

What is Dick Lit?

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Dick lit (or lad lit, as it is occasionally referred to) is literature written by male authors and centered on male characters in their twenties and thirties. Defined by authors such as Chuck Palahniuk, Chad Kultgen, Paul Neilan, Walter Mosley, and John Niven, the stories are most often written from the point of view of a first-person narrator dealing with the challenges of urban life as it pertains to men specifically, thereby providing a counterpoint to its female-centric sister genre **chick lit**.

The stories often come off as pure entertainment for its primarily young male readers – promising cheap laughs and **titillation** with its dark humor and **gratuitous** sex scenes – but there is a serious **undercurrent** of **existentialistic despair** that runs through the stories. Dealing with people who are constricted by the norms of their society and breaking rules as well as taboos to fight against these norms, dick lit also belongs to the genre of transgressive fiction.

chick lit litterær genre der fokuserer på storbyliv for kvinder i 20'erne og 30'erne med et fokus på humor, mode, venskab, seksualitet, karriere og kærlighed, eksempelvis Candace Bushnells *Sex and the City* (1997), Sophie Kinsellas *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2001) og Lauren Weisbergers *The Devil Wears Prada* (2003)

titillation parring

gratuitous unødvendige

undercurrent understrøm

existentialistic eksistentia-
listisk / havende at
gøre med eksisten-
tialismen, en filosofisk
retning som beskæftiger
sig med livets mening

despair fortvivelse

THE SETTING OF DICK LIT...

absent fraværende

devaluated devalueret / mistet sin værdi

Sisyphus Sisyfos, græsk mytologisk figur som gjorde guderne vrede, og som blev dømt til at rulle en sten op på toppen af et bjerg kun for at se den falde ned igen på den anden side og starte forfra - for evigt

Albert Camus (1913-1960) fransk filosof og eksistentiaalist som brugte den græske myte om Sisyfos som illustration for livets meningsløshed og absurditet, hvor den eneste måde at undslippe evigt arbejde er selvmord

toil slid / hårdt arbejde

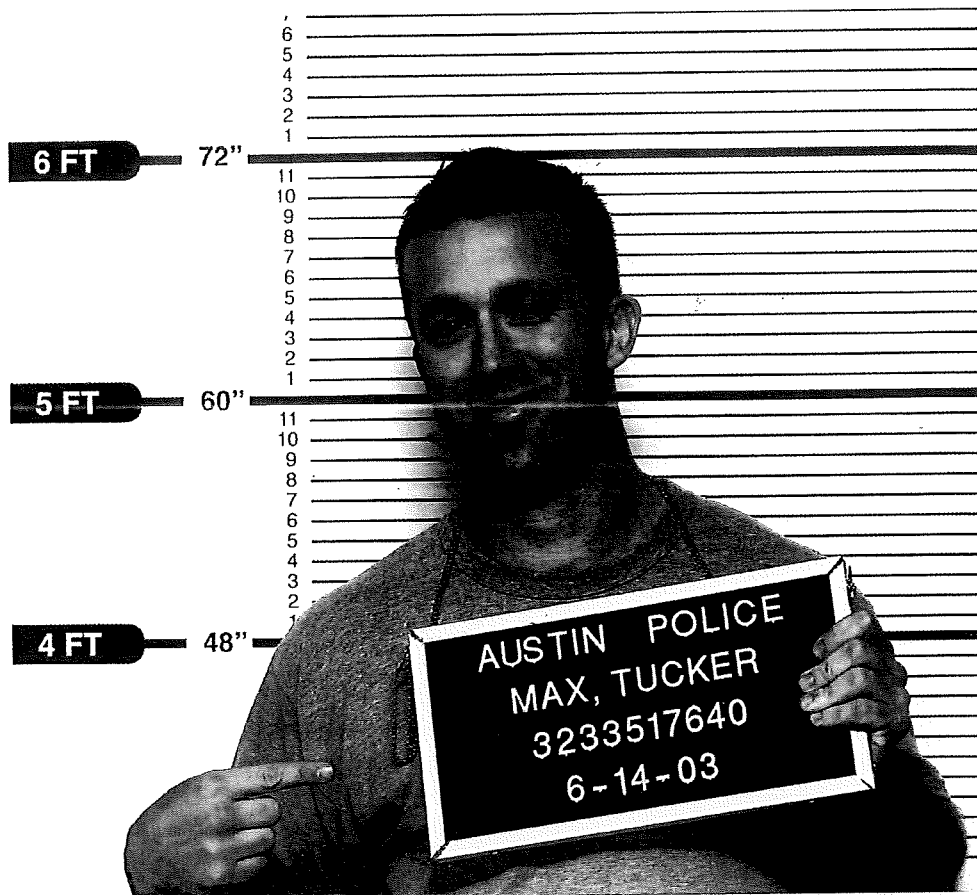
aesthetic æstetiker / et begreb brugt af Søren Kierkegaard for en person som er optaget af nydelse

emasculation kastration / afmaskulisering

As is common in postmodern narratives the traditional sources of answers and direction are **absent** in dick lit. The society where men are bread-winning patriarchs and women care for their families is no more. The traditional gender roles have been **devaluated**, career-oriented women are common, and father figures – including God, the ultimate father figure – are largely absent.

It is a world governed by rules that make no sense, a world driven by shallow consumerism and materialism, a world that is populated by people too stupid and narrow-minded to see the meaninglessness of their own existence, and a world that has no room for traditional masculine values.

Like **Sisyphus** from the philosophy of **Albert Camus**, humanity seems to be trapped in an endless cycle of meaningless toil from which there is no obvious escape beyond suicide. The narrators of dick lit typically recognize this meaninglessness of their existence and their own powerlessness in facing it, and in this they often mirror the boredom, anxiety, and despair expressed in Danish existentialist Søren Kierkegaard's **aesthetic**. Or – more plainly – the narrators of dick lit experience varying degrees of identity crisis and **emasculation** due to the realization that – ultimately – none of their actions matter.



While this is a promotional photo, Tucker Max has had several run-ins with the police during his adventures.

... AND THE MEN WHO LIVE IN IT

Faced with the harsh reality that their actions carry no real weight in the **grander scale of things**, many of the narrators of dick lit seek to fight back and make a difference. With no God, no fathers, and no heroes in their lives, many of the characters seek to become these things themselves; they want to take action and they want their actions to matter. Others take the realisation that they cannot do anything as a free pass to not do anything. What they have in common is that they see through – or are beginning to see through – the meaningless rules that **permeate** society; some of them respond by breaking the rules others by taking advantage of the rules.

There are three main ways that the narrators of dick lit respond to the meaninglessness of the surrounding world and the emasculation they feel as a result of it. It is not uncommon for one narrator to fit into more than one category.

- 1) **Apathy and snark**: The apathetic male sees that the world does not make sense and that he has no ability to make a difference in it, and he does not care. Instead of fighting **futilely** against the world the apathetic narrator mostly just exists in it, knowing that he is more aware of his surroundings than most others. He responds with snark – often unspoken – for in his eyes existence is but a giant **tragicomic** joke.
- 2) **Aggression and/or violence**: The aggressive male is a destructive force. Being a man and making a difference are both synonymous with raw power, violence, and destruction. He sees that the world makes no sense and it makes him angry; he wants to tear it down. Masculinity is about being able to hold your own in a fight and occasionally it is to start that fight yourself.
- 3) **Sex**: The **libidinous** male responds to his feelings of emasculation by focusing it into his sex drive. In a life without purpose, **gratification** becomes the replacement. For him, having sex with women – and preferably as many women as possible – combines experiencing pleasure and expressing masculinity and it represents an arena in which he can feel in charge and in control.

STYLISTIC CHOICES

In dick lit the sex is graphic, the violence is poetic, and the language drips with irony and sarcasm as the narrators relate their view of the world almost in a style of heightened reality **riddled with** pop-cultural references. Furthermore, it is common for the stories to experiment with stylistic features that **underscore** the postmodern themes of the stories and the fragmented nature of the lives and identities of their narrators.

The first page and chapter of Chuck Palahniuk's *Survivor* (1999), for example, are numbered 289 and 47 respectively and as the reader progresses through the

the grander scale of things
the store billede
permeate gennemsyrrer
snark spydige
kommentarer
futilely frugtesløst
tragicomic tragikomisk /
sjovt og tragisk samtidigt
libidinous libidinos / styret
af sine drifter
gratification tilfredsstillelse
riddled with gennemsyret
af
underscore understreger
pattern mønster
portmanteau ord
sammentrukket af to
andre ord
pseudonyms dæknavn /
kunstnernavn

narrative the page and chapter numbers decrease as a countdown to the inevitable and catastrophic climax. In *The Average American Male* (2007) Chad Kultgen also plays with the numbering of his chapters; most are given numbers in the traditional way so that chapter one leads to chapter two and so, but in between chapters two and three, for example, there is an extra chapter designated with the more vague label "some chapter". While the pattern seems to be that the chapters that do not advance the plot of the novel bear this label, it is also interesting that the entirety of the chapter one – subtitled *Christmas with Mom and Dad* – consists only of the three words: "Same old bullshit."

When Kultgen leaves the narrator of *The Average American Male* (2007) unnamed throughout the entirety of the novel, he mimics what Palahniuk does with his narrator in *Fight Club* (1996), but he takes it one step further and leaves out the nature of his narrator's job as well. The narrators – regardless of how extreme their actions may seem to the readers – are everymen. We are not necessarily expected to feel sympathy for them, but we are expected to feel empathy. Their thoughts and desires – if not how they choose to act on them – are meant to reflect those of average American men.

AND WHAT IS FRATIRE?

Fratire is a genre that was largely defined by writers such as George "Maddox" Ouzounian, Tucker Max, and Warlizard and given its name by journalist Warren St. John. Despite the name of the genre being a portmanteau of the words *fraternity* and *satire*, most of the writers have not actually been in fraternities.

The main thing that separates dick lit and fratire is that dick lit is fiction whereas fratire is narrative non-fiction. Due to it being based on real-life events, many of the characters are given obviously fake pseudonyms, but otherwise fratire centers on many of the same themes as dick lit and offers the same kind of dark humor.

The stories deal with comradery between men, heavy partying and drinking, and picking up women, and they glorify reckless and immature behavior from grown-up men. Like their fictional counterparts in dick lit, the fratire narrators see through the rules and patterns of a meaningless society and they seek to break these rules and become heroes in their own lives.

ANALYSIS:

Answer the following questions:

- 1) Who are the primary target audience for dick lit?
- 2) How is the world typically described in dick lit?
- 3) What are the three ways that the narrators of these stories typically respond to the meaninglessness of the world and their own feelings of emasculation?
- 4) What are some stylistic choices of dick lit?
- 5) How is fratire different from dick lit?
- 6) How are these genres postmodern?