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The Persistence of Austen in the 21st Century: A Reception History of The Lizzie Bennet Diaries

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THE PERSISTENCE OF AUSTEN IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
A RECEPTION HISTORY OF *THE LIZZIE BENNET DIARIES*


by

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INTRODUCTION

Nineteenth-century author Jane Austen wrote timeless novels centering around ideas of female relationships and home life, concepts which are equally viable in the twenty-first century. Austen's 1813 novel *Pride and Prejudice* features a particularly relatable heroine and compelling storyline, making it an audience favorite. For decades, film and television producers have adapted the tale for viewing; authors, too, have created written adaptations and sequels. Various versions have appealed to multiple audiences with mixed success. In 2012, the first episode of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* aired online via YouTube.com, offering a modernized serial form of *Pride and Prejudice*. With only word-of-mouth marketing, this series gained hundreds of thousand of views, a loyal following, and an Emmy award. In this paper, I will explore the reception history of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* by referencing its source material, analyzing its target demographics, and explaining its success.

The storyline of *Pride and Prejudice* is often simplified to the romance between a headstrong young woman and an initially unlikeable man, but other significant relationships buoy the plot. The novel describes the life of Elizabeth Bennet as she navigates familial struggles, societal pressures, and the marriage market in 1810s England. With matrimony the given conclusion to a young woman's life at home, looking for a husband is the foremost pursuit of teenage girls and their parents. Wealthy, eligible Charles Bingley moves into the neighborhood and Mrs. Bennet immediately targets him for Jane, the eldest Bennet girl. Bingley's associates include his two sisters, one sister's husband, and their friend Fitzwilliam Darcy. Darcy is richer than Bingley, but classified as disagreeable in contrast to Bingley's open friendliness. Jane and Bingley form an attachment. Elizabeth meets George Wickham and gains unfavorable insight into Darcy's past. Mr. Collins, a minister and cousin of the Bennets, comes to find a wife among the Bennet girls. With Jane informally spoken for, he targets Elizabeth. When she declines him, he moves to Elizabeth's friend Charlotte Lucas, who accepts his proposal; the married couple

return to Collins' living at Hunsford. Collins' patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, is Darcy's aunt. Jane and Bingley's relationship ends abruptly when Bingley moves back to London. Elizabeth eventually visits Charlotte, meets Lady Catherine and Colonel Fitzwilliam, and is proposed to by Darcy. She refuses him, additionally citing his poor treatment of Wickham. Darcy reveals by letter the full story of their past dealings, and Elizabeth is confused. Weeks later, she tours Derbyshire with her aunt and uncle. The visit Darcy's home while he is out, but he returns unexpectedly. Their relationship begins to heal but a sudden scandal involving Elizabeth's youngest sister Lydia and Wickham forces Elizabeth to return home. Much to the Bennets' confusion, the scandal is resolved almost as quickly as it rises. Lydia lets it slip that Darcy was involved in the resolution, and Elizabeth thanks him. Bingley returns to the neighborhood and renews his attentions to Jane. Despite approbation from Lady Catherine, Darcy asks Elizabeth again for her hand. Jane marries Bingley and Elizabeth marries Darcy; as the novel closes, all are living happily. *Pride and Prejudice* includes relatable protagonists, realistic relationships, and a surprising storyline, points which significantly contribute to the novel's success.

POPULARITY OF AND LOVE FOR AUSTEN'S WORK

Admirers of Jane Austen's work are numerous, as evidenced by book sales, movie and TV adaptations, book clubs, and fan clubs. The foremost association of aficionados is the Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA). Their mission statement explains simply, "The Jane Austen Society of North America is dedicated to the enjoyment and appreciation of Jane Austen and her writing... members, who are of all ages and from diverse walks of life, share an enjoyment of Austen's fiction and the company of like-minded readers" (The Jane Austen Society of North America). Benefits of JASNA membership include journal and newsletter subscriptions, invitations to attend annual conferences and regional groups, and the opportunity

to participate in a special Austen-based trip to England. Membership costs range from \$18 for a student for one year to \$500 for lifetime membership for a family. Local or regional groups hold regular activities including discussions, lectures, and events related to Austen, her work, and the Regency era. The first Annual General Meeting, held in 1979, was convened around the simple theme, “*Pride and Prejudice*.” Scheduled for October, the 2014 meeting is scheduled for October boasts the theme “*Mansfield Park* in Montreal: Contexts, Conventions and Controversies.” Like any professional conference, the three-day meeting includes presentations, exhibits, workshops, local tours, and entertainment. Conference attendees are invited to participate in a banquet and Regency Ball, which is often a highlight of the experience.

In addition to members of JASNA, Jane Austen and her work have an unquestionable online fanbase. The Republic of Pemberley advertises itself as the “largest, most comprehensive Jane Austen site,” and welcomes visitors with a warning:

We, all of us, remember only too well the great relief we felt upon discovering this haven for Jane Austen Addicts. If your eyes did not widen, if you did not gasp in recognition, if you did not experience a frisson of excitement when you discovered a whole campful of soldiers - er - a whole websiteful of fellow Jane Austen Fanatics, then this place may not be for you. We are The Truly Obsessed here and have been known to talk for weeks about Jane Austen's spelling quirks and Mr. Darcy's coat ("No, no - the green one.")

(Republic of Pemberley)

Before beginning this research, I knew about The Republic of Pemberley only as an online discussion forum. While I am familiar enough with the 1995 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* to recognize the two scenes referenced in that paragraph, I do not seek the virtual camaraderie of other Austen fans. Admittedly, this site provides wide offerings: a forum for discussion of each of Austen's written works, information on the era in which the books were written, a filmography of adaptations, and biographical information are readily accessed.

Multiple fora for discussion of non-Austen writings abound as well; this community of like-minded individuals recognizes that members form online friendships and that off-topic conversations do emerge. In fact, online camaraderie seems to be the point of The Republic of Pemberley. Like-minded individuals are able to share appreciation and insight in a more scholarly format than many other online sources.

Jane Austen's work clearly resonates with audiences, whether or not they participate in formal fan-groups, with *Pride and Prejudice* a definite favorite. Adaptations range from several generally consistent BBC miniseries to the absurd parody *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, published in 2009. The first film version of *Pride and Prejudice* was released in 1940, directed by Robert Z. Leonard, produced by Hunt Stromberg, and starring Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier. The BBC released multiple *Pride and Prejudice* miniseries, starting in 1952 and followed by 1958 and 1967 versions. Each of these was 180 minutes divided into six parts. The 1980 BBC-2 miniseries was the first to be released in color. It starred Elizabeth Garvie and David Rintoul, and ran in five parts for a total of 226 minutes. The popular 1995 BBC adaptation, which was my first introduction to the story, was directed by Simon Langton and produced by Sue Birtwistle. It featured Jennifer Ehle and Colin Firth. Andrew Davies wrote the screenplay, and later did the same for the 2008 three-part BBC-1 version of *Sense and Sensibility*.

In 2005, Keira Knightley and Matthew Macfayden starred in a 129-minute film version of *Pride and Prejudice*. Many previous adaptations were BBC productions, but this version was produced in Hollywood; Focus Features, Universal Pictures, StudioCanal, and Working Title are all listed in the pre-film credits. This movie came out ten years after I had seen the BBC's 1995 miniseries, and I happily anticipated its opening. I had enjoyed Keira Knightley in *Pirates of the Caribbean* and was anxious to see how she would interpret Elizabeth's laughter, wit, and boldness. After seeing it in the theatre, though, I came away dissatisfied. I had wanted so badly to like it and could not explain why it failed. My cool reaction to it grew into a distrust of Austen

adaptations. Recently re-watching the film reminded me of my disappointment, but now I can clearly state the movie's problems. Hollywood made it for an American audience. The visuals are stunning, dramatic, and sumptuous to the point that the story seems secondary. Character development is sacrificed for camera angles. Alternately, I might argue that the producers needed the razzle-dazzle cinematography to mask weak acting: Elizabeth sounds like she is reciting high school Shakespeare, Mrs. Bennet is warm and sympathetic, Bingley wears a creepy smirk, and Darcy shows no signs of repressed passion. Scenes are truncated or omitted for the sake of time, so the audience gets very little sense of the Bennet sisters' relationships. This compression centralizes Elizabeth's and Darcy's romance, as advertised in the film's tagline: "This holiday season, experience the greatest love story of all time." It felt unseemly to me, but United States audiences enjoyed it, as evidenced by box office receipts, DVD purchases, and user reviews.

In addition to adapting *Pride and Prejudice*, many writers have attempted to modernize Austen's original storyline. *Bridget Jones' Diary*, by Helen Fielding, was published as a novel in 1996 and made into a movie starring Renee Zellweger in 2001. *Bride and Prejudice*, a 2004 film, adds Bollywood flair to the adaptation. A lesser-known film, released in 2003, is listed on the Internet Movie Database as *Pride and Prejudice: A Latter Day Comedy* and described as "Jane Austen's classic is transplanted to modern-day Utah. While her college roommates search for love, aspiring writer Elizabeth Bennet focuses on her career but constantly finds herself fighting haughty businessman Will Darcy" (Internet Movie Database). I wondered how I had missed this modernization and recently questioned an Austen-adaptation-loving friend if she had heard of it. She had, and was willing to loan me her DVD copy. What the DVD case (merely titled *Pride & Prejudice*) did not reveal was that this Elizabeth Bennet and many of the other characters are Mormon. Brief references to scripture, Sunday, and the church are scattered through the first third of the movie. Jane refers to Bingley as "the kindest, sweetest, most spiritual man" she knows. The credits close with "amen." While Mormonism is not explicitly mentioned, the film

takes place in Utah and was distributed by Excel Entertainment Group, a company best known for works related to the Latter-Day Saints. In its IMDb description, this film seemed nearly identical to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*: a young modern woman meets a snobbish young businessman and things get off to a bad start. Even the low production cost provided added similarity. The difference is in the modernizations' approaches in attention to detail. Outside of the romantic plot, character names, a few situations, and scene-changing placards with quotes from the novel, *Pride & Prejudice* (2003) is not related to the original book. Elizabeth has no sisters and, seemingly, no family. Jane is Elizabeth's attractive Latina roommate; Lydia is their landlady. Collins marries Mary after proposing first to Elizabeth, then to Jane. Darcy breaks up Wickham's and Lydia's Las Vegas wedding with a fistfight followed by a police chase. This movie centered on Elizabeth's disinterest in pursuing a career or relationship and showed no evidence of strong female connections, causing it to come across as remarkably untrue to the spirit of the original.

Even more prolific than the film versions are the written sequels and adaptations. The trilogy *Fitzwilliam Darcy, Gentleman*, written by Pamela Aidan and first published from 2003-2005, interprets the events of *Pride and Prejudice* from Darcy's viewpoint. In *Death Comes to Pemberley*, 2011, prolific author P.D. James created a murder mystery sequel to *Pride and Prejudice*. Like many other professional and amateur writers, Linda Berdoll sought to continue Darcy's and Elizabeth's relationship in *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife*, published in 2004. Reviewer Kristine Huntley writes, "This rollicking sequel to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was originally self-published in 1999 as *The Bar Sinister*. In Berdoll's wild, bawdy, and utterly enjoyable novel, the Darcys begin their married life as one of the happiest, most in-love couples imaginable" (Official Linda Berdoll Website, accessed Feb 21/14). Predictably, sex is the focus of the plot. The back cover exclaims, "Whoa, Darcy!" Berdoll fills in the physical spaces left by Austen with Darcy's experienced sexual history, Elizabeth's briefly shy virginity, and the

couple's eventual overwhelming mutual desire. When the townspeople display at the local inn the appropriately stained bedsheets from the Darcys' wedding night (Berdoll 64), they are unwittingly mimicking their author; just as Darcy expresses exasperation at the airing of his dirty laundry, so too might Austen feel when the understood relationship between her characters is made explicit. Instead of creating a reasonable continuation of Austen's story, Berdoll seems to have published fan fiction, work written on the backs of borrowed characters, often without consideration for the original author's intent. Like the 2003 and 2005 film versions of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife* sacrifices the intimacies and intricacies of the Bennet familial relationships to promote wish-fulfilling romance.

Clearly, I have particular expectations for adaptations of the novel. One seeming exception is the "Cozy Classics" version of *Pride and Prejudice*. Brothers Jack and Holman Wang have adapted several works of classic adult literature into board books for very young children. Their take on *Pride and Prejudice* includes only 12 words: "friends," "sisters," "dance," "mean," "sick," "muddy," "yes?," "no!," "write," "read," "walk," "marry." The accompanying images are of needle-felted dolls representing Bingley, Darcy, Jane, and Elizabeth. The costumes and facial expressions change from picture to picture, but the characters are easily recognizable to someone familiar with the story. Even though the characters' names are never mentioned, red-haired Bingley, brown-haired Darcy, blonde Jane, and darkly brunette Elizabeth are readily distinguishable and can be followed throughout the story; there is no question that the sister presented in the "dance" image is the one who is "sick." Similarly, the friend who was "mean" is clearly the one who "writes" the letter. Generally, I would scoff at an adaptation that left out so many key characters—Charlotte, Mr. Collins, the other five Bennets, Wickham—but the "Cozy Classic" cuts to the romance of the story without fully sacrificing the importance of female friendships. Jane and Elizabeth are shown to be close in the "sisters" image as they hold hands and smile together at a mirror. When Jane is depicted as "sick," Elizabeth tromps through a

windy, “muddy” field to get to her. The choices that the women of *Pride and Prejudice* make are referenced, too. While Elizabeth is never shown refusing Mr. Collins, she vehemently declines Darcy's hopeful bent-knee proposal in the “yes?” image with a bowed head but firmly set mouth in “no!” The details of the pictures accentuate the connotations of the well-selected text, creating a fuller story than could be expected from a twelve-word board book. This has become one of my favorite adaptations; even though I can read and enjoy it in less than five minutes, I feel that it interprets the novel more appropriately and pleasingly than the 129 minutes of the 2005 film version. Perhaps that is what appeals to me most about *Pride and Prejudice*: it's an everyday story, elegantly told. To approach the appeal of the original, an adaptation must be equally balanced.

Produced in 2012-2013, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* are a significantly modernized version of the story that retain and emphasize the female relationships, family life, and surprises of the original story. Taking place almost exactly 200 years after Austen's 1813 novel *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is a 24-year-old graduate student living at home with her parents and sisters. Lizzie introduces her vlogs as a school project filmed by her friend Charlotte; through them, viewers learn about Lizzie's home life. As Lizzie discusses her daily trials, we hear about her mother's schemes to marry off the girls, Lydia's enthusiastic partying, Jane's never-ending good humor, and the new acquaintances they meet. Bing Lee is just as nice as Jane; Caroline is cool; Darcy is distant and impolite. Lizzie briefly dates George Wickham and re-meets Ricky Collins. Lizzie refuses Ricky's job offer, but Charlotte accepts. Ricky's company, Collins and Collins, is owned by Catherine de Bourgh, who turns out to be Darcy's aunt. While visiting Collins and Collins, Lizzie meets Fitz Williams, who informs her that Darcy discouraged a friend's relationship with an unfit girl. Rightly understanding this couple to be Bing and Jane, Lizzie shares her justified anger and sadness over her vlog right before Darcy enters and professes his secret desire for her. She vehemently refuses him and

returns home, where she comforts Jane. Lydia, in the interim, has begun to secretly date George. Lizzie gets an internship at a digital media company to conclude her degree; the company is Pemberley Digital, owned by Darcy. Lizzie and Darcy are forced together by proximity (and by Darcy's sister Gigi) and they begin to form a friendship. They are interrupted by scandal: lydiabennetsextape.com. Lizzie goes home again as her family decides how to act. Led by Gigi, who was also deceived by George, Darcy locates George and prevents release of the video. Lizzie thanks Darcy, and they mutually begin a romantic relationship.

PERSONAL HISTORY

My understanding of and affection for *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* grew out of a love for educational and cultural programming established in my childhood and teens. Throughout my years at home, my parents guided my TV viewing interests. They may have watched sitcoms after my sister and I went to bed, but they heavily promoted PBS while we were awake. As a preschooler and elementary school student in the 1980s, I watched well-known classics like *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company*, as well as my favorite *Square One TV*. My television consumption was by no means limited to educational programming; I also watched Saturday morning cartoons and shows on the kids' cable channel Nickelodeon. By the mid-1990s, my parents respected my maturing viewing palate and encouraged more adult shows, albeit still on PBS. They preferred British comedies and dramas from the 1970s and 80s, and we often saw reruns of *To the Manor Born*, *All Creatures Great and Small*, or *Are You Being Served?*. PBS also aired more recent British shows like *Mr. Bean* and *Keeping Up Appearances*. As comedy lovers, my younger sister and I enjoyed watching middle-class and middle-aged Hyacinth Bucket (pronounced "bouquet") attempt upward social mobility while hiding her less classy sisters, trying to impress neighbors and friends, and dragging along her contentedly pedestrian husband.

Far and away, however, our family's favorite was the comedic *Are You Being Served?*.

Set in a contemporary 1970s London department store, the male and female employees of Grace Brothers deal with difficult customers, bring troubles from their home life to the workplace, and avoid or comply with the odd schemes of middle and upper management. As in any sitcom, the plots ranged from the mundane to the wild. One of the most memorable episodes, titled “German Week,” sees senior store owner Young Mr. Grace declaring that, as England joined the Common Market, Grace Brothers would feature products from Germany. The men's and ladies' clothing departments were redecorated along stereotypic Bavarian themes: the employees donned lederhosen, referred to clothing and related items by German names, and were encouraged to perform a “spontaneous” and “authentic” German dance. The episode closes with the dance disintegrating into a slapping match between two employees as Young Mr. Grace watches and declares the entire campaign a bust. Scattered with bawdy jokes and near-slapstick comedy, this show was a significant departure from what I typically expected to see on PBS. Even though the only “educational” facet of the show is social information about the 1970s which comes via casual discussions between characters, *Are You Being Served?* gave me a sense of comfort and familiarity with and enjoyment for British cultural exports.

My dad was the first to introduce me to *Pride and Prejudice* via the 1995 BBC adaptation starring Jennifer Ehle and Colin Firth. It aired on cable channel A&E as a miniseries and was an instant favorite with our family. We missed it hugely when it went off the air. Within a year, Dad purchased the \$100 six-VHS boxed set for us to enjoy; we often watched two to four hours of the five-hour series on Sunday afternoons. Dad, Mom, my sister, and I could recite long stretches of it, doing our best imitations of soon-beloved characters. When, as an adult, I moved to a new house and had to provide directions to it past Brighton Road, my family's response was identical and unanimous: “I want to go to Brighton!” as bemoaned by Lydia. We knew exactly how long to fast-forward through the intro, although we could all hum the tune if made to watch through it. The length of the miniseries ensured a bounty of visual detail, but my repeated viewings still

allow me to visualize easily and immediately Mrs. Bennet's flustered fluttering handkerchief, Mr. Collins' puffed-up prance, and Lydia's unabashed teenaged whine. I adored Elizabeth's good-natured teasing and her exasperation with her mother. I simultaneously cherished Darcy's longing looks, the dramatic letter outpouring his explanations, and Elizabeth's eventual reciprocation.

The scene in which Darcy and Elizabeth are surprised to meet at Pemberley was an immediate favorite with my family. This part of the miniseries needs no descriptive explanation to a fan. In a liberty taken by the adaptors, Darcy returns to Pemberley ahead of his party of guests. He pulls off his coat and dives into a pond on his property, ostensibly to cool off after the long, hot horseback ride. Darcy hands his steed over to the servant who has come out to meet him and continues walking, damp from his swim, to the house. Intercut with this are shots of Elizabeth exploring Pemberley's house and grounds with her aunt and uncle. Walking from opposite sides of the grounds, Darcy and Elizabeth are shocked to encounter each other. If time was short on a given weekend, my family would select the VHS tape containing this scene instead of enjoying the entire story. This point, where Elizabeth's affection begins to turn as she sees Darcy in his natural habitat, was more surprising than Elizabeth's confession of her changing emotions to Jane, less polished than her explanation to her father after Darcy asks him for her hand, and more intimate than the wedding scene at the end. Each additional viewing let me be more attentive to the nuances of their facial expressions and vocal tones; I felt as though I was getting to know their characters as I would get to know friends.

Repeatedly watching all five hours of the BBC adaptation had made me confident that I knew the story of *Pride and Prejudice*, so I did not read the original novel until a few years later. I typically pride myself on “reading the book before seeing the movie,” and I was interested in seeing if there was anything I missed, or, rather, that the BBC version missed from the original text. I bought an inexpensive paperback copy of the novel in early December 2000, either

intending to read it at home during JMU's winter break or to use it immediately as academic procrastination in denial of exams. When I opened the book, I was surprised by how the first page simultaneously did and did not read like a script. Mrs. Bennet's exclamations sounded in my head as spoken by Alison Steadman from my beloved BBC miniseries. Mr. Bennet's responses, however, were not immediately delineated. In response to Mrs. Bennet's opening query regarding whether Mr. Bennet had heard of the lease of Netherfield Park, Austen writes, "Mr. Bennet replied that he had not" (Austen 1). Although Mr. Bennet's contributions to the conversation are eventually made explicit, Austen initially mutes him. Even though the reader understands that Mr. Bennet has responded in the negative, we do not see/hear the exact words he uses. Such a tactic is not possible in a movie or miniseries; if Mr. Bennet is in the scene and needs to reply, the audience must hear his answer. Austen's introduction of him through narration instead of speech increases the reader's awareness of Mr. Bennet's imposed silence in the presence of his wife.

As I continued to read, Austen's narrative became less satisfying. The descriptions and dialogue were still enjoyable, but the paragraphs in between seemed to summarize discussions in an unwelcome way. I am a quick reader, but impatience and excitement tempted me to rush through the text at an even greater speed to find the sections I knew by heart. Instead of reading, I nearly skimmed for touchstones: Mrs. Bennet's high-energy cries, Bingley's enthusiasm, Mr. Collins' absurdities, Darcy's fiery distance, and Elizabeth's wit and love. The seemingly superfluous intermediary narrative felt tedious. I was free to turn pages at any speed I wished; I could take control and be selective about how slowly or quickly the scenes changed, unlike my captive viewings of the miniseries episodes. As I read, no lilting melodies played to support transitional scenes. I had no imagery to call to mind when unknown locations were described. I missed seeing expressive people portray the characters I admired. The number of times that I had watched the BBC adaptation was great enough that it had become my source material.

Secure as I was in my understanding of the story, the novel's last two chapters took me completely by surprise. The BBC adaptation ends with a double wedding and closes on Darcy's and Elizabeth's kiss. Imagine my delight in finding that Austen herself had provided a seeming epilogue. We see Elizabeth teasing again after all her serious gratitude. Darcy speaks with unabashed romance about how he fell in love: "I was in the middle before I knew that I had begun" (285), a line that is not heard in the BBC adaptation. Kitty is redeemed and retrieved from the brink of following Lydia. Jane and Elizabeth secretly send money to the Wickhams and, for Lizzy's sake, Darcy helps Wickham with his career. Caroline Bingley and Catherine de Bourgh slowly reconcile themselves to the Darcys' situation. Pleased by these additions to the story I knew, I realized suddenly and heavily that this novel was the original work. In creating these characters and situations, perhaps the author had endowed them with more depth or different attributes than could be found in the BBC adaptation. This apparently backwards understanding allowed me to slow my next reading and appreciate what I continued to perceive as augmentations or slight changes to the characters.

DISCOVERING *THE LIZZIE BENNET DIARIES*

I first found out about *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* during my regular review of The Mary Sue, a website devoted to "girl geek culture." On April 20, 2012, the site embedded the YouTube videos with the observation, "Yes, in true meta inversion, this is a world where Elizabeth Bennet of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* finds *Bridget Jones' Diary* to be a dirty pleasure" (The Mary Sue, "Pride and Prejudice Webseries"). As a fan of *Pride and Prejudice*, if not a thorough Austenite, I decided I should watch this modernized treatment. The first four episodes were available to view, so I put aside my typical skepticism of adaptations and watched them. Episode One, simply titled "My Name is Lizzie Bennet," opened with the same words as Austen's novel: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be

in want of a wife.” This line, however, is delivered dryly by a young woman who reads it off a pink tee-shirt in the comfort of her bedroom. Seeing Lizzie as a 24 year old graduate student introducing her life via video blog entranced me. I watched, shocked and delighted, as Lizzie briefly describes her school and family situation before laying out her mother's scheme to marry off the daughters. Instead of simply explaining or recounting her circumstances, though, Lizzie enlists Charlotte's help. Lizzie puts a man's shirt over Charlotte's shoulders, a brown hat on her head, and hands her a pipe and a script. “Who wrote this?” asks Charlotte confusedly. Lizzie's voice replies sarcastically from offscreen: “Shakespeare.” In the next shot, we see Lizzie in a floofy, pale turquoise hat, a pastel shawl around her shoulders, and wearing pearl earrings and necklace. She addresses Charlotte in a bright Southern accent, asking, “Honey, did you hear: the house in Netherfield sold the other day?” After a brief conversation between the “Bennet parents,” Lizzie appears again sans costume and explains to her new audience that she has no interest: “Who is my mom to tell us who to marry? What if he's gay? What if he's a serial killer? What if he's a gay serial killer? I've got other things to worry about.” Lydia enters, however, in raging excitement over Bing Lee, the rich new guy in the neighborhood. The episode closes with Lydia offering a high-five to a reluctant behind-camera Charlotte as Lizzie signals “cut.” Following a brief cut to black, an onscreen link appeared for Episode Two, which I clicked without hesitation. Lizzie's alternatingly straightforward and sarcastic approach intrigued me, and I wanted to see if she would continue to be so appealing.

The following three episodes did not disappoint. Lizzie introduces her sisters in Episode Two, “My Sisters: Problematic to Practically Perfect.” She first shares a little more about herself: she's studying mass communications (and likes any movie with Colin Firth). She reminds her viewers that they met Lydia in the previous vlog, showing a clip from that episode as Lydia asks her soon-to-be-trademark “Whaaaaaaaat?” and proffering her hand for a high-five. Next, Jane walks into the shot from the hallway and Lizzie drags her in front of the camera for a brief

introduction. Finally, Lizzie pulls Charlotte from behind the camera, notes Charlotte's role in filming and editing the video diary, and extolls their lifelong best-friendship. The characterizations of Lizzie's sweet but put-upon elder sister and flippant party-girl younger sister fit well with what I remembered from the BBC adaptation. Charlotte's cool knowledge and behind-the-scenes support felt like an appropriate way to represent the mostly unseen relationship between her and Lizzie in the novel. Episode Three, "My Parents: Opposingly Supportive" details Lizzie's relationship with, as well as her opinion of the relationship between, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. Completely baffled by how her near-neurotic mother and placid father got together in the first place, Lizzie does note that her dad enjoys irritating her mom. She describes, first to the camera and then via costume theatre, the back-and-forth between the Bennet parents over meeting Bing Lee. She imagines, again through roleplay, how the conversation between Mr. Bennet and Bing might have gone. Highly satisfied by the writers' interpretations of the storyline and feeling a growing kinship with Lizzie's modernized version of Elizabeth, I continued without hesitation to the next episode.

In Episode Four, "Bing Lee and His 500 Teenage Prostitutes," Lizzie opens by agonizing about her mother's obsession with the neighborhood's new rich guy. Gossip has expanded the number of people visiting Mr. Lee to "Five hundred women! There are prostitutes and teenagers and probably lots of distant cousins." Lydia interrupts to reveal, however, that the mysterious stranger has brought only one woman: his sister. He has also brought another man. "Wait, like, frolicking in the meadows holding hands, another man?" asks Lizzie. Lydia exasperatedly explains that this also hot, also rich, probably also single man is just a friend. She near-whispers his name: Darcy. Lizzie immediately proclaims, "Wow. That's an awful name." Lydia reminds her, "Isn't that, uh, Colin Firth's name in that chubby Zellweger movie?" Lizzie smiles indulgently, "I do love that movie." Just as The Mary Sue had promised, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* nodded to their knowledgeable audience and carried on with a smart modernization of

the beloved classic text. I was eager to see if the series continued to satisfy my suddenly high expectations and would have watched another episode immediately.

When I think of *Pride and Prejudice*, the BBC version still comes to mind first. Understandably, it guided the bulk of my perception of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. As already established, the series seemed to delight in recognizing other adaptations of the original novel. Outside of Episode Four's explicit references to Colin Firth and Renée Zellweger of *Bridget Jones' Diary*, characters hinted at similarities to the BBC miniseries. As Lizzie tours Pemberley Digital in Episode 77, "Tour Guide," she describes the comforts of the company headquarters: "The state of the art facilities! The in-house creative departments! The landscaping!" and concluding with "the topiary around the rooftop pool." Later in the video, Lizzie's yet-unnamed tour guide is informed on camera that a visiting group of school children have gotten into the pool. The viewer comments immediately exploded with speculation about Darcy and the pool, based on the now infamous "lake scene" in the BBC adaptation. As noted earlier, fans of that version recognize it as a high point of the miniseries despite its absence in the original work. It served to ground Darcy in a physical way, metaphorically purifying him in the transition from city life to his beloved home and revealing his connection to the environment and returning him to his natural behavior. The physically present Darcy who emerged provided a strong contrast to the literally buttoned-up, cerebral Darcy that Elizabeth (and viewers) knew from their other encounters. When Elizabeth first sees Darcy as he arrives at Pemberley, freshly emerged from the lake, he is vulnerable. Again, this scene does not occur in Austen's novel; it is a creation of adaptors. After teasing vlog followers with hints and references, however, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* stick to the text instead of the BBC version and do not include a scene at the rooftop pool.

At times, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* seem even more faithful to Austen's novel than the BBC adaptation was. In Episode 33, "Nope! He Doesn't Like Me!," Jane and Lizzie discuss a recent encounter between Lizzie and Darcy. The sisters disagree as to whether Lizzie has turned

down Darcy's request to dance with her. Jane has prepared a costume theatre script and the girls reenact the confrontation. Jane-as-Darcy says, "This song is really catchy. I hear it's popular and really good for dancing. You like this kind of music, right?" before she breaks character to tell viewers, acting as a narrator, "and this is the part where she ignored him." Lizzie replies that Darcy's comments are not an entreaty, arguing that Darcy was trying to bait her into saying things he could later deride, "so just go ahead and hate me anyway." Jane counters that Darcy told Lizzie that he could never hate her. In the matching scene from *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy asks Elizabeth if a "lively Scotch air" makes her feel like dancing. Suspicious of his motives, Elizabeth answers that she does not want him to "have the pleasure of despising [her] taste" and as a result of her refusal, he is welcome to "despise [her] if [he] dare[s]." Darcy replies simply that he could not. Elizabeth, in turn, is surprised by his graciousness. The narrator reveals that "Darcy had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her" (Austen 38). The BBC version misses this insight entirely, leaving viewers to wonder at how quickly Darcy came to love Elizabeth; his proposal at Hunsford comes as a near blindside, perhaps for the added drama, but the novel and webseries lay more groundwork towards the audience's recognition of Darcy's growing feelings.

Even after a mere four episodes, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* promised to faithfully and entertainingly recreate Austen's original work. I knew right away that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* should be shared. Moments after I finished watching the first four vlogs, I thought about other people who would appreciate a modernization of *Pride and Prejudice*. One of my coworkers, Janet, is a Jane Austen fan. My sister and dad seemed likely candidates given our obsessive watching of the BBC adaptation. My mother was off the list, despite her enjoyment of Jennifer Ehle and Colin Firth; she prefers specifically period dramas and additionally would not have been technically equipped to find and load new episodes online. With high hopes for this fledgling webseries, I emailed the three parties: "Janet, sis, Dad: you may get in line to thank me."

Dad was the first to respond, with Janet not far behind. Both replies were positive.

Since the series was regularly uploaded to YouTube at 9:00 am PST (noon EST) on Mondays and Thursday, and I had found the series on a Friday, I had to wait until the following Monday to see the fifth episode, “After the Wedding: The Real Bing Lee.” Jane and Lizzie review the ceremony and celebration they just attended, where Jane and Bing Lee met and spent time together. Jane, unwilling to share her feelings about Bing with the internet, watches while Lizzie roleplays as Jane. Lizzie dons Jane's signature headband, pitches her voice high, widens her eyes, and fairly gushes with admiration of Bing and his sister. In response, Jane grabs Lizzie's flannel shirt, accessorizes with a book, and tries to play it cool but can't come up with anything appropriately mocking to say. The vlog ends abruptly as Jane tries to turn the conversation to Darcy and Lizzie responds by shutting off the camera. Needless to say, I was captivated. The creators and writers seemed to know what they were doing with this modernization. Characters and situations were familiar but not trite. Lizzie's casual, open conversation with the audience had completely drawn me in; more than ever, I identified with her character.

With this keen new interest, I made it a priority to be at my computer at noon in order to see each episode as soon as possible. Despite being at work on Mondays and Thursdays, I used lunchtime as an excuse to take a few minutes out of my day to see what Lizzie was up to. In order to look casual, I plugged in my headphones and kept my hand on my computer mouse, ready to click away from YouTube if someone came to my office door. Early on, watching *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* felt like a guilty pleasure. I was stealing company time (albeit during my lunch break) to indulge in three or four minutes of half-familiar escapism. Even though I know the story by heart, I wanted to see how these adapters would unfold it. Who would they introduce next, and how would they differ from the matching character in the novel? How will they modernize the way the Bennets spend time in town? What will I recognize from the original

plot? Not every episode was a cliffhanger, but each vlog promised more stories to come.

At some point, I became shamelessly obsessed. The creators of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* were happy to indulge me. In July 2013, three months after Lizzie's vlog aired, *The Lydia Bennet* premiered as Lydia's own video series. While Lizzie started recording and posting videos for a school project, Lydia began her vlog out of boredom while the Bennets remodeled their house. Unlike *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, *The Lydia Bennet* did not air regularly; Lydia might upload on any given day. Two months later, in September 2013, *Maria of the Lu* aired as Charlotte's sister Maria documented her internship at Collins and Collins. The role of the vlog was not to expand Maria's character; instead, it provided viewers an insight into Charlotte's life away from Lizzie immediately following Mr. Collins' offer, Charlotte's acceptance, and Lizzie's disdain. It regularly aired on Tuesdays and Fridays for a total of seven episodes. The last associated series premiered in January 2013 as Gigi Darcy live-tested Domino, a new product from Pemberley Digital. Over the course of six episodes airing on various weekdays, Gigi tried various aspects of the software. Like *Maria of the Lu*, Domino was a MacGuffin enabling Gigi and Darcy to find George Wickham. For a brief period in September 2012, there was a new video to view daily: Lizzie on Mondays and Thursday, Maria on Tuesdays and Fridays, and Lydia on Wednesdays. During this time, the opportunity to view *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*-related videos more than doubled, and it seemed like a gift. I was surprised at my eagerness to consume more videos. If I could have raced through the episodes in immediate succession, I would have. I was so delighted by the series' interpretation of its source material that I craved the gratification of every detail. Many dedicated viewers felt the same: as soon as one video ended, speculation about the next one began in the YouTube comments and other online platforms. The series creators were careful never to double-upload, and there was always a minimum 24-hour wait between episodes.

The episodic nature of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and its related series amplified tension and excitement between uploads. Initially, when *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was the only vlog

airing, the series creators filled the intermediary time with social media postings from the characters: Lizzie, Jane, Lydia, and Charlotte had Facebook pages. Those four plus Maria had Tumblrs. Ricky Collins had a Linked In profile. Jane had a fashion-based LookBook. Gigi listed and listened to music on This is My Jam. George opened a listing on dating site OK Cupid after the failure of www.lydiabennettape.com, his sex tape website. Pemberley Digital had a business website. Almost all of the characters had Twitter accounts: Lizzie, Darcy, Jane, Bing, Lydia, George, Charlotte, Ricky, Maria, Fitz, Gigi, Mary, and even Kitty. Viewers who accessed these social media accounts could gather clues about what the next episode might reveal or understand un-broadcast character relationships. In addition, the platforms often served different purposes. Facebook and Tumblr typically reminded viewers that an episode was about to air or provided a link to recent videos. Ricky's Linked In account reinforced his professional attitude, just as Jane's Look Book did for hers; Gigi revealed her feelings through song and George cemented his status as a ladies' man and charmer. Twitter revealed side conversations between characters. Caroline and Bing might discuss upcoming events, Lydia could ask George when he planned to go out with her again, or Gigi could post pictures of San Francisco. Twitter enabled viewers access to information Lizzie's first-person-viewpoint videos did not: it replaced the original novel's narration. The use of social media fueled viewer interest between episodes, keeping attention and expectations high.

AUDIENCE RESPONSE

In addition to conversations between characters, the various social media platforms offered an opportunity for viewers to interact with the characters. Lizzie uploaded her first Questions and Answers video on May 5 in response to comments and queries on YouTube, Tumblr, and Twitter. She added that viewers were also welcome to ask questions via GooglePlus. Some of the fans who utilized GooglePlus, particularly the Hangout feature, began in December

2012 to call themselves the LBD Seahorses. Their self-naming story seems almost legendary.

LBD Seahorse Kelsey, known on Tumblr as mamaleh6994, writes:

Okay, so it all started in a G+ Hangout, of course. People were guessing about what Lydia's plot was going to involve, and someone brought up the pregnancy idea. Someone in the chat asked "What would Darcy even do to help the situation?" To which another person suggested: "He'd offer to carry the baby for her." And then I said "Oh, so he's going to become a seahorse?" (On to Iconium, "The LBD Seahorses: An Explanation")

Kelsey posted an image of a seahorse superimposed with Darcy's head and it made the fandom rounds via social media (especially Tumblr), eventually garnering the series creators' and cast's



mamaleh6994.tumblr.com

attention. Many regular viewers recognized the LBD Seahorses as a particularly vocal and involved segment of the fandom. In Lizzie's ninth Questions and Answers video, she directly answered a fan question about her opinion of seahorses: "Now that I'm around them so much, they're growing on me." The query and response would sound odd to anyone who was not a part of the following, but it was intended as such; the subtlety reinforced the desirable insider nature of the LBD Seahorses.

Not all fans of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* considered themselves LBD Seahorses, but Seahorses and non-Seahorses alike responded enthusiastically to the series. In a digital era of 140-character limits and similarly brief attention spans, images with overlaid text have become a highly effective form of visual communication. Tumblr proved to be a significant creative outlet for this form of fan art. Series viewers captured images from the videos and created JPEGs and GIFs. Since the nature of these media does not permit sound, artists superimposed text on the images. Depending on how the character looked in the shot, the words varied. For example, a visual of Lydia's noted enthusiasm might be paired with one of her often-used terms, "adorbs,"

whether or not the image was actually captured during a time when she used that word.

Alternately, Lydia could also be depicted in the midst of her signature phrase, “Whaaaaaat?” with text to match. Descriptions by other characters might also provide inspiration for the overlaid wording.

In reviewing fan-made JPEGs and GIFs, viewers may find that the text superimposed on an image seems only loosely related to the image itself. Often, fans blended screen captures from



thedoctorlizzie.tumblr.com

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries with quotes from other media to reflect their personal opinions or theories. Tumblr user thedoctorlizzie creates and promotes “crossovers” between *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and British sci-fi series *Doctor*

Who. The image above is the second in a series of four blended images with overlaid text quoting *Doctor Who* season seven episode “The Doctor, the Widow, and the Wardrobe.” The time-traveling Doctor explains to a newly widowed mother why she is so frustrated with her cheerful children, whom she has not yet told about their father’s death: “Because every time you see them happy, you remember how sad they’re going to be. And it breaks your heart. Because what’s the point in them being happy now, if they’re going to be sad later?” (*Doctor Who*, “The Doctor, the Widow, and the Wardrobe”). Fans of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* found resonance with this sentiment. Posted after the series concluded, the juxtaposed images and overlaid text reminded viewers that none of the four female leads had an emotionless journey through the story. In the color portion of the first picture, Charlotte happily shares the screen with Lizzie; in the black and white half, she looks pensively aside as she and Lizzie disagree about Collins and Collins. Jane and Bing’s playful flirtation is contrasted with Jane’s crumpled face as she and Bing break up via phone. Lizzie celebrates with a party blower in her room but frowns with disappointment and frustration as she and Jane contemplate Lydia’s future in light of scandal. Finally, Lydia’s

helpless giggles and cheerful pink shirt are depicted opposite her dispirited, blank confusion when confronted with George's betrayal. Even though the series had ended happily by the time these JPEGs were created and published, fans had not forgotten the pain of the journey. As the creators of *Doctor Who* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* must know, the struggle must be endured and fought through before characters (and viewers) can find satisfactory resolution. Visually illustrated with a dramatic juxtaposition of pictures and text, such depictions of emotionally charged scenes reinforce viewer sentiments.

When a non-moving digital image overlaid with words is varied and repeated within particular parameters, it becomes known as a meme. In its simplest usage, a meme is created when words are superimposed on a picture or photo. However, in the specific genre of memes, the font used for the text is most commonly Impact or Arial, in white, with a black outline. Images can come from nearly anywhere: movies, television, the news, digitally drawn pictures, or other online sources. If the images are cut or cropped from a larger source, a colored background may be used. These elements are combined most often for humorous and potentially unexpected effect. The images, repeatedly utilized, become instantly familiar to frequent viewers; recognition of the image (and background, if applicable) set up the joke delivered by the text.



www.knowyourmeme.com

Memes, like most digital phenomena, vary in popularity. They rise and fall with the popular culture that informs them, which also may obscure their origin. Also, as is common with online trends, you blink and you miss it: the meme that is ubiquitous today may be gone the next time you look for it. In 2009-2010, Socially Awkward Penguin emerged as a popular meme.

This unfortunate animal, depicted in the center of the meme and backed with blue, can never

seem to get it right. The text in the upper portion of the meme sets the scenario and the text at the bottom reveals the painful outcome. Socially Awkward Penguin's popularity peaked in late 2011 – early 2012 and is currently in decline (Google Trends). While the message of the meme is still relevant enough to be viewed and recreated, its waning status may be attributed to the advent of newer images via popular culture.



direwolves.tumblr.com

As noted previously, many fans of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* are well-versed in online culture. Having heard accounts of Darcy's speech and behavior through Lizzie's costume theatre-based, it seemed clear that Darcy was, like the aforementioned penguin, socially awkward. Throughout costume theatre, he is uniformly represented as stiff and uncomfortable in action and conversation. In Episode 15, he pretends to text to avoid

encountering Lizzie at a bar. When he asks Lizzie to dance in Episode 33, he is unable to do so directly. Lizzie refers to (and enacts) him as a robot in Episode 55. Would-be meme-making creative fans lacked only an image of the character himself. When Darcy's face first appeared onscreen in Episode 60, which aired on November 1, 2012, his image was quickly captured, trimmed to exclude the offices of Collins and Collins, and backed with the recognizable blue pattern seen behind Socially Awkward Penguin. The quotes and circumstances described in countless reenactments were set in text above and below Darcy's closed look. In reproducing this meme, fans visually reinvented the history of Darcy's actions, essentially creating a partner narration to Lizzie's vlog in their desperation for more series-related material.

Episode after episode, costume theatre had given viewers a visual stereotype of Darcy: newsie hat, red bowtie, uncomfortable expression. We were keyed to await the offense Darcy had recently perpetrated. The Socially Awkward Darcy meme gave fans even faster gratification.

Even though the sayings and situations were taken from existing episodes, they reinforced Darcy's image, ranging from stiff, detached, or impolite to fully jerk-faced. Like Lizzie's reenactments of Darcy, fan creation and distribution of the meme secured universal disapproval and dislike of the character. Without any cue from the series creators, the fans perpetrated and relished the same prejudice that Lizzie did.

Darcy's onscreen appearance in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* coincides with the peak of Lizzie's hatred of him. Early on, Darcy's discomfiting behavior had merely sparked her dislike. When George explains how Darcy has mistreated him, Lizzie's anger grows. Upon learning from Fitz in Episode 58 that Darcy split up Jane and Bing, Lizzie is furious. She spends the bulk of Episode 59 fuming about his influence over people in her life. Darcy walks onscreen (but is only visible from his chin to his shins) just as Lizzie finishes explaining that she could kill him on sight and would prefer to never see him again. In Episode 60, Darcy sits with Lizzie in front of the camera and reveals the extent of his feelings. When Lizzie yells at him, Darcy stiffly but coolly outlines his previous behavior. Following Lizzie, viewers were primed to hate him. Darcy appears again in Episode 61, proffering a handwritten letter that he claims will help Lizzie understand their previous conversation. They still treat each other with distance, but Lizzie and Darcy seem to have overcome their emotional outbursts. Darcy even apologizes for any unpleasantness he may have caused during Lizzie's tenure at Collins and Collins. After he leaves, Lizzie opens the letter, surprised by its wax seal and four cursive pages. She initially refuses to read its contents, but quickly caves in. Within seconds, Lizzie's expression changes from skepticism to confusion and she turns off the camera.

In the course of one episode, Darcy's socially awkward status begins to crumble under Lizzie's new, more realistic, understanding of him. Series viewers watching Episode 60 were filled with gratifying rage: Darcy finally shows his face to the internet and confirms everything viewers had heard through costume theatre. Fans delightedly seize the opportunity to plaster past

offenses over his image, encouraging everyone to agree: Look at Darcy! He has been a complete tool to our Lizzie! Admittedly, many fans knew the plot and waited for Darcy's redemption. It began swiftly; meme creators had only a few days between Episode 60, nicknamed "Darcy Day," and Episode 61, in which Darcy and Lizzie incrementally began to soften towards each other. Viewer rage at Darcy's injustices had to burn quickly in order to accommodate the pace of the plotline, and the creation of the Socially Awkward Darcy meme enabled that fulfillment of fury.

Most of the items produced in relation to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, whether fan-made or officially licensed, were digital: online videos, social media accounts, websites, JPEGs, GIFs, and memes. Cartoon images of the four female leads began to appear at the conclusion of each video starting with Episode 10. Created by Naomi Gunadie at the request of the series' creators (email interview, February 17, 2014), these pictures became the official YouTube channel art for *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Given the nature of the vlog, it seems to follow that an internet-based source should produce online responses. However, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* co-creator Hank Green is also co-founder of DFTBA Records, a company that sells clothing, posters, music, and other products for and by musicians and artists. Merchandise promoting and celebrating the Vlogbrothers, *CrashCourse*, *The Fault in Our Stars*, and other Hank Green creations figure heavily among the offerings. Perhaps not surprisingly, considering Green's involvement, a small number of items are also available for *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. At the end of Episode 12, an advertisement for a tee shirt with the famous opening line of the novel and pinned buttons featuring Gunadie's drawings was embedded beside the links to the previous and next episodes. The advertisement changed slightly after Episode 29, when Lydia's vlog was given room for a link. The closing screen changed again to conclude Episode 41; it now featured a blue tee shirt with Gunadie's imagery. This was the moment I had waited for: a real-life way to advertise my addiction to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. The first available tee shirt, while recognizable to fans of *Pride and Prejudice*, was not specific to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. I do not pin buttons on my

jacket or bags, so those were out of the question. I mentioned the shirt to my husband, Scott. In a remarkable show of attention, he picked up on the hint and bought the shirt for me for Christmas 2012. Owning the shirt was important to me because I wanted something tangible from this beloved digital series. I wanted strangers to ask me questions about the shirt; I wanted to be able to promote the series.

Clothing is a recognized way to endorse a product, but fans of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* were not satisfied with tee shirts. In the comments section below the videos, many viewers asked specific questions about the actresses' clothing. Posting to a Tumblr page called "Lizzie's Clothes," Ashley Clements and Mary Kate Wiles ("Lizzie" and "Lydia") answered fan questions about their outfits and accessories, listing stores like Anthropologie, Macy's, and Old Navy. As a fan of the BBC's typically period adaptation and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*' contemporary viewpoint, I was pleased to think that I could dress like Lizzie without having to wear a nineteenth-century empire-waisted lawn gown. Luckily, many fans admired in the outfit Clements wore in Episode 80, where Lizzie confronts Darcy about his interference with Bing Lee and Jane's relationship. Clements posted information about the dress, which I thought might look flattering on me, and I quickly searched online. The dress was new in fall 2012 and on sale by the time the episode aired in January 2013. I bought it, paired it with boots and a cardigan I already owned, and dubbed it "my Lizzie dress."

Although it was a relatively available dress from a department store, I have worn it as more than a work or going-out outfit. When I purchased it, I let myself put on Lizzie's characteristics as I put on my Lizzie dress in a way that did not happen with my Lizzie Bennet Diaries tee shirt. Without pretending to be the character, I let the dress give me permission to enhance my own qualities that I also admire in Lizzie: I could be funnier, flirtier, smarter, and bolder. Eventually, I recognized my actions as a form of cosplay, a creative response where fans dress up as admired characters. In "Lizzie's Clothes," Clements recognized that many Tumblr

followers were acquiring clothes specifically for this purpose (Lizzie's Clothes, March 27, 2013). While many sci-fi, anime, steampunk, or period cosplayers hand-craft their clothes, I clearly did not; there may be near-identical Lizzie imitators, but my personal reinterpretation is unique despite the exactly matching dress. Like Lizzie, I often wear boots with the dress, but I have also layered a bolero-length black cardigan over it. I might pair it with a bronze-based charm necklace reminiscent of Lizzie's key necklace, but I also dress it up with funky pearls.

In spring 2014, The Mary Sue announced that Tumblr was celebrating Stealth (or Closet) Cosplay week. Community members were invited to post pictures of themselves in clothing that suggested, if not completely imitated, the attire of fictional characters (The Mary Sue, "Tumblr Closet Cosplay"). By this time, I had stopped putting on Lizzie's characteristics when I wore the dress; my recognition of the act had led to confidence in my own personality. Between that confidence and the date of Stealth Cosplay week nearly coinciding with the anniversary of the airing of Episode 80, I decided to reveal what I had been doing. At the time, I did not have a Tumblr account, so I posted the following image to Facebook with the text, "Outing myself for casual cosplay week. So now you know."



I did not mention nor link to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*; the 24 people who “liked” the picture were able to make the connection on their own. My love for all things Lizzie had been well-established.

FAN DEMOGRAPHICS

Although I felt a particular kinship with Lizzie, I knew that I was not the only fan. Many of my friends are Jane Austen aficionados, and I was intrigued to find which of them would be best suited for regular discussion of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

Janet Carty is the Manager of Exhibitions at the Eleanor D. Wilson Museum at Hollins University in Roanoke, Virginia. She was born in 1965 and graduated from Hollins with her B.A. in 1984 and her M.A. in Liberal Studies in 1999. We have been colleagues since my hire in 2006, and we have become close friends with many overlapping interests. Dissatisfied with the superficial term “fan,” Janet considers herself a student of Jane Austen: “I go to Jane Austen all the time to immerse myself in the language. Her writing is exemplary.” Due to the series’ workday release time, she was my most regular co-viewer of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. As my friend, Janet felt that she should support my enthusiasm about the series. However, her position beside me at the computer screen was not exclusively to feed my continuing addiction, nor was it due to equal interest in the series on her part. Even as we watched together, often shrieking at the same plot twists, she made it clear that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was not engendering in her the same connection to the characters as I felt. Janet explains, “I feel an almost proprietary sense toward the writings of Jane Austen that I feel the need to monitor when someone modifies the text. The story is engaging, and will continue to be so if it’s done right, no matter what the format” (personal interview, January 24, 2014).

Kristen Miller Zohn works with the Columbus Museum in Georgia as Director of Collections and Exhibitions. Born in 1970, she received her B.A. in Art History from Salem

College, North Carolina, and her M.A. from Florida State University. Kristen and I had colleagues in common through the museum world, and we met briefly at a conference in 2010. One of those colleagues, Abbie Edens, saw my Facebook posts about this paper and suggested that I reconnect with Kristen, who is a member of the Jane Austen Society of North America. Kristen's interest in Austen first bloomed in the time after she finished her master's thesis on Anne Seymour Damer, an English artist and contemporary of Austen. She describes the progression of her involvement:

I started out stalking the Republic of Pemberley website from University of Texas when the internet was brand new to me in 1997, and I think that's where I first learned about JASNA. I became a member of JASNA in 2008, and was planning to go to the annual meeting in Chicago that year, but because I was new to the organization I had no idea that it SOLD OUT, very unusual for a literary conference.

In the following years, Kristen made sure to register early. She has presented twice at the annual meeting; in 2011, she discussed hairwork and portrait miniatures as tokens of affection in Austen's novels and in 2013, she investigated the relationship between Pemberley's architecture and furnishings and Darcy, its owner. Kristen first heard about *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* at the 2013 JASNA conference. Cast and crew members held a panel discussion, and Kristen credits this portion of the meeting with attracting people younger than herself to the conference. She adds that, afterwards, she "watched the first five episodes [of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*], but lost interest—I'm too old" (email interview, January 21, 2014).

Jamie Holcomb and I attended high school together in the mid-1990s. Coming from different middle schools, we met in the way that smart-but-not-popular kids do: recognizing brains and knowing we had to stick together. We became best friends, discussing and dissecting our lives. Inevitably, the 1995 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* worked its way into our conscious and became a touchstone for grown-up aspirations and romance. Elizabeth was smart,

funny, and no one's fool; Darcy was cold and inaccessible but could be humanized. Jamie and I felt like *Pride and Prejudice* was a very mature way to live out our teenaged angst over parents and boyfriends. After high school, Jamie attended William and Mary, graduating with her B.A. She then earned her master's in English from Washington University in St. Louis. Jamie saw my Facebook posts about *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, but did not begin watching until summer 2103, after the series concluded. By January 2014, she had seen all of Lizzie's episodes, ignoring the tangential vlogs in her desire to see how the story wrapped up. When I asked what appealed to her about this adaptation, she replied, "I liked that it was both a different way of telling the same timeless story and a way of noticing how differently that story would go today. What does a man who uses women the way George Wickham did look like today?" She added, "I just fell really hard for the mix of fidelity to the story and modern reinvention. Catherine De Bourgh as a creepy, [dog]-stroking venture capitalist? Brilliant" (online interview, January 18, 2014).

Sarah Henty Sprigings is a graphic designer with Anstey Hodge Advertising Group in Roanoke. She was born in 1982 and graduated from Virginia Tech in Blacksburg with her B.F.A. She briefly worked in New York City before moving to Roanoke. Anstey Hodge creates most of the marketing pieces for Hollins, and Sarah collaborates directly with me on museum publications. We have been Facebook friends for the past few years; she saw my occasional posts about *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. A self-described "sucker... for all things P&P" and encouraged by our other matching interests, Sarah decided to try the webseries. "I really wouldn't have heard about it otherwise," she explains. She told her mother and sister about the vlog and ended up hooking her mom, who also enjoyed it. In fall 2013, Sarah's sister still had plans to watch the series, but only after she concluded the original Star Trek. While Sarah says she would attend a science fiction, comic, or otherwise fan-based convention, she feels no call to respond creatively to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Since she began watching the series close to its conclusion, she also did not participate in its eventual fundraising campaign (online interview,

January 26, 2014). She has, however, been a regular watcher of *Emma Approved*, a follow-up vlog by the creators of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

Leslie Ann Johnson is my sister. Born in 1983 and almost four years younger than me, she became a “person” in my teenaged eyes when she entered seventh grade in 1995. We happily watched the Jennifer Ehle / Colin Firth *Pride and Prejudice* together. She became an Anglophile in high school, traveling to London on a drama department field trip and reading the first Harry Potter book before the budding series gained popularity. Leslie Ann attended Maryville College in Tennessee and graduated with her B.A. in 2005. In 2014, she was certified as a massage therapist with Arbor Institute in Knoxville. Recalling her interest in all things British and our family's enjoyment of the 1995 BBC *Pride and Prejudice*, Leslie Ann was one of the first people I emailed upon discovering *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. However, she did not watch the series until after it ended. Although Leslie Ann watched all of Lizzie’s webisodes, she was not particularly enamored with the main character: “No, I didn’t love Lizzie. I loved to see her interactions with the other characters and got particularly bored near the end when she was sobbing at the camera. It didn’t feel like her.” She blames the bulk of her dislike on the way she watched: “I often felt the wait time wasn’t worth the episode” (email interview, January 27, 2014). Perhaps if Leslie Ann had not “binge-watched” on her slow-loading Apple TV, she would have been happier with the experience; digital consumption is less tedious in smaller doses.

Jennifer Patel is one of my best friends. She was born in 1979 in Mount Jackson, Virginia and graduated from Roanoke College in 2001 with a degree in sociology. She has worked with the Veterans Administration for more than 12 years. Jenn and I met in 2002 through our husbands' workplace, WSLS Newschannel 10, in Roanoke. Jenn is a media junkie, always up to date on new movies and television series, so it came as no surprise when she started watching *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Over the course of our friendship, we have often sat on her couch to watch newly released period romances, sci-fi crossovers, cult-favorite comedies, or BBC series.

She introduced me to shows that became favorites but would have otherwise passed me by: *Firefly*, *Arrested Development*, and *Doctor Who* top the list. Jenn seems able to bring any disc from her DVD and Blu-ray library, but only in discussing our mutual enjoyment of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* did I learn of her particular love for Austen adaptations. Until then, it seemed merely insightful that Jenn would suggest an afternoon of watching *Northanger Abbey* or *Persuasion* at her place. Jenn is the person who loaned me her copy of the covertly Mormon 2003 *Pride & Prejudice*. Like Janet Carty, Jenn feels responsible for keeping track of the way writers and producers adapt Austen's work. She is eager to enjoy new versions, but is unafraid to note when something does not suit her. "I'm pretty easy to please, as long as the main romance is there, I'll usually overlook a bad adaptation and focus on the pay off when the characters get together in the end... but I'll pretty much refuse to keep reading a book that completely changes the story. That's fan fiction" (personal interview, January 25, 2014).

Thu Ngo is the only person I interviewed for this paper that I do not know in real life. Miranda Williams, a mutual friend, saw both of us posting about *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* on Facebook and encouraged us to discuss our interest. Born in 1982, Thu studied English at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon. She earned her M.A. From the University of California, Irvine, in 2005 and completed additional teaching credentials at Santa Clara University in 2006. Her Master's thesis explored Jane Austen's use of a character's attitude toward literacy as a way to categorize him or her. Now, Thu teaches high school English in Milpitas, California. She first heard about *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* through a Facebook friend's post about the series. In addition to Facebook, Thu is also active on Twitter and Instagram, and was therefore able to follow more social media aspects of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* than I was; I often relied on her cross-posts to Facebook to keep track of what the characters were posting. Thu was never stingy or proprietary about information. When she shared links or posts with Facebook group Socially Awkward Darcy, a fan-administered page created in response to the webseries (and named for

the meme discussed earlier), she gave hundreds of other fans access to pieces of the story that they would have otherwise missed. This is a devoted fan who has creatively responded to the series through fanfiction, but she does not consider herself a Seahorse:

To me, that term refers to a specific group of girls who obviously constitute some sort of “in-crowd” within the LBD fandom, and individually they’re nice people, but together they seem really cliquey to me, and the general consensus is that they represent the fandom, which I resent because I don’t want or need other people to speak for me... I am 31 years old, and a mother, and a full-time educator – I don’t have time for “cliquey.” (online interview, February 3, 2014).

Clearly, enjoyment of Austen’s work was not enough to guarantee appreciation of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. All of the women I interviewed self-identified as enthusiasts of Austen’s stories, but their favorite versions of *Pride and Prejudice* differed. The eldest interviewees were two of the most scholarly, and prefer the novel. The remaining interviewees are closer to my age and were more likely to claim the 1995 BBC *Pride and Prejudice* as a favorite, but also respect the source material. While age may have been a factor in relating to Lizzie as a 24-year-old grad student, the mode of presentation also provided potential audience selection. Neither Janet nor Kristen is unable or unwilling to use the internet, but many people of an older generation are not comfortable with seeking out entertainment online. The time commitment required for watching the webseries also proved to be a block. Viewers who followed *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* from the beginning took a year to complete it; those who “binge-watched” had almost seven hours of footage to see from Lizzie’s vlog alone. Followers who watched Lizzie’s videos exclusively without accessing or understanding the added social media content lost a significant part of the experience. While the ideal consumer of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* viewed all videos as they aired and followed the associated social media, other methods did not preclude enjoyment of the series. Openness to adaptations, viewer age, and willingness to invest time informed a fan’s

likeliness of supporting and appreciating *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

SUCCESS

As the series neared its conclusion, the creators of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* were primed to access their excited fanbase. On March 21, 2013, Episode 98, “Gratitude,” aired on YouTube. The video picks up as Darcy has just surprised Lizzie by walking into the Bennet family living room. “Do you film everything in your life?” he asks, the corner of his mouth quirking up. A few episodes previous, Lizzie had left Darcy a message asking him if they can talk. Finally, face to face, they speak honestly about their confused relationship and agree to be friends. As Darcy begins to confess the strength of his admiration for her, Lizzie closes his mouth with a long kiss. She breaks away, almost surprised at herself, to ask quietly, “Does that... clarify some things for you?” Darcy slowly replies, “Some. I could use some clarification on certain points, however” as he moves to embrace her, and they share a mutual kiss. They stop long enough to confirm with each other where their relationship stands. Lizzie laughs, “God, for two such smart people, we can certainly act like idiots, can’t we?” They kiss once more before Lizzie reaches for the camera to end the video. At last: obstacles had been overcome, the air was cleared, the romance had really begun, and anything left was merely tying up loose ends. Viewers shared a satisfied sigh, simultaneously enjoying the series and preparing to be sad at its close.

The creators, however, were at the ready for their fans. The following day, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* announced that it was holding a campaign to raise funds for a DVD release of the series. Kickstarter, a website dedicated to the production of artistic projects, hosted this promotion. Pemberley Digital was a real company, led by the series creators, and they had ideas beyond *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* YouTube series. I eagerly read their plans for *Welcome to Sanditon*, a mini-series based on one of Austen’s unfinished novels and featuring Gigi Darcy. Viewers were promised participation in the story and more details to come. The part that had me

ready to throw cash at my computer screen, though, was this line: “*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* DVD box set should be in your hands this July 2013” (Kickstarter). In my hands. It seemed almost surreal. How could I own this heretofore untouchable media? I had faithfully clicked my mouse on that play button on video after video. I had watched the digital clock in the corner of my computer monitor, waiting for noon to roll around and waiting for a new episode to air. I had followed social media updates and shared my own enthusiasm on Facebook. I bought my Lizzie dress on macys.com. With the exception of owning and wearing my official tee shirt and my cosplaying Lizzie dress, this had been a virtual experience. It had been real, though; the series had lasted for almost a full year of my life, inspiring me, making me laugh and think and reread the text, serving as a discussion point with my colleagues and friends. The physicality of the DVD set promised to solidify the ephemeral nature of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* experience. I had no qualms about seeing it as a near-holy idol: it would be a talisman of a shared experience in growth and self-discovery.

Pemberley Digital already had their plans laid out. They would complete the Kickstarter before beginning to produce the DVDs. The month of fundraising would give the creators time to film interviews, select outtakes, and create featurettes around portions of the series. They stated that much of the time would be involved in actual production of the DVDs, including manufacturing. Money was not an object, but I selected the \$55 level of support, which promised “Thanks on the DVD liner AND *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* full series 8 disc DVD set. Including all episodes from Lydia, Maria, and Gigi. 10 short features, 20 episode commentaries, and interviews with the cast members and creators” (Kickstarter). Other levels of support promised journals, a reissue of *Pride and Prejudice* with a Lizzie Bennet cover, and autographed items. All I desired was the printed thanks. I wanted my name on this because I helped make it happen. I watched faithfully from nearly the beginning; even when an episode began with a YouTube-generated ad, I sat through patiently for the sake of the series.

While the eventual on-screen ads generated an influx of cash to the series, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was initially funded by series co-creator Hank Green. As noted earlier, his understanding of YouTube culture via his participation in The Vlogbrothers provided some comfort towards support of a fledgling series. Digital marketer Annelise Larson expresses her surprise at the series' success without a pre-plotted long-term marketing plan:

With zero dollars for marketing and promotion, the team still expected that after about three weeks of LBD they would have to reach out and do some active PR to get write ups in on and offline publications. This turned out to be unnecessary... While there are no hard stats on this, the teams' anecdotal evidence suggests the majority of the audience discovered LBD because it appeared in their social media feeds as their friends shared and frothed about the series. What an amazing example of the power of superfans when a story and experience is truly authentic and engaging enough to move and inspire them in this way. Is it marketing, smart storytelling, or a hybrid of both? (Larson, "Digital Marketing for Transmedia")

Although Larson's report is accurate, her incredulity contradicts my experience of the series. If the creators had secured corporate partnerships and performed a large-scale marketing campaign, those actions would have belied the series concept. Even knowing that this was a written and produced webseries, I easily accepted that it simulated a graduate student's vlog, and I thoroughly enjoyed it that way.

As much as I felt I had been responsible for the series' success, I knew that I was not alone, and nor could I fund the Kickstarter by myself. I posted an update to Facebook with a link to the campaign, encouraging those who had enjoyed the series to support Pemberley Digital monetarily. My dad, a huge fan of the series, got a personalized email in case he had not seen the hype already. Later that same day, Pemberley Digital posted this update, titled "THANK YOU OH MY GOD" and signed by series co-creator Hank Green, to Kickstarter:

Less than six hours after we launched a 30-day Kickstarter we have reached our \$60,000 goal. This was beyond any of our expectations and we are extremely grateful. This Kickstarter is still alive and well though, and we have lots of work to do making sure that we can fulfill the high level of interest in this project. And there may very well be some more rewards and flex bonuses as we move forward. But, for now, I just wanted to say thanks (Kickstarter).

The next day, Green posted a video update reporting that supporters had given over \$200,000 to the project. Within 48 hours, funding was at four times the initial goal. When the campaign concluded on April 22, 2013, Pemberley Digital had raised \$462,405. Green reported that extra money would be used to enhance the DVD content and quality as well as serve as a bonus for the cast and crew associated with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Fans had come out with cash to show their support and enthusiasm for the series, proving their love and devotion.

The series had been an unmitigated success with viewers, but on August 22, 2013, the Facebook page for *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* posted the astonishing news that the series had won an Emmy. The linked article brought readers to an entry by Rachel Poletick on the Yahoo! TV Emmys Blog reporting on the four “juried winners for Creative Arts Emmys in the field of digital media programming” (Poletick). To almost any other consumer of media today, the other three winners listed are household names: *Top Chef*, Oprah, and Nickelodeon. All of these winners had a television presence augmented by digital applications. Competitive cooking program *Top Chef*’s “Last Chance Kitchen” provides extra footage, an online follow-up with Bravo TV, and recipe resources. *Oprah*’s *Lifeclass* acts as a TV lecture featuring Oprah and a life coach or other expert. An added online response for viewers rounds out the program. Nickelodeon created the Nick App, which includes clips and episodes of Nickelodeon shows in addition to “more interactive content.” Mentioned last “and perhaps most unusually” is *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. The author briefly summarizes the series, praising it as “fun, quirky, and

generally sarcastic,” and describes the unique component of the characters’ interactions with social media via Facebook and Twitter. Each Creative Arts Emmy won in a particular subset of the digital media field, and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* were celebrated as an Original Interactive Program.

While a vlog seems to only involve a camera and a person in front of it, production of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was significantly more complex. The finished product seemed, as it should, like something a grad student was making with a friend. I recognized that there were authors, makeup artists, and actors at work; I was never fully fooled. My husband, Scott, watched several episodes with me and realized immediately that much more production work was involved than I gave the series credit for. His background in television and marketing provided the insight for him to explain that the lighting, the camera angle, and the sound quality were of appreciably greater quality than should be expected for an amateur vlog. He was proved absolutely correct when The Stylish released “*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries: Interview with Cast and Crew!*” on their YouTube channel in January 2013. I was shocked to see footage of the actors and crew on set with multiple cameras, microphones, sound equipment, and wires everywhere. Production team members were quick to remind viewers that *The Lizzie Bennet*



still from “*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries : Interview with Cast and Crew!*” by The Stylish

Diaries had a limited budget; production designer Katie Moest explains, “That means going to the Dollar Store, going to thrift shops.” Producer Jenni Powell adds that “Lizzie’s room” is really Powell’s room in her own apartment (The Stylish). The series creators and producers used significant resources to not only be true to Austen’s

original work, but to create an increasingly polished version of a video blog. While fans may or may not have recognized the impact of its production, critics did.

In writing a second article about *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*' Creative Arts Emmy, Rachel Poletick outlines three major points regarding their victory. First, Poletick cites the surprise of the "unknown" creators behind the series. The writing following this bold announcement backpedals somewhat as she recognizes that while Hank Green may not be a household name in the way that Oprah and *Top Chef* are, Green is well known in particular YouTube circles; Poletick avers that many of his existing fans were responsible for viewing and grassroots-promoting *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Next, the author recounts the interactive component of the characters' social media accounts. Lastly, Poletick, writes, "This is only the beginning." She reports that even though Lizzie's story has concluded, the creators have responded to audience demand with two more shows springing from Jane Austen's work. The mini-series *Welcome to Sanditon*, based on one of Austen's incomplete novels, would serve as a segue between *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and another full-length series set to air in fall 2013.

CHALLENGES

On October 7, 2013, Pemberley Digital released the first episode of *Emma Approved*, based on Austen's 1815 novel *Emma*. In her opening video, "I am Emma Woodhouse," Emma introduces herself as an "entrepreneur in the love and lifestyle business." Bright, confident, and featuring a twin-camera setup for multiple viewpoints, Emma introduces her professional matchmaking business, her work partner Alex Knightley, and her shamelessly bold tendency toward self-promotion. While Emma is not unlikeable, she clearly sees herself as a superior person; she is always right. While this is true to Austen's characterization, it does not promote kinship with the character and may cause viewer disinterest.

Admittedly less relatable than Lizzie's story, *Emma Approved*'s first episode gained

almost 297,000 views. Viewership dropped by the second episode, however, by almost half. By the ninth episode, that number slipped under 100,000. Since then, the views per *Emma Approved* episode have dropped to average around 60,000. In comparison, the first episode of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was viewed more than 1,500,000 times. Admittedly, this was driven in part as a fan-based show of support for the series instead of views for mere enjoyment; fans rallied to push the quantity over 1,000,000 but views since then have increased that sought-after number by another 50%. As with any webseries, viewership for *Lizzie* dropped after the first episode, but its lowest point was Episode 71 with just over 292,00 views. Regular vlogs typically garnered over 300,000 views, with higher numbers for Darcy's first appearance, *Lizzie's* internship at Pemberley Digital, and climactic concluding videos. At its lowest moment, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* nearly matched the high point of *Emma Approved*. While *Lizzie* was likeable from the first video, *Emma* was not; unlike *Lizzie*, *Emma* doesn't act as a surrogate, nor does she represent wish fulfillment, making her an unrelatable protagonist.

Lack of connection to the heroine is only one challenge facing Pemberley Digital's pursuits. The immensely successful Kickstarter caused problems for the company. DVD release had been plotted for summer 2013, but the unexpectedly large influx of cash inspired the series creators to not only provide bonuses for the cast and crew but also include additional features for the DVDs: commentaries on every video, blooper reels, and multiple language captions. In July 2013, co-creator Bernie Su emailed Kickstarter supporters to update the DVDs' status, apologize for the delay, and confirm that the DVDs would not be ready for shipment by the end of July. An email in August provided another status update and apology. Another email in October did the same. A November email explained part of the delay: the DVD production company was unable to use the subtitle files that Pemberley Digital had provided at the beginning of the project. The series co-creators and crew applied the language captions onto the YouTube versions of the videos but explained that formatting them for the DVD release was not feasible in matters of

time or money. In November, Pemberley Digital shared links to exclusive online featurettes and bloopers with its supporters in order to maintain goodwill. January 13 and 28, 2014 brought hopeful updates confirming approval of the first several DVDs in the full packaged set. At the end of February, Bernie emailed to confess audio trouble with the DVDs and, again, apologize for a delay of more than six months:

We do apologize for the perception that we've moved on from the Kickstarter project and are spending the money on other things. We can promise you that we are not. Anytime we are able to do anything to push the DVD production along, we do so immediately. The money that the Kickstarter raised is in a self contained Kickstarter bucket/budget. Much of the money is still sitting in the account waiting to finish this campaign. None of those dollars have gone back to our series financier, DECA, nor our follow up series, Emma Approved.

When I decided to support the series' Kickstarter campaign, I did so out of gratitude for a delightful year of entertainment via *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. At the time, physical ownership of the series on DVD was important to me. Almost a year after pledging my money to this project, I am simply tired of waiting. The series co-creators recognize their dissatisfied audience and seek to maintain the good opinion they ended on in April 2013. Mild disenchantment with Pemberley Digital, a lack of time to watch *Emma Approved*, and less kinship with the new series' main character have made me and probably others disinclined to commit further resources to current and future projects.

CONCLUSION

Like many of the other followers of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, I know the *Pride and Prejudice* storyline by heart. I prided myself on having studied the novel as well as all but memorizing the BBC adaptation. The twists in the story were my friends: simultaneously

surprising and comfortable. I eagerly anticipated the treatment they would receive in Lizzie's vlog. Watching this version of Lizzie's story unfold twice a week (or more often when Maria's, Lydia's, and Gigi's vlogs aired) in an open if not confessional manner introduced me to the characters in a more intimate way than I had experienced reading the novel or watching the BBC adaptation. I spent a minimum of eight minutes every week watching and listening to a young woman discuss her life with me. In comparison, this equals or surpasses the approximate amount of time I spend talking online with my sister on a weekly basis. Lizzie told me her family troubles, excitement about school, and relationship issues. Her direct eye contact and willingness to share the content of her days seemed completely real. It wasn't until the series ended that I realized I had become friends with a fictional character. There were days when I was sad that I had not heard from Lizzie. It was as though she had started a new life and left me, an old friend, behind.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth feels deeply unhappy when Charlotte weds Mr. Collins and departs for Hunsford; in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, Lizzie is similarly bereft when Charlotte leaves for Collins and Collins. Jane Austen wrote convincingly about female relationships and home life in nineteenth century England, and the creators of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* accurately modernized those views for a twenty-first-century audience. In its year of vlog releases, this series drew a dedicated fanbase who responded enthusiastically with resources of time, creativity, and money in their delight with the adapted storyline. With faithful details, endearing actors, and the originality of added social media platforms, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* successfully adapted a most beloved story.

Characters

Pride and Prejudice

Elizabeth Bennet
Jane Bennet
Lydia Bennet
Mary Bennet
Kitty Bennet
Mrs. Bennet
Mr. Bennet
Charles Bingley
Caroline Bingley
William Collins
Fitzwilliam Darcy
Georgiana Darcy
Lady Catherine De Bourgh
Anne De Bourgh
Colonel Fitzwilliam
Uncle and Aunt Gardiner
Charlotte Lucas
Maria Lucas
George Wickham
Captain Carter

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries

Lizzie
Jane
Lydia
Mary (cousin)
Kitty (a cat, only discussed, has a Twitter account)
only seen in costume theatre
only seen in costume theatre
Bing Lee
Caroline Lee
Ricky “Mr.” Collins
William Darcy
Gigi Darcy
only seen in costume theatre
only seen in costume theatre (Anniekins, a dog)
Fitz Williams
Dr. Gardiner (a woman, only discussed)
Charlotte Lu
Maria Lu
George Wickham
Carter's Bar (location, only discussed)

Eliminated characters: Mrs. Hurst, Mr. Hurst

Locations

Pride and Prejudice

Longbourn
Netherfield
London
Hunsford
Pemberley
Brighton

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries

suburban home in California
suburban home in California
Los Angeles
Collins and Collins
Pemberley Digital, San Francisco
Las Vegas

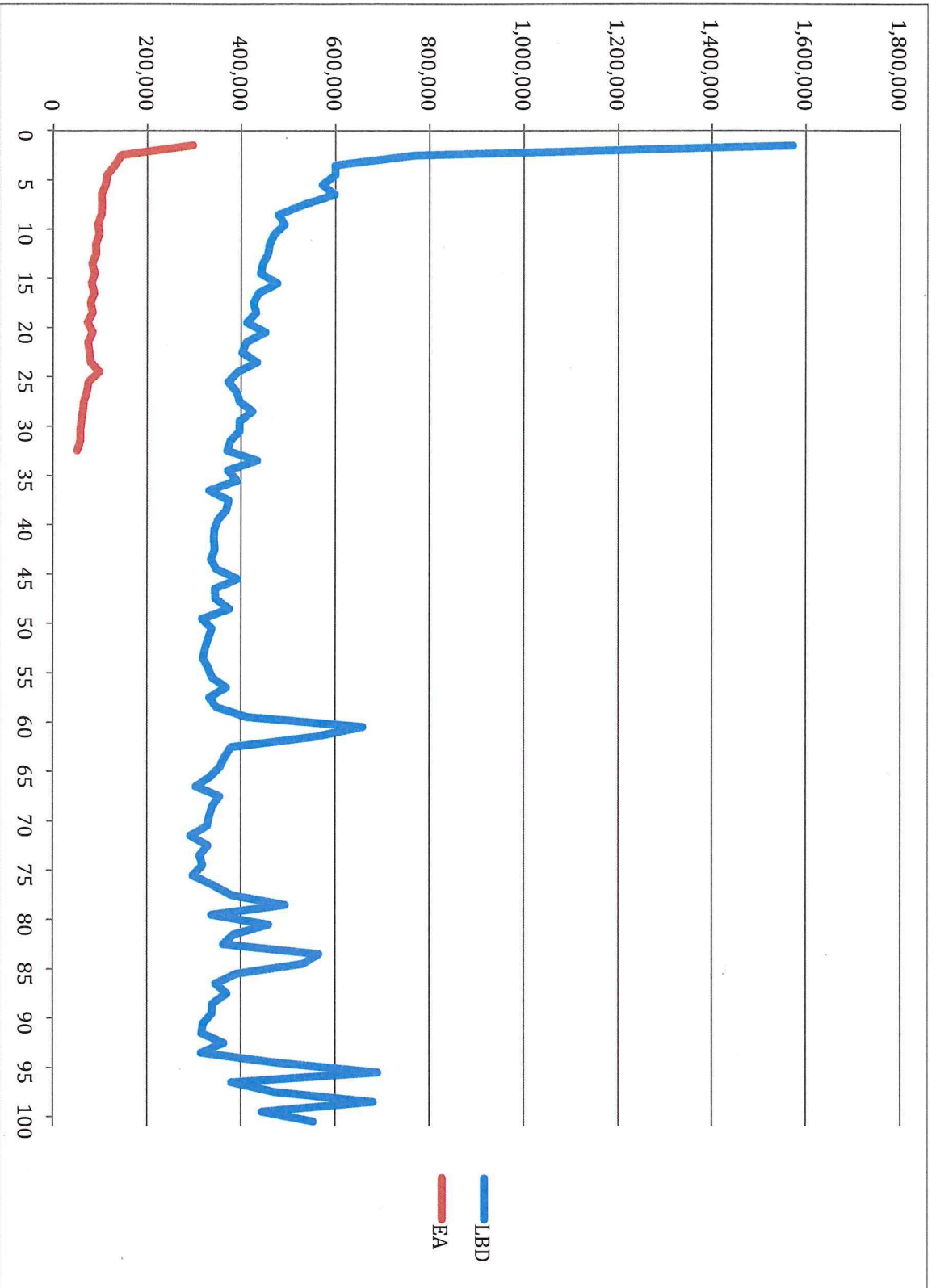
Situations

Pride and Prejudice

Elizabeth (age 20) is a gentleman's daughter
Jane (age 22) is a gentleman's daughter
Lydia (age 16) is a gentleman's daughter
Charlotte (age 27) is a gentleman's daughter
Bingley is a wealthy gentleman
Darcy is a wealthy gentleman
Jane is invited to Netherfield but gets sick
Mr. Collins is a minister
Mr. Collins holds the entail to Longbourn
Jane (sick) and Lizzie stay at Netherfield
George Wickham is in the Militia
Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth and Charlotte
Lady Catherine de Bourgh supports Hunsford
Colonel Fitzwilliam is retired from the Militia
Georgiana is delighted by Elizabeth
Lizzie disapproves of Lydia
Lydia leaves Brighton to elope with Wickham
Darcy discovers Wickham and Lydia
Darcy forces Wickham to marry Lydia
Other people save Lydia
Lady Catherine visits Longbourn to refuse consent

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries

Lizzie (age 24) is a grad student living at home
Jane (age ??) is in the fashion industry
Lydia (age 20/21) is a college student
Charlotte (age 24) edits the vlog
Bing Lee is a med student
Darcy is CEO of a company
Mrs. Bennet plots to get Jane naked at Netherfield
Ricky Collins runs Collins and Collins
Ricky and Lizzie grew up together ("betrothed in the second grade")
Jane and Lizzie stay at Netherfield as the Bennets remodel (Jane gets sick)
George is a swim coach
Ricky Collins offers a job to Elizabeth and Charlotte
Lady Catherine de Bourgh funds Collins and Collins
Fitz works with Pemberley Digital
Gigi schemes with Fitz to unite Darcy and Lizzie
Lizzie and Lydia have a significant falling-out
Lydia visits Las Vegas and gets closer to Wickham
Gigi uses Pemberley Digital technology to find Wickham
Darcy buys out the sex tape website George set up
Lydia learns, changes, and redeems herself
Caroline visits Lizzie to warn her off Darcy



Views per episode (March 2, 2014)

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