



## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Samara Surface for the degree of Master of Arts in English presented on May 17, 2016.

Title: “Its Own Sense of Verisimilitude”: *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* As a Transhistorical Adaptation of the Semipublic.

Abstract approved:

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Megan Ward

*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is a multimodal adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, released from 2012-2013. As a media event, the show proved how effective transmedia storytelling can be, eventually winning an Emmy for Original Interactive Program. In creating an intensely immediate narrative world, the series adapted more than Jane Austen's story; it adapted the semipublic experience of reading emerging novels. Like the forms of autobiographical, serial, and epistolary novels, it blurred lines between public and private, fiction and nonfiction. The resulting immediacy provoked and enabled particular kinds of political conversations and action. Just as the early novel provided opportunities for women to challenge patriarchal standards by writing or participating in the semipublic, today's nontraditional media forms offer renewed ways to confront those standards which have been re-inscribed. These connections demonstrate the importance of viewing adaptation not only through vertical relationships, such as palimpsests, but also horizontally, through transhistorical approaches.

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"Its Own Sense of Verisimilitude": *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* As a Transhistorical  
Adaptation of the Semipublic

by  
Samara Surface

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Samara Surface, Author

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This work is dedicated to Melissa, Cami, Rebekah—  
the women whose encouragement and example  
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Introduction: “My Name Is Lizzie Bennet and...” This Is Transhistorical Adaptation

January 28, 1813, Elizabeth Bennet met the public. On April 9, 2012 her fictional reincarnation posted a video to YouTube announcing, “My name is Lizzie Bennet and this is my life” (“My Name is Lizzie Bennet”). This served as the introduction to a yearlong project adapting *Pride and Prejudice* for mobile screens and to a revolutionary new media event. My thesis on *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* explores how this innovative, transhistorical retelling affects our understanding both of its source text and of adaptation theory.

Fundamental to my work is adaptation theory’s shift away from an obsession with fidelity. Kamilla Elliot describes the field’s twentieth-century landscape by quoting scholars like George Bluestone who said that “the novel is the norm and the film deviates at its peril” (129) and Robert B. Bays’ assessment of adaptation criticism as asking “‘How does the film compare with the book?’ and concludes: ‘The book was better’” (128). Robert Stam notes the highly charged, accusatory vocabulary used on adaptations such as: infidelity, betrayal, deformation, violation, vulgarization, bastardization, and desecration (4). He points out that these words imply the absolute sanctity of source texts. When addressing a series of fallacies keeping adaptation studies from “fulfilling its analytical promise” (149), Thomas Leitch says, “Fidelity to its source text... is a hopelessly fallacious measure of a given adaptation’s value because it is unattainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in a trivial sense” (161). Leitch points out an underlying, supposed binary between word and image (153) or, in Stam and Hutcheon’s terminology, often between an “iconophobia” vs. “logophilia” (Hutcheon 4).

Theorists resolve this schism in a number of ways. One of the models many subscribe to is Gerard Genette's work on palimpsest, where various texts are layered onto one another so as to see different distinct meanings at the same time. Another theory central to the significance of adaptation is Kristeva's intertextuality. Leitch, quoting Deborah Cartmell, explains that approaching adaptation as intertextual allows readers to find a "plurality of meanings" ("Twelve Fallacies" 167). He also dedicates a whole chapter of his book, "Between Adaptation and Allusion" in *Adaptation and its Discontents*, to examining a spectrum of intertextuality. For Stam, both Kristeva and Bakhtin are essential to seeing the creator of adaptations "as the orchestrator of pre-existing discourses" (4). He continues this line of reasoning, saying, "An adaptation is thus less a resuscitation of an originary word than a turn in an ongoing dialogical process" (4). Stam's writing suggests a move away from the dichotomy of word and image and instead a process where both bring their offerings to the recursive table. Building on this, Hutcheon urges for retellings to be seen "*as adaptations*," that is as neither derivative nor stand-alone works. They are "deliberate, announced, and extended revisitations of prior works" (xiv). Yet rather than a direct translation, she points out that the "pleasure...comes from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual with the piquancy of surprise" (4). For each of these theorists, adaptations provide opportunities for texts to be in conversation with other texts within a unique relationship but without superiority.

For Hutcheon, adaptation studies are plagued with not only artistic but also economic prejudices. She argues the fixation on fidelity also reveals an "imagined hierarchy of medium or genre" (3). In addition to the supposed binary between word and

image, visual adaptations of literary texts also face discrimination on the grounds of the constructed strata of high culture and low/popular culture. She says, “we tend to reserve our negatively judgmental rhetoric for popular culture, as if it is more tainted with capitalism than high art” (31). She points to academia being quick to note the commercial-driven choices of a blockbuster, yet choosing to ignore that Shakespeare made very calculated artistic moves based on the same economic principals. Likewise film or, in this case, web series adaptations are often labeled lowbrow in comparison to the classic novels they are based on; a transhistorical approach recovers the fact that those novels were also once part of popular, not high culture.

Within a fidelity-centric approach, Bluestone and others often position the source text as foundational and in a vertical relationship with the adaptation. Hutcheon argues, “Multiple versions exist laterally, not vertically” (xiii), however she and others utilize the vertically oriented palimpsest analogy for their theory. While we have shifted away from fidelity, we have not completely moved away from fidelity’s vertical relationship. Viewing a source and its adaptation as texts layered on top of one another is useful for interpretive work, but in order to discuss the significance of adaptation we need both vertical and horizontal relationships represented in our theory. Where palimpsest offers us discrete meanings vertically layered on top of one another, treating texts horizontally reveals their transhistorical continuity. When it comes to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, one might expect the contemporary webseries to emphasize the historical differences, due to its setting; however, studying the adaptation reveals how it actually highlights transhistorical similarities. Noting these similarities and patterns in their distinct

historical moments have enabled me to better understand the production, reception, and political arguments of both *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

Essential to understanding this historical approach to adaptation is tracing how narrative changes from one form to another over time. While not usually discussed in these terms, Bolter and Grusin's seminal work, *Remediation*, offers ways to view story transhistorically. They see "remediation [as] a defining characteristic of the new digital media. What might seem at first to be an esoteric practice is so widespread that we can identify a spectrum of different ways in which digital media remediate their predecessors" (45). As part of the dialogic, new media are constantly re-shaping and re-telling; adaptations with access to new media make this even more evident. They go on to describe their "double logic of remediation" by saying, "Our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them" (5). In other words, as our culture becomes more hypermediated, it appears more immediate and therefore feels more authentic. Remediation allows us to see how new media adapts not only content but also form in an attempt to feel more immediate. Across this 200 year timeline a transhistorical approach opens the door to a shared space in which a narrative is retold and forms are refashioned. This space is unique because it is semipublic.

I borrow this term from Deidre Lynch's *The Economy of Character*, where she describes it as part of the act of nineteenth century reading (241). The "semipublic" is simultaneously public and private without entirely being one or the other. For my purposes, it is the place on the spectrum where those two begin to blur; it is the most public private space (e.g. a home's living room) and the most private public space (e.g. a

personal blog). The semipublic also carries political weight as it allows minority groups traditionally excluded from the capitol-p Public—i.e., positions of power in government, media, education, etc.—innovative spaces, “a room of [their] own.” Repeatedly, the public has been constructed as masculine and the private, feminine. Austen recognized the uneven power structure resulting from the separate spheres and in *Persuasion* has Anne Elliot argue, “Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands” (221). Lynch uses this to comment on how women readers from this era “are connected only indirectly to the world in which men have ‘continual occupation’ (210), and...accordingly know the spaces of interior feeling all too well” (243). Within the public, men have had the agency to “[tell] their own story,” to possess education, and to hold the pen whereas women only come into contact with the male sphere “indirectly.” The semipublic, however, is its own sphere, existing between public and private which provides an alternative to the dichotomy. Embracing the semipublic allows minorities to reject the notion that in order to affect political change one has to mimic white, patriarchal, heteronormative masculinity to participate in the public. Because it offers a way into the public conversation from within the private spaces to which marginalized groups have been restricted, the semipublic has unique political potential for progress.

Exploring adaptation transhistorically enables us to view how the creators and audiences engage the semipublic at the beginning of the nineteenth century as well as the beginning of the twenty-first. This brings us to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*: a multiple

narrator, vlog<sup>1</sup>-style retelling of *Pride and Prejudice* set in modern day California. The story centers on Lizzie Bennet, a 24-year-old pursuing her master's degree in communications, making a video-diary for her thesis. Aiding Lizzie in this project is her best friend and fellow student Charlotte Lu. The diaries often feature the other Bennet sisters: Jane, a fashion merchandiser, and Lydia, a 20 year old, “party girl” in community college<sup>2</sup>. In figure 1, you can see from left to right: Charlotte (Julia Cho), Lizzie (Ashley Clements), Lydia (Mary Kate Wiles), and Jane (Laura Spencer).



Fig. 1. “Home Sweet Home – Ep: 35.” *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. YouTube. 6 Aug 2012. Web. 8 Apr 2015.

<sup>1</sup> Contraction of “video web log”

<sup>2</sup> In this iteration Mary and Kitty are not sisters, but are still represented. Mary (Briana Cuoco) has become a quiet, bookish cousin who is regularly on Lydia’s channel and has one scene-stealing appearance on Lizzie’s main vlog (Episode 72, “Party Time”). The fourth Bennet sister has become a literal cat. In a creative nod to the novel, Lydia exclaims, “I did get a cat; I named her Kitty. She follows me a round everywhere and now you can follow her cuz now she’s on twitter [@thekittybennet]” (Episode 20, “Enjoy the Adorbs”)

The show aired “webisodes,” 2-8 minute episodes on the Google-owned platform YouTube, at least twice a week over the course of an entire year. Lizzie’s episodes on the main channel (“The Lizzie Bennet”) were released on Mondays and Thursdays, 9 am PST. Content was also released (albeit less frequently) on other channels, like Lydia’s (“The Lydia Bennet”) and Gigi’s (“Pemberley Digital”). Across these channels, they published 153 webisodes totaling 9 hours of video content.

Incredibly, the creators were able to relay the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* almost entirely through direct address. Each episode consists of one or more characters sitting in front of a stationary camera (only in interior settings), consciously recording material to post publicly. This construct requires creativity within the format. For example, many scenarios from Lizzie’s life are reenacted on her vlog with the help of “costume theater.” A small number of uniquely identifiable props allow any character to portray any other character. While Charlotte, Jane, or Lydia often assist by dressing up as friends or family, the vlog convention of rapid-style editing allows Lizzie to play two sides of a conversation when necessary. Figure 2 compiles various costumes used to represent different characters displayed by other characters. Going left to right, top to bottom, there are costumes for: Lizzie, Mrs. Bennet, Bing; Caroline, Darcy, Mr. Bennet; Wickham, Fitz, Lydia; and Charlotte, Jane, Gigi.





Fig. 2. Bibiana. “If you don’t like costume theater you’re wrong.” *The Meryton*. Tumblr. 14 Mar 2013. Web. 25 Feb 2016.

This way they are able to represent characters without ever having an actor portray them; while the audience never sees Mr. Bennet, Mrs. Bennet, or Catherine de Bourgh, they still play a vital role in the series. With a nod to the nineteenth century popularity of charades, costume theatre enables the show to relate important events that would not naturally take place in a bedroom or office.

Currently, vlog-structured storytelling may best enact the “double-logic of remediation” as a hypermediated, new media form represents itself as immediate and, in some cases, appears to be non-fictional. To understand this, it is helpful to review some vlog history, beginning with the advent of YouTube in 2005. In their fundamental exploration of the site, Jean Burgess et. al say, “YouTube is not actually in the video

business—its business, rather, is the provision of a convenient and usable platform for online video *sharing...*” (Burgess 4). Not only does it provide a player that is easy to share on a plethora of sites, YouTube is also an inherently semipublic platform because it is often experienced in private (on a phone or laptop screen) yet comes with a built-in comment section. As a video sharing service, it has formed a reciprocally beneficial relationship with content-creators. One type of content that has become increasingly influential and ubiquitous is the vlog—a channel for one (or just a few) speaker(s) to share their opinions or expertise more broadly. These can range from amateur to professional, filmed on an iPhone or in a studio, on any topic from make-up tutorials to fan theories on *Game of Thrones* to political commentary. Based on advertising revenue, many vloggers are able to garner enough consistent views to make a career out of it. Because vloggers often incorporate personal parts of their life, whether as the focus of their channel or only anecdotally, they feel especially immediate while also remaining distant. Most vlogs are non-fiction, but its seemingly transparent mode of direct-address happens to be a perfect way to play with the line between fiction and non-fiction.

Here, one has to start with a channel called *lonelygirl15*. Beginning in May of 2006—just a year after YouTube opened to the public—this channel started posting regular semi-weekly vlogs. Within a month the vlog centering on a teenager named Bree, her friend Daniel, and her parents’ religious fundamentalism had become extremely popular. The show gained viewers and quickly reached a reliable audience of around 300,000 (Davis). After three months of surprising success, *lonelygirl15* was uncovered as a fictional show presenting itself as a vlog; “Bree” was actually actress Jessica Rose and the scripted show was filmed in the creator’s (Mesh Flinders) apartment (Davis).

While some viewers were understandably upset by the pretense, the show continued on quite successfully for over two years. From its inception, Flinders and his team intended to play with audiences' notion of fiction and reality. Writing for *Wired*, Joshua Davis says that the creators "were planning to exploit the anonymity of the Internet to pull off a new kind of storytelling" and avoided any option that could "make it feel less real." Without referencing *Remediation*, it is clear the creators of *lonelygirl15* were drawn to the "double logic" of hypermediation and to making an experience in a new medium as realistic as possible. A few other shows framed as vlogs eventually followed but they always announced their fictionality. Notable examples that are at least partly relayed in vlog form are *The Guild* (2007-2013)—a YouTube series created by Felicia Day—and *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* (2008)—created by Joss Whedon during the Writers Guild of America strike; starring Neil Patrick Harris, Nathan Fillion, and Felicia Day; and released on Hulu. In interviews and blog posts the creators of *Lizzie Bennet* explicitly reference all three of these digitally-born series as inspiration for their own show (Green). Before *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, *lonelygirl15* had set precedent as a fictional vlog, but few had experimented with its capabilities and boundaries and no one had ever used it to *adapt* a story, let alone a novel.

When professional vlogger Hank Green met webseries creator Bernie Su and discussed the possibility of a fictional vlog as an adaptation, they both saw the uncharted possibilities ("Why I took on *Pride and Prejudice*"). However, the creators of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*—now a production company called Pemberley Digital—did not limit the series just to YouTube, instead they worked incredibly hard to craft one of the richest transmedia worlds seen to date. New forms of social media allowed them to

lay out the story of *Pride and Prejudice* in “real time,” utilizing accounts on YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr, LookBook, Pinterest, and others. The series eventually won Streamy awards for Best Writing (2013), Best Interactive Series (2013), Best Actress (2014), and Best Drama (2014) as well as an Emmy award for Original Interactive Program (2013). Within this expansive, multimodal text, I will be looking primarily at Lizzie’s vlogs, YouTube comments, and character twitter conversations, but I would first like to explain the backdrop their full transmedia experience created.

Henry Jenkins explains, “A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole” (622). Traditional media forms have been slowly incorporating online transmedia components for years, often with the goal of making the story appear more authentic. An early example of this is the *Blair Witch Project* and their (in)famous internet promotion to make their fictional horror film appear to be a type of documentary (Lambie). While the *Blair Witch Project*’s website aimed to drum up publicity, other projects have used low-stakes transmedia to add a web presence for fans, but without it affecting much of the show itself. For another popular transhistorical adaptation, the British TV series *Sherlock*, the BBC owns multiple online accounts for its characters, including John Watson’s blog ([www.johnwatsonblog.co.uk](http://www.johnwatsonblog.co.uk)) and Irene Adler’s twitter handle (@TheWhipHand), both of which are referenced within the show. While not necessary to understanding *Sherlock*, these constructs adapt forms with Watson going from short-story biographer to contemporary blogger. Whether for marketing or some in-world story components showing up in a Google search, online transmedia is becoming an increasing part of storytelling. It adds another layer to the hypermediated immediacy of the art,

potentially makes us forget its fictionality, and, in the case of adaptation, allows for the refashioning of forms.

From the beginning *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* wanted to rely heavily on transmedia to make their characters seem as life-like as possible. While creating an immersive experience, however, they knew the plot had to make sense for someone who just wanted to watch the playlist of Lizzie's vlogs. Bernie Su told his writing team "every big plot point/beat needs to happen and be told on Lizzie's channel" while other accounts filled in additional information ("Balancing Transmedia"). He believes, "'transmedia' should not be required. Transmedia should enhance but not prevent any viewer from enjoying the basic story without diving all the way down the story threads" ("Balancing Transmedia"). For Pemberley Digital, the experience of the series should allow audiences to "choose your own adventure."

As a transmedia web-series, *Lizzie Bennet* offers both visual content through videos and photos as well as textual content through in-world social media accounts on micro-blogging sites like Twitter or Tumblr. The narrative is woven across these semipublic platforms instead of remaining in one form, creating the story and interacting with fans in spaces that are, at times, both public and private. While furthering the story, these also serve as forms of expression for their characters. Early on, the creators toyed with the idea of each of the sisters having their own YouTube channel, but realized that it did not make sense for Jane's character to promote herself through a vlog. Instead, they gave her an online presence through the fashion website LookBook (figure 3) and a Pinterest account pertaining to her current interests in the world of the show.

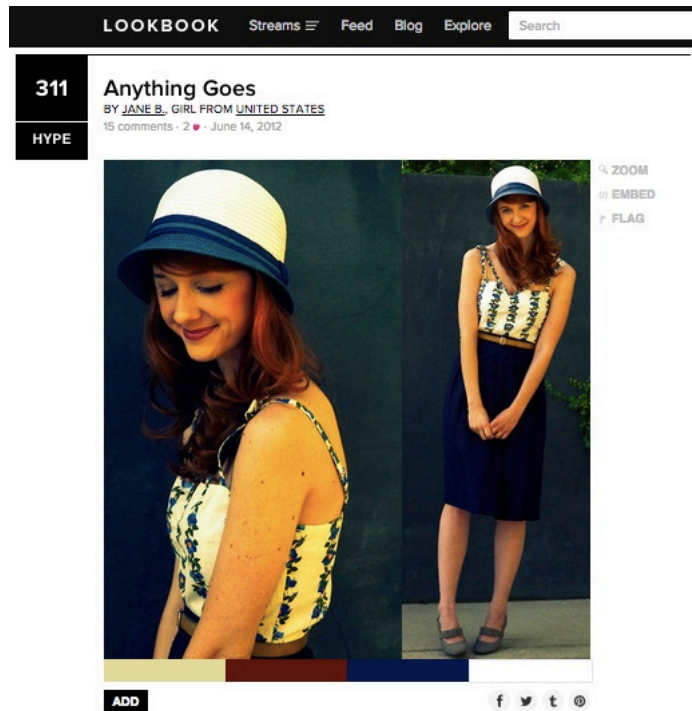


Fig. 3 Bennet, Jane . “Anything goes.” *LookBook*. 14 June 2012. Web.

By the end of the series, partly due to her presence on Lizzie’s vlog, Jane has accepted a fashion job in New York City. They used her accounts to hint at the move, as with New York-themed Pinterest board (figure 4).

### New York it

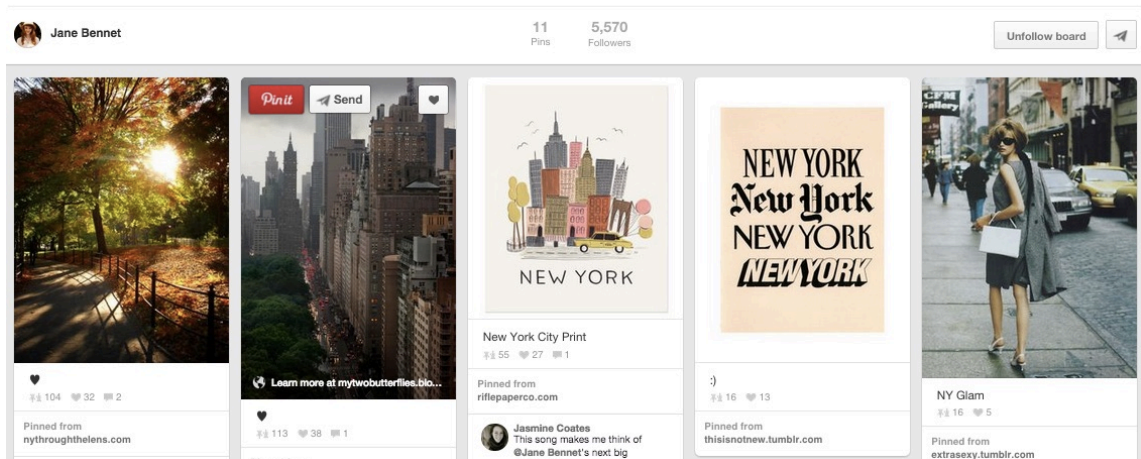


Fig. 4 Bennet, Jane. “New York it.” *Looks by Jane*. Pinterest. Screenshot. 16 Feb 2016.

Whereas Jane was represented through her LookBook and Pinterest, Lydia was especially active on her Tumblr (figure 5) and, when absent from Lizzie, created her own vlog. Near the show’s climax (February 2013), Su noted that Lydia’s vlog had roughly half the number of followers as Lizzie’s, or that half of viewers were engaging with the story’s “second level.” He explains, “Right now Lizzie’s channel has 145k subs. (100%) Lydia’s channel (second level) has 71k. (50%) Lizzie’s personal Twitter account (third level) has 35k followers. (25%)” (“Balancing Transmedia”).

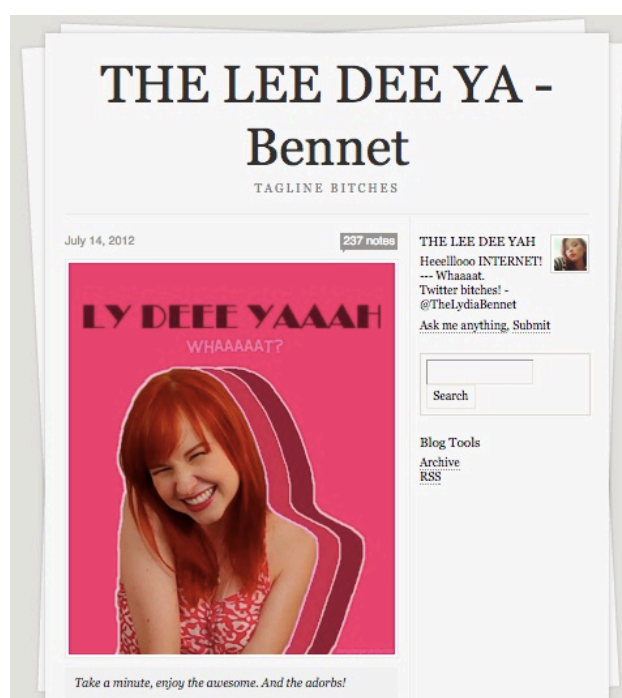


Fig. 5. Bennet, Lydia. “Take a minute, enjoy the awesome. And the adorbs!” *The Lee Dee Yah*. Tumblr. 14 July 2012. Web. 10 Feb 2016.

Giving the characters social media accounts allowed the fans to follow the subtlest moments of the story, making it feel more immediate. After Jane shared about meeting

Bing Lee in episode 5, one fan captured the moment the two started “following” each other on Twitter (figure 6), a social media equivalent of exchanging phone numbers.

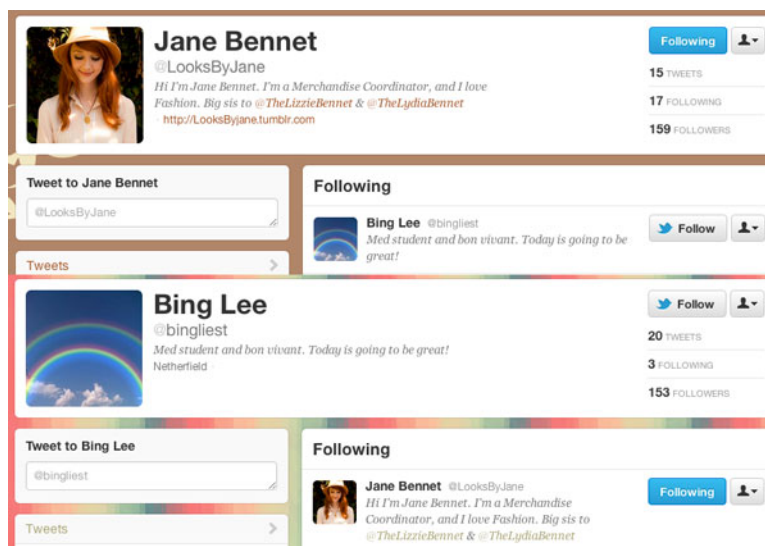


Fig. 6. “Lizzie Bennet Jumps Down the Rabbit Hole.” *The Weirdlings*. The Weirdlings. 24 Apr 2012. Web. 26 Feb 2016.

While the transmedia creates a plethora of interesting story-telling possibilities, it also comes with a few of its own challenges. Some issues Pemberley Digital faced were small, like how to run accounts for characters the viewers have not met (or may not have been cast yet). For this, the team often used profile pictures of objects, replacing it with an actor’s image once the character was revealed on Lizzie’s vlog. However as for larger scale challenges, with the supposed instant connection social media provides, at times the show’s plot required the creators to contrive explanations. According to the writing, Darcy remained unaware of Lizzie’s channel—and by extension, ignorant of her hatred of him—throughout the first half of the series, partly because he was not subscribed to her social media accounts. In order for the Lydia-Wickham scandal to surprise Lizzie, the series features an argument between the sisters that result in them “unfollowing” each



other on various sites. Rather than appearing as plot holes, the show was able to use the accounts to explain how characters sometimes remained in the dark.

While also engaging the semipublic, characters' accounts were ways the writers could flesh out characters, advance subplots, and, perhaps importantly, interact with fans *as* the characters. Sometimes these conversations were sought out, such as when Lizzie would invite questions for her Q&A videos. More often, a fan would reply to a character's tweet or leave a comment and the writer's would respond in the character's voice. While the YouTube description for each episode explains the series is an adaptation of the well-known novel, the social media accounts rarely relay this information, heightening the immediacy of the experience. Ultimately, this enabled its cult following to take on an agency of its own within the story and proved that immediacy can be political.

*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* offers us the insight of an adaptation whose content and form both are transhistorical in nature. Fans may be transported from 1813 to 2013, but even across time and forms, the shared narrative highlights the ways history repeats itself and invites re-interpretation. Just as the novel was new in Austen's time (hence, the term "novel"), discovering its boundaries and creating its own conventions, so too is the storytelling power of the web and "new" media. In the midst of another war on American soil and anxious over Napoleon's increasing power, around the time *Pride and Prejudice*'s was published, England publically faced intense economic uncertainty that Austen's characters privately echo. Meanwhile the world of Lizzie Bennet is shaped by the impact of the 2008 recession; insecurities over jobs and mortgages serve as an impetus to the plot. Austen was influenced politically by other proto-feminists like Mary

Wollstonecraft, which, as a female creator, she wove into her semipublic work. Likewise, Pemberley Digital is facing the feminist issues of the twenty-first century head-on by creating female-centric content in contemporary semipublic spaces. What the novel and vlog hold in common—narratively, formally, historically—creates a space across time. This is a space where one can learn much both about how a contemporary may have experienced the original novel as well as how hypermediacy affects creators. Transhistorical adaptations offers access to this space in a way that pairing a nineteenth century novel and an unrelated web series simply would not enable.

*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* then is not just an adaptation of a story; it is an adaptation of the semipublic experience of gendered reading. This is significant because it enables us to a) reclaim part of the original reading experience of the early nineteenth century and b) apply the progressive meanings of that narrative to our current semipublic spaces. Because fidelity studies are overly concerned with narrative similarities, current adaptation theorists have, understandably, not focused on such connections. Critics like Hutcheon point out that adaptations require change; according to her, they are related but different. Even where *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* does update or diverge from narrative moments, a horizontal perspective reveals not the differences but the transhistorical similarities. A transhistorical approach enables us to talk about the similarities and their political significance without fixating on fidelity.

My first chapter explores the transhistoric similarities of both production and form. The semipublic enabled *Pride and Prejudice*'s female author to work professionally even while relegated to the private sphere. For *Lizzie Bennet*, it provides female creators agency they would likely not have in traditional media like film or

television. I then turn to the webseries' formal remediations of the early novel. Here I am specifically concerned with the fictional autobiography, serial, and epistolary novel and how these forms heighten the immediacy of the narrative then and now.

After production and form, I look at reception in the semipublic. As with the novel, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*' fan base was predominately female. The webseries' platform allowed the audience to interact with the show in a number of significant ways. Part of this was due to the show's hypermediated authenticity, the potency of which both fosters and enables particular kinds of political action. Semipublic reception eventually blurs lines between author and audience, allowing for collaborative authorship. All together, these allow us to view *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as a transhistorical adaptation of the semipublic and its progressive discourses.

“Novel” Media: *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* Adapts the Semipublic

Until now, most work on adaptation has been constructed as vertical; texts are “layered onto one another” or are “palimpsests.” While building on this vertically oriented theory, I propose that adaptation is also horizontal. A multi-dimensional approach to adaptation theory allows us to see shared plot-points or formal consistencies interconnected along the historical continuum of those narratives’ forms. By exploring past and present modes of production, we can more clearly see the transhistorical, horizontal link between source material and re-telling. The continuum between *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* shows us how the semipublic has been claimed by female creators, both then and now, to examine and expose their contemporary gender politics.

In a multi-dimensional framework, adaptation re-appropriates and re-fashions form and history as well as content. Just as T. S. Eliot said, “No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone,” no form has its complete meaning alone (37). The creators of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* adapted not only the story but also the forms of the emerging novel to re-tell Austen’s classic novel. Bolter and Grusin expand on Eliot in their landmark *Remediation*, explaining in their introduction:

We will argue that these new media are doing exactly what their predecessors have done: presenting themselves as refashioned and improved versions of other media. Digital visual media can best be understood through the ways in which they honor, rival, and revise linear-perspective painting, photography, film, television, and print. No medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media any more than it works in isolation from other social and economic forces. What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media (Bolter 14-15).

They lay the groundwork of how new media not only refashion older media—they hybridize them and, once we understand their historical moments of production, reclaim them.

Though separated by 200 years and technological forms, when viewed horizontally, *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* invite us into the same space. This space is unique because it is generated and set in predominately female spheres at the crossroads of public and private. Women have often been relegated to the private while men managed the public; the semipublic, however, is more complicated. It has enabled people to bring the private into the public and vice versa. Because of semipublic writing spaces, once female authors in the eighteenth century could publish, they had a chance to reach an audience. Yet, while it has provided opportunities for women, this space can also be dangerous if, for example, too much of the private is exposed to the public. The novel becomes a way women challenge the political status quo by claiming shared ownership of the semipublic space.

The creators of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* replicated more than Austen's plot; they re-opened that space, now across multiple modalities even more common and cheap than the original novel. Thus, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* adapts not just a story, but the gendered, semipublic production and form of that story. In so doing, the similarities between those historically distinct moments help us reclaim the nineteenth century reading experience while examining our own political atmosphere to reveal areas that still need progress. This chapter will explore the ways in which the production of these texts utilize and represent the semipublic space as the intersection between gender, economics, and media in order to see the transhistorical significance of adaptation.

Semipublic Production

The production of this novel, published in 1813, and the web-series, released from 2012-2013, are distinct and yet their processes intersect in being semipublic. Writing from the cottage in Chawton, Jane Austen composed in the drawing room, often around other people and the possibility of interruption. Park Honan expounds on J.E. Austen Leigh's history of his aunt's life, saying she would often "write 'when sitting with her family'" (268). He goes on to say that when her family was around, "A visitor would be kept away from the drawing room where she wrote," but that

when alone she had a special protection... "There was, between the front door and the offices, a swing door which creaked when it was opened," her nephew recorded later, "but she objected to having this little inconvenience remedied, because it gave her notice when anyone was coming" (Honan 268).

Working in the most public part of the private, domestic space, her individual effort overlapped with the social life of the family—much like the characters in her novels.

We see similar crossover of public and private in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Within the construct of Lizzie as author, she represents an up-to-date creator working from a semipublic space. She often films her vlog from her bedroom or their family's den. Of the 100 central episodes, 57 occur within her bedroom (including the guest room she stayed in while at Netherfield), 22 take place in a personal office (either at Collins & Collins or Pemberley Digital), 2 outlier episodes are filmed at a convention, and the final 15 are in the den. Kathleen Fitzpatrick draws on the gendered assumptions connecting the forms of the early novel and the contemporary blog, which I extend to the vlog, as well. She addresses the female creator saying,

there is of course a relationship to be posited between the dismissal of such private-sphere blogs and the historical dismissal of feminine modes

of writing; such personal bloggers are certainly not exclusively female, but they bear much in common with the “damn’d mob of scribbling women” lamented by Nathaniel Hawthorne (173).

An adaptation conveyed through the “private-sphere” vlog of its heroine—with filming initially done in her bedroom—could be dismissed in much the same way.

This calls attention to social limitations placed on the female creator. In Austen’s day, women were expected to remain private; so one who published and thereby entered the public sphere were harshly judged. Their supposed exposure to the public combined with the economic transaction of selling a book seemed like a type of prostitution.

Fitzpatrick goes on to point out that, as it emerged,

the novel inspired anxieties in the general public that seem a bit familiar today... [One] aspect of this anxiety had to do with the very femaleness of the novel itself, which, as another critic has argued, resembled nothing more than “a coquette who lured readers into a claustrophobic world of desire and self-indulgence, the antithesis of the *public* domain of rationality and men” (Gilmore, 1994: 621), (173, emphasis added).

There was a perceived danger of women leaving the private sphere only to “lure” people back into it in an unhealthy way. Writing from primarily private spaces, Austen and women like her were able to enter the public conversation in a new way. However, they achieved this not by attempting to be like men and join their spaces, but by embracing a new version of a semipublic space that they worked to make their own.

Aware of this, Austen abstained from publishing under her own name; she refused a male pseudonym (which later the Brontë sisters and George Elliot would opt for) and instead the author’s line for her first novel simply read, “By a lady” (figure 7).

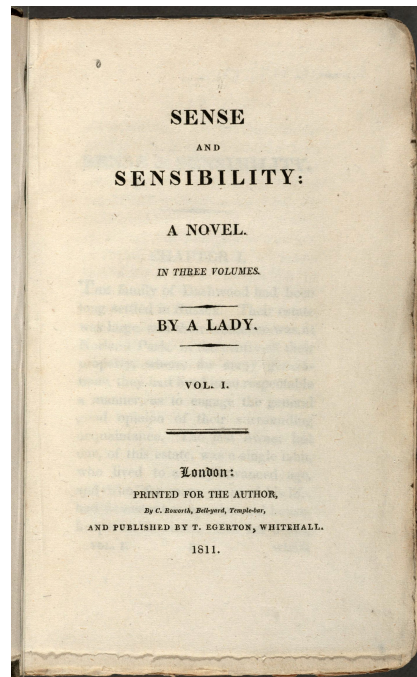


Fig. 7. “*Sense and Sensibility* Frontispiece.” EC8 Au747 811s (B), Houghton Library, Harvard University. Web. 30 Jan 2016

Establishing her novel’s female creation without accepting the infamy proved to be a shrewd move for Austen. In exploring the history of her publication, Kathryn Sutherland says:

The price of her success, as she well knew, was her anonymity. To have become known as “Jane Austen, novelist”... [t]hat would have inhibited her freedom as an artist. Further, her notoriety could damage the Austen family; it might be assumed that their circumstances had obliged her to try to support herself by earning money (269).

Being a woman publishing and “earning money” would certainly have exposed her private life too much.

Instead of using her name to claim her novels, Austen reserved it; “As far as we know, Austen’s name appeared in print only twice in her lifetime” (Sutherland 113). One was for a publication of sermons in 1808, where she is listed with her parents, but far earlier “she features as ‘Miss J. Austen, Steventon’ in the subscription list in Frances



Burney's *Camilla* in 1796" (Sutherland 113). This is significant not only because it evidences her support of fellow women writers but also because it reveals her ambitions as a professional writer. Sutherland points out, "As a subscriber, her name circulates in print in 1796 not just in appreciative association...but in the same list as Miss Edgeworth and Mrs. Hannah More. In this distinguished company, the subscription looks like a secret pledge to her own art" (114). While she remained anonymous, she did not stay silent in her support of female writers and creators.

In a similar way, though *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* has two male show runners, Hank Green and Bernie Su (to whom I will return shortly), the show is primarily focused on the female creator. Recognizing that they were two cis-hetero-males, Green and Su's first steps were to hire a creative team that could feature female voices. So for their team behind the camera they hired Jenni Powell as a producer, Margaret Dunlap as co-executive producer, Alexandra Edwards as transmedia editor, Kate Moest as production designer, and writers Rachel Kiley, Kate Rorick, and Anne Toole ("Team"). In front of the camera and in-world, they explained that Lizzie recorded, after which either she or Charlotte edited and posted the video to YouTube. This meant that, according to the story, women had complete control of the camera.

In front of the camera, the female characters and their relationships to each other were far and away the central focus. The only male characters on screen are the Bennet sisters' love interests, Bing Lee, William Darcy, and George Wickham; the former schoolmate, Ricky Collins; and Darcy's best friend, Fitz Williams. Altogether, these male characters appear in a combined total of only 29 out of 100 episodes. There are never two men on screen, there is never a man on screen alone without a woman present,

and only two episodes (41 and 99) have a man in the opening frame. On the contrary, the show filmed its first 24 episodes having hired only its four, principal, female characters: Lizzie (Ashley Clements), Charlotte (Julia Cho), Jane (Laura Spencer), and Lydia (Mary Kate Wiles). The arguable climax of the show is Episode 87, “An Understanding,” which revolves entirely around Lizzie’s relationship with Lydia. To emphasize that their interpretation was not all about Darcy, the show-runners also decided to have him exit the show in the penultimate episode, saving the finale for the same three characters featured in premiere: Lizzie, Charlotte, and Lydia. So not only was *Lizzie Bennet* an adaptation of a novel written by a woman, featuring women, the creators aimed to involve a new generation of young, female creators in re-telling this story<sup>3</sup>.

In the early nineteenth century, women writers were indeed entering the public conversation like they never had before, but not without help. For Austen, it took her brother’s connections to find the right publishers (Sutherland 122). As Sutherland explains, “Jane Austen had dealings with several publishers, eventually issuing her novels through two: Thomas Egerton and John Murray. For both, Austen may have been their first female novelist” (105). After early attempts at larger, more well-known

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<sup>3</sup> Though that may not seem progressive or even remarkable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is important to note that female creators in a variety of industries face discrimination, lack of opportunities, or even threats of physical violence. Shortly after the webseries wrapped, women involved in another form of interactive storytelling, video games, faced doxxing and violent online messages. After some had their personal addresses revealed online, they were forced to go into hiding due to mounting threats of rape and murder (Dockterman). This is aside from the more casual or everyday sexism these and other women face on twitter or in YouTube comments. In light of this, the show’s intentional focus on and inclusion of the female creator is still progressive. The series comes to represent writers, actors, directors and more who in spite of a patriarchal entertainment industry, in spite of continual on-line threats of violence to female creators, and in spite of wage gaps, enjoy an audience because of this new, more agile form.

publishers of novels, Henry Austen's acquaintances connected her to these two, with *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Mansfield Park* being published by Egerton; *Emma* and the posthumous *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* by Murray (Sutherland 106). For better or worse, men were the gatekeepers to publication and, to this day, they often still are.

Despite all the female creators involved in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, it should not be overlooked that it only came about because of an idea two men had and their investment in the project. So who are Hank Green and Bernie Su? Ashley Hinck explains,

In January 2007, brothers Hank and John Green decided to communicate with one another through only vlogs for one year... By the end of 2007, John and Hank had accrued such a following that they decided to continue to make videos... As of 2015, their YouTube channel [VlogBrothers] had more than 2.5 million subscribers and their videos have accrued more than 520 million views (71).

His brother, John, is the New York Times best-selling author of *The Fault in Our Stars* and *Paper Towns*, both of which have now been adapted by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox. As for Hank, Hinck says he

is an entrepreneur and content creator who produced an Emmy-winning web-series, founded and manages a record label for YouTube music artists, created a crowd-funded platform for educational YouTube videos, founded and runs the website EcoGeek, recorded and released four of his own music albums, and created his own science-focused YouTube channel (71).

Both brothers are involved in educational web-videos such as CrashCourse, with PBS Digital Studios, and SciShow. Su explains that it was Hank who personally funded the first 24 episodes and got the show off the ground. Bernie Su was already a webseries creator and writer, having won a 2010 Streamy Award for his series *Compulsions*. While

these two get top credits as co-creators and executive producers, with female driven content written by mostly female writers, I find them analogous to the Henry Austens, Thomas Egertons, and John Murrays of the world. Though not women themselves, they enable women writers and use their privilege to facilitate entrance into the semipublic space.

Another factor that propelled the semipublic experiences of both readings was the creation of new, more accessible publication forms. At the time Austen was beginning to write, the codex book was becoming more affordable, especially due to advances in technology and the rise of the circulating library in England. As Diedre Lynch explains “the repetitions of mass communications...were stepped up in Austen’s lifetime as presses began to be driven by steam engines and as printers began to employ the molds called ‘stereotypes’ (invented in 1789) and ‘clichés’ (introduced in France in 1809)” (221). This increase in “mass production” and the popularity of circulating library caused some economic anxiety. In discussing economic prejudice against adaptation in new forms, Thomas Leitch actually uses the novel as an example, saying, “Entrenched representational forms have always greeted new rivals with a suspicion amounting to hostility, especially if economic power is at stake, as it was in the rise of the novel as the predominant mode of entertainment for the rising middle class two centuries ago” (155). While this was a cause of concern for some, it coincided with, and potentially catalyzed, increased production of novels written by women. Newer, more accessible forms allowed marginalized creators to make a space for themselves.

This is adapted by the *Lizzie Bennet* team’s choice of the YouTube-based, transmedia series form. Like the novel, because this content is far cheaper to produce

and to consume (free on YouTube for anyone with Internet access), the series and others like it could be viewed as low-culture. Compared with the well known 1995 mini-series or 2005 film version of *Pride and Prejudice*, the series cannot compete with the BBC's or Focus Feature's budgets. This, however, highlights the show's ability to work within limits. For example, Su explains, "[W]hen this is all said and done *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* will be the longest video version of *Pride and Prejudice* in history and it will have been primarily shot on an \$800 camera and a \$150 microphone. Welcome to the new age of content" ("Answering"). It is precisely because they were able to start out on a low budget and because they had the freedom to hire and cast diversely that they were able to innovate within the emerging webseries form. In a way, both use newer forms to create the semipublic and cheat the gendered economic structure. They eschewed forms that, at least at the time, were more entrenched in patriarchal structure—plays or poetry for Austen, film or television for Su and Green.

In addition to affecting the production, gendered economics are represented in the texts of the novel and the show, especially when Collins proposes. In the novel, Collins is the male relative who will inherit the Bennet's house, Longbourn, when Mr. Bennet dies. Due to the Bennet's lack of a son (despite their numerous attempts), the entail makes clear who is next in line since the daughters cannot inherit. Making financial matters worse, because Mr. Bennet expected to have a son, he failed to plan properly and so does not have much liquid capital for his surviving wife and/or daughters. In order to alleviate fears of the Bennet's impending homelessness, Collins proposes marriage to Elizabeth. Austen writes, "On finding Mrs. Bennet, Elizabeth, and one of the younger girls together, soon after breakfast, he addressed the mother" (71). Though we are not

told the exact room where this takes place, it is clear, due to the congregation of the women and it being “soon after breakfast,” Collins imposes himself on the semipublic space. He offers a solution that reinforces the patriarchal economic system in place and would require the independent Lizzie to sacrifice any personal aspirations for the sake of her family. Though facing the economic imperative of the entail, Elizabeth declines Collin’s offer.

The series appropriates this plot point for 2012 while maintaining the theme of financial insecurity. In Episode 39, “The Insistent Proposal,” Collins launches into a speech that sounds as if he is proposing marriage until, at the very end of his monologue, he asks her to be his “business partner.” One of the big changes here is that, in order to catch it on camera, the writers stage this in Lizzie’s bedroom. He justifies coming into her room without invitation by saying, “Oh don’t be alarmed, I’ve garnered your mother’s permission to visit you.” A clear nod to the novel, the twenty-first century Lizzie rebuffs sarcastically: “Oh, yes, because that is all that is required to enter my bedroom.” After forcing himself into her bedroom and even when Lizzie says “no” to the offer, Collins does not relent, assuming she is just negotiating. He speaks over her multiple times and belittles her status, claiming she would have to quit school right before bemoaning the fact she does not have a higher degree. After explaining as directly as possible, she announces, “I don’t want to be your business partner!” he retorts, “I am well-connected, funded, and offering you a respectable position. As charming as you are, you are unlikely to ever be offered anything comparable with your connections and degree.” By this point in the series, Lizzie has already expressed anxiety about finding a job after her graduate degree and has shared concerns about her parents’ house—the

entail has been updated to a faulty mortgage. As in the novel, Collins seems to “propose” a solution. Again, his plan is one that would cost Lizzie her goals (finishing her Master’s degree) and require her to submit to the gendered economic structure in place.

Collin’s proposal represents the threat of patriarchal control over a woman and her relationship with the public. In the novel this consists of the all-encompassing economic control a husband had over the wife. Retelling the proposal in the form of a job offer, this threatens to coopt Lizzie’s creative control. Instead of operating out of a female-run semipublic, creating the content that matters to her, she would be “play[ing] second fiddle to Ricky Collins...making corporate videos” (“Friends Forever”). Not only that, but economically she would become dependent on Collins instead of making her own way. The significance of this transhistorical rendition becomes clearer in comparison with how period dramas treat the same plot point. For instance, this moment in the 2005 Focus Feature film just comes off as absurd, making audiences comfortable to think of how much progress has been made. Here, although the plot is updated, the stakes remain remarkably the same. In the narrative difference, we find the transhistorical similarity. The job offer reveals not just “everyday sexism,” such as being talked over or condescended to, but that the same principles of patriarchal economics Elizabeth faced, Lizzie faces again. By reenacting the political issues at stake in Collin’s proposal, it becomes clear that, rather than being in isolation, the same economic and political imperatives on women have been re-inscribed.

I bring up Elizabeth/Lizzie’s refusal of Collins to focus on how the protagonist herself is on a journey from private to semipublic. She begins by reveling in solitary walks or eschewing the niceties of drawing- and ball-rooms to being mistress of

Pemberley. As a novel that enacts both the marriage plot and *bildungsroman*, Elizabeth must navigate her reconciliation with the semipublic socially. Before marrying Darcy, she learns not to sacrifice her private individuality, as a marriage to Collins would have required, but to reconcile it with the collective. In the webseries this is reflected as Lizzie moves from recording videos in her bedroom or personal office to her family's den. This journey also represents the author's own passage from private writing for her family to a "marriage" with the semipublic through publishing.

Lizzie's arc as new media storyteller allows us to read her as analogously similar to Austen as novelist. They both work in semipublic spaces, connecting with a wider audience while simultaneously hiding their work from many of their acquaintances. Both innovate within emerging media forms that are cheaper for creators and audiences. Like the novel, the web-series was produced and published because men of means empowered female creators and invested in female stories. Each narrative represents the threats gendered economics pose, revealing that we should not have an inflated view of our own progress. These crossovers draw a political thread through history to connect the productions of each horizontally.

### Semipublic Form

There are many similarities between early novels like *Pride and Prejudice* and transmedia webseries like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Unlike plays performed publicly or poetry, which might be read aloud, novels operate in a uniquely semipublic space. The author writes in private, the audience's reading journey is one they take alone, and yet the experience is also somewhat-public; the author and audience interact, the successful novel is read by more than one person, it is discussed, meaning is often created



collectively rather than only in private. Furthermore, the forms utilized by early novelists internalized a semipublic experience—often featuring shared spaces such as drawing rooms. Likewise, the webseries is at once far more private and far more public than a film or stage adaptation. As I mentioned, *Lizzie* films within private spaces and there are never more than three people on screen at once—though she often films completely alone. As a digitally born show, many experienced it on mobile devices or, at maximum, with only as many people as could share a small screen. Yet, even as they privately consumed the story on their YouTube or Twitter app, viewing was innately interactive with comment sections and a “reply” button adjacent to the story. While ostensibly different, there is crossover in the semipublic experiences of these forms as they have emerged.

Formally, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* innovates in ways reminiscent of emerging novels. Despite their distinct historical moments and different technologies, the webseries remediates aspects of the early novel and of three forms specifically: the fictional autobiography, serialized novel, and epistolary novel. Each of these three forms was used in the initial stages of the novel’s history, as it was being developed and defined. Like the use of transmedia today, they were often heightened the immediacy of audiences’ experiences. Webseries find themselves in a similar state in their evolution as creators are still discovering the limits and best uses for the web video<sup>4</sup>. Since *Lizzie*

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<sup>4</sup> After her TEDx Talk on “What Jane Austen Can Teach Us About Our New Internet Selves,” Julie Salmon Kelleher published some further notes on her personal site. She notes, “Watching LBD reminds me of reading Samuel Richardson’s early novel *Pamela*, which is so often out of control of its conventions that you get the sense you’re watching those conventions emerge right in front of you, growth pangs included” (“Part I”).

*Bennet* is an announced adaptation, it makes its transhistorical remediations more apparent, but I would also suggest these are being used by a variety of new media forms.

It turns out that the creators of *lonelygirl15*, one of the first fictional vlogs (refer to page 9), were not original in passing off their narrative as an authentic account; Daniel Defoe beat them to it. One of the early examples of the fictional autobiography—and of the novel in general—is *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* in 1719. The novel’s frontispiece claims it was “written by Himself,” instead of crediting the actual author, Defoe. Even more prevalent in the nineteenth century, autobiographical novels like *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*, “edited by Currer Bell” (see fig. 8) or *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens also attempted to blur lines of fiction and non-fiction.

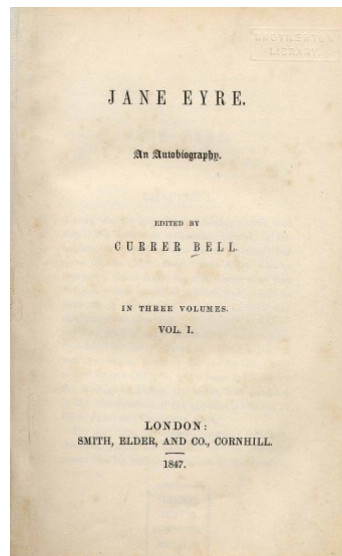


Fig. 8. Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1847. Web. 11 Oct 2015

They were often attributed to their eponymous “authors,” but edited or compiled by someone else. Relaying fiction in a new form plays on “the double logic of remediation” when audiences are not yet familiar with the conventions and signs of artificiality.

Certain burgeoning media forms, even as they are hypermediated—whether appearing as

an edited collection of letters or on a YouTube channel—feel immediate because the audiences believe what they are experiencing is “real.” Real people had published travelogues before *Robinson Crusoe*; real people had kept up personal vlogs as a common way to share about their life. So readers and viewers may not have initially suspected fictionality, because they had not been conditioned to. The seeming authenticity played a part in making *Robinson Crusoe* a best-seller and *lonelygirl15* such a big hit.

The fictional vlog refashions this construct. Even through its title, the series claims to be a type of non-fictional documentation, her *Diaries*. Here the “dear reader” becomes references to her viewers and the consistent use of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person. To justify the posting of episode 60 (#DarcyDay), Lizzie addresses the camera saying,

“So...here on my videos we’ve had some crazy things happen on camera, and there have been several moments we didn’t include. So this was not an easy decision to make, but it seems these videos are bigger than me now. And though, I’ll probably regret this, I don’t think you guys will ever forgive me if I don’t show you what happened after my last video” (“Are you kidding me?”).

Moments like this direct address reinforce the autobiographical construct.

Another transhistorical formal connection between the novel and webseries is the serialized novel. In discussing the Internet serial form of the blog (still applicable to the vlog), Kathleen Fitzpatrick defines the appeal of serialization through the “ways that interruption, deferral, and waiting produce the desire that gets readers to return. These notions of the serial allow for an understanding of blogs that connects them to earlier narrative forms, including of course the picaresque and the epistolary novel” (182). Indeed, early novels were often serialized. The most obvious example is Dickens, but single novels were being sold as series in the eighteenth century as well. Samuel

Richardson released his seven-volume novel *Clarissa* in three separate installments over the course of a year (15). Even novels that were published at one time, like *Pride and Prejudice*, were broken up into volumes, creating a physical sense of seriality.<sup>5</sup>

Some may argue that the serialized vlog is modeled after television and its weekly format. However, I would suggest that this series is more akin to serialized novels. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was filmed in batches ahead of release, averaging about 1 month of content per filming day, a month ahead of what they were releasing at the time (@berniesu). These episodes were then edited and aired continuously, gathering views and comments along the way. Unlike traditional television where the story would be written, filmed in its entirety, and then aired, the breaks between filming gave Pemberley Digital the benefits of reception. This harkens back once again to other novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which were written over the course of serialization, leaving room for the author to gauge audience reception and alter their work accordingly.

Perhaps most specifically, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* refashions the formal elements of the epistolary novel. Richardson's *Pamela* helped begin a trend that would define novels of the long eighteenth century. Even Austen tried her hand at this form in her juvenile writings. Her novella *Lady Susan* is comprised of letters and some suppose Austen's original draft of *Pride & Prejudice*, "First Impressions," was as an epistolary novel (Harding). Michael McKeon writes in *The Secret History of Domesticity*,

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<sup>5</sup> Fitzpatrick goes on to suggest that serialization is a distinctly feminine mode: "As Beverle Houston has argued, seriality puts all television spectators 'into the situation provided for the feminine in theories of subjectivity as well as in her actual development and practice in patriarchy' (Houston, 1984: 189). The quotidianness, the deferral, the refusal of closure that is the signature of serial television forms such as the soap opera is also key to the structure of the blog — and is a significant aspect of the personal blog's construction as feminine" (182-183).

*Evelina* is an epistolary novel, and for all its fascination with the letter form, *Pride and Prejudice* makes a crucially different choice of narrative technique. Austen's novel is filled with letters—it is thought to have begun in epistolary form—and recalls earlier experiments of Behn, Richardson, and many others in figuring both interior privacy and its limits (700).

Even its published iteration includes a surprising amount of letters.

Letters within *Pride and Prejudice* are semipublic not only because they are supposedly private correspondences set in type and mass-produced but because, as McKeon points out, they represent characters reading other people—literally and figuratively. He says that

what is most private is what is both most deeply felt and most unacknowledged. Elizabeth's development involves the discovery of what has always been there, a secret from herself. Reading letters provides a powerful figure for reading people, both others and oneself, one that privatizes the public activity of social knowledge and publicizes the private activity of self-knowledge (701).

In the same way, Lizzie's vlog “publicizes the private activity of self-knowledge” while allowing viewers—including other characters allegedly watching them—to “privatize the public activity of social knowledge.” When reading and processing letters, audiences get to see the most personal instance of the public and private blurring.

The formula of this type of novel was of “found literature”—supposedly one person's letters to another compiled by some editor who had discovered them. Though the videos are one person's “diary” to a wider group, the effect of narrative as correspondence works here and elsewhere. McKeon goes on to say, “Interesting experiments in narrative hybridization occur in both narrative modes [epistolary and third person] through what might be called a third-person effect—the private made public—that is achieved when characters are explicitly depicted in the process of construing the

meaning of letters” (700). *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* expands on this “hybridization,” utilizing both the third person when Lizzie recounts stories costume-theatre style and the epistolary through a variety of correspondences. Both reveal the “the private made public” in their respective historical moments.

Even more reminiscent of the “epistolary novel” is the show’s use of Twitter accounts for their characters. Audiences could actually read their correspondences, just like the fictional correspondences exchanged in the epistolary novel. While the letters in novels are privately written from one person directly to another person (or just a few people), when shared in the novel they become semipublic in the same way tweets can be semipublic. For those not familiar with Twitter, there are a couple of different ways to correspond. One could simply tweet and that tweet will show up in the feeds of anyone who follows them. However, if they begin that tweet with an “@” symbol followed by someone’s Twitter handle, the person they “at” will get a notification and it will only show up in the feeds of people who follow both the tweeter and the person tweeted at. This type of tweet is known as an “at.” If something is truly private, two people who follow each other are able to “direct message” or DM and these are not visible to anyone except the sender and receiver. So when the characters tweet, especially “at” another character, it makes that direct communication semipublic—available to the public, though not as public as a general tweet.

Though the core of the series was on Lizzie’s YouTube channel, the story was furthered on Twitter. Sometimes these were mundane conversations, such as Caroline Lee tweeting incessantly at William Darcy without a response (see fig. 9).

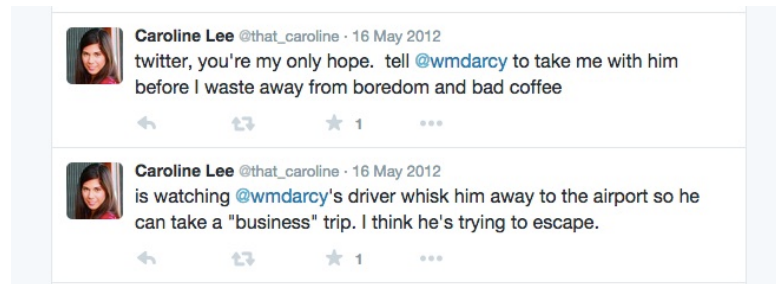


Fig. 9. Source: Lee, Caroline (@that\_caroline) “is watching @wmdarcy’s driver whisk him away to the airport so he can take a ‘business’ trip. I think he’s trying to escape.” 16 May 2012, 4:48 pm. Tweet.

---- “twitter, you’re my only hope. tell @wmdarcy to take me with him before I waste away from boredom and bad coffee.” 16 May 2012, 5:00 pm. Tweet.

But at other times the correspondences extended the plot, like when Lizzie started following Darcy and even tweeted at him following the series’ version of her visit to Pemberley (figure 10).



Fig. 10a. Source: Bennet, Lizzie @TheLizzieBennet “@wmdarcy Thank you and Gigi for an awesome day.” 28 Jan 2013, 5:09 pm. Tweet.

Fig. 10b. Darcy, William @wmdarcy “@TheLizzieBennet Our pleasure.” 28 Jan 2013, 5:12 pm. Tweet.

Though smaller in scope at 140 characters than, say, *Clarissa*'s pages-long letters, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*' use of the epistolary construct—where audience members could read interactions between individual characters—refashions this emerging novel form and also heightens its relevancy. Just as the novel raised proto-feminist questions in the semipublic, the webseries interrogates the current political environment and some of the same, yet still unresolved, questions. Specifically, they explore the risks women face when engaging with the semipublic while arguing that the engagement is still worth it.

This may be most evident in how each treats the Lydia-Wickham scandal. In the novel, Lizzie learns of Lydia's disappearance from a letter by Jane, which becomes available for the audience. Reading such a sensitive letter feels akin to a spilled secret or bit of gossip. *Lizzie Bennet* escalates the threshold of participation. The creators realized the most analogous scandal—a falsely romantic event that poses a serious economic threat to the entire family—would be Wickham selling a sex tape of him and Lydia without her consent. Along with the audience, Lizzie learns of the tape on Twitter. As in the book, Lizzie finds out about the scandal from personal correspondence: instead of a letter from Jane, it is now a tweet from Charlotte with a link to the tape's site (figure 11):

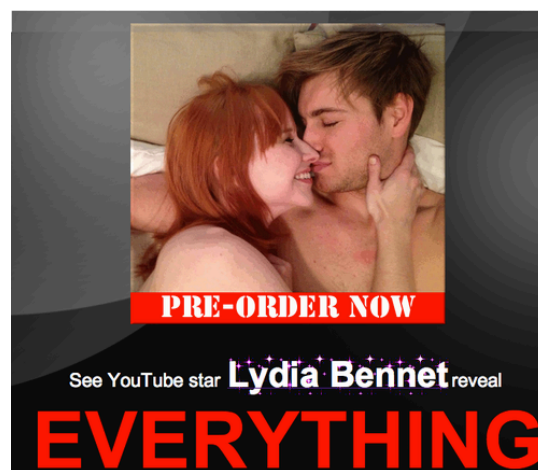




Fig. 11 “Lydia Bennet Tape.” *Novelty Exposure*. Pemberley Digital. 30 Jan 2013. Screenshot of Web. Unavailable after 13 Feb 2013.

Both types of correspondence require semipublic participation. Curious audience members could even send a personal email to subscribe to the supposed adult video company, Novelty Exposures. They would then get an automatic reply about the forthcoming tape, expected release set for Valentine’s Day 2013. In each text the forms used to communicate the news invites the reader/viewer to go beyond a passive experience and step into a semipublic space.

As the very notion of a leaked sex tape indicates, this is potentially dangerous space; the blurring of public and private may lead to exposure. Here, the series highlights the gendered or sexualized violence women face when engaging the semipublic. Lydia, who is also given the chance to be a creator in her own spinoff series, faces the very real-world danger of having a sex-tape exposed. While many women have faced the threat, it is precisely because of Lydia’s engagement with the public that there is interest in her body as a perceived transgression and transaction. It is important to see this moment in the plot as representative of the gendered, economic system where women are still vulnerable to exploitation.

While this threat is embodied within the narrative, its resolution proves why it is still worth it, still empowering for women to engage with the semipublic. The tape is eventually stopped thanks in part to Georgiana “Gigi” Darcy creating a vlogging app that baits George into revealing himself (“If Else”). Lizzie’s continued YouTube presence is empowering not only emotionally but economically when she eventually sets up her own company (“Future Talk”). The show was willing to go through this dark plotline to demonstrate that the risks women face in 2013 may look different than the ones in 1813,

but they are both rooted in gendered economic structures. However, the way they write the arc also proves that those structures will not change if women retreat from the semipublic; rather, acknowledging its risks, they should claim ownership of it.

*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* does not simply retell *Pride and Prejudice*; it also adapts the context of its production and forms. Exploring the history of production enables us to see both how the semipublic was claimed by writers like Jane Austen and is re-claimed by female creators today as they continue to investigate the intersections of public and private. The webseries borrows from the fictional autobiography, the serialized novel, and the epistolary novel. These transhistorical remediations allow them to heighten the show's sense of immediacy; they rely on tropes like claiming non-fictional documentation and publishing correspondences. By adapting the constructs of the emerging novel, I would argue they captured a piece (even if only a small piece) of the reading experience audiences had 200 years ago. In the next chapter, I will look at how audiences perceive and engage the semipublic.

The Engaged Woman: Reception of the Semipublic from *Pride and Prejudice*  
to *Lizzie Bennet*

While the last chapter examined the creator's relationship to the semipublic, here I will look at the audience member's reception of the semipublic reading experience. I am primarily concerned with how this enables audiences to work through anxieties about changing boundaries between the public and private and how to advance progressive values. To begin with, this chapter looks at how the experience and reception of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* extends that of *Pride and Prejudice*, which includes studying the female fan and the fan as female. I then examine the layers of realism and immediacy within the narrative by returning to Collin's proposal and audiences' responses to it. In the last section, I explore how the semipublic allows fans to move past merely observing into collaborating and how this affects the webseries, especially in Lydia Bennet's character arc. Because *Lizzie Bennet* is the adaptation of a reading experience, these moments of gendered participation within the semipublic are significant. As with the last chapter, they demonstrate the connections between the source, its adaptation, and the eras they belong to. These links allow us to revisit moments in the source text that were progressive in their historical moment and reclaim them as progressive in ours. By transhistorically updating these moments and making them immediate again, the show empowers fans to embrace the progressive potential of the semipublic. The immediacy of *Lizzie Bennet* motivated a particular kind of feminist politics, the reception of which led to progressive conversations as well as actions. Because the adaptation—like the novel before it—enables interactive, gendered reading, its reception in the semipublic is political and progressive.

Reception and Gender

Just as the novel form offered a semipublic space for female creators to enter a broader conversation, so it did for female readers. Though some critics have argued that reading was a private act, even the accounts they give cannot ignore the public elements of women's reading. For instance, after Martyn Lyons establishes, "Women formed a large and increasing part of the new novel-reading public" (315), he portrays this as a private act. He explains how female novel readers were viewed, saying, "The traditional image of a woman reader tended to be of a religious, family-oriented reader, *far removed from the central concerns of public life*" (316-317, emphasis mine). Expounding on this removal, Lyons says:

Novels were held suitable for women, because they were seen as creatures of the imagination, of limited intellectual capacity, both frivolous and emotional... Newspapers, reporting on public events, were usually a male preserve; novels, dealing with the inner life, were part of the private sphere to which nineteenth-century bourgeois women were relegated (319).

For Lyons, the distinction between male/public reading and female/private reading is definite. In some senses, Lyons is correct in his assertion that novel reading belonged to "the private sphere"; unlike attending the theatre or the recitation of poetry, the act of reading a novel is in itself solitary. However, while not a public form, the experience equips the reader for dialogue. Even Lyons notes "Reading had an important role in female sociability," going on to say that "fiction...changed hands through exclusively female networks" (320). Because this account cannot entirely separate the private from the public experience of reading, I propose the notion of novel reading as semipublic.

Reading a novel was at once solitary and shared. Deidre Lynch says, “even in reading by and for oneself, one reads in a crowd” (209). She goes on to use scenes from *Persuasion* to discuss how novels were read in the early nineteenth century:

Mary’s description of Benwick [and his constant reading] also speaks to the semipublic (and noisy) nature of the scene of reading in this era. The rites of gentry sociability had readers reading in company, in common sitting rooms in which other people were playing at cards or playing the piano or doing needlework and dropping their scissors, and thereby producing, to borrow a much-used locution from *Persuasion*, a buzz of sound. Female reading was particularly likely to have this aural accompaniment (241).

Here, Lynch adds nuance to Lyons’s view that reading is a “private sphere” activity.

Reading was not simply shared after the fact; at the time, it was simply one of the many activities a person might pick up in the company of others.

Reading in semipublic spaces is exemplified as a common occurrence in the sitting rooms of Austen’s characters. Just prior to the infamous discussion of “an accomplished woman,” when Elizabeth enters “the drawing room she found the whole party at loo [a card game], and was immediately invited to join them; but suspecting them to be playing high she declined it, and...said she would amuse herself...with a book” (26). Darcy concludes his description of the accomplished woman with: “and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading” (27). Elizabeth and Caroline react to this commendation quite differently. A few drawing room gatherings later, Elizabeth has taken up needlework instead of her novel but when “Darcy took up a book... Miss Bingley did the same” (36). Representations of reading within the novel not only serve as a reflection of the characters’ temperaments but also of how people may have read at the time. Here, the act of reading in the drawing room—the most public part of the private sphere—connects the

consumption of Austen's novel with its production, behind the squeaky door of her family's common room.

In fact, novel reading sparked concerns because of women's potential engagement with the semipublic. Lynch recounts,

“Ladies’ transactions with literature had social sanction insofar as they made ladies better company: in the words of Ann Laetitia Barbauld’s essay ‘On Female Studies’ (1826), the genteel young woman should read only as many books as would enable her to ‘give spirit and variety to conversation’” (241).

Barbauld’s comment connects the act of reading with a broader “conversation,” linking the private and public. As Lynch’s phrasing “social sanction” suggests, there were underlying concerns, however, related to women consuming fiction. Kathleen Fitzpatrick argues that like the blog today, and TV before it, novels were originally viewed as a moral threat. She explains, “During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries...the novel inspired anxieties in the general public that seem a bit familiar today. Some portion of these anxieties about the novel was driven, famously, by concerns about what the novel was doing to its female readers” (Fitzpatrick 173). She refers to Cathy Davidson, who characterizes the novel as “the subject of heated popular debate in the late eighteenth century... It was condemned as escapist, anti-intellectual, violent, pornographic; since it was a ‘fiction’ it was a lie and therefore evil” (3). According to Lyons, novels

carried a certain danger for the nineteenth-century bourgeois husband and *paterfamilias*: the novel could excite passions, and stimulate the female imagination... [the] novel was thus associated with the (supposedly) female qualities of irrationally [sic] and emotional vulnerability (319).

Fueled by misogynist views of women “as creatures of the imagination, of limited intellectual capacity,” patriarchal gatekeepers feared the novel’s power.

Referring back to Kathleen Fitzpatrick, she brings these moral concerns back to questions of the public-private divide, saying that one

aspect of this anxiety had to do with the very femaleness of the novel itself, which, as another critic has argued, resembled nothing more than ‘a coquette who lured readers into a claustrophobic world of desire and self-indulgence, the antithesis of the public domain of rationality and men’ (Gilmore, 1994: 621), (173).

As these accounts of female novel-reading show, the novel was perceived as dangerous and potentially transgressive precisely because it was semipublic—that is, simultaneously too public to be traditionally feminine and not public enough to be respected as masculine. By questioning this restrictive binary, the act of novel reading held progressive potential. While still a solitary, “private” activity, reading exposed women to a world beyond the indoor, internal one they were “relegated” to. Not only were they writing novels, by consuming them women were able to both experience a fictional public in the world of the story and a real public in the conversations of drawing rooms and other social meeting places.

Just four months after the publication of *Pride and Prejudice*, Annabella Milbanke, the soon-to-be Lady Byron, wrote to her mother,

I have finished the Novel called *Pride & Prejudice* [sic], which I think a very superior work. It depends not on any of the common resources of Novel writers [listing sensational occurrences common to novels]. I really think it the *most probable* fiction I have ever read... I wish much to know who is the author or *ess* as I am told (Morrison 56).

While not as semipublic as YouTube comments or twitter replies, this letter shows us how Milbanke found *Pride and Prejudice* paradoxically immediate; it is acknowledged as “fiction” while simultaneously earning the superlative, “*most probable*.” The correspondence between two women is also significant because the daughter realizes she

may be able to claim this the “superior” novel for an author-“ess.” Even early on, the novel, its female writers, and female readers created a space, the immediacy of which encouraged conversations, like this letter, and female modes of meaning making, such as Milbanke’s literary criticism of the novel. By embracing a form that was at once public and private, nineteenth century women readers of novels (like those by Austen) entered and helped shape this semipublic space.

In straddling the same public-private line and engaging primarily female viewers, as it aired *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* created a new and unique media event, which was also paradoxically immediate. In my personal experience, the semipublic nature of viewing the series on YouTube mirrors that of reading the early novel. Leading up to every Monday and Thursday, my friends and I shared our nervous anticipation for the video to upload. We rushed home from work or waited for breaks in the day for our five minutes with Lizzie. The experience itself was private (or, at a maximum, shared with just a few people), viewing the YouTube video on a laptop or mobile screen, but it catalyzed interaction. We reacted over group-texts, in YouTube comments, or more broadly on Twitter. *Lizzie Bennet* was not just something we watched; it became a recurring event that fostered or furthered community. So who was demographically represented in that community? According to Su, the audience for the show was overwhelmingly young and female. In fact, during the year the show aired, YouTube’s analytics recorded the audience as 86% female<sup>6</sup> (see fig. 12).

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<sup>6</sup> At the time of the series airing, I was represented in the 50% block of women ages 18-24.



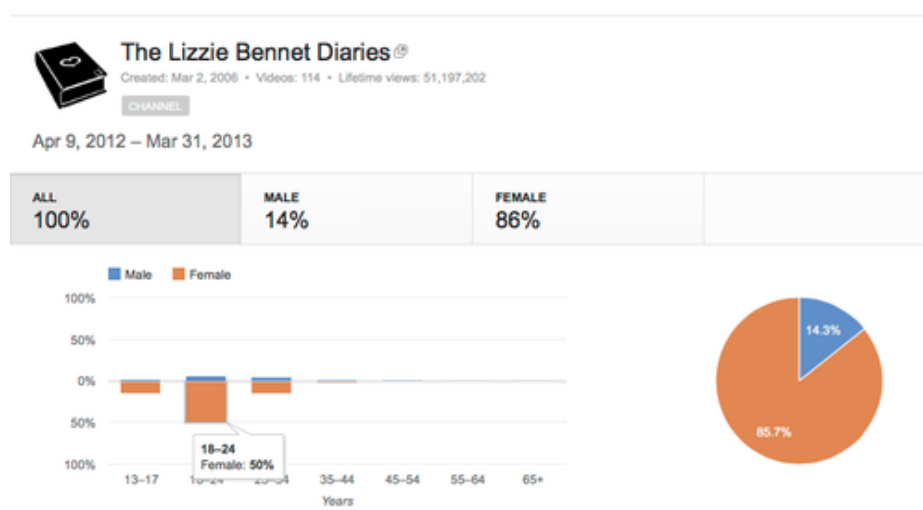


Fig. 12. Su, Bernie. “rjmakes asked.” *Bernie Tumbles*. Tumblr. 22 Sept 2014. Web. 9 Oct 2015.

As with the novel, the audience for this adapted webseries is predominantly women. This is important because the semipublic affords the opportunity for progressive discourses.

An *Indiewire* review by Aymar Jean Christian notes,

The success of “Lizzie Bennet” signals the possible maturation of women’s programming in web video. Even as advertisers and networks continue to see online as a way to reach young male viewers, producers...Hank Green and Bernie Su, now with the help of DECA [a leading women’s digital media company], have been proving how women, particularly young women, respond to web originals as well.

This primarily female audience “respond[ed] to web originals” in a number of ways. Aside from a video from Hank, “Introducing Lizzie Bennet,” posted on the Vlogbrother’s channel, the growth of the show was all word of mouth or from press who sought the creators out. The viewers also stayed incredibly devoted to the show; even its slower, plot-preparing episodes have several hundred thousand views. AV Club reviewer Myles McNutt points out that *Lizzie Bennet* will be “memorable for its longevity (in terms of number of episodes), its ingenuity, and its popularity, with more than 1.5 million views [as of March 2016; 2.4 million] of its first episode and more than 500,000 [and 770,000]

for its 100th” (McNutt). The fans remained invested throughout the series, not just hitting the high points. They also proved their financial agency when the show ran a Kickstarter and fans funded the 771% of the goal (Larson). Returning to Christian’s point, though “young male viewers” have been the golden demographic for decades, *Lizzie Bennet* demonstrates that, as with the novel, female audience members engage effectively with a semipublic narrative platform.

The fans’ engagement with *Lizzie Bennet* is significant, not just as an interesting media event, but because fans are uniquely located for female modes of meaning making. There has been some debate as to whether the position of a fan is empowering for women, which Henry Jenkins explores in his work on reception and gender in *Textual Poachers*. He defines a fan as one who makes a text’s meaning their own; his textual “poachers do not observe from the distance...; they trespass upon others’ property; they grab it and hold onto it; they internalize its meanings and remake these borrowed terms” (62). He identifies this proximity to a text as an innately feminine position, quoting Mary Anne Doane who:

suggests that the traits most often ascribed to the experience of mass culture, “proximity rather than distance, passivity, overinvolvement and over-identification” (2), are those traditionally ascribed to femininity. If traditional masculinity provides spectators with some critical distance from media texts, Doane argues, the female spectator is often represented as drawn so close to the text that she is unable to view it with critical distance and hence as less capable of resisting its meanings (61).

For Doane, a fan’s proximity to a text is a cause for feminist anxiety; it threatens to dominate her perspective. Jenkins however turns this on its head, suggesting,

Proximity seems a necessary precondition for the [fan’s] reworkings and reappropriations... Only by integrating media content back into their everyday lives, only by engagement with its meanings and materials, can fans fully consume the fiction and make it an active resource (62).

For Jenkins, this process is not one of “passivity.” Rather than privileging the masculine, distanced, traditionally academic view, he acknowledges that the typically feminine position of proximity is better to “fully consume the fiction and make it an active resource.” In fact, he says, “Fan criticism is the institutionalization of feminine reading practices just as the dominant mode of academic criticism is the institutionalization of masculine reading practices” (116). Interestingly, this theory seems to anticipate the term now applied gender-neutrally to the actions of obsessive fans: “fangirling,” as in, “to fangirl” over something. Viewing the fan as theoretically female and the fan of both novel and webseries being actually female becomes especially significant as new technology enables her to become a collaborator. Jenkins notes that the reception of texts by fans becomes a space to work out societal issues in a mediated way, saying, “To some degree, even though feminism has enabled more women to speak publicly about issues of concern to them, fan talk about television characters serves similar functions, creating a more comfortable environment for addressing topic issues” (84-85). The reception of *Lizzie Bennet* evidences this.

Why is it important that the audience was primarily female and so actively engaged? Women are widely considered “better off” now than they were in the eighteenth century and in some ways this is true; most Western women have gained legal rights such as voting, suing for divorce, or owning land. However, as both the last chapter on female creators points out and this chapter on female fans explores, far more progress is still needed for women and other marginalized groups. From the wage gap to threats of violence online, from rape culture to the often-patriarchal entertainment industry, women still benefit from the types of representation and conversation that *Lizzie*

*Bennet* offers. Specifically, I will spend the remainder of this chapter exploring audience reaction to two plot points that used *Lizzie Bennet* as an “active resource” to work through contemporary issues involving gender policing and slut shaming. As female fans engage with those progressive aspects semipublicly they demonstrate the dialogic significance Stam argues adaptations have. A horizontal approach shows us how this adaptation mines the more politically progressive aspects of *Pride and Prejudice*, representing them with renewed immediacy to both reclaim and further them.

### Reception and Realism

The novel was able to reconcile the divide between public and private because it created a semipublic space not only in form but also in reception. During the enlightenment, author and audience had a “novel” narrative form to work through political, societal, and philosophical issues that at once accommodated the individual and the group. In first quarter of the twenty-first century we face renewed concerns about the public, the private, the area between them, and how marginalized groups navigate those spaces. Once again, semipublic narrative forms become necessary and enable audience members to respond to anxieties about too much of the private life becoming public or women’s relationship to the public being controlled by patriarchal structures. These moments reveal how the potency of immediate forms both foster and enable particular kinds of political action. In the case of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, these provoked feminist interaction with current political issues.

These narratives are particularly effective for political conversation because they are so immediate. Michael McKeon discusses how even in the telling mode, and

specifically through free indirect discourse, a reader can experience “transparent immediacy.” He argues,

the perspectival oscillation entailed in free indirect discourse is no more consciously registered in the experience of the reader than it is in that of the character. [It] achieves an effect of transparent immediacy whereby representation is transformed into the illusion of the real. Like the character, the reader internalizes the lesson of narration unselfconsciously (“Domesticity” 706).

In other words, the reader forgets the fictionality of the experience and “internalizes” the narrative. It is experienced as “real,” even as free indirect discourse is itself a form of hypermediation. Online platforms take realism even further as they embrace hypermediacy while also heightening immediacy. Jenkins study of early fan sites (such as that of *Twin Peaks*) proves audiences “embrace” technology “as almost an extension of their own cognitive apparatus” (78). The “double logic of remediation” is again at play here as both the narrative form and technological platform create an immersively realistic experience. Again, hypermediation actually supports a sense of authenticity, which viewers’ can experience as “as an extension of their own cognitive apparatus.” This means that fans are able to process the political stakes of the narrative more directly and readily, acting as an agent in the conversation instead of passively observing.

We certainly do not have the same amount of contemporary reception on record for the novel as we do for the webseries, however, there are moments within the plot that offer us an exploration of the ways people may have responded to *Pride and Prejudice*. As previously discussed, Mr. Collins makes an offer of marriage to the financially imperiled Elizabeth. Economically speaking, turning Collins down was a highly risky move. With a dowry of only £1000, or £40 per year, their diminished family capital, and her home guaranteed only as long as her father remained alive, the marriage offer from

Collins meant a potential answer to homelessness (Austen 73). McKeon points out, “The plot-driving problem of the fact that Mr. Bennet’s estate is entailed to Mr. Collins is not the diachronic one that the patriline will come to an end but the synchronic one that the present generation—the Bennet girls—will be deprived of financial security” (“Domesticity” 699). While we do not have an account of readers’ initial reactions to this scene, Austen does provide an exaggerated but not entirely irrelevant response in Mrs.

Bennet:

Aye there she comes...looking as unconcerned as may be... provided she can have her own way—But I tell you what, Miss Lizzy, if you take it into your head to go on refusing every offer of marriage in this way, you will never get a husband at all—and I am sure I do not know who is to maintain you when your father is dead—I shall not be able to keep you (77).

Here Mrs. Bennet more explicitly connects Lizzy’s choices with economic risk and, though overdramatic, states the truth: “I do not know who is to maintain you... *I shall not be able to keep you.*” Returning to Annabella Milbanke’s paradoxical assessment of *Pride and Prejudice* as “the most probable fiction” she had read reminds us of the measure of immediacy the novel achieved. It is likely that the realistic economic pressures would have caused many reading these chapters of *Pride and Prejudice* to share Mrs. Bennet’s concerns.

For a number of reasons, Episode 39 of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* has some of the richest reception data. This episode, where Collins offers Lizzie a job as his business partner, which she turns down forcefully, demonstrates semipublic reception and hypermediated immediacy. With a built-in comment section, fans responses are much easier to capture now than they were 200 years ago. Reactions varied, but many of the initial comments say things like, “Lizzie you are mean” (evehhr) or “I think that lizzie is

a little too harsh on Mr. Collins in this version. He is merely ignorant and obnoxious, and she is just a little too mean [sic]" (heartbrkn5). One of the commenters even pulls out the B-word: "Whilst she doesn't really like him, it doesn't hurt to be polite. Besides, it's not just this video that I'm talking about - if you look in the last few she's been rudely bitchy rather than humorous like she used to be" (Andy King). The gender policing here communicates expectations: no matter what, girls must be polite. Being direct and explicit will garner accusations of being "mean," "harsh," or "rudely bitchy." Some, like Mrs. Bennet, even point out how her family is in a difficult financial situation, with the threat of losing their house. One person exclaimed, "wt efff they need the money! :(" (dezyroxursox), once again placing the family's financial burden on the daughter's actions rather than the financial irresponsibility of the father/parents.

Later, others, like user bethanyblueberry, supported Lizzie pointing out, "I don't get why people are so quick to label Lizze [sic] as rude when Ricky is the one invading her privacy and ignoring her refusals. I think he's being much ruder." Several made the transhistorical jump, analyzing the parallel between the marriage proposal of the book and the business proposal of the adaptation. One user, Ash Alonzo, said, "This really helped me better understand Lizzie's outrage in the novel. The analogy of a business proposal illustrates the importance of marriage back then." Finally, others pointed out that she is not responsible for her family's financial difficulties and should not be pressured into taking a job to support them. Commenter Helena C said, "Technically it isn't her house, it's her parent's. It's unfair to argue that she should be responsible for their property." Though many eventually backed Lizzie's decision and actions, the fact these

fans felt the need to defend Lizzie reinforces how applicable this narrative is to the contemporary semipublic.

These comments seem to reveal attitudes about expectations placed on women: whether Lizzie should be more polite, whether she should accept the job, and whether she should make choices to benefit other people or focus on her goals. This is where the transhistorical reclamation becomes significant as progressive solutions are applied. While the political issue of gender policing persists, the novel and the webseries offer a resolution to the unresolved. Austen used the refusal to argue it was better for Lizzie to risk financial stability than to capitulate to unhealthy expectations. By the end, Lizzie's philosophy, as revealed by her response to Collins: "You could not make *me* happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who could make you so," has evolved into a more refined pursuit of happiness (73). She tells Lady Catherine, "I am only resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to *you*, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me" (233). The adaptation of Lizzie's refusal sparks responses within a platform designed for conversation. While many readers of the novel side with Elizabeth and see the impropriety of the derisive comments made by Mrs. Bennet (and, later, by Lady Catherine), when the story is adapted some viewers echo Mrs. Bennet by confronting Lizzie's pursuit of happiness. These reactions highlight that a woman pursuing and asserting her own happiness is often still viewed as transgressive/progressive. Many of these comments reveal how engrained patriarchal messages are or that, in order to navigate the semipublic, young women feel pressured to support these messages—making *Lizzie Bennet's* challenge to those messages all the more important. While



marriage is no longer women's only respectable income opportunity, the policing of women in the semipublic unfortunately remains. Austen's novel and its adaptation offer us a template for progressive resistance. Ultimately, these similarities across historical moments teach us to not undervalue Austen's subtle progressivism or to have an inflated view of our own.

The audiences' reactions to Lizzie's rejection of Collin's job offer also serve as a moment proving the life-likeness of the series. Extending the level of realism and immediacy established by the novel, *Lizzie Bennet*, according to Karen Swallow Prior, succeeds at crafting an "interactive 'storyworld,' which...blurs the lines between fiction and non-fiction, creator and audience." As evidence of this claim, it is worth noting that many viewers participated in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* for long periods of time before realizing what they were watching was not "real." On their YouTube entries, it is not uncommon to find commenters share the startling realizations they were watching something fictional, let alone the adaptation of a famous novel. On episode 39, user Abby I says, "Why didn't I know that this was based on Pride and Prejudice [sic] until now?" Even on Episode 75, one commenter admitted, "I only just found out these were acted" (Beckydoesstuff). This is in spite of the creators drawing attention to their artifice within each episode's description, explaining, "The Lizzie Bennet Diaries is a series based on Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice [sic]..." before a long listing the cast and creative team. Many of the transmedia elements, however, such as character's twitters or blogs, belied their artificiality.

The creators even wrote in a meta-moment in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* to draw attention to its own hypermediacy. Episode 80, entitled "Hypermediation in New Media"

contains a scene in which Lizzie, who is interning at Pemberley Digital<sup>7</sup> for her thesis project, asks Darcy to perform a costume-theatre version of them having a conversation.

Lizzie: Look, there's this theory about levels of mediation in media that says it's possible for artificiality to both remind their audience that what they're seeing is a construction while at the same time adding to their level of immersion. I thought... Forget it. It's stupid.

Darcy: You thought...that costume theatre as ourselves would remind the audience that this isn't a conversation we would naturally have but because of that the obviously constructed nature of the scene would, by its very artificiality, create its own sense of...verisimilitude.

Lizzie may have well been reading Bolter and Grusin in her graduate seminar;<sup>8</sup> they say, “The appeal to authenticity of experience is what brings the logics of immediacy and hypermediacy together” (71). Important for its own moment within the plot, the conversation also served to break the fourth wall and acknowledge that what the audience is seeing is constructed, yet allows for immersion. While audience members reacted in shock after realizing the vlog was fictional, their comments support what Bolter and Grusin argue about interaction on the web.

Later in *Remediation*, they quote “computer graphics expert Randall Walser: ‘Whereas film is used to show a reality to an audience, cyberspace is used to give a virtual body, and a role, to everyone in the audience. Print and radio tell; stage and film show; cyberspace embodies’” (Bolter 162). The show’s points of semipublic interaction—e.g. a fan reading a tweet from Lydia to Lizzie—enable the kind of

<sup>7</sup> In world, “Pemberley Digital” is the name of Darcy’s family company, with him explaining, “Pemberley is the name of the place my Father’s family comes from in England” (“Corporate Interview – Ep: 83). Later, the creators adopted this title for their real world studio.

<sup>8</sup> After asking writers Margaret Dunlap and Alexandra Edwards about their theoretical inspiration for this episode, Edwards confirmed Bolter and Grusin was whom she had in mind.

Edwards, Alexandra (@nonmodernist). “@spyscribe @iwaitandhope bolter/grusin was what I was familiar with! In my vetting process :)” 26 Feb 2016, 4:34 pm. Tweet.

embodiment Bolter, Grusin, and Walser are discussing here. While highly hypermediated, there is an appeal to authenticity not only because the actors' "virtual body" are always present within the transmedia, but also because audience members have become accustomed to interacting with non-fictional vloggers or web personalities in precisely the same way. To someone browsing YouTube who may never meet the people they are watching, Lizzie Bennet seems just as immediate, just as "real" as her co-creator Hank Green. So the fictional, impending economic crisis threatening Lizzie is internalized by fans prompting their authentic reactions, even those who suggest she capitulate to a male-dominated economic system. Even if a fan is consciously aware that "this is just a story," the seeming embodiment of the characters incentivizes interaction, which is precisely what happened with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

This perceived embodiment and the authentic reactions it elicits return us to the blurring "between fiction and nonfiction," which catalyzed a particular kind of political action (Prior). McKeon is also interested in how the earliest English fictions respond to what he calls "questions of truth" and "questions of virtue." The former he defines as, "The instability of generic categories registers an epistemological crisis, a major cultural transition in attitudes toward how to tell the truth in narrative"; the latter as, "The instability of social categories registers a cultural crisis in attitudes toward how the external social order is related to the internal, moral state of its members" ("Origins" 20). Since even before Phillip Sydney's "Defense of Poesy," English literature had been struggling with "how to tell the truth in narrative" or, as Cathy Davidson puts it, that fiction was suspect since it "was a lie and therefore evil." According to McKeon, the "questions of virtue" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were about how to

reconcile the public, “the external social order,” with the private, “the internal, moral state.” He points out that during the “instability of generic and social categories... symptomatic of a change in attitudes about how truth and virtue are most authentically signified [the] novel comes into existence in order to mediate this change in attitudes” (“Origins” 20-21). New media has opened up a new set of questions regarding “truth” and “virtue,” “the external social order [and] the internal, moral state” and the adapted webseries attempts to “mediate this change.”

### Reception and Collaboration

Fans’ political engagement with the semipublic was facilitated by its sense of communal immediacy—a sense that the early novel also fostered. There is a long history of fictional reading experiences inspiring audiences’ real-world actions, specifically with the novel. Karen Swallow Prior points out that “one of the first examples of transmedia storytelling occurred in 1740 when Samuel Richardson, the ‘father of the English novel,’ published England’s first bestseller, *Pamela*.” She elaborates:

Richardson didn’t have the technology LBD has at its disposal, but he did have a circle of female friends among whom he circulated his book manuscript to solicit feedback[, which] helped shape the story (along with criticisms that followed the first edition and resulted in significant changes in the second). Richardson’s responsiveness to his readers, even sans social media, worked. The *Pamela* phenomenon included communal readings of the work in at least one village; the ringing of the church bells at one public reading of Pamela’s marriage; the proclamation of the novel’s merits by preachers from the pulpit; the sales of Pamela paraphernalia such as paintings, fans, prints, playing cards, and wax-works; and the publication of various knockoffs, parodies, and sequels (copyright law not yet being in place). Furthermore, *Pamela*, like many transmedia stories, blurred the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. The idea for the plot came to Richardson from a real-life example of a maid marrying her master, and he presented his fictional tale in the guise of a true story in the form of “edited” letters (not unlike the faux-documentary style of *The Blair Witch Project*).

Prior's outline here suggests some of the ways the novel's early readers responded to it; examining fans' reception of *Lizzie Bennet* reveals they refashion and extend their interaction with the story. By seeing how the novel's early readers engaged with its seeming immediacy, we can better understand the way viewers of the webseries responded by simultaneously embodying and internalizing the narrative. Fan reception of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* reveals new ways to interact with the story, ways that show the semipublic—the blurring of public and private, fiction and nonfiction, even audience and author—coming full circle.

It was not only the writers who found ways to remediate the early novel reading experience; fans also (even if unconsciously) adapted the novel's early reception, extending their level of engagement. As refashioned forms of “communal readings,” social media allowed fans to comment, tweet, blog, record reaction videos, and more. No church bells rang, but there was mass celebration for #DarcyDay on November 1, 2012, which saw the release of Episode 60, Darcy's first time on screen, and the show's equivalent of “the first proposal.” Then, on April 8, 2013, fans celebrated Episode 98—the “second proposal” and first kiss—dubbed #DizzieDay, a portmanteau of Darcy and Lizzie. When it came to merchandising, Pemberley Digital of course had some tie-in items, like a t-shirt, mug, or poster; but fans expanded their engagement by creating fan art and homemade gifts for the cast and crew. They took their support even further when, in response to fan requests, Pemberley Digital launched a Kickstarter campaign to produce a DVD collection of the web videos. The studio asked for \$60,000 and fans responded enthusiastically, pledging enough to meet that goal in less than six hours. The

following (fig. 13) is a screenshot from the first day of that month-long campaign, showing the goal more than met.

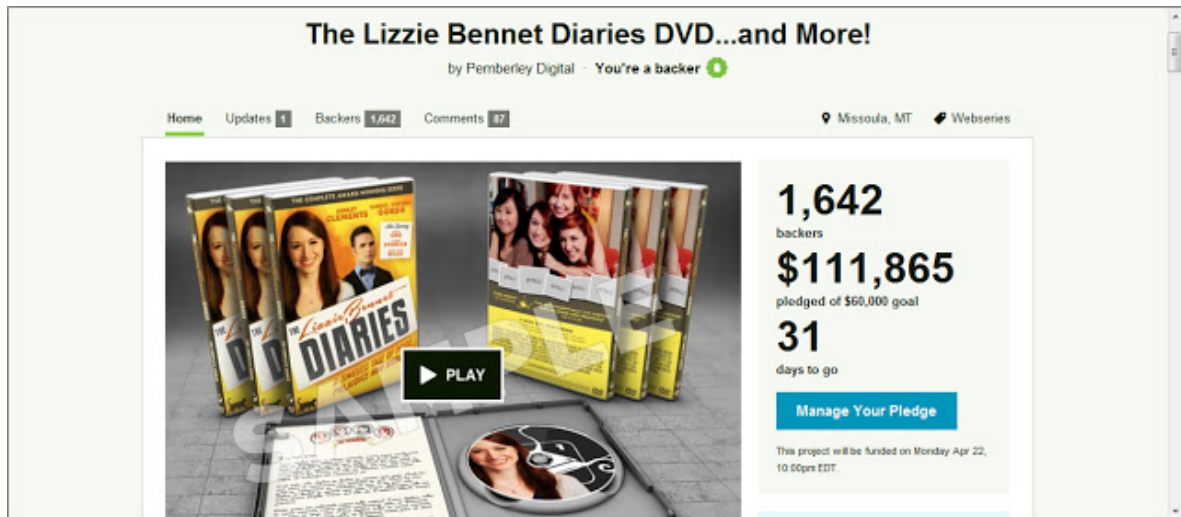


Fig. 13. “The Lizzie Bennet Diaries DVD...and More!” Pemberley Digital. *Kickstarter*. 22 Mar 2013. Screenshot of Web. Unavailable after 22 Mar 2013.

By the end of the campaign, they had raised \$462,405 with 7,158 backers (“The Lizzie Bennet Diaries DVD...and More!”). Because the audience was 86% female, statistically it is likely that a majority of these donations were from women. Once again, this is evidence of the economic influence female fans have within and because of the semipublic. *Lizzie Bennet* has also had their own experiences with “knockoffs, parodies, and sequels” in the best way possible. Since their 2012 debut, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* has inspired more than 60 adaptation projects in a similar form. Even while the series aired, followers were writing their own fan-fiction and (a conversation for another paper) the creators ended up receiving a Touchstone book-deal for *The Secret Diary of Lizzie Bennet*—Lizzie’s notes on the vlog project itself—and *The Epic Adventures of Lydia Bennet*—a sequel to Lydia’s arc, told in her unique voice.

These moments of engagement were the result of a semipublic reading experience, which made an activity that could be completely solitary into a community-wide event. Since *Lizzie Bennet* was crafted in a semipublic, interactive space, it invited audience members not just to watch, but to collaborate. Kelleher notes how the serial form opens itself up to this sort of collaboration:

“One of the (many) interesting things about internet stories, especially serial internet stories, is that they have the potential to be a hybrid of individual and collective voices. Yes, [authors] can put [their] name on it, but the audience can also respond to and get involved in the storytelling” (“Part II”).

Aymar Jean Christian notes this also, “Like 2006's *lonelygirl15*, ‘Lizzie Bennet’ started slow, taking its time with key plot points. This built up anticipation for how the series would handle plot points Austen fans knew were coming... The result is one of the most fan-driven web series since its predecessor in *lonelygirl15* [sic].” Because the seriality of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* gave the creators time for audiences to react and writers to respond, those reactions gained an agency of their own.

Kelleher points out that while new media changes the dynamic of this involvement,

This isn't an entirely new phenomenon. Critics Kathleen Tillotson and John Butt have talked about the role that audiences played in the serial novels of Charles Dickens... But the internet ups the involvement, because a fan comment posted on a Youtube video is public in ways that a fan letter sent to Charles Dickens simply was not (Kelleher, “Part II”).

The comments and tweeted responses were just one way the creators took stock of people's reactions; head-writer Bernie Su frequently opened his personal blog up for questions and to share the behind-the-scenes process. Fans responses to Pemberley

Digital prompted reaction, at times direct and out-of-world and other times as quiet considerations for future writing.

This collaboration is most evident in the creators' treatment of Lydia. Fans responded so positively to Mary Kate Wile's portrayal that the writing team decided to include her much more than they had originally planned. Hank Green even said, "Lydia's increased role in the show has entirely been due to viewers' reaction to her" and later admitted, "I was surprised that people took to Lydia so quickly. It really changed how we saw the character and what we wanted to do with her" (ecogeek). The fans' increased interest in and care for Lydia made the eventual Wickham-Lydia scandal far more emotionally potent, which in turn affected their interaction with the story.

As discussed in the previous chapter, both the novel and web series invite audience participation to make this private matter public. In 1813, some of the reactions to that private matter responded to "questions of virtue" quite publicly. In an anonymous review of the novel written for *The Critical Review*, the author shares his less than generous opinion of Lydia. After describing the Bennet sisters and their personalities, he says, "but Miss Lydia...is mad after the officers who are quartered at Meryton" (Morrison 56). He goes on to add, "An excellent lesson may be learned from the elopement of Lydia: - the work also shows the folly of letting girls have their own way, and the danger which they incur in associating with the officers, who may be quartered in or near their residence" (Morrison 56). According to this reading, Lydia's role is not that of a fully realized character, but an anti-feminist didactic lesson; her fate will be the norm when "girls have their own way." Her story is used as a way to semipublically process morality.



The response to Lydia in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was drastically different.

Overall, there was a far more compassionate treatment of Lydia after the scandal—even among those who may have found the character annoying. Leading up to the announcement of the site, and in response to Wickham’s manipulative actions on her own vlog, many fans reached out to Lydia. They were worried about her health,<sup>9</sup> they tried to warn her about him,<sup>10</sup> they begged her to touch base with her other friends and family.<sup>11</sup> The writers had evidently anticipated, or at least thought Lydia would anticipate, negative audience reactions. In episode 87, “An Understanding,” Lydia mimics their expected responses:

Lizzie: I don’t want you to leave...

Lydia: Why not? [Points at camera] They do.

Lizzie: No.

Lydia: [Shaken and nearly shouting] Lydia, get over yourself. Lydia, you’re being too dramatic. Lydia, you dragged Lizzie away from Darcy and Gigi where she could have been happy forever! You’re so selfish! ...Do you think I don’t know what they’re saying?

As those in front of the camera are often positioned as the narrator(s), this moment appears as a form of free indirect discourse. Lydia narrates the supposed thoughts of the audience with her own voice, as if she has internalized them, returning us to McKeon’s statement that free indirect discourse “achieves an effect of transparent immediacy

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<sup>9</sup> Sofia (soisbelo). “@TheLydiaBennet @thewickham That's right, Lydia. I don't understand. But we CARE about you and you don't even seem healthy anymore.” 29 Jan 2013, 12:36 am. Tweet.

<sup>10</sup> Mora, Barbara Nicole (Barbandita). “@TheLydiaBennet @TheGWickham you don't know anything about wickham. PLEASE SEE THIS! <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3nUxHf-BuM&list=UUXfbQAimgtbk4RAUHtIAUww&index=2> ... [Video of Gigi explaining how George lied to her].” 28 Jan 2013, 7:35 pm. Tweet.

<sup>11</sup> Bee, Melissa (MelBeeBuzz). “@TheLydiaBennet If he is so good for you, then why do you look so sad? :-( Have you talked to Mary [Bennet, her cousin] lately? What does she think?” 29 Jan 2013, 9:13 am. Tweet.

whereby representation is transformed into the illusion of the real.” This hypermediated moment layers “the illusion(s) of the real” as Lydia—who appears real, but is not—conveys messages which appear real, but are not.

More importantly, by reflecting back the judgmental responses the audience may have, Lydia, with help from Lizzie, is able to take over the discussion of morality. The discussion that follows reverses *The Critical Review*’s reading of the narrative’s moral; no longer is it a cautionary tale of female desire but an exploration of the real harm slut shaming can cause. When Lydia says, “None of this would have happened if I hadn’t been acting like a ‘stupid, whorey slut again,’ right?” she is quoting Lizzie’s words from Episode 2, “My Sisters: Problematic to Practically Perfect,” right back to her. This fictional moment becomes not only real but also vitally important here because the show is reappropriating the novel’s function of reinforcing “right conduct” for young women, but that instead of repressing female desire, “right conduct” is support of female sexual expression and solidarity with victims of exploitation.

This is an important learning moment for Lizzie, as she processes her prejudices in front of the audience. In this episode, the arguable climax of the series, Lizzie tearfully admits,

Sometimes I feel so clever and rational and appropriately analytical about the world around me. I’m a grad student; it’s what I do, what I’m supposed to be skilled at doing—communicating and relating and acknowledging that people do not fit into neat little boxes all wrapped and tied up in string. But here we are... (“An Understanding”).

Lizzie’s acknowledgement of her headstrong opinions and tendencies to stereotype are significant because they are usually reserved for her treatment of Darcy. By admitting her failure at “communicating and relating and acknowledging that people do not fit into

neat little boxes,” Lizzie recognizes where she has not granted Lydia the complexity she affords others, instead stereotyping her and choosing to withhold affection. While the webseries offers the sisters a restoration the novel does not, I would argue that it does successfully adapt Austen’s ending for Lydia, which, though not excessively compassionate, was progressive within its literary context. Eighteenth century novels established a pattern of how “fallen women,” such as Lydia, ended up in a novel. From Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748) to Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* (1791) to Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Coquette* (1797), no matter how sympathetic a seduced female appeared, her fate always ended in death. Austen gave Lydia a better literary fate; her hasty marriage to Wickham can hardly be considered a happy ending, but Lydia is significantly (albeit awkwardly) reconciled with the family in her post-wedding visit to Longbourn. *Lizzie Bennet* takes this reconciliation much further, acknowledging Lydia’s legitimate need for reconciliation and affection. This episode marks the first time we see Lizzie hug Lydia and re-centers the story by making her first on screen “I love you” directed at Lydia, not Darcy. Though *Lizzie Bennet*’s resolution of the Wickham-Lydia scandal diverges from the novel, it reclaims and applies Austen’s subtly progressive argument.

Due to the show’s immediacy, fans navigated this arc and its moral discussion alongside the characters. Rather than the responses Lydia imagined, after Wickham’s public betrayal, actual fans’ tones became even more compassionate towards Lydia. Still, participation in this transmedia story required some conflicting decisions. Those who interacted with the show by following various transmedia accounts spoke of seeing another side to Lydia, especially through her YouTube channel. For these fans, caring

about Lydia meant they should not subscribe to the site purporting to extort her; however, staying fully immersed in the story would mean engaging with as much of the transmedia world as possible, including an email subscription to the site. One fan tweeted, “I’m genuinely curious about emailing but I don’t want to seem like a creep life’s tough decisions [sic]” (scarlett). Many did subscribe, though sometimes just to communicate their disapproval. One fan, Emily Buford, published the automatic email she and every other subscriber received on her personal blog:

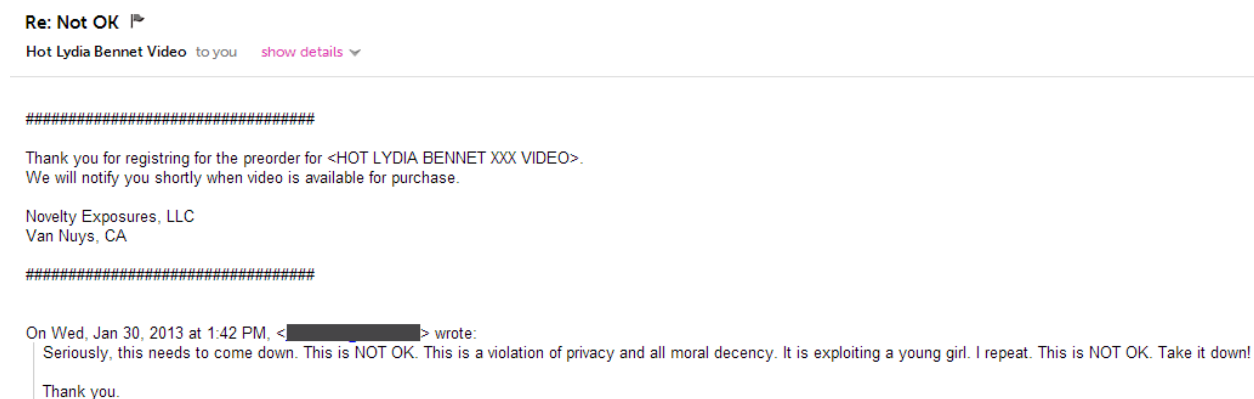


Fig. 14. Buford, Emily. “So I couldn’t resist the temptation to email...” *Emily Buford*. Tumblr. 1 Feb 2013. Web. 18 Jan 2016

The announcement of a forthcoming tape for sale went live on January 30, 2013; around the time the show had nearly 150,000 YouTube subscribers. By February 8, Bernie Su said, there were around 3,500 subscribers to the sex tape (“LBD – Answering Questions”).

For other fans, there seemed to be a different way they may participate in this story arc. The same day the site was announced at least one fan suggested interaction be taken a step further, with fans taking control of one of the plot points by planning to DOS—or “denial of service”—attack the (fake) pornography company’s website:

Thoughts on the Interactive Media influence on the Lydia Situation:  
 What if.... ITS THE FANS WHO HELP TAKE THE SITE DOWN AND  
 'SAVE' Lydia. Surely, among the thousands of us, there are  
 some....denizens of certain circles... who know how to do a DOS attack  
 on a site. And if the plan all along was to get the fandom so invested in  
 Lydia and Lizzie's happiness (because we fall in love with their  
 characters) that we FORCE the narrative ourselves by taking an active part  
 in it. Because we can't keep our hands out of it. Recent example: having  
 Lydia respond to people's negative texts about George and it driving her  
 even more into his arms[.] Making it Interactive Media INDEED (The  
 iBetch).

This post has 461 notes on tumblr,<sup>12</sup> meaning that it gathered fairly wide support and/or discussion. One fan even researched the site enough to track down its IP address, a necessary component for a DOS attack (Faewinds). The idea of a DOS attack gained enough attention to prompt responses from both Jay Bushman, Transmedia Editor, and Bernie Su asking fans to not DOS their site, explaining that the plot had been written to resolve itself. Jay Bushman commented, "You've reached a perfectly valid and understandable conclusion here. Which would be disastrous. Please don't. A DOS attack on the site would cost the production real money and time, resources that we would rather use on other parts of the show" (Bushman). It is remarkable that while they began by wondering if anyone would watch and interact with the show, by the end, the creators' pleading tones reveal a fear that some audience members would engage *too much* with the story. The team at Pemberley Digital had a plan for how the site would come down, a plan which, like in the novel, included Darcy paying off Wickham but, unlike in the novel, not without Gigi's assistance. The fans' passionate reactions to this plot point raise questions about a future in which, perhaps, plot points are not resolved without audience intervention. Within the semipublic the roles of author and audience become

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<sup>12</sup> Notes on tumblr are any interaction including liking or reblogging.

collaborative and may even blur. This blurring seems to be the ultimate end of Jenkins's argument about "reworkings and reappropriations." Here the fans, "by integrating media content back into their everyday lives, [by] engagement with its meanings and materials... fully consume the fiction and make it an active resource" for progressive discourses (62). Engaging in a female mode of meaning making, fans are able to not only engage in those conversations, they get to direct them.

The female reader and female fan are empowered to participate in meaning making when a text is delivered in a semipublic form. *Lizzie Bennet's* form fosters interaction and even collaboration as audience members engage and internalize the meanings of those texts. Here, the immediate can be political. It heightens both the sense of realism within the text and the power it has to represent a more progressive politic, such as addressing contemporary gender policing and slut shaming. Though he does not use this term, I think we see McKeon explaining the power of the semipublic when he says, "The realm of privacy in modern life is not (only) an alternative to the public but (also) its internalization, a truth that has become best known through the feminist maxim 'The personal is political'" ("Domesticity" 716). These progressive lessons exist because of Austen's original politics, not apart; by adapting the semipublic experience of reading, those lessons can be reclaimed and "internalized." *Lizzie Bennet* reintroduces and re-immediates these discourses; it updates them for our current context while also revealing how they are connected to a transhistorical conversation. Texts that are at once private and public, at once hypermediated and immediate should be adapted in the same semipublic cross-section so that new generations of fans are enabled to apply their progressive meanings.

## Progressive Conclusions: “So Far We Are Equal”

Progressive resolutions are hardly original to twenty-first century Lizzie. Austen delivered a cautiously political conclusion to *Pride and Prejudice* that offered a final word on the class conflicts central to her novel. Mrs. Bennet and the Gardiners’ status in the trade class is a concern raised throughout the novel; Darcy even lists her “connections” among his hesitations about Elizabeth (125). This comes to a head when, during the confrontation with Lady Catherine De Bourgh, Elizabeth boldly states, “[Darcy] is a gentleman; I am a gentleman’s daughter, so far we are equal” (232). While true, De Bourgh points out that while both may have claims to the gentry’s middle class, they are as far apart in that class as possible; Darcy’s mother was an aristocrat, Elizabeth’s the daughter of a tradesman. In another layer of Austen’s irony, it is the Gardiners who bring Elizabeth to Pemberley, facilitating her reassessment of Darcy; Mr. Gardiner who assists Darcy in recovering Lydia; and Mrs. Gardiner who informs Elizabeth of Darcy’s noble actions. While technically a gentry marriage, their high- and low-class connections make Darcy and Elizabeth’s eventual union a subtly progressive marriage, bridging the entire middle class. Both have overcome their class prejudices, as Austen impresses with the closing lines of the novel. Pemberley, now the site of a new social structure, has been visited just once by Lady Catherine, who “condescended to wait on them” (254). Of the lower-class relatives, however, the novel concludes, “With the Gardiners, they were always on the most intimate terms. Darcy, as well as Elizabeth, really loved them” (254). The final word, here, reaffirms Austen’s sophisticated progressive argument.

*Lizzie Bennet* preserves the progressive ideal at the end of the novel, even as it updates it. The series also navigates class differences, even if America's upper, middle, and lower classes are not as distinct as the aristocracy, gentry, and trade class of nineteenth century England, nor are they defined solely by birth and land. The economic differences are still noted by Darcy when he declares his love (the series' version of the first proposal), as he once again justifies his hesitation to Lizzie by mentioning "your odd family, your financial troubles, you're in a different world from me... You can't deny it; social classes are a real thing, people who think otherwise live in a fantasy" ("Are You Kidding Me"). Once again, Darcy maintains pre-conceived judgments about Lizzie's family<sup>13</sup> and she assumes because he is rich, he must be snobby, high-and-mighty, etc. Both must move past these prejudices in order to achieve mutual happiness.

Unlike Jane Austen in the eighteenth century, the creators of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* were able represent several plot points while also distinguishing the romantic from the economic. It insightfully reads Collins's proposal for what it was even in the novel: an economic proposition. By the same principle, the series enables Lizzie to be romantically reconciled to Darcy while maintaining her economic independence. In the penultimate episode of the series (which also served as Darcy's exit from the show), Darcy offers Lizzie a job at his company.

Darcy: I would set up a whole department around you; you'd have access to state of the art equipment... What do you say?

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<sup>13</sup> In this world, instead of the Gardiners being relatives, they are represented by Dr. Gardiner, Lizzie's thesis advisor. Here, she does not stand in for the Bennet's social standing—that is addressed through their faulty mortgage and other financial issues—but she does still guide Lizzie to Pemberley, now Pemberley Digital, for her thesis project. Appropriately, there are two post-scriptum episodes addressed to Dr. Gardiner.



Lizzie: [Pauses] No...I don't want to work Pemberley Digital, as amazing as it is. I want to be with you—but I don't want to be the girl who dates the boss...

Darcy: So what do you think you will do when you graduate?

Lizzie: Yeah, funny thing. When you have a video diary that gets millions of views, it attracts the attention of several people who run digital media companies.

Darcy: Oh so you want to work for my competitors.

Lizzie: Actually, I was thinking of *becoming* one of your competitors.

She goes on to explain that some potential investors have contacted her and that she plans to start her own company. As a romantic resolution to the story, Lizzie decides to start her company in San Francisco, where Darcy lives. Yet, instead of accepting a position at a public company, inextricably tied to patriarchal structures, Lizzie's engagement with the semipublic leads to succeeding economically, but on her own terms. Though different than the plot of the novel, both endings are resolving the class differential; the Gardiners being a continual part of the social life of Pemberley and Lizzie starting her own company rather than joining Darcy's. In a way, both partners have successful media projects, "so far [they] are equal." In 2013, as in 1813, she claims her independence as equal with Darcy.

The endings of both texts, with their assertion of equality, exemplify moments which may seem tame but, when updated and remediated, prove to be quietly progressive. I have attempted to show how these transhistorical moments play out not only in the plot, as the endings show, but also in the form, the production, the reception. Together these reveal how *Lizzie Bennet* adapts more than just the story of *Pride and Prejudice*. Rather, it reopens access to the semipublic space where both stories were created and experienced. Because of its unique position between public and private, this space can catalyze and facilitate progressive actions. Rather than relegating similarities

to fidelity studies, contemporary adaptation theory can use transhistorical similarities to explore political issues on a continuum.

The semipublic affords opportunity for creators who might otherwise be marginalized. During the rise of the novel, itself a semipublic form, this meant women could write and publish, read and discuss in ways they could not before. Austen had to work anonymously to protect her personal life; while female creators today are more empowered to take credit for their work, too often there still are negative ramifications. So an adaptation about a woman creating a vlog returns us to the semipublic while also directly commenting on it. By remediating forms like autobiographical, serial, and epistolary novels, the series capitalizes on the immediacy of those forms with the heightened authenticity of social media. These work to allow audience members the ability to more readily internalize the political arguments of the series.

The immediacy of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* did indeed captivate audiences and catalyze their engagement. Fans viewed, shared, commented, tweeted, discussed, crafted, wrote fanfiction, bought merchandise, gave their input, involved themselves, and invested cash in Pemberley Digital. Predominately female, this fan base interacted more than the creators ever hoped and by doing so, reclaimed the potential the semipublic possesses both for storytelling and for particular kinds of political action. These reflect and extend the engagement of female novel readers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The dialogs of drawing rooms and circulating libraries may have moved into cyberspace, but they revisit many of the same political discourses. Whereas most comment sections are derided for their negativity and “trolls,” the YouTube comments tangential to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* often acted as a conversation. As one might expect these were often

conversations expressing excitement over romantic tension but, at times, these were discussions around very current, charged political topics. These allowed fans to internalize and, in the case of the Wickham-Lydia sex tape, take action on progressive discourses.

As a media phenomenon, I have no doubt *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* will continue to be studied; I would offer that a horizontal approach to adaptation be applied more broadly. Today, a search of the title on the *MLA International Bibliography* already yields five times the number of results as it did at the beginning of this project. This impact does begin to account for the TEDx Talk, the pieces of journalism, and the new fans, the ones who keep finding and binging the show, adding their own comments. People will continue to study how Pemberley Digital harnessed the vlog form for their stories and achieved profound levels of interaction—indeed, their adaptation *Emma Approved* won them their second Emmy for Original Interactive Program. While this work continues, I think these other shows, along with the countless other online literary webseries, should be explored as we can continue to move away from fidelity while still exploring similarities that reveal and further the dialog of political continuums. As new media adaptations become increasingly popular, we need expanded ways to understand them. A horizontal approach helps us view all adaptation as transhistorical and explore the political potential of their “universally acknowledged” truth.

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