

Mixing media:
The Lizzie Bennet Diaries as a postmodern
adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*



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elvishness. "So what do you recommend to encourage affection?". Drawing. *Tumblr*. Tumblr, 16 Feb 2013. Web.
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“New technologies have left their imprint on literature as a paper-based medium, and vice versa. Literature no longer has a single material location, and one may wonder if it ever had one.”

Kiene Brillenburg Wurth

From: *Between Page and Screen. Remaking Literature through Cinema and Cyberspace.*

~

“I cannot fix on the hour, or the spot, or the look, or the words, which laid the foundation. It is too long ago. I was in the middle before I knew that I had begun.”

Fitzwilliam Darcy in
Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, 1813.

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Introduction

It is 'a truth universally acknowledged' that, even though two centuries have passed, Jane Austen's novels and persona are more popular than ever. Nowadays, there are many people who first have come to Austen's work through its many adaptations, and have learned to love her novels through other media – it was how I myself, at fifteen years old, first encountered them. *Pride and Prejudice* is the most well-known of Austen's six major novels, and the one that has been adapted the most times to either screen or stage. An intriguing and also very recent example of a completely different adaptation is *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. At the moment of writing (late May 2013) this adaptation has only just come to its conclusion, running from 9 April 2012 to 28 March 2013 and consisting of more than 100 video blog episodes on YouTube.

Developed by Bernie Su and Hank Green, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* takes *Pride and Prejudice* into present-day society by transforming the novel into Elizabeth "Lizzie" Bennet's 21st century video blog. Updated twice a week in episodes of roughly five minutes long, it showed *Pride and Prejudice* almost completely through the eyes of Lizzie. As the story continued, spin-offs by Maria Lu (Maria Lucas), Lydia Bennet and Georgiana "Gigi" Darcy were added to this perspective, as well as additional social media accounts that all the main characters updated outside the regular episodes. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* seems a very well thought-out and intelligently made project, that lends itself very nicely for closer analysis. Especially when examined through the lens of the ever-developing field of adaptation studies, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* makes for an interesting case study.

Though the last few years have seen a surge of popularity in making adaptations of literary classics (adaptations of the works of Jane Austen being a prime example), adaptations as a phenomenon have long been the 'black sheep of the family' within the humanities. Adaptations seemed to fall in between the appreciation for their source material and the medium they are adapted into: their 'borrowed' source material makes them inferior to original works, and their new

medium makes them inferior to the source material they are based upon. Thus it is imaginable that, adaptation theory also had trouble being taken seriously within the humanities (Murray 1; Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* 6).

In the last twenty years, there has been a shift within adaptation studies that has changed the way adaptations are viewed. In this shift in ideology, influences from postmodernism and post structuralism are incorporated into the analysis of adaptations – thus it was dubbed “The Impact of the Posts” by Robert Stam (*Literature and Film* 7). Adaptations are no longer seen as “sub-literary” and even “parasitic”, but as a “hybrid construction” deserving of being seen *as adaptations* (Stam, *Literature and Film* 8; Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* xvi), for their own merits. Consequently, the field of adaptation studies in itself has become a very ‘interdisciplinary’ field, combining literary studies, film studies, new media studies and also often cultural and political studies in studying adaptations, also opening up to “concepts of audience agency” (Murray 9). This development, according to Simone Murray, has only properly come to fruition since 2005, when “the discipline’s long-standing and increasingly theoretically uncomfortable privileging of a specific subset of print texts [was severed] in favour of an inclusivist conception of adaptation as a freewheeling cultural process” (2). Since then, there seems to be a surge of interest in the adaptation as a critique of its source material, displaying “wilful infidelity” to it (10). These “postmodern adaptations” (Brooker 108) could be characterised as “always critical reworking[s], never a nostalgic return” (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 4).

How does *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as an adaptation place itself within this development, this “third major wave of innovation” (Murray 9) within adaptation studies? And could it, consequently, be called a postmodern adaptation? To give a satisfying answer to this question, this thesis will look at *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* both as a product of and an adaptation within this framework of ‘new-wave’ adaptation studies, and will examine how *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* itself employs (or does not employ) multiple characteristics of these ‘new’ adaptations. Case studies of

particular storylines will aid in the illustration of these points: how exactly do these characteristics manifest themselves?

Chapter 1 examines the aforementioned recent changes within the field of adaptation studies a little more closely: what came before this “third major wave of innovation”, and what exactly does this ‘new wave’, postmodern field of study look for and value in adaptations? Moreover, this chapter will dive deeper into Austen adaptations that preceded the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and look at how they paved the way for what exactly this adaptation takes from and leaves out of *Pride and Prejudice* – especially in adapting the story mainly to Lizzie Bennet’s perspective.

Chapter 2 then goes on to look at how the different media that the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* employs in storytelling aid its ‘wilful infidelity’ towards *Pride and Prejudice*. Video blog narrative and transmedia storytelling seem to have their precedent in serialized stories. Yet, especially in combination with each other, they have a very different means of plot development than can be discerned in ‘earlier’, older media. How the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* uses these media to take a critical stance towards *Pride and Prejudice* becomes especially apparent in the way Lydia Bennet’s elopement was adapted.

Chapter 3 then, finally, examines the place of the audience in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. This adaptation quite heavily relies on its audience to be successful, both in terms of crowd funding and storytelling. How exactly does *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* fit into this new tradition? And though the viewers are invited to actively immerse themselves in the story, is their presence really necessary in the critical stance *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* takes toward its source material? In this case, it is relevant to look at how William Darcy was introduced as a character: if the audience is already aware of ‘Darcymania’, how can the adaptation still manage to create suspense?

Chapter one

Wilful infidelity: *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* in relation to its source material

As a quite young and very interdisciplinary field, adaptation studies is ever-changing to incorporate new developments. Especially the most recent ones in this field, the taking on board of postmodernist views and elements from other disciplines, cast an interesting light on adaptations as an phenomenon. How do earlier adaptations of the works of Jane Austen place themselves within this discussion, and most importantly, what does this certain view entail for *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*?

1. (Recent) changes in the field of adaptation studies

In the introduction to her book *The Adaptation Industry*, Simone Murray gives a valuable overview of this young field. She identifies three “major waves of innovation” that prove to be very helpful in how adaptations are viewed since the 1950’s. These ‘waves’ are not exclusive of each other and mostly signify additional insights into the phenomenon of adaptation that helped strengthen adaptation studies into a serious field of study.

The first wave of innovation in adaptation studies largely dealt with the “outright rejection of fidelity [to the source material] as directorial goal or critical norm” (8). ‘Fidelity’ consequently became somewhat of a dirty word, and fidelity criticism something that was *not done* with respect to adaptations (notable examples of this criticism from Stam, “Beyond Fidelity” 75; Brooker 108) Later, wilful *infidelity* would even become the most important object of study. The ‘second wave’ in the late 1970’s consisted of introducing structuralistic elements and narratology into adaptation studies, thus bringing in textual analysis of the source text as a method for analysing adaptations.

It is the “third major wave of innovation in adaptation studies” (9), however, that proves to be the most important step towards adaptation studies as a influential field of study. The introduction of concepts from post-structuralism, post-colonialism, feminism and cultural studies in the early 1980s, according to Murray, “opened adaptation studies up” (8). The issue of ‘fidelity’ criticism that was problematized in the first wave was, moreover, taken one step further:

[F]idelity criticism was deemed not only a woefully blunt instrument with which to examine adaptations, but wilful *infidelity* was in fact the very *point*: adaptations interrogated the political and ideological underpinnings of their source texts, translating works across cultural, gender, racial, and sexual boundaries to secure cultural space for marginalized discourses. (10)

It was now not only just the relationship between the source material and the adaptation, but also what the *message* of the adaptation was, that became interesting to adaptation scholars. And the other way around, because of the march into postmodernism by the humanities and arts, it also became important for adapters to reflect critically on the source material they were adapting onto the screen, stage, or other medium.

This was for some scholars, most notably Peter Brooker, the reason to refer to these adaptations as “postmodern adaptations”. As he explains, these adaptations represent of their source material “less ‘more of the same’ than *more* of the same” (110), meaning that they are more critical, self-aware and conscious of the material they are adapting, intending to be *more* than just another work with borrowed source material. In the words of Linda Hutcheon: they refuse to just be a “nostalgic return” (*A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 4) Postmodernist adaptation, difficult enough to define as it is, does in this context then mean that the adaptation is critical, self-reflexive and highly aware of its source material, often in subtle, playful ways pointing back to it.

This new way of adapting does not necessarily have to mean, however, that the source material is completely rejected in favour of the adapter’s own world view.

Kamilla Elliot calls this the “De(re)composing concept of adaptation”, explaining that though these adaptations display a wilful infidelity, “these infidelities represent rejections of certain parts of the novel in favor of others, not total departures from the novel” (157).

An important question to be asking in this context is whether the field of adaptation studies is actually this closely connected as to how actual adaptations are made. If the field of adaptation studies, the way it is now, researches adaptations to other media than literature and film and is interested in audience engagement and politically charged adaptations, does that mean that adaptations in this era were also made with these values in mind? The answer to this question, at least for the sake of this thesis, might lie in turning it around: some of the elements that adaptation studies nowadays takes from postmodernism and cultural studies and applies to adaptations in their analyses must already have some foundation in these adaptations themselves. As Linda Hutcheon notes: “An adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context – a time and place, a society and a culture; it does not exist in a vacuum” (*A Theory of Adaptation* 142). Both adaptation studies and actual adaptations are products of their time; in this case the fact that adaptation scholars succeed in analysing the adaptations in question through these filtered lenses must be evidence enough.

2. Austen adaptations and wilful infidelity

Even if they are sometimes described as “heritage films”, expressing “nostalgia for long-ago worlds of coherency, romance, adventure, and some degree of psychological and social order” (Corrigan 47), there are plenty of examples of Austen adaptations in the mid-nineties and early years of the twenty-first century that seem to be ‘postmodern’ in the previously described way. Thus, they could be seen as fitting into this new tradition of adapting classic novels that is the product of the “third major wave of adaptations”.

These adaptations could then, again, be divided into two categories. Firstly, there are the directly critical readings of Austen's work in the vein of Patricia Rozema's 1999 adaptation of *Mansfield Park*, or Ang Lee and Emma Thompson's 1995 adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*. Secondly, there are adaptations that interpret Austen's story lines to make a point about their own culture, like Gurinder Chadha's 2004 Bollywood adaptation *Bride and Prejudice*, or Amy Heckerling's 1995 loose adaptation *Clueless*.

The first category stays faithful, at least, to one very important aspect of Austen's novel: the time period. The adaptations are still set in Regency times, and examine parts of this culture critically. In Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility*, this is done in a subtle way, yet it certainly is there. Though this adaptation stays quite close to the events of the novel (there are no major changes to the plot), it makes sure to place emphasis on the helplessness of the situation of Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, who are at the mercy of their older brother and cannot make a living for themselves. This adaptation criticizes Regency society, only this time with a modern, post feminist perspective (Gay 92).

The second category, however, turns Austen's work completely upside down, so that it is only loosely based on its narrative. Instead of criticizing society in Austen's time, they use her storylines to make a point about both the universality of Austen's novels and about how they are still applicable to modern times. As Kathryn Sutherland notes, these adaptations "are not adaptations so much as transcultural commentary and critical levers upon the novels they daringly transpose" (224). Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice*, for example, takes the original marriage plot of a mother obsessed with finding husbands for her five daughters into modern India, so as to make a point about modern Indian society. Heckerling's *Clueless* does something comparable in taking the plot of *Emma* and placing it into 1990's Beverley Hills, and showing how the courtship plot is something that is even applicable to American teenagers.

How, then, does *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* fit into this tradition? In a way, it seems to fall between both of these categories – it has elements of both. By shifting the focus to an adaptation centred around Elizabeth “Lizzie” Bennet, thus empowering her even more as a heroine, it seems to reflect on the limited position of women in Jane Austen’s own time, in much the same way as Emma Thompson adapted *Sense and Sensibility*. However, it also takes the story of *Pride and Prejudice* and turns it completely around, in the same way as *Bride and Prejudice* and *Clueless*. It modernizes *Pride and Prejudice*, while retaining its basic plot. It also seems to do so because it is critical of the society to which it is updated – just as *Bride and Prejudice* is in some respect critical of marriage-oriented Indian society or *Clueless* is perhaps critical of the shallowness of modern teenagers in Beverley Hills.

3. From Elizabeth to Lizzie: modernizing *Pride and Prejudice*

In this adaptation, particularly the way Lizzie Bennet herself is adapted is a prime example of dual criticism towards *Pride and Prejudice*: it shows both reflection on how Elizabeth Bennet develops in *Pride and Prejudice* in contrast to modern culture, and a critical stance to how modern Internet culture might aid in the process of growing up today.

The most striking contrast between the adaptation and its source material becomes almost immediately apparent – the title. Though later in the adaptation there will be spin-off video blogs, and other characters frequently will make their appearance apart from Lizzie, it is clear from the start around whom this adaptation will revolve: *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. In the title of *Pride and Prejudice*, the two ‘sins’ are named that must be overcome by *both* Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy. Here, playfully pointing back to the tradition of the Bildungsroman, the creators show this will be all about *Lizzie’s* development.

Another consequence of modernizing *Pride and Prejudice* is that especially the circumstances of the women in the adaptation change. As Bernie Su, co-creator of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, remarks: “one of the challenging thematic changes we had to

consider in our series is to incorporate the fact that women in the modern era have many more choices in life than in the 18th [sic] century." Thus, the video blogs initially start at as part of Lizzie's graduate thesis, and Lizzie's imperative is not to marry only for love, but to "find where she is supposed to be" (Episode 76).

The main force that drives the plot, however, still remains the same: the Bennet sisters need financial security, and they need it soon. And while it is hinted at that in this adaptation, Mr. Bennet also does not manage the family's finances well (Episode 73), Lizzie's financial problems are hers alone: she has a "mountain of student loans" (Episode 1). The same applies to Jane and to some extent, Lydia.

And just like the problems are the girls' own responsibility, so is the solution to them. This is made clear in quite an clever pointing back to the novel, when Lizzie early on announces: "It's not like we are all putting our lives on hold because some rich, single man dropped from the sky" (Episode 1). Of course, this is quite an accurate, be it slightly short and unsympathetic description of what happens in *Pride and Prejudice*. Yet, it also points to what will be different in this adaptation. Indeed, Lizzie will not put her life on hold for either Bing Lee or William Darcy: she needs to finish her degree and find employment to find out who she is supposed to be.

Still, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is not only about Lizzie growing into a modern young woman. It also reflects critically on the fact that she does so on the Internet. As Lizzie herself remarks in the very last episode: "There's growing, and then there is growing in front of tens of thousands of people". More than once, it is made clear by both Lizzie and the people around her, that her video blogs affect the way they live offline. Lizzie feels obliged to show on her video blog her argument with Darcy in Episode 60, claiming that the videos are "bigger than [her] now" – by again and again criticising Darcy (and others) openly during the show, she now feels obliged to finally show him on camera. She not only learns from her misjudging Darcy (and in this adaptation more importantly, Lydia) on a personal level, she also learns that it is insulting to expose it in so public a way.

Thus, it could be said that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* takes a critical stance in both ways: on the one hand, it reflects on the position of women in the early 19th century critically in comparison to modern culture. Yet, it also reflects on the complications and even dangers of this modern culture, especially modern Internet culture. By making the adaptation even more about Lizzie than *Pride and Prejudice* focuses on Elizabeth, it enables itself to form a contrast to it. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* not only takes *Pride and Prejudice* and transports it one-on-one to video blog format, it is highly conscious of the consequences that has for both the novel and the medium it is adapted into.

Chapter two

YouTube and transmedia as a means of storytelling in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*

To be able to better grasp *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as a postmodern, 'new-wave' adaptation, it is vital to understand what its medium (or, in this case, media) contributes to the way this adaptation tells its story. Essentially, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* combines two different elements in this new type of adaptation: the short video blogs on YouTube, and the use of multiple social media to fill in the gaps between characterization and plot development. What does this combination effectuate?

1. Video-blogging as a means of conveying narrative

Though the practice of using video weblogs (usually abbreviated into 'video blog' or 'vlog') to convey narrative and set up fictional stories is quite new, the practice of keeping personal video blogs seems to be around much longer. Even before YouTube was created in early 2005, there had been similar forms of the video blog around, or blogging styles that video blogging would eventually evolve from. As Burgess and Green state, "[Video blogging on YouTube] has antecedents in webcam culture, personal blogging, and the more widespread 'confession culture' that characterizes television talk shows and reality television focused on the observation of everyday life" (53). It is undeniable that YouTube has made the practice of video blogging a great deal more popular, by making it easier to upload and share video blogs. However, it seems that without the emergence of this 'confession culture' keeping a video blog would not have become so popular in the first place.

What, then, makes the video blog a suitable medium for story-telling? The explanation might be twofold: on the one hand, the video blog combines

characteristics of existing media into a new medium. This first and foremost includes the idea of serialization (the breaking-up of the narrative into short pieces) that seemingly points back to television.

Perhaps, however, it could be said that it dates back even further, to the weekly instalments in which for example Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell first published their work in magazine form. Both media rely heavily on creating suspense by feeding content in smaller pieces and over a longer time span to the audience. Moreover, especially in the case of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the complete narrative once it is finished is much more extensive: just like Dickens' *Little Dorrit* (70 chapters) and Gaskell's *North and South* (52 chapters) are longer than modern novels, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is with more than 10 hours of material well longer than any previous adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. While serialization would later develop further, it seems that the basic format is still a precedent for video blog narrative.

On the other hand, it could be argued that the video blog has its own, unique characteristics in story-telling. Video blogs are in general very short – mostly because YouTube allows videos to have a maximum length of ten minutes (Dovey *et al*, 244). In the case of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, this means that episodes are on average five minutes long, a huge contrast to the often hour-long episodes of television series.

Video blog narrative (or web series, as they are now often referred to) were something that existed before *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Adapting an already existing story into web series, however, was something that had not previously been done professionally. The idea for *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* came from Hank Green in early 2011. Himself an avid video blogger, the main motive for him was to experiment with the medium in adapting a story. As explained earlier, *Pride and Prejudice* was chosen because he felt that it would work best if the adapted work was “very dialogue-based and very character-based”, so that the story would come across even if it was just “one person talking to a camera” (“Introducing Lizzie Bennet”).

However, as I argued in chapter 1, changing *Pride and Prejudice* into Lizzie Bennet's own video blog can make for a one-sided, flawed perspective, even if other

characters regularly appear alongside her. This is where transmedia storytelling adds an interesting, different layer of characterization and plot development to the series.

2. The use of transmedia to enrich story-telling

'Transmedia storytelling' is a term that has gained multiple definitions over time. Henry Jenkins defines it the following way: "Stories that unfold across multiple media platforms, with each medium making distinctive contributions to our understanding of the [story] world." (*Convergence Culture* 334). Siobhan O'Flynn adds to this, arguing that there must not only be more than one medium to the story, but that all the used media platforms must form "an integrated, interconnected whole, though they are encountered separately" (181). In the end, it could be said that there are two types of transmedia storytelling: Franchise Transmedia and Integrated Transmedia.

Franchise Transmedia, first of all, seems mostly to exist *around* a story. In Franchise Transmedia, multiple media are used to give access to the same story universe. This universe might have started out with a film, but is then extended into for example television series, novelizations, video games, etc. These elements do all refer to the same story, but can be understood separately. Examples include *The Matrix*, *Lord of The Rings*, or the *Harry Potter Series*. The reason for Franchise Transmedia storytelling is usually, as the term implies, to create products around one story to sustain a fan community and sell merchandise. As Jenkins remarks, Franchise Transmedia is mostly used to "create a narrative so large that it cannot be contained within a single medium" (*Convergence Culture* 97), not the other way around.

Integrated Transmedia storytelling, on the other hand, works in quite a different way. In this case, the multiple media are not used for the world *around* a story, but rather to *tell* the story through different media. The story is not a complete whole, but rather "broken into pieces and spread across multiple conduits to the

audience.” As a consequence, a narrative that uses Integrated Transmedia tends to stay within the boundaries of one ‘type’ of medium, though for example *Sherlock* manages to sustain Twitter accounts for the characters next to as well as the television series (Hutcheon and O’Flynn, 182).

It is clear that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* are a prime example of Integrated Transmedia storytelling. This means that the events and characters of *Pride and Prejudice* are scattered over multiple online media to create its story. Along with Lizzie Bennet’s own YouTube account, other characters also have video blogs: Lydia Bennet’s consists of 29 videos, and then there are also ten short episodes by Georgiana “Gigi” Darcy and Maria Lu. On top of this, all characters were active on Twitter with the addition of Tumblr, Lookbook, Spotify and Pinterest accounts. These social media accounts seem to have multiple functions in storytelling: they either aid in developing the plot of the series, or are used to add depth and understanding to the characters.

3. ‘A deadly combination’: adapting Lydia Bennet to video blog format

Especially in the case of Lydia Bennet’s storyline in the narrative, it is shown how much the combination of video blog format and transmedia storytelling is needed to shape the plot. In terms of characterization, the video blog format is very helpful, while the transmedia storytelling comes in when things truly ‘get serious’ in Lydia’s dealings with George Wickham.

The difference between the Lydia Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice* and her modern counterpart is one of the biggest that occurs on character level in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Where Lydia Bennet is in the novel described as “a stout, well-grown girl of fifteen, (...)”, who has “high animal spirits, and a sort of natural self-consequence, which (...) had increased into assurance.” (45), the modern Lydia, like her sisters, is made a little older (she turns 21 years old during the story). However, there is one other big difference that is discernable in the modern Lydia: she is lonely. With Kitty

Bennet being cut out of the narrative (though she still exists in the story's universe as Lydia's cat), she has no close relationship with any of her sisters: at least not the close relationship that Lizzie and Jane, both in the novel and again in this adaptation, enjoy. Consequently, this Lydia craves the approval and attention of her sisters in a way that the Lydia from *Pride and Prejudice* does not.

It is this loneliness and craving that sets the stage for Lydia's own spin-off video blog: while Jane and Lizzie are at Netherfield because Longbourn is being remodelled, Lydia is forced to stay with her cousin Mary (the modern equivalent of Mary Bennet). From there, she starts video blogging, claiming that her videos will be "like Lizzie's, but way more awesome" (Episode 1). Constantly, Lydia's loneliness and insecurities towards her sisters are emphasized, a most striking example being when Lydia vlogs about being fired as babysitter because she played only with the youngest child: "The older boys were just being so mean to him and I felt really bad for him. He seemed lonely" (Episode 5).

By giving Lydia her own video blog, the creators truly give off a message about the importance of Lydia Bennet in their adaptation. Where Lydia Bennet is not given too much consequence in the novel, here her own perspective is shown completely apart from Lizzie's. As Lydia herself remarks when she is asked in one of her own "Questions-and-answers-videos" whether she would consider herself a secondary character in someone else's story (once again, playfully pointing back to *Pride and Prejudice*): "You are only a secondary character if you let yourself be!".

The transmedia storytelling truly is used to its full advantage when this storyline descends rapidly into the equivalent of Lydia's elopement with George Wickham. The elopement, in this case, is the threat of a sex video leaking out. Through Lizzie's video blog, this is only revealed as late as Episode 84 (published on 31 January 2013). Viewers who had watched Lydia's video blog and followed Lydia's Twitter account, however, already saw Lydia's downward spiral into Wickham's arms and her loving tweets towards him long before that.

The storyline is resolved in a way that quite differs from the novel: through another video channel of Pemberley Digital, Darcy and his sister Gigi are able to track Wickham and to put the website down. Lydia is not made to marry him, consequently being 'exiled' to the North – she gets the opportunity to learn from her mistakes and heal her broken heart. Lydia is truly different from Lydia Bennet in this respect, who is described as being “Lydia still -- untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless” (298).

In the end, it becomes clear that the video blog format and transmedia storytelling serve two purposes here: firstly, they enable deeper character study by fragmented and biased storytelling, and because of that, secondly, the adaptation is able to be critical both towards Lydia Bennet's treatment in *Pride and Prejudice* and modern Internet culture. Thus, it is shown that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, especially in the case of Lydia Bennet's character and the plot development occurring around her, is more than just an adaptation, or even more than just a modernization. The plot of Lydia's 'elopement' is turned into a personal tragedy (and ultimately, a learning experience) for both Lizzie and Lydia, instead of a moralistic message. At the same time, the way the 'Lydia-plot' was adapted could be seen as a warning for modern audiences. Though Internet culture is essential to the plot of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, it still once again shows critical reflection on what happens when you expose yourself on it as especially Lizzie and Lydia do.

Chapter three

Audience participation and character development in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*

The importance of the audience within the process that is an adaptation is something that has become increasingly important since “The Impact of the Posts”. It could be said that to earn the label ‘postmodern adaptation’, an interactive audience is vital. In the case of the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the audience participation is there to such an extent that it becomes necessary to also look at *how* this audience interaction works. The audience plays different parts in telling the story and furthering the narrative, but is it equally important in the critical stance that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* takes towards *Pride and Prejudice*?

1. Audience participation and participatory culture

The concept of audience participation is not something that exclusively belongs to or arose with new media – in that respect, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* fits into a tradition that goes back further called *participatory culture*. Henry Jenkins, founder of the Comparative Media Studies Program at MIT, defines participatory culture in the following way: “Culture in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content” (*Convergence Culture* 331, emphasis mine). This culture, in my opinion, exists in two ways: on the one hand, it already has to exist, in a way; the atmosphere in which “fans and other consumers” are used to the idea that they can actively participate must be already there. The medium they use to participate can assist in this – with online media for example, creating space for comments and questions becomes a lot easier.

On the other hand, participatory culture is something that is created every time anew around a work of fiction. Authors and writers of a work must create a point from which the audience can start. This is not just the work of fiction itself, but

also the opportunities around them to actually participate: in the case of the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, as will be shown later, the presence of ‘Question-and-Answer-videos’ which answer questions from the audience plays a large part in furthering the plot.

Participatory culture has also increasingly gained importance within adaptation studies. A consequence of participatory culture, namely the audience contributing to the content of a work, is that it blurs the line between the author and the reader. After all, if the author is only there to provide the idea and the framework, and the audience fills in the other parts (in most extreme cases), who is the actual creator of the whole? This blurry line was already vague in adaptations - the complicated relationship between the source material and what the adaptation turns it into already existed. Now that adaptations also become increasingly interactive, this also means that the audience can, at the very least, influence how this relationship plays out. As Timothy Corrigan remarks, with the increasing interactivity and power of participatory culture, it may become more appropriate to think in terms of “creative and interactive players” rather than about “texts and screens” and “readers and viewers” in the case of these adaptations (51). Through this viewpoint, it becomes clear that not only in original works of fiction, but also in adaptations audiences actively engage with the material.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries, being both an adaptation and a work that uses new media heavily, thus stands at an intersection between these two in relation to this participatory culture. On the one hand, there is the medium that more or less ‘forces’ the audience to actively engage with the story (as we have seen in chapter two, the fragmentary nature of transmedia storytelling implies that parts of the story must be actively sought and put together). On the other hand, as an *adaptation*, it needs the engagement of the audience to help create the relationship between the source material and the adaptation. It seems that as an adaptation in online video, audience engagement must be doubly important to this project. Though the narrative is largely already mapped out through the video blogs and transmedia posts on social

networks, and thus does not rely on the audience creating content, audience engagement is still needed on story level.

Throughout the narrative, Lizzie uploads 10 'Question-and-Answer-videos', which mimic the way real video bloggers also often answer questions from viewers. In these videos, Lizzie reads out questions (including who asked them and through which medium, which makes them verifiable) and then answers them. These questions are cleverly used to show either more of a character, or to playfully point back to the source material. For example, some questions were asked multiple times to Lizzie – what time period she would like to live in if she could time travel, what she would do if she woke up in Victorian (sic) England. The answers often had to do with pointing back to *Pride and Prejudice*: Lizzie answering that though she loves to live in the 21st century, she is a large fan of empire waists (which were fashionable in Regency times) and would probably walk everywhere for want of a car, saying she would “probably have a lot of muddy dresses” (Q&A #6). Thus, she points back to Elizabeth Bennet arriving at Netherfield with her petticoat “six inches deep in mud” (Austen 36).

However, these questions seem always to be asked by individuals through their own social network accounts. Fan communities “broadening the field of meanings that circulate around a primary text” (Jenkins, “Interactive Audiences? The Collective Intelligence of Media Fans” 6) do not seem to be needed to further the storytelling shown here. This complicates the idea of adaptation audiences being the same as “fans”, which Hutcheon suggests (*A Theory of Adaptation* 116). In the case of an interactive adaptation like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, where the audience is almost ‘forced’, or at least actively encouraged to engage with the material, it are not only fan communities who “create and circulate new content”; to some extent, it is part of the experience to react as an individual to the characters on Twitter, or ask them a question through one of the “Question-and-Answer-videos”. In the case of these interactive adaptations, fan communities might become superfluous in terms of storytelling. For that, the audience is enough.

This, of course, does not mean that people who are active within the fan community surrounding *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* cannot be part of the audience at the same time. Indeed, from my perspective it seems impossible to be an active fan without having, at first, taken notice (or in this case, interacted) of the production. It is, on the other hand, possible to engage with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* on a ‘non-fandom’ level, and it is this general audience engagement that it relies on in its storytelling.

2. Knowing and unknowing audiences; revealing Mr. Darcy

It is very understandable that the terms ‘actively engaging’ and ‘interactively participating’ at this point in my argument might still be very vague terms. What do they consist of here? In what ways does this adaptation need the audience to adapt *Pride and Prejudice*? Especially the way that Fitzwilliam Darcy, adapted into William Darcy, makes his entrance into the adaptation might make for an interesting case study. The audience’s influence was twofold here: firstly, the adaptation relied heavily on the knowledge the audience already has of *Pride and Prejudice* and the significant role that Mr. Darcy plays in the narrative. Moreover, the adaptation needs the audience to use this knowledge to help them advance and sustain the storyline.

As Linda Hutcheon remarks, an adaptation is not only just a replication of a previous, existing work – it often has its own interpretation of it (*A Theory of Adaptation* 8). Part of this interpretation lies with the audience, which also experiences the adaptation from their own “horizon of expectation” (*A Theory of Adaptation* 121). She distinguishes between “knowing” and “unknowing” audiences – knowing audiences being aware that they are watching an adaptation, and being familiar with the source material, unknowing audiences watching the adaptation without this knowledge. (*A Theory of Adaptation* 120). Knowing audiences are especially important in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* in working towards the appearance of Darcy.

Though William Darcy does not appear in the flesh until Episode 59, this does not mean that he was not present during the story before that. His name is first mentioned as early as the fourth episode, when Lydia mentions that he is one of Bing Lee's friends at Netherfield. After that, he is frequently impersonated by Lizzie (and later also by Jane, Charlotte and Fitz, the modern equivalent of Colonel Fitzwilliam) through the use of 'costume theatre'.



Lydia (l.) and Lizzie impersonating Bing Lee and William Darcy, respectively (Episode 6)

This way of incorporating Darcy in the story, yet his not actually being on screen, seems a very clever way to create suspense. This suspense is only possible because of the knowledge that the audience already has of the Darcy of *Pride and Prejudice* – they *want* to see him. William Darcy is not only based on the Mr. Darcy of the novel, but also on the image that has come out of the other adaptations. Thus, the already existing 'Darcymania' is used here to actively engage the audience with the narrative.

Indeed, throughout the first sixty episodes, it becomes very obvious that a large part of the knowing audience suffers from 'Darcymania'. In the story universe this occurs during the fourth Q&A video, where Lizzie admits that the question "Will we ever get to see Darcy?" is asked quite a lot. She answers it the following way: "And to be fair, I do talk about him a lot. But seriously, 'when are we going to see him?' Hopefully never! In what universe would he be in my bedroom on my video blog?".

This response manages to do a lot at the same time: it addresses the plausibility of showing Darcy at this point (which would indeed be implausible) and show Lizzie's unawareness of 'Darcymania' by her ascribing the enormous interest in Darcy merely to the fact that she "talks about him a lot". Even after Darcy has made his first full appearance in Episode 60 (the equivalent of Mr. Darcy's first proposal to Elizabeth), Lizzie still does not seem to understand why the audience is so preoccupied with seeing Darcy, opening Q&A #7 with the remark: "you finally saw Darcy, so let's answer some *other* questions".



William Darcy's first physical appearance on Lizzie's video blog (Episode 59)

However, this refusal to show Darcy might have another reason than just creating suspense – it might also point to something more. As discussed in chapter one, the fact that this adaptation is named after its heroine alone indicates that this adaptation is focused more on the growth and maturation of Lizzie Bennet *herself* than on her relationship with Darcy. As Susan Greenfield points out: "Darcy is an important character in **the story she tells** (...) but his actual appearance is irrelevant." (emphasis mine). In this case, the adaptation is about how Lizzie discovers herself through her interactions with Darcy, rather than about his bodily attractiveness. Once again, Greenfield manages to word it perfectly: "This is a story about a heroine who must learn to see herself. The romance plot is secondary."

It might turn out that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* might not only show some 'wilful unfaithfulness' to *Pride and Prejudice*, but also to the cult surrounding Darcy. Though this adaptation *does* need the audience to 'work' on story level, it might actually also work against it. It retains its focus on Lizzie, refusing to give in to the demands of the audience to see Darcy at an earlier stage than it was plausible. All in all, the audience seems to be very important in the process of telling Lizzie's story, contributing to character- and plot development, but the message that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* wants to convey is still very much its own.

Conclusion

The time has now come to return to the research question: how does *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as an adaptation place itself within the “third major wave of innovation” (Murray 9) within adaptation studies? As was shown in the first chapter, the field of adaptation studies has developed over the last twenty years to a field that no longer only sees adaptations as another version of their source material, but as an *interpretation* of them, this interpretation being interesting enough to be looked at for its own merit. In this new way of analysis, adaptation studies continues to open up to other disciplines, incorporating elements from for example cultural studies and new media studies.

The *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* certainly became a very interesting case study for this type of analysis, and largely showed the ‘wilful infidelity’ and critical stance towards *Pride and Prejudice* that new-wave adaptation studies values. At the same time, in the vein of earlier Austen adaptations like *Clueless* and *Bride and Prejudice*, this wilful infidelity was also used to criticize the modern Internet culture that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was updated to. Especially in the case of adapting Elizabeth Bennet into Lizzie, this meant a heavier focus on her Bildung alone, so as to also create space to show the dangers of showing every aspect of your life on the Internet.

In the way it used its media, this adaptation also showed its critical reflection on *Pride and Prejudice*. The video blogs enabled the adaptation to develop characters more deeply, which together with the fragmented way that is the result of transmedia storytelling made for a clever way of plot development. In the end, it is the equivalent of Lydia Bennet’s elopement that shows how this ‘mixing of media’ truly sent a message about *Pride and Prejudice*: it resulted in a very well characterized Lydia who is deserving of a second chance.

Though it is true that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* relies heavily on its audience for keeping up the narrative, as well as for already possessing enough knowledge about the story to help it develop, it turns out that it does not rely as heavily on the

audience in assuming a critical position towards *Pride and Prejudice*. Though the audience is present in the second degree – interacting with the story – it does not influence the way the story was already planned out or sees its source material.

Could *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, consequently, be called a postmodern adaptation? The answer to this is very hard to pinpoint. This adaptation can certainly be called critical, and highly conscious of the material it is adapting and previous adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*. It often points back to the novel in a meta-fictional way. On certain points, however, this adaptation is still searching. Especially in the case of audience interaction, there was still too little critical reflection on *Pride and Prejudice* to call it postmodern. Yet, the answer to this question could also be broader; the fact that all these things come together and are connected at all, the fact that the project would not have existed without each piece contributing to it gives it quite a postmodern ‘vibe’.

This conclusion brings up further questions that I wish that I could answer at this point in time: is the way this adaptation went about adapting *Pride and Prejudice* the way of the future? Does the future adaptation audience require active immersion into a story and the invitation to participate in it? The citation of Kiene Brillenburg Wurth which became one of the two mottoes of this thesis, to me words this idea of ‘the literary adaptation of the future’ very nicely: “New technologies have left their imprint on literature as a paper-based medium, and vice versa. Literature no longer has a single material location, and one may wonder if it ever had one” (1). The way new media were used here to not only tell a fictional story, but an actual *adaptation* of a previously existing literary story, really complicates the idea of a linear, passive consummation of narratives. Perhaps it is true that in the future, or even now, literature will be much more of a puzzle to be put together – a truly fascinating prospect.

While web narrative is still very young, web narrative used for adapting stories is even more completely in its early developmental stage. It would be intriguing to see whether in a few more years more of these fragmented, transmedia,

online adaptations have sprung up and if these are as successful in taking a critical stance towards their source material. There is certainly already development in that area: as of mid-June 2013, Hank Green and Bernie Su announced that the fictional company of William Darcy, Pemberley Digital, has become a real company that will produce adaptations in the same vein as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Their next adaptation of Jane Austen's unfinished manuscript *Sanditon* is in the process of being broadcast on YouTube, with the announcement that another full-length literary adaptation is to follow. At the same time, another unrelated group of filmmakers and students is working on a video blog adaptation of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, making the idea of comparative research in this phenomenon an actual possibility in the future.

During the process of writing this thesis, I came into contact with a fellow student in Comparative Literature, who had recently taken a course in New Media Theory and was so kind to share her experiences with me. She told me about what the teacher of the course had said about the emergence of new phenomena within these new media, and this advice kept resounding in my head constantly while I worked: "Don't believe the hype". It is hard not to become incredibly enthusiastic about this new phenomenon, but to remain objective and perhaps even a bit detached is vital to conducting academic research. It would be fascinating to see what *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* will do now that it has ended and the initial hype has died down - how audiences will connect and interact with the adaptation now that all the information is already available. As Hank Green himself remarked in retrospect: "The Lizzie Bennet Diaries can never exist the way it did when it was happening. It can never be as rewarding as it was right when it was occurring." Especially this last part is thought-provoking – is it indeed the case with this kind of adaptations that they are not as rewarding to watch after they end? And is this not something that is universal for all serialized fiction?

Perhaps, in the case of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the feeling of immersion that accompanies experiencing the adaptation is a bit like falling in love. The way that fan

communities speak of the experience, at least, reminds me strongly of Mr. Darcy's description of love – once you start watching, *experiencing*, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, you are in the middle before you know that you had begun.

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