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Fans and Adaptation: An Analysis of the Use of Interactive Storytelling in The Lizzie Bennet Diaries

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Fans and Adaptation:

An Analysis of the Use of Interactive Storytelling in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of English

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Margaret Kathryn Brodbeck

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Abstract:

By using adaptations of Jane Austen's classic novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) as a frame of reference, my thesis will demonstrate that transmedia narratives are most effective in tandem with original texts that have a history of successful adaptations due to the perpetual audience of fans and their previous knowledge of the story to meaningfully, as well as canonically, interact with the narrative. This thesis will first introduce theories surrounding adaptations and look at previous *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations in light of a devoted fan base. It will then introduce the concept of transmedia narratives and examine the culture of fans and their interactions with texts in the digital age. Lastly, I will analyze the success of the Internet production company Pemberley Digital and their transmedia YouTube adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* that boasts a view count of 82.2 million views and secured an Emmy. This analysis will apply the theories on transmedia, fandom, and adaptation introduced in the first three sections to demonstrate that interactive transmedia narratives are most effective when they have an established fan base, which is most easily found in popular texts prone to adaptations. Digital storytelling will only continue to grow, especially as upcoming generations favor online streaming and independent producers as opposed to the cable television shows created by the larger media corporations. The research contained within this thesis will show the importance of appealing to wider audiences by creating richer, more immersive narratives through transmedia and paratexts that encourage collective authorship.

Introduction:

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was first published on 28 January 1813 in England and quickly became the popular, beloved novel it is today. *Pride and Prejudice* details the romantic journey between two flawed characters, Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy. Mrs. Bennet, the mother of Elizabeth, is desperate to find husbands for her and her husband's daughters, as the family estate is set to be inherited by their cousin Mr. Collins in the patriarchal society of England at the time. When wealthy bachelor Mr. Bingley rents out a nearby estate, she is determined to make a connection between him and her daughter Jane. However, Mr. Bingley's friend Mr. Darcy finds the country town boring and uncivilized. After a bad first impression in which Mr. Darcy snubs Elizabeth at a ball, the two must learn to grow from their preconceived notions of each other. While Austen's story situates itself as romance, it is well-known for its humor, irony, and dynamic characters as well.

Pride and Prejudice is a story that is continuously being adapted and re-imagined, which can be seen in its most popular recent adaptation, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. On 9 April 2012, the production company Pemberley Digital released the first vlog of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* on YouTube under a channel of the same name. "My Name is Lizzie Bennet" (ep. 1) introduces the audience to graduate student Lizzie Bennet as she relates a story of her match-making mother and her obsession with the new neighbor, a supposedly a rich, single man. The series was created by Hank Green and Bernie Su. Green is well-known in the online world for the YouTube channel Vlogbrothers, a video blog in which he and his brother John Green exchange epistolary-style videos. Su is a writer, director, and producer who creates interactive stories—most of which are Pemberley Digital productions. The series, a modern-day adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), created a contemporary setting and publishing paradigm. Rather than

releasing another period drama adaptation (that our main character is fond of), the creators told the story through a series of YouTube vlogs, much like Green himself makes, and additional transmedia content that spanned across multiple social media platforms.



Fig. 1. “Darcy follows Lizzie.” *Pemberley Digital*, 2 Nov. 2012, <http://www.pemberleydigital.com/darcy-follows-lizzie/>.

The vlogs and social media posts were posted in real time and allowed for fan interaction with characters on popular sites such as Twitter or Tumblr. This technique of using social media in real time was not new, as television shows such as *Misfits* (2009), a British science-fiction series, had employed the technique few years prior to the release of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. However, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* presented their show in a manner that valued the additional story content on the social media platforms just as much as the primary narrative seen in the YouTube vlogs. Both platforms, that is the social media and YouTube, were equally important in understanding the story and even encouraged fans to interact in ways that substantially contributed to the story’s narrative. One example can be found in a Twitter exchange between Lizzie and two of her followers on 2 November 2012. The followers discovered that Darcy had followed Lizzie on Twitter, and Pemberley Digital used their tweets to reveal this in an

interaction with Lizzie. The exchange occurs a day after Lizzie's release of the episode in which Darcy declares his unrequited love for Lizzie. In the ensuing argument between the two, Lizzie accidentally reveals that she talked about Darcy in her video blogs (ep. 60). The followers' observation that Darcy had followed Lizzie on Twitter allowed the fans to speculate more precisely as to what his reaction was to her video and the discovery of her YouTube channel. Lizzie even expresses her own confusion in the Twitter exchange (see fig.1). For the audience that followed the series in real time, these interactions with the characters created a more immersive narrative.

The Adaptability of Jane Austen:

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) is perhaps one of the most recognizable romances in recent history due to the proliferation of many on-screen adaptations and re-imagined versions of it in literature and other forms of text. Screenwriters and directors have recognized the commercial success of the story regardless of format and continue to produce more adaptations, much to the delight of Jane Austen fans. From the first film adaptation in the mid-1900s to a transmedia version told through YouTube vlogs, *Pride and Prejudice* has a rich and varied history of adaptation that continues to build upon each narrative reiteration. Much of *Pride and Prejudice*'s success can be attributed to its devoted following, often referred to as Janeites, that spans across an entire century from the late nineteenth-century to present day.

While it is not the most iconic of the novel's adaptations, *Pride and Prejudice* (1940), directed by Robert Z. Leonard, marks the beginning of the novel's lasting cinematic adaptations, though it was preceded by live, theatrical versions that are lost to time. The 1940 film, featuring Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier as Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, was based upon a Broadway play entitled *First Impressions* produced a few years prior, rather than a direct adaptation of the novel (jasna.org). While the film takes some creative liberties with the original text, it was highly successful. The most notable change can be found in the time period the story is set in. Instead of taking place in Austen's regency England, the film chose to set the story in the 1830s. This change is mostly attributed to the film's costuming decisions. Some claim the studio thought the styles of Austen's time were too boring for that of the audience, and it would benefit to change it to the dramatic gowns of the later time. It has also been said that costumes left over from the studio's previous film production of *Gone with the Wind* were used in effort to cut costs (tcm.com). Regardless of the reason, the updated style served to change other aspects of the film

and the audience's perception of the characters. The 1830s style of dress more closely resembled that of Southern debutantes, than of Regency women, which made the characters seem excessively dramatic in their movements and personalities.

While other adaptations in the form of television movies and series followed the 1940 film, none are more beloved and popular than the television series version of *Pride and Prejudice* (1995). The six-episode series, written by Andrew Davies and directed by Simon Langton, aired on the BBC and the American A&E at the time of its release. Jennifer Ehle and Colin Firth filled the roles of the two main characters, and the series more closely followed the original novel than its predecessors. However, the most iconic aspect of this adaptation lies in its casting choice of Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy, particularly a scene in which he emerges from a lake in wet clothes. This scene, despite not being written in Austen's original novel, was popular among the female audience and even turned many of them into *Pride and Prejudice* fans. Often dubbed the 'wet-shirt' version, this film not only served as the launching point of Firth's acting acclaim, but his portrayal cemented the character as a pop culture icon and has become a reference point for all following reiterations. Firth was even cast again as the Darcy archetype in *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), a film adapted from a novel of the same name that is a modernized reinterpretation of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Though it did not reach the same level of admiration as the 1995 television series, the film version of *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) was well-received and often acknowledged as one of the novel's better adaptations. The screenplay was written by Deborah Moggach, who attempted to tell the story as closely to Austen's novel as she could, especially with dialogue, though the film's director Joe Wright strayed slightly from Moggach's original script. In an effort to distinguish it from the typical period drama, the film chose to set the story in an earlier time

period, which allowed for plainer clothes and added the semblance of reality to its rural setting. The 'muddy hem' version (focusfeatures.com) of the film, starring Kiera Knightly and Matthew Macfadyen, was intended for a younger audience, and this is evident in its choice to move away from the emphasis in most period adaptations on grandeur and wealth.

The previous two adaptations discussed are what defined and propelled Austen and her stories into mainstream media in the last twenty-five years. The story's adaptation history progressed alongside the growth of transmedia narratives, while its larger narrative meaning remained constant through its reiterations. Deborah Cartmell, author of *Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice: The Relationship Between Text and Film*, compiled a list of recent adaptations and finds the novel has increased in status since the last half of the twentieth century due to the many television adaptations that were popular, while film adaptations took the lead in the twenty-first century (Cartmell 12).

Fan Interaction and Transmedia Narratives:

While the term ‘Janeites’ has been around much longer than the ‘wet-shirt’ Darcy of the 1995 adaptation, it especially came into use after the BBC series premiered with many of the audience members finding that particular adaptation an accessible entrance point into Austen’s works—though the Janeites still view Austen “more like a film star, than a serious academic writer and the characters, as real people” (Cartmell 39). Deborah Yaffe’s book, *Among the Janeites: A Journey Through the World of Jane Austen Fandom*, documents the stories of Janeites from the fans who cherished the novel before it was ‘cool’ to those who entered the fandom after watching the BBC adaptation. The author herself often considers how the Janeites have changed in recent years, especially after the swelling of their group in 1995. Yaffe even goes so far to say that the Jane Austen fandom did not exist before the Internet, rather there were unconnected fans of the novel (Yaffe 180). Much of the change she focuses upon occurred in the online communities in which Janeites can engage and discuss with others about anything relating to Austen and her works (Yaffe 181). Overall, Yaffe’s position is often at odds with the current state of the Janeites, as she advocates for the connected community, but criticizes the commercialization and ‘mania’ fostered within it.

This type of ‘fandom’ study has steadily risen in popularity since the publication of media scholar Henry Jenkins’s novel *Textual Poachers* in 1992, a few years before the rise of the Jane Austen fan community. While some critical texts preceded it, and many followed, *Textual Poachers* is hailed as the most formative and central work in the field of fan studies. In his work, Jenkins argues that fans are not the obsessed outcasts that many have painted them to be. ‘Textual poaching’ is a term created by scholar Michael de Certeau in his work *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) to describe readers’ subversive appropriation of authors’ texts for their own

enjoyment. Jenkins further examines de Certeau's idea and finds textual poaching to be a creative, productive hobby of fans that should not be discouraged by those involved in the creation or production of television series, using *Star Trek* as his example as the show was oft to do with its fans. This was the first of multiple books on fandom by Jenkins and paved the way for fan studies in academia. Without Jenkin's work on fans, interactive stories like Pemberley Digital's adaptations would be impossible as fan interaction with texts and media are now viewed positively and encouraged by creators.

However, in early fandom, fanwork (fan fiction, fan art, videos, and more) was often deemed to violate copyright by creators in an effort to stop the appropriation of their characters and stories. After facing years of legal backlash from creators, many fans have come together to protect fan interests. Most notably, the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW) is a nonprofit organization created by fans that advocates for fanwork creation, legal protection and preservation. The organization envisions a future that fanworks are "recognized as legal and transformative and are accepted as a legitimate creative activity" (transformativeworks.org) which would protect fans and their creations under United States' Fair Use Laws. The organizations efforts to reach this goal can be seen in the projects created for fans: Archive of Our Own, Fanhackers, Fanlore, Fan Video and Multimedia, Legal Advocacy, Open Doors, and Transformative Works and Cultures (transformativeworks.org). From hosting an open-source fanfiction archive to fandom wikis and guides to a peer-reviewed academic journal, the Organization for Transformative Works hopes to continue to change the public's perception of fans and their creations.

Fortunately, many creators today view fans as a narrative aspect that can be used within a story, rather than a force that needs to be suppressed. With the development of different

technologies in the field of entertainment, the ability to tell a story in new and innovative ways has evolved significantly since the publication of *Textual Poachers*. In an influential 2003 *MIT Technology Review Article* entitled “Transmedia Storying,” Jenkins defined the emerging topic of transmedia storytelling. At this time, it had become common for different types of media to expand past their initial narrative and storytelling platforms. Movies such as *Star Wars* (1977) became multiplatform franchises outside of the initial cinematic releases with the addition of action figures, videogames, and comics. Videogames were beginning to expand their narratives into film series as seen with *Resident Evil* (2002). Jenkins argues that this desire for story enhancement originates in the generation of children at that time, and that the desire for this type of media will mature with them. The connections between these platforms arise because “younger consumers have become information hunters and gatherers, taking pleasure in tracking down character backgrounds and plot points and making connections between different texts within the same franchise” (MIT). Additionally, the platforms are not prioritized one over the other and are viewed equally in terms of quality.

At the time this article was written, Jenkins was doubtful of the entertainment industry’s ability to produce quality transmedia experiences. He found that they were not utilizing the available technology or collaborating effectively. A model of ‘co-creation,’ he argued, was needed instead of the typical ‘adaptation-of-content’ that was popular at the time. With this model, a single creator or creative unit controlled the narrative vision of the story’s franchise, rather than separate units that compete under one conglomerate. Transmedia storytelling can only be successful once these pre-requisites are met. Jenkins further describes that the ideal form of transmedia storytelling should allow each media or platform to focus on excelling in their particular method, while ensuring that each aspect of the franchise enable autonomous

consumption, thus allowing the enjoyment of one media without relying on prior knowledge of another platform. This allows the audience to enter the story at any point along the franchise's narrative across platforms. However, audiences will lose interest if each form of media is repetitive of the others, so the stories must be compelling enough to encourage further consumption of the narrative forms. Likewise, and perhaps most importantly, this high level of engagement across platforms enables larger economic gain for the franchise.

Jenkins concedes that not all stories are adaptable to transmedia, and that transmedia narratives are just different, not better or worse, in comparison to other storytelling types. Some films had strong characters that allowed for a large cinematic franchise to develop. For a franchise or text to produce successful transmedia storytelling, it must have a complex and intriguing world that allows for diverse characters and stories for the audience to engage with. *Star Wars* again acts as a prime example for this model as it expanded past its dominant cinematic narrative into television shows, comics, and videogames that introduced new and interesting narratives separate from the movies. Jenkins says that like many novels, well-built worlds and new character perspective make for good stories.

In a more recent analysis of current fan culture entitled *Millennial Fandom*, author Ellen Louisa Stein finds that division between fans and creators is further decaying due to the proliferation and accessibility of social media. With popular social media apps like Twitter and Instagram, fans, actors, writers, and creators can converge on equal ground. Fans can follow and ask their favorite actors questions about the show, or share their transformative works with them in a Tweet—an act that is especially popular with fan art. Creators too have embraced the meeting and discourse ground that is social media; actors and directors post photos from sets and

have impromptu live shows with the fans. On the other side of the divide, fans can tweet about fanfiction writer's block or discuss the newest episode with fellow fans.

Fans have a long and varied history with visual media texts. Despite early discouragement by franchises and other platforms such as videogames, fans have long engaged with their favorite texts by producing their own non-canon transmedia work through mediums such as fan fiction or art. However, with the introduction of transmedia narratives, their interaction is greatly desired by the media industry now and has led it to become the most important aspect of interactive storytelling.

The focus of this thesis' analysis, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* effectively utilized the large fanbase offered by both the Janeites and the fans of creator Hank Green to aid in the acquisition of views and subsequent audience interaction with the show's transmedia elements. As mentioned previously, contemporary Austen fans are perpetually eager for more on-screen adaptations of her beloved works. By using *Pride and Prejudice* as the adapted text, Pemberley Digital accessed the pre-existing fandom and their enthusiasm for the show. The fans brought in by Green's association and promotion of the project likely contributed greatly as well to the show's effective use of interactive storytelling. Green and his brother's YouTube channels' content are geared toward a younger demographic—typically ranging from middle-school to high-school. This generation is tech-savvy and frequented the same social media sites as both Green and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* characters. By using the same active and social media platforms as the potential audience, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* ensured that the intended interactive elements of the show would be easily engaged and understood by the audience. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* also received the advantage of being widely publicized by Green to his own fan base, and saw its popularity decrease with the subsequent adaptations produced by

Pemberley Digital that he was not directly involved with in the way he was with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. When Green's fan base is combined with the Janeites, it is no wonder the show was able to garner over eighty-million views.

This successful mode of interactive storytelling secured *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* an Emmy for Outstanding Creative Achievement in Interactive Media – Original Interactive Program, the first web series to do so. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was able to successfully garner an audience due to their understanding of how young fans operate. In her work on millennial fandom, Stein finds that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* can be viewed as a transformative work of transmedia fan fiction. The series exists because the creators were fans of the original novel and wanted to create their own version of it. Likewise, the creators' enthusiasm for the story as fans themselves is what made it a habitable space for other fans to interact with and enjoy.

Pemberley Digital:

Pemberley Digital's productions are not only innovative in their storytelling mode, but in their method of adaptation as well. While Pemberley Digital is a real production company, it also acted as the fictional company owned by William Darcy in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. The transposition of Austen's Mr. Darcy's estate into an entertainment company merged the story's transmedia and the real company's digital presence. During the show's run, the Pemberley Digital Twitter (@PemberleyDig), website (pemberleydigital.com), and YouTube acted as an extension of its fictional counterpart. After the end of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, it merged into a both real and fictional company that continues to wink at the fourth wall.

Pemberley Digital's adaptations of Jane Austen novels moves away from the comparative or 'fidelity' aspect of adaptations that many use when discussing the quality of such texts. To view *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* as an adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, one has to acknowledge that adaptations in any form are what Linda Hutcheon describes as 'palimpsestuous' (Hutcheon 6). This term acknowledges that the audience will experience an adapted text through their prior understanding of the original work, and that an adaptation will have an overt connection to the original work. Hutcheon further defines adaptation as an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works, a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging, and an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work (Hutcheon 8).



Fig. 2. The Lizzie Bennet Diaries, “My Name is Lizzie Bennet – Ep: 1” *YouTube*, 9 Apr. 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=KisuGP2lcPs.

A work can be transposed, or transcoded, in different ways—such as medium, genre, or point of view. *Pride and Prejudice* is transposed in two ways into *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*: setting/time and the story’s medium. The story is brought from nineteenth century England into the modern age. Elizabeth “Lizzie” Bennet now lives as twenty-four-year-old American graduate student on the East Coast, rather than Regency England (see fig. 2). The original work itself changes medium from written word into a YouTube vlog series with transmedia elements outside the primary narrative used to directly interact with the audience. These ‘paratexts’ were largely focused in on the social media platforms of Twitter and Tumblr, which are the only ones now presented as part of the ‘story’ on the Pemberley Digital website even though others were used. LookBook, This Is My Jam, LinkedIn, and Pinterest are some of the other platforms employed by the series during its initial run.

These changes do more than just “update” *Pride and Prejudice*. They change the context of the entire narrative. This is an example of Hutcheon’s observation that adaptation is a process of “both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation” (Hutcheon 8). Creators of adaptations are not appropriating stories from their original context, but rather salvaging elements of them to be told

and understood in another. For example, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*' Mr. Collins has different intentions from the original novel. In the novel, Mr. Collin is a cousin of the Bennet sisters and positioned to inherit the Bennet's estate after their father's death. Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth in effort to unite the family by allowing them to retain the connection to the family estate through her, but she rejects his offer. After Elizabeth's rejection, he is still set upon securing a wife and proposes marriage to Elizabeth's best friend, Charlotte Lucas. In Pemberley Digital's adaptations, they salvage the effect of the scene, while updating it to be understood in a modern context. Mr. Collins proposes a job offer to Lizzie (and later Charlotte) at his media company Collins & Collins instead of a marriage proposal. A job offer is better understood and more impactful than a sudden and unexpected marriage proposal for modern audiences.

Many of the modernizations in the show were character centered. In the web series, the Bennet family has only three daughters, Jane, Lizzie, and Lydia, instead of the five in the original novel. However, Mary Bennet is later introduced as a cousin who is often forgotten, and Kitty Bennet is the family's pet cat—a fitting and humorous update. Mr. Bingley and his sister Caroline become Bing Lee and Caroline Lee from an American-Asian family. Similarly, Charlotte Lucas becomes Charlotte Lu. These transpositions diversify the novel's characters and bring the story further into the postcolonial twenty-first century.

However, the most daring modernization of the original novel in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* lies in the characterization of Lydia Bennet. In *Pride and Prejudice* and its on-screen adaptations, the youngest Bennet sister is characterized as self-concerned, impulsive, and dramatic. In every adaptation, she runs away with the problematic antagonist George Wickham believing that Mr. Wickham intends to marry her. However, after the scandal breaks, Mr. Darcy forces Mr. Wickham to marry Lydia, thus saving the Bennet family's reputation. In *The Lizzie*

Bennet Diaries, the audience's initial impression of Lydia is similar to those of her adapted predecessors. Her character is made contemporary: a seemingly empty-headed, flirtatious party girl who is always seeking attention, even if it means crashing her "dorky" sister Lizzie's vlogs. Even Lizzie goes so far as to describe her younger sister as "a stupid, whore-y slut" (ep. 2). Though Lizzie and Lydia often fight like typical sisters, the two clearly care for each other. The relationship deteriorates when Lizzie gives her sister a well-meaning birthday gift of an advice guide on how party girls can become successful adults (ep. 73). After posting an angry rant on her own YouTube vlog "The Lydia Bennet," and arguing with her sister, Lydia goes to Las Vegas for New Year's Eve. Once in Las Vegas, Lydia begins to date George Wickham. However, instead of a scandalous marriage, Lizzie is forced to return home when she discovers that there is website counting down to the release of George and Lydia's sex tape. The two sisters fight when she returns, but stop when Lizzie realizes that Lydia did not know about the website (ep. 85). At the suggestion of Jane, Lizzie watches her sister's vlogs and the two soon reconcile as the family works towards a solution (ep. 85-86).

Alongside Lizzie's emotional and empathetic reaction to Lydia's turmoil, the audience too reacted similarly and supported Lydia. This is a stark contrast to how Lydia was previously perceived in other adaptations, as well as the original. In Austen's novel, Lydia and her situation are viewed as immoral and scandalous, which is how previous adaptations imagined her to be as well. Stein finds that Lydia is the character that best exhibits the high emotions she describes as "millennial feels" due to her personal use of digital media. The series shows that Lizzie needs to learn to embrace her sister's qualities, rather than punish her. The technology causes turmoil in their lives, but the reconciliation leaves the audience feeling hopeful for their future. *The Lizzie*

Bennet Diaries transforms Lydia's character into someone to feel sympathy for, rather than annoyance or shame.

The transformation of Lydia is one that echoes the transformation of the audience of the show—an audience that was made up with millennials. Millennial culture is highly focused on the embracing of women's sexuality and femininity in addition to holding men accountable for their actions. Many millennials understand the importance of consent and recognizing both sexual assault and emotional abuse. These ideas are often seen and discussed on the social media that millennial fans most frequent, Tumblr and Twitter. By reimagining Lydia as a victim of revenge porn, the creators were able to create sympathy for Lydia's narrative due to the audiences' presumed familiarity with the topic—to the point that Lydia even became a fan favorite of the audience. Stein finds that Lydia is a character that millennial women can identify with, or at least the aspects of femininity she represents. She further finds that Lydia transforms from the original novel's 'bad object' into a key figure of the web series whose narrative is as important as Lizzie's, though the transmedia content she produces is secondary to the main narrative.

Lastly, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* adds to the audience's perception of *Pride and Prejudice* and understanding of the work through other adapted texts, or palimpsests. Due to its adaptability, *Pride and Prejudice* has been adapted many times across many mediums. Lizzie even alludes to a past adaptation of her character by saying, "I like rain, classic novels, and any movie starring Colin Firth" (ep 2). Most modern audience members, especially those who are watching the series solely because they are fans of Austen, would make the connection to the 1995 adaptation of the novel starring Firth as Mr. Darcy. Adaptation is not a singular act, but rather an extended conversation about the original work.

With interactive narratives like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, it is often difficult to pinpoint the end of the story, as the transmedia aspect allows for the story to continue without the primary narrative frame, which are the YouTube episodes in the case of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. But in personal correspondence with Allegra Tepper, author of the article “Lizzie in Real Life: Social and Narrative Immersion Through Transmedia in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*,” the show’s transmedia producer Jay Bushman finds that “if you don’t consume all of the transmedia content, you haven’t seen the full show” (Tepper 46). This rings true for the show’s post-finale transmedia content. On 28 March 2013, Lizzie ends her vlogs with the one-hundredth episode titled “The End,” in which she reflects teary-eyed on the journey of the vlogs and thanks the audience for following along. In addition, Charlotte’s announces her new job at Mr. Collins’ company and Lydia appears for a kind, sisterly moment with Lizzie—a stark contrast from the first episode. Judging from a combination of the episodic nature of the vlog frame and the novel form from which it is adapted, most would assume this the end of the show’s content, full-stop. Even Lizzie remarks, “I’m stopping because the timing felt right. I’m stopping for me” (ep 100), a clever nod to the end of the original novel’s plot. But with transmedia and the fans’ emotional investment in the story, the characters’ narratives and universe continued outside *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and well past the one-hundredth episode. The characters’ Twitters periodically updated through 2014, and “The Lizzie Bennet Diaries” YouTube channel posted two more videos updating the audience on Lizzie and Darcy’s life.

In Cartmell’s studies on *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations, she finds that the adaptations never exist in isolation, but instead “they self-consciously address each other, reflecting on, reviewing and revising what’s gone before” (Cartmell 50-51)—as we saw with Lizzie’s reference to the 1995 adaptation. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is not the first modernized adaptation

of the novel, and even the title is a reference back to the loose novel-to-film adaptation *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001). However, many of the modernized versions were received well, despite straying far from Austen's novel. Cartmell finds that "the less they resemble the story as described by Austen, the less they are victims of the unfruitful 'not as good as the book' conclusions while being more prone to accusations of devaluing, dishonouring, or trivializing Austen's narrative" (Cartmell 95). As long as the story does not attempt to misplace the novel in a similar time to the original setting such as the 2005 film did, it is less subject to criticism. For this reason, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and other Austen adaptations such as the film *Clueless* (1995) which reimagines *Emma*, are unlikely to receive the accusations of 'devalueing' Austen's narrative. Cartmell writes, ". . . loose screen adaptations of Austen's novels [. . .] are often witty and knowing, self-consciously reflecting upon their status as adaptations" (Cartmell 96). Examples of this include scenes in which the character is reading the original novel—acting as both an intertextual reference to the 2005 film and as a way to position the Elizabeth character as both the author and the audience (Cartmell 102). These versions with the tongue-in-cheek references to their predecessors "challenge Austen's representations from contemporary perspectives" (Cartmell 96).

But Pemberley Digital's intertextual engagement with Jane Austen's works did not end with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Beginning in January 2013 during *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries'* initial run, Gigi Darcy, Darcy's sister, began posting videos to the Pemberley Digital YouTube page. In the first episode, she demonstrates a new mobile application by the company called "Domino." Through a series of press statements, publicity, and Gigi's demonstrations, Pemberley Digital chose the town of Sanditon, California to test the "narrative documentation and communication" app. The show *Welcome to Sanditon* adapts Jane Austen's unfinished novel

Sanditon into the Pemberley Digital universe. Rather than a direct sequel to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, *Welcome to Sanditon* exists laterally to the previous show.

Speaking in terms of fidelity to the unfinished novel, *Welcome to Sanditon* would not stand, and Jane Austen's *Sanditon* was not in any way connected to *Pride and Prejudice*. The show's creators instead replaced the main character of Charlotte Heywood with their Gigi Darcy, which raises some interesting questions: Why connect the series through the replacement of the main character? What is the purpose? While fidelity is not a goal of Pemberley Digital's adaptation, it seems almost fraudulent to call *Welcome to Sanditon* an adaptation when the main character from the original novel is no longer present.

Hutcheon refers to elements such as the world, themes, and characters of the original story transposed into the adapted story as "equivalences." Themes are important to both the original and the adaptation. Often, stories are adapted over and over again because their themes are still relevant, regardless of the context. Hutcheon observes that even characters can be transported from one text to another. Pemberley Digital's Gigi Darcy can become Charlotte Heywood in an adaptation if the themes of the story stay true to the original text.

After the completion of *Welcome to Sanditon*, Pemberley Digital continued to add to their list of Jane Austen adaptations. On 7 October 2013, *Emma Approved* premiered on the Pemberley Digital YouTube channel. As the name suggests, *Emma Approved* is an adaptation of Jane Austen's novel *Emma*. Emma Woodhouse remains her stylish, clever, and self-centered self, but her meddling in her friend's lives is channeled into her lifestyle and matchmaking business "Emma Approved." The original characters, save for one, all make appearances throughout the series to consult, visit, or talk with Emma, Harriet Smith, and Alex Knightly, the three main characters. Much of the original drama and romance remains the same, but with the

modern takes that are typical of a Pemberley Digital production. The biggest change is that the character of Augusta Hawkins from the original novel is replaced with the character of Caroline Lee, the Caroline Bingley of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Like *Welcome to Sanditon*, the decision to transport Caroline Lee into *Emma Approved* rests on the notion that Caroline would fulfill Augusta Hawkins' role in the plot. The two characters are both mean-spirited and value wealth over personal value. It seems an easy decision to make, especially as it continues to connect the universe of Pemberley Digital.



Fig. 3. @TheLizzieBennet. “Just got a postcard from @SanditonCA – CC @ggdarcy.” *Twitter*, 17 Mar. 2014, 12:05 p.m., <https://twitter.com/TheLizzieBennet/status/445636964025655298>

Throughout the run of these series, the characters of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, outside of Gigi Darcy and Caroline Lee, remained active on social media and ‘in’ the universe of the show.

The characters' Twitters become active in the spring of 2014 for a variety of reasons that all lead up to the announcement of James Elton and Caroline Lee's engagement as well as some bonus episodes from *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *Collins & Collins*. The characters also interact on Twitter regarding each other's shows: Bing Lee appears in photos from Elton and Caroline's engagement party, Emma works with a client in Sanditon, and Lizzie shows off a postcard from Gigi (see fig. 3). This idea of a fictional universe is not one that is new to texts such as videogames or larger cinematic franchises, but it was the first of its kind to create an on-going universe with transmedia elements. When describing the adaptations of movies into videogames or theme parks, Hutcheon calls these universes 'heterocosms:' A heterocosm is not only an 'other world,' but it also contains stories elements like characters and setting (14). Pemberley Digital created a heterocosm within its YouTube and social media narratives. The characters celebrate, react, and engage in a place that the audience too can join. It is not interactive in the sense of a game or a ride, but is fluid and constantly changing as new characters and plot lines are developed. The dedication to retaining not only the interactive aspect of the productions, but as well taking the time to connect them all for the enjoyment of its audience, is what makes Pemberley Digital's adaptations so effective.

Conclusion:

Through my research on *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations, fandoms and transmedia, I have shown that a successful transmedia narrative such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* relies on the shared balance of the three area of studies. Adaptations work effectively as interactive narratives due to the built-in audience and history from which that audience can draw intertextual connections. Additionally, the established fan bases allow for an easy transition from a familiar and stable story such as *Pride and Prejudice* into the new, uncharted territory that is presented in these digital narratives. Interactive storytelling will only become more popular as the line between creator and fan dissolves—allowing fans to share authorship with creators, rather than retaining their transformative works within fandom spaces.

However, as these narratives become more and more popular, we are seeing a decrease in the success of transmedia adaptations. *Emma Approved* was perceived to be the last of the Jane Austen Pemberley Digital universe when the show's narrative ended at the original novel's conclusion in 2014. In September 2018, Pemberley Digital announced the return of *Emma Approved* as a celebration of its five-year anniversary. The revival also comes with a new transmedia element: Patreon, a crowd-funding site similar to Kickstarter to which many of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* fans pledged money to provide financial support for the production of the series. *Emma Approved* employs Patreon as a way “to immerse the audience further into the story as “shareholders.” Fans who become Patrons will influence decisions affecting the show, have access to exclusive behind-the-scenes content, and even vote for future character/clients” (pemberleydigital.com). The show stayed true to this sentiment as posts on the page are authored by the characters, featuring Q&A's, polls, advice blogs from Emma, and fictional behind-the-scenes photos from the new chapter of the documentary. Each donation tier advertises a new type

of shareholder (bronze, silver, gold and diamond) and includes more exclusive content as the amount increases (patreon.com).

It appears that the *Emma Approved* revival was to act as a frame and launching point for an adaptation of Austen's novel *Persuasion* (1817). Eight episodes were released between October and November 2018. The episodes focus on Emma trying to regain her confidence following the failed wedding of Anne Elliot and Freddy Wentworth, the event which marks the beginning of Austen's *Persuasion*. Emma takes on a new client, the infamous Mr. Collins from *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, as Alex Knightley tries to prove to the shareholders, or the audience, that their business is performing well. Unfortunately, Pemberley Digital's aim of 1,000 shareholders was not met and the documentary was put on pause in November 2018, though there is no indication of return at this time. Along with the revival, the other Pemberley Digital adaptations did not perform as well as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

However, the proliferation of transmedia stories has continued to grow. As Pemberley Digital saw a decline in view counts, other production companies and media corporations were hard at work creating more innovative storytelling methods to engage their audiences. A recent example is *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018). This interactive film is an addition to Netflix's popular anthology series *Black Mirror* (2011-present), a science fiction show that takes a dark approach to how the technology of today will affect the growth of society. The main character Stefan Butler adapts a fantasy novel into a videogame, causing his own world (and the viewers) to become a choose-your-own-adventure game. Like the interactive games, the viewer chooses how they want Stefan to progress his story—which changes depending upon your choice. As a result, there are multiple different run-times and endings for the film. *Bandersnatch's* interactive narrative was well-received by audiences and has prompted Netflix to pursue more like it.

Netflix's Vice President of Product Innovation Todd Yellin said in a presentation in March 2019 that the company is 'doubling-down' on interactive storytelling after the unexpected popularity, though he goes on to say they are pursuing different genres that are more light-hearted than *Black Mirror's* darker narratives (theverge.com). After seeing the success and interest the current generations have in transmedia storytelling, more and more 'mainstream' shows will begin to adopt these aspects of storytelling. It is no secret that the current and upcoming generations favor Internet streaming sites such as YouTube and Netflix over cable television. These online platforms offer the unique ability of merging technologies in a way that traditional television cannot.

As we step further into the digital age, media will continue to change our understanding of storytelling mediums much in the same way Pemberley Digital did with *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. I have concluded that the other Austen adaptations did not have the rich and varied adaptation history of *Pride and Prejudice* which allowed for a larger pre-existing audience and more intertextual connections. Additionally, *The Lizzie Bennet Dairies* was an entirely new storytelling experience for many at the time, including myself. It was the first transmedia series to successfully weave its narrative across the many platforms, while allowing the fans to meaningfully interact with the story. For many, the newness of the experience might have driven initial interest in the later series, and familiarity may now be causing many audience members to fail to engage with Pemberley Digital's continuing adaptations. Most importantly, when Pemberley Digital moved to less familiar texts of Austen, its audience numbers declined when the interactions became less significant to them. Transmedia adaptation is an effective form when it has an established audience and continues to build upon the work's adaptation history.

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