



Literacy and Longing in L.A.

Jennifer Kaufman , Karen Mack

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Some women shop. Some eat. Dora cures the blues by bingeing on books—reading one after another, from Flaubert to bodice rippers, for hours and days on end. In this wickedly funny and sexy literary debut, we meet the beguiling, beautiful Dora, whose unique voice combines a wry wit and vulnerability as she navigates the road between reality and fiction.

Dora, named after Eudora Welty, is an indiscriminate book junkie whose life has fallen apart—her career, her marriage, and finally her self-esteem. All she has left is her love of literature, and the book benders she relied on as a child. Ever since her larger-than-life father wandered away and her book-loving, alcoholic mother was left with two young daughters, Dora and her sister, Virginia, have clung to each other, enduring a childhood filled with literary pilgrimages instead of summer vacations. Somewhere along the way Virginia made the leap into the real world. But Dora isn't quite there yet. Now she's coping with a painful separation from her husband, scraping the bottom of a dwindling inheritance, and attracted to a seductive book-seller who seems to embody all that literature has to offer—intelligent ideas, romance, and an escape from her problems.

Joining Dora in her odyssey is an elderly society hair-brusher, a heartbroken young girl, a hilarious off-the-wall female teamster, and Dora's mother, now on the wagon, trying to make amends. Along the way Dora faces some powerful choices. Between two irresistible men. Between idleness and work. And most of all between the joy of well-chosen words and the untidiness of real people and real life.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Paleomichi says

Ho comprato questo libro, come molte Anobiiane, attratta dalla copertina e dalla trama. La protagonista è una giovane donna divorziata, appassionata lettrice, quando qualcosa nella sua vita non va si chiude in casa e legge, legge, legge, legge. Praticamente il mio sogno (se solo non ci fosse il "problemino" del lavoro). Quando ho letto "Colleziono nuovi libri allo stesso modo in cui le mie amiche comprano borse firmate. A volte mi basta sapere di averli e non mi pongo il problema se riuscirò a leggerli. Non che alla fine non li legga tutti, a uno a uno. Lo faccio. Ma il solo gesto di comprarli mi rende felice: la vita diventa più promettente, più appagante. E' difficile da spiegare, ma io mi sento, in un certo senso, più ottimista. Tutta la trama dell'acquisto mi mette allegria." mi ci sono ritrovata in pieno, e ho pensato che fosse il libro per me. Le prime pagine sono piacevoli. Ma poi ha iniziato a darmi sui nervi. Intanto la protagonista non fa niente dalla mattina alla sera, campa di rendita. E si lamenta pure. Poi infila ogni due tre frasi una citazione, come se volesse far vedere quanto è colta. La maggior parte dei libri citati, però, sono di autori americani. Poi c'è la difficile scelta fra due uomini affascinanti, dice la quarta di copertina. Il primo è a mio modesto parere un povero sfigato egoista, snob e presupponente e il secondo non mi ispira per niente. Mi sembra come se debba risultare simpatico a partire da un certo punto del libro solo per necessità di trama. In generale si trova una superficialità irritante in tutte le vicende e i personaggi del libro. Alcune idee sono interessanti, ma svolte in modo talmente superficiale da risultare praticamente luoghi comuni.

Principalmente non sopporto questo libro per un motivo molto semplice. La protagonista non è un'amante dei libri, ma una persona con un difetto tipo ossessivo-compulsivo nei confronti della lettura. Dà un punto di vista deviato sull'amore per la lettura, come se chi legge lo facesse esclusivamente per sfuggire alla realtà circostante, e per tornare "normale" dovesse ridurre il ritmo delle sue letture.

In breve a mio parere è un'americana idiota e superficiale. Orribile.

se ne discute sul mio blog: <http://paleomichilibri.blogspot.com/2...>

Sara says

Book Lover is a painfully inconsistent depiction of a self-absorbed and largely unsympathetic heroine, Dora, whose best feature is her adoration of books. All book lovers will enjoy all the quotes and literary references the novel makes and admire Dora's dedication to books - except even that doesn't last.

There isn't really anything driving the plot; instead Dora's life meanders on past the reader's eyes, without any direction or tension. There's romance without tension, life challenges that are easily conquered, and a personal journey that goes pretty much nowhere. Dora herself is a strong voice and I did like how closely the author's manage to get into her head and thoughts. However, she is deeply unsympathetic. Constant appeals to how Dora's life is so lackluster look very unconvincing when the heroine has handsome men falling over her, a trust fund, expensive taste, no job (but a former successful career). Her childhood is realistic and believably unhappy - why then did the authors constantly emphasise that her biggest problem, the sign of how messed up she's become, is that she can't drive on the freeway? If the reader is expected to feel sorry for the heroine you have got to make her suffer. Tortment her, put hardship in her way, thwart her plans, at least embarrass her. *Book Lover* is like listening to a rich, beautiful, clever person whinge about how hard

everything is for them because their cleaner was late that morning - it's not going to work for most people.

Being unloveable might have been a problem I could overlook, though in chick lit I think you should want to root for the woman at least some of the time. The major fault with Dora was that she was an inconsistent character. The place where this was most irksome was in her discussion of the many wonderful books mention in *Book Lover*. Dora is presented as a down-to-earth reader who is worried that her tastes aren't literary enough and doesn't go in for pretentiously over analysing books. Except then she does, in the a superlatively pretentious manner. She loves woman's fiction and chick lit and has a bookcase suspiciously filled with high literature and classic novels. I felt that Dora was unlike any reader I had ever met - she had no taste or opinions of her own that stayed constant, she just seemed to like whatever suited the scene the author's were writing at the time.

One of the things I most disliked about this book was how mean it was; posh people were snobs to be disdained, poor people were slobs, feminists were man-haters, new bosses were harpies. Is nobody in LA interesting, nice and not a stereotype? It would be alright if there was a sense that it was Dora who was so critical and we were to judge her for it, but there is no counterbalance. And the only loveable people in the book are the poor and weird (has to be both) who need Dora's help - which smacks of them being just there to show how nice she is to the unfortunate. And when it wasn't busy being snide and insensitive, it was dull. I think that may even be worse. Yes, shopping for expensive shoes is fun: reading about shopping for expensive shoes is not exciting. The glamour was a clinical list of how posh the food was and who designed which dress, nothing at all swept me away into a fantasy of being a fabulous and well-read woman. It simply was not fun and with this added to the lack of plot and tension, I found it a very boring read. Perhaps the Daily Mail writing that it was "smart and classy" on the back cover should have been my warning; neither fish nor foul, neither high nor low fiction, it was a confused book.

Jessica says

A beach read with greater aspirations. I'm always skeptical of people who just "loooooove books so much" and the heroine of this otherwise fairly standard chick-lit entry does just that. Separated from her second (wealthy and charming husband) and with a designer-wear addiction, whenever Dora goes into a funk she lies in her marble bath for hours and devours books. She falls for a rakish bookstore clerk, and rather abruptly finds herself enmeshed in the life of his family -- his earthy mother and adorable niece, who has just lost her junkie mother. Then, just as abruptly, she's headed back in the direction of her (still charming, still wealthy) not-quite-ex-husband. The literary pretensions (there is an extensive bibliography cataloging every book and author reference, and footnotes, for god's sake) don't do much of anything to mask the fact that the characters and their arcs don't make a lot of sense and there isn't much there there. (see, no footnote necessary)

Kathrina says

When life gets rough some girls shop, some girls drink, some get chatty with their girlfriends, and some girls do all of the above, and also grab a stack of novels and soak in the tub until their toes turn to raisins. I've been known to turn to a narrative or two when real life gets overwhelming, so I thought this title might be a nice way to ease myself in slowly to the world of chick lit. But nope. Turns out habitually reading books does not make you smarter or more insightful or more interesting. Just means you're more likely to throw a

book at the wall in the middle of your mid-life temper tantrum.

This book's first chapter starts off with a poignant childhood trauma -- our narrator survives a harrowing car crash with her drunken mother at the wheel. The tone is set for a serious, introspective narrative concerning the repercussions of this tragedy throughout her life -- but wait, this is chick lit, that's such a bummer, forget we started that way -- let's talk about my ex-husband who's wealthy and handsome and successful and, yeah, he's still in love with me, but I'm so depressed and lonely reading books all the time I really haven't picked up on it. But there's this really cute bookseller at my local independent, I think I'll slum it with the working class for a bit and see if he'll go out with me. But it turns out he's a jerk, but he has a really sweet mom and niece and bad shit keeps happening to them and it feels really good to take care of them, so screw the bookseller, but bring on the pseudo-family duties and let's get back with my ex, 'cause he is hot and super-rich and thinks it's cute that I read a lot. Do these books make me look fat? Screw the books, who needs 'em, I'm going to throw every book I own against the wall 'cause that bookseller was such a jerk. And then I'm going to donate my busted-up bindings to the library. And then, two weeks later, I'm going to ask for them back, because I am an immature whiney bitch, and can't figure out what point I'm trying to make, just shut up and let me read.

I can't figure it out. Two authors who collaborate together, both seemingly having some knowledge of literature, and therefore, one hopes, an inkling of what makes literature good, decide together to write a chick lit novel that depends and relies on a love and respect for literature, and this is what they come up with?! This is what they squeezed from the genre? Is it that chick lit and a thoughtful narrative are irreconcilable? Were they taking on too much? Does anyone care? My surmise is: anyone who likes chick lit will not identify initially with the character (they're reading chick lit, not McCarthy or Woolf or etc), and anyone who loves to read, as the character claims to, will be insulted by the book's banality. Oil and water, right here.

I actually owned this copy in my collection. And a good thing to, as my cat shares my feelings on this particular title, and gave it a nice, wet, stinking piss all over the cover. It's gone to the trash, and it's the first time this booklover feels no qualms about throwing a book away.

Michelle says

Ok, I only read the first few chapters, but that's all I needed to read to determine this was a trite, snotty, manifesto of the stereotypical "L.A. mentality". Now, the authors may have been shooting for this in an ironic, tongue-in-cheek manner...but it fell flat for me. And for some it could've been amusing, but it really just grated on my nerves.

I'm a bit disappointed...merely because I'm a geeky bibliophile and can relate, completely, to escaping for days on end in a pile of books!

Sandy says

If you actually like reading real literature, this is one of those books that you're slightly embarrassed to admit that you've read. It's okay --- I'd classify it as even slightly trashy --- it goes quickly, I would only recommend it if you need a little relief after a really intense novel, or you enjoy reading stories about the superficial L.A. living of spoiled women. I'm only on page 100 and I'm already anxious for it to end --- it

kind of feels like when one of your friends goes up to do karaoke and you hope it goes quickly because you're expecting them to be humiliated. I don't foresee this becoming life-changing literature . . . luckily they use big font.

Krystal Racca says

Ugg. Awful. I did like the quotations at the beginning of each chapter, and the all the literary references, but the writing finally won out. I find it unimaginable that the authors (yes, there are two authors) have read anywhere near the books they allude to their character having read in the book. It's almost like they just went to the quotations page and plugged in, "quotes about reading and books" to gain their literary references-it just feels fake. If the protagonist actually had read all those books during her "book binges" (a disgustingly girly analogy to having a food disorder), than she wouldn't, couldn't, be so darn SHALLOW. Unfortunately, these two are working on another book. Gag me with a spoon.

Dormouse says

I bought this book because I recently discovered that I enjoy chicklit. It looked promising - a woman who likes reading, and hides in reading binges when she is low!

It was bad.

I kept reading it, trying to find when the heroine becomes likeable. She likes pizza, she enjoys buying books, her favourite shop is a book-shop. But no. She doesn't become likeable.

She is a snob. She's biased against people who are not as rich as she is, who enjoy books differently than she does, who are not her.

She talks about her equally-rich and high-status friends, but the friends she actually sees and spends time with are people of lower status, or poorer than her, or who don't read the books she regards as good.

She has no sense of humour about herself. She mocks other people, but never seems to perceive herself as equally mockable.

The heroine spends a lot of time judging everyone she knows, but that judgemental tone isn't there when she talks about herself - including talking about her failures.

She has nothing bad to say about her own body, either. Even after weeks of hiding at home and living on pizza, and being too agoraphobic to go out. Oh wait, she does feel she is looking older and even considers surgery. Possibly that just didn't resonate with me, as I worry about other things about my looks.

The book is full of quotes from books, and there are little asterisks and footnotes, saying what book the quote is from. It felt very heavy-handed. It also felt as though the heroine's prejudice was reflected in it - obviously if a person is reading chicklit, she won't recognise quotes from 'real literature'.

I've seen quotes from books done better in Esau by Meir Shalev. The quote would come up, and a page or

two later the book it was from would be mentioned, or come up in conversation. It felt much more organic and a lot less annoying and patronising.

Melissa says

This book took me forever to read...literally almost a year...mostly because it was so annoying, I kept putting it down and starting other books and only reading it when I was done with my new books and before I'd find something more interesting to read.

It was often incredibly ignorant too and very narrowly indicative of the women who wrote it.

Long story short, the last 1/3 of the book was pretty good and I enjoyed FINISHING it finally.

I do not recommend it at all, EXCEPT for all of the very cool quotes used and literary history throughout the book. That was very cool and the first time I'd read anything like this. Some of the poems quoted are also nice.

Ainsley says

Books about book lovers always seem a bit tricky to me - 'book lovers' aren't necessarily 'readers' and vice versa, and what do those terms mean anyway? etc. And if your 'book lover' heroine doesn't enjoy the same sort of books or have the same attitude to them as the reader, then what? I found the title character's (frankly snobbish) attitude to books annoying, though I envied her articulateness :) It probably says a great deal about me that the part of the book I really liked showed the heroine, in a low moment and unable to find a book of her own to suit her mood, resorts to the 'trash' fiction left on her shelves by a friend with 'inferior' taste, and discovers that (shock) genre fiction can be good! Other than that, the plot ran fairly true to chick-lit conventions and the heroine eventually ends up with the right bloke.

Kelly says

what the fuck? this book started out pretty good and then just completely fizzled. then ending is absolutely ridiculous. the main character sells out. the love interest falls into an plot scenario that has been written way too many times. i was so disappointed by this book i had to go out and buy several others just to make up for my lapse in judgement in buying this one.

in fact, i am now writing an update to this review because i am still upset over this book. i can't believe what a let-down it was. serves me right for trying the new fiction table at barnes and noble. if you pick this book up stop half-way through because it just goes downhill from there.

ugh. what the hell? no one understands my obsession with books so im just going to sell out and become mind-numbingly normal. screw that.

Corina says

I REALLY wanted to like this book. It unfortunately felt pretentious, snobbish and like it was trying too hard. :(

Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says

"I collect new books the way my girlfriends buy designer handbags."

Despite a main character who could be construed as a kindred spirit, this book disappointed me. The blurb on the back described the plot as that of a woman who deals with the problems of her life by going on a book reading binge. Okay. Excellent strategy. And the authors (Why are there two? Two authors concerns me.) tossed into the story every wonderful book title, every wonderful book quote, every wonderful author...but it wasn't enough. A stew of things obsessive readers love, but it wasn't enough. The book still read like a rough draft. Disappointing.

Lena says

Sigh. I had such high hopes for this book. I got it because I was intrigued by the idea of a character who used books as an escape from real life. I expected some thoughtful explorations of that topic from someone who loved literature. What I got was a pedestrian, chick-lit novel with a lot of literary name dropping. A real missed opportunity.

Kimberly Jones says

Honestly, I didn't finish this book. It started out well, and went down hill from there.
