

Paper proposal for International Women's Writing Association Conference (Falmouth University 17th – 19th June).

Title: Pink Fluffy Pens: The Postfeminist Makeovers of the *Legally Blonde* Franchise

Abstract

This paper reappraises *Legally Blonde* (2001) by examining how its feminist reputation is constructed through adaptation, aestheticisation, and political erasure. Celebrated in scholarship and popular opinion as a paradigmatic postfeminist text that reconciles femininity with feminism, the film is read as affirming female ambition, solidarity, and pleasure through the logic that pink is powerful. This paper argues, however, that this empowered surface is the product of a postfeminist makeover that obscures the franchise's politically conservative foundations.

Despite the cultural prominence of the *Legally Blonde* film, Amanda Brown's 2001 novel has received little critical attention. Through comparative analysis of the novel and its cinematic adaptation, this paper demonstrates how the film transforms a narrative that mocks feminist activism and valorises aesthetic conformity into a depoliticised fantasy of choice. While the novel relies on makeover logic that equates beauty with legitimacy and satirises collective feminism, the film reframes bodywork as freely chosen empowerment, aligning femininity with meritocratic achievement. Drawing on critiques of postfeminism and neoliberal rhetorics, this paper argues that the film does not dismantle conservative gender norms but renders them palatable.

Crucially, the paper situates this transformation within the franchise's production history. It examines disputes over authorship, the erasure of co-writer Bridget Kerrigan, and the marketing of Brown's pink furry pen as an authorial performance mirroring the film's hyperfeminine branding. These paratextual strategies are central to the franchise's postfeminist appeal, strategically depoliticising its origins while sustaining a market-friendly narrative of empowerment.

Reading *Legally Blonde* across adaptations and in relation to its production history, this paper argues that the franchise is emblematic of how postfeminism repackages conservative gender politics through neoliberal idioms of choice, pleasure, and success. Brown's furry pen becomes a metaphor for this paradox: playful, performative, and suited to sell empowerment – even when what lies beneath is far less pink.

Biographical Note

Annabel Hogg is a PhD candidate in English Literature at Newcastle University, where her research reappraises chick lit in light of the contemporary revival of its key texts through

sequels and adaptations, amid shifting feminist discourses. Drawing on feminist cultural theory, book history and performance theory, her work examines chick lit as a form of women's writing that constructs and circulates gendered cultural knowledge. She holds an MLitt in English Literature from Newcastle University, where archival research into the columnar origins of *Sex and the City* shaped her sustained focus on chick lit as a mode of gendered cultural communication.

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