

“My Name Is Lizzie Bennet”: Successfully Adapting Jane
Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) for the Twenty-First
Century with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012-2013)

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This thesis argues that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (or the *LBD*), the 2012 transmedia YouTube webseries adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, is a successful adaptation of Jane Austen's novel because – like its source text – it is all about communication. Told primarily in a video-diary format, the *LBD* is a transmedia narrative that spans across various traditional, digital, and social media platforms. All of the characters within the narrative interact with one another via video blogs, texts, tweets, and even handwritten letters while simultaneously inviting viewers to participate and immerse themselves in the story by responding to the characters' online activity. The form, content, and audience engagement of this particular adaptation thus hinges on various forms of communication to tell Austen's story of marriage, manners, and misunderstandings. The *LBD* therefore not only succeeds as an adaptation, but specifically as one of the definitive adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* due to its ability to respectfully yet innovatively translate its source text into the twenty-first century in a way that keeps Austen's emphasis on communication central to how, why, and with whom the story is retold. Thus, as a successful adaptation, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is a successful act of communication, which gives a fresh voice to Jane Austen's two-hundred-year-old novel, hence reaffirming its significance to a new generation of audience and preventing it from lapsing into silence.

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For My Grandmother

You shared your love of *Pride and Prejudice* with
me and so I feel as if I share this thesis with you.
(I am still not ready, however, to share Mr. Darcy.)

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Introduction

“Just so you know, you’re not the only one who was confused.”



(Episode 98: Gratitude)

In perhaps one of *Pride and Prejudice*'s most famous chapters, Jane Austen describes a remarkable conversation between the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, and her love interest, Mr. Darcy. After nearly three full volumes full of miscommunication and misinterpretation, Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy finally understand and accept one another for who they truly are and, upon revealing their mutual feelings for each other, they become engaged to be married. Chapter XVI of Volume III details the pivotal exchange between these two characters that begins with Mr. Darcy's second marriage proposal and Elizabeth's acceptance of it, and moves into a discussion dedicated to clearing away any misunderstandings that persist between the two. In short, the two characters make themselves vulnerable and, for the first time in the entirety of Austen's novel, engage a discussion in which neither of them is blinded by either pride or prejudice. This conversation is remarkable because it demonstrates an instance of successful communication – in other words, an exchange in which both parties begin and end a verbal exchange without any misunderstandings. In direct contrast to all of their past interactions, Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy enter into this discussion without any false notions about the other and walk away from it without any unanswered questions. In fact, this chapter affords the pair of them the clarity Austen has denied them up until this moment, for – throughout the first two volumes and nearly the entirety of the third – Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are constantly guessing (or at a complete loss) in regards to what the other thinks or feels about them.

Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are not the only characters within *Pride and Prejudice* who suffer from the negative effects of miscommunication. Over the course of the narrative, several characters fall victim to believing lies, making choices based on falsehoods, and purposefully withholding information. Elizabeth's eldest sister, Jane, for example, believes the lies told by Caroline Bingley about her brother's feelings and whereabouts, and incorrectly infers that Mr.

Bingley does not reciprocate her love. Alternatively, Mr. Bingley decides to sever ties with Jane and move back to London because Caroline and his best friend, Mr. Darcy, manage to convince him that she does not feel what he does for her. In addition, Elizabeth falls prey to and initiates a misunderstanding caused by withholding information. Elizabeth's initial opinion of Mr. Darcy is formed by Mr. Wickham's distorted account of their childhood friendship in which he excludes his shameful use and manipulation of Mr. Darcy's younger sister, Georgiana, for money. When Mr. Darcy later reveals Mr. Wickham's misdeeds, Elizabeth chooses to withhold this information from her family and friends (except her favourite sister and confidante, Jane); however, her decision to keep everyone else ignorant of Mr. Wickham's true character results in his ability to sweep Elizabeth's younger sister, Lydia Bennet, off her feet and persuade her to run away with him despite the disastrous effect this will have on her and her sisters' reputation. In short, the narrative of *Pride and Prejudice* is driven by misunderstandings as well as the effects of failed, aborted, or thwarted attempts at communication, which is why the open and successful exchange between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy in Chapter XVI of Volume III is so significant.

Of course, this conversation marks the denouement of the main love plot; however, it does so much more than tie up their relationship in a satisfying bow. Instead, their exchange represents the resolution of the main conflict and the culmination of the entire novel, ultimately suggesting that *Pride and Prejudice* not only revolves around communication, but that it also upholds *successful* communication as the key to solving problems. While Jane's engagement to Mr. Bingley precedes Elizabeth's to Mr. Darcy and outwardly seems to act as the catalyst for the novel's happy ending, the reader is shut out from the conversation that takes place between the eldest Bennet sister and her suitor – instead, Austen chooses the later discussion between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy as the first display of successful communication in the novel to which

she makes the reader privy. It is thus this particular discussion to which Austen wishes to draw attention and then use to usher in the narrative's fairytale conclusion, arguably positioning successful communication as a conciliatory force that rewards all characters who engage in it. It is no accident that *Pride and Prejudice* ends with the idyllic marriages of Elizabeth to Mr. Darcy and Jane to Mr. Bingley, for they are the two couples who are finally able to clear away the multitude of misunderstandings that have plagued them for nearly the entirety of the novel.

That said, despite the importance of the third volume's sixteenth chapter, not every adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* includes this pivotal scene. While the 1995 BBC miniseries includes a section of this conversation between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, other adaptations such as the 2005 film starring Keira Knightley exclude it entirely in favour of a sweepingly romantic scene with little dialogue. Although this example of a filmic adaptation does not feature the key exchange between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy from Austen's novel, it does not mean that it is necessarily inferior to the adaptations that do choose to include it. Though adaptations like the 1995 BBC *Pride and Prejudice* miniseries that adhere very closely to the source text may outwardly seem more faithful to Austen's vision than, say, an adaptation like the 2004 *Bride and Prejudice* (a contemporary Bollywood reimagining of Austen's novel), every adaptation differs from its source text and inevitably takes certain liberties. Purists may choose to hail adaptations like the six hour-long 1995 BBC miniseries as "faithful" because of its painstaking endeavours to recreate nearly every scene from the source text; however, even the most "faithful" adaptations deviate. Who could forget the now-iconic scene in the 1995 BBC miniseries in which Colin Firth's Mr. Darcy goes for a spontaneous swim and unexpectedly meets Elizabeth afterwards when he is both sopping wet and informally attired? Naturally, this sexually charged encounter does not appear in Austen's original, but it serves as testament to the ways in which all

adaptations each have something new to add, or to say about their respective source texts. As Linda Hutcheon states in *A Theory of Adaptation*, the joy of adaptations lies in “repetition with *variation*,” or “the comfort of ritual combined with the *piquancy of surprise*” (4, emphasis added). Of course, should someone wish to consume a version of *Pride and Prejudice* without variation and without surprises, then the only way to fulfill that desire would be to read the source text, for “source texts will always be better at being themselves” (Leitch 161). Otherwise, all adaptations will offer up different readings of the original complete with twists, updates, or modifications – some minor, others major – to the form, content, or initial target audience of the source text. In fact, I would argue that the driving force behind the centuries-old and ever-popular practice of adapting stories is to breathe fresh life into them and hence keep them alive by crafting novel interpretations that will appeal to a new generation of audience.

Within the field of adaptation studies, one of the most persistent debates surrounds what adaptation theorists call “the fidelity criterion.” For decades, adaptations have primarily been judged on their ability to remain “faithful” to the source text upon which they are based. As the definition of what it means to be “faithful” to a source text is vague, unclear, and up for interpretation, several prominent adaptation theorists decry the injustice of the fidelity criterion. “Fidelity to its source text ... is a hopelessly fallacious measure of a given adaptation’s value because it is unattainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in a trivial sense,” writes Thomas Leitch. “Even if the adaptations are remakes in the same medium, their most conscientious attempt to replicate the original will betray their differences, and thus their inferiority, all the more plainly” (161). As explained by Leitch, the fidelity criterion is not only close to impossible to pin down, but it is also a trap for all adaptations trying to be as faithful as possible to the source text – the more an adaptation tries to imitate the original, the more it will

pale in comparison. Only the source text can be entirely faithful to itself, for anything that varies even the slightest bit is immediately “unfaithful.” If an adaptation does not differ from its source text – either in form, content, or target audience – then it is more of a copy than an adaptation.

Despite the constrictive nature of the fidelity criterion, adaptations should not dismiss it entirely, for, if an adaptation does not resemble the source text in any way, it cannot be considered an adaptation. I would therefore suggest that a successful adaptation must walk the fine line between fidelity and infidelity in a kind of balancing act that aims to simultaneously respect and renew its source material by retaining certain elements of the original while updating or reinterpreting others to keep the story fresh. In so doing, a successful adaptation should accomplish two things: first, present fans of the source text with a story that fuses the comfort of the familiar with the thrill of the unexpected; and second, invite new audience members into the world of the original with an interpretation that makes the source text accessible and appealing. In other words, a successful adaptation is a successful act of communication, for it is one that both manages to convey a clear and compelling message that speaks to different audiences and answers some of the various questions, concerns, and desires of those audience members. As a successful act of communication, a successful adaptation gives a new voice to the source text and saves it from lapsing into silence, thus keeping it alive for a new generation of audiences.

In this thesis, I would like to argue that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (or the *LBD*), the 2012 transmedia webseries adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, is a – if not the most – successful adaptation of Jane Austen’s novel. Not only does the *LBD* achieve a balance between respecting and renewing its source text, but it also manages to address audiences both old and new – thrilling fans of the original while captivating a readership previously unfamiliar with it. Additionally, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is all about communication. Told primarily in a video-

diary format, the *LBD* is a transmedia narrative that spans across various traditional, digital, and social media platforms. All of the characters within the narrative interact with one another via video blogs, texts, tweets, and even handwritten letters while simultaneously inviting viewers to participate and immerse themselves in the story by responding to the characters' online activity. The form, content, and audience engagement of this particular adaptation thus hinges on various forms of communication to tell Austen's narrative. Since *Pride and Prejudice* – as evidenced by the telling display of successful communication between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy – is a story that emphasizes the power of successful communication, it seems fitting that an adaptation that mirrors this focus on multiple levels stands above the rest in terms of effectiveness. The *LBD* therefore not only succeeds as an adaptation, but specifically as one of the definitive adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* due to its ability to respectfully yet innovatively translate the form, content, and target audience of the source text into the twenty-first century in a way that is satisfying to audiences both old and new alike – all the while, keeping its emphasis on communication central to how, why, and with whom the story is retold. Thus, as a successful adaptation, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is a successful act of communication, which breathes new life into Jane Austen's two-hundred-year-old novel and reaffirms its significance.

The first chapter of this thesis will focus on form and delve into the implications of transitioning Austen's novel to a transmedia webseries as well as the affordances and constraints of both forms of communication. Dealing with the historical parallels between the rise of the novel and the advent of the Internet, this chapter will make use of critical texts by Ian Watt, Cheryl L. Nixon, and Michael McKeon in order to illustrate the ways in which the media of old intersects with the new and how *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* utilizes these similarities to produce a successful adaptation of its source text. In so doing, this chapter will demonstrate how the *LBD*

employs a multiplicity of media platforms and manages to weave several modes of communication into the narrative to produce an adaptation that successfully honours and updates its source text by formally emulating the original novel's emphasis on communication.

The second chapter of this thesis will examine the effects of modernizing the content of *Pride and Prejudice* – concentrating on the changes made to both character and plot – and the ways in which these variations are respectful of the source text yet vital to crafting a successful adaptation. In its focus on how the *LBD* translates the content of a two-hundred-year-old novel to fit a twenty-first century context and effectively communicates the story to a modern audience, this chapter will draw from adaptation theory and make use of theoretical texts by Robert Stam, Linda Hutcheon, and Thomas Leitch. Thus, this chapter will provide further evidence as to how *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* succeeds as an adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* due to the way it cleverly updates the content of its source text to successfully communicate the centuries-old story in a modern-day setting and help keep Austen's novel alive as well as culturally relevant.

The third and final chapter of this thesis will discuss how the *LBD* creates a new kind of readership through its use of transmedia to communicate with its audience and, in so doing, once more demonstrates how it succeeds as an innovative adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. As it delves into concepts such as immersive storytelling and participatory culture, this chapter will borrow from the work of Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, Joshua Green, and Frank Rose in order to contextualize various modes of audience engagement and their evolution from Austen's time to now. This concluding chapter will hence look at how *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* successfully adapts *Pride and Prejudice* and ensures its survival in the twenty-first century through its harnessing of modern forms of communication to engage and immerse its audience.

Episode 1: Form

“Is this hand-written? And wax-sealed?”



(Episode 61: Yeah I Know)

Despite the two hundred years separating Jane Austen's 1813 novel *Pride and Prejudice* from the Emmy Award-winning 2012 webseries adaptation *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the twenty-first century reimagining feels remarkably similar to its nineteenth century counterpart. Of course, there are several formal differences between Austen's original and Hank Green and Bernie Sue's adaptation: one is written while the other is primarily visual, one employs a single medium to tell its story while the other uses a transmedia approach, and one was published in three simultaneous volumes while the other was released serially. The list certainly does not end there, but variances are only natural when it comes to adaptation, for as Linda Hutcheon reminds her readers in the second edition of *A Theory of Adaptation*: "Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication" (7). As this quotation suggests, the responsibility of an effective adaptation is to simultaneously respect and revitalize its source material – keeping enough of the source text to feel familiar, but adding or changing enough to make it feel fresh. "We retell – and show again and interact anew with – stories over and over," writes Hutcheon, expanding on her earlier claim, "[I]n the process, they change with each repetition, and yet they are recognizably the same" (177). This explains why *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* does not feel that different from *Pride and Prejudice*, for both of them tell the same story despite the aforementioned differences. More importantly, however, the two feel so similar because they both hinge on the same crucial formal elements: the harnessing of an emerging and innovative mode of communication, and the subsequent exploration of its newfound possibilities.

Written at a time when novels were still considered a new and undignified literary form, *Pride and Prejudice* innovatively fuses prose and epistolary elements as well as sustains – arguably for the first time in history – a third-person narratorial form we now call free indirect speech or discourse (Austen-Bolt 273). Told primarily in a video-diary format, *The Lizzie Bennet*

Diaries (commonly abbreviated to the *LBD*) is a transmedia narrative that spans across various traditional, digital, and social media platforms. Thus, while it escapes certain affordances and constraints presented by the novel form, it encounters new ones born of its still-developing medium. While two centuries separate Austen's text from this particular adaptation, I would argue that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is a successful adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* because it mirrors its source material's focus on communication. Austen's story is about communication and miscommunication – how people understand and misunderstand each other – and the *LBD* mirrors this focus in form, content, and the way in which it engages its audience. It is this ability to distill the essence of Austen's novel through the way it is retold that makes *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* a truly successful adaptation – successful because it fulfills the concept of adaptation in both a creative and biological sense. Not only does the *LBD* manage to translate all aspects of *Pride and Prejudice* into different media, but it also helps the centuries-old story survive and thrive in a new environment. Adaptations like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* hence keep their source material alive by respectfully yet inventively translating and hence communicating key elements of the original to a new audience – starting first with form. This chapter will begin by examining parallels between the historical contexts in which *Pride and Prejudice* and the *LBD* were released and move into a discussion of the formal affordances and constraints encountered by Austen's novel and Green and Su's webseries in regards to both medium and narrator. In so doing, this chapter will ultimately demonstrate how the *LBD* produces a successful adaptation of its source text by formally mirroring *Pride and Prejudice*'s focus on communication.

While it is difficult to think of the novel as a new form of technology in today's digital age, this is exactly how it was regarded when it first began to take shape in the eighteenth century. Essentially an amalgamation of previous literary forms – ranging from the mediaeval

romance to epic poetry – the novel caused quite a stir when it first appeared. In fact, eighteenth-century critics were divided on whether or not the novel should be considered an acceptable literary form at all. “This species of reading cultivates what is called the heart prematurely, lowers the tone of the mind, and induces indifference for ... common pleasures and occupations,” write Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth of the novel in their 1798 treatise entitled *Practical Education* (qtd. in Nixon 250). The fear that the fictional (and often sensational) content of the novel would be mentally debilitating when consumed in excess was rampant in the eighteenth century – particularly in regards to the female mind. “With respect to sentimental stories and books of mere entertainment,” the Edgeworths state, “we must remark, that they should be sparingly used, *especially in the education of girls*” (qtd. in Nixon 250, emphasis added). They were certainly not alone in this belief and others articulated this anxiety in even more radical terms. “The love of Novels is ... extremely pernicious,” writes Elizabeth Parker in an 1800 essay, “as it introduces false ideas into the mind, vitiates the taste, and has a tendency to corrupt the heart” (qtd. in Nixon 252). As Parker’s essay progresses, it is clear that she, too, believes the novel to be especially dangerous to women, for she employs feminine pronouns when referring to the reader of novels that are centred on female characters:

The consequence is, that the youthful Novel-reader, if *she* possess sensibility, will really participate in the various misfortunes and tragical adventures of the *heroine* of a romance, and will perhaps shed a tear of sympathy and compassion, if *she* be involved in severe calamities ... for the authors of such works too frequently endeavour to make vice appear amiable, and, to heighten the colouring, they clothe *her* in the garb of virtue. (qtd. in Nixon 252, emphasis added)

What is striking about this passage is not Parker decrying writers who allegedly corrupt their readers with a glorification of sin and depravity – a sentiment commonly expressed by early detractors of the novel – but, rather, the immersive quality she attributes to novel reading. In the above quotation, Parker states that the danger for a female novel reader in possession of sensibility is that she “will really participate” in the events of the plot and be so affected by these fictional occurrences that she is moved to some kind of physical response (in this case, tears).

Unsurprisingly, the idea of fictional stories producing real as well as intensely emotional reactions from their readers was alarming in a time where rational thought was considered paramount (it is no accident, of course, that the eighteenth century is now known as the Enlightenment or the Age of Reason)¹. In conjunction with the rise of a more individualistic culture, the novel also provided its readers with a truly private reading experience in which they could – for hours on end if they wished – become immersed in a fictional tale focused on the thoughts and actions of a single character. In his 1987 *The Origins of the English Novel*, Michael McKeon paraphrases Ian Watt and proposes that the eighteenth century saw the union of “[t]he philosophical, the novelistic, and the socioeconomic” to produce a “validation of individual experience” (2). Shaped by the increasing dominance of capitalistic practices, the growing separation between Church and State, and the rise of a newly influential middle class, the individualistic ethos of the eighteenth century took root and continued to flourish well into the Age of Romanticism and beyond. Most importantly, however, the era’s growing focus on individualism prompted the development of what Watt calls “a reading public” (McKeon 2). Of course, like all revolutionary phenomena, this reading public did not materialize out of nowhere.

¹ It must be noted, however, that the Age of Sensibility also ran in parallel to the Age of Reason from the mid-eighteenth century onward, eventually spilling into the Romantic Period (which dated from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century). The Age of Sensibility and the Romantic Period were both reactions to the Enlightenment in their championing of emotion and imagination over reason, this new emphasis perhaps speaking to the wider acceptance of the novel in the nineteenth century and beyond.

Prior to the eighteenth century, an array of print materials were already in circulation – ranging from pamphlets to instructional manuals – and thus set the stage for the explosion of print culture that would accompany the novel (Nixon 28). Add to this the advent of the 1710 Copyright Act² and the ensuing lowering of the cost of paper, type, and ink, and conditions were ripe for the subsequent frenzy of publication and creation of this new reading public. The number of printing presses in London, for instance, increased from 65 in 1668 to 625 in 1818 (Kernan qtd. in Nixon 59) with the number of titles printed annually rising from around 1,800 before 1700 to more than 6,000 a century later in 1800 (Raven quoted in Nixon 1-2). This sharp increase in printing presses and published works that took place roughly over the course of a century demonstrates the demand for written materials with the emergence of a reading public.

Coupled with these unprecedented numbers was the increasing accessibility of reading material – particularly the novel. “Expanding print signals an expanding audience, re-introducing the question of readership,” notes Cheryl L. Nixon in *Novel Definitions*, “During the ‘long’ eighteenth century, a novel is read by more than one reader” (32). Nixon then goes on to describe the birth of the circulating library: “the first opened [in London] in the 1730s, and they rise in number from 9 in 1740-50, to 19 in 1770-80, to 26 in 1790-1800” (32). The significance of this expanding readership and sudden spike in accessibility thanks to these libraries relates directly to the development of Watt’s reading public and feeds into the aforementioned anxiety in relation to the novel. As evidenced by the writings of the Edgeworths and Elizabeth Parker, women made up a noteworthy part of this new reading public, which was cause for alarm for several reasons. Unlike the event of attending a play – a widely accepted eighteenth-century form of literary fiction that was always performed in a public venue and thus consumed in the company of others

² A piece of British legislation that put a stop to “publishers’ profitable ‘perpetual copyright’ powers which had been keeping print runs low and prices high” (Nixon 29).

– the novel was a truly individual and hence solitary reading experience. Thus, in this culture of individualism facilitated by the surge in availability of novels, women could easily access and consume this new literary form privately. This was distressing to Enlightenment and later Romantic-era critics like Parker and the Edgeworths because female novel readers were presented with the opportunity to consume novels – a new literary form full of fictional and potentially dangerous ideas – without interruption. In the absence of (namely masculine) company to regulate any irrational thoughts or check overwhelming emotions, the novel allowed women the freedom to, in Elizabeth Parker’s words, “really participate” in the fictional story contained within its pages. As seen with the comments made by Parker and the Edgeworths, the risk of women opening their minds to risqué subject matter and blurring the lines between reality and fiction – exacerbated by the solitary nature of novel reading – was concerning.

While this unease regarding the consumption of novels was particularly pronounced in relation to female readers, several eighteenth-century critics were comfortable including both men and women alike in their anxieties regarding the toxic effects novels could produce upon their readers. According to “R.R.E.” in the December 1787 edition of *Gentleman’s Magazine*, novels are not only “useless to society,” but also “pernicious, from the very indifferent morality, and ridiculous way of thinking, which they almost generally inculcate” (qtd. in Nixon 220). In his 1780 essay “On Novels,” William Jones echoes the mysterious R.R.E.’s sentiments by claiming that novels “vitiate the taste while they corrupt the manners,” going on to assert that novels feed the reader’s imagination “with wind and flatulence,” resulting in the inevitable degradation of the mind (qtd. in Nixon 241). Like Parker and the Edgeworths, R.R.E. and Jones are adamant in their condemnation of novels as breeders of immorality and irrationality. In addition to censuring novels for their abundance of depraved content, they also denounce novels

for their lack of practical content with R.R.E. claiming that novels are “useless” and Jones asserting that they fill the reader’s brain with nothing. Thus, due to its innovative nature and dubious content along with the new reading practices it encouraged and literary culture it inspired, the novel was widely regarded as harmful, unproductive, and, above all, dangerous.

If any of these sentiments sound at all familiar, it is because we are currently living through a similar period of transition in which new reading practices are being integrated into society and seemingly threatening older and more traditional ones. In fact, Nixon sustains a fitting parallel between the eighteenth-century culture of anxiety surrounding the novel and the twenty-first century ethos of unease in regards to the Internet:

Parallels to this understanding of the novel as both a textual form and a cultural experience can be found in the world of today’s readers. With the rise of the internet, still-developing debates question how new forms of technology are creating new forms of reading, writing, and thinking that, in turn, are creating new forms of individual intelligence, social relationships, and community structure. In the eighteenth century, the novel is a similarly new “technology,” exercising new powers. As Clifford Siskin argues ... the extension of cheap, popular print in the period means that writing itself acted as a new technology. (16)

In this passage, Nixon picks up on the eighteenth-century decrease in printing supply prices discussed earlier and remarks on how this important development positions the novel as a new piece of technology. The explosion of print culture resulting from the new accessibility of paper, type, and ink lent the novel an unprecedented kind of immediacy that we would associate nowadays with the almost-instantaneous modes of communication to which we are now accustomed. What is perhaps most significant about this quotation, however, is the way Nixon

connects the issues of these two seemingly disparate eras through their relationship with emerging forms of technology. The rise of the Internet today is what the rise of the novel was to an eighteenth-century audience, for both provoked an endless number of debates revolving around eerily similar issues: Should this new technology be legitimized? Should everyone have access to it? Should its immoral content be censored? Does it encourage unhealthy reading practices? Does it promote irrational or impractical ways of thinking? Is it too realistic? Is it too *unrealistic*? Essentially, at the root of all these questions is an interrogation of just how dangerous these innovative and still-developing modes of technology are to their consumers.

Of course, the conservative anxieties produced by the novel and the Internet are due in large part to their newness, the accompanying uncertainty as to their capabilities (both good and bad), and their power to disrupt. While the novel and the Internet by no means erased the reading and writing practices that existed before them, they caused an irrevocable shift in their respective literary scenes. “[L]ike the novel, the internet asserts its power through the invention of new forms of text and the encouragement of new forms of reading and writing,” explains Nixon. “The internet user easily understands that these new forms lead to thinking new ideas and to thinking in new ways, and this understanding of how reading and writing can re-shape culture can be used in an examination of the eighteenth century” (17). Once again, Nixon illustrates the parallel ways in which the novel and the Internet redefined an era’s relationship to text and opened up new and innovative storytelling possibilities. Therefore, even though it seems as if the two hundred years separating *Pride and Prejudice* from *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* should reduce the likelihood of similarities existing between the source text and its transmedia adaptation, the contexts in which these two stories were released are mirror images of one another. When Jane Austen published *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813, she did so in the wake of the eighteenth-century frenzy surrounding

the novel. When Hank Green and Bernie Su released the first episode of the *LBD* in 2012, they did so close to a decade after the tumult that accompanied the advent of Web 2.0. While both the source text and its adaptation avoided the initial stir caused by the emergence of their respective new technologies, they came to life at a time when the status of their chosen medium was still uncertain.³ Despite the acceptance of the novel and the Internet as means to tell stories at the moment when Austen published *Pride and Prejudice* and Green and Su released the first episode of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, a palpable amount of skepticism remained in regards to their legitimacy. In the case of Austen, how could a mere novel compare to the likes of Milton's epic poetry (in other words, "high literature")? In the case of Green and Su, how could a webseries adaptation compare to Austen's classic novel (in other words, "high literature")? Of course, what these identical situations indicate is that the definition of "high literature" is malleable – over the two centuries separating Austen from us, the novel rose from low to high literature – and that the new is automatically considered to be inferior to the old, the understood, the traditional.

In his 2012 *The Art of Immersion*, Frank Rose illustrates the ever-shifting attitudes espoused by critics when confronted with new forms of technology:

A claw that encloses you. An environment as real as the world. That was Bradbury's beef with television – it was just too immersive. Logical, linear thought was no match for its seductively phosphorescent glow. It became and was the truth. ... Dangerously, immersively, more-real-than-reality real, Huxley would say. Better to curl up with a good book. But once upon a time, books, too, had

³ While the disparity between historical contexts may seem too wide for a point of comparison – Austen, after all, published her story a *century* after the uproar surrounding the novel while Green and Su released their webseries a *decade* after the mayhem of Web 2.0 – the speed at which society processes and accepts new technology has increased dramatically. Thus, a century of mistrust in regards to a new form of technology in Austen's time is arguably equal to a decade of the same phenomenon now.

seemed more real than reality. They offered a passport to imaginary worlds. They triggered delusions. They were new, and not to be trusted. (37)

In this brilliant passage, Rose succinctly demonstrates the ways in which innovative forms of fiction are routinely labeled as dangerous. No matter how traditional a particular medium might seem to us now, it was once revolutionary and inevitably the subject of critical censure. What is particularly notable about this quotation is the way in which it once again evokes Elizabeth Parker's concerns from her 1800 essay regarding the novel and its immersive qualities.

Apparently, the fear of new technology engaging its consumers in an unprecedented way and subsequently enticing them into preferring fiction to reality is a timeless one. To a twenty-first-century mind – given the fact that it is newer than the novel – the Internet would no doubt appear to be *more* immersive than its eighteenth-century predecessor. “The Internet is a chameleon,” writes Rose, “It is the first medium that can act like all media – it can be text, or audio, or video, or all of the above” (2). Because of this, “a new type of narrative is emerging – one that’s told through many media at once in a way that’s nonlinear, that’s participatory and ... that’s designed above all to be immersive” (Rose 3). He is talking here, of course, about transmedia storytelling.

As the first transmedia webseries adaptation of a classic novel, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is a prime example of this emerging kind of narrative described by Rose: told primarily through video diaries on YouTube, an integral part of the *LBD*'s story is also told through the characters posting and interacting with each other as well as with fans on digital and social media platforms like Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr, Facebook, and LookBook. This way, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* harnesses the various media now available to storytellers and utilizes them to create a narrative that makes use of video, text, pictures, music, and even gifs – thus, fashioning a truly immersive story environment. Rose likes to call this “deep media”: “stories that are not just entertaining, but

immersive, taking you deeper than an hour-long TV drama or a two-hour movie or a 30-second spot will permit” (3). The *LBD* is indeed an excellent example of deep media, for despite the short running time of each episode (ranging between three to eight minutes long), they are typically accompanied by tweets, blog posts, or videos for the viewers to read or watch in conjunction. This extra material serves a number of functions: not only does it enhance the main narrative arc by allowing secondary characters the chance to speak and develop, but it also allows the storytellers to include and expand upon more minute details from Austen’s novel. For instance, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Darcy’s first appearance in the novel is described thus:

[He] soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien ... The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley, and he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening... (6)

Despite the fact that Austen goes on to inform her readers that Mr. Darcy’s unpleasant demeanour soon gives cause for everyone at the ball (including Elizabeth) to dislike him, the fact that he is initially received so favourably is key to the character’s introduction, for it illustrates the unfortunate nature of his proud and superior conduct. The viewers are first introduced to Mr. Darcy – or, in this case, William Darcy – in Episode 6 of the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* entitled “Snobby Mr. Douche.” In this episode, Lizzie (played by Ashley Clements) relates her first impression of Darcy to her viewers and, given the fact that the main narrative arc is told through her video diary, we are given only her perspective. Therefore, in this adaptation, Mr. Darcy is presented without Austen’s initially positive account and is instead described by Lizzie thus:

I recently had the absolute pleasure of meeting Bing Lee’s friend and houseguest William Darcy. ‘Absolute’ isn’t the right word. It was more of a grotesque,

nauseating, run-the-other-way-as-if-your-life-depended-on-it pleasure. Darcy is so obnoxious, I can't tell if I like Bing Lee now, or he just seems awesome by comparison. Darcy is boring, stuffy, unbelievably rude. ... I just can't properly express what an infuriating douchebag this guy is. (Kiley)

In contrast to the excerpt from Austen's novel above, Lizzie's introduction here is scathing and entirely devoid of Darcy's attractive qualities such as his "fine, tall person, handsome features" (Austen 6). Additionally, given the fact that the viewers do not get to *see* Darcy until nearly fifty episodes later, they are not given any descriptive or visual information on his physical appearance and thus cannot judge if he is as handsome as Austen initially describes him.

This is where the brilliance of the *LBD*'s transmedia storytelling and its use of deep media comes in. While it is possible to simply watch Lizzie's video diaries for a cohesive and satisfying adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, delving into the *LBD*'s transmedia extensions offers a richer experience to the viewer. On the subject of Darcy's introduction, Lizzie's point of view is only the tip of the iceberg – three days before she posts her 24 April 2012 "Snobby Mr. Douche" video, William Darcy himself speaks out about his reception on Twitter:

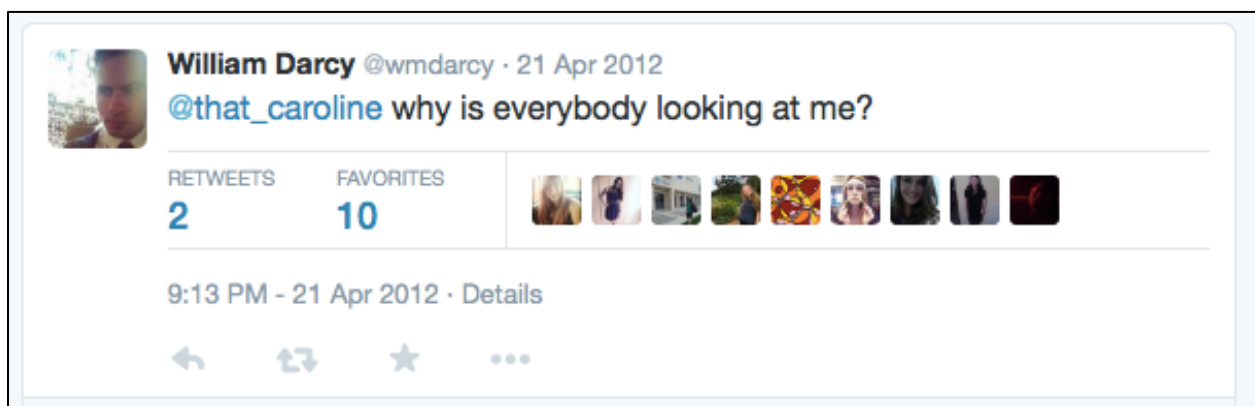


Figure 1: @wmdarcy's 21 April 2012 tweet at the Gibson wedding.

In this tweet, he is addressing Caroline Lee, the sister of his best friend Bing Lee (an ingenious play on Mr. Bingley), who is also in attendance at the wedding where he meets Lizzie and her family. Caroline responds with:



Figure 2: @that_caroline's reply to William Darcy's tweet.

With this simple exchange, we are given an introduction much more in line with Austen's original that both addresses the attention drawn by an illustrious figure like Mr. Darcy in a small town like Elizabeth's (his awareness of being watched) and hints at his striking good looks (Caroline's flirtatious compliment). In addition to the details provided by these two tweets, Caroline's hashtag #belleoftheball makes clever reference to the fact that in Austen's novel, Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy meet at a ball instead of a wedding.

The *LBD*, however, did not only use deep media to provide its viewers with clever little nods to the source text like in the example above. In fact, transmedia extensions were brought in to flesh out some of the most significant plot points in *Pride and Prejudice*. Remarkably, a pivotal instance in which *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* used transmedia to enhance one of its key scenes actually occurred after the completion of the webseries. In Episode 61 entitled "Yeah I Know" which aired on 5 November 2012, William Darcy (played by Daniel Vincent-Gordh) gives Lizzie the letter that is accorded so much importance in Austen's novel because it not only

changes her mind about him, but also marks an enormous shift in her character. After reading Mr. Darcy's letter in *Pride and Prejudice*, the impact of this letter on Elizabeth is demonstrated when she famously exclaims: "Till this moment, I never knew myself!" (Austen 159). This only happens, however, after the reader has been given access to Darcy's words, for Austen dedicates an entire chapter to the letter, so that her readers are able to understand Elizabeth's reaction and, in a way, participate in her epiphany. In Episode 61 of the *LBD*, Darcy asks Lizzie to read his letter and, after he leaves, Lizzie mocks the old-fashioned medium of Darcy's message and puts it aside, stating: "Well, forget about it. Nothing that he can say can change anything" (Rorick). After a few seconds of trying to ignore it, however, Lizzie capitulates and starts reading. Although her expression is initially one of derision, it soon morphs into something different and she quickly turns off the camera, effectively shutting the audience out from the content of Darcy's letter and the moment in which she comes to her important realization.

In Episode 62 entitled "Letter Analysis," Lizzie begins the video by trying to talk about her thesis project, but her best friend Charlotte Lu (played by Julia Cho) – Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice* – interrupts her and says: "No one cares about your project. We just want to know about the letter" (Rorick). Charlotte's use of "we" rather than "I" aptly includes Lizzie's audience because, until this point, Lizzie has shared close to everything with her viewers – including things that probably should have remained private such as Darcy's declaration of love and the explosive argument between him and Lizzie that follows. Additionally, viewers familiar with *Pride and Prejudice* felt the exclusion of Darcy's letter keenly with reactions ranging from understanding to desperation to disappointment:



stylilpuffnstuff 2 years ago

YES. I LOVE THAT YOU DIDN'T TELL US. That makes total sense, I continue to loooooove how this adaptation works! And treats the videoblog format like a realistic part of the story.

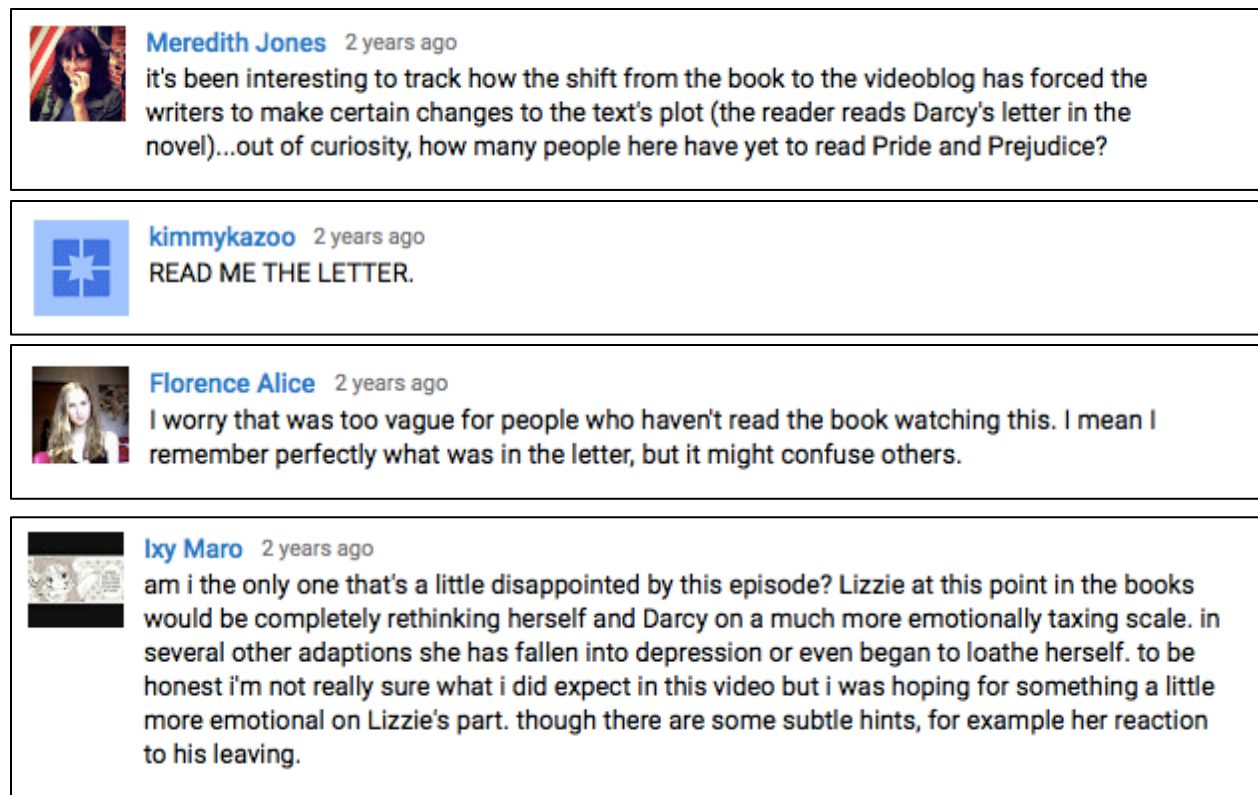


Figure 3: A sample of YouTube comments on Episode 62 of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

As demonstrated by these comments, the experience of being a viewer as opposed to a reader was interesting to some and unsatisfying for others – one of the key affordances of the novel is that it is, as discussed earlier, a private medium that allows its readers access to the innermost thoughts, feelings, and experiences of each character without any direct repercussions on the story. As *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* plays out across several public media and all the characters follow and interact with one another, it limits what they can realistically reveal without affecting the plot. Had Lizzie revealed the contents of Darcy's letter in her video, she would be allowing her sister Lydia access to the knowledge of George Wickham's true character, aborting all chances of their pivotally disastrous romance that marks the climax of *Pride and Prejudice*. The public forms of media used to tell the *LBD* therefore present a constraint for both storyteller and consumer and, as shown by some of the comments above, resulted in mixed feelings.

Despite acknowledging her audience's curiosity regarding Darcy's letter in Episode 62, Lizzie addresses this constraint and says for the first time in her video blog that she cannot share this information with her viewers. "Trust me, I know this goes against all previously established principles of these videos where I tell you guys every embarrassing little thing," she says, "but the problem is the contents of the letter are not mine to share" (Rorick). That said, the *LBD* writers work around this and viewers are given a taste of Elizabeth's inner monologue in Austen's novel when Lizzie tells her viewers what was *not* in Darcy's letter: an apology for separating Jane from Bing⁴ and a retraction of his disdain for Lizzie's family⁵. After imparting this, Lizzie gloats momentarily that she was not entirely wrong about Darcy's character, but she is soon forced to admit that the rest of the letter made her feel as if she might have been "a little harsh on Darcy" (Rorick)⁶. In an effective update of Austen's "Till this moment, I never knew myself," Lizzie states: "It's like... I don't know myself anymore" (Rorick). Austen describes Elizabeth's reaction to Darcy's letter as "a contrariety of emotion" (156) and Episode 62 of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* conveys this beautifully with Lizzie's initial reticence to talk about the letter, her weak attempt to justify her vilification of Darcy, and her eventual admission that she was wrong. Nonetheless, viewers lose Lizzie's initial reaction to the letter that readers of *Pride and Prejudice* are privy to – in the *LBD* timeline, "Letter Analysis" comes three days after Darcy gives Lizzie his letter, so the audience is presented with the heroine's belated reaction. While immediacy is not a quality often associated with novels in the twenty-first century (especially when compared to digital media), Austen's representation of Elizabeth's mindset after reading

⁴ Correspondingly in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth notes of this omission that "Mr. Darcy's explanation *there*, had appeared very insufficient" (Austen 159, original emphasis).

⁵ Conversely in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth calls Mr. Darcy's description of her family in the letter "mortifying" yet "merited" (Austen 160).

⁶ Elizabeth accordingly "grew absolutely ashamed of herself" when reflecting on her judgment of Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen 159).

Darcy's letter is imbued with an immediacy lacking in the *LBD*'s adaptation of this scene. After the reader is given the chance to read through Mr. Darcy's letter, Austen begins Chapter XIII of Volume II with a play-by-play of Elizabeth's thoughts as she reads through the contents of the letter. The reader is thus given the chance to experience Elizabeth's reaction as it happens in real-time. Austen walks the reader through the evolution of Elizabeth's feelings in regards to Mr. Darcy as she reads over his letter for the first and then second time. The reader is informed that Elizabeth spends nearly two hours analyzing Mr. Darcy's letter and, in the process, "reconsidering events, determining probabilities, and reconciling herself as well as she could, to a change so sudden and so important" (Austen 160). Up until now, Austen has made it a point to establish Elizabeth as a self-assured and stubborn thinker, so the effect of her self-reevaluation in the novel results in a monumental turning point for the story and its heroine. Meanwhile, in Episode 62 of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, Lizzie admits to feeling a change in herself, but some of the impact of this shift is lost in the transition from immediate to delayed, private to public.

While viewers of the *LBD* are only allowed a glimpse into Lizzie's mindset after Darcy's letter, those who followed the transmedia extensions were given unprecedented access to Darcy's mindset while writing the letter – a moment the readers of *Pride and Prejudice* are not permitted to see. Near the end of his botched love confession in Episode 60, William Darcy notes bitterly that he was unaware of how strongly Lizzie disliked him to which she replies: "You were unaware? Then, why don't you watch my videos?" (Green and Su "Are You Kidding Me!"). Clearly, Lizzie had not meant to let slip the existence of her vlog to Darcy given the number of videos in which she berates, insults, and mocks him and her expression of anger transforms into one of horror when Darcy asks, "What videos?" (Green and Su). A few days

after the 1 November 2012 airdate of Episode 60, William Darcy posted the following on Twitter (to be read from the bottom up):

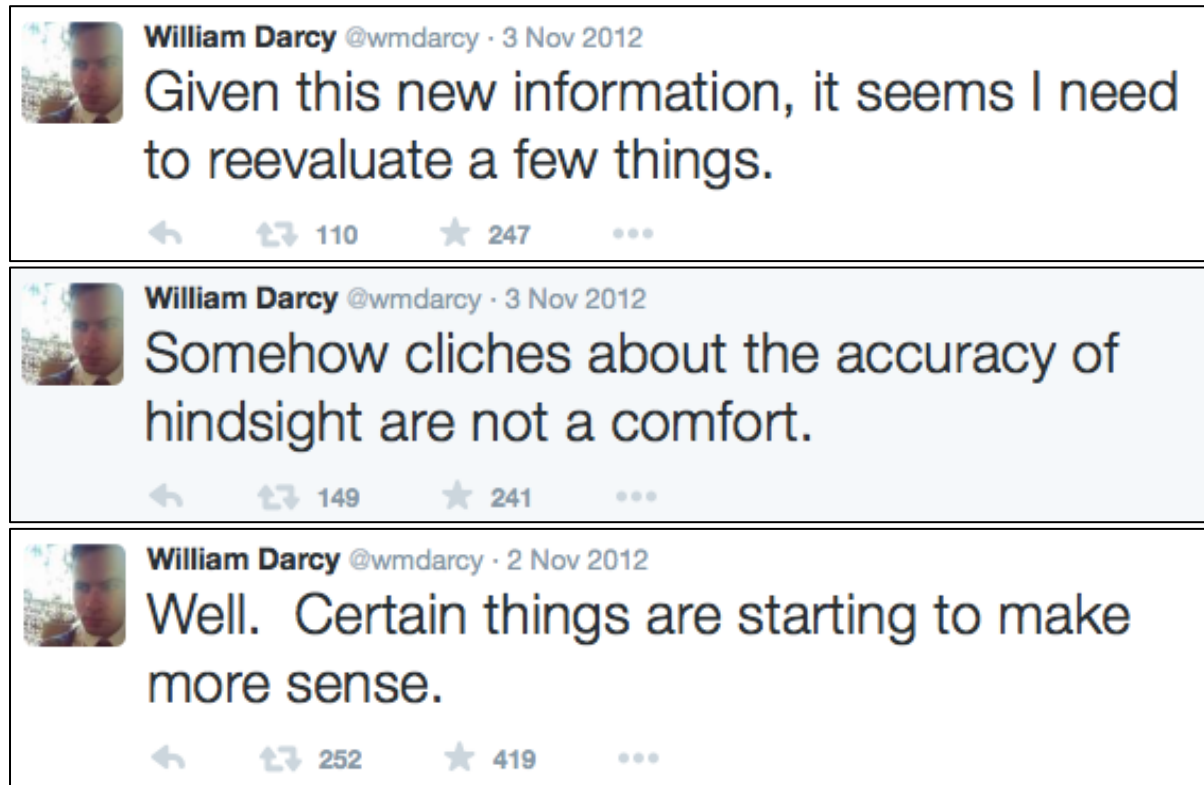


Figure 4: William Darcy's tweets watching Lizzie's videos (to read from the bottom up).

Viewers of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* who followed the characters on Twitter would have known immediately that Darcy's tweets were his reaction to watching Lizzie's videos given the fact that she (accidentally) challenged him to watch them in Episode 60. The series of tweets above – no matter if a member of the *LBD* audience read these tweets as they appeared in real-time, or were to read them now – are a window into the character's thoughts as they occurred. In the absence of Lizzie's first reaction to Darcy's letter, this glimpse into William Darcy's thought process preceding the writing of his letter allows *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* viewers the chance to feel as if they are participating in this pivotal moment of the story – just as Austen's readers are invited to

do when she grants them access to the turmoil of Elizabeth's mind in the wake of Mr. Darcy's letter. The series of tweets culminate, of course, in William Darcy's decision to write the letter:

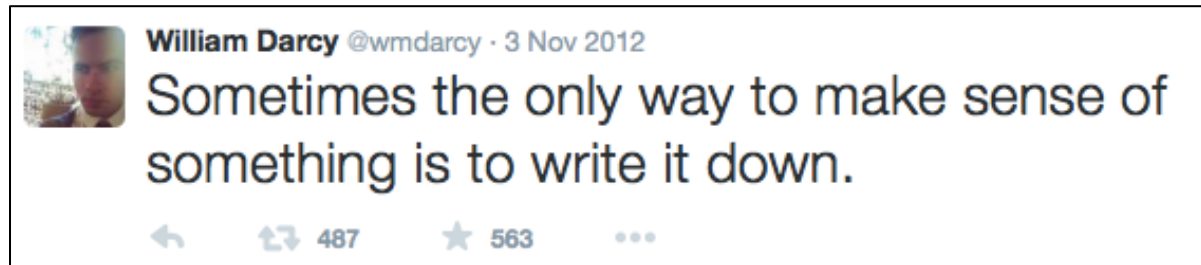


Figure 5: William Darcy's decision to write Lizzie a letter posted on Twitter.

Thus, the *LBD* attempts to compensate for denying viewers the chance to read Darcy's letter and the experience of Lizzie's epiphany by granting them access to a scene Austen does not give her readers: the build-up to Mr. Darcy's decision to write the all-important letter.

This all changed, however, thanks to the transmedia extensions that continued after the final episode of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* aired on YouTube on 28 March 2013 – the most notable being the novel tie-in entitled *The Secret Diary of Lizzie Bennet*, which was made available a little over a year after the show ended. Written by Bernie Su and Kate Rorick and published 24 June 2014, *Secret Diary* presents an interesting transmedia extension for two reasons: one, because, unlike the transmedia extensions posted during the run of the webseries, this one is retroactive rather than real-time; and two, because it adopts the same form as its source text – the novel. Despite the formal resemblance to *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Secret Diary of Lizzie Bennet* is written in a pseudo-diary format with a smattering of text conversations and transcripts here and there, adding a visual element that is not present in Austen's original. Meant to fill in some of the blanks left by the webseries, *Secret Diary* is more of a recapitulation of the *LBD*'s major events with a few added scenes that happened between episodes – all told through what are supposed to be entries in Lizzie's diary. While the added scenes are nearly all drawn from *Pride and Prejudice* and allow Su and Rorick the chance to adapt more of Austen's source

text, *Secret Diary* adds little to the *LBD* universe with dialogue taken verbatim from several episodes and an unconvincing narrator (Lizzie is supposed to be writing in her diary yet she describes conversations between characters in novelistic language).

All this notwithstanding, what *Secret Diary* gives its audience is William Darcy's letter as well as better insight into Lizzie's reaction to it – the two missing elements from Episodes 61 and 62 of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. In order to justify the inclusion of Darcy's letter in Lizzie's diary, it is made to look as if it is taped onto the pages – that way, the reader can consume the letter in its “original” format, imitating the way it is presented in *Pride and Prejudice*. While the content is the same as in Austen's novel, the language is updated to suit a modern context. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Darcy opens his letter with: “Be not alarmed, Madam, on receiving this letter, by the apprehension of its containing any repetition of those sentiments, or renewal of those offers, which were last night so disgusting to you” (Austen 150). In *Secret Diary*, William Darcy opens his letter with: “Lizzie – Don't be alarmed. This letter is not meant as a reiteration of the feelings I expressed to you previously – and as I now know, on video. I won't do us both the insult of replaying that scene” (Su and Rorick 222). The reformulation of Mr. Darcy's letter in *Secret Diary* is one of the highlights of this particular transmedia extension because it accomplishes what the webseries does so well, which is successfully translate the content of a two hundred year-old novel into the twenty-first century. While the opening to William Darcy's letter clearly reads as modern, very little has been changed (even the word “alarmed” is repeated in both versions). William Darcy's letter follows the same trajectory as Mr. Darcy's; it moves from an explanation of why he divided Bing Lee and Jane to an account of how Wickham wasted away money given to him by Darcy and subsequently manipulated Darcy's sister Georgiana to gain access to more. Of course, Su and Rorick update a few details

such as Wickham asking for money under the pretense of using it to attend college instead of to study law as in *Pride and Prejudice* and, instead of signing off with “I will only add, God bless you” (Austen 156), William Darcy writes: “Thank you for your attention, and giving this letter the benefit of the doubt” (226). Thus, with this piece of transmedia, *Secret Diary* retroactively fills in the gap left by Episodes 61 and 62 of the *LBD* by finally giving its audience the chance to read over William Darcy’s letter just as Austen allows her readers to do.

Additionally, through *Secret Diary*, Su and Rorick provide their take on the pivotal scene in *Pride and Prejudice* in which the reader experiences Elizabeth’s change of heart after reading Mr. Darcy’s letter. While the diary entry in question is dated 8 November 2012 (three days after the airing of Episode 61 in which Darcy gives Lizzie the letter), Lizzie writes down her thoughts on Darcy’s letter and recalls the way she reacted when she read through it initially. While this adaptation still does not give the *LBD* audience the same sense of immediacy and intimacy in Austen’s novel⁷, it does walk the reader through a thought process similar to Elizabeth’s in *Pride and Prejudice*. Just as Austen informs her readers that Elizabeth spends several hours reading, re-reading, and analyzing Mr. Darcy’s letter, Lizzie writes: “Yes, my perspective has changed, with every subsequent reading of the letter. I’ve pored over it at least half a dozen times, and each time, my worldview gets knocked a little more out of alignment” (Su and Rorick 227). This statement brings the *LBD* audience closer to the monumental shift experienced by Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* because it demonstrates how Lizzie is forced to rethink her once steadfast opinions and how instrumental Darcy’s letter is to that change in herself. Also, in Austen’s novel, the development of Lizzie’s varied emotions – from anger and disbelief to humility and

⁷ With the use of free indirect discourse, Austen simulates the experience of being inside Elizabeth’s head as she reevaluates her opinion of Mr. Darcy. In *The Secret Diary of Lizzie Bennet*, Lizzie is writing in the first person and is thus *retelling* what she thought, effectively distancing the reader both personally and temporally from her initial reaction.

doubt – are described with each rereading of Darcy’s letter. For instance, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen notes that “[w]ith a strong prejudice against every thing he might say, she began his account of what had happened at Netherfield” (156). Similarly, Lizzie writes in her diary that “[o]n the first read, the part about Bing and Jane basically had me seething, and convinced that his snobbishness and superiority made him blind to the true love they had for each other” (Su and Rorick 227). Thus, both incarnations of Elizabeth begin reading Darcy’s letter with minds closed against whatever he has to say. Lizzie’s thought process continues to follow Elizabeth’s as she sees the truth in Darcy’s account of George Wickham and (eventually) understands his rationale for separating Bing and Jane, ultimately culminating in an expression of humility: “Basically, I’ve been *blind. Partial. Prejudiced. Absurd*. I wanted to curl up into a ball and hide in the corner, thinking about how I acted toward Darcy” (Su and Rorick 228, emphasis added). Notably, the italicized part of this passage is lifted verbatim from the same scene in *Pride and Prejudice*: “[Elizabeth] grew absolutely ashamed of herself. – Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been *blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd*” (Austen 159, emphasis added). Once again, like Darcy’s letter, Lizzie’s sentiments are modernized for a twenty-first century readership, but – as the repetition of the passage above illustrates – Austen’s language and ideas remain remarkably current. Therefore, through the use of both digital and print transmedia extensions, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* makes a valiant effort and ultimately effective attempt to capture and communicate the details – both big and small – of its source text.

These are just a few examples of the wide array of transmedia components that make up *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and serve to flesh out its adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* in new and sometimes surprising ways. “The technology may be new, but the concept isn’t. Authors have always relied on communication techniques as a narrative device,” Kate Welsh reminds us in her

article in *The Guardian* on transmedia webseries literary adaptations, “[W]here Austen used letters and Wilkie Collins had diary entries, now we have Twitter, Tumblr and Instagram. Just as letters can be intercepted and diaries can be read, videos can be leaked and tweets broadcast” (n.pag.). As Welsh notes in this quotation, the integration of different modes of communication as seen in transmedia storytelling has been ongoing, and includes Jane Austen’s own integration of the epistolary form in her novels. In her decision to include letters to and from various characters, Austen breaks with her third-person, free indirect discourse narration to allow the likes of Mr. Collins, Jane Bennet, and Mr. Darcy to express themselves in the first person in *Pride and Prejudice*. Like the tweets exchanged between the *LBD* characters, the letters included in Austen’s novel offer alternative perspectives to the one espoused by the narrator and main focus of the narrator: Elizabeth Bennet. “[T]he story [of *Pride and Prejudice*] is told substantially from the point of view of Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine,” writes Ian Watt in his influential *The Rise of the Novel*, “but the identification is always qualified by the other role of the narrator acting as dispassionate analyst, and as a result the reader does not lose his critical awareness of the novel as a whole” (297). Watt affirms Elizabeth’s narrative control here; however, he also points out how Austen utilizes her third-person narrator to maintain a certain distance from her characters and present a larger picture than what Elizabeth sees. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, more than *Pride and Prejudice*, focuses on Lizzie’s perspective because the main narrative arc is told through her video blogs, but it is still able to retain Austen’s presentation of the larger picture through the transmedia material that gives a voice to the story’s secondary characters. The *LBD* also allows secondary characters the chance to point out and sometimes critique Lizzie’s biases in her videos, reminding viewers once again that there is always more to the story than what the titular character see and relates.

Although the way she crafted her novels seems relatively straightforward to a twenty-first century reader – with their incorporation of realistic inner and outer dialogue as well as narration that easily recounts plot yet leaves room for social commentary – Austen’s writing was something akin to revolutionary in the early nineteenth century. Notably, Watt attributes the perfection of the novel form to Austen by asserting that she resolved the problems with which eighteenth-century novelists like Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding grappled:

Jane Austen’s novels, in short, must be seen as the most successful solutions of the two general narrative problems for which Richardson and Fielding had provided only partial answers. She was able to combine into a harmonious unity the advantages both of realism of presentation and realism of assessment, of the internal and of the external approaches to character; her novels have authenticity without diffuseness or trickery, wisdom of social comment without a garrulous essayist, and a sense of the social order which is not achieved at the expense of the individuality and autonomy of the characters. (297)

In this passage, Watt argues that Austen “combine[s] into a harmonious unity” the various devices that were apparently too complex for Richardson and Fielding to seamlessly integrate into their novels. This assertion thus illustrates the way in which Austen was able to balance a variety of literary elements to create a story that felt unified to its readers. “Indeed, the full maturity of the [novelistic] genre itself, it can be argued, could only come when this reconciliation had been achieved,” Watt reminds his readers, “and it is probable that it is largely due to her successful resolution of these problems that Jane Austen owes her eminence in the tradition of the English novel” (296). While this feat may now be anticipated of novels, it is because writers like Austen shaped the novel form into what it is today and its numerous moving

parts – plot, narration, character, perspective, style, and so on – are now nearly invisible to us because they are expected to cohere. Therefore, even when compared to a production like the *LBD* in which its moving parts are immediately obvious due to the multiplicity of media it employs, *Pride and Prejudice* is still a complex achievement of storytelling; for even though Austen’s 1813 novel only deals with the written medium, it – like its transmedia adaption – incorporates several forms of communication into the narrative to produce a coherent whole.

As demonstrated by the examples of transmedia discussed earlier in this chapter, the action of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is propelled by methods of communication; whether it is a recorded conversation between Lizzie and Charlotte, an interaction between characters on Twitter, or a letter written to the heroine, the series hinges on messages being expressed and repressed, intercepted and redirected, understood and misunderstood. Because it is an adaptation built on digital and social media platforms – sites designed to facilitate twenty-first century communication – the *LBD*, like its source text, is both made up of and about forms of communication. Additionally, like Austen’s original novel, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* makes private thoughts and feelings public through similar methods of communication. Watt touches the paradoxical “development of the novel’s concentration on private experiences and personal relationship,” noting how strange it is that “the most powerful vicarious identification of readers with the feelings of fictional characters that literature had seen should have been produced by exploiting the qualities of print, the most impersonal ... and public of media of communication” (206). Although it might seem somewhat of a stretch to equate the novel with YouTube or Twitter, the effect is the same – in *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet’s innermost fears and desires are broadcast to a reading public just as Lizzie Bennet’s are to her viewing public. The narrator of Austen’s novel also lays bare the secrets of secondary characters like Jane Bennet,

Lydia Bennet, and Georgiana Darcy just as the creators of the *LBD* do with pins on Pinterest, tweets, and comments made on side-vlogs. Of course, as Watt hints at in the above passage with his identification of the paradoxical private-public tension at the heart of the novel form, there are certain affordances and constraints that accompany a supposedly private story told through a public form of communication – particularly in relation to the concept of realism.

Defined as “a recurrent mode, in various eras and literary forms, of representing human life and experience in literature,” realism is a term that often comes up when studying the rise of the novel (Abrams and Harpham 334). As discussed earlier in this chapter, novels struggled to find acceptance in the eighteenth century amidst a culture that prized rationality above flights of fancy, fact above fiction. Early novelists therefore took pains to describe the events of their stories in realistic rather than idealistic language in order to ensure that their fiction was received positively. Of course, the number of constraints placed on a novel striving for realism become very obvious very soon when one takes into account that novels are, by definition, works of fiction and can hence never be wholly real. Several eighteenth-century novelists attempted to work around this constraint by writing introductions that asked the reader to believe that the story contained within the subsequent pages was an account of true events and thus *non-fiction*. Pioneering writers such as Aphra Behn and Daniel Defoe claimed that their most famous novels (*Oroonoko* and *Robinson Crusoe*, respectively) detailed real events – Behn asserts in the dedication preceding *Oroonoko* that “[t]his is a true story” (5) while Defoe famously proclaims in the preface to *Crusoe*’s sequel that he is himself Robinson Crusoe (265). By classifying their works of fiction as biography and autobiography, Behn and Defoe illustrate the constraint of realism that accompanied (and continues to follow) the novel form.

As seen in the earlier quotation from *The Rise of the Novel*, Watt posits Austen as the writer who perfected the novel form, citing her mastery of “realism” and her ability to produce works that “have authenticity without diffuseness or trickery” (297). While Austen does not – in the heavy-handed vein of Behn or Defoe – make any claims that the events of *Pride and Prejudice* are drawn from life, she makes several subtle moves within the text to imbue her story with a sense of realism. Not only are all her characters sharply delineated and believably fleshed out, but they are also given dialogue that is not always used to advance the plot; instead, Austen’s characters are allowed conversations full of witticisms and playful teasing that sound remarkably natural, making their purpose more engaging than didactic. Perhaps the most important way in which Austen incorporates elements of realism into *Pride and Prejudice*, however, is through her deployment of letters. In using this form of communication that periodically breaks up her novel, Austen discloses information that would otherwise be difficult – and often *unrealistic* – to convey through verbal conversation. Returning to the example of Mr. Darcy’s letter, Austen’s use of the letter in this instance cleverly adheres to the constraint of realism. First, having established Mr. Darcy as a reticent character, it is believable that he would be able to set down his thoughts more coherently in writing and be able to disclose painful memories in a more removed fashion. Second, having stressed Elizabeth’s prejudice toward Mr. Darcy and illustrated her unwillingness to hear what he has to say in the preceding proposal scene, a letter is the most believable way in which she would be willing to listen to Mr. Darcy’s perspective. Lastly, a letter is the most believable way in which Austen could have presented Elizabeth’s change of heart because it gives her heroine the pivotal ability to reread, reassess, and revisit his words – had Mr. Darcy not presented Elizabeth with a letter, her feelings would not have had the opportunity to evolve with each rereading. Thus, Austen works within the

constraint of realism by spending time on character growth as well as incorporating a different mode of communication to relay important information and facilitate key moments in the text.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries grapples just as much as *Pride and Prejudice* with the constraint of realism – if not more so due to the new and intensely public forms of media it harnesses. Jay Bushman, a member of the *LBD* writing team, said in an interview that one of the main challenges of adopting a video blog format for their adaptation was “continually finding reasons for [characters] to be OK with putting themselves on camera” (n.pag.). In the same interview, Rachel Kiley – another member of the *LBD* writing team – adds to this:

You have characters like Lizzie and Lydia and Fitz [Colonel Fitzwilliams] and Wickham and a couple others who would absolutely vlog and say things to thousands of people without thinking twice about it, but it’s a little bit more difficult to justify that with some of the other characters sometimes.

And there were definitely situations we felt we really needed to see on the vlogs that, realistically, probably would have been edited out if this had been a real vlog, or posted in an emotional state and then deleted afterwards. So it was a constant attempt at striking a balance between realism and telling the story in the most effective way. (n.pag.)

As Kiley points out, telling an effective yet realistic story is nothing short of a balancing act. In this passage, she identifies the particular pitfall of harnessing the vlog format for their adaptation – while it is plausible that the more outgoing characters like the ones mentioned above would feel comfortable being on camera and exposing their private lives to an audience, it is less so with shyer characters like Jane and Darcy, or even clueless participants like Bing. The *LBD* writers do their best to address the instances mentioned by Kiley above where, in real life,

questionable or emotional videos would most likely never be posted, or taken down afterward. For instance, in Episode 29, Lizzie grapples with her last video in which she posted a private conversation between Jane and Bing. In Episode 28 entitled “Meeting Bing Lee,” Bing (played by Christopher Sean) walks in on Jane (played by Laura Spencer) recording a video letter to Charlotte and thus has no qualms flirting and joking around with her. Lizzie uploads the footage excitedly, informing her viewers in an introductory message that they are “finally going to see Bing Lee!” (Dunlap). In Episode 29, however, Lizzie questions her decision and worries about “the ethical line in [her] video diaries” (Toole “Ethics of Seeing Bing”). Halfway through her musings on ethics, Bing walks in once again and waves to the camera, believing that Lizzie is, like Jane, recording a video letter to Charlotte. After he leaves, Lizzie calls Charlotte, believing that she needs to delete Episode 28 because she posted it without Bing’s express permission. When Charlotte does not answer, Lizzie seeks out Bing’s sister Caroline (played by Jessica Andres) who convinces her that Bing understood that he was being filmed and that, because Charlotte will indeed be watching Lizzie’s videos, his participation in Jane and Lizzie’s “video letters to Charlotte” is not really a lie. Of course, Lizzie brings up the fact that thousands of viewers in addition to Charlotte will watch her videos, but Caroline still manages to persuade her that Bing is informed enough for his appearance on camera to ethically remain online.

What Episodes 28 and 29 demonstrate is the complicated balancing act highlighted by Kiley, for while “Meeting Bing Lee” addresses the viewers’ desire to see Jane’s love interest, “Ethics of Seeing Bing” attempts to answer the questions of realism elicited by the previous episode. Of course, creating this particular kind of realism was not an issue for Austen, as introducing a new character is simple in the context of a novel that makes use of a third-person narrator; to a reader, the all-knowing, all-seeing omniscient narrator (as employed in *Pride and*

Prejudice) is accepted as a narrative convention and thus the information relayed through that narrator does not need justification. In the case of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, Lizzie is a first-person narrator who cannot know or see everything and must judge what or how much she can share with her audience. Additionally, the writers of the *LBD* must take on the constraints of realism that accompany a first-person narrator as seen in an episode like “Ethics of Seeing Bing” – because Lizzie was not present to witness Bing’s appearance on-screen, she does not feel as if she has the authority to legitimize his position in her narrative until she has express permission.

Conversely, Austen’s narrator has the authority to introduce characters at his or her leisure without having to worry about ethics. The narratorial realism constraint speaks to the way in which the *LBD* team handled William Darcy’s letter. As has already been discussed at length, transitioning the simple presentation of Mr. Darcy’s letter in Austen’s novel into a twenty-first century transmedia adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* was no easy task. Given the intensely public nature of the media employed in the telling of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, there would have been no realistic way for Darcy to present Lizzie with his letter and allow the audience access to its content – due to the private matters discussed within the letter, Lizzie could not have read it aloud on her vlog, nor could she have posted it on Twitter, or Tumblr. These actions would have violated Darcy’s privacy and thus presented a huge deviation from the source text; it is crucial that Darcy trusts Elizabeth enough to disclose deeply personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences in his letter and that she does not share all of his confidences with anyone⁸.

Additionally, it is essential to the plot that the information Darcy shares about Wickham is known only to Elizabeth otherwise the climax of the story with Lydia and Wickham’s

⁸ In Austen’s novel, Elizabeth tells Jane about Mr. Darcy’s letter, but only so far as George Wickham is concerned – she omits all details pertaining to Mr. Bingley. The two sisters then decide to keep this information to themselves even though Elizabeth later discloses some of Wickham’s misdeeds to Mrs. Gardiner without revealing her source. Nonetheless, Elizabeth makes the pivotal decision to keep the entirety of the letter to herself.

relationship could not happen and would be made less poignant. In Episode 62, Lizzie most likely speaks for the writers when she defends her decision to keep the content of Darcy's letter private and says: "If he wanted the letter public, he would've just tweeted it" (Rorick "Letter Analysis"). This line demonstrates the limits imposed upon the *LBD* writing team in their efforts to produce as faithful an adaptation as possible of Austen's novel – although the reader is given the chance to read Darcy's letter along with Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*, the privacy of that letter is more important to the plot and must therefore take precedence.

The switch from a third-person to a first-person narrator further complicates the realistic balancing act of Darcy's letter in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. As in all of Austen's novels, "there is usually one character whose consciousness is tacitly accorded a privileged status, and whose mental life is rendered more completely than that of the other characters" (Watt 297). In *Pride and Prejudice*, this character is Elizabeth Bennet. While the story is not written in the first-person, Austen allows the reader almost unlimited access to Elizabeth's thoughts and feelings, detailing the inner workings of her mind throughout the novel. For instance, the narrator gives the reader a glimpse into Elizabeth's thoughts when she initially misinterprets Mr. Darcy's gaze: "She hardly knew how to suppose that she could be an object of admiration to so great a man; and yet that he should look at her because he disliked her, was still more strange" (Austen 38). Much of the narrative is filtered through Elizabeth's perspective, so the reader is given the opportunity to watch Austen's heroine develop over the course of the novel – even detailing the moment when she finally comes to terms with her feelings for Mr. Darcy: "She began now to comprehend that he was exactly the man, who ... would most suit her" (Austen 237). As seen in these examples, the reader is given insight into Elizabeth's mind, but Austen does not stop there – because *Pride and Prejudice* is written in free indirect discourse, the narrator is free to move

from Elizabeth's thoughts to those of Mr. Darcy or Mr. Collins. The reader is inside Darcy's head when he tries to fight his burgeoning feelings for Elizabeth – "He began to feel the danger of paying Elizabeth too much attention" (Austen 44) – just as the reader experiences Mr. Collins change his mind about which Bennet sister to whom he will propose: "Mr. Collins had only to change from Jane to Elizabeth – and it was soon done – done while Mrs. Bennet was stirring the fire. Elizabeth, equally next to Jane in birth and beauty, succeeded her of course" (Austen 53).

This ability to weave in and out of the minds of various characters is particular to the third-person narrator of free indirect discourse and, according to *LBD* writer Margaret Dunlap, it was yet another element of *Pride and Prejudice* that the writing team struggled to adapt:

While most of *Pride and Prejudice* centers on Elizabeth Bennet, Jane Austen actually steps away from her quite a bit, telling us things that Lizzie doesn't know about, or directly commenting as the third person narrator about what Elizabeth is thinking or saying. ... *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is about as first person as you can get in a video format. It was always a balance to try to show the audience where Lizzie was being accurate when she tells us about other people, and where she was being blinded by her own opinions. (n.pag.)

Just as Kiley does in the same interview, Dunlap brings up the concept of a narrative balancing act – in this case, representing the third-person events of *Pride and Prejudice* as best they can when told from Lizzie's first-person perspective. With the story's transmedia extensions (including the characters' Twitter accounts, Lydia's independent vlog, and Jane's Pinterest account to name a few), the writers of the *LBD* gives viewers a taste of perspectives other than Lizzie's. Even in Lizzie's videos – the main narrative arc – multiple characters are quick to point out that the heroine's judgment is biased and often recounts events from her limited perspective.

For instance, in Episode 15, Jane and Charlotte take over Lizzie's weekly vlog entry because they feel as if "Lizzie isn't being particularly comprehensive with her commentary regarding recent events" (Kiley "Lizzie Bennet is in Denial"). They give an alternate perspective on Lizzie's unfavourable account of her encounter with Darcy in the previous episode, playing out the conversation they overheard between Caroline and Darcy in which he makes his crush on Lizzie apparent⁹. In so doing, the writers draw attention to the fact that Lizzie's point of view is not always accurate and is, most importantly, both proud and prejudiced.

Returning once more to Episode 61 in which William Darcy gives Lizzie Bennet the all-important letter, there is a specific moment that speaks to what makes this particular adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* so successful. After Darcy leaves, Lizzie looks down at his letter and makes a face. "Is this hand-written? And wax-sealed?" she wonders aloud, opening the envelope before continuing: "And it's in cursive! [laughs] I don't think I've had to read cursive since they taught it in the fourth grade" (Rorick). Lizzie's derision melts away, however, the minute she begins to read. This initial display of cynicism that so many expect from a member of the millennial generation in regards to traditional media that soon gives way to genuine surprise is one of the most brilliant moments of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. It is brilliant that – within a transmedia webseries that harnesses almost exclusively social and digital media platforms to tell its story – the *LBD* writers chose to keep the original medium of Mr. Darcy's letter to communicate with Lizzie. Despite the fact that this adaptation has William Darcy running a communications empire with cutting edge technology, he still decides on a traditional mode of communication (exaggeratedly so with the wax seal) to relay sensitive information. In so doing,

⁹ This conversation is a brilliant update on the passage in *Pride and Prejudice* in which Mr. Darcy famously speaks to Miss Bingley on the subject of Elizabeth's "fine eyes" (Austen 19).

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries not only pays homage to its source material, but also demonstrates the continued relevance of old forms of media in the face of the new to communicate.

Through its transmedia approach and focus on communication, the *LBD* manages to simultaneously update Austen's text and highlight the aspects of it that are still remarkably current. Running in parallel to the novel genre's mixed critical reception in the eighteenth century, the *LBD*'s Internet-based form similarly challenges the traditional concept of readership as well as encounters and overcomes comparable obstacles. Additionally, while *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* differs formally from *Pride and Prejudice*, it manages to incorporate nearly all of the content from Austen's novel in a believable manner for a twenty-first century audience thanks to its transmedia extensions. Therefore, despite the fact that some aspects of *Pride and Prejudice* are presented differently in the *LBD*, it tells the same story by using media both old and new in a fusion of tradition and modernity. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* thus, in the words of Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, "doesn't presume that new platforms liberate people from old constraints but rather suggests that the affordances of digital media provide a catalyst for reconceptualizing other aspects of culture" (3). The *LBD* succeeds as an adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* because it formally respects its source text; forged of an extraordinarily similar historical context, it uses twenty-first century media to tell a familiar story in a fresh yet faithful way and distills the essence of Austen's novel by boiling it all down to a question of communication. Thus, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* successfully retells and hence communicates *Pride and Prejudice* in a form specifically adapted to survive and thrive in the twenty-first century, keeping Jane Austen's text both alive and relevant to a modern audience.

Episode 2: Content

“It’s the twenty-first century. We are strong, proactive women!”



(Episode 48: Snickerdoodles)

Not only does *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* successfully adapt the form of *Pride and Prejudice* in a way that still emulates the original, but it also manages to effectively transition and update the content of Jane Austen's two hundred year old novel to fit into a twenty-first century context – all without sacrificing the source text's focus on communication. In fact, the *LBD* emerges as a successful adaptation of its source text because of its ability to distill *Pride and Prejudice*'s emphasis on communication in the way it translates the form, content, and audience engagement of the original to address and appeal to a modern readership. This chapter will delve into the way in which Hank Green and Bernie Su's webseries strikes the ideal balance between preservation and renewal in its treatment of the content of Austen's novel, walking the fine line between fidelity and infidelity that is necessary to producing a successful adaptation that breathes new life into its source text. It does so by presenting fans of the original with a reimagined version that is recognizable yet pleasantly surprising, and welcoming new fans to the story with a narrative that is both accessible and absorbing. Thus, in the *LBD*'s approach to successfully adapting the content of *Pride and Prejudice* to suit the webseries' contemporary setting and new generation of audience, it accomplishes a feat that outwardly seems impossible (or, at the very least, a tall order): it retains nearly every key element of Austen's 1813 novel yet radically revises several characters and critical plot points. From embracing a twenty-first century attitude toward gender dynamics and injecting *Pride and Prejudice* with even more female empowerment, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* successfully adapts and thus communicates Austen's novel in a way that ensures the relevance of her story of marriage, manners, and misunderstandings more than two hundred years after its publication.

Although there are many changes made to both character and plot within *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the beating heart of Austen's story remains the same – it revolves around how

the characters communicate, miscommunicate, and re-establish communication with one another throughout. Picking up on the intersecting notions of successful communication and successful adaptation, this chapter will bring them once more to the forefront to account for the alterations *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* makes to the content of *Pride and Prejudice*. It will do so by drawing from adaptation theory and in turn proposing a qualified version of the controversial fidelity criterion to explain the *LBD*'s success as an adaptation of Austen's novel. This chapter will then turn to a discussion of the noteworthy modifications made to the main characters of Elizabeth, Jane, and Lydia Bennet, and move into an analysis of how the plot revisions made in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* befit the variances in character and the adaptation's twenty-first century setting. In so doing, this chapter will argue that the *LBD* is a successful adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* because its content mirrors its source text's emphasis on communication in two ways: first, by translating the content to address modern anxieties to successfully communicate with its audience; and second, by maintaining Austen's focus on communication through the way the plot continues to rely on the characters failing or refusing to properly communicate with one another until they clear away all misunderstandings in the story's conclusion.

Filmic adaptations of novels are often evaluated in terms of how "faithful" they are to the source text despite the fact that many adaptation theorists disapprove of the fidelity criterion. "Given the indefensibility of fidelity as a criterion for the analysis of adaptations, why has it maintained such a stifling grip on adaptation study?" asks Thomas Leitch before offering a potential answer: "The likely reasons seem less theoretical than institutional. The assumption of fidelity is really an appeal to anteriority, the primacy of classic over modern texts" (162). The traditionalist unease in the face of something new or modern explored in the previous chapter reappears in the passage above. Just as the novel was initially considered a lesser form of

literature because it was not as established as the essay, play, or poem, so filmic adaptations are repeatedly seen as inferior to the novels upon which they are based. The automatic assumption that what came before is better than what comes after is nothing more than conservative elitism in the face of an ever-changing cultural landscape. The definition of high and low culture is, of course, cyclical – what is old is deemed superior to the new until something newer comes along. A prime example of this phenomenon is the fidelity criterion, which assumes that a novel must be better than its filmic adaptation because not only is the novel an older medium than film, but also because an adaptation comes second to its source and must be secondary.

Even the term “faithful” in reference to a successful film adaptation is a loaded one – especially when taking into consideration the vocabulary employed by critics when an adaptation fails to live up to its source text. “The language of criticism dealing with the film adaptation of novels has often been profoundly moralistic,” explains Robert Stam, “awash in terms such as *infidelity, betrayal, deformation, violation, vulgarization, and desecration*, each accusation carrying its specific charge of outraged negativity” (54, original emphasis). As illustrated by this quotation, the vocabulary used by critics to describe an unsuccessful adaptation is rife with condemnation. Stam rightfully calls the rhetoric surrounding disappointing adaptations “profoundly moralistic,” for every disapproving term in the passage above cast adaptations as a disgraceful act. In fact, this condescending kind of language denounced by Stam closely resembles that utilized by early detractors of the novel. In the June 1785 issue of *The Lounger*, novelist Henry Mackenzie writes of how novels result in “forming a mistaken and pernicious system of morality” (qtd. in Nixon 236). William Jones similarly focuses on the novel’s negative effects on a reader’s morality, using terms like “corruption” and “subversion” multiple times in a 1780 essay in reference to the novel’s influence on one’s morals as well as principles, judgment,

and manners (qtd. in Nixon 240-1). Clearly, the similarly harmful rhetoric surrounding adaptations stems from the fidelity criterion and its conservative roots, for if critics believe that a successful adaptation is one that is *faithful* to its source text, then it only makes sense that they would call an adaptation that deviates from that source text *unfaithful* and accuse it of infidelity.

The ultimate flaw in the fidelity criterion's logic lies in its reliance on the concept of "fidelity," for anything that differs even slightly from the source text is quickly deemed unfaithful and adaptations are hence set up to fail. Adaptations must, however, adhere to some semblance of "fidelity" to their source material if they are to be considered adaptations at all, for, if an adaptation does not resemble its source text in any way, then it ceases to be an adaptation. Therefore, while not entirely groundless, the fidelity criterion is in need of qualification. In his "Beyond Fidelity" article, Stam proposes to replace the trope of "fidelity" with that of "translation," for "[t]he trope of adaptation as translation suggests a principled effort of inter-semiotic transposition, with the inevitable losses and gains typical of any translation" (62). Linda Hutcheon echoes this sentiment in her *Theory of Adaptation*, noting that "translation comes closer to defining adaptation" because adaptations often transfer the content of their source text to a new medium and are thus "translations in the form of intersemiotic transpositions from one sign system (for example, words) to another (for example, images)" (16). In this move away from adaptation as an act of fidelity, Stam and Hutcheon remove the unrealistic expectations and negative vocabulary that accompany the fidelity criterion. Instead, in conceptualizing adaptation as an act of translation, Stam and Hutcheon position adaptation as an act of communication.

Translation is defined as "[t]he action or process of turning from one language into another" and "[t]he expression or rendering of something in another medium or form" (OED). To translate is thus to successfully communicate the same message in another language, another

medium, another form. The act of translation will inevitably entail several losses and gains, for no one language overlaps neatly with another. Therefore, a successful translation must – like a successful adaptation – strike a balance between those losses and gains to produce a text that effectively communicates the message of the original in a way that will speak to a brand new audience. To measure an adaptation’s success in terms of how well it translates its source text to suit a new medium, context, or audience is thus a way of sidestepping the fidelity criterion to allow an adaptation to be judged on fairer terms – namely, how well an adaptation communicates the original story in a new language. It is no accident that, in their discussion of adaptation as translation, Stam and Hutcheon refer to the study of semiotics. If semiotics studies how signs and symbols are used to communicate, then *intersemiotics* deals with how signs and symbols alter when transferred to a different field – in the case of adaptation, how the signs and symbols of a written text change when translated to the visual medium of film. Therefore, if the act of a translation is rooted in communication and the act of adaptation is rooted in translation, then a successful adaptation must be a successful act of translation and hence communication.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries is an adaptation that accomplishes this. Take, for example, the way in which Green and Su’s webseries translates Austen’s characterization and presentation of the Bennet sisters – Elizabeth, Jane, and Lydia – to suit a twenty-first century setting. Perhaps the most beloved heroine in all of Austen’s novels, Elizabeth Bennet is also arguably the most beloved by Austen herself. In a letter to her sister Cassandra, Austen declares that she “think[s] Elizabeth] as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print” and that she does not know how she could “tolerate those who do not like *her*” (“Letter XL to Cassandra Austen,” original emphasis) and many literary critics call her Austen’s particular favourite because of how “handsomely rewarded” she is at the conclusion of *Pride and Prejudice*. “[S]he marries the richest man in all

of Jane Austen's novels," Mary Poovey reminds us in her article on ideology in Austen's work, "and is established as mistress of Pemberley, one of those great country estates that superintended and stabilized patriarchal society" (42). It is true that Elizabeth's marriage to Mr. Darcy – the wealthiest of Austen's romantic male leads – positions her as the most financially independent and hence most powerful heroine in all of Austen's novels; however, it is because she blatantly defies so many gendered expectations along the way and is *still* rewarded thusly that her character becomes even more remarkable. Throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth exhibits behaviour atypical of early nineteenth-century literary female protagonists: rational minded and sharp-tongued, she does nothing to downplay her intelligence; unapologetically independent and self-confident, she refuses to be intimidated by classism or cowed by social convention; and, despite her romantic subplot with Mr. Darcy, she retains her agency for the entirety of the novel and fosters a relationship based on equality and respect with him. The fact that Austen allows Elizabeth to move through the narrative without ever shaming her for these subversive behaviours and ultimately rewards her for breaking all the rules is a testament to her not only being a particular favourite of Austen's, but also to her persisting as a literary icon more than two hundred years later. Elizabeth Bennet is a female character ahead of her time, which is most likely the reason why she endures as Austen's most popular heroine.

In her book *The Courtship Novel*, Katherine Sobba Green offers a possible explanation as to why we as modern-day readers "love Lizzy best among Austen's heroines": "[I]t is not solely for the feminist subject position she delineates," she explains, "but also for her redemptive role in relation to Darcy whom she leads out of the confines of pride" (158). To justify this claim, Green highlights two key moments that occur between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy near the end of *Pride and Prejudice*. The first is when Elizabeth asks Mr. Darcy to "account for his having ever

fallen in love with her” and she teases him, asking: “Now be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence?” (Austen 291). To this, he answers simply: “For the liveliness of your mind, I did” (291). Elizabeth goes on to clarify his reply, gathering that he was “sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention” from “the women who were always speaking and looking, and thinking for [*his*] approbation alone” (291, original emphasis). She then declares: “I roused, and interested you, because I was so unlike *them*” (291, original emphasis). While this exchange “marks Lizzy’s difference, her individuality, as compared with the designing women Darcy has known” (Green 158), it is also a definitive moment for Austen because she uses her heroine to articulate why she allows her to succeed within the narrative and is so handsomely rewarded at the end: it is because and not in spite of her differences (namely her refusal to have her entire existence revolve around male approval) that Elizabeth attracts the attention of Mr. Darcy and results in her subsequent marriage to him that is both financially advantageous and emotionally fulfilling.

In addition to this passage, Green also draws attention to a brief scene at the novel’s conclusion that illustrates Elizabeth’s positive influence on Pemberley and its residents after her marriage to Mr. Darcy as seen through the eyes of his younger sister, Georgiana:

Georgiana had the highest opinion in the world of Elizabeth; though at first she often listened with astonishment bordering on alarm, at her lively, sportive, manner of talking to her brother. He, who had always inspired in herself a respect which almost overcame her affection, she now saw the object of open pleasantry. Her mind received knowledge which had never before fallen in her way. By Elizabeth’s instructions she began to comprehend that a woman may take liberties with her husband. (Austen 297)

In this single yet infinitely significant paragraph, Austen firmly asserts Elizabeth's power and establishes her position as a deeply feminist figure whose progressive thinking and behaviour has impacted not only the likes of Mr. Darcy, but has also inspired a young and once conservative woman like Georgiana. "This we may understand as the real object lesson for Austen's readers," writes Green of this moment, "[that] like Lizzy, they are to take liberties with the façade of patriarchy, to domesticate the Darcys of the world" (159). It is seemingly no accident that this scene is one of the last within the novel, for it not only leaves Austen's readers with the image of Elizabeth instructing the meek Georgiana on how she "may take liberties with her husband," but it also reassures them that the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice* remains unchanged after marriage. If Elizabeth is still able to speak to Mr. Darcy in a "lively, sportive manner" that produces "astonishment bordering on alarm" in Georgiana, then it is clear that Austen's heroine has retained her independent spirit in the face of the ultimate space of patriarchal hegemony: marriage. Of course, this also demonstrates the extent of Elizabeth's effect on Mr. Darcy and the way in which his love for her has allowed him to shake off the masculine trappings of his pride and learn, in his words, how "to please a woman worthy of being pleased" (Austen 282). Thus, in highlighting these two passages that show the easy rapport that ultimately develops between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, Green posits that it is because "Lizzy's verbal freedom makes a substantial change in Darcy's life" and ensures Mr. Darcy's "conversion to more feminist and more egalitarian principles" that Elizabeth Bennet continues to be the subject of so much literary adoration today. Austen's most beloved heroine endures because she not only espouses and enacts feminist ideas of independence, but her influence also manages to sway the initially immovable Mr. Darcy – an intimidating figure who epitomizes patriarchal power with his wealth and rank in society – to fully embrace Elizabeth and love her for her progressive behaviour.

While Green offers plausible rationalization for Elizabeth's persistence as a literary icon, I would push her argument even further to propose that Austen's heroine continues to fascinate readers today because she is a female character ahead of her time who fits quite easily within a twenty-first century context. As stated earlier, Elizabeth Bennet defies nearly everything expected of a nineteenth-century woman throughout the course of *Pride and Prejudice*. For instance, Sarah Winter describes in "The Education of Men and Women, c. 1760-c.1912" the gendered divide advocated by so many contemporary writers, citing Jean Jacques Rousseau's declaration in his highly influential *Emile, or On Education* (1762) that a married woman's place is in the home; however, should she ever "fail to recognize the voice of the head of the house," he warns that the "result of this disorder is never anything but misery" (qtd. in Winter n.pag.).¹⁰ Already, the scene discussed in the previous paragraph in which Austen describes the dynamic between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy as husband and wife defies Rousseau's idea of a successful marriage. From Georgiana's account of her sister-in-law's "lively, sportive manner of talking" to her brother and insistence that "a woman may take liberties with her husband," it is clear that Elizabeth is just as much the head of the household as Mr. Darcy and that their situation is far from miserable. Instead, Austen presents them as the picture of marital bliss with their respectful and equitable partnership as evidenced by the final lines of the book in which Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are referred to as a united "they" in their opinions and feelings and, in so doing, effectively dismantles Rousseau's misogynistic ideal of marriage and a wife's role (297-8).

This is not the only instance in which Elizabeth Bennet rebels against the Rousseauian model of proper female conduct. According to him, women should only be allowed to read

¹⁰ While there were more progressive opinions on female education in circulation during Austen's time – like, for instance, Mary Wollstonecraft's – ideas more in line with Rousseau's predominated. Austen herself speaks to the prevalence of this dominant mindset in Mr. Collins' choice of James Fordyce's conservative *Sermons to Young Women* as suitable reading material for his female cousins (51).

didactic books and essays so that they can hold a conversation with their husbands and in turn instruct their children – under no circumstances, Rousseau warns, should women be able form any kind of independent judgment: “Since they are not in a position to be judges themselves, they ought to receive the decision of fathers and husbands” (qtd. in Winter n.pag.). If anything is made apparent throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, it is that Austen’s heroine is fully capable of forming her own judgments – even if they are not to anyone’s taste but her own. “You have liked many a stupider person,” Elizabeth asserts in response to Jane’s confession that she likes Mr. Bingley, a critical remark that causes Jane to exclaim in astonishment, “Dear Lizzy!” (Austen 9-10). Elizabeth’s opinionated nature is given even sharper delineation through her conversations with Mr. Darcy and the multiple instances in which she blatantly disagrees with him. When presented with his idea of the accomplished woman, Elizabeth states decisively: “*I* never saw such a woman. *I* never saw such capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance, as you describe, united” (Austen 29, original emphasis).¹¹ Another moment in which Elizabeth boldly contradicts Mr. Darcy is when she challenges his assumption that poetry is “the *food* of love”: “Of a fine, stout, healthy love it may,” she says, “Every thing nourishes what is strong already. But if it be only a slight, thin sort of inclination, *I* am convinced that one good sonnet will starve it entirely away” (Austen 33, emphasis added). In both of these instances, Elizabeth attacks Mr. Darcy’s notions about women and romance – introducing complexity into his idealized ideas of both – but does so by emphasizing that she is giving her opinion. She cites neither books nor essays when refuting Mr. Darcy, giving credit only to herself with her repeated use of the first person pronoun and showing herself more than capable of independent judgment.

¹¹ Note the repeated use of the italicized “*I*’s, which Austen uses to demonstrate Elizabeth’s self-confidence when expressing her thoughts.

Perhaps the most famous (and obvious) examples of Elizabeth exercising her independence in judgment are when she refuses a marriage proposal first from Mr. Collins and then from Mr. Darcy. “I am perfectly serious in my refusal,” Elizabeth informs Mr. Collins, “You could not make *me* happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make *you* so” (Austen 82, original emphasis). The use of the words “serious” and “convinced” convey the depth of Elizabeth’s certainty in her own feelings and we see this kind of firm language amplified in her rejection of Mr. Darcy’s first proposal. In fact, Elizabeth is nothing if not blunt when she ends her refusal of Mr. Darcy thus: “I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry” (Austen 148). Once again, Elizabeth stresses her feelings in the matter and gives her opinion freely and authoritatively – there is no way her words could be misconstrued. In fact, these scenes showcase yet another way in which Elizabeth resists Rousseau’s definition of the ideal woman by contradicting his assertion that “[w]oman’s empire is an empire of gentleness, skill, and obligingness; her orders are caresses, her threats are tears” (qtd. in Winter n.pag.). This picture of female tenderness and obedience could not be further from describing Elizabeth’s headstrong and sometimes harsh manners as evidenced by the examples provided above.

Throughout the novel, this strength serves her well, as she expertly holds her own against figures of authority who constantly wish to belittle her and her family. After Mr. Darcy’s first proposal in which he makes constant reference to the “inferiority of [her] connections,” Elizabeth berates him for not addressing her “in a more gentleman-like manner” (Austen 148) – an accusation, that he later admits, haunted him and subsequently served in humbling him (Austen 281-2).

Additionally, when Lady Catherine de Bourgh pays a visit to the Bennet household to insult Elizabeth’s middle class status and warn her against becoming engaged to Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth

retaliates and asserts that she and Mr. Darcy are equals: “He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman’s daughter; so far we are equal” (Austen 272). In these exchanges, Elizabeth rebukes two members of high society for their disgraceful behaviour toward her and courageously demands equal respect. In fact, Elizabeth’s claim to Lady Catherine that she and Mr. Darcy are equals is a radical one – especially in a nineteenth-century context – for, in so doing, she suggests that they deserve to be treated exactly the same in spite of her difference in class *and* gender.

Thus, in Austen’s presentation of Elizabeth Bennet as a woman who actively resists gendered nineteenth-century conceptions surrounding appropriate female behaviour, she is depicted as a character ahead of her time who often feels modern due to her independent judgment, fearlessness in the face of adversity, and unwillingness to suffer classism or sexism. As seen in the above quotations from *Pride and Prejudice*, much of Elizabeth’s progressive nature is shown through the way she communicates with other characters – since women were expected to be submissive and essentially silent in nineteenth-century society, Elizabeth’s vocal nature once again sets her apart and aligns her with more modern sensibilities. It therefore stands to reason that a character ahead of her time in a nineteenth-century context would easily fit into a twenty-first century one. In *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, Elizabeth “Lizzie” Bennet is a self-described “twenty-four year-old grad student with a mountain of student loans living at home” (Su “My Name is Lizzie Bennet”) who likes “rain, classic novels, and any movie starring Colin Firth” (Kiley “My Sisters: Problematic to Practically Perfect”). Shared with her audience in the first two episodes of her video blog, these facts successfully set up Austen’s heroine in a brand new setting while also cleverly situating her within the long history of *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations. As in the source text, the *LBD*’s Lizzie is an intelligent young woman who still lives with her family and suffers from financial woes – caused in this instance by the period-

appropriate burden of student loans. Additionally, with Lizzie's avowal that she likes rain (no doubt a nod to the 2005 filmic adaptation in which Mr. Darcy's first proposal to Elizabeth is done in the pouring rain), classic novels (no doubt a nod to the source text itself), and Colin Firth films (no doubt a nod to the 1995 BBC miniseries as well as the 2001 film *Bridget Jones's Diary*, which is loosely based on Austen's novel and stars Firth as a man named "Mark Darcy"), the writers of the *LBD* establish their adaptation as both self-aware and smart through these intertextual references to other variations of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Other key aspects of Elizabeth Bennet's personality that are successfully translated from Austen's novel to Green and Su's webseries are her quick wit and opinionated personality. The entire webseries begins with Lizzie holding up a t-shirt emblazoned with *Pride and Prejudice's* iconic opening sentence: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Austen 1). She reads the line aloud – effectively beginning the *LBD* with exactly the same words as its source text – and, once finished, addresses the camera a sardonic look that immediately alerts the audience to Lizzie's trademark playful yet sarcastic disposition (see Figure 6 on the next page). She wryly informs her viewers that her mother gave all her daughters the same t-shirt for Christmas last year, but that she does not intend on ever wearing hers because "[i]t's not like we're all going to put our lives on hold because some rich single guy dropped from the sky" (Su). Thus, from the very first episode, Austen's heroine is firmly established as the same headstrong and independent female character beloved by nearly all readers of *Pride and Prejudice*. Perhaps the most brilliant aspect of the *LBD's* modernized Lizzie, however, is the reinforcement of Elizabeth's judgmental nature in a move that makes her a "spiky and occasionally dislikable" protagonist (Welsh n.pag.). If Mr. Darcy is "pride" in *Pride and Prejudice*, then Elizabeth is undoubtedly "prejudice" in that she –

like her love interest – is flawed. Unlike other adaptations that tend to present an idealized picture of Elizabeth, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* endeavours to portray her in the same way Austen did: as an outspoken woman who most likely shocked nineteenth-century readers with her sharp tongue, disregard for social convention, and harsh opinions. Therefore, in presenting Lizzie to twenty-first century viewers as an intelligent yet imperfect individual who makes several blatant errors in judgment, the *LBD* writers aim to recreate the same kind of reception Elizabeth Bennet would have originally earned as a female character ahead of her time. As Mr. Darcy notes in the novel, Elizabeth Bennet’s propensity is “willfully to misunderstand” people before she gets to know them and this is illustrated through the way in which modern-day Lizzie is quick to judge family, friends, and new acquaintances (Austen 43).

In fact, the majority of the central miscommunications that occur within *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* are triggered by Lizzie’s misjudgments. For example, the *LBD*’s Lizzie calls her youngest sister Lydia “a stupid whorey slut” (Kiley “My Sisters: Problematic to Practically



Figure 6: Elizabeth Bennet’s snarky spirit is alive and well in her twenty-first century counterpart.

Perfect”); deems her best friend Charlotte’s decision to accept a job offer a “wrong life choice” as well as the position itself both “mind-sucking” and “pointless” (Su “Friends Forever”); and asserts that William Darcy is a “boring, stuffy, [and] unbelievably rude” person who think that he is “better than everyone else” after only meeting him once (Kiley “Snobby Mr. Douche”). While Lizzie is unquestionably the protagonist of the *LBD* and remains just as charismatic and endearing as her literary counterpart, her biased perspective is often called into question by those around her and she suffers the consequences of her prejudiced opinions. As in *Pride and Prejudice*, Lizzie eventually learns from her mistakes: Elizabeth is made to rethink her disdainful attitude toward Charlotte’s decision to marry Mr. Collins when she sees her friend’s “degree of contentment” and “composure in bearing with her husband” (Austen 122) just as she is humbled by her misjudgment of Mr. Darcy and feels “ashamed of ever feeling a dislike against him” (Austen 201). Similarly, the *LBD*’s Lizzie admits to being “so proud of [Charlotte]” (Bushman “Robot Surprise”) when she sees how her best friend is excelling in her job for Mr. Collins and, contrary to Austen’s novel, even makes an effort to be kinder to Mr. Collins himself, thanking him in Episode 54 for inviting her to dinner with him and Catherine de Bourgh when she visits his company Collins & Collins. “That wasn’t so difficult,” she admits after he leaves, “Being nice, right?” (Kiley “Anniekins”). Additionally, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* sees the heroine change her mind about Mr. Darcy just as Elizabeth does in the original with Lizzie admitting to her viewers that he “deserved more from [her]. ... More consideration. More understanding. Less Judyg McJudgment” (Rorick “Special Delivery”). Eventually, these misunderstandings are resolved once Lizzie properly communicates with the people she judged – apologizing to Charlotte for her negative reaction in Episode 51 (“Together Again”) and clarifying her feelings

for Darcy in Episode 98 (“Gratitude”) – retaining the source text’s focus on and endorsement of successful communication.

Where the *LBD* diverges significantly from its source text is in the adaptation’s decision to have Lizzie atone for her unfairness towards her younger sister, Lydia. Throughout the webseries, Lizzie consistently shames Lydia for her party girl antics, making snide comments about her sexual freedom as seen with her “whorey slut” comment in Episode 2. This is no different from Austen’s novel in which Elizabeth condemns Lydia as “the most determined flirt that ever made herself and her family ridiculous. A flirt too, in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation; without any attraction beyond youth and a tolerable person” (176-7). Due to nineteenth-century notions of propriety, however, Austen condones Elizabeth’s contempt for the rambunctious Lydia while *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* takes a decidedly twenty-first century approach in punishing Lizzie for slut-shaming her sister. The effects of Lizzie’s disparagement of Lydia become central to the plot of the *LBD* and one of the most pivotal points of the denouement is Lizzie’s reconciliation with her youngest sister. “Lydia, I want you to know how sorry I am for the things I said to you on and off the internet,” she tells her sister in Episode 88 (Kiley “Okay”), informing Darcy in her penultimate video that her vision of their future together “includes lots of trips home and visits from Lydia” because she’s “really enjoying getting to know [her] little sister better” (Bushman “Future Talk”). *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* hence successfully transitions Elizabeth Bennet into the twenty-first century by having her character arc culminate in successful communication while simultaneously updating her feminist ideals to suit a new and more progressive context. Thus, the *LBD* truly modernizes Austen’s heroine by illustrating Lizzie’s personal growth – not only through her ability to learn from her mistakes

caused by prejudice as in the source text, but also through her eventual acceptance, understanding, and support of Lydia throughout and in the aftermath of the Wickham ordeal.

Elizabeth is not the only Bennet sister who undergoes some changes in the translation from a nineteenth-century novel set in Regency England to a twenty-first century transmedia webseries set in modern-day California. For instance, the five Bennet sisters in Austen's story are whittled down to three in the 2012 adaptation – Mary becomes a cousin while Kitty becomes Lydia's cat. This decision makes sense for two reasons: one, because families of five children are less common today than they were two hundred years ago and two, because Elizabeth, Jane, and Lydia are the only Bennet sisters who really contribute to the advancement of the plot. Mary and Kitty round out the crowded Bennet household in Austen's novel; however, their virtual absence in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* goes relatively unnoticed as the original storyline progresses just as it should with the three principal sisters. While Lydia's modern-day incarnation differs the most from her novelistic counterpart, the *LBD*'s Jane is also a bit of a departure from the character upon whom she is based. Described by Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* as a person who is “a great deal too apt ... to like people in general” and “never see[s] a fault in any body,” the twenty-first century Jane remains just as kind and gentle-hearted as Austen envisioned (10). In *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, Jane is a soft-spoken, twenty-something merchandise coordinator who dearly loves her younger sisters as well as everything fashion and crafts. In addition to running a Twitter, Tumblr, and Pinterest account, Jane also manages a Lookbook account to showcase her stylistic talents (see Figure 7 on the next page). Not only does this Lookbook show that the *LBD*'s Jane is as beautiful as she is said to be in Austen's novel – “Oh! she is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld!” cries Mr. Bingley upon first meeting her (7) – but it also exemplifies the meekness of her personality. For example, the “About Me” section of her Lookbook reads: “Hi

I'm Jane. I hope you like my looks, if not that's okay. Have a great day" ("About Me" n.pag.). When introducing her eldest sister in Episode 2, Lizzie evokes Mary Poppins by pronouncing Jane to be "[p]ractically perfect in every way" and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* does everything to emphasize this description (Kiley). Always impeccably dressed and unfailingly cheerful, Jane is portrayed as a loving and attentive sister to both Lizzie and Lydia as well as a devoted girlfriend to Bing Lee. Additionally, Jane's inability to, as Austen writes, "see a fault in any body" is highlighted in the way she constantly attempts to soften Lizzie's harsh judgments of others (10). "He can't be that unpleasant all the time" the *LBD*'s Jane insists when Lizzie calls Darcy "a total douche," blatantly refusing to believe the worst of him or anyone without a reasonable explanation (Dunlap "Cats and Chinchillas"). In short, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* successfully translates all of the positive qualities of the eldest Bennet sister whom Austen herself

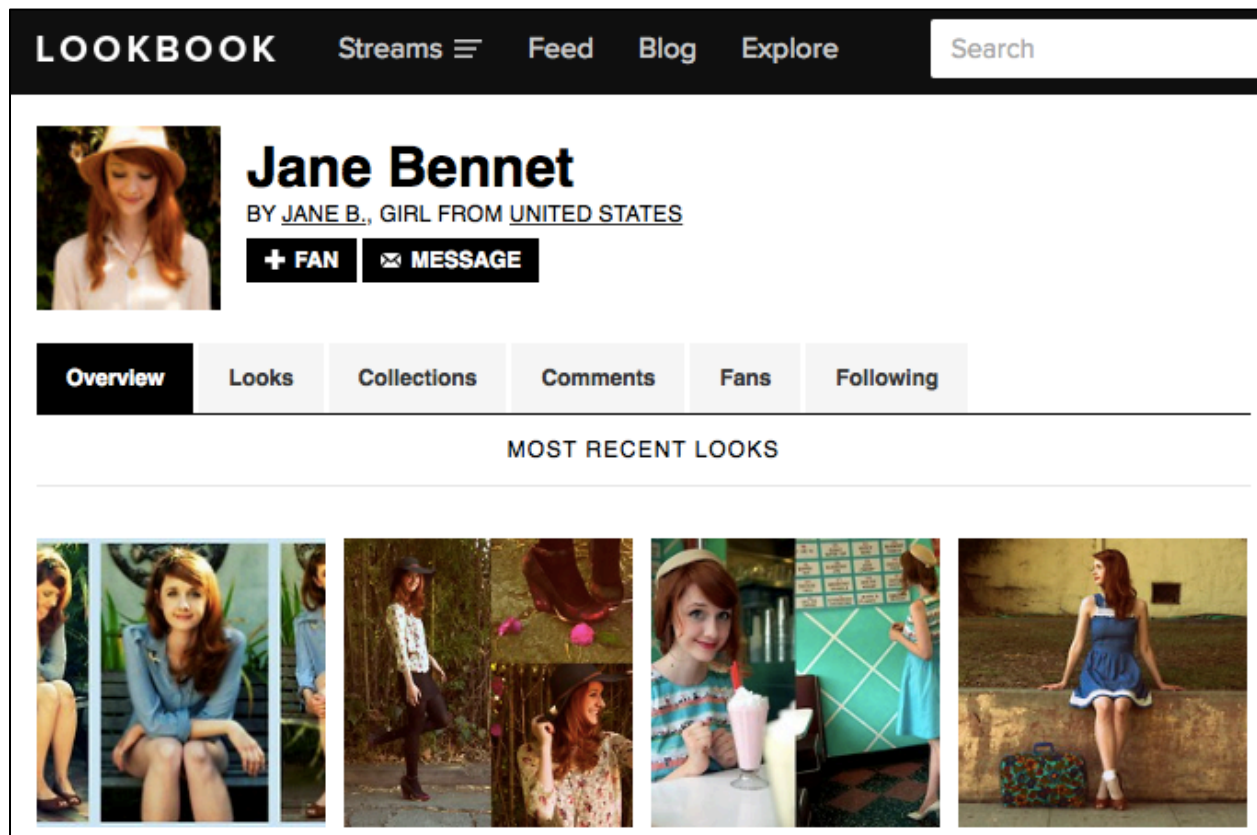


Figure 7: Jane Bennet's Lookbook profile.

characterizes as an individual who is “too good” as well as “angelic” (104).

Modern-day Jane, however, differs from her nineteenth-century counterpart in that she is also a career-driven individual who does not allow the majority of her existence to revolve around her love life as in *Pride and Prejudice*. In the novel, a broken-hearted Jane travels to London in the hopes of running into Mr. Bingley to ascertain why he left Netherfield without any explanation; however, the *LBD*’s Jane moves to Los Angeles to further her career as well as seek closure with Bing after his sudden move to the big city.¹² In so doing, Jane is the first of the Bennet sisters to move out of their parents’ home and gain independence. “Yes, I’m sad it didn’t work out. Yes, I miss him. But being in LA has taught me a lot of things,” Jane tells Lizzie after she is unable to get in contact with Bing in Los Angeles. “I’m a lot stronger than I thought I was. And I’m really happy that I live there.” When Lizzie expresses doubt at this, Jane reassures her: “I’m in a new city. I have a job that I love with people that are really cool and interested in cool things. I don’t need one failed relationship to define me” (Rorick “New Jane”). With that, Lizzie proudly proclaims “new” Jane to be pretty “kick-ass,” to which Jane replies, “New Jane so is.” Throughout the remainder of the webseries, Lizzie continues to refer to her sister as “new Jane,” which brilliantly distinguishes the Jane of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* from Austen’s original character. In breaking with Jane’s resigned yet pining attitude in the novel, the *LBD* creates “new Jane” who puts her career first and does not accept Bing back into her life with open arms when he reappears near the end of the series to make his apologies as in *Pride and Prejudice*. Jane’s storyline ends with her accepting a well-paying job offer in New York City and agreeing to Bing’s request to come with her, so that they can have a fresh start together. “You would have to get your own place and I would get mine,” she informs him, though, setting boundaries “That’s

¹² In a clever nod to the source text, Jane comforts a distraught Lizzie in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* by telling her: “I’m moving to Los Angeles, not London” (Dunlap “Not Paranoid”).

the first rule” (Rorick “Goodbye Jane”). Thus, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* successfully adapts the eldest Bennet sister by retaining many of Jane’s qualities from the novel yet adjusting some of her outdated behaviours to allow her character the chance to grow and flourish within a twenty-first century context.

Although the *LBD* modernizes both Elizabeth and Jane and, in so doing, presents them in a way that differs from their *Pride and Prejudice* counterparts, the biggest departure from the source text is the way in which Lydia is depicted in the webseries. In her novel, Austen describes the youngest Bennet sister as a “well-grown girl of fifteen” with “high animal spirits” and “a sort of natural self-consequence, which the attentions of the officers ... had increased into assurance” (33). As a “well-grown girl of fifteen,” Lydia is said to not only look older than she is, but also – as suggested by her self-assurance around older men (the officers mentioned in the excerpt above) – act older than she is. Throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, Lydia is denounced as a model of impropriety due to her boundless energy and flirtatious nature. For instance, when the narrator relates Lydia’s hopes in regards to her upcoming trip to Brighton, she is said to be imagining “herself the object of attention, to tens and to scores of [officers] at present unknown” and “tenderly flirting with at least six officers at once” (Austen 177-8). The frivolous picture that this paints of the youngest Bennet sister speaks to the way in which Austen is categorically unsympathetic toward Lydia at every turn. Even after Lydia is forced by her family to marry the despicable Mr. Wickham, Elizabeth is said to be “disgusted” and Jane “shocked” because “Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless” (Austen 239). This condemning description is soon followed by Elizabeth feeling “satisfied” to find that Wickham does not love Lydia as much as she loves him – an implied suitable punishment for Lydia’s scandalous behaviour in a nineteenth-century context (Austen 241). According to Christina Neckles,

Austen's poor treatment of Lydia is symptomatic throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, arguing that the novel "sanctions a lack of sympathy for people who do not 'deserve' it – who are silly, shallow, pedantic, or naïve" (32). In her article, Neckles asserts that characters like Lydia, Mr. Collins, and Mrs. Bennet "are put through the process of rounding or flattening. That is, Elizabeth and Austen's narrator *flatten* them" and hence dismisses them because they are either silly or ridiculous (32). The marginalization of Lydia's experience within the novel is something that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* actively seeks to address and correct.

The *LBD*'s Lydia behaves in a very similar fashion to her nineteenth-century counterpart; excitable and irresponsible, she often bursts into Lizzie's videos without preamble or apology and either attempts to upstage her sister, or simply insults her for being "perpetually single" and "nerdy" (Su "Swimming with Scissors"). Almost always clad in pink, she prances and preens her way through several episodes of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and eventually creates her own video blog to chronicle her various adventures (it is through Lydia's vlog that the *LBD* audience is first introduced to Mary Bennet). The youngest of the Bennet sisters at twenty years old, Lydia exhibits the same "high animal spirits" as Austen's original in her proclivity for underage drinking and partying. She routinely coerces her sisters into taking her to Carter's, the local bar, where she often gets inebriated, flirts with men, and then cannot remember their names the morning after (Kiley "I Really Suck At Video Games"). As in *Pride and Prejudice*, she also convinces Bing Lee to throw a house party because, according to Lydia, the only truth that is actually universally acknowledged is that "[n]othing gets done without alcohol" (Dunlap "Enjoy the Adorbs"). Green and Su effectively translate the rambunctious and silly nature of Lydia's personality into the twenty-first century by imbuing her character with some of the worst stereotypes attributed to members of the millennial generation. Not only does Lydia frequently

employ text message abbreviations in real-life conversations – regularly referring to herself as “adorbs” (adorable) and exclaiming “JK!” (just kidding) when she is teasing – but she also displays a blatant lack of concern for her family’s financial difficulties as seen in Episode 20 in which she hijacks Lizzie’s video to brag about her purchases (see Figure 8 below). *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* thus presents Lydia as the same “untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless” young woman from Austen’s novel, refusing to shy away from adapting all of her attention-seeking, immodest, and often maddening qualities to suit a modern context (239).

What the *LBD* refuses to do, however, is shame Lydia for her vibrant personality, or paint her party girl ways in a hypercritical light as Austen does in *Pride and Prejudice*. To use Neckles’ language, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* chooses not to “flatten” Lydia – rather, the webseries humanizes her and even encourages viewers to sympathize with her. Although Lydia is constantly seeking attention – as evidenced by her over-the-top stories and love of the camera – the writers make it clear that the person whose attention she seeks the most desperately is her



Figure 8: “My name is Lydia Bennet and this is my haul!” she exclaims excitedly in “Enjoy the Adorbs.”

sister, Lizzie's. Despite her habit of insulting her "boring and perpetually single" older sister, it is plain to the audience that Lydia adores Lizzie and only wants her approval (Rorick "Missing Charlotte"). For instance, when Lizzie bemoans the fact that Jane is spending more time with Bing, Lydia envelops her sister in a hug and exclaims, "Well, you'll always still have me, right?" In response, Lizzie simply rolls her eyes and says, "Oh, lucky me. I get to keep the boy-crazy, completely irresponsible, substance abuser" (Su "One Sister Behind"). As Lizzie speaks, the viewer watches as Lydia's brilliant smile shrinks and, although she does not say anything in retaliation, it is obvious that she is hurt. In fact, Lizzie's disdain for her younger sister is established from the very first episode in which she snubs Lydia's efforts to connect by denying her a high-five. Lizzie also does not make it a secret that she has a favourite sister, naming Jane her second best friend (after Charlotte) and declaring that Lydia "doesn't even rank" (Dunlap "Jane Chimes In"). Lydia is obviously aware of Lizzie's feelings in this respect because, after Lizzie and Charlotte get into a fight, Lydia presents Lizzie with a résumé because she is "applying to be [her] new sidekick" (Rorick "Missing Charlotte"). Additionally, when George Wickham leaves town after his brief fling with Lizzie, Lydia rushes into Lizzie's room with tissue and chocolate, announcing that she has "spent [her] entire life preparing for this moment"; although Lydia says she knows that Jane is Lizzie's "go-to sister," she asserts that "heartbreak and recovery is [her] specialty" and she is ready to assume the role of Lizzie's interim go-to sister (Dunlap "Moving On"). Therefore, while Lydia is portrayed as the same wildly energetic youngest Bennet sister from Austen's novel, the webseries positions her attention seeking ways as a product of – as well as a coping mechanism for – her insecurities.

It is perhaps no surprise that the biggest plot deviation in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* revolves around the webseries' choice to create empathy for Lydia Bennet and flesh her out as a

character in a way that Austen never dared to do. In a move that also alters the course of Lizzie's plotline, the *LBD* has Lydia's decision to run off and be reckless in Las Vegas (the equivalent to Lydia's trip to Brighton in *Pride and Prejudice*) arise from an argument she has with Lizzie that is not present in the novel, in which Lydia's feelings of insecurity come to the fore. In Episode 73, Lizzie gives Lydia her birthday present: a book entitled *Where Did I Park My Car? A Party Girl's Guide to Becoming a Successful Adult*. It is clear in this video that Lizzie is coming from a place of genuine – albeit judgmental – concern, reasoning that Lydia turning twenty-one is perhaps the time for her sister to become “a mature, responsible adult” and avoid the kind of “hasty impressions” people can form from her behaviour (Kiley “2 + 1”). Lizzie makes the mistake, however, of calling Lydia “energetic” – the same word that Darcy uses in Episode 60 when he is expressing his disdain for the often embarrassing conduct of Lizzie's family – a choice of words that Lydia does not miss. She immediately feels as if Lizzie is siding with him instead of with her own sister, inferring that Lizzie must also think that Lydia is “an embarrassment to everyone” and wants her to change. Lydia is also perceptive enough to pick up on Lizzie's hypocrisy, noting how she does not offer any other members of their family advice on how to “improve” the way they live. The heart of this miscommunication between the two sisters lies in what they do not say to each other. At the end of the “2 + 1” video, it is only after Lydia has left that Lizzie addresses the camera and says, “I was not trying to be mean. ... I love Lydia. I just – I worry about her” (Kiley). Rather than apologizing to Lydia and expressing her love for her sister to her face, Lizzie talks to the camera. In the next episode, “How to Hold a Grudge,” Lizzie discovers that Lydia has posted a video to her YouTube channel in which she insults everything from Lizzie's fashion sense to her lack of a boyfriend. Lydia concludes the video by urging Lizzie to “[s]top thinking [she's] better than everyone else,” going on to imply

that her judgmental behaviour has effectually driven away Charlotte, Jane, Wickham, and now Lydia (Kiley “Dear Lizzie”). Thus, instead of trying to talk to her sister face-to-face, Lydia lashes out to hurt Lizzie because Lizzie has hurt her. It is in this mindset that Lydia decides to go to Las Vegas for New Year’s. “You think I’m too much to handle now?” she spits in Lizzie’s face, “Just you wait” (Kiley “How to Hold a Grudge”).

Before she leaves for Las Vegas, Lydia tells Lizzie not to even bother watching her videos when she’s gone, to which Lizzie replies, “What makes you think I would even want to?” (Kiley “How to Hold a Grudge”). Once again, Lizzie disregards Lydia’s cry for attention and the two sisters spend the next few weeks ignoring one another, living out their respective storylines from the source text; just as Austen’s Elizabeth visits Pemberley (Mr. Darcy’s estate), Lizzie visits Pemberley Digital (Darcy’s new media company) for an independent study while Lydia reunites and begins a dangerous relationship with George Wickham. During her time at Pemberley, Lizzie – as in *Pride and Prejudice* – grows to respect and even develop feelings for Darcy; however, an important addition to Lizzie’s Pemberley arc in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is her friendship with Darcy’s sister, Georgiana (Gigi in the webseries). Made to be a more outgoing, enthusiastic, and bubbly character than her literary counterpart, Gigi in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is the youngest Darcy sibling and is presented as a kind of mirror image of the *LBD*’s Lydia¹³ – especially when taking into account the foreshadowing in Episode 82 when Gigi recounts what happened between her and George Wickham. As in Austen’s novel, Wickham pretends to love Georgiana to use her as leverage against Darcy for more money after he spends the initial sum allotted to him. In an important addition to the plot that allows Gigi to tell her own story, the younger Darcy sibling tells Lizzie that she believes it is because her older

¹³ Even Darcy confirms this parallel in Episode 99 of the *LBD* when he apologizes for everything he ever said about Lydia in the past, confessing that “[i]t just took a while for [him] to see the similarities” between her and his own sister, Gigi (Bushman “Future Talk”).

brother did not tell her his reasons for distrusting Wickham that she fell for his ploy. “Well, he was trying to protect you,” Lizzie offers in Darcy’s defense. “Keeping someone ignorant isn’t protecting them,” Gigi counters, “It can actually endanger them” (Bushman “Checks and Balances”). Not only does Gigi iterate the importance of successful communication here, but she also illustrates a parallel between Darcy and Lizzie in their choice not to share crucial information about Wickham with their younger siblings in the name of protecting them. The more Gigi speaks, the more her situation with Wickham and the way her relationship with her brother influenced her behaviour aligns with Lydia’s situation with Wickham and the way her relationship with Lizzie influences her behaviour. Gigi admits to being taken in by Wickham saying he needed her because she wanted something that was entirely hers – something of which even her brother disapproved. “No one’s ever needed me before,” she confesses in a move that shows how Gigi – like Lydia – often felt overlooked and hence insecure enough to be open to Wickham’s advances (Bushman “Checks and Balances”). Gigi also discloses that she can be hard on her big brother and tells Lizzie that despite everything she has ever said about Darcy in her videos, it does not come close to what Gigi has “said about him to his face” (Bushman “Checks and Balances”). Thus, the *LBD* sets up several parallels – Gigi and Lydia as the insecure younger sisters prone to verbally lashing out at their older siblings and rebelling against them by seeing someone of whom their siblings disapprove; Darcy and Lizzie as the controlling older siblings who unconsciously push their little sisters away from them and into the arms of George Wickham; and the two storylines as ones caused by miscommunication.

Throughout Lizzie’s Pemberley Digital arc, Lydia posts videos to her YouTube channel that chronicle her meeting with George Wickham in Las Vegas and subsequent toxic relationship with him. Like Gigi, Lydia knows that Wickham is someone that “Lizzie wouldn’t necessarily

approve of,” but it is made clear that when Lydia returns home she is intensely lonely with both her sisters gone, which is what pushes her to call George and start hanging out with him (Kiley “Surprise!”). In the videos that follow Lydia’s involvement with Wickham, he is presented as a master manipulator who preys on Lydia’s insecurities – constantly flattering her, planting seeds of doubt in her mind about Lizzie and her family’s love for her, and twisting the bad things everyone has said about him to cast himself as the victim. As their relationship progresses, Lydia goes from wearing her customary bright colours to washed-out whites and greys, her voice grows softer, and she constantly looks tired. The *LBD* paints Wickham’s treatment of Lydia as emotional abuse with his threats to leave her as well as attempts to alienate her from her loved ones and guilt her into decisions (Kiley “Special Two”). The modern Lydia-Wickham subplot culminates in him leaving after he convinces her to make a sex tape, which he subsequently uses without her knowledge or permission to build a website that asks for monetary subscriptions in exchange for the tape’s release. Rather than having Lydia, an unmarried woman, run off with Wickham as in Austen’s novel – no longer a shocking occurrence in twenty-first century society – the webseries chooses to show the ways in which young women like Lydia are still vulnerable to dishonest men like George Wickham.

“By making Lydia a victim rather than an agent in her disgraces,” writes Lori Halvorsen Zerme in her ideological study of the transmedia adaptation, “*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* not only makes her more sympathetic but also emphasizes the importance of the close relationship of the Bennet sisters” (n.pag.). Indeed, rather than having the Bennet family (save Mrs. Bennet) treat Lydia with scorn throughout and after her scandal with Wickham as in *Pride and Prejudice*, the Bennet sisters – particularly Lizzie – rally around Lydia in the *LBD* and try to help her through George’s betrayal. It is in this time of crisis that Lizzie realizes just how blind she has been to her

sister's cries for help and the extent to which her own actions have affected Lydia. In Episode 87, Lizzie and Lydia finally have the chance to openly and honestly communicate with one another – where Lizzie understands Lydia and Lydia allows herself to be vulnerable. Lydia blames herself for the sex tape, referencing Lizzie's "stupid whorey slut" comment from Episode 2 and showing that she has taken everything negative her sister has ever said about her to heart. Eventually, Lydia breaks down and Lizzie hugs her tightly, finally voicing how much she loves her sister: "I love you. Do you hear me? I love you. ... I'm sorry I wasn't there before. I'm sorry I didn't understand. But I love you" (Kiley "An Understanding"). With this display of successful communication, Lizzie and Lydia's bond is salvaged and the remainder of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* shows them growing closer and supporting each other in a brand new way.

In a huge deviation from Austen's novel, the *LBD* does not end with Lydia in a relationship with George Wickham. Instead, the webseries saves the youngest Bennet sister from the disgraced and undoubtedly miserable fate of her literary counterpart and allows her the chance to heal, suggesting a far brighter future for her than Austen does. In fact, the decision to end the story with Lydia as a single woman instead of in a relationship ties into *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*' removal – or, if you will, modernization – of the marriage plot central to its source text. Throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, four marriages take place: Charlotte's to Mr. Collins, Lydia's to Mr. Wickham, Jane's to Mr. Bingley, and Elizabeth's to Mr. Darcy. The question of marriage is ever-present with Mrs. Bennet's incessant fretting over her single daughters, Elizabeth's rejection of two proposals, and Lady Catherine's visit to the Bennet household to warn Elizabeth away from marrying her nephew, Mr. Darcy. It may seem impossible to posit an adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* that does not include a single marriage as successful; however, the *LBD* manages to effectively update the nineteenth-century fixation

on marriage while still allowing the four main female characters – Lizzie, Jane, Lydia, and Charlotte – to remain unmarried at the end. In an apt modernization, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* transforms marriage proposals into job offers and this translation is particularly brilliant because marriage in Austen’s time was often regarded as no more than a business transaction – the main (and most respectable) way for a woman to access financial security. As seen with Charlotte’s storyline in the novel, her decision to accept Mr. Collins is based on a logical desire for financial security. On the other hand, Elizabeth’s refusal to marry for anything less than love is considered illogical – especially in light of her position as a woman with little money. “I do not know who is to maintain you when your father is dead,” Mrs. Bennet informs Elizabeth after she has rejected Mr. Collins, “I shall not be able to keep you – and so I warn you” (Austen 87, original emphasis). In the *LBD*, Lizzie turns down a lucrative job offer from Mr. Collins despite her financial burdens because she is not passionate about the position and she finds both him and his company ridiculous, privileging sentiment over practicality as in the novel. Charlotte – equally if not more in debt than Lizzie – accepts the position to gain more financial security. Whereas Austen’s Charlotte is simply content in her marriage to Mr. Collins, the modern Charlotte flourishes in her new job and ends up becoming the CEO of the company (Su “The End”).

While both Jane and Elizabeth end up finding financial security as well as love in *Pride and Prejudice* through their respective marriages, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* ultimately rewards these two characters with the same results; however, financial security does not come from the men that they love. As discussed earlier, Jane ultimately privileges her career over romance, only letting Bing come with her to New York to start fresh together after she establishes that she’s going “for [her] career, for [her] life” and that will take precedence (Rorick “Goodbye Jane”). Similarly, after Lizzie and Darcy finally begin a romantic relationship, they have a discussion

about the future in which Darcy – thinking that this will put Lizzie’s mind at ease in regards to the uncertainty of her post-grad school life – offers her a job at Pemberley Digital. Lizzie turns him down not only because she does not “want to be the girl who dates the boss,” but also because she wants to start her own company and become “one of [Darcy’s] competitors” (Bushman “Future Talk”). Thus, Lizzie reiterates how much she wants to be in a relationship with Darcy, but also establishes herself as a modern woman who wants to create her own financial security. To show just how invested she is in their future as a couple, however, Lizzie adds that she is thinking of starting her company in San Francisco – where Darcy lives and works – so that they can be close. This conversation is the last one between them before the conclusion of the webseries and – while it does not establish them together as decisively as Austen does with marriage – it shows how much the pair of them have changed together, how in love they are, and how both of them are ready to move forward as a team. “This is our happily ever after,” notes Hank Green of this episode, emphasizing how he and co-creator Bernie Su always intended *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* to be about Lizzie “becoming a new person, becoming a stronger person, a stronger woman in this modern era” (“Ep. 99 Commentary”). The twenty-first century Lizzie is hence in the same position as Austen’s Elizabeth at the end of the source text, for she is Darcy’s equal without having had to sacrifice any of her independence, personality, or integrity to be in a romantic relationship with him.

Thus, the *LBD* successfully translates the stories of these female characters into the twenty-first century in a way that respects the source text, but also speaks to a modern context and audience. It would not do, for instance, to adopt Austen’s disparaging treatment of Lydia and shame her for her sexuality in an increasingly feminist world, which is why the webseries retains the character’s defining qualities and updates her scandal with Wickham in a way that urges

viewers to sympathize with her and her situation. It would also fall flat nowadays for brilliant young women like Charlotte, Jane, and Lizzie to get married when their hearts are so clearly set on a career, which is why *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* takes the marriage plot of *Pride and Prejudice* and revises it to fit a twenty-first century context while still managing to present the characters with a choice between financial security and sentimentality. In so doing, the *LBD* effectively communicates the obstacles standing in the way of Austen's female characters to a modern audience and makes them understandable as well as relevant. As made clear throughout the webseries, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* focuses principally on the lives of women and the strength of female bonds. Lizzie's kinship with Charlotte, Jane, and eventually Lydia is central to the adaptation, which aligns it even more closely with *Pride and Prejudice*. Contrary to popular belief, Austen's novel is less about romance and more about how nineteenth-century women navigate through a society governed by the marriage market. The *LBD* successfully translates Austen's emphasis on the female experience in its refusal to overly romanticize the male heroes, or have them feature prominently throughout the webseries. "Notwithstanding Colin Firth's gigantic shadow, Austen's novel is about Elizabeth far more than it is about Mr. Darcy, and to the extent that it is about Darcy, the emphasis is on how Elizabeth thinks about him," writes Susan Celia Greenfield. "The same is true in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, which records Lizzie's thoughts via her Vlog" (n.pag.). In fact, William Darcy is merely in eight out of the one hundred episodes of the *LBD* (or fifteen out of one hundred and seventy episodes, counting all the transmedia extensions in addition to Lizzie's video blog) and first appears on camera sixty episodes in. Before then, the audience gets to know Darcy through Lizzie's stories, which is, as Greenfield notes, what Austen intended – while Mr. Darcy is indisputably an important character, the novel focuses more on Elizabeth and her emotional journey. *The Lizzie Bennet*

Diaries therefore successfully translates the content of *Pride and Prejudice* by retaining and even increasing its emphasis on the lives and voices of the women who populate Austen's story.

Of course, like its source text, successful communication remains at the heart of the plot and the eventual resolution of all narrative conflict in the *LBD*. As discussed throughout this chapter, characters continuously misread and miscommunicate with one another and, in so doing, propel the story of *Pride and Prejudice* forward. Lizzie allows her biases to cloud her judgment, which creates discord between her and Charlotte when she refuses to listen to her best friend's reasons for taking a job Lizzie believes is beneath her. As in Austen's novel, Bing permits himself to be convinced by Caroline and Darcy that Jane does not love him as much as he does her, causing him to suddenly end their relationship without first talking to Jane or telling why he left. Additionally, Lizzie brutally rejects Darcy when he clumsily confesses his feelings to her, basing her opinion of him on her first impression and lies told to her by George Wickham. Finally, the relationship between Lizzie and Lydia falls apart because Lizzie continuously misjudges her younger sister while Lydia refuses to communicate to her older sister just how hurtful Lizzie's disparagement can be. Eventually, all of these misunderstandings are resolved through successful communication. After their argument, Lizzie and Charlotte reunite in Episode 51 in which they reassure viewers that they made up once they talked everything over (Dunlap "Together Again"). When Jane and Bing reconcile, they do so over "a good talk" in Episode 90 and then reestablish their romantic relationship in Episode 92 entitled "Goodbye Jane" in which they have a conversation that allows them to clearly articulate their feelings for one another (Dunlap "Something Lighter... Please"). Similarly, Lizzie and Darcy sort out their long history of miscommunications when Lizzie finally calls Darcy in Episode 96 to have an honest chat about where they stand and he shows up in Episode 98 to talk to her in person. It is during this

pivotal conversation that they clear away the other's confusion and become a couple: "Let me make things as clear as possible," says Lizzie in an act of honest communication, "William Darcy, I don't want to be just friends and I don't want to be with you because I'm grateful. I want to be with you because of you. Got it?" He responds affirmatively – "Clear as day, Lizzie Bennet" – and, with that, the two of them finally understand one another (Rorick "Gratitude"). Lizzie and Lydia's relationship is also salvaged by their climactic conversation in Episode 87 in which the pair of them voice their true feelings and allow themselves to be vulnerable in each other's presence. In the following episodes, Lydia asks for help when she needs it and Lizzie frequently checks in to make sure that Lydia is doing all right in the wake of the Wickham sex tape scandal. "I am trying to get better about opening up and talking to people. Talking to you," Lydia tells Lizzie in Episode 94, "And it actually feels good. So thank you for listening" (Kiley "Revelations"). With this endorsement of open communication, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* ties up yet another central conflict with an act of successful communication between characters.

Hence, the *LBD* writers make it abundantly clear by the end of the webseries that Lizzie – much like her literary counterpart – has learned her lesson when it comes to communication. "Talking to the internet," she muses in Episode 96, "Not the same as talking to people" (Dunlap "Talking to Myself"). It is also in this episode that she makes the decision to assume an active role in her relationship with Darcy and call him to clear away all her lingering questions and doubts about him and how he feels about her. In Austen's novel, Elizabeth waits until Mr. Darcy makes the decision to visit the Bennet household to engage him in their all-important discussion in which they successfully communicate for the first time in the novel. Nineteenth-century propriety restricts even the headstrong Elizabeth from contacting Mr. Darcy first to discuss such personal matters; however, this is not the case for a modern-day Lizzie. Although she hesitates to

call him at first, she imagines what her best friend would tell her: “Oh, come on, Lizzie,” she says in her best Charlotte imitation, “This isn’t 1800. If you want to know what Darcy’s thinking, just ask him” (Dunlap). With this, Lizzie convinces herself to call him and sets the resolution of her love plot in motion. What this episode – and this moment in particular – also does is distill the main reasons why *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* succeeds as an adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. Not only does it update its source material in order to successfully communicate a two-hundred-year-old story to a twenty-first century audience (there is no good reason why a modern-day Lizzie would not make the first move in calling Darcy), but it also mirrors the novel’s emphasis on communication. As a successful translation of its source text, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* walks that fine line between fidelity and infidelity in its ability to retain the essentials of *Pride and Prejudice* while simultaneously revising certain aspects of the story in order to keep it both fresh and relevant to modern-day viewers. Therefore, from the brilliant irony of casting Lizzie Bennet as a mass communications major and William Darcy as the CEO of a communications empire to all of the misunderstandings that arise throughout the webseries from the lack of successful communication between characters, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* keeps Jane Austen’s focus on the effects of miscommunication at the heart of its adaptation while effectively communicating the content of the original novel to a new audience.

Episode 3: Audience

“That’s it for another round of questions and answers. Keep those questions coming!”



(Questions and Answers #8 w/ Gigi Darcy)

In addition to adapting the form and content of *Pride and Prejudice* in a way that effectively translates Austen's two-hundred-year-old novel into a twenty-first century context, this third and final chapter will demonstrate how *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* also succeeds as an adaptation of Jane Austen's novel in its ability to engage and hence communicate with a modern audience. In harnessing new forms of communication and using a transmedia approach to tell its story, the *LBD* targets a new generation of viewers and – like the novel before it – creates a new kind of readership. As established in the first chapter, the novel was regarded as a new form of technology in the eighteenth century and created a new reading public due to its popularity and unprecedented availability (Nixon 16). Similarly, Hank Green and Bernie Su's transmedia webseries – the first ever video blog-style adaptation of a classic novel – was developed utilizing various social media platforms, which not only made this adaptation accessible to a new audience, but did so through the harnessing of new modes of technology (Su "The Idea and Creation"). While Green and Su's innovative use of the webseries format and transmedia approach to communicate the story of *Pride and Prejudice* to a new kind of audience parallels Jane Austen's use of the novel form to engage with a new kind of readership, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* pushes its source text's focus on communication even further in its desire to engage viewers and give them the chance to immerse themselves in the narrative. Throughout the *LBD*'s yearlong run, audience members were encouraged to interact with the story and its characters via social media and were subsequently rewarded for their participation through a variety of materials produced specifically for the fans – hence, when fans spoke, the creators of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* listened and spoke back, building a reciprocal relationship based on successful communication. Beginning with an examination of the way in which the *LBD* translates its source material's use of a new form of communication into the twenty-first century to address a

new kind of audience, this chapter will then move into a discussion of how *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* embraces a participatory model by using the technology at its disposal to involve its fans in the narrative and generate a dialogue between creator and consumer. In so doing, this chapter will argue that the *LBD* once more proves itself to be a successful adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* through the particular emphasis it places on its source text's central focus of successful communication – in this instance, in regards to audience engagement.

As seen in the first chapter, the novel was able to reach a broader audience than ever before due to the increase in printing presses and circulating libraries – principally in Britain (Nixon 32). This newfound availability, in turn, elicited an upsurge in literacy rates, which climbed “gradually from the middle of the seventeenth century to the last decades of the nineteenth, when something close to universal literacy was finally reached” (Todd 397). One of the biggest changes that characterized this wider and newly literate reading public was that it was composed of a record number of women. “Women of the upper and middle classes could partake in few of the activities of their menfolk, whether of business or pleasures,” writes Ian Watt in his seminal 1957 *The Rise of the Novel*, “Such women, therefore, had a great deal of leisure, and this leisure was often occupied by omnivorous reading” (44). Coupled with the increase in literacy rates and the ample leisure time of an upper- or middle-class nineteenth-century woman, the novel owed a great deal of its popularity to a large female readership. In fact, Watt attributes the rise of the novel to female readers *and* writers, citing their greater freedom in contemporary English society to do as they wished with their time (i.e. read or write) as compared with other European countries (138). Jane Spencer, however, qualifies this new “freedom” for women, reminding her readers that “[i]n legal terms there was not much change in women's position during the century” because “[a] woman was still regarded basically as a chattel, under the

authority first of her father and then her husband” (12). That said, the way women were viewed in society and allowed to live changed enough over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to alter popular perception enough in regards to female readers and novelists (Spencer 11). Thus, with its increasingly female audience, the female novel writer also rose to prominence over this period. Naturally, this kind of unprecedented female presence in literature fed into the novel’s rocky reception with several critics fretting over the effects the novel would have on a woman’s mind (as discussed in chapter one) and others dismissing the novel as a lesser form due to its reputation as a feminine and hence frivolous exercise. “We have seen how reviewers tended to scorn fiction,” writes Spencer, “but this is nothing to the abuse men sometimes gave to women writers” (5). Despite this, early female novelists like Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, and Charlotte Smith defiantly wrote and published works that focused primarily on the lives of women and catered to their audience in two ways: first, in acknowledging and addressing the experiences of female readers and second, in appeasing male readers through assurances that they were able to write their novels at home and hence fulfill their family duties (Spencer 20-1).

Of course, Jane Austen herself lived through and wrote during this literary shift and was clearly aware of her audience demographics. In her posthumously published *Northanger Abbey*, for instance, Austen’s narrator deviates from the action to go on a tirade against all those who belittle novels, employing unflinchingly fiery rhetoric to protest the kind of gendered criticism to which the novel form was often subjected. The narrator opens this rant by refusing to follow the example of other novelists who employ self-deprecating language in relation to the form they chose to tell their story. “I cannot approve of it,” Austen’s narrator asserts, “Let us leave it to the reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us not desert one another; we

are an injured body” (22). With this, the narrator not only refers to her or himself in the first person – a rare occurrence within the text that highlights the importance of this passage – but also moves into a collective “us” that attempts to consolidate novelists in a show of strength against their detractors. The use of the word “body” in the excerpt above is particularly powerful, for it joins all writers into a singular entity that suffers every time someone – either a critic or fellow novelist – demeans the form. “Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried,” continues the narrator, “From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers” (22). Here, Austen’s narrator speaks to the novel’s perplexing situation – beloved by readers yet subjected to endless critical attacks – and continues to emphasize the bond that should exist between novelists by referring to critics as “our foes,” placing them in clear opposition to the interests of novel writers.

The narrator then shifts into the most pointed portion of her or his diatribe, exposing the underlying sexism in the criticisms directed at the novel form and its readers:

And while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridgers of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens – there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist ... “And what are you reading, Miss –?” “Oh! It is only a novel!” replies the young lady, while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame. “It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda” ... Now, had the same young lady been engaged

with a volume of the Spectator, instead of such a work, how proudly would she have produced the book, and told its name... (Austen 22-3)

The gendered language in this passage is telling and too specific to be coincidental – Austen’s narrator clearly identifies the writer whose accomplishments are admired as “the man” and, in setting up this juxtaposition between the renowned male writer and the disparaged novelist, it is implicitly understood that the writer whose labour is undervalued and capacity decried by critics is female. In the excerpt above, the narrator also names explicitly male authors – targeting respected writers like John Milton, Alexander Pope, Matthew Prior, and Laurence Sterne while making indirect reference to Joseph Addison and Richard Steele through a mention of *The Spectator* – when discussing works that are critically celebrated. In contrast, Austen’s narrator does not refer to any female novelists by name; however, lists off three novels penned by women writers: *Cecilia* (1782) and *Camilla* (1796) are both by Frances Burney while *Belinda* (1801) is by Maria Edgeworth. Notably and most importantly, the hypothetical reader of these novels in the passage above is a young woman who is forced to adopt “affected indifference, or momentary shame” when asked about what she is reading as opposed to the pride she might have felt had she been engaged in the perusal of a piece of masculine writing (Austen 23). Thus, to identify the novel reader in this scenario as female, Austen demonstrates an awareness of who her main audience is and speaks directly to them, encouraging young ladies to take pride in their choice of reading material.

With this quotation, Austen takes full advantage of her characteristically cheeky narrator to articulate a particularly damning critique of the patronizing and blatantly sexist environment fostered by readers, writers, and critics of novels alike (hence the narrator’s opening call to fellow novelists to stand together and celebrate their work). In so doing, Austen shows herself to

be keenly attentive to her audience and mindful of their feelings. The passage above addresses women and their plight as both novelists and readers of novels, and is therefore an attempt on the part of the author to communicate her support to her audience – no matter if the women Austen is addressing are writers themselves or content to remain readers. Therefore, even though there were no specific tools in place for the readers of *Northanger Abbey* to respond directly to these remarks, Austen nonetheless attempts to connect with her readers and make them feel as if they are part of a conversation – albeit one in which it is difficult for them to take part and hence mostly one-sided. That said, according to Cheryl L. Nixon, the novel form engendered the fledglings of a participatory kind of culture due to the amount of criticism it inspired: “In the eighteenth century, the new genre is defined by debate, and that debate often takes a remarkably participatory form, blurring the line between the writer and reader, between the novelist and critic” (16). As seen with the narrator’s commentary on the novel and the controversy surrounding it in the excerpt above, Austen participates in and thus perpetuates the debate surrounding the new literary form by adding her voice to the ongoing dialogue. Effectively, what this section of *Northanger Abbey* does is harness a new form of technology (the novel) to speak to and engage with readers, writers, and critics alike and propel the discussion forward while encouraging an early prototype of the modern participatory model theorized by Henry Jenkins.

In fact, in her 2013 article “Mediating Happiness: Performances of Jane Austen’s Narrators,” Caroline Austen-Bolt proposes that Austen uses her novels to formulate a participatory model all her own. “Austen uses her narrator to draw the reader into the narrative action, thereby encouraging the reader to participate actively rather than passively,” writes Austen-Bolt, “[j]udgment is one form of reader participation in Austen’s novels; Austen’s narrator uses multiple strategies and techniques to position the reader to participate, and thereby

teach the reader to think” (285). Hence, according to Austen-Bolt, Austen incites her readers to act the part of Elizabeth Bennet by pushing them to exercise their independent judgment and take part in the story through the formation of their own opinions. Of the aforementioned strategies and techniques employed by Austen’s narrator, Austen-Bolt positions narratorial absence as one of the key incentives for readers to shift from passive consumer to active participant:

As with the technique of FID [free indirect discourse], the perceived vacuity of the narrator positions the reader “to intersperse other voices with her own” – in this case, with the otherwise strong narrator’s voice and opinion – and the reader is thus prompted to make the moral judgment Austen’s narrator refuses to articulate. (285-6)

Through Austen’s use of free indirect discourse, the narrator is able to weave in and out of the narrative, offering commentary in some instances and remaining silent in others. As Austen-Bolt posits in the above passage, it is in the moments of narratorial silence that Austen subtly encourage her readers to participate in the narrative and fill in those blanks with their own judgments. In *Pride and Prejudice* the narrator often takes a step back when relating Elizabeth’s thoughts, refraining from comment in certain pivotal moments. For example, During Elizabeth’s visit to Pemberley in the wake of Mr. Darcy’s first proposal and the delivery of his letter, she witnesses a change in him and wonders what could have precipitated it. “Why is he so altered? From what can it proceed?” thinks Elizabeth, “It cannot be for *me*, it cannot be for *my* sake that his manners are thus softened. ... It is impossible that he should still love me” (Austen 193, original emphasis). Tellingly, the narrator does not offer any answers, launching instead into a description of Elizabeth’s tour of the Pemberley grounds in the following paragraph. Rather, it is left to the reader to respond to Elizabeth’s questions and participate in the story as a kind of

temporary narrator. Through her use of the novel form and the deployment of her narrator, Austen thus shows herself to be an early proponent of a participatory model by speaking directly to her readers – particularly women – and encouraging them in turn to engage with the story.

While it undoubtedly expands on some of these audience engagement strategies with the modern availability of new media platforms, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* also translates some of Austen's techniques to encourage readerly participation into a twenty-first century context. In the same vein as Austen's narratorial rant in *Northanger Abbey*, for instance, the *LBD* demonstrates a keen awareness of its audience demographics and addresses the contemporary concerns of its mainly female audience. According to a September 2014 blog post by series co-creator Bernie Su in which he shares the demographic breakdown of the *LBD* viewers over its yearlong run, 86% of the webseries' audience was female while 14% of it was male (see Figure 9 on the next page). Interestingly, half of that whopping 86% was comprised of women between the ages of 18 and 24 years old, making millennials the largest group of viewers. Thus, as with the novel, women constituted an important part of *the Lizzie Bennet Diaries*' audience and the *LBD* writers, like Austen, made certain that they acknowledged this particular demographic. As discussed in the previous chapter, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* – like its source text – focuses primarily on the lives of its female characters. Naturally, the webseries revolves around Lizzie – its titular heroine – but it also chronicles the thoughts and feelings, triumphs and struggles of Jane, Lydia, and Charlotte in superb detail. In fact, the initial twenty-four episodes of the webseries are solely populated by and hence entirely dedicated to the four aforementioned characters – they carry the entire first quarter of the *LBD* through their stories, conversations, disagreements, and opinions. In so doing, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* firmly sets the tone of the whole webseries from the very

beginning by prioritizing the voices and perspectives of its female leads, establishing that this adaptation is one dedicated to highlighting the experiences of modern women.

Throughout the webseries, the female characters are consistently allotted more screen time than their male counterparts – while the pivotal characters of William Darcy, Bing Lee, George Wickham, and Ricky Collins are each given the chance to play their parts within the story, the women retain narrative control. Lizzie appears in ninety-six of the one hundred main episodes, Jane and Charlotte in thirty-three, and Lydia in thirty-one. In comparison, Darcy and Bing both appear in eight of Lizzie’s one hundred video blogs, Collins in eleven, and Wickham in only three. The *LBD* even allows the marginal female characters of Austen’s novel a bigger share of the spotlight by giving them their own spin-off series within the webseries’ transmedia universe. Gigi Darcy, for example, not only appears in four out of Lizzie’s one hundred videos, but is also the star of a separate six-video arc in which she uses new Pemberley Digital software to assist her brother in tracking down George Wickham in the midst of the Lydia sex tape

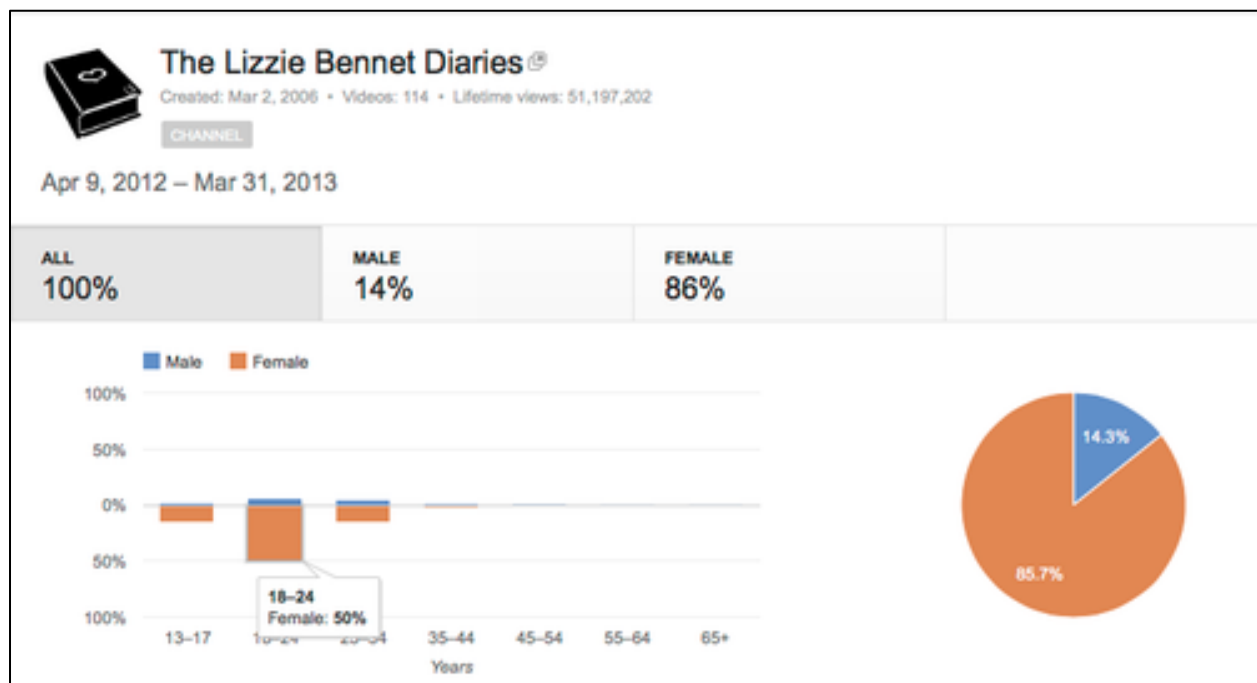


Figure 9: The demographic breakdown that shows the primarily female audience of the *LBD*.

scandal. The even more peripheral character of Maria (Charlotte's younger sister) also gets a six-episode run of her own on her YouTube channel entitled "Maria of the Lu" that documents her experience as an intern at her sister's new company. To illustrate the significance of these spin-offs, Georgiana is completely silent in *Pride and Prejudice* – she never gets the chance to express herself let alone participate in the action of the story – while Maria utters a grand total of five lines throughout the entire novel and is written off as "empty-headed" (Austen 117). Thus, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* not only ensures that the principal female characters of Austen's novel remain the undeniable focus of the story, but also awards the passive and overlooked women of *Pride and Prejudice* a newfound sense of agency by giving them a voice and a space to speak.

Through this emphasis on its female characters, the *LBD* imitates Austen's efforts to acknowledge her core demographic and address her audience as directly as possible. In its focus on women and their experiences, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* also takes a figurative page out of Austen's book by speaking to female insecurities and providing reassurance. While Austen wrote in *Northanger Abbey* to assuage the doubts of her fellow female novelists and encourage female readers to take pride in their choice of reading material, the *LBD* writers tackle the fears of modern women as well as the pressures facing them today. From the very first episode, Lizzie rails against her mother's archaic views on marriage: "I've got other things to worry about," she says dismissively, referring to her self-avowed "mountain of student loans" mentioned earlier in the episode (Su "My Name is Lizzie Bennet"). Lizzie continues to express her frustration with Mrs. Bennet's old-fashioned obsession with marrying off her daughters throughout the webseries, taking particular issue with her mother's logic that marriage signals the start of a woman's life. "As if my life has not started yet!" she exclaims indignantly in Episode 9, "My pestering, traditionally-valued mother has it cast in stone that I'm practically an old maid at

twenty-four. But I've done my research! The majority of marriages occur significantly after twenty-five and they tend to be happier and longer" (Strauss "Single and Happyish"). With this, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* speaks out against the curiously persistent yet progressively weakening pressure for women to get married by countering outdated reasoning with facts that reflect twenty-first century marital trends. In so doing, the *LBD*'s Lizzie addresses any anxious female viewers who, like her, are also in their early twenties and struggle with being single in a world that continues to tell women that they are somehow incomplete in the absence of a romantic relationship. "I am single, and that is perfectly okay," Lizzie announces in the same episode, proudly going on to list some of the things she could do with her life other than date someone, or get married: "I can get a Ph.D. I can run a company" (Strauss).

In addition to Lizzie's verbal validation, viewers are also given reassurance through *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*' portrayal of its titular character that a twenty-four-year-old woman navigating through a life riddled with academic, financial, and relationship obstacles in the twenty-first century can not only achieve success, but also happiness. A year after the final episode aired, the *LBD* team released two bonus videos that showed Lizzie answering questions for a graduate seminar put on by her old thesis supervisor, Dr. Gardiner. With these two videos, the audience gets to catch up with Lizzie to see how she is thriving in her post-grad school life with a successful company and healthy romantic relationship with Darcy (who appears in the second video). "I hope that you are learning something in Dr. Gardiner's class and that you learned something from us here today," says Lizzie in closing, "Maybe that life after grad school can be pretty good." (Rorick "Dr. Gardiner's Seminar – Bonus 2"). Thus, through Lizzie's example, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* attempts to address the anxieties of its target audience and reassure its key demographic that a young woman can find happiness on her own terms.

In addition to Lizzie's story, the *LBD* also offers the experiences of Jane, Charlotte, and Lydia to tackle and ultimately assuage the fears of their female millennial viewers. Jane speaks to the difficulties of making a living on a minimum wage job (Dunlap "Cats and Chinchillas") while Charlotte articulates the pressure of finding a job in today's economy when both she and her family are in debt: "I want to take the offer. I *need* to take the offer," she says, trying to explain to Lizzie why she accepted Mr. Collins' job offer, "Like you, my family's in debt. Like you, I'm in debt. Just more debilitating than yours. ... We live in an apartment. We used to live in a house. I have a younger sister about to start college. There is no house to sell" (Su "Friends Forever"). As discussed in the second chapter, both Jane and Charlotte are eventually rewarded for their hard work and, like Lizzie, shown to succeed in their chosen careers with lucrative jobs that they enjoy. Additionally, the importance of mental health and wellness is addressed through Lydia's storyline. In Episode 94, Lydia discusses her counseling with Lizzie and how it is helping her cope in the aftermath of her abusive relationship with George Wickham (Kiley "Revelations"). Although a small moment within the webseries (the conversation lasts no longer than thirty seconds), it nonetheless seeks to validate the experience of any female viewer who has been subjected to a similar situation and sought help. By the end of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, Lydia has by no means regained the confidence displayed at the beginning of the webseries, but it is clear that she is healing and will eventually overcome the trauma of her ordeal. Therefore, through its four main female characters, the *LBD* acknowledges the various obstacles encountered by modern women yet finishes each of their respective storylines on a hopeful note that serves as potential reassurance to their viewers. "Despite the questions that Austen's novel and the YouTube series raise in the middle of their narratives, both texts

ultimately suture over these conflicts with happy endings in which the heroines attain both love and financial security,” writes Lori Halvorsen Zerne, expounding further:

The continued popularity of *Pride and Prejudice* and the astounding success of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* suggest that these conclusions satisfy the audience’s desires. Why? We want to believe the closures of the narratives because they portray the successful balance we seek in our own lives. (n.pag.)

Although Halvorsen is speaking here of Lizzie and Jane with the balance of romantic love and financial security they are able to attain by the end of the webseries, I would widen that to include Charlotte’s balance of happiness and financial security as well as Lydia’s balance of self-love and mental wellness. Therefore, *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* resonate with their audiences through their ability to successfully communicate with them by tapping into their anxieties and presenting them with the kind of happy endings they desire.

While Austen harnessed her narrator and the technique of free indirect discourse to encourage readerly participation with her novels, the *LBD* makes use of a transmedia approach to create a participatory and hence immersive storytelling experience that in turn generates a new kind of readership. In his influential 1992 book *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins coined the term “participatory culture” to refer to the way in which fans interact with a particular piece of media and how it separates them from the traditionally passive role of consumer. “As the concept has evolved, it now refers to a range of different groups deploying media production and distribution to serve their collective interests,” write Sam Ford, Joshua Green, and Henry Jenkins in their 2013 *Spreadable Media* on the evolution of participatory culture (2). Throughout *Spreadable Media*, they chart the ways in which the world of twenty-first century digital media distribution is currently at odds with the notion of leveling the hierarchy between creator and consumer by

embracing a more participatory and hence mutually beneficial model for both parties. Some producers have moved toward generating what Ford, Green, and Jenkins call “spreadable” content, which “refers to the potential – both technical and cultural – for audiences to share content for their own purposes” (3). In embracing the concept of “spreadability,” content must be distributed in a way that makes it as accessible across as many online media platforms as possible to reach a wider and more diverse audience as well as created in such a way that it allows its audience to easily share, repurpose, or interact with it however they like. Others resist this shift and persist in creating what Ford, Green, and Jenkins call “sticky” content, which “refers to the mechanisms motivating people to seek out and spend time at a particular site” and “focus[es] on counting isolated audience members” (4, 5-6). In short, companies who cling to a sticky model have no interest in how the audience reacts to their content outside of how many times and how long they view it, reducing their viewers to mere statistics and robbing them of the capacity to respond. “In a stickiness model, it’s clear who the “producer,” the “marketer,” and the “audience” is. Each performs a separate and distinct purpose,” write Ford, Green, and Jenkins, “In a spreadable model, there is not only an increased collaboration across these roles but, in some cases, a blurring of the distinctions between these roles” (7). Hence, creators who embrace a spreadable model endeavour to foster a reciprocal relationship between themselves and their audience, and promote a culture of participation to keep the content alive and relevant. As Ford, Green, and Jenkins remind their readers: “if it doesn’t spread, it’s dead” (1).

Media that is spreadable thus spurs on a participatory culture amongst its fans, for it not only affords them the opportunity to interact with it and engage with the creators, but also *encourages* them to do so. It therefore only stands to reason that digital content that embraces a transmedia approach increases its chances of cultivating a participatory as well as immersive

environment for its fans. With extra content spread across various social media channels and platforms, transmedia storytelling epitomizes Ford, Green, and Jenkins' spreadable model – particularly in its focus on engaging as many participants in as many different ways as possible. “We know this much: people want to be immersed. They want to get involved in a story, to carve out a role for themselves, to make it their own. But how is the author supposed to accommodate them?” asks Frank Rose in *The Art of Immersion*, “What if the audience runs away with the story? And how do we handle the blur – not just between fiction and fact, but between author and audience?” (8). As previously discussed, this emerging blur between creator and consumer that Rose describes has been an emerging source of anxiety for producers of content, resulting – in many cases – in a desperate adherence to a sticky model of distribution. From the beginning of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, however, co-creator Bernie Su set himself up in direct opposition to this, openly embracing the blur between author and audience – including its narrative possibilities. “It was pretty early that we wanted to have it be interactive, for sure,” says Su in the “Modernizing a Classic: Adapting *Pride and Prejudice*” featurette included within the *LBD* DVD boxed set, “We just didn’t know *how* interactive – meaning that, you know, it was just Lizzie being interactive on Twitter? Or was it going to be, like, four characters? ... And we kind of found it as we went along” (Su). In the conceptualization of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as an interactive project from the onset, the webseries was thus created to be a participatory vehicle for fans. As mentioned in the quotation above, the *LBD* creative team handled the level of interactivity as they went along and hence made room for fan engagement and feedback.

The creative team’s initial plan for an interactive webseries adaptation is made abundantly clear by the first weeks of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*’ run. On Twitter, Lizzie begins responding to fan engagement early on, expressing her delight at how many “[a]mazing

responses” her videos are receiving and urging viewers to “[k]eep them coming!” (19 April 2012). She celebrates her first video response from Twitter user @nenalyzed (28 April 2012) and replies to comments from her viewers: “Well unfortunately, you will,” she tweets in response to @jet_set_go’s plea to “hear more about William Darcy!” (30 April 2012). After eight episodes, Lizzie posts the first of ten “Questions and Answers” video in which she answers a sampling of some of the “awesome questions” left by her viewers to “show [her] extreme gratitude” for their interest (Su “Questions and Answers #1”). Interwoven throughout the webseries, more than half of Lizzie’s Q&A videos briefly feature another character for added perspective; however, the focus is always on engaging with the fans – answering their questions, addressing their comments, and making them feel involved in the story. In fact, Lizzie was not the only one to answer fan questions during the *LBD*’s run; Lydia not only copied her older sister and produced two Q&A videos of her own, but – in a move from the diegetic to the extradiegetic – Bernie Su also routinely answered the various fan queries and concerns on his blog over the course of the webseries. In one of his posts, Su assured a nameless fan that all of the questions answered by Lizzie in her Q&A videos are taken directly from the viewers – not a single one¹⁴ was made up by the creative team to serve their storytelling purposes. “My favorite thing about the QA videos is how we actually are able to give you extra character depth (and sometimes even a little plot) through these “interactive” videos,” he writes, “It’s a fun challenge (and great practice) as a writer to take a fan question and turn it on its head into a plot/character thread in world” (Su “LBD – Answering Questions – Clearing out the inbox” n.pag.).

As noted by Su, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* Q&A videos are made to simultaneously acknowledge and highlight fan contributions while allowing the writers the opportunity to use

¹⁴ The only exception to this, according to Su, is a question posted by the character of Maria Lu on Episode 53 entitled “Royal Dining” and which Lizzie answers in “Questions and Answers #6.”

these questions to include more details from, or nods to the source text. In Lizzie's "Questions and Answers #8 w/ Gigi Darcy," for instance, she speaks to how "weird" it is that fans often ask her if she plays the piano. When Gigi appears near the end of the video, Lizzie asks her if she gets that question a lot. "Yeah. A lot. It's kind of annoying," Gigi admits, "Growing up, I had a lot of people who wanted me to play, but I don't" (Su). It is established in *Pride and Prejudice* that Georgiana is a proficient piano player while Elizabeth is not, which explains the abundance of fan questions related to Gigi and Lizzie's piano-playing abilities (Austen 133). In addressing this deviation from the source text, the writers of the *LBD* cleverly use this recurring fan question to make a sly, metatextual reference to Austen's novel that will thrill viewers familiar with *Pride and Prejudice*. Nonetheless, the writers of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* ensure that it is unnecessary to have read the original text to understand or appreciate Lizzie's answers to the questions that allude to Austen's novel. The creative team's willingness to appeal to their casual audience just as much as their devoted one was, according to Su, integral to their entire transmedia approach:

My policy is that the Transmedia is there to enhance the story but is not required to enjoy it. If you want to get the story of *Pride and Prejudice* as a video blog then you can push play on this playlist, "lean back" in your chair, and get the whole story. ... But if you want an enhanced experience, see other [points of view], and truly experience the grand world of *The LBD* you can "lean forward" and immerse yourself. We reward you for being immersed, and we don't punish you if you don't want to be. ("LBD – More Pre-Pemberley Questions. – Part 2" n.pag.)

With this, Su articulates a balanced view of not only transmedia storytelling, but also of the process of adaptation adopted by the *LBD* team – just as a successful adaptation should be able to communicate the story to its audience in a way that pleasantly surprises fans of the original

text and delights newcomers, transmedia components should reward invested viewer with extra material that does not alienate the portion of the audience who prefers to stick to the main narrative. In so doing, it manages to address fans both old and new through its ability to tailor and convey messages to these two kinds of viewers. Hence, the successful use of transmedia – like the successful act of adaptation – also hinges on successful communication. The transmedia employed throughout *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is arguably the key component that elevates it to one of the most successful adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, for it opens the doors for true, reciprocal communication between author and audience. In so doing, the webseries upholds and enacts Austen’s positioning of successful communication as the central focus of her novel.

The communication between creator and consumer is evidenced by the multiple instances in which the *LBD* writers have Lizzie address her fans, commenting on their activity and treating them with a mix of affectionate teasing and respect. She acknowledges the desires of her viewers – particularly how much they wanted to see Bing Lee and William Darcy appear on camera¹⁵ – and knowingly tantalizes her audience with content she knows that they want to see. After leaving her viewers on a cliffhanger in which Darcy shows up unexpectedly at the end of Episode 97, Lizzie coyly begins Episode 98 by asking how her audience is doing: “I don’t ask that enough. This really should be more of an equitable, back-and-forth relationship, don’t you think?” she asks mischievously, “I spend so much time talking about me, me, me, me, me and that must bore you. And I don’t want that! You are my loyal viewers and I love you” (Rorick “Gratitude”). Eventually, she relents, abandoning the ruse by exclaiming, “You guys didn’t really think I’d leave you hanging like that, did you?” (“Gratitude”). With that, the footage from

¹⁵ “And I know what you’re all going to say down in the comments,” says Lizzie in Episode 28, “We want to see Bing Lee!” (Dunlap “Meeting Bing Lee”). Similarly, when she is discussing with Jane in Episode 75 how little she knows about the personal lives of her audience members, Lizzie notes wryly that the one exception to this is that she knew “that they *really* wanted to see Darcy” (Dunlap and Toole “Merry Christmas”).

Darcy's unanticipated visit plays, but this introduction shows the warm familiarity with which Lizzie treats her viewers. Additionally, Lizzie's rhetorical question – "You guys didn't really think I'd leave you hanging like that, did you?" – suggests a relationship built on trust between her and her audience. She implies this earlier in the webseries when she debates whether or not to show her viewers Darcy's first appearance on her videos when he comes to make his first disastrous confession of love. She ultimately decides to share this unflattering moment with her audience: "It seems like these videos are bigger than me now," she explains in Episode 60, "And though I'll probably regret this, I don't think you guys will ever forgive me if I don't show you what happened after my last video" (Su and Green "Are You Kidding Me!"). In suggesting that her fans would feel betrayed should Lizzie withhold this pivotal event from them, it is clear that she views their relationship as one built on honest communication.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries' emphasis on communicating with its audience is made even clearer through the narrative's transmedia extensions. Not only were fan questions solicited and subsequently answered, but fan ideas were also used in the development of the webseries, helping to shape certain characters and elements of the plot. "Fans were anticipating Gigi like no other character – sans Darcy," Su shares in the "Beloved Spinoffs: Multiple Characters, Multiple Adventures" featurette within the *LBD* DVD boxed set, "They were already in love with this character before she even appeared" ("Beloved Spinoffs"). In response to this early interest in Gigi, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries'* creative team decided to feature her prominently across the transmedia universe – Gigi was active on Twitter months before her first appearance on camera, tweeting about her favourite music and movies, and initiating conversations with her brother. In the weeks leading up to her in-person arrival, the writers began to have her live-tweet her reactions to Lizzie's video blog and, inspired by a popular fan idea, set up a friendship between

she and Darcy's friend, Fitz Williams (Colonel Fitzwilliams in Austen's novel). Charmed by the idea of a relationship between Fitz and Gigi, *LBD* fans imagined the potential of these two characters teaming up to concoct matchmaking schemes in an effort to help Darcy woo Lizzie. Su seized upon the fan idea of "Team FiGi" and was compelled to write it into the show: "It really came from the fans. Fans put these two characters together as this dynamic duo and in transmedia, we were like, 'Alright, they're going to start tweeting at each other' ('Modernizing a Classic: Adapting Pride and Prejudice'). The Fitz and Gigi friendship continued for the remainder of the webseries as the two constantly conspired to throw Darcy and Lizzie together. After the airing of Episode 78 entitled "The Lizzie Trap," for example, in which Gigi facilitates a meeting between her brother and Lizzie – their first since he gave her the all-important letter – Fitz sends a congratulatory tweet to Gigi which simply reads: "*HighFive*" (10 Jan 2013). *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* writers were sure to acknowledge this fan contribution of "Team FiGi" with a nod to this fan idea in the final episode of Gigi's spin-off series, "Domino." In Episode 6, she calls Fitz to thank him for his help in tracking down George Wickham and he announces that he will be celebrating their success by going on a trip with his boyfriend to Fiji – a not-so-subtle play on FiGi¹⁶ (Su "Return"). Thus, with the characterization and use of Gigi over their transmedia channels, the *LBD* creative team demonstrated how "storytellers can increase emotional investment in properties through respecting and recognizing the contributions fans make to the value of stories" (Ford, Green, and Jenkins 61). Gigi spoke to the fans' desires through her friendship with Fitz and determination to see Darcy and Lizzie as a couple and hence represented yet another way in which *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* harnessed its transmedia extensions to establish a relationship built on communication with its audience.

¹⁶ The fact that this reference was specifically meant for the fans is confirmed by the closed captioning of this particular episode in which "Fiji" is repeatedly spelled "FiGi" (Su).

While the kind of participatory culture cultivated by transmedia narratives like the *LBD* creates a new kind of readership – one born of the immersive possibilities offered by this new technology – it is a readership that is not yet wholly inclusive. To fully engage with a webseries like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* across its various social media platforms, one must have the privilege of both time and money: time to spend watching the one hundred episodes of the main narrative (let alone the seventy other videos consisting of spinoff series as well as hundreds of character tweets and blog posts) and money to afford a computer and/or smartphone as well as an Internet connection. Just as the circulating libraries and rising literacy rates represented strides in making the novel accessible to a wider readership in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the spreadability of the *LBD*'s transmedia content housed on free websites is a similar step toward accessibility in the twenty-first century; however, participatory culture has not yet evolved to a point where everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute. Despite this, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* does everything in its power to communicate as successfully as it can with its audience – not only does it employ Austen's technique of tailoring the majority of its content to address the hopes and fears of its core demographic of viewers, but it also adheres to the participatory model outlined by Henry Jenkins through its distribution of spreadable content that incentivizes the viewers to engage with the story. Additionally, by actively seeking out fan opinions and ideas, and rewarding participants by acknowledging their contributions throughout the webseries, the *LBD* consistently endeavours to open the channels of communication between author and audience, effectively bridging the divide between creator and consumer. It is because of this sustained emphasis on successful communication with its audience that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* once more proves itself to be a successful adaptation *Pride and Prejudice*.

Conclusion

“[I]t’s nice to be able to understand each other now.”



(Dr. Gardiner’s Seminar – Bonus 2)

On 22 May 2014 – a little over a year after the final episode of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* aired – a bonus video entitled “Dr. Gardiner’s Seminar – Bonus 1” was posted to Lizzie’s YouTube channel. Filmed as a favour for her former graduate thesis supervisor, Lizzie uses the video to answer student questions for Dr. Gardiner’s hyper-mediation in new media seminar, as she will be unable to attend visiting instructor’s week (Rorick). After expressing her delight in regard to the fact that her videos are being viewed and analyzed in class, Lizzie updates Dr. Gardiner’s students on her life, her company, and the lives of her family and friends. Three weeks after the appearance of this first bonus video, a second and final installment aired on 10 June 2014, which had William Darcy join Lizzie to answer all questions pertaining to their relationship. Through the couple’s answers to the questions provided, the *LBD* writers reassure the viewers that Lizzie and Darcy are just as happy together and as in love as they were when the audience last saw them a year earlier. Unlike their literary counterparts, the modern Lizzie and Darcy are still (realistically) unmarried; however, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* makes it clear that the bond between the pair of them is just as strong and their situation just as idyllic as that of Jane Austen’s Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy at the end of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Of particular interest in the second bonus video are the answers Lizzie and Darcy provide to a question on how they cope with working in the same industry. Darcy remarks on how this overlap in their professional lives “makes it easier to communicate to each other” to which Lizzie adds that since “communication was one of the stumbling blocks at the beginning of [their] relationship, it’s nice to be able to understand [one another] now” (Rorick “Dr. Gardiner’s Seminar – Bonus 2”). In acknowledging miscommunication as the obstacle that prevented them from understanding one another and – by extension – any chance of a romantic relationship developing between them, the *LBD*’s Lizzie and Darcy conclude the webseries by upholding

successful communication as the key to their happily-ever-after ending and hence the conciliatory force that precipitates the story's blissful resolution. Therefore, by placing this endorsement of successful communication in the very last video of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* universe, the creators deftly align their adaptation with its source text by once more reiterating their commitment to keeping the primary focus of Austen's novel central to this retelling.

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* meets all of these criteria and thus qualifies as a successful – if not one of the most successful – adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*. Not only does the webseries successfully translate the form, content, and mode of audience engagement of the original to suit a modern context and audience, but it does so by consistently emphasizing the importance of successful communication, which is the beating heart of Austen's story. As established in the introduction, a successful adaptation is a successful act of communication in its ability to give the source text a fresh voice that speaks to audiences old and new alike, translating the original in a way that strikes a balance between honouring and updating the source text. Thus, a successful adaptation effectively communicates the relevance of the story it retells by allowing it to rearticulate what the source text has to say in a new and engaging way that simultaneously welcomes back lovers of the original and invites newcomers to experience an interpretation that is both appealing and accessible.

On a formal level, the *LBD* hinges on communication; as a transmedia webseries, it harnesses and relies on a multiplicity of social media platforms to effectively bring *Pride and Prejudice* into the twenty-first century and address its new readership. Like Austen's use of the novel, the creators of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* employ an emerging form of technology to tell this now two-hundred-year-old story about communication. Hence, through its innovative use of modes of communication both traditional and modern, the *LBD* formally adapts Austen's text in

a way that pays homage to the original and cleverly transitions various aspects of the original novel to fit this new technology – achieving that balance between respect and renewal.

Similarly, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* retains this focus on communication in the way it adapts the content of *Pride and Prejudice*, seamlessly transitioning the characters and plot of Austen's novel into the twenty-first century by presenting its audience with a familiar story while also reimagining several elements of the original to align with contemporary attitudes. Thus, like its source text, the ways in which the characters communicate and miscommunicate with one another is central to the plot of the *LBD* and continues to propel the action forward; however, what elevates *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* to a successful adaptation is that it accomplishes this while also tailoring its content to best address and communicate with a modern audience.

In addition to the *LBD*'s ability to translate the form and content of Austen's novel into a twenty-first century context while maintaining a steady focus on successful communication, it also adapts its source text's mode of audience engagement to encourage a dialogue between creator and consumer. Through the use of transmedia and adherence to a participatory model, the team behind *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* creates a relationship with its audience by actively soliciting their ideas and opinions, listening to their desires, and acknowledging their input within the webseries. In so doing, the *LBD* builds on Austen's techniques to involve her readers and creates a new kind of readership that, in its ability to foster a discourse between author and audience, upholds the sort of successful communication central to *Pride and Prejudice*.

Therefore, in its emulation of the central focus of Jane Austen's novel, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* succeeds as an adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* because it embraces communication on every level – form, content, and audience engagement – to make the voice of its source text heard for a new generation of readers and prevent it from ever lapsing into silence.

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