

Chick Lit in Historical Settings by Frida Skybäck

Helene Ehriander

Published online: August 2015

<http://www.jprstudies.org>

Abstract: Chick lit is mostly contemporary portrayals of single women in cities. The Swedish author Frida Skybäck writes “chick lit in corsets”, that is, chick lit in a historical setting, and she writes primarily for teenage girls. Her two novels *Charlotte Hassel* (2011) and *Den vita frun* (2012) balance between chick lit jr. and romance. They can also be read as historical novels, and in my article I highlight how Skybäck has consciously played with the different genres to convey a feminist message and to strengthen young readers.

About the Author: Helene Ehriander is a lecturer in comparative literature, with focus on children’s and young people’s literature, at the Department of Film and Literature, Linnaeus University in Växjö, Sweden. She defended her thesis in Comparative Literature, *Humanism och historiesyn i Kai Söderhjelm’s historiska barn- och ungdomsböcker* (“Humanism and the View on History in Kai Söderhjelm’s Historical Novels for Children and Young People”), at the University of Lund in 2003. She is currently writing a book on Astrid Lindgren as an editor at the publishing house Rabén & Sjögren. Together with Maria Nilson, Helene Ehriander has edited a volume of studies, *Chick lit: Brokiga läsningar och didaktiska utmaningar*, published by Liber Förlag in 2013.

Keywords: Chick Lit, Chick Lit Jr., Frida Skybäck, historical novels, romance fiction, Scandinavian Chick Lit, young women's fiction

Chick lit is a genre that usually depicts what life is like for young women in big cities, or occasionally—for the sake of variety—on fashionable country estates. They pursue their careers, go to parties, gossip with their girlfriends, and shop, while dating a series of men in their hunt for the right one. They contemplate their identity and their life, and they want everything at once so that their life will be perfect. Being slim and fit, having flawless nails and well-coiffed hair, enjoying success at work, and having a beautiful, well-kept home is a must for these women who aim for perfectionism and long for happiness. Chick lit is usually associated with the present day, and tends to be regarded as a humorous and ironic commentary on contemporary ideals and expectations. Most of the books classified in this genre take place in our own time.

There are, however, several novels very close to chick lit that take place in a historical setting. These novels include many of the ingredients that we find in chick lit, but here it is grand balls instead of clubbing, muddy streets instead of asphalt, horse-drawn coaches instead of sports cars, rustling silk and bobbing tulle from dressmakers in Paris instead of famous designer brands, and visits to the confectioner instead of a latte at the sidewalk café. The important questions that the young female protagonists have to confront are not very different from those occupying Bridget Jones and her sisters, and it is not difficult for the reader to recognize herself and identify with them (Ehriander).

“Chick lit in corsets” is written by women, read by women, has female heroes, and conveys a picture of women as being basically the same throughout the ages, so that much is still as it was in the past. The readers, moreover, are often young, and this is the type of book that attracts teenage girls and their mothers. In this article I discuss Swedish “chick lit in corsets” with examples from two novels by the Swedish author Frida Skybäck (born 1980): *Charlotte Hassel* (2011) and *The White Lady (Den vita frun)* (2012). I am particularly interested in these narratives as adolescent literature and adolescent reading. Frida Skybäck’s novels are marketed by the publisher Frank Förlag as adult literature, but Skybäck deliberately writes primarily for teenage girls, and *Charlotte Hassel* has been offered to teenage readers in the children’s book club Barnens Bokklubb (Skybäck, interview).

Chick lit in historical settings

According to Rocío Montoro, “Chick Lit is sometimes seen as a revamped version, a rebranding, or (for some) simply a renaming, of other more traditional forms of popular writing, namely romance or romantic fiction” (7). “Chick lit in corsets” can be regarded as a genre hybrid with some of its roots in older romantic literature. The novels are very close to what is usually called “romance” but they also have several typical features of chick lit. Many of them could also be called “feel-good” novels, a designation that comes from the emotions they arouse in the reader. Kaye Mitchell writes in her article “Gender and Sexuality in Popular Fiction” about how chick lit has also influenced the traditional romance. Chick lit is considered to have higher status and is treated with greater respect than romance, and authors and publishers alike believe that the romance genre has something to gain from being influenced by chick lit as regards, for example, the portrayal of better-educated, more ambitious heroines (Mitchell 134). Chick lit has also challenged the old boundaries between popular culture and more highly esteemed literature, and publishers tend to advertise romance together with chick lit so that the two genres will attract readers from each other (Harzewski 2011, 32, 41). That genres in today’s literature cross-fertilize each other is the rule rather than the exception, and there are many reasons for this. Authors who write in a particular genre are often regarded as innovative if they break one or more of the traditional structures. They can also profile themselves and express their personal authorial style by relating to the set framework of the genre, and by going against the conventions they can criticize the accepted norms and values of the genre.

Maria Ehrenberg, in a book about present-day romance from Maeve Binchy to Marcia Willett, divides light historical novels into four categories:

1. The unique person. In this category we meet historical personages and read about historical periods and events from the perspective of one person's actions.
2. Laborious everyday work. These books describe the misery and toil of everyday life.
3. Recent history. The Second World War is a common topic here, and the narrative often continues down to the present day.
4. The Miss Novel, also known as the governess novel or the manor-house novel. Here we find mystery and elements of thriller, as well as issues of class, money, and wealth. The historical backdrop is often sketchy and stereotyped, and the stories end with the by tradition dictated kiss. (39-40)

Frida Skybäck's novels do not fit into any of these four categories, although there are elements of the Miss Novel in particular. Maria Nilson writes that it may seem strange to call historical portrayals "chick lit," and she cites as an example Anna Godbersen's four-part suite *The Luxe*, which takes place in Manhattan in 1899–1900, of which at least the first part is close to chick lit (40). Nilson writes that it is fairly unproblematic to call the first book, *The Luxe*, chick lit jr., that is, chick lit for young readers: "There are parties and clothes and shopping and intrigues in an upper-class milieu. Then the series develops in a different direction, turning much darker, and it also becomes more difficult to identify the genre" (40, author's own translation). Chick lit jr. is characterized by the inclusion of typical chick lit ingredients while simultaneously considering matters such as reaching adulthood, identity, awakening sexuality, the future, and relations to friends, customary elements in stories for adolescents and young adults (Johnson 141 ff.).

The action of Frida Skybäck's debut book *Charlotte Hassel* (2011) takes place in 1771, with flashbacks to 1758. In 1758 Charlotte is a young woman from a well-off family who falls in love with a man of her own age. After a party she walks the short distance to her home, waiting for her parents, when an older man, influential and wealthy, follows her closely in order to assault her. Charlotte puts up a fight when he finds his way into her bedroom and tries to rape her, and she kills him with her letter opener in self-defense. When her parents arrive they help her get rid of the body and they send her to safety in England, where she finds a good life with a male friend, to whom she becomes engaged. Her parents and sister suffer fraud and extortion, and after thirteen years Charlotte decides to come back to Stockholm incognito to try to put things right. She also understands that a *coup d'état* is in the making. She meets once again the man she loved in her youth and breaks off the engagement in England; it turns out that her fiancé is homosexual and that they can only ever be good friends, which they remain even after Charlotte marries someone else. The kind, thoughtful homosexual male friend, with interests in fashion and interior decoration, is a common character in chick lit. The female characters in the novel are complex, and Skybäck plays with the stereotypes of the whore and the Madonna when she allows room for young women's thoughts and feelings.

In this novel there is plenty of female culture and feminine attributes: Charlotte buys mineral makeup, enjoys delicious pastries, and has exquisite dresses made for her. However, there is also a feminist intention in that Charlotte takes control over her life and her situation. She gets involved in the game of politics, showing a clear vision and sense of purpose as she averts the planned *coup d'état*. The reader follows Charlotte from the time when she is a young and somewhat insecure girl, which makes it easier for younger readers to identify with her, up to the happy ending, when she has developed into a grown-up woman who takes her share of what life has to offer.

Romance

The term “romance” is one that embraces a wide variety of literature on the theme of romantic love.[1] In Barbara Fuchs’s book *Romance* the analyses range from ancient Greece, through medieval tales of chivalry, Shakespeare and the Renaissance, to end with Harlequin romances. Fuchs also underlines how many sub-genres there are, and how popular contemporary romance literature is (124 ff.). Romances in the sense of romantic literature written by women for women usually have a similar construction, consisting of a number of set narrative structures that are varied in a more or less predictable way up to the happy ending when the heroine receives a kiss, an offer of marriage, or both. Frida Skybäck’s second novel, *The White Lady* (2012), contains less chick lit and more romance in the narrative, but it is powerful in its feminist message when it comes to emphasizing women’s right to shape their own lives and to be respected even if they are neither beautiful nor rich. This novel combines several literary motifs and patterns that often occur in both romance, chick lit and books for young adults: for example, the “ugly duckling”, “Cinderella,” and the orphan child (Harzewski 2006, 38). Most of the action takes place in the castle of Borgeby in Skåne. The story is about the fates of individual women, insolvency, and love across class boundaries: “love across the classes [is] an extremely common theme in historical romance,” Jerome de Groot writes in his survey in *The Historical Novel* (58).

Janice A. Radway, who has written a study of female readings of romance literature, *Reading the Romance*, states that the reading works for readers “as the ritualistic repetition of a single, immutable cultural myth” (194). But Radway goes on to claim, albeit in a rather limited study, that the reading women display different strategies and that their reading serves a number of different purposes. This is interesting given that romance literature and the reading of it has been criticized from many quarters for being conservative, presenting a distorted picture of society, fooling its readers, and even turning them into addicts and slaves since their real problems are never solved; instead they get stuck in a reading that brings temporary relief through illusory solutions. This outlook on the reading of romantic literature and female readers as victims has a long history. Gustave Flaubert’s novel *Madame Bovary* (1856–57) has achieved great significance with its portrayal of a reading girl who through time loses contact with reality and as a young woman falls into a destructive pattern with reading, eroticism, fashion, and shimmering pink dreams of romantic rendezvous, while she cheats on her husband, runs up huge debts, and ends up seeing suicide by arsenic as the only way out.

Perhaps some romance literature over the years could be called escapist, and can justifiably be accused of building on stereotyped gender roles, with protagonists that are poor role models for young readers, but in today's romance and chick lit there are interesting exceptions which actually use the genre and the form to communicate feminist messages to their readers through playful, knowing hints and examples of energetic heroines who shape their own lives. It is also not infrequent that the genre comments on itself in its portrayal of literature and reading. This gives readers the chance to read subversively and to read against the text; instead of passivizing the reader, this can give strength. It is also quite common for the female protagonists to be interested in literature, and using the wisdom they have derived from their reading. Maria in *The White Lady* enjoys the castle library and immerses herself not only in romantic novels but also reads, for example, contemporary female poetry.

Diana Wallace, who has written a study titled *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900–2000*, argues that the historical novel was one of the most important forms for women's reading and writing during the twentieth century. She testifies to how she herself and many of the women she knows have read historical novels by and about women ever since childhood: "From an early age I read women's historical novels avidly, as did my mother and sister. The same was true, I later discovered, of many of my female friends and colleagues, and of many of the literary critics, writers, and theorists who have been central to the development of feminist literary criticism" (ix). She points out, however, that there has been a tendency to associate female authors' historical novels with romance and label them as escapist: "Associated with the 'popular', women writers have thus been doubly excluded from the established canon" (Wallace 10). What I think becomes clear when one studies what has been written about the different genres is that romance is perceived as a female genre while historical novels are masculine (and "serious").

Historical novels

Då som nu ("Then As Now") by Hans O. Granlid from 1964 is still the standard Swedish work about the historical novel. Granlid does not write anything about children's and young people's literature, nor about young people's reading, and of all the novels he analyses, only one is by a female author. The situation is similar in major English-language studies, and another remarkable thing is that, when the origin of the historical novel is described, only male authors are highlighted, with Walter Scott taking pride of place. Female authors and the genres they have developed and published their works in have to take a back seat as male authors set the pattern for how historical novels should be written.

In his introduction Granlid poses interesting and fundamental questions about what a historical novel is and what characterizes it. He is interested in the problems of analogy and archaization: that is, how the historical period is described in the literary work, how the matter is presented and placed in a particular time, how it is related to the present, and what specifically is archaized in content and style. Closely linked to the problems of analogy and archaization is the problem of anachronism: that is, what happens when writing about something from the past that is to be read in the present, made comprehensible to contemporary readers (Granlid 16 ff.). Archaization is thus about how the text is made

“old-fashioned”: anachronisms are things or expressions that are out of place in the period, and analogies are agreements between our time and the historical time.

Historical books often incorporate a large amount of fact in the narrative, which means that people often ask where the dividing line between fact and fiction runs. A historical novel can never be regarded as “true,” for somewhere the author has decided where history ends and the story begins: in other words, where facts give way to fiction, and if a factual event is described we must remember that it is slanted in some way by the author.

Maria Nikolajeva, in her book *Barnbokens byggklossar* (“Building Blocks of the Children’s Book”), discusses what a historical portrayal is, with examples from Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, published in 1868. The novel is about the author’s experiences in a domestic setting during the America Civil War, and it is partly or mostly autobiographical. The book has been read by many generations of girls and has also been filmed:

Historical novels are set in the past. It is important to remember, however, that it is the author’s past, not the reader’s, that determines whether a novel can be called historical. From the perspective of a reader in the 1990s, *Tom Sawyer*, *Little Women*, *Nils Holgersson*, and *Elvis Karlsson* all depict a bygone time, but they were written as contemporary accounts. This may seem unimportant, but it is crucial when we judge values in the text. *Little Women* expressed its period’s view of the role of women in society. A modern young people’s novel set in the same historical period as *Little Women* would perhaps express our modern view of the same issue. (Nikolajeva 49)

With regard to values, which Nikolajeva finds important, a story thus cannot just lie maturing and subsequently become historical (49).

Ying Toijer-Nilsson writes that most historical novels for young readers have a boy as the leading character (24). This no doubt has something to do with the conventions of historical books for young people, where war, for example, is a common topic, and girls have traditionally stayed at home while boys have been at the center of the exciting events. Moreover, girls and women learned early on to read texts where boys and men have prominent roles, whereas boys and men tend to read only about their own gender, since they are brought up to view anything associated with the female sphere as less important. However, Maria Nikolajeva writes in *Children’s Literature Comes of Age: Toward a New Aesthetic* that one can discern a change in historical narrative as regards the leading characters: “In particular, the masculine viewpoint of the earlier historical novel has been challenged by contemporary writers in favor of the ‘her-story’” (131). To attract all readers it has often been considered important that the protagonist should be a boy or a young man and that there is excitement enough to keep the reader’s interest to the very end. It has also been common for the author to choose to have both a girl and a boy, often siblings, so that readers of both sexes can identify with one of the leading figures. Kent Hägglund has written about the significance of the historical novel both for our perception of history and as reading matter for young people:

Ever since the middle of the nineteenth century, the historical novel has meant a great deal for the interest that children and young people take in

history. Novelists have often taken the lead in giving new perspectives. Women, children, minorities, and war victims of bygone times were given a central position in literature, long before they were included in school history books.

It has even happened often that authors of young people's books have taken up an interesting topic before historians have tackled it. There is nothing strange about that: both historians and authors are driven by a conviction that knowledge of the past can help us in our lives here and now.

Both use knowledge and imagination to explore people and phenomena in a bygone time. But the researcher always reaches a limit where he or she must stop, and dividing lines between what we know, what we can assume, and what we have no idea about. The author has the freedom—or perhaps rather the compulsion—to step over that line, to give life to persons who never existed, to forge links, to invent. (Hägglund, author's own translation)

Hägglund goes on to say: "Of course there are novelists who use a historical setting merely as a backdrop for stories that could just as well have been enacted in the present." The concept of the historical novel thus includes not only the time aspect but also a quality aspect. In research on literature and history there has long been awareness that history and fiction are closely related since all attempts to depict our past take some form of narrative, but this can be done in more or less responsible ways. There are and have been authors who have endeavored to write serious historical novels and there are those who have written what are somewhat condescendingly called "costume novels," seeking to tell an entertaining story in a historical setting. In costume novels the historical period is just a backdrop; the historical details can be quite correct while the people and relationships are not put into any factual historical context.

There are thus many levels to take into consideration as a reader when reflecting on a historical novel and what is "true" and "correct". The details must be accurate in that the clothes, for example, should correspond to the period and that there should be no cars in a period before the car was invented. In Frida Skybäck's novels, the characters are placed in a historical time where genuine historical figures are named and possible historical events are depicted. Frida Skybäck, who teaches history and English, faithfully uses the vocabulary of the period and she is also careful to try to get the historical details right. During the time she was working on *Charlotte Hassel*, one of the books she read was the diary of Märta Helena Reenstierna (*Årstafruns dagbok 1793-1839*), and she learned how modern that lady was in her way of expressing herself, and how her thoughts did not differ noticeably from the way we think today. In both of Skybäck's books there is an afterword outlining how much of the narrative is fact and how much is fiction.

Historical events must be correctly depicted, but as a reader one also has to be aware that they are probably depicted from a particular angle, perhaps with a specific intention, and that it is often the victor who writes the history. In historical accounts women, poor people, and children are portrayed less frequently than men, kings, and well-off people, although this is slowly changing (Brown and St. Clair 186). It is even more problematic in a historical narrative to picture how different people have thought and felt

through the ages. There is more documentation and material when it comes to men, but the material for women and children is very limited.

People are the same through the ages

“The problem for historians,” Karin Norman writes, “is that we have so little access to the way people perceived their own situation and justified their actions. It is easy to resort to ascribing our own thoughts and values and emotions to other people. It takes a balancing act between generalizing and relativizing: how similar or different were people in the past from us today? Similar or different in what way?” (51, author’s own translation). Authors have greater freedom in this matter than historians do. John Stephens, in his study *Language and Ideology in Children’s Fiction*, says that major historical events tend to be described through love stories and human relations in this kind of fiction (206). On several levels, as Stephens also points out, there lies a contradiction within historical fiction. While the text links past and present, it simultaneously gives the illusion of an older literary discourse. The discourse constantly balances between “the same” and “different.” In a broader perspective this is a matter of a transhistorical outlook versus cultural relativism (Stephens 202 ff.). As I see it, it is not a question of either/or, but of where the discourse is positioned on different occasions on a scale between these two poles. In portrayals of the past there must be more similarities than differences to facilitate understanding, especially for young readers. A text that is placed too far on the scale towards “difference” makes identification difficult and risks not being perceived as plausible, and may even be incomprehensible. It is also a matter of the level on which one wants to put the interpretation. If you go straight into the text and look at the details, relations, or emotions that display similarity or difference, you tend to perceive the text as showing a high degree of cultural relativism. If, on the other hand, you choose to abstract and raise the relations and emotions to a higher level, there is a good chance of seeing the text as transhistorical and common to all mankind. The foundation is similar but the constituents take on relative expressions depending on the time in which they exist and the culture and social class they reflect. The transhistorical position means that humanity, wishes, and needs are the same through the ages, but that they find different social expressions. In other words, one could say that people are alike through the ages and that it is the stage on which they act that differs from one period to another. People are steered by their environment and their culture, but they are basically the same; if we peel away or abstract the exterior, the human core is constant. By emphasizing the similarities and the basic correspondences, it is possible to create an understanding of both past and present.

This understanding is also used by Frida Skybäck. The distance from the historical period allows readers to see their own lives and their own problems in perspective, and it offers an opportunity to come to terms with these. Moreover, the reader gets an idea of what it means to be a woman here and now in comparison with what it could be like in the past. When women read about women and the things that have occupied women’s time and interest through the ages, it also establishes a historical community. Family sagas tend to be popular, and by reading them one can glimpse historical connections that would not otherwise be visible. Women get their share of history and can draw parallels to their own

experiences. Frida Skybäck's *The White Lady* depicts two generations of women in parallel. The older woman has just had a daughter, and since she is growing increasingly weak from a terrible illness that she does not understand, she writes a diary for her newborn daughter. The novel ends with the daughter reaching adulthood and having a daughter of her own, for whom she starts writing a diary. Through her own mother's notes she has found out who she is and has got to know the mother who drowned herself to save her newborn daughter when she was just a few months old. Diana Wallace writes: "As a genre, the historical novel has allowed women writers a license which they have not been allowed in other forms. This is most obviously true of sexuality where it has allowed coverage of normally taboo subjects, not just active female sexuality but also contraception, abortion, childbirth and homosexuality" (6).

In Frida Skybäck's two books we find, beside the portrayal of the young woman who does not understand that she has contracted syphilis from her husband, accounts of pregnancy before marriage, the contraceptive methods used in those days, attempted rapes, a sexual relationship with a man who is not a potential future husband but a tender lover who teaches the young woman "the art of love", and sexual relations across class boundaries. History is written here from a female perspective, and female concerns are visibly in focus. At the same time, this can be viewed as a comment on life today, an explanation for why we relate to these parts of life in a particular way. Girls and women are lifted out of their exclusion and marginalization, and the author has the liberty here to write alternative history. John Stephens says that what is depicted as universal human experience in a historical account can mean that our descriptions of the past are colored by our image of present-day reality (202 ff.). In Frida Skybäck's books this is entirely intentional, a narrative device to enable the reader to reflect on herself and her own life as she reads.

Role play in a historical setting

Diana Wallace writes in her preface how history lessons in school disappointed her since they were never about women, and she sees this as one reason why so many girls and women have read and still read historical novels where women are allowed to be central figures (ix). Wallace goes on to write:

The "woman's historical novel", then, encompasses both the "popular" and the "serious" or "literary" ends of the spectrum, but one of my arguments here is that the two are intimately linked. [...] We need to read both "serious" and "popular" historical novels together and against each other if we want fully to understand the range of meanings that history and the historical novel have held for women readers in the twentieth century. (5)

Eva Queckfeldt has written about "the historical novel without history" in the annual of the history teachers' association:

To restrict the discussion solely to historical novels, these have been considered and discussed both as a source of knowledge and as an educational aid, not least by history teachers. The advantages of the novels are thought to be, among other things, that they let the reader experience the past in a different way from the textbooks. For example, the reader meets figures from the past and it is, probably rightly, assumed that this makes him/her familiar with the people of bygone times, their context, their everyday life, and their thoughts. This almost always concerns the “good” historical novels: Per Anders Fogelström’s novels about Stockholm, Vilhelm Moberg’s emigration epic, Väinö Linna’s crofter trilogy, to name just a few examples. These are novels written by authors who took pains to give as correct a picture as possible of the past. Often they were accounts that not even professional historians could object to.

The problem is that these good novels are just a small proportion of all the “historical novels” produced. There is also a whole undergrowth of novels that call themselves “historical.” (63, author’s own translation)

The good historical novels mentioned by Queckfeldt are also all by male authors, and she contrasts these with seven “pulp novels” in which reality is doctored for the reader and the novels’ “conflicts become simple and are explained as a result of the individual persons’ actions.” The plot “circles around LOVE for the female readership” (64, author’s own translation). These novels have such great defects in their language, the anachronisms are piled on top of each other, and all the historical details are so vague that they could be used almost anywhere. Queckfeldt argues that these novels, carelessly thrown together and trivial in content, are “without history.” Frida Skybäck’s novels counteract this by showing, from a female perspective, how history repeats itself and how today’s women are a part of the past, therein giving women a place where they refuse to “take shit from anybody.”[2]

Frida Skybäck plays with historical depiction, with romance and chick lit, and with the stereotyped characters of the whore and the Madonna, in order to give scope to women’s thoughts and feelings. By playing with genres she opens possibilities for readers to read subversively, to try out new roles and lines, and to find themselves and stand up for who they are. Frida Skybäck, who works as a teacher at an international high school in Lund, is also aware that in other countries much more historical material is used than in the Swedish school. In Sweden, history as it is taught is comparatively dry and lifeless, and she thinks that it is important to arouse an interest in the source of power that history represents through literature that can move people. Diana Wallace writes about how women in Mussolini’s Italy were prohibited from studying history at university: “A knowledge of history, this suggests, has the potential to be dangerously subversive [. . .]. It is not surprising that in women’s hands the historical novel has often become a political tool” (2). Compared with Madame Bovary’s tragic fate, this is the reverse way to view women’s reading: either girls and women read with emotion and can then be affected to the point of madness, or else they are able to read with the brain connected and the result can be a threat to the prevailing society.

Janice A. Radway has exposed the narrative structures in romances in the same way that Vladimir Propp in the 1920s identified the set narrative features of Russian folktales. Radway has found thirteen recurrent features, which she calls functions, in romances:

1. The heroine's social identity is destroyed.
2. The heroine reacts antagonistically to an aristocratic male.
3. The aristocratic male responds ambiguously to the heroine.
4. The heroine interprets the hero's behavior as evidence of a purely sexual interest in her.
5. The heroine responds to the hero's behavior with anger or coldness.
6. The hero retaliates by punishing the heroine.
7. The heroine and hero are physically and/or emotionally separated.
8. The hero treats the heroine tenderly.
9. The heroine responds warmly to the hero's act of tenderness.
10. The heroine reinterprets the hero's ambiguous behavior as the product of previous hurt.
11. The hero proposes/openly declares his love for/demonstrates his unwavering commitment to the heroine with a supreme act of tenderness.
12. The heroine responds sexually and emotionally.
13. The heroine's identity is restored. (134)

It is important to have knowledge of how narratives are built up, since this is also the foundation for our interpretation of them. When we recognize the set form, we know what type of story we are reading, and when we have read several of them we soon detect when an author is going against the familiar pattern. In these deviations an author's ideological intentions can be obvious: for example, when an author with feminist ambitions breaks the pattern in a traditional romantic narrative. This also opens up for questions about how historical literature functions, namely, that it brings our history to life and invites the reader to take the step into an alternative time, a kind of role play where one can learn something about our history, about our own time, and about ourselves and the contexts to which we belong as girls, women, and humans.

[1] "The term *romance* derives from the French and was first used exclusively to refer to medieval romances (sometimes called 'chivalric romances') written in French and composed in verse. These narratives were concerned with knightly adventure, courtly love, and chivalric ideals, often set at the court of King Arthur. Later the term was used to refer to any medieval romance, whether in verse or prose, and regardless of country of origin" (Harzewski 31).

[2] This idiomatic expression is often used by young women in Sweden today to indicate that they do not accept infringements of their integrity, outdated values, stupid comments, or lack of respect.

References

- Brown, Joanne, and Nancy St. Clair. *The Distant Mirror: Reflections on Young Adult Historical Fiction*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press Inc, 2006. Print.
- Ehrenberg, Maria. *Nutidsromantik: Från Maeve Binchy till Marcia Willett*. Lund: BTJ Förlag, 2009. Print.
- Ehriander, Helene. "Chick lit i korsett." *Chick lit – brokiga läsningar och didaktiska utmaningar*. Ed. Maria Nilson and Helene Ehriander. Stockholm: Liber, 2013. 159-173. Print.
- Fuchs, Barbara. *Romance*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Godbersen, Anna. *The Luxe*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007. Print.
- Granlid, Hans O., *Då som nu. Historiska romaner i översikt och analys*. Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 1964. Print.
- Hägglund, Kent. "Mot främmande land på Attilas häst." *Dagens Nyheter*. 14 May 2001. Print.
- Harzewski, Stephanie. *Chick Lit and Postfeminism*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011. Print.
- — —. "Tradition and Displacement in the New Novel of Manners." *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*. Ed. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young. New York: Routledge, 2006. 29-46. Print.
- Johnson, Joanna Webb, "Chick Lit Jr.: More Than Glitz and Glamour for Teens and Tweens" *Chick Lit. The New Woman's Fiction*. Ed. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young. New York: Routledge, 2006. 141-157. Print.
- Mitchell, Kaye. "Gender and Sexuality in Popular Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Popular Fiction*. Eds. David Glover and Scott McCracken. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 122-140. Print.
- Montoro, Rocío. *Chick Lit. The Stylistics of Cappuccino Fiction*. London: Continuum, 2012. Print.
- Nikolajeva, Maria. *Barnbokens byggklossar*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1998. Print.
- — —. *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Toward a New Aesthetic*. New York: Garland, 1996. Print.
- Nilson, Maria. *Från Gossip Girl till Harry Potter: Genusperspektiv på ungdomslitteratur*. Lund: BTJ Förlag, 2010. Print.
- Norman, Karin. *Kulturella föreställningar om barn: Ett socialantropologiskt perspektiv*. Stockholm: Rädda Barnen, 1996. Print.
- Queckfeldt, Eva. "Den historielösa historiska romanen." *Historielärarnas förenings årsskrift*. N.p., 1995-96. 63-70. Print.
- Radway, Janice. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. 1984. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991. Print.
- Skybäck, Frida. *Charlotte Hassel*. Stockholm: Frank, 2011. Print.
- — —. *Den vita frun*. Stockholm: Frank, 2012. Print.
- — —. Interview by Helene Ehriander. 2 August 2012.
- Stephens, John. *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*. London: Longman, 1992. Print.
- Toijer-Nilsson, Ying. "Lite välkommen 'herstory'." *Abrakadabra* 6 (1997): 24-25. Print.
- Wallace, Diana. *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.