with a mental fallback position. (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 190)

What we can draw from this statement is that Bridget focuses her attention solely on what is in her favour. When she acts otherwise, helping others and putting her own interests aside, she immediately acts as if she were a saint. After only a few individual phone calls to her mother and father after their first quarrels, only listening to what they both are saying, Bridget gains a 'feeling of smugness over [her] new role as carer and [...] wise counsellor.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 48/49) She even begins toying with the idea of 'becoming a Samaritan or Sunday school teacher, making soup for the homeless' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 49) which seems a totally ridiculous thought given Bridget's obsession with her favourite television programmes, going out with her friends and sleeping late – in short, doing everything for herself and nothing for others.

Anyway, Bridget is often enthusiastic about many things in the beginning but then starts reflecting on the negative aspects. When Daniel and Bridget are finally a couple (at least in Bridget's view) she immediately begins planning a weekend away with him. While she is just dreaming how marvellous a mini-break with Daniel would be, the next second she suspects him of having an affair out of the blue, as for Bridget, Daniel 'refuses' to discuss going away with her (actually quite difficult given that Daniel has no idea that Bridget wants to go, for she has not said a single word).⁵⁴

Another instance of Bridget's indecisive and moody character can be analysed in connection with her trip to the Edinburgh Festival. Although all her friends are going, Bridget is not sure whether she can afford it and fears running into Daniel (after they have broken up). The next day, however, Bridget is informed that Daniel is staying in London, so she might as well join her friends for the trip. The day after, Bridget has again changed her mind and does not want to go to Edinburgh, for she fears she will not have a good time (dreading that she might dress for summer and afterwards it is freezing cold). Then, the following day reads like this:

Friday 25 August

7 p.m. I *am* going to Edinburgh. Today Perpetua said, 'Bridget, this is *absurdly* short notice, but it's just occurred to me. I've taken a flat up in Edinburgh – I'd adore it if you wanted to stay.' So generous and hospitable of her.

10 p.m. Just called Perpetua and told her I'm not coming. It's all stupid. I can't afford it. (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 199)

One of Bridget's most annoying qualities is her obsession with her weight, which – along with her age – she constantly blames when things go wrong. When Daniel starts an affair Bridget comments: 'Why does nothing ever work out? It is because I am too fat.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 181)

⁵⁴ Cf. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 142f.

Nonetheless, although Bridget desperately tries to be thin, when she finally achieves her goal of weighing 8st 7, all her friends think she looks a bit tired and drawn, and looked better before she lost so much weight.⁵⁵ However, one has to clarify that Bridget would probably be a size 36/38 in European standards and ‘therefore slimmer than the national average and certainly not “fat” by any definition except that of Hollywood or the fashion industry.’ (Whelehan, *BJD*, 47) But that is exactly the point. As Bridget gains a lot of her knowledge about physical appearances from magazines, she might have lost track of reality. Whelehan even goes as far as to say that although Bridget (and also her single friends) describes herself as a career woman having control over her own destiny, the only thing she actually successfully controls is her body, through listing calories and alcohol units.⁵⁶ The obsession with the body can also be seen in relation to femininity (again drawn from magazines and self-help books) and what efforts women have to go to in order to conform to ‘*Cosmo* norms’. When Bridget prepares for her first date with Daniel she realises that femininity in her sense is not at all natural:

Being a woman is worse than being a farmer – there is so much harvesting and crop spraying to be done: legs to be waxed, underarms shaved, eyebrows plucked, feet pumiced, skin exfoliated and moisturized, spots cleansed, roots dyed, eyelashes tinted, nails filed, cellulite massaged, stomach muscles exercised. The whole performance is so highly tuned you only need to neglect it for a few days for the whole thing to go to seed. Sometimes I wonder what I would be like if left to revert to nature – with a full beard and handlebar moustache on each shin, Dennis Healey⁵⁷ (*sic!*) eyebrows, face a graveyard of dead skin cells, spots erupting, long curly fingernails like Struwelpeter, blind as bat and stupid runt of species as no contact lenses, flabby body flobbering around. Ugh, ugh. Is it any wonder girls have no confidence? (*Bridget Jones’s Diary*, 30)

⁵⁵ Cf. *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, p. 106f.

⁵⁶ Cf. Whelehan, *BJD*, 47.

⁵⁷ Denis Healey was a British Labour politician with very prominent, bushy eyebrows.

Generally speaking, the obsession with the body very much conforms to Mills' theory of female characters often being described in terms of their appearance in order to establish sexual attractiveness.⁵⁸

Sharon (Shazzer)

As I have briefly indicated above, apart from Bridget, the reader does not get a really close insight into the other characters. Since we are dealing with a diary, we are not introduced to their profession or appearance in any greater detail.

As a stock type, Bridget's friend Sharon could thus be vaguely described as the feminist conscience in her group of friends. Although she is a self-proclaimed feminist, I prefer to describe Sharon as commonly acting according to feminist thoughts. However, compared to the other characters in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, she is definitely the one who knows most about feminism and its goals. For Sharon, feminists can be compared to liberal, 'green' thinkers, as 'ten years ago people who cared about the environment were laughed at as sandal-wearing bearded-weirdies and now look at the power of the green consumer' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 126), hoping that in a few years time, women will also enhance their power and achieve equal status with men. But more often than not, Sharon rants and raves about how much she hates men and that 'they are so catastrophically unevolved that soon they will just be kept by women as pets for sex' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 77), vastly exaggerating so that one cannot fully trust her proclaimed position. The reader sometimes gets the feeling that she is trying too hard to be something she cannot stand up to completely which can be confirmed by her attitude towards '1471 calls'.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Cf. Mills, 160-163.

⁵⁹ 1471 is the access number to the so-called 'last-call return', a facility offered by phone companies to get the time and phone number of the last received call. Note that at the time *Bridget Jones's Diary* was published (1997), mobile phones were by far not as wide-spread as they are today.

Although she refers to most men as 'stupid, smug, arrogant, manipulative, self-indulgent bastards' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 125), she is still longing for a functional relationship with a responsible man and regularly uses 1471 to check whether a man she recently went out with had rung while she was away.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, as opposed to Mills' thoughts⁶¹ about female characters often being described as inferior and desperately searching for a man to whom they can look up, Sharon is depicted as a confident woman whose 'suffering or shame [...] in the absence of finding a husband is countered by sexual self-confidence.' (Mc Robbie, 262)

Already at an early stage, we learn that Sharon is not particularly keen on Bridget's latest date, Daniel Cleaver, but nonetheless, Bridget discusses with her friends every little step their 'relationship' is taking. One particularly interesting incident is Bridget's desperate longing for an answer to the question of why Daniel has not called her several days after they have had sex. Sharon, as the feminist voice, advises Bridget to openly tell him what she thinks of him, as it is 'inhuman to leave a woman hanging in air for two weekends after sex' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 69)

Jude

Bridget's other best friend, Jude, is a very successful businesswoman – 'Jude is Head of Futures at Brightlings' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 19) – but despite (or maybe because of) her success on a professional level, she is quite weak and insecure as far as her personal life is concerned. Jude can be described as being more down-to-earth than Sharon and generally of a similar character to Bridget. She, too, is very much concerned with what she reads in (self-help) books and magazines and what she hears on the radio and is therefore seeking affirmation that her way of living is 'normal'. A survey she has come across claimed that 'by the turn of the millennium a third of all households will be single, therefore proving that at last we are no

⁶⁰ Cf. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 129.

⁶¹ Cf. Mills, 163.

longer tragic freaks'. (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 77) Interestingly, Jude has actually been going out with a man they call 'Vile Richard' for a few months but still speaks of herself as a singleton.

Being a good and loyal friend, she might not want to upset Bridget and Sharon by boasting about having a boyfriend while they do not. Jude is a rather weak character who subordinates her own wants and needs; not in her job, of course but definitely in her private life. Moreover, Jude is understanding and supportive as regards the 'Daniel incident', for although she does not particularly like him, she defends him for not calling Bridget, as he is 'bound to be anxious about work situation, etc., etc.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 69) and encourages Bridget to 'give him a chance, be friendly and flirty' (*ibid*). The option of giving someone another chance is also one of the credos in her own relationship with Vile Richard, as she tolerates his break-up and desire to just be friends⁶² but then gives him another chance by letting him come back to her. However, their second start is also ill-fated, which leads Jude to suggest relationship counselling⁶³ – further proof of her weak personality and lack of self-awareness in personal matters.

Perpetua

Perpetua is Bridget's supervisor at the office and is described by Bridget as 'slightly senior' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 17). She is quite a bossy character and loves humiliating Bridget in front of others. While on one occasion she asks Bridget how many Valentine's Day cards she has got (although perfectly aware of the fact that Bridget lacks a date, let alone a boyfriend), another time she ridicules her for watching great works of literature on television instead of reading the books: 'And you do realize *Middlemarch* was originally a book, Bridget, don't you, not a soap?' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 100) Thus, Imelda Whelehan describes Perpetua as a 'London Sloane Ranger, moneyed from birth, entirely materialistic, and filled with the kneejerk

⁶² Cf. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 125.

⁶³ Cf. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 187.

snobbery of the privileged.’ (Whelehan, *BJD*, 33) True to this description, she is indeed constantly showing off her wealth and seemingly good taste when she is speaking on the phone to one of her friends about the flat she is going to buy with her husband: ‘But the question is: does one want to pay another thirty grand for a fourth bedroom?’ (*Bridget Jones’s Diary*, 67)

Overall, it can be said that Perpetua is very traditional in her beliefs, especially concerning interpersonal relationships. She believes in hierarchies, as can be seen in the respect she shows towards her boss, Daniel Cleaver, but also in the sub-ordination she puts upon Bridget by dumping a lot of her work on her. She is only seemingly friendly and helpful to Bridget on one occasion, when she invites her to come and stay with her at the Edinburgh Festival. In the end, however, she charges her an extra amount of money, for she suspects her of having had a guest in her room: ‘Oh, come *on*, Bridget, we all knew you had a man in there.’ (*Bridget Jones’s Diary*, 202) Again she is humiliating Bridget and accusing her of something she has not done in order to demonstrate her superiority.

Magda

Magda is one of Bridget’s ‘smug married’ friends. Although she once used to be a successful businesswoman like Bridget and her other single friends, she gave up her job as a commodity broker⁶⁴ and is now married. Together with her husband Jeremy she has two children, one of whom is Bridget’s godson (Harry). Magda is a particularly double-sided character: On the one hand, she can be described as a typical ‘smug married’ who competes with other mums about the AGPAR test and ‘the size of the boys’ genitals’ (*Bridget Jones’s Diary*, 70) but on the other hand, she tells Bridget to enjoy being single as long as it lasts, for her perfect little life is starting to crumble when Jeremy starts an affair and begins accusing Magda of having a life that is

⁶⁴ Cf. *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, 70.

'just one big holiday' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 132) – not seeing or wanting to see how much love and time she devotes to supporting her family.

Though not always content with her own life, Bridget reflects on the irony of both her and Magda being unsatisfied with what they have – single versus married life:

Talk about grass is always bloody greener. The number of times I've slumped, depressed, thinking how useless I am and that I spend every Saturday night getting blind drunk and moaning to Jude and Shazzer or Tom about not having a boyfriend; I struggle to make ends meet and am ridiculed as an unmarried freak, whereas Magda lives in a big house with eight different kinds of pasta in jars, and gets to go shopping all day. And yet here she is so beaten, miserable and unconfident and telling me I'm lucky... (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 132)

From this quote it becomes apparent that Magda, of all the characters from the younger generation, is the only one who could be described to falling into Mills' category of female characters being more related to the private than the public sphere and more concerned with emotion than action.⁶⁵ In this sense, feminism has not yet found its way into Magda's life, which is the reason she calls Bridget 'lucky', as she is able to benefit from the fight for equal representation in the workplace. What is not as easy to fight for, however, is the attitude of men towards stay-at-home mums who give up their careers in order to take care of the family, making them feel inferior and 'rather powerless'. (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 133)

Bridget's mother (Pam)

Bridget's parents, like Mark's, are part of the suburban bourgeoisie whose lives revolve around Rotary Club and charity events and pairing off their children. (Whelehan, *BJD*, 33)

⁶⁵ Cf. Mills, 170 & Chapter 3.3.1 "Characters".

Indeed it seems that one of the main goals of Bridget's mother is to find her daughter a suitable boyfriend by telling her what to wear and how to behave. She is constantly moaning about the clothes Bridget is wearing and tries to convince her that she should wear more colourful clothes, as 'nobody wants a girlfriend who wanders round looking like someone from Auschwitz' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 131) and warns her that if she does not do anything about her appearance she will never find a new job, let alone a boyfriend.⁶⁶ As Whelehan has pointed out in the above-mentioned quote, Pam, as part of the bourgeoisie, pretends to be posh and thus carefully watches her diction – something she also expects Bridget to do: 'Don't say "what", Bridget, say "pardon"' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 152). Pam normally would never swear and Bridget states that she has actually never heard her mother say anything worse than 'Oh my godfathers' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 47), but when the troubles begin with her husband, she loses her nerves and shouts out: 'Let him bloody well have his way as usual' (*ibid*) which leads Bridget to the assumption that her mother might have been drinking. But then again, her mother being a very accurate person, traditional and conservative in her beliefs, was never drunk in her life, as 'there's nothing worse than a woman drunk' (*ibid*). However, although it seemed that her marriage with Colin was bound to last forever, after she has spent a holiday with some friends in Portugal, she returns as a new self and proclaims that she is going to change her life. Pam is obviously seriously suffering a midlife crisis, as she thinks she has wasted her life looking after bag and baggage and starts an affair with Julio, whom she has met in Portugal. When Bridget first sees him, her 'eye was caught by a tall, distinguished-looking man with grey hair, a European-style leather jacket and one of those gentleman's handbag things. (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 54) Bridget's description is very much proof of how crucial style is to her and how she judges people on grounds of what they wear. Julio seems to be the complete opposite of Bridget's dad as far as styling is concerned, as Julio is presented as a rather fashion-conscious person – maybe one of the reasons why Pam has fallen for him.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 192.

Being different to Colin in terms of temperament and interested in fashion is something Pam has probably long been longing for.

Overall, it seems that in the course of the novel, Bridget's mother gains more and more power which 'makes her irresistible', in Bridget's terms.⁶⁷ She uses this power both to make her husband feel miserable by going out with different men but also to fulfil her dream of having a career. And indeed, she is offered a job as a TV presenter.⁶⁸ Bridget is of course very jealous about that, as she herself lacks not only a new and more fulfilling job, but also a boyfriend – and her mother now has both. The pleasant thing is that Pam is able to get Bridget a job on the TV show *Good Afternoon*; the bad news, however, is that her mother is almost ruining her family personally and financially by getting involved in Julio's ominous businesses.

In summary, Pam is at first presented as a character with traditional beliefs and customs (acting like the perfect poster wife) but continually develops a feminist conscience by breaking away from societal boundaries and hence experiencing personal independency. She is probably the only character who experiences an immense transformation in the course of the novel.

5.3.1.2 The Men

According to Whelehan, there are three categories of men, into one of which all of the male characters can be placed: the hero, the bastard and the gay friend. Obviously, the hero and the bastard both have to have certain qualities in order to be of any interest to the heroine in the first place.⁶⁹ The following description of the main male characters is going to explore the concept of said categories.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 66f.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 81.

⁶⁹ Cf. Whelehan, *BJD*, 50.

Tom

Tom is Bridget's third friend, along with Sharon and Jude, and the only gay character in the novel. He is also Bridget's only genuine male friend and he clearly belongs to the category of 'the gay friend'. Tom believes that

homosexuals and single women in their thirties have natural bonding: both being accustomed to disappointing their parents and being treated as freaks by society. (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 27)

Generally speaking, Tom's character is very much feminised, as he shares the same concepts as his female friends – his concerns are almost identical to those of the women. For that reason, he is dissociated from evil masculinity and rather supports his female friends in their relationship struggles, making him a rather one-dimensional figure.⁷⁰ Bridget usually calls for him to gain a third viewpoint on her problems, as occurred in the 'Daniel crisis'. When the latter did not get in touch with her within a certain time span, Tom suggests that Bridget should neither listen to Sharon nor Jude but 'be an aloof, coolly professional ice-queen' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 72), as most (heterosexual) men regard sexuality as a kind of competition: the more you reject them, the more attracted they are to you.⁷¹

Tom, like his female friends, is fashion-conscious and very much concerned with his looks. He keeps ranting about his alleged nasal bump which all his friends tell him is nothing to worry about. Still, Tom gets a nose job and as he is afraid and embarrassed to tell Bridget, Sharon and Jude; he is simply gone for a few days and in the end melodramatically 'saved' by his friends. Generally speaking, as Tom is not reluctant to change his body via surgery and is also very concerned with surveys he reads in magazines, he warns Bridget after she finds out that Daniel is having an affair that '90 percent of plastic surgery was done on women whose husbands had run off with a

⁷⁰ Cf. Whelehan, *BJD*, 52.

⁷¹ Cf. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 72.

younger woman' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 185). However, his seeming boyfriend, Jerome, turns away from him when he sees him after the operation but later on they get back together again. Generally, their relationship is an on-and-off affair and the reader gets the feeling that it is not a truly serious relationship. Jerome is therefore referred to as 'Creepy Jerome' by the girls for leaving Tom depressed and traumatised every once in a while. However, Tom is depicted as a stereotypical gay man who regularly makes a mountain out of a molehill, be it what he says or how he (re)acts.

Daniel Cleaver

Daniel, Bridget's boss, can surely be said to fall into the category of the bastard. He is particularly prominent in the first half of the novel, when it quickly becomes clear that there are sexual tensions between Daniel and Bridget. Being obsessed with sex, Bridget is immediately open to Daniel's advances in their virtual discussion, as has already been explored earlier on. Sadly enough, although it all looks to Bridget as if she has found the love of her life, confessing to her friends that she is in love with Daniel, the latter is only looking for a bit of adventure at first. He clearly is using his superior position over Bridget to get her into bed. Although Bridget is seemingly hurt by his chauvinist behaviour and by his not calling her for several days after they have had sex (for which she consults her friends for advice), she actually wants Daniel to be exactly like that. By contrast, Daniel is quite confused by Bridget's flirty but then rather reserved behaviour, stating:

First you completely ignore me like some Hitler Youth ice-maiden, then you turn into an irresistible sex kitten, looking at me over the computer with not so much 'come-to-bed' as just 'come' eyes, and now suddenly you're Jeremy Paxman⁷².
(*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 76)

⁷² Jeremy Paxman is a BBC news presenter who became known for his tough and often condescending questioning.

Although Bridget keeps wondering about his various sexist remarks⁷³, she actually quite enjoys them but Daniel gets a notional punch in the face from Bridget's friends (especially Sharon), who refer to him as an 'emotional fuckwit'. Still, Bridget is delighted by Daniel's referring to her as an 'irresistible sex kitten' and is completely gobsmacked, when, after an evening of the two of them watching television, they were supposed to 'tear each other's clothes off like beasts' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 124) but instead Daniel goes to bed with pyjamas on and reads a book before he turns off the lights. This makes Bridget pray to God to 'turn him back into the naked lust-crazed sex beast [she] used to know and love' (*ibid*). From the way he usually acts and the things he calls Bridget, we can assume that Daniel is a quite sexist and often nasty character but still he knows how to twist Bridget around his little finger to make him call 'gorgeous, messy, sexy, exciting, hilarious Daniel' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 298).

From a feminist point of view, Daniel's character is catastrophically sexist and thus not desirable and suitable as a boyfriend. He has old-fashioned views on what a woman is supposed to do and is therefore criticised by (primarily by Sharon) for his traditional role patterns. The 'true purpose' of a woman (Bridget) is 'to cook all my meals for me, of course, darling [...] and walk around my flat with no pants on' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 166/167).

Although the reader knows from the very beginning that it will not be 'the bastard' whom the heroine chooses in the end, he contributes a lot to the tensions of the story, making him a much more exciting character than the well-behaved and sometimes boring 'hero'. In keeping with a prejudiced character trait of 'the bastard', he naturally hurts the heroine by starting an affair while he is in a relationship with her. In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Daniel pretends to be busy working while Bridget is attending a Tarts and Vicar party.

⁷³ Daniel calls Bridget all kinds of different things, including 'frigid cow' (p. 44), gorgeous creature (p. 73) or 'dirty little bitch' (p.104).

When she later finds out that he was being with another woman all the while, Bridget at first cannot bear to accept what she sees and would rather want him laundering money or dealing drugs than having an affair⁷⁴, totally denying to herself what the reader (and all her friends) had known from the very beginning: that Daniel is just not the right man for her.

Mark Darcy

Mark Darcy can be classified as 'the hero' in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Interestingly, 'the bastard' and 'the hero' know each other, as Daniel and Mark met in Cambridge while they were still students. Not surprisingly, Daniel does not particularly like Mark – 'Can't stand the stupid nerd' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 103) – and vice versa, Mark's answer when asked if he was a friend of Daniel's is: 'Absolutely not' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 171). One reason for their mutual dislike could certainly be that they have known each other for a while and might have some unresolved issues from their years of study, but it is more likely that Mark is quite attracted to Bridget from the very beginning and is thus jealous of Daniel for dating her.

Although the character of Mark is introduced already at an early stage of the novel (at the annual Turkey Curry Buffet her parent's friends are hosting, as has been mentioned before), he does not appear again in person until the business party Bridget is also attending. While she has (more or less) broken up with Daniel and goes to the party alone, Mark is with his new girlfriend Natasha. At this point of the story, Bridget still seems to be only interested in Daniel and struggles hard to not fall for him again when they run into each other at the party. When Bridget tells Jude about what happened, she is surprised that she actually knows Mark as well:

⁷⁴ Cf. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 173.

'Wait a minute,' said Jude. 'You don't mean *Mark Darcy*, do you? The lawyer?'

'Yes. What — do you know him as well?'

'Well, yes. I mean, we've done some work with him. He's incredibly nice and attractive. I thought you said the chap at the turkey curry buffet was a real geek.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 104)

It seems that from this moment on Bridget starts to think positively of Mark, now that Jude has deemed Mark Darcy to be a 'nice and attractive' man. However, there is again some time in between until Mark's next appearance in the novel at the 'Tarts and Vicar party', for which Daniel excused himself, once again leaving Bridget alone at a party, running into Mark and his girlfriend. It is apparent that the elders do not approve of Natasha in any way, as they think she is just 'desperate to get her feet under the table' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 170) and is generally exploiting poor Mark.

Yet, although Mark only actually has few 'in-person-appearances', we learn a lot about his professional and private life through discussions about him, mainly from Bridget's mother. She is constantly trying to make Mark interesting for Bridget and invites her to every single party Mark is also attending, as she thinks 'it might be nice to have one or two young 'uns there to keep Mark company' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 207) – ignoring the fact that Mark actually has a girlfriend and does not necessarily need company. Bridget shares this view confessing to her diary that '[she is] not going to spend another evening being danced about in front of Mark Darcy like a spoonful of puréed turnip in front of a baby.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 212) Eventually, Bridget does indeed go to the party and is completely unexpectedly asked out on a date by Mark. Later on he confesses that he was interested in Bridget from the very beginning, greatly enjoying her being 'different', as 'all the other girls [he knows] are so lacquered over' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 237). In Alison Case's view,

the plot appears routinely to punish Bridget for attempts to manage her life, while rewarding her for being out of control – the genuineness that apparently wins Darcy's heart, after all, is the product of Bridget's persistent failure to carry through her plans to remake herself in another image. (Case, 180)

Bridget, on the other hand, thinks that Mark might be

too perfect, clean and finished off at the edges for [her], with his capability, intelligence, lack of smoking, freedom from alcoholism, and his chauffeur-driven cars. (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 286)

Nonetheless, Mark wins over her heart in the end – also due to his heroic act of getting back the Jones's money which Julio had gone off with, making Bridget admit 'God, he's cool.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 306)

Another little detail that clearly distinguishes 'the bastard' from 'the hero' is Bridget's regular reference to Mark by his full name. This might testify to her respect for Mark, as opposed to Daniel, with whom she ultimately only wanted to have fun, but it also adds to the comic effect – of a friend not only being referred to by his Christian name.

Bridget's father (Colin)

As Whelehan points out, Bridget's father is the only character who cannot be easily classified, as he is rather 'an interesting amalgam of hero and bastard' (Whelehan, *BJD*, 51). Clearly, for Bridget he is most certainly a hero, being her father. Moreover, as opposed to the contentious relationship with her mother, Colin is depicted as benign but also rather compliant. For Bridget's mum, at least in the beginning of the novel, it also seems that Colin is a warm and charming character, very much in love with his wife: 'When someone loves you it's like having a blanket all round your heart' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 72). This metaphorical description of how important love is to him, above all other things, having to be protected by a blanket in order to not run the risk of being touched by others. Sadly enough, this is exactly what happens to him and his marriage. After Pam has realised that she has spent her whole life taking care of her husband, who for all these years has taken her role as a housewife for granted, he suddenly turns into the role of 'the bastard', which is the reason for Pam's dissatisfaction.

But there is more to it than that – in the course of the novel, he becomes increasingly cowardly and ever more helpless in his ‘quest’ to save his marriage, which he finally leaves to his wife completely. His highly inferior position is often depicted by the insertion of a ‘daddy’ in Pam’s utterances, like ‘Could you carve, Daddy, please, and get everyone sitting down?’ (*Bridget Jones’s Diary*, 303), hugely humiliating him in front of their friends and signifying his state of resignation. Colin could be said to be the type of man who is totally rejected in a post-feminist society by Bridget and her friends – first, supporting patriarchal structures and then, when the relationship falls apart, being totally incapable of handling the situation, and thus being a ‘dysfunctional emotional fuckwit’ as has been often pointed out by Sharon.⁷⁵

5.3.2 Focalisation

As with so many other chick lit books, *Bridget Jones’s Diary* is a novel written from a first-person point of view, with the narrator (Bridget) being referred to as ‘I-as-protagonist’.⁷⁶ As has already been indicated above, one of the reasons for authors to choose first-person narration is that the main character’s voice is strengthened and that the reader gets a sense of being able to identify more intensely with the heroine. Yet what drastically distinguishes *Bridget Jones’s Diary* from other novels is its diary format. Its particular structure and style add to the concept of dealing with a very personal female writing. Rochelle Mabry explains further:

Although some passages read like any other traditional works of fiction [...], many sections are written in an immediate, abbreviated style that makes it seem as if Bridget writes about her experiences as they happen. (Mabry, 196)

⁷⁵ Cf. Whelehan, *BJD*, 51f.

⁷⁶ Cf. Chapter 3.3.2 “Focalisation” & Jahn, N3.3.2.

One particularly precise example of this style of writing is Bridget's diary entry on Saturday 4 March, after having spent a night out with her friends Sharon and Jude, drowning her sorrows over Daniel Cleaver: '2 a.m. Argor sworeal brilleve with Shazzan Jude. Dun stupid care bout Daniel stupid prat. Feel sicky though. Oops.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 68) Instead of describing the evening step by step,

Fielding uses almost phonetic spelling and stream-of-consciousness sentence structure to convey the idea that Bridget is actually writing the entry while she's still drunk. (Mabry, 196.)

The same 'stream-of-consciousness' style of writing occurs the next day when Bridget awakes to find herself in a dizzy state of mind:

8 a.m. Ugh. Wish was dead. Am never, ever going to drink again for the rest of life.

8.30 a.m. Oooh. Could really fancy some chips.

11.30 a.m. Badly need water but seems better to keep eyes closed and head stationary on pillow so as not to disturb bits of machinery and pheasants in head. (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 68)

These incidents enhance the idea that it is actually Bridget telling her own story by giving the reader such a clear visual image of her physical and mental state, philosophising about grabbing something to eat and fighting a hangover.⁷⁷ Moreover, the structure of *Bridget Jones's Diary* overall establishes an intimate feeling with the self, for diaries normally are only intended for the writer himself/herself. The first-person narration thus evokes feelings of identification on behalf of the reader through its oppressive closeness and great sense of subjectivity.

⁷⁷ Cf. Mabry, 195f.

One gets the feeling that Bridget sometimes wants to act otherwise but due to certain social restrictions, she backs down and the only way for her to confess what she actually wants to do or say is to write it down in her diary.⁷⁸

5.4 Analysis at the Level of the Phrase or Sentence

In this section, I will mostly be concerned with the analysis of metaphors in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. As we have seen earlier, Sara Mills (as a feminist scholar) is primarily looking for gender-specific, stereotypical metaphors in texts, to substantiate her theory that women are discriminated against, especially on a sexual level.⁷⁹

5.4.1. Metaphors in *Bridget Jones's Diary*

One metaphor that conforms to what Mills is suggesting concerning female discrimination in texts is the ticking of the clock. Right at the beginning of the story, when Bridget is invited to a New Year's party at the house of her parents' best friends, the hostess – Una Alconbury – teases her for still not having found a boyfriend, stating

‘Bridget! What *are* we going to do with you!’ [...]. ‘You career girls! I don’t know! Can’t put it off for ever, you know. Tick-tock-tick-tock.’ (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 11)

The ticking of the clock in this excerpt clearly is an auditory paraphrase for the biological clock Una sees counting for Bridget. Being in her early thirties, for the generation preceding Bridget's, not being married and still not having children when you are beyond a certain age limit (thirty), this meant a kind of social downfall and was something that very few women considered desirable.

⁷⁸ Cf. Whelehan, *BJD*, 25.

⁷⁹ Cf. Mills, 136f.

But for the '90s woman⁸⁰, being single is perfectly normal and legitimate and rather than falling for someone who may not be the right man just for the sake of having a boyfriend; women like Bridget are seeking a serious relationship, 'looking for life partners rather than the temporary frissons of their twenties.' (Whelehan, *BJD*, 33) Nonetheless, even today (especially in the more rural areas) many people mock women who, voluntarily or unintentionally, do not have children at a certain age. So the 'tick-tock-tick-tock' example is a recent one and in this sense could be said to support Mills theory.⁸¹

However, in another instance where the clock metaphor occurs, it has nothing at all to do with age or the process of ageing. This time it is male-related and refers to the rich and successful Mark Darcy, of whom Bridget's mother is very fond. After several unsuccessful attempts to set her daughter up with Mark, she again talks Bridget into coming to a party with her parents, which Mark would also be attending. As Bridget is not at all happy about her mother's plans, the latter plays the joker of praising Mark's success: 'He was earning thousands of pounds an hour. Had a clock on his desk, tick-tock-tick-tock.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 208) In this case, the clock definitely reflects the amount of money Mark earns (or used to earn) every second the clock is ticking. Thus while on the female level, the ticking of the clock stands for the inevitable passing of time and the woman's biological clock (which actually is a female-only phenomenon), on a male level it mirrors money and success. In other words, while in the female case it shows a personal failure, in the male case it is an illustration of professional success. This metaphor can indeed be said to work on a stereotypical level: the woman as 'the loser' in her ascribed personal and family-related surroundings and the man as 'the winner' in his accredited area of business life.

⁸⁰ Cf. Expression by Lisa Habib.

⁸¹ Cf. Mills, 137.

Another metaphor that somewhat corresponds with what has been said above is the phrase 'being eaten by an Alsatian'⁸². Generally speaking, *Bridget Jones's Diary* presents a quite contradictory picture of singleness. While on the one hand, the state of being single is highlighted by dating, flirting and going out drinking with some friends, on the other hand there is also a serious tone of loneliness and living alone. In their nightmares, Bridget and her friends therefore often have the fear of 'end[ing] up all alone, half-eaten by an Alsatian.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 33) Nonetheless, Sharon – the only character with a self-proclaimed feminist touch – also shares this view and argues that

As women glide from their twenties to thirties, [...], the balance of power subtly shifts. Even the most outrageous minxes lose their nerve, wrestling with the first twinges of existential angst: fears of dying alone and being found three weeks later half-eaten by an Alsatian. (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 20)

Thus Sharon is suggesting that even if you pursue feminist goals, there comes a time when you want to settle down with your partner and no longer be on your own. All the things that Bridget and her friends have loved doing so much, living an independent life full of gorgeous friends and exciting parties, following the image of a 'Cosmo Girl', seem to go down the drain. Again, the dichotomy of these two battling ideas becomes apparent: the hip idea of being a 'Cosmo Girl' versus the old-fashioned thought of failure when you are not married by a certain age. Yet when Bridget considers everything to be going perfectly well with Daniel and visualises the two of them 'running along beaches together with tiny offspring' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 131), she imagines herself 'being trendy Smug Married instead of sheepish Singleton' (*ibid*).

⁸² Cf. *Bridget Jones's Diary*, p. 20, 33, 211, 265, 287.

The 'Alsatian metaphor' can also be discussed in relation to Bridget's constant quest for self-improvement. After several quite unsuccessful incidents concerning her love life, Bridget has survived the first week in her new job and starts feeling more confident, which is mirrored not only in her vital statistics but also in the following report of events:

8st 12 (v.g.⁸³ advantage of new job with attendant nervous tension), alcohol units 4, cigarettes 10, calories 1876, minutes spent having imaginary conversation with Daniel 24 (excellent)

[...]

I was starting to think maybe it was all going to be OK, maybe I wasn't *necessarily* going to be eaten by an Alsatian [...]. (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 211)

Bridget feels good for having lost weight and reducing the consumption of alcohol and cigarettes to a minimum. Moreover, she is happy about having found control again over her emotions and not constantly thinking of Daniel, which she highlights as 'excellent' behaviour.

On another occasion – around Christmas, of all times⁸⁴ – Bridget worries about Mark not returning her calls, again thinking that she will never find the right man. Highly dramatically her diary entry reads:

2 a.m. Why hasn't Mark Darcy rung me? Why? Why? Am going to be eaten by Alsatian despite all efforts to the contrary. Why me, Lord? (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 287)

Although Bridget thinks of herself as having tried really hard to finally deserve the 'success' of a fulfilled love life, destiny apparently has something else in mind for her, which she conversely blames on the Lord.

⁸³ The abbreviation v.g. stands for 'very good'.

⁸⁴ Cf. Bridget remembers a poem by Wendy Cope that goes:
At Christmas little children sing and merry bells jingle.
The cold winter air makes our hands and faces tingle.
And happy families go to church and cheerily they mingle,
And the whole business is unbelievably dreadful if you're single.
(*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 285)

Another instance that widely accompanies what has been said above is the 'Alsatian metaphor' in the context of Tom's nose operation. After his pseudo-boyfriend left him, being repulsed by the sight of Tom's face after the operation, the latter locked himself up and was simply 'gone' for a few days, unplugging his phone, so that his friends became delirious with worry about what might have happened, and Tom was thinking that nobody cared about him, to which Bridget replies:

I told him to ring my answerphone, which held twenty-two frantic messages from his friends, all distraught because he had disappeared for twenty-four hours, which put paid to all our fears about dying alone and being eaten by an Alsatian.
(*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 265)

In fact, it seems that the fear of dying alone is so huge that the characters go berserk after only one day of not being able to call each other, not knowing what is going on. Again, of course, the exaggeration of these images adds to the humorous effect of the novel.

5.5 Analysis at the Level of the Word

In this chapter, I will mainly concentrate on the 'invention of new words', as has been done by Helen Fielding, who coined the terms 'singleton' and 'emotional fuckwit', setting them in relation to Sara Mills' theory of female derogation.

5.5.1 Invention of New Words

In the introduction to her book *The Feminist Bestseller*, Imelda Whelehan states that *Bridget Jones's Diary*, amongst others,

created a media sensation through a word or phrase [which came to be known as] a cluster of evocative words and phrases devised by Bridget and her friends to conceptualize the embattled world of the single woman. (Whelehan, *Bestseller*, 6)

Without a doubt, Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* captured the zeitgeist of the time, when an increasing number of people were living in single households. This moved her to invent new words to describe these so-called 'new kinds of people' as opposed to the 'old-fashioned', traditional ones who despite an upcoming new lifestyle, got married and had children. The coining of new terms by Bridget and her friends is a central concept in *Bridget Jones's Diary* and definitely worth an examination within the framework of word analysis.

The often-mentioned term 'singleton' refers to the new type of single people, mostly women, in their early thirties who are on the one hand are confident, successful career types and proud of their independence, but on the other hand insecure, foolish whiners, as Lisa Habib describes them.⁸⁵ Still, the term 'singleton' has a much more positive tone to it than its predecessor 'spinster', which Sara Mills in her *Feminist Stylistics* denotes as an "old maid" referring to someone who is unable to find a husband, by implication because they are too ugly or too "sour". (Mills, 111) Luckily enough, the term 'spinster' nowadays is rarely used because its meaning is fairly insulting. However, while being female and single is mostly seen as tragic and is often smiled at, being male and single is quite a preferable state. On an issue of *Tatler*⁸⁶, Bridget finds 'Mark Bloody Darcy's face smouldering out from feature on London's fifty most eligible bachelors [...] (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 194) From this quote, one could make a reference to Mills' theory that "Bachelor" by contrast [to spinster] has the positive connotations of freedom and independence and still having all your choices open to you' (Mills, 111). In this sense, whereas a single female is said to be a bit of a weirdo, being a male single is perfectly normal and even shows a certain lifestyle.

⁸⁵ Cf. Habib, Lisa. "Bridget Jones' Is Today's Everywoman, Role Model Or Not, And We Like Her Like That".

⁸⁶ *Tatler* is a British magazine that primarily features social trends of the upper class.

In addition to the 'singletons' in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, we are also introduced to couples. But most of them are not just in relationships, but married (sometimes even with children) and are therefore most often referred to as 'smug marrieds'. What Bridget finds most annoying about 'smug married' people is the fact that being around them reduces her ego to a minimum, as 'when they are together with their married friends [she] feel[s] as if [she] ha[s] turned into Miss Havisham⁸⁷.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 40) But although Bridget is confident and sometimes even proud of being a 'singleton' when she is with her other single friends, she does not dare present her viewpoint about being 'smug married' to actual married couples. At a dinner party with only married people (except for the host's single but ugly brother), it is made clear to the reader that Bridget actually has several statements in her mind all about the same as 'I don't want to end up like you, you fat, boring, Sloaney milch cow.' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 40) but then rather refrains from doing so, so as to not hurt their feelings. Instead, Bridget herself is constantly insulted for not having a boyfriend, let alone a husband, by both her (married) friends and her family. Because of that, she tries to find solace in her friend Sharon, who supports her position by reflecting a survey she has come across.

There is more than one bloody way to live: one in four households are single, most of the royal family are single, the nation's young men have been proved by surveys to be *completely unmarriageable*, and as a result there's a whole generation of single girls like me with their own incomes and homes who have lots of fun and don't need to wash anyone else's socks. (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 42.)

Still, although all of Bridget's friends rant about 'smug married' couples, all of them wish to find a functional relationship with someone who is the total opposite of an 'emotional fuckwit'. This term almost exclusively describes a man in his early thirties who 'tries to embark on a liaison with the clear intent of *avoiding* a functional relationship.' (Whelehan, *BJD*, 36)

⁸⁷ Miss Havisham is a central character in Charles Dickens's novel *Great Expectations*. She is a wealthy but single woman and often described as a bit of a witch.

In her New Year's Resolutions, Bridget therefore plans on 'form[ing] functional relationship with responsible adult' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 3) and definitely not

Fall for any of following: alcoholics, workaholics, commitment phobics, people with girlfriends or wives, misogynists, megalomaniacs, chauvinists, emotional fuckwits or freeloaders, perverts. (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 2)

From this almost never-ending list, one gets the strong impression that Bridget has not been lucky in her choice of men in the past, as it seems that she has experienced relationships with all of the above-mentioned types of men. Already from this early stage in the novel, one could state that Bridget has an aptitude for falling for the wrong guys. Except for the alcoholic, the misogynist and maybe the pervert (although this is a quite subjective term), from a male perspective the above-mentioned types may possibly be considered desirable. As Sara Mills points out, terms for males that per se have a rather bad connotation may be regarded in a positive way when they refer to sexual activity or attractiveness.⁸⁸ A 'commitment phobic', for example, may not be ready for a proper relationship but that leads to the assumption that he simply does not want to get seriously involved so as not to lose his position as a 'casanova'. Nonetheless, when the sexual activity of a woman is considered, she may easily be labelled a 'slut' or a 'bitch' (which do have a pretty negative tone), whereas 'words which refer to the sexual availability of men tend to have positive connotations suggesting that they are successful rather than social outcasts.' (Mills, 113f) To take an example from *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Daniel labels Bridget a 'bitch'. When asking the question how she knows Mark, saying that '[she] used to play with him in the paddling pool' (*Bridget Jones's Diary*, 104), Daniel answers: 'Yes, I bet you did, you dirty little bitch.' (*ibid*) Although ironically used in this example, as Bridget at that time probably was not yet sexually active, there is a certain insulting tone about this statement, prejudicing Bridget of always having been an easy prey.

⁸⁸ Cf. Mills, 113.

6. Sophie Kinsella's *Shopaholic & Baby*

6.1 The Author

Madeleine Wickham (née Townley) was born in 1969 in London and later educated at Putney High School and New College, Oxford. After she quit her job as a financial journalist, she turned to writing fiction. She now lives with her husband and her three sons in Hertfordshire.

Kinsella's first novels were still published under her real name but later she decided to choose a pseudonym for the publication of her famous Shopaholic novels. Nonetheless, although in an interview on bookreporter.com Kinsella states that 'I never really felt financial journalism was my true love, [...] because I'm just not interested in the subject'⁸⁹, the main character of her Shopaholic novels, Becky Bloomwood, starts out as a financial journalist in the first book *The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic* (2000).⁹⁰

6.2 The Novel

The novel *Shopaholic & Baby* was published in the UK in 2007 and is the fifth (and probably last) of the successful Shopaholic novels by Sophie Kinsella. What we have learned in the last story *Shopaholic & Sister* (2004), preceding the novel at hand, is that Becky is expecting a baby. For me, *Shopaholic & Baby* can therefore be seen as an 'in-betweenner', being neither classical chick lit nor traditional mummy lit but rather the forerunner of mummy literature, as Becky is no longer searching for Mr. Right but still has not experienced what life is actually like when you have a baby and be a mother. Still, for reasons of simplicity, I will talk of Kinsella's novel as being a chick lit novel.

⁸⁹ For the full interview, visit <<http://www.bookreporter.com/authors/au-kinsella-sophie.asp>>.

⁹⁰ Cf. <<http://www.sophiekinsella.co.uk/>>. The title of the American edition is *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2001).

As Sophie Kinsella's Shopaholic novels are a great success not only in the UK but more or less worldwide, they are going to be made into films. The first one, *Confessions of a Shopaholic* directed by P.J. Hogan, will be released in February 2009.

6.2.1 The Cover

The cover of the first paperback edition of *Shopaholic & Baby* by the Bantam Press is a prototypical exponent of a glossy magazine-style chick lit cover of today. It is primarily kept in light blue and pink with huge pink letters depicting the name of the author, as well as the title of the novel. Interestingly, the letters take up more than half the page (situated on the top and bottom of the cover) and there is only a little picture in the middle showing a pram full of shopping bags. This is typical for Kinsella's Shopaholic novels that seem to be promoting not only the image of a 'shopaholic' (illustrated by several varieties of images of consumer goods) but even more so the term 'shopaholic' itself, which has become a bestselling strategy. Whenever you see 'shopaholic' in huge letters beaming at you in a bookstore, you know what to expect – a successful Kinsella novel. After a first glance at the big letters, on closer examination you discover what could be described as a subheading of the title of the novel: 'Becky Bloomwood is back – with a bump', probably assuming that you are already familiar with the heroine of the Shopaholic novels (Becky Bloomwood) and her life (she is expecting a baby). The dash in between these two phrases adds to the suspense and anticipation of finally holding another series of the Shopaholic novels in hand. The picture of the pram on the cover is actually just another intensifier of this whole image of Becky being pregnant and shopping for all kinds of things for her baby. However, although we do not actually gain an insight into the contents of the shopping bags, one has the feeling that there might be several items having been purchased not for the baby but actually for its mummy (cf. the stiletto shoes in the front).

In this sense, what is shown on the cover of the novel is already some kind of signpost for what the novel is going to be like, or more precisely, what the content of the novel will be. What has always been condemned by feminists as frivolous is now excessively depicted in the chick lit novels of the post-feminist era – the pleasures of fashion and consumerism as a means of expressing identity.⁹¹

6.2.2 Arrangement of Chapters

As regards the arrangement of chapters, or rather the organisation of the whole novel, it has to be said that Kinsella uses a device that is regularly employed in chick lit writing: inserting pictures, letters or virtual conversations, for example. In the case of *Shopaholic & Baby*, there are several instances where bank statements are inserted before or after a chapter. Even before the actual story starts, the reader gains some insight into the story via three letters Becky has received from one of her financial advisers. These interpolations are not just intended to be funny or maybe distracting, but they also serve as additional plot information. The story itself is then chronologically told, with the twenty-two chapters being numbered in ascending order. Yet, letters are inserted both at the beginning and at the end to prepare the reader for the story or let him know how the story might continue.

6.3 Analysis at the Level of Discourse

Similarly to the analysis of *Bridget Jones's Diary* before, I will mainly concentrate on the focalisation of the novel *Shopaholic & Baby*, as well as on the description of the main characters.

⁹¹ Cf. Ferriss, 10.

6.3.1 Focalisation

I am going to briefly explain again the concept of the 'I-as-protagonist' narration, as has been signified by Jahn. *Shopaholic & Baby* as a first-person-narration in general, and the character of Becky being both the narrator and the main character in the story in particular, account for the novel being regarded as an 'I-as-protagonist' narration.⁹²

The only changes in style mark the already mentioned insertions of bank statements, as well as letters from all different kinds of people. Clearly, these would have to be characterised separately, as the first-person pronoun in these cases is (and cannot be) Becky's, for she is the one who is actually addressed in these letters.

However, what can be said without a doubt is that the chatty, informal voice of Becky adds to the special light-hearted tone of the whole novel and that 'by means of a confessional first-person narrator, [it] prevents readers from taking her or her problems too seriously' (Van Slooten, 220). Still, every novel of the Shopaholic series begins with the sentences 'OK. Don't panic. Everything's going to be fine. Of course it is. Of *course* it is.' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 13) However, this calming and consoling mantra is immediately shattered by the narrator's declaration that she is 'just a teeny bit...nervous' (*ibid*), not truly acknowledging that she is scared to death by the insertion of the diminutive 'teeny'. Generally, the hesitating expressions are a characteristic of the narrator's voice, which I shall analyse on the following pages.

6.3.2 Characters

The following analysis will give a detailed description of the major characters in *Shopaholic & Baby*, contrasting the female characters Becky, Suze and Jess with the two most prominent male characters Luke and Danny.

⁹² Cf. Jahn N3.3.2.

The portrayal of the differences and similarities of each of the characters will be of central interest.

6.3.2.1 Female Characters

Becky Brandon

Becky Brandon (née Bloomwood), the main character in *Shopaholic & Baby*, lives in London with her husband Luke and works as a personal shopper at a failing department store ('The Look').

First of all, it has to be clarified that the reader does not get a physical description of the character, thus the narrator does not conform to Mills' theory that female characters are often portrayed with respect to their bodies in order to establish sexual attractiveness.⁹³ This was probably a conscious choice by the author, as Kinsella thinks that in this way people can identify better with the main character.⁹⁴

However, Becky herself very much judges people on grounds of how they look and what they are wearing.

A very slim woman in her forties is standing on the black and white marble tiles. She's wearing white D&G jeans, a casual top which I *know* cost her five hundred pounds, and a diamond ring so huge I'm amazed she can lift her arm. (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 42)

Her observant character often makes her compare herself to other people, which clearly is a sign of a rather weak personality and low self-confidence. The detailed description of what the above-mentioned woman is wearing adds to this fact but moreover, it makes clear that Becky can surely be described as a fashion victim, as she can detect from a distance what designer had fashioned this woman's outfit.

⁹³ Cf. Mills, 160f.

⁹⁴ Cf. In an answer to the question of why she does not give a detailed physical description of Becky, Kinsella states that '[she] want[s] [her] readers to feel they are inside Becky's head, seeing the world through her eyes, not looking at her from the outside.' <<http://www.randomhouse.com/bantamdell/kinsella/index.html>>

Additionally, one could assume that Becky also owns one of these horrendously expensive tops, which is intensified by emphasising the word 'know' or similarly that she is just so much into fashion that she learns about these things in magazines and the like. In fact, Becky does gain a lot of her 'knowledge' from magazines, self-help books and TV shows, similar to Bridget and her friends in *Bridget Jones's Diary* who also rely heavily on what they get from these guiding authorities. When Becky tries to make clear to her husband that now that they are expecting a baby, they should make important decisions together because otherwise their child will 'run around hitting [them] and [they'll] end up hiding in the bedroom and never have sex again. [...] "It's true! It's on *Supernanny!*"' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 38), it indicates that Becky takes what she sees on TV for granted.

Generally speaking, the character of Becky Brandon is very insecure about both her personal and professional fulfilment and thus regularly lapses into a serious shopping frenzy.⁹⁵ Of all the *Shopaholic* novels, this becomes particularly obvious in *Shopaholic & Baby*, as Becky has found out that shopping cures morning sickness.⁹⁶ Her obsession with designer goods even goes so far that she considers naming the newborn Birkin, because 'then [she] could get a Birkin to be his nappy bag'⁹⁷ (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 18), obviously forgetting that she does not even know the sex of the baby yet. As for herself, Becky only wants the best for her baby, and with a husband who is able to afford his wife's exaggerated expenses, this can be all done. Even though Becky earns her own salary, she prefers to spend Luke's money on all sorts of different things, and the reader sometimes gets the impression that Becky is not really aware of how to deal with money, let alone bank institutions. We learn that Becky has recently discovered the advantages of online banking: '[...] they don't send bank statements out by post, so no one (e.g., your husband) can see them lying around the house.' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 35) It is thus clear that she aims to hide her expense statements from Luke.

⁹⁵ Cf. Van Slooten, 219.

⁹⁶ Cf. *Shopaholic & Baby*, 139.

⁹⁷ A Birkin bag is a handbag by fashion manufacturer Hermès who is known for his luxurious and very expensive fashion goods.

Although it is presented in this example as a possibility by putting the 'your husband' in parenthesis, preceded by an 'e.g.', it is obviously meant to refer only to the husband (bearing in mind that the only person who could possibly see this statement was Luke, as it is only the two of them sharing a household). Thus the 'e.g.' in this case would be redundant but is chosen for a humorous effect.

Another instance that goes along with Becky's naïve access to money can be seen with regard to her online bank account in Namibia, amongst others, which in itself sounds horrendously ridiculous. However, Becky then admits that she got an e-mail offering very good rates to which Luke replies: "Do you respond to every email you get, Becky?" [...] "Do you have a fine selection of Viagra substitutes too?" (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 37) The humour in this example definitely lies in the underlying fact that today one receives more and more spam mails offering all kinds of dubious things, and that one normally would not think of actually trusting the content of these e-mails. Secondly, the fact that Becky is so naïve about financial matters is particularly funny, as she used to be a financial journalist; thus one would assume she should know better. Becky compares her former profession to riding a bike, declaring to her sceptical friend Suze that she is 'a financial professional' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 188). Explains Becky: "It's like riding a bike," I assure her loftily. I'm not actually that great at riding a bike, but I needn't mention that.' (*ibid*) Becky leads her friend to believe that she knows what she is doing concerning financial matters, while she herself admits that she actually does not have a clue. This is the outcome of the metaphorical meaning of this example. Overall it seems that Becky only appears self-assured on the outside, while she is in fact a very insecure person. Although she has a good sense of fashion, she still becomes uncomfortable when dressing up for important meetings or appointments, commenting: 'I look pretty good, I think. I hope.' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 71) The hesitant 'I hope' that follows the rather assuring words 'pretty good' and the less hopeful 'I think' is an identifier for this behaviour.

Yet it is not just her looks, but also her private life that is put on the scales. When Becky is struggling with the thought about whether it was possible that her husband could be having an affair, she is completely sure that this just cannot be the case, stating:

I'm 110 per cent confident.

[...]

Maybe I'm not 110 per cent confident. Maybe just one hundred per cent.

Or even... ninety-five. (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 153-155)

Becky's unassertive character becomes particularly obvious in this example. While she is at first positive that Luke is not betraying her, the degree of confidence is minimised by stressing the '110', followed by the result of 'just one hundred'. On second thoughts, only ninety-five of the initial 110 per cent remain; the disillusion of the final outcome is further illustrated by the dots. Nonetheless, although Becky keeps telling herself to be strong and not to get too hysterical about Luke going out with some friends, she realises: 'Oh God. I sound exactly like a whingy *East Enders* wife.' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 175) The effect of this comparison is linked to the assumption that the reader is familiar with soap operas like *East Enders* and their stereotypical portrayal of men and women. Yet again, the reader knows that Becky has overreacted far too often, becoming carried away by her thoughts: as a result, one cannot take her altogether seriously. There is one particularly significant instance demonstrating how Becky is losing touch with reality, when she talks about non-alcoholic cocktails she is bound to drink now that she is pregnant:

I mean, obviously I don't mind. I'm creating a beautiful new human being and all that. But still. If I was God, I'd make it OK for pregnant women to have cocktails. In fact, I'd make it *healthy* to have cocktails. And your arms wouldn't swell up. And there wouldn't be any morning sickness. And labour wouldn't exist... (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 66)

The word 'obviously' in the first sentence has a bit of a warranting tone about it. One cannot be entirely sure if Becky is aware of what it means to be pregnant and what the consequences of an unhealthy lifestyle during

pregnancy might be. This is enforced by her claim that she would make it 'okay' and even 'healthy' to drink alcohol. Admittedly, many pregnant women have probably had similar thoughts about the subject but in Becky's case, she wishes for the whole nature of pregnancy to amend a woman's position by ranting about swollen arms and labour pains. Then, at the end of the novel we learn that although everyone said it was an easy and straightforward birth, to Becky 'it seemed pretty complicated and bloody hard work [...] But anyway. Some things are best left a blur. Births and Visa bills' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 348). Thus she is comparing the painfulness of giving birth to the sometimes painful look at a credit card bill, showing how obsessed Becky actually is with spending money.

Another attribute of Becky's character is her two-fold naivety. On the one hand, there are cases in which she refers to herself as being a bit stupid which are obviously connected to shopping. Further instances include other people regarding her as silly and shallow. As has been mentioned above, Becky defines herself by what clothes she buys and what she wears but has apparently not spent enough time finding out what trendy babies are supposed to wear:

I've never even heard of Baby in Urbe. Or Piglet shoes. How can I be so uncool? How can I have not heard of any of the labels? [...] I have no idea about baby fashion. And I've only got about four months to get up to speed. (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 28)

The tone of the statement arouses our suspicion that Becky is actually panicking a bit at the thought of not being familiar with the above-mentioned labels, paired with a feeling of self-doubt of how it is actually possible to be Becky Brandon, *the* fashion victim, and not know these labels. The second source of panic is that time is seemingly running out, which conversely adds to the humorous effect of the whole paragraph, as four months actually appears to be quite a long time to get familiar with baby fashion.

On the other hand, there is 'external' evidence that Becky might be not the brightest of women. When Luke tells her about his mother 'touring Europe with her art collection' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 36), Becky replies 'why?' and continues:

I have a vision of Elinor in a coach, a bundle of paintings under her arm. It doesn't seem very *her*, somehow. "The collection is currently on loan to the Uffizi, then a gallery in Paris—" Luke breaks off. "Becky, you didn't think I meant she was taking her pictures on holiday." (*ibid*)

Of course this is exactly what she meant, although understandably she does not admit it. Still, Becky is a very likeable character and her naïve comments add to the humour of the book.

On the whole, Becky's character can be described as pursuing traditional values and moral concepts ('I thought marriage was for ever.' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 254)) and although she has a job, she very much depends on her husband, most obviously financially. Sadly enough, the reader sometimes gets the feeling that she is only in love with Luke because he is successful and very wealthy and she is quite openly exploiting his wealth:

He said I should line up every form of pain relief I could, never mind about the cost. So I've hired a reflexologist, a hot-stone-massage person, an aromatherapist, an acupuncturist, a homeopath and a doula.' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 292f)

Bearing in mind that alternative medical treatments are quite expensive, this all seems a bit exaggerated just for the event of a birth. But then again, as Becky grew up an only child, she may have been spoilt from an early age and is still living according to these standards.

Suze

Suze is Becky's oldest and best friend who is married and already has three children. She comes from a wealthy aristocratic family and although she is also very much into shopping and dressing up, she is far more down-to-earth than Becky, especially since she has had the babies. Suze and Becky share every single detail of their life and now that Becky is expecting a baby, Suze gives her tips on how to cope with the pregnancy.

"You wait till it starts poking knees out and stuff," says Suze. "It's so freaky, like having an alien inside you." You see, this is why you need a best friend when you're pregnant. Not a single one of my baby books has said, "It's so freaky, like having an alien inside you." (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 62)

It becomes clear that the two women have been friends for quite a while and that Suze is now very important in Becky's life, as indicated by the 'you need a best friend' and even further intensified by directly addressing the reader ('you see'). However, having known her for so long, Suze has learned how to explain certain things and situations to her, so that even Becky can understand what it is like and what it feels like. Moreover, it is obvious that talking amongst friends is of a completely different nature than gaining your knowledge from a book. For that, Becky's inner thoughts, repeating what Suze has said, seem somewhat redundant if you look at it matter-of-factly. However, the effect of this repetition clearly is how much Becky relies on what her friend Suze is telling her and strengthens the bond between them. Already having been through three pregnancies, Suze knows exactly what it feels like and what to expect. This is also made clear in the following incredulous statement by Suze regarding Becky's priorities: "You do know having a baby is about more than buying it clothes, don't you? You do have...realistic expectations?" (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 103) The tone of this statement is one of annoyance and the reader somehow sympathises with Suze, who, though having tried really hard, still is not able to get Becky to realistically look at her pregnancy.

It has a strong educational sound to it, as if Suze were talking to a ten-year-old, but again it only goes to show what good friends Suze and Becky are. However, the verb 'do' in both sentences demonstrates that the authoritative tone is exactly what Becky needs in order to understand what Suze actually means.

Generally speaking, as concerns Mills' theory of how women are portrayed, it is made obvious that although Suze is married and has three children to look after, she is still portrayed as an independent woman (mostly financially) and not at all as the 'appendage' of her husband.⁹⁸ However, one has to mention again that by coming from a wealthy family, Suze never actually had to worry about financial matters anyway.

Jess

Jess is Becky's long-lost half-sister and she is the complete opposite of Becky's character on both an intellectual and an ideological level. She is studious and quite thrifty and she tries to talk Becky into making her own nappies and encourages her to save money. The fact that she is an environmentalist also adds to her idea of having an all-hemp wardrobe for Becky's baby.

All-hemp? What on earth is she—

Oh. Maybe I did say something like that at Mum's party, just to stop her lecturing me about evil bleached cotton.

"I'm going... part hemp, part other fabrics," I say at last.

"For... er... biodiversity." (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 145)

Becky has obviously agreed to what Jess was saying just to shut her up, showing that Jess is a rather timid character and definitely not able to counter Becky's statement, but it is manifested that Becky obviously does not have a clue what she is talking about now that she is confronted again. She probably has never actually thought about the 'all-hemp wardrobe matter' in any greater detail.

⁹⁸ Cf. Mills, 170.

This is indicated by the hesitant reaction to Jess's suggestion, marked by the dots in between her stuttering. However, one can see from the above but even more so from the following example how important protecting the environment is to Jess and how she tries to make Becky think twice before spending money on irrelevant things. The following instruction by Jess of how to use recyclable nappies is proof of that:

“We just need to boil them and soak them in a solution of oil and soap,” [...] “It’s far kinder to the environment. And the baby’s skin. And they’re reusable. You’ll save pounds in the long run.” (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 58)

This can be seen as one example that shows how different Becky's and Jess's attitude towards environmental and financial matters actually is, as Becky has never been concerned about saving up money for the future.

As I have already mentioned above, in contrast to Becky and Suze, Jess is not at all into shopping and dressing up, for which she is regularly 'told off' by the narrator for 'wearing a hideous blue anorak instead of the cool faux-fur jacket [...]. Honestly.' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 23) This example shows that to Jess other things are far more important than fashion and moreover, being a protector of nature, she would probably not be wearing a fur-jacket at all, even though it is only a fake one.

Generally speaking, we learn a lot about the private lives of the characters, but with Jess it is different as she does not openly want to talk about these things, or rather mostly does not feel that it is that important. However, for Becky, Jess's secrecy is hard to handle, as for her 'the whole point of having a sister is you phone her up and tell her about your new boyfriend. Not keep her totally out of the loop. (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 136) To sum up, the discrepancies between Becky and her half-sister add to the humorous and light-hearted tone of the whole novel, as you tend to sympathise with either one of them.

Venetia

Introductorily, the reader does not get a too detailed characterisation by Venetia's appearances herself, but she is the character that mostly is described through other characters, primarily Becky.

Venetia is an 'A-list obstetrician'⁹⁹ who delivers the babies for film stars, which is why Becky also wants to get an appointment with her. After a successful phone call, she actually has the pleasure of seeing Venetia, which will be the reason for her sleepless nights. On their first appointment, we find out that Venetia and Becky's husband Luke used to be a couple back when they were both students at Cambridge. Although at the beginning of the novel Venetia is described as a 'stunningly beautiful woman with long vivid red hair' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 77), it does not take long until Becky nourishes the prejudice of red-haired women being more mean and evil than others and soon suspects Venetia of having an affair with her husband. Being well-educated, Venetia writes Luke text messages in Latin, as this used to be 'their thing' at university. This obviously causes Becky to become even more suspicious, for she does not have a clue what the messages are supposed to mean.¹⁰⁰

To make matters worse, Venetia is hiring Luke's company 'Brandon Communications' as her new PR agency, which makes Becky come to think: 'I can't help it. Suspicions are rising up inside me, as thick and fast as ever.' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 170) This is one example that shows Becky's rising terror of her possibly losing her husband to Venetia and it becomes more and more apparent throughout the novel that the two women just cannot stand each other. At one appointment, Venetia gets Becky to wear unfashionable white tights for medical reasons, as she is sure that 'fashion is bad for your health' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 181). However, Becky thinks that Venetia is just trying to humiliate her in front of her husband, which is enforced by a 'you look great, Becky' (*ibid*)

⁹⁹ Cf. *Shopaholic & Baby*, 53.

¹⁰⁰ Becky even hires a translator to learn that "'Latin lover" is not generally taken to mean someone who talks to their lover in Latin.' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 193).

The effect of this exclamation clearly is of an insulting kind, as in Becky's view you cannot possibly be honest telling a woman she looks great when she is wearing white surgical-support stockings.

The reader only finds out later that Venetia is actually still in love with Luke and even tells Becky that they are having an affair although they are not. She just cannot believe that Becky should be the one Luke wants to spend the rest of his life with:

“This mindless, consumer little... *girlie* is who you're going to spend the rest of your days with? Luke, she has no depth! She has no brain! All she cares about is shopping, and her clothes... and her girlfriends...” (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 341)

This example rather neatly describes how Venetia sees Becky and how little she thinks of her. In her view, all she is concerned with is shopping and spending money ('consumer', 'shopping', 'clothes') and she defines Becky as being stupid, which is indicated by the totally demeaning utterance 'she has no brain'. Moreover, Venetia does not take Becky seriously at all, which is shown by the diminutive 'girlie' and enforced by the dots preceding this word. Venetia is probably the least likeable character, as she is trying to destroy the perfect life of Becky and Luke but her appearance in the novel definitely marks a highlight.

6.3.2.2 Male Characters

Luke

Luke is Becky's husband who runs his own very successful PR company (Brandon Communications). He is a determined character with good manners and he is incredibly caring and thoughtful of Becky. “Shall I drop you off at the thrift shop?” he enquires, opening the door. (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 25)

The use of the verb 'shall' as opposed to, for example, 'should' is an indicator of Luke's considerate behaviour and a sign of respect towards Becky. Moreover, Luke also seems to have gentleman-like attributes, as he opens the door of the car for his wife.

There are several instances throughout the novel that are proof of Luke's loyalty towards Becky, but the reader nonetheless gets the feeling that he might at some point be a bit overprotective. When he hides the fact that his company is having troubles from Becky for fear of worrying her, he nourishes Becky's speculation of having an affair, as he grows quite distant. However, this could also be seen as a sign of understanding and how much Luke respects the worries and needs of his wife. Though he sometimes makes fun of Becky's excessive shopping, Luke still satisfies her wish by accompanying her to 'Pram City'.

"We need a pram," says Luke.

"Ah." [...] "Congratulations! Is this your first visit here?"

"First and only," says Luke firmly. (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 223)

It is quite interesting to see that it is actually Luke who tells the shop assistant what they are there for, however obvious it is. Normally you would expect Becky to rise and speak, as the matter concerns shopping. However, this could also be a sign that Luke does not feel confident about the whole situation and wants everything to be done in no time at all. This is also indicated by his firm statement 'first and only', making it crystal clear for all participants involved that he definitely only wants to spend one day looking for a pram.

Luke seems to cope very well with Becky's constant overt enthusiasm and has found a way of bringing her back down to earth. When they are looking for houses on the internet, we get the feeling that Becky has completely lost her sense of reality:

"See this one?" I point at the screen. [...] "Becky..." Luke pauses, as though thinking how to explain the situation to me. "It's in Barbados." (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 40)

The tone of Luke's statement sounds quite like an annoyed father talking to his naughty child. The pause after 'Becky' serves the purpose of thinking how to explain the situation to someone who just does and cannot understand his point.

Becky is most certainly not on the same intellectual level as him, which Luke implies by his declaration "We have talked about things I haven't even thought about in years. Politics... the arts... (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 151) after a meeting with his former friends from university. The reader can practically sense Luke's passion for these things, which he has suppressed for such a long time, and it is made apparent that Luke has diverse interests – from being a successful businessman to an advocator of the arts to a loving husband. Overall, although the reader sometimes feels that Luke and Becky may not be the most perfect match, we are still convinced by Luke's proclamation of how much he loves Becky and for what reasons:

"Becky has ideas no one else has. Her mind goes to places no one else's does. And sometimes I'm lucky enough to go along with her. [...] But she makes me laugh. She makes me *enjoy* life." (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 343)

This example sums up what fascinates Luke about Becky and how, in his stressful and hectic working life, Becky brightens up his days. This is particularly emphasised by the word 'enjoy', even more so as it is highlighted through italics.

If we were to categorise the male characters of *Shopaholic & Baby* according to Whelehan¹⁰¹, which I have done regarding the characters in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, we would come to the conclusion that Luke is definitely a representative of 'the hero'. Although he sometimes gets annoyed with his wife's shopping addiction, he still remains honest and faithful to her.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Whelehan, *BJD*, 50.

Danny

As I have indicated above, if we wanted to analyse the male characters according to Whelehan's classification, Danny would be an exponent of 'the gay friend'. Danny Kovitz is an up-and-coming designer whom Becky met when she and her husband were living in New York. He is portrayed as the stereotypically gay man, which is paired with his profession as a designer, nourishing the prejudice that people working in the fashion industry have to be gay. Being a young and hip American designer, Danny has acquired a very particular way of speaking:

'She was like, "Don't you stop appreciating your friends, young man," And I'm like, "What are you talking about?" And she's like –' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 92)

Firstly, the meaning of the whole statement by Danny regarding its outcome is basically zero. He actually does not have much to say but instead wraps it up in irrelevant speech. Secondly, the discourse marker 'like' is usually regarded as a hesitation filler with no actual purpose in a dialogue and is especially common in American English, mostly used by the younger generation.

The reason for Danny coming to London is Becky's quest to do a fashion line for the failing department store she works at. He tries playing it cool with regard to the fact that he is famous now, but he is actually very proud of what has become of him:

"Look at you!" [Becky] retorts. "Mr Famous!"
"C'mon. I'm not *famous*..." Danny makes a two-second stab at being self-deprecating. "Well... OK. Yes, I am. Isn't it wild?" (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 211)

By stressing the word 'famous' and making it sound less valuable, it makes the reader think he actually does not mean what he is saying at all. However, in the next sentence it is made clear that famous is exactly the word he was looking for.

Although diminished by the introductory fillers ('well' and 'ok'), he totally agrees with Becky's exclamation (Mr Famous) and even strengthens it by grading his happiness, which is indicated by the adjective 'wild'.

In conjunction with what has been said above, Danny's demands for his business trip to London are highly exclusive.

He's specified first-class travel, a suite at Claridge's, a limo for his personal use, unlimited San Pellegrino "stirred to take the bubbles out"... (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 133)

"I just wanted to check Mr Kovitz's hotel room had been ordered as he wanted it? Eighty degrees, the TV tuned to MTV, three cans of Dr Pepper by the bed?" (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 210)

On closer inspection, this all sounds quite demanding for someone who is actually just a wannabe star. However, Danny's diva-like behaviour definitely adds to the humorous effect of his whole appearance in the novel and makes him a more than welcome relief from the rather boring character of Luke. Moreover, Danny serves a similar purpose to Becky, just like her female friend Suze as regards exchanging experiences in private matters, as I will more closely analyse further down in the section 'euphemism and taboo words'.

6.4 Analysis at the Level of the Phrase or Sentence

In this section, I will analyse the metaphors in *Shopaholic & Baby* and how stereotypical views could serve as a basis to support Sara Mills' theory that females are often discriminated against in texts.¹⁰² Moreover, it will be shown that the analysed metaphors provide evidence for categorising chick lit in the genre of popular fiction, demonstrating its close connection to commerce and entertainment.

¹⁰² Cf. Mills, 136f & 149.

6.4.1 Metaphors in *Shopaholic & Baby*

I will be considering two significant metaphors that repeatedly occur in *Shopaholic & Baby*. First of all, I shall analyse Becky's exclamation regarding Venetia, when she tells Danny about her suspicions of her obstetrician having an affair with her husband: 'She's a red-haired bitch and I hate her'.¹⁰³ This motto is a recurring theme throughout the novel, implying that red-haired women are evil characters. This stereotype is strengthened by Becky thinking that 'you get married and you think everything's great and then he leaves you for another woman with red swishy hair' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 255), implying that the colour of a woman's hair is of central importance if you suspect your husband of being unfaithful. Admittedly, red-haired women are often the ones who are portrayed as outgoing, carefree and relaxed, and sometimes even as the 'bitchy' characters.¹⁰⁴ This stereotype probably goes way back to the Middle Ages when red-haired women were prosecuted and labelled witches for which they were then burned. Derived from that, as can be seen in various popular novels or films, the stereotype is quite topical and still works in contemporary society.

Establishing a connection between the stereotypical portrayal of red-haired women as evil and the theme of the whole novel, namely fashion and shopping, Danny designs a T-shirt that has the inscription 'She's a red-haired bitch and I hate her' on it. Thus the inscribed meaning of the phrase of the potential angst of losing a loved one to somebody else is even made public by putting the motto onto a piece of clothing. However, it turns out that the utterly negative sense of the phrase 'She's a red-haired bitch and I hate her' is able to be transformed into a positive image in the novel *Shopaholic & Baby*. Danny designs another T-shirt for Becky's baby shower that says 'She's a yummy mummy and we love her', something Becky always wanted to be.

¹⁰³ Cf. *Shopaholic & Baby*, p. 216, 238, 346.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Mills, 160.

Moreover, this phrase is also an indicator for the change in lifestyle of the novels' heroine as it marks a kind of turning point as regards her obsession with shopping, for she realises that there are far more important things than spending money on consumer goods, such as being there for your loved ones.

Another metaphor that in its outcome is of a similar nature to the one mentioned above is the comparison of Venetia and Luke with the two characters from Greek mythology, Penelope and Odysseus. Again, the fear of losing someone is of central interest, as Venetia thinks that she and Luke 'were like Odysseus and Penelope' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 246), implying that in all these years they have not seen each other, she was faithfully waiting for him to come back and be reunited. Thus Becky's fear of Luke leaving her becomes apparent through this metaphor. However, it is not entirely clear if Becky actually understands the meaning of what Venetia has told her:

"[...] She said the minute you saw each other again it was just a question of when and where. She said you were intoxicated with each other, and it was like Penelope and... someone. Othello."

"Penelope and Odysseus?" Luke stares at [Becky].

"Yes! That's it. And you were meant to be together. And that I didn't have a marriage anymore..."

[...]

"Luke, who are Penelope and Odysseus?" [Becky] ask[s]. I'm really hoping they're not a PR guy and an obstetrician who get together after the wife is pushed out of the picture. (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 339-340)

This example could be said to be proof of both Luke and Venetia being well-read, while at the same time it shows Becky's intellectual poverty and demonstrates the considerable angst of losing somebody. This is indicated by the sentence 'I didn't have a marriage anymore'. Moreover, it is shown how Venetia actually had manipulated Becky by telling her all different kinds of cruel things in order to make her feel jealous and unwanted by Luke. The use of the verb 'intoxicated' refers to this strong feeling on Venetia's behalf towards Luke.

Nonetheless, apart from the seriousness of the whole paragraph meaning-wise, the tone is definitely hilarious. The fact that Becky is not familiar with Penelope and Odysseus and the mythological background clearly adds to the humour of the paragraph, especially as Becky cannot even remember the names and ‘transforms’ Odysseus into Othello. Furthermore, her interpretation of who these characters might be sounds more like a description of the heroes of a soap opera (‘a PR guy and an obstetrician who get together’), which adds to the fact that Becky actually is an obsessed receiver of light entertainment.¹⁰⁵

6.5 Analysis at the Level of the Word

The following paragraph will deal with euphemisms and taboo words and the question of whether or not chick lit novels engage in the use of taboos or not. Moreover, it will be analysed what the effects of swear words could be.

6.5.1 Euphemisms and Taboo Words

As I have already indicated in previous chapters, authors of chick lit novels do not seem to conform to Sara Mills’ theory¹⁰⁶ of females talking less about tabooed subjects and being less accepted when they do, so that they tend to use euphemisms for certain taboos. In this paragraph, however, I will be concerned more with analysing tabooed words than looking for euphemisms. Similarly to *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, Becky and her friends openly talk about sex or other intimate things, which Heike Paul in her article “Feminist Chicks?” further explains as picking up and modifying a feminist tradition by

¹⁰⁵ There are several instances within *Shopaholic & Baby* of the two quite contrary spheres of interest of Becky and Luke. While Luke is reading a high-quality newspaper, Becky is watching TV or skimming through magazines:

‘[...] and flip the TV over to *The Simpsons*. Meanwhile Luke picks up the *Evening Standard* [...]’ (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 98) or ‘I pick up a magazine, and Luke opens the *FT* with a rustle’ (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 120).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Mills, 117f.

stressing female bonding via sharing every little secret with your (mostly) female friends.¹⁰⁷ In this sense, one particularly concrete example marks Becky's exclamation 'We laugh, and we talk, and we have sex.' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 247) However, it is not only the heroine's female friends but also the role of 'the gay friend' who serves the purpose of a comforter in times of need. In *Shopaholic & Baby*, this role is clearly ascribed to Danny, in whom Becky confides her secret suspicions that her husband is having an affair. Conversely, Danny also takes on the role of a chit-chatter, letting Becky know about a guy with whom he had spent a night together in Marrakech '[...] and honestly, I had to put my hands over the baby's ears.' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 270) The personal pronoun 'I' obviously belongs to Becky and the reason for her being a bit embarrassed implies that the story Danny told her is not exactly G-rated. However, although this example only implies talking about taboo things, there are also numerous instances of the characters using swear words openly. The term 'bitch' is widely used throughout the novel with all different kinds of variations, such as 'I know that's really bitchy' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 108). Other examples include Becky becoming upset over Venetia's behaviour of humiliating her in front of her husband, replying 'Bitch. Bitch.' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 180) The double use of the word even enforces its negative effect. Yet, even the mostly calm and relaxed Luke at one point gets completely carried away by his emotions and tells Venetia off, by stating 'You have no fucking idea, so shut the fuck up.' (*Shopaholic & Baby*, 343) The tone of this statement is one of total annoyance with the woman he used to be in love with but now just simply is fed up with. Generally speaking, what these examples show is that Sophie Kinsella is totally confident with presenting characters as representatives of a post-feminist society in which it is common to use swear words and openly talk about sex – not only for men but also for women.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Paul, 64.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Mills, 117-120.

7. Maria Beaumont's *Motherland*

7.1 The Author

Maria Beaumont was born in London in 1975 into a working-class family of Greek-Cypriot origin. It is indicated on her homepage that she did not like school and that she preferred to go dancing to attending her lessons. Before she began to write novels, therefore, Beaumont worked as a dance instructor, as well as in advertising. She is married to British novelist Matt Beaumont and they live in North London together with their two children. Apart from publishing books under her real name, Maria Beaumont also writes under the pseudonym Jessie Jones.¹⁰⁹

7.2 The Novel

First published in the UK in 2007 as *Motherland*, it was renamed 37 for the publication in America, the title that had originally been Beaumont's wish¹¹⁰ and which is also the age of the main character of the novel.

I will discuss *Motherland* as a representative of mummy lit and instead of doing a too detailed examination of all the characters and some metaphors, I will concentrate on highlighting the differences in tone and effect between *Motherland* and the two chick lit novels I have analysed before. This analysis therefore will not be as extensive as the previous ones. As I mentioned already at the beginning, mummy lit leaves the mostly glamorous life of successful women behind and concentrates on older 'stay-at-home mothers with school-age children'.¹¹¹ This is also true of the novel *Motherland* that is set around the insecure heroine Fran Clarke, who has to deal with a lot of difficult issues, like post-natal depression, alcoholism and a failing marriage.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. <<http://www.letstalkaboutme.com/index.html>>.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ Berwick, Isabel. "Mummydom's the word in chick-lit land".

7.2.1 The Cover

The original hardcover edition of *Motherland* from 2007 appears quite different to the pastel covers of its predecessor chick lit. Although there are still traces of prototypical chick lit covers (i.e. the occasional stiletto shoes and lipstick images), it is much more concerned with serious and 'grown-up' matters like therapy centres, children's playgrounds, etc.

I have argued previously that the covers of chick lit and mummy lit novels, respectively, can often be seen as a depiction of what the story line might be. In the case of *Motherland* this can certainly be said to be true. The cover of this novel must be analysed dually. On the one hand, pictures and images of the inner life of the heroine are shown; on the other hand, it can be seen as a written portrayal of her mental state in the form of a road network. And over all that you see the inscription 'Motherland' in the form of a banner, which represents the overall authority that all other features are subject to. The images of plastic surgery clinics as well as gyms are a representation of the successful smug marrieds and yummy mummies who live next door to Fran and who give her a hard time. The lipsticks, shoes and jewellery, however, symbolise Fran's urge to be one of them, which is shattered by the image of an open bottle of wine that clearly represents Fran's affection for alcohol.

Then again, the street names, as it were, also signify similar themes. Being tagged 'Gossip Gardens' or 'School Run Strip' they have the same meaning as representations of Fran's pseudo-friends at her children's school. The streets 'Mid Life Approach' or 'No Sex Drive', on the other hand, symbolise Fran's fear of growing old and growing apart from her husband.

Overall, it can be argued that the cover of *Motherland* already gives away quite a lot about the story line, as well as the themes of the novel.

7.2.2 Arrangement of Chapters

Beaumont did something intelligent and witty when numbering the chapters, which is a particularly interesting feature style-wise. *Motherland* consists of 35 chapters in total but the novel starts with chapter 21 and then goes down

until arriving at chapter one. After that there is a very short chapter zero that actually consists of only a few sentences.¹¹² This marks the point in the story when everything in Fran's life seems to have gone completely wrong and she passes out after an alcohol overdose. The serious and worrying tone of these lines is enhanced by the use of the strongly upsetting adjectives 'numb', 'paralysed' and 'distant'. The chapters following this one are then numbered in ascending order, up to the final chapter thirteen – the only one that actually has a title: '13 (Unlucky for some, but only some)'¹¹³ The reason for this unusual chapter numbering being so particularly clever is that it can be analysed as representing the development of the main character, from a very depressed and desperate housewife to finally sorting out her life and positively looking ahead.

7.3 Analysis at the Level of Discourse

In the following analysis I will mainly concentrate on the focalisation of the novel *Motherland*, as well as on briefly characterising the heroine and her husband and pointing out the similarities and differences to the characters from the previous chick lit novels.

7.3.1 Focalisation

As Berwick points out, 'the first-person voice is a must in mummy-lit. What else can there be?'¹¹⁴ This also corresponds with *Motherland*, which is obviously written from a first-person point of view, whereas Fran, being both

¹¹² "Fran... Francesca..."

I can't move. My body is numb... paralysed. Can't even open my eyes.

"Jesus, Fran, wake up."

The voice seems distant...

"Fran!"

... Miles away. I will move when it gets nearer. (*Motherland*, 183).

¹¹³ Cf. *Motherland*, 320.

¹¹⁴ Berwick, Isabel. "Mummydom's the word in chick-lit land".

the narrator and the main character in the story, can be referred to as a so-called 'I-as-protagonist' narrator.¹¹⁵

The deeply self-confessing style adds a lot to the seriousness of the subject matter as a whole and neatly demonstrates the ups and downs of motherhood. At times, *Motherland* sounds more like some kind of self-help book that its main character actually despises but then realises: 'Parenting textbooks, eh? Maybe I should write one myself.' (*Motherland*, 248) But not only does Fran fail in her parenting duties, her marriage also seems to go down the drain until she realises she needs to talk to her husband about the problems they are having but then again, she just cannot get round doing so. Fran confesses:

And I *think* that I definitely should have talked to Richard last night. It didn't matter that it was late. [...] If we still love each other, time of day is immaterial, isn't it? *We should have talked*. We'd have cleared the air... and then had mad, passionate making-up sex. And I wouldn't now be thinking regretfully that *we should have talked*. (*Motherland*, 71)

First of all, by emphasising the phrase 'we should have talked', which is signified by putting it in italics, the importance of the concept is demonstrated. Moreover, by repeating the phrase it becomes apparent that Fran regrets afterwards that she did not do what she was supposed to, namely be honest with her husband and talk to him openly. The acquired self-knowledge serves as a basis for her self-improvement and at the same time sounds like a self-help pamphlet to the reader. If there is something on your mind, go on and talk it through so that 'the air is cleared' and you do not have to feel regretful.

Another aspect of the self-confessing style, as well as the specific first-person narrative of *Motherland*, is its frequent use of addressing the reader directly. Examples include 'You see, I wasn't where I was supposed to be today – I think I may have mentioned it.' (*Motherland*, 15) or 'And before you say anything, [...]' (*Motherland*, 127).

¹¹⁵ Cf. Jahn N3.3.2.

There is a close connection being established to the reader, who can therefore identify even more with the heroine and her problems. However, the regular insertions of rhetorical questions such as in 'Funny how you forget what it's like going out with toddlers once yours are no longer small, isn't it?' (*Motherland*, 246) or 'And that's not really very much at all, is it?' (*Motherland*, 257) are two examples of signs of weakness and low self-confidence on the part of the heroine by her constant search for (unacknowledged) confirmation. However, a more detailed characterisation of Fran will be given in the following paragraph.

7.3.2 Characters

As I have already indicated above, I will only be considering the main character of the novel, as well as briefly introducing one secondary character (Richard – the husband), as the latter can generally be described as stock types whose roles are inferior ones.

Fran Clarke

Sara Mills' categorisation of female characters being ascribed more to the private than to the public sphere, as well as women being seen as appendages of their husbands,¹¹⁶ could be said to be true for the character of Fran. She is the mother of two children (Thomas & Molly – five- and ten-years-old) and although she once used to be a successful voiceover artist, she could never start working again after she has had kids. In her current situation she refers to herself as 'I'm Fran the mum now. Fran the housewife. Occasionally – not that often, given his work schedule – I'm Fran the wife. (*Motherland*, 16)

¹¹⁶ Cf. Mills, 170.

From this, one could draw back to pre-feminist theories saying that women had to give up their jobs for the kids and running the household. However, this is not necessarily true for the character of Fran.

Although her friends at least half-heartedly pushed her to go back to work, it seems that she is just too scared of failing and thus uses her children as an excuse for not having to go through with job interviews and the like. Her answer to the question of what she had been doing all week, is "Children. I've been doing children and home things and, well, all sorts." (*Motherland*, 72) The hesitant response paired with the apology for having been busy doing domestic duties conjures up the idea that Fran just might not yet be ready yet to take the big step back into business.

As has already been indicated above, Fran has huge self-doubts and is completely unsatisfied with her life and her looks, and thus states 'I *know* what I look like; it's just that I can't *believe* what I look like' (*Motherland*, 1). Although she is perfectly aware of this fact, as indicated by the verb 'know', she just cannot actually accept what she has to look at in the mirror. Fran is constantly reminiscing about the days when she was still a happy and self-confident woman who was very much in love with her husband and had a brilliant job and it becomes increasingly clear that what Fran misses is actually some reassurance from the people around her – especially her husband. And as he apparently does not take her seriously, she turns more and more away from him and turns herself to drinking. Her insecurities keep her problems bottled up inside and instead of discussing her issues, she opens a bottle of wine. As if the problems concerning her marriage were not enough, she cannot even find solace in her friends, for they are all busy doing their own thing (both being pregnant at the same time). For that, Fran takes comfort in the two-faced mum Natasha whom she knows from picking up the kids at school and who ironically states "Poor Fran. Everyone's left you [...]" (*Motherland*, 154). Natasha is cheating her way into Fran's life, only to make her feel even more miserable in the end by going around the neighbourhood telling people about Fran's family, as well as her drinking problems.

When her husband finally admits that he is having an affair, which Fran has been sure of all along, this marks the point at which Fran hits rock bottom. '[...] I'm drinking myself into oblivion. I've looked, and, well, there really is nowhere else to go.' (*Motherland*, 182)

The very sad and depressing tone of this statement that is enforced by the strong noun 'oblivion' is the powerful notion of her capitulation. Although she had tried really hard, alcohol is the last resort now. These lines are the final ones of chapter one, followed by the complete blackout of chapter zero, as I have mentioned before. After that, Fran slowly gets a grip on her life and gradually sorts everything out: her drinking problem, her missed opportunities to go back to work and her marriage. However, this is not at all presented in a kitschy fairytale kind of way but rather quite realistically, as not everything turns out well immediately. Fran misses an audition for a voiceover after finally opening up to her friend and telling her about her slight drinking problem:

How could I have been so stupid? So stupid and self-absorbed. Self-*obsessed*. Talking about me, me, *me* all bloody day. It's good to talk, is it, Sureya? She must be insane because all talking does is make you forget – FORGET! – the appointment that was going to *save your life*. (*Motherland*, 213)

What this example shows us is that Fran is reverting to old patterns of behaviour, that is not opening up to her friends and discussing her problems, as she is sure that confessing has ruined her future life by missing the appointment for her audition. She is actually blaming her friend Sureya for having made her talk to her about her problems, quite grimly referring to her as 'insane'. Moreover, Fran believes that sharing a problem with your friend is a sign of selfishness or, using an even stronger noun, 'self-obsession'. This might also be a reason why she rarely asks her friends for advice, which is the complete opposite of what the heroines in *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Shopaholic & Baby* do. The latter always immediately call their friends for advice, so this is one major distinction to the characters from chick lit novels.

Moreover, Fran does not waste money on therapists and self-help books either, quite unlike Bridget and Becky or even Fran's friends Summer and Sureya. But not only that, in the second half of the novel, Fran distances herself from her traditional and mostly old-fashioned view on marriage and patriarchal role patterns and acquires a post-feminist vision thinking 'that any woman can function – and quite happily, thank you – without a man.' (*Motherland*, 289) Still, in the end she partly forgives Richard and lets him move back to their house. However, Fran is not sure whether he will 'end up moving back into the double bed. Or [...] move out for good' (*Motherland*, 321) demonstrating that she might change her mind and start a completely different life herself without her husband nearby.

Richard

Richard is the only significant male character in *Motherland* and is mostly portrayed as a horrible, non-supportive small mind who is not facing up to reality as far as his marital problems are concerned.

As Sara Mills has indicated in *Feminist Stylistics*, male characters are often described in relation to their occupation and professional success.¹¹⁷ For the character of Richard, this could most certainly said to be true. There are several instances within the novel that demonstrate Richard's success as the Managing Director of a marketing company, whereas managing his family is not really one of his strong points: 'He's MD to this lot. Managing Director. But to us at home, all it stands for is Missing Dad.' (*Motherland*, 55) This statement by Fran clearly shows how much Richard is concerned with his job and how little he looks after his family. In this example of a mummy lit novel, Sara Mills' declaration 'women have relationships and men have jobs' (Mills, 163) is almost a universal truth.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Mills, 163 & 170.

Richard only ever acts understandingly and supportively when spoken to by Fran but actually he does not have a clue what is going on inside her. When she hints at his affair, his main interest is keeping up appearance as a happy family to outsiders.

He still has a smile on his face but there's nothing behind it. He lifts my hands from his shoulders and holds them in front of him, effectively a barrier between us now. His eyes dart nervously around the room. "Just keep it together, Fran. Harvey's looking over." (*Motherland*, 84)

It is made clear that their relationship as husband and wife is more than tense, as is indicated by the metaphorical barrier described above. Through the portrayal of his darting eyes, it is illustrated that Richard is intensely nervous and eager for other people not to notice their strange behaviour. The tone of this paragraph is deeply frustrating, imagining the smile on Richard's face that actually has no meaning apart from putting a good face on the matter.

In the course of the first half of the novel, Fran and Richard increasingly drift apart and Richard's only argument for Fran's strange behaviour is her drinking problem when she keeps asking about whether he is having an affair. "This is insane," he spits. But I see it in his eyes. Not sure what, but there's no denying it's something. "Absolutely insane." (*Motherland*, 92) Richard is completely denying Fran's accusation, repeating how 'insane' he thinks she is (re)acting. However, it is again his eyes that serve as a basis for understanding what is going on inside. Although in this case it is not made obvious, it is stated that there is at least 'something'. Shortly after that, it seems that Richard can no longer hold up to his lie and quite calmly admits that he indeed is seeing someone else, as for him "[...] things haven't been... *right*, not for a while. Long before Bel, if we're honest... You're right, Fran. I should go." (*Motherland*, 101-111) The word choice seems quite insensitive and indifferent by admitting that 'things have not been right' for some time, implying the sadness of not being able to talk about the problems after having known each other for so long.

Moreover, it is a sign of total reluctance and not being delicate at all, mentioning the name of his affair in front of Fran. Sadly enough, Richard blames it all on Fran that their marriage was facing problems, so that he was more or less forced to turn to another woman.

Only after Fran's total breakdown does he realise that it was also his fault that the marriage did not work out as planned. 'He looks up at me and raises an eyebrow. "Whatever..." he says eventually. "Look at what I've done to you. This is terrible."' (*Motherland*, 186) Again, the eye area is of central interest in these lines¹¹⁸ and the raising of the eyebrow visually supports the final doubts he has concerning his relationship with Fran, only to find out and finally acknowledge that his behaviour was wrong and made Fran a broken woman. It is at the end of the novel that Richard ultimately opens up, making clear how much his family means to him. "'I've missed the kids. I've missed you. I've missed home.'" (*Motherland*, 293) In terms of Imelda Whelehan's categorisation of male characters, claiming that every male character can be counted as either 'the hero', 'the bastard' or 'the gay friend' in chick lit novels,¹¹⁹ Richard would have to be described as a mixture of 'the bastard' and 'the hero'. Maybe one could claim that in mummy lit novels, categorising male characters is not as easy a task as in the case of chick lit.

7.4 Analysis at the Level of the Phrase or Sentence

In the following section, I will analyse a recurrent phrase in *Motherland* that quite nicely demonstrates the hopelessness of the heroine in the first half of the novel. It is mentioned several times that there is no use crying over spilt milk.¹²⁰ The meaning of this idiom obviously is that there is no point being upset about something bad that has happened as the situation then cannot be changed anyway. But that is exactly what Fran does. In a way, the 'spilt milk idiom' could be said to define the theme of the whole novel.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Mills, 161.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Whelehan, *BJD*, 50.

¹²⁰ Cf. *Motherland*, 4.

As Fran is constantly reminiscing about the past and dreaming of how wonderful her life had been before she got married and had kids, the image of spilt milk becomes even more prominent. Being such a lost soul and having such low self-confidence, the heroine is desperately trying to cling to the good old days.

However, at times when she is strong and appears self-confident, she condemns herself for wallowing in self-pity and accepts her fate:

Still, mustn't fret over that – spilt milk, etc. I form my mouth into an O and pop out a near perfect smoke ring. *Older woman* did the boy say? Never. (*Motherland*, 7)

After having been tagged 'older woman' by an adolescent, she nearly feels sorry for herself again, but then stands up against this impudence and says to herself that she is nowhere near having to be described as 'old', which is indicated by the strong adverb 'never'. From this, one might draw the conclusion that Fran is tough enough to actually pursue her goal but unfortunately she fails and consequently laments that '[her] thirties are slipping through [her] fingers [...] and there's nothing [she] can do to stop it.' (*Motherland*, 9) Again, the heroine desperately wants to stop time, which obviously is impossible to do. In that case, heeding her self-imposed advice of not crying over spilt milk would be best in order not to plunge into further depression.

Another aspect I am going to examine that also falls in the category of phrase analyses is gender-specific ideology. Sara Mills claims that women are especially affected by ideology as regards love and emotion but also on a professional basis.¹²¹ The latter can be said to be true for *Motherland* and probably many other mummy lit novels alike, as most heroines in mummy lit are no longer successful career-minded women who stand on the same level as their male counterparts.

¹²¹ Cf. Mills, 149 & 132.

They are rather depicted as desperate housewives whom no one ‘takes [...] seriously, apparently because they are no longer in the salaried workforce.’¹²² No wonder the heroine in *Motherland* refers to the era when she was still happy as ‘another age – BC, as in Before Children’ (*Motherland*, 54), for she is constantly subject to gender-specific ideology¹²³ of the woman having to stay at home looking after the children, while her husband earns the money and gets all the attention. In the course of time, the two become separated even further when the woman not only has to quit her job to be able to care for the children but the husband gets promoted.

While Richard is climbing the job ladder, his wife increasingly suffers from her depression and damns his promotion for what came to be known for her as ‘promoted as in physically removed from the house and turned into a passing ship.’ (*Motherland*, 189) From a feminist viewpoint, the image of conventional gender roles being so openly presented as it is done in this mummy lit novel is catastrophic. However, *Motherland* is not at all a tale about a depressed and frustrated housewife constantly lamenting about her life – it is rather an ironic and humorously written story with which a lot of mothers can probably identify. It certainly does not provide solutions for any burgeoning conflicts between work and family but that certainly is not mummy lit’s point anyway. Its purpose rather is of an entertaining kind, making its readers laugh and cry with the heroine both at the same time.¹²⁴

7.5 Analysis at the Level of the Word

Quite similarly to the two chick lit novels I have analysed before, I am going to concentrate on taboo words in *Motherland*. On the one hand, there are a lot of swear words used in the novel; on the other hand, the whole concept of the taboo subject of the deserted wife and mother are of central interest.

¹²² Berwick, Isabel. “Mummydom’s the word in chick-lit land”.

¹²³ Cf. Mills, 129.

¹²⁴ Cf. Hewett, 128-130.

First of all, I am going to investigate the use of taboo words. As has been indicated before, chick lit and mummy lit, respectively, do not share Sara Mills' idea of females being less accepted when talking about taboo subjects and thus do so less frequently.¹²⁵ Similarly to *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Shopaholic & Baby*, there are several examples of the female characters talking about sex and their sexual orientation. At one point in the novel, the heroine finds out that one of her best friends has had sex with a man, which is odd bearing in mind she is homosexual. And now she does not know what to make of the encounter and needs her friend's shoulder to cry on: "I didn't know why I was doing it, but I knew I couldn't help myself. I wasn't expecting much from the sex, but... God, this is a total mind-fuck." (*Motherland*, 139)

It is a particular style of popular fiction to use informal, everyday speech that obviously also includes taboo words and swear words, in order to achieve an authentic effect and give the reader the opportunity to identify even more with the characters.

In the case of *Motherland*, the overuse of swear words is particularly characteristic of the narrator's shattered self-confidence. 'I guess that when you know you've lost the argument and you haven't a leg to stand on, well, the F word is all you're left with, isn't it?' (*Motherland*, 8) This statement implies that when you do not know what else you could say in order to substantiate your argument, the last resort is swear words. "Look, just... just fuck off." (*Motherland*, 8) and 'Where have those hands been? *Bastard*.' (*Motherland*, 99) are just two examples demonstrating the above-mentioned theory. In the first example, Fran is arguing with a woman about whether her smoke had gone into her eyes and Fran, too tired of talking this through, simply tells her to 'fuck off'. Understandingly, the woman becomes furious whereupon Fran dryly states: "You heard. I haven't got time for this. I've got a heroin deal to close." (*Motherland*, 8) What with all the seriousness of the matter, the narrator counters with an ironic comment, implying that she is of a

¹²⁵ Cf. Mills, 104.

lower social status, doing illegal things and that stereotypically speaking, people from lower social classes also use a greater number of taboo words.

The second example demonstrates the heroine's hopelessness when having found out about her husband's affair. She is looking at him, quietly examining his body and comparing it to her own. She is wondering why his greying temples make him even more appealing whereas her grey makes her look haggard and undesirable (in her viewpoint). She complains about his lean torso, 'muscular through no particular gym regime and despite several lunches a week.' (*Motherland*, 99) Her figure, on the other hand, is not at all what she would want it to look like. And then she starts examining his hands that she describes as smooth and un-callused and suddenly it comes to her mind that his hands have touched another woman's body, at which point she immediately stops her silent sanctification and denotes him a 'bastard'.

There are numerous other incidents at which the narrator resorts to swear words, often in connection with Richard, such as "'Fuck him," I slur. "Fuck the lot of them."' (*Motherland*, 179) or simply calling him all kinds of names, like 'scumbag' or 'fucking liar'.¹²⁶ Generally speaking, it seems that the overuse of swear words is particularly prominent in the first half of the novel, when the heroine is facing an intensely harsh time. In the second half of the novel, however, when Fran's life is slowly getting back to 'normal' and she no longer has to refer to herself as a single mother, she also appears to swear less frequently. In this sense, it could be claimed that the use of taboo words stands in relation to the mental condition of a character – the more unhappy s/he is with his/her life, the more s/he tends towards swear words to express his/her resentment.

¹²⁶ Cf. *Motherland*, 99.

8. Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis, the introduction of the chick lit genre, as well as the development of new sub-genres was of central interest. It was aimed at establishing an awareness of chick lit being not only 'literature written by women for women' but that there might be more to be discovered under the surface.

The primary focus was the formation of a theoretical basis on which the discussion of the novels was going to be built, which I have done by including the work of Sara Mills. As a feminist, she aims to raise awareness about how differently men and women are treated in texts and what negative effects this might have. In her book *Feminist Stylistics*, she analyses texts on three different levels: 'analysis at the level of the word', 'analysis at the level of the phrase or sentence' and 'analysis at the level of discourse'. I adopted her model in the discussion of the chick lit and mummy lit novels I chose for this thesis: *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding, *Shopaholic & Baby* by Sophie Kinsella and *Motherland* by Maria Beaumont.

My prior concern was to look at the language that was used in the novels to introduce the characters, describe metaphors as well as taboo words. But not only that, I tried to establish a connection to Mills as regards feminist beliefs and values. It seemed at various points that chick lit clashes with feminism as far as the heroine's constant search for Mr. Right and the persistent purchase of consumer goods is concerned. Conventional role models and the constant look-out for status symbols does not at all conform with feminist ideas. For that, a new concept was established in the discussion of chick lit: post-feminism. Its aim is not so much a backlash against or even a condemnation of traditional feminist ideas, but rather the presentation of an image of the 'new woman' who does not fight for equal rights anymore but rather for a 'normal' life, which is also true for the heroines of chick lit. As opposed to Mills, it is not the aim of the authors of chick lit novels to ever achieve gender-free language, nor present their characters as rigid advocates of feminism. Rather, they show characters with flaws and quirks with which the readers can identify.

However, in the case of the novel *Motherland*, it appears at some point that feminism has never actually existed. It is the portrayal of a desperate housewife, having to quit her job in order to run the household and look after the children, while her husband makes a career and cares less and less about both his wife and his children. Nonetheless, the tone and the humour of the book add to its entertaining quality and make the reader aware that mummy lit is not there to present you with any solutions to the problems of motherhood, but rather to show that life as a mother also has some negative sides.

Overall, both chick lit and mummy lit refuse to present political or economic affairs; their main concern is to portray contemporary women's lives and concerns. This could lead to the assumption that men are completely excluded in this genre of popular fiction, but male characters do indeed serve an important purpose. They are either the man of the heroine's dreams, a total bastard who seemingly destroys the heroine's life or the regularly portrayed gay friend, who is a comforter in times of need. However, male characters are obviously never as extensively portrayed as the female ones and are most often stock types. The female characters of chick lit, however, are clearly the true heroines in that although their problems are mostly similar, their personality is always unique. The accurate portrayal of women's lives, paired with the informal voice of the narrator, are only two reasons why chick lit and mummy lit are such a huge success not only in the UK and the US, but also in other parts of the world so that 'chick lit, for better or worse, is here to stay.'¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Memmott, Carol. "Chick Lit, for Better or Worse, is Here to Stay".

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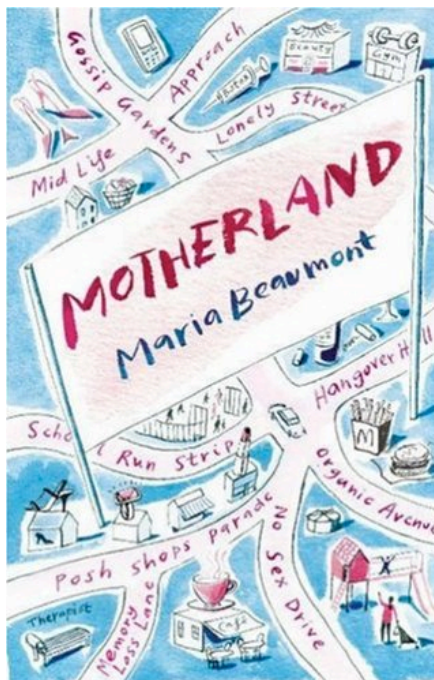
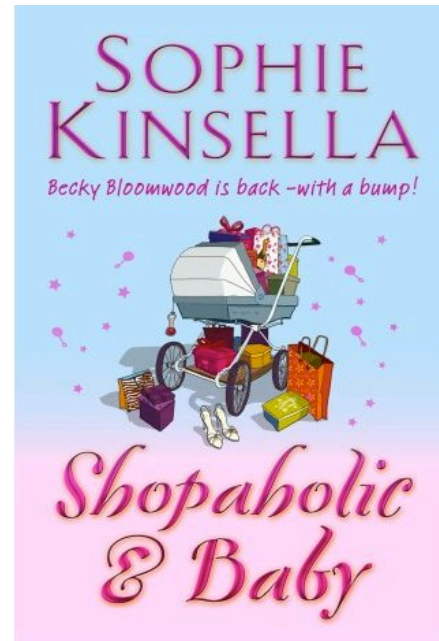
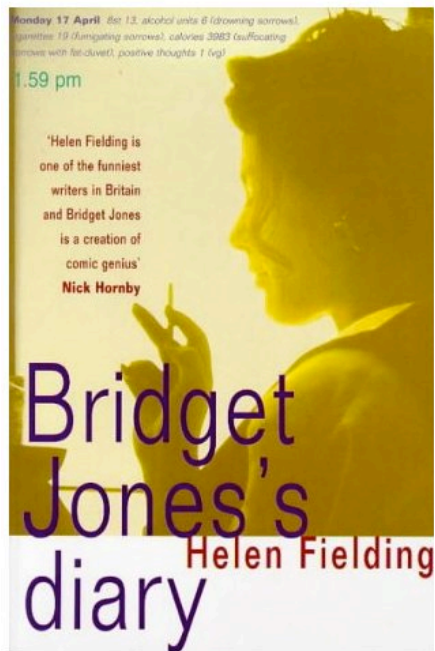
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Zusammenfassung in deutscher Sprache

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit einem Genre der Populärliteratur, das weitgehend als ‚Literatur von Frauen für Frauen‘ beschrieben wird – *chick lit*. Der Begriff *chick lit* leitet sich vom umgangssprachlichen Wort ‚chick‘, also junges Mädchen, und der Abkürzung ‚lit‘ für Literatur ab. Dieses besonders im angloamerikanischen Raum verbreitete Phänomen aktueller Unterhaltungsliteratur wird von Kritikern oft als trivial abgetan und oftmals nicht ernst genommen, da diese darin nur wenig literarischen Wert sehen. Diese Diplomarbeit soll zeigen, dass durchaus mehr hinter der Fassade der meist an ihrer pastellfarbenen Einbände erkennbaren Romane steckt.

Der erste Teil der Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit dem Phänomen *chick lit* selbst, erklärt seine Ursprünge und gibt Einblicke in die aus *chick lit* resultierenden Ausformungen dieser Literaturgattung, wie zum Beispiel *mummy lit*. Weitaus größer ist allerdings die Konzentration auf ein bestimmtes Werk der feministischen Linguistin und Literaturtheoretikerin Sara Mills - *Feminist Stylistics*. Mit Hilfe dieser Theorie, die Texte auf der Basis der ‚Wortanalyse‘, Satz- oder Phrasenanalyse‘ und ‚Diskursanalyse‘ untersucht, werden drei Romane der Gattung *chick lit* beziehungsweise *mummy lit* analysiert.

Zuerst ein über die Grenzen Großbritanniens hinaus bekanntes Werk von Helen Fielding: *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Dieses gilt weitgehend als Prototyp des *chick lit*-Genres und erzählt ein Jahr im Leben der fiktiven Gestalt Bridget Jones, wobei dieser Roman zur Gänze aus Tagebucheinträgen besteht. Des weiteren wird der neueste Roman der erfolgreichen britischen Autorin Sophie Kinsella untersucht, die mit ihrer Buchserie bereits für Aufmerksamkeit gesorgt hat und deren Erstlingswerk im Frühjahr 2009 auf die Leinwand kommt: *Shopaholic & Baby*. Der dritte Roman, der in dieser Diplomarbeit behandelt wird, ist *Motherland* von Maria Beaumont. Das Thema dieses Romans geht weg von der Suche nach dem richtigen Mann oder dem passenden Paar Schuhe, hin zur Darstellung einer Hauptfigur, die mit ihrem Leben als mehr oder weniger alleinerziehende Mutter so gar nicht zurechtkommt.

Obwohl die Stimmung dieses Romans weitaus düsterer ist als die der beiden *chick lit* Romane davor, ist auch dieser geprägt von einer erfrischenden sprachlichen Leichtigkeit und unterschwelliger Ironie.

Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, aufgrund stilistischer Analysen zu untersuchen, wie Sprache in den vorliegenden Romanen verwendet wird, um bestimmte Effekte zu erzielen. Besondere Beachtung gilt dabei der Präsentation der Charaktere, der Untersuchung von Metaphern, sowie der Analyse von Tabuwörtern. Aber nicht nur das, es wird auch versucht eine Verbindung zu feministischen Ideen herzustellen und zu untersuchen, ob diese mit den Themen der *chick lit* Romane übereinstimmen oder nicht. Daraus resultierend ergibt sich die Theorie, dass *chick lit* zwar Feminismus schätzt, ihn aber nicht in jeder Weise gutheißt. Vielmehr spricht man im Zusammenhang mit *chick lit* von post-feministischer Literatur. Im Zentrum dieser steht die ‚Die neue Frau‘ (*the new woman*), die nicht mehr um jeden Preis unabhängig sein will und um ihre Gleichberechtigung kämpfen muss, sondern sich bewusst für den einen oder anderen Lebensweg entscheidet, sei es ein feministischer oder eher traditioneller. *Chick lit* will aber auf keinen Fall den Feminismus missbilligen; genauso wenig ist es aber auch ihr Ziel, klarerweise im Gegensatz zur Feministin Sara Mills, beispielsweise eine geschlechtsneutrale Sprache aufzuzeigen. Was *chick lit* macht, ist ein Bild von Frauen in der heutigen Zeit zu vermitteln, mit allen ihren Ecken und Kanten, die sie daher so interessant für ihre Leserschaft machen, da viele Leserinnen sich mit ihnen und ihren Problemen identifizieren können. Es bleibt also zu wünschen, dass sich der Trend der erfolgreichen *chick lit* Romane fortsetzt und wir noch lange über Bridgets Nachfolgerinnen lachen aber auch weinen können.

Lebenslauf

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