

**THEMATIC COMPARISON OF LYNNE GRAHAM'S *AN ARABIAN
COURTSHIP* AND EVE GLADSTONE'S *BETWEEN TWO MOONS*
AS POPULAR ROMANCE AND LAUREN WEISBERGER'S *THE DEVIL
WEARS PRADA* AND MARIAN KEYES'S *SUSHI FOR BEGINNERS* AS
CHICK LIT**

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TRADICINIO MEILĖS ROMANO IR ŠIUOLAIKINIO MOTERŲ ROMANO TRAJEKTORIJOS: LYNNE GRAHAM „AN ARABIAN COURTSHIP“, EVE GLADSTONE „BETWEEN TWO MOONS“, LAUREN WEISBERGER „*THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA*“ IR MARIAN KEYES „SUSHI FOR BEGINNERS“

Santrauka

Šiame baigiamajame magistriniame darbe nagrinėjami du literatūros žanrai – tradicinis meilės romanas ir šiuolaikinis moterų romanas. Lynne Graham „An Arabian Courtship“ ir Eve Gladstone „Between Two Moons“ yra tradiciniai meilės romanai, o Lauren Weisberger „The Devil Wears Prada“ ir Marian Keyes „Sushi for Beginners“ yra šiuolaikiniai moterų romanai. Šie romanai yra analizuojami norint atskleisti jau minėtų žanrų panašumus ir skirtumus atsižvelgiant į pagrindinių herojų tarpusavio santykius, karjera, lytiškumą, jų santykį su vartotojiška kultūra ir grožio pramone.

Romano „Between Two Moons“ autoriai – Joyce Gleit ir Herma Werner. „Eve Gladstone“ buvo pasirinkta slapyvardžiu. Abu rašytojai yra sutuoktiniai, kurį laiką dirbę mados industrijoje, vėliau nusprendę rimtai atsiduoti rašytojo karjerai. Romanas „Between Two Moons“ pasakoja apie jauną, sėkmingą, karjeros siekiančią moterį, kuri vadovauja prekybos centrui „Lambs“. Staiga ji suvokia, kad parduotuvė parduota pasiturinčiam ir žavingam anglui vardu Tonny Campbell.

Lynne Graham (1956) yra populiari Šiaurės Airijos autorė, išleidusi daugiau kaip šešiasdešimt romanų. Pirmasis bandymas tapti rašytoja buvo nesėkmingas, todėl Lynne Graham panėrė į šeimininį gyvenimą: ištėkėjo už vyro kurį mylėjo nuo pat paauglystės, susilaukė dukros. Pabandžiusi rašyti dar kartą Graham sulaukė sėkmės. Jos romanas „An Arabian Courtship“ atskleidžia jaunos merginos vardu Polly istoriją. Ši netikėtai sužino, jog yra pažadėta Jungtinių Arabų Emyratų princui Raschid.

Lauren Weisberger (1977) - šiuolaikinio moterų romano autorė. Jos pirmoji darbo patirtis, įgyta dirbant mados žurnalo „Vogue“ vyriausiosios redaktorės Anna Wintour asistente, paskatino parašyti romaną „The Devil Wears Prada“ („Ir velnias dėvi Prada“). 2003 metų balandį pasirodžiusi knyga iškart sulaukė tarptautinio pripažinimo, o romano motyvais sukurtas filmas taip pat turėjo didelį pasisekimą. Romane „The Devil Wears Prada“ vaizduojamas jaunos merginos Andrea Sachs gyvenimo tarpsnis, kai ką tik baigusi koledžą ji pasamdoma dirbti redaktorės Miranda Priestly asistente. Miranda Priestly pasirodo esanti šiuurkšti ir negailestinga vadovė, kuri komplikuoja Andrea gyvenimą.

Rašytoja Marian Keyes (1963), pradėjusi rašyti 1993 metais, yra išleidusi dešimt romanų. Vienas iš jų - „Sushi for Beginners“ („Suši pradedantiesiems“), kuriame pasakojamas trijų moterų Lisa, Ashling ir Clodagh gyvenimas. Lisa yra žurnalo „Colleen“ redaktorė, kuri atvyksta į Dubliną pagerinti žurnalo pardavimą. Ashling yra to paties žurnalo redaktorės asistentė, nuoširdi ir draugiška asmenybė, nuolat jaučianti nepaaiškinamą trūkumą savo gyvenime. Clodagh, geriausia Ashling draugė, yra namų šeimininkė, trokštanti jaudinančių pokyčių.

Šio darbo tikslas - išanalizuoti tradicinio meilės romano ir šiuolaikinio moterų romano žanrus ir atskleisti, kaip jie reprezentuoja moters tarpusavio santykius, karjerą, jos lytiškumą ir jos santykį su vartotojiška kultūra bei grožio pramone. Darbas pagrįstas feministinėmis ir socialinėmis teorijomis, išplėtotomis tokių specialistų kaip Imelda Whelehan, Suzanne Ferriss, Mallory Young, Pamela Regis, Janice Radway, Sarah Gamble, David Gauntlet, Paula Black, Janet Batsleer ir kitų.

Šį darbą sudaro keturis skyriai ir keturi priedai. Pirmame skyriuje pristatoma pagrindinė tema, tikslas bei pateikiama informacija apie autorius ir jų romanų siužetus. Antrasis skyrius susideda iš keturių poskyrių, kuriuose pateikiama bendroji teorinė dalis ir terminologija, pagrįsta feministinėmis ir socialinėmis teorijomis. 2.1 ir 2.2 poskyriuose nagrinėjami tradicinio meilės romano ir šiuolaikinio moterų romano žanrai, o 2.2 ir 2.3 poskyriuose analizuojami moters ir vyro personažai būdingi šioms žanrams.

Trečiasis skyrius sudarytas iš trijų poskyrių, kuriuose pateikiami moters tarpusavio santykiai, karjera, lytiškumas ir jos santykis su vartotojiška kultūra ir grožio pramone pagal Lynne Graham „An Arabian Courtship“, Eve Gladstone „Between Two Moons“, Lauren Weisberger „The Devil Wears Prada“ ir Marian Keyes „Sushi for Beginners“ romanus. 3.1. poskyryje nagrinėjami moters tarpusavio santykiai ir jos karjera analizuojant pagrindines romanų veikėjas Kelly ir Andrea. 3.2 poskyryje aptariams lytiškumas remiantis pagrindinių romanų veikėjų Polly ir Ashling personažais. 3.3. poskyryje aptariama vartotojiška kultūra ir grožio pramonė, remiantis visomis pagrindinėmis romanų veikėjomis: Andrea, Kelly, Ashling ir Polly. Darbą apibendrinančios išvados, pristatančios analizuojamų žanrų panašumus ir skirtumus ir jų vaizduojamas pagrindines temas pateikiamos ketvirtame skyriuje. Prieduose pateikiamos nagrinėjamų romanų santraukos.

THEMATIC COMPARISON OF LYNNE GRAHAM'S *AN ARABIAN COURTSHIP* AND EVE GLADSTONE'S *BETWEEN TWO MOONS* AS POPULAR ROMANCE AND LAUREN WEISBERGER'S *THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA* AND MARIAN KEYES'S *SUSHI FOR BEGINNERS* AS CHICK LIT

Summary

This thesis examines the treatment of relationships, career, sexuality, the consumerist culture and beauty industry in two literary (sub)genres, romance and chick lit. The novels chosen for comparison are the following: Lynne Graham's *An Arabian Courtship* and Eve Gladstone's *Between two Moons*, which are romance novels, and Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* and Marian Keyes's *Sushi for Beginners*, which are chick lit novels.

Lynne Graham (b. 1956) is a popular Northern Irish author of over sixty romance novels. After the first unsuccessful attempt to be a writer Lynne Graham got married to a man she had loved since her teens. When their first daughter was born Graham began writing again, this time with success. The novel *An Arabian Courtship* is about a young female protagonist, Polly, who is arranged to marry an Arab prince Raschid.

Eve Gladstone's *Between Two Moons* is a Harlequin romance written by two authors, Joyce Gleit and Herma Werner. Both Gleit and Werner are married and worked in the fashion industry before becoming romance writers. Eve Gladstone is the name of their writing team. The novel is about a young and successful career woman, Kelly, in charge of a big store Lambs. Suddenly she realizes that her store has been sold to Tony Campbell, a handsome, charming and enigmatic man.

Lauren Weisberger (b. 1977) is the writer of the contemporary new woman's fiction (called as chick lit genre). Her first job as the assistant to the editor-in-chief of *Vogue*, Anna Wintour, influenced her to write *The Devil Wears Prada*. This novel was her first book published in April 2003 and made into a motion picture. The novel is about Andrea Sachs, a girl who recently graduates out of college and is hired as the assistant to Miranda Priestly. Miranda Priestly appears to be a harsh and cruel boss who complicates Andrea's life.

Marian Keyes (b. 1963) is also the writer of contemporary new woman's fiction (or chick lit). She began writing in 1993 and is the author of ten novels including *Sushi for Beginners*. *Sushi for Beginners* tells the story of three women: Lisa, Ashling and Clodagh. Lisa is a magazine editor who moves to Dublin to launch *Colleen's* magazine. Ashling, *Colleen's* assistant editor, is a friendly and good-hearted personality who is aware that something fundamental is missing from her life. Clodagh, Ashling's best friend, lives a domestic life and longs for excitement.

The aim of the present paper is to analyze the two female genres of romance and chick lit and to see how they treat female characters in terms of relationships, career, sexuality, consumerist culture and beauty industry. The study is based on feminist approaches to romance and chick lit developed by specialists such as Imelda Whelehan, Suzanne Ferriss, Mallory Young, Pamela Regis, Janice Radway, Sarah Gamble, David Gauntlet, Paula Black, Janet Batsleer and others.

The present paper is divided into four parts and includes four appendices. Part One presents the main topic and aims and also presents some information about the authors and the plots of the novels. Part Two is divided into four sections which present theoretical approaches to romance and chick lit and introduces the main terms. The discussion draws on the theoretical insights of Pamela Regis, Janice Radway, Merja Makinen, Tania Modleski, Stephanie Harzewski, Imelda Whelehan, Rian Montgomery, Fiachra Gibbons and others. Sections 2.1 and 2.2 discuss romance and chick lit genres, while sub-sections 2.2 and 2.3 examine female and male protagonists in those genres.

Part Three is divided into three sections that offer an analysis of relationships, career, sexuality, consumerist culture and beauty industry in romance and chick lit novels: Lynne Graham's *An Arabian Courtship*, Eve Gladstone's *Between Two Moons*, Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* and Marian Keyes's *Sushi for Beginners*. Section 3.1 refers to the treatment of relationships and career as represented by the characters: Kelly and Andrea as untypical representatives of romance and chick lit. Section 3.2 examines sexuality as represented by the characters: Polly and Ashling as typical representatives of romance and chick lit. Finally, section 3.3 discusses consumerist culture and beauty industry as represented by the characters: Andrea, Kelly, Ashling and Polly. Part Four, the conclusion, summarizes the main ideas about the main themes and thematic intersections between the romance novels, Lynne Graham's *An Arabian Courtship* and Eve Gladstone's *Between Two Moons*, and the chick lit novels, Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* and Marian Keyes's *Sushi for Beginners*. The four Appendices provide plot summaries of the above mentioned novels.

1 INTRODUCTION

The present paper analyses the relationship between the literary genres of romance and chick lit regarding the main thematic intersections such as relationships, career, sexuality, consumerist culture and beauty industry as represented by the romance novels of Lynne Graham's *An Arabian Courtship* and Eve Gladstone's *Between Two Moons* and chick lit novels of Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* and Marian Keyes's *Sushi for Beginners*.

According to Jean Radford, the term romance is "one of the oldest and most enduring of literary modes" (Radford 3). She indicates that the term includes "Greek romance, the medieval or Renaissance romance, Gothic or late nineteenth-century women's romances, and mass-produced romance fiction now" (3). This paper will focus on mass-produced contemporary romance that is defined by Pamela Regis as "a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines" (Regis 14). The examples of a contemporary romance that represents courtship and betrothal of the female protagonist is Lynne Graham *An Arabian Courtship* and Eve Gladstone *Between Two Moons*.

Lynne Graham is a Harlequin romantic novelist. As it is indicated in her official Web site, her first book was published in 1987 and now she is the bestselling author "with sales of fifteen and a half million books worldwide (Graham, www.lynegraham.com). Her novel *An Arabian Courtship* is a story about a young and innocent woman, Polly, who has to marry Prince Raschid ibn Saud al Azarin from Saudi Arabia. Since Polly's parents had accepted quite a large sum of money in exchange for the marriage, Polly has no other choice but to adhere to their agreement, otherwise, her family will be on the verge of bankruptcy. She becomes a wife of an autocratic Arabian prince. It is not easy for her to adjust a new life in a Middle East country and to accept her new secretive husband. At the end of the novel she discovers that the man she had been forced to marry is a wonderful companion.

Eve Gladstone's *Between Two Moons* is written by Joyce Gleit and Herma Werner: a married couple who decided to publish their romances under the name of Eve Gladstone (Gladstone 2). Their novel *Between Two Moons* depicts a career woman, Kelly, who is thirty one years old and already a president of a big woman's specialty store in Manhattan called Lambs. She meets her beloved, Tony Campbell, at a business party. They fall in love with each other. However, the fact that Tony Campbell is the new owner of the store complicates their relationship. Kelly does not agree with the changes brought by the new owner who insists on relocating the Lambs. She does not want her store to be sold, rebuilt or moved. She has to fight for her job and the jobs of her employees. Since she loves Tony she has to fight her own heart as well. At the novels closure, these conflicts are resolved. The story ends with a passionate kiss in the moonlight.

The other novels that are chosen for the present analysis represent the genre of chick lit. Imelda Whelehan calls chick lit books the clones of Bridget Jones with the soft pastel covers as their trademarks (Whelehan 4). She defines the genre as “a fun pastel-covered novel with a young, female, city-based protagonist, who has a kooky best friend, an evil boss, romantic troubles and a desire to find the One – the apparently unavailable man who is good-looking, can cook and is both passionate and considerate in bed (Whelehan 203). The main characters are usually “white, straight, reasonably well-off, and able to fit into a size 12/14 dress” (Whelehan 6). Carol Memmott states that chick lit books picture female protagonists in the urban setting filled with fashion, parties, friends, a career in a magazine and a dream to find a male hero (Memmott). Memmott ascribes these books to the sub-genre of chick lit that belongs to the contemporary women’s fiction (Memmott). Chick lit books are both condemned and admired by critics. Nevertheless, their sales are increasing constantly since, according to Heather Cabot, chick lit “fuels publishing industry” (Cabot).

The Devil Wears Prada was first published in April 2003 and it has many features of the genre as defined above. Madeira James announces that book’s success was surrounded by gossip and doubts about whether its plot gives an ironic representation of the actual editor of *Vogue* Anna Wintour. The gossip was based on the fact that Lauren Weisberger was “the Assistant to the Editor-in-Chief of *Vogue*, Anna Wintour” (James). Juliette Wells asserts that Lauren Weisberger is one of the lucky authors whose very first novel hit the sales and became popular gaining respect and recognition for the author herself (Wells 56).

The novel depicts the life of a young female protagonist who has just graduated from college, moved to New York and is eager to start a career in the *New Yorker*. She gets a job in a fashion magazine *Runway*. Andrea enters a world that is completely new to her. What is more, she has to work for Miranda Priestly, the worst boss ever. Miranda does not care either to remember Andrea’s name or to specify her tasks for Andrea. She calls her early in the morning or late at night and demands complete obedience. Finally, Andrea realizes that money and power is not what she wants in life and she quits the job. At the end of the novel she reunites with her family and gets an offer to work for a teenagers’ magazine as a writer. Caitlin Flanagan describes this novel by declaring that it shows “the ice-water shock of leaving college and getting a real job” (Flanagan). To put it otherwise, *The Devil Wears Prada* pictures the struggles of most young women while entering “into the culture of the professional workplace” (Hale 103).

Marian Keyes’s *Sushi for Beginners* is one of her seven novels that have been sold worldwide (*mariankeyes*). Her official Web site announces that Marian Keyes was born in the Western Ireland in 1963, she was brought up in Dublin, and she spent her twenties in London. According to the information on the Web page on Marian Keyes, “her lifelong self esteem

gradually mutated into a drinking problem” (ibid.). After coming out of rehab Marian Keyes started writing and since then “became a publishing phenomenon” (ibid.). As a result, her book enriches the subgenre of chick lit by introducing “an unusual blend of comedy and darkness” and by covering “subjects like depression, addiction and illness” (ibid.).

Sushi for Beginners depicts the life of three female characters: Ashling, Clodagh, and Lisa. Ashling and Clodagh are best friends from childhood. Lisa is introduced as the editor of *Colleen* who comes to Dublin to revive an unpopular magazine. Moreover, Ashling starts to work at *Colleen* as Lisa’s assistant. In his review William Morrow explains that “the stories of the three women intersect with each other as they struggle through depression, loneliness, betrayals and a need to find the man of their dreams” (Morrow). At the end Ashling is happy to find out that the man who truly loves her is her boss, Jack Devine. After working in a different city with different people, Lisa reconsiders her mistakes and comes back to her husband Oliver. However, Clodagh cheats on her husband with Ashling’s boyfriend and loses both her husband and her children. The novel centers on the lives of three different women by representing their every day issues and by picturing their need to belong to the right man as well as their need to be independent.

The present paper aims to examine two romance novels and two chick lit novels by looking at how the subject of career, relationships, sexuality, consumerist culture and beauty industry are treated. It also seeks to compare and contrast romance and chick lit in relation with these thematic intersections. Part Two introduces theoretical background on the genres of chick lit and romance and it also explains the characteristics of the female and the male protagonist. Part Three provides the analysis of four novels with regards to the main themes and thematic intersections such as relationships, career, sexuality and consumerism. This part is divided into three sections and each section will analyze each subject in a more detailed manner. Part Four offers the concluding ideas about romance and chick lit and their relation to the female readers.

2 THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO ROMANCE NOVELS AND CHICK LIT NOVELS

The present part represents the main theoretical tenets of romance and chick lit and the relationships between the two literary genres. The term romance, according to Gillian Beer, has a wide spectrum of meaning, therefore, one needs to limit the ways the term is applied (Beer 4). This paper, will discuss the contemporary popular romance that is defined by Romance Writers of America as having two basic elements: “a central love story and an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending” (Romance Writers of America 2010). J. McKnight-Irontz claims that the popular romance genre started in 1940 with “the mass-market paperback and new soft cover books sold for pennies” – romance for women was one of them (Irontz 9). Janice Radway holds that gradually “the event of the book reading was transformed into a consumer-oriented industry making use of the most sophisticated marketing” (Radway 44). By extension, as Irontz has it, in 1964 romance stories became formulaic, which means that stories written according to a formula appealed to consuming audience and that determined the success of Harlequin (Irontz 16). She states that readers that bought these romances knew that their expectations will be met (Irontz 28). Radway suggests that such successful marketing is one of the major factors of extraordinary popularity of romances (Radway 44).

Chick lit, according to Imelda Whelehan, appeared in 1996 when Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* was first published (Whelehan 155). The Chick lit genre can be defined by Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young as follows: “chick lit features single women in their twenties and thirties navigating their generation’s challenges of balancing demanding careers with personal relationships” (Ferriss and Young 3). Both definitions of romance and chick lit serve to evoke such themes as the relationship between the male and the female protagonist, the representation of the female protagonist in her society, the representation of the male protagonist and the conflict between career and personal life.

Such themes and subjects are quite relevant to many of female readers and that is why romance and chick lit are particularly popular among women. According to Pamela Regis, “the romance is the most female of popular genres. Nearly all of the writers and readers are women” (Regis xii). In a similar manner, Rosalinda Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff point out that as soon as chick lit was established, it aimed “to attract single, urban-based white women in their twenties and thirties” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 2).

The popularity of romance and chick lit attract the attention of critics who, according to Janet Batsleer and John Ezard, tend to condemn rather than praise both genres. For instance, Janet Batsleer indicates that “romance has incurred almost universal condemnation [...] as a part of [...] a

debased popular culture” (Batsleer 87). John Ezard states that chick lit is regarded as “a fad unduly favoring younger writers and the shallow dilemmas of the young” (Ezard). On the other hand, Briel Nichole Naugle, holds that a number of scholars are “following in the footsteps of Janice Radway” and have recently begun seriously analyzing popular genre fiction (Naugle 3).

The present part analyses both genres by looking at how they treat the male and the female protagonist. Sections 2.1 and 2.2 will look at theoretical background for the analysis of these aspects of the genres. It will present the origin of the genres and describe the main features concerning both romance and chick lit. Section 2.3 will focus on the representation of the female protagonist in terms of relationships, career, sexuality and appearance. Section 2.4 will discuss the male protagonist. This section will reflect on similarities and differences of the male character as represented in romance and chick lit.

2.1 Theories of Romance

The concept of romance is a literary term that includes various definitions depending on time and period. It might be indicated that romance genre can be introduced from a historical perspective. For example, Gillian Beer asserts that in the early Middle Ages the term romance had the meaning of the new vernacular languages derived from Latin (Beer 4). Beer holds that “the meaning of this word extended to include the qualities of the literature in these tongues” (4). The characteristics of such literature had been “a preoccupation with love and adventure” and this literature had been written in a language that could be understood by all (4). Therefore, according to Beer, the old French term *romant* had acquired the meaning of “courtly romance in verse” or a “popular book” (4).

Beer defines romance by saying that it is written to entertain, to absorb the reader by drawing him or her into its own world – “a world which is never fully equivalent to our own” (Beer 3). According to Beer, the world of romance intensifies and even exaggerates certain traits in human behavior and represents human figures as ideal heroes and heroines (3). Northrop Frye describes romance as the “mythos of summer”. He claims that “the romance is nearest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfillment dream” (Frye 186). He further explains that ruling social class projects its ideals in some form of romance where “the virtuous heroes and beautiful heroines represent the ideals and the villains the threats to their ascendancy” (Frye 186).

With the development of literary genres the term romance acquires new meanings and features. For instance, Beer states that in England the romance is shaped by the two major turning points in the history: “the publication of Shelton’s translation of *Don Quixote* [...] and the romantic revival” (Beer 6). Both events, as Beer argues, stress the romance world of the imagination and of

dream (Beer 7). Gillian Beer also states that to find a single characteristic to distinguish romance from other literary kinds is almost impossible (Beer 10). However, she attempts to name the following features: “the themes of love and adventure, a certain withdrawal from the society, sensuous detail, simplified characters, intermingling of the unexpected succession of incidents, a happy ending and an enforced code of conduct” (10).

Regarding the contemporary understanding of romance fiction, it may be pertinent to refer to Janice Radford who argues that “the plots of early classical romance bear a remarkable resemblance to those in contemporary mass-produced romance” (Radford 4). According to Janice Radway, the book’s “proper plot structure is what makes it a romance” (Radway 64). It is necessary that popular romance develops a particular manner of loving relationship. More specifically, Radway claims that “to qualify as a romance, the story must chronicle not merely the events of a courtship but *what it feels like* to be the *object* of one” (64 emphasis in the original). Since romance is a place where women escape their daily routines and spend their time alone, they prefer to identify with the female protagonist and experience “the sense of exquisite tension, anticipation, and excitement” (Radway 65). The ideal popular romance, to use Radway phrasing, includes a specific personality of the female protagonist, the character of the hero and “the particular manner in which the hero pursues and wins the affection of the heroine” (Radway 77).

Pamela Regis states that “the romance novel has often been described as being written according to a formula” (Regis 23). Regis defines romance formula in the editorial guidelines: “category romance, contemporary, fast-paced, fun, flirtatious, entertaining, real-life hero and heroine meet directly or indirectly through a form of written communication, romantic conflict, and a happy ending” (Regis 24). Furthermore, Tania Modleski represents the formula of Harlequin books as follows:

A young, inexperienced, poor to moderately well-to-do woman encounters and becomes involved with a handsome, strong, experienced, wealthy man older than herself by ten to fifteen years. The heroine is confused by the hero’s behavior, though he is obviously interested in her, he is mocking, cynical, contemptuous, often hostile, and even somewhat brutal. By the end, however, all misunderstandings are cleared away, and the hero reveals his love for the heroine, who reciprocates. (Modleski 21)

According to Regis, these similar “tipsheets”¹ define a formula within the larger genre (Regis 23). Due to such formulaic definitions, as Janet Batsleer has it: “Romance has incurred almost universal condemnation. Cultural conservatives see it as an integral part of the shapeless, sprawling, anti-human mass of a debased popular culture” (Batsleer 87). Regis claims that such criticism and

¹ The description of publishers’ separate lines issued to guide writers (Regis 23).

condemnation of romance novels is based on “faulty reasoning” and “hasty generalizations” (Regis 5). Attempting to recuperate the genre, as it were, Regis provides the following definition:

The romance novel is a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines. All romance novels contain eight narrative elements: a definition of society, always corrupt, that the romance novel will reform; the meeting between the heroine and hero; an account of the meeting between the heroine and the hero; an account of their attraction for each other; the barrier between them; the point of ritual death; the recognition that fells the barrier; the declaration of the heroine and hero that they love each other; and their betrothal. (Regis 14)

Regis’s definition serves to illustrate that there is more than a love story and a happy ending in a romantic novel. Every romance should contain courtship and betrothal between the male and the female protagonist as well as eight essential narrative elements. In other words, not every love story is a romance. Regis rightly points out that “the eight essential elements of the romance novel represent the core of the genre [...] when the writer focuses on other kinds of narrative elements, the novel is another kind of thing” (Regis 47).

In terms of the popularity of romance, Regis asserts that “in the last year of the twentieth century, 55.9 percent of mass-market and trade paperbacks sold in North America were romance novels” (Regis xi). With regards to the reading public of the genre, Linda K. Christian-Smith states that “historically, women have dominated romance fiction as writers and readers” (Christian-Smith 766). Thus taken, romance is a popular genre read and written by women, which is why this genre contains all kinds of subjects and themes relevant to a female audience. As Linda K. Christian-Smith indicates the studies of romance fiction readers showed that women chose romance for relaxation, escape, personal private time and learning opportunity (Christian-Smith 767). In fact, according to Christian-Smith: “reading romances represents a mild protest against women’s devalued position, and a channel through which women claim their rights to pleasure and fantasy” (Christian-Smith 768). Restating Smith, women read romances not only for pleasure and relaxation but also for the ability to escape their own restrictions in life while identifying with the main character’s quest for freedom.

In conclusion, the romance novel has a long history. It becomes a part of popular literature in Middle Ages including medieval chivalric romances that represent courtly love, adventures and idealization of the heroes and heroines. Today the contemporary mass-produced romance novel has become a female genre depicting the love relationships between a man and a woman. Although, romance is particularly popular, especially among women readers, literary critics argue that the genre has little prominence. The reason why the romance novel is considered to be trivial is that

critics generalize romance to “a single feature of love story” (Regis 10). Moreover, the critics disregard the definition of the genre while ascribing romances to a certain formula. However, Regis provides us with a definition of romance that contains eight essential narrative elements and in this way she proves that not every love story is a romance. The romance novel continues to be popular and is being enjoyed by many female readers that look for relaxation, their private time, and ability to escape their own restrictions and limitations.

2.2 Theories of Chick lit

Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff begin the analysis of chick lit by calling it a “new genre that have claimed to rewrite contemporary romances” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 2). In this light, chick lit can be considered as a descendant of romance. Gill and Herdieckerhoff state that the beginning of chick lit dates back to the time when publishers started to “commission fictions [...] build on the popularity of TV shows such as *Sex and the City* and *Desperate Housewives*” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 2). According to Gill and Herdieckerhoff: “They [publishers] marketed new sub-genres such as “mum-lit,” “lad lit” and “dad lit” [...]. Chief amongst these new genres is the phenomenon of chick lit” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 2). On the other hand, Briel Nichole Naugle starts to analyze chick lit by representing the term which has been “coined by one of the feminist authors who so vehemently abhors the genre” (Naugle 9). Fiachra Gibbons does not agree with such name of the genre and argues that chick lit is “more a marketing term than a real genre,” she adds that “chick lit is a deliberately condescending term” (Gibbons).

Chick lit is also called as “postfeminist fiction” (Naugle 18) or “new woman’s” fiction (Ferriss and Young 1). Sarah Gamble asserts that chick lit is “the mass-produced literary genre” that contains many of postfeminism’s conventions and problems (Gamble 62). With regards to the feminist movement, today women arrive at the third wave of feminism or so called postfeminism. According to Nick Bentley, postfeminism can be understood in two senses. First, it can mean that all the aims of second wave feminism from the 1960s to the 1980s have been achieved and no longer relevant (Bentley 14). Second, it could refer to the sense that although equal rights have been reached, the most powerful positions in most of the countries are still occupied by men (14). Bentley also states that many popular culture movements and trends have risen associated with the idea of postfeminism (14). For instance, he points out at the success of Spice Girls who had presented themselves as “post-feminist gang,” they had used sexuality on their own terms and had “advocated a culture where young women had the confidence to tell what they ‘really, really want’, and were able to get it” (14).

These different female images claiming their sexuality and freedom remind us Emma Anderson's statement. She writes that in recent years there have been lots of debates about "the single modern woman and her role in contemporary society" (Anderson 9). This modern woman emerges from popular culture and, specifically, from such a new genre of fiction known as chick lit (Anderson 10). Anderson defines the single modern woman as the one who is in her late twenties or early thirties, educated with a promising career, sexually assertive, unmarried and childless (Anderson 9). In other words, chick lit represents a new woman releasing a different type of femininity. Nick Bentley holds that chick lit novelists produce narratives in which female protagonists are growing in contemporary society and attempting to find their place in the world usually in heterosexual partnership (Bentley 15). Gamble states it more straightforwardly, she says that chick lit heroines are lamentable kind of heroines for whom happiness depends upon "the most limited and hackneyed of objectives: romantic fulfillment" (Gamble 63). The freedom of choices, as Gamble has it, makes them feel confused rather than liberated and as they attempt to counteract that confusion they spend most of their time obsessed about beauty procedures, diets and lifestyle (Gamble 65).

Regarding the origin of chick lit, almost all critics agree that the phenomenon of chick lit starts with Helen Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones's Diary*. As for instance, Gill and Herdieckerhoff state that the chick lit "burst onto the publishing scene in the wake of the extraordinary success of Helen Fielding's (1996) *Bridget Jones's Diary*" (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 10). Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young claim that Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* is considered to be the first example of the chick lit genre:

When we consider the origins of chick lit, a single urtext clearly presents itself: Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996). The entire chick-lit phenomenon is invariably traced back to this single novel. (Ferriss and Young 4)

On the other hand, Ferriss and Young assert that the roots of chick lit had appeared much later than Fielding's *Bridget Jones's*. According to Ferriss and Young: "The most obvious of Fielding's sources is well-known to be Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, from which Fielding admittedly borrowed much of her plot and many of her characters" (Ferriss and Young 4).

With reference to the thorough definition of chick lit various scholars provide various definitions. For example, the Web site of the chick lit fans in Britain defines it as follows:

Chick lit is a term used to denote genre fiction written for and marketed to young women, especially single, working women in their twenties and thirties. Chick lit features hip, stylish female protagonists, usually in their twenties and thirties, in urban settings (usually London or Manhattan), and follows their love lives and

struggles in business (often in the publishing, advertising, public relations or fashion industry). The books usually feature an airy, irreverent tone and frank sexual themes. (Memmott, www.chicklitchicks)

According to definition above, chick lit books are appealing to the audience of young women. They feature a young, stylish female protagonist of our days who lives in a big city and encounters problems in her career and personal life. The tone of the books is light and friendly. They also contain honest but not explicit sexual scenes.

In addition, chick lit Web site in the United States introduces chick lit in the following manner:

The books range from having main characters in their early 20's to their late 60's. There is usually a personal, light, and humorous tone to the books. [...] The plots usually consist of women experiencing usual life issues, such as love, marriage, dating, relationships, friendships, roommates, corporate environments, weight issues, addiction and much more. (Montgomery, chicklitbooks.com)

Both British and American Web sites mention the light-hearted and friendly tone of the books which according to Briel Nichole Naugle is “one of the main differences between mainstream women’s fiction” (Naugle 13). Anderson also indicates that “it is the use of humor that lifts chick-lit out of the domain of melodrama and has even led chick-lit to be coined as romantic satire” (Anderson 8). Anderson claims that humor is created through characterization by depicting “the farcical nature of the circumstances the protagonist finds herself in and, most predominantly, the witty, self-deprecating way in which she relates these to her friends and the reader” (8). The chick lit protagonist is a flawed character, but, according to Anderson, it is these flaws that are highlighted as her most endearing traits (Anderson 4). When the reader is directed to all the mistakes and imperfections of the main character she can identify with her more easily. As Naugle states further: “In a society where imperfections are airbrushed, surgically removed or suppressed with prescriptions drugs, it is refreshing and almost therapeutic for women readers to relate to female characters who don’t hide their flaws” (Naugle 13).

In conclusion, chick lit is quite a young genre presumably arising from romance and popular television shows. Chick lit gains popularity with the raise of Helen Fielding’s novel *Bridget Joneses’s Diary* that pictures a young female protagonist in her thirties placed in the urban setting and balancing between her career life and love life. The name of the genre although created for the sardonic purposes, is widely used in scholarly studies as well. Called as postfeminist fiction or a new woman’s fiction, chick lit represents the reader with a modern young woman of postfeminist era. Such modern woman tries to benefit from the freedom of choice available to her but at the end she finds herself complete only in romantic alliance with a man. As for the main features of the

genre, it may be considered that a pleasant and casual tone as well as humorous effect to the books is what distinguishes chick lit and adds to its popularity.

2.3 The Treatment of the Female Protagonist in Romance and Chick lit

As it has already been mentioned romance and chick lit are targeted at female audience. By implication, in both romance and chick lit the protagonist of almost every story is female. This section will give brief insights into the protagonists of both genres regarding their relationships, career, sexuality and appearance. More detailed analysis of these questions will be provided in the following sections.

To start with, most of the scholars agree that the romance genre changes a lot through time. For instance, Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff suggest that “romance is able to adapt and mutate as it responds to the transformations brought about by feminism” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 9). In fact, Merja Makinen holds that what comes to feminist appropriation it is hard to make generalizations about a contemporary romance fiction as a whole because of the huge output of romance material during the 1900s-1990s (Makinen 24-31). The changes that have been brought about to romance resulted in different kind of female protagonists. According to Makinen, the heroines have changed in age, innocence and occupation and only in 1950s the conventional stereotype becomes more or less established (Makinen 27). As Makinen has it, the stereotype includes “masculine domination, with the hero as a man of the world, thirty-five, sardonic, and wealthy, in contrast to the heroine in her early twenties, a virgin and with few protective relations” (27). Polly and Rachid in Lynne Graham’s *An Arabian Courtship*, as it will be revealed in the forthcoming analysis, serve as a case in point. From 1990s, as Makinen suggests, “readers gradually develop an appetite for less naïve heroines and spicier plots” and this is where the “temptation heroine” comes from (Makinen 29). Eve Gladstone’s *Between Two Moons* represents such kind of the female character. According to Makinen, she is sexually experienced, has an engrossing job, reached “a pinnacle of success” already in her thirties and is “ripe for something different in her life” (29).

Together with the changing waves of feminism, different trends, values and different female and male protagonists one basic aspect of the romance novel remains the same. It is the use of the same plot pattern which, according to Janice Radway, is based on a “resolute focus on a single, developing relationship between heroine and hero” (Radway 122). J. McKnight-Irontz has it in a simpler manner: “the arc of traditional romance relationship follows a simple pattern: woman desires man, man is hard to get, woman snags man, they live happily ever after” (Irontz 35). Chick lit, however, instead of centering on the love story, according to Harzewski, focuses on the social

interactions of the female protagonist (Harzewski 37). It can be indicated that chick lit provides more realistic picture of woman's life as it portrays her personal, social as well as work worlds.

Furthermore, regarding the relationships of the romance protagonists, it must be stated once again that, according to Pamela Regis, courtship is the focus of the twentieth century popular romance novels. In addition, Regis claims that courtship focus "much more on the emotional elements of the heroine's and hero's relationships" (Regis 111). The reader views the female protagonist mainly in relationships with the male protagonist and, as these relationships develop, the reader can explore the female character: "her development into a strong woman," "her inner life" and "her claims to pleasure" (Christian-Smith 766). Moreover, Radway indicates that most of the romance heroines are "able to translate male reticence and cruelty into tenderness and devotion" (Radway 128). Tania Modleski says that at first the romance heroine is presented as rebelling against the male authority and even being able to compete with him (Modleski 29). Then, as the story develops, the woman "outgrows the resentment of the male [...] and forms an erotic attachment to him" (Modleski 30). The way the female protagonist stops resisting him is by realizing that "behind his protective exterior hides an affectionate and tender soul" (Radway 128).

According to Stephanie Harzewski: "Chick lit replicate romance conventions in the heroine's union with Mr. Right" (Harzewski 37). Thus, it may be claimed that chick lit is interested in romantic relationships, as Briel Nichole Naugle has it: "the novels certainly don't advocate a life without romance" (Naugle 11). In contrast to a more spiritualized romantic love plot, many chick lit novels represent their "Mr. Right" more realistically (Harzewski 37). For example, Harzewski reveals that "Mr. Right [...] is not a requisite" (Harzewski 37). She says that very often chick lit protagonists encounter false heroes before they actually meet the right one (37). By implication, chick lit shifts from "one woman – one man" (Harzewski 38) love plot and pictures female protagonists choosing "serial dating and casual sexual affairs" (Naugle 11). According to Cris Mazza, "Chick lit gives a fresh insight into relationships" (Mazza 25). What Mazza may be indicating is that the relationships of the chick lit character are pictured from many different angles in detailed and sometimes ironic way and they include more than one man. Thus taken, romance stories represent their love plots based on the idea that there is one man for a one woman, while chick lit novels introduce a female protagonist handling various romantic relationships with different men (Harzewski 38).

The other aspect to discuss is the treatment of career regarding romance and chick lit protagonists. According to Pamela Regis a typical romance heroine is perceived as ignoring any kind of opportunity to become independent on her own merit (Regis 10). Some critics claim that "the romance novel extinguishes its heroine, confining her within a story that [...] denies her independent goal-oriented action outside of love and marriage" (Regis 10). This suggests that a

traditional romance heroine depends on a man as a lover and a provider. On the other hand, with regards to the contemporary romance novels, Janice Radway asserts that the ideal romance heroine must have three character traits: “intelligence, a sense of humor, and independence” (Radway 77). Nevertheless, Radway holds that “independence and a secure individual “identity” are never compromised by the paternalistic care and protection of the male” (Radway 79). Although the female character is represented as financially independent and is even building herself a career, she is still in need for a male hero to care for her and protect her. That need, according to Harzewski, is so strong that at the end of most career romance stories the female protagonist quits her demanding job and rather chooses a simpler one to enjoy the time with the hero (Harzewski 15).

Chick lit characters are different in this manner, Gill and Herdieckerhoff state that there are two kinds of heroines: those committed to the idea of career but dissatisfied with their jobs and those that are successful employees but unfeminine (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 16). In other words, Gill and Herdieckerhoff suggest that “within this genre women are only allowed to be successful at work if this is achieved with the support of a loving man. Without that ticket, the successfully employed woman is villainised” (16). Such characters are accurately reflected in Weisberger’s *The Devil Wears Prada* where Miranda, although the head of a successful fashion magazine, is depicted as cold, manipulative and immoral. However, her employee, Andrea though she struggles with her job, she is honest, warm and friendly and she has a support of her loving boyfriend.

As far as the subject of sexuality is concerned, according to Radway, most of the romance protagonists are represented with a childlike innocence, therefore, “these heroines are completely unaware that they are capable of passionate sexual urges” (Radway 126). Maggie Humm indicates that “Romance stresses a heroine’s naivety [...] she must not understand the nature of sexual desire” (Humm 131). Nevertheless, Radway asserts that “female beauty is inextricably linked with sexuality” (Radway 126). She holds that the beauty of the female protagonist is “a sign both to the hero and to the reader that the heroine is sensual and capable of carnal passion despite her immature repression of those urges” (126). The time when she discovers that she has sexual urges is “when the hero forces his attention upon her,” then she is “awakened” (126). It is the hero who, as Radway claims, “is held responsible for activating her sexuality” (Radway 143).

Chick lit characters are the examples of a single modern women or, according to Imelda Whelehan, the new “feminist” addressed by the media in the 1990s (Whelehan 168). Melissa Benn argues that this new woman “likes sex probably more than the men or man she’s having it with” (Benn 224). In addition, Emma Anderson claims that “the chick lit protagonist and all her friends are sexually confident and sexually active” (Anderson 8). That is why Anderson suggests that chick lit “has become a site for ideological debate about female sexuality” (Anderson 4). The book that raises most of the arguments regarding female sexuality is Candace Bushnell’s *Sex and the*

City. This novel, as Anderson has it, depicts female characters engaging into “numerous sexual exploits” and talking explicitly about it (Anderson 32). Therefore, many critics complained that “this was not an accurate representation of how women talk” (32). However, with comparison to romance novels one can distinguish that chick lit characters are far from being innocent. They freely enjoy the benefits of postfeminism that give them a right to express their desires without restraint.

Regarding the question of appearance, chick lit depicts their female characters as greatly interested and even worried about their appearance. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young state: “chick lit heroines usually worry about their appearance, admire shopping and participate in fashion and cocktail parties” (Ferriss and Young 4). Imelda Whelehan indicates that chick lit protagonists are “governed by the schizophrenic edicts of glossy magazines and trend watchers” (Whelehan 176). Knowing that nowadays the magazines are “a bombardment of idealized images of modern womanhood” chick lit serves as an example of a woman trapped in a consumerist culture (Whelehan 177). According to Whelehan, in the midst of the society’s interest in fashion, lifestyle and beauty, chick lit characters are presented as undergoing “some form of identity crisis” (177). They are confused and “crippled by the burden of choice” to have everything a woman can want (177). Therefore, according to Katherine Marsh, they celebrate the notion of “real human connection” which make them feel worthy and complete despite of all their flaws in character and appearance (Marsh 41, 44).

On the other hand, with regards to the romance genre it may be assumed that romance and chick lit are the opposites in terms of the female characters’ appearance. Modleski asserts that romance heroine has appealing looks but she is also young, innocent and childish (Modleski 36). Since she is childish she is not aware of how beautiful she is, that is why, as Modleski argues, “she can do a lot and be excused: she can arouse the hero by her appealing looks and her spunky and whimsical behavior” (36). Moreover, Radway holds that since romance heroines are unaware of their attractive appearance, they never “preen in an effort to attract a man” (Radway 126). Still, what really attracts him is certain features of their appearance, as Radway defines it: “they always have “glorious tresses” and “sparkling” or “smoldering” eyes, inevitably “fringed by sooty lashes” (126). Thus taken, in chick lit women characters are represented as extremely conscious of their appearance while romance female characters either do not recognize or do not pay a particular attention to the fact that they are attractive.

In conclusion, the popular romance genre changes through time, different periods and trends. Along with the changes of the genre, the characteristics of the female protagonist change as well. Next to the young and innocent female protagonists a more confident and independent career woman appears. However, even then the focus of the story remains the same – the relationships

between the male and the female protagonist and “gradual removal of emotional barriers between two people” (Radway 123). Chick lit, in this respect, is more interested in the identity of the female protagonist in terms of her social and personal life. The hero of the story is not as prominent to the plot as the romance hero. Most of the chick lit characters are pictured in relationships to other men before they meet “the one” (Whelehan 126).

In terms of career, as far as many contemporary romance novels are concerned, female characters are represented as career women. However, after they meet the hero they tend to abandon their well paid jobs and stay with him. Chick lit characters are all working city women and most of them are unhappy about their jobs. The novels are more concerned to show that women find their fulfillment in relationships rather than work. The female protagonists are depicted as dating and even engaging in “one night stands” as well as explicitly talking about sex (Wells 51). However, romance female characters are represented as pure and innocent and if they had any past relationships before they met the male protagonist their previous sexual experience is not stressed. Romance heroines are left to be “awakened” only by their heroes (Radway 126). Their innocence is also emphasized by their looks. They are beautiful and attractive but they seem to be unaware of it. They do not invest any particular attention to their appearance. With regards to chick lit characters, the society they inhabit influence a serious concern about their looks. They are deceived by the idea that attractive appearance determines ones success in life. Still, when the right man comes into their chaotic lives he is able to reduce the never-ending worries about their appearance.

2.4 The Treatment of the Male Protagonist in Romance and Chick lit

The analysis will now proceed with the treatment of the male character as represented in both genres. The male protagonist is quite essential in both romance and chick lit but his role in the lives of the female protagonists is different. The male protagonist as represented in romance will be discussed first and then the male protagonist as represented in chick lit will follow.

As the romance novel is focused on the love relationships between the male and the female protagonist these central characters are given more attention, which means they are much more developed than other characters. Janet Batsleer states that “the relationship between hero and heroine is represented as a process of individualization. Each discovers the other’s uniqueness. Each singles the other out from the generality of men and women” (Batsleer 103). Batsleer suggests that both the male and the female protagonists are important for each other’s development and self-identity. Considering the male character in greater detail, Pamela Regis points out that

“the hero can step to the fore to assume a much larger place in the narrative [...]. The hero is much more in evidence much more a part of the action” (Regis 111).

Therefore, Regis divides romance male protagonists into the “dangerous hero” and the “sentimental hero” (Regis 112, 113). The “dangerous hero” is called an “alpha male” by Regis as she explains that “he is one of the tough, hard-edged, tormented heroes that are at the heart of the vast majority of best-selling romance novels” (Regis 112). This reminds us of Janice Radway statement who indicates that “almost everything about him is hard, angular, and dark” (Radway 128). Moreover, Tania Modleski states that the hero is “more or less brutal, and it is the function of the novels to explain such brutality in a lover” (Modleski 24). According to Regis, such hero functions as the medium that helps to dramatize the “chemistry of the interaction between heroine and the hero” (Regis 114). As Radway claims, when the story develops the reader is revealed that, the hero can be tender with the heroine and that his “previous impassivity was the result of a former hurt” (Radway 148). By extension, the male protagonist’s brutality with the female protagonist can be explained by the former hurts he had from other women in the past. He resists the female protagonist because he is afraid to fall in love with her and because he does not want to be hurt again. Regis points out that such a man becomes the barrier to the romantic plot, and the woman must tame him so that the romantic plot could end with the unity of both lovers (Regis 114). Since the female protagonist is able to recognize the hurtful things in the male protagonist’s past, according to Radway, she realizes that her man really loves her and that he is dependent on her (Radway 148, 149). Then the heroine is ready to tame the hero. In fact, Regis claims that it is necessary for the female protagonist to tame the male protagonist because “if he is an alpha male and the heroine does not tame him, he will regard courtship wrongly, as merely the action he needs to go through to get a woman into bed” (Regis 114).

In the same manner, the “sentimental hero” is defined by Regis as follows: “he is still strong, virile, manly (“a lion among men”), but he is wounded physically, psychically, or emotionally. The heroine must heal him” (Regis 113). Such hero functions “to evoke emotion – both his own and the reader’s [...]. These heroes focus not on action, but on reactions” (Regis 113). In the same way as with the “dangerous hero,” the “sentimental hero” has to be healed to follow the usual romantic plot with a happy ending. To use Regis phrasing, “if he is a sentimental hero and the heroine does not heal him, he will regard courtship, wrongly, as something that he is exempt from: [...] it will merely hurt him” (Regis 114). From all what has already been discussed it may be indicated that the romance male protagonist is at the centre of the narrative plot. He is usually depicted as masculine because he does not show his emotions, he is cold, tough, and he reflects a strength of character signaled by his past experience. Even with a case of the sentimental

hero, he is “a lion among men,” which means he never shows his sensitivity in public and in that sense he remains masculine (Regis 113).

While the romance male protagonist is “much more a part of the action,” the chick lit male character, however, is not given an equal prominence in the plot of the story (Regis 111). As Briel Nichole Naugle has it: “the men in chick lit novels are accessories to an already established life rather than necessities that make life worth living” (Naugle 11). What Naugle might be suggesting is that the novels are focused on the female protagonist and her quest for self-identity which involves much more than meeting an ideal love partner. Stephanie Harzewski indicates that the role of the male character is diminished to the point of suitor or fiancé in bridal magazines (Harzewski 38). Knowing that men in bridal magazines are presented just as a background presence one can assume that the role of the male protagonist in chick lit is not very prominent.

The reason of such representation of the male partner as “a shadow presence,” as Harzewski states, is due to the depiction of “serial dating,” “authorial inexperience” and “the monologue form” (Harzewski 38). By “serial dating,” as Harzewski implies, chick lit do not bring the relationship between the female and the male protagonist into the main focus, many other possible partners are introduced when the female protagonist participates in “serial dating” (Harzewski 38). With regards to an “authorial inexperience,” Harzewski suggests that “underdeveloped male characters may stem in part from authorial inexperience as numerous novels are debut works” (Harzewski 38). By implication, young inexperienced writers do not have enough knowledge of how to represent a male character. As with the “monologue form,” Harzewski argues that the first person narrative and “confessional mode” is usual in chick lit stories and it removes direct male speech and “facilitates the heroine’s development” (Harzewski 38).

There is one significant similarity between romance and chick lit as far as the male protagonist is concerned. It is the fact that both genres depict the female protagonist’s union with the male protagonist and this union, according to Whelehan, signifies female’s entering into full maturity (Whelehan 216). As Whelehan has it: “chick lit, women [...], are existing in a grey area between young adulthood and “growing up” and they do not enter full maturity until their future with the One is sealed” (Whelehan 216). Moreover, Gill and Herdieckerhoff indicate that chick lit “heroines still frequently require rescuing at regular intervals [...]. In this sense, showing that men in chick lit, like previous romance heroes, are still presented as knowing better about what women want” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 19). In other words, at the end of most chick lit novels, female protagonists are happy to unite with their male protagonists. With them they discover their true identity and enter into complete maturity. Chick lit and romance are similar in the way they portray their heroes as necessary for the heroine’s happiness.

In conclusion, the romance genre gives more importance to the male partner than chick lit. Since all the focus of the story is the relationship between the male and the female protagonist, the reader is presented with fully developed and individualized characters. In popular romance the male protagonist may be secretive, cold and brutal or he may be a very sensitive character. This dangerously brutal hero has to be tamed while a sentimental one has to be healed, otherwise the romance will not achieve a happy-ending and will not be a romance. Regarding chick lit, the male protagonist performs a secondary role to that of the female's. Critics call him "an accessory," "a man in bridal magazines," "a shadow presence" (Naugle 11, Harzewski 38). Such treatment may serve to indicate that young writers of chick lit do not have much experience of how to develop the male character and while using the first person narrator they make the female character easier to reflect. In addition, the female protagonist is represented as participating in many dates with other male characters which also explains why the male protagonist gets little prominence. Nevertheless, both romance and chick lit agree on one convention: a happy ending in the heroine's unity with the hero. This unity indicates the heroine's end of self-quest and the beginning of her maturity.

3 THEMATIC INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN THE ROMANCE AND THE CHICK LIT NOVELS: LYNNE GRAHAM'S *AN ARABIAN COURTSHIP*, EVE GLADSTONE'S *BETWEEN TWO MOONS*, LAUREN WEISBERGER'S *THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA*, AND MARIAN KEYES'S *SUSHI FOR BEGINNERS*

The following part of the paper will focus on three thematic aspects that will be discussed in terms of formulaic genres of romance and chick lit novels. The analysis will focus on relationships and career, female sexuality, consumerist culture and beauty industry. The two romance novels, Lynne Graham's *An Arabian Courtship* and Eve Gladstone's *Between Two Moons*, and two chick lit novels, Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* and Marian Keyes's *Sushi for Beginners* are chosen for the present analysis.

The four novels introduce different female protagonists of the present days. Some female characters in the chosen novels are not typical representatives of the heroine in these formulaic genres. As for example, Graham's *An Arabian Courtship*, portrays a pure, innocent and young female who is chosen for a much older, wealthier, moody, cynical and much more experienced hero. In this novel both protagonists adhere to typical gender roles: the woman is passive and the man is active. In Gladstone's *Between Two Moons*, the female protagonist Kelly is a career woman, she is in her thirties and she seems to be as much experienced as the hero, Tony. Thus taken, in this

novel both protagonists are represented in conflict with the typical gender roles, since both male and female are active characters: they have good and steady jobs and high status in society.

As far as chick lit novels are concerned, according to Imelda Whelehan, a typical chick lit heroine is committed to show that “the only happy ending to aimless singledom is coupledness of the quite traditional kind” (Whelehan 188). In other words, a typical chick lit heroine must meet her hero. Keyes’s *Sushi for Beginners* depicts three female characters that face different problems and issues related to their boyfriends, lovers or husbands. The protagonist, Ashling is a typical chick lit heroine who has a successful relationship with her moody boss Jack. She is the one that “finds true self-determination through the right kind of man” (Whelehan 188). Weisberger’s *The Devil Wears Prada* represents an untypical heroine of chick lit. Andrea’s only concern is career, there is little attention given to romantic relationships. The novel is focused on career matters.

Knowing that both romance and chick lit genres are highly popular and that there are many books published every month, the range of topics and concerns depicted in the novels is expanding. According to Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young, chick lit extends into new forms, such as “hen lit” (with the heroine over forty), “chick lit Jr.” (with the adolescent heroine) or “mommy lit” (with the heroine who has children) (Ferriss and Young 5). Regarding romance novels, Merja Makinen points to changes in the characteristics in the romance heroine. She is not necessarily immature and innocent as in a typical romance novel. She can also be represented drinking cocktails and smoking (Makinen 24, 27). J. McKnight-Irontz holds that the category romance has expanded to include romance featuring career women, bad and good girls, nurse romances, hometown doctor romances, romances with past settings and exotic encounters (Irontz 35).

The following section will discuss Kelly, the protagonist of Eve Gladstone’s *Between Two Moons*, and Andrea, the protagonist of Lauren Weisberger’s *The Devil Wears Prada*, as far as career and relationships are concerned. Section 3.1 will give theoretical overview while sub-sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 will provide the application of the theoretical issues as depicted in the two novels regarding the main character, Kelly, as untypical representative of romance, and the main character, Andrea, as untypical representative of chick lit. Section 3.2 will analyze sexuality by giving theoretical background on the subject. Sub-section 3.2.1 will discuss sexuality as exemplified by two female protagonists, Polly, in Lynne Graham’s *An Arabian Courtship* and, Ashling, in Marian Keyes’s *Sushi for Beginner*, as typical representatives of romance and chick lit. Finally, section 3.3 will discuss consumerist culture and beauty industry with regards to Andrea in Weisberger’s *The Devil Wears Parada*, Kelly in Gladstone’s *Between Two Moons*, Ashling in Keyes’s *Sushi for Beginners* and Polly in Graham’s *An Arabian Courtship*. Section 3.3 gives theoretical points while sub-sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 is an application of the theoretical questions by the examples of four women characters.

3.1 THE TREATMENT OF RELATIONSHIPS AND CAREER IN ROMANCE AND CHICK LIT

According to Imelda Whelehan chick lit writers are aware of the fact that in writing about women's lives they are reflecting on the material context in which their readers live (Whelehan 192). This context is embedded in postfeminist values. This implies that, as Jenny Colgan holds, there are "far too many choices about getting married, having children, and hauling ourselves up through the glass ceiling" (Colgan). The present section will introduce the way romance and chick lit protagonists negotiate these choices that many women face in contemporary society. Drawing on literature on the subject, the discussion will be based on the female protagonists and their relationships with male protagonists, their relationships with friends and family and their relationships to career

As mentioned in Part Two, love between the hero and the heroine is at the center of a romance story. Pamela Regis traces eight narrative elements in romance:

Eight narrative elements take a heroine in a romance novel from encumbered to free. In one or more scenes, romance novels always depict the following: the initial state of society in which the heroine and hero must court, the meeting between heroine and hero, the barrier to the union of heroine and hero, the attraction between the heroine and the hero, the declaration of love between heroine and hero, the point of ritual death, the recognition by heroine and hero of the means to overcome the barrier, and the betrothal. (Regis 30)

Regis asserts that the elements can appear in any order and can be repeated several times. The only condition is that all of these elements should be included otherwise the work departs from the romance genre (Regis 14). One can notice that the definition of romance with its eight narrative elements concerns the male and the female protagonists placed in a particular society which builds the barriers for their union. At the center of the story is the development of a love relationship leading to the union of two lovers. According to Harzewski, the action is more prominent than the development of characters (Harzewski 37).

Concerning the hero of the romance focus, as indicated in Section Two with reference to Pamela Regis, the hero is a necessary part of the action (Regis 111). Whether he is "dangerous" or "sentimental" (Regis 112) the female protagonist is expected to "bring to the surface traits and propensities that are part of the hero's most basic nature" (Radway 129). In other words, even if the male protagonist is unpleasant and hostile at the beginning, it is the female character's task to discover his inner tenderness. The most ideal romance hero, as Radway has it: is "strong but gentle," "masculine but caring," "protective of her and tender," "a he-man but a lover-boy, too"

(Radway 130). One of the heroine's goals is to discover a gentle, caring, tender and a lover-boy side of him. Through her journey of "establishing a connection with a man who is initially incapable of satisfying a woman," the female protagonist also undergoes a journey towards the discovery of her own identity (Radway 139). Radway states that this journey to her female self leads to a discovery of "the self-in-relation" (Radway 139).

Chick lit as stated by Harzewski, depicts "serial dating" and it "strays from what Harlequin readers have articulated as the one woman – one man tenet" (Harzewski 38). Although chick lit characters try to find Mr. Right, their stories are not focused on the relationship between the male and the female protagonist. Harzewski asserts that frequently "Mr. Right turns out to be Mr. Wrong or Mr. Maybe" (38). She also states that "the quest for self-definition and the balance of work with social interaction is given equal or more attention than the relationship conflict" (38). In chick lit, the focus shifts to the heroine and her identity rather than the heroine's search for a perfect man. Harzewski indicates that "chick lit virtually jettisons the figure of the heterosexual hero" (Harzewski 38). A close attention is given to the heroine's friends instead.

According to Rochelle A. Mabry: "The communities portrayed in many chick-culture texts are equally as important as the romantic relationship – sometimes arguably more important" (Mabry 202). To illustrate her point, Mabry refers to Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* where such friends are called "urban family" (202). Bridget and her "singleton friends are always available to offer each other support and advice" (202). The "urban family," according to Mabry: "often provides the emotional closeness and support expected from traditional nuclear family" (Mabry 202). In other words, the assistance and caring that the chick lit female protagonist fails to receive from her parents or her lover is compensated by her friends.

In contrast to chick lit female characters, the romance heroine seems to be lacking the relationships of a close friendship. Pamela Regis in *Natural History of the Romance Novel* does not reflect on the topic of friendship or family in her analysis of a contemporary romance heroine. Her analytical focus is "the heroine, the hero and the courtship itself" (Regis 111). Such is the focus of the romance novel and that is why any other topics are not analyzed in detail, as they can distract the attention from the issue of the union between the male and the female protagonist.

As far as the question of career is concerned, according to Lisa Witter and Lisa Chen "Women's economic clout is growing" (Witter, Chen 13). Increasing numbers of women commit themselves to careers and well-paid jobs. Moreover, Witter and Chen assert that "there are strong indications that women will continue to level the playing field with men as their income as a group continues to rise" (Witter, Chen 13). The interest in career becomes part of women's lives. As a result, the popular female genres such as romance and chick lit have to adapted the changes in their social lives and portray their female protagonists struggling with career related problems.

Pamela Regis claims that in popular twentieth-century romance novels the heroine is different from that in the traditional romance: “the heroine of the twentieth-century popular romance has the freedom she needs to pursue her own ends; the risk she needs to possess her own property, as well as the skills requisite to acquire that property herself” (Regis 111). Thus taken, a typical romance heroine would depend on Prince Charming for material and emotional well-being, however, the female protagonist of nowadays Harlequin romance is willing to provide for herself, she is free to seek a better paid job or even to embark on a career.

On the other hand, Stephanie Harzewski states that Harlequin heroines’ careers are short: “when the romantic plot begins to thicken, the heroine’s job that initially imbued her with glamour then becomes temporary” (Harzewski 39). Harzewski claims that as soon as the heroine’s job serves its role of uniting her with the man of a suitable status, it loses all the importance and is usually abandoned (39). Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff argue that “as soon as they decide to marry their heroes, the heroines magically have the courage to ditch their dead-end jobs and fulfill their dreams” (Gill, Herdieckerhoff 16). What Harzewski and Gill and Herdieckerhoff imply is that although romance female protagonist are pictured as able to provide for themselves and enjoy autonomous life, they are not interested in their career development. The career is used as a tool for “a romantic alliance with a man” (Gill, Herdieckerhoff 15).

Harzewski argues that such series as Harlequin Temptations extends into chick lit where the boss figure is the hero of the story (Harzewski 39). She holds that popular romance initiates career oriented heroines that were portrayed as “having crushes on or full-fledged affairs with their bosses or senior colleagues” (Harzewski 39). Thus, chick lit borrowed a plot-line from romance novels and developed it to a great extent. In general, chick lit characters are portrayed “as employed and committed to the idea of career” (Gill, Herdieckerhoff 15). According to Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young, there even appeared a subcategory of chick lit novels focusing more specifically on the work world (Ferris and Young 7). One of such novels is Lauren Weisberger’s *The Devil Wears Prada*. These novels, as Ferris and Young indicate, “treat the professional world as the ultimate chick lit challenge” (7). Ferris and Young also state that “many of these books portray women’s working conditions as demeaning and ultimately destructive” (7).

Nevertheless, Gill and Herdieckerhoff state that chick lit characters are never professionals and successful employees (Gill, Herdieckerhoff 16). Julliete Wells discusses that chick lit characters struggle in their jobs because of their “endearing faults” which makes them “more likeable than the characters around them” (Wells 32). For instance, she holds that “the heroine of *The Devil Wears Prada* [...] gains our sympathy by being far more humane than her selfish employer and makes mistakes only in interpreting her employers’ bizarre demands” (Wells 52).

According to Imelda Whelehan, they are illustrating the fact that “character flaws are a part of one’s unchangeable personal make-up” (Whelehan 175).

To conclude, the romance novel is usually built around the relationships between the male and the female protagonist. Therefore, other kinds of social relationships in the heroine’s life are not as fully developed. The male and the female protagonists are portrayed as active participants of the romance story. This is different in chick lit, since the lives of chick lit female protagonists are centered on their social spheres whereas their love for a particular man is just a part of it. Chick lit female protagonists are depicted in a more detailed way. In a humorous, ironic and casual manner chick lit novels picture their heroines’ “personal [...] social, and work worlds” (Harzewski 37). These three worlds are equally important as the female protagonist’s search for self-identity is the primary aim of most chick lit novels. Both romance and chick lit characters are usually represented as independent career women. Nevertheless, the female protagonists of neither of these genres seem to consider a career as the main priority in life. Romance female characters, for instance, leave their highly demanding jobs as soon as they unite with their male protagonists. Chick lit characters are not skilled and professional employees, but they are represented as having higher values than their unscrupulous employers. It is necessary that they make mistakes and misinterpret the orders given to them because then the reader is given a chance to identify with the protagonists and enjoy the common human faults.

3.1.1 The Treatment of Relationships as Represented by the Female Protagonists, Kelly and Andrea, as Untypical Representatives of Romance and Chick lit

The present discussion will focus on the analysis of Eve Gladstone’s *Between Two Moons* and Lauren Weisberger’s *The Devil Wears Prada*. Gladstone’s *Between Two Moons* is a Harlequin romance novel depicting white middle class female character, Kelly, in the contemporary New York. Weisberger’s *The Devil Wears Prada*, according to Madeira James, “was sold in thirty-one [foreign countries](#) and made into a major [motion picture](#) by Fox 2000, starring Meryl Streep and Anne Hathaway” (James). The novel portrays a young white middle class woman who moved from a small town to present-day New York. The discussion will proceed by analyzing Kelly and Andrea, as untypical representatives of romance and chick lit, regarding the treatment of relationships.

Kelly and Andrea are among the major characters of the novels. The protagonists bear several similarities in the way they view their careers. Andrea has a degree in journalism, and she gets a job for which “a million girls would die for” (Weisberger 30). She becomes an assistant for Miranda Priestly, successful editor of *Runway* magazine. When she starts to work in *Runway* her

way of life changes completely. She has little time for her boyfriend, friends and family, and she literally becomes absorbed by her work. At the onset of Eve Gladstone's novel *Between Two Moons*, Kelly is a successful thirty-one year old president of a most fashionable women's store, Lambs, situated in Manhattan. Most of Kelly's acquaintances are casual. Since she devotes most of her time to her career, she is still single and lonely. She meets Tony Campbell, the new owner of Lambs. Tony is an upper class British businessman with good manners and charismatic personality. Both characters fall in love the first time they meet, and their relationship becomes the focus of the story.

In contrast, Andrea's story is centered on her self-discovery rather than romantic relationships. The story is about a young girl placed in the big and powerful world of fashion. She realizes that the life of a wealthy, busy and tough career woman is not for her. At the end of the novel, after breaking up with her boyfriend but reuniting with her family and a best friend, Andrea chooses to work as a journalist in *Sixteen* magazine.

Kelly, similarly to Andrea, reaches a point when she has to make a decision. She can either continue working as a president of a store and fighting the new owner with whom she fell in love or she can stop fighting, acknowledge her love for him and let him be the new president. After serious consideration Kelly chooses to give up battling and follow her heart. She starts relationships with Tony, the protagonist of the story, which signifies their symbolically called "betrothal" (Regis 14). Then she decides to work at Job-Up program that helps poor teenagers to make a living. Just as Andrea, Kelly is happy with her choice. Now she has a lover and a job she always wanted to have.

By drawing on Andrea's story, Juliette Wells indicates that it is "built around the young heroine's relationship with her fashion magazine boss" (Wells 54). With regard to the fact that usually both "the love plot" and "the professional plot" are combined in most chick lit stories, Wells points out that "*The Devil Wears Prada* is rare among chick lit novels" (54). She claims that its distinctiveness is based on the fact that this novel focuses on the heroine's work life rather than love life (54). Andrea is depicted as a very ambitious character. For instance, before she applies for the position of an editor's assistant at *Runway* she admits the following: "Although I knew it was highly unlikely I'd get hired at *The New Yorker* directly out of school, I was determined to be writing for them before my fifth reunion" (Weisberger 11). In this way, according to Juliette Wells, "Andrea announces her literary ambition almost immediately" (Wells 58).

Kelly, in Gladstone's *Between Two Moons*, is also represented as exceptionally ambitious. For example, she talks about her father who wanted all of his children to be responsible for their lives: "He wanted us *in charge*. And we are in charge" (Gladstone 61, emphasis in the original). The ambitiousness and the independence are not typical features of the romance female protagonist. As it has already been mentioned, the female protagonists of romance novels are not successful

career women (Gill, Herdieckerhoff 15). In this regard, Kelly is different from the stereotypical romance female characters. Her life consists of various “business engagements and the social engagements that grew out of them” (Gladstone 248). As the treatment of career will be discussed in the following sub-section, here one should focus on the relationships that both ambitious protagonists are dealing with.

Since most of Kelly’s time is devoted to her career, her life is inevitably filled with superficial relationships: “the peck on the cheek, the gossipy lunches, concerts she scarcely heard because her mind tingled with the day’s events” (Gladstone 248). As a result, she does not have a close male or female friend. Neither does she have a strong connection with her family in Pennsylvania. The story mentions her mother, father and her two brothers. Kellie’s mother died when she was fourteen. Kelly remembers her mother many times in the story. She describes her as the opposite of her father, “a dreamer, a poet. [...] with sweet, dreamy face” (Gladstone 51, 62). Her father was strict with “rigid, self-righteous expression, that of a man who was absolutely certain of his opinions and his way of life” (Gladstone 51). He taught his children to “go ahead,” to “choose a field, excel in it and leave Pennsylvania [...] far behind” (51). The children followed their father’s advice. Kelly describes her siblings: “I’ve got a lawyer brother in California and a doctor brother in Chicago” (Gladstone 61). Kelly lives in New York and she does not have a close relationship with her brothers. Neither is she talking with her father. Her family is scattered and the reader is provided only with a glimpse of memories about Kellie’s childhood.

That is not the case with Andrea. Besides having tight relationships with her family she also has a family of friends or so called “urban family” that consists of a male friend and a female friend (Mabry 202). Andrea has a boyfriend Alex and a girlfriend Lily. The first day when she meets Lily, Andrea admits that “something about the way she talked [...] charmed me, and we immediately became friends” (Weisberger 83). She also says that they have been “inseparable through the rest of high school” and now they decided to be roommates in New York (Weisberger 58).

Lilly is represented as undisciplined and careless. Moreover, her disorderly behavior, which most of the time is the consequence of her alcohol addiction, even breaks the social norms. Andrea states that Lily is a type of girl who goes out with “different guys almost every night” and she sleeps with plenty of them as well (Weisberger 67, 126). Though Andrea and Lilly are different in character, they are close friends and supportive to each other. This reminds us of Rochelle Mabry’s statement that the chick lit heroine and “her singleton friends are always available to offer each other support and (sometimes comically misguided) advice” (Mabry 202).

Speaking about Andrea’s boyfriend Alex, she has been dating him “since junior year at the Brown” (Weisberger 24). Alex is a good-hearted guy who is eager to teach the city’s underprivileged school children. Since Andrea and Alex are together for almost three years, they

know each other quite well and share common experience which is the basis of their close relationships. One can call them both good friends and a couple. Andrea describes Alex as follows:

I knew every inflection of his voice, every look, every signal. [...] Alex was so understanding, so sweet, so available, that I'd begun to take for granted that he'd always be around to listen or talk me down after a long day or cheer me up when everyone else had felt free to take a swing. (Weisberger 286)

This statement indicates that Alex is a kind, warm-hearted, sweet and attentive boyfriend. He is the one who cares about Andrea and shows his support. Yet, Andrea stops giving him as much attention as she used to as soon as she starts to work as an assistant to Miranda Priestley.

The same happens with her family. Before the job at *Runway* she is represented as having close relationships with her family members: mother, father and her sister. She looks forward to a thanksgiving day with them. When she visits her parents house in the small town of Connecticut, she confesses the following: "I found myself looking forward to the next forty-eight hours with my family [...]. Thanksgiving was my favorite holiday, and this year I was set to enjoy it more than ever" (Weisberger 73).

Kelly does not have other relatives or close friends. Her story is then centered on the relationships between her and her hero Tony whom she meets at a party. As they talk, he persuades her to go for a walk. Kelly enjoys their peaceful walk, and when they sit on the bench she falls asleep: "the feel of his arms around her had been so natural, so calming, that she had instantly fallen asleep" (Gladstone 41). After this evening Kelly remembers his face: his light hair, strong chin, a decided cleft, a dimple, the color of his eyes (Gladstone 41). Tony thinks about Kelly as someone who "was making him see things in a new way, and was curling into his mind in a way that might be impossible to dislodge" (Gladstone 79). This point of the plot could be regarded as one of the narrative elements suggested by Pamela Regis as "hero and heroines attraction for each other" (Regis 14).

Later in the story Kelly realizes that Tony bought her shopping center, Lambs, and that she is now under his power. Tony's plan to reconstruct the building is the point of "the barrier" between the male and the female protagonist because Kelly cannot agree with the fact that the real estate can be put to sale (Regis 14). She sees the Lambs as "unique because of its location [...] and because the building is old and has nooks and crannies, small corners and hidden places, an intimate cozy atmosphere" (Gladstone 135). That is why she starts to treat Tony as her enemy: "He'd been at the back of her mind all week. [...] but now they were enemies" (Gladstone 130). Tania Modleski points out rebelliousness as one of the important features of the romance heroine, she says that "at times [she] wishes to be able to compete with him [the male protagonist]" (Modleski 29). Radway

argues that such rebellious female characters were a result of feminist movements as they embody “female sponsored fantasies” that refuse to be silenced by “the male desire to control women” (Radway 124). Kelly fights the feeling for Tony Campbell convincing herself that “in the world of business they were doing battle” (Gladstone 183). As Modleski indicates, the heroine’s rebelliousness is necessary because it evokes a gradual and fundamental transformation from hostility to the attachment and attraction to the male partner (Modleski 30).

At the end of the novel when the crisis of their relationships reaches climax, both lovers come to the point where they declare that they love each other. Their “betrothal” is signified by the wish of the female protagonist to give up her career and start working as the administrator with Job-Up: “I want to take kids who start life with no hope and help them with their dreams” (Gladstone 301; Regis 14). This reminds us Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff’s description of the romance narrative progressing through “hostility, separation and reconciliation which brings with it the transformation of a man [...] and a new sense of social identity for the female protagonist” (Gill, Herdieckerhoff 4). In Gladstone’s *Between two Moons*, both female and male protagonists are transformed. A very ambitious and busy heroine abandons her career and takes maybe a less prestigious but more fulfilling job. Whereas an extremely charming and charismatic hero, who “was brought up to collect and discard women like trophies,” is transformed into a man who wants to spend the rest of his life with Kelly (Gladstone 240). In this respect, Tony is quite similar to “an alpha male” represented by Regis (Regis 112). Similarly to an “alpha male” Tony is “tamed” by Kelly and that is why he regards courtship as a serious action to get the woman he respects and loves (Regis 114).

In contrast to Kellie, Andrea does not have a male protagonist. As to be more specific, there are two men that court Andrea: her boyfriend Alex and Christian Collinsworth. As far as her boyfriend is concerned, when Andrea takes a new job her “never-ending work emergencies” consumes her so much that she has no time for him any more (Weisberger 286). Therefore, Alex decides to break up with her: “I feel like I don’t even know you any more. I think we need a break” (Weisberger 286). After the break they never get together again.

Christian Collinsworth, is a well-known writer. He meets Andrea at one of Miranda’s parties, and Andrea is particularly charmed by the fact that she is talking with a famous writer: “The critics had gone crazy over his first book. [...] The guy was some big-time author – what the hell did he want with me, anyway? (Weisberger 119). Moreover, few days later Christian decides to ask her for a date: “Christian Collinsworth was asking me on a date. [...] I hadn’t been asked on a date by anyone other than Alex in three years” (Weisberger 148). Their brief relationship comes to a climax in one of the parties where Andrea agrees to dance with him and as they dance Andrea feels captured by his charm: “He smelled of masculine, preppy cologne [...]. His hips moved naturally to

the music [...] we just moved together all over the makeshift dance floor, and he sang quietly in my ear” (Weisberger 324). At that particular moment, Andrea is seduced: she smells Christian’s masculine perfume, she loses the awareness of other people around her and she thinks only about Christian.

Since Andrea is still in relationships with Alex she also knows that now she is not loyal to him: “somewhere in the deep recesses of my mind, there was a tiny but insistent reminder that this body against me is not Alex” (324). However, romantic relationships between Andrea and Christian are short and they do not go further than an intimate dance. They finish after Andrea leaves her job. According to Harzewski, the male protagonists in chick lit novels perform a “shadowy presence,” thus Alex and Christian could also serve as examples of such male characters that are necessary only to reveal the “self-quest” of the female protagonist (Harzewski 38).

Taken in this manner, it may be relevant to refer to Juliette Wells who states that, “*The Devil Wears Prada* is rare among chick lit novels, however, in focusing as fully and vividly on the heroine’s work life as on her love life” (Wells 54). This novel is not a typical chick lit novel since there is no Mr. Right that Andrea is looking for and there is no man that makes a particular influence to leave the unbearable job. Andrea gives up her career because it involves too much to sacrifice: “young girl gets super caught up in achieving something and ends up screwing all the people who matter in her life” (Weisberger 354). Her decision to leave the job is based on the need to be with her family and her friends again. Andrea reminds us of Harzewski’s idea who indicates that sometimes work and social life is given more importance in chick lit novels than relationships with the hero (Harzewski 38). The quest for a perfect man in Andrea’s story is excluded, the focus of the story is Andrea herself and her identity.

In conclusion, both Kelly and Andrea are represented as ambitious and career driven female protagonists. They become entangled in their top jobs, and this has a negative effect on their relationships. Kellie’s career is the reason why she cannot be together with Tony, the male protagonist. Andrea’s career is the reason why she breaks up with the long time boyfriend Alex, abandons her best friend Lilly, and stops visiting her family. At the end of the novels both females leave their high-powered jobs and come back to maintain their strained relationships. As Whelehan has it, even in such new genres as chick lit: “women are still positioned as the makers of relationships” (Whelehan 183). In this manner, Andrea comes back home to Connecticut, starts to live with her family and pursues her dream to be a writer. Kelly is happy to unite with Tony and let him handle the big shop that she used to handle for many years. Now she is more comfortable with the idea of helping to find jobs for teenagers.

3.1.2 The Treatment of Career as Represented by the Female Protagonists, Kelly and Andrea, as Untypical Representatives of Romance and Chick lit

Kelly and Andrea are quite stubborn and determined characters. Both of them try to pursue their dreams to become respected career women, and to live an exciting life surrounded by crowds of important people. As a teenager, Kelly imagines herself “sitting in one of the world’s great concert houses dressed [...] in a glamorous gown and in the company of elegant men and women” (Gladstone 248). Andrea dreams “to get hired at *The New Yorker*” (Weisberger 11). Since she knows she will not be employed in a famous weekly magazine without any experience in publishing, she wants to find a job that would lead her to *The New Yorker*. Andrea strives to reach her ambitious future goals by deciding to work for Miranda Priestly. There are similarities and differences in the way both characters treat their careers and in the way they correspond to the chick lit and the romance genre conventions. The following analysis will discuss Kelly and Andrea as not typical romance and chick lit protagonists as regards their career.

As it has already been mentioned both stories give most of the prominence to the world of work. Which is why they can be regarded as slightly distinctive if compared with the most romance and chick lit novels. The major action of the stories is performed at the work place. Kelly is represented as the president of women’s “favorite shopping emporium” in Manhattan (Gladstone 18). This store is big and famous surrounded by “five-story buildings on either side” and Kelly admires those buildings, she calls them “unique [...] like Romeo and Juliet, the sum of its parts” (Gladstone 156, 131). As a president of Lambs, Kelly handles her job very professionally. She is called as someone who “have a penchant for being so correct,” “workaholic” and who always supposed to know and tell “how to wear hair and what clothes to buy” (Gladstone 19, 95, 17). Kelly is a “single successful career women” and her “work consumed her life twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week” (Gladstone 41, 248). Her career made her into a woman who attended “charity balls, private dinner parties, the opera, the ballet, concerts” (Gladstone 41). Now she has all she was dreaming about when she was a teenager.

In this way Kelly resembles “the heroine of the twentieth-century popular romance” represented by Pamela Regis (Regis 111). Kelly is a heroine of Harlequin romance who “has the freedom she needs to pursue her own ends; the risk she needs to possess her own property, as well as the skills requisite to acquire that property herself” (Regis 111). Coming from a poor family she has been taught “to be in charge” of her life by her father and her life and career is, as she says, “everything I worked hard for” (Gladstone 61; 101).

Andrea just as Kelly gets a job in the fashion industry. However, unlike Kelly, she knows nothing about fashion. When Andrea enters *Runway* headquarters for a job interview, she

understands that she does not belong in this place. For instance, Andrea says that “my clothes and hair were wrong for sure, but more glaringly out of place was my attitude. I didn’t know anything about fashion and I didn’t care” (Weisberger 21). Although she perceives herself as someone who wears inconsistent attire and has the wrong approach, she starts to desire a job even more. Andrea admits that “it was at this point that I began to want the job most desperately, in the way people yearn for things they consider unattainable” (Weisberger 21). The fact that she is indifferent to fashion, which is why she might not be accepted, implies that Andrea takes it as a challenge to get the job. Her “starved-for-success mind” urges her to take a step to be the assistant to Miranda Priestly, “the high-profile, fabulously successful editor of *Runway* magazine” (Weisberger 360). Finally, the interview goes well: “I knew I had the job” (Weisberger 22).

As mentioned, Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young claim that Weisberger’s *The Devil Wears Prada* is one of those rare chick lit novels that focus on the “work world” and “portray women’s working conditions as demeaning and ultimately destructive” (Ferriss and Young 7). According to Juliette Wells, Andrea is represented as a good worker who is “far more humane than her selfish employer” (Wells 52). Her misinterpretations of employer’s commands are usually depicted in a humorous manner which makes Andrea’s character comical and more realistic. According to Emma Anderson, who analyses the style of the language used in chick lit: “humor is in all chick lit novels. [...] It is created through the farcical nature of the circumstances the protagonist finds herself in” (Anderson 8). Many times in the novel Andrea has to face bizarre orders of her boss Miranda and the way she describes them and handles them is pictured in the “witty self-deprecating” manner (Anderson 8).

For instance, Andrea depicts Miranda’s orders as follows:

Every night, without exception, Miranda would leave eight to ten ambiguous messages for us between the hours of one and six in the morning. Things like, “Cassidy wants one of those nylon bags all the little girls are carrying. Order her one in the medium size and a color she’d like,” and “I’ll be needing the address and phone number of that antique store in the seventies, the one where I saw the vintage dress.” As though we knew which nylon bags were all the rage among ten-year-olds or at which one of four hundred antique stores in the seventies – east or west, by the way? – she happened to spot something she liked at some point in the past fifteen years. But each morning I faithfully listened to and transcribed those messages, hitting “replay” over and over and over again, trying to make sense of the accent and interpreted the clues in order to avoid asking Miranda directly for more information. (Weisberger 132)

In the quoted excerpt one is represented with two strange and confusing orders: to buy a nylon bag for Miranda’s daughter Cassidy, making sure that it is of the color she likes and to find an address of the antique store where Miranda has seen the vintage dress. Moreover, it is usually eight to ten

such orders that Andrea finds each morning and struggles to interpret them. It should be pointed out that Andrea is not allowed to question Miranda. Such is an unquestionable rule to all the workers of *Runway*. That could be the reason why it takes much more time, efforts and cheerful misunderstandings to fulfill these demands. Due to the failure of interpreting the unusual commands of Miranda Priestly, Andrea is similar to a typical chick lit character who, according to Juliette Wells, struggles in her job because of her “endearing faults” which makes her “more likeable than the characters around” (Wells 32).

It must be taken into consideration that Kellie’s position is different. She is not an assistant but the president of the shop. This suggests that she is not struggling with her job matters the way Andrea does. Despite the “success she had attained” Kelly still feels that there is something lacking in her life (Gladstone 248). She is described in the following manner:

She thought of the measure of success she has attained, and the price she was paying for it. [...] She’d thought she was filling her life with important work, but now wondered whether her work was a subterfuge, an excuse for not living like other people, for not allowing things to reach her on a personal level. The truth was that while running herself ragged she didn’t have the time to make personal decisions, even a decision about whether to take a lover or whether a relationship with a man could be serious for a while, even if the future didn’t look promising. (Gladstone 249)

Kelly is unsatisfied about the sacrifice she has to make in order to achieve such a remarkable success. Although she has her work and responsibilities that keep her busy, she still misses something on a more personal level. Most likely it is a need to have close relationships with the male protagonist, Tony Cambell. Even though she has enough money, respect and power, Kelly is not complete without him in her life. As it was mentioned in the previous sub-section, Kellie’s career becomes a hindrance to their relationships because Kelly decides to fight Tony as a new owner of her store. Only at the very end when their relationship crisis is resolved Kelly announces that she is leaving the job. She passes her position as a manager into the hero’s, Tony’s, hands. Taken in this manner, the ending of the story follows the romance genre conventions. According to Stephanie Harzewski, romance novels usually represent the heroine who decides to marry her hero, to quit her “dead-end” job and to pursue her dreams (Gill, Herdieckerhoff 16).

Andrea leaves her job for quite different reasons, if compared to Kelly. Besides the fact that her busy life takes the free time that she could share with friends and family she also experiences constant humiliation by her boss. Unbearable tasks and strange requirements if not done properly are followed by offensive remarks. As for instance, when Miranda realizes that her daughter’s passports have expired, she starts to overreact and blame Andrea for such a misunderstanding in the following way:

“Ahn-dre-ah, *You* have a very serious problem. [...] the twins’ passports expired last week.”

“Oh, really?” was all I could manage, but that clearly wasn’t the right response. [...] her eyes began to bulge with anger.

“*Oh, really?*” she mimicked in a hyena-like howl. People were beginning to stare at us. “Oh really? That’s all you have to say? ‘Oh really?’”

“No, uh, of course not, Miranda. [...] Is there something I can do to help?”

“*Is there something I can do to help?*” she mimicked again, this time in a whiny child’s voice. If she had been any other person on earth, I would have reached out and slapped her face. “You damn well better believe it, Ahn-dre-ah. Since you’re clearly unable to stay on top of these things in advance, you’ll need to figure out how to renew them [...].” (Weisberger 341; emphasis in the original)

In the above excerpt Miranda is blaming Andrea and humiliating her publicly in a disrespectful manner. It is hard to understand how expired passports are Andrea’s fault in general since there are “two parents, a step-father, and a full-time nanny to oversee such things” (341). This example reflects Juliette Wells’s idea that “*The Devil Wears Prada* is full of criticism of its heroine’s working conditions” (Wells 66). The fact that Andrea leaves the job is also related to Andrea’s reconsideration of self-respect. According to Wells, *The Devil Wears Prada* illustrates the heroine’s realization that “she must walk away from her job to keep her self-respect” (Wells 66). The last point that causes her to make the final decision to escape Miranda’s traps is the fear of becoming like her “boss from hell” as called by Kate Betts (Betts). Standing in the back of the room with Miranda Andrea reflects the following: “So, maybe, just maybe, I, too could be sitting at this very same event thirty years from now, accompanied only by an assistant who loathes me, surrounded by armies of people who pretend they like me because they have to” (Weisberger 341). This was the last thought that influences Andrea to call her mom in Miranda’s presence to say that she is coming back home. Andrea’s self-discovery and self-definition also plays an important role in leaving the job. Andrea can be regarded as a chick lit character whose relationships with a female boss Miranda reveals her “quest for self-definition” and makes her more mature as she decides to prioritize family values rather than a need to have a high salary and a respectful job.

In conclusion, both Kelly and Andrea are very career-oriented female characters, which is not a common feature among typical representatives of the heroine in romance and chick lit genres. At the beginning of both stories the female protagonists are dreaming about well-paid job positions and a glamorous career life. However, throughout the course of the novels they are made to discover that money and fancy business meetings are not what they really want. Andrea’s struggle with the misleading commands of Miranda Priestly brings her to a point where she decides to regain her self-respect. The idea of becoming like her unscrupulous boss Miranda inspires to re-evaluate her priorities. Andrea’s new job can be considered as a test of her values and a way to her

maturation. Kelly, in this respect, accomplishes a very successful career but her unhappiness is based on the fact that she is lonely. In the midst of superficial relationships and artificial smiles, she is longing for the real feelings of love and affection. These and other desires are fulfilled after she starts a loving relationship with the male protagonist Tony. Andrea and Kelly, although they are not typical protagonists of chick lit and romance, adhere to the main features of the genres: both characters prove that chick lit is more centered on the woman's self-definition while romance is showing that true self-determination can be found "through a romantic alliance with a man" (Gill, Herdieckerhoff 15).

3.2 THE TREATMENT OF SEXUALITY IN ROMANCE AND CHICK LIT

The present section analyses the similarities and differences between the literary genres of romance and chick lit as regards the treatment of sexuality in those genres. Adeilaide and Kurt Hass reflect on the first decades of the twentieth century. They claim that after Sigmund Freud and Henry Havelock Ellis had announced that women indeed have sexual desires and "dispelled the punishing misconception of Victorianism" many studies had been made to explore woman's sexuality (Haas 21). This part of the paper will continue to explore it by looking at the most popular female genres considering the ways they approach female sexuality through the main characters.

Considering sexual desire represented in contemporary romances, Merja Makinen asserts that there appeared two sub-genres of romance at the turn of the century: "a strand that presented love as semi-religious fervor, and a strand that celebrated the more sensual passions" (Makinen 25). According to Janice Radway, at the time the romance genre developed more open and explicit sexual scenes it became a "site of struggle of feminine subjectivity and sexuality" (Radway 213; in Glenwood). Carol Thurston points out at the importance of sexually explicit romances as follows:

These new romances mark the first appearance of a large and coherent body of sexual literature for women, providing the opportunity to learn to use sexual fantasy and to explore an aspect of their identities that patriarchal society has long denied women. (Thurston quoted in Radway 224)

In other words, the new strand of romances with more open sexual passions had introduced a more active sexuality and allowed women to freely explore their identities. Thurston claims that these stories can be called feminist because "they attempt to imagine a highly elaborated version of feminine sexuality in which the entire body is eroticized and even conversation is libidinally charged" (224).

Janet Batsleer suggests that "some, though not all, romances are sexually explicit" and she states that "there is a clear and strong sexual division in the industry and conventions of sexual

fantasy: romance for women, pornography for men” (Batsleer 99). In fact, according to Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff: “Many commentators have drawn analogies between romances and pornography” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 4). Such an analogy is made for two main reasons. First, according to Gill and Herdieckerhoff: “romantic novels fetishise particular emotions in the way that pornography fetishises particular body parts and positions” (4). In the similar manner, Batsleer claims that it all depends on the structuring and repetition of “thrills of delight” (4). What Gill, Herdieckerhoff and Batsleer might be indicating is that romances contain certain sexual fantasy that is hidden in emotions of the anticipation for the happy ending “followed, in imagination or on the page, by kiss and penetration” (Batsleer 99). To put it otherwise, it is the emotion that is sexualized in romance. As Janice Radway holds, female sexuality is “tactile, verbal, intimate, nurturant, process oriented” (Radway 66). She also notes that in some romances there is no sexual description but sexual feeling, sex scenes are suggested rather than started (Radway 69).

The second reason why an analogy between romance and pornography holds is that, according to Gill and Herdieckerhoff: “both heterosexual pornography and romantic fiction eroticize the power relations between the sexes, in this way making them both palatable and pleasurable” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 4). Janet Batsleer asserts that “the desire that romance structures [...] is exclusively heterosexual, patriarchal, sado-masochistic” (Batsleer 99.). By sado-masochistic Batsleer implies that the dominant sexual relationship reflected in romance novels is the one between man and woman, “in which pleasure is the result of masculine activity and feminine dependence and passivity” (Batsleer 99). Radway also states that female sexuality is inclined to monogamy (Radway 66). In romance sexual relationships are represented as based on traditional gender roles: man is active while woman is passive.

Batsleer claims that “the man is the teacher, the woman his willing pupil. Women’s sexuality must be awakened” (Batsleer 100). Gill and Herdieckerhoff state that “in traditional romances the typical heroine is characterized by sexual innocence and passivity. Usually, this means she is a virgin” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 13). The heroine is in need of an experienced hero to awaken her sexuality. In this connection, Batsleer states that “women must come to their husbands as virgins, while men may, indeed, should be sexually adventurous and experienced in order to awaken the sexuality of their virgin brides” (Batsleer 103). The fact that the female protagonist is “sexually innocent” does not suggest that she lacks sexual desires. On the contrary, Gill and Herdieckerhoff point out that “she lies to hide her desire and always tries to cover up any signs of sexual interest [...] She may want sex, but within the codes of romance, she can only have it if she is seduced” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 13). Thus taken, it may be indicated that the man is in control of woman’s passions. The female protagonist does not have power over them and cannot

freely express them. For instance, she can not have any other sexual relationships except the ones with the male protagonist.

As it is commonly believed, romance novels emphasize the romantic love which, according to Haas, had been enhanced by the movement of Romanticism that brought emphasis on “the non-physical, spiritual, and ideal aspects of love and sexuality” (Haas 16). Haas further explains that Romanticism idealized love, centered on emotion and imagination and claimed the idea that there is “a one woman right for just one man” (Haas 16). The romance genre still supports such a view in some ways and one of these ways may be illustrated by the spiritualization of sexuality. Batsleer claims that the “transference from outer to inner, from physical to spiritual, is basic to romance. The hero must distinguish himself from the other men in the story, rescuing the heroine for a more sacred kind of lust” (Batsleer 100). What Batsleer may be suggesting is the idea that sexuality in romance transcends the physicality of two bodies and indicates the unity of two hearts, minds and souls. What is more, Batsleer states that for a heroine a sexual act signifies “a transcendental spiritual union like death” (Batsleer 100).

Chick lit reveals quite a different approach to woman’s sexuality. In fact, it is a complete opposite to that represented in romance novels. Gill and Herdieckerhoff quote Jemima Jones who states that “far from being virginal most of the heroines are sexually experienced describing themselves as a great lay or as able to sit here reading about oral, anal, sucking, fucking or casually engaging in one night stands” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 13 quotes Jemima J.: 60). Furthermore, Emma Anderson holds the following: “Not only did the characters confront or engage in these sexual practices, they spoke openly and explicitly about them with each other” (Anderson 33).

It can be noted that chick lit female characters give free reign to their own desires and are free to choose to satisfy them or not. According to Rochelle Mabry: “in these novels, sex becomes a way for the woman to explore her own identity and express her own desires, rather than merely part of a single romance narrative that emphasizes traditional gender roles” (Mabry 200). All of the above mentioned critics state that this particular treatment of sexuality is conditioned by the fact that chick lit portrays the female protagonist engaging in many sexual relations. This is partly because chick lit novels do not focus on the love plot but centers on the woman’s self-definition.

In addition, the way chick lit represents sexuality suggests quite an extreme shift from traditional gender roles. Candace Bushnell introduces this change in the following way: “We were hard and proud of it, and it hadn’t been easy getting to this singular position – this place of complete independence where we had the luxury of treating men like sex objects” (Bushnell quoted in Kiernan 209). Bushnell’s statement indicates a rejection of a submissive and passive female character who is usually treated as a sex object and a turn to a new type of a female protagonist who enjoys the freedom to relegate men to the status of objects.

On the other hand, the liberated view towards sex exercised by chick lit does not concern the female and the male protagonist. Their sexual relationships are different than the ones between the female protagonist and other male characters. Gill and Herdieckerhoff explain it as follows:

Interestingly, whatever their degree of sexual experience, heroines are frequently 're-virginised' in the narrative when it comes to the encounter with their hero. With him, they return to what we might characterise as an emotionally virginal state, which wipes away previous 'sully' experiences by making them enjoy sex fully for the very first time, or which allows them to 'admit' their sexual timidity or inexperience after previously having boasted about their sexual expertise. (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 13)

Drawing on Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff it may be assumed that chick lit heroines have points of intersection with the traditional femininity as far as their relationships to the heroes are concerned. For instance, during the sexual intercourse they enjoy an emotional return to the "virginal state" which suggests sexual pleasure that they have never felt, although they had experience with their past lovers (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 13). The "virginal state" may also remind us the sexual union between the romance heroine and the hero; the union that is based on traditionally perceived passivity of a woman and activity of a man (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 13). In addition, chick lit is similar to romance as both of the genres emphasize the "specialness of the sexual encounter between hero and heroine" (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 14). Emma Anderson states that, when chick lit heroines talk about their sexual encounters with other men, they tend to use "humorously crude language. [...] Yet when in the midst of a romantic encounter with the hero, romantic cliché is used" (Anderson 74). Anderson illustrates that "an intimate encounter with the hero contains various traditional symbols of romance, including champagne and fourposter bed, and a euphemism is used to describe the sexual act" (Anderson 74).

In conclusion, contemporary romances vary in terms of the representation of sex scenes but what all of them have is the emotion and thrill. The actions, looks or conversations can be sexually suggestive and emotionally charged. This is what Janet Batsleer call "female pornography" (Batsleer 99). The typical female character of the romance novel is usually a pure and innocent heroine waiting for a strong masculine hero. When such a hero appears the female is ready to embark on a journey to her own sexuality. Sexually experienced male protagonist seduces the virgin female protagonist and awakens her sexuality. The sexual union between the two characters is based on the stereotypical power relations. Furthermore, it is also a symbol of the higher more mature form of love. The female characters of chick lit are far from being sexually innocent. On the contrary, Candace Bushnell's heroines redefine female sexuality as something that does not need to be controlled and concentrated upon one man. Such an active sexual matter represents a departure

from traditional gender roles. It reveals women's freedom to express their sexual desires rather than repress them. Still, both romance and chick lit seem to lay great importance on the sexual intercourse between the female and the male protagonist. In chick lit, for instance, the sexual encounter between the female and the male protagonist is described in romanticized language and their first sexually intimate experience is so special that it returns the female protagonist to an emotionally virginal state.

3.2.1 The Treatment of Sexuality as Represented by the Female Protagonists, Polly and Ashling, as Typical Representatives of Romance and Chick lit

The present analysis will apply the above reflected theoretical tenets to Lynne Graham's *An Arabian Courtship* and Marian Keyes's *Sushi for Beginners*. Graham's *An Arabian Courtship* is a Harlequin romance novel depicting white middle class female character Polly at the modern times of London. Keyes's *Sushi for Beginners* is a contemporary chick lit novel that represents white middle class women's lives in the present-day Dublin. The discussion will proceed by analyzing two female characters, Polly and Ashling, as typical representatives of romance and chick lit regarding the treatment of sexuality.

Polly in Graham's *An Arabian Courtship* and Ashling in Keyes's *Sushi for Beginners* are the protagonists of the two novels. Both characters are quite different in terms of their age, job and their relationships with friends and family. At the beginning of the novel Polly still lives with her parents, two sisters and a small brother. She is in her twenties. There is nothing mentioned about her job; neither is there any hint about her friends. At the onset of the novel a limousine stops near Polly's house and, in that limousine, there arises the prince Raschid, her future husband, by implication, the hero of the romance. Polly has never met him and is forced to marry Raschid due to financial difficulties of her family. At the end of the story it becomes clear that the marriage has been arranged successfully. Polly and Rachid become lifelong partners.

At the onset of Marian Keyes's novel *Sushi for Beginners*, Ashling is jobless and lonely. She lives alone in a rented apartment. She has two friends: a female friend, Joy, and a male friend, Ted. Ashling is older than Polly, she is in her thirties. As the novel develops, Ashling finds a job: she becomes an assistant to the editor of a women's magazine. In contrast to the character of Polly who meets her hero at the beginning of the novel, Ashling discovers her hero, Jack Devine, much later in the book. Before that the reader is left to guess who is going to be "the One" for Ashling.

The way Polly and Ashling are portrayed in the two novels allow us to characterize them as typical female protagonists of romance and chick lit. As Rosalinda Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff hold: "[romance] stories are constructed around the series of obstacles that must be overcome in

order for the hero and the heroine to fall in love” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 3, 4). These “series of obstacles” seem to be present from the very moment Polly is introduced in the story since she is forced to marry and love a man she had never met before. As far as Ashling is concerned, she is a typical representative of a chick lit heroine defined by the Web site of the chick lit fans in Britain (Carol Memmott). As for instance, Ashling is in her thirties, living in Dublin, engaging in various relationships with men, and struggling over her career in publishing.

Considering the treatment of sexuality as represented by the character of Polly, it can be stated that Polly adheres to the above discussed theoretical tenets about the typical romance heroine. First of all, she is a woman whose sexuality has to be awakened. Intending to train as a librarian Polly has been “quiet and studious” (Graham 12). She is described as the character who had experienced painful teenage years: “A late bloomer, she had been a podgy ugly duckling in her slim and beautiful mother’s eyes. She had been further cursed by shyness in a family where only extroverts were admired” (Graham 12, 13). The fairytale of “ugly duckling” promises further development along the same lines and a “cursed shyness” signifies a very feminine feature (Graham 12, 13). In her later years Polly “blossomed into a slender young woman” and her perceived shyness prevented her from intimate relationships with other men. (Graham 12). For instance, “she has scrupulously avoided dating” at the first years of the university and the dates she had in the later years “turned into disastrous grappling sessions concluded by resentful and bitter accusations that she was frigid and abnormal” (Graham 12). It may be assumed that the dates she used to have were usually unsuccessful and never actually developed into serious relationships.

Prince Raschid is the only man who uncovers the woman in her. For instance, the first time she sees him is revealed as follows:

Reluctantly, fearfully, she looked up. Some treacherously feminine part of her was seized by an almost voyeuristic fascination. He was superbly built, dramatically good looking. [...] High cheekbones intensified the aristocratic cast of his features. Sapphire-blue eyes were set beneath flaring dark brows, his pale golden skin stretched a savagely handsome bone structure. Up close he was simply breath taking. [...] Polly sensed a contradictory dark and compelling animal vibrancy. He had the unstudied allure of a glossy hunting cheetah, naturally beautiful, naturally deadly (Graham 17).

As introduced in the extract above, the language that is used denotes Polly’s fascination with the extremely handsome Arab prince. She is represented as watching him with a “voyeuristic fascination,” – a passive action involving the single act of observing (17). The prince is perceived as “superbly built” and “dramatically good looking,” his bone structure is “savagely handsome.” Polly’s “voyeuristic fascination” betrays how greatly she admires the prince from their very first

meeting. Finally, Raschid is compared to an animal: “glossy hunting cheetah” (Graham 17). The image of a hunting animal can be associated with activity since hunting itself is a masculine act while the aspect of watching is related to passivity. The notions of activity and passivity are stereotypically associated with man and woman. In this novel Polly’s passivity illustrates her femininity and Raschid’s activity marks him as masculine. He is pictured as a hunter who captures Polly with his enigmatic looks and comes to possess her as his wife.

After she becomes an official wife of Prince Raschid, Polly continues to avoid intimate relationships with her husband. However, the more she resists the harder it is to reject his touches that betray “an expert lover” (Graham 35). Polly’s sexual awakening is described in the following manner:

And Raschid taught her differently. Carelessly, easily, with the light touch and control of an expert lover, he had showed her what physical hunger was – a wanting, unreasoning ache without conscience, powerful enough to destroy every scruple. She was disgusted with herself. And dear heaven, she was like Jekyll and Hyde! Whatever she might have expected, it had not been that heart-stoppingly sensual persuasion which had effortlessly overcome her resistance. He bewildered her. (Graham 35)

Raschid unravels the part of Polly’s identity, her sexual sensual self that she herself was afraid to acknowledge. Polly is scared to admit that she has sexual desires, she describes them as “physical hunger [...] powerful enough to destroy every scruple” (Graham 35). She perceives them as darker forces of her personality thus comparing herself to Jekyll and Hyde. *Online Encyclopedia* defines the term of Jekyll and Hyde as “most often used to designate a two-faced person who alternates between a charming personality and one that is extremely unpleasant.” (*Online Encyclopedia*). Her comparison with Jekyll and Hyde reflects the secretive part of her personality that was hidden and unidentified.

It appears that she has never felt this way before, maybe because she has never been that close to a man. After the first sexual encounter with Raschid Polly is represented as follows: “in the mirror she looked the same, and yet she would never be the same again” (Graham 92). This reminds us of Janet Batsleer’s statement who holds that for a heroine a sexual act signifies “a transcendental spiritual union like death” (Batsleer 100). Through the first sexual act Polly undergoes a spiritual death to her old self and acknowledges the new self with sexual instincts and desires.

The fact that Polly is a virgin bride of Arab prince Raschid suggests us Batsleer’s idea that in romance “the man is the teacher, the woman is his willing pupil. Women’s sexuality must be awakened” (Batsleer 100). In this story Polly is the example of a female protagonist who discovers her sexuality and willingly learns to accept it with the help of her teacher and husband Raschid.

Furthermore, Gill and Herdieckerhoff state that “in traditional romances the typical heroine is characterized by sexual innocence and passivity” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 13). Graham’s description of the main character Raschid illustrates him as an experienced lover: “but on the level with that shockingly polished technique of his, her experience was nil” (Graham 34). His experience in sexual matters serves as a case in point. From this perspective, Rachid is the one who initiates sexual intimacy and plays an active part during the sexual act while Polly remains passive. Thus taken, it can be again stated that, according to Gill and Herdieckerhoff: “romantic fiction eroticizes the power relations between the sexes, in this way making them both palatable and pleasurable” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 4).

Ashling’s passivity of herself in relation to sexuality is quite different from innocent and studious character of Polly. Ashling is represented as having two quite serious relationships with other men before she meets the male protagonist of the story. The first is Phelim, the second is Marcus Valentine. She experiences sexual intimacy with both of them. As it is stated in the novel: “Phelim had been Ashling’s on-off boyfriend for five years” (Keyes 29). Since both of them kept ending and reuniting the relationships too many times, one day Ashling decides to leave him: “Phelim came home from Australia and expressed mild surprise when Ashling wouldn’t sleep with him” (Keyes 398). As she talks about the sexual relationships she experienced with him she says that: “the first time she’d had sex with Phelim it hadn’t set the world on fire” (Keyes 250). The best sexually intimate experience for Ashling happened “during making up with Phelim, when the joy of being reunited added an extra piquancy to an already compatible experience” (Keyes 250). Ashling leaves him because Phelim is not willing to make a “full-blown, grown-up commitment” (Keyes 29). After the end of their relationship Ashling stays single until she meets Marcus Valentine.

Marcus Valentine is a comedian who approaches her at a comedy show, asks her for a dance, and gives her a piece of paper. The paper contains his name, Marcus Valentine, his phone number and “the instruction *Bellez-moi!*” meaning - “call me!” (Keyes 35). That is the start of their relationships. However, already at the very beginning Ashling does not like Marcus Valentine’s “enthusiasm,” his “bright eyes,” his “lack of cynicism,” “freckles,” “keenness on her” and “his stupid name” (Keyes 120). Despite these disadvantages, Ashling admits that “he was charming and likable,” “baffled and vulnerable” and “he had a very nice body” (Keyes 120). The main reason why she starts dating him is, as she later admits, because she “falls foul of the man-on-a-stage rule” (Keyes 406). It suggests that she chooses to date him just because he is attractive and famous.

Ashling has erotic encounter with Marcus Valentine during their second date. Before that she was already thinking: “And what would sex with Marcus be like?” (Keyes 244). She also confesses to herself that “it felt too soon to go to bed with him, but to resist would seem old fashioned. She simply could not understand the ridiculous timidity that paralyzed her – she was

thirty-one years old, she'd sex with lots of men" (Keyes 249). The sex they have together is described as follows: "It certainly wasn't the worst sexual experience she'd ever had. And the best sex had always been slightly unreal" (Keyes 250).

Her relationships with both of the boyfriends serve to illustrate an earlier mentioned statement by Gill and Herdieckerhoff. They indicate that chick lit characters "far from being virginal [...] are sexually experienced" (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 13). Ashling distinguishes between good sexual experience and bad one. It seems that with Phelim she was sexually active. As for instance, she indicates that with him she experienced both good and bad times with regard to sexual intimacy. As far as Marcus Valentine is concerned, what she sees in him is his charming and likeable nature and his body. Ashling chooses to date him charmed by the fact that he is famous. There is little beyond simple attraction that she feels for Marcus. She is impatient to have more intimate relationships with him although she thinks it is too soon. The role of Marcus Valentine in the novel is to act as a body for Ashling, a means to satisfy her desires. Earlier mentioned Candace Bushnell statement serves as a case in point:

We were hard and proud of it, and it hadn't been easy getting to this singular position – this place of complete independence where we had the luxury of treating men like sex objects. (Bushnell quoted in Kiernan 209).

Ashling is an embodiment of women's freedom and their independence. This is expressed through many characters of today's popular literature and chick lit is one of the genres used to exercise active sexuality for women presenting them as active desiring sexual subjects.

By comparison, Ashling is radically different from the character of Polly. Polly is a virgin innocent heroine who shockingly discovers the nature of her sexuality in the embrace of the hero. It is the hero that introduces her to reality of sex. Ashling, however, is familiar with her sexual passions, she has sex with different men before she meets the hero.

The male characters, Phelim and Marcus, are used to represent Ashling, her identity, personality and her desires. According to Emma Anderson such characters "serve as foils to the eventual hero" (Anderson 55). As to be more specific, they do not satisfy Ashling, neither spiritually nor sexually and for that particular reason they are chosen to serve as sexual objects. When Ashling meets the male protagonist, Jack Devine, the same liberated view towards sex is suddenly shifted to more traditional gender roles. First of all, it must be taken into consideration that Jack Devine is Ashling's boss. He is the head of *Coleen* where Ashling works as the assistant of an editor. There is already a clear difference in terms of social status between two characters. Jack holds a higher position in social rank. Such power division corresponds to traditional gender roles that depict men as more powerful than women.

With regards to sexual relationships between Ashling and Jack Devine, this time Jack has an active role, he initiates the intimacy between them. When Ashling suffers from depression he tries to make her happy: “It was Jack Devine. He’d taken her out for a drink to celebrate her coming off Prozac” (Keyes 409). He invites her to his house, asks for dance lessons and offers eating Sushi lessons: “Maybe you’d come over to my house? You’d said you’d show me how to dance. [...] And I still think you’d like sushi, if you’d only trust me” (Keyes 412). As they eat Sushi together Jack feeds her:

“Ready?” He asked, lifting the sushi toward her.

For a moment she panicked. She wasn’t sure she was. Feeling as though she was opening more than just her mouth, she let him place the tiny bundle on her tongue. (Keyes 413)

During the act of feeding Jack Devine as usually is in his role of a leader and supervisor (he lifts the sushi towards her) while Ashling is the one who follows his orders (she opens her mouth). However, Ashling feels anxiety, she panics. The act of opening her mouth for him acquires many other implications such as letting him to seduce her. It may be indicated that Ashling is not thinking about sexual intimacy with Jack the way she did with Marcus Valentine. Therefore, she panics at the thought of getting too close to him. As they dance she cannot even look at him: “Ashling, would you please look at me?” The same Ashling who proudly admits that she has slept with many men before is now insecure and shy. This example reminds us of Janet Batsleer’s statement who argues that in romance novels the sexual pleasure is based on power relations where “pleasure is the result of masculine activity and feminine dependence and passivity” (Batsleer 99). In this case of chick lit it may be pointed out that in terms of sexuality between the male and the female protagonist chick lit repeats the conventions of the romance genre. In addition, sexual relationships between Ashling and Jack is a little similar to sexual relationships between Polly and Rachid as in both of them the male characters serve as seducers and the female characters are the seduced ones.

The evening finishes with two of them sharing sexually intimate moments together and these moments are described in much more detailed and romantic manner:

Upstairs on Jack’s freshly laundered bed he peeled her underwear off in slow motion. Inching it down and away from her with such tiny, languid movements that she thought she’d shriek. Finally, there were no more obstacles. [...] They slid themselves along each other and every touch, every gesture, was inquisitive and gentle. (Keyes 416)

The description of sexual intimacy between Ashling and Jack is careful, slow and musical. The choice of words emphasizes the romantic aspect of the moment. It again reminds us of Emma Anderson who indicates that “an intimate encounter with the hero contains various traditional symbols of romance” (Anderson 74). In fact, what has been mentioned above exemplifies Emma Anderson’s following insights:

Chick lit espouses a proactive sexuality for single modern women, but only to a point. It shies away from advocating that sexual permissiveness can lead to happiness or romantic relationships, and rather reverts to more traditionally gender oriented plotting to explore the more thematic concerns, thus sentencing the single modern woman of chick lit to contradiction. (Anderson 56)

Anderson points out that chick lit portrays a heroine who is sexually active but it also shows that “sexual permissiveness” is not the right way to long lasting romantic relationships (Anderson 56). What concerns the relationships between the female and the male protagonist, they are inevitably reverted to traditional gender roles and put to contradiction. No matter how much sexual freedom is expressed by the characters of chick lit “ideologically, women are still positioned as the makers of relationships, the people who need marriage and children” (Whelehan 183).

In conclusion, Polly and Ashling as typical romance and chick lit characters function to represent different approaches of female sexuality. Sexually pure and innocent Polly is an example of stereotypical femininity. She is the woman with unrecognized sexual desires that are awakened by the predominantly masculine male protagonist, Arab prince Raschid. By comparison, Ashling is far way from naive and submissive character of Polly. As she is aware of her sexual desires and needs, she embodies a female who enjoys greater sexual freedom. Nevertheless, Ashling’s liberated view about sex does not exist in relation to the male protagonist, Jack Devine. When she is with him she asserts his superiority, thus, acting as the one who follows his orders not only in the workplace. He feeds her, he kisses her and he initiates the sexual intimacy between them while Ashling gradually submits to his masculine power. Accordingly, in terms of the relationship between the female and the male protagonist, romance and chick lit represent similar attitude towards sexual pleasure, which is based on the power relations between both sexes.

3.3 THE TREATMENT OF CONSUMERIST CULTURE AND BEAUTY INDUSTRY IN ROMANCE AND CHICK LIT

The 1960s is significant in the industrial capitalist societies as, according to Dominic Strinati, “the economic needs of capitalism have shifted from production to consumption” (Strinati 235). This implies that the need for people to consume has become very important and resulted in

“the growth of consumer credit, the expansion of advertising, marketing, design and public relations” (Strinati 236). In fact, as Dominic Strinati has it: “Consumption is a field of feminist debates because women have been defined as the main group of consumers by advertising, by capitalist industries and by much cultural theory” (Strinati 217).

Hilary Fawcett holds that there has been a “collusion of post feminism with mainstream consumer culture in the excessive commodification of femininity” (Fawcett 95). She believes that the postfeminism with its consistent appeal to youth appeared quite comfortable for profit oriented manufacturers of diet pills, cosmetics, plastic surgery and women’s magazines. The images of young and beautiful women are a part of the consumerist culture that is oriented to increasing consumption. Therefore, it perverts the idea of femininity by turning it into a commodity which women are pressured to acquire by paying money. Angela McRobbie states that “femininity [...] exists as a product of a highly charged consumer culture which provides subject positions for girls and personal identities for them through consumption” (129 quoted in Fawcett 110).

One of the fields used to exercise the new femininity is media, particularly television and magazines. One of the influential women’s magazine is *Cosmopolitan*. According to David Gauntlett: “*Cosmopolitan* in its modern form had been launched in America in 1964 (Gauntlett 53). This magazine “was able to assert a strong sexual identity from the outset” (53). It asserted “women’s right to enjoy sex, and to talk about it” (53). Gauntlett states that “the cosmo woman is expected to be so many things: sexy, successful, glamorous, hard-working; sharp and relaxed in social settings, powerful and likeable at work” (Gauntlett 54). By extension, *Cosmopolitan* produces women (and men) consumers who aim to “have it all” (Black 153). Expanding on this, Paula Black states:

With freedom comes the pressure to succeed. By being part of the ‘can have it all’ generation, women felt that they were expected to ‘have it all’. [...] And this entails career, economic independence, property owning, sexual freedom and investment in a feminine appearance. (Black 153, 154)

“To have it all” means the freedom to achieve the above mentioned rewards, but together with the freedom comes a pressure to succeed in all of them. Such freedom of choice becomes a responsibility and is inseparable from the fear of failure. According to Briel Nichole Naugle: “In a society where women are expected to ‘have it all’ (a career, a family, an adoring husband, and an active sex life), women who don’t live up to society’s notions of perfection are made to feel like failures” (Naugle 10). Susan Douglas sees this notion of “having it all” “as a triumph of the capitalists, managing to turn feminism into something narcissistic which you have to spend lots of money on – in line with L’Oreal’s ‘Because I’m worth it!’” (Douglas quoted in Gauntlett 54). As

stated by Caroline Smith chick lit “often presents the readers of their texts with critiques of women’s manuals. [They] satirize female, consumer behavior in their novels in order to question the consumer ideologies being offered by women’s magazines” (Smith 47). Smith explains that chick lit authors question how realistic the advice presented in magazines is by depicting characters who act in opposition to the rulebooks. Therefore, “with the emergence of the chick lit genre, however, women’s so called “imperfections” and “failings” were reconsidered” (Smith 52). Chick lit characters are not able to follow any rulebook of how to have a perfect figure or how to seduce a man of your dreams. Nevertheless, they are appealing and life-like protagonists that most probably mirror the reality of the female readers.

Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young assert that chick lit evoke “physical stuff of every day life” (Ferriss and Young 4). Because of this focus, the chick lit novel is often criticized and said to be investing too much into fashion and cocktails. Such focus, however, cannot be regarded exclusively in terms of superficiality of the subject matter. It is also a fictionally constructed reflection of consumerist culture (4). In this connection, Julliete Wells points out that “countless heroines cheer themselves up by buying expensive lingerie, indulging in pricey spa treatments, and adding to their often already impressive collection of shoes, handbags, and outfits” (Wells 62). Such extensive consuming of material goods is presented for three main reasons. First it is “essential to chick lit heroines’ self-conception and self-presentation” (Wells 62). According to Briel Nichole Naugle: “in our image-laden contemporary society, outward appearance, specifically dress, serves to convey a person’s identity” (Naugle 14). She also claims that “chick lit authors reasonably assume that their readers are as fashionably conscious as their characters and that they too use fashion and consumption as marker of identity” (Naugle 14). In this respect, chick lit simply reflects the belief of contemporary society that “you are what you buy” (14).

Second, chick lit satirizes and questions woman’s relationships to consumer goods and consumption. As Ferriss and Young have it: “numerous chick lit novels focus on the simultaneous pleasures and dangers of consumerism” (Ferriss and Young 11). As for instance, some chick lit novels picture heroines who consumes in order “to assuage her insecurities about love and personal fulfillment” (11). Imelda Whelehan states that all of the insecurities are resolved as soon as the heroine unites with the hero (Whelehan 202). Ashling, the heroine of Marian Keyes’s novel *Sushi for Beginners*, as it will be revealed in the forthcoming analysis, serves as a case in point. She is rewarded with the love of her charismatic boss, who encourages her to cast off all of her anxieties by tossing her handbag into the sea. Just like Ashling, most chick lit female protagonists are usually brought back to the traditional values of life that are based on relationships and family. This does not always prove to be compatible with emphasis on material goods.

The third reason of extensive consumption in chick lit is the fantasy that it offers to the reader. According to Jessica Lyn Van Slooten: “We [the readers], too, experience the fantasy of self-creation through fashion and the allure of celebrity culture” (Van Slooten 236). In addition, Van Slooten states that the novels can provide shopping obsessed readers with a fantasy of indulgence without the real-life consequences (Van Slooten 220). What Van Slooten might be implying is that the chick lit readers take part in the consumer fantasy without participating in consumption themselves as all they have to do is to read about their heroines shopping. In this way, the reader identifies with the female protagonist and imagines the pleasures of spending money on fancy goods.

In the romance genre, on the other hand, there are just a few indications about consumption. In Harlequin romances, consumerism is not treated as central by the majority of critics. Janice Radway regards romance books as a commodity when she says that “Harlequin now publicly claims in their own advertising campaigns that some emotional benefits can be purchased along with the latest romance novel” (Radway 117). Readers of romance, just as chick lit readers, participate in consumption by buying the novels. The characters in the traditional romance, however, are not typical representatives of the consumerist society.

With regards to beauty industry, Paula Black writes that it is vast and expanding. It is an important site of employment, a popular cultural practice and a place where men and women participate on a daily basis (Black 143). The Beauty industry also plays an important role in chick lit novels. As according to Paula Black, the beauty industry keeps convincing women to consume more and more:

Women’s bodies can be viewed as a canvas, the basis of which must be smooth and hairless in order for the cosmetic paint that is applied to achieve its required aim. The fashion, cosmetic and advertising industries market a vast array of products designed to prepare the skin, to remove hair and to achieve a desired look with cosmetics. (Black 147)

The aim of the beauty industry is to make money by selling the products that are made to help women to look beautiful. In order to do that the market of the beauty industry presents the best looking models and encourages women to be like them by buying “cosmetic paint” (Black 147). This market economy enforces women to match “the idealized look of femininity” because women feel “that appearance is a key indicator of success” (Black 147, 152).

The beauty images today include young looking models made into, as Daniel Chandler calls it, the “objects of gaze,” in mass media, advertising and especially in women’s magazines (Chandler). According to Hilary Fawcett:

From as early as 1951 there had been references to youth fashion in British *Vogue* and in 1953 *Vogue* had started a Young Idea page directed at a seventeen to twenty-five-year-old readership. Across other popular sites such as television and film, an acknowledgement of a new youthful consumer had emerged. (Fawcett 98).

Such a new type of female iconography has remained dominant. Magazines are overloaded with the images of young beautiful and attractive women. David Gauntlett asserts that there is a debate about the influence of women's magazines on women, especially, images of skinny fashion models and celebrities (Gauntlett 194). He says that such skinny fashion models "bombards women with impossible images of perfection day after day, undermining their self confidence, their health and hard-earned cash" (194). Germaine Greer reflects on the present situation:

Every woman knows that, regardless of her other achievements, she is a failure if she is not beautiful...The UK beauty industry takes £8.9 billion a year out of women's pockets. Magazines financed by the beauty industry teach little girls that they need make-up and train them to use it, so establishing their lifelong reliance on beauty products. (Greer quoted in Gauntlett 77)

Greer reminds us that this argument has been an important part of the feminist case for decades, still, the situation has not changed. In fact it has become worse since she wrote *The Female Eunuch* in the late 1960s (Gauntlett 78).

Chick lit shows how beauty industry affects contemporary women. However, Juliette Wells notes that "with beauty, chick lit writers must toe a fine line" (Wells 59). She explains that chick lit heroine cannot be too beautiful because then the readers may resent her beauty (59). In a society where images of perfect femininity are continuously enforced on women, chick lit readers might be looking for a more realistic character, a character that would remind them of themselves. But if the character is unattractive, Wells point out, "she gives readers nothing to admire" (Wells 59). Thus, the chick lit female protagonist is "beautiful but not too beautiful," she is still self-conscious and unsatisfied with some minor imperfections of her body (59). As De Pierres has it, a typical chick lit heroine usually has "a huge wallop of low self-esteem most specifically related to weight, but occasionally about other things like, "no waist," "big nose," or some perceived physical imperfections" (De Pierres quoted in Anderson 8). According to Rosalinda Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff, the way to maintain her body is through "endless self-surveillance, monitoring, dieting, purging and work" (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 18). Thus taken, chick lit character devotes a considerable amount of time and efforts to her appearance just like Bridget Jones who "demonstrates the comic and satiric potential of excessive preoccupation with weight gain and appearance" (Wells 59).

Juliette Wells presents another example of how chick lit writers treat the question of beauty. She says that they provide an “essentially good-looking though anxious heroine with a more gorgeous foil who is also much more irritating on the subject of beauty maintenance and makes the heroine seem appealingly normal by contrast” (Wells 59). What Wells might be implying is that the chick lit female protagonist with her perceived imperfections in appearance is contrasted to other female characters who are more attractive but less likeable.

As regards the relationship of the traditional romance heroine to beauty industry, it is significantly different if compared to that of women characters in chick lit. Janice Radway holds that the romance heroine is extraordinary beautiful (Radway 124). Tania Modleski indicates that she has appealing looks because of her youthful innocence (Modleski 36). Rosalinda Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff hold that “romance heroines fall into a category that might be described as “effortlessly beautiful,” that is why they are given a particularly attractive appearance but they are entirely unselfconscious about this (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 18). The protagonists of popular romance do not struggle with keeping their bodies fit. Neither do they worry about how to keep themselves beautiful the way chick lit characters do. They are naturally beautiful, and the fact that they are unaware of their attractive appearance emphasizes their innocent nature.

Furthermore, romance female protagonists reflect a different set of values. According to Sheri McGregor, author of *Dream Catcher*, “The heroine can be more difficult to develop than the hero” as she should complement and yet conflict with the hero (Sheri McGregor in *eHow.com*). Janice Radway holds that the romance heroine has to have special qualities, she must be “strong,” “fiery,” “able to defy the hero and soften him” she also must be able to show him the “value of loving and caring for another” (Radway 64). With regards to her appearance once again, Oyceter in her article “Rules for Romance Novel Heroines” characterize the romance female protagonist as “beautiful beyond reckoning,” “slender and voluptuous,” “never taller than the hero and always younger than the hero” (Oyceter). She also claims that the female protagonist must be spirited, loved by others and always good. The qualities mentioned serve to indicate that the romance heroine is a character without flaws. Even her fiery nature is turned into a positive feature which the hero later admires. She possesses many special qualities that make the male protagonist to fall in love with her and other characters to like her. As Oyceter points out, the heroine is loved by the people that are designated as “good” in the book and if people don’t like her they are evil (Oyceter).

The Romance female protagonist cannot be compared to ordinary female characters of chick lit in this respect. Her self-confidence is something that does not need to be acquired by investing into her looks. According to Radway romance novels present their protagonists who seem to be “out of the ordinary” (Radway 55). Radway asserts that such heroines are enjoyed by female readers because they “provide a utopian vision of the female,” they serve to indicate that female

individuality can be compatible with nurturance and care by another (55). Radway's research reveals that through the act of reading romance readers enjoy escaping temporal demands associated with their social roles as wives and mothers. Through the act of reading they claim their own privacy and independence and imagine themselves being nurtured and loved in the way their male partner cannot offer (Radway 12).

In conclusion, consumerist culture is associated with the rise of capitalism and the time when economic needs shift towards consumption. Due to such changes there appear new fields for consumption, with particular interest in the fashion industry. The new models of femininity appealing to youth are pictured in advertisements and used as examples of maintaining ones femininity by consuming material goods. The rapid expansion of beauty industry makes women believe that they can make use of the means offered by the beauty industry and thus become beautiful, by implication, successful. Germaine Greer states that women are now "infected" with the need to conform to certain images of beauty (Greer quoted in Gauntlett 78). Moreover, the extensive advertising of attractive appearance causes one to see himself or herself as a product. Most critics agree that such commodification of femininity definitely illustrates tight links between postfeminism and mainstream consumer culture.

While romance heroines are not presented as consumers, chick lit heroines adore shopping, fashion shows and cocktail parties. Such treatment of consumerist culture is not a mere superficial matter. Chick lit characters serve to question the idea that a woman can reach almost everything she desires by all the available choices nowadays. Consumption is one of the ways they try to create their identity but, eventually, they realize that their self-value is not based on the things they buy. The ending of the novels celebrates the old values and shows that the real enjoyment of life is found in the things you cannot buy. Chick lit novels also represent their female protagonists as being considerably concerned with the shape, size and look of the body. In such a way chick lit protagonists reminds us of real life female characters who are beautiful but not without imperfections. The lack of self-acceptance makes them realistic and more appealing to "image-conscious women readers" (Wells 59). Romance female protagonists, however, do not share the negative effects of the beauty industry as their chick lit counterparts do. Since they are gifted with naturally beautiful and attractive appearance they do not worry about how to perfect themselves. Romance female characters live by different set of values. They are beautiful, intelligent and spirited heroines that do not associate themselves with trivial matters of shopping, dieting or fashion.

3.3.1 The Treatment of Consumerist Culture and Beauty Industry as Represented by the Female Protagonists, Andrea and Kelly, as Untypical Representatives of Chick lit and Romance

As it was already mentioned with reference to Featherstone, fashion is part of consumerism (Featherstone 83). In the two novels, Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* and Eve Gladstone's *Between Two Moons*, fashion plays quite an important part in shaping and constructing the characters of Andrea and Kelly since both of them are closely related to the world of fashion. This world unavoidably affects their lives. Andrea in Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada* starts to work as an editor's assistant in a famous fashion magazine, *Runway*. Kelly in Gladstone's *Between Two Moons* is an owner of a glamorous shopping center, Lambs. Organizing fashion shows, attending cocktail parties, meeting designers, watching young skinny models, choosing dresses and beautiful accessories are at the center in both stories. Taken in this manner, the two novels reflect a contemporary consumerist culture and represent the issues related to beauty industry. The following analysis will discuss Andrea and Kelly in terms of consumerism and beauty industry by looking at what makes them to engage into consumption or restrain from it and by looking how they treat and maintain their appearance.

At the onset of the novel *The Devil Wears Prada*, Andrea is represented as the girl that has never been particularly interested in fashion before she starts to work at *Runway*. She admits that the past twenty three years she spent "embodying small-town America. [...] We wore sweatpants to school, jeans for Saturday night, ruffled puffiness for semiformal dances" (Weisberger 10). Her past is contrasted with the present where she has to reshape herself another identity. After the carefree school and college time she now comes to a point when she needs to start to build herself a career. She starts by preparing herself for the interview with Miranda Priestly. Andrea takes the preparation very seriously. She considers that the most important aspect in this preparation is her appearance. However, she finds it difficult to choose the right clothes:

I managed to assemble a jacket and pants that did not match and in no way created a suit but at least they stayed put on my emaciated frame. A blue button-down, a not-too-perky ponytail, and a pair of slightly scuffed flats completed my look. It wasn't great – in fact, it bordered on supremely ugly – but it would have to suffice. [...] Clearly, I was barely lucid. (Weisberger 13)

Andrea dresses in a jacket and pants that do not harmonize together. She also puts on shoes that have been worn out and comments on her looks by saying that it "bordered on supremely ugly" (13). Her mistakes in outfit reveal her failing efforts to meet the dress code rules in *Runway*. When Andrea enters *Runway* office, she is amazed by the fact that all women in the office look pretty and

stylish. Then she realizes “how very very awkward” she is “among the most toned and stylish women in New York city” (Weisberger 19).

When Andrea is admitted to work at *Runway*, for three months she has to suffer angry and suspicious looks directed at her just because she does not match the dress code of this place. For instance, she remarks that she has “already grown accustomed to being looked up and down every time [she] went anywhere” (Weisberger 64). Tired by never ending glances, she decides to change: “I’d decided I’d start putting together a new and improved wardrobe immediately” (Weisberger 124). The new clothes that become part of her new style are taken from *Runway* closet by a friendly designer, Jeff. Now Andrea is satisfied by her new looks and says that it makes her feel “pretty damn good” and that she “could get used to it” (Weisberger 124).

Andrea’s story serves to illustrate the effect of consumerism and beauty industry on women. For women working at *Runaway* it is imperative to follow fashion and obey dress code rules. Andrea decides to change her style of dressing, first of all, because there is pressure at the workplace and, second, because she feels “awkward” among the stylish women (Weisberger 19). Although her style of dressing has nothing to do with her skills as an assistant, she admits that her outfit makes her feel “stupid, incompetent, and all-around moronic” (Weisberger 121). According to Paula Black, women feel pressure to be beautiful through media and regulations in the work place (Black 152). Moreover, Black indicates that appearance is considered to be “a key indicator of success” (Black 152). According to Briel Nichole Naugle: “dress, serves to convey a person’s identity” (Naugle 14). Thus, as Andrea starts to work at *Runway* and continues to wear her usual clothes, she is made to realize that her identity is inconsistent with her job position and that without extreme makeover she is destined to be regarded as a failure.

After she decides “to be a new woman” with the help of a designer Jeff, Andrea becomes more involved in the life of *Runway* and, therefore, more successful in her duties (Weisberger 121). It may be pertinent to refer to Juliette Wells who claims that “regardless of their source, however, consumer goods are essential to chick-lit heroines’ self-conception and self-presentation” (Wells 62). For example, she argues that “even Weisberger’s Andrea, who is initially almost indifferent to fashion, most unlike her obsessive coworkers at *Runway* magazine, gains a firm appreciation for the advantages conferred by truly up-to-the-minute accouterments” (Wells 62).

Her new attire now consists of Prada, Gucci, Versace and other designers’ clothes offered by *Runway*. The changes influence her to put constant efforts to beautify and maintain her appearance. Yet, she is still discouraged. Andrea is always surrounded by more beautiful coworkers who enforce her dissatisfaction with herself. She feels especially uncomfortable in the presence of her female boss, Miranda. For example, the first time Andrea is invited to assist Miranda at a fashion show she puts on a beautiful Chanel dress and decides that it is “time to be a lady” (Weisberger

264). After climbing “the never-ending white staircase” of Metropolitan Museum of Art and entering the building itself, Andrea admits that “the sense of history, of culture, was awesome” (Weisberger 264, 265). Andrea is particularly fascinated with the luxury of the museum. However, the figure of her female boss Miranda that appears around the corner stuns her even more:

As I turned my head around to take in the wonderful contrast of the color and the white [...], a vibrant red figure caught my eye. In the corner, standing ramrod straight under a looming painting was Miranda, wearing the beaded red Chanel that had been commissioned, cut, fitted, and precleaned just for tonight. And although it'd be a stretch to say that it had been worth every penny [...] she did look breath-taking. She herself was an *objet d'art*, chin jugged upward and muscles perfectly taut, a neoclassical relief in beaded Chanel silk. [...] She was stunning in a way. [...] I couldn't take my eyes off her. (Weisberger 266)

Her admiration of Miranda is greater than the admiration of the architectural details of the building. She names Miranda as “an objet d'art” and “a neoclassical relief” (266). As a result, even though Andrea is wearing a beautiful Chanel dress she perceives herself as being “instantly ridiculous” and feels “like a girl from a small town trying to dress for a big-city black-tie affair” (Weisberger 265). As Alison Umminger points out, in a current consumer based economy women are reduced to embodied equivalent of objects which leads them to the equation of self-as-a-product (Umminger 246). That is why, as Black holds: “in their endeavors to achieve the idealized look of femininity, women are destined to failure” (Black 147). No matter how hard Andrea tries to achieve the perfect looks there is always someone that looks better than her and it is usually her female boss Miranda.

Miranda is the most beautiful to the extent of perfection: shockingly skinny (wearing size zero), with expertly dyed blond hair, always having “perfectly lined and filled-in lips,” and always wearing “a single white Hermes scarf” (Weisberger 20, 21). Juliette Wells claims that chick lit stories usually include such female characters who are “more gorgeous foils [...] much more irritating on the subject of the beauty maintenance” (Wells 59). Miranda, in this manner, serves as an example of such character. Called as an “empty, shallow, bitter woman who has tons of gorgeous clothes and not much else” (Weisberger 207), Miranda is a contrast to Andrea making her “seem appealingly normal” (Wells 59). Andrea is represented with flaws and these flaws make her authentic and life like. As to use Imelda Whelehan's phrasing, she says that chick lit characters are “champions of the ordinary and everyday” (Whelehan 182). Moreover, Briel Nichole Naugle indicates that “the humorous tone of chick lit novels often stems from the character's flaws and the characters' willingness to let the reader see her flaws” (Naugle 13). Andrea is affected by the ideas of the consumerist culture, that convinces women to be flawlessly beautiful, but she is also affected by her innate self. Naugle interprets Andrea's character in the following manner:

Andrea witnesses the ways in which media messages sent by the fashion and beauty world can negatively affect a woman's self-image [...]. Andrea's rejection of the image-obsessed magazine world in favor of a less lucrative but more fulfilling career serves to warn the reader about their own internalization of negative media messages. (Naugle 11)

Andrea's example is a warning to the reader to be cautious about ideal female images represented by the media. After she leaves the job she is pictured at home wearing jeans and sweatshirt. She also decides to sell or give away all the fashionable clothes she took from *Runway* (Weisberger 358). Andrea's story questions the consumerist ideology that, according to Mike Featherstone, represents us with the dream world (Featherstone 81) and, according to Jean Radford, seduce people away from their real interests by substituting false ones (Radford 10). Andrea discovers that such a dream world is non-existent and glamorous commodities do not make one happy.

In Gladstone's *Between Two Moons* a romance heroine, Kelly, just as Andrea, works in the fashion industry. She is the manager of the most famous women's clothing and accessories store that occupies "a forty-five-foot frontage on one of the most expensive street in the world" and is "five stories high" (Gladstone 63). As a president of women's "favorite shopping emporium" Kelly Aldrich is seen as "the person who told them how to wear their hair and what clothes to buy" (Gladstone 17, 18). Kelly is expert in fashion, therefore, she knows what clothes to choose for what occasions since she is "a frequent escort to charity balls, private dinner parties, the opera, the ballet, concerts" (Gladstone 41). When Kelly prepares to one of the parties her choice of dress and accessories is described as follows:

For this party Kelly selected a long, black, body-hugging dress with a plunging neckline emphasized by a white satin collar, the kind of dress that made her look both sophisticated and yet a little wild, like a tiger on the prowl. Perhaps that's what she was. (Gladstone 159).

The way her appearance is portrayed represents her sophisticated taste of clothing. It may look like she chooses the best looking dress without much effort. Before she leaves home she stands in front of the mirror:

The light was good, and upon closer examination Kelly thought she saw right through the woman in the mirror, the woman she was supposed to be. [...] She's become an elegant young model of success, invited to parties in the best penthouses. Arriving alone and thoroughly in charge of her life. (Gladstone 159, 160)

She perceives herself as young, elegant and successful, the woman she is supposed to be. Such self-reflection may serve to indicate a beautiful and attractive appearance. She also has

achieved material wealth which allows her to enjoy all the best and the most fashionable clothes, accessories and cosmetics. In fact, Kelly is interested in fashion, moreover, she is a fashion expert, the head of the luxurious women's store, she is the representative of fashion. Kelly is described as "an elegant young model of success" (Gladstone 160). As to use Janice Radway terms, she is "an extraordinary example of full-blooming womanhood" (Radway 126). Radway holds that romance heroines have "especially alluring appearance [but] they are unaware of their beauty and its effects on others" (126). Kelly, however, as untypical representative of romance, is aware of her beauty and, most probably, she invests a certain amount of time and money into her appearance but this is not indicated in the novel. The reader is represented with an idealized female character who is beautiful at all occasions without any efforts.

There are very few hints about extensive consumption in the Gladstone's novel *Between Two Moons*. The only hint to consumerism is the hint to clothes, models or fashion designers. People working in Lambs are quite different than the ones working in *Runway*. For example, through a Job-Up program that helps young teenagers to get jobs Kelly hires a young teenager, Isabella. As a fashion designer: "the youngster was gifted [...] Kelly had elected to be her mentor" (Gladstone 16). If in *The Devil Wears Prada* the world of *Runway* is presented as proud and unfriendly, here, the store Lambs is pictured as a close-knit community. Kelly disagrees with the expansion of Lambs because she cares about her employees. By implication, she is afraid that the long time workers will need to leave: "I know what happens in these expansions. The first thing to go are the old employees. Charlie the night watchman – they'll replace him with a robot. No" (Gladstone 134). Miranda, however, as a head of *Runway* mistreats Andrea just as other workers and shows a lack of respect for everyone lower in rank or status.

Janice Radway defines the new romance heroine, as "the heroine of the twentieth century" who is portrayed as a man's equal (Radway 127). Kelly reflects such a heroine who goes against the submissive and dependent heroine of traditional romance. She is intelligent and beautiful career woman who tries to find happiness by being busy, occupied and independent. The actual focus of the romance novel, as Janice Radway points out, is "the heroine's search for self-identity together with the developing relationships with the hero" (Radway 64). Unlike Andrea, Kelly as a romance character is not engaging in consumer goods or beauty industry in search of her identity. Consumerism is excluded in this romance novel for two possible reasons.

First, it seems that Kelly embodies the majority of the ideal romance heroine's qualities introduced by Radway (Radway 126). She is unusually intelligent, self-perceptive, she has a bright and strong personality and "an extraordinary fiery disposition" (126). As to illustrate, when she keeps analyzing herself she "sighs at her reflection, trying to understand just what was bothering her" (Gladstone 160). An attractive appearance and material wealth do not satisfy Kelly, thus, she

keeps thinking that there must be something else that would make her happy. When she fights for the Lambs existence, the reader is introduced with her rebellious nature and, when she talks with her employees, the reader is presented with her bright mind and spirit. In other words, a “spirited heroine” like Kelly cannot be associated with trivialities of consumerist culture such as shopping or beautifying herself because that would simply contradict her characterization (Radway 123).

Second, Kelly resembles the “temptation heroine” introduced by Merja Makinen (Makinen 29). According to Makinen, such heroine has a good job, she has reached a success in her thirties and she longs for something different in her life (29). As a result her temptation is “not to surrender her precious virginity, but to commit the post feminist sin of giving up her hard-won independence” (29). Remembering that the focus of almost every romance novel is “the emotional intensity of love,” the reader is driven by the need to know if Kelly will give up her independence (Makinen 23). Due to such focus of the novel the concept of consumerism might disturb the plot line and distract the reader’s attention.

In conclusion, Andrea and Kelly are presented within the context of the fashion industry that effect their self-perception and self-presentation. Before becoming the editor’s assistant of *Runway* Andrea is not interested in fashion but after working in the most famous magazine for two weeks, Andrea is convinced to change her dressing style by suspicious humiliating looks of other colleagues. Even though she develops a good taste in fashion, she still feels discouraged by the presence of her female boss Miranda. Miranda always looks more sophisticated, more attractive or more elegant than Andrea. Andrea’s story reveals that women can never reach the “idealized look of femininity” because the femininity on the display of popular culture is perverted and can be damaging to women (Black 147). Since Andrea is represented as beautiful but not more beautiful than most of her female colleagues she serves to question and reconsider ones imperfections in appearance and to deny the fact that beauty determines success. Kelly, in contrast to Andrea, is depicted as flawlessly beautiful and attractive. She is also free from any damaging or deceiving influence of consumerism. Because of her maturity, intelligence and sensibility she is not associated with the artificial culture of consumerism, rather, her story is focused on Kelly’s self maturation and her relationships with the male protagonist.

3.3.2 The Treatment of Consumerist Culture and Beauty Industry as Represented by the Female Protagonists, Ashling and Polly, as Typical Representatives of Chick lit and Romance

As it has already been mentioned, Ashling and Polly are quite different protagonists as far as their age, occupation, family, their heroes and their relationships to the heroes are concerned. However, both characters are quite typical representatives of romance and chick lit protagonists.

Polly is a young, innocent character who has just finished school and now is arranged to marry an Arab man she has never met before. Ashling is a woman in her thirties who lives on her own, has a couple of friends, and has just left her job and her long-time boyfriend. The way Ashling's and Polly's stories are developed allow us compare and contrast the concerns of beauty and consumerism by looking at how they treat their bodies, their appearance, consumer goods or shopping. On the whole, Polly and Ashling as romance and chick lit protagonists will be discussed considering the similarities and differences between the two of them with regards to the treatment of consumerist culture and beauty industry in both novels. It is the difference between the two characters that will be the focus of the present analysis.

Ashling, just as Andrea, in Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada*, and Kelly, in Eve Gladstone's *Between Two Moons*, works in the field of fashion. After she is forced to resign from *Woman's Place*, a weekly, unglossy Irish magazine, she gets a job in *Coleen* magazine. There Ashling is offered a much higher editor's assistant position. Ashling's job is as demanding as that of Andrea's, but the relationship between Ashling and her colleagues is not as strenuous as those experienced by Andrea. Ashling never experiences humiliating looks or comments about her appearance. Her co-workers in *Colleen* do not resemble perfect magazine girls. For instance, the first time Ashling meets Trix, a woman at the receptionist, she notices her eyebrows that "were plucked into non-existence," her lip liner that "was so thick and dark she looked as if she had a mustache," and her blond hair that "was caught up in dozens of tiny [...] butterfly clips" (Keyes 14). Ashling thinks that "she must've had to get up three hours early to do it" (14). Such a character devotes a great deal of effort to her appearance and it seems that her efforts are crossing the line. She uses too much cosmetics, plucks her eyebrows "to non-existence" and makes a bizarre haircut (14). Trix may serve as an example of the exaggerated attempt to beautify oneself. As mentioned by referring to Caroline J. Smith, chick lit authors criticize and satirize the consumer behavior through the particular choice of female characters (Smith 47).

Another female character that serves as a case in point is Ashling's boss Lisa. Just as Andrea, who feels humiliated by the presence of her female boss Miranda, Ashling feels as if she is Lisa's shadow. Lisa "always looked spectacularly, astonishingly, just-this-minute fashionable" (Keyes 63). Lisa has "caramel-colored hair with honey-colored highlights," "flawless skin," "shimmering ten-denier legs" (Keyes 4, 50). In the parties she is described as "skinny and gorgeous, trendy and funky [...] with the fabulous clothes and quirky accessories" (Keyes 279). Besides being the best looking woman out of all the staff, Lisa is also the most arrogant and unfriendly, as for instance: "there had never been much chance that Lisa would be friendly to someone as ordinary as Ashling" (Keyes 68). It seems that Lisa selects people to whom she needs to be friendly and to whom she can be rude since they are of little importance to her. That is why Ashling perceives that

no matter how carefully she maintains her looks, she can never match Lisa. In one of the parties Ashling had dressed to “look young, pretty, and approachable” but “as soon as she saw Lisa, the glory of her new clothes disappeared and she felt lumpish and diminished” (Keyes 117; 119).

The relationships between women reflect what may be called usual female rivalry. As Alison Umminger states “the equation of self-as-a-product leads to a related problem in chick lit: competition among women” (Umminger 246). While comparing herself to Lisa, who gives her advice to not “dress for the job you have, dress for the job you want,” Ashling spends all Saturday afternoon looking for the best outfit for work (Keyes 72). Somewhere deep in her mind she admits that “what she actually wanted [...] was to look like Lisa. Perhaps then she’d feel deserving of her new job” (Keyes 71). Ashling overestimates the importance of appearance. While comparing herself to Lisa she mistakenly assumes that Lisa is so successful because she is beautiful but not because she is skilful or well qualified. Ashling is an example of “the anxieties women suffer because they don’t match up to the ideal femininity on display in popular culture” (Whelehan 182). Contrasted to such characters like Trix and Lisa, Ashling is the ordinary one, to use Whelehan’s phrasing, she is the champion of the ordinary and every day (182).

As most chick lit novels, Keyes’s *Sushi for Beginners* “immerses the reader in a world in which the pursuit of beauty is never ending” (Wells 61) because it portrays female characters “trapped in a culture that values surface first” (Umminger 246). Almost all of the female characters in this novel are extensively preoccupied with their appearance. The following excerpt serves as a case in point:

Then Ashling *raced* into action, a blur of rubbing stuff on her or rubbing stuff off. Over the course in the afternoon she washed and heavily conditioned her hair, exfoliated her entire body, removed the chipped polish from her toenails and applied fresh stuff, melted away the hairs on her legs, slathered herself in Gucci Envy moisturizer, which was only wheeled out on special occasions, combed a quarter of a tube of smoothing cream through her hair, plastered herself in makeup [...] and drenched herself in Envy eau de parfum. (Keyes 207)

In the passage above Ashling is preparing for a date with Marcus Valentine. The process of self-surveillance before going out is quite long and time consuming. She applies shampoo-hair, conditioner, hair remover, nail polish, moisturizer, smoothing cream, make-up and perfume. In other words, she cleans, shaves, polishes and moisturizes her body from head to toe. Thus viewed, Ashling represents a typical chick lit heroine who according to Gill and Herdieckerhoff is too much concerned with her appearance which is “depicted as requiring endless self-surveillance, monitoring, dieting, purging and work” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 18). This enormous amount of time spent to monitor her body can be seen, according to Umminger, as the problem of consumerist

culture which reduces women “to the embodied equivalent of objects competing for self space [...] where men choose the newest, shiniest, thinnest, blondest models” (Umminger 246). What Umminger might be suggesting is that the consumerist culture makes women to see themselves as products that are required to be the “shiniest” ones for the men to choose them. On the other hand, chick lit questions such a false ideology by showing that ones imperfections are a necessary part of the complete personality.

As with regards to Ashling, although she is beautiful and invests a lot in her appearance she still does not look like a Cosmo girl. The problem is that “Ashling had a very little in the way of waist” (Keyes 12). It has to be stressed that she tries very hard to improve her waistline:

Eventually she got herself a Hula-Hoop and set to it with gusto in her back garden. For a couple of months she rotated and whittled, day and night, her tongue stuck earnestly out of the corner of her mouth. [...] Not that the nonstop, obsessive whirling had made any difference. Even now, sixteen years later, there was still an undeniable straight-up-and-down quality to Ashling’s silhouette. (Keyes 12)

As it is suggested in the quote, even the excessive exercising with a hoop does not make any difference in her waistline. Thus taken, Ashling’s attempts to be as nice as possible usually end in failure. As for instance: “she has lipstick on her teeth,” she feels “disgustingly unfit” and she “hates her legs” (Keyes 18, 156, 209). Her internalized self-dissatisfaction should not be mistaken with the fact that she is a bad-looking woman. According to Imelda Whelehan, chick lit “falls for the seduction of magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, while acting as testimony to the fact that the flawless Cosmo girl simply does not exist” (Whelehan 182). Whelehan suggests that the chick lit heroine seeks to be like a perfect magazine girl and, obviously, her endeavors end in failure because chick lit is concerned to represent women who resist the “unattainable femininity” (Whelehan 176). According to Whelehan, the rebellion towards “idealized images of modern womanhood” is expressed through “the self-deprecating humor and even at times physical comedy” (Whelehan 176; 177). In other words, Ashling’s “obsessive whirling” is described ironically and it serves as an illustration to the tendency in chick lit to reconsider and celebrate the character’s flaws.

Another issue that could be mentioned is the anxious and superstitious nature of Ashling’s character. When she goes for an interview she performs several rituals that determines her feeling of security: she rubes her lucky Budda’s statue, pops her lucky pebble in her pocket, and looks regretfully at her lucky red hat which she decides not wear on a job interview (Keyes 13). Ashling thinks that if she does certain things or buys certain goods she would be luckier and that would make her relationships work. The following extract serves as an illustration:

To make the relationships work, Ashling spent her life avoiding cracks in the pavement, saluting lone magpies, picking up pennies, and consulting both hers and Phelim's horoscope. Her pockets were always weighed down with lucky pebbles, rose quartz and miraculous medals, and she'd rubbed nearly all the gold paint of her lucky Buddha (Keyes 29).

Ashling's insecurity about herself and her relationships forces her to rely on such things like lucky pebbles, rose quartzes, medals or Buddha statues. Ashling naively thinks that mere things can bring luck to her and resolve her relationships. Still, no matter how much she tries to maintain all the rituals and carry all the lucky things in her pocket, she breaks up with Phelim. Only after she starts a relationship with Jack Devine, her charismatic boss and the hero, she removes all her anxieties by throwing her bag into the sea. This is another way to question the heroine's relationship to consumer goods. Ashling is an example of many women who try to find personal fulfillment by consuming medals, horoscope signs or lucky elephant statues to make themselves believe that it will turn their lives into the right direction. Ashling's story again proves that, according to Mike Featherstone, consumerist culture represents a dream world and shifts us away from reality (Featherstone 83). At the end, Ashling understands that she does not need any lucky charms to be happy, her happiness is found in the embrace of the loving man.

As far as Polly in Graham's *An Arabian Courtship* is concerned, there are just a few indications to consumerist culture in her story. She is not represented as a character who likes beautiful clothes, enjoys shopping or reads fashion magazines. In fact, Polly is pictured as a young and beautiful woman who is disinterested in fashion and not particularly interested in her own appearance. When she is waiting for the prince, her future husband, to come she does not even make an attempt to change her clothes:

'You're not dressed yet! Anthea's harassed lament from the door shattered her reverie. 'You can't possibly let Raschid see you looking ... '
'The way I usually do?' Polly slotted in dryly 'Well, he might as well see what he's getting, and I'm no fashion-plate.' (Graham 13).

Although her mother is dissatisfied with her appearance, she cannot persuade into changing her outfit. Polly remarks that it is her usual way of looking and that she is not a "fashion-plate" (Graham 13). Polly is not eager to beautify herself for a man she has never seen before. She prefers to stay natural and to let Raschid see her natural beauty. As soon as the Arab prince approaches Polly and she notices that "the nearer she got, the bigger he seemed to get [...] unusually tall for one of his race" (Graham 16). Then as he comes close enough, he starts to untie her hair:

‘Now take your hair down.’ [...]

‘M-my h-air??’ [...]

She flinched when he moved without warning. Long fingers darted down into her hair, and in disbelief she shut her eyes. [...] Her bright hair tumbled down to her shoulders, the pins carelessly cast aside. (Graham 17)

As Raschid loses her long and bright hair down, the reader is already hinted that despite her lack of interest in fashion, Polly is in fact beautiful and attractive. Moreover, later in the pages she is described as the one whose “puppy fat had melted away and she miraculously blossomed into a slender young woman with a cloud of pale hair and flawless features” (Graham 12). Her flawless features, a slender figure and long blond hair serves as an illustration of Radway’s statement that the ideal romance heroine is the one who has “an alluring appearance” and is unaware of its effects on others (Radway 126). The Arab prince is the one who is impressed by her beauty: “Could I be impervious to the allure of such beauty as you posses?” (Graham 20). Moreover, he calls her “a pearl beyond price” and adds that he is “blessed” to “claim so perfect a bride” (Graham 22). Raschid’s reaction to Polly’s appearance also reminds us of Gill and Herdieckerhoff’s description of the romance heroine as “effortlessly beautiful” and “unselfconscious about this” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 17).

It may be stated that the consumerist culture and beauty industry do not play a major role neither in Kelly’s nor in Polly’s stories. In both of them, the biggest part of attention is given to the maturation of the female protagonist along with “the developing relationships with the hero” (Radway 139). At the beginning of the novel Polly is represented as a rebellious character who is not going to obey the demands of her strict Arab husband. She also cannot accept the fact that she is forced to marry someone she does not love. Her outrage against the arrangement appears after the marriage as she shouts the following: “No woman with an IQ above forty would want to marry you and clank about in chains for the rest of her days” (Graham 29). According to Radway, such an initial resistance is typical for most of romance female characters because they “refuse to be silenced by the male desire to control women” (Radway 124). The focus of the story is the heroines’ intellectual power to tame the hero even if she resists him at the beginning. Later in the pages both of them mature in love together by overcoming the barriers for the consummations of that love.

The points considered refer to Polly and Ashling as typical romance and chick lit heroines. They are different with regards to their age, occupation and a way of life. Their stories take place in present time England and Ireland. The problems of consumerism and beauty industry are relevant to Ashling but not to Polly. Ashling struggles to be attractive and beautiful. Ashling, just as Andrea, pictures that woman’s investment into her appearance is also caused by the “workplace pressures” (Black 152). She tries to match the appearance of her female boss Lisa thinking that if she were as beautiful as Lisa, maybe than her coworkers will respect her the way they respect Lisa. Ashling’s

struggle to be fully feminine and, therefore, beautiful and attractive illustrates her wish to be successful at work and have a happy personal life. However, she is not able to attain the body she desires, instead, she learns to appreciate herself with all the flaws and imperfections. With the hero Jack Devine, she admits that “waist or no waist she was more confident than she has ever been” (Keyes 416). Through the character of Ashling chick lit is aiming to show that perfectly beautiful women on the cover of the magazines are hard to find in the everyday life. Such women are rather the inventions of the consumerist culture that is interested to seduce women for a never ending consumption of beauty products.

The character of Polly is an ideal romance heroine: innocent, childish, rebellious and naturally beautiful. She is not even aware of the effect her beauty has on others, especially the male protagonist, Arab prince Rachid. Both Kelly and Polly are very spirited protagonists and their stories are constructed around the hindrances that both heroines have to overcome to unite with their heroes. The emphasis is laid on their inner characteristics, therefore, the issues of shopping and obsession about ones body are excluded.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary romance and chick lit are the most popular female genres nowadays and both of these genres demonstrate complex and significant issues regarding women's lives. They reflect different values and can be analyzed in different respects. From the late nineteenth century, when popular romance has flourished as a female work of fiction concentrating on "the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines" it transformed the female characters as they adjusted to the changes brought by feminism (Regis 14). According to Merja Makinen, the heroines have been pictured from young and innocent to more mature, economically independent, less naive and sexually experienced (Makinen 24-29).

However, the most typical and the less typical romance heroine can be illustrated by pointing at the novels analyzed in this paper. In Lynne Graham's *An Arabian Courtship*, Polly is the most typical romance heroine, she is young, pure, innocent and virgin, while in Eve Gladstone's *Between Two Moons*, Kelly is untypical romance heroine, she is well educated, assertive and most likely sexually experienced. What these female protagonists have in common is the "authoritative father-figures" as their heroes (Makinen 27). Both Polly and Kelly possess special character traits that help them to transform "an inadequate suitor into the perfect lover-protector" (Radway 214). By extension, they are very spirited and intelligent characters able to recognize the true inner feelings hidden under the surface of the male protagonist.

Janice Radway, in her ethnographic study of female romance readers, suggests that the act of reading romance novels is "a utopian state" when readers indulge into a vision of "the affective care, ongoing tenderness and a strong sense of self-worth" (Radway 215). When these women, who are mostly defined by their roles as wives and mothers, sit down and pick up the romance novel, they are signaling to their families that, while they are reading, they are not mothers or wives but independent women free from constraining gender roles. The readers, according to Radway, need ideal heroines so that they could construct a vision of independent, smart and spirited female character and yet the one who is in need of a male care and protection (Radway 79).

As far as chick lit readers are concerned, Briel Nichole Naugle claims that they separate themselves from the dominant culture through their choice of reading material (Naugle 60). Naugle holds that the novels in this genre, much like the romance genre, visually signify their identity as separate from "traditional women's fiction" (Naugle 61). By their bright covers and titles, chick lit novels are easy to identify, making the reader visibly marked as a certain type. Therefore, by reading chick lit (or romance) novels, a woman is declaring her separation from the dominant culture and her association with a subculture.

Chick lit is quite a new genre and, according to Shari Benstock, the popularity within the past decade suggests “ongoing concerns with sexuality and femininity, genre and gender” (Benstock 253). It is fiction about “a new woman” who lives in the time of postfeminism when all the choices are available and the past restrictions are long forgotten. One must agree that women are no longer battling to come from the margins into the mainstream. Benstock states that “the phenomenal success of chick lit, featuring independent, professional protagonists testifies to the extent that women have left such battles behind” (253). Yet, the genre raises many issues and questions for contemporary feminist and cultural studies. The problem at present lies in the freedom itself, as women are allowed to acquire all the possible roles, they feel a pressure to succeed in everything and struggle to balance professional and personal satisfaction.

The Chick lit genre is not about shallow female characters worried about their looks, as some critics suggest, but a fictional representation of the consumerist culture and the power of the beauty industry. Lauren Weisberger’s *The Devil Wears Prada* serves to indicate how strict and even cruel the world of fashion can be to such characters like Andrea. Marian Keyes’s *Sushi for Beginners* pictures how ideal female images are internalized by Ashling who is extremely dissatisfied with some minor imperfections in her body. Only when the right man comes into the scene, Ashling’s worries are no longer relevant. The endings of the novels celebrate the old values and show that the real enjoyment of life is found in the things you cannot buy. The first person narrator and the “confessional mode” of chick lit expose one’s flaws and failures and enhance readers’ identification (Benstock 256).

Emma Anderson argues that the chick lit genre depicts single modern woman “trapped in a state of paralysis, swinging between value systems” (Anderson 86). In other words, she says that the value systems of chick lit characters are contradicting each other. Although it seems that chick lit aims to celebrate woman’s freedom of choice by depicting smart and assertive female protagonists, who usually have quite well-paid jobs in the field of publishing, still, the endings of the novels signal some form of reconsideration of career matters and reuniting with the family or “the One” (Whelehan 216). Ashling’s story, in Marian Keyes’s *Sushi for Beginners*, illustrates Whelehan’s statement that “to be without a man is to fail to reach full maturity” (Whelehan 216). When she is seduced by her boss, Jack Devine, and starts a relationship with him, Ashling no longer worries about her appearance or fears for the future. She is completely satisfied, secure and happy. Andrea, in Lauren Weisberger’s *The Devil Wears Prada*, as an untypical chick lit character, instead of seeking a man seeks for a career. Her story proves that a vigorous pursuing of career goals can steal one’s happiness found in the quality time with family and friends.

In this manner the chick lit genre repeats romance genre conventions. The typical romance female protagonist is indifferent to career. Less typical romance protagonist could be pictured as a

career woman but only before she meets the male protagonist. Her career only serves as a background to the story or a hindrance for the consummation of the loving relationship between her and the male protagonist. The romance story is completely focused on the relationship between the man and the woman. As it can be illustrated by the typical romance female protagonist, Polly, in Graham's *An Arabian Courtship*, career issues are not present in the story. Polly marries her hero as soon as she finishes high-school. Kelly, in Gladstone's *Between Two Moons*, however, is a respected career woman but after she meets the hero her career becomes a huge barrier for their relationships. At the end, the barrier is recognized and removed, both characters declare their love for each other and enter into the final narrative element introduced by Regis – "betrothal" (Regis 14).

With regards to sexuality, Emma Anderson states that it might look like chick lit challenges the boundaries of female sexuality and at the same time comes back to the old values dictated by the patriarchal society in the time of Victorian Era (Anderson 76). In chick lit stories females are sexually active characters that talk openly about sex, however, their ambiguous endings portray heroines "adopting a traditional patriarchal feminine role" and they are rewarded with a possible romantic future (76). Their romantic stories are unresolved, though the male protagonists are promising love and romance they do not promise long lasting relationships that can only be secure in marriage. In Keyes's *Sushi for Beginners*, Ashling meets two men in her life, and with both of them she has sexual relations. The third male character, Jack, appears to be the one, but the ending of the novel does not guarantee that their relationships will last long. There is no marriage proposal or anything that would indicate stability and assurance of the future. In short, Anderson claims that "chick lit fails to either celebrate the triumph of the independence of the single modern woman, or to reward her with a fairy-tale happy ending" (77). Therefore, by exposing these two contradicting ideas about female sexuality chick lit does not celebrate the freedom and power of choice in a postfeminist era nor it celebrates the benefits of patriarchy, rather it reveals "the corruption of these conflicting ideologies for female sexuality and society's attempts to reconcile them" (77).

Romance novels depict the male character in a different light, which shapes the portrayal of the female sexuality in the stories. According to Pamela Regis, the typical romance heroine is at the center of the novel but the hero steps forward to take an equal place with her as well (Regis 206). Since she has to tame the dangerous hero or to heal the injured one, the female character has to be very intelligent, strong and spirited. She also has to be very attractive and beautiful without even knowing that so that she could seduce the male protagonist in her innocent and child-like manner of behavior and be excused. After the seduction, the male protagonist asserts his role as a conqueror and the female protagonist becomes conquered. By extension, the female character is represented as someone who is sexually passive and if she has sexual desires they are repressed. She needs a

sexually experienced man to awaken her sexuality. Polly's story serves as a case in point. A young, beautiful, innocent and virgin heroine is awakened and introduced to her own sexual passions by her husband, a moody Arab prince.

The Romance novels focus on emotion that is why, as Regis asserts, it is out of step with the prevailing contemporary high culture "simply because of this emotional sensibility" (Regis 206). Regis also points out that the story "of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines, is, finally, about freedom and joy" (207). Pamela Regis argues that this female genre should not be trivialized as it gives joy to so many female readers providing them their own private time, romantic fantasy and knowledge (Regis 207). Chick lit is more interested to show their female protagonists in all comic misunderstandings with wit and a humorous manner rather than sentimentality. Even the hard issues are pictured in ironic light. That is probably the major difference that stands out between chick lit and romance novels. Both genres are influencing women's lives in one way or the other and both genres have a lot of room to grow as the women's lives and experiences are changing together with the changes of contemporary society.

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APPENDIX 1

The Summary of Lynne Graham's *An Arabian Courtship*

The story is about Polly Barrington, Ernest Barrington's first born daughter whom he promises to give to the first born son of his Arab friend King Reija. Her father made an agreement long ago in the dessert of Middle East after he saved King Reija from an assassination attempt experiencing head injuries himself. Overcome by gratitude King Reija had stated that his firstborn son would marry Ernest Barrington's firstborn daughter. The agreement would have been long forgotten if Barrington's family would have not had financial problems. Polly's father decided to meet his old friend and ask for a loan. His Arab friend agreed to help him and offered to give him the money as a price for the new bride for his son Raschid ibin Saud al Azarin. Polly agreed to marry Arab prince since she felt that her refusal would leave her mother, her father, her two sisters and a little brother without money.

The first time she sees her future husband she is surprised how handsome he is. He is tall, black-haired with extraordinary brilliant blue eyes. After the marriage she is taken to Raschid's home in the Middle East, a place she describes as Frankenstein's castle. There she has to adopt the new culture and the new way of living. Although at first she rebelliously resists her husband's affection, later she realizes that she is falling in love with him. His mastery of love making overpowers her and she is shocked to discover that she possesses desires she has never knew about.

She learns that Raschid was married and that his wife was mad who convinced him that he cannot have children though it was she that had problems with infertility. She realizes how much Raschid suffered after his wife killed herself falling from the stairs. As their love grows stronger Polly receives the news that her father is not well. She leaves Raschid and goes to her parents. There Raschid unexpectedly visits her and finds Polly in the arms of her old friend trying to kiss her. A brokenhearted Polly comes back to her husband's house and patiently tries to win his love back. Finally, at the end of the novel she succeeds and comes to know that she carries his baby.

APPENDIX 2

The Summary of Eve Gladstone's *Between Two Moons*

The novel is about Kelly Aldrich, the president of Lambs – the favorite shopping emporium. Kelly is a single career woman and her job is all she has in life. Suddenly, Kelly is shaken by the news that Lambs has been sold to Campbell brothers. After she hears the news she realizes that she has already met one of Campbell's, he appeared to be the same charming man that had taken her to the park and had his arms around her.

In spite of how charming Tony Campbell is he is also the new owner of the shop who wants to take the Lambs national which means the shop can be sold and removed. It threatens all the employees of the market, including Kelly. However, Kelly's biggest desire is to keep Lambs the way it is with its unique decorations and the shopping assortment she has kept for years. Kelly loves the store, she invests into it and considers it to be archaic, therefore, unchangeable. She is not going to give up easily she knows she has to fight for Lambs. The hardest thing, though, is to fight Tony, the man who courts Kelly in the most pleasant manner.

Gradually, Kelly begins to trust him, especially after the theft of the store. Tony takes the matter into his hands and finds out the thief. The thief is one of the employees of the shop, a teenager Isabela who was accepted for the job because she belonged to Job-UP program that helped poorly living teenagers to find a living. Kelly chose her because she saw her as a talented clothes designer. She loved and cared for her, thus, a parent like conversation with her brings Kelly and Tony even more closer.

Their love is tested again after Kelly's conversation with Diane Bourne, his ex-girlfriend. The things she says about him are lies that Kelly starts to believe and fight her own heart even more. Luckily, Kelly meets Tony's father and misunderstandings are resolved. At the last pages of the novel Tony says that he is going to keep the building intact and build up and around it. Nevertheless, Kelly is no more interested about the building she decides to quite her job and work in Job-Up program, being an administrator there she wants to help teenagers with their dreams. Finally, the two lovers confirm their love for each other by a passionate kiss in the moonlight.

APPENDIX 3

The Summary of Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada*

The story is about Andrea Sachs, the simple girl who has just graduated in journalism and dreams to work in the *New Yorker*. She comes to New York to start her career and is hired to work as the second assistant of the powerful and sophisticated Miranda Priestly. Dreaming to become a journalist Andrea faces the opportunity as a temporary professional challenge. However, later she realizes that she will not develop her writing skills working for Miranda Priestly of the *Runway* magazine. Miranda appears to be a snobbish, merciless and cruel woman, diminishing Andrea and making her experience into a living hell.

The environment of the *Runway* is unfriendly, cold and extremely critical with the physical appearance. All the men that work there are stylish and good-looking and all the girls are skinny and elegant. As a result, even having a normal weight for a normal height Andrea feels examining eyes and critical remarks pointing at her overweight. Accordingly, the girl has to change her simple and plain style, for a more trendy and elegant one, in order to gain the acceptance of her ruthless boss and colleagues.

Andrea considers everything as a challenge, so she drastically changes her clothes and self-image, with the help of Nigel, the magazine's art director. Nevertheless, the job becomes extremely demanding for the Miranda's tough work rhythm and nearly impossible tasks. Andrea has to prepare lunch in a very particular way; take care of Miranda's dry-cleaning; take care of twin's homework; order breakfast; fetch lattes; hung up her coat separately from others' or even find a driver in Paris; obtain the next unpublished Harry Potter manuscript; find the address and phone number of 'that' antique store in the seventies or find a jet that would agree to take her home in a terrible storm.

All the orders and demands leave Andrea without private life with her boyfriend Alex, family and friends. Her boyfriend decides to break up; her best friend Lilly starts to suffer from alcoholism. However, Andrea is too busy to notice all that. Finally, as she flies to Paris with Miranda to attend a glamorous fashion festival, she hears horrible news that Lilly had an accident and is in comma. At this moment she realizes that the life is made of choices. When Miranda starts to blame her for the expired passports of kids Andrea, tired of Priestly's absurd complains and demands, curses her in public and runs to fly back home. The story ends with her friend recovering from comma and Andrea going back to her old self. Furthermore, Andrea's dream to be a writer comes true: she gets the offer to work in the *Sixteen* magazine.

APPENDIX 4

The Summary of Marian Keyes's *Sushi for Beginners*

The story focuses on three women that are very different personalities and have different lives. It is about confident and professional career woman Lisa, generous, sensitive and having low self-esteem Ashling and dissatisfied, bored and unhappy with her housework Clodagh.

Lisa is a magazine editor in London who is hoping for a job in New York but she is sent to Dublin instead to establish a new women's magazine. Dissatisfied with such an unfair decision Lisa comes to Dublin and becomes the editor of the *Colleen's* magazine. Her way of treating *Colleen's* staff is rude and unpleasant. Despite that she is a professional editor and revives the unpopular magazine during the one year time.

Ashling has been fired from her previous magazine and is hired as the assistant in the *Colleen* to help Lisa start up the magazine. Ashling is a friendly and good-hearted personality. She takes care of the young beggar near her house; she always carries disaster prevention equipment and is ready to help anyone having a small emergency. However, her friendliness is not welcomed by her boss Lisa who steals her ideas and diminishes her in a variety of ways. Clodagh, Ashling's friend, is a mother and wife, but is bored; she envies Ashling her work and lifestyle as she feels she has decayed being a housewife. She is not even sure about her feelings for her husband.

All the women in the story experience romantic relationships. Lisa still loves her husband Oliver who decides to divorce her, Ashling dates a comedian but falls in love with her boss Jack and Clodagh cheats on her husband with Ashling's boyfriend.

Specifically, Lisa's relocation to Dublin turns for the better. She learns to value friendship and respect other people. As a result, her husband likes the new Lisa and decides to revive their relationships. Lisa's story ends with her joyfully accepting Oliver's offer to be together again.

Ashling has been dating Marcus Valentine until he cheated on her with Clodagh. When she finds out about cheating she falls into depression. Luckily, with the support of her family and friends she fights over the depression and goes back to work. Coming back to the office she realizes that her boss Jack Devine secretly loves her. The novel ends with Jack and Ashling walking together as Jack encourages Ashling to throw all her disaster prevention things to the sea.

Clodagh's story has a distinctive ending. When her husband witnesses her betrayal he moves out and takes their kids to himself. Moreover, Marcus Valentine leaves Clodagh for another woman. Ashling is not willing to be her friend any more. Clodagh's story ends with some unknown boys shouting compliments at her and reminding that life goes on.