



Women Rule!

Women's Fiction Reader's Advisory

Division of Library Services | KDLA | 2018

Introduction

- What does Women's Fiction mean to you?
- Can a man write Women's Fiction?
- Various opinions about the definition of this genre
- Least "genre-y" of all genres
- Reaches into most fiction genres such as Romance, General Fiction, etc.
- Referred to as an "Umbrella" term or "Catch-all" term
- Also known as: Women's Lives/Women's Lives and Relationships



Overview



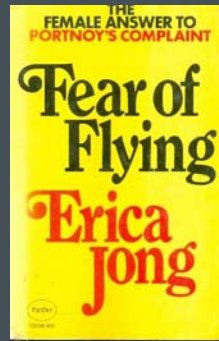
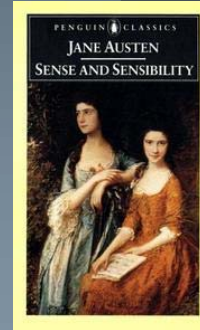
- Definition: “A body of literature that focuses on women’s lives and relationships such as family, friends, careers, empowerment, and aging.”
- Written by women and men for women and men. Depending on who you ask . . .
- Includes feminist issues, but is not solely feminist literature.
- Usually contemporary-i.e. in relation to when it was published (applies to after 1960).
- Character-centered with the main character and secondary characters all being female.
- Women’s emotions and relationships are key elements of the plot.
- Is it Women’s Fiction? One Librarian’s Test:
 - Q.: Can the main female character be easily swapped out for a male character?
 - A.: Yes-then general fiction
 - No-Women’s Fiction



What We Like About Women's Fiction

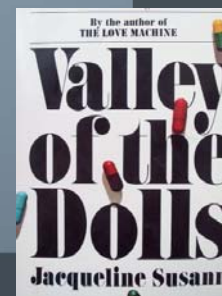
- Elements in there: romance, women testing the boundaries of their lives & freedom, working lives of women against a male-dominated society
- Appeal: character's ability to find resolution and reconciliation; reader can identify with the character (realistically drawn) and the storyline. On a lesser scale-mood or tone
- It is NOT Romance!
 - More to the story than love interest or a sexual relationship
 - No internal dialogue from the man
 - No expectation of “happy-ever-after”
 - Personal growth for the female character

- Early Forerunners
- 40's-60's: Women@Home, Women@Work
- 70's-80's: Rise of the Saga, Feminism, Glitz & Glamour
- New Millennium: Late 1990's through mid 2000's



History

Women's Fiction from
the Past to the Present



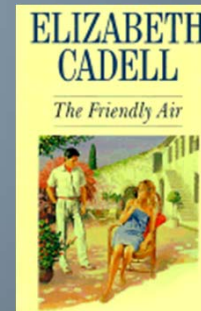
Early Forerunners



- Possibly grew out of the traditions of Romance
- Beginning with early feminist writers and 19th century writers of domestic fiction: Jane Austen and her contemporaries/Virginia Woolf
- First “bestseller” in America: *Charlotte Temple* by Susannah Rowson (1794)
- *A New England Tale* by Catharine Maria Sedgwick (1822) solidified the domestic genre novel
- Classic Examples: *Little Women*-Louisa May Alcott (1880); *The Awakening* –Kate Chopin (1899); *Mrs. Dalloway*-Virginia Woolf (1925); and *Gone With The Wind*-Margaret Mitchell (1936)

40's~60's: Women@Home, Women@Work

- Emphasis on working outside the home and sexuality.
- Iconic authors and titles:
 - Nancy Mitford's trilogy: Pursuit of Love (1945); Love In A Cold Climate (1949); and Don't Tell Alfred (1960)
 - Best of Everything by Rona Jaffe (1958)
 - The Group by Mary McCarthy
 - Peyton Place by Grace Metalious (1956)
 - Valley of the Dolls by Jacqueline Susann (1966)
 - Author, Elizabeth Cadell-books out of print, but wrote during 1940's-1980's



70's~80's: Rise of the Saga, Feminism, Glitz & Glamour

- Sex and Feminism with *Wifey* (Judy Blume); *The Women's Room* (Marilyn French); and *Fear Of Flying* (Erica Jong)
- “Me” decade & glitz & glamour of the 80's
 - Jackie Collins
 - Danielle Steel
 - Judith Krantz
- Sagas
 - Judith Michaels
 - Barbara Taylor Bradford
 - Helen Van Slyke



New Millennium: Late 1990's through mid 2000's

- Into the modern day, Oprah Winfrey and her Book Club have highlighted women's fiction with authors such as Toni Morrison, Anita Shreve, and Chris Bohjalian
- Chick Lit with *Bridget Jones' Diary* by Helen Fielding and the TV series *Sex and the City*, based on Candace Bushnell's books
- From “chick lit” to “chick lit grows up”
- Shift to Ensemble Fiction with a cast of characters instead of just one main character
- -Books feature crafts or cooking
- Issue-driven Fiction
- For 2010-rise of the “beach house” novels (escaping to the beach)





Subgenres



Grand Dames & Pioneers

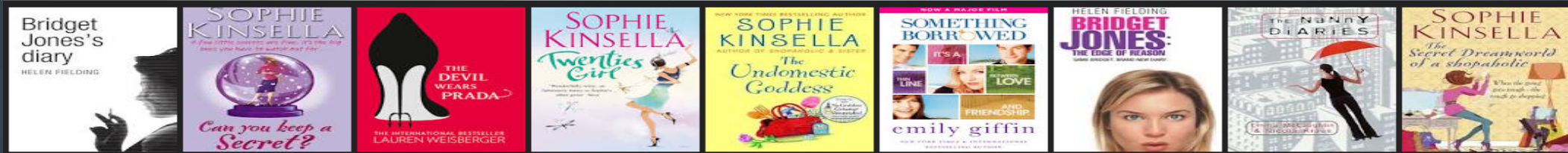
- **Requirements:**

- Multi-decade career
- Multiple novels with bestseller status
- Books that have shaped and/or defined women's fiction

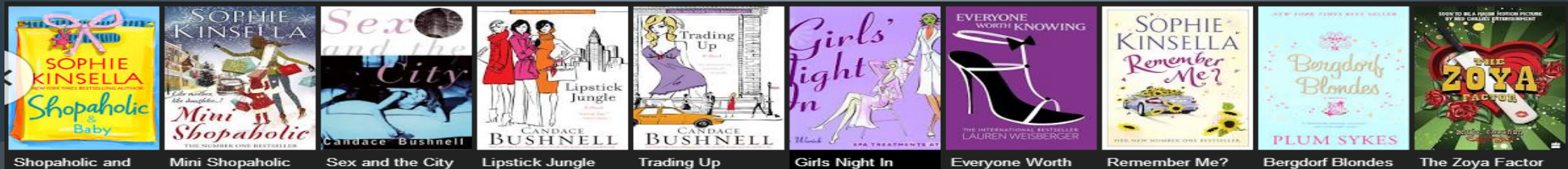
- **Authors:**

- Maeve Binchy
- Barbara Taylor Bradford
- Sandra Brown
- Jackie Collins
- Fern Michaels
- Rosamunde Pilcher
- Belva Plain
- Nora Roberts
- Danielle Steel

Chick Lit



- Foundational Texts: *Bridget Jones' Diary* and *Sex In The City*
- American founding mother-Erica Jong with *Fear of Flying*
- “Everyday working women”
- Breezy, light style





Chick Lit cont.

- Humor is tongue-in-cheek and witty
- Heavy focus on popular culture and urban settings
- Usually women in their 20's & 30's on their own for the first and struggling with new careers and relationships
- Began in late 1990's and has faded a bit by mid 2000's
- Has evolved to: Mommy Lit, Sistah Lit (Sisterfriend), Hen Lit
- Authors: Candace Bushnell, Beth Harbison, Emma McLaughlin & Nicola Kraus, Lauren Weisberger, Sophie Kinsella, Jennifer Weiner

Issue~Driven



- Often found in general fiction
- Became popular in the 1990's because of Oprah's Book Club
- Has an exciting storyline that deals with family and personal issues; fast-paced
- Issues are controversial or "hot topics" of the day
- Authors pull no punches & make reader's problems seem minimal or nonexistent
- Has an emotional wallop that absorbs the reader
- *Rule Exception*: May have a male protagonist equal to female protagonist
- Authors: Diane Chamberlain, Jodi Picoult, Lolly Winston, Jacquelyn Mitchard, Leah Hager Cohen, Barbara Delinsky, Joy Fielding, Sue Miller, Anita Shreve

Humorous



- Consistently funny authors with a focus of course on humor
- Sassy characters of all ages with snappy dialogue
- A wide variety of contemporary settings and a wacky plot
- **Authors:**
 - Mary Kay Andrews
 - Fannie Flagg
 - Jane Heller
 - Meg Cabot
 - Lorna Landvik
 - Sophie Kinsella
 - Haywood Smith
 - Clair Cook
 - Sarah Strohmeyer

Romantic



- Crossover authors from Romance to Women's Fiction
- Features a love story, but does not have to have a happy ending and the romance is not the main plot point
- Case by case basis
- **Authors & Titles:**
 - *P.S. I Love You* by Cecelia Ahern
 - *Love Letters* by Katie Fforde
 - *The Violets of March* by Sarah Jio
 - Jennifer Cruise-selected titles
 - Debbie Macomber (Cedar Cove/Blossom Street)
 - Lisa Kleypas (Friday Harbor Series)
 - Susan Mallery
 - Kristin Hannah



Gentle Reads

- Stories of families, communities and enduring friendships
- Pace is light and leisurely
- “Comfort food” of women’s fiction-no graphic sex, profanity or violence; hopeful tone or message and often with a happy ending
- Authors:
 - Maeve Binchy (*Whitethorn Woods*)
 - Jennifer Chiaverini (Elm Creek Quilts series)
 - Fannie Flagg
 - Lynne Hinton
 - Ann B. Ross (Miss Julia series)
 - Marcia Willett
 - Beth Hoffman

Multicultural



- Enduring subgenre
- African-American Authors: Bebe Moore Campbell, Pearl Cleage, Terry McMillan, Kimberla Lawson Roby
- Asian American Authors: Amy Tan, Caroline Hwang, Kim Wong Keltner, Michelle Yu, Blossom Kan
- East Indian American: Shobhan Bantwal, Bharati Mukherjee, Thrity Umrigar
- Latina: Kathy Cano-Murillo, Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez, Gwendolyn Zepeda



Family Sagas & Fiction

- Sagas were popular in the 1970's & 80's
- Some Must Read Sagas are *Just Rewards* by Barbara Taylor Bradford (part of the Harte Family Series) and *Roses* by Lila Meacham
- Family fiction has family as a common and main theme
- Must Read Family Fiction is: *Summer Blowout* by Claire Cook and *Real Life and Liars* by Kristina Riggle
- Other Family Fiction Reads are: *Another Piece of My Heart* by Jane Green, *The Island* by Elin Hilderbrand, *Then Came You* by Jennifer Weiner, *Once In A Blue Moon* by Eileen Goudge, and *Ladies Of The Lake* by Haywood Smith

Genreblends



- Genreblends=books that contain some, if not all, of the elements of women's fiction, but they also contain elements of other genres
- Christian Women's Fiction: varied tone and content, but all share main plot points of strong Christian value beliefs and renewal of faith. Authors: Colleen Coble, Kristin Billerbeck, Robin Jones Gunn, Dee Henderson, Karen Kingsbury, Janice Thompson, Susan May warren
- Historical Women's Fiction: have to have been written at least 50 years after the events described or by someone who has not alive at the time of the event(s). Authors: Ellen Baker, T.J. Brown, Margaret Dilloway, Dorothy Garlock, Kate Morton, Nancy Horan
- Romantic Suspense: strong female protagonist who falls in love and escapes from peril or solves a mystery with the mail appeal being plenty of tension. Authors: Elizabeth Adler, Sandra Brown, Elizabeth Lowell, Karen Robards, some of Nora Robert's titles (also as J.D. Robb)

New Titles



After The Fall – Julie Cohen

In This Moment – Karma Brown

Before Everything – Victoria Redel

Map of the Heart – Susan Wiggs

Confessions of a Domestic Failure – Bunmi Laditan

Still Me – Jojo Moyes

The Confusion of Languages – Siobhan Fallon

Before and Again – Barbara Delinsky

A Distant Heart – Sonali

How Hard Can It Be? – Allison Pearson (sequel to *I Don't Know How She Does It*)

The Goddesses – Swan Huntley

How To Walk Away – Katherine Center

I'll Be Your Blue Sky – Marisa de los Santos

Limelight – Amy Poeppel

Resources



- *A Few Good Books* by Stephanie L. Maatta
- *Genreflecting: A Guide To Popular Reading Interests*
- Book Reporter website: <http://www.bookreporter.com/>
- *Women's Fiction: A Guide To Popular Reading Interests*
- *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, edited by Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young
- Collection Development: "Chick Lit": Hip Lit for Hip Chicks-<http://reviews.libraryjournal.com/2005/07/collection-development/chick-lit-hip-lit-for-hip-chicks-collection-development-may-2005/>
- Good Ole' Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chick_lit and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women's_writing and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_writing_in_English
- Chick Lit Books: <http://chicklitbooks.com/>
- Chick Lit Club: <http://www.chicklitclub.com/>
- Good Reads' Chick Lit: <http://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/chick-lit>
- Provo Library's Women's Lit: <http://www.provolibrary.com/womens-literature>



Thank You All

Alicia & Beth