Narratology on Facebook

An examination of how a digital narrative on
Facebook influences identity and narrative elements,
using *Bridget Jones's Diary* as a case study

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INTRODUCTION

Helen Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* has the presentation of a diary. Originally written as a series of columns, the novel gives a detailed account of a year in Bridget Jones's life through a series of day-by-day diary entries written by Bridget herself.

The internet and social network sites were unknown terms in 1996, when the novel was first published, but they have become a part of daily life in the twenty-first century. Had *Bridget Jones's Diary* been written fifteen years later, Fielding would have had the possibility of presenting her story in the style of a twenty-first century narrative, as a digital narrative—in the form of a blog, or through the popular medium of a social network site such as Facebook.

This paper aims to examine in what ways the traditional literary narrative would change if it were turned into a digital narrative by having it take place in the world of Facebook. The first part of this paper will therefore briefly discuss the phenomenon of social network sites with specific attention to Facebook. The second section examines the idea of a digital narrative; if it qualifies as a narrative and in what ways it differs from the traditional narrative. The third part of the paper examines online behavior and personalities, and how these would influence the *Bridget Jones's Diary* narrative. Finally, the paper contains a short work of fiction, which follows a month in Bridget's fictional life through her Facebook account, and a brief analysis of this digital narrative on Facebook and how it deviates from reality.

SOCIAL NETWORK SITES AND FACEBOOK

What are they and why Facebook?

The perhaps most well-known description of social network sites (SNSs) was given by Boyd and Ellison in 2007, when they defined SNSs as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system."

According to the website, Facebook is a "social utility that helps people communicate more efficiently with their friends, family and coworkers." As defined in points one and two of Boyd and Ellison's description of SNSs, Facebook allows a user to maintain a profile, add or confirm friends, and share (personal or contact) information. In addition, Facebook has a number of applications that allow users to, among many other tasks, engage in many kinds of media sharing (photos, videos, music), to play a variety of games and quizzes, and to create or respond to (personalized) advertising (Facebook.com).

"Friends"

In the world of Facebook, there is a difference between "Friends" and "friends." The distinction between the two is made on the website itself, which states that "Facebook is a place for connecting with friends, family and other people you know personally" (Facebook.com). In a user's network, all these different categories are defined as Friends. Boyd and Ellison point out that "the term 'Friends' can be misleading, because the connection

does not necessarily mean friendship in the everyday vernacular sense." Therefore, a distinction must be made between people perceived to be a user's friend in offline situations, and all people in that user's network on Facebook, who are all defined as Friends. In order to make this distinction, in this paper the first group will be referred to as "friends," and the second group as "Friends."

Why Facebook?

The purpose of this paper is to examine in what ways an existing traditional narrative would change if it were turned into a digital narrative. Because every narrative is different in form and content, and because digital narratives can be presented in many ways (as an e-mail conversation, a blog, or perhaps even using such digital media as games and films), which digital medium is most appropriate depends on the nature of the traditional narrative.

Bridget Jones's Diary is a personal account of a fictional character's life, recounting experiences and emotions, shaped by the interactions Bridget has with other characters, and not targeted at any specific audience. Digital media that would best suit such a narrative are blogs and social network sites, which allow the necessary self-disclosure and interaction. Any blogging service, such as the widely known and used LiveJournal, seem to fit *Bridget Jones's Diary* best, because such a service is similar to a diary in many respects. "LiveJournal is a community publishing platform, willfully blurring the lines between blogging and social networking. Since 1999 LiveJournal has been home to a wide array of creative individuals looking to share common interests, meet new friends, and express themselves" (LiveJournal.com). LiveJournal, although it does incorporate some social networking into its services, in its most basic form is simply an online diary.

In this way, Twitter is similar to LiveJournal. "Twitter is a real-time information network that connects you to the latest information about what you find interesting. Simply find the public streams you find most compelling and follow the conversations" (Twitter.com). In addition, one can send short messages ("Tweets") out into the world, respond to others' Tweets, and incorporate various media (Twitter.com). Although Twitter in this interactivity also has a social networking component and is different from LiveJournal in its strict character limit, the result in its simplest form is the same: a medium for (micro)blogging.

Because social interaction plays a significant role in what brings the character Bridget to write down her experiences and emotions, a suitable medium for the story is a social network site, which combines the possibilities of social interaction and self-disclosure. In addition, because blogging is closely related to diary writing, there is not much challenge in researching an adaptation of the narrative to this medium; in fact, it could be transferred to LiveJournal or Twitter almost in its entirety with minimal changes. Lastly, unlike a blogging service, an SNS is a more suitable medium to examine the phenomenon and possibilities or limits of the digital narrative, because it is interactive and participatory, and uses a number of media to tell the story (not just words, but also photographs, music and advertisements). The many changes in stylistics, content, and a character's behavior that need to be taken into account in transferring a narrative onto an SNS would then make this medium the most challenging and interesting option.

In this world of SNSs, there is still a large number of websites to choose from. One option to be considered is conventional, social SNSs versus professional SNSs. "While socially-organized SNSs solicit broad audiences, professional sites such as LinkedIn, Visible Path, and Xing (formerly openBC) focus on business people" (Boyd and Ellison). Clearly, the

highly personal narrative *Bridget Jones's Diary* is more suited for a social interaction-oriented SNS than a professional one.

A distinction can also be made between regular social SNSs and those with a specific media focus. "[W]ebsites focused on media sharing began implementing SNS features and becoming SNSs themselves. Examples include Flickr (photo sharing), Last.FM (music listening habits), and YouTube (video sharing)" (Boyd and Ellison). Any SNS with its focus on media sharing, however, would be less suitable than a regular, conventional SNS. Since the focus in the novel is on Bridget and the people in her social network, it is more logical to have the narrative take place on a conventional SNS, based on social interaction, than on an SNS which has a focus on one type of media sharing, which would not necessarily add to the story, since neither the novel nor the character suggest a media-specific SNS or a specific type of media sharing.

Out of the range of these conventional SNSs, Facebook seems the most suitable choice. Out of the most widely used SNSs, Facebook creates the largest set of possibilities for transferring the literary narrative, since it offers a variety of social actions and is host to many applications. In addition, with currently 500 million active users around the globe (Facebook.com), and with nearly 38 million daily U.S. users in 2009 compared to MySpace's nearly 12 million (Prescott 3) Facebook is simply the most popular and widely used SNS, and the chance that the character Bridget would choose this SNS over all others would be quite likely.

THE DIGITAL NARRATIVE

Can it be defined as such, and in what ways would it change a literary narrative?

M.H. Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines narrative as "a story, whether told in prose or verse, involving events, characters, and what the characters say and do" (181). The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines a narrative as "an account of a series of events, facts, etc., given in order and with the establishing of connections between them; a narration, a story, an account." These definitions have some elements in common (a narrative should be made up out of elements such as characters and events) and differ on other aspects (the OED states a narrative has a certain defined order, whereas the *Glossary* mentions no such order).

These two explanations show there are differing working definitions of the term narrative—regardless of its form (traditional or digital, for instance). It is therefore useful to sketch a working definition of the term constituting what defines a narrative, and use this to determine if a collage-like digital narrative on Facebook is in fact a narrative.

In *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling,* Marie-Laure Ryan sets a number of standards that a narrative must comply with in order to be defined as such.

> A narrative text must create a world and populate it with characters and objects.
> Logically speaking, this condition means that the narrative text is based on
> propositions asserting the existence of individuals and on propositions ascribing
> properties to these existents. (8)

The characters in a Facebook narrative are the users of the network—in this case, Bridget and the other people in her network. Objects in the digital environment take form as, for instance, shared media to comment on or Like, advertisements, or games to participate in. The existence of the characters is asserted by their actions and interactions, in which way the characters function as in a traditional narrative. In *Writing Fiction: a Guide to Narrative Craft*, Janet Burroway mentions four direct ways to present a character: "dialogue, appearance, action and thought" (74). Properties are ascribed to characters in a narrative on Facebook through dialogue (users interact with each other), profile pictures (appearance), actions (for instance, using the Like feature) and thought (a short status update often reflects a user's mood or thoughts on a certain matter).

> The world referred to by the text must undergo changes of state that are caused by nonhabitual physical events: either accidents ("happenings") or deliberate human actions. These changes create a temporal dimension and place the narrative world in the flux of history. (Ryan 8-9).

In addition, these changes and developments must be related, carefully arranged, and create a logical structure:

> The text must allow the construction of an interpretive network of goals, plans, causal relations, and psychological motivations around the narrated events. This implicit network gives coherence and intelligibility to the physical events and turns them into a plot. (9)

Burroway makes a distinction between story and plot, story being "a series of events recorded in their chronological order" and plot being "a series of events deliberately arranged so as to reveal their dramatic, thematic, and emotional significance" (262). Since a narrative on Facebook functions the same way with regard to plot as a traditional narrative does, all actions taken by users (posts, comments, Liking) move the narrative forward and bring about developments, and thereby create a story. Plot originates from characters discussing how certain mentioned events came to pass and why. Logically, this construction of events creates the dimension of time. The temporal dimension automatically originates from this (carefully ordered) series of events; it is in addition reinforced by the time stamps marking each message on Facebook.

It can thus be concluded that, according to Ryan's definition at least, the collage of posts, comments, pictures and other social interactions on Facebook can be defined as a narrative.

In addition, Ryan argues that this model is not only applicable to verbal narrative, but also to nonverbal elements. "One the one hand, narrative is a textual act of representation … On the other hand, narrative is a mental image—a cognitive construct—built by the interpreter as a response to the text. Once again, this representation may be induced by various types of stimuli" (9). These nonverbal stimuli take form on Facebook as, for instance, photos and videos. Although the "logical structure" is dependent on the use of language, "media based on sensor channels [can] make unique contributions to the formation of narrative meaning" (12).

As for transferring a traditional narrative to another medium (in this case, Facebook), Ryan argues this is only possible if the "parameters of verbal narration" can be transferred (15). The narrative should then include a narrative message, a narratee, "in addition to sender (author) and receiver (reader, spectator, etc.)" (15). The narrative message is the content of

the story. The sender or author is any user writing on Facebook. The receiver is the reader of

the of the story. The narratee is defined by the *Glossary of Literary Terms* as "the explicit or

implied person or audience to whom the narrator addresses the narrative" (181). This means

that the narratee on Facebook is anyone who is addressed. The narratee can therefore be a

single person (if a message is directed specifically at that person) or multiple persons (either if

a message is directed at a group or entire network, or if the message has no specific target

audience; for instance, a status update detailing a user's thoughts will be visible to the user's

entire network and automatically qualify that network as the narratee). The receiver and

narratee can thus be the same person, for instance when a user reads a message (which makes

him the receiver) directed at him (which makes him the narratee). The receiver and narratee

can also be different subjects, for instance when a user reads a message (thereby becoming the

receiver) that was directed at another user (who would then be the narratee).

The final parameter Ryan mentions is the narrator, a role that is not as easily assigned

on Facebook. This medium could be argued to have multiple narrators or points of view. The

first group of narrators or point of view is made up of any users posting on Facebook and

thereby narrating the story. Since a Facebook page follows the lives of everyone in a user's

network, the digital story is not told by one person, and therefore all characters who post a

message or engage in a social action could be argued to be narrators; they can all be argued to

be points of view when the narrative is read from their profile and thus as if through their

eyes.

An additional narrator or point of view that can be defined is a type of third person

point of view, which can be argued to be the software behind Facebook. Any action that is

reported (for instance, "Bridget is now friends with Daniel Cleaver") is done by Facebook, or

rather the software that automatically generates these reports from actions taken by the users.

As for an analysis of this type of story told on Facebook, and whether the narrative is actually suitable to be told through a digital medium, is analyzed by Ryan in her work "Beyond Myth and Metaphor: Narrative in Digital Media." In this analysis, Ryan examines different types of stories by using the oppositions internal/external and exploratory/ontological (595). In the external mode, "users are situated outside the virtual world. … [T]hey conceptualize their own activity as navigating a database" (595). A narrative on a social network site can be in the external mode, if a reader from outside the SNS, someone who is not a user, merely reads and navigates the pages. A narrative on an SNS can also be in the internal mode, however. In this mode, a user is a part of the digital world, for instance, by having and potentially also using an account on that SNS and thereby playing a part in that environment.

The exploratory and the ontological modes refer to the influence a user can exercise on the narrative. The ontological mode allows a narrative to be influenced by the participation of the reader. "[D]ifferent types of interactivity open different possibilities on the level of narrative themes and plot configuration" (595). The interactivity available to the user/reader in this mode allows him to, by using his account, for instance engage in discussion and actively participate in the narrative, and thereby help shape it. Even his mere presence as a member of the network in which the narrative takes place could be argued to exercise an influence on the narrative.

In the exploratory mode, however, "[t]hough each storytelling performance is uniquely adapted to the needs of the audience, the plot remains basically the same" (585). Indeed,

> [i]n the *exploratory* mode, users navigate the display, move to new observation points, alter their perspective, or examine new objects in order to learn more about the virtual

world. But this activity does not make fictional history, nor does it alter the plot; users

have no impact on the destiny of the virtual world. (596)

A user on Facebook can therefore make use of both modes. If he chooses to read and

participate, he operates in both the exploratory and ontological modes; if he chooses to read

only, he operates only in the exploratory mode. In this latter mode of non-participation, the

user merely reads the narrative, and does not alter the basic elements or plot of the narrative.

The exploratory mode of navigation allows the reader to choose his own path of

reading. "There could be one fixed story that comes to the reader in many different ways,

depending on which path is chosen through the network" (588). This is supported by

Westlake, who writes that

[i]ndeed, the web allows— even demands—reading strategies that are not linear,

inviting the reader to choose the path and order of text read, as driven by the reader's

own desire and cognitive processing style. This carries over into Facebook's structure,

where users see how they are connected to others through mutual friends and groups.

(25)

A way in which the digital narrative on Facebook then distinguishes itself from its

traditional form is in linearity. Although the reader can choose his own reading order in a

novel, he is logically assumed to work through it from front to back. The Facebook narrative

allows him to defy linearity and choose his own reading order, depending on the page (he

could choose to first read the Wall, or the News Feed, or the private messages). Linearity,

however, does persist on the pages themselves, on which posts on which are ordered

chronologically.

The only exception to this is the News Feed, which is not ordered chronologically, but by importance. At the top are any activities from Friends that have generated the most interest. Which activities are the most interesting depends on factors such as "how many friends are commenting on a certain piece of content, who posted the content, and what type of content it is (e.g. photo, video, or status update)" (Facebook.com). The News Feed is therefore highly personal, designed specifically to tailor to the interests of the user.

It is in these aspects of internal/external and ontological/exploratory, then, that a controlled digital narrative on Facebook faces limits that an actual Facebook narrative has not. Presenting the narrative in the internal mode would allow the reader to become a part of the narrative, which seems an unnecessary requirement. Moreover, it would give the reader the possibility to use that account to enter the ontological mode, by engaging in the story through participation—placing posts, for instance—which would bring a whole new dimension of interactivity to a story that in its traditional form is fixed. Moreover, because the traditional form is fixed, with a defined plot, and a beginning and an end, it lacks the potentially limitless length of an actual Facebook narrative, which could in theory go on forever so long as users keep interacting. Careful considerations then have to be made regarding the format of the story in relation to the medium it will take place on.

THE ONLINE IDENTITY

How does it differ from the offline identity and how does it change Bridget Jones?

The online identity is different from the identity in offline environments, or from that in a diary, and therefore requires examination. Based on research by Boyd (2007) and Meyrowitz (1997), Lewis and West wrote that "Facebook is interactive, and such sites are themselves social contexts that foster certain forms of interaction and social identities" (1213). Bridget would present herself differently in the private sphere of her diary (or even in face-to-face communication) than in the public sphere of Facebook. To find out in what ways the character would be presented differently, it is useful to examine typical online behavior and presentation of the self.

This examination into the online identity is carved up into several parts. Firstly, the paper takes a look at a Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality types to determine offline and online identities, and which type best fits Bridget Jones's character. Researchers have used this model to research personality and behavior since the 1980s (McCrae and John 176) and many researchers examining the online identity today, some with specific regard to behavior on SNSs, still use this model.

Because the novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* is presented as a diary, and is therefore a continuous stretch of self-presentation of the character, and because presentation of the self is an important aspect of Facebook, it is useful to examine online self-presentation and performance, in order to determine how Bridget would be presented online. In addition to these issues, the second part of this section examines how this influences self-disclosure—an important aspect of the diary format.

In the third part, offline interaction is compared to online interaction, for interaction is the primary purpose of social network use. Since self-disclosure is a part of interaction, offline as well as online, a brief examination of the issue will also be part of this section.

Lastly, activity and passivity on Facebook with regard to characterization is briefly discussed. At the end of each section, the traits and attitudes discussed are applied to the character of Bridget Jones, concluding how the character would be presented in the digital narrative.

1.1 | *Determining the offline and online identity using the Five-Factor Model*

According to Amichai-Hamburger (2002), "personality is a leading factor in understanding why people behave the way they do on the Internet" (Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky 1290). Research by Ross et al. and Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky shows how different types of personality traits influence online behavior on social network sites such as Facebook. In both research projects, this is done using the Five-Factor Model which, according to research by Costa and McCrae, "divides personality into a series of five dimensional traits" (Ross 578). In order to predict how the character Bridget Jones would behave online, it is useful to examine her personality in the novel by using the Five-Factor Model, and use these research projects to compare her personality type to the general online behavior exercised by real people with this personality type.

The five factors or types of the FFM are Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness (McCrae and John 178). In a study into the FFM, McCrae and John made a compilation of a series of personality traits characteristic to each personality type, gathered from three large scale research projects into the five types.

When sorting out which traits apply to the character and which do not, an evaluation of the character's personality type can be made.

Extraversion is marked by the traits "active, assertive, energetic, enthusiastic, outgoing, talkative, skilled in play/humor, gregarious, warmth, excitement seeking, positive emotions" (178). Agreeableness is made up of traits such as "appreciative, generous, trusting, considerate, altruism, modesty" (178). "Efficient, organized, responsible, productive, and self-discipline" (178) are traits associated with Conscientiousness. Neuroticism is associated with a category of more moderate traits such as "worrying, fluctuating moods, self-consciousness, impulsiveness and vulnerability" (179), as well as some more extreme traits such as "tense, unstable, basically anxious, hostility, depression" (179). Finally, Openness is defined by traits such as "artistic, imaginative, wide range of interests, aesthetics and values" (179).

The two personality types that most fit Bridget's character are Extraversion and Neuroticism. Extraversion has a number of traits that apply to her character, although not all fully. Bridget could be said to be assertive; the novel is marked by her initiatives and resolutions. Whether she follows through on her assertiveness, however, is another matter. Similarly, the character often has positive emotions; however, she is also prone to mood swings and can perceive a situation she evaluated positively before with a negative view moments after. Generally, however, most traits seem to apply to the character to some extent.

The more moderate traits of Neuroticism apply to the character, while the more extreme traits do not. This suggests that the character does not have high or low levels of Neuroticism, but rather moderate levels, which means an examination of this personality type entails keeping in mind it does not apply to Bridget's character in the extreme sense.

According to previous research by Hamburger and Ben-Artzi (2000), a "link between personality and Internet use has been demonstrated using a number of different personality theories, among them those of extroversion and neuroticism" (Amichai-Hamburger and

Vinitzky 1290). In conclusion, in predicting how Bridget would behave and present herself online, it is most useful to examine online behavior associated with the personality types Extraversion and Neuroticism.

1.1.2 | Extraversion

According to research by Ross et al. and Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, the personality type Extraversion is generally consistent with the following online behavior. An extraverted person is more likely to have his social life take place primarily offline rather than online. "Amichai-Hamburger and colleagues (2002) argued that personality constructs are associated with the location in which a person places their true identity … more extraverted individuals are likely to locate their true identity offline" (Ross et al. 579). This is supported by Amiel and Sargent (2004), as explained in Ross et al.: "extraverts do not use the Internet as a substitute for real-world interactions, but rather are more likely to use forms of CMC [computer-mediated communication] to voice their own opinions, conduct research and share music with others" (582). The same research also suggests Extraverts prefer offline communication to Facebook communication, since the latter lacks the immediate feedback present in the former (582).

1.1.3 | Neuroticism

Firstly, Neuroticism has been associated with using online social networking to fill the absence of offline social contact. "Butt and Phillips (2008) described how those who were high on the trait of Neuroticism were likely to use the Internet to avoid loneliness" (Ross et al. 579). Similarly, Ross et al. reported that previous research by Wolfradt and Doll (2001)

showed individuals with high Neuroticism levels desired to use the internet for communication purposes (579).

Secondly, Neuroticism influences whether a user prefers to use the Wall or upload photos. Ross et al. reported that "individuals high in Neuroticism preferred using the Facebook Wall, whereas those low in Neuroticism preferred posting photos on their Facebook profile" (581). This is supported by Butt and Phillips (2008), whose research suggests Neuroticism and posts on the Wall are linked by a desire for information control.

These authors observed that Neuroticism plays a role in information control, such that those high in the trait of Neuroticism are more likely to control what information is shared. With a Wall posting, an individual has a great deal of time to consider his or her response and is capable of limiting the amount of extraneous information presented as Wall posts are entirely textual and can be deleted afterwards. (Ross et al. 582)

Contradictorily, research by Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky reported the contrary, finding that "individuals in the highly neurotic group were found to be more inclined to post their photos on their Facebook profile than individuals in the less neurotic group" (1293).

Thirdly, Neuroticism determines the type and amount and information shared by the user. Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky reported that "people with a low or high level of neuroticism prefer to share more basic information than people with a moderate level of neuroticism" (1292). This corresponds with findings in Ross et al., who found that "individuals who scored higher on the trait of Neuroticism would be more willing to share personally-identifying information on Facebook" (580).

Lastly, a link has been found between the Neuroticism personality type and bloggers. According to a study by Guadagno, Okdie, and Eno (2008), "people who are high in openness and high in neuroticism are likely to be bloggers. Additionally, the neuroticism relationship was moderated by gender indicating that women who are high in neuroticism are more likely to be bloggers as compared with those low in neuroticism" (Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky 1290).

1.1.4 | Bridget Jones's online representation,

based on the personality profiles of Extraversion and Neuroticism

A likely profile of Bridget's online behavior can now be sketched.

Firstly, Bridget would probably use her Facebook profile to support her social life, rather than have her online social life replace her offline one. This is because Bridget is established to have high levels of Extraversion, whereas she has moderate levels of Neuroticism, the latter personality profile suggesting a person primarily uses an SNS to find social contact.

Secondly, although research was not unanimous on whether a Neurotic individual prefers to either use the Wall or upload photos, it seems likely Bridget would prefer the Wall. Butt and Phillips suggested a Neurotic individual would desire information control, which can be done more accurately in written posts than in photos, which would not give Bridget the direct ability to point out what she wanted to convey specifically. "Visual media lack the code, the grammar, and the syntactic rules necessary to articulate specific meanings" (Ryan, Narrative 10).

Thirdly, since Bridget has moderate rather than high levels of Neuroticism, it would be unnecessary to assume she would certainly share relatively personal and much basic

information on Facebook, although it is perhaps not unlikely; the faithful keeping of a diary

shows the character has a tendency to put personal information into words. How much of this

she would share with her online community, however, is purely hypothetical and can

unfortunately not be clarified with more research.

Lastly, the link between (female) Neurotic individuals and bloggers suggests Bridget

would use Facebook for the same purposes one generally uses a blog, which also correspond

with the purposes for which Bridget keeps her diary; the Oxford English Diary defines a blog

as a "frequently updated web site consisting of personal observations, excerpts from other

sources, etc., typically run by a single person, and usually with hyperlinks to other sites; an

online journal or diary."

1.2 | Self-presentation and social acceptance

A factor in how Bridget would behave or present herself in online situations is her

(and most persons') desire for social acceptance. In her research into rhetoric on Facebook,

Jane Mathison Fife writes that "very general responses to items in the "about me" section (for

example, someone claiming to like "all types" of music) suggested that the person was trying

to be more likeable, to appeal to greater numbers of people instead of revealing specific likes

or dislikes that might turn off some readers" (559). This trait of self-consciousness is

associated with the Neuroticism personality profile.

Facebook, unlike the immediate face-to-face situation, gives a person the opportunity

to think before acting, which allows a user to consciously consider their presentation of self

before actually presenting themselves. This is what Erving Goffman calls "impression

management," described by Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky as "the attempt to control

information in order to affect others' opinions of us" (1289). According to Fife,

[E]ven apparently small features like the status … can offer telling information about

the person's attempts to affect an audience. Silly or "random" statements might make

the person appear clever or witty, while a straightforward statement like "Becky is

lonely" could prompt an invitation from a dorm neighbor to come and hang out (558).

This impression management can also influence a user's careful choice who to and

who not to Friend (Donath and Boyd 80).

Another example of this deliberate self-presentation is the use of photos on Facebook.

Students note that when they see a few pictures of drinking, they know that they are

generally not representative of someone's life. … While the photos are real, I assume,

partying images are carefully selected moments from a person's experience that trump

the more usual boring stuff; descriptions and pictures of more common activities like

studying just do not make the cut for most folks (559).

The use of photos as a careful means of self-presentation is corroborated by Amichai-

Hamburger and Vinitzky: "It seems clear that the photos displayed on the individual profiles

constitute an important way to project the image we wish to present to others" (1290).

1.2.1 | Self-disclosure

When it comes to self-presentation in two environments as different from each other as

a private diary and a public social network site, a significant aspect of difference is self-

disclosure. Nearly all of a user's actions and writings are visible to the public, and not only

that, they appear in the News Feeds of everyone in that user's network. Unlike in a diary, deliberate choices on what to and what not to write have to be made, which shows Facebook disallows the full self-disclosure of a diary.

As a result, since nearly everything that happens on Facebook is for an entire network to see, it might be assumed that users generally consider what they write and do online before they take action. This is taking into account the possibility of creating lists, which allows a user to subdivide his network into different groups with different privacy settings, and thereby to control which messages are presented to which Friends (Facebook.com). The use of this function is another example of a user's consideration of online self-disclosure.

1.2.2 | Bridget Jones's online representation,
with regard to self-presentation and performance

The link between self-consciousness and the desire for social acceptance fits the character of Bridget. She can be self-conscious of her appearance, as illustrated by her obsession with weight, or of what others think of her (an absent phone call from Daniel leads to range of theories of what she might have done wrong).

Bridget would for these reasons also likely engage in impression management in order to control her self-presentation. Bridget has the tendency to speak or act before thinking; for instance, leaving a message on Daniel's answering machine asking him when the "skirt-health summit" will take place, and panicking about it afterwards (Fielding 28). Therefore, it seems likely she would make use of this opportunity of more deliberate communication in order to not misrepresent herself to others in her network. A part of that is considering what photos of herself she would upload or rather keep hidden.

The issue of self-disclosure in the public environment of Facebook versus a private diary suggests that Bridget will likely more carefully consider her writings online than she would in her diary. The reader can then assume that, unlike in the latter medium, what he reads on Facebook is (apart from the occasional impulsive post) most often only what Bridget would want him to read. In this sense, the novel, which creates the illusion of reading a woman's actual diary, a work that has privacy as its defining characteristic, has an edge over the more carefully considered online work.

1.3 | Offline versus online interaction

Although Bridget's diary details much of her thoughts and emotions, the character also uses it to recount interactions that took place before. They are often presented as if happening at that very moment, which evokes a sense of real-time interaction. Because having the story take place on Facebook would mean a constant stream of real-time interactions and events, it is useful to look at how this online interaction would differ from the offline interaction presented in the novel. (This is assuming that these presentations are accurate, since any demonstrations of Bridget's face-to-face interactions were written by the character herself from memory.)

In his article on Facebook use and its users, Westlake mentions:

Erving Goffman's well-established model of analyzing the performance of self (1959) applies not only to face-to-face interaction, but also to asynchronous and real-time interaction on the internet. While Goffman could not have predicted the dynamics of computer-mediated interaction, his model works because users, socialized in face-to-

face interaction, are often conscious of applying the rules of such interaction to the cyber world. (27)

This suggests that when it comes to interaction, people's online behavior is quite similar to their offline behavior.

An important influence in this real-time online interaction is the function of Facebook's News Feed of displaying all actions by everyone in a network, including the user's own actions. Westlake writes:

I also remember feeling a little strange knowing that my every move (well, almost every move) would be seen by all of my Facebook friends. … Granted, these things are publicly available, but previously one had to search for them; now News Feed announced them to anyone in my Facebook social circle. … [T]he new feature certainly made me more conscious of the way I behaved on Facebook—the way I *performed*. (22)

This relatively new function brings interaction on Facebook close to offline interaction, in the sense that it makes the user aware of his own actions and that of his Friends, as he is when they are in physical presence of one another. As in face-to-face situations, most of the character's moves are noticed and evaluated by her environment—a quality characteristic to an SNS such as Facebook, which aims to connect people and enable online social contact. "Surveillance comes not from Big Brother watching the internet, but from users affirming or denying the performances of self they encounter on the internet" (36). In this way, Facebook thus functions as an offline society does; moreover, it could be argued that it largely self-censures due to inter-user evaluation.

1.3.1 | Self-disclosure

A comparison between "sharing" information in a diary and on Facebook shows that the latter has less privacy and therefore does not allow the full self-disclosure of the former. Compared to face-to-face information sharing, however, the issue of self-disclosure is not as clear-cut.

Information can be shared between two or more persons offline and, if needed, generally be trusted to remain within that group. The same certainty can generally be had with a private message on Facebook, but not with a public message on a user's Wall, which would automatically be visible to all people in the communicator's network. Facebook then seems to be a more open form of communication than face-to-face communication, for nearly all that is posted on Facebook is immediately shared with everyone in the network, whereas information-sharing face-to-face in most circumstances does not result in it becoming known to everyone in a person's social circle.

Still, according to Ledbetter's research, several studies reported that "communicators often self-disclose more online than they do when face to face" (31). This might be related to a digital medium being a medium that allows for a careful consideration of words and does not require an immediate reply, as is the case with most communication on Facebook. In addition, such a digital medium can be hid behind completely (concerning for instance body language and intonation) apart from written language and its meaning.

However, what Bridget self-discloses online heavily depends on the nature of the information. Digital communication might take away some reservations present in face-to-face communication, but a user would still not disclose information online he would not disclose offline. As has been established, online society is governed by the same rules of the

offline society, which means peer evaluation. According to Goffman, "[w]hen the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole" (Westlake 35). Communicators might then self-disclose more online than offline, but generally not if it would violate the rules and values of (online) society, especially not in a social environment built on existing offline connections such as Facebook.

1.3.2 | Bridget Jones's online behavior,

with regard to interaction

For determining Bridget Jones's online behavior, the similarities between the offline and online societies and the behavior people show in both environments mean that the character would not have to be presented much differently online from how she was presented to be in offline interactions in her diary. The issue of self-disclosure in online compared to offline environments suggests that the character would self-disclose more online than in face-to-face communication, depending on the nature of the message.

The first part seems true for Bridget as illustrated in the novel by the flirtatious e-mail conversation between her and Daniel about her short skirt (Fielding 23-26). Especially considering that at that point, Bridget and Daniel were nothing more than boss and employee, this message is quite explicit. Bridget would most likely not have engaged in this kind of banter with Daniel out of the blue had it been face-to-face—Daniel would probably not even have initiated the conversation in that situation. However, with e-mail as a medium, which allows Bridget to take some time and carefully consider her reply, she has more freedom and security.

The nature of the message influencing self-disclosure can be illustrated by Bridget using her diary as a venting tool. She writes, for instance, about her frustrations over Perpetua's behavior at several occasions, but she does not voice these feeling to Perpetua's face. Similarly, then, Bridget would not post anything negative about another person on Facebook for that person herself and everyone else to see. In both situations this is because the rules of society are applied to the online society as well. This means that in both situations, Bridget would have to deal with both peer evaluation and direct evaluation from the other person herself. If Bridget were then to openly ridicule Perpetua online, she would have to deal with all the negative feedback she would receive if she were to openly ridicule Perpetua offline.

1.4 | Characterization: activity versus passivity

The issue of activity and passivity play an important role in characterization in adapting *Bridget Jones's Diary* to a social network site. Because the novel is presented as Bridget's diary, the character has full control in the narrative: she alone decides what will and what will not be divulged, and thereby to a certain extent how we perceive her. Indeed, the reader creates his own sense of the character by being giving information through such means as action and dialogue. However, Bridget could influence our perception to some extent by, for instance, omitting information that would put her in a negative light, or painting (whether consciously or not) a situation to have been differently than it actually was.

The situation on Facebook is different. On there, Bridget would have a certain amount of control. She could actively use impression management to define her character, by having control over what she will write, Like, or upload. However, because of the interactivity on Facebook, the character will be defined passively, through other characters as well—a

technique impossible in the novel. Through their posts and actions, the reader can get an impression of how other characters see Bridget. Facebook would allow Bridget to have a certain amount of control even in these cases—she could remove someone else's post on her Wall, for instance—but these actions would only add to characterization, since they would convey Bridget's approval or disapproval of her online representation.

STORY ANALYSIS

*How is the discussed theory applied to the short story
and how does the story differ from the original and Facebook in reality?*

One way in which the short story deviates from reality is in the aspect of limitlessness. A true narrative on the actual Facebook website is potentially infinite. Users in a network can interact endlessly, without worry over time, word count or running out of paper—or in this case, running out of web space. A self-constructed narrative (a written, defined story) on Facebook can be potentially limitless as well, but (for this paper at least) such a project is practically not feasible. It would entail one or possibly a team of writers using a number of Facebook accounts to create a continuous stream of messaging and interaction. They would possibly have to keep interacting for months, or years, or decades, or whatever time a Facebook network could and does stay in existence (an issue that cannot even be researched considering the recentness of social network sites).

The impracticability of such a cooperation is one of the practical reasons the short story is presented not on Facebook itself, but rather on a webpage designed to look like Facebook and creating the illusion of being the actual Facebook website. Another practical reason for doing this is that Facebook is public, and any user might have found the profiles hosting the narrative and have interfered. Although this would have made for an interesting study into blurring the lines between reality and fiction, such a study was not the purpose for this thesis.

For all such practical reasons, the short story was given a limit: it is a limited narrative of about three thousand words, with a more or less defined beginning and ending. In the matter of structure and limit, then, the short story is closer to the common written story than an actual, potentially limitless Facebook page. In that way, the short story can thus be better

classified as a digital narrative, taking place on Facebook, than as a Facebook narrative as it is in reality.

The limit of the short story as opposed to unlimited reality also influences the aspect of interactivity. As brought forward in the paper, in digital narratives on SNSs, a distinction can be made between the ontological and the exploratory modes. Had the story been presented on the actual Facebook website, the ontological mode would have been a possibility. The reader might have been allowed to use a Facebook account to engage in the story and exercise influence on it. The story should then have been presented as a Facebook group rather than an actual network; a group and all messages posted there can be made visible to the general audience, whereas a network of Friends and their messages and actions can only be visible to users part of that network, which means the reader would have first needed to be accepted as a Friend by any one of the fictional characters. Again, this would have turned the study more into an examination of reality meeting fiction, whereas the purpose of this paper was to examine how a fixed story would take shape on Facebook.

The short story, therefore, has the more approachable, strictly exploratory mode. It is presented as a fixed, self-constructed webpage which can solely be read. As is possible in this mode, the short story can be navigated like a database, freely explored, and it allows the reader to choose his own path of reading. However, since the story is reading-only, he cannot interact or exercise influence on it in any other way.

The coherence of this non-linear story then depends on three factors: the chronology of the separate pages themselves; clear and suggestive signs in the narrative that alert the reader of the connection between the various posts on the various pages; and the reader's ability to perceive the coherent structure. Clearly, the latter two are heavily dependent on each other, which means any references to other pages in the narrative need to be very clear. As Ryan argues,

Since it would be impossible for the author to foresee a coherent narrative

development for each path of navigation, the order of discovery of the lexia cannot be

regarded as constitutive of narrative sequence. The only way to preserve narrative

coherence under such conditions is to regard the text as a scrambled story that the

reader puts back together, one lexia at a time. (597)

Readers have to be able to understand that they can switch from a Wall post to a

private message, for instance by Bridget posting "RE: private message: Oh, bugger" in an

attempt to share her mood with her network without divulging the private information behind

it—which is, however, visible to the reader of the short story. If no such signal is given for the

reader to switch between messages on different pages, he must at least be able to understand

the connection between the messages scattered across these pages (for instance, by Bridget

copying a quote from her coworker Caroline, which had been posted on her Wall, into a

private message and then commenting on it). The reader also has to be able to place these

scattered messages in the timeframe; to be able to assign linearity in a not entirely linear

structure.

In the aspect of linearity, then, the short story has found a place in between the

traditional narrative and the reality of Facebook. Its non-linear structure and exploratory

options distinguish it from the traditional form, whereas the fixed plot and disallowance of

interactivity distinguishes it from a narrative taking place in a real Facebook environment.

Another aspect of the limitedness of the short story is the amount of access the reader

has to the profile and network, and in this way the story deviates from reality in a way

beneficial to the chosen format. In an actual Facebook network, nearly all actions and

messages are shared by the entire network, except for a few aspects. For instance, on

Facebook in reality, a user can remove a post, and no notification will be sent out. In the short story, the reader is in fact aware that Bridget has removed a post; in a deviation from reality, the notification of the removed post remains hovering in the middle of the page, allowing the reader to ponder and debate the content of this blind spot. The reader also has access to another's private messages in the story, unlike in reality. A user can send a private message to one or a number of people, and logically, the message will be visible only to the addressees. Such matters, which are not visible to the user's network in reality, are indeed visible to the reader in the short story. Because the story is presented as Bridget's profile, as if the reader is logged on under her name, everything that is usually visible to Bridget but not to her network is now indeed visible to the reader. In this respect, the short story functions as the diary does, in that it gives the reader access to matters otherwise private.

Reading the entire narrative from Bridget's profile alone also defines perspective in the narrative. In the novel, the sole narrator is Bridget herself, and since it is presented as a personal diary, everything is seen from her point of view. Facebook has a number of narrators (these are the various users in real life or, in the story, the characters). Point of view can then be assigned by presenting the narrative from the point of one profile only. By reading the story from Bridget's profile, with full access as if the reader is logged on under her name or constantly reading along over her shoulder, the reader has the impression of watching through Bridget's eyes after all.

The decision of limiting the short story is not just for practical reasons, but for creative reasons as well. The focus in the novel is on Bridget (the main character), and to a smaller extent on some of the most important people in her life (the supporting characters). Assuming Bridget would have a reasonable number of friends, all their actions (and in turn, all responses to those actions from *their* friends) would appear in Bridget's News Feed. In this way, all characters, however major or minor, would receive a large focus, with the main focus on

Bridget disappearing in the clutter. Of course, a narrative containing such a News Feed, reporting every minor action taken by a large group of characters which would normally be mentioned only briefly, would simply become quite muddled and disorganized.

In order to keep the focus on Bridget and the supporting characters in the story, the entire narrative is viewed from her profile only. The reader is unable to switch to the profile of any other character, and all messages and actions reported are either by Bridget or related to Bridget. The supporting characters thus do get to play a part, but they maintain their supporting role by primarily functioning to flesh out or move Bridget's story forward, instead of receiving as much attention as Bridget herself through the News Feed. By following only Bridget's life instead of many lives at the same time, then, the short story again is (and for creative reasons needs to be) closer to the form of a traditional (digital) narrative than an actual narrative on Facebook.

With regard to Bridget's online behavior and presentation, Bridget is shown using Facebook rather to support her offline social life, than replacing her offline social life with her online one. Although the reader cannot be sure of her offline social activities, some references are given to this issue. Bridget reports various offline social interactions (the company party, having drinks with her friends), and uses Facebook to discuss these with her friends afterwards.

In addition, whenever Bridget uses Facebook, it is primarily for reasons other than making social contact or using it to replace her offline social life. As such, Bridget uses her account to give her network short status updates (on her progress in quitting smoking, or her troubles with trying on the ordered dresses); to respond to a message or share with her friends something she encountered online (Daniel Cleaver voting for her in the "Best Looking Contest," or the pictures of her doing karaoke at the company party); or at times simply to perhaps fight off boredom at work, as shown by posts carrying time stamps of the middle of a

work day. All this suggests that Bridget certainly uses Facebook to maintain her social

contacts, but not necessarily to replace her offline social life with an online social life, or to

find and make new friends.

As it was established Bridget would probably prefer the Wall and the medium of

written language over posting photos, Bridget is seen primarily post status updates and

interact on her Wall, or engage in private messaging. In addition, these messages are often

personal in nature and in content similar to messages that would be posted on a blog or

perhaps written in a diary. All this is due to Bridget's Neurotic nature, which is related to both

the sharing of personal information and to the tendency of using an SNS for reasons similar to

blogging or writing in a diary. As such, Bridget's status updates often report semi-personal

information such as her increasing weight or her dissatisfaction with how she looked at the

company party.

The matter of activity and passivity in characterization is a part of the short story as

well. Activity in characterization means that Bridget has the option to actively control her

self-presentation—in other words, impression management. What primarily leads Bridget to

want to manage others' impression of her is self-consciousness and the desire for social

acceptance. Bridget is shown to engage in this practice. It is clear she is self-conscious and

that she wants to manage the impression people have of her; for instance, she is embarrassed

by the photos of her at the company party and demands her coworker take them down. It is

only when Daniel, whom she clearly has a crush on, Likes the pictures—showing he has a

positive impression of her and grants her social acceptance—that she no longer dislikes them

being online.

In addition, impression management on Facebook influences Bridget to carefully

consider what she writes and does, more so than in face-to-face interaction; however, because

the reader can only see the end result and not the progress, he cannot be sure when Bridget

carefully phrased a message that otherwise she would have perhaps blurted out. He can assume, however, that since Bridget is aware of her posts becoming visible to the public, everything he reads is only what the character intended to be read. Of course, Bridget would not be Bridget without a certain matter of impulsiveness that leads to awkward situations. This results in such occurrences as posting she is out of time to finish an assignment for work and that she will ask Perpetua for an extension on the deadline, before realizing Perpetua is a Friend and able to read along.

It is Jude, on the other hand, who is aware of the careful and deliberate communication that Facebook allows; out of professional discretion, she shares information on her business deal only through private messages, whereas she freely posts more general information on the Walls. When a message that does not seem professionally discrete appears on Bridget's profile, the reader might assume Jude has made use of a list, making that message visible only to her close Friends.

Impression management also influences self-disclosure. It is established that Bridget would likely self-disclose more online than offline, but only if her message was suited to be self-disclosed offline. To illustrate with an example, Bridget has found the courage to jokingly share with all her Friends she has "become The Blob," a piece of information she likely would not have announced publicly to, say, her entire office. On the other hand, she voices her annoyance with Caroline's preferential treatment at work to Tom but not to her entire network, just as she would not voice that annoyance publicly in an offline environment.

Passivity in characterization is also a part of the short story. In this case, characterization takes place not through Bridget actively managing her self-presentation, but passively through other characters influencing her presentation. For instance, after having drinks with her friends and feeling awful in the morning, Bridget calls in sick for work with the excuse of having a stomach flu, rather than sharing the real reason of her absence. Her

boss Perpetua finds out anyway, however, because Tom uploads pictures of the friends drinking and engages in a conversation with Jude on their resulting hangovers, all of which eventually makes its way back to Perpetua's News Feed.

In conclusion, the short story is an example of the possibilities, limits of the digital narrative on Facebook, as well as the necessary deviations from reality and the original story. It is limited in a number of ways a true narrative on Facebook is not, for a variety of practical and creative reasons. For the purpose of this paper, the story has illustrated examples of online behavior, self-disclosure, social interaction and self-presentation.

APPENDIX

Friend | A person in a user's network by mutual confirmation of association. Any person in a network is called a "Friend," meaning they can be "friends, family and other people you know personally" (Facebook.com). The term can also be used as a verb, in which case it refers to the action of sending or confirming a Friend request to or from another user, after which the two users will be displayed as Friends in each other's networks.

Groups | "A closed space for small groups of people to communicate about shared interests" (Facebook.com). Groups can be created by any user. Joining a group requires permission from the administrator of that group. Unlike in a Friend network, posts on the Wall of a group can be made visible to users outside that group.

Hidden request | A user can choose to temporarily hide a (e.g. Friend or game) request with the intention of removing the notification from his profile. A hidden request can revisited at a later time, at which point the user can decide whether to accept or permanently delete the request.

Info page | A page on the user's account where he can list personal information, contact information and personal interests.

Like feature | "'Like' is a way to give positive feedback or to connect with things you care about on Facebook. A user can like any content posted by Friends, or he can like a Page that he wants to connect with on Facebook. A user can also connect to content and Pages through social plugins or advertisements on and off Facebook" (Facebook.com).

News Feed | The News Feed is the homepage of a user's account, and displays nearly all actions taken by the user himself as well as by everyone in the user's network. According to Facebook.com, "News Feed — the center column of your home page — is a constantly

updating list of stories from people and Pages that you follow on Facebook." The News Feed

is not ordered chronologically, but by which content is determined to be most interesting. This

is based on "how many friends are commenting on a certain piece of content, who posted the

content, and what type of content it is (e.g. photo, video, or status update)" (Facebook.com).

Personalized advertising | A Facebook user may encounter personalized advertising. These

advertisements can be based on a user's activity or activity by someone in the user's network,

Liking, or other social actions (Facebook.com). Any other activity on the web by a user or his

Friends can also be used to generate personalized advertisements.

Private message | A message from the user not shared by his entire network, such as a

message placed on the Wall, but sent to one or more specific Friends only and visible only to

the addressees.

Profile | The name given to a user's entire account, visible to him and his Friends, from

which can be navigated to all personal pages (Wall, Info, Photos, Friends…).

Status (update) | A short message posted by a user on his Wall, often briefly discussing a

certain thought, opinion or mood.

Tagging | When a user comes across a photo featuring someone from his network, he can

tag this person in that photo. That person will then receive a notification saying the user has

spotted him in a photo somewhere on Facebook. The photo will automatically appear in the

tagged user's photo section and on his profile (Facebook.com).

Wall | The Wall is a page on a user's account that displays all actions taken by the user and

all responses to these actions from other users. As such it displays matters such as posted

short status updates, uploaded media, participation in games, and comments from and to the

user.

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