

The Funny Face of Feminism

Chick lit puts a silly spin on women's literature



After seven years of serving fish 'n' chips in a greasy spoon, Jody walks out of her dead-end job and into the arms of a glorious new life. Everything is going great until she discovers her boyfriend is cheating on her and she quickly becomes single, homeless and unemployed, all in one fell swoop. This is the premise behind Wendy French's *Going Coastal*, the newest contribution to the chick-lit phenomenon.

What is chick-lit? It used to be a kind of gum that was crunchy on the outside and came in a cute little box. These days the term refers not to a chewing sensation, but to a new genre in fiction: women's fiction, or more commonly, chick literature.

You've seen these books before. If the cover is not pink it is at least a combination of pastels. The title is usually in cursive and more often than not there is a stylized drawing of the main character looking frazzled. And who is this cute protagonist? Normally she is a slightly cheeky 20-something woman with a dead-end job, crummy apartment, slacker friends, disappointing boyfriend, and overbearing parents. This quirky chick suddenly rejects her crappy existence and strikes off into her new, perfect life. Her quest quickly leads to a comedy of errors that includes awkward job interviews,



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embarrassing dates, a little mistaken identity in some form or another, and other misadventures. Our shero usually manages to mistreat or alienate a good portion of her friends and family, but they forgive her by the last chapter. And not to ruin the ending for you, but she always gets the dream guy, the perfect job, and a better apartment.

Chick-lit is sort of like a sitcom. It gives you a common problem, a minor struggle, a few laughs, and a tidy solution, all within 30 minutes (or 300 pages). "I think it's the written equivalent of a 'chick flick'—a light, funny read that makes people feel good," says French.

While the concept may seem a little airy and trite, there is definitely a niche being filled by these bubble gum flavoured books. There are reading groups that revolve around discussing the newest titles, websites dedicated to updating fans on the latest in the genre, and thousands of people devouring the novels daily. Think *Bridget Jones's Diary* and the *Shopaholic* series. They are everywhere.

Going Coastal is French's second such novel (after *Mothering*), and she has two more on the way. She describes chick-lit as being "light and humorous" while touching on serious subject matters. "Ultimately, the reader has the satisfaction of seeing the character triumph . . . by the end of the book," French contin-

ues. "I want the reader to have some laughs, but also come away with the sense that happiness and contentment usually aren't too far from their own doorstep."

—Sarah Gignac