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Margaret Brennan
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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING IN THE
WORLD OF JANE AUSTEN

Margaret Brennan

Faculty Supervisor: Rachel Ramsey, Ph.D.

English Department

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Introduction

Elizabeth Bennet is more than just the protagonist of Jane Austen's classic novel *Pride and Prejudice*. She has graced the silver screen with both Colin Firth and Matthew Macfadyen as her Mr. Darcy, performed on stage, appeared as a comic book character, and even slayed zombies. Elizabeth's reputation as heroine extraordinaire has pushed her beyond Pemberley and has secured her a lasting place in contemporary pop culture, and this can be said for more of Austen's characters. Beyond the pages of the original novels, various adaptations have assisted with bringing Austen's stories into the twenty-first century and establishing her as a seemingly timeless author. Adaptations have allowed Austen to escape the ivory tower and turn into a cultural phenomenon whose stories resonate even with audiences today. As times change, so do adaptations –mediums translate stories differently depending on the culture of the present generations. For many twenty-first century Austen fans, reading a novel is not always the preferred method of storytelling. Adaptations specifically designed by and for the present generation look for cultural values in Austen's works that reflect their own and trust these values extend to the stories that are delivered. This is where transmedia storytelling comes in.

Transmedia storytelling is an opportunity for developing interactive stories involving various media, which “has grown out of the increased possibilities that come with the multifaceted developments of the ever evolving Internet” (Jandl 167). This means that multiple media platforms can be utilized to convey a single story –from videos to blog posts, tweets on Twitter or status updates on Facebook. The goal of transmedia is ultimately to have many moving parts that create one cohesive storyline, and the ways in which these pieces move and work together creates a unique, immersive story experience. Transmedia storytelling has become a hallmark of today's “readers”. Taking cultural icons like Austen and adapting her in this form

allows for her stories to be consumed in new ways. The hit YouTube series *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is a transmedia adaptation of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and offers a case study into the importance of both Austen adaptations and this new mode of adaptation in general. As Devoney Looser writes in *The Making of Jane Austen*, "that [Austen's] stories and characters have been rediscovered with each new generation suggests their amazing adaptability, if not universality" (12). Transmedia storytelling capitalizes upon this universality, bringing new insights into the novels and allowing for Austen to be reinvented for the digital generation. And just like that, Elizabeth Bennet takes on the new role of vlogger, propelling her into the digital age.

Readers, academics and fans may question this new form of adaptation – can Austen's work be translated for the online space? In Nicole Peters' article "Austen's Malleability: Fans, Adaptations, and Value Production", she notes that "Austen fandoms have problematized the boundaries between reader and object, author and character, affected and affecting" (75). There are some who believe only the original novels should be part of Austen canon; others, like Devoney Looser, insist that adaptations have led Austen to her coveted spot in today's literary history, stating "[Austen] has adapted, or, rather, many of us have adapted her, finding in her what best suits us" (217). The argument regarding the correct way to consume stories is not limited to only Austen's works, for there are many other stories that some believe should be restricted to their original form in order to be understood in the "right" way. Part of Austen's appeal should be credited to her characters' abilities to transcend the pages of her novels, and this speaks to the question of the difference between the original Austen novels and their adaptations. Can one consume the same ideas of the original novels from adaptations? Peters

insists that particularly in the day of the modern reader, there is no right way to consume stories and the adaptations are useful in the sense of their cultural relevance. She writes:

...contemporary popular Austen readers are doing something much more complicated than is often recognized within the institutional setting: they use her novels to build and reinforce a strong community and to create a hybrid way of reading and interacting with a text, while simultaneously drawing attention to the arbitrary nature of the many boundaries they occupy and confront. (Peters 75)

The notion of audience interaction with text becomes especially important in the world of Jane Austen, because it frames the basis of adaptations for the future. Understanding Austen is just as much about the fandom community as it is about the original stories and their thematic elements, so this is why the culture of the newest generation of Austen fans matters so much.

Contemporary readers are paving the way for the future of Austen, allowing for a more interactive reading experience with the tools and tech of the world today, which emphasizes the latter's importance for transmedia storytelling. If an Austen adaptation does not fit academia's protocols of a significant adaptation, this does not merit a dismissive response. The audience for Austen has rapidly moved away from academics and to the masses who approve of these new adaptations. Adaptations are successful in the ways in which they capitalize upon the culture of the generation from which they derive, and Austen adaptations reflect a cultural moment, and this is what continues to keep Austen a literary icon. With this in mind, an understanding of the relevance of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* in terms of as an Austen adaptation and as a transmedia storytelling experience can be better understood.

Pride and Prejudice for the YouTube Generation

Jane Austen's status as a literary icon is due in part to the many adaptations of her works. Over the two centuries since her death the original novels are still read by academics and general readers alike, and stage and film adaptations have allowed Austen's stories to reach audiences beyond those interested in perusing 19th century courtship narratives. From modern book adaptations to films, and now even on the free, accessible platform of YouTube, the tales of Austen's characters have found a new generation of admirers. What is next? Enter *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, a transmedia adaptation that primarily utilizes YouTube "vlog" style videos paired with social media platforms to tell a modern rendition of one of Austen's most popular works, *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth Bennet becomes Lizzie Bennet, a graduate student studying communications who is documenting her life via video blogs as part of her thesis project, and the original narrative of *Pride and Prejudice* is cleverly worked into a story fit for era of the media age. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as a modern adaptation also capitalizes on the aspects of the original novel that would resonate the most with the young audience that would be consuming the story – it targets savvy young internet users, and the series boasts a meta-narrative about social media that surprisingly has its roots in Austen's novels. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is a fiercely feminist reading of *Pride and Prejudice*, with the most important scenes and character interactions occurring between Lizzie and her sister Lydia rather than the central romance between Lizzie and William Darcy. Overall, the cast of women characters who are featured in this vlog style adaptation are continually redeemed, rewarded, and never fully vilified, and this is a fairly substantial change from the original narrative in Austen's novel. Why is this? *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* are thus a prime example of Austen being adapted to fulfill modern narrative desires, an updating of the novel that cuts loose certain uncomfortable elements in favor of highlighting what works for 21st century feminist viewers.

Those who are familiar with *Pride and Prejudice* likely know it as a courtship novel, chronicling the slow relationship between the poor but genteel Elizabeth Bennet and the proud, rich and aloof Fitzwilliam Darcy. Both display “prejudices” towards the other due to their difference in social class. Austen originates the rom-com standard device of awkward first meetings: at local dance Darcy complains to friend Bingley that no woman is suitable to dance with, remarking that Elizabeth herself “is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt [him]” (Austen 7). When Elizabeth overhears this, she decides that there “remained with no very cordial feelings towards him,” declaring Darcy to be obnoxiously pompous and proud (Austen 7). With Darcy’s attitude towards Elizabeth and hers towards him established – he’s the “abominable Mr. Darcy” –, the novel then forces Elizabeth to look beyond her initial prejudices to see Darcy anew and recognize her misconceptions (Austen 99). The novel turns on Darcy’s assistance in helping save Lydia, Elizabeth’s younger sister, after she runs off with a soldier named Wickham, a man who has close connections with the Darcy family. While visiting Darcy’s country estate, Elizabeth receives a letter from home informing her that Lydia has gone off to elope with Wickham, a scandal certain to ruin her sisters’ reputations (Austen 182). Fearing the shame this could bring her already struggling family of five unmarried and poor sisters, Elizabeth departs for home to assist in the search for Lydia before it is too late. Lydia is saved when the dastardly Wickham agrees to marry her. Darcy has paid Wickham to marry Lydia, and Lydia reveals this during a visit home. Elizabeth thus is ready to admit that her feelings towards Darcy are not what they once were, for she understands that “[Darcy] had done it for her” (Austen 218). The novel’s story ends with a marriage between Elizabeth and Darcy. Both overcome pride and prejudice to conclude the courtship novel. Elizabeth’s sister Jane also marries Mr. Bingley, Darcy’s friend,

after trials and separations. All ends well – except for Lydia who is cast off with Wickham to the north of England.

Lydia is a cautionary tale and plot device in the novel, a bit player in the larger Elizabeth and Darcy romance. Elizabeth regards her as “untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless,” all characteristics which make her seem less mature than her older sisters and likely to cause exactly the sort of trouble she does (Austen 211). Lydia is consistently portrayed as childish and unaware of her actions. In contrast to Elizabeth, who transcends her mother’s desire to marry off her daughters, Lydia can think of nothing but marriage. Lydia does not necessarily understand the repercussions of her actions and falls prey to Wickham’s advances. In his article “No Love for Lydia: The Fate of Desire in *Pride and Prejudice*,” Dennis Allen argues that “Lydia continually seeks immediate, complete gratification...[and the] elopement with Wickham [is] a synecdoche of her tendency to grasp at instant, total pleasure” (Allen 437). Lydia’s character fails to repress any feelings of desire, and constantly longs for things and puts herself into situations where she will receive pleasure for herself even if it damages her own reputation or that of her sisters. We see this when Lydia plays whist at the Philips’ house. At first, Lydia was engrossed with talking to Wickham, who was also present at the Philips’ house, but then her “being likewise extremely fond of lottery tickets, she [Lydia] soon grew too much interested in the game, too eager making bets and exclaiming after prizes, to have attention for any one in particular” (Austen 52). Though Lydia is particularly interested in investing time in Wickham because she finds him handsome, a game like whist that involves bets and prizes captivates her attention more in this moment because of the potential gains Lydia sees via her participation. Lydia’s obvious concentration on playing the game highlights her pleasure-seeking tendencies and also emphasizes her focus to be on the trivial things that bring one pleasure just for a moment.

Lydia practices no self-restraint and instead seeks self-gratification, and as Allen writes “Lydia [thus] reveals the basic danger of desire: it is antithetical to the social order” (Allen 438). While the game of whist is not necessarily linked to disrupting the social order, it acts as a metaphor for Lydia’s approach to life: she is oblivious to the consequences of risking it all for her desires. It prepares us for her hasty decision to run off with Wickham without a thought for the future – to gamble all on an unlikely bet. Lydia showcases the dangers of unrestrained desire, but her “recklessness” moves along the Elizabeth and Darcy narrative. Elizabeth’s relationship with Lydia in the novel makes it clear that Elizabeth views Lydia as a byproduct of their mother’s motives to get one of her daughters married. In response to Lady Catherine de Bourgh asking about Lydia already having debuted in society, Elizabeth remarks that she thinks “it would be very hard upon younger sisters, that they should not have their share of society and amusement because the elder may not have the means or inclination to marry early. – The last born has as good a right to the pleasures of youth, as the first” (Austen 113). In this way, Elizabeth is subtly conveying that she thinks her mother allowing Lydia to “come out” as a lady in society as an early teen has somewhat robbed her of her childhood, for while Lydia enjoys being a part of society she is still so young and naïve. In the novel, Elizabeth rarely shows affection for her youngest sister either, and instead views Lydia as silly and incapable of understanding the consequences of her actions. When Elizabeth rushes home from Pemberley after catching word of Lydia and Wickham’s elopement, she finds Lydia’s situation worse than she thought, for there was no hint of marriage and Wickham is in debt. Lydia’s elopement also provides an opportunity for Darcy to rescue her for Elizabeth and saves the Bennet family from shame by paying off Wickham to marry Lydia, thus securing a place in Elizabeth’s heart and

paving way to their eventual union by the novel's end. Darcy, and Elizabeth for that matter, both take actions for the best interest of others.

It is not fair to discuss Lydia's scandal with Wickham before first delving into the relationship between Wickham and Elizabeth, for before Lydia had set her sights on Wickham it was Elizabeth who initially engaged in courtship-like behavior with him. Wickham is first introduced as a soldier the Bennet sisters see while they are in Meryton, and Wickham is described as "[having] all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address" (Austen 49). Elizabeth sits next to him the next evening at a dinner party at the Phillips', and she is immediately charmed by his conversation and company. What really interests Elizabeth, though, is Wickham's obvious tension with Darcy, which she notices when Darcy and Bingley encounter Wickham in Meryton – the pair share a look Elizabeth could only describe as strange. Wickham confides his version of the drama that went down between him and Darcy – that Darcy did not honor his father's request to give Wickham some of the Darcy estate – and this further fuels Elizabeth's already vehement dislike of Darcy, believing that Wickham "had given a very rational account of [what had happened]" (Austen 57). Though the community agrees with Elizabeth's sympathy for Wickham, her aunt Gardiner warns Elizabeth that a relationship with Wickham would not be well for the Bennet family because he lacks money (Austen 98). It is then clear to Elizabeth that Wickham has already set his interest on Miss King, a young lady in town who recently inherited ten thousand pounds, and Elizabeth claims to be upset about the whole affair (Austen 103). Even before Elizabeth learns the truth about Wickham through Darcy's letter, she does not devote her passion so strongly to Wickham that she finds herself in a disastrous relationship with him. Though Wickham is charming and attractive, Elizabeth fiercely proclaims that she "is not in love with Mr. Wickham" and recovers

when his attention strays to Miss King (Austen 99). Elizabeth falls prey to his charm, but upon discovering the truth of his character she is able to see Wickham for who he really is.

Importantly, Elizabeth was able to push initial thoughts of a courtship with Wickham to the side before she knew just how vile his character was because she sees the broader picture and can resist her desire for pleasure. Where Lydia becomes the victim of immediate desire and gratification time and time again, Elizabeth is more restrained and understands how her actions could affect her family, such as when she heeds Aunt Gardiner's advice about Wickham's lack of fortune. Elizabeth's relationship with Wickham is meant to exemplify her sensibility and to contrast with Lydia's instantaneous, blind desire for Wickham.

While they are different in many regards, Elizabeth and Darcy both operate by way of protecting those they care about, particularly their families. Where this is obvious for Elizabeth, as seen in her immediate return home to assist with the Lydia situation, Darcy too is willing to take action when those he cares for are in danger. After rejecting his proposal, Elizabeth receives a letter from Darcy in which he provides her with the true reason behind his ill relationship with Wickham: Wickham attempted to seduce his younger sister Georgiana to gain her fortune, because he had already spent an inheritance given to him by Darcy and was rejected when he asked for more (Austen 136-137). Darcy writes in his letter that "regard for [his] sister's credit and feelings prevented any public exposure" of the matter with Wickham, but left Wickham free to pursue others (Austen 137). Darcy assists with subduing Wickham after he attempts the same with Lydia, and this time he acts for the protection of Elizabeth and her family. Though initially believed to be two very different individuals, beneath the façade of their respective social classes Elizabeth and Darcy inherently operate for the benefit of those who they care for. When Elizabeth realizes this, "she began...to comprehend that [Darcy] was exactly the man, who, in

disposition and talents, would most suit her,” which thus emphasizes how she came to return the feelings Darcy expressed towards her. (Austen 209)

The relationship between Lydia and Wickham, in contrast to Elizabeth and Darcy, is based on self-gratification. Lydia’s focus is on the glamour of being with Wickham, while Wickham uses her as a way to escape the debts he would be leaving behind. Upon marrying Wickham, Lydia’s “good spirits increased” and she enjoyed “[showing off] her ring and boast[ing] of being married” (Austen 212). Lydia seems ignorant of the shame she very nearly brought upon her family through her recklessness, instead enamored and distracted by everything “her dear Wickham” seems to be to her (Austen 213). Wickham, for his part, seems content with the marriage, but it is clear that this is due to the monetary compensation he received for actually marrying Lydia rather than eloping with her. Elizabeth also picks up on the fact that “Wickham’s affection for Lydia, was just what Elizabeth had expected to find it; not equal to Lydia’s for him” (Austen 212). He was not adverse to having a companion, but it is obvious to anyone who has paid attention that Wickham values money over love. The Lydia and Wickham relationship creates an opposite narrative to the Elizabeth and Darcy relationship, for theirs operates on selfish desire whereas Elizabeth and Darcy desire things for others.

In many of the more prominent *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations, the narrative revolving around Lydia remains the same. The 1995 BBC miniseries adaptation starring Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle depicts Lydia as an “empty-headed [twit]” according to John J. O’Connor for *The New York Times* (O’Connor). In the 2005 film starring Kiera Knightly and Matthew Macfadyen, Stephen Holden writes for the *Times* that the interpretation of Lydia in the film “offers an amusing caricature of teenage idiocy and entitlement” (Holden). Both reviewers have particularly harsh words for Lydia – calling her a “twit” and demoting her to the posterchild of

“teenage idiocy” insisting that Lydia’s character cannot be moved beyond those notions. Though these are just two of the more well-known examples, Lydia’s character is hardly ever granted redemption from her rashness. Especially in adaptations that are not attempting any sort of modern twist on elements of the original narrative, Lydia remains just as silly, unabashed, and naïve as she does in the novel.

Then arrives the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, a 2012 YouTube series created by Hank Green and Bernie Su. The *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* has a unique format in comparison to previous *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations – the primary avenue for the story utilizes video blogs, each timed from three to eight minutes. These short videos were posted serially between April 2012 and March 2013, so that viewers could quickly consume a small bit of the story and return weekly for new content on the YouTube channel. The premise behind the video blogs is that Lizzie Bennet (Elizabeth Bennet) played by Ashely Clements is a communications graduate student producing them with the assistance of her best friend Charlotte Lu (Charlotte Lucas) played by Julia Cho for her thesis project. While the focus is obviously on Lizzie, various other characters make on-screen appearances including Lydia played by Mary Kate Wiles, who is the modern version of her original *Pride and Prejudice* character: she becomes the bubbly, obnoxious party girl who is quickly a chaotic presence in the video diaries. These other characters interact with the story beyond guest appearances in Lizzie’s vlogs through various social media accounts, thus creating a story that is comprised of multiple smaller pieces of media that create one larger detailed narrative. The main narrative in the video blogs initially mirrors that of the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, with eligible bachelor Bing Lee (Mr. Bingley) played by Christopher Sean moving into a mansion in Netherfield and the off-screen but just as overbearing Mrs. Bennet getting excited about an opportunity to marry off one of her three daughters: her beautiful and gentle

eldest, Jane; headstrong and opinionated Lizzie; or her colorful, girlishly crazy youngest, Lydia. With Bing Lee comes his vindictive sister Caroline Lee and best friend William Darcy, who is described by Lizzie as “boring, stuffy, [and] unbelievably rude” after they first meet at the Gibson wedding (LBD Episode 6, 0:23). All of the crucial narrative points are for the most part adapted by the series into a modern version of what takes place in the novel – for example, Elizabeth turning down Mr. Collins’ marriage proposal instead becomes Lizzie refusing a high-paying job at his online video company, which Charlotte ends up accepting much like how in the novel Charlotte marries Mr. Collins. One of the biggest changes in the series was the reduction of the five Bennet sisters to three, with Kitty Bennet becoming Lydia’s adoring cat and Mary becoming a cynical cousin that Lydia grows close to. With this change, however, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was able to focus more carefully on the relationships among Jane, Lizzie, and Lydia, setting up the sisterly relationship to take the forefront of the story as the characters go through the trials and tribulations of a modern *Pride and Prejudice*.

Lydia’s portrayal in the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* begins as would be expected from the track record of other *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations – she seems shallow, self-absorbed, and interested in doing only the things that please her. It is clear that upon accidentally walking in on her older sister Lizzie filming her first video that Lydia is more than interested in the idea of being a YouTube star, and her initial appearances in the diaries make her out to be attention-obsessed and self-involved. In Episode 2, Lizzie takes the time to introduce her web audience to her sisters, and in reference to Lydia says that “we’re [the Bennet family] all very proud she’s now too old to be on any reality shows about having babies in high school,” conveying that Lydia is a reckless young woman who engages in youthful antics frequently (LBD Episode 2, 1:05). It is clear that Lizzie is often frustrated with said antics of Lydia, for she often wears an

exasperated expression on her face with Lydia enters a video uninvited or when she recounts a story of something that Lydia has done. This is the Lydia those who are familiar with the original narrative are expecting – despite being portrayed in the 21st century, Lydia is still a depiction of a reckless youth. However, as the narrative develops in this version Lydia ends up redeemed and self-aware, and the development of her relationship with Lizzie takes precedent over any other relationship in the series.

The episodes surrounding *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* adaptation of the Netherfield Ball especially exemplify Lizzie's initial dismissal of Lydia as anything more than a mindless party girl. After Jane spends the night at Bing Lee's house following the party, Lizzie spends some time "contemplating the loss of [her] beloved sister" to what she sees as an eventual marriage to Bing (LBD Episode 23, 3:13). When Lydia interrupts the video and reminds Lizzie with a hug that she will always have her, Lizzie sarcastically remarks "Oh, lucky me, I get to keep the boy-crazy, completely irresponsible substance abuser" (LBD Episode 23, 3:22). Immediately after this remark it is clear that Lydia is hurt by Lizzie's words, but she makes no effort to challenge them. This instance of interiority on Lydia's part despite the vlog being from Lizzie's perspective makes her appear more human than her original counterpart. In the novel when Lydia is ridiculed by Elizabeth, there is no instance that she is aware of her sister's response and Lydia seems aloof to everyone's perceptions of her and her actions. Lydia's sisterly love towards Lizzie is also emphasized when Lydia gives Lizzie the necklace she thought to have lost at the party the night before, and this small gesture of kindness shocks Lizzie so much that she remarks, "What have you done with my baby sister?" (LBD Episode 23, 4:15). *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* makes a conscious effort to make Lydia seem more layered beyond the party girl

stereotype, and makes her desire to be loved and accepted by Lizzie who initially fails to see her as a more complex character.

The focus on the sisterly relationship in the series also allows for Jane to play a more prominent role beyond just the eventual marriage partner to Mr. Bingley. While Jane and Bing Lee go on their own journey over the duration of the series, Jane's relationship with Lizzie juxtaposes with Lizzie's relationship with Lydia, emphasizing Lizzie's prejudice against everything she believes her youngest sister to be. Jane, ever kind, is always there to reel Lizzie in and remind her to be kinder to Lydia, and is the only one who seems to see initially Lydia as only ever wanting to have approval from everyone, especially Lizzie. It is evident from Jane's first appearance in the series that Lizzie thinks the world of her older sister, referring to her as "practically perfect in every way" (LBD Episode 2, 1:19). These descriptions of Jane are very different than the ways Lizzie refers to Lydia, constantly harping on her promiscuity and recklessness.

Lydia's relationship with Wickham also marks the emotional climax of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* narrative, and highlights the series' overall value of the relationship between Lydia and Lizzie over the Lizzie and Darcy romance. Instead of an elopement threatening the reputation of both Lydia and the rest of the Bennet family, Lydia has now gone off with Wickham and recorded a sex tape which Wickham decides to leak online (LBD Episode 84). Initially, Lizzie believes that Lydia is aware of the site and that she was complicit in the release of the video, and then upon confronting Lydia about it discovers that the video is being posted without Lydia's consent (LBD Episode 85, 3:51). Lydia's frantic, emotional insistence that "this is not happening" upon the discovery of the site counting down to the release of the video emphasizes that while appearances may make her out to be rash and impulsive, she is also young and

susceptible to the actions of a master manipulator in the form of George Wickham (LBD Episode 85 4:17). In one of the following episodes, Lizzie takes time to watch Lydia's own vlogs and understand her younger sister on a level she never took the time to previously, admitting that "it's like [her] sister is a person [she's] never met" (LBD Episode 87 0:10). Lizzie comes to an understanding that her own pride did not allow her to see Lydia as more than her antics. Episode 87 marks a turning point for Lizzie and Lydia's relationship, where they reconcile their past differences and agree to start anew in their relationship. It also emphasizes Lydia's victim status when Lydia states that the reason she let Wickham film her at all was because he said "that [she] didn't love him as much as he loved [her] and [she] needed to prove it" (LBD Episode 87 5:20). Lizzie's insistence that Lydia "[doesn't] deserve this" rewrites Lydia's arc in a way that allows her to be redeemed for any of her previous mistakes, which is a significant departure from the novel's Lydia storyline.

Lydia's growth and eventual redemption by *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries'* end creates a far more feminist narrative than its source material allows. Where *Pride and Prejudice* Lydia is allowed "no love" as Dennis Allen would say, *LBD's* Lydia is loved fiercely by her sisters and by the audience alike who have watched her overcome her self-destructive behaviors and survive an emotionally abusive relationship with Wickham. It is a narrative that works for an era in which the series is being produced – an initially unlikable female character is given a redemption arc that allows her to be viewed as a byproduct of the society in which she has been placed, and in Lydia's case this means a household that does not take her seriously because of her promiscuous and irresponsible behavior. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* seems to be a feminist reading of *Pride and Prejudice*, where allowances are made for female characters who are not given the same chance at redemption within the original narrative. With the Lydia and Lizzie

relationship marking the one of the most poignant and memorable scenes of the series, it pushes all thoughts of favoring the courtship narrative to the side to suggest that sisterly relationships in this reading are far more important.

Beyond Lydia's redemption, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* alters the endgame result for many of the female characters to give them some sort of autonomy or redemption that was not necessarily allowed for them by Austen's original novel. This is not to say Austen did not allow happy endings for her female characters beyond Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*: Jane gets married to the sweet Mr. Bingley and Charlotte Lucas benefits from her marriage to Mr. Collins which also rescues her from spinster status. These endings, however, are altered in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* to be more satisfying in terms of what a modern audience would want. Jane by the end of the vlog series has shown tremendous growth as an individual character, and when Bing Lee arrives to make amends they are strictly on Jane's terms. They do not immediately reinstate their relationship, but upon Jane's insistence to take things one day at a time due to how much they have changed since their time apart she allows Bing back into her life (LBD Episode 92). While Jane's ending in the novel is satisfying due to her marrying Mr. Bingley, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* works more for modern audiences because Jane's control over where the relationship with Bing goes. She made no room for guarantees that things will work out between them despite how they both feel towards each other, and this is because within the narrative of the vlogs she was able to grow independently and not as just a potential marriage partner to Bing.

Charlotte's ending in the vlogs is also far more satisfying. To start, she does not end up married to Mr. Collins, which is already a better fate than what she gets in the novel. Instead, she accepts Mr. Collins' proposal to be his business partner at his online video company Collins & Collins, taking advantage of, as she says, "an amazing and lucrative opportunity" (LBD Episode

42, 1:55). Very quickly from the time Charlotte begins working at Collins & Collins it is clear that she runs the show for the socially inept Mr. Collins, who finds her “forethought” to only rival that of his venture capitalist funder Catherine de Bourgh (LBD Episode 51, 3:59). By the last episode in the series, Charlotte has been put in charge of the entire Collins & Collins company, an exponential step in her career growth (LBD Episode 100, 1:44). This change in Charlotte’s character arc makes Charlotte a more dynamic character, for she is not merely benefitting from a marriage that will keep her stable as in the novel but is earning money and a reputation for herself in her chosen career field of online video. This change for Charlotte especially signifies *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*’ efforts to champion the female characters of *Pride and Prejudice*, for she is given opportunities beyond marriage and the advantage of career goals.

At first glance, Caroline Bingley hews closely to the novel. In the novel, Caroline is not thrilled with her brother’s growing attachment towards Jane Bennet, and Elizabeth even tells Jane that “Miss Bingley sees that her brother is in love with [Jane], and wants him to marry Miss Darcy. She follows him into town in the hope of keeping him there, and tries to persuade [Jane] that he does not care about [her]” (Austen 82). Best put by Elizabeth, Caroline Bingley’s attitude towards the Bennet sisters is that of “pretended regard” (Austen 235). Caroline is polite, but by the novel’s end even Jane can tell that it is a façade for her deep-rooted annoyance towards her brother’s continued affiliation with the poor Bennet family. In *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, Caroline Lee follows suit – though she does not make an in-person appearance on Lizzie’s video blogs right away, Lizzie is initially suspicious of Caroline’s kindness towards the Bennets and the audience is given a clearer picture of Caroline’s behavior once Charlotte does a rather snobby impression of her in Episode 15. However, Lizzie even starts to like Caroline once she and Jane stay at Bing’s Netherfield mansion, saying to Caroline that “[she’s] sorry [she] misjudged

[Caroline]” (LBD Episode 27, 3:36). This opinion is rescinded when Bing moves to LA without warning, taking Caroline and Darcy with him, and attempts to reach out via Caroline result in vague answers that suggest Lizzie was right about her all along. This is even further confirmed through a final confrontation between Lizzie and Caroline, with Caroline showing up at the Bennet house and telling Lizzie that she has “ruined [her] brother’s life,” blaming Lizzie for Bing and Jane’s reconciliation (LBD Episode 95, 1:16). There also comes the reveal that Caroline was involved with Jane’s “indiscretion” at Bing’s birthday party that lead to Bing leaving town suddenly (LBD Episode 95, 4:04). At first glance this episode serves to solidify the audience’s dislike for Caroline, but Caroline is given a more understandable motive than her novel counterpart for acting the way she does. In the novel, it appears Caroline only cares about how Mr. Bingley and Jane come from different financial backgrounds, but in the vlogs Lizzie realizes Caroline acted vindictively “because [she] didn’t want to lose [Bing]” to his and Jane’s relationship (LBD Episode 95, 4:50). Though this does not absolve Caroline from all of her manipulation, it does provide her with realistic motivation and garners sympathy. Lizzie realizes that Caroline does not want to lose her brother, much like how earlier in the series Lizzie did not want Charlotte to take the job at Collins & Collins because she did not want to lose her. Ultimately Caroline is awarded more of an allowance for her actions than in the book, and furthers *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* narrative of redeeming the female characters where Austen herself did not.

So what does this mean for *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as an adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*? Devoney Looser writes in her book *The Making of Jane Austen* about how “[Austen] has been adapted, or, rather, many of us have adapted her, finding in her what best suits us” (217). Austen adaptations continue to happen because of the realism in her stories, and Looser’s

thesis insists that Austen's works are moldable to whatever a specific audience would resonate with. For the current times, a story that champions its women and their relationships with the ones they love was a necessary adaptation for the story to be successful. A lack of redemption for Lydia, especially after falling for Wickham's manipulation, would seem unprogressive for an era that places an emphasis on protecting women stuck in abusive relationships. Jane and Bing ending up together with no issues despite all they have gone through would feel unsatisfying, whereas the place that their relationship ends up at the end of the series seems realistic and shows that relationships take work. Charlotte is rewarded for being a loyal and hardworking young woman in the male-dominated media field, and Caroline is not painted as being simply a mean girl but given a legitimate grievance due to her love for her brother. While Lizzie and Darcy's eventual relationship is incredibly satisfying to viewers, it is clear from the multitude of YouTube comments that the most powerful part of the series seems to be Lizzie's relationships with her sisters and friends. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* reimagines *Pride and Prejudice* in such a way that it anticipates audience issues with the original novel and transforms them into realistic, with-the-times circumstances that makes the vlog series one for the modern era.

The Appeal of Multiple Platforms – *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as a Transmedia Adaptation

What exactly is transmedia storytelling, and why can it be considered the future of literary adaptations? Henry Jenkins, the Provost Professor of Communication, Cinematic Arts and Education at the University of Southern California, mentions on his blog that “transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (Jenkins). A narrative is dissected across multiple media in order to create one cohesive story with various moving parts. There is no limit as to what sort of media

can be utilized when one turns to the freedom of social media – various platforms can be incorporated into a narrative structure and allow for instantaneous audience responses, and because social media is free it is also easily accessible to anyone with internet access. All of the moving parts of transmedia storytelling help to make it an overall unique way to present a story – the audience must keep up with the interplay of every platform being used in order to grasp the full scope of the story, and this makes the consumption of a story presented in this way far more interesting and unique than other adaptations like it. The more one keeps up with the various platforms utilized, the richer the story they consume – depending on the narrative’s dependence on all the additional media platforms, this could result in different narrative possibilities if one is not keeping up with all parts of the story.

In Peter Gutierrez’s article “Every Platform Tells a Story: Transmedia Has the Power to Make Any Topic More Personal and Vivid,” he writes that “when done thoughtfully, transmedia isn’t about exploiting trendy new platforms...rather, it allows participation in a narrative in powerful and original ways” (34). The primary focus of any story being told in the transmedia format is to create a story that truly immerses the reader, allowing the story to become something that they, too, have a part in. The world of the internet has always been interactive, and those who choose to utilize it can do what they want with the online resources at their fingertips. Active participation is one of the most significant shifts when it comes to the difference between transmedia storytelling and traditional storytelling, for utilizing interactive media platforms allows an audience to become invested in a story in a new way. This focus on active participation while “reading” stems from the ideology of reader response theory, which Patricia Harkin states in her “The Reception of Reader-Response Theory” is when “readers make meaning...[and] engage in an active process of production-in-use in which texts of all kinds...are received by

their audiences not as a repository of stable meaning but as an invitation to make it” (413). The meaning of the work is thus dependent on what a reader takes from it, rather than what was intended by a creator. Devoney Looser argues that Austen adaptations allow audiences to take what they need from the novels to create something new, and within the realm of transmedia storytelling audiences take what they need to get the most out of the storytelling experience and thus make meaning for themselves.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries has already been established as a transmedia adaptation of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, but how exactly are various forms of media integrated into Lizzie’s story? The YouTube channel “The Lizzie Bennet Diaries” offers the main platform so the audience can readily access the one-hundred primary episodes of the series. In their “The Lizzie Bennet Diaries: Adapting Jane Austen in the Internet Age” Silke Jandl argues since the show was “produced specifically for a YouTube audience, the story is told in a series of videos restricted to only a few minutes at a time” (Jandl 174). While these quick videos initially may seem like they do not allow for the entirety of the story to be conveyed, Jandl insists that “the vlog format, by being comparatively inexpensive, has enabled the creators to take the time necessary for telling the story” (Jandl 174). The series is no big-budget production, rather shot as if it truly were a graduate student’s vlog with a single camera on only a handful of sets over the course of the one-hundred main episodes. On top of this, episodes were released twice a week between April 2012 to March 2013 and mirror the year-long narrative of the novel, which spaced out the content enough to not require a high budget since they could continue development on the episodes as they were coming out. When content was released was entirely up to the showrunners and based on audience engagement while giving them time to work on central story arcs that would be more important in later episodes. The core narrative told via the video blogs

“ultimately amount to more than seven hours of content” and this number does not include the various social media platforms and spin-off videos also at play during the story (Jandl 174).

Jandl discusses in their piece the way different media platforms are utilized in the narrative:

YouTube...provides audiovisual content, while Twitter is restricted to short and often elliptic personal comments and short text-based conversations. Lookbook is a visually oriented platform consisting of photographs and short captions. Tumblr allows the collection, manipulation and commentary of creative content...the sum of all of these activities is supposed to be representative of the users personality (Jandl 184).

Social media is a key component in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* narrative to convey some form of authenticity to the characters. The various posts made on all of these platforms are scheduled to be released at certain times to convey how the narrative is occurring in “real-time” and allows for audience members to feel more invested in the characters of the series due to their realism and mirrors an idea of the novel. Showrunners insist the story can be enjoyed without participating in the various transmedia elements, but insist that “these additions [via the various social media platforms and extra videos] not only contributed in some ways to characterization but also to plot” (Jandl 185). Beyond the primary platform of YouTube, social media enriches the story experience by developing characters’ personalities beyond what is seen in the vlogs and providing hints of what is to come upon the next video, if being followed in real time. Social media provides insight to character personalities and mirrors the free indirect discourse Austen used in her novels, where the narrator provides “comments” in the voice of certain characters but they are not quotes. Laura Mooneyham White discusses how free indirect discourse functions for Austen in her “Discerning Voice through *Austen Said*: Free Indirect Discourse, Coding, and Interpretive (Un)Certainty” stating:

Because [free indirect discourse] always blends the speech of the narrator with that of a character, it creates opportunities for tremendous narrative flexibility, as narrative voice can vary in terms of how closely it mimics the language of characters, and a narrator can make ironic points at a character's expense even as the narration seems to let characters speak or think for themselves (White).

The various social media accounts thus provide a "mimicry" of the character's voices through what they post, tweet, and comment on, not providing a direct quote but allowing their personalities to come through nonetheless. The transmedia scope of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* capitalizes on this aspect already present in Austen's original novel, utilizing a new form of indirect discourse through multiple media platforms to provide a richer narrative.

The use of these various internet platforms also allows for a variety of audience engagement opportunities – *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* allows for a type of interactivity that is considered the first of its kind. Jandl writes that for *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, "audience involvement includes pressing the 'like button', sharing the videos, creating fan art and writing fan fiction and choosing to immerse themselves more fully into the story by seeking out additional content provided transmedially" (189). The series debuted online, so anyone with access could get involved in the story, generating a high-level of involvement that led "adjustments to be made according to commonly expressed preferences and suggestions of viewers" (Jandl 189). For example Lydia Bennet, portrayed by Mary Kate Wiles, quickly became a fan favorite, and thus the writers of the show began to make her character a larger presence in the series by including spin-off vlogs on the YouTube channel "The Lydia Bennet" that provided more detail to the Lydia plotline (Jandl 189). Question and answer videos, popular amongst actual YouTube vloggers, are also another opportunity for audience engagement, and all

but one planted question from the showrunners have been from fans, which offer opportunity to learn more about the characters on an audience member's terms (Jandl 189).

Of course, all this engagement with the narrative poses questions to authenticity, since the series is adapting the narrative arc from Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Those familiar with the original novel or even any of the movie adaptations can predict what will happen as the vlogs continue – Lizzie will eventually realize her prejudices against Darcy as she grows to know him; Jane and Bing will end up together, as will Charlotte and Collins; and Lydia will run off with Wickham. The comment sections on the videos and the social media feeds the characters are supposedly “scrolling” through are full of spoiler material, from advising Lizzie of Wickham's true intentions to revealing the contents of Darcy's letter when Lizzie refuses to do so on screen. Do these characters, posed as real people, truly not see any of the conversations going down in the comments on the videos when they claim to read through them? With the authenticity aspect to be one of the most unique characteristics of the show, it is a valid question to ask. To Jandl, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is aware of these potential issues and merely asking that fans suspend their disbelief from time to time despite the show's active concern “with maintaining its air of authenticity” (182). One way that the show “regains authenticity” as Jandl puts it is having the characters reference said comments – Lizzie's stubborn enough about her Darcy opinions that it makes sense that she would disregard any advice to reconsider her evaluation of his character, and Lydia flat out mentions how the viewers of her side vlog seemed “judgy” about her hanging out with Wickham (Jandl 182). With this sort of project, it is near impossible to eliminate every threat to the series' air of authenticity if it is going to be released onto platforms that foster community engagement, so it is understandable that some suspension of disbelief is required if one is to fully immerse themselves within the narrative. A “willing suspension of disbelief,” the

term coined by romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is necessary. Michael Tomko writes in his “Politics, Performance, and Coleridge’s “Suspension of Disbelief”” that “aesthetic reception is predicated on an active gift of self...[and] this gift entails an openness” which allows one to see what the work is intended to show them (244). This ideology works for both Austen fans rediscovering *Pride and Prejudice* through transmedia and those entirely new to the story – in order to accept the story in its best form, one must suspend their disbelief to dispel any cognitive dissonance once feels with certain aspects. Returning Austen fans are ready to do this, since they are already familiar with the novel’s ending and understand that to enjoy this unique “reread” they must be willing to accept details which otherwise seem inauthentic. They will accept *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as a modern take and subsequently suspend their disbelief even if aspects of the narrative do not seem plausible. For new fans, an eagerness for story engagement allows them to suspend their disbelief, for the transmedia platform provides an outlet to “personally” connect with characters in a way that disbelief would hinder. Both groups are more fixated on appreciating the story as it is being presented rather than digging for narrative issues with the transmedia form. This aspect is a fundamental difference from any previous film or stage adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* – *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* inhabits multiple worlds as does the audience, and subsequently makes the series a unique “reading” experience.

Another important aspect about the transmedia narrative *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* presents is the metacommentary it provides about the usage of technology. The series is both a modern reproduction of the Austen’s tale and a cautionary tale for the ways one utilizes various media platforms, due to the widespread of information on the internet and the lack of privacy once something is posted on the online space, due to the potential foreverness of the internet. Lizzie Bennet is a mass communications graduate student, so it only makes sense that she has

conversations about the way her own content is being communicated – this aspect of the series really begins come Episode 29, “Ethics of Seeing Bing”. The vlog that precedes this one takes place in Bing Lee’s Netherfield mansion while Jane and Lizzie are staying there, and while Jane is filming a video message to send to Charlotte she is interrupted by none other than Bing Lee himself. Lizzie posts the Jane-Bing screen time as one of her vlogs that week, for at this point in the series Bing has only been discussed on screen by various characters or represented by Lizzie’s comedic costume theatre caricatures. While exciting for the audience to finally see a character who has become so central to the Bennet sisters’ story, in terms of authenticity it raises a red flag – Bing consented to being filmed because he believed the video clip Jane was filming would only be sent to Charlotte. He did not consent to the video being posted online for Lizzie’s many subscribers, nor did he even know of the video diaries’ existence. Jandl writes in their piece that “the problem is that Bing Lee does not and cannot know about Lizzie’s video project. Were he to find out about the blog prematurely, the misunderstanding between him and Jane, which is crucial for the plot, could not be realized” (Jandl 182-183). It was essential to the plot to keep Bing unaware of Lizzie’s videos, despite affecting the overall authenticity of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as an attempt to come across as real, and in this instance it was turned into an opportunity for the writers to comment on why it really is not a good idea to post things online without consent. Lizzie acknowledges that the posting of the Bing footage “crossed some sort of ethical line” because he does not know of the diaries’ existence, despite the justification that it is the sort of content her audience has been dying to see (LBD Episode 29, 0:28). Though she debates taking down the video (as well as editing out pieces of later vlogs that include footage of those who are unaware of the videos), ultimately the content remains posted because without it there would be a piece missing in terms of the narrative. However, at least by having Lizzie

acknowledge the ethical implications of what should and should not be posted online allows her character to provide a teaching moment to the audience.

While the ethics of privacy seem prevalent for the technological age, this aspect of the series can also be viewed as derived from the way gossip is spread in the original novel. The world of Elizabeth Bennet as Austen created it in *Pride and Prejudice* is full of gossip, of which the character's reputations seem to be dependent on. When it comes to learning about Mr. Bingley at the novel's beginning, the Bennets must rely on "the second-hand intelligence of their neighbor Lady Lucas...[and] her report [of Mr. Bingley] was highly favorable" (Austen 5). As an eligible bachelor with a sizable fortune, Mr. Bingley became the primary topic of gossip and it seemed clear that many townsfolk (especially those with unmarried daughters) were grasping for information from any source other than the man in question. There was also the report of Mr. Bingley bringing "twelve ladies and seven gentlemen" to the local dance, which was initially received as a grievance to the Bennet sisters until the rumor was proved to be false (Austen 6). The gossip surrounding Mr. Bingley defined his character until he was formally introduced, and though this particular instance of gossip was relatively harmless, it emphasized just how gossip functions in their society as a never-ending, swift cycle. Another link is the ethics of sharing private information, and in the novel this takes shape primarily through the sharing of letters. A notable example of this is Elizabeth sharing the contents of Darcy's letter with Jane, focusing on the portion regarding the truth of George Wickham's character (Austen 151). Darcy's letter is one that was hand delivered to Elizabeth, likely to prevent it from getting sent elsewhere due to the sensitivity of the content matter. Letters are just as "private" as the internet – meaning the information within could just as easily be spread around if one is not careful. And, indeed, sharing of letters was a regular occurrence. Darcy trusts Elizabeth to keep his letter private, and

Elizabeth shares with Jane because as her sister she trusts her. Other characters or even other residents of their town may not keep such salacious information to themselves if they were given such a letter due to the culture of gossip in town – this is noticeable when Mr. Collins sends a letter to the Bennets after Lydia runs off with Wickham and it is clear he’s gossiped about the scandal (Austen 198). In this way the commentary provided by *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* on the usage of technology for sharing information has its roots in the novel.

The series also provides commentary for the highly edited, limited perspective of the online sphere. Lizzie Bennet is the title character of the series, so naturally audiences are inclined to trust her word because it is her story. However, both those who are familiar with her character’s source material and those who watch the first few episodes of the series are quick to realize Lizzie’s prejudices – she sees things the way she wants to see them, and therefore they must be correct. Costume theatre is a technique utilized by the series to truly convey Lizzie’s perspective on the various other characters of the narrative, especially her mother who is an off-screen presence for the entire series. Because the vlog format is already limited to championing the perspective of whoever vlog it is, the costume theatre segments provide a hilarious take on Lizzie’s perspective while also highlighting her flawed view. The use of costume theatre can also be in reference to Austen’s usage of free indirect discourse, for Lizzie is the narrator in question “speaking” for the other characters in her dramatized perception of their voices and personalities. Upon her first meeting of Darcy, Lizzie is quick to paint him as a monotone, robotic man who “dislike[s] smiling [because] it contorts the face” (LBD Episode 6, 2:09). It is a humorous portrayal meant to entertain the viewers, but Lizzie insists it is not far from the truth unless made to admit otherwise. When the audience finally gets to see Darcy on screen in Episode 60, it is clear there is some truth to Lizzie’s portrayal – he is articulate to the point of sounding mildly

robotic and his words convey a sense of arrogance. In the following episode, Darcy tells Lizzie he has finally watched her videos, noting that “[she] called him a robot. And a Newsie” (LBD Episode 61, 2:40). To being directly confronted by someone who she had exaggeratedly portrayed on the vlogs, Lizzie is quick to admit that her words “probably [were not] the best descriptor[s]” that she could have chosen, and how she took certain aspects of his character and “just ran with it” (LBD Episode 61, 2:44). This is a prime example of the vlog and online format allowing creators to selectively show the “truth”. Content can be edited or exaggerated for the purpose of entertainment, and it is hard to feel guilty when one is sitting behind a screen, hence why Lizzie only really fully reconsiders her portrayal of Darcy once he has a conversation with her in person. The series attempts to alert viewers early on that Lizzie is not always the most reliable narrator when Episode 15 features Charlotte and Jane setting the record straight on events from a previous episode due to them feeling as though “Lizzie isn’t being particularly...comprehensive with her commentary regarding recent events” (LBD Episode 15, 0:21). Though they are not invalidating Lizzie’s emotions in regards to how she feels events went down, Jane and especially Charlotte are eager to remind Lizzie’s audience that the vlogs only highlight the aspects of the narrative that Lizzie wants to talk about, not every little detail. These moments in the series provide metacommentary on sensationalizing events online for the benefit of entertainment, and how what is seen on the internet should not always be taken for face value.

Conclusion

The success of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* also suggests a move forward in the world of Austen adaptation, for it has prompted a new wave of adaptations utilizing the many tools of the online universe. The most notable follow-up adaptation was created by the same team behind

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries and adapted Austen's novel *Emma* similarly on YouTube. The series *Emma Approved* painted the heroine Emma Woodhouse as an event planner documenting her life and career success in time-capsule-esque vlogs uploaded to YouTube. Since it saw similar success to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the realm of the online space by way of adaptation has thus been very popular. This does not strictly limit these online adaptations to the YouTube format; another adaptation of Austen's work online has been in the form of *Project Persuasion*, which has Austen's lead *Persuasion* character Anne Elliot maintaining a blog and Twitter account. It is unique from other transmedia adaptations because its main story is told through blog posts and tweets with no contribution of a video element, but this does not make it less effective in the way it is able to communicate the original Austen story in a way that makes Anne Elliot feel as real as the YouTube presences of Lizzie Bennet and Emma Woodhouse. In her article "iAnne: Rethinking *Persuasion* in the Age of Transmedia Adaptation", Sarah Schaefer Walton argues that while not as popular or necessarily interesting as utilizing videos as the core story platform, *Project Persuasion* "seems to gesture towards a digital afterlife for Austen that, like the internet itself, feels infinite in its capacity for growth, collaboration, and imagination" (2). The world of Austen has been continuously growing since its first adaptation, but transmedia storytelling has moved Austen into the digital sphere and allowed for creativity to thrive. These transmedia takes of Austen's stories have also prompted the genre of transmedia takes of various classics, with novels such as *Jane Eyre* and *Peter Pan* getting their own adaptations on YouTube with hopes to live up to the universality Austen tales seem to provide. It should be noted that such adaptations have come nowhere near as popular as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, which will continue its reign as the premiere transmedia adaptation of the era.

Jane Austen has always been popular – just look at the wealth of adaptations – so now audiences can log onto the internet and watch Lizzie fall for Darcy over 100 YouTube episodes, see the triumphs and failures of Emma Woodhouse through her diary-like videos, and read about Anne Eliot’s interactions with a man from her past through her blog and Twitter account. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was only the first online cultural engagement with Austen, an appropriate twenty-first century format. and it seems that Austen will not be removed from the online space any time soon. Transmedia adaptations depend on creating “reading” experiences that allow for optimal narrative engagement and place Austen’s characters in situations that are socially relevant to current readers. Perhaps the next time Elizabeth Bennet is reimagined it will be through a platform like virtual reality, where an audience member has the opportunity to virtually imagine themselves in the room with the characters as the narrative unfolds, or to even be a character themselves and take part in moving the story along. For now, Austen seems comfortable inhabiting the transmedia platform, and we can only look forward to her future in the technological space. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* has ultimately secured Austen’s place in modernity and insists that there is something worth telling in Austen’s original novels that prompt new, creative adaptations to thrive. After all, it is a truth universally acknowledged that Austen adaptations are here to stay, regardless of their format.

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