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Narrative Style and the Female Story in *Pride and Prejudice*,
Bridget Jones's Diary, and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*

Parker Jones

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Bridgewater State University

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Introduction

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen has remained relevant since its publication in 1813, in part due to the popularity of numerous adaptations in multiple mediums. *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel that champions protofeminism¹ as well as offers an example of Austen's unique style of writing. The story follows the Bennet family, and specifically the second oldest daughter Elizabeth, as their mother searches for husbands for her five daughters. Elizabeth is a woman that is expected to enter into a successful marriage, which would be defined by financial security for herself and her family. However, she refuses this and instead seeks happiness, freedom, and choice in her life. As the story progresses Elizabeth emerges as a character that is fiercely independent while at the same time heavily conscious of what others think. This is shown time and again through the narrator, as the narrator serves as a source of honesty in the midst of stubborn characters.

Free indirect discourse, a commonly characterized aspect of Austen's writing, is defined as:

a mode of presenting discourse, the thoughts or statements of characters in a work, that blends third-person narration with the first person point-of-view ... combines elements of direct discourse and indirect discourse to give the reader a sense of being inside a character's head without actually quoting his or her thoughts or statements. (Murfin & Ray 190)

¹ Protofeminism is understood as the ideas of feminism which existed before any feminist movement. Elizabeth displays traits of protofeminism in her views on marriage and independence.

There is a dual voice that is understood by the reader as both the character and the narrator. This allows for more than one perspective to be accessible in the story. This can be displayed in a moment in the story in which one of the Bennet daughters is reprimanded for trying to show off: “Mary, though pretending not to hear, was somewhat disconcerted; and Elizabeth sorry for her, and sorry for her father’s speech, was afraid her anxiety had done no good. —Others of the party were now applied to” (Austen 69). In this paragraph, the reader receives a layout of the character’s actions, feelings, and emotions all at once. The reader also hears the narrator as the voice of authority in the story, one that pushes certain narratives more than others. The paragraph ends on the implication that the other people in the room were the most important and impressionable to Elizabeth. Mary being reprimanded is not for the sake of her family, who know her personality, but for everyone else in the room. It is for the sense of propriety that is perceived by others. Through the use of free indirect discourse, Austen allows the female characters to express their thoughts and feelings without bias or judgement of emotions. Through altered narrative forms of *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, modern feminism is challenged and displayed in adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* as well.

Within *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, we can observe the struggle women face in the modern era as they attempt to balance their personal life with career and happiness as told in a diary format first-person perspective. Bridget is a single woman in the 1990s, someone with a career marking her independence but surrounded by people with values that revolve around marriage and traditionalism. She faces constant bombardment from her married friends, and from her parents and older relatives. Not only is she facing the pressures of marriage and the duties that go along with it that Elizabeth Bennet faced, but she also struggles with the more current expectations of a

women in her generation. The idea that a women should be married, have a career, raise children, maintain healthy relationships, and maintain a high standard of their appearance all define the pressures of Bridget's life.

We see the challenges of the female story play out similarly to *Bridget Jones's Diary* in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is told from the perspective of Lizzie's vlog. There is, in this 21st century version of the story, an entirely new set of expectations for our female characters that includes the assumption of a career, relationship, and family. It follows very closely to *Pride and Prejudice*, with Lizzie facing pressure from her family to be in a relationship, and with her own aspirations of completing her education and starting a career. The story is told in a second-person perspective². In film, this is a way of the characters breaking the fourth wall and addressing the audience. As this story is told in vlog format it is necessary to use this perspective, as the story is mostly told by and through Lizzie. However, there is more outside influence as Lizzie's sisters and other characters interject themselves in the story. There is no narrator to sort out the truth for the audience, there are simply varying accounts of life that the audience must decide are true or false.

In these stories we see a written timeline of the expectations and duties of a young, single, middle class woman over the course of three different centuries. In this research there will be an understanding of the changes and consistencies in the female story, and literature's record of it. The same problems that existed for Elizabeth Bennet persist over the centuries and still impact Lizzie Bennet in 2012. There are also new, more complex hurdles for characters like Bridget and Lizzie to overcome. In addition to these personal issues, the idea of narration also

² Second-person perspective in literature is different than film. In film, it refers to the 'face-to-face' perspective of audience to character, such as in a vlog.

establishes the message that the story is conveying. Between the free-indirect discourse of *Pride and Prejudice* to the video adaptation of *The Lizzie Bennet diaries*, there are many different influences at play and struggles that the reader or audience faces on what or who to believe. The use of narrative style is essential in understanding the story, as we see through the adaptations how differently the story of *Pride and Prejudice* can be told. The original *Pride and Prejudice* shows the ability of free indirect discourse to frame a story in a way that expresses the longings and perceptions of a woman in 1800s England, through *Bridget Jones's Diary* there is a first-person controlled narrative of a woman living in 1990's London, and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* shows the experiences and struggles of a woman in 2012 California. All three face vastly different circumstances, but somehow still face common struggles and aspirations that go above what is expected.

Pride and Prejudice

Free indirect discourse gives the reader the ability to see multiple perspectives, as well as the emotions invoked by different characters in the story. This is an advantage over a first person narration, which only shows one character's emotions and understanding of the story; it also stands out from a third person narrative which would simply allow you to look down at the situations that arise between potentially all characters of the story. There is a balance between the characters and the narrator that "embeds the character's statement or thought in the narrative flow, and even more importantly in the narrator's interpretation, communicating also his way of seeing and feeling" (Murfin and Ray 191). In *Pride and Prejudice*, it allows the reader to be particularly aware of the complex relationship between Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth. In Elizabeth's mind, Darcy is a prideful and arrogant person who thinks he is above everyone simply because

of his status and monetary worth. Once these opinions of Darcy are cemented in Elizabeth's mind, every action Darcy takes is perceived through that standard. When Elizabeth's friend Charlotte suggests that the two might get along Elizabeth responds, "Heaven forbid! — *That* would be the greatest misfortune of all! — To find a man agreeable who one is determined to hate!" (Austen 62). Elizabeth's response is immediate, and powerful. In a way, she exaggerates the dislike she has for Darcy, seeming to emphasize it in a joking manner with Charlotte. Still, the way that Elizabeth acts towards Darcy only serves to reinforce these strong, and potentially over the top feelings of disdain. The very thought of finding a positive light in Darcy would be terrible. However, Elizabeth does not say 'to find a man agreeable who is evil' or 'who is cruel', but instead, "who one is determined to hate". For Elizabeth, it does not actually make any difference how Darcy acts to her at any given moment. She has decided in her mind that he is a rude person, and so everything he does will be interpreted through that lens.

Mr. Darcy makes his first appearance at a ball that most people in the community are attending, including the Bennet family. His description begins favorably, but soon becomes more critical: "Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien ... till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity, for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased" (Austen 7-8). All of this information is received about Mr. Darcy in the length of a paragraph, without his having any dialogue, and without any mention of the Bennet sisters. From this information we can infer that the Bennet sisters were among those informed about Mr. Darcy's rudeness, but we as the reader do not receive any examples of his being rude. The emphasis given on his description is provided by 'the room', thereby not allowing any one character to take credit for

the reading of his character. As Darcy became unpopular it is described as the turning of a tide, as if once again the room has made the decision together, and are therefore all bound to it. It is safe to assume that the Bennet sisters are included as part of 'the room' as there is no mention here of any of them individually. Even Elizabeth, who is constantly understood to be an independent thinker who is stubbornly out of the norm, is part of 'the room' as an entity.

A large part of Elizabeth's opinion of Mr. Darcy is based on George Wickham's account of Darcy. Wickham is understood for most of the novel by the Bennet family as a respectable and well liked person. His account of his childhood with Darcy reaffirms Elizabeth's opinion of Darcy as a selfish man. It is important to note as well that Elizabeth's opinions of both Wickham and Darcy are formed before she speaks to either of them. Through both the opinions of others who know them and her first impressions of their persona, Elizabeth establishes her thoughts on each man, and in their later dialogue operates using these assumptions. The first time the Bennet sisters see Mr. Wickham it is described as somewhat of an event: "the attention of every lady was soon caught by a young man, whom they had never seen before, of most gentlemanlike appearance ... his appearance was greatly in his favor; he had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address" (Austen 49). Every part of Wickham is described with grace and likability before he even has a line of dialogue. In this passage, we also see specific mention of the sisters' admiration of him, rather than just a simple statement of his being liked by the general group.

Even as Elizabeth has made up her mind about Darcy, the narrator often clues the reader in on misconceptions she has against him. As mentioned above, Elizabeth often assumes that anything Darcy does is a negative, and interprets his intention as always having a double

meaning. For example, when Elizabeth is staying with Mr. Bingley, Mr. Darcy asks if she would like to dance one night while music is playing. Elizabeth doesn't respond, is asked again, and replies, "You wanted me, I know, to say 'Yes', that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste; but I always delight in overthrowing those kind of schemes, and cheating a person of their premeditated contempt" (Austen 35). Darcy replies politely to this speech by Elizabeth and the narrator goes on, "Darcy had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her" (Austen 35). Clearly Elizabeth assumes that Darcy wants to embarrass her with the question; she even says 'I know', but obviously a few lines later the narrator turns this idea away. There is a disconnect with reality because of Elizabeth's determination to believe her initial thoughts about Darcy's character are true regardless of how much Darcy contradicts those thoughts.

As a character, Elizabeth is not someone who is going to follow along with what her family expects of her unless it makes her happy to do it. When Jane is in courtship with Mr. Bingley, it is mentioned time and again how wonderful it is that the two seem so compatible, and seem to like each other. The reason that this affection stands out is because it is not necessarily the norm. Mrs. Bennet's goal for her daughters is to be married; not married happily or for love, but simply married. There is a valid urgency in her goal, as the entirety of the family property will go to the next male heir and not any of their daughters, but it creates a manufactured version of a marriage. This is something we see in Mr. Collins' marriage to Charlotte. Do the two love each other? No. However, they operate together smoothly and it was in Charlotte's best interest financially to marry Mr. Collins. As Charlotte explains it to Elizabeth, "I am not romantic ... I never was. I ask only a comfortable home" (Austen 85). Charlotte did not employ the same stubbornness that Elizabeth did in not marrying a man she did not care for, and in Mr. Collins'

case actively dislike. We understand Charlotte's perspective from her dialogue, but we understand Elizabeth's mostly through her feelings on the matter.

As the story progresses, the reader learns information about both Wickham and Darcy at the same time that Elizabeth does. Despite the fact that there are aspects of narration that indicate certain things to the reader about each character's nature, there are larger details that both Elizabeth and the reader must decide who to trust. In one of Elizabeth's early interactions with Wickham, she knows that Wickham is acquainted with Darcy. When talking with Wickham Elizabeth observes that, "what she chiefly wished to hear she could not hope to be told, the history of his acquaintance with Mr. Darcy" (Austen 53). It is implied through her reservations that she knows and respects that it would be impolite to be nosy about their relationship. However, "Mr. Wickham began the subject himself" (Austen 53); for no known reason for bringing up Darcy, Wickham reveals that he has grown up with Darcy, and that Darcy essentially prevented him from inheriting money from Darcy's father that would have secured his future. The following day, Elizabeth tells Jane about what happened between Wickham and Darcy and Jane attempts to dig out a middle ground for Elizabeth to consider. Jane is generally the more reasonable one, able to see the good in people despite a negative situation, which is seen clearly in that Jane could do nothing, "but to think well of them both, to defend the conduct of each, and throw into the account of accident or mistake" (Austen 58). Much of what Jane understands and feels about the situation is relaying through the narrator, and therefore it is unclear how much of her feelings are actually received by Elizabeth. Regardless of Jane's attempt to make Elizabeth see both sides, she still feels that Mr. Darcy is in the wrong because Elizabeth is determined to understand reality through the lens of Darcy being a cruel unkind person.

This perspective is held on to by Elizabeth for a large portion of the story. In her future interactions with Darcy, this conversation with Wickham will serve as a continued reason to see Darcy as a villain. This all changes after Darcy writes her a letter to explain the situation from his perspective. Wickham in fact was a wasteful and lazy person, and Darcy did give him a large amount of money before eventually cutting Wickham off for wasting it in the span of a few years. After this fact Elizabeth begins to realize that Wickham may not be as genuine and honest as he made himself out to be. Elizabeth observes that of Wickham, “nothing had been known in Hertfordshire but what he told himself. As to his real character, had information been in her power, she had never felt a wish of enquiring” (Austen 135). We see here again the power that the general consensus had over Elizabeth’s view of a person, as it was decided by the town that Wickham was a man of character simply because he was polite in his manners. Going even further as Elizabeth considered Wickham revealing the story of Darcy to her, “she was *now* struck with the impropriety of such communication to a stranger, and wondered it had escaped her before” (Austen 136). Where before Elizabeth had been only interested in learning the gossip, now knowing the true story from Mr. Darcy, she realized that it was a sensitive situation that Wickham should not have been sharing with anyone. In this revelation, the reader is also forced to think back and reflect on the original conversation between Wickham and Elizabeth, and if read again the tone completely changes. Elizabeth becomes more of a victim of being too trusting to someone she has no reason to trust, and Wickham becomes even less respectable than he was after the information in the letter is revealed. This fractured relationship also displays how the narrator and ‘the room’ are two very different entities. The narrator possesses an

omnipotent knowledge that allows a view of each character's true nature and intentions, while the view given by 'the room' is simply the general reputation of a character at any given time.

Mr. Bingley's sisters, Ms. Bingley and Mrs. Hurst, serve as a catalyst between the formality of the time, and the true prideful nature of the upper class. In a way, they represent the upper-class snobbery that Elizabeth thinks Darcy represents, although the sisters are simply better at displaying the necessary manners to Elizabeth's face. Bingley's sisters are first introduced at the same ball Mr. Darcy first appears in the story. They are given one line of recognition; "His sisters were fine women, with an air of decided fashion" (Austen 7). There is no mention of their character, as with Darcy and Bingley, nor their monetary worth, as they are judged only by how they appear in reference to their brother or husband. There is no reference to who is even deciding that the sisters have fashion, it is simply stated as if it is a fact; once again something that is determined by 'the room'. The only other mention they get at the ball is that Jane, "had been distinguished by [Mr. Bingley's] sisters" (Austen 9). Again, this statement provides no context and does not give the reader any examples of how Jane may have been distinguished by Mrs. Hurst and Ms. Bingley. However, as Elizabeth gets to know them personally, we see a different side of the sisters than the simple one presented at the ball. When Jane is sick and she and Elizabeth are staying at Netherfield, Elizabeth begins to notice a less considerate side of the sisters coming out. Mrs. Hurst and Ms. Bingley are often observed putting on a facade of concern for Jane, when in fact they do not care very much for her one way or the other. At one point a doctor is sent for to look at Jane, and it is observed that, "Bingley was quite uncomfortable; his sisters declared that they were miserable. They solaced their wretchedness, however, by duets after supper" (Austen 28). This quip from the narrator is one of many seen in

the time that the Bennet sisters are staying at Netherfield. Often, the dialogue of the sisters is over the top, in an effort to prove that they are concerned. However, their actions tell a completely different story, and like Darcy show their true intentions.

The most obvious example of Darcy and Elizabeth's vastly different perspectives of their relationship comes when Mr. Darcy proposes to her. What Darcy has considered shyness or minor slights, Elizabeth has seen as great offenses to herself and her family. While we hear Darcy express his love and affection for Elizabeth, much of the speech of his proposal is summed up by the narrator: "[Darcy] concluded with representing to her the strength of that attachment which, in spite of all his endeavors, he had found impossible to conquer ... As he said this, [Elizabeth] could easily see that he had no doubt of a favorable answer" (Austen 125). The choice of words used offers a glimpse into what Darcy said, but it could just as easily be the manner in which Elizabeth interpreted his speech. The word 'conquer' calls to mind some sort of battle that was lost; it goes far beyond the normal capacity of human affection and enters into a space of victory or defeat. In using the word 'conquer', there is a suggestion that Darcy now confessing this love for Elizabeth means he lost a battle, something counterintuitive to how most people think of love. In the same passage the reader can also see that Elizabeth perceives Darcy's expectations of acceptance as quite sure. It is interesting to note that Elizabeth is described as seeing through the facade, but Darcy is not shown to be capable of reading Elizabeth's feelings in the moment. Her rejection of his proposal is shocking, and it speaks to the disconnect that has existed between the two of them up to this point.

The interactions between Darcy and Elizabeth are minimal after this proposal for much of the story. Darcy does give Elizabeth the letter explaining his feelings, as mentioned earlier. When

they meet again, Elizabeth is the one who feels differently about Darcy. The two begin a more cordial relationship when Elizabeth visits Mr. Darcy's estate Pemberley with her aunt and uncle. It is during this trip that Lydia and Wickham run off together, potentially throwing the Bennet family into scandal, and tarnishing their name so severely that the single Bennet sisters would be unable to find husbands. When Elizabeth receives word of this she is devastated and collapses into tears. Darcy happens to be the one to find her and displays emotion in a way he never has before asking Elizabeth, "Good God! what is the matter?" cried [Darcy], with more feeling than politeness, then recollecting himself" (Austen 179). This line from the narrator is very important, as it emphasizes the fact that Darcy felt concern for Elizabeth more strongly than his need to show the proper formality. In an attempt to calm Elizabeth down he asks later if she would like wine, asking, "shall I get you one?" (Austen 179). This is another very subtle moment that has strong implications. Darcy is someone who was raised in extreme wealth, and while he has a good reputation with his servants, he is certainly accustomed to being served. Darcy asking if he can get the wine himself shows both the level of intimacy he feels towards Elizabeth, and the urgency of concern he feels that she needs this right away. It is a far cry from the self-assuredness he displayed to her during his proposal.

The story of *Pride and Prejudice* is shown through the experiences of Elizabeth Bennet, but the use of free indirect discourse creates a disconnection between the narrator and Elizabeth that allows the story to be told the way it is. Without the use of free indirect discourse the novel would not have been able to capture the feelings and actions of all its characters in such a successful way. The ambiguity of the narrator allows readers to cast their own opinions into the story, to debate about what is accurate, and to see the humanity in each character, even if the

characters cannot always see it in each other. The journey Elizabeth goes on is one of gaining perspective and confidence in addition to the love that she garners by the end of the story. The intense pressure faced to follow the consensus of 'the room' is something that Elizabeth learns to turn her back on by the end of the novel, ultimately allowing her to see Darcy for who he truly is.

Bridget Jones's Diary

Bridget Jones's Diary is a modern retelling of *Pride and Prejudice* told through the diary of a woman in 1990s London as she navigates through her life at work, with her friends and family, and her own personal private life. Since it is written in diary format, the only thing the reader hears is the voice of Bridget Jones reliving her day. This means it is a first person narrative, much different from *Pride and Prejudice's* free indirect discourse style, and new considerations must be taken in understanding the story. As a first person diary format, the reader is completely reliant on Bridget for her honest accounts of what goes on during her day. This means that all the traits, actions, and even words of other characters in the story are told completely through her lens. This leaves the reader with many potential questions, the most basic being, is Bridget honest? Is her portrayal of other characters accurate? Is her portrayal of herself accurate? And even if it is honest is it cherry-picked to avoid certain things she does not want the reader to see, or to even let herself acknowledge? All of these questions need to be considered when reading this first person narrative. It excludes us from seeing other characters' intentions and perspectives in a way that *Pride and Prejudice* constantly displayed. There will be, throughout this analysis, a consideration of all these factors, as we will be in the midst of emotions felt by Bridget in close to real time as far as the story is concerned.

Bridget exists in a different world than Elizabeth Bennet. As a 'modern woman' she is expected to balance a career, a romantic relationship, closeness to family and friends, and personal fulfillment. In many ways these expectations can be seen as a callback to Mr. Darcy's extensive list of achievements any accomplished woman should have. From the very first entry, we see Bridget both succeed and fail in these expectations. Each entry begins with a list of her current weight, the amount of alcohol she has consumed, the amount of cigarettes she has smoked, and the calories she has consumed. At one point Bridget spends the one days entry peppering in insults about her weight: "terrifying slide into obesity ... inadvisable since I am fat, have spot on chin" (Fielding 15). This entry is harsh and she is focusing only on the negative aspects of her appearance. However, only a few days later, when she gets attention from her boss Daniel Cleaver, she writes, "Daniel Cleaver wants my phone no. Am marvelous. Am irresistible Sex Goddess. Hurrah!" (Fielding 23). Based on the attention of a man, she suddenly feels attractive and desirable. Based on the entry of that day we can surmise that she has lost 1 pound; an accomplishment but not a life altering change. So it's clear that simply by getting questionably positive attention from a man, she develops confidence.

These sort of back and forth emotions can be seen constantly in Bridget's entries. One day she is disgusting and the next day, when she receives attention from Cleaver, she is attractive and sexy. Much of her self-confidence appears to come and go based on how much positive attention she is getting from men. Bridget does acknowledge this back and forth in her feelings writing, "Wise people will say Daniel should like me just as I am, but I am a child of *Cosmopolitan* culture, have been traumatized by supermodels and too many quizzes and know that neither my personality nor my body is up to it if left to its own devices" (Fielding 52). There

are a few questions that arise from this entry by Bridget, the first being who exactly ‘wise people’ are. Something encountered frequently in *Pride and Prejudice* was the judgment and expectations set by ‘the room’. Similarly, Bridget seems to suggest there is a higher social power that exemplifies the expectations of society. She also says that she is a child of these things, suggesting that despite the fact that she is an independent adult, she still has a naivety when it comes to men. Also like Elizabeth, Bridget asserts an opinion she holds as a fact, suggesting a universal connection with other single middle class women, as they all face the same pressures of model-culture. Still, what trumps this higher power of ‘wise people’ is Cosmopolitan. The emphasis of personal appearance wins out over the idea of self acceptance. It is clear from this entry that Bridget knows she is being unrealistic in her expectations of herself and her partners. However, it is a point that she cannot escape from; one that crops up over and over when she is relying on these men to fulfill her.

Another major struggle we see playing out in Bridget’s diary is the role of work: how important is it to her identity, how does it shift her role in society, is it something worth valuing? These are all questions that pop up when reading her entries, and we get different answers to these questions largely based on her state of mind at the moment. As Bridget’s friend Sharon puts it, “we women are only vulnerable because we are a pioneer generation daring to refuse to compromise in love and relying on our own economic power” (Fielding 18). Bridget is part of a group of women who are normalizing women in the workplace for the future. As a result of this they are having to find out for themselves how to balance their lives. Rather than just the expectation of getting married and taking care of a family, they are expected to do all that, and have a fulfilling career, and be happy.

We see the foil to this idea of a working woman in Bridget's mom, who spent her life being a housewife, taking care of the kids and the home while her husband worked. That is what was expected of women when her mom had a family, so that is what she did. However, now in her 60s, Bridget's mom is realizing that her life feels unfulfilled. In a conversation with Bridget her mom admits, "I want a career", to which Bridget writes, "some horrible mean part of me felt happy and smug because I had a career. Well- a job, anyway" (Fielding 62). The irony of Bridget's response is that she spends a large amount of time complaining about her job, and as she herself observes, does not see it as a fulfilling or satisfying part of her life. However, because her mom expresses a desire to achieve that goal, Bridget suddenly becomes smug about it. To Bridget's mother, a job is something unattainable, something that she as a wife and mother never even had the opportunity to explore. This likely makes it seem more desirable, but we have no way of knowing how Bridget's mom would feel if she had worked her whole life and had not been with her kids everyday. Bridget's mom becomes an example of how limited choices can make you feel unfulfilled, while Bridget shows how having all the options is not any better.

Since this story is written in diary format, it is not only a first person narrative, but also a tailored perspective of what is happening. There are times when Bridget quotes dialogue from other characters, but even then we must acknowledge that what she is writing is likely not exactly what occurred. There are many times in reading this story that the reader may be skeptical about what they are being told, and it is important to recognize those moments and understand how they can change the course of the story itself. The first big moment where the reader can really doubt Bridget's telling of the story is when she goes home with Cleaver after their date. They are about to get intimate and Cleaver makes it clear he is only looking for

something casual. Bridget's response is immediate as she tells him off, calling him, "fraudulently flirtatious, cowardly and dysfunctional" (Fielding 29). This response from Bridget is highly out of character. Everything previously written about her interactions with Cleaver place him in the position of power, and she often seems very awkward and quiet. Additionally, in her work conversations with Cleaver she is very self-conscious, and as the reader we see how much she second guesses herself in her conversations with him.

Through Bridget's diary entries, we see previews of the influences that shape her worldview. Her main goals in life revolve around getting men to find her attractive (this is mostly played out through Cleaver), losing weight, and smoking and drinking less. All of these things are vanity based. She worries that her smoking and drinking are unbecoming and unattractive, and that is why she wants to cut back. She wants to lose weight because she thinks she is too fat. This influence of the weight she should be plays out through the popular culture she consumes, as well as the people that she spends time with. However, in a great moment of achievement for Bridget, she finally reaches her years long goal of weighing less than 120 lbs. It is celebrated in her diary as, "a historic and joyous day. After eighteen years of trying to get down to 119 lbs. I have finally achieved it ... I am thin" (Fielding 90). This moment for Bridget is an amazing accomplishment; it is something that she has been working at for a long time, and something that she feels will allow her to have a positive role in society. The accomplishment of weight loss even makes her write, "I am not in love with Daniel anymore. I am free" (Fielding 91). There is so much to dissect in these two sentences in relation to her weight loss. These two sentences really bring into question her relationship with Daniel. It tells us that not only is she worried about her weight, but that she probably choses her partners based on those inner

feelings. Does this mean that she understands Cleaver as a negative person, and therefore feels okay about being with him despite being ‘fat’? Or does it mean that she is punishing herself for being ‘fat’ by being in an unhealthy relationship? These are questions that we cannot directly answer because of the limited view of her relationship with Cleaver; we see what she writes and that is all. Prior to the weight loss entry, though, she exemplifies Cleaver as the pinnacle of a man and a great partner, despite his faults.

To Bridget, her appearance represents her role in life. As a ‘fat’ woman, she is not desirable to others, she is not successful to herself, and she is not happy. These are things that she believes at a base level. This is important to understand about her character, as despite the fact that this diary covers one year of her life, she makes a point to say that 18 years of her life have been spent thinking, near constantly, about her weight. Her view of her own role in life revolves around her weight and appearance. This is influenced from the sources we have discussed prior, as well as from her mother. Bridget’s mom Pam often makes little digs at Bridget’s appearance that seem to be intended as helpful but are not truly meant that way. There are many moments that Bridget writes about her mother coming into her apartment to make these kind of comments. At one point when her mom is depressed about work Bridget writes, “eventually I managed to cheer Mum up by allowing her to go through my wardrobe and criticize all my clothes” (Fielding 62). What is not included in this entry is anything about how this makes Bridget feel, simply that it makes her mom feel better to do this. When Bridget is starting her new job she lets on to how these interactions make her feel, almost as if her mom is wearing her resolve down. After telling Bridget she is “not going to go looking like a *sloppy tramp* in dull colors” over the phone, Bridget writes after that she, “felt so bad when she put the phone down that smoked five Silk Cut

in row. Non-vg start to day” (Fielding 182). These comments from her mother, who is really meant to be a secure place in her life, do a lot of harm to Bridget in the midst of all the other influences swirling around her.

In many ways *Bridget Jones’s Diary* acts as a bridge between the conservative expectations of the past, and the modern struggles of the present. As a story written in diary format it offers a narrow and biased view of the world, but also an honest one. Megan Behrent summarizes, “post-feminist³ heroines like Bridget Jones ... struggle to find their way in a world in which women are expected to exude both feminist consciousness and a new incarnation of the feminine mystique” (23). This is seen as Bridget is pulled between the influences of Sharon the feminist and Jude the self-help zealot. Bridget represents this middle ground that faces pressure from almost every angle as they attempt to balance everything in a healthy manner, while also remaining conscious of the feminist movements of the society.

Bridget is greatly influenced by her three closest friends: Tom, Jude, and Sharon. The three of them all offer different perspectives of how to act in life, and they serve as a sort of characterization of their loudest qualities. Sharon plays as the role of the ‘raging feminist’, Tom is the platonic male perspective as he is gay, and Jude serves as the ‘self-help’ guru. Bridget bases many of her interactions on the advice of the three of them, often mixing the advice together. At times it seems as though Bridget herself is not even playing a part in her actions. When talking about interacting with Cleaver she writes, “flushed with the success of Tom’s ice-queen theory I began to rather brim over, as it were, into Jude’s, and starting messaging Daniel

³ Post-feminism refer to the responses to second-wave feminism in the 1970s and 1980s and the contradictions that existed in its ideology. Seen in the quote as the expectation between feminist ideology and ‘feminine mystique’.

again, to reassure him that I trust him” (Fielding 65). There is nothing in that passage about how Bridget feels, or what she thinks she should do with Cleaver. Later in that same passage Bridget writes, “a siren blared in my head and a huge neon sign started flashing with Sharon’s head in the middle going, “FUCKWITTAGE, FUCKWITTAGE” (Fielding 66). Once again, we are hearing her friends’ thoughts but not her own, in her own diary. This situation occurs again and again; when Bridget falters, her friends advice becomes her guiding light. While this has a modern quality of ‘friends’ as family’ familiarity, it also speaks to the insecurity that Bridget feels in herself. She does not even trust her own judgment when interacting with a man that is supposed to be her boyfriend.

The character of Jude, as stated above, represents a sort of caricature of a self-help guru. She sums up the damaging nature of these self-help books as an easy fix to your entire life. Several moments in Bridget's diary are dedicated to Jude sharing new ideas from a recent book she has read. For Jude, there is no subject of modern trends that will not benefit her life. The first appearance of Jude’s input comes in the form of a book about zen, encouraging Bridget to allow flow into her life to help her be calm. Jude also insists, “not to mention idea to Sharon because she thought it was bollocks” (Fielding 81). This conflict of ideas plays into the fact that Bridget serves as a landing ground for all of these cultural ideas that are swirling around her. Jude and Sharon are independent messengers of their cause, and Bridget absorbs all of these varying ideas and struggles to ground herself in all of them. This same situation occurs later in the diary when Jude is talking about Feng Shui being in a *Cosmopolitan* to which Bridget writes, “resolve to buy Cosmo at earliest opportunity. Jude says not to tell Sharon as, naturally, she thinks Feng Shui is bollocks” (Fielding 222). Bridget herself clings on to these ideas that Jude feeds her, usually

spending the time after learning about them changing her habits or routines to align with whatever new philosophy has been discussed. None of these new ideas stick around for very long, but Bridget and Jude both continue to feed into the idea that they can fix their problems. Bridget is constantly looking for one simple solution to all her problems and insecurities. From the standpoint of her rights and freedoms, Bridget has gained so much since the days of Elizabeth Bennet. However, she seems to be much more miserable and unable to achieve the self-assured happiness that Elizabeth was able to despite the freedom that Bridget has.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries is a video blog adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* in 21st century California. Through the main character Lizzie, we see the struggles that women face in the modern age, as well as how the *Pride and Prejudice* story may play out today. The vlog follows very closely to the original story, with its application slightly changed due to changed cultures, customs, and social statuses. Lizzie faces much more pressure from various segments of her life, similar to the struggles we saw in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. There is an expectation of career success, of family, and of romantic relationships all being something to realistically balance.

In the introductory vlog, Lizzie opens with the line that kicks off *Pride and Prejudice*, “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune ... must be in want of a wife” (ep 1 0:00-0:07). Except in the video version the quote decorates a t-shirt that Mrs. Bennet made for her daughters, attempting to take the role of conventional wisdom for her daughters. Mrs. Bennet establishes herself as the authority on life, pursuing a narrative that asserts that finding a husband is the only path to success. Lizzie introduces herself as a graduate

student studying communications; this is a point of pride for her. Her role as a student, and her older sister Jane's role pursuing a fashion career, are defining qualities for Lizzie. She sees herself and her sisters as strong women, who are happily pursuing the professional aspects of their lives. In her article on *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, Lori Halvorsen Zerneck proposes the question that sums up the experiences of all three stories discussed: "do women's success and happiness depend on financial security or on having good relationships?" (1). The answer to that question has changed over time, but we can see that shift occurring over the progression of these three stories. The dominant society in *Pride and Prejudice* relied on marriage as a means of financial security. In the case of the Bennet daughters specifically, they would be on their own once their father died if they did not marry. Individually, Elizabeth strongly opposed this idea.

The trend continued in *Bridget Jones's Diary* as Bridget utilizes her relationship with men as a means of self-confidence and pleasure. She has achieved a career and is now struggling to find what it means to be both financially secure on her own and searching for a healthy and happy relationship. We see this goal as a success in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Lizzie successfully turns her vlog into a business venture without the assistance of Darcy, and maintains a happy and loving relationship with him at the same time. Throughout their narratives, each of these stories struggles with this question of the old and the new, of how women can and should navigate the world around them.

From the first few videos of the vlog we can pull out some main areas of focus in Lizzie's life. The first being her family, as the second two videos are completely dedicated to introducing and describing them. In that family block I would also include her friend Charlotte, as Lizzie states, "Charlotte and I have been friends basically since we were fetuses" (ep 2 2:35). This

emphasizes the closeness of their relationship, and also the similarities to that of a real sibling.

Early in the videos we can also see the relationship emerging between Lizzie and her sisters. Jane seems very level-headed and hardworking, and Lizzie seems to not only trust Jane more but place more value in Jane's motivations and opinion of herself. On the other hand, Lizzie's younger sister Lydia is seen as a nuisance, someone who Lizzie often mocks in the videos and does not ever seem proud of. Lydia feels like someone weighing Lizzie down, as she often talks about having to keep an eye on Lydia when they go out.

In addition to family, we understand her role as a student is very important to her. Lizzie is a grad student studying communications and she often expresses frustration as she feels her mother does not take this role as a student seriously. Her mother's main focus is getting her daughters into marriages that will allow them to be supported. Lizzie's mother is fixated on the idea that a marriage equals comfort for her daughters. Lizzie fights hard against this concept as she touts her status as a student, and says at one point about Jane, "It frustrates our mom to no end that Jane hasn't snatched up a husband yet. She's doing so much more with her life than prancing around as some trophy wife" (ep 2 2:16). Lizzie sees her mother's ideals as outdated and struggles to connect with them on any level. Her mother represents an outdated ideal for women, and Lizzie is trying and struggling to forge her own path in order to succeed by her own definitions.

The other main topic of conversation for Lizzie is the family's new neighbor, Bing Lee. He is discussed extensively, mostly to point out how often he is discussed by her mother as a potential suitor. He serves as the catalyst for the Bennet mother to push her daughters towards the life that she envisions for them, while Lizzie fights against those expectations to forge her

own path. We also see the contrast between Lizzie, her sister Jane, and her friend Charlotte. All three of them walk down slightly different paths, and as a viewer we can see the motivations that exist in each of them. Lizzie's big goal is to be happy and successful in her career. She is proud of being a graduate student and the work she is doing, and she mentions several times how proud she is of Jane for her fashion career. However, to Lizzie's mom, those are all distractions from finding a husband to care for them. As Lizzie points out in an early video, "what make me happy and what makes [my mother] happy are two very different things" (ep 9 2:15). From this statement we can understand the obvious frustration that Lizzie feels in her mother's disregard for education and career, but we also feel her sadness in her mother's failure to recognize these accomplishments.

The struggle between Lizzie and her mother can be showcased very clearly at the beginning of episode 4 of the vlog when Lizzie lists the struggles she and Jane are facing, and follows it up with the concerns her mother is focused on. As the video opens Lizzie rants:

My mother was freaking out ... so what was she freaking out about? That Jane has to default on her student loans again even though she has a full-time job? Nope. Or the fact that I have midterms coming up that will probably shape my entire future? Not even close. No, my mom freaks out about Bing Lee. (ep 4 0:05-0:17)

This trend continues throughout the course of the vlog, and does not seem to display any growth on the part of Lizzie's mom in the way that the other characters learn and grow. Part of this could be the fact that Jane and Bing do eventually end up together, and Lizzie also finds a partner, though not yet a husband, in Darcy.

As *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* offers a more visual experience for viewers, it still follows the story of *Pride and Prejudice* very closely without being an exact replication of the story. As discussed, the narration of *Pride and Prejudice* allows readers to understand what is happening beyond the main character's experience. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* features Lizzie as the main character, and main voice of the videos. However, we get frequent interjections from other characters in the videos that sometimes undermine Lizzie's perspective. When things are written in a book, they generally have descriptions of characters and locations that remain on the same level of detail. For example in *Pride and Prejudice*, the information the reader receives about Bingley is going to be received in the same manner as information about Darcy. However, in a video format, there can be different details excluded from the viewer, thereby forcing them to imagine certain people or situations using their imagination completely. In her article on the relationship between *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* Silke Jandl points out that:

While the vlog format allows for figural narration, the camera inevitably and unambiguously shows us how the characters look... when the main character meets another main character for the first time, their introduction is usually highlighted to the audience and in great detail. Not so in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. (177)

This highlights the conflicting accounts given in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. Lizzie is the figural narrator in the vlog. While the video is not shot through her eyes in the same way that *Bridget Jones's Diary* was shown through Bridget's eyes, it is from Lizzie's perspective and narrative. So while Lizzie cannot control how we see Jane, Charlotte, or Lydia, as they are seen in the videos, Lizzie can control how we see the off camera characters.

The greatest example of this is the fact that Darcy as a character is discussed constantly in the vlog, but does not appear until episode 60. Up until this point, the viewer has been forced to imagine what he looks and acts like based on the information given by Lizzie and her sisters. Not only is the audience trying to determine which accounts are true from which of the characters that appear, they must also be thinking about the characters off-screen. One of the major comedic points in the role-playing is how Mrs. Bennet is portrayed. Throughout the vlogs, Lizzie makes short skits to play out experiences she has had off camera. They usually include a few items of clothing to represent a character, such as a bow tie and scally cap for Darcy, and a biased script she creates to represent her view of the character.

The costume for Mrs. Bennet consists of a large garden hat and a tulle shawl, and when Lizzie plays her mother she adds in an overdramatic southern accent. However, when other characters, such as Jane, play the role of Mrs. Bennet, she speaks normally. Jandl sums this up by stating that, "Lizzie tends to employ the method of re-enacting scenes with exaggerated, almost caricature-like impressions of people who have not been on-screen" (177). The illusion the audience has of Mrs. Bennet is shattered in one of the final episodes as Mrs. Bennet comes on screen. We do not see her face, but she has a similar outfit as the costume Lizzie wore, and speaks in the same exaggerated accent Lizzie gave her. This creates a sort of break in the illusion of the vlog for the viewers. Lizzie and other characters have always acknowledged Lizzie's portrayal of Mrs. Bennet as, at best, exaggerated. However, when Mrs. Bennet comes on screen behaving exactly as Lizzie's portrayal, it feels a bit dishonest and hyperbolic.

Charlotte and Lizzie are two characters that are very similar in their pursuits and goals in life, but who offer very different perspectives on how to get there. As previously mentioned,

Lizzie is a character that is focused on happiness. She is studying her passion in graduate school and is highly focused on her own happiness and autonomy as a person. On the flip side, Charlotte is someone who is very practical and at times cynical. Charlotte's family is lower middle class, and she believes that most success comes from luck rather than simply working hard and wanting to succeed. The expectations for Charlotte differ from the ones placed on Lizzie because they come from slightly different social classes. While this is expressed verbally early on in the videos, we see the situation play out in their lives in a very emotional way.

The character of Ricky Collins is introduced as a childhood friend who returns to town looking for a business partner for his company. He believes he finds that person in Lizzie, as she is a communications student and creates the vlog which is portrayed as a successful online venture. However, Collins has problems communicating effectively with others and Lizzie cannot stand to be around him. For this reason, as well as the fact that she will have to drop-out of school to take the job, Lizzie turns down an offer from Collins. This is seen by her mother, and partially by Charlotte, as a selfish move. The salary and benefits Lizzie would have earned working for Collins would allow her to live comfortably. Charlotte is offered the job after Lizzie turns it down, and she accepts it. For Charlotte, this job is a lifeline for herself and her family. It does not matter that she has to drop-out of school, because with this job she will be financially stable.

One of the areas of Lizzie's life that she feels pressure in is balancing her relationships with her family. It is clear through her reenactments that she sees her parents in a ridiculous but affectionate light. However, her younger sister Lydia is often presented in harsh words, with Lizzie introducing her in her second video as a "stupid whorey slut" (ep 2 0:10). While it is clear

in the videos that Lizzie does not dislike her younger sister, she certainly does not treat her with much respect. Lydia is seen as a burden, as the annoying younger sister you always have to keep an eye on. Lydia's treatment also highlights the other side of the spectrum from Mrs. Bennet's idea of how her daughters should be have. Lizzie finds Mrs. Bennet's expectations for herself to be old fashioned and confining, and yet Lizzie herself places judgments on Lydia for not following her own idea of womanhood. All of this changes when Lydia gets in trouble after becoming involved with George Wickham. George is a character who Darcy had a falling out with, and who Lizzie had a relationship with before she learned the truth of his character. After being in a relationship with Lydia, George puts up a subscription to their sex tape without Lydia's consent or knowledge. When Lizzie first learns about the situation she is devastated, telling Darcy "if I hadn't been so wrapped up in my own life, I might have had a clue about it and I could have warned her about him" (ep 84 3:08). Lizzie feels responsible for Lydia's situation because despite knowing George was not a good person, she never told Lydia the details. Despite being in another part of the state, working on her thesis, and shadowing Darcy's company Pemberley Digital, Lizzie still feels that she should have been more involved in Lydia's life.

The vlog exists as a first person narrative of Lizzie's life and the lives of her friends and family. While we are predominately getting her perspective, as it is her vlog, we still have other characters appearing in the video to give their own take on situations. Often when Lizzie creates recreations of what has happened off screen, others in the video will point out she is being over the top in her portrayal of certain characters, in particular Darcy. However, Lizzie never seems concerned by these exaggerations, even saying to viewers, "of course I'm biased, it's my video

blog” (ep 12 0:46). As the viewer, we do not have a chance to see the situations Lizzie experiences in real time, we only see her reenactments of them and so that is our only perspective. While we do see the corrections she receives from others in the video, we do not actually know how over-the-top Lizzie is being. Most of our opinions as the viewer are reliant on the information she, as the narrator, is providing, and that can make for a biased experience.

While Lizzie serves as the voice of the vlog, there are other competing voices, as mentioned above. These come mainly in the voice of her sisters, Jane and Lydia, and her friend Charlotte. In one of the few episodes without Lizzie, Jane and Charlotte ‘take over’ the vlog to speak to viewers directly about Lizzie’s biases. The episode is titled “Lizzie Bennet is in Denial”, and in it Charlotte seems to pressure Jane into making the video. Charlotte insists that Lizzie is not portraying the truth in her reenactments, and as Jane says, “Lizzie sees what Lizzie sees” (ep 15 0:35). This statement is perhaps the simplest but most comprehensive interpretation of Lizzie’s stories on the vlog. While everything she says may not be true to life, it is true to Lizzie. Still, at the end of their hijacked video Charlotte amends that they are also adapting their reenactments, leaving it up to the viewer to decide who they really want to believe.

Most of the videos take place in Lizzie’s bedroom, with some travel towards the second half of the vlogs. The character of Darcy does not appear until video 59, with his first speaking part in video 60. That means that the viewer’s only understanding of Darcy is mainly through the perspective of Lizzie, with corrections from Jane, Lydia, and Charlotte. Darcy is painted as a prideful person who acts like he is too good for everyone. Lizzie even titles one episode “Snobby Mr. Douchey” when talking about how Darcy would not interact with her. All of the information given to the viewer about Darcy leads us to believe that he is a pretentious person. This

perception could potentially be confirmed for many in episode 60 when Darcy confesses to Lizzie that he is in love with her. In this confession he states that “two parts of me have been at war. Your odd family, your financial troubles, you’re in a different world from me, people expect me to travel in certain circles ... I can’t believe it either, that my heart could completely overwhelm my judgment” (ep 60 1:21-1:46). Darcy’s focus, in the midst of confessing his love for someone, is to point out all the negative associations that are likely to be attached to their potential relationship.

That short speech alone, the very first moment we hear any dialogue from Darcy, could easily seal his reputation to the audience as exactly what Lizzie presented him as. Yet, as their conversation continues, Darcy’s perspective on things come to light as well. He discusses the reason he helped break up Bing and Jane, which mostly stem from his concern for his friend being hurt by Jane. To Lizzie, Darcy’s actions are based solely on the idea of social standing, but to Darcy it was about protecting his friend. In the following episode, Charlotte justifies Darcy’s feelings towards Lizzie. As Charlotte lists off times when Darcy went out of his way to be around Lizzie, Lizzie brushes them off with excuses. In this moment viewers can begin to understand that the story Lizzie has been telling has been very selective, and Darcy’s own perspective begins to gain more authority.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries returns to *Pride and Prejudice*’s neat ending, but arguably with even more of an idealistic ending to wrap it up. Lizzie and Darcy begins relationship after he resolves the scandal between Lydia and George Wickham. However, if the story ended there it would not have expanded on one of the subtle aspects of the ending to *Pride and Prejudice*; Elizabeth is able to find in Mr. Darcy not only a loving partner but also man who is willing and

excited to have an intellectual partner. Lizzie achieves this goal independent of Darcy's financial or networking help as she begins her own company building off the success of the vlog. This success was largely possible because of the formatting of her story, and the medium in which she chose to present it to an audience. In the end, she achieves a loving relationship, and the financial and professional success she had been working towards from the beginning.

Conclusion

As a reader, there is an assumption placed in most narratives that the stories being told will represent the truth of their world. The ability that a reader or viewer possesses in interacting with any story can be affected by a number of factors, but none more than the narrative style. It can shift the entire perspective of the story being told, and completely change your view on character and story arc. In each of the stories discussed here, the integrity of the story relies on the way in which the story is told. Through the use of free indirect discourse in *Pride and Prejudice* the reader can interpret the story far beyond the understanding that Elizabeth possesses. However, in *Bridget Jones's Diary* the reader is completely, and sometimes painfully, tied only to what Bridget presents. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* offers a bit more balance as the viewer receives information from other characters in the vlog, but the narrative is still heavily controlled by Lizzie. Due to these shifts, and despite the fact that all three stories follow a close storyline, each of them are very different from one another, and each offers a unique experience.

Additionally, these three stories showcase an arc of development for single middle-class women. Elizabeth, Bridget, and Lizzie all face decisions about how to empower themselves to achieve happiness in their lives. They face the pressures of balancing so many aspects of their lives into one cohesive unit, while also pushing beyond the expectations placed upon them.

Bridget is the first of the three that has the opportunity to pursue a career and live independently, privileges that would seemingly allow her to be happy. However, there are many new issues that come into play with these opportunities. Lizzie, as well, has the opportunity to pursue an education, and develop a relationship with someone who's he falls in love with. In some ways the story of Lizzie is the most successful, but she still faces the intense failures that Elizabeth faced in losing touch with her family and the anguish that Lydia experiences. The significance in which the narrative styles of these stories interacts with the female stories being told shapes the record of the change seen within them.

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