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Lydia in the Modern Age: *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and the Victimisation of Jane Austen's

Lydia Bennet

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### Abstract

This thesis analyses the character of Lydia Bennet from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. By comparing her characterisation through the narration in *Pride and Prejudice* the novel, *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the argument is made that her character is treated unfairly. For a modern audience, she is easier to be regarded as a victim than a villain, and this thesis reflects on the way the regard of Lydia Bennet changes over time and through the use of media. Ultimately, for a modern audience Lydia Bennet is a victim of her time, and a victim of the manipulative Mr. Wickham, while Jane Austen's Lydia Bennet was blamed for her problems, and her fate was seen as deserving. Thus, Lydia's character is influenced by her time, but also the way she is presented to and received by the audience. Narration and perspective greatly influences her reception, as do the possibilities for audience interaction in modern forms of narration, such as seen in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. More research could be done in this area, looking at audience participation and the influence it has on narration in modern forms of storytelling.

## Introduction

“Lydia, self-willed and careless, would scarcely give them a hearing. They [Lydia and her friend] were ignorant, idle, and vain” (180).

Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* focusses on the Bennet family as the five sisters navigate courting and marriage in Regency England. One of these sisters, Lydia Bennet, seems to have drawn the short end of the straw: at only fifteen years old, Lydia is described as a flirtatious, incautious, and wild young girl by the narrator and by the focaliser, Elizabeth. When she is tricked by the wicked Mr Wickham into eloping and then has to marry him, she is quite happy with the marriage, although her sister remarks that this happiness cannot last very long, and that Lydia deserves the unhappiness that is coming her way (260). This might leave a modern audience to wonder if a fifteen year old who is manipulated by an older man should indeed be punished for her foolishness.

To gain further understanding of how a problematic character like Lydia can be adapted in our modern age I will focus on the 2012 YouTube adaptation *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, comparing it to the novel *Pride and Prejudice* and the 2005 contemporary film adaptation with the same title. Both adaptations are recent, but their approaches differ. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is a YouTube adaptation which Geoffrey Wagner calls an analogy, “which must represent a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art” (223-227) – Lydia becomes a 21-year-old college student and Mr Wickham a swimmer in a college swim team. In contrast, the 2005 film *Pride and Prejudice* is a transposition, which transposes the same storyline and setting into a different medium: that of film. Thus, my research question is: how does *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* portray the problem surrounding Lydia Bennet and her character arc in comparison to the novel and *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), and how do the use of YouTube as a medium and the modernisation of the story influence this characterisation.

## Chapter 1: Adaptation Theory

As has been noted by scholars such as Linda Hutcheon and Brian McFarlane, fidelity does not define an adaptation's value, even though it is often a point of critique for scholars and movie-lovers alike (Hutcheon 6-7; McFarlane 15). Fidelity can be defined as the closeness of an adaptation to its source in plot, characters, and time and place. As Hutcheon argues, fidelity criticism is what marks the array of different terms used for forms of adaptations;

the constant debate over degrees of proximity to the “original” that has generated those many typologies of adaptation processes: borrowing versus intersection versus transformation (Andrew 1980: 10– 12); analogy versus commentary versus transposition (Wagner 1975: 222– 31); using the source as raw material versus reinterpretation of only the core narrative structure versus a literal translation (Klein and Parker 1981: 100). (7)

Hutcheon gives three kinds of adaptations. The first one is transposition, which entails the transcoding of a work, as a shift in medium, in genre, in point of view, or in ontology (8). Director Joe Wright's 2005 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* is a case of transposition, as the original plot is transposed into a new medium – that of film. The second type of adaptation is that of (re)-interpretation and then (re)-creation, which is inherent to the act of adaptation (8). According to Hutcheon, it is this interpretation that might create a distance from the original work, bringing up the question of fidelity, but there is no way to adapt without creating a (re)-interpretation of the source. Every stylistic and story detail choice falls under this interpretation, and in film, so does the visual aspect. Lastly, adaptations are a form of intertextuality; “we experience adaptations (as *adaptations*) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (9).

As McFarlane argues, with novel to film adaptations, what brings the two together is the narrative, in this case meaning the plot, the series of events and how they interrelate with the characters. However, what causes the greatest discrepancy between novel and film is the narration, in this case to be understood as all the ways the narrative is presented to the audience (19). Thus, while plot elements are often easily adapted, it is the way these plot elements are presented that gives insight into characterisation and underlying themes.

Moving in on *Pride and Prejudice*, Linda Troost divides Austen film adaptations into four categories: Hollywood adaptations, heritage adaptations, fusion adaptations, and imitation adaptations. *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) is a fusion adaptation; while it is a period piece, the camera work, script, and styling of the characters is modern (86-87). *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, on the other hand, might be categorised as what Troost calls the Imitation adaptation: “[t]he Imitation uses a novel’s plot and character but updates the setting to focus on a modern-day highly structured society” (76). Furthermore, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is identified by Jessica Seymour as a form of transmedia storytelling, that is; “storytelling which uses a combination of video, text and audio to tell stories. [...] Transmedia, [...] will be defined as a storytelling technique which uses multiple online spaces to tell the same narrative. (113)

This form of storytelling enhances audience participation, creating a new dynamic between narrative and narration. According to Seymour, “[b]y using transmedia to fill the gaps between episodes, the series invites ‘viewer’s participation as a minimal condition for comprehending the narrative...’”. Thus, “the narrative [relies] on the online presence as the driving force of characterisation and plot, and establishes the narrative in the same virtual space as the fans who consume it” (Seymour, 114, quoting Jenkins).

Thus, when looking at the two adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, the focus will lie on the narrative and the narration, as well as the differences between the sorts of adaptations.

Fidelity in this case will not be used as a point of criticism, but rather a point of investigation on the effects of changes in medium, narrative, and narration in *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

## Chapter 2: Austen's Lydia Bennet

In Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the reader comes to know a flirty, good-humoured, but foolish Lydia Bennet. With catchphrases like "Oh Lord", and an overall giddy and boastful attitude, Austen portrays a young, open-hearted, but also naïve girl. It becomes clear, however, that this naivety is not to be regarded as an endearing trait, but rather a recurring issue and the cause of a lot of family grief. While in the novel Lydia is blamed for what happens to her by both the narrator and the other characters, including her family, putting her character in the context of her time reveals her to be a victim of circumstance, more than an active participant. Still, the novel treats Lydia like a bad girl who needs to be punished for her behaviour, thereby revealing the way the social norms of Lydia's time place the responsibility of good conduct on women, and blame and punish them when a man violates their boundaries of good conduct.

In the novel, the first time Lydia is mentioned, it is Mrs Bennet who is talking, calling her good-humoured (4). From this description, one might deduce Lydia to be a pleasant girl. The first time Lydia speaks, it is to say that she is not worried about Mr Bingley wanting to dance with her: "for though I *am* the youngest, I am the tallest" (8). Already here, there is a sense of boasting, of competing with her sisters, in Lydia, that shows her to be focused on her position between four sisters. Mrs Bennet seems to have a soft spot for Lydia; she is good-humoured (4), surely Mr Bingley will want to dance with her (8), and Lydia is described as "a favourite with her mother, whose affection had brought her into public at an early age" (41). As Madison Olivia Ann Tuck argues, "[e]ven Lydia's arrogant nature can be traced back to a lifetime of coddling from her mother, who encourages her on numerous occasions to be sure she feels as good as her older sisters" (4). Because her mother keeps coddling her, Lydia does not learn to listen to critique, and does not notice when her behaviour falls outside the proper code of society.



However, Austen's narrator puts Lydia in a completely different light. Lydia is described as "her mind being more vacant than her sisters'" (26), "self-willed and careless [...] ignorant, idle, and vain" (180). Elizabeth, who often functions as the focaliser in the novel, also provides a more negative perspective of Lydia, describing to her father "all the improprieties of Lydia's general behaviour" (195). Lydia is presented as a wild young girl who is given too much leeway by her parents, and refuses to listen to any sort of criticism. Unaware of her position as a young girl, Lydia falls for the first man who gives her enough attention: "she [Elizabeth] was convinced that Lydia had only wanted encouragement to attach herself to anybody" (233). However, as Tuck argues, Lydia's behaviour is two-fold; it stems from her mother's regard for her (4), as well as society's, and subsequently the Bennets', focus on the importance of finding a husband (5-6). As the youngest of five sisters, Lydia has been exposed to the pressure of finding a husband from a young age. Because women often cannot inherit their father's inheritance, and most working positions are unavailable to women, the only way to secure a good position in life is to find a husband who can provide for them (Tuck 6, Bailey). Thus, Lydia has been conditioned to be looking for men, which shows in her interest in the officers in Meryton (27, 30, 42), and her desire to go to Brighton with the officers (195). From a young age, she has been conditioned to believe that finding a husband is of the utmost importance, and in combination with her mother constantly pushing her towards men, it results in the frivolous, if not naïve, attitude Lydia has towards men.

In this context, Lydia's elopement with Mr Wickham seems to her logical, as she believes Mr Wickham will marry her, which is explained in Mrs Gardiner's letter to Elizabeth (268). In her letter to Mrs Forster, Lydia explains that she is going to Gretna Green, which is a place in Scotland where people could get married away from the public eye. This was not possible in England because of Lord Hardwicke's Act, passed in 1753, an act that ruled

couples could only marry “in a church after the publication of banns (a notice read out on three successive Sundays in the parish church, announcing an intended marriage and giving the opportunity for objections) or after the parties had obtained a special license” (Bailey). Readers in Austen’s time would have noted Lydia’s intent to marry when hearing she is going to Gretna Green with Mr Wickham. Furthermore, she calls Mr Wickham her angel, and anticipates being able to write home as Lydia Wickham (242), all indicating that she truly believes she is going to marry Mr Wickham. Albeit naïve, it shows that Lydia truly did not have any bad intentions, and did not elope with Mr Wickham with the supposition that she would be bringing shame onto her family. As Bailey argues, “the continuing possibility of clandestine marriage permitted unscrupulous men to seduce young women, even when the men had no intention to carry through with the promised wedding”. This is shown in Jane’s letter, in which she writes: “[i]mprudent as a marriage between Mr Wickham and our poor Lydia would be, we are now anxious to be assured it has taken place, for there is but too much reason to fear they are not gone to Scotland” (228). While Lydia has been led to believe that Mr Wickham will marry her, it soon becomes clear to the Bennet family that he has never had this intention, and is rather using the promise of marriage to get what he wants from her. Elizabeth does not believe that “Mr Wickham should marry a girl, whom it was impossible he could marry for money” (232), and this proves true as Mr Darcy pays off Mr Wickham to marry Lydia in order to keep the Bennet family from disgrace.

Even though from this context it becomes clear that Mr Wickham has tricked Lydia, who truly believed she was going to marry him and did not see her actions as putting the family name in danger, Lydia’s family all place the blame on her. Mary remarks “that loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable – that one false step involves her in endless ruin – that her reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful, - and that she cannot be too much guarded in her behaviour towards the undeserving of the other sex” (240). Firstly, Lydia is described here

as being the active participant in a wrongdoing, rather than being tricked. Secondly, although Wickham is implied to be a member of this “undeserving of the other sex”, it is still Lydia’s fault for being too unguarded in her behaviour towards him. Everyone has been fooled by Mr Wickham – all thought him pleasurable and kind in the beginning – yet Lydia is blamed for not seeing through his false pretences. Elizabeth also places blame on Lydia; “[b]ut how little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue, she could easily conjecture” (260). She blames Lydia for letting her passions override her virtue, ignoring the fact that Lydia believed she was getting married, something she has been conditioned to want from early age.

Lydia truly believes she has done the right thing, and is comfortable in her new position; the couple comes to Longbourn with “easy assurance”, and “Lydia was still Lydia; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless. She turned from sister to sister, demanding their congratulations”. She goes on about her adventures, and wants to know if the neighbours are aware she is married (262). She even seems proud to be the first to get married, telling Jane she is above her now because she is a married woman (263). She truly does not believe she has went about marriage the wrong way, telling her mother that her sisters should also go to Brighton – “[t]hat is the place to get husbands” (263). She also does not realise that Wickham has not married her for love; she fawns over her husband, and “was exceedingly fond of him. He was her dear Wickham on every occasion; no one was to be put in competition with him” (265). Lydia believes she has done the one thing she has been led to believe was most important; find a husband, and she cannot see that the way she accomplished this was wrong, or that her husband does not love her the way she loves him.

While Lydia believes her marriage to be a happy, fruitful one, Elizabeth foresees an unhappy future for Lydia. Elizabeth sees it as a punishment for Lydia, as her getting what was coming to her: “and though, in looking forward, neither rational happiness nor worldly

prosperity, could be justly expected for her sister [Lydia]; in looking back to what they had feared, only two hours ago, she [Elizabeth] felt all the advantage of what they had gained” (255). While Lydia’s position is a product of her upbringing and the society she lives in, it are the same moral rules and social norms of this society that lead her to be blamed for her position, and the result of her actions to be a just punishment.

As Fitzgibbon argues, “[i]n a different time or place, events might have involved primarily the government and the courts” (583) when Lydia first elopes with Mr Wickham. It is precisely the “identity of the applicable normative order” (Fitzgibbon 583) that not only sets in motion the events, but also demands this particular conclusion. The position of women, the social rules of marriage and the societal pressure to get married all directly influence Lydia’s character arc. However, rather than her unfortunate conclusion being characterised as a problem caused by societal rules and women’s dependence on marriage, Lydia is characterised by the other characters as well as the narrator as an active participant in her own downfall, and her loveless marriage with Mr Wickham as a just punishment for her own foolishness.

Thus, in the 1813 novel, Lydia is not a naïve victim of Mr Wickham’s deceit, but a girl who fails to live up to the contemporary social norms and is punished accordingly. From a modern perspective, this may come across as strange. Therefore, when this plot is transposed to the modern age, the attitude towards Lydia needs to be updated to a modern understanding of womanhood and social norms, which is what happens in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, but not yet in the 2005 film adaptation by director Joe Wright.

### Chapter 3: A Modern Problem in an Austen Setting

While the 2005 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* directed by Joe Wright is made in the modern age, the setting remains that of pre-regency England, as when Jane Austen first wrote *First Impressions*, *Pride and Prejudice*'s precursor (Stewart-Bear). This means that not only the technology, dress code, and nature remains similar to that in the novel, but also the social norms and moral rules under which Lydia is forced to live. When it comes to Lydia's story, the film remains mostly faithful to its source material, again presenting a Lydia Bennet who is brazen, loud, and boastful, and who again is left to deal with the repercussions of eloping with a bad man.

While in the novel, the reader first sees Lydia through Mrs Bennet's eyes, in the film she is seen rather than described. She runs around with Kitty, yelling and laughing. Just like in the novel, the first impression of Lydia is a young, happy, and good-humoured girl (*Pride and Prejudice* 2:26-2:34). It also becomes immediately clear that the girls, including Lydia, have been brought up with a focus on finding a husband; when they hear a new, single man has come into town, and Mrs Bennet wants him to marry one of her daughters, Lydia and Kitty show great enthusiasm (*P&P* 3:30-3:54). Through visual cues, Lydia is portrayed as lively and focused on men.

This focus on men and getting their attention comes back throughout the film; Lydia drops her handkerchief for the officers in hopes of one of them picking it up and talking to her (19:43-20:15), she asks Mr Bingley to hold a ball and invite the militia (24:40-24:56), and she gives Mr Wickham a flirty look when he lends her some money for ribbons (30:50-31:06). Lydia in the film remains faithful to Lydia in the novel; flirty, wild, and unapologetic. While the medium influences the devices used to portray Lydia, her character remains the same.

When Lydia elopes with Mr Wickham in the novel, this is brought to the reader through letters from Lydia, showing her own perspective, and through the perspective of the characters around her, through letters and thoughts. Lydia's letters give the reader some insight into Lydia's reasoning for eloping; it becomes clear in these letters that she believes Mr Wickham is taking her to get married, and she believes she is doing a good thing for the family by getting married. In the film, however, Lydia's story is not shown. The audience learns about Lydia's elopement through Elizabeth explaining the contents of a letter from her sister Jane (1:31:23-1:32:19). By not showing Lydia's perspective, it becomes harder for the audience to sympathise with her. Whereas in the novel, the reader is given a sense that Lydia is running away to get married, as signalled by the mentioning of Gretna Green, the film lacks such motivation for her character as conveyed to the audience. Her decision becomes less easy to sympathise with, as the audience is given no explanation for this decision.

Because the audience is told that Lydia's actions severely impact the wellbeing of the rest of her family, but she is given no chance to explain herself, her arrogance when she returns home is even more appalling. She boasts about her ring, and how she shows it off to the other girls and town, and does not show any sign of understanding why her family is upset with her. Just like in the novel, all she can talk about is her "dear Mr Wickham" and her bettered position now that she is a married lady (1:35:25-1:36:26). Because the film does not show the audience Lydia's underlying thought process, her arrogance upon returning makes her seem even more ignorant and unpleasant than in the novel, making it harder to sympathise with her when the allure of Mr Wickham starts to peel off.

This is shown in the film when Lydia and Mr Wickham are set to leave Longbourn. As the carriage leaves and Lydia is calling out her goodbyes, her face falls for a second, and she is roughly pushed down by Mr Wickham, foreshadowing the unhappy marriage Lydia will be stuck in (1:37:53-1:38:20). As Stewart-Ber argues, "Lydia remains flirtatious, vulgar and

brazen, but there is a distinct vulnerability to her character, which is not as apparent in either Austen's work or other adaptations". While the film does not offer more insight into Lydia's reasoning, it does give her a small sense of vulnerability that the novel version of Lydia lacks. At first, the film makes it harder to sympathise with Lydia as her actions are given no motivation, and her untasteful boasting makes a stark contrast against the hurt she has caused her family. However, by making the unhappiness lying in her future more explicit – as in the novel it is only mentioned indirectly by Elizabeth and the narrator, and in the film the audience sees it happening – the film makes the audience sense the problems that will arise for Lydia, who is now totally dependent of a man who does not care about her. The physicality of Mr Wickham's conduct, not present in the novel, reads abusive to a modern audience. By pulling her down so roughly, a modern audience is given a cue that connects more to the modern social norms, making it easier for the audience to recognise the marriage as unhealthy, and Lydia's future as unhappy. The violence towards Lydia thus works to reiterate Lydia's unhappy outcome to a modern audience.

All in all, the film remains faithful to the novel when it comes to Lydia's character, using visual cues to present what is described in the novel. Lydia has to adhere to the same social norms as in the novel, and is given the same punishment for stepping outside the line as in the novel. However, by not granting Lydia a chance to explain herself the way her letter did in the novel, it becomes harder for the audience to sympathise with the choices she makes. On the other hand, the visual representation of the unhappy marriage that Lydia is now stuck in works to enhance our sense of injustice, as the physical violence towards Lydia aligns to a more modern understanding of an unhealthy marriage.

#### Chapter 4: The Modern Lydia Bennet

In contrast to the 2005 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* has been completely transposed onto a modern setting. Lydia is a 21-year-old American community college student, and George Wickham the coach of an university swim team. The story has not only been re-contextualised with regard to the time period, but also the place; from Regency England to modern America. To fit in this completely different social atmosphere, Lydia's storyline is also altered, as she becomes the victim of a mentally abusive relationship. Instead of running away with Wickham and thereby ruining the family status, as in the original, Wickham releases a sex tape of the two of them, speaking to a modern audience the way a forced marriage would not.

*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* follows the format of the YouTube vlog, used mainly by YouTubers who video blog about their own life. Thus, the vlog holds an almost autobiographical position, in which people can pick and choose what they show their viewers about their lives. This too, comes forth in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, as Lizzie is sitting alone in front of the camera, talking about her life and sometimes roleplaying the other characters. Other characters like her friend Charlotte or her sisters might come in, but it is clear that Lizzie is giving her own perspective. The comical roleplay of her family and friends shows how Lizzie functions as the focaliser of the story; anything we learn about the other characters, we hear from Lizzie. In episode two, Lizzie calls Lydia "a stupid whorey slut" (0:10-0:12), and assures the audience that after getting to know Lydia, they would agree with Lizzie on this judgment. While the versions set in the Regency era opt for less explicit descriptions, like wild, and unthinking, the modernity of the story also affects the language use. In the beginning, the only way we get to know Lydia is through Lizzie's perspective, and when Lydia pops in during filming and starts talking.



Lydia first appears on camera in episode one, when she barges into Lizzie's room to tell her about the handsome rich man that is moving into Netherfield. Just like in the novel and the film, Lydia is immediately shown as being obsessed with men, and with getting validation from men. As Heredia Torres argues "[s]he is a modern Lydia, but, at the same time, we can also identify Austen's Lydia due to her way of speaking, all her exclamations, her energy and her joy" (12). Thus, while her attitude and problems are modernised to appeal to a twenty-first century audience, Lydia in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is still similar to the Lydia from the novel.

It is when Lydia is given her own spin off channel – TheLydiaBennet – the first vlog of which appears after episode 28 of the main channel, that Lydia starts to show vulnerability. She first mentions George Wickham in vlog 11 as the guy her sister Lizzie dated, calling him "hot" but stating she would never go after her sister's ex (1:15-1:27). As the vlogs progress, Lydia seems to get alienated by her family; Mary does not want to hang out with her as much, and Lizzie tells her off and tells her to grow up. Then, in vlog 20, she runs off to Vegas, and it is heavily implied she does it because she feels rejected at home. When she returns in vlog 22, she has made friends "Lizzie would not approve of", and lets it shine through that one of them is a boy, who she decides to call since her whole family is out (2:00-2:27). In vlog 23, it becomes clear that this new friend is George Wickham, with whom she quickly gets into a relationship. He widens the distance between her and her family, especially Lizzie, and soon seems to want to be the only one she talks to. Gradually, she becomes quieter, she loses her happiness and seems to become insecure, looking at Wickham for assurance and approval. It escalates until she starts to lash out at the audience, which tries to warn her for the manipulative tactics used by Wickham. When fans try to tell her to leave Wickham, it only drives her closer to him. She replies to tweets warning her about Wickham by defending him: "GEORGE cares about me. You guys just don't freaking get it", "But they don't get it. They're

being so mean to you. Why? You're more important to me than them. You know that” (@thelydiabennet et al). As Seymour argues, “[t]he online, transmedia nature of the narrative extends a level of power towards the fandom which is rarely seen” (116). While they do not have an influence on the plot itself, they do influence the story in the sense that they are part of the narration, and influence the way the characters present themselves in online spaces. It pulls in a younger audience which is used to more interactive entertainment. The YouTube series modernises the way the audience participates and interacts with the story.

The process in which Lydia becomes totally dependent on George occurs throughout the vlogs, and because it is visualised, the audience also gets insight into the manipulation that pulls Lydia in, which is lacking in the novel and the film. Lydia is clearly characterised as the victim of an emotionally abusive relationship, and the audience is given the information that explains this outcome. In the end, Wickham convinces her to make a sex tape, which he then releases without her permission. Lydia has to find out from her sisters, no longer talking to anyone and refusing to believe that Wickham, the only person she believes cares about her, would do that. In this way, the audience is presented with a Lydia who is more insecure, more dependent, and more the victim rather than perpetrator. The audience can sympathise with her because they have seen what is happening to her, which is strengthened by the use of transmedia, creating the opportunity for fleshing out Lydia’s character. Although the YouTube medium has a similar plot to the novel, audience interaction and the spin off channel give a broader view of the character (Jandle, 2015; Seymour, 2014). More so than in the novel or the film, Lydia is able to give the audience her own perspective, and the audience is provided insight into the inner working of the relationship between Lydia and George Wickham, which soon turns emotionally abusive. As the series continue, Lydia becomes sadder and quieter, fuelled by the manipulative tactics of George Wickham, until she seems completely dependent of him. The audience is invited to participate in the story by interacting

with the characters. However, in line with the plot, those warning Lydia for Wickham get negative replies from the character, making the interaction seem more authentic.

Thus, the YouTube series provides a modernised version of the classic story both in content and form, thereby creating a new story that relates to a modern audience both in themes and audience interaction. Lydia's struggle with Wickham becomes one of abuse, rather than an enforced marriage, creating a problem that is more understandable and recognizable for a modern audience. The form of the series creates a stronger bond between the characters and the audience, inviting participation and interaction to further pull in the audience and think critically about the events they spectate.

## Conclusion

Lydia's character is a complex one. In the novel she is portrayed as a vain, careless and stubborn girl who neglects to think about the consequences of her actions on her own life as well as her family's. She ultimately has to marry someone to prevent a social downfall, rather than for love as she initially believes. Her ending is not a happy one, and is described by the narrator as well as the other characters as her own fault, not taking into account her age, her intentions, or the social norms and upbringing that build up to the ultimate conclusion. She is not given any leniency, and has to live her life with a man who does not love her back. In modern Western society, this punishment seems unfair and harsh, as comes back in the adaptations.

While the 2005 film does not grant Lydia's perspective to explain her behaviour to the audience, the added scene of physical violence is used to relate to the modern audience, who recognises abuse as a sign of an unhealthy relationship, and the recipient of the violence as the victim within the relationship. Since the film is largely faithful to the novel in terms of setting and social norms, it also follows the novel in the judgment and punishment of Lydia, except for this scene, which paints her more as a victim rather than an active participant in her own problems.

On the other hand, since *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is set in modern America, the social setting, and consequently Lydia's storyline, also changes. Lydia becomes a clear victim of manipulation and abuse, and is no longer blamed for the consequences of her involvement with George Wickham. By means of transmedia storytelling, Lydia is given a voice, subsequently giving the audience insight into her life, thoughts, and intentions. The added perspective from Lydia's point of view, combined with the modernised storyline, creates a complex character who is shown to feel alienated from her family, thus becoming vulnerable

to the manipulation tactics of George. The interactive storytelling is used to draw in the audience, and make them think critically about the dynamic of abusive relationships.

While open for interpretation, it is clear that for a modern audience, Lydia's character is a difficult one to pin. In these modern adaptations, there is a sense of victimisation that is not present in the novel. Overtime the position of women and marriage has changed, and Lydia's behaviour is now less easily identified as worthy of social disgrace and lifelong punishment. However, this research could be expanded upon, looking at more adaptations, audience interpretations, and the dynamics between audience participation and story progression. While Lydia is a product of her time, she is also a product of audience interpretation, and as times change, so does the regard of her character.

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