

РОЗДІЛ 7 ПОРІВНЯЛЬНЕ ЛІТЕРАТУРОЗНАВСТВО

UDC 821.111-31+821.133.1-31:305-055.2:81'42
DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/tps2663-4880/2026.46.1.50>

POSTFEMINIST DISCURSIVE FORMATIONS IN CHICK-LIT: TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF NARRATIVE PRACTICES

ПОСТФЕМІНІСТИЧНІ ДИСКУРСИВНІ ФОРМАЦІЇ У ЖАНРІ ЧІК-ЛІТ: ТИПОЛОГІЯ НАРАТИВНИХ ПРАКТИК

Tsapro G. Yu.,
orcid.org/0000-0002-0748-7531
PhD in Linguistics, Associate Professor,
Head of English Language and Communication
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University

The article examines contemporary chick-lit fiction from a perspective that moves beyond fixed genre definitions. Although the label chick-lit is still common in publishing and criticism, many recent Anglophone and Francophone novels linked to it no longer rely on romance, irony, or lifestyle aspiration as their main organising principles. Instead, they focus on everyday emotional experience, care, vulnerability, and long-term relational responsibility.

The study examines a selection of popular novels by English- and French-language authors in which genre conventions are present only marginally or lose their organising role altogether. The analysis considers narrative voice, focalisation, evaluative language, and recurring thematic patterns. Instead of moving toward clear resolution, these texts often stay with fatigue, illness, grief, emotional dependence, and the ongoing effort of sustaining relationships.

These tendencies appear across both Anglophone and Francophone material, despite differences in language and cultural context. What connects these novels is not a shared plot structure but a shared orientation toward emotional attentiveness and ethical engagement. As irony becomes less central and care gains narrative weight, the interpretive focus shifts away from genre features toward narrative practices.

On this basis, the article proposes the concept of women-centred prose as a more productive analytical category for describing contemporary popular fiction written by women. The term highlights how meaning is shaped through sustained attention to emotional experience and relational life, rather than through adherence to genre-based expectations. It allows these narratives to be approached through how experience is organised within situations, interaction, and everyday routines.

Key words: chick-lit; women-centred prose; postfeminist discourse; narrative practices; Anglophone and Francophone fiction; care and vulnerability.

Актуальність дослідження зумовлена трансформацією сучасної популярної прози, що традиційно позначається терміном чік-літ, та потребою її переосмислення поза межами фіксованих жанрових визначень. Статтю присвячено аналізу новітніх англійських і французьких романів, у яких жанрові конвенції чік-літ втрачають свою організуювальну роль. У статті розглянуто зміну наративних принципів, зокрема відхід від домінування романтичної інтриги, іронії та наративів стилю життя.

У дослідженні охарактеризовано корпус творів сучасних англо- та французьких авторок, у яких жанрові ознаки чік-літ функціонують периферійно або відсутні. У статті проаналізовано наративний голос, фокалізацію, оцінну лексику та повторювані тематичні мотиви. Увагу зосереджено на репрезентації повсякденного емоційного досвіду, зокрема втоми, хвороби, втрати, емоційної залежності та тривалих зусиль, пов'язаних із підтриманням міжособистісних стосунків, а також на способах їх мовного й композиційного оформлення.

У публікації висвітлено спільні наративні тенденції в англійському та французькому матеріалі попри культурно-мовні відмінності. У роботі обґрунтовано, що ці тексти об'єднує орієнтація на емоційну уважність і етичну залученість, а не спільна сюжетна модель. У статті досліджено зсув аналітичного фокусу від жанрових ознак до наративних практик унаслідок послаблення ролі іронії та зростання значущості турботи як організуювального принципу оповіді, що визначає логіку розгортання тексту.

У статті обґрунтовано поняття жінкоцентричної прози як продуктивнішої аналітичної категорії для опису сучасної популярної літератури, написаної жінками, що дозволяє інтерпретувати формування смислу через тривалу увагу до емоційного досвіду та реляційного виміру життя поза межами жанрово зумовлених очікувань і традиційних класифікацій.

Ключові слова: чік-літ; жінкоцентрична проза; постфеміністський дискурс; наративні практики; англійська та французька проза; турбота і вразливість.

Introduction. The label chick-lit has always been convenient. It gives a name to a group of popular novels that centre women's lives and use an accessible style: first-person narration is common, the tone often leans toward wit, and relationships – romantic, familial, friendly – carry much of the narrative weight. In publishing terms, the category is easy to recognise. In critical terms, it is useful up to a point.

That usefulness ends the moment the label starts doing the analytical work on its own. The more one reads across the field, the harder it becomes to treat chick-lit as a stable genre with predictable narrative goals. A number of texts associated with the label no longer organise their plots around romance, humour, or lifestyle aspiration. They slow down. They stay with fatigue, grief, illness, loneliness, care, and the small obligations of everyday life – things that are not decorative “themes” but the actual engine of the story. In such novels, the reader's attention is pulled away from the expected arc of self-improvement and towards questions of emotional responsibility: what it means to look after someone, how relationships survive strain, and how a self is rebuilt after loss.

This shift matters even more in a comparative frame. Similar changes can be traced in both Anglophone and Francophone popular fiction despite the fact that they represent different cultural expectations and publishing traditions. The overlap is not a shared formula; it is a shared pressure on the genre label itself. When irony loses its central place and care becomes structurally important, the interpretive centre of these narratives moves. For that reason, a purely genre-based approach risks missing what is most significant in contemporary women-authored popular prose: the ethical and affective work the texts ask their protagonists and readers to perform.

This article takes that pressure as its starting point. Chick-lit goes into a broader development into women-centred prose, which defines itself through emotional attentiveness, relational responsibility, and the narration of experience that does not resolve neatly into genre closure.

LITERATURE REVIEW. Studies of chick-lit in literary scholarship often focus on how humour, irony, and confessional narration shape stories about independence and relationships. S. Ferriss and M. Young [4] and S. Harzewski [12] describe chick-lit through a recurring narrative pattern in which young, educated women move through work, romance, and consumer culture, with identity negotiated across these domains. G. Tsapro [21] and I. Whelehan [22] approach these features within postfeminist cultural logic.

Analyses of Anglophone and Francophone fiction demonstrate similar features in both traditions: a core reliance on self-ironic narration, intimate focalisation, depiction of everyday ethical dilemmas in works by Helen Fielding [5], Marian Keyes [14], Mhairi McFarlane [16], Agnès Abécassis, Virginie Grimaldi [11], Katherine Pancol, Aurélie Valognes, and Mélissa Da Costa [2]. Importantly, these studies also show that chick-lit frequently reflects narratives of precarious labour, mental health, ageing, care, and intergenerational responsibility.

Chick-lit has also been examined from a discourse-analytic perspective. In N. Fairclough [3] and M. Foucault [7], discourse is treated as a system of practices shaping identities, social relations, and power structures. M. M. Lazar [15] and M. Talbot [19] extend this line of analysis.

Feminist critical discourse analysis, in particular, highlights how linguistic and narrative choices contribute to the reproduction or contestation of gendered norms. Applied to chick-lit, these approaches make it possible to trace postfeminist discourse as a constellation of recurring stylistic, evaluative, and affective patterns that stabilise specific versions of femininity, agency, and intimacy.

A growing body of research has also focused on the stylistic and verbal features that shape the genre's recognisability. Chick-lit is characterised by a colloquial register, expressive evaluative vocabulary, intertextual references, and humour-based self-presentation [4; 12].

Self-deprecating wit, confessional narration, and emotionally saturated internal monologue in chick-lit represent postfeminist subjectivities, particularly in relation to body image, romantic disappointment, workplace tensions, and everyday crises [10; 22]. Chick-lit gradually broadens its thematic scope. The genre moves from consumerism and romance toward narratives focusing on family life, friendship, care relations, and emotional resilience [17].

Research on femininity and postfeminism in contemporary prose, beyond chick-lit itself, has paid particular attention to narrative voice and narrative structure. Studies of focalisation, narrative perspective, and plot structure explore how literary texts handle issues such as agency, vulnerability, and ethical responsibility [1]. In this line of research, narratological work by G. Genette [8], M. Fludernik [6], and D. Herman [13] helps clarify the role of first-person narration and restricted internal focalisation. Rather than functioning as neutral formal features, these narrative choices shape how everyday experience is foregrounded and made meaningful for the reader. In chick-lit, such strategies frame postfeminist dilem-

mas between self-care and care for others, ambition and relational obligation, individual fulfilment and social expectation within narratives that remain emotionally accessible while engaging with complex ethical questions.

Overall, existing scholarship points to several issues. Chick-lit is embedded in postfeminist cultural logics that prioritise individual agency, self-reflexivity, and affective labour, as discussed by S. Genz and B. A. Brabon [9], R. Gill [10], and Y. Tasker and D. Negra [20]. Features such as self-irony, colloquial language, and confessional narration determine how these ideas appear in chick-lit, as shown in S. Ferriss and M. Young [4]. Contemporary prose allows scholars to approach questions of femininity and postfeminism through the ways stories are told and organised, as noted by I. I. Repushevska [1]. What remains insufficiently systematised, however, is a coherent account of postfeminist discursive formations in chick-lit and a comparative typology of the narrative practices through which these formations are realised across different linguistic and literary traditions.

The label *women's fiction* is used for texts that are grouped together in publishing practice rather than defined through a shared narrative logic. It brings into one field novels that deal with relationships, work, and identity, where the central perspective belongs to a female protagonist. What holds these texts together is not the way the narrative is organised, but the fact that they are read and marketed as stories about women's lives. Similarly, contemporary women's writing operates as a broad literary designation that does not imply a specific mode of narrative organisation.

The notion of women-centred prose shifts attention away from thematic grouping and market classification. It brings into focus how narrative is organised: meaning emerges through attention to emotional experience, relational dynamics, and everyday interaction. These texts do not move through clearly defined stages or toward resolution. Experience appears within situations and stays connected to them. It develops through sequences of moments and through interaction, where one situation continues into the next and boundaries remain fluid. The term women-centred prose refers here to this organisation of narrative, where meaning forms within these sequences and remains within everyday interaction.

The aim of this article is to explore chick-lit as a form of contemporary popular fiction shaped by postfeminist discourse and to examine the narrative practices through which this discourse is expressed in Anglophone and Francophone texts.

Methodology and materials. This study is based on close reading and qualitative analysis of contemporary Anglophone and Francophone popular fiction. It draws on elements of discourse analysis to explore how postfeminist ideas are expressed in narrative form. The material includes novels traditionally associated with chick-lit, as well as texts that are beyond clear genre boundaries and place greater emphasis on care, vulnerability, and relational experience. Attention is paid to narrative voice, focalisation, evaluative language, and recurring themes, especially in the ways emotional experience is shaped and interpreted within the text. A comparative perspective allows to identify tendencies across English- and French-language fiction, while still taking into account differences in cultural and literary context.

The selection of texts follows two criteria: 1) contemporary novels published from the mid-1990s onward and commonly associated with chick-lit in publishing and criticism, which provides the initial field of material; 2) within this field, novels where narrative attention shifts toward emotional experience, care, and relational life.

Results and discussion. The analysis shows that chick-lit is no longer a reliable label for describing the narrative logic of many contemporary texts. Although the term is still widely used, it loses precision when applied as an analytical category. Across the material examined, genre expectations such as romance-driven plots, sustained irony, or lifestyle-oriented self-improvement are often present only in the background or disappear altogether as organising principles.

Instead, these novels tend to structure their narratives around everyday emotional experience. The plot frequently slows down and remains focused on states rather than events: exhaustion, grief, care for others, emotional withdrawal, or the gradual rebuilding of trust. In works by authors such as Marian Keyes [14], Mhairi McFarlane [16], Virginie Grimaldi [11], Mélissa Da Costa [2], and Sophie Tal Men [18], narrative attention shifts away from resolution and toward process. Many of these novels are concerned with how characters live through vulnerability, responsibility, and emotional uncertainty and do not have a conventional ending. This makes it hard to approach chick-lit as a fixed genre. While traces of familiar conventions remain, the narrative focus often lies elsewhere; thus, it can no longer be treated as a defining genre feature. In this context, it is more helpful to discuss narrative practices rather than genre features. These practices foreground emotional attentiveness and care, shaping what can be described as women-centred prose.

In earlier chick-lit narratives, irony often played a central role in organising the story. Characters such as Bridget Jones in Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* [5] rely heavily on humour and self-mockery to manage insecurity, romantic disappointment, and professional anxiety. Irony creates distance between the narrator and her experience, allowing emotional difficulty to be reframed as temporary, manageable, and ultimately solvable through personal adjustment.

In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, narrative voice is organised through self-observation structured as lists and resolutions. The opening section presents a sequence of self-imposed rules:

I WILL NOT

Drink more than fourteen alcohol units a week.

Smoke...

Get upset over men, but instead be poised and cool ice-queen.

Have crushes on men, but instead form relationships based on mature assessment of character. [5].

The fragmentation of experience into enumerated self-instructions creates distance and frames emotional life through ironic control.

In more recent novels, this organising function of irony becomes noticeably weaker. In Marian Keyes's *Grown Ups* [14], for example, humour remains present in dialogue and narration, but it does not structure the plot as a whole any longer. The novel centres on long-standing family conflict, emotional exhaustion, and unresolved trauma, all of which resist ironic containment. Irony appears episodically, but it does not neutralise emotional tension or guide the reader toward a reassuring resolution. The opening scene is built through interaction: *Lovely. He could die here, literally die... and would his brothers... even notice?* [14]. The thought appears in the middle of the scene, while the conversation at the table continues. It is part of what is happening and follows the character's reaction to the situation.

A similar shift can be observed in Mhairi McFarlane's *If I Never Met You* [16], where the protagonist's ironic voice gradually gives way to a more direct engagement with emotional vulnerability and professional burnout. While moments of wit remain, the narrative increasingly focuses on emotional fatigue and the slow re-evaluation of personal priorities, rather than on ironic self-presentation. The character's perception appears through comparison with others: *she feels like a dishwater-feathered pigeon in an enclosure full of chirruping tropical birds* [16]. The comparison comes from how she sees herself among the others at the table.

Francophone fiction shows comparable tendencies. In Virginie Grimaldi's *Les possibles* [11] and

Mélissa Da Costa's *Tout le bleu du ciel* [2], humour is present only intermittently and never functions as a protective frame. The narrative begins with a message posted online: *Jeune homme de 26 ans, condamné par un Alzheimer précoce, souhaite prendre le large pour un ultime voyage* [2]. This continues in the following passage, where the character reflects on the diagnosis: *Il a pris la nouvelle avec une lucidité totale* [2].

The sentence presents the character's response directly and stays close to the experience itself. Instead, the narratives remain closely aligned with experiences of illness, care, grief, and emotional dependency. Characters are not encouraged to distance themselves from these experiences through irony; rather, the texts insist on sustained emotional proximity.

In Sophie Tal Men's novels, such as *De battre la chamade* [18], the narrative voice remains calm and focused on the character's experience. Attention is directed toward everyday states, waiting, and emotional tension. The narrative begins with short entries that register time and reaction: *Temps écoulé depuis le départ de Matthieu : 22 heures. Dans ma tête ? Une éternité* [18].

The character counts the time, registers her state, and reacts to it, so that experience appears through these brief entries. Tension, exhaustion, and mental health are not demonstrated openly but appear in awkward conversations and long-standing emotional strain. The novel stays with the discomfort of being together and shows how care within families can be uneven and difficult to sustain.

In these novels, care shapes how the stories unfold. Characters make decisions in response to tiredness, responsibility, and emotional pressure. These decisions do not lead to a clear resolution and remain tied to ongoing situations. Vulnerability appears as part of everyday life and stays within the scenes where it emerges.

Across the novels discussed, the narratives stay close to everyday experience. They return to familiar situations and allow emotional states to change gradually. Emotional effort becomes visible in ordinary interaction and small decisions, often shaped by fatigue. Tension is not resolved but remains within the unfolding of the narrative.

Conclusions. The analysis shows that these narrative features recur across the material examined and form a consistent way of organising experience in contemporary popular fiction. They are visible in the structure of narrative voice, in the use of focalisation, and in the recurrence of thematic patterns related to care, vulnerability, and relational responsibility. Attention to

these elements allows the texts to be read not only at the level of narrative organisation, but also in terms of how experience unfolds within situations, interaction, and everyday routines. Across both Anglophone and Francophone material, similar configurations appear in the representation of emotional states, in the pacing of the narrative, and in the absence of resolution as a dominant organising principle. This makes it possible

to identify a stable set of narrative practices that structure these texts and to treat them as part of postfeminist discourse realised in literary form.

Perspectives for further research. Further research may extend this discussion to a wider range of popular fiction and explore how women-centred narrative practices develop across larger bodies of texts and different authorial contexts.

REFERENCES:

1. Репушевська І. І. Лінгвальні та позалінгвальні витoki привабливості класичних героїнь жіночого роману. Закарпатські філологічні студії. Ужгород: Видавничий дім «Гельветика», 2021. Вип. 16. С. 96–100.
2. Da Costa M. Tout le bleu du ciel. Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2019. 736 p.
3. Fairclough, N. Discourse and Social Change. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992. 259 p.
4. Ferriss, S., Young, M. (eds.). Chick-lit: The New Woman's Fiction. New York: Routledge, 2006. 352 p.
5. Fielding H. Bridget Jones's Diary. London: Picador, 1997. 310 p.
6. Fludernik, M. Towards a "Natural" Narratology. London; New York: Routledge, 1996. 454 p.
7. Foucault, M. The Archaeology of Knowledge / trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith. London: Tavistock, 1972. 245 p.
8. Genette, G. Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method / trans. by J. E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980. 285 p.
9. Genz, S., Brabon, B. A. Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009. 224 p.
10. Gill, R. Gender and the Media. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007. 304 p.
11. Grimaldi V. Les possibles. Paris: Fayard, 2021. 352 p.
12. Harzewski, S. Chick-lit and Postfeminism. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011. 288 p.
13. Herman, D. Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. 460 p.
14. Keyes M. Grown Ups. London: Penguin Books, 2020. 656 p.
15. Lazar, M. M. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Gender, Power and Ideology in Discourse. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 320 p.
16. McFarlane M. If I Never Met You. London: HarperCollins, 2020. 432 p.
17. McRobbie, A. The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change. London: SAGE, 2009. 208 p.
18. Tal Men S. De battre la chamade. Paris: Albin Michel, 2018. 320 p.
19. Talbot, M. Language and Gender. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010. 256 p.
20. Tasker, Y., Negra, D. (eds.). Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. 360 p.
21. Tsapro, G. Evolving Femininities in English and French Chick-Lit: Three Stages of Genre Development (1996–2025). Закарпатські філологічні студії. 2025. Вип. 43(2). С. 263–268. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32782/tps2663-4880/2025.43.2.41>.
22. Whelehan, I. The Feminist Bestseller: From Sex and the Single Girl to Sex and the City. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 264 p.



Стаття поширюється на умовах ліцензії відкритого доступу CC BY 4.0

Дата першого надходження статті до видання: 23.04.2026
Дата прийняття статті до друку після рецензування: 22.05.2026
Дата публікації (оприлюднення) статті: 29.05.2026