

Looking for Austen in the 21st Century: from *Pride and Prejudice* to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*

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Abstract: Jane Austen and her works have belonged to the canon since the beginnings of the 20th century, but Austen as a popular and cultural phenomenon dates back to 1995 with the release of the BBC adaptation *Pride and Prejudice*. This rebirth of Austen's six novels in the form of movie adaptations, spin-offs and merchandise has led to what it is known as 'Austenmania'. Nevertheless, not only Austen's world is introduced into contemporary times, but contemporary times are introduced into Austen; this is obviously present in the *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* DVDs (originally YouTube videos). This essay studies the last *Pride and Prejudice* modern-day adaptation, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, following a 'close viewing' of the videos as well as a careful reading of *Pride and Prejudice* in order to see how Austen has been introduced in contemporary fiction.

Keywords: adaptations; Austenmania; Darcymania; postfeminism; media.

Resumen: Jane Austen y su obra han sido parte del canon desde principios del siglo XX, pero Austen como fenómeno popular y cultural datan esto en 1995 debido al estreno de la adaptación de la BBC de *Orgullo y prejuicio*. Este renacer de las seis novelas de Austen en forma de adaptaciones en películas, *spin-off* y *merchandising* ha conducido a lo que se conoce como 'Austenmania'. Sin embargo, no solo el mundo de Austen se introduce en la época contemporánea, sino que la época contemporánea se introduce en Austen; esto se ve claramente en los DVDs *El diario de Lizzie Bennet* (originalmente vídeos de YouTube). Este trabajo analizará la última adaptación contemporánea de *Orgullo y Prejuicio*, *El diario de Lizzie Bennet*, siguiendo un «visionado atento» de los vídeos además de una lectura atenta de *Orgullo y prejuicio*.

Palabras clave: adaptaciones; Austenmania; Darcymania; posfeminismo; media.

I. Introduction

During the last two centuries Jane Austen's novels have been thoroughly read by academic and non-academic readers alike. In contrast to what is popularly called 'high' literature, Austen's novels have been, and still are, a source of inspiration to novelists, journalists, filmmakers and fans all around the world. Her six complete novels have been meticulously studied throughout the twentieth century, and the author's fame is such that the Bank of England has decided that her portrait would appear on the ten pound notes from 2017 (Allen). Jane Austen became part of the popular culture due, in great part, to the BBC's adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* in 1995 (Brownstein 2012: 40); some scholars such as Rebecca Munford point the beginning of the 'Austenmania' in the mid-1990s (2012: 61). However, the fact remains that, even without taking into account the success of film adaptations, Austen is well-known in the popular culture¹, and her novels have been enjoyed by many generations.

The recent bicentenaries of *Pride and Prejudice* in 2013, *Mansfield Park* in 2014 and *Emma* in 2015 have led to a re-enactment and boost of Austen-related works. In this new Austen era, filmmakers and writers have set aside the nineteenth-century English countryside in turn for a more modern approach to Austen's work; in this last decade there is a tendency towards the entrance of contemporary scenarios, such as India (*Bride and Prejudice*) and other European countries (*Mr Darcy, Vampire*), into Austenland. This is the clear case in the miniseries *Lost in Austen* (2008), the *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* DVDs (2013) and the *The Jane Austen Book Club* film (2007). The purpose of this essay is to give a comprehensive background to Austen as a popular phenomenon in contemporary culture, focusing on the last *Pride and Prejudice* modern-day adaptation, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2013) as it is the most significant, prolific and latest bits of Austen on the screen. In order to do so, a 'close viewing'² of the videos as well as an attentive reading of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) will be produced. Furthermore, the 'Why Austen?'³ question will be discussed in order to throw some light into the Austenmania of the last couple of decades which has surrounded scholars and fans alike. This Austenmania will be contextualised in terms of literary and filmic productions.

1. Corpora of cultural productions such as literature, films, music, television, fashion, etc. which are considered mainstream and consumed by the general public.

2. Attentive watching and careful interpretation of the mentioned visual devices following the same principle of the close reading in literary texts.

3. Reasons why Austen and her novels are so prolific in popular culture in ways of film adaptations, sequels, spin-offs, etc.

II. 'Why Austen?'

Many have tried to conjecture which were the special ingredients that Austen used to make her writings so 'universally acknowledged'. In *Why Jane Austen?* (2012), Rachel Brownstein tries to unravel the mystery, and quotes Katherine Mansfield writing that «every true admirer of the novels cherishes the happy thought that he alone, reading between the lines, has become the secret friend of their author» (2012: 28), that is, there is a relationship between the reader and the author which provides the basic ground for a partnership between the reader and the text. Austen adheres to this and includes the reader in her universally acknowledged truths, thus creating a sense of camaraderie between them: they (Austen and the reader) share and keep information from the characters. According to Lionel Trilling in Brownstein, «[t]he reason that «we» crave what Jane Austen offers [...] is that human nature requires the restraint, civility, decorum, and organized beauty of art» (2012: 64), but Brownstein argues that «Austen appeals to readers who are inclined to value mental ability and to scorn stupidity» (2012: 204).

In fact, if we take into consideration Austen's fictional and non-fictional love interests, all her heroes share one trait in common (besides their fortune), that is, their intelligence. Even the less than dashing Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility* is characterised by a 'good understanding' and «his education had given it solid improvement» (Austen 1972: 26). Nevertheless, she also portrays comic and silly characters in her novels such as Mr. Collins. By depicting such a lacking, self-absorbent and flighty character, Austen showed how unfair the Bennets' and, to an extent, all women's situations were. Characters such as Mr. Collins, Mrs. Bennet and Miss Bates are often portrayed in the books and movie adaptations as instruments of comic relief, but they also serve to set a quite visual comparative between the characters and others of 'superior' mind as it can be Mr. Knightley. However, this should not lead to think that Austen tried to just mock 'low intellect': for instance, handsome, *clever* and rich Emma is told off by Mr. Knightley for her ill treatment of Miss Bates.

Even though Austen prided on her intellectually superior characters, none of these get away from the author's pen if they are part of some folly: Mr Darcy is thoroughly punished for his arrogance until he redeems himself; Anne (*Persuasion*) faces the dangers of spinsterhood or a possible unhappy marriage to Mr Elliot until she stops being 'persuaded' by others; and Emma is tricked by her own matchmaking game and spends one chapter thinking she had lost her faithful Mr Knightley to her friend Harriet Smith. It is not much later discovered there was no danger of a Knightley-Smith union, but the happy

ending and pairing of Emma and Mr Knightley leaves a bittersweet taste; even though both characters are rewarded, the reader cannot help but think that Emma is not as deserving of this happiness as the constant and unwavering Mr Knightley, but again, Austen already predicted that Emma was «a heroine whom no-one but myself will much like» (Austen-Leigh 2005: 84). It is this sense of imperfection in these seemingly perfect characters that differentiates Austen's heroines from their other counterparts and humanise them to the reading public, thus, creating a sense of comradeship between the characters, the readers and the author.

In *Uses of Austen*, Shelley Cobb shares these perspectives on Austen appealing to riddle-solving people, but goes further and reflects on Austen as the antidote to contemporary life (2012: 215). She considers Austen's novels as time-travel narratives: the reader imagines oneself in the nineteenth-century quaint English county surrounded by charming characters such as Elizabeth Bennet. The hectic pace of contemporary life makes readers to wish for a more simple scenery in which mobile phones and cars are turned into letters and carriages, and tea drinking and gossip are the major highlights of one's day. This domesticity in Austen serves to a dual purpose: to approach realities between Austen's world and contemporary life because, even though two centuries have passed since Austen wrote her novels, «for what do we live, but to make sports for our neighbours, and laugh at them in our turn?» (Austen 1989: 280), but also to transport the reader to the apparently utopic nineteenth-century.

In fact, this is the plot for *Lost in Austen* (2008): «Amanda Price [sharing Fanny's (*Mansfield Park*) surname] whose favourite book is *Pride and Prejudice* [...] finds a door in her bathroom that opens into the Bennets' house, allowing Elizabeth Bennet into the contemporary world and Amanda into the world of the Bennet sister, Darcy and Wickham» (Cobb 2012: 209). Amanda, who feels out of place in the real world, believes that she belongs in the Austen world. By placing Amanda in Regency England and Elizabeth in the contemporary world, a chance of making a feminist reading of the story arises: Elizabeth becomes enchanted with the modern world and the opportunities it gives to women; and Amanda is free to escape from her unfulfilling job and her cheating boyfriend to a more pleasant place. It is significant that Amanda and Elizabeth Bennet are able to time travel, a feat that has been mostly reserved for men in films and books (Smith 2013); this body transportation offers two different readings: time travel serves as a way of escapism for Amanda's colourless contemporary life, but it also sets a precedent for women's empowerment and their ability to change and influence their environment. In *Lost in Austen*, Amanda shakes up the pacific society of Meryton and, thanks to her perspective, the spectator is able to

watch some aspects that Austen was not allowed to expand as, for instance, Mr. Collins' perverted stares or the fact that Caroline Bingley is a lesbian (at least in *Lost in Austen*).

Furthermore, it is not strange to find film adaptations or sequels to Austen's novels in which there is a homosexual character, in fact, it is quite common: Bridget Jones' male friend is gay, and one of the main characters of Karen Jay Fowler's novel *The Jane Austen Book Club* (turned into a film in 2007), Allegra, is a lesbian. It is significant that the homosexual character in *The Jane Austen Book Club* would represent one of the most 'unstable' Austen characters (Marianne Dashwood), and that she is the only one who is single at the end of the film. Allegra is able to take part in Austen's world, but she does not achieve the level of happiness that the other heterosexual couples do. In the same film, Bernadette comments on the fact that Jane Austen could have written Charlotte Lucas as being gay without knowing it, and this could be as well true: Charlotte did not fit in her society and her pragmatic vision of marriage could refer to an apathy towards men, but, if Austen noticed this, she would not have been able to explain it or understand it.

These new materials based on Austen's texts give the reader the chance to expand their own reading of Austen and to pay notice to some aspects that were somewhat hidden, such as colonialism. In the Indian film adaptation for *Pride and Prejudice, Bride and Prejudice* (2004), Elizabeth Bennet becomes Lalita Bakshi and Mr. Darcy is Will Darcy, an American businessman. As it occurs in the original version, the protagonists bicker and argue, but, in this case, they discuss neo-imperialism, and «in so doing, the film seems smoothly to pursue the mode of reading Austen and her texts that was brought to controversial prominence by Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993)» (Jones 2012: 177). In Patricia Rozema's film version of *Mansfield Park* (1999), the issue of colonialism is further elaborated by a more assertive and 'slave-conscious' Fanny –played by Frances O'Connor– who confronts her tyrannical slaveholder uncle about slave rights. In this film, the main character does not only represent Austen's heroine, but she interprets Austen as well, that is, the character is a mixture of Fanny Price –a fictional character– and the author of *Mansfield Park*.

Although most of the adaptations regarding the Austen phenomenon are about her complete novels, the author's life has been a topic of interest for filmmakers due to the spread of the so called 'Austenmania' in the last decade of the twentieth century and its lasting presence in the twenty-first century. In these last years, documentaries and biopics have been made of Austen's life such as *Becoming Jane* (2007) and *Miss Austen Regrets* (2008) (North 2012: 92). However, these film versions of Austen's life are considered by many experts a

‘harlequinized’ vision of the author’s biography. In *Becoming Jane*, the action is set in Austen’s earlier years as a writer, in particular, when she was writing the first draft of *Pride and Prejudice*, but many events and characters are reshaped: «Focused on Austen’s flirtation with Tom Lefroy, it ratcheted up the romantic drama by having Harris Bigg-Wither –here recast as a ‘Mr. Wisley’– make his proposal of marriage at this early period, rather than in 1802. In the film ‘Jane’ simply does things that Jane did not do: she visits Ann Radcliffe in London, for instance, and she elopes with Tom Lefroy». (2012: 92)

Even though the film was based on historical documents to some extent, the events in the movie were invented or not accurate enough to fit in Austen’s life timeline: the romantic relationship between Jane Austen and Tom Lefroy is further expanded from the light flirtation they were part to the point of eloping; Austen as a female writer leaves to make space to Austen the woman. This romantization of Austen is surely performed in order to attract a wider audience, but the fact remains that this out-of-character Austen, performed by the starlet Anne Hathaway, has been criticised by scholars (2012: 94).

Nevertheless, not only Austen’s life translation to the screen is rejected by scholars. By quoting Deborah Kaplan, Julian North comments on the film adaptations of Austen’s fiction: «The medium of film itself may be neutral, but American-produced popular films generally are not. To put Austen novels on film by means of corporations (Columbia Pictures and Miramax) that produce what is now a global popular culture informed by American tastes is to enter a medium shaped by powerful generic conventions of romance» (2012: 101-2). These generic conventions and mainstream view of romance are frowned upon in Austen adaptations as her uniqueness is lost, thus making these films be placed among others of the same genre.

Curiously enough, this criticism is not extended to British adaptations, for instance, BBC’s 1995 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* has been widely acclaimed and liked by scholars and Janeites, «a term coined by the English literary critic George Saintsbury» (Brownstein 2012: 27). As it has been pointed out, «[t]he Jane Austen films of the mid-1990s were smart and sophisticated and gaily irreverent, knowledgeable about the novels and literary theory, too; they read against the texts in a poststructuralist spirit, offering new, crowd-pleasing interpretations» (2012: 36). In fact, the interpretation of Colin Firth, Mr. Darcy in the 1995 miniseries, was the beginning of the phenomenon that was labelled Darcymania (2012: 47). This morphed «with a sly, suggestive postmodern gender bend, into something else: Jane-o-mania. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Jane Austen was an adjective and a brand» (2012: 50). After the release of the miniseries, the pilgrimage to Chawton cottage –Austen’s last residence

turned into a museum— increased in numbers until it reached a record of 57 000 visitors in 1996 (F. James 2012: 142).

In fact, the hype on the BBC miniseries and the Darcymania reached such levels that even the acting career of the actor who played Mr Darcy, Colin Firth, has been influenced by his role in the Jane Austen book adaptation. Before Firth accepted his role as Mr Darcy, it was academy award winner Lawrence Olivier, who had been proclaimed as ‘the Mr Darcy’, but it is nowadays Firth’s Byronic Darcy who Janeites take as the ‘true’ and most Austen-like Mr Darcy. When asked about his characterisation as one of the most popular characters in English literature Firth commented that: «to make myself different enough to play Darcy, I will have to do an awful lot. But doing anything is the last thing that is right for playing Darcy. The only way for it to work is to be Darcy already» («Colin Firth on ‘Darcymania’» 2001). In becoming Mr Darcy, Firth created a fully-fledged character with whom the public could sympathise thanks to the scenes where the character was at his most vulnerable, for instance, seeing Elizabeth from his window after taking a bath. This ‘humanization’ of the character and its good public acceptance is clearly seen on the highly popular ‘Darcy takes a dip in the lake’ scene and the endearingly awkward encounter with Elizabeth in the grounds of Pemberley –with Firth on his still wet clothes–.

Actually, this has become a whole phenomenon on its own and has served of inspiration for many book adaptations and fanfics alike. In fact, the miniseries *Lost in Austen* paid its own homage to the iconic scene when Amanda asks Mr Darcy to take a dip in one of Pemberley’s pools clad in breeches and a white shirt. On seeing him like this, she says «I’m having a bit of a strange postmodern moment here»; undoubtedly, Amanda was referring to Firth-Darcy’s lake scene.

However, the BBC’s adaptation has not been the last time Firth has taken a dip in the water filmically speaking, but it seems screenwriters have tried to copy the acclaimed bath scene every time Firth is on their payrolls. Even in the teenage movie *St Trinians* (2007), Firth’s character ends up being thrown into a water tank and the following scene stars him walking in slow motion dressed in a white shirt towards his love interest, resembling very much to the scene when Mr Darcy and Elizabeth find each other at Pemberley in the BBC adaptation. However, Firth finds himself under water in other film adaptations such as in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004) based on the book with the same title by Helen Fielding. In this second *Bridget Jones* movie, Firth falls into a fountain while fighting a Wickham-like character played by Hugh Grant who, curiously enough, played Edward Ferrars in Ang Lee’s interpretation of *Sense and Sensibility* (1995).

Additionally, Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones' Diary* was based not only on Elizabeth and Darcy's rocky relationship, but shared many similarities with the BBC's adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) as the main character is said to be watching the BBC's adaptation in some part of the novel. All these facts would lead to consider a self-referential relationship between Darcy and Firth; usually it is the actor who introduces their mannerisms in their performance and the character, but in this case Darcy has crawled his way into Firth without the specific invitation of the actor. In a recent interview, the academy winner stated that he does not own Darcy (Branch 2015), but surely all modern takes on this Austen hero in films has lead one way or another to his performance of the master of Pemberley. The *Bridget Jones* films have allowed Firth to play Darcy twice, though a third film will be released in 2016 with Colin Firth starring Mark Darcy once again (Lang 2015).

However, Helen Fielding's novels are set in what is called an alternative universe. The plot does not take place in Austen's Regency era, but it is developed in contemporary London, and the main character is a slightly overweight thirty-year old woman who is looking for a husband. Apart from the plot similarities between *Pride and Prejudice* and *Bridget Jones Diary* (the aim is to get a husband), the characters resemble very much. Mr. Jones (Mr. Bennet), for example, is eclipsed by her much more sociable and gossip-hungry wife and Daniel Cleaver (Wickham) is a charming but 'wicked' character who pursues Mark Darcy's (Mr. Darcy) love interest. In this case, however, there is no elopement between Wickham and Georgiana, but Mark and Daniel's antagonism is based on the latter's liaison with Darcy's wife.

Many *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations and versions⁴ born after the mid-1990s boom followed this non-canon idea; from 1995 to 2013 six films or miniseries based on *Pride and Prejudice* within a contemporary setting were produced: *Bridget Jones Diary* (2001), *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), *Bridget Jones: Edge of Reason* (2004), *Lost in Austen* (2008), *A Modern Pride and Prejudice* (2011) and *The Liz-zie Bennet Diaries* (2012) (Warren). However, many of those adaptations are not based purely on Austen's novel, but they are adaptations of some of the most well-known literary sequels of *Pride and Prejudice* such as the aforementioned *Bridget Jones Diary*.

Much like Fielding's contemporary setting, *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2005) deals with a representation of all Austen's six novels set in a contemporary city

4. Version differs from the original form (characters, setting, alternate ending, etc.) whereas adaptation follows the original story with no significant changes.

near San Francisco (Sacramento) in which a group of five women (and a man) discuss Austen's complete novels, and try to use them in real life because, as Bernadette –one of the main characters– says «All Jane Austen, all the time. It's the perfect antidote [...] to life!» (Cobbs 2012: 208). Each of the characters and their lives represent one of Austen's novels, and fall into the same mistakes the original characters did: Allegra (Marianne) breaks her leg being impulsive; Jocelyn (Emma) tries to set up all her friends, but is unable to do the same for herself; and Prudie (Anne) almost gives up on her husband.

However, the great majority of the published novels which reconstruct Austen's world follow the Regency era canon, and place the story after the events of the original books take place without tainting Austen's novels, that is, there is a 'fidelity in betrayal' (Munford 2012: 59). For instance, Tennant's four Austen sequels *Pemberley: A Sequel to Pride and Prejudice* (1993), *An Unequal Marriage: Or Pride and Prejudice Twenty Years Later* (1994), *Elinor and Marianne: A Sequel to Sense and Sensibility* (1996) and *Emma in Love: Jane Austen's Emma Continued* (1996) follow what is called the «classic progression» (2012: 60). Even though those novels do not share Austen's blissful happy endings, they respect her canon.

Not many authors have dared to write a different version of Austen's novels, but there are some such as Seth Grahame-Smith (one of the few male writers who has written an Austen sequel), who has published *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009). In this novel, Grahame-Smith introduces zombies in the Regency era, and turns the Bennet girls into a zombie-fighting army, but he is not the only one to insert mythical and culturally popular characters in the Austen world. In *Mr Darcy, Vampyr* (2009) Amanda Grange explains Darcy's reserved and cold attitude by stating that he and his sister are vampires, hence, his reticence towards marrying Elizabeth is due to his fear of her becoming a vampire. Although mythological elements are introduced, the whole of *Pride and Prejudice* (except from the last three pages) is untouched as the novel is developed during the Darceys' honeymoon around Europe.

Apart from this vampirised continuation of *Pride and Prejudice*, Grange has written several novels or sequels on Austen's fiction; excluding *Mr. Darcy, Vampyr*, one of her most popular books is *Mr. Darcy's Diary* (2007). The novel has an epistolary format (much as Austen's first draft of *Pride and Prejudice*), and Darcy is the narrative voice which explains the events before *Pride and Prejudice* –his father's death, Georgiana's elopement, etc.– Although it follows the events of the original novel, those are told from Darcy's point of view, so his reactions to the incidents in Austen's novel are further explained, though his actions remain as those of the original novel. Therefore, Grange follows the Regency era canon and Austen's world as she only changes the focaliser.

It is significant that many of these sequels are not only influenced by Austen, but also by other popular phenomena such as zombies, vampires, literary genres and best-selling books. For instance, William Codpiece Thwackery (mocking the name of the author of *Vanity Fair*, William Makepeace Thackeray) mixes *Pride and Prejudice* with *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and writes *Fifty Shades of Mr. Darcy* (2012), a parody of E.L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey*, but in the fictional world of *Pride and Prejudice*. Following the success of the mystery and detective novels, British author P.D. James writes *Death Comes to Pemberley* (2011): set six years after the Darcys' marriage, the novel deals with the mysterious murder of Captain Denny by George Wickham (supposedly). In line with Austen's true style, *Death Comes to Pemberley* is set on the beautiful English landscape, and has a –though debatable– happy ending; but the descriptions and the plot could have been taken from a detective novel. This versatility in including Austen is proof that the nineteenth-century author is still present in all kinds of literature, and is introduced within the cultural and popular movements that contemporary culture undergoes.

However, not only Austen is used by professional writers, but her ever-growing popularity has much to do with Janeites (fans of the English novelist) who «have taken to the Web to extend the author's oeuvre themselves, creating on-line libraries of hundreds of stories inspired by her novels» (Licalzi 2000). Juliette Wells cites Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss and C. Lee Harrington, and writes that «fans engage with 'texts not in a rationally detached but in an emotionally involved and invested way'. Fandom [...] is essentially a 'mode of reading', one that seeks 'familiarity and the fulfilment of expectations'» (2012: 87). Thus, some Austen Web sites were created in order to fulfil this need for more Austen: *The Republic of Pemberley* collects pieces which mimic Austen's style and her Regency era plots, whereas *Austen.com* allows non-canon and «crossover» stories in which the original characters mix with those from television or other novels (Licalzi 2000). Furthermore, some of these 'fics' are published on paperback later on such as Diana Oaks' *One Thread Pulled* (2012), a what-if-Elizabeth-had-not-heard-Darcy's-comment-at-their-first-ball story. Hence, Austen is alive through her fans, and will remain part of the contemporary literature for the foreseeable future.

III. The Lizzie Bennet Diaries

«It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife»; this is how the protagonist of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2013) starts her video vlog. Certainly, the video begins with the

first sentence of Austen's most popular novel –as any *Pride and Prejudice* self-respecting adaptation would– but this is as far as Austen's direct quotations go in the one-hundred episodes of this *Pride and Prejudice* spin-off. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* presents the plot-line of *Pride and Prejudice* but setting the story in contemporary America, thus, leaving the Regency era apparel of bonnets and breeches for hipster clothes such as newsy caps and bow-ties. In this new adaptation, «Darcy is a hipster, Lizzie is a beleaguered grad student and her mother is just as desperate to get her married off as in the original» (Welsh 2013). Even though the series are placed in an alternative universe as it is contemporary life in America, the characters share the personality traits of Austen's models.

Lizzie (Elizabeth Bennet) is a twenty-four year old graduate student of mass media communication with student loans to pay, living at her parents' home and the middle child of the family, being Jane the eldest and Lydia the youngest sister (in this version, Mary is the Bennet's cousin and Kitty is her cat). Her extroverted and outgoing nature (some of the most likeable traits in Austen's heroine) is reflected on the videos and the fact that she studied mass media communication emphasises these features. These diary-form videos of about two to eight minutes are part of her thesis project so she does that as a means to improve her career options, thus securing a good job which will lead to financial stability. Besides, the fact that they are part of a creative process could reflect of Austen's own creative work which helped her to get by (Fergus 2005). But her link to Austen's novels does not end here, in fact, Lizzie and her best friend Charlotte were born the same day her mothers were reading in their book club Jane Austen's first novel *Sense and Sensibility*. This makes for an interesting twist in the understanding of the adaptation as it is the first time that Austen as a writer appears in one of her novels adaptation as a non-fictional entity without having repercussions in the development of the story, hence, blending real facts and the fictional world.

In regards to the story, Lizzie begins introducing her family in the earlier episodes much like Austen did in her novel, but, in contrast to *Pride and Prejudice*, the protagonist is not hiding at plain sight during some of these episodes, but the viewer knows from the start that Lizzie is going to be the protagonist of the story. As the story is told from Lizzie's room (and later on from different office settings) with a fixed camera, the background does not vary, though the characters do; using different sketches the viewer is introduced to Charlotte Lu, Lizzie's best friend and video editor, «practically perfect in every way» Jane Bennet and her boisterous and exuberant younger sister Lydia. Later in the videos other Jane Austen characters appear such as George Wickham, Ricky Collins (Mr Collins in the novel) Caroline and Bing Lee (Miss and Mr Bingley),

Fitz (Colonel Fitzwilliam), Gigi (Georgiana) and, of course, William Darcy. Furthermore, throughout dramatization –that is, role play and costume theatre– the eldest characters of *Pride and Prejudice* such as Mr and Mrs Bennet as well as Lady Catherine are introduced in the videos without actually being present, but their actions and conversations are represented by the use of theatre props by the usual characters.

This dramatization is very valuable for the plotline as it explains the events that happen outside Lizzie's room and allows the viewer to draw the background of the story. For instance, Bing Lee is played for the first time by Lydia with a head mirror and a stethoscope (in this adaptation he is studying to become a doctor) and Darcy is characterised with a newsy cap and a bowtie by Lizzie. As in the novel, the public has to trust Lizzie with her portrayal of Darcy whom she defines in episode six as «boring, stuffy, unbelievably rude. He thinks he's too good for us 'common folk'». However, unlike in the novel, the public is allowed to see how Darcy's not so kind words about Lizzie hurt her and how these affect her perception of his character as in the book it is only said that «Elizabeth remained with no very cordial feelings towards him. She told the story however with great spirit among her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in any thing ridiculous» (Austen 1989: 12).

This playful taking of the 'tolerable enough' (in the *LBD* 'decent enough') is not shown in Lizzie's videos, in fact, she resents him greatly. This could lead to think that twenty-first century Elizabeth nonsensical and offended attitude is the natural progression of a contemporary woman stating freely her opinion without the social constraints that nineteenth-century Elizabeth Bennet had to follow. Lizzie was not taught to forgive men for their follies and slights as, for instance, Jane did after Bingley's abandonment and posterior return in *Pride and Prejudice*. In fact, men are not absolved so easily in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*: instead of swiftly forgiving Bing (as portrayed in the novel), Jane mulls over her relationship with Bing and how it hurt her that his own opinions were not strong enough against his friend and sister's advices. Therefore, it takes a while for Jane to accept him again and, contrary to continuing where they left off, they start dating again and, at the end of the show, the viewers are told that Bing left his medical training because he was not happy at it and Jane has a successful job in the fashion world in New York. Therefore, she moves out and it is Bing, the man, who follows her to her new adventure. Furthermore, Lizzie comments on Bing being an «arm-candy» at one of Jane's work events, making us reflect on how the roles are reversed in this modern take on *Pride and Prejudice*.

Taking into consideration the videos background (set in contemporary times in America), it is only normal that Lizzie's opinions on gender equality and fem-

inism would be further developed from nineteenth-century Elizabeth Bennet. In fact, these are some of the most significant topics in the videos as marriage is very present in Mrs Bennet's mind and her '2.5 WPF' ('two and a half kids with a white picket fence') club. Mrs Bennet represents the nowadays old-fashioned (and the Regency era) way of viewing marriage as the only option for a woman whereas Lizzie represents the twenty-first century take on marriage based solely on love and not as the only option for women: «All life doesn't revolve around men anymore! I can get a PhD! I can run a company!» Lizzie states when speaking about this topic and her mother ceaseless interest on getting them married. However, she also reflects on her family's economic difficulties and wonders if «is this whole marriage fixation a race to get us out of the house before there isn't a house to get us out anymore?». Nevertheless, she does not dwell much on this, but focuses on the importance of having a successful career to support herself and be independent of men. For instance, she describes Jane saying that «she's doing so much more with her life than prancing around as some trophy wife». Work and education are essential to a modern woman's life as these elements will enhance their job prospects and, hence, their future.

The fact that marriage prospects are changed to job opportunities is very telling, but it all comes back to the idea of financial stability. The Bennet family is handling some financial troubles with their house mortgage; this along with Lizzie and Jane's student loans creates the troublesome economic background of *Pride and Prejudice* where the entailment of the state to a male heir could lead to, as Mrs Bennet so dramatically pointed out, them being thrown into the hedgerows. In the novel Elizabeth is offered a marriage proposal from Mr Collins, the future heir, but she refuses him; in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* Ricky Collins (Mr Collins) makes Lizzie other type of proposal, a job. Similar to the book, this job offering would also secure Lizzie's –and, to some extent, her family's– financial stability. However, this work opportunity would mean that Lizzie leave her principles aside and submit to Ricky Collins' ridiculous orders and viewpoints (much like Elizabeth if she were to marry Mr Collins). Furthermore, the acceptance of the job would mean abandoning her studies; as it was previously mentioned, education is an essential element for Lizzie's career and late job options, hence, giving up on her studies would not only mean impoverishing her future prospects, but it would probably also narrow them down.

Nevertheless, her spot is taken by Charlotte who is portrayed as a sensible and practical woman (much like in the novel) who takes the job due to her financial difficulties even if it meant to forgo her studies. Later on the videos, Lizzie goes and visits her friend in her new office in 'Collins and Collins', thus, reflecting again on the idea that marriage life is changed to work life as Eliza-

beth visits Charlotte Collins in her new home in Kent in the original story. In here, she meets Ms de Bourgh (Lady Catherine) and her asthmatic poodle dog Anniekins (Anne de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice*) who is Darcy's aunt and the main investor of 'Collins and Collins'. Thanks to this characters' relationship (Darcy and Ms de Bourgh), Darcy is introduced in the videos by becoming consulting accountant to her aunt's investments during Lizzie's stay with Charlotte. His first appearance on the video vlogs coincide with the Hunsford famous proposal, though in this case Darcy does not make an offer of marriage but a more believable confession for current twenty-first century; he declares his love for Lizzie and is rejected much in the same way.

However, this is not the last time that Darcy and the professional world are linked. In fact, one of Lizzie's independent studies is a placement at Pemberley Digital, a multinational company run by Darcy in San Francisco –though this fact is not known to Lizzie until she is informed of this by Charlotte–. It is important to highlight the relationship between Pemberley Digital (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*) to Pemberley Estate (*Pride and Prejudice*): both Pemberleys are the place where Lizzie/Elizabeth and Darcy meet again and get to know each other, thus, leading to Austen's happy ending; but still, it has to be considered that, whereas the relationship between Elizabeth and Pemberley Estate resides on her being the possible future mistress of the estate, Pemberley Digital and Lizzie are connected with her work placement and possible future career. In both cases (marriage and career-wise) Pemberley is connected to one of the main topics of these stories, the protagonist's future; in the first case (*Pride and Prejudice*), Pemberley is related to Elizabeth's marriageable prospects and her future, but Pemberley Digital falls into the work realm as the study of the company is part of Lizzie's independent study but it also stands for a possible future job prospect as Darcy offers her a job at the end of the series.

It does not escape to notice that Lizzie's future in both alternative worlds is related to Darcy and his material belongings. However, there is a twist in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*; although Darcy and Lizzie are romantically involved at the end of the videos, she does not accept Darcy's job offer but decides to begin her own digital company, thus, becoming Darcy's working competitor. This unexpected twist certainly falls into the feminist standpoint the videos try to outline by following Austen's feminist ideas and further developing them in the twenty-first century taking as a motto 'women's future is not dependant on men's decisions'.

However, this does not mean that Lizzie rejects the idea of marriage but she is, as Charlotte describes, 'picky' when it comes to men and work. As a matter of fact, Lizzie makes a comparison between job interviews and dating when saying

«a decent job is almost as hard to find as a decent guy». Like her 19th century counterpart, she believes marriage should only come from the deepest love, but her reluctance to falling in love in the series in contrast to Elizabeth Bennet's open nature leads to think that Lizzie knows more about the dating world so she is not able to behave as freely as 'innocent' Elizabeth because she knows and has more experience than Ms Bennet. Nevertheless, Lizzie and Elizabeth's ideas on love are not different and nor are their characters in their basic traits.

In fact, when Lizzie describes herself, she says that she likes rain (Elizabeth walked to Netherfield under a light rain), classic novels (they both love and probably read the same books) and any movie starring Colin Firth. On this last trait there is much to be said as this love for Colin Firth is a clear gesture to the actor's role in the BBC miniseries *Pride and Prejudice* (1995). Although it would not have been possible to mention this adaptation without putting into question the realness of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* plotline, the screenwriters found the way to introduce *Pride and Prejudice* and its adaptations and their popular results: the idea of Darcymania originated by Firth's performance of Mr Darcy and making Darcy (in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*) explain that he named his company (Pemberley) after his father's family house in England. Even though it is not explicitly said, the viewer cannot help but to link Lizzie's love of Colin Firth's movies with his role as Darcy, especially when she declares her love for classic novels in the same sentence. Furthermore, there are other references to this adaptation when Lizzie sardonically comments on how Darcy «uses his money to lounge all day in five thousand dollars watching BBC miniseries» so it is not far-fetching to think this is yet another reference to the 1995 adaptation.

However, there are other significant references to other adaptations of Jane Austen's most famous novel which took the *Pride and Prejudice* plot to the twenty-first century such as Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones' Diary*. In the series, the 2001 film adaptation with the same title is mentioned in a conversation Lydia and Lizzie have about Darcy's name as Lydia says «I think it's a great name. Isn't that Colin Firth's name in that chubby Zellweger movie?» to what Lizzie responds «I love that movie». As it was previously mentioned, this adaptation takes after the events of *Pride and Prejudice* and follows the marriage plot (to some extent) but with a contemporary setting, hence, it may be possible that Lizzie is somewhat identified with Bridget Jones as she too has experienced the tribulations of being a twenty-first century woman and what it implies in both the professional and love realm. Again, her love for Colin Firth/Darcy could be explained due to her Janeite nature (it must not be forgotten she was born the same day her mother was reading *Sense and Sensibility*) but also it could be read as a prediction of her future love life as if she is destined to fall in love with a Darcy.

Apart from the various Austen references, the series also deals with other cultural phenomena in digital form; for instance, the viewer is told that Charlotte and Ricky Collins are working on a web video series called *Game of Gourds* which has been very well received in its pilot episode. The similarities of the title with the popular TV series *Game of Thrones* cannot be missed and it should be again one considered how popular culture is introduced in *Pride and Prejudice* filmic adaptations as it has happened with literary adaptations (e.g. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, *Mr Darcy Vampyr*, etc.). Furthermore, it is necessary to take a step up and take into consideration how not only 'popular' content, but also new formats, has been introduced in Austenland: the change of format in Austen's materials has gone from being paperback editions to film adaptations in the last decades of the twentieth century. This change was a result of the adaptation of Austen's novels to the visual culture and its new technological era, but a further step was taken when *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* were created.

The fact that Lizzie's story was filmed as a web series says much about the new creative formats that are being introduced in the twenty-first century; from a sociocultural standpoint, the entrance of new formats answers to the demands of people for new media as well as professional creativity. People's hectic lives may not allow them to sit and read *Pride and Prejudice*, but they could spare time to watch the two-to-eight-minute videos of Austen's most popular story. Additionally, the videos digital form allows viewers to interact with the story by means on talking to other fans on the YouTube comment boards, checking the character's Twitter and Facebook accounts made by the creators of the show and asking questions in the different available social platforms which are answered by Lizzie (the character, not the actress) in her Q & A videos. This interaction between the viewer and the story could not have been possible in the traditional way (i.e. reading the books) nor by watching the countless film adaptations; with this web series design Austen and her stories are not only introduced in the twenty-first century but they become part of popular culture.

IV. Conclusions

This essay has put forward why and how Austen has been introduced in the twenty-first century by means of spin-offs, book adaptations and films. Even though two thousand years have passed since her novels were published for the first time and in contrast to many other canonical writers, Austen has been kept in the collective's minds and her work is still a topic of interest for academics and non-academics alike. She is one of the two nineteenth-century writers in the

Amazon classics list –the other being Charles Dickens– and the farthest chronologically («Most Popular Authors in Classic Literature and Fiction» 2015). Besides, her novel *Pride and Prejudice* is in the fourth place in the list of «Best Sellers in Classical Literature» (2015) being also the oldest chronologically speaking.

This Austenmania has reached contemporary literary works by following Austen's canon from a different perspective (e.g. *Mr Darcy's Diary*, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*), but also changing Austen's nineteenth-century settings in favour of contemporary life (e.g. *The Jane Austen Book Club*, *Bridget Jones' Diary*). Furthermore, other best seller books such as the young-adult novel *Twilight* is influenced by Austen's writing (Kennedy), but what stands out most in popular culture are Austen films on screen. Both the author and her novels have been taken to the big screen in repeated occasions which have allowed the making of different readings of Austen such as the postcolonial reading of the film *Mansfield Park* (2003). However, there is one which stands out from the many film adaptations: the BBC's miniseries *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) starring Jennifer Ehle and Colin Firth. It must not be forgotten the latter's performance was the key which unleashed the phenomenon named Darcymania and, to some extent, the Colinmania. As previously mentioned, the bath scene and Firth/Darcy have reached fame of their own up to the point of being a significant part of many Austen-related films such as *Bridget Jones*, *Lost in Austen* and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

Many of these Austen-intertextual aspects are handled in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (*Pride and Prejudice* quotations, *Bridget Jones Diary*, Colin Firth's films), but it is also true that the twenty-first century setting has had an influence on Austen's most famous novel: from the new web video format to the story plot, some changes had to be made in order to adapt the nineteenth-century story to contemporary life. The marriage plot is set aside (apart from Mrs Bennet obsession to marry off her daughters) to focus on the female protagonists' future professional careers. In this *Pride and Prejudice* version, the Bennet sisters do not need to get married in order to obtain financial stability as their future economic prospects depend solely on themselves and their job opportunities, unlike in nineteenth-century England. Therefore, men stop being women's providers and women become economically independent, thus, adapting *Pride and Prejudice* to contemporary life. Still, the story remains faithful to the Austen canon as the plot differences can only be taken as a natural progression of how Elizabeth Bennet and the rest of the characters would have behaved had they lived in the twenty-first century.

To conclude, it is necessary to point out that Austen as a cultural phenomenon does not end with published works, but many Janeites have taken into their

shoulders the responsibility of not letting Austen be forgotten by means of Regency Era parties, self-made Austen merchandising and stories which recreate the Austen world with a slight plot twist or an alternate universe. These stories (commonly known as ‘fics’) are often published and become part of popular and contemporary literature, but no matter what the story is or whether they are OOC (out of character), they have two things in common; their appreciation of Austen as an all-times writer and the need to continue with her work because, as Pamela Licalzi wrote, «it is universally acknowledged that Austen wrote too little».

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